

Sleep Song for Dead Girl



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The events of the story take place in Arghavan Residential Complex where its residents call it Arghavan Complex. Locating it on maps is not so easy. If the map of 'Tehran and its suburbs' is by your hand next to you, you could simply give it a try. As in the western areas of Tehran many complexes and residential buildings of several types are being constructed to such extent that finding one of them is not also an easy task. I'd like to place the map of the geographical position of Arghavan Complex at the outset of the book to let the prospective readers know about the exact place of the events, but it was not feasible. It wasn't possible for me to find the place of the Complex on the map since the construction never came to its end completely. So, I make effort to describe the place of occurring of this story events.

Arghavan Residential Complex is placed in North-West of Tehran somewhere far from this busy and crowded megacity. The distance of this complex to Tehran is not precisely known. If you head toward the Complex through the old road of Tehran-Karaj, after driving a distance of about thirty kilometers before reaching the city of Karaj, you have to enter a narrow detour where to reach Arghavan Complex; you have to drive twenty-five minutes on that. The distance to Arghavan Complex from the beginning of this detour emerging from Tehran-Karaj Highway is usually calculated by minute and not by kilometer. Its reason is not known. Perhaps it is because from its midway to the Complex, this road is a dirt one and not asphalt and the cars are slipping on small and big stones of the road. So most of the drivers prefer to look at their watches rather than speedometers of their cars to see how long they have been driving on the road. After some time for more or less than those twenty-five minutes of driving, a quiet and less traffic and broad road will appear that ends to Arghavan Complex after driving about one kilometer on it. So, by driving through Tehran-Karaj old road, the distance of Tehran

to the Complex is thirty-one kilometers and twenty-five minutes.

If you drive from Tehran toward Arghavan Complex on Karaj expressway, the distance is longer. It is not clear why. In this way, first, you have to drive toward Karaj and then enter Qazvin expressway. From there, after a distance of seven kilometers by making a u-turn, you have to drive back in the way you already drove and about five hundred meters, you reach a sidetrack, at its beginning, and there is no traffic sign. This is a dirt road from its beginning. And its distance to Arghavan Complex is about thirteen minutes. The amazing point is that while the distance to the Complex through expressway is longer than its distance from Tehran through Tehran-Karaj Highway, those driving to Arghavn Complex arrive there sooner than those commuting there through Tehran-Karaj Highway as the expressway are less dense and cars are driving faster there.

There is a third way for reaching Arghavan Complex that is not known to everyone and is through Karaj special highway. As this way is really meandering, whoever not knows that way very well, will be

certainly lost. So most of residents of residents of Arghavan commute their homes through either Karaj Highway or Karaj expressway.

Arghavan Residential Complex is semi-constructed. In other words, the construction of its all buildings is not finished yet. Among all its blocks, five are constructed completely and the rest are incomplete. Some of the buildings only have the frame built. Some of those buildings just are consisted of their metal frames. And the others, the installing of doors and windows was just left. The apartments on some floors of some of the buildings were completed while some apartments on other floors of the same buildings were left incomplete.

In fact, the story of these buildings, in fact, started seven years ago when many families enrolled to buy them when the pre-purchasing advertisement of them was published in papers. Many of those families were among those not to be able to buy any places in Tehran which are expensive. For those families, the Terms and Conditions of pre-purchase of Arghavan apartments was very ideal especially because of the long-term bank loan those apartments have on offer.

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The construction work of the apartments was progressed very well and fast. Those who had deposited money in the account of the construction company were really satisfied of its development. But an unexpected accident ruined all the preplanned programs. That was nothing except the death of engineer Arghavan, the main owner of Arghavan Complex and its construction company. His death happened when about a year from the start of the construction works of the apartments was passing that in a hot day of summer, engineer Mohsen Arghavan fell down from the scaffolding of the fifth floor of block thirteen and died. Workers were saying that the engineer had jumped on the board put on the bars of the scaffolding to test its strength and well as it was not firm enough, it broke. With engineer Arghavan's death, the construction work left incomplete. He was the owner of the whole company. Before anything else, after his death, the state of his belongings had to be clarified. This meant nothing except few years of legal hardships and discrepancies between the engineer's inheritors who went to the construction site of the Complex together to inspect things once in a while.

When the buyers of the apartments heard about the engineer death, they all rushed to the sales office to clarify their states. After a lot of follow-up, it was supposed that those apartments which were ready or which were about to be ready completely to be delivered to their buyers. So, in a short while, about eighty families whose apartments were almost ready went to the Complex and began to complete their apartments. After that, their moving to the Complex began while still there were a lot of difficulties. The residents did not have the water. So, it was supposed to bring them water with tankers. The electricity wirings were not complete. The Cabals installed in the complex were not capacious for all resided apartments so every day the electricity currency was cut off for several times. The blocks engine house operating the radiators were not ready to use but fortunately, there were some months until the winter and they had time to make them ready.

In this way, Arghavan Complex residents began their lives in half-constructed blocks there and gradually they got used to their lives. Later on, some shops also were opened in the complex, Shops that were selling

everything, from groceries to clothes, medicines, and stationeries. A year later, with the residents' follow-ups two elementary schools, one girl, and one boy school, in that incomplete Complex were formed. All the students of those schools were residents of Arghavan Complex and Banafshe Complex which was constructed few kilometers further up of Arghavan Complex. Residents' welcoming of these schools and their assistances and contributions to them caused a girl high school also be formed in Arghavan Complex a year later. The boys were attending a high school built in Banafshe Complex. The teachers of girl schools were coming from Tehran. Every morning, the cars service of that neighborhood educational office brought the teachers there and at two P.M. it took them back. But, it was not always a regular procedure as it was just enough that it rained or snowed a little and then everything was out of its order. The service had come there at eight A.M., could not take the teachers back until half past three. Then, female married teachers would become worried about their children or husbands at their homes. Sometimes in such occasions, things

were vice versa and the teacher, who had to be at schools at eight, would not show up until ten.

The most prominent characteristics of Arghavan Complex was its quietness. There was no sound of horns of cars or sound of passing motorbikes. There was sometimes just the voice of wind that could be heard like a whistle or a howl when passing through half-constructed buildings. At nights when the electricity was going out, the only thing that could be heard was the sound of collective barking or yelping of the dogs and sometimes the voice of someone who was yelling and it was not clear whom he was calling.

The atmosphere of Arghavan Complex with all those half-constructed buildings, the memory of the deadly falling of its builder from the fifth floor of block thirteen and with a heavy silence constantly flowing there was hallucinatory. When a population of about four hundred and fifty people is living in a place designed for three thousand people, there will be found so many empty places that can make the whole people of that population hallucinated. Perhaps that was the very reason that when Zohre who was one of the girls of the second grade of the Arghavan

Complex high school was explaining others what he she was seeing, everybody was repeating that she was hallucinated and nobody believed her words. Zohre had told what she had been seeing to her friend, Mina, for the first time. After that, others became aware of that one by one. At last, the story was widespread in the whole Complex. Zohre was saying that she knew a girl who had a gray hair and her hands had been burnt from her elbows downward and above all who was dead one hundred years ago.

Mina

My uncle told that one day when he had been twenty-five, jobless and single, he was passing by Tajrish square while he was heading to find a job in a company, which my uncle had seen whose vacancy advertisement on a paper that he came across a friend from his military service time. They greeted each other warmly and began to talk about each other's situation. My uncle told his friend that he had been jobless and single while his fellow friend was the manager of fodder importing company and had a well-to-do life and coincidentally, he had a vacancy in his company and needed a clerk there. In this way, my
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uncle changed his way and went to his friend's company and became the employee of the fodder importing company, After a while, my uncle got married to his very friend's sister and got promotion to become the company's deputy manager and about five years later, he became so successful that he could own an independent company. My uncle repeatedly told the memory of that day in several occasions and I thought with myself that if my uncle had left home that very day a few minutes sooner or later or if he had been passing the Tajrish square in another direction, he his life would have had another form. Maybe instead of being the manager of a fodder importing company, he could be a librarian and his wife instead Nasrin could be anyone else. His children were not like now for sure; they were similar to one who was their mother instead of Nsrin. Perhaps if, when my uncle were passing his military service, he had been dispatched somewhere else and some other people, among whom there had not been a manager of fodder importing company, had become his fellow soldier, no changes would have happened in his life even if he had faced the manager of the fodder importing company face to face, again and again.

Sometimes, coincidental placing of some things changes our lives. If that day I put my book in my school bag just a few seconds sooner, I had nothing to do with the fifth floor of block thirteen. Even if I had not taken a wrong book, there would not have been any changes if I had put the right book in my bag thirty seconds sooner or later. Zohre was interested in Fahime Rahimi's books, not John Kristofer, Erisch Kastner or Moradi Kermani unlike me that did not like Fahime Rahimi. But, that day, Zohre's book was in my bag otherwise I was busy just with my own affairs. I was studying and I had nothing to do with others. If Zohre and Mirza Jafarkhan Moshibashi were not in my way, I would be the same studious schoolgirl and my parent's obedient girl. They changed my life; Zohre with what she was telling about Hakime's life story and Mirza Jafarkhan Moshibashi with his memories of Ghuchani's girls. Whenever I want to eat rice, I remember the story Mirza Jafarkhan Moshibashi told. Every time I look at the windows around our apartment, I see Hakime that jumps out of one of them and while whirling around herself and before reaching the ground, she disappears. No traces of her will be remained. Neither

the grayness of her long hair nor the redness of the flowers of her blazing and loose dress. As Mirza Jafarkhan said: “The world won’t be to a person’s happiness if he sees the state of such wretched ones only once.” My world became dark. Always, I feel that somewhere around here something bad is happening, someone is grieving, someone needs help. I do not eat rice. Whenever my mom sieve the half-cooked rice, I feel bad especially as I do not know why she threw away the water extracted from half-cooked rice through the sink. Mirza Jafarkhan heard the voices of cries when they were put the rice in the plates. Someone is crying. Somewhere around here.

Zohre

I just came back home from school. My throat had become dry. I unlocked our apartment’s door with my key and went inside. My mom from the kitchen said: “Are you home, Zohre?”

I said: “Yes.”

She said: “did you say hello?!”

I said: “Hello.”

I took off my maghna'e (scarf-like Islamic code covering worn by women in Iran in public places like offices and schools which make its wearing mandatory) from my head and threw it and my bag on an armchair. I asked: "What do we have for lunch?"

She replied: "*Ghormesabzi*."

Its smell was emitting out from the kitchen. I asked her out of my habit otherwise the smell of *ghormesabzi* was quite palpable. The smell of *ghormesabzi* and cooked rice. I headed toward my room while I was opening the bottoms of my dress one by one. My mom called me: "Come here and give me a hand. I want to sieve the rice."

I said: "Right now." and opened the door of my room. She was there, sitting in my room between my books and magazines. Her gray hair from her back fell on her flowery and blazing dress. As I entered the room, she turned her face and looked at me. I got transfixed. Her face was pale. Her lips were white and her eyes like colorless water. She laughed. Her white, tidy and complete teeth were shining. She said: "How beautiful they are!"

I got tongue-tied. She turned to me and showed me the book she had in her hand and said: “I wish I were literate.”

I pressed my back to the wall. I tried to scream but it was not possible. I looked at her hands that she held the book by them. Their skins were full of wrinkles and full of red and pink vessels stuck together. Her hands had been burnt. She looked at me again and laughed at me with her water-colored eyes. She was laughing at my sacredness. She dropped the book on the ground and went to the window. She laughed at me again and jumped out through the window. I screamed and ran to the window. I bent down the window while screaming. There was nothing. Neither on the ground nor in the air. She got disappeared. My mom took my shoulders and pulled me back. I kept screaming and crying. My mom was shaking me. The sound of her voice was on and off in my brain. I was both hearing and not hearing her voice. I was seeing her face through the layer of my tears in a fading manner. She kept shaking my shoulders and then pulled me back to make me sit on the ground. Her last sentence was: “Don’t disgrace us!” I did not get

whatever she had said before. I looked at my books scattered on the ground. The opened book among them was a book full of colorful pictures.

-- Shame on you.

I looked at my mom's face. She was angrier rather than worried.

-- What is all this fuss for? What happened then?

I said: "She was sitting here."

She said: "Who was sitting here?"



Hamidreza Shahabadi

(1967-Iran)

Biography:

Shahabadi, Iranian talented researcher and writer, is educated in history. His main concern is retelling some social incidents of his country contemporary history in the form of story. His first novel (Before the Rain) was published in 1368.

He began his profession as a writer by writing stories for children and adolescents. The addresses of most of his novels are the adolescents so Shahabadi is mostly known as a capable writer for this age group.

This writer besides writing novel, as a well-known cultural manger, has several executive responsibilities in cultural foundation and publishing institutes in Iran.

He retired from 2015 and now, away from the troubles of executive responsibilities, attempts to depict dark and sweet incidents happened in stages of Iran's contemporary history in the form of readable and memorable novels and present them at the view of readers and interested ones in Iran and the world in particular.

HamidReza Shahabadi in the thirty year period of his writing created about 20 works that some of them has been praised and appreciated in many cultural and literary festivals and circles in Iran.

Two famous and great publishers in Iran undertake publishing of his works.

He is married and has two children and with his wife who is a writer and his children lives in Tehran.

Books:

-Dayere Zangi, short story, Kaman publisher, ۱۳۸۰.

-Dilmaj (translator), novel, Ofogh publisher, ۱۳۸۵.

-Sleeping song for a dead girl, Ofogh publisher, ۱۳۸۶.

-Slaves' confession, adolescent novel, Kanoon publisher, 1388.

-When the Eyelashes lost, adolescent novel, Kanoon publisher, 1391.

-No one dares that, adolescent novel, Kanoon publisher, 1392.

-Goth Street Cafe, novel, Ofogh publisher, 1384.

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