

Adapted Extract from *Never Lonely in Iran*

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Always pack a spare top when heading out for the day in Iran. Today's lesson, I thought, as I danced at the party. I was baked. My heavy beige long sleeved knee length shirt thing and five euro baggy Tesco trousers were not made for an occasion like this one. I looked at the brightly coloured tunics and the elegant dancing of the women around me, a rainbow of discarded headscarves on the rug. I felt decidedly frumpy. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. Clothes to wear to a party hadn't been on the list of items to squeeze into my rucksack. Not for a solo trip through Iran and Central Asia. Torch – yes, medication – yes, toilet roll – yes. Nothing about packing for a party.

If they could see me now. With better clothes on, of course. They had reacted in pretty much the same way when I told them what I had planned:

'Iran? Why?'

'Huh?'

'Where?!'

'But, Iran? Alone?'

'Ah jaysis.' (My dad).

As I danced I wondered how I would be able to describe my experiences in Iran to everyone at home. How to tell them about party I was at. Do it justice. The food, the dancing, the laughing. How to put it into words. Words that wouldn't sound hollow and meaningless. Words that would bring it as alive as I felt then, being part of that evening. The way I had felt so often in Iran. *The people were oh so kind. So generous. Really lovely. Fascinating. So many stories. A sound bunch of lads. Great banter. Lots of laughs. The craic was mighty. You just had to be there.* I knew that with every attempt at description, a part of it would be lost to me. The magic would be chiselled away.

'Do Irish men dance like that?' the woman beside me asked, bringing my mind back to the party. I watched the men move gracefully and thought about parties at home. I pictured

my male friends doing the ‘pointy finger dance,’ the ‘air guitar dance,’ or the ‘lepping about like an eejit dance.’

‘Em. Not really. I don’t think Irish men like dancing,’ I said.

‘Iranian men are emotional,’ she said, laughing. ‘I think that is why they like dancing like this.’

I showed her how Irish men dance. She laughed. I smiled. So what if this moment, gossiping about men with a new friend in Iran, couldn’t be captured. It didn’t matter. The moment was mine.