

## Leaving Iran

Marjorie Lotfi

Ten years later, in the tiny Persian cafe  
in Innsbruck, at a table covered in red  
chequered cloth, with two bowls of *polow*  
and *khorest fesenjan, bademjan* steaming  
  
between us, my father said in passing  
*you know, it was a blessing, our loss.*  
  
I closed my eyes and saw Freedom our dog  
barking us goodbye, the Shomal roses woven  
  
through my hair, Ameh smiling as I refused  
another night of sleep. *A blessing?* –  
  
I started, stopped. I knew in leaving he'd lost  
everything, mostly himself. *If we'd stayed,*

he said quietly, *I'd never have known*  
*you. I'd never have known you at all.*

## **Marjorie Lotfi**

Marjorie Lotfi was born in New Orleans, moved to Tehran as a baby with her American mother and Persian father, and fled to the US during the Iranian Revolution. She settled in the UK in 1999 and has lived in Edinburgh since 2005. Marjorie was joint winner of the inaugural James Berry Poetry Prize in 2021, and her first book-length collection *The Wrong Person to Ask* (Bloodaxe Books, 2023) is a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation.

Marjorie is one of the British Council/UNESCO Cities of Literature 2024 ILX 10 'Rising Stars of UK Writing'. Her poetry has won awards, been published widely in journals and anthologies in the UK and US (including *The Rialto*, *Gutter*, *Ambit*, *Magma*, *Rattle* and *Staying Human*) and been included in *Best Scottish Poems 2021* and in London's 'Poems on the Underground'. She's currently finishing a memoir about her interrupted childhood in Iran and subsequent arrival in a small town in Ohio.

A former corporate lawyer in New York and London, Marjorie later founded the Belonging Project (considering the experiences of refugees with over 1,500

participants) and is now Co-Founder and Director of Open Book, which runs over 1,000 shared reading and creative writing workshops each year across Scotland.

A recording of this text can be found at [writersmosaic.org.uk](https://writersmosaic.org.uk)

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