FOREWORD

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The history of World War I is steeped in tragedy so fathomless as to sometimes seem impossible to comprehend. Millions died, both soldiers and civilians. Nation-states emerged; others were carved up, absorbed into neighboring regions, or simply—forcibly—had their name and borders erased from the world map. But if one looks back at this world conflict, a single word among all others asserts its right to define the underlying tragedy of this era, and that is *genocide*.

One of the tales arising from the seemingly unspeakable atrocities of genocide is given an extraordinarily strong voice in this memoir by Karnig Panian (1910–1989). Panian was a young child when he was caught up in the Armenian Genocide. With heartbreaking and yet affectingly poetic language, he brings the reader into his life as an orphan subjected to the daily abuse that inculcated a devil's bargain: *Forget who you are and we will let you live. You will always remain the “Other” but at least you will be alive, and for that you should be grateful.* This combination of outright slaughter and brute-force brainwashing was the first modern example of a kind of historical lobotomy meant to erase an entire people from the record of human existence. Thankfully, it did not work.

The publication of this book is timely because it comes on the eve of the centenary of the Armenian Genocide. And it is presented to us at a time

when genocide and ethnic cleansing are not just isolated episodes but practiced almost routinely around the world. Indeed, genocide seems to be one of the great afflictions of the twenty-first century. In her recent book, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, Samantha Power, the current United States ambassador to the United Nations, references acts of genocide against Armenians, and later Jews, Cambodians, Iraqi Kurds, Rwandan Tutsis, and Bosnians, arguing it is “no coincidence that genocide rages on” when the world becomes indifferent, overloaded, perhaps, by endless images of atrocities that appear before our eyes in the relentless news cycle that assaults us twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

And therein lies the great importance of *Goodbye, Antoura*. It is a testimonial to the impossibility of denying the invaluable, eternal, and unalterable humanity of even a single child, and thus, by extension, of his family, his village, his people. Armenians and all those who were subsequently devastated by genocidal acts never simply constituted a political problem to be solved, were never a “category” to be eliminated for the supposed purpose of a greater good or design, never a mere millet to be allowed a measure of autonomy until it suited a greater power to crush it into nonexistence. Karnig Panian will not allow us to rationalize that kind of excuse for the idea that even a single individual’s memory or identity can be taken from him. Bodies may be slaughtered, human beings bludgeoned and burned, but if even a single child survives, then memory survives as well. Memory cannot be assassinated. Truth cannot be denied. Karnig Panian survived, along with the revelatory truth of his story, and all of humanity is enriched by what he remembers and what he relates.

This is a remarkable and unforgettable book. It is an indispensable tool for awakening our consciences, restoring our collective sense of decency, and forging our solidarity with all those who have suffered the horrors of genocide. And it bears a message that must be heard: we can never let our guard down. We can never forgive or forget the suffering of all Karnig Panians, all over the world. That is the responsibility of humanity. It is the responsibility of each and every individual, as well.