

My relationship with my past is like, Jean Valjean and Inspector Javert
one fleeing for a lifetime without remembering what his crime was, while the other pursues him

COPPICE BLUE

FAAVIDEL



CHAPTER ONE: **EPISODE 4**
OBLIVION

Coppice Blue
Faavidel

Chapter One

Oblivion

Literature - Persian Fiction - Novel

Coppice Blue

By FAAVIDEL

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Pieces of a Family

I was flipping through the photos, and my memories collapsed over me like a massive wall; vivid! As if they were happening at that very moment. I could hear Aban's voice coming from Sam's studio. She had brought him tea and cake. Then she came to my room and closed the door behind her. She placed the tray of tea on the table in front of us and removed the albums and shoebox from my work desk. She sat next to me on the couch and arranged them in front of her. One of the albums was dedicated to my baby pictures up until my teenage years, while the other contained childhood, teenage, and single life photos leading up to my parents' marriage, along with our group photos at family gatherings. In both albums, alongside Mom and Dad, my aunt and uncle were the most present, and I was passed around in their arms. The album of my childhood and teenage years was filled with pictures of the six of us together. I could hear my own voice. Finally, I started to speak in a hoarse and strained tone. I don't know why it started from there;

"Dad and Uncle have been friends since childhood. During their university years, even though Dad studied medicine and Uncle engineering, their connection remained strong outside of university. When I was very little, I thought Uncle was Dad's brother and Aunt was Mom's sister. Let me say that Aunt is the daughter of a family friend of Uncle Farhad's Dad. Uncle said that at some point, I didn't realize what happened, but I became deeply in love with family gatherings. He meant Aunt's presence. Right after his military service¹, he married Aunt. At that time, he was in his first semester of Master's degree, and Aunt had just graduated with a degree in accounting and had started working at a company. I've already told you about Mom and Dad's story." Aban nodded with a smile.

My parents met during their general Medical Residency. They were supposed to get married after finishing their specialization, but the cultural revolution² and the closure of universities happened, leaving their education in limbo. So, my mom accepted my dad's proposal to move up their wedding. Their wedding ceremony—contrary to their families' wishes—was modest and held with a small group of relatives; due to the unpleasant social atmosphere of those days, many of their

1. In Iran, a mandatory two-year military service period is required for boys. After high school, they enter as conscripts, and if they enroll in university, they join the military as officers after completing their studies.

2. The Cultural Revolution in Iran took place after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and continued from 1980 to 1982. Its goal was to change the educational and cultural system of the country in order to eliminate the influence of Western culture and establish a system in accordance with Islamic principles. Universities were closed for a period of time. Universities came under control, many professors and students were expelled, and curricula were changed. This revolution had profound effects on Iranian society that are still observable today.

classmates were arrested, and there were political issues they were dealing with at that time.

I continued, "During the visits, my uncle and dad, along with my aunt and mom, became quite close. At that time, my uncle's house was around Sohrevardi. My parents' wedding gift from their parents was a house in Qolhak that they never lived in. They decided to build a house together, the way they wanted it. My uncle was keen on this project. He suggested they buy a new place together and, under his supervision, build a two-story villa there".

"Why buy? You had your lands in Shemroun and many other places!"

"At that time, they were far from the city center. They wanted a key location with good access to work and other places".

"But your dad's current house is in that area, right"?

"No. They bought this house as it was built. My uncle sold his share years ago. When my dad saw everyone building residential towers, he preferred to implement the clinic and hospital project there. He didn't want the land to become fragmented and fall into the hands of unrelated people".

"He really did something significant. I wish at least everyone would invest their money wisely in their profession instead of in harmful constructions".

I pointed to one of the photos with my chin; "In short, this place was chosen. A few months before their wedding, my mom and dad started building the house." Aban was all ears, one eye on the photos and one eye on me. I gave a bittersweet smile,

sipped some of my tea, and continued, "By the time my mom and dad got married, the house was somewhat complete enough to live in. Apparently, the four of them were so excited that they didn't let the landscaping be finished." Aban held up their picture of the four of them shoulder to shoulder in the yard of the house and waited for confirmation that the house behind them was indeed that house. In the picture, they stood happily and excitedly in front of a two-story white house. The surrounding area looked like a construction site. That day, they decided to move into that house and finish the remaining work once they settled in. That picture was the first souvenir photo taken in that house.

"Was your uncle's family wealthy as well? Where did their wealth come from"!?)

Until that day, I had never once thought about the answer to this question. It was strange! It was as if everything I was supposed to tell Aban had never been articulated before. I was searching for the right words. I started: " You know, we are somewhat old money. We've been wealthy for a long time, and my uncle comes from a prestigious and well-known family. I don't know the details very well, but his grandfather was an educated and worldly man and held a political position. When I was a child, I didn't understand these things much, and later I didn't ask. Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to get the details from my dad. All I know is that he lived in Russia for many years; Uncle Farhad's father was born in Russia and returned to Iran during his adolescence. My uncle's father and my grandfather were among the graduates of the second decade of Tehran University's establishment. You know my grandfather studied medicine, while Uncle Farhad's father studied mechanical engineering. My uncle always said that his father

worked hard for the automotive industry in Iran. Our grandfathers had a relationship similar to that of my dad and my uncle. My grandfather My grandfather owned many properties and gardens, and in a way, he could easily afford to send his children to a good university. He got his specialization board in France after completing general medical training. Both of them were deserving individuals. It's true that their fathers' wealth had an impact on their growth, but like my dad and Uncle Farhad, much of what they achieved years later was a result of their own efforts. If I start talking about them, it will lead us off track. Anyway! Both my dad and uncle inherited a substantial fortune from their fathers, and due to their professions, their financial situation improved day by day. Of course, they were hardworking individuals. It wasn't just about the money earned by their previous generation, but still, having financial backing contributed to their growth."

I found a picture of our grandfathers in one of the albums and showed it to her. Aban, with furrowed brows from concentration, was examining the family album photos one by one. Before she could ask her next question, I anticipated it and continued: "Uncle Farhad was a civil engineer. In fact, it was the old road and building engineering; during the golden years of engineering disciplines."

He was among the last graduates of the road and building engineering program in Iran, which was later renamed civil engineering after the revolution; he was one of those talented and capable students. Shortly before finishing his studies, one of his best professors invited him to work, and he got hired at a company. He was also a graduate of the Faculty of Engineering at Tehran University and the founder of one of the most

important dynamic construction offices from before the revolution until now. This company has a great debt to us for executing lasting projects like Azadi Square, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Niavaran Cultural Center, and many other enduring works. Before his marriage, my uncle would sometimes travel for projects in other cities, but since he jokingly said he became family-oriented, he accepted more projects only in Tehran.

Aban had started searching for the company's name and its background on Google. She was reading the list of programs and their history one by one, nodding her head in admiration. She usually wouldn't give up until she found documentation on something. I really liked this trait of hers. I spent some time with her engrossed in her research, and we returned to the albums. She held up another photo in front of me. I never thought it would be in my album. I couldn't remember when I had placed it on the last page of the album. It was a picture of a baby in Dad's arms in our yard, which had been landscaped perfectly. She hesitantly asked, "Is this you?" The corners of my lips involuntarily lifted, and I shook my head, finally uttering his name after years: "Alborz! The son of aunt Ela and uncle Farhad. He was born seven or eight months after we moved to that house, the same year that Dad and Mom got married." I took the photo out of the album. I wanted to look at it directly. Dad, with a broad smile, was holding Alborz in his arms facing the camera; "Dad said that from the moment Alborz was born, he wanted a child and insisted on it with Mom, but Mom was against it. Maybe because she wasn't feeling good due to the uncertainty of her specialization period and thought that pregnancy would waste all her efforts. But somehow, things became harder for her; because two years later, just a few months after universities reopened, she found out she was

pregnant while she had to study her remaining specialized courses intensively."

"I remember she always talked about how hard it was for her during those days." Aban said this and showed me another photo with a gentle smile. Alborz, three years old, was sitting on the couch with a big smile, and I was placed on his lap as a baby. We both looked sweet and adorable. I said, "Aunty resigned from her job after Alborz was born because she didn't want to leave him at a daycare or kindergarten or hire a babysitter. She preferred to always be by his side. But when I was born, Mom was just starting to establish herself in her career. At that time, the situation for working mothers, especially doctors, was much harder than it is now. That's why I started going to the daycare near the hospital when I was three or four months old. In the first couple of years, as long as she wasn't on call, Mom spent most of her time with me. During her shifts, granny and aunty Ela would come to help; sometimes other family members would help too. Two years later, Dad's military service ended, and granny passed away while they had just opened their medical offices. I

In the evenings, despite the continuous shifts, I was divided between Mom and Dad and family. They also tried a babysitter for a few months. It didn't work out; they were scared and gave up on it. As I got older, sometimes they would take me to the clinic in turns; occasionally with Dad and most of the time with Mom. You know! It's the repetitive story of many kids who have working mothers."

During those days, finding a suitable and educated babysitter, someone who hadn't chosen their profession out of necessity, was even more difficult than it is today. On the other hand, characteristics such as having a driver brought attention back to individuals. To be honest, in that society, not everything could be

obtained with money; especially if you were to avoid becoming the subject of gossip based on social norms. I didn't remember those days very well, but undoubtedly what my parents experienced with me during the early years of my growth, provided they maintained their professional positions, was much harder for both of them than I could imagine. The traces of those days, although impactful, were for me merely vague memories that seemed to drift in a fog. The clearest memory was the day I was sitting on the steps of the kindergarten, waiting to see a familiar face with a suppressed sob, resting my chin on my hand while gazing at the door. I was five years old. It had been a couple of hours since everyone had left, and I was alone in the yard with my teacher. Suddenly, my aunt's face appeared like a light at the door, and I jumped into her arms. The teacher chatted with her, and she apologized shyly. She held me in her arms, and we went towards the car. She opened the back door and placed me on the seat next to Alborz, who was happily holding a lollipop in his cheek and another one in his hand for me. "This is for you!" He said.

That day was one of those times when Mom and Dad had once again failed to arrive at the kindergarten on time, and I had been waiting for hours. Ever since Alborz started school, my aunt had been fortunate and, with Uncle's support, became an accountant for the company where he worked. During the day, she would do her work at home, and sometimes Mom would ask her to take me from kindergarten to our house or her clinic. My aunt would pick up Alborz from school and then come for me. That day was the last time. From that day onward, a new arrangement was made for my care. Alborz was three years older than me and was in second grade at that time. It was decided that they would bring me to a kindergarten close to home so that I

could return home with his school bus. The school bus passed by the corner of the kindergarten, and every day I would stand with my teacher there until the noisy boys' bus arrived. The minibus door would open, Alborz would come to greet me at the door, and the teacher would hand me over to the driver upon seeing him. This arrangement was the result of Uncle and Aunt's kindness; they felt sympathy for my uncertainty and decided to take responsibility for me until evening in the absence of my parents.

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Aban said, "With the job my mom had, we were really lucky. Being a kindergarten teacher had its perks for me and Mehran. When we were little, we didn't understand much because we were with her at the kindergarten all the time. Once we started school, our bus would drop us off in front of the kindergarten every day, and in the afternoon, the three of us would come back home together. But overall, it was a tough time. The absence of ride-hailing services and taxis, along with the scarcity of personal cars, made things even harder."

I replied, "We were like a defeated army. Still, from around the age of five, right when my memories began to form, things got much better. I no longer had to be exhausted and worn out from the kindergarten, lying on the leather couch in the clinic, doodling and enduring my mom's glares in front of patients. She would get annoyed at my typical child behavior; my toys scattered around the clinic, not greeting some patients, making a mess while eating my fruit, Or even having to pee at the wrong time! Every day, Alborz and I would get home together. I would stay at their house until evening, and I had so much fun. My aunt was very kind. She dedicated time to me and kept me entertained in a way that made me wish she could always be with me. My mom never invested as much effort in me as my aunt did. She

always acted as if I was bothering her or preventing her from getting her work done."

After sympathizing with me and caressing the child within the photos, Aban cut a piece of her cake and put it in her mouth. She held her tea with one hand and reached for the pictures with the other as if she didn't want to waste any time. Suddenly, she pulled an envelope from among the photos that I hadn't noticed. I recognized it, and this time before she could open it, I snatched it out of the air. I raised my hand in warning and placed the envelope among my books on the shelf before she could protest. This time, as if she hadn't seen anything, she shrugged it off. She picked up another photo and gazed at it with delight: "My dear! Your parents looked so beautiful and stylish. All four of them! It's interesting that you also didn't have the religious and traditional entanglements."

I stared at a photo from our teenage years that she was looking at. Mom and Aunt were sitting on the backrest of the sofa, and Uncle had both of them in his arms. Dad was sitting in the center of the picture on that same sofa, with Aunt's hand on his shoulder, while Alborz was sitting between Dad's legs, leaning against him, and I was sitting on the floor in front of Alborz. Alborz's hand was tightly around my neck, pulling me toward him while he tickled me with his other hand to make me laugh. The album had many photos of the six of us at parties, embracing each other. "Yeah. Although such close relationships in friendship and family were often questioned, we weren't in those spaces; not just us but our whole family." I said.

"I want to know every single memory behind these photos. I don't know if it's because I want to know you better or what! But there's something about these two families that really draws

people in. Look at these pictures?! They're so beautiful! What's the story behind these Polaroid photos and the camera you two had?"

Recalling it brought a smile to my lips. One afternoon when we got home, Alborz pulled me into his room and excitedly said that his dad had given him a prize for being first in his class for the first term, which had previously belonged to him. He took out a Polaroid camera from the cupboard next to his bed and held it up in front of my eyes. I was thrilled and wanted to take it and look at it when he pulled it back and wouldn't let me have it. "It's very delicate and should only be handled by those who know how to use it." He said.

Taken aback, I asked, "Do you even know how?"

"Of course I know how! Maybe when you grow up like me, you'll learn too!"

The little brat! He spoke as if he were already a grandfather! "If you're telling the truth, take a picture and let's see."

"I don't have any film. Dad promised to buy me some today."

Then he slung the camera strap around his neck and flaunted it in front of my eyes all day. I pouted at him. In the evening, when Uncle Farhad came, he brought special paper for him. Back then, special papers were rare, but what Uncle had was so plentiful that I was sure it would last Alborz until he turned a hundred.

A smile never left Aban's lips; "But honestly, it's clear he was very passionate and talented!"

"Very! The photos you see are way fewer than the ones he took. He took tons of pictures of the walls and other people. He loved to secretly take pictures of our parents. I remember one day Mom got really mad at me and Alborz for messing up the living room, and she kicked us both out into the yard. Alborz

found one of the pictures he had taken and stuck it on the wall of the entrance hallway. Then he rang the doorbell and ran away. Mom's face was priceless."

Aban's eyes widened in laughter; "What was he taking pictures of?" I laughed and said, "Nothing special. Mom had just come out of the shower looking all fresh, slouched on the couch, yawning away. But her picture with her mouth open, big nostrils, sleepy eyes, and no makeup was definitely not something Dr. Mom would want to see of herself." She exclaimed excitedly, "Oh, I can just imagine it. I've never seen your mom without makeup and looking messy. She was very particular about her appearance. What did you do? I bet you got in trouble!"

"We got chased by the vacuum cleaner hose out into the yard. The mess we made has now been added to by a broken flower pot. In the end, Uncle Farhad came to rescue us from her. He teased her a lot about the 'cold weapon' she wielded against two kids. In short, Alborz used every subject available."

Aban pointed to the second box, which contained photos taken with a more advanced camera, and confirmed my words by saying, "His progress in these photos taken with the analog camera is clearly evident."

"By then, Polaroids were no longer usable. From that time on, we were allowed to handle our dads' cameras and take high-quality photos without worry. Alborz had bought a photography tutorial book, and we had fiddled with the camera so much that we were taking really good analog photos. We would buy the film rolls ourselves and take them to a photo shop to get them developed. The owner of that shop knew Alborz and me very well."

"What made him finally agree to let you take pictures with his camera?"

That Polaroid camera marked the beginning of a new chapter between us. Until then, we had only occasionally played together, and Alborz often didn't include me in many of his activities. Our three-year age difference created a significant barrier; he was in third grade while I was just starting kindergarten. I sometimes felt that when he had to give up his seat for me on the minibus or let me sit next to him so I wouldn't fall, he wasn't particularly happy about having me hanging around him. The day after he didn't give me the camera, I was still angry with him. When I got on their bus at noon, without looking at him, I went to sit next to two other kids, but the driver pointed out that I should sit next to my brother so he could keep an eye on me. I got even more annoyed. Who said he had to be my babysitter? On the way home, I didn't say a word to him. I occupied myself with the images outside the window while he was busy playing with his friends. Even when we got off at our street, I walked toward home without paying attention to him, and he followed behind, Walking carelessly, singing to himself and not attempting to engage with me. After lunch, I was sitting at their large dining table in the living room, drawing. He arrived with his camera and sat down on the chair next to me. I pretended to be indifferent, resting my hand on the table and leaning my head on it in such a way that the skin of my face stretched under my hands and one side of my lips was pulled closer to my ears. I looked at him sideways. He tried to say something but instead just smiled. Why? Why was he getting on my nerves? Suddenly, he took a picture of me, and before I could protest, he said, "Do you want me to teach you how to take pictures with it?"

My mouth dropped open. I wasn't sure if I had heard him correctly. Stammering, I asked, "Can I really?"

He laughed and said, "You'll learn well!" Eagerly and out of pure desire, I agreed. Once he was sure we had made up, he

placed my crooked picture on my drawing pad. We both laughed heartily at it. We decided that after he finished his homework, we would go outside together, and he would teach me photography.

Aban said, "My dear! What a kind brother! You got upset with him, but that kid couldn't take it..."

I interrupted him, "I don't know what it's like to have a brother, but he was never my brother! Never! Um... the siblings of our age in the family had a different kind of relationship; it was full of fights and disagreements. It was as if there was no friendship between them; they were more like relatives than friends. But Alborz was different; maybe because he filled a lot of gaps for me. From that day on, especially with what happened that evening, I was counting down the moments until he was done with school so we could spend time together. When we were together, time felt different."

"What happened?"

From Sam's studio, there was a sound of something falling and breaking. It was easy to guess what it was; his tea cup! I glanced at my cup to see which of our set was now incomplete. I smirked and raised my voice so Sam could hear, "Is everything okay?"

Sam replied from the other side of the door, "Yeah. I wasn't paying attention, and the cup fell off the table and broke." It was an interesting coincidence! I picked up a photo where I was both laughing and crying, while holding my palm in front of my face towards the camera, and showed it to Aban.

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Dad still hadn't arrived home, and Mom had just returned from her office. We were having tea and cake that Ms. Parvin had baked for us after cleaning the house. I don't know what happened, but the tea cup slipped from my hand and fell to the

floor! The tea spilled on the parquet, and pieces of the china cup scattered everywhere. Mom was always angry when her dishes broke; she actually got upset about any unexpected occurrence in her daily life. I still don't understand! To me, breaking dishes isn't important enough for someone to be punished or put on trial or feel guilty about; but Mom's look was different. She started yelling, "Clumsy! You broke another piece of this set! Parvin just cleaned everything! Now we have to mop and sweep again." Embarrassed, I said, "I'll fix it for you."

" But what good is a mended cup to me, kiddo?

I hadn't seen Mom since that morning until that evening. I was no longer bothered by her long absence, but I longed for her to come home so we could spend time together. However, Mom was angry. I just wanted to remind her that breaking the cup wasn't worth my reprimand and her anger."Auntie never scolds us for breaking her dishes." I said. I thought this would calm her down, but I made it worse. Her anger intensified, and " impudence and rudeness " were added to my accusations. First, she slapped me hard, and then her slippers came down on my feet, back, and shoulders as they always did after her outbursts. I had reached my limit. So, amidst the blows, I added, "Auntie never hits Alborz." Mom angrily hurled a few more curses at me and said, "That same aunt has spoiled you..."

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I wanted to say something, but my sobs broke free, and I couldn't continue. Children who have been physically punished in their childhood rarely recount those moments in detail to others. Usually, what comes out is just the lingering feeling from those memories. I didn't understand how those memories returned to my mind with details I had never remembered before. Until that day, I had never voiced them. I felt a bit ashamed.

Aban gently placed her hand on my back and empathetically said, "Our generation was the punching bags. I sometimes got beaten by my dad too. It had nothing to do with their social status or education. They had grown up the same way. If the old punching bags don't heal themselves, they become future boxers. You know better than anyone! Children pay the price for their parents' unresolved issues."

"Unfortunately, Mom would lose her temper very quickly. Ever since I was very little, I had been beaten for various reasons".

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As soon as Dad entered the house, I managed to escape from Mom. I ran to the yard and, fearing that she might follow me and find me, I took refuge behind the gazebo, among the boxwood bushes. I don't know how long I stayed there, silently crying, when I heard Alborz's voice from the other side of the gazebo. For a while, like someone who had lost a kitten, he searched for me in the yard, softly calling my name; under the swing, around the pond, near the cars, by the flowerpots! By the flowerpots? Was I an ant? I didn't want him to find me; I was embarrassed. He had probably heard Mom when she was scolding me and... yes! A few minutes later, I felt his shadow above me. I didn't want to lift my head. My face was wet with tears and mucus and dirt. Without saying anything, he sat down next to me on the ground. He fiddled with his camera in silence for a bit and then said that his mother sometimes hits him too. I couldn't believe that Auntie could get angry like my mom! The expressions and ferocity of adults in that situation were very ugly and disgusting. I had seen Mom in that state many times, but I couldn't imagine Auntie like that. I had never even heard her yell. Hearing Alborz's confession calmed me down a little. After that, he said there were two or three friends in his class whose parents punish

them physically as well. His second confession seemed more genuine. Still, knowing that I wasn't alone in getting hit made me feel less ashamed. Then he showed me a picture of his mother sitting on the couch, eating a whole apple while watching TV. It was a funny picture. Maybe if Auntie saw that image, she'd get upset. I couldn't help but laugh. Without any preamble, Alborz raised his camera and took a picture of me. He kept most of the photos for himself and gave me a few. That night, after much pleading and begging, he handed me this photo. I never understood what changed our relationship that night, but from then on, Alborz gave me a sense of intimacy and companionship. From that night onward, we spent more time together.

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Aban continued to admire our childhood photos and, noticing my discomfort at that moment, set aside the shoebox pictures and turned to the family album. Surprised by our large family during family gatherings, she searched for familiar faces among the images from celebrations. She recognized most of our relatives and friends. She had seen all of them at our wedding and had seen the closer ones frequently over the years.

Our parents had many mutual friends apart from relatives. That's why, usually once a month on Friday nights, our house would be filled with guests; both houses at the same time. There were many kids my age and Alborz's; it seemed as if the adults had all decided, in a coordinated manner, to have children in alternating years. We kids, with a height difference of at most four years, would sometimes run around the yard and sometimes from room to room and from one floor to another. Despite their presence, Alborz and I were always in the same group. Unless the girls and boys got involved in different games; as the leaders, we often tried to create games that kept the kids together. My aunt always said that when you separate from each other, the

mischievous increases. In short, our house was bustling and crowded. One of the reasons that Uncle and Dad decided to build that house was precisely because of these pleasant experiences; especially in that closed and under-equipped environment of that time when there were hardly any cafes or restaurants for social recreation, these private get-togethers bore the burden of social life.

"Ah, the parties of the '80s and '90s! What a commotion they were!

"Our house was north-facing. The bedroom windows opened to the back alley, and the living room opened to the yard. That's why we were quite far from the entrance door. We weren't into strange parties; still, because of the noise in the house and yard and the sound of music, Uncle and Dad were always on alert during parties. Mr. Ali would keep watch at the door on party nights. Most of the patrol motorcycles knew our house well; they would take as many bribe as they wanted. A couple of times, they even caused a ruckus trying to burst into the house, but it turned out they wanted more money.¹

She looked at the photos and shook her head in regret; "Wasting money and unnecessary expenses! Just like my uncle's wedding! You remember, right?" She didn't continue because she had already told me the story, and I knew it. Suddenly she said, "Afra! So many kids! All so small! You have more pictures with some of them than others. Who are they? Do I know them?"

1. In those years, mixed parties for men and women were not approved by the government; holding such gatherings was considered illegal. However, it could be made possible with bribes to the local guards.

"The ones who changed every year are our friends. As for the ones who are constant, apart from one or two, you don't know them! None of them are in Iran anymore. These are my cousins. These two are Sepand and Sepideh, Alborz's cousins. Kati is also Alborz's cousin. This little one is Darya.

" My dear! Beautiful Darya! What a round little face she had!"

I affectionately agreed and continued, "These two are Sofia and Mattia, my cousins."

" Oh my! Is this Mattia? I should have recognized him by his curly hair!"

I found a picture of Uncle and Dad at Uncle's house among the photos and absentmindedly said, "Yeah. He hasn't changed at all!" My eyes were locked on those two inseparable friends. With their backs to Uncle and Aunt's wide bookshelf, both stood there oblivious to the camera. Dad's hand was on Uncle's shoulder as they laughed at something. Both were stylishly dressed and young, perhaps around the same age as I am now. I could even smell their perfume wafting from the image. I could stare at it for hours. That photo, like many others, was taken from a low angle. This meant that the camera was in Alborz's hands. Aban said, "Oh my God, Afra! So many books! Two walls of their house are filled with books from top to bottom!" I nodded in agreement; my gaze shifted from the image to around my room. All its walls, except for the window and wardrobe section, were lined with bookshelves from floor to ceiling; I had about that much in the living room too. At that moment, I didn't tell Aban that at least half of the books in my library were mementos from the library in that photo. I wasn't ready to confess. Surely questions would arise for her that I had no answers for. I turned my attention back to the album. The window frames in the foreground of the image indicated an approximate date of

capture; white cross-shaped stickers prominently displayed on them. Another photo was beneath that image taken at our house, with Dad and Uncle in the same clothes, a Haftseen¹ spread on the table in front of the couch, and all six of us sitting warmly and intimately around it. In that frame as well, the windows behind us had white cross-shaped² stickers. Aban excitedly said, "Oh my god! I remember that New Year! It was so scary! It was 1366, right?"

"Nowruz '67! (March 1988) I don't have clear memories from that year, but its effects remain in our subconscious. For example, a rocket was dropped on Zafar Street, just two alleys down from my uncle's house; a few months after their wedding. The blast shattered their windows, and they had witnessed death right before their eyes. I didn't understand much at the time, but Alborz always excitedly talked about it."

"That year, at the kindergarten where my mom was a teacher, they brought in some new kids. Mom said their parents had been killed and they were sent from Dezful to live with distant relatives in the capital. I remember that many people left Tehran around that time. We also went to Chalus for a while; there was a villa belonging to one of my dad's friends.

1. Haft-Seen is one of the traditions of Iranians during Nowruz. It is a table that is set up and includes seven items whose names start with the letter "S" in Persian. These items typically include senjed (oleaster), samanu (wheat sprout pudding), sir (garlic), sib (apple), sabzeh (sprouted greens), sekkeh (coins), and serkeh (vinegar), each representing symbols of life and happiness.

2. Those years were during the Iran-Iraq war, and the windows of most houses were taped in a cross pattern with paper to prevent shattering due to the blast of bombs

"In fact, there was talk of us leaving Iran too, but Mom, Dad, and Uncle didn't agree because of their work and commitments. Uncle and Aunt were also against traveling anywhere without us during those conditions and leaving us home alone. In the end, we all stayed in Tehran.

Aban said, "If I'm not mistaken, that was the last Nowruz when the windows of houses were like that."

"My peers don't remember much about the bitterness of those days unless they were directly involved. Our house, given our circumstances, was a safe island amidst the darkness of the '80s and '90s. The older ones talked a lot about the issues and restrictions of those days; but in our childhood world, nothing changed."

I showed her a photo of colored eggs in a basket: "The night before the New Year, Aunt would spread a sheet on the floor for us and put 10-12 boiled eggs in front of us. Our entire New Year's activity after cleaning our rooms was coloring the eggs with the help of Ms. Parvin. We had good holidays... very good! Even at the moment of the New Year, we were together."

"Well, ever since I saw you, you've been depressed every Nowruz and sometimes angry about why it's even a holiday!"

I didn't lift my head from the album. I took a deep breath and, with a sigh, softly said, "The reason for that was something else... and still is." Fortunately, Aban noticed the tone of my voice; without insisting on an explanation, she wanted to change the subject: "Afra! Tell me about your parents!"

"My uncle was friendly and loud; you know my dad! Calm and shy. My uncle's relationship with my aunt was great, but my

dad and mom just didn't get along and couldn't stay together without fighting."

Our weekend plans, provided that mom and dad stayed home, were usually like this: either all three of us would go upstairs, or we would have three guests, or we would host other guests, or we would go to a party. Mom was a dictator, and dad seemed to walk around the house with a silent weapon at his waist. But sometimes when he couldn't tolerate mom's hammering behavior, he would reach his limit. That's when things would escalate, and they would be in a cold war for weeks. Dad always treated me well, but he never protested against mom's parenting methods; he didn't have the patience for other battles. I feel like he was lenient when it came to me. If he objected, he wouldn't have enough time to spend more with me. However, my aunt and uncle's situation was very different. My uncle would come home every day around three to five PM and spend the evenings with his family; their time usually passed in peace and tranquility. I also preferred to imagine myself as a permanent member of their family, like a refugee from war. All my fun times were summed up with those three: parks, cinemas, zoos, and even shopping sometimes. Life alongside them was easier for me, and it helped me forget the painful touches of mom. They provided me with calmness, comfort, and support; something that was missing in our three-person family dynamic.

"I have a million questions, Afra! Where are your aunt, Alborz, and your uncle? If you were this close, why haven't I seen them all these years? Why have you never mentioned them? I want to know!"

"I wish I could answer you without recalling the past. I've forgotten many details, but a lot of my memories are coming back like a big wave. Memories that I had never seen in words.

I lived them once; without giving them any other state in life and time. Whatever the reason is, I'm unaware of it."

"Don't stop them! Let them come back! Even if I have to sit here for a week while you tell me stories, rest assured I won't move from my spot. It's so captivating for me! It's as if I'm getting to know you all over again. If you don't mind, please tell me! Just before that, with your permission, I want to go heat up the coffee. Because I really don't want to doze off in the middle of 'Forrest Gump.'"¹ She said and headed towards the kitchen. I smiled bitterly and said behind her, "Forrest Gump! I wish I were at least a little like Jenny. She enjoyed life and came back to Forrest whenever she wanted." And every time she returned, everything remained the same.

1. The film Forrest Gump, released in 1994 and starring Tom Hanks and Robin Wright, was directed by Robert Zemeckis and is based on a novel of the same name. It tells the story of several decades in the life of a slow-witted but hardworking man. Important parts of the film relate to his relationship with his childhood friend, and it won most of the Academy Awards that year.

The Fate of the Broken Cup

I looked at the clock on the wall; it was almost 11pm I went to Sam's room; the door was half-open. With his back to the window and facing the large canvas in front of him, he was busy chatting on WhatsApp. As soon as he sensed my presence, he exited the app and tossed his phone onto the table beside him. He turned to me in his armless swivel chair, grabbed my hand in the air, and pulled me towards him. I went over, and the soles of my feet brushed against a large paint stain.

"What's up? Are you better?"

"You were chatting; I interrupted you."

His hand was cool and refreshing around mine; "It didn't matter. I had already said what I needed to say. Are you okay?" I nodded in agreement; "Aban is staying with us tonight."

"That's good. You guys will dissect the past, and I'll take care of my stuff. Just promise to bring me whatever you eat!"

"Here! This is your first."

Aban said this and placed a cup of coffee and Sam's share of chocolate on the table next to him, continuing, "You also promise to return the cup in one piece!"

"Oh, thank you! The coffee is for the night monsters and the cup will come back safe. The other one, it was so strange how it fell! I had no idea what happened!"

He had gathered the pieces of the cup and handed them to me. Aban gave me a smirk and said to Sam, "Forget it. Just return the shell!" She took advantage of being in Sam's room and was cleaning the sole of her sandal with a cotton ball soaked in turpentine; it had gotten stained upon entering. Suddenly, as if a question had come to her mind, she glanced around the room and said, "By the way, I've always wondered what would happen if you had a baby, which room would be the baby's?"

Before Sam could say anything, I replied, "Before the baby arrives, we have some extensive renovations planned. One of the walls in the master suite has two windows. We'll move the partition between the rooms and take out another one from the middle of these three. Sam and I need our workspace, and we've kind of gotten used to this blended space of work and home. The room by the door is small and doesn't work for us. So it will remain a guest room." Sam didn't say anything. He raised an eyebrow at Aban and nodded in agreement.

About a year ago, we made this decision. Our first shared home, a 200-square-meter house, had a separate suite that kept Sam's studio space separate. However, its low ceiling was restrictive for the dimensions of his work. That's why, two years later, we moved to this house on the eleventh floor, which was twice the size of the previous one, and its most important feature, alongside the layout's suitability, was its high ceiling. During the renovation after the purchase, we expanded part of the living room to create space for Sam's large canvases and equipment. Now, the smallest room in this house was my 17-square-meter workspace. The size of Sam's studio matched that of the living and dining areas of the house. He still occasionally had to go to

friends' studios to complete some projects. He didn't need more than that; otherwise, he would have set up a space for himself; he liked working at home because everything was within reach. Mom and Dad were always dissatisfied with our lifestyle; they disapproved of the intertwining of work and life. From their perspective, none of what we did constituted real work; it was merely a hobby and a waste of time.

Aban thoughtfully said, "Hmm... Fortunately, this house is big enough. It will be fine! Although it's unlikely that when the baby starts walking, Sam will still be able to manage here!" She said this as she headed towards the door. About a decade ago, when I introduced Sam and Aban to each other at Sam's exhibition, their relationship was friendly and respectful. They had many shared interests in sports, and Aban's expert skills sometimes answered Sam's questions. She was my only remaining close friend and, in a way, my older sister. Especially in recent years, she had been by my side during IVF visits and filled in for Sam during busy times as a trusted person. I asked Sam, "How are your projects going?" He casually replied, "Not bad. But I need to wrap things up soon because I'm going to get really busy starting next week. Between the end of this semester and the beginning of summer classes, I need to finish a few projects."

"Why don't you get more assistants to speed things up?"

"Actually, I've thought about it, but I still need to supervise them. I can't just leave them alone."

I was wiping my foot with a piece of cloth; "Thank God your classes aren't in person."

"Yeah, but I wouldn't mind setting up in-person meetings with the students sometimes. It's more appealing for me to see them occasionally."

I gently tapped him on the back and turned towards the door; "For now, just be satisfied with this little bit of appeal until later." Aban was sitting at my desk flipping through an album. She had placed her finger between one of the pages. As soon as I entered, she pushed aside the pages on top and pointed to a large photo in the middle; "Was your birthday celebration together? It seems like you both have cake and gifts at all your birthdays!" I was opening the cabinet inside the closet to throw the pieces of the broken cup into a box when I froze right there. Aban hesitantly asked, "Should I not have asked?" I was mentally calculating on my calendar, which floated before my eyes like a boat in the air. I knew, but for confirmation, I asked, "What day was it when we were at the hospital?"

"I think... the twenty fifth. Why?"

I ran my hand over my face and tugged at my hair; "Oh! How is that possible?"

"What happened?"

With shock and a lump in my throat, I said, "That day was his birthday." It was his birthday, and he was in the recovery room with me, and for a few years, I had been trying to forget past occasions. Aban said, "Wow! This is getting interesting; what a coincidence!" I wiped my tears and said, "We were two months apart. He was born on April 25, and I was born on July 2. For both of us, they would celebrate our birthdays at the end of

Khordad after the third-term exams. Birthday parties and receiving awards for our final results! If I'm not mistaken, this photo is from the same year I started first grade on September 22. I remember that year well. For this birthday, Mom and Dad got me a pair of one-wheeled roller skates and a small microscope, and for Alborz, a skateboard. My aunt and uncle got me a box of 60-color Polychromos colored pencils from Faber-Castell and for Alborz, a piano." She let out a quiet whistle and laughed, saying, "Oh my God, the gifts! Now, let's leave aside the rest, but seriously, 60-color Polychromos pencils for you and a piano for a ten-year-old?"

I laughed and said, "Both had their own stories. Alborz had fallen in love with the piano. A couple of relatives had pianos, and whenever we went to their houses, Alborz would sit behind it and have a great time. I remember he drew a picture of piano keys on A4 paper and sometimes started playing on that paper when he heard a melody. One day, when he was really into his imaginary instrument, his parents promised him that if his average for the third term of third grade was excellent, they would buy him a piano for his birthday. And they did just that."

"What cool people! Back then, parents didn't take art seriously!"

"Art was valued by my uncle and aunt. Their house was filled with paintings and unique decorations. My mom and dad would easily spend money on any painting or decorative item that had an expensive price tag that made its beauty double and looked great in a golden frame. But this perspective was very different from that of my uncle and aunt. I preferred their taste more."

With a smile, she said, "I never saw your old house, but I'll never forget the day I first came to your current house. I was speechless seeing that big space and all that luxury." For Aban, perhaps this statement was a cute reference to our home, but for me, it reminded me of the bubble that separated us from the outside world. It felt like I was involuntarily defending myself; "But you know better than anyone that even now we are not considered very wealthy by world standards!"

"Yes, that's right. But back then, there was a deep divide among the people in society. It seemed like the upper-middle class was not meant to be seen!"

She was right. Among our classmates, we had many friends who were just like us, but what we were sometimes became the reason for our isolation and avoidance in public gatherings; to steer clear of the labels and unpleasant social titles of those days. Aban continued, "Let me tell you something interesting?" I nodded with a smile. She said, "In the area where we lived, people weren't as filtered as in your side. We had all sorts of classes among us. We were also part of the middle-class community. Now that I think about it, it seems really funny, but I remember the atmosphere was such that we weren't even allowed to talk about our video recorder at school. I was 12 or 13 years old. One of my classmates, when she saw our house for the first time, thought we seemed very wealthy. She said until then she thought there were no rich people in Iran! And years later, I faced a similar experience in your house." She laughed. I said, "Yeah! That was something that happened after the revolution. Wealth was considered an offensive issue, and it seemed that all wealthy people were forbidden and associated with tyranny. Because of this, most of them hid themselves due to the contrast with societal norms. In a way, everyone played

roles outside their homes, especially in public places, to blend in. To be honest, I think one of the main reasons for the secrecy and dishonesty among many of us over the past 40 years was this external and internal contradiction. We kids, without being directly lied to, observed and recorded these scenes and became part of it ourselves. It seems to me that it took years for many families to show their true selves. We had someone around us who sold their luxury items and furniture after the revolution and filled their house with carpets and cushions, not out of poverty! More due to the public atmosphere and pretense of simplicity."

"Exactly! It seemed that pretending to live simply had become a lifestyle and a trend. Suddenly, tastes changed. This current ambiguous and distorted aesthetic seems to stem from that time. "

"The lampshade and sofa were replaced by cushions and fluorescent lamps. Dad called it revolutionary decor! "

We laughed again. An image of the unique arrangement of our childhood homes came to my mind; something different from most homes of that era. Both houses were arranged by one of Uncle's interior designer friends, according to the owners' tastes. Still, I liked Uncle's house more than our own; it had warmth. Our house had green satin and golden Italian furniture with leather sofas. Uncle's house had white silk and oak furniture with sky-blue velvet couches. Both houses, given what the culture and norms of that time imposed on us, had a somewhat criminal atmosphere. To be honest, that's why I didn't want to invite my friends over to our house. When I was younger, sometimes classmates would come over to get notes or for birthday parties, but I didn't understand why they felt so uncomfortable. Most of the time, I preferred to meet in the yard's gazebo rather than inside the house.

I consciously brought the discussion back to where it had been interrupted and continued, "Uncle always said that living without art is harder to endure. He said art is like snacks with tea! If the tea is tasteless, it goes down easier with them. But if it's rich and high-quality, the snacks double the enjoyment!"

"How beautiful!"

"Uh-huh. Quite the opposite of my parents, who were only focused on their studies and structured routines. According to Mom, art was not only useless, but it also made people lazy. When Aunt and Uncle bought me colored pencils because of my interest in painting, Mom wasn't happy. She thought painting was not a future-building activity worth spending money on. The most exciting gifts I received from them were before I started school. Besides the skates and bicycle that became sports equipment as I grew older, they mostly gave me scientific items. My room resembled a model of a school laboratory".

She laughed and showed me a photo of myself in my room next to models of a human torso, limbs, a horse's head, a snake skeleton, and a fish in the album. That photo made me feel nauseous! Even after all these years, it still turned my stomach. I changed the subject: "The colored pencils were Alborz's suggestion. He always encouraged me and said that even if he killed himself, he couldn't paint like me. He was exaggerating; his design skills were excellent. With just one colored pencil or even a piece of charcoal, he could leave you speechless. In a way, he wanted to motivate me by downplaying himself. He had talent in artistic work. I didn't have that kind of talent on my own."

"You're being modest! I remember the first time I saw your paintings; I couldn't believe you had never taken a class! I think one of the features that makes your books more special is their

unique illustrations. Even the fact that you didn't go for oil or acrylic paints like Sam could be a smart choice."

"Actually, I sold a new piece at the Foundation¹ a few hours ago!"

"There you go! I'm telling you, you underestimate yourself; that's it. You make all your successes seem ordinary. I don't think Sam has sold as much work as you have in this space! "

"Well, Sam's prices are really high. Otherwise, he has his own audience too."

"Yes, this buddy operates entirely in the luxury space of the world!"

"If it weren't for Alborz, I would never have discovered this talent of mine".

"It's strange that you didn't develop an interest in piano! It seems like you should play an instrument too!"

"Hmm. I don't know. Alborz's tutor came to their house twice a week. I was supposed to sit with them, and if I was interested, he would arrange classes for me. Honestly, I wouldn't have minded, but from the very first day, Mom kept saying that Afra had no interest in this kind of thing and no talent for it! Now I understand that this was something she wanted me to be".

Not that I didn't want to, but it seemed that what Mom instilled in me as her logical hypothesis had an impact regarding something I hadn't tested myself in yet. Maybe she was right, and I really was untalented. But I never dared to pursue it as I should have; I knew my family had no interest in such things.

"One can guess how they viewed the situation. I'm surprised with that perspective, how you became a writer!"

1. Foundation is one of the most important platforms for displaying and selling NFT artworks in the world. In recent years, many artists have showcased their works there for sale.

I gave a bitter smile and said, "They didn't let me! I became one." She pointed out an interesting point because my mom's attitude never dominated my writing, and before I knew it, I had immersed myself in it. Maybe because I had unconsciously found a way to test myself in it. I shifted the conversation; "There's no doubt that the right path is the one they took. Mom always said that Alborz probably wouldn't amount to anything. She easily conveyed this theory to them because her assumption was that she needed to make them aware".

"Your mom was always straightforward. Didn't they get upset?"

"They were sensitive about Alborz, but they didn't take it to heart too much. Their relationship was somewhat closer than that of siblings. I remember once my uncle told my mom, "It's okay to let him be an artist and not succeed at anything." My mom replied, "Why are you fooling yourself? Is his mom an artist or his dad?" My uncle responded, "His uncle!" That night, for the first time, I felt that my aunt and uncle were quite upset with my mom, but they didn't show it. They had somehow accepted my mom's sharp demeanor and biting tongue. My uncle was right. His brother, who was an architect in London, was also a good pianist.

Aban laughed and said, "So maybe your mom was jealous. Or perhaps she expected Alborz to become an accountant or a civil engineer according to her formula! How creative! So what did he end up doing?" I looked at her. without wanting to avoid answering her question, I opened my mouth several times to speak, but no words came out. My mouth had gone dry; I

moistened my lips with my tongue and took the last sip from the bottom of my coffee cup with trembling hands.

"Afra! What happened? What's making you so upset?"

My eyes filled with tears. My tongue wouldn't open to speak; it felt as if speaking in Persian was the hardest thing to do at that moment. She came back to my side, placed her hand on my back, and gently stroked me; "Forget it! You don't even have to talk about that part. If you want, tell me about the rest of your childhood!" She pointed to our photos at the zoo; "For example, can you tell me why you two crazy kids have so many photos from the zoo and animals and the park?" I laughed and wiped my tears; "Well, the zoo was just two streets down from our house. You remember, right? Later they closed it down and moved it to Eram. Except for one or two times when we sneaked in and secretly ended up there together, we usually went to the zoo a lot in the summers with my uncle and aunt. After that, we'd go to the park for skating, biking and volleyball"

"Wow! I remember the weekends at Mellat Park¹ so well! Back then, there weren't many places for young people to hang out. Before everyone learned the way to Enghelab Club², we had only a few hangouts; one of them was this park. It used to get really crowded around the lake on Fridays. I might have seen you rich kids with your skates there a lot!

1. One of the large and old parks in Tehran, located on Vali Asr Street and in a famous wealthy residential area of Tehran.

2. Enghelab club is a huge cultural and sport center in Tehran, specifically designed for families and young people. Which had been utilized before the revolution. After the revolution, it was closed for a few years and then reopened.

With a smile stuck in my memories, I said, "That's unlikely! Because precisely because of the weekend crowds, we spent most of our time there during the week. My uncle always said to let the park be for the local guests on weekends!"

She laughed and said, "I mean for us! Even though we didn't do anything special, we were always running away from the police officers. Remember? The famous question of 'What relation do you have with each other?'"

"Oh! Yes. Although my memories with Alborz from that park go back to childhood and early adolescence. During that time, they didn't bother us. When I got older, I was so caught up in my own isolation that there was no one around to get into trouble with. But I remember this was one of the main reasons my mom never came to the park with us. One morning, she went for a walk with my aunt. At the entrance of the park, two or three officers stopped them, and one of them, after complaining about the size of my mom's scarf that didn't cover her neck and also handed her a pair of thick socks to wear right there. My mom got stubborn and never came to the park with us again until Enghelab Club reopened and she got her membership card there.

"Wow! Now that's what you call a dramatic protest!

"Yeah, well, it was mom and her all-or-nothing ways! No one was allowed to dictate to her! She had every right!

Her gaze was still locked on the photos. She said, "In that case, you spent most of your time at their house."

"I didn't have much to do at home, and I usually stayed upstairs until mom or dad got back. Sometimes I'd fall asleep there at night and wouldn't even notice when dad and mom came

home and left the next morning. I didn't even realize that one or both of them were on call the night before. It always smelled like life there, like fresh food and cake. The food at our house was also made by Ms. Parvin! But most of the time, it was prepared from the day before. Mom didn't cook well; Ms. Parvin was at our house throughout the week. She came three days a week for cooking and cleaning, and on two days, she went to my uncle's for cleaning. Even when mom and dad were home, I was often at my uncle's. Sometimes on holidays when mom was home, she would force me to stay so I wouldn't disturb them. That's when Alborz would show up with his notebook and books, and we'd spread out our stuff at our house.

"Sweethearts! You were used to being with each other."

"Yeah. And our innocence from today's perspective really pains my soul."

"Why pain? It's beautiful!"

I didn't say anything. She continued, "Did you fight with each other?"

"With mom more than anyone! There was no one at our house to help me with my homework except on weekends. And that usually ended in a fight. It only took a few mistakes in dictation for mom's physical reactions to start. When it came to math and science practice, it got even worse. I hated math and science, and since those two were the most important foundations for a medical career, mom and dad were particularly sensitive about them. They wouldn't accept any grade below 18. One Thursday morning when I was still in first grade, mom made such a fuss

over a mistake in addition and subtraction that I couldn't believe I was going to get hit again for such a small error. She had pinched my legs hard twice and was still yelling when my aunt rang the doorbell asking for the wrench. She said the bathroom faucet had come loose, and my uncle couldn't find his wrench. Mom quickly handed her the wrench. When she came back, I had gone to my room, and she didn't come after me anymore.

"Was the faucet really loose?"

"What do you think?"

"Wow!"

"In the evening when the guests arrived and we were playing with the other kids in the yard, Alborz told me that when Aunt Ela heard Mom's voice, she wanted to come and rescue me from her. But Uncle had decided in his own way to distract Mom so that it wouldn't count as direct interference.

"That's how many people raised their kids. Even now, it's like that! Our neighbor beat their kid every night, and we can't do anything about it. Here, whatever you do, it counts as interference. If it were a better place, at least out of fear of the consequences, they wouldn't be able to allow themselves to do this.

"Yes, if it were a better place, maybe Mom would never resort to violence because of her good social image and fear of losing her reputation; she would have been a bit more in control of her nerves. Do you remember Mom? On the surface, she seemed perfectly normal. Even her social behavior was very friendly and respectful. The only thing that never made her angry was her

work and her patients. Sometimes when I saw her behavior on the phone with her friends, Aunt, or even in the clinic with patients, I couldn't believe she was the same Mom I knew at home. At work, everyone loved her. But the work pressure was high, and I think somehow she unintentionally unloaded her endless mental fatigue onto me. I felt like I was too much for her and that she never really wanted me from the beginning. I often heard in my ear that I was a rude child and that my silly actions annoyed her!

"I remember; she called everyone "my dear" and "my love." But what was behind all that anger?"

"Now I understand that she was angry at her father because of what her mother had to endure. My grandfather was a doctor and had a quick temper. It seemed he often imposed his will on Mommy and the kids. When he married granny, he promised to let her continue her studies. But granny got pregnant very soon and had three little children, and with just a diploma, she stayed at home. Mom always saw her own existence and that of the other two kids as an obstacle to her mother's growth. For Mom, being a woman meant weakness and backwardness; she didn't want to become like her mother. Besides wanting to raise me in her own mold, she had no commitment to me. Maybe I'm being unfair."

"Perhaps from her perspective, it wasn't that bleak. Like other mothers, she used the best method she knew for raising you. She probably didn't think there was anything wrong with it."

"To be honest, it doesn't matter to me anymore."

She was right. Mom was a good person, but the manifestation of dictatorial and controlling parents for their children usually isn't anything else. Children don't see the sacrifices and sleepless nights. They only bring memories into adulthood through the lens of deep emotions and momentary feelings. Maybe Mom was one of those mothers who, due to her family situation, didn't have a proper understanding of motherhood and needed training in motherhood just as she did for her profession so that later, when placed in situations, her emotional hormones would come to her aid. No one expected Mom to give up her career. She worked for years to reach her position, and she deserved to enjoy it. But as her child, I wished that during those few short hours she was at home, she would fill my life with love, warmth, and her safe embrace; not fear, anxiety, and deprivation. I always felt her absence! I yawned and said with my mouth open, "My eyes are getting heavy." Aban got up and went towards the half-open closet door. She opened the box where I had thrown the pieces of the cup and excitedly said, "Wow, they have increased so much!"

"You've not seen anything yet! I have another box back there."

She replied with reproach, "Then why aren't you doing anything with them?"

"I haven't had the chance, but I also need gold powder for this work. I ordered it from a friend who is a goldsmith, and it's supposed to arrive this week."

"How elegant! Does it have to be gold?"

I nodded, "Yellow or white gold! A large part of its philosophical value comes from the presence of gold."

"What's it supposed to do?"

"By reconstructing a destroyed object and filling in the cracks and re-composing it with this special method, that vessel can be made even more beautiful than it was before."

"How lovely! Are you sure you didn't come up with this yourself?"

With a smile, I went to my bookshelf, took a book I had bought years ago, and handed it to her, saying, "The initial example of Kintsugi¹ was created in the late 15th century in Japan; it's a kind of philosophical art. Instead of repairing broken vessels with wires and materials that make them look ugly and damaged, they used powdered stone and gold. In the end, what shows through the cracks is a golden line that gives a special charm to the vessel." Aban was carefully examining the pictures in the book, nodding in wonder and admiration, "Wow! So it actually wants to say that you are the one who decides what to fill the cracks with? That breaks and cracks can be filled with gold to redefine the beauty and value of that object from a more precious place?!"

"Uh-huh. Breaking is part of the natural process of objects and doesn't mean destruction. With a new appearance and acceptance of breaks, one can return to life even more

1. Kintsugi comes from two words: Kin, meaning gold, and Tsugi, meaning to join together. It is a form of Japanese philosophical art. In the kintsugi method, by emphasizing and joining broken pieces of pottery with gold, they are returned to use even more valuable than before.

beautifully than before! Have you ever heard of wabi-sabi?"¹

"No, honestly! I always feel uneducated in front of you, Afra!"

"It has nothing to do with education, dear! These concepts come from Japanese culture, and it's natural that not everyone knows them. Just like concepts in our philosophy and language! Wabi-sabi is about discovering beauty and perfection in seemingly flawed and simple things. It says nothing in this world is permanent or perfect! And that's precisely what conveys the concept of beauty. Beauty emerges beyond impermanence and evolves. Like a broken vessel, a dried leaf being crushed, or an architectural structure that lacks symmetry. Now, what do you think its connection to Kintsugi is?"

She thoughtfully nodded and, with narrowed eyes, said, "I think the essence of Kintsugi is that it doesn't try to hide the flaws. In fact, it highlights them and transforms imperfections into something beautiful!"

"Exactly! Wabi-sabi is an aesthetics of impermanence and incompleteness!"

"Then how did you learn this Kin...let me see, Kintsugi technique?" She glanced at the book cover, "I mean where did you learn Kintsugi?"

1. A kind of Japanese worldview is based on the acceptance of impermanence, transience, and the acceptance of flaws. Wabi means to appreciate and find beauty in sorrow, poverty, and simplicity, while Sabi means to appreciate and find beauty in aging, oldness, solitude, and nostalgia. Although wabi-sabi cannot be easily described, it is more often used to describe the beauty of works that lean towards naturalness, simplicity, and unpretentiousness, avoiding ostentation and pointless display. Kintsugi is one of the best examples of this worldview.

"The exact date goes back to our engagement period and our first trip to America. We were guests of Sara, Sam's sister. I don't know how it happened, but the kids' ball fell into the tea tray and a few of the cups got broken. They were beautiful cups! Poor Sara was upset but didn't show it. I collected the large pieces and brought them home. I did a lot of research to see how to mend porcelain, and eventually, I became familiar with this method and read as much as I could about it. Then I bought the materials, and during that month we were there, after a lot of mess and practice, I managed to learn it. It's a difficult task but just as fascinating for me! These days, many artists are turning their attention back to this method!"

Aban was sitting next to the box on the floor, looking at me with her narrowed eyes. I said, "Don't look at me like that! Right now, I have so much work piled up that I don't have the time or patience for it."

She stood up and went towards the photos; "Damn! By the way, when is your doctor's appointment?"

"The day after tomorrow. In the evening."

"Should I come with you?"

As we were gathering the photos from the couch and returning them to the boxes, I said, "No, my dear! It's crowded there! Where would you go to hang around during this COVID? I'll be fine by then and can go alone."

She pointed at the photos and said, "Don't lose these again! I want to see them again. I have so many questions for you."

I placed a smaller box containing the film reels on one of the bookshelves to keep it in sight. I said, "Okay. I don't think I'll take them back to storage."

She pointed at the films and asked, "What are you planning to do with those? Do you know anyone who can convert them?"

Coppice Blue 47

"Honestly, no. I need to ask friends and acquaintances to find someone reliable. After all, they are family films. I can't just hand them over to anyone."

"Oh dear! They must be worth seeing."

I smiled bitterly; "I don't even remember what's on those tapes anymore."

To be continued...



FAVIDEL, a multidisciplinary artist, has studied graphic design and has worked in the fields of interior design management, architecture and furniture and accessory design

Her collection of artworks includes both physical and digital paintings and illustrations, accompanied by music she has composed. These works are showcased in short videos on digital art platforms, each telling a brief story.

To date, her works have been exhibited and sold in New York, Vancouver, Beijing, Istanbul, and Dubai. Previously, her book "The Lake Monster, Chopin, Barbequed Eggplant" was published in Iran.