



The Ministry of Guidance Invites You to Not Stay: An American Family in Iran

Hooman Majd

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With U.S.–Iran relations at a thirty-year low, Iranian-American writer Hooman Majd dared to take his young family on a year-long sojourn in Tehran. *The Ministry of Guidance Invites You to Not Stay* traces their domestic adventures and closely tracks the political drama of a terrible year for Iran's government.

It was an *annus horribilis* for Iran's Supreme Leader. The Green Movement had been crushed, but the regime was on edge, anxious lest democratic protests resurge. International sanctions were dragging down the economy while talk of war with the West grew. Hooman Majd was there for all of it. A new father at age fifty, he decided to take his blonde, blue-eyed Midwestern yoga instructor wife Karri and his adorable, only-eats-organic infant son Khash from their hip Brooklyn neighborhood to spend a year in the land of his birth. It was to be a year of discovery for Majd, too, who had only lived in Iran as a child.

The book opens ominously as Majd is stopped at the airport by intelligence officers who show him a four-inch thick security file about his books and journalism and warn him not to write about Iran during his stay. Majd brushes it off—but doesn't tell Karri—and the family soon settles in to the rituals of middle class life in Tehran: finding an apartment (which requires many thousands of dollars, all of which, bafflingly, is returned to you when you leave), a secure internet connection (one that persuades the local censors you are in New York) and a bootlegger (self-explanatory). Karri masters the head scarf, but not before being stopped for *mal-veiling*, twice. They endure fasting at Ramadan and keep up with Khash in a country weirdly obsessed with children.

All the while, Majd fields calls from security officers and he and Karri eye the headlines—the arrest of an American "spy," the British embassy riots, the Arab Spring—and wonder if they are pushing their luck. *The Ministry of Guidance Invites You to Not Stay* is a sparkling account of life under a quixotic authoritarian regime that offers rare and intimate insight into a country and its people, as well as a personal story of exile and a search for the meaning of home.

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