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**SUSAN
TAGHDIS**

Biography



Narrow and maze-like alleys of Shiraz, somewhere near Shah-Cheragh Shrine. Marmalade orange blooms are on the top of every narrow wall, watching the passerby who goes away with his donkey. Suddenly a sound breaks the silence of the alley. A girl sitting behind a donkey starts screaming. The donkey is scared. The girl laughs and screams. Then she lightly falls from behind the donkey. A man runs behind her and hits her back. He takes her clothes from behind and pushes. The girl is still laughing. Other kids look from behind the walls and windows. The man leaves the girl

by an open door, shouting “Here is your kid... What is she? Even boys do not do such things. Is she a girl or a monster with three heads?!”

Grandma looks at the girl, addressing her “Susan! What are you doing? Why do you jump on people’s donkeys?” The laugh on Susan’s face vanishes, but her eyes continue shining as before. She is thinking about her first experience of riding a donkey, thinking about how to make a story of this for kids. Tomorrow when they meet, she has something new to narrate. Once upon the time and a very good time... there was a donkey... No, there was a girl...

Susan among the snows

It is the dead of winter, February 1960. The grandmother

runs out of the house barefooted to find firewood. Her daughter is giving birth to her first child, and she must return as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Susan is born. Father is not happy. He is sitting in a corner with a frowning face. It was not supposed to be a girl. What is the use of a girl to him? Can she help in the work? Would sometime he lift his head and be proud of her daughter? It is obvious that he would not!

The grandmother is happy and looks at her nephew. But father turns his face away. He asks grandma to take away the child as soon as possible. Grandma takes Susan to her home.

Susan Taghdis grows up to by her grandmother. She listens to grandma's tales and narrates them to the children of the alley. Every week, she goes to the newspaper kiosk, looking at *Keyhan for Kids* magazine. Whenever she has a penny, she runs to buy the new issue of the magazine. She could not take her eyes away from previous issues. In an occasion, she buys some the old issues and devours more stories.

Susan reads a simplifies and serial version of *Les Misérables* in *Keyhan for Kids*. When reading the name of Victor Hugo, she told herself, is it possible for me to become a writer one day? When asked first about what she is going to do when she grows up, she took her head up with confidence: "a writer!". Everyone is laughing. "Shut up baby, writing is not yours..."

But Susan wants to do whatever she is told not to do. Now that this is told her, she wants to be a writer... is it possible? Could it be?

When Susan is nine, the father returns to take her. So far, she has seen her father a couple of times. Now he has found the girl useful. Mom is pregnant again and

the home is crowded with little children. At last, there should be somebody to take care of them. Susan returns home after a few years. But she must take care of her younger brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters who are hard to control. Susan gathers them and tells them stories. Father is utterly surprised when he finds how Susan treat the kids with stories. Gradually, all neighboring kids are invited to sit and listen to the stories by a little girl who makes stories of her simple adventures around her. She tells stories about the life of donkeys and about whatever happens in the neighborhood. Her little sister is always waiting to listen to a story. Susan buys *Keyhan for Kids* every week and reads the stories to her brothers, sisters, and mother.



But this good setting does not last. Father bans *Keyhan for Kids*. He also prohibits writing and reading stories. However, Susan continues buying *Keyhan for Kids* and such other magazines as *Boys and Girls* and continues writing every day. She finds a way to hide the magazines and manuscripts under the carpets or above the closet.

At school, she loves composition classes to read her new writings for her classmates. At other classes, she cannot listen to the teacher. She is always talking to

others, making a story out of everything. The teacher tries to capture her, “Susan, please repeat just what I said now...”

But she repeats the teacher every time. As if she was not talking all the time.

One day when she returns from school, she finds her father has discovered all the magazines and manuscripts. He has thrown everything in the middle of the yard and is shouting. A piece of paper was in his hands telling others, “look, this girl is rebellious... see what she has written.... why aren’t you like other girls... what shall I do with you?”

And in front of Susan’s eyes, he tears apart the latest issue of *Keyhan for Kids*, rip... rip... rip... rip... rip... Five pieces. Exactly five pieces. And throws the pieces in the garbage.

Susan waits for her father to depart. She takes the pieces of *Keyhan for Kids* from the garbage and puts the pieces together on the steps. Sitting on a lower step, she weeps and puts every piece of the story in order. She thinks about why her father has such behavior toward her. Why he is treating the brothers differently? Why is everything prohibited for her and not for the boys? Thinks about the title of *Girls and Boys* magazine as if there is no difference between the genders. Of course, there is. Because she was forbidden to do whatever she likes.

The only way to escape this situation is the school. At least at school, no one is prohibited from reading or writing. At home whenever she could, she sat in a corner and start writing stories. When she wrote, she felt free to go wherever she wanted. The teacher had discovered Susan’s love for writing. Because of this, as long as her writings could be, she lets her read them in the classroom. Once Susan wrote a composition that was 23 pages. But the kids listened to it without blinking. This was because Susan’s stories carried them away to a different world...

Empty days filled with stories

Now everyone knew at school that Susan writes very well. But in mathematics and other lessons, she is rather weak. However, she

wants to work around every subject. The exams of the fifth grade are close and when everything is forbidden for Susan at home, the school is like a paradise. But it does not take long when the father says she is not allowed to go to school. After the first exams of the fifth-grade, Susan has to stay home forever. She is no longer allowed to go out and there is no way to buy a magazine. She must take care of her siblings and her parents do not take her anywhere.

This goes on until one day, the father brings 18 boxes of books. Books belong to one of his friends who is reconstructing his house and have asked the father to store them in an empty room upstairs. Susan curiously goes to the books. Father's friend has even kept his school textbooks. The boxes books are full of academic books about literature, psychology, and sociology as well as magazines such as *Woman of the Day* and *Intellectuals*. Father did not know he has brought back all the stuff he has already forbidden. The house is no longer a prison for Susan. Every day, she read new things. She even learned some mathematics. She sat for hours, reading books she had never expected herself. She read magazines and talked to her mother about the outside world.

Susan's days are filled with reading and writing. Now she writes for the adults and like the contemporaries, she is often reading a text in the intellectual atmosphere of the 1979 revolution. After the revolution, she sent her stories to Shiraz radio and TV stations. For a while, she privately attended Shiraz Art University courses to learn painting and printing, away from her father's eyes.

Meanwhile, Susan finds suitors. Father hopes Susan to change her mind and start a normal life with marriage. But Susan rejects. Father does not know Susan is still writing. She writes to make a distance with the real world she is living in. He does not know sometimes Susan leaves home to deliver her writings to radio and television stations.

One day, Susan recalls her old friend, *Keyhan for Kids*. She wants to know what happened to the magazine after the revolution.

She buys a recent issue of the magazine from a newspaper kiosk. An interesting story is published in it. Joan Aiken about a tiger that flies at

nights. She continues buying and reading *Keyhan for Kids* for several weeks. Then she reads the stories written by Iranian writers, most of them about the creatures flying at night! As if they have rewritten all those stories by Aiken with different animals. She asked herself why with so many themes and subjects around, people start copying. Susan does not hesitate to break the silence. Calls the magazine's office to talk to Vahid Nikkhah Azad, the editor in chief. She asked him why do you publish different copies of the same story? Mr. Nikkhah, who does not take this reader seriously, answers: "You know how difficult it is to write for kids? Have you ever written anything for kids?"

These words made Susan angry. She should show them yes! I also write, so much... Stories much better than what you are publishing!

Susan goes home. She sits in a corner and starts writing. The story of "the year summer came early" finds shape. She rewrites it on clean pieces of paper again and posts it to *Keyhan for Kids* office in Tehran. But the editor does not believe that this story is written by Susan Taghdis herself. Susan can no longer tolerate. She sits and writes another original story, with a very original subject. She wrote about a girl who discovers that her father is a thief and to compensate for her father's misdeeds, she gives



all home furniture and appliances to others. The title of the story becomes “My father was a thief”. This title becomes the first story by Susan Taghdis published in *Keyhan for Kids*.

Now Susan is constantly writing the stories for *Keyhan for Kids* the kids and Mr. Nikkhah is happy with her works.

In 1980, Vahid Nikkhah Azad leaves *Keyhan for Kids* to IRIB, (national broadcasting service) and is replaced by Dariush Nowroozi. One day it was in the news that Mr. Vahid Nikkhah is going to visit Shiraz TV station. Susan is happy. She likes to see Mr. Nikkhah closely. She departs to Shiraz TV headquarters, introducing herself. “So you are Susan, that courageous writer” Mr. Nikkhah answers.

Then he tells Susan why she is still in Shiraz. He talks about how they are searching for writers like her in Tehran and continues “Susan, come and join us at IRIB.” IRIB is the national broadcasting service. Susan is perplexed. She wants to leave everything behind and depart to Tehran. But she is aware of the impossibility of this. If her father would know about this, he would force her to marry somebody and abandon such projects. She keeps her silence but continues thinking. She thinks about Tehran, and about a situation for work and for writing. Is this possible?

One night she narrates everything to her mother. “I think Mr. Nikkhah had a very free image of me when he invited me,” she told her mother. Suddenly, the mother hugs Susan and starts weeping. With eyes full of tears, she tells her, “Now that you don’t want to marry... and your father does not like your works.... Leave and go... nothing is important... just go...”.

Susan is surprised. With rounded eyes, she told her mother that she does not even know the streets of Shiraz. How is it possible for me to depart to Tehran?

Her mother reminds that one of her friends is to go to Tehran in a few weeks. She tells Susan to prepare herself for traveling to Tehran with

her friend.

Susan still cannot believe. As the day arrives, the mother hugs Susan every night and cries. lullabies every night. Nobody knows what would happen next. Tehran is extremely big; especially for a strange girl who is coming from Shiraz.

Step Eleven, Tehran

Susan feels she is standing on a high cliff surrounded by fog and nothing could be seen. She must jump on the fog without knowing what is expecting her. She may fail. She may never reach what she is after. Susan's mother gives her a very small amount of money she had saved. One night, Susan leaves Shiraz together with a friend.

Susan settles at the house of Mr. Nikkhah's friend and starts working at IRIB. Her father still thinks she is in Shiraz, at the home of a relative. Susan knows if her father discovers her travel to Tehran, he may do unexpected things. But everything is OK for the time being. She works and has an income to start an independent life.

She starts writing scripts for the TV. Gradually, she develops and is





happy with her position. But one day Susan gets unemployed. Now she has no income.

Many years later, Susan Taghdis wrote about those days: “I was afraid because my father had told me if I go to Tehran, I will have no place at home. I was not allowed to return and if I return, I had to marry the son of a relative. It was not just that. I had actually come to Tehran to work in television, and with the dispute between the director of the group and the other influential people in the TV organization, they had been fired from the television and, as it was at that time, all those who worked for him were fired. We were all fired together. I had lost my job. I found that returning home was equally painful. I might have obliged to start a marital life. Nothing would have remained of the dream of writing. Not from a home, but from prison, I would have gone to another prison. All of my dreams would have withered away and I had no right to dream again. I did not tell anybody. I was ashamed.

The day I lost my job, perplexed and mystified, I sat down at home for a while. It was not a real home, but a small room in an attic belonging to an old woman who was alone; with a roof full of snow and dull and dark days. I had a small electric

stove and I used it to warm the room and the tenant who often jumped in to see what I am doing.

I promised myself not to return home, even if I could not find a job in *Keyhan for Kids* or Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. Even if I had to work in a house. When I could win over perplexity, I recalled a subject that was always with me. The title of the story was 'alive in the grave'. How could one be alive in a grave? This was my own situation. However, I had opportunities to struggle. It was *Keyhan for Kids*.

I started ... I had a little paper. I had to write everything on that limited space. I used small handwriting to write more. I wrote and wrote. Four days and I night I wrote.

On the second day, there was nothing left of the frozen bread and cheese over the window. I had a pair of earrings. It was a gift from my grandmother. I went to sell it, but I did not want to sell pairs. So, I sold one pair and kept the other. By that time, Mr. Nowroozi was the editor of the *Keyhan for Kids*. When I finished my long story or novel, I went to the office of the magazine but the atmosphere had changed. Mr. Nowrouz was gone and was replaced by Mr. Fardi.

Around Mr. Mansard's desk was there were many people I could not recognize. I was confused. I looked at them with disappointment. There was such a crowd there that one could not recognize Mr. Fardi.

What should I have done? There was no hope. I should have left the room before anybody noticing me. But all of a sudden, for a moment, Mr. Fardi was almost left alone. Everybody went to lunch. Mr. Fardi was also about to leave. I went ahead and said hello. I gave him the text and told him that this is a sequential story.

Mr. Fardi looked at me with amazement and I did not understand why. He smiled, sat down again, and started reading the story, and then as if he forgot that he was to go to lunch and started turning the pages...

And my story was published.”

Meanwhile, a girl who is a roommate of Susan finds her a suitor. She thinks now that Susan has lost her job, it is better for her to get married. Susan has

a different idea herself. She does not want to marry just because she does not have money. She likes to make progress in her writing. She wants to find stability in her work so that she could finally lift her head and prove to everyone that she is a writer. Publication of the sequential 'Alive in the Grave' has improved her situation. But her roommate does not leave here. She likes to help Susan in a way as to get her out of this situation. Susan, however, rejects all the suitors. Until one day a Mehdi appears. A blond boy who is often described as pleasant. He has a glass shop and seems



to be well off. Susan rejects Mehdi like others. But Mehdi does not stop. He uses beautiful words and does not give up like others. Mehdi says he does not have much money like Susan. He says he wants to start their lives from zero. His has effective words and could not be overlooked. Susan thinks perhaps this is the person who

would help her to develop. She wants to think about Mehdi more. But writing had captured her mind before. She thinks she is not going to marry before an achievement in writing. She thinks she can run her life, and most of all, she does not like blond boys!

Mehdi still is there, insisting. This time, he sends a few common friends to convince her. They tell Susan that life requires money and that she cannot afford to pay for everything by herself. They say Mehdi is a special boy and cannot be ignored. Susan says she is a writer and her job does not match with Mehdi's. 'Why should

be better! Writing cannot result in money, but Mehdi's job can!'

The words of friends have affected Susan's mind. Also, she has a very limited income from her publications. She understands that if this situation continues, she may have to return to Shiraz, back to the life she has fought to escape. The worst thing to do was to return to Shiraz.

The financial pressure together with Mehdi's insistence did their job. Susan accepts. She goes to the phone center to inform her mother. The mother becomes happy. But father, who has recently discovered that she has been in Tehran, is no longer willing to see her.

In 1982, Susan and Mehdi marry. Susan's brothers are doing their military services and could not attend the ceremony. Her three younger sisters attend. Susan is feeling stranger than ever. When signing the marriage contract, Mehdi turns to Susan, telling her, "Shall I write your job as a housewife?" Susan replies that she is a writer, not a housewife. But Mehdi does not take this seriously, and starts writing in front of Susan's name: "H..." Susan starts up, takes the pen shouting "I am a writer! Nothing else!".

The surprised Mehdi maintains himself and tries to calm Susan. Then he says she did not intend anything bad and corrects the text: Susan Taghdis, Writer.

In the first two months, everything goes well. Mehdi has no problems with Susan's writing, and his family also accept Susan. But after two months, he starts to show rigidities. He tells Susan that since she is a writer she cannot do her household tasks. For various reasons, he relates every problem to Susan's writing. He says why Susan does not cook. Why she does not sweep? But Susan manages to answer all these objections. She does all household tasks

and continues her writing. She limits her going out to once a week, so as to avoid the objections of Mehdi. She collects her stories during the week and brings them to *Keyhan for Kids* or *Roshd* once a week. She departs early in the morning and returns by eleven, before noon.

However, Mehdi still opposes Susan to write. He keeps repeating that since Susan often writes, she does not pay attention to anything else. Mehdi wants his uncle to convince Susan to stop being a writer. The uncle talks to Susan telling him how Mehdi is against her writing habit. Susan could no longer tolerate. She has already left everything in life to be a writer, her mother, her brothers and sisters, her city. Therefore, confidently, she replies, “No matter ... if he cannot tolerate me as a writer, I am ready for divorce...”

The uncle does not expect such a word from Susan, neither Mehdi. Susan meant she prefers to be alone, but she cannot stop writing. Mehdi, who is convinced he cannot stop Susan from writing, never repeats such a position.

Susan develops day by day. But now some publishers and journalists create problems for her. For some people, she should not develop, simply because she is a woman. There are publishers who persistently reject her works. Every time they find new objections in her stories and block her way. But Susan has learned how to build a bridge over any complication. Every time they find new objections, she continues with more stories.

Current Situation

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Susan published her first book, *Thumbnail Girls* in 1981. She regularly writes for such popular magazines as *Aftabgardan*, *Poupak*, and *Soroush* and occasionally composes poetry. Now she now stands where she liked to be. She enjoys writing for kids and kids love her stories,

But the turning point of her life in 2004 is when *Step Eleven* is published by the Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. *Step Eleven* is the story of a young lion who cannot pass through subjective and mental barriers. At that time, the book created an

uproar. She received many awards to the readers found a new story to enjoy.

The initial idea of *Step Eleven* returns to a few years ago when Susan was only twelve and she was watching the TV documentary about cats. A researcher had kept a few cats for a long time in a room with vertical lines on the walls and then took them to a room with horizontal lines on the walls. In the new room, the cats never notice the walls. They hit the wall as if their eyes could not detect the wall.

The documentary made Susan think. We the humans are exactly like those cats. Each of us is imprisoned in his or her how special subjectivity and mentality. The initial idea of the story is created here in her mind. At that time, Susan was always narrating stories for her brothers and sisters. One day, when her five-year-old sister asks for a story, Susan starts telling the story of a lion cub, and suddenly the cage bars appear in her mind. Bars resembling vertical lines on the wall. She immediately wrote some notes about lion cub and reads it for her sister. When she sees the deep effect of the story on her sister, she imagines how effective this story could be for the rest of the children.

Taghdis seriously started writing *Step Eleven* when she was twenty. But she kept that script for many years to find a good publisher. According to herself, the book has greatly affected her own life. Because when she looks back at her life, she sees that she has never put herself in any – internal



or external – prison and has been able to live a free life; therefore, she feels ready to successively continue with the step eleven and the next steps toward her future.

In any library of the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, *Step Eleven* is often among the most read book. A teacher once showed how dog-eared and worn-out all the copies of the book have become. The book has found its readers and affects their life. It enters educational textbooks and is translated into several languages.

Susan Taghdis has written more than seventy books for children and adolescents. Now is working on the overall corpus of her works, categorizing the stories and organizing her ideas. She has a son who is a computer engineer and has recently married.

Life brought her bitterness too. She suffers from hypothyroidism, heart disease, and diabetes, and in 2014, she has lost one of her fingers due to diabetes. However, she says in one of her interviews: “I never feel that much has changed. I always think that people are more with their spirits than with their bodies, and thank God that the spirit never becomes diabetic, and it is impossible to cut a member of the spirit!”

Susan Taghdis now has a good relationship with kids and always finds new ideas for new stories by them. She tries to keep in touch with them and write stories that affect their lives at a level beyond ordinary bits of advice.

Resume

Judgments

Referee, Children's and Toddler Story section, 16th Book Festival of Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2013.

Referee, 6th Literary Award of Parvin Etesami, 2015.

Referee, Children's and Toddler Story section, 18th Book Festival of Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2016.

Referee, 15th Roshd Festival for Educational Books, 2017.

Referee, 8th Literary Award of Parvin Etesami, 2018.

Meetings and lectures

The problem of Children's Books to Communicate with Children, Presentation at the Special Meeting of Book City, 2015.

Iranian Children's and Youth Literature in the English-speaking World, Presentation at the Special Meeting of Book City, 2015.

Awards

Award for a collection of artistic achievement, Al-Zahra University, 2000.

Diploma of Honor for a sustained and artistic endeavor on reflecting women's problems, Presidents Office for Women's Participation, 2000.

Diploma of Honor, Roshd Festival for Educational Books, 2003.

Didn't you see a yellow nose? Parvin Etesami Award, 2004.

My Giraffe is Blue, Diploma of Appreciation Hello Kids and Poopak Festivals, 2006.



Foot Sounds of Green Goat Kid, Diploma of Appreciation
Hello Kids and Poopak Festivals, 2006.

Step Eleven, Nomination in Second Pravin Etesami Festival,
2006.

Step Eleven, Selected as Book of the Year of the Islamic Republic,
2007.

Diploma of Appreciation, Association of Writers for Children
and Adolescents, for efforts on establishing the Association,
2007.

Once Upon a Time, Diploma of Appreciation from *Hello Kids*,
Poopak, and *Dragonfly* Magazines, 2009.

Liar Shepherd, Nominated by Ninth Press Festival of Center for
Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2009.

At the Presence of God (Screenplay), Nominated in 11th
International Resistance Film Festival, 2010.

And God Answered, Book of the Year of the 10th Martyr
Ghanipour Festival, 2010.

Step Eleven, Letter of Acknowledgments from Director General
of the Office of Publications and Educational Technology for,
2012.

Whose Nose Made the Noise? Listed in Flying Turtle, 2013.

Letter of Acknowledgment from the 11th Roshd Festival for
Educational Books, 2014.

Adventures of Aunt Beetle and Uncle Mouse, Listed in Flying
Turtle, 2014.

Lilizi, Let's Play, Listed in Flying Turtle, 2014.

The Shadow with No Head, No Tail, No Body, Listed in Flying
Turtle, 2014.

What a Dangerous Animal, Listed in Flying Turtle, 2015.

Ten Yellow, Green, and Blue Birds, Listed in Flying Turtle,
2016.



Nominated by Festival on Pictorial Fiction, Center for Studies into Children's Literature, Shiraz University, 2016.

Gilly Gilly, Awarded by 16th Roshd Festival for Educational Books, 2018.

Awarded Writer, Members of Third Reading Club of Children and Young Adult, 2018.

Articles and notes

Through the Mirror: Frankenstein, *Quarterly Journal of the Children and Adolescent Literature Research*, Autumn 1995, No. 2.

Dream of a Star, *Quarterly Journal of the Children and Adolescent Literature Research*, Winter 1995, No. 3.

Review of Season: Comparison and Contrast in the Reconstruction of Stories and Myths (Reviewing *Little Red Robot and the Mechanical Wolf* by Eric Sanvoisin, Translated by Zahra Saeed Bahr), *Quarterly Journal of the Children and Adolescent Literature Research*, Autumn 1996, Issue 6.

Review of the Season: *Bath Symphony* by Farhad Hassanzadeh, *Quarterly*

Journal of the Children and Adolescent Literature Research, Spring 1996, No. 4.

Has anything happened again? (Reflection on a philosophical and mystical book), *Quarterly Journal of the Children and Adolescent Literature Research*, 1997, Issue 10.

Notes on the Children, Story and Reading, *Quarterly Journal of the Children and Adolescent Literature Research*, Winter 1999, Issue 19.

My Wishes, *Monthly Review of Children and Adolescents Books*, October 2012, No. 180.

A Good Incident, on *Top and Bottom Stories* by Mohammad Reza Shams, *Review of Children and Adolescents Books*, Spring & Summer 2014, Issues 1 & 2.

Happy International Children's Book Day, *Review of Children and Adolescents Books*, Spring 2013, no. 5.

Articles and notes on works

Introducing Writers for Children and Adolescents: The Measured Imagination in Stories by Susan Taghdis, Mehdipour Omrani, Rohallah, *Monthly Review of Children and Adolescents Books*, August 2000, no. 34.

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Step Eleven: an introduction, *Monthly Review of Children and Adolescents Books*, September 2005 - No. 95.

Lion Cub's Little Home, Pakpour, Mania, *Monthly Review of Children and Adolescents Books*, October 2011, no. 168.

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A female-centered review of two books by Susan Taghdis: a solution to overcome gender discrimination, Ansariyan, Masoumeh, *Quarterly Journal of the Children and Adolescent Literature Research*, Spring 2012, No. 53.

Yet another Aunt Beetle, Rahmandoost, Mostafa, *Review of Children and Adolescents Book*, Summer 2013, No. 6.

A review of characterization in stories for young children, Rashidi, Saforasadat; Yahyaei, Mohammad; *Children Literature Studies*, Spring and Summer 2016, No. 13.

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They say you are too serious! Dadashi, Hamid Reza, *Roshd for Kids*, Autumn 2018, no. 61.

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Away, Until Day of Judgment, illustrated by Saeed Razaghi, Barg Publications, 1991.

Leila and Sultan, illustrated by Akbar Nikanpur, Tehran: Arts and Literature Institute, 1991.

Like the Smell of Flowers, illustrated by Attieh Markazi, Ofogh Publications, 1991.

Thousands of short-footed Horses, illustrated by Zohre Parirock, Surah Mehr, 1991.

So, When it Will Snow? Illustrated by Gholam Ali Maktabi, Ofogh Publications, 1992.

I Do Not Know How, illustrated by Abolfazl Aali, Surah Mehr, 1993.

Granma, Cuti Cuti Cotton, illustrated by Gholam Ali Maktabi, Tehran: Rouyesh, 1993.

A Gift for You, illustrated by Farisa Aflatoun, Zekr Publishing and Research Institute, 1993.

Didn't you see a yellow nose? Illustrated by Gholamali Mektabi, Tehran: Burhan School, 2002.

So where is our baby? Illustrated by Nasrin Yavari, Madreseh Publications 2003.

The Sock with a Hole, illustrated by Alireza Goldouzian, Shabaviz, 2003.

Night, the Devil and the Sword, illustrated by Attiyeh Markazi, Tehran: Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2003.

Electric Elephant, illustrated by Majid Zakeri, School Press, 2003.

A Long Way, illustrated by Mohammad Mehdi Tabatabaee, Shabaviz, 2003.

Step Eleven, illustrated by Masoumeh Kashae, Tehran: Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2004.

Rug Hat, illustrated by Simin Shahrivan, Institute



of Arts and Literature, 2004.

Where did the moon get her spot? Illustrated by Banafsheh Ahmadzadeh, Shabaviz, 2004.

Salt-Boy and the Demon, illustrated by Lisa Jamileh Barjasteh, Mashhad, Beh Nashr, 2004.

Here Barberry, There Raspberry, illustrated by Saeed Razzaghi, Zehr Publishing and Research Institute, 2005.

My Giraffe Is Blue, illustrated by Alireza Goldouzian, Amir Kabir, 2005.

Elephantine Hide and Seek, illustrated by Ali Mafakheri, Shabaviz, 2005.

Aunt Beetle Collection, illustrated by Saeed Razzaghi, Zekr Publications, 2005.

A Hole Here, A Hole There, illustrated by Sajjad Razzaghi, Zekr Publications and Research Institute, 2005.

Who Carried Away Pari? Illustrated by Sepideh Motavasel-e-Haq, Shabaviz, 2006.

Behind That Blue Wall, illustrated by Reza Maktabi, Amir Kabir, 2006.

My Beautiful Horse, Amir Kabir, 2007.

Green Goat Kids, illustrated by Marjan Vafaeyan, Shabaviz, 2007.

Travel Toward God (Concerned for Butterflies

Collection), Tehran: Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, 2007.

Black Worm, illustrated by Rasoul Mirdamadi, Shabaviz, 2007.

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ناشرون ٢٠١٧.

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له بن بن بنی چالو، نگارکیش عهلی رهزا گولدوزیان، وهرگیر سیامه ند بهختازه (سقز):
نشر بیریار (٢٠١٧)

Overview of Work

Susan Taghdis is one of the writers who has greatly influenced the field of literature for children and adolescents in Iran. When children and adolescent literature in Iran was at the early phase, it was Susan Taghdis who found a new shape and meaning for it. Her innovations in expressing childish feelings and her unique tone led to significant changes in children's literature.

Taghdis has produced significant artistic and literary works a variety of genres and fields such as poetry, teen novels, children's stories as well as movie scripts. But her best works are those that are written for children. Stories that have a deep sense behind a simple narrative. These are the concepts that remain in children's mind and shape her or his future. Among these concepts is the idea of giving courage to children. Taghdis attempts to encourage children to find their own personality, to be brave and not to be afraid of discovering. Certainly, these concepts can have a profound effect on the future of children and the formation of their personality. Among the other themes addressed in the works by Taghdis include living in a happy and secure world; a world based on peace, friendship, and love.

In *Salt-Boy and the Demon*, she admires joy and





delightfulness. Salt-Boy finds a great secret. Joy defeats the demon. And instead of filling the glass of the demon with tears, he patiently enjoys, thus defeating the demon and releasing the captured girls with him from the tragic dungeon. In *Adventures of Aunt Beetle and Uncle Mouse*, we encounter a series of recreations that represent reciprocal and affable love between Aunt Beetle and Uncle Mouse and the creation of setting for understanding the fundamental freedom of women. *Here Barberry, There Raspberry*, in addition to representing tolerance, kindness, love, and beauty, shows how to respect women against the violence of traditional society.

The shadow in *A Shadow Under the Moonlight* is nothing. It is simple, and when it is alone it is a lonely shadow. When it unifies with sadness, it is a sad shadow, but when it couples with joy, it transforms into a little girl with curly hair and a deeply yellow shirt!

Happiness, kindness, and peace are the other important themes this writer often addresses. In *Why Do the Bears Fight Together?* she portrays the beauty of reconciliation and ugliness of war and fight, even though the bears continue fighting. The reader can contrast the beauty of peace and reconciliation with a devastating conflict. This story inspires a strong wish

for peace and a great passion for reaching true dialogue and enduring collaboration. Along with philosophizing and portrayal of the splendor of love, reconciliation, kindness, and altruism, Taghdis strongly considers the special enthusiasm for discovery and experimentation in children. Most of her works passionately reinforce the will to explore, experiment and discover in the audience. Stories capture the reader to show them another version of the world.

Among other features of Taghdis's works, one can point out the novelty of subjects. Her vision of the world is a creative one that is very close to children's point of view. Taghdis has been working in this field for many years, but she never repeats herself and every time, in every new book or story, she tells entirely new stories with new themes, subjects, and visions. She introduces adventures and stories we have not seen or heard before. The characters of Taghdis's stories are active characters. They show the readers how can to find a role, become more influential, and accept responsibility in the society. Taghdis identifies herself with the children. She does not consider herself to be an adult who is sitting in a higher position to preach. She understands the children very well and writes a true and appropriate story for them.

At the same time, one of the most prominent features of Taghdis's works is in the realism they exercise. This is most evident when we consider how Taghdis confronts gender discriminatory stereotypes in society. In her stories, there is an equal number of male and female characters and usually, it is the female characters who carry the main burden of the story. In all her stories, Taghdis has focused on the important role of women, and this is equally true about both her fantasy stories and stories that she has re-created from ancient tales and the history of the prophets. Feminine characters in her stories are often in critical conditions and, in proportion to the story, they show reasonable and measured actions and reactions.

Taghdis shows her readers how women can also be influential, take important decisions and do the main tasks of the story.

Girls in Taghdis's stories are talented, front-runner, adventurous, curious, risktaker, and smart; also make appropriate decisions in real conditions. By creating such characters, Taghdis has created a small model of her ideal society. A society in which all people, including girls, can participate and can challenge the ordinary order of society and change the ruling stereotypes. Just as she herself did in her life and resisted the discrimination. Unlike her peers, she started reading books and magazines and then turned to write to find a way out. Very like the lion cub of *Step Eleven* she was not caught in any cage, external or internal. She could freely put her ideas on paper and encourage children to follow their dreams.

Concision is the other feature of her works. The language of Taghdis is simple, fluent, and full of familiar words. She delicately arranges her words and cuts the unnecessary parts away. Intellectual simplicity, inner concerns as well as emphasizing the structure of the story, have made the reader easily communicate with her works. Susan Taghdis is a master of narration of stationary, stagnant, and motionless situations for young children. The descriptions are almost precise, detailed and based on the realism of contemporary urban life that is flowing in a fantasy and childish setting. Susan Taghdis knows her society very well and considers the existing norms,



values, and beliefs in her writings. She also has extensive studies in child psychology and has thus far been able to write as appropriate to our modern society. She writes for the children and in her writing, she talks about the problems of the society with the children and makes them think how they can address them both in their existing position and when they grow up.

All of these led the Association of Writers for Children and Adolescents to organize a special meeting in December 2017 to award Taghdis. Different writers and critics talked about aspects of her works and contributions, especially for the advancement of literature for children and adolescents. The writers described their memories with Taghdis and admired her talent as well as her persistence to develop her life, her works, her field.

Hoda Haddadi, illustrator of children's books called her "a brilliant experimentalist writer for children," and pointed out how Taghdis accepts different points of view about her works and has never closed her mind to criticism. Farhad Hasanzadeh, a writer for children and nominee for Hans Christian Andersen Award, called her a creative writer who has a strong sense of the public and good public relations and is herself a passionate social activist.

Taghdis has written many stories with a religious subject or theme. She has recreated the life of religious figure through creative writing. Unlike other religious books, Taghdis has made these stories more attractive to the children who live in modern society. Her rewritings are her more realistic and free from superstitious elements. Also, women and girls find a true role in these stories. Like the rewriting of the story of Moses, that unlike all the stories, the younger sister, the mother, and wife of Prophet Moses find a more prominent role.

Taghdis is a very conscious writer, especially in her religious books. She studies extensively to avoid providing false



ideas and information to the reader. Therefore, in her works, many of the superstitious element often found in ordinary religious literature are replaced with rational elements.

Taghdis believes that religious concepts cannot be easily erased from society but they need to be strengthened. She believes that a society with stronger adherence to religion is less wandering society. Of course, this requires a more appropriate treatment with religious concepts.

The trace of some important folklore and mythological narratives of ancient Persian literature is also evident in the works of Taghdis. Many of her stories recall the settings of classical Persian poetry. In addition to these, Taghdis has books that are direct rewriting of ancient and traditional Persian literature. Like *Bijan and Manijeh*, and *Ahriman's Game*, which rewrites the stories of *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi. These works, which show her mastery over Persian literature, familiarized the present-day children with ancient literature, and their fascinating tone, makes the child interested in reading classical Persian literature. Persian Folklore stories also have a special place in her works. In several collections, Taghdis has attempted to rewrite Aunt Beetle's story in several collections. Her difference lies in the fact that following the contemporary society, she considers different roles for women and girls. In the original story of Aunt Beetle, there are strong signs and elements of gender discrimination and patriarchal society. Taghdis, in rewriting this story, represents the prevailing gender equality in society and demonstrates how society has transformed.

Step Eleven

Nelly Mahjub

The lion cub was born in the zoo. In a small room behind the iron cage bars, which was only ten steps long. Her mother, fed the lion cub with her milk every day. She played with her mother's tail and climbed up her head. Sometimes they walked in the cage, but only in ten steps. In the eleventh step, she would hit the cage bars.

This was their story until one day the guard forgot to close the cage which makes the starting point of the real story. The reader wants to know what happens next and what the lion cub is going to do. *Step Eleven* can be considered as one of those works that rely on the originality of the reader's subjectivity.

Even if the child could not discover the deeper layers of the story, he or she would find the story interesting and enjoy it.

Step Eleven is the story of a lion cub who cannot recognize the true opportunity that is open to her. Simply because she has been in a cage all his life, she can only take ten steps (a metaphor for individual and social limitations) and when she is free, she cannot take the eleventh step. She even does not try to take a further step and change her destiny.

At each stage of the story, the writer introduces a set of new possibilities that are open to the lion cub while she is unaware of them.

Very indirectly and in the different layers of the story, Taghdis introduces such concepts as freedom, confinement, liberation, courage, and experience, the concepts are introduced in such a way that any school child can easily understand and recognize.

Through using animal characters, Susan



Taghdis has found a more convenient way to communicate with her audience. The ideas expressed by different characters and their opinions about the lion cub create new and meaningful situations for further action, discussion, and deliberation.

In the end, the little lion cub never develops her position in the world because she never takes the eleventh step. But an important event happens at the end of the story which helps the reading or listening child to build a more hopeful story. There is hope that rejects the tragic ending. Very comically, the writer introduces the possibility of future experiences for liberation.

The book ends with the image of the old lion cub who never understood the range of possibilities that were open to her. Now she is a grownup mother with a new lion cub. "One of her cubs is always trying to push her head out of the bars. Maybe, in a day, she would start the eleventh, twentieth, hundredth, or thousandth step. Maybe her cub would be born in a green plane.

At that time, instead of living in the cage of ten steps, they would play among the tree. She would tell her children how the world is larger and more beautiful than a ten-step cage."

The courage to pass through subjective and mental barriers and to live freely are the main themes that are addressed in this low volume book. This story has introduced new meaning to children's literature in Iran and developed new approaches to writing for children. This finds significance when we consider the fact that most of the contemporary stories themselves were captured by stereotypes and repetitions.

This story has been translated into several languages, including English and Spanish. Also, an animation version of the story is being produced.

Ten Yellow, Green, and Blue Birds

The book story occurs on a tree, in a very cold morning. As cold as it makes the birds to shiver, to blow their feathers, even their crests become frozen.

On this side of the tree, the birds come one by one and sit on the branch to sit by each other, talking, laughing, and warming themselves. At the other side, however, there is a lonely little bird who is not willing to set aside her pride and sit with the rest.

Although the weather is cold, the colors of the book create a sincere and warm atmosphere. The most intriguing feature of the book is the special design and layout of the book that makes the following of simple adventures of the little bird, an interesting and exciting activity. The exemplifying illustration of the book gives each bird a singular character and thus the book has been very original and creative in its characterization.

Ten Yellow, Green, and Blue Birds is a story about friendship, and despite its small size, it has incorporated a rich set of themes and meanings. The tree is space for a small community of bird to dwell. But the little bird refuses to consider itself as part of this community. Nonetheless, the other birds treat her friendly and invite her to their warm community.

This book has proved very effective for teaching social skills to preschool children. Also, it can be used indirectly for teaching colors and numbers.

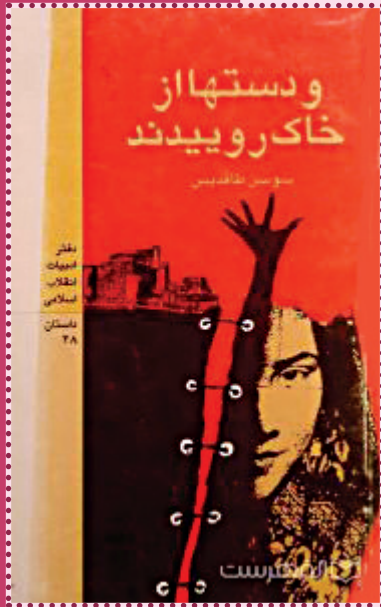


And the Hands Grow from the Soil

Masoumeh Ansarian

Susan Taghdis is generally known for her stories for children but she has produced literary works for the adolescents and *And the Hands Grow from the Soil* is one of them which is a novel that can reveal a different picture of its writer.

Farzaneh and Mahmoud, a brother and sister, together with their parents travel to the village in the summer. Everything goes well until the local shepherd informs them that by the middle of the night a car has carried a corpse to bury in the desert. Then



the shepherd disappears himself. The kids go to the desert by midnight where they witness a car carrying two bodies. The kids rescue the life an eighteen years old girl, and after some signs on the car, they suspect the local lord. The rest of the story is about their conflict with the lord.

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Farzaneh, an urban girl is the protagonist of *And the Hands Grow from the Soil* who has traveled to the village for holidays for recreation. Like any other teenager, she is a very adventurer, curious, and risk taker person. In the story, the female characters are roughly equal to the number of male characters. Girls and boys find equal positions and react according to their surrounding settings. In terms of diversity and number of characters, the story is very like ordinary and natural life and there is no gender bias in the text or the plot of the story.

The story considers no distinction between the private and public realms. Women are present both at home and at the community; also, they are at the center of social activity and,

along with men, are involved in a struggle to find a solution for social problems.

When Farzaneh and Soheila (both female characters) exit the garden at midnight, Ali is surprised and alarmed. Initially, Taghdis introduces the common, traditional, and stereotypical view on gender with its discriminations then takes a critical stance against them. Brother is a reality that Taghdis represents in these dialogues, and through language and behavior of Farzaneh, she proves it to be unreal and irrational. Interestingly, Farzaneh, the urban girl, is more courageous than Soheila, the simple and submissive rural girl. She is more at home with mountains and deserts too. By overcoming the subjectivity of Ali, Soheila, Mahmoud, and Assad, Farzaneh proves to be a competent leader. Farzaneh's talent and ability to command are realistically displayed in her actions. When stereotypes and gender bias dominate the mind and language of Ali and Mahmoud, and Soheila does not do anything but to accept and surrender, Farzaneh's behavior and language against gender stereotypes find more prominence. In this story, Taghdis has freed from curiosity, adventure, and fear from gender bias and reconsidered them with a more broadly human approach. Adventuring is a main characteristic habit of teenagers and it has found representations in the actions of both female and male characters of the story. Soheila, Ali, Mahmud, Farzaneh, and Asad, climb over the wall of a house. By hearing the voice of a peacock, all the children are frightened, except for the Farzaneh. The way to encounter groaning voice and

stretched hands requires a specially designed character like Farzaneh in a well-developed plot. The leading character of Farzaneh is created through her clever actions. Farzaneh encourages everybody to follow her. By staying at the middle of the desert on a dark night to save the life of a girl, she is showing her full capacity as a leader.

Gohar, the servant of the house of the lord is caught in a dangerous position; even though her health and the life of her son are the lord's hands, the lord has ordered him to guard the prisoners and to set fire to the house and the prisoners.

But the human behavior of captive women fascinates and transforms her. Prisoned women are more ingenious than men; they recognize the position of Gohar and try to detach her from the lord and attract her.

This story provides women with a space for action and they show that in most violent settings, they can distance themselves from violence and search for peace, friendship, and tolerance.

Farzaneh, as the protagonist of the story, more than everybody else emphasizes freedom of human life. Her mood when separating from the children, her staying in the desert, the moment of hearing the last breath of a humankind under the soil, the moment of breaking the fear and leaving the childhood behind, going toward the hill, and struggling with all her body to rescue ha humans being, are the moments that find beautiful and vivid portrayals in the story. The writer leaves no distance between herself, Farzaneh, and the buried person. It seems that the writer is living inside Farzaneh and with Farzaneh. She has penetrated deep into her soul and could reflect her conflicting feelings.

The Sock with a Hole

Have you ever thought about the fate of a sock, after finding a hole? This story is about a simple incident that we experience every day and we easily pass cross it. At the beginning of the story, the mother finds her daughter's socks with a hole on it. So, she throws that pair of socks on the garbage.

The sock with no hole blames the other pair with a hole for the situation they have fallen into. The sock with a hole does not stop. She suggests the other go outside of the garbage and find a new owner. At last, someone may need a sock with a hole. But the other one does not accept. However, the pair with a hole does not surrender. She believes that in this great world, there will be someone who needs a sock with a hole.

One of the main themes of this story is endurance, especially in conditions that our life forces us to face. At the same time, the concept of recycling is another theme in this story. This story indirectly tells



the child how is it possible to recycle the things that seem worthless and unnecessary.

When the sock wakes up and moves away from the garbage, to prove to be useful, the concept of hope is introduced in the mind of the reader. Finally, the damaged socks serve as a hat for a mouse who was shivering in the cold, and then, when she finds a tattered shoe, she suggests the mouse make a bed in the shoe. This time makes the shoe not to feel useless and to be happy.

Addressing environmental issues and urban life in the other layers of the story, along with its simple tune and fluid rhythm, has made this a fascinating story for children.

I Have A Girl, King Has Not

Bitā, the main character of the story, is a little girl whose father is very proud of her. Bitā's father is a typical man with only one piece of land where he both farms and lives. He always reads the poem "I have a girl, the king does not have a such a girl...", which is a line in folk poetry of Iran for her daughter. But one day the king hears his voice and grows angry over the fact that the farmer has a better daughter than him. He orders to arrest Bitā and her father and to take them to the palace.

One of the most important features of the book are the images drawn in the form of lithographs and associate the atmosphere of Qajar dynasty (nineteen-century kingdoms of Iran).

The main character of the book, like many other characters of Taghdis, is an insubordinate girl. A girl who takes the right decision in the critical situations and shoulders the main task of the story. Bitā saves herself and her father in a sharp and conceited way against the king. But her sagacity intensifies the jealousy of others. The king's daughter is jealous of Bitā and plans against her. In this story, there is no person who is absolutely negative. Even those who draw bad plans for Bitā are not essentially and intrinsically vicious. They are simply in situations for doing jealousy. Bitā approaches them with a thorough knowledge of their subjectivities and intentions. Despite the plans of the daughter, son, and wife of the king against her, Bitā approaches them softly and makes them accompany her.



Bitu, who is a witness to the king's incapability on decisions of the country, starts working to make the people of her land feel comfortable. The small and quiet society of this book is a good example for the society in which we live. A society this is full of people who are not essentially bad. But they make mistakes and therefore make people lose their lives. Or there are those who are not in their right place. Another underlying theme of the story is reliance on individual capacities and the fact that every human being has a set of positive features that are often undiscovered and hidden. The story shows the child how to discover her or his capacities and believe them. Because, as is the case of Bitu, everybody can accept and play an important role in the overall development of humanity.

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