

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 6**
OBLIVION

Coppice Blue

Faavidel

Chapter One

Oblivion

Literature - Persian Fiction - Novel

Coppice Blue

By FAAVIDEL

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Fear of imposed kisses, maintaining social distance

That night, I wandered in the park for hours with my bag of medications. It was past ten when I got home. Sam still hadn't arrived. His evening work commitments had increased a lot over the past month. I thought it would be better to remind him before it became a habit. When he came that night, he mentioned that he might have a project in Shira

"How come there ?"

"They built a great and prestigious hotel. They want to decorate the walls and ceiling of the lobby and restaurant with stunning paintings. I might start working on the restaurant next week. But first, I'll schedule a visit with these hotel people so that after the restaurant, I can move on to it ."

" How long will it take ?"

"The she construction is almost finished. The plan is for the painters to come first and prepare the areas I need to work on, and then hand them over to me. In the best-case scenario, it will start in a month. If nothing special happens, I'll be working there for at least two weeks."

"Two weeks ?"

" If you don't have anything planned, you can come with me !"

"It's unlikely I can. From what you said, your work will fall during those two weeks right after my transplant surgery, and it's better if I'm not traveling then .

"Oh! You're right! I forgot. Let's see what happens.They're supposed to inform me. What's new with the doctor ?

"He didn't say anything new; just the same old stories ."

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He was focused on his phone. It seemed he was reading a message; "Have you gotten better "?

"Uh-huh ."

He didn't raise his head. He nodded and went to his study; those kinds of questions whose answers aren't really important to us, and we ask just to fulfill our obligation .

Since that night when memories vividly and gradually came alive before my eyes, I hadn't spent a moment without those days. It felt like I was living with the characters of a novel while reading it. My past had shaped my present, and for years, I had been filling the pages of life without paying attention to it. My body, like a tree returning from the world of the dead in spring, seemed to awaken after 13 years. Not because I had lived for years as if they hadn't existed, nor because these days brought the slightest reaction in the universe that took me back to those days. It seemed that I remembered more scenes that had made a significant impact on what I had become .

Two nights later, when I was at my desk amidst waves of childhood and teenage photos, trying to write at least a few pages after several days, I received a message from Aban; "Delaram has found a place around Chalus¹. She says we can go see it and come back in a day ".

"Is the road open² "?

"Yes. It has been for a long time."

"Sam is going to Shiraz for a day on Saturday. Can you arrange for us to go at that time? "

"Great! I'll cancel my class. I'll let her know we're going."

I sent her a thumbs-up emoji and went back to my book... Hmm... Of course, I went to the pictures in the shoebox; my beloved images. My gaze was drawn to a close photo of me and my aunt; she had

1. Chalus is a city in Mazandaran province, Iran, known for its beautiful nature, forests, and beaches, making it a popular destination for tourists. This city is recognized as a gateway to the northern regions and the Alborz mountains.

2. Crossing intercity roads during the peak of COVID-19 was only permitted for essential tasks and sometimes only with official permission.

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pressed her cheek against mine and I was leaning my head against her face. Seeing the photo, I felt once again the softness of her cheek on my skin. She was laughing, and I was in bliss and tranquility with my half-closed eyes and wide-open smile. The picture was taken by Alborz. My aunt was beautiful; she had fair skin and large eyes with a black pencil line in them. Her eyebrows were arched, her nose was a small bony one, and her lips were plump. When she laughed, she laughed with her whole face. When she loved, she loved with all her being, and I effortlessly found comfort in her; without even trying. Under my hand, I found a picture of me and my mom in the album. Mom was wearing a pomegranate-colored silk dress with bob blonde haircut, serious penetrating eyes, a small turned-up nose from surgery, and red lips. Her lips appeared compressed and gathered in hesitation between a smile and the fear of not looking beautiful. She was sitting on the sofa, and I was standing next to her; maintaining social distance. It seemed we had been infected since that time. She had wrapped her arm around my waist, and I looked at the camera awkwardly and restlessly. Only I knew what my pain was. Most of my photos with mom were like that; entirely formal and artificial, specific to special occasions and only for capturing memories! What was my problem? I was afraid of mom and lived with that fear until the last years of my adolescence. The differences between these two women in their roles as mothers and femininity always amazed me; what mom tried to deny and what my aunt lived with. What for mom, mistakenly, was defined as backwardness, deprivation, and fragility, for my aunt was love and intuition. The presence of a delicate and vulnerable little girl pulled me out of the images; her braided hair hung down on both sides of her neck, sitting cross-legged on the floor beside the couch, silently shedding tears. I was gradually going crazy; this was an image I often remembered from childhood and adolescence without having a clear memory of the events before or after it. That night, however, by comparing mom and my aunt and perhaps each of their roles in my tranquility, a memory came alive. It was no longer my workspace there; it became my bedroom in my childhood home. I had returned to that house again, and I wanted to hold the little girl in my arms.

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I was in the third grade of elementary school. By that time, studying with my aunt and mostly with Alborz had become a habit for me. He was a patient and understanding boy. Sometimes my aunt and uncle would help Alborz with me. During exam nights, they would either ask us questions from the lessons or present us with practice quizzes. Sometimes, they would consciously leave us to our own devices. At other times, Alborz would help me with solving the exercises. Occasionally, I would annoy him in math, and we wouldn't talk for a while. In other instances, however, he would guide me patiently. When he got angry and frustrated, he would turn to his own studies or sit at the piano and practice a piece. Then, as if he had given me a chance to solve the problem and nothing special had happened, he would return and check on my homework.

One day, we were discussing fractional numbers in math, and we were both studying for the third-term exam. That same day, he had gotten into a fight with one of his classmates, and after a thorough beating, both of them had been called to the office, where it was decided that they would go to school the next morning with their parents. By the time he got home that afternoon, he was frustrated. My aunt and uncle were also angry with him! In the meantime, as much as I hated math, I found fractional numbers difficult to understand. He explained it to me several times, but I kept making mistakes, which made him angry: "How can you be so silly? This exercise is so easy! Why can't you learn? I've explained it to you a hundred times. Ugh!" He said this and went back to his studies. I was in shock; it was the first time he had spoken to me like that. I tried a little harder and waited hopelessly for him to return; he didn't come back. I sat there for over half an hour, and he didn't even turn his head. I felt deeply humiliated. First, he called me silly, and then he pretended not to see me anymore. I gathered my things to go home. My aunt caught my wrist at the door: "Where are you going, dear?"

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"I'll finish the rest myself, Auntie! Today Alborz has a lot of homework."

"Alright then, dear! You do it yourself! But don't go home; stay right here! It's still a long time until your mom comes."

I reluctantly gave in and stayed, but Alborz didn't talk to me anymore; he preferred that I not be around him.

For several days, while Alborz was sulking and ignoring me, I continued to be at their house after school until evening; I did the exercises with my aunt or uncle. Time passed very slowly during those days. My aunt had noticed our quarrel and once in the kitchen asked me to leave Alborz alone: "He's fine. He's just angry with himself." But it seemed like he was more angry with me.

Because of my carelessness in calculating fractions and one multiplication example, I received a score of 16 on that math exam. Four days later, when I got my result, Alborz still wasn't talking to me.

Fortunately, we received our mid-term exam scores ourselves, and there was no need for parents to be present; otherwise, Aunt Ella would often come to school, and sometimes Mom. Oh, Mom! Having Mom at school was nothing but fear and anxiety. I was always afraid that the teacher would say something about me, and that would be the end of it. I placed my math exam paper between my books and went home. I planned to seek support from Aunt so that perhaps I could avoid telling Mom about the mess I had made. Mom didn't accept a score of 17 either; now with this 16, which was poorly written on my paper, who knew what fate awaited me. Aunt was sitting on the couch in front of the TV, engrossed in a book. I didn't want to confess my score in front of Alborz. I took Aunt's hand and pulled her into the room to ask for her help against Mom; I showed her my paper. She held it in her hand and examined it carefully; "Four mistakes! None of them are calculation problems. It's clear you know the right way, dear! You just need to be more careful!" She said kindly.

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"I don't know why this happened. What should I do about Mom? She'll kill me, Auntie!"

Aunt smiled and patted my head; "No, don't worry! She won't kill you! Tonight, don't tell her anything! In the morning, when she's not tired and wants to leave the house, we'll explain it to her together. When she sees the paper herself, she'll understand that next time, with a little more care, your score will be higher."

I was still full of worry and fear, but I felt a bit reassured. I returned to the living room. Alborz was still among his books. When doing homework, we would sit together in the living room at the dining table. His desk didn't have enough space for both of us. During those days, even though he wasn't talking to me, he wouldn't go to his room either. He somewhat adhered to the unspoken rules. Without lifting his head, he asked in a cold tone; "What did you get in math?"

Why did he want to know? Did it matter to him? I took a deep breath; "16."

He smirked; "You deserve it!"

Was that it? Did you ask just to say that? I knew I deserved it; "But why?"

He still had his head buried in his books; "Because you're silly! You're wasting my time!"

"You're the silly one!"

"Now that you got a 16! Just..."

Aunt interrupted him, as always firm yet kind; "Alborz! Watch your behavior, darling! It's not good to talk like that, my son!"

Alborz fell silent. I didn't respond to him either. I was filled with anger towards him; it was his fault I got a 16. If he had just helped me a little more. Now he was sitting there enjoying himself. I decided to study without his help, just like these past few days. It was entirely my fault. I needed to reduce my dependence on him. I was in the third grade, and it was better for me to learn to study alone. I did my homework all evening without paying attention to him. I didn't even

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watch the kids' program with him. He had become irritable, and even when no one bothered him, he would fixate on something just to stay angry. Once he told Uncle; "Dad! Can you turn down the volume of that TV? This music is making me feel bad."

"You've become really irritable, dear!"

"No! It doesn't make me feel good."

Uncle turned down the volume of the TV. Then he narrowed his eyes as if challenging Alborz and looked at him with a smile; "You tell us what makes you feel good, and we'll do that!"

Alborz was buried in his notebook; "I think today nothing!"

Aunt mischievously said; "I think he knows himself."

I was unaware of what Aunt said, but what was making Alborz feel bad at that moment was one of those permitted songs from the '90s; a limited collection that was constantly played on television and radio back then. I agreed with him; even after years, hearing those sounds still fills me with depression and disappointment. Those sounds were a reminder of strange days for the children of that time; a mix of adolescence and social identity crisis of that era. It was a betrayal that our radio and television inflicted on traditional music during those days.

While Alborz practiced piano, I went to the yard and tried not to listen; it didn't work. When he played, the sound of his notes could be clearly heard in every room of the house. While I was sitting on the metal swing with my book, Auntie brought tea and cake for me and herself. She placed the tray on the metal table in front of the swing and went towards the garden. The spring breeze pulled her green and white polka-dotted cotton dress to one side, and with her dark hair flowing, she resembled a weeping willow dancing in nature. She bent down, picked a few orange wild rose branches, sat beside me, and patiently placed them among the strands of my braided hair. I thanked her with

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a smile. She patted my head; "When you two aren't making any noise, it feels like no one is in this house."

"I have no problem with him, Auntie; he doesn't talk to me. I think he's tired of me."

She pulled me toward her and held me in her embrace; "He will never get tired of you, my dear! She's a bit angry because of her behavior at school. Between us, ever since he's turning 13 these days, his temperament has become sharper."

I didn't know why 13-year-old boys had to be wild, but I smiled; "Auntie! Why doesn't my mom ever hug me like you do? Did you know she only kisses me during the holidays and on my birthday?" Her kisses were forced; they were just a polite gesture like shaking hands with friends and acquaintances! Auntie said, "Oh, sweetheart! Your mom is busy. When she comes home, she's tired. But she has held and kissed you a lot; when you were little, you don't remember. Did you know I wanted to have a daughter?"

"Then why didn't you have one?"

Auntie hugged me tighter; "Well, because you were born at that time! Now I have a daughter who is 9 years old. She is about to turn 10." She kissed my head and looked at me for a while; her embrace was warm and soothing. In her arms, I had no worries. The pleasant scent of her body, a mixture of tangerine, orange blossom, and acacia, along with the smell of her face cream reminiscent of baby powder, filled me with all the good feelings in the world. I didn't want her to let me go. I wished my mom wanted me as much as Auntie did. Oh mom! I remembered her again. My stomach twisted.

That night when mom came home and we had dinner, I tried not to get in her way too much so she wouldn't remember the exams. I was busy gathering my things in my room when she came in and asked seriously but cheerfully; "Afra! Haven't you gotten your exam results yet?"

I tried to hide my anxiety. I stammered, "Some of them haven't come back yet."

She didn't take her eyes off me; oh! Her gaze! "Well! What about the ones that have come back?"

Reluctantly, I took out the papers and handed them to her. Fortunately, the rest were good; I had just messed up in math. I thought my scores of 19 in science and 20 in Persian literature and dictation would compensate for that careless mistake in math, but... mom's silence didn't say that. The happy expression on her face vanished. She held my good grades in one hand and the math score in the other. She exclaimed loudly; "Oh! What kind of mistake is this? Huh?"

I didn't say anything. The scent of her perfume filled my room. Mom always took care of herself like Auntie, but the expensive scent of her body and the smell of her creams and cosmetics only made me feel anxious and scared. She shouted; "Answer me!"

I burst into tears. With a voice I could barely hear, I said; "I swear I knew everything. I just made a careless mistake."

"What else were you doing besides studying! You have become so arrogant that you are just trying to justify it now!"

"Well, my other grades..."

She didn't let me continue. Her anger erupted; it was too late to escape. I don't remember what happened after that. I knew the sound of mom's anger and perhaps my pleas echoed throughout the house like Alborz's piano. I could hear the phone ringing amid mom's screams, but she didn't go to answer it. Maybe it was Auntie again wanting to distract mom. This time, however, it was useless. I hated loud noises; I hated the white women's slippers, hated the pinches, and hated the sounds of pain and apologies that made me feel worthless. I hated myself for being a burden and making mom angry, and honestly... sometimes I hated mom too; for her laughter that was for everyone, except me, for the affection she showed to strangers, and for the pleasant scent of her body that never enveloped me. I also hated dad for coming home late and returning to the hospital in the middle of the night with every phone call, oblivious to what was happening at home and never addressing mom's behavior toward either of us. I was too exhausted to make it to the gazebo or my bed; I curled up on the floor and fell asleep.

In the morning, I heard Auntie's voice in the yard as she went after mom, scolding her for last night's events. Mom was angry and complaining; she said Alborz and I weren't studying together and were wasting time. Why was nothing other than my studying important to her? Did she really think I had no other needs? Maybe she thought my other needs were being met by the expenses they paid. If maternal affection was something useless, then why did Auntie spend so much on Alborz? Alborz! That selfish, rude brat who hated me!

While I was having breakfast, someone rang the doorbell. In the mornings, after Mom and Dad left, Ms. Parvin would arrive and prepare my breakfast before the school bus came. I thought Dad had returned from his night shift. Ms. Parvin opened the door, and my aunt came into our house; she went straight to me and sat at a 90-degree angle with me at the kitchen table. Then she ran her hand on my back; I pulled away. My back hurt from Mom's pinch. My aunt tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear; "I'm sorry, dear! I should have told your mom that the night before. When I realized it was too late, I called her several times, but she didn't answer. I just spoke with her now. I promised her to let you come back up and study with Alborz again. I will help you more."

I couldn't believe my aunt was apologizing to me. Did adults ever make mistakes? I said hopelessly, "But Alborz doesn't want me to disturb him."

"sweetheart! It's not like that. He was upset about something else. Last night, he was the first one to hear your voice from his window and called for me. I was in the kitchen when I saw him begging me to come down. Your mom didn't answer me, and he was upset with me and his dad for not doing anything for you."

So he felt guilty! What difference does it make? "He's mad at me anyway."

"No, my dear! Go put on your clothes; the bus is coming now. When you come back at noon, we will talk more."

I choked up; "Auntie! I wish I were your child!"

"You are, sweetheart!"

I was; just not in a way that you would come to my rescue during punishment! Not in a way that I would never return to this house. Not in a way that I could stay in your arms forever while your hands kept every blow away from me.

After lunch, before we started on our homework, we would take a little nap. Sometimes Alborz practiced piano while I drew or read a book out of Mom's sight. I still loved drawing. That day, until lunch, Alborz and I hadn't spoken a word to each other; it felt like we were both shy around one another! I could tell something had changed in Alborz compared to previous days. I pretended not to notice, but he looked at me in a way that made me see regret in his eyes. After lunch, I took my colored pencils and book to the dining table; I was reading *Alice in Wonderland* those days. I wanted to get lost with Alice in the pages of the book; a place where Mom wasn't around. Ms. Parvin was cleaning, and my aunt was at the kitchen table working on the company accounts. Alborz came up behind me and said with a pleading tone, "Can we go to the gazebo for a minute?"

I didn't say anything. I left my things there and followed him. My aunt called us from the kitchen and then came with two ice cream cones; she gave Alborz his ice cream, and he went out to the yard. Then she handed me mine, ruffled my hair, and with her kind and smiling face, winked at me as if hinting at a secret that no one but us knew about. We went to the gazebo. I picked up one of the A2-sized papers from the middle table and laid it on the ground. Uncle bought these papers for us from the stationery store in Enghelab Square. We always kept some of them for drawing in the gazebo. Those days, alongside charcoal, other tools had been added to our supplies: a box of twenty-four colored pastels that gave a fresh look to our charcoal drawings. While eating my ice cream, I started drawing on the paper. However, he didn't sit next to me. He leaned against the middle table. He remained silent for a moment. I was sure he was licking his ice cream and looking at my drawing. A minute or two passed; "That day, during the last period, Nima wanted to come here in the afternoon so we could work on math together. I told him I couldn't because I had

to practice with Afra. He mocked me for it. He said you're just wasting time with that clingy girl." He said.

I had finished my ice cream and was still busy drawing; a road flanked by dense trees on both sides and trees with paw-shaped and serrated leaves. Nima was the friend I had seen since elementary school in the school bus and at our birthday parties alongside Alborz. He sometimes came over to his house as well. Without looking at him, I asked, "What did you tell him?"

"I reminded him that he had been at our house a few days ago, and we had seen each other at the park before that. But then he said something bad that I can't say right now. Then I hit him. I pushed him, and he fell in front of the bathroom door. That's why they took us to the office and..."

I said defiantly, "Well, you can go anytime you want. I don't care about you and your friends."

"Um, well, he was talking nonsense. I can be with them whenever I want right now. He got jealous."

I wasn't looking at him, but from his hoarse voice and full mouth, I guessed he had stuffed the last piece of ice cream, which was bigger than a usual bite, in his mouth. He was right. I wasn't allowed to go to my classmates' houses; they didn't come to our house at that age either. I only saw them occasionally for notes outside of school or in our yard. But Alborz often hung out with his friends. Sometimes he went to his friends' houses, and sometimes they came over while I spent the day with my aunt. I asked, "What was he jealous of?"

"That we, me and you, are always together and not alone."

Nima was also an only child, just like us and many kids our age. But we were lucky to be together. Maybe he was right about that too. He continued angrily, "Even though I hit him, I got really mad at him for acting like a jerk. I wanted to hit him more."

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If my aunt and uncle heard Alborz curse, they would scold him. He only swore under his breath sometimes when we were alone, especially when he got excited or angry; but he wouldn't say it in front of his parents. I said, "Well, he's right. I am clingy!"

He calmed down again; "You're not! You're smart, you know your lessons well, and you're drawing so beautifully! Besides, you're way better than me in writing and Persian literature!"

Was he trying to fool me? Hadn't he just said I was dumb?

"My mom doesn't think so." I mumbled.

He ignored what I said and continued innocently; "These past few days, I've been bored. I've missed being silly. I don't like being alone. What happened last night was my fault. If we had practiced those two problems more that day, it wouldn't have happened... I'm sorry!"

How well he explained his feelings and confessed without shame. He apologized to me just like my aunt did! I didn't say anything. I choked up. I remembered last night again. I stopped drawing lines; my heart sank. He sat cross-legged on the floor in front of me and turned my drawing towards himself; it was a forest full of tall and short trees with a road running through it. Without saying anything, he drew a mountain range in the sky behind the trees with peaks covered in snow; he painted various parts of the forest and the thicket and coppice at the foot of the mountain in his favorite shade of blue, where the sunlight shone on them, sparkling beautifully and majestically under the slanting sunlight and the hazy shades. It became more beautiful; it was perfect. It became exactly what I wanted. He returned the drawing to me; "Are we friends?" He said.

A wave of tears filled my eyes. I looked at him, smiled, and shook my head. What would I have become if they weren't there? How wonderful it was to have their unconditional presence in the house. They were my joy. They were everything I didn't have. With them, I lacked nothing.

The road that led to the sea

I felt that the flood I was worried about had flowed away, and the house I built at the mouth of the river was floating on it. Throughout all these years, I had often thought about something that created a sense of insecurity and unrest within me. But since I had hidden half of myself under the hard layers I had woven around me, I never reached a correct answer. I knew that the thread of my lost puzzle was in my childhood and past, but I consciously did not go after it. By creating a new world above myself, I was like that maple tree in our yard on which they built that new house. But eventually, in the midst of this new path, becoming a new person and perhaps becoming a mother, I fell into its trap. If I had a choice, during those days more than ever, I wouldn't want to think about the past.

I had heard the term "Dissociative amnesia"¹ before, but I never thought I was somehow afflicted by it. They say, "Whatever happens

1. "Dissociative amnesia" is a defensive reaction of the human brain that occurs as a result of severe psychological trauma. Events that exceed a person's capacity to endure happen, and the mind makes all events related to those occurrences disappear from awareness, such that the individual does not remember them

is surely for your best." I don't know if this saying is true, how I should accept that recalling those days and their consequences in these sensitive times was best for me? Was it necessary for those details to come back to me now? Should I go after them? There was no room for a negative answer. Because the beehive whose holes I had sealed and shaken for years was now punctured by my own hands. Sam also had no reaction to my madness; it seemed he had accepted that period of life as it was and had no objection to my liminal state. Perhaps because this time was supposed to be our last effort, he had promised himself to maintain utmost silence and cooperation and to wait with me for the result.

A few days later, it was early morning when he set off for the airport and Shiraz. I, too, along with Aban, headed to Chalus to visit a house that could be the home of my dreams in the near future. This trip was our first journey during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before that, Sam had gone on another work trip, but it had been a long time since my last road trip and travel experience. I was extremely nostalgic for travel and craved the fresh air of another city. Although I didn't think my first trip, with the massive wave that had recently hit me, would be the Chalus road¹. I had many memories of that road, filled with joy and excitement. I didn't remember the details precisely; only the feeling of it remained with me. I was sitting behind the wheel. We had chosen the audiobook of "The Remains of the Day"² for this trip and were listening to it together. A part of the Tehran-North freeway had opened during the pandemic, and we were passing through it. We finished the freeway and went onto the old road; it felt as if I had returned from a distant journey to my homeland. Just before the Kandovan tunnel, we got stuck in heavy traffic. It wasn't normal for

1. Chalus Road is one of the most beautiful roads in Iran, connecting Mazandaran to Alborz. This road is a popular destination for tourists due to its stunning natural scenery, including forests and mountains. Additionally, it has historical significance and is recognized as one of the major construction projects from the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi.

2. By Kazuo Ishiguro

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the beginning of the week. We asked around and found out there had been an accident, and the road maintenance crew was working to clear the path. We didn't mind; we were happy being together with the book and the road.

My connection with Aban was an ideal relationship for me in our own world. Sometimes, without saying a word, we enjoyed each other's company for hours. I didn't know how my presence felt to her, but Aban, who seemed to find meditation in all aspects of life, always immersed me in tranquility. For this reason, being with her was very easy for me. She never judged me for what I was in the moment, and I always learned how to approach life from her; she also considered me very experienced and perceived me as more than I was, often condemning me for self-sabotage. Perhaps she was deceived by my reading habits and my insights. I was happy for her that during those days she was caught up in a romantic marriage; something I had never experienced.

We were still stuck in traffic. We turned off the audiobook so she could attend to her romantic call. The windows were down, and the sound of music was coming from the car in front of us, and I found myself unconsciously humming along with it:

"Come, let's write that God is at the bottom of the heart of the mirror

Like the fervor of a scream or your breath, it's the cage of the chest
With always staying, when there's nothing left to stay
It's the peak of every lover's voice that can't be broken."

Aban's call had ended, and she was looking at me with wide eyes. Surprised and playfully, she said, "Whoa! I can't believe it! Since when have you been listening to 90s pop? And specially this one!"

I didn't say anything. Suddenly, it felt as if I was being transported to another world; I was immersed in joy. My train of thoughts came to a halt at a new station. I wanted to stay there forever.

"Tell me what's on your mind? Describe it to me! Since we set off this morning, you've been full of words!" She said.

A memory of one of my trips to the north came alive for me; one of those group trips with relatives during the summer when I had just turned 10. At that time, my uncle Amir had a large villa by the beach near Ramsar. We were supposed to stay there for a week. Uncle had served in the military as a doctor in the deprived villages of that region; since then, he had fallen in love with the north. As far as I remember, he had also found a villa for us to buy jointly with Uncle Farhad if it turned out well during that trip. Uncle sat in our car to relay information to Mom and Dad and discuss their work matters, while her wife sat behind the wheel of Uncle's car, which had their five-year-old daughter, Darya, and her Aunt in it. As always, we were supposed to go to the entrance of the Chalus road and wait there for the others; which was my other aunt's family and my uncle. It was six in the morning; I was dozing off and intermittently hearing Mom, Dad, and Uncle's conversation. Mom told Uncle, "My dear, it's expensive! We can't buy this year. Besides, we have the next checks for the clinics too."

"We might be able to delay that check. Farhad is trying to convince them. With him in the middle, we're at ease. They are good people." Dad said.

Uncle said, "It would be great if we could increase the pre-sales at this stage. This way, our share of costs would be less than now."

Dad said, "I really don't want to get involved in property issues. Amir! I think you should explain it to the lawyer so he doesn't entangle us any further. It's not our business!"

"I say we sell the land in Niawaran.¹ That way we can comfortably pay off the checks for the doctors' building and save the rest for the villa in the north!" Mom said.

1. One of the affluent neighborhoods in Tehran

Dad said, "Don't even think about it. If the plans for building the hospital and clinic are finalized in two or three years, I'd prefer to invest that land there. Maybe we won't sell it and turn it into something useful."

Uncle nodded in agreement, saying, "Yeah, it doesn't make sense to sell properties in Tehran to buy something in the north."

Mom reminded them, "This year our expenses suddenly went up. The cars consumed a lot of our capital."

Uncle said, "But I have a proposal..."

I said, "Dad! Can you open the sunroof for some air?"

Dad replied, "No dear! It's early morning; you'll catch a cold!"

I wasn't even allowed to open my own window because... it was dangerous. What danger? I was suffocating. The smell of leather from the seats and their perfumes was too much for that time of morning. I craved fresh air. I tried not to listen to the rest of the conversation; "Boring talk!"

The story was that Dad had finally sold the burgundy Mercedes-Benz S280 and, against his will, had bought a Pajero. This was our first trip with the Pajero. Mom, whom Dad called stingy, had replaced the Renault 5 with a red hatchback Pride.¹ In those days, owning two cars was not common. In fact, their actions were considered a kind of extravagance in a society where wealth was regarded as an unspoken crime. The Korean Pride was also a special car in those years, before it reached mass production domestically. Mother preferred not to be in the spotlight, but Dad's forced choice was due to the restriction on importing the Mercedes model he wanted; in a way, he had compromised so he wouldn't have to buy his preferred model at several times the price until the right time came. On the other hand, he

1. The first generation of the Pride was introduced at the request of Ford from 1986 to 1993 in Japan under the name Mazda 121 and in North America under the name Festiva. At the same time, from 1987 to 2000, it was also produced by Kia Motors of South Korea under the name Pride, and in 2001, its production line was sold to Saipa in Iran

was also building a multi-unit medical building in Niavaran¹ with his brother-in-law; they were gradually planning to move their offices there. Now, with the proposal to buy a villa in the north, two plus two didn't add up...

We stopped at the beginning of the Chalus road. Uncle's wife parked behind us, and Uncle Farhad's car passed by us like a carnival of joy, making noise as it stopped a little ahead. Music was coming from its open windows:

“Now that the flower vase has reached the flower stem,
Now that the scent of reconciliation has spread through our blood,
Don't say, don't say I won't come! Don't say, don't say I won't come!”²

Alborz jumped out like a spinning top and, as if fleeing from something, ran off with Uncle to a corner behind the trees. Uncle stood with his back to Alborz, facing us, looking at Mom. He shook his head with a smile from side to side; it meant, as always! Alborz had a habit of needing to pee as soon as we set off for a long trip. Aunt came over to Mom, and they started talking through the window; “It seems this kid's bladder is connected to the road. He said he needs to go as soon as we left the alley.”

Uncle said, “It's the excitement of travel. Luckily, this road has space to pull over.”

We all got out. We had to wait for two more cars. A little later, Alborz and Uncle returned. Alborz came toward me and quietly said, “Ask your mom for permission and come into our car!”

“She won't allow it. I told her before.” I replied hopelessly.

“Say it again! Now that uncle Amir and mom are here, maybe they'll allow it. If you don't come, Sepand and Sepideh will come to me; I can't stand their annoying antics.”

He was talking about his cousins. We were the same age and played together. Fortunately, my male cousins were both a few years older than Alborz, so we didn't have any trouble. I asked my mom, "Mom, can I?" Alborz also said after me, "Auntie! Can Afra come in our car?"

"No, she can't! What did I tell you? On a trip, everyone stays in their own car."

"Then why is Uncle in our car?"

"Did you talk back again?"

Uncle laughed and kissed my head while he had Alborz in a headlock, messing up his already tousled hair, and said, "She's right, good kid. Send her over there! This way, she's not alone. They'll have more fun."

Darya also clung to Uncle's leg so that she could go too. Uncle picked her up with one arm; "No, sweetheart! You sit in our car with your mom and auntie on your own seat!"

Auntie Ela said, "You all can comfortably haggle."

Uncle Farhad said, "Haggle all you want, but I have no money." He pointed a finger at his car and said, "I spent everything I had on this toy."

Uncle Amir replied, "Well, at least you're buying a piece of land in Lavason!"

Dad said to Mom, "Let her go! We're going one after another anyway."

Mom finally gave in; "Go! But don't be a nuisance!"

"Hooray!"

Auntie Ella said, "No way! What nuisance? They're happy with each other."

A little later, the others arrived, and before Sepand and Sepideh could think of it, Alborz and I had claimed the back seat of Uncle's

car. It was the first time I was getting into their new vehicle. The carnival of joy set off again.

Uncle Farhad had also updated his car that year, at the same time as my father. It was the mid-1970s, and many foreign cars had finally hit the Iranian market after a long time. Until then, my uncle had a burnt brown BMW 518. After the revolution, against his will, he had been forced to sell his beloved Cadillac at a significant loss. Back then, during the era of U.S. sanctions, Cadillacs were seen as tools of enemy influence, and anyone who owned one was considered a tyrant or a traitor. Even if you had only ridden in that attractive and powerful monster once, you would notice how different it was from other cars. Now my uncle referred to his black Mitsubishi Galant VR4 as a toy;¹ "Welcome to the toy of the Arasteh family!"

I ran my hand over the black velvet upholstery of the seat; "Uncle, this is really nice! I love your car a lot."

"My dear! Your dad's car is fancier than this! Of course, that's also a toy for him!"

"Yeah! But what good does that do? He won't even let me roll down the window. It's all work talk."

My uncle laughed; "That's just how Reza is. Every thing needs to be neat! His pants' crease shouldn't get messed up!"

Then turned up the car's stereo again and sang along to a song while keeping one eye on the road.

"I closed my eyes and you come to greet the dawn!²

With the melody of your breath, call out to the garden!"

And where it said,

"You whose name means a clear sky,

The root of the sound is the pulse of love, beneath the skin of the earth,"

1. A small number of VR4 Galant models, produced in a limited edition as the strongest and most complete version, were imported to Iran in the mid-1970s.

2. Bia Benevisim, By Mahasti

he looked at Alborz through the rearview mirror and sang loudly for him. Alborz put his hand on his face and laughed through his fingers, saying, "Oh Dad! You sing so out of tune! Please have mercy on us!"

"Look at this little goat, telling me I sing out of tune!"

Antie Ella laughed and said to my uncle, "So what do you want to do with the villa?"

Uncle replied, "I honestly don't know."

"Do you think it's worth it?"

"I need to consult. The land area in the north is larger, but I don't think it compares to Lavason. In any case, whichever one we take will stay for this gentleman!" and he nodded toward the back seat. The gentleman was casually untying his shoelaces. My aunt turned back and said, "darling! Don't keep your head down when we are moving! You'll feel bad." She occasionally passed around seeds and nuts among me, Alborz, and Uncle Farhad. She continued toward my uncle;" We can't just jump into things without thinking. Our expenses are high."

My uncle playfully pretended to cry and said, "Yes, well! We have seven or eight people in family to feed!"

My aunt said sympathetically, "Don't say it like that! Enjoy it all! Let's see what good comes from it!"

"Uncle! What does that mean?"

Alborz was searching for something in the console between the two front seats. He quickly answered; "It means me and you. Us who eat up our parents' money and finish it all!"

Uncle's laughter filled the car; "That's exactly it."

Aunt turned back and held Alborz's chin with her hand; "Oh, look you how you're explaining that!" and turned up the volume of the stereo. Alborz had found what he was looking for. His face scrunched up as if he had dipped his head into a bucket full of fish; "Oh no! Not this song again! Mom! Can you change this tape?"

Aunt, with half-closed eyes and a smile on her lips, had casually untied her scarf and let her hair blow in the wind. Uncle said instead; "Don't even mention it! You can't be here without these!"

Alborz opened the lid of the video camera bag and replaced the old battery with a new one; "But Dad! Admit it, some of them have technical flaws. This one more than any other; both its violin and its lyrics! I mean, come on, what does 'the owner of sorrow in my eyes' even mean?!". I thought he was right; even if we hadn't heard its lyrics, its violin sounded like a bee trapped behind a window! Uncle said cheerfully and patiently; "Not 'my eyes', but 'my voice'! Besides, these are road songs for Chalus Road. To groove along with the car, my dear! We listen to both Bach and Pink Floyd. But tell me, which of them fits this road?"

Alborz rolled his eyes... and surrendered. In my opinion, both Bach and Pink Floyd would fit this road. Now that I look back at my memories, I see that our music on road trips was entirely different from what we listened to at home. No one could discover our musical taste in our family's road music. Uncle and Aunt often prepared special playlists for this road; a mix of cheerful and somewhat noisy Iranian songs from their memories and old foreign songs from their student days. Suddenly, my eye caught the battery compartment door on the camera; "Whoa! Why is this broken?"

"Some guy wasn't paying attention and broke the door of the camera." Auntie said.

"Ah, Mom, don't remind me! I'll feel awful! I don't know why it happened like that. I swear it got stuck!"

"It didn't get stuck, dear! You were trying to force it shut. That wasn't the way to do it." Uncle said.

Aunt and Uncle's responses to Alborz's mistakes were always gentle and devoid of anger or guilt, in a way that made him aware of his errors. I turned to Alborz and said, "Good job, Engineer!"

He had turned on the camcorder and was filming each of us; "you're welcome! I couldn't do any better than this!"

Aunt said, "Let me take it from you two."

This time, Aunt was humming the song for Uncle and playfully presenting her feelings to him. Occasionally, she would throw a flirtatious glance at Alborz and me. Aunt was very beautiful, and when she was happy, she became even more so.

"O my eternal love! O my dream and every thought!¹
O my clear spring! Oh where are you and my state?
Innocent beloved of mine..."

Uncle would sometimes let go of the steering wheel to clap for her and wave his hand. Every time he let go of the wheel, all three of us would scream, and then Alborz's pleas would come from behind the camera; "For God's sake, change this song!"

I loved the way Uncle and Aunt expressed their affection for each other; their love was something to behold. Sometimes when Aunt was busy with something at home, Uncle would approach her, place a kiss on her neck or cheek, wrap his arm around her waist, and caress her or gently massage her shoulders. If Aunt felt assured that we weren't watching them, she would stroke Uncle's head and face. Such displays of affection were rarely seen in front of children in most Iranian families. They were from another world; both still handsome, well-dressed, and attractive. Despite having Alborz, Aunt still had a slim waist and her figure looked youthful. Uncle was also fit and had no belly. They both often went for walks and to the pool. Uncle mostly wore jeans during his off-hours; unlike Dad! Dad was always in pressed cotton pants in the most formal manner possible. He referred to jeans as "American worker clothes"! Although Mom was very stylish and well-dressed, it seemed that after my birth, she had become a bit wider. She always complained about her appearance. Her body's imbalance was one of the criticisms I received alongside being "too much." Mom was one or two years younger than Aunt but appeared older than her with her highlighted blonde hair. Aunt's hair was always dark. Recently, Dad had lost some hair from the front of his head, and his belly had slightly protruded. He would say, "I'm just starting to look like the doctors." Now I think the most important thing that made Aunt and Uncle look younger was the love between them, their relaxed faces, and their healthy relationship with each other. I felt a bit dizzy. I came back to myself. Aunt was behind the camera, and Alborz, as

1. Khoobe Man, By Mahasti

usual, made a silly face to pull me out of my thoughts and exaggeratedly hummed a song he didn't like to make me laugh;

"Don't play with my heart! O good one, my dear!

O my dark morning! Don't play with my heart!"

I laughed; "You crazy! Not dark morning; bright morning!"

He was tapping with his left hand and playing the notes on an invisible piano with his right. He laughed at his mistakes, but he frowned as if he didn't want to lose focus on the instrument; "The situation is so bad that my mistakes don't really affect the terrible state of the song! But you'll remember the lyrics really well!"

"Yeah! You memorize the music well, I memorize the lyrics! We make a good team!"

I knew he didn't like the noisy pop music. My taste in music at that age hadn't fully formed yet, but he had a clearer understanding than I did due to his musical education and inclination towards playing European classical music. A little later, he taught me how to find the melody underneath and the sounds of the instruments separately without listening to the song at the same time. My aunt took out a tape and put another one in the player. If I'm not mistaken, that trip was our last experience with those cassette tapes. After that, CDs hit the market, and Uncle Farhad immediately upgraded his and Dad's car sound systems. My aunt seemed to have found her song by rewinding and fast-forwarding another tape; "How's this?"

This time, Alborz was happy and swayed to the rhythm of the music; like a pigeon puffing out its chest, he held onto the collar of his T-shirt with his index and thumb, pouting his lips and making clownish faces with a mix of pride and a furrowed brow. With those antics and his messy hair, he looked just like a cute cartoon character. He was doing his best to make us laugh. My aunt sang along with the song for him;

"In that tall mountain, proud from head to toe,

Reaching for the sun, strange and without passage." ¹

I said, "That's not fair! Why has no one sung a song for me?"

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My aunt replied, "Don't worry, dear! I don't have any songs either, but your uncle sings them all for me!"

Uncle nodded in agreement and continued; "Sweetheart! Doesn't matter what they sing with your name; what matters is that there is someone to sing it for you"

His eyebrows raised, emphasizing the last two words. Perhaps that day, I didn't fully understand what Uncle said. But after that, it didn't matter what the songs were; we sang and danced along with all of them, laughing at each other's antics. My aunt continued to respectfully and lovingly swaying for Uncle and sing;

"The story of your love is still in my voice! One night of intoxication, back on my path.

There's just one breath of distance between us; what excitement I have with you tonight!

You who are the moonlight in my night! You who are a melody on my lips!

You came and stayed..." ¹

Uncle shook his shoulders while we sat behind our instruments. Alborz brought out the details of the songs very accurately in his gestures. His keen ears showed their strength in distinguishing sounds even at that age. He laughed at my movements, and I laughed at his. Our bodies had become a metronome, and our hands were various instruments. Sometimes we moved so much behind our instruments that our heads would bump together, my drumstick would fall from my hand onto the road, and in the middle of it all, one shoe would come off and fly into the air; laughter filled the space.

"You are that high cloud whose hands heal the barren land!

You are that shore of light to which every wave bows down."

And Alborz's silly singing;

"In the cold season of love, every flower has an excuse from you.

If your caress isn't there, the flower in the greenhouse sleeps!

¹. Ghesseye Eshgh, Ebi

I'm in love..."¹

Just as he reached this point, Uncle suddenly hit the brakes, and we all fell to one side. Back then, no one wore seatbelts in the back seat in Iran. My dizziness was slowly turning into nausea. I leaned my head against the backrest and tried to calm down. Auntie glanced back and placed her hand on Uncle's thigh; "Farhad dear, slow down a bit! The kid isn't feeling well."

Uncle quickly glanced at the cars behind us in the rearview mirror. He caressed Aunt's hand on his thigh and nodded in agreement. Shortly after, we reached a police checkpoint, and he turned down the music. Back then, loud music was a suitable reason for a fine and pulling over, and as far as I remember, having high-end cars made us good targets for heavy extortion on that road; Uncle and Dad had been ripped off several times with high fines.

Auntie said to me, "Close your eyes and rest a bit, my dear!" Then she looked at Alborz through the passenger-side mirror; "How are you, sweetie? Are you having fun?"

Alborz leaned forward and pulled and caressed his mother's cheeks from behind. Aunt started kissing her fingers rapidly; "Oh, look at these little salty fingers!"

I couldn't laugh. I closed my eyes, but it didn't help; "Uncle! Can you pull over? I want to throw up."

"Sure, sir! At the first opportunity!"

Alborz said, "Haha! Optimistic soldier! What first opportunity? If you don't pull over in the next thirty seconds, the back seat will be full of soup!"

"I beg you to have mercy on me, sir!"

Uncle signaled and stopped on the shoulder of the road; he quickly got out and opened the door for me from outside. I ran and threw up behind a rock. Other cars also stopped behind us. Mom got out; "Did you see how bad you felt? I told you to take your medicine in the morning, but you didn't listen!"

¹. Khalegh, By Moein

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Mom's scolding made me throw up again. Auntie had taken the water jug from Uncle and was bringing it to me; "Now give it to her, Leila!"

I said, "But it's really bitter, and it makes me sleepy. I don't like it."

"I know sweetheart! Instead, you'll sleep a little, feel better, and enjoy the rest of the trip!"

Mom handed me a quarter of a dimenhydrinate tablet with a glass of water. One hand was on my back while she massaged the lower part of my chest with the other; even though it was painful, I felt good from her touch. Dad asked, "Are you feeling better, my dear?"

I nodded in affirmation. He continued; "This pill is bitter. It's also a bit sedative. But for those who are feeling sick, it's a good thing!" Alborz was standing over me; he pointed at my stomach contents and said, "Wow, you swallowed all the snacks whole. You should use your teeth a little, lazy girl!"

I felt sick again; "Ugh, don't look! What about you? You eat all the seeds with their shells!"

Aunt asked, "OMG, Alborz?"

"I think it's better if you come back into our car! You're bothering them!" Mom said.

Uncle Farhad had taken the water jug from Aunt and was closing its lid; "No way! It doesn't bother us at all. If you want to stay, stay, dear!"

I didn't like our car. Its bumps were worse; "I'll stay, Mom!" Mom nodded in agreement and turned to Aunt; "Give us one or two tapes too. Our tapes have become very repetitive."

Mom was happy. She wasn't as kind as Aunt but was cheerful, and just seeing her smile made me happy too. Uncle Amir went to their car and sat behind the wheel. Mom switched places with Dad, and Uncle Farhad switched places with Auntie Ella. We set off again. I enjoyed this kind of commotion during our trips, constantly stopping for some excuse, changing seats, and shifting snacks. A little later, I fell asleep. Between sleep and wakefulness, I could hear;

"You have interpreted the dreams of lovers anew!

You have reinterpreted the ancient tales of love!

You said that talking about you means breathing!
My selflessness means reaching you!"¹

My neck swayed on the backrest of the seat and stiff. The sunlight streamed in from the open roof of the car into my eyes. A cool breeze caressed my cheeks. I opened my eyes. Perhaps I had been asleep for a long time; it seemed we were getting close to the restaurant. Aunt was behind the wheel, softly humming the lyrics of the song. Uncle was tapping on his lap. Alborz had placed the camera somewhere between us and had put the Walkman earphone in his ear, gazing at the scenery outside. Later, I learned that while I was asleep, he had taken a picture of me with my mouth open. Mom honked and passed by us; she was also a tough one on the road. When she passed, the sound of music came through the open windows; it was the same music we had been listening to here a few minutes earlier. It puzzled me; how did Mom and Dad listen to romantic songs? They didn't flirt with each other like Aunt and Uncle did. Their relationship was not like that at all. Sometimes I would hear one of them humming a tune to themselves; but really, who were they singing romantic songs for? Now that I look back on those days, I see that perhaps this is why expressing feelings was so difficult for me and so easy for Alborz even from childhood. He was constantly seeing and practicing, while I was somewhere caught between accepting my parents' behavior towards each other as correct. I had been awake for a while but hadn't moved from my spot. Alborz felt my gaze and turned towards me; his face lit up with joy. Perhaps he was bored; "Did you feel better, little girl?"

I nodded with a sleepy smile; "When did we pass the tunnel?"

"Just a few minutes ago. I wanted to wake you up, but Mom wouldn't let me."

Before I could ask what he was listening to, he leaned towards me, took one of the earphones out of his ear, and put it in mine. He had a habit of inviting me to listen to something he liked this way. A gentle, uplifting, and melancholic melody filled my ears, a blend of violin,

1.Eshghe Man, By Dariush

cello, flute, and piano. Just when you wanted to sit down and cry your heart out to it, it suddenly became joyful and energetic; it made you want to dance and stomp your feet along! He said softly, "I want to practice this for Mom's birthday and play it for her. What do you think?"

Aunt's birthday was in mid-September. I got excited; "That's great! She'll love it." Auntie adored both Alborz's playing and his playful antics behind the instrument. This piece was truly him;

"Yeah. It's just that my job is hard because I have to practice when she goes out."

"That's not a problem! We'll take her out so you can practice!"

"How?"

"For example, I'll say let's go buy me some clothes, you say you're getting bored and don't come."

A spark lit up in his eyes. He agreed and continued; "Or for example, you guys go to the park, I'll stay home to study for my english language exam!"

"We're not lying! My jeans are getting short on me."

"Uh-huh. I have a language exam too."

"And also..."

I cut off my words because at that moment, Uncle turned back; "What are you two listening to? Let us hear it too."

We squinted our eyes and made duck-like lips, acting as if we had been caught. Alborz took the tape out of the Walkman and winked at me. He quickly grabbed another tape from the seat and handed it to Uncle. Uncle put it in the car's player;

'You arrive from the road, full of dust!

All the waiting comes with you in spring!

How nice to see you, how nice to have you!

How nice to wipe the dust off your body!' ¹

Auntie excitedly said; 'Wow! Look at this! I've been looking for this tape since morning. I searched the dashboard a hundred times. I thought it was lost!'

Uncle said, "When did you two become so stylish?"

Aunt looked at me in the mirror; "My dear Afra! Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, Auntie! I'm better."

"Farhad, darling! would you taking the fruits out of the basket under your feet?"

Uncle took out the fruit bowl; "Thank God the fruits are summer ones, and I don't have to peel them for you."

Aunt said, "Eat a little to feel good! We are going to have lunch soon..."

*

At that moment, we arrived at the restaurant, Sahra, with a chain of traffic jams. I pointed to Aban that it was right here. Today's Sahra restaurant was very different from those days; it was big, modern, and newly renovated. Back then, it was a small cozy kebab place overlooking the valley. Uncle Amir discovered it during his trips to the north. Aban said, "If you want, we can eat lunch here!"

I said, "No! What I have in mind is very different from its new face. It's better not to stay anywhere because of Corona."

Aban continued; "Wow! Group trips during childhood were amazing! I didn't have much experience with this road. We mostly traveled the Tehran to Isfahan route to visit relatives. But your uncle's family must have been so much fun! If I were you, I would want to be with them from morning till night. By the way, I remember when I first saw you, you had a navy-blue and silver Pajero. Was that the one you just mentioned?"

I smiled; "Uh-huh. That was it. Dad didn't keep that one for long. At the end of the 1990s, he got another Mercedes S-Class for himself. Mom also exchanged her Pride for a French Peugeot 206 for a while. If you remember, that model had just come into the Iranian market back then and was very attractive. It was around that time I got my driver's license and drove the Pride for a few months. Once I got used to driving, Dad wanted to sell the Pajero to get something else for me, but Mom wouldn't let him. She said, " Sit behind it, and your fear will

melt away! With that, when you hit the road, no one can bully you. You can easily go right through them." Mom always wanted me to be strong. It was a good car, but honestly, it was too much for me, and I felt too conspicuous with it and didn't have good memories with it either. I drove it for a while and then returned it to its owner a short time later. When Mom exchanged her car for a Toyota, despite Dad insisting on buying me a new car, I had the 206 until my marriage. You know I'm not a car enthusiast and have never been into cars. I often went places without a car. But even though Mom and Dad weren't happy with me during those years, they preferred that I didn't get stuck on the street."

Aban said "your mom's choices were interesting too; even though she could have driven something better."

"Yeah. Mom always chose average cars."

"You know? I grew up in a middle-to-upper-class family. My parents' income was relatively good compared to many of their peers. But there were many things we wanted to do that we held back on because of financial constraints. I never experienced what it's like to have money without feeling happiness? Although it doesn't matter to me now, and I know what lies behind those perceptions. But you're a perfect example of the answer to this question! Maybe someone from afar would see and say you're just being ungrateful! What else did you want? You were raised in luxury, and you don't even appreciate it! It's the same thing you always use for self-pity. There are many kids who are unaware of their family's financial struggles but are happy because they receive love and attention."

With embarrassment, I said, "Maybe the main reason I don't see myself as separate is that many people experience both neglect and frustration, as well as tough economic conditions. What do I have to say in front of them?"

"Your first sentence is correct, but sorry... you kind of have a habit of making it easier on yourself by constantly comparing yourself to those worse off! I don't think that works."

My mind was occupied; I nodded, just to have given a response. I had no interest in continuing the discussion. Honestly, I was tired of

those kinds of analyses. For many years, I had put myself in front of the firing squad of my own analyses. How can one ignore that overcoming problems becomes easier with money? Money! One of humanity's most apparent and ancient concerns, with all its flaws. How can one ignore that a wealthy mind is at least safe from some worries when facing problems? For example, does the experience of a long-standing and difficult illness pass the same for a wealthy person as it does for someone not so wealthy? What about those who, according to Aban, regardless of their wealth, do not withhold love and attention from one another? How can one...

Aban brought me back to the road with a question; "What was that song you were secretly listening to with Alborz?"

My smile returned; "Hungarian Dance No. 4 by Brahms!"¹

"Wow! Did he really play that for his mom's birthday? He has gotten so professional?"

"Yeah! Because of that, we had to keep making excuses for Auntie so Alborz could practice. But in the end, it turned out well. Aunt was overjoyed. That piece is always filled with Aunt's presence for me."

To be continued...

1. Hungarian Dance No.4 In F Sharp minor, Johannes Brahms

Coppice Blue 38



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