

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



EPISODE 2&3
CHAPTER ONE: **OBLIVION**

Coppice Blue

Faavidel

Chapter One

Oblivion

Literature - Persian Fiction - Novel

Coppice Blue

By FAAVIDEL

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Reverse Migration

A little before noon the next day, I saw Aban in the frame of video intercom. Our home had a weekend vibe even during the week due to the different work style of Sam and me. When Aban arrived, I was no longer in bed. I wanted to sit on the terrace, but the table and chairs there were covered in dust due to the absence of Ms. Sima. Therefore, I had moved my things to the three-seater L-shaped sofa facing the large windows of the living room that opened onto the terrace, and I had settled there. As always, the white curtains of the floor-to-ceiling windows were drawn aside like a stage set for a performance. I became absorbed in watching the horizon before me. I could still see traces of the mountain within their frame. After breakfast, Sam had returned to his studio. Lucky him for knowing what he was doing and being immersed in his work! I, on the other hand, had only written a page of my book in the past 24 hours and guessed that nothing useful would come from it. My only productive action had been writing short texts for two cultural Instagram magazines; perhaps out of fear of losing face due to my lack of

commitment to a work contract¹. Although it didn't take much energy from me. Other than that, every time I found myself, instead of writing, I was engaged in watching scattered memories that were stirring within me.

I was listening to Schubert's serenade softly playing on my phone; for the umpteenth time after years. Aban hung her outdoor clothes on her own designated coat rack, washed her hands, filled her cup with coffee from the coffee pot, and sat down across from me. She looked at me as if she recognized me while I had a black sock pulled over my face, as if I were attempting to rob a bank. I avoided looking her. She took a quick look at the robotic vacuum that was approaching us; she tucked her legs under herself and sat cross-legged on the couch so as not to block its path. "Why do you look so messed up?" She said. After two seconds of silence, she added, "Are you sure you're okay?" Another two seconds of silence followed, and then she said, "You look pale as a ghost! Have you eaten anything since morning? Is your bleeding excessive?"

"Your answers in order! I don't know! No! Yes! And Relatively. I think I answered all of them. Right?"

She couldn't hold back her smile; "Come on! How are you?"

Ah, how was I? What definition was there for this state?

1. Many Instagram pages are managed based on contracts with a group that consists of graphic designers, filmmakers, photographers, and writers. They are referred to as the content production team.

“My condition is such that I feel a large part of it has nothing to do with yesterday’s action.”

“Why?”

She glanced towards the end of the hallway; towards Sam's room, which had its door half-open, and then turned back to me. She lowered her voice; “Did you have an argument?”

“No way! That poor guy is in his own world; he doesn’t even know what’s going on. He was busy working until morning.”

“So what?”

I didn’t know what to say. She didn’t know much either. Reluctantly, I said, “It’s very strange! I resolved my issues with my past and started my new life. Apparently, everything was in its place. But since yesterday at the hospital, some things from those days keep spinning in my head. Can you believe that when I was unconscious, I was seeing memories from my childhood? Does a person even see memories when they’re unconscious? It was so vivid that it felt like it just happened yesterday. It’s driving me crazy, Aban! My situation is so bad that I even see my past in Sam’s paintings.” Her gaze remained fixed on the screen of my phone; “And now you’re stuck on Schubert. You always hated this! If I had played it, you would have instantly killed me!” She said.

I didn’t hate it; in fact, I missed it; “I couldn’t help it. I was feeling bad... at one time, this was the only thing that calmed me down, but at some point, it started to make me very sad!”

“But now you’re listening to it! So are you sad or calm now?”

“Whatever I am, I’m out of control.”

She held her cup with both hands. She took a sip from it and said carefully; “I don’t know anything about this part of your past. I mean, whenever I felt you didn’t want to talk about it, I didn’t insist on knowing. But now that you’ve brought it up, I have to say I don’t understand. If you don’t have a problem with it, what’s wrong with remembering? You always said you forgot too many days in your life. I wondered why you wanted to forget? Why does it ruin your mood when you remember it? Let’s look at it honestly! The reality is that if it were truly resolved, you wouldn’t feel bad about it, Afra”

"Maybe because at some point I realized that as long as I chain my past to my feet and drag it along, there’s no room for growth in my future. Whatever it was, it was over, and seeing it only made me feel powerless. I learned this in the same place where I met you. Remember? Being in the moment! Not getting stuck in the past! Wasn’t that the plan? So where did I go wrong on this path?"

"Sometimes a person understands the meaning of something they've heard years later. I don’t want to give you advice based on a superficial judgment; you know this stuff better than I do. But I’m sure there are unresolved issues in the midst of this that are resurfacing for you again. Have you even thought about why this is happening in your current situation?"

"I wish I knew. Since yesterday, I've asked myself a thousand times why now? And why those images?"

She cautiously said, "I only have one suggestion for you, as always. You know what it is!" I put my hand on my face and let my head fall back on the couch cushion; "Oh no! I don't want to talk about it again."

"My dear! You're a writer! Anyone who can pick up a pen wants to find an interesting subject and write about it."

"What could be interesting about the past of a cliché person like me I don't even have the courage to reveal myself to my family; let alone my fans. By saying things I shouldn't, I only put my own credibility at risk. Judge me with what you know! A well-of person with strict parents! And a mother who was abusive; Like many in my generation who had neither a deep connection with their children nor with themselves. If we add my father's betrayal and my mother's death to that, nothing new comes out of it. Especially in a situation where thousands are dying every day and thousands are betraying each other... Oh! By the way, like all the cliché characters in the world, I only have one real friend; one of those who are pretty and smart and know everything."

She rolled her eyes and interrupted me; "Right now, the situation for everyone is at best like this. Most of our friends and acquaintances have emigrated!"

"You will soon realize your mistake and run away!"

She ignored that; "You mentioned something in the middle of your speech. Even though you talk about it less, it really bothers me. Your mother's death is acceptable, but your father's betrayal never made sense to me, Afra!"

"What do you mean? Well, it doesn't make sense to me either!"

"With what I know about your father, it's very strange for me! Don't you think it would be better to sit down and discuss this issue with him in detail?"

"You know that our relationship isn't one where we can talk about these things.

Yeah, but..."

I interrupted her. I really didn't want to get into the details of this story; "It's so ridiculous! Most people think their life story is so interesting and educational that it should be a book. Sometimes, even those I least expect, when they find out I write, their first reaction is to ask why I'm not writing their life story!" Aban burst out laughing; "The last one was that nail technician at the salon. Remember? They talk about it as if you're desperate for a subject and you should be grateful they offered it to you."

"Do you really think my life story is interesting?!"

"I have no doubt. You're not someone with a boring life! At least I've seen ten years of it with my own eyes. Make it readable!"

"Aban! The hardships I've gone through may seem funny to many. My life until now has felt more like an old illness that I've gotten used to its small and big pains; a repetitive linear story. Some parts might seem special to me; like some things in everyone's life. Those years when everyone in Iran was caught up in the depression of limitations, poverty, war, and its consequences, while the hot topic of the day was long lines for rationed food, what does it matter what my personal struggles were? After all, everyone gets hit from somewhere!"

"You always come up with these excuses, Afra! Yes, we know! All the people in the world, in their physical shells due to the fundamental similarities that make them up, ultimately experience similar feelings. It's the way of narrating life that separates them. Most of the fascinating novels in the world revolve around stories of war and poverty and misery or love and wealth and betrayal of people. Because many people empathize with these issues and everyone identifies with those like themselves who have traveled similar paths and have new proposals for each other. Your job is writing! It's about being able to tell a simple thing in a way that makes me, the reader, captivated. It's about showing how one can escape from the middle of problems. You're a good storyteller! I'm just amazed at how you can line up those absurdities in your novels without referring to yourself? Take a look at yourself! How many writers like you do we have in this country at the age of 37?"

She started counting with her eyes in her head and continued; "You have four novels that have been reprinted several times, three translated novels, a few plays, and an award that's prestigious, and your books have been translated into other languages. Plus..."

I cut her off; "Six. Two of them haven't received approval and are circulating as criminal content in PDF files. And let's not even talk about that prestigious award!"

Don't change the subject! I'm telling you honestly, there's nothing cliché about you so far, Afra! I don't understand what makes you want to blend in with clichés! I believe experiences shouldn't be confined. Sharing them illuminates paths not taken for others. Just write it down to get it out of your mind. Write it so that I and your other friends can read it. I promise I'll love it.

I didn't tell her, but I had written years ago. I was writing when I ran out of steam and abandoned it. I got scared! It felt like they would repeat themselves in the same way. They were devastating. I erased them from the pages of time. I said, 'After all these years, even if I want to write, I won't remember much about them.'

'If you want to write, it will definitely be the hardest book you've ever written; but think about it! By the way I have some good news for you!'

My head was resting on the couch cushion. I turned towards her with minimal movement and glanced at her from the corner of my eyes.

'Do you remember Delaram? That friend of mine who was into travel and camping?'

'That blogger?'

‘Exactly! I told her about your plans a long time ago. She called me last night. She said many of the eco-tourists are putting their houses up for rent for a year or putting them up for sale; because of COVID and the decline in travel, along with high maintenance costs. She said it’s the best time to find a place.’

Reluctantly, I said, ‘That’s great! If I can convince Sam, that would be awesome! I can’t endure living in this crowded city anymore. I feel like my creativity is drying up here. It’s as if...’ At that moment, Sam walked past me towards the kitchen with a cup in his hand. He sent a greeting to Aban in the air and interrupted my speech; ‘Oh my God! I’m saying we should go to L.A. for your delivery in the last months of pregnancy so that the baby doesn’t get an Iranian birth certificate, and you’re thinking about going behind the mountains? Believe me, you are crazy!’ With a tired smirk, I said, ‘I wonder if L.A. is so great, why do we keep going back and forth? Why aren’t you there right now?’ From the kitchen, he replied loudly; ‘You know very well! I love my job and making money. Teaching at university is a given, but hey, I have the right not to want my art without money. As long as I can make good money from my work here, I prefer to stay here and take vacations by the ocean.’ He filled his cup with coffee and paused briefly behind me on his way back to the studio. I wasn’t looking at him, but I could guess he had narrowed his eyes towards the windows and was gazing into his infinite thoughts. After a pause, he continued; ‘This way, maybe when I’m old, I can sit on the terrace of my last house by the edge of the ocean and just paint. Without thinking about the money.’

The cliché solution of all wealthy Iranians! Become a dual citizen, hammer your stake over there, build a safe haven, and as

long as things don't get turbulent, earn money from here and go on vacation there. If you ask me, both of us were well-fed and busying ourselves for entertainment. My situation will be clarified in the following pages. But for Sam, California was his favorite toy. Whenever he wanted, he would go after it."

At the age of 13, Sam's 23-year-old sister, Sara, had started working at a company with a degree in management. One of her friends introduced her to a boy whose father was a dried fruit and nut merchant. After the 1979 revolution in Iran, his father had established his first dried fruit and nut shop in San Francisco. The dried fruit merchant's family traveled between Tehran, Tabriz, and San Francisco from the late 1980s until the early 1990s. Eventually, they decided to immigrate, and the son of the family pursued a degree in business management at the University of California, Berkeley. Gradually, he followed in his father's footsteps, and the family business—this time with a modern management system—expanded. During one of their trips to Iran, the two families officially met. The young people saw each other and fell in love. Some time later, Sara went to California with her merchant husband; a traditional, healthy, elegant marriage that was pleasing to the typical Iranian family.

Shortly after their marriage, Sara's husband established a second branch more elaborately than the first in Los Angeles; in a way, he moved the heart of the business from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Their Iranian customers in L.A. were significantly more than in other areas, especially since that part of California had become the final destination for

wealthy Iranian expatriates after the revolution. At that time, Sam was still a teenager. Given Sara's ideal situation, her travels and those of her family during summer vacations were not difficult, and this is how Sam's path to studying in America opened up. He studied painting at the School of Fine Arts and managed to secure a scholarship to UCLA two years after finishing high school and obtaining military exemption in the field of painting. Doing anything with money becomes easier. Sam's parents, with their substantial family inheritance, did not need an oil company salary as a simple employee. Work had always been a source of entertainment for them. Shortly before Sam, they also prepared for their green cards by selling land and investing in real estate, thus settling permanently in America. However, after obtaining his master's degree, Sam found that the raw and young market in Iran was more suitable for his profession during his trips back to Iran, and he gradually became interested in it. He preferred to find himself among a middle minority rather than get lost among a professional majority. I remember when I first saw him ten years ago at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art; he had just returned from America and was seeking new connections through his artist friends. It didn't take long for him to reach a satisfying position. The name and reputation of a good American university and several exhibitions and galleries in L.A. led him to prominent solo exhibitions and galleries in Iran. In Iran, foreign resumes are still more favored and serve as a means of advancement. Likewise, friends who are connected to higher governmental positions in every aspect. Sam progressed intelligently and appropriately in selecting works and organizing his exhibitions according to the needs of society. What was always and clearly seen in him was that he spent his art not to express his thoughts but undoubtedly to earn income. Two years after we met, his

architect friend commissioned him for a painting for a villa in Lavasan¹ at one of the exhibitions. Sam quoted an astonishing amount out of thin air, and to his surprise, they accepted it.

This marked the beginning of Sam's professional journey and his cascading income from selling his works to the wealthy. In the past two to three years, he also had the opportunity to teach at university. Thanks to his continuously updated background in both America and Iran, along with articles and teaching critique sessions in galleries, offers were pouring in for him. With the title "young professor graduated from UCLA!"—the one that everyone liked; he himself preferred it for entertainment and networking in the market.

Now he had thrown out his opinion and returned to his office. I ignored him. Arguing was the last thing I wanted at that moment. I said to Aban, "You were saying!" Ignoring Sam's speech, she continued, "It was decided that if she found something, she would let me know quickly! The good thing about these houses and camps is that they are not easily sold." With a smile that had a hint of mischief and in a somewhat loud voice—so as to tease Sam—she continued, "You might find a place and at the same time with the start of your pregnancy, you end up staying there!"

Pregnancy! I was so caught up in the mechanical process of pregnancy that I completely forgot where this happy ending of the story was supposed to lead. It's strange how sometimes our goals get badly affected by the path to reach them. I sighed and let my head fall back onto the couch again.

1. One of the affluent suburbs close to Tehran.

That evening after Aban left, I had an extensive discussion about this matter with Sam. For a long time, I had wanted to create a healthy space outside of Tehran for pausing, thinking, freeing my mind, and group relaxation. A refuge away from the city's noise that could accommodate 20 to 30 people and could be utilized for tours on specific themes during the first half of the year; educational, sports, artistic courses, and anything else that the distance from the city would improve its conditions. I would also be involved in coming and going, sometimes staying there to write in solitude and spending more of the second half of the year in Tehran. Sam said, "A backward, useless, rural life!" The first person who got excited upon hearing this and offered his help and collaboration was Aban. Although she was on the verge of marriage and faced an unfillable pit of expenses ahead, she was even willing to partner with me. Although I didn't need a financial partner; her companionship was more important to me than anything else. Both of us had long-standing detailed plans for holding meditation and wellness tours in nature, which we had abandoned due to COVID. Now the idea had once again taken hold of us. However, Sam clearly stated in that day's discussion that he preferred a place where money could be made. In between, he had also made a remark about my not-making-money profession. Of course, he admitted that alongside his part-time job at the university, sometimes my name lent semi-credibility to both of us; credibility without money! Tehran was the best possible place for him, while I was still lost in the dream of my long-held wish.

This was a serious matter that we needed to reach some sort of agreement on. That day, Sam's final word was that, on the condition of my becoming pregnant, the issue would be

postponed until after childbirth; undoubtedly, during that time, even if we didn't go to America, we weren't going to end up behind the mountains! If I didn't get pregnant, we would discuss it again; a discussion along the lines of "if I were foolish enough to still prefer being behind the mountains, then perhaps I would go there and Sam would join me occasionally on weekends." To be honest, although both scenarios seemed to have many flaws and merits, the second one appeared more concerning than a reliable possibility. Sam's proposal seemed a bit strange. In a way, he was indicating his unwillingness to participate in this plan. Tired of the discussion, I let the matter take its natural course, waiting without resistance or conflict for whatever would come and to make the best decision in due time.

Four days later, it was Saturday morning when I set off to the hospital to get the embryo card. The pain and swelling in my stomach had diminished, and due to the release of the ovum, my period had started two weeks earlier than usual. I didn't know if my unsettled state was related to hormonal issues from PMS, the puncture surgery, or the chaotic dreams and visions that wouldn't leave me alone. I was behind the wheel, driving in the morning traffic. I felt like a student waiting for their results. Remembering the results made me feel worse, and my mouth turned bitter; school memories! The past! Mom! Mom? Wow! How quickly time passed.

I remembered that about a year ago, when I was going to the hospital to get the embryo card after the previous puncture surgery, Dad had informed me of Mom's serious illness. she was passionate about her work and since the onset of COVID-19, she might not have spent even one night at home without worries. She had even canceled appointments for non-emergency patients at her clinic, ignoring them to focus more on her hospital work. Her specialty was ENT (ear, nose, and throat), and the ward had become filled with COVID patients. The day they came to visit Sam and me, she was worried about the rising death toll in the hospital, and I never imagined that I wouldn't see Mom in this world again. She was worn out while the fire of saving more lives still burned within her. The time she was hospitalized, her survival was nothing short of a miracle. With

her lungs in such condition, she was transferred to ICU in less than two days and shortly after was placed on a ventilator. In his last call with me, Dad had said from behind the ICU room door that we should prepare to say goodbye to Mom. Moments later, Mom left us forever. I couldn't believe we had lost Mom, with all her strength and capability, so easily! My relationship with Mom had never been good or intimate. Despite all her shortcomings as a mother, she was a capable doctor, and losing her created another big hole in my already hole-filled life. Even our last meeting didn't hold anything significant; no memorable sentence or strange feeling that would indicate it was the last time we would see each other. Nothing! Just a simple meeting of a doctor father and mother who had come to visit their sick children, reassured that no one would die!

That day marked the first anniversary of Mom's passing. Without hesitation, I dialed Dad's number to try my luck at talking to him. I suspected he might be in surgery at that hour. The call went to voicemail, and I hung up; it meant Dad was in the operating room. Since we lost Mom a year ago, Dad had been spending more time at his clinic and hospitals. His life revolved around brief nights of sleep, continuous surgeries until four in the afternoon, and back-to-back patient visits at the clinic until nine at night. Sometimes, even after closing the clinic or in the middle of the night, he would return to the hospital to check on emergency patients. Dad was an endocrinologist, and during the COVID period, there were many unpredictable cases that pulled him to the hospital at all hours. Many who contracted COVID and recovered after a lengthy illness experienced hormonal disruptions and sometimes strange reactions in various glands that had no logical explanations, leading to

emergency treatments being suggested for them. In short, this was also a way for Dad to forget his loneliness; it wasn't anything new. As far as I could remember, he always sought refuge in work to escape his failures; in what he was successful at. My parents were always more attached to their profession than to home. Undoubtedly, what kept them away from home was not only their commitment to the health of others but also an escape from each other; home revealed their weaknesses while their jobs showcased their strengths. They were romantically estranged from each other and unable to mend the deep gaps between them; and I was deprived of both their presence! I yearned for a warm embrace from them in that cold and distant world.

I rang the bell at the IVF room door and waited for my card, stating my name and Sam's. Minutes passed, and the cheerful nurse opened the door, waving a card in the air and said, "Here you go, dear! Good luck! I hope you get results this time!" I snatched it. I thanked her and stepped aside to see the number on it. I couldn't believe it. Why? All this effort, all this trouble, only two embryos and one chance for implantation? Had my ovum reserve decreased so much in just one year? Last year at this time, I had at least eight embryos and four chances for implantation! Four chances that... well... all ended up being unsuccessful and vanished into nowhere. In fact, the average lifespan of my children with Sam until then hadn't exceeded seven days. We were counted among the few thousand non-reproducible human species in the world. A minority that itself included a vast majority. Now, whatever its name was; a computational error in creation or hidden intelligence! My gaze was fixed on the card and the number one on it. It wasn't a good day, and this number made it worse. My eyes filled with tears. Through the blurry and indistinct images I saw, I made my way

to the car. There was no one to share my tears with. I had nothing to say. I rested my head on the steering wheel and released my exhaustion with loud sobs. My phone in my handbag rang. Dad! I cleared my throat and answered; my voice came from the depths of a well.

"What's wrong, sweetheart? Why does your voice sound like that?"

What should I say? What did I have to say? That all the times he had asked about my condition and I seemed fine, I wasn't fine, and today was just like any other day? That after all that struggle, few-day-old grandchild has been placed in the freezer for him, which feels more like an illusion than a human being whose life was hanging by a thread? How ridiculous, empty, and foolish! I said, "Nothing. I remembered today is Mom's anniversary."

"Today? Are you sure?"

I wasn't mistaken. Because the timing coincided with receiving my brilliant report card; "I don't think so. Is it today?!"

"No, dear! It's almost a month away. Are you're sitting there mourning an anniversary alone? Save some of your tears for that time!"

Oh, you foolish idiot! What did marking a time in the past for getting your silly embryo card have to do with Mom's anniversary? A mental year and a calendar year are vastly

different. I said, "Oh come on! Why am I so forgetful? I've lost track of months and years. Sorry, I made a mistake!"

"It was about time I heard your voice."

"Now that you mention it, do you have any plans for her anniversary?"

Due to the COVID pandemic and the situation back then, we hadn't held any ceremonies for Mom's passing. The conditions were more or less the same for her anniversary as well. Every month, in her name, I donated a sum to a charity for sick children. But Dad usually had his own ways. He said, "Actually, I told Sima that while she's with her family and has support, she would take the trouble to prepare about 300 boxes of groceries and protein for those in need that she knows right there. It's a lot of work! She is so kind; she said she can do it for your mom. Later, I'll do something to make her happy for this favor. I think if your mom were here, she would do the same."

"That's great! Thank you!"

"Now that your mom's issue is resolved tell me, how are you? How's Sam? Is everything going well for you two?"

Great! Just like always! Now that the issue is resolved; "Yeah, I'm fine..." and the rest of the conversation was just the everyday lies we all tell each other. On the way back, I looked at myself with agitation. How pathetic I was! What right did I have to feel hopeless? It was true that with all that effort and suffering, I had only one chance, but if that one chance was meant to lead to my desired outcome, what did it matter how many there were? That chance could be the penalty kick that would score a goal at the end of the football game and bring me victory.

I tapped on Sam's name in my recent calls list and waited for the connection. After six or seven rings, I hung up. I was about to call Aban when she called me. How nice it was that I only had

to explain my efforts to these two. People only explain themselves to those who know about their lives.

"My class just finished. Tell me what's up?"

More than anything, my ears perked up at the familiar background music of her voice; it was calm and pleasant, and it had been years since I last heard it. I didn't have a precise memory of it, but I recognized it immediately. One of the many songs on my forbidden list; "Fields of Gold" by Eva Cassidy.¹

"You'll remember me when the west wind moves

Upon the fields of barley

You'll forget the sun in his jealous sky

As we walk in fields of gold

I never made promises lightly

And there have been some that I've broken

But I swear in the days still left

We'll walk in fields of gold..."

I said, "Why are you listening to this song?"

"What's wrong with it? Behrad sent it to me last night. Isn't it beautiful?"

Behrad was Aban's fiancé. Oh yes! Of course, they also had memories and romances with each other. It was my problem that I didn't understand why everyone was conspiring to drive me crazy. I said, "Sorry! It's really beautiful!" The music on the other end faded; "You didn't say what's up?" she said.

"Nothing, I've been killing myself just to have one more chance!"

1."Fields of Gold" is a song composed by Sting and performed by Eva Cassidy, an American guitarist and singer who worked in jazz, blues, and folk music and was known for her powerful voice.

"Are you kidding me?!"

"I'm serious. I hope this one works! I have nothing left to go through this path a third time. I don't even think about it at all."

She paused, and her voice regained its energy; "Awesome! I'm sure good things will happen this time!"

"I think so too."

Another lie! I had even convinced myself of this one. While I didn't truly believe it. My thoughts weren't negative, but they were different this time. I knew I was at the final stage of something in my life, but I didn't know what! Just to avoid it seeming complicated, I felt the need to get some things in order as soon as possible. Because with pregnancy and a baby, there might not be time for them later. I continued, "She passed away at 33."

Aban asked in surprise, "Who?"

"The one you're listening to! She died a few months after singing this song!"

"Really? I didn't know that. How bitter! How did it happen?"

"If I'm not mistaken, it was metastasized skin cancer that spread to her bones. Can you believe that when she was performing this song, the cancer had already spread throughout her body?"

"Wow! I should look her up a bit. Is that why you got so down?"

I took a deep breath; "I don't know." I did know, but it wasn't the right time to say it.

When I got home, Sam still hadn't arrived or called. I went to my office to write a bit. I had started my new book a few weeks ago, but I was progressing very slowly. It was about a female traveler who, after the death of her companions, was forced to live for help with a bear cub in a four-meter-deep pit

until rescue arrived. They both grew accustomed to each other, and their emotional bond deepened, but it had a bitter ending. Because the woman died on the second day and became the first prey that the bear cub caught before its mother arrived and without her help. The collaboration and closeness of the woman's short life with the bear depicted a challenge in the novel. For a long time, I had researched various types of carnivorous and herbivorous bears and finally concluded that nothing bad would come of it. But for several days, my mind had been locked; it felt like I needed to do something else, and I was procrastinating. Every time I approached the bear cub, guilt would wash over me. Sometimes I wondered what I would really say if I were to write about myself, other than the superficial matters we discussed with Aban? I really had something to say! I was afraid. Because my life would be turned upside down. Did I want that? I believed that no event happens without reason, but what could be the reason for those dreams and sudden nudges? Sam's painting, the sounds, the songs, the dreams and all those scattered images?

I went to Sam's studio to take another look at his design. He had made good progress; it seemed he had finished the first two pieces and started on the third. The mop and broom next to the first panel still stood out awkwardly with their strange feeling! Not because they were a broom and mop, but because I still saw myself in them. The red broom represented me, and the blue mop represented him! My breath caught! I hadn't even uttered his name for years. A name that was repeated a hundred times a day in my childhood. A name that clearly intertwined with my childhood, adolescence, and youth identity. His name didn't just remind me of him; it brought back memories of our

home, the yard of that house, my aunt and uncle, mom and dad. Maybe that house was what I should write about. Now that vivid blue filled with memories was before me and occupied my entire mind. Sam had created an incredible color. It had been years since that color held any place in my choices, but it still captivated my eyes just as much as before. It felt like he was now narrating a version of me in another world! Maybe I should... something moved up and down before my eyes, and I jumped up.

"Hello? Where's your mind? Have I been so amazing that you've become speechless? You didn't hear me come in!"

I looked at him and said, "Narcissist! Really? So much has happened and I'm completely oblivious?" A frown appeared between his eyebrows. He glanced at me, then at the painting, and back at me. He hesitantly asked, "What happened?"

"It's just that you came in with all that noise and greeted me, and I didn't hear!"

"Oh, I see! Yeah, boy! You were in your own world! Is something wrong? Why the long face?"

I twisted the subject; "I called and you didn't answer!"

"Oh right! Sorry! When you called, I was busy talking. Then I forgot."

"How was the meeting?"

"I knocked their socks off. They want a mural for their 12-meter restaurant wall. Maybe I'll go for the contract in a day or two."

"Is it that one of those trendy golden kebab places?"

"No, actually it's one of those modern ones. Don't worry! I'm not going to ruin my record. What's new with you? How many kids do we have in the freezer?"

Ah, our children! Our intertwined cells! The icy people! Of course, if they could be considered people. My mind had been

empty of this topic for a few minutes. I said, a bit louder than the silence, towards the painting, "Two. I mean, once!" Sam's tone dropped. He knew it wasn't good news; "Seriously?" I nodded in confirmation. He planted a quick kiss on my temple and said, "It's good!" Then he walked out of the room while unbuttoning his shirt. We weren't very good at showering each other with affection. I think my behavior over the years had pushed him in that direction too. Sometimes I feel like my ice never melted with him. This gesture was the utmost comfort I expected from him at that moment. The phrase "it's good!" was full of reassurance for me. It meant he cared about me. It meant my well-being mattered. It meant... From inside the closet room, it seemed he was talking to himself and continued, "This one time is enough. If it doesn't happen, so much the better!" He poured out his venom! That secret affection and hasty kiss were washed away so obviously that I wanted to vomit on his painting. But I remained silent; a silence that was always the result of my screams. What should I have said? I had repeated these words so often that I no longer thought about their bitterness and the tightening of my heart with each repetition. If I said anything, it would just remind him for the umpteenth time that he hadn't wanted this situation and had submitted to it for my sake. In reality, my suffering in this process was merely an excuse he used to justify himself. I knew he didn't want the whole affair in any way. What was the benefit of those discussions other than more hurt and exhaustion for myself? I returned to my study to write but couldn't shake the image of my childhood home from my mind. It was so closely glued to my gaze that it prevented me from seeing anything else. It had been years since I envisioned myself there. I hadn't even dreamed of it

anymore. But that day it stuck to my memory in such a way that I yearned to find myself in those days, in those scents, in that atmosphere again. I wanted the fluid flow of those images to come and stir the stagnant waters within me. It was a strange feeling! Despite their resemblance to a dream I had never experienced, they felt very familiar. Every time they came to me, they left something behind from the past; an image, a feeling, a memory in everyday life that seemed to return my lost cells to my body. It felt as though the more they approached me, the more I became myself; the one I knew and had been years ago. A voice was pulling me toward it; as if I had set off in search of a childhood I recognized. I feared I might have gone insane or become entangled in something like psychosis or schizophrenia!

As I came to my senses, I found myself standing in front of the storage room door on the minus three floor of the tower. Without questioning why I was there, I entered and went toward a large box among Sam's paint cans, canvases, and other stuffs that I had brought from my childhood home years ago. After my marriage, I took that box with me to our first home and placed it in the basement. Two years later, when we bought this house, the only thing I did was move the box from the storage room of that house to the storage room of this one, without even taking a look inside. Its contents had always seemed to me like a monster that I should not allow to escape. But this time, I had come to open it. There didn't seem to be anything scary this time; it was just like all personal boxes in the world. A number of my childhood and teenage drawings, charcoal and pastel drawings on A4 paper, books I loved and had read several times with notes written on some pages; we had written notes. Two photo albums and two shoeboxes containing a few photos and film reels. I gathered the albums and boxes in my arms and returned to my study. I sat down at my desk and with trembling hands opened

the first album. Hands fell on my shoulders; "Where have you been? What is this?" Sam said.

"In the basement. I was looking for the albums. I thought you were busy working!"

He picked up another album from the table, opened the first page, and said, "I was watching TV. I'm just about to start." He flipped through the pages, pausing briefly on some of them. Seeing pictures of my childhood made him smile, and he traced his finger over Mom's face in a photo; "May her soul rest in peace! I hadn't seen these photos!" Then he placed the album back on the table and headed for the door. How sentimental! It was better that he didn't get curious. I really didn't want to explain those photos to him. Sam had seen only a few images from my childhood; the ones I liked and that had been captured during our happy days with Mom, Dad, and my relatives. I said, "It's close to Mom's anniversary. Suddenly I felt nostalgic for these photos."

Another lie! I hadn't even remembered the exact date of Mom's anniversary until close to noon. I wished I had just kept my mouth shut instead of lying. What drove me to such small lies? Definitely fear! But fear of what? His judgment of me? Being rejected? I wasn't sure, but these lies were like iron armor that had protected me from further harm since childhood. Perhaps they were just an old habit for solving problems; for escaping!

I didn't know how long I spent among the photos, but it felt like a while. The ice of my past slowly melted within me. It began with anger, hatred, and agitation and transformed into profound sorrow. The sound of the doorbell startled me.

Aban! How could she be here unannounced? PERFECT! I opened the door for her and returned to my room. I had just seen her message on my phone. Two hours earlier, she had said that her private class wouldn't take place in the evening and that she would come over for dinner. After Ms. Sima, who came to help us with household matters, Aban was our only regular guest and felt more like a family member. Aban arrived and first went to Sam. She was always the first person to check out Sam's paintings after me and watched them with excitement. Sam delighted in the praise and eagerly awaited compliments. A little later, she opened the door to my study and found me at my desk with puffy red eyes and a tear-streaked face; "What happened, sweetheart? What are you doing to yourself? Sam said you got depressed because of your mom's anniversary and isolated yourself." I gave her a smirk. She walked straight to the table and saw the albums; "Ooooh, what are these? Why haven't I seen them before?" I sniffed; "I haven't looked at them in over ten years either. You haven't missed anything! You arrived just in time!"

Wow, these are so good. I love old photos." She reached out and went for one of the boxes.

"No, don't open that..."

Before I could move and stop her, she opened it. Her eyes gradually widened in amazement. She stared at the Polaroid photos, captivated and astonished, picking them up one by one and looking at them. I was bent over the table, my face in my hands, remaining silent. I still didn't dare to approach them. It felt as if I was afraid to see them.

"Oh my God, what beautiful photos! I can't believe it. Who is this child? Sweetheart, how adorable you all were! What amazing photos! It looks like some of these were taken by you yourselves."

She paused; "It seems like you took all the photos in this box. Most of these are selfies!" She was excited again, asking question after question. The smile faded from her face when she saw me crying again. She led me to the three-seater couch across from the table and hugged me. A little later, we were sitting on the couch together, silently looking at the photos from the box. There was me as a child, shouting and carefree with hair blowing in the wind. Me sliding down the steps of our house entrance. Him rolling down a grassy hill. Him with a red clown nose made of a ping-pong ball, lying on the floor of the gazebo with a book in his hand; me and him lying on the sand with our parents in the background, all in colorful swimsuits at Nice beach. Him sitting next to the fountain in Massena Square with his mouth open as if water was pouring into it. Me from behind with cherry earrings and braided hair, surrounded by cherries; him with crossed eyes and his tongue sticking out behind the piano. Me and him under the maple tree with its autumn red leaves reaching up to the sky like deer antlers above us. We stood serious and arms crossed in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Nice, staring at the camera lens on the ground. Him on the persimmon tree in the yard; me upside down on a wooden swing under that same tree with my hair on the ground. Him sitting on the grass in Victoria Park with scraped and tear-stained knees. Me and him on a white swing in our yard, with a camera in his hands, half of our faces out of frame. We were at the zoo. The image showed our heads from the nose up with the River Thames in the background. We were at Ramsar¹ beach. We were in a tilted frame, sitting on a bench in front of the Eiffel Tower. Me with my skates, my hand in his as he took a photo. Him

1. One of the coastal areas in southern Iran

lying on the snow. Me in a dark space with tearful eyes and my palm facing the camera. The frames of our couple photos were ruined because we had taken them ourselves; with the camera hanging from a tree, planted on the ground, or on a bench.

Aban said softly, "I think I'm starting to understand what's going on with you!" She held up one of his photos, where he was innocently smiling at the camera, as if a referee were pointing a red card at a player. She said, "Even though I know almost nothing, I'm sure now that you're not crying for your mom!"

I took the photo from her hand and stared into the boy's eyes. He was about eight or nine years old; with fair skin, hazel almond-shaped eyes, and messy brown hair on his head and forehead, looking happily and peacefully at the camera. It felt as if I had never seen him with my adult eyes before. It seemed like he was coming back to life in my gaze. Aban continued, "Let me go get some tea and our cakes because it looks like you're going to make us tonight!"

If I were to dig up the past, it was better to do it with someone like Aban. At least she had been in my life for nearly a decade. After my family, I had the longest history with her, and after her, with Sam. For many reasons, I had no desire to share my past with Sam. But I felt that with Aban, I would never be questioned; neither myself nor my family.

To be continued...

Coppice Blue 34



FAAVIDEL, 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.