Hello, my name is Nazanine Hozar, and I am the author of *Aria*. *Aria* is a novel about a baby girl who is abandoned in an alleyway in early 1950s Tehran, Iran, and is then discovered by a driver in the Iranian army, and then grows up moving through the different echelons of Iranian society. And her life leads up to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. And I am going to read for you a small section of when this driver, his name is Behrouz, first discovers Aria in the alleyway.

Behrouz was staring at the letters on the front of the cinema when he heard the cry—like a cat in pain. He walked closer to where he thought the sound was coming from, but water gurgling in the gutter muffled its location. He crossed into another alley—nothing there. He continued to move from alley to alley, jumping over gutters. The more he found nothing, the more urgently he searched. His only help was the moon; there were no lights in the nearby homes; it seemed the rest of the world was asleep.

He finally reached the mulberry tree, which was flanked by rows of garbage. Staring up at him was a pack of wild dogs. He imagined them tearing the tiny creature who had made the sound limb from limb.

He grabbed a stick from the ground and charged. But none of the dogs moved. How long had they been there? As he neared, the dogs sat and watched quietly. At last, Behrouz bent down and lifted the baby into his arms. The dogs sniffed his feet, turned and left.

He sped toward the edge of town, past abandoned buildings in which the poor secretly lived, past stacks of cardboard where the even poorer slept. He wondered how long the child had gone without food. The stores were still closed, but his wife must have bought some milk, he thought frantically.

The baby didn’t look more than three days old. His head hurt. The stars whirled in the sky. At last, not far in the distance, he saw the pale outline of his house.

For three hours, Behrouz sat in his living room, trying to feed the child. He had woken a sleeping neighbour, who had found some milk, though the baby threw up most of it. Now, the only thing he could think to do was speak to it, human to human.

“Want me to tell you a story?” he whispered to the little girl.

“I used to love music, you know, when I was a little boy,” he said, putting his pinky finger in the baby’s mouth so she could suckle. “I used to sing, in secret, so my father wouldn’t...
know. I used to sing arias. Know what they are? Little tales, cries in the night. If you sing an aria, the world will know all about you. It will know your dreams and secrets. Your pains and your loves.”

Behrouz heard his wife throw a pillow against the bedroom wall, and paused. After a few moments, hearing nothing more, he kept on. “I'll name you Aria, after all the world’s pains and all the world’s loves,” he said. “It will be as if you had never been abandoned. And when you open your mouth to speak, all the world will know you.”

[Author speaking]

Thank you.