

A DOOR BETWEEN US

EHSANEH
SADR

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Thank you for reading *A Door Between Us*. Your openness to learning about and from a time and place that is very different is no small thing and I'm grateful for the curiosity and empathy that inspired you to do so. Thank you.

As someone who is lucky enough to belong to more than one country, culture, and religion, it's sometimes jarring to hear the way friends in different areas of life speak of each other. I wrote *A Door Between Us* to create a portal for American audiences to get to know, relate to, and even cheer for people that are often misunderstood and vilified in our mainstream culture. My hope is that as we meet the 'other' and recognize ourselves within him or her, the similarities in our human desires and limitations will inspire us to reach out and search for solutions that uplift us all.



The list of questions below is meant to enhance your enjoyment of *A Door Between Us*. I'm quite curious to hear reactions from you and other readers and would be delighted to join book clubs or other forums to be part of a discussion. Please reach out via my website: ehsanehsadr.com. And if you enjoyed the book, please consider leaving a review that will help others find it on Amazon or Goodreads.

Ultimately, I hope the book has given you a glimpse of the brave Iranians who've sacrificed so much over the past fifty years in search of a fairer and more representative country and community. Only you can judge if I've succeeded.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ehsaneh". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Ehsaneh



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

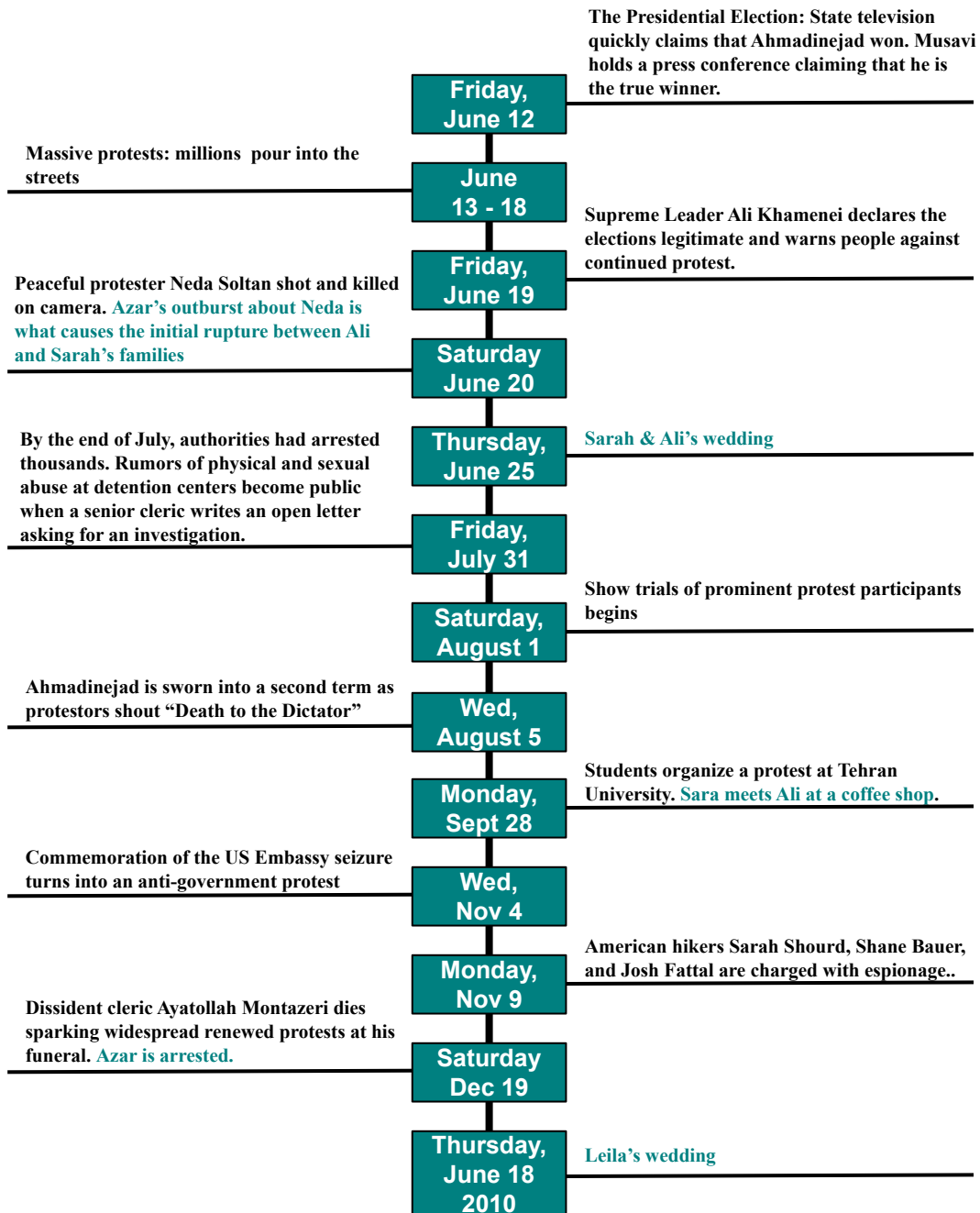
1. The novel features a major historical event and its aftermath. How much did you know about the 2009 Iranian election before you read *A Door Between Us*? Did the story show you a new side to events you were already familiar with?
2. Have you read other books from or about Iran? How are Iran and the Iranian characters portrayed in *A Door Between Us* similar to or different from those in other books about Iran?
3. Which character did you feel most sympathetic toward? The least? Did your feelings for various characters evolve as you read?
4. Several characters in *A Door Between Us* provide a strong defense of the regime and the post-election crackdown. Were any of their arguments surprising or convincing? Why do you think the author chose to include those perspectives?
5. *A Door Between Us* provides an intimate glimpse of family relationships within upper-class religiously conservative Iranians. In what ways were the dynamics portrayed between husbands & wives, men & women, parents & children similar to or different from your expectations or your own experiences?
6. Throughout the story Azar makes decisions that put herself, her family, and other people at risk in order to hold powerful people accountable and move her country toward democracy. Does she risk too much? How does her role as an activist complement or conflict with her role as a mother? How much would you be willing to risk to protect or fight for democracy?
7. What do you make of Sarah's decision to protect Ali and her family by returning the file to Sadegh? Are her priorities wrong? Would you consider Sarah young and innocent or complicit and immoral? Would you want your daughters to be more like Sarah or Azar?
8. Is Ganjian a good man doing his best in a bad institution? Or a selfish man who has sacrificed others for his own self-preservation? How can one tell the difference?
9. How do the characters of Azar and Sumayeh compare in terms of their politics and parenting? Could you see them becoming friends?
10. What are the most important elements in Sadegh's transformation? Have you ever experienced a similarly dramatic transformation in your own political or religious convictions? Do you know someone else who has? What are the elements that made such a transformation possible?
11. Are there any parallels between the experiences of 2009 Iran and that of 2020 in the U.S.?
12. Ehsaneh Sadr has written that she hopes *A Door Between Us* will make it harder for the U.S. to bomb Iran. Is this a worthwhile goal? Do you think she has succeeded?

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TIMELINE

of the 2009 Iranian election and aftermath





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LIST OF CHARACTERS

Hojjati Family

- Mehri—sixty-year-old matriarch of the family
- Sadegh—Mehri's adopted son who was born to her husband's first wife
- Sumayeh—Sadegh's half-American wife
- Zainab—Mehri's oldest daughter and confidant.
- Fatimeh—Mehri's younger daughter
- Alireza—Mehri's son

Bagheri Family

- Sarah—nineteen years old and engaged to marry Ali Rahimi
- Mahdiyeh—Sarah's mother and Mehri Hojjati's sister
- Abbas—Sarah's father

Rahimi Family

- Azar—thirty-five, a divorce lawyer, mother to Hossein and Muhammadreza
- Ibrahim Jafari—Azar's husband, an economist
- Ali—Azar's brother, engaged to marry Sarah
- Mr. & Mrs. Rahimi—Ali & Azar's parents

Tabibian Family

- Roksana—Azar's secretary
- Leila—Roksana's daughter

Basijis

- Ganjian—Sadegh's former teacher and friend, leads a Basij unit headquartered in Sa'adat Abad.
- Heydari—Member of the Revolutionary Guards



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AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Q: What is your personal connection to Iran?

A: My father is Iranian. He came to the US to study in the 70s and, along with my mom, was super involved in efforts to raise awareness about the Shah's abuses of power. When things started getting tumultuous in late 1978, my parents felt compelled to return to Iran to help overthrow the Shah and establish what was supposed to be a new democratic order. Unfortunately, things went awry and within a few short years many of my father's family and friends had been jailed, exiled, or killed. We were lucky enough to be able to get out in time for me to start third grade at Bonneville Elementary School in Salt Lake City.

Q: Have you been able to return to Iran since?

A: Yes, when I finished my undergraduate degree, I moved to Iran in 1996 with a desire to reconnect with the country and find a way to contribute. I ended up working with several non-profit organizations as well as the Ministry of Reconstruction Jihad that did rural development and poverty-alleviation. I met my husband while there so even though we left in 1999, we've visited frequently over the years.

Q: What was your inspiration for the book?

A: We happened to be in Iran just a few months before the election and the enthusiasm for the challenger, Mir-Hussein Musavi was palpable. Back home, we watched with excitement, concern, and then horror as the government launched a violent crackdown on peaceful protestors, dragging young people to prison where they were often mistreated and then broadcasting show trials and forced confessions that resulted in lengthy prison sentences and even executions.

Q: Aspects of your book, especially stories of protests, street conflict, and mass arrests feel particularly relevant today given the Black Lives Matter protests going on in so many American cities. Is this something that surprises you? Or do you see these as completely separate?

A: Certainly, the images of people pouring into the streets and taking a stand for something they believe in is very similar and inspiring whether in Oregon, DC, or Tehran. And I think all movements for social justice and democracy are strengthened by finding ways to connect with and support one another. That said, each struggle is unique and we need to be careful about making assumptions of similarity when there is still much to learn about one another's histories and experience of oppression.

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Q: Are your characters based on real people?

A: Yes! All my characters are based on composites of people I've met or read about. Azar represents the thousands of brave activists and protestors who've fought for truth and justice in the face of forces determined to stamp them out. Sadegh represents sincere regime supporters who are struggling to reconcile their understanding of Islam with the misdeeds of their rulers. And Sarah represents the complex interplay of innocence and complicity in those who close their eyes to injustice as they are caught up in their own lives and small dramas.

Q: What is the most challenging part of your writing process, and why?

A: With two kids and a demanding day job, the most challenging part of my process is finding time to write! I find it useful to follow the advice my graduate advisor once gave me which is to devote at least 15 minutes a day to my writing no matter what. That way, when you finally get a larger chunk of time, you haven't lost the thread of the story and can dive right back in.

Q: Do you have a regular first reader? If so, who is it and why?

A: My first reader for *A Door Between Us* was a dear friend from high school. We got to know each other because we were fascinated by our differences (she was secular Jewish while I was a religious Mormon-Muslim) and disagreed about everything except how fun it was to talk to someone with polar opposite views. She read every single chapter as I completed it, managed to ignore all the embarrassing flaws of early drafts, and made me feel like my voice and story had value so I had the courage to continue.

Q: What are your interests outside of writing and reading?

A: At heart, I'm a social change activist and have been lucky enough to work with some incredible and inspiring people on a variety of noble efforts including things like combatting climate change, Palestinian human rights, and lifting inhumane sanctions. I also love a good bike ride and any game night including Speed Uno

Q: What's something about you that most people wouldn't know?

A: A few years ago, I learned that from my mother's side I'm a descendant of Governor William Bradford who came over on the Mayflower. As the daughter of an Iranian immigrant, it was a fascinating experience to feel suddenly more connected to the sweep of American history and the good and bad that entails.