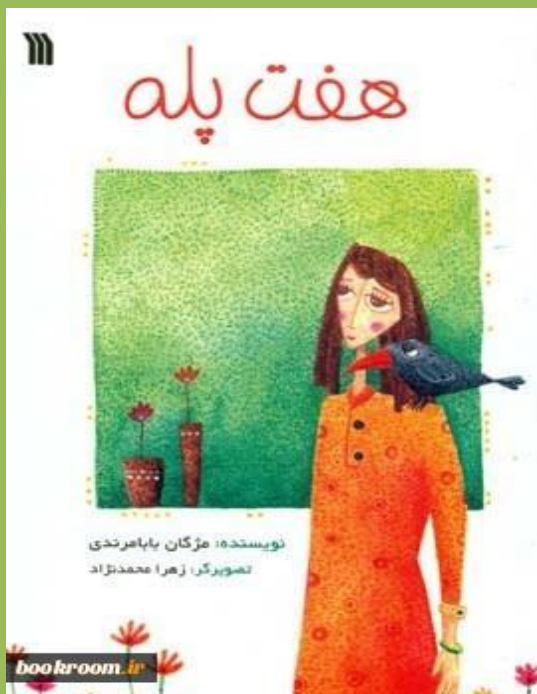


The Seven Steps



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The Seven Steps

Why were not the seven stairs complete?

I arrive at school. It is raining. Elly is not waiting for me at the door, which is not normal. I lift up the corners of my veil and enter. It is raining, but it is unlikely that Elly would be scared of rain. We were always showered by the rain. We just opened our mouths to feel the raindrops in them. Then we thought that God sends us water which with a miraculous taste is just coming from the heaven. Then we laughed at our own thought.

I am glad. Today we have a class with Mrs. Noushi. Again the Arabic class! Mrs. Noushi will be looking at me frequently which means "be quiet!". Instead of Noushi, she should be named Mousey. Her eyes are like a mouse. I have put a stunning thing in my bag. That is a toy when mom was a student; it's an owl same size as a knuckle. It's made of metal. There is a tiny tongue behind its head. If I push the tongue, a banging noise will be heard twice; but it's so loud that it will be heard in the entire class. That moment must be recorded in the history. Eye surgery in an instant. Mrs. Mousey's eyes are remarkable. They would be open and wide. This device would be particularly useful if a man comes to her with a marriage proposal, as her big eyes would seem attractive (when she hears the owl's noise). But their thoughts did not work well and

their daughter stayed with them for a longer time. As far as I know, she got married late. As my eyes are not big, either. I should also have Elly to come and make that bang sound when I offer tea when someone comes to propose to me.

I laugh and step forward, but the school is not like usual. Not only Elly is not spinning in the rain in the courtyard, but also nobody is sitting on the stairs. Even Shukrian, the top student of the class, is not studying under the bushy pine tree by the courtyard. The school looks weird. My heart sinks, but I don't care. The owl and Mousey' eyes are tempting. I have not gone up the first stair of the corridor yet. I see the windows with steel fence in the ground floor.

I said to Elly: "Go out and buy a snack and hand it to me through the gaps among these steel bars".

Elly replied: "Come on! It would be better to give it up. It would get so bad. The classroom would be filled with its smell".

I said: "Come on! Go. The boy who sells the greengage is standing at the door. I've told him before. All you have to do is to look at him, then he will give you a pack of it. After the class, I'll go and pay for it".

Why is Elly not waiting for me on at the stairs? I skip the first and second stairs alternatively.

Mrs. Noushi said: "Jeida be quiet!"

I whispered: "Nonsense".

I want to say you think you're so funny that you pronounce "J" instead of all "Sh"?! I'm Sheida, not Jeida!

Why isn't Elly there? Why is the school so quiet?

Mrs. Noushi looked at me. She said: "I did say to you right now, don't talk." I looked at her. I laughed. She laughed back and said: "How much I like the eyes having a shining laughter. Sheida's eyes are always laughing".

I said: "All the other teachers complain about why I laugh, whatever I say to them and swear that I am not laughing, they don't believe me".

Mrs. Noushi laughs: "Okay. Everyone can think what he/she wants, but don't talk in the classroom".

And she looked at me. She gestured to me with her eyes to mean "Promise not to talk". Elly looked at me. Her eyes are also laughing.

I wrote down on a sheet: "Snake venom! Why are you laughing?"

She wrote in reply: "Nappy girl! The class got manageable!"

I wrote: "What nonsense! How much I hate her laughter. She is going to subdue me with her laughter. The blind".

Mrs. Noushi, pointing to the bench in the first row, ordered: "Jeida, come and sit here."

She asked the girls who were on the first bench to go and sit on the back benches.

I said: "No, I won't bother them! It's okay here. Thanks, I'm comfortable."

The class burst into laughter.

Mrs. Noushi said: "I know! It's clear that you are comfortable with the window and the snack and the greengage, but I'm a little uncomfortable. Our today's lesson is very difficult. You must not get distracted nor should you the other girls distracted. You will have at least two questions of this lesson in the university entrance exam. "

I said: "Oh ... It will be a long time before we have that test...!"

She said: "It will come in a blink of an eye. Do you think it would be a long time? A man's lifetime will be over in a twinkling of an eye! Let alone the entrance exam. Only two years left. So, come forward like a good girl".

Then she stared at me in astonishment. I was looking for a word to reply, but her rat-shaped eyes had stolen the words from me. I jotted down at the corner of Elly's notebook: "I wish she would die."

I collected my stuff. I heard: "What did you write?"

I replied: "Nothing."

I was scared. I didn't know my own voice. I was scared that she would ask me to bring the notebook to her to see. I rushed and sat down on the front bench. She went on teaching the lesson. The bench creaked as I moved. The bench legs were not balanced. Distracting by the creaking noise of the bench, she turned back. She was angry for the first time. She said: "Don't make the creaking noise!"

I had stuck her weakness point. She put her back. She kept teaching. I made a creaking sound. She picked up her chair from the table and brought it for me and commanded: "Sit here."

And she started.

Why Elly isn't there? Why don't these courtyard stairs come to the end so that I can reach the classroom sooner? But no! I stand on the third stair. What should I be scared of? Why don't I enter? What is this sound that I hear? The sound is like crying. Why does my heart beat so fast? There was a small feather under her arm. I jotted to Elly "Did you notice how much I said right?" She gradually gets closer to death. Look! You can see a feather under her left arm. She wants to fly away to leave us. Within a few hours, this small feather will turn into big wings by which she will fly away. But don't think that having wings makes

her go to heaven. She will go straight to hell. Hell's doorman will be standing at its gate with folded arms, as he has been expecting her eagerly.

I handed on the note to my friend behind me to pass on to Elly. I was anticipating that the girls would read it. I could hear the girls were laughing quietly and stealthy. I turned back to look at Elly. She whispered and pointed with her hand: "Don't say it, it's a sin."

I laughed. And I said while pointing to her: "You are very stupid!"

When I turned back Mrs. Mousey was looking at me. Her eyes were glaring. If I was sitting beside Elly, I would make a meow sound.

A crying sound is heard. I have reached the fourth stair. Mrs. Tajalli, our schoolmaster, passes me. She is crying with a handkerchief before her mouth as if she has been trying not to cry loudly. I climb the fifth stair and watch our classroom through the window. Nobody is there. I complete the sixth and seventh stairs. I enter the hallway. All the classrooms are empty. My hand feels the metal coolness of the owl. Everyone is in the chapel. I'm walking near the chapel. Elly is sitting at the door. She has cried so much that her eyes are lentil size. It means the size of Mrs. Mousey's eyes and mine. As she sees me, she gets up. She says: "Flew! Sheida, Mrs. Mousey flew away ...!"

I don't understand. I bring out my hand from my pocket. I still have its metal coolness in my hand. I say: "What do you say?!" She says: "She left. We are going to go to the funeral ..."

I feel a chaos in my inside. I'm getting hot. I'm starting to shiver. The girls are watching me. I want to hide from everyone's eyes. The sound of the rain is heard. Everyone is crying. Our headmaster is sobbing. Lady Maryam, a school maid, calls loudly: "Buses have arrived. They are at the door."

The girls are coming out of the chapel. I am standing in the middle of the way. They constantly jostle me and I can hear: "Sorry" or "Go a little farther". Elly catches my hand. She drags me towards the wall. I want to cry, but I cannot. Elly puts on her shoes. We go seven stairs down. Wish I would not climb the stairs to come down now for the funeral. I wish I was absent.

We go under the rain .One of the buses toots. I turn back to watch the classroom window. I could picture Mrs. Noushi who should now be standing up and teaching behind the window and my owl is singing. The bus again toots. Elly drags me. I want to go on a bus where our classmates are not there. Everyone knows me here, too. But they have not read the letter so ...

We get on. I lean my head against the front seat. I close my eyes and wish all of this would be a dream. Crying sound does not let me focus on my praying. We

arrive. Mrs. Noushi's family has also come. Her daughter is my age. She has also two sons. One elder and the other younger than us. In a helping way, they are holding her daughter's arm. She comes near Mrs. Noushi's head. She sits in the mud. Suddenly, it starts to rain. All her clothes have become muddy.

Her name is Golbarg.

They place our teacher in the grave. My heart is sinking. I remember my letter. Don't ...

I don't know why I had not thought about her family till now. Does her daughter know what I have done? I know that she is here now and she is standing with us. But surely she's more worried about her daughter. I cannot stay up more. Opposite me, her photo is on a large bouquet of the flowers. In the photo, she has a smile. The rain is washing her photo frequently, but her laughter is still obvious and doesn't vanish. I picture her conjugating the various tenses of the verb "Zahaba" (to go) in past, present, and future tenses. Someone talks about the ceremony of the seventh day after her demise. I pull out my handkerchief from my pocket. My hand touches something that is cool. I pull it out. That's mom's owl. I throw it away. The girls are getting on the buses. The owl rolls under their feet and then disappears under the mud. There is no longer a trace of it. It has been a neighbor for our teacher. I myself walk over it. I get on the bus in which my classmates are. I have not recited Surah Hamd (Fatiha) yet. I have not cried yet. Her photo is still under the rain.

She is still laughing. The bus leaves. I recite Surah Hamd (Fatiha) and the tears which had clogged my throat are now descending.

My father does not like to wait in a queue

This is what my daddy says, "we are all in the queue; a terrible queue". His best effort is to get out of it. He says: "If I can save myself, I would be able to save you". He meant mom and me. He thinks that mommy and I would not consider any queue; so, we are dumb.

It's too early in the morning. Mom wakes up. She puts the cover over us. She is worried that perhaps we'll get cold in this cool spring.

Daddy! You talked about Shahnameh till late last night. You also mentioned that Ferdowsi was only thinking of keeping his name alive/perpetuating and he did. Keeping the name alive and getting eternal should be remained. It means you overslept this morning just for this reason. Mom sighed and whispered: "If he was going to work like you do, now we would only have one page of the Shahnameh, which would be for Daghighi."

And you were asleep sooner than us. I think you scared all away from the queue with your snoring symphony. You will be watchable when we utter to you about your snoring.

It is unbelievable to you that an artist could even snore; it is such a loud noise. Mom opens the hall door to go out to the courtyard. She is going to wash her hands and face.

Our lavatory is in the corner of the courtyard. Our bathroom is in the basement. We freeze in the winter, and we have cockroaches and lizards in the summer. Both of us are scared of them, but I know something that in spite of living with my mom for 17 years you still don't know; she is afraid of cockroaches and lizards, too; otherwise is there any other reason for her not to go to lizards at all? Also, she has sequentially short screams when she hits a cockroach. When these insidious creatures show up, unrecorded in the queue, there is no need for a multiple-choice question. "Mom" would be the answer to all four choices. All three wrong alternative choices would not only take one negative score, but also each wrong answer takes an infinite negative score. The negative points that my mind gives you are higher than these matters. Mom's supply was not adequate to rent better than this home.

The courtyard is situated seven stairs (in height) lower than the rooms. She comes down the stairs. Then she has to pass through the dried leaves. I count her steps. One is where the leaves are low. Two is where the leaves are getting many. The lizard's life begins from this step. The third, fourth, fifth and sixth steps are full of lizards and cockroaches. And the seventh step means reaching the toilet, but there is a hubbub of life. I think they get

married and they will have children there, but you don't know anything about it. Mom has not told you anything about life underneath the leaves. She also forbids me to tell you anything. She says: "Don't say anything. Just let's see what he is going to do for this year! It's time to drip the last drop and everything will be overflowed".

You even don't know what mom is talking about. The colors you use to paint are drop-abled. You drip and use them by dropper. Between us, even though she does not tell you, don't you know yourself? Don't you see them on the cement walls of the courtyard and also sometimes in the room?

I hate this old plantain. I don't know why I recall the same tree that Rustam tied up the dastard Shaghad to it. It is unclear who and how many years ago planted it in our landlord's home, and what it is planted for. Its entire shadow extends all over our courtyard. The tree is so weird. It does not know any other season except autumn. All of its leaves are small. I hate all the autumn trees. You believe that it cleans the air in our house. It's as if we did not live in smoky Tehran. It's as if we live most often in the countryside. How bad that all your life is as if. I think getting out for you is also as if and you don't consider. See, our life has got as if, too.

Mom goes through the leaves again and enters. Her face is covered with drops of water. She wipes them off. A new life is beginning with water and washing, but you are asleep! She puts on her uniform. She passes over the

underneath leaves living and she goes in the bread queue. We both love fresh bread for breakfast. I am sure that our bakery is busy this morning; its bread is well-baked; but what's the use of it? I don't think that none of them either good or bad bakers do know how to get out of the queue you have mentioned before. Although people like them very much. Just after all, mom stands in many queues and cannot get out of them; especially in the bread queue. Because all the people in the line would complain to her; particularly in our own neighborhood, which everyone knows her.



Mozghan Babamarandi has started writing for children since ۱۹۹۰ focusing mostly on teenagers. She is a well-known figure in Iranian children & teenagers' literature and her books are published by famous Iranian publishers. Her stories reflect her own childhood. Her books contain ethical and social themes. She is fond of short-story format and this is the prominent format of her books which are published in Iran.. At the time being, she lives in Tehran. She is the author of more than ۷۸ books of novel and collection of stories for children and young Adults .Among her books are:

Children & Young Adults Stories:

۱. **The news presenter was silent**, Rowzaneh Publication, ۲۰۱۸
۲. **I was my grandma's mom**, Peidayesh Publication, ۲۰۱۸
۳. **Daddy's Laugh Paint**, Monadi Tarbiat Publication, ۲۰۱۷
۴. **In the name of god, Raise exam sheets**, Monadi Tarbiat Publication, ۲۰۱۷

۵. **The yard was full of bird and song**, Monadi
Tarbiat Publication, ۲۰۱۷
۶. **Ghelghelak's cocoon was beside grandma**, Amir
Kabir Publication, ۲۰۱۶
۷. **Whish under the all snow was viola**, Soroosh
Publication, ۲۰۱۵
۸. **The Story of Situation and Wishes of an Ass**,
Peidayesh Publication, ۲۰۱۵
۹. **The aunt oldwoman liked storytelling**, Elmi-
Farhangi Publication, ۲۰۱۵
۱۰. **The Seven Steps**, Soroosh Publication, ۲۰۱۲
۱۱. **My mother is lost**, Institute for the Intellectual
Development of Children and Young Adults
Publication, ۲۰۱۲
۱۲. **I will become a Spiderman like Rostam**,
Institute for the Intellectual Development of
Children and Young Adults Publication, ۲۰۱۲
۱۳. **Even the Sun Cried**, Amir Kabir Publication,
۲۰۱۲
۱۴. **My Indian Name**, Soroosh Publication, ۲۰۱۲
۱۵. **Lady Poetess and Mr. Beethoven**, Peidayesh
Publication, ۲۰۱۱
۱۶. **Let's go paint the sky**, Madrese Publication,
۲۰۱۱
۱۷. **Every Year Before the First Bell**, Beh Nashr
Publication, ۲۰۱۱
۱۸. **What is the taste of secret?**, Elmi-Farhangi
Publication, ۲۰۱۰

۱۹. **A Shying Guest**, Elmi-Farhangi Publication, ۲۰۱۰
۲۰. **Only the father can awakening me from sleep**, Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults Publication, ۲۰۱۰
۲۱. **Sun Passed Me and Moonlight**, Amir Kabir Publication (Shokoofe), ۲۰۰۹
۲۲. **Hi Grandpa**, Madrese Publication, ۲۰۰۸
۲۳. **Even Men Sometimes Crying**, Madrese Publication, ۲۰۰۸
۲۴. **The Butterfly Was My First Word**, Soroosh Publication, ۲۰۰۸
۲۵. **All Stars for You**, Madine Publication, ۲۰۰۱
۲۶. **Gold Fountain Pen**, Madrese Publication, ۲۰۰۱
۲۷. **A Gift for Narges**, Farhang Eslami Publication, ۱۹۹۶

- And ۸ story books in print.

- She has more than ۱۰۰ **published stories** at prestigious magazines for children and young adults in Iran like Doost, Salam Bacheha, Roshd, Soroosh, Docharkhe, Baran, etc from ۱۹۹۰ to present.

Babamarabdi was awarded many literary prize including:

- Winner of Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults ۱۶th Festival for novel “I will become a Spiderman like Rostam”, ۲۰۱۳

- Winner of Salam Bacheha Festival for book “Hi Grandp”, ۲۰۰۹
- Appreciation of the book ” Gold Fountain Pen” at Roshd Educational Festival, ۲۰۰۳
- First Prize in story for “Hi Grandpa” at Press Festival, ۲۰۰۱

Other Career Successes:

- Top Trainer Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Tehran Province, ۲۰۰۹
- First Prize in Drama for the Play “I Miss the Sun” at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults ۵th Puppet Show Festival in Tehran Province, ۲۰۰۳
- Third Prize in Music Selection for the Play “I Miss the Sun” at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults ۵th Puppet Show Festival in Tehran Province, ۲۰۰۳
- First Prize in Directing for the Play “The Man Had No Lips” at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults ۴th Puppet Show Festival in Tehran Province, ۲۰۰۲
- Top Trainer Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in the country, ۲۰۰۱

- Top Trainer Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Tehran Province, ۱۹۹۹
- First Prize in Stage Design for the Play “Aunt Cockroach” at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults First Puppet Show Festival in the country, ۱۹۹۹
- Storytelling Festival Winner of Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Tehran Province, ۱۹۹۸
- The use of the my novel **Only the father can awakening me from sleep** as one of the references in the book **Fatherhood in contemporary discourse** by Anna Pilinska, Cambridge

Other artistic activities:

- Jury member in Drama Festival The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Tehran province, ۲۰۱۶
- Jury member in Razavi Festival stories and memories The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, ۲۰۱۴
- Jury member in Drama Festival trainers of The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in the country, ۲۰۱۰

- Jury member in Drama Festival trainers of The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in the country, ۲۰۰۶
- Jury member in torytelling competition The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in the country, ۲۰۰۵
- Jury member in Theatre Festival Ministry of Education in Karaj, ۲۰۰۱
- Designer scene in the play “Sabr e Zard” in Chahar Soo Hall at the City Theatre, ۲۰۰۱