

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 1**
OBLIVION

Coppice Blue

Faavidel

Literature - Persian Fiction - Novel

Coppice Blue

By FAAVIDEL

Fall 2024

Editions: 999

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Chapter One

Oblivion

Coma

My relationship with my past is like that of Jean Valjean and Inspector Javert; one fleeing for a lifetime without remembering what his crime was, while the other pursues him. I was running away from everything that drove me towards it, blocking the way to avoid facing it; lest I go mad or wander into the wilderness. It felt as if I had suddenly fallen into a steep slope from which escape was no longer possible. Something within me erased all my memories, and I found myself floating in that. In everything I had buried and ignored to live; "life," that great misunderstanding!

Everything began in those minutes at the hospital. Like an airplane under repair, I lay half-naked in the most defenseless state possible on a special bed. That uncomfortable bed that most women in the world have memories of; a kind of torture device for which no better substitute has yet been found. My legs were strapped to their designated spots. The sound of music coming from the doctor's speakers was pleasant and calm, hanging in the air. The doctor sat behind the curtain above

my head, reading news from the world while sneering at the foolishness of politicians. All this music! Why this? What I heard was a familiar melody of violin and piano harmony that I had deprived myself of hearing for years; an old performance of Schubert's Serenade¹. To avoid having to suffer alone, the doctor occasionally read out headlines mockingly for us. I wasn't listening; all my attention was on the music. The sound of the notes quickened and irregularized my heartbeat.

Two or three people around me were bustling, all cheerful and patient; the nurses, assistants, and midwives who made up the doctor's shift that day. The lower part of my abdomen was swollen and painful. I wanted to lose consciousness as soon as possible. One was busy finding my vein to insert the IV catheter. Another, staring at the monitor in front of him, stood on a stool, pushed my gown aside, poured a cold liquid on my stomach, and glided the ultrasound probe over it. A little further away, another person was organizing instruments on a tray. I couldn't see her, but I could hear her voice. The clock in front of me showed eleven ten. On one hand, I wanted to lose consciousness quickly, and on the other, I wanted to watch them. The midwife holding the ultrasound probe began to speak with a gentle smile. Her explanations were about getting more familiar with the post-operative condition; the very things I already knew. She knew that I knew. She was more warming up my head so that I wouldn't distract her colleague while she was finding my vein!

1. "Serenade" in D minor is the fourth piece from the "Schwanengesang" (Swan song) collection by Franz Peter Schubert, the last Austrian composer of the Romantic classical music. He passed away at the age of 31 due to illness.

The IV catheter was secured in my hand, and I felt the cold liquid flowing into my veins. I wanted to see and feel myself losing consciousness; before it slipped out of my control. I liked this feeling and game. I always played this game before losing consciousness; it was my beloved pastime in such situations. But every time I tried to notice it, I found myself half-conscious on the recovery bed, while the doctor had done his job and left. This time, I wanted to focus so I could see the moment of unconsciousness and catch it. The sound of the piano surrounded me as if it were being played in a moving bath; it rose and gradually faded away. The nurse's voice became slow and drawn out. It seemed she was deliberately speaking softly. My head began to spin, a light breeze swirled in it, and....

A familiar voice whispered in my ear, "Wake up! It's over!" What? No way! I said something that sounded more like a moan than what I intended! Another voice came. This one was feminine; loud and clear from above my head. She was holding my hand and squeezing it.

"Afra!¹ Afra, dear! Get up, girl! Open your eyes and let me see if you're awake so I can relax!"

There was no music; maybe the doctor had left. I opened my eyes and weakly waved my hand at the shadow above me. I could breathe on my own, but the oxygen mask was on my face. The loud voice smiled at me, smoothed the blanket over me, adjusted my temperature, and then left. The clock in

1. A feminine name meaning "maple tree".

front of me showed ten minutes to twelve. So I had been unconscious for about forty minutes, and this time I hadn't understood anything except... I knew very well that the voice that woke me up wasn't that of the nurse. I recognized it. It was the voice of a teenager whose throat was still wavering between childhood and adulthood but had recently taken on more masculine notes. Now? Here? Why? I took a deep breath. My heart started racing again, fast and irregular. There was a sharp pain somewhere below my navel. The alarm sound from the machine grew louder, and that smiling face was back above me: "What happened, dear? Are you okay?" I shook my head and said from under the mask, "Can you give me a painkiller? I'm in pain."

"Yes, dear! Of course!"

Thirty seconds later, she returned with a syringe in hand: "You'll feel better now!" She gave me another smile and left. The pain below my abdomen eased, but my heart, my heart was constricted and twisting in my chest; for what I couldn't remember or wouldn't let myself recall.

In the threshold between sleep and wakefulness, he returned again. This time his face was clearer; the tousled strands of his hair framed his eyebrows, the sparkle in his bright eyes, and the angles of his jawline and cheekbones were so vividly seen that it felt like I was looking at a painting. He put both earbuds in my ears and with those eager eyes and a wide smile urged me to listen. The sound filled my ears. It was a piano solo; a very familiar piece. But I couldn't remember its name. I looked at him questioningly; his face

transformed from adolescence to adulthood. He placed a kiss on my forehead and remained just as close to me. I could feel his breath on my skin. He placed his hand on the lower part of my abdomen—the very spot that hurt inside—and then, very slowly, he started to caress me there while reaching down and down between my legs. It felt as though he was covering and soothing all my sensitive areas with his fingers. I didn't feel uncomfortable or surprised, as if it wasn't my private area anymore. As if it were something ordinary, I felt a pleasant sensation! His caress was like water on my fire. With a relaxed gaze, he searched my face for signs of tranquility. The pain faded, and the music soared. In an effort to recognize its notes, I pressed my eyes shut and woke up again. The sound stopped. In the recovery room, there was no one but me, but my body still throbbed with the trace of his fingers and the warmth of his hand. I felt full of shame for what I had experienced! What was this? I realized that half an hour had passed again, and instead of the oxygen mask, there was a five-layer mask on my face. The serum container was empty, and I had regained consciousness. Without wasting any time, I got up and sat down, and with the help of that same nurse, I went to the restroom.

"My dear! Please don't close the door! Don't worry, no one will disturb you! Just leave it open! When you come out, slowly put on your clothes and come sit on this chair until they come to give you the necessary explanations. If you need any help, call me! Either you or your husband should be here on Sunday morning to receive your card!

The explanations were repetitive; a set of robotic warning sentences about post-operative care that I had to experience and discover its unpredictable and specific points myself, just like last time. Complications such as bladder infections due to drug allergies and other emergency conditions that if I encountered—like what I had experienced before—no one but myself would come to my aid. I had heard all of them, but I listened carefully again. After a few minutes, like a defeated commander returning from war, I was stumbling in the waiting room with my documents and prescriptions in hand.

Aban¹ was sitting on the nearest chair to the surgery room door; as soon as she saw me, she got up, rushed towards me, took my hand, and gently sat me down on the chair.

"Are you okay? How was it? Did you suffer a lot?"

I was great; crushed and disheveled! But this time he was beside me; after years, he woke me up and calmed me down. "It wasn't bad. Just a little pain and dizziness right now," I said. She took a plastic container out of her bag, opened it, peeled some pistachios for me, and placed them in my palm. At the same time, She held a bottle of orange juice in front of my other hand. I could only look at her; her speed of action was much greater than my brain's processing at that moment. She said

1 . A feminine name meaning "guardian of water" and also the eighth month of the solar calendar, equivalent to the months of October and November.

very seriously, "Eat! You need it to regain your strength! You haven't eaten anything since last night! I sweetened your orange juice with honey. After three hours, it doesn't have much benefit left, but it's better than nothing."

Oh! I forgot that I was fasting. I pulled down my mask, took a sip of orange juice, and as if I had been illuminated by light, my whole being brightened. There was a commotion in front of the operating room. A young woman was arguing with one of the nurses alongside her husband, and the nurse patiently explained to her, "Dear, for the umpteenth time I'm sorry that you're in trouble, but I can't help you. The sample you brought was unacceptable."

"Well, where should we go now? We don't have anyone here. You know we came a long way to here."

"I mentioned that the sampling room is closed due to COVID. Tell your husband to go to one of the restrooms..."

The conversation was among the women, and the man was a clear example of domestic bullying, power-hungry and unable to manage the crisis, preferring to stand a little distance away from them and wait for a result in his favor. Whatever it was, it was all on him and the pressure he exerted on his wife for his own comfort. The situation wasn't that complicated. The woman said, 'But in the restroom?'

"Well, go to a hotel or a hostel!"

"Ma'am! Are you serious? Should we go spend a lot of money renting a room for a two-minute task?"

"Well, my dear, that's exactly what I'm saying! his work takes two minutes. Tell him not to be so difficult!"

We stood up. Aban was holding my arm tightly. Slowly, we headed toward the stairs. Due to COVID, we preferred not to take the elevator. The voice of the young woman continued from behind me; 'Can't you tell the doctor to use that one?' The nurse this time spoke slowly—as if talking to someone hard of hearing—continuing; 'Dear... that... sample you... brought... has spoiled and... cannot be used. It might have been too old. Please tell your husband... If he wants your surgery done today, he needs to deliver his sperm sample within an hour before your procedure.'

The continuation of their conversation was drowned out by the noise of the hospital and my nausea. It was another repetitive story of a husband not cooperating in this 100% two-person project with a clear ending. Fortunately, even though Sam couldn't be with me that day, he had handed over his sample to me just moments before Aban arrived; although he had struggled with himself over it. I had also delivered it to the hospital on time. Sam said delivering this sample was just like saving a life in exchange for eating a pack of Digestive biscuits in less than a minute and without a hot drink. The psychological tension of timing and delivering it on time, along with the discomfort of eating the biscuits in such a rough manner, added to the difficulty of the situation."

Aban, with embarrassment, pointed to a place beside the doorstep. "Can you just stay here for a minute while I bring the car. There was no parking, so I left it a bit further up." Yes, go ahead; take your time! I'll just sit here and ponder why today I've been struck twice by the past, leaving me utterly exhausted. Why? I shook my head wearily and resignedly sat down. A few minutes later, the back door of Aban's car opened, and I slumped

onto the seat, drifting off again. The nausea wouldn't leave me. I didn't seem to be asleep, but suddenly I saw Aunt Ella in the front seat. With her charming and smiling face, she turned towards me and said in a sweet voice, "Sweetheart! Did you see I told you to sleep? You'd feel better! You managed not to throw up!" With the car braking in front of the tower, I opened my eyes. Auntie! After all these years! How much I missed her! Why had she never come to my dreams? And now today? What was going on? A lump formed in my throat. The entire journey had been a struggle against nausea and holding back the contents of my stomach, and I had succeeded. I felt a bit satisfied that I wouldn't leave the back seat in a mess. Once we entered the house, I headed straight to the bathroom and threw up in the toilet. The contents were orange juice and pistachios and... pain! Aban was behind the door; where could she go when I was making such a ruckus?

"Are you okay?"

More like she meant are you alive? She knew I wasn't well. I cleared my throat; "Yeah, I'm fine. It's just the anesthesia." I washed my hands and face, took off my clothes with closed eyes, and tossed them into a corner of the bathtub. I wanted to take a shower but wasn't allowed. Naked, I stepped out of the bathroom.

"Let me help you!"

"No thanks! I can manage."

The shirt I had worn that morning before leaving was carelessly thrown onto the bed; I put it on with two movements and lay down on the bed. The pain had returned! I listened with closed eyes to the sound of Aban moving around from the room to the kitchen

and restroom: "Go home and take care of your stuff! I'm fine. Just let me sleep for a bit, and I'll be alright."

"Don't worry about me! I have nothing to do until my online class starts at four. Sam texted that he'll arrive in an hour."

"Thank you so much! Now you've also joined me on this path; I bacam a trouble for you!"

It was as if she was swatting a fly in the air, waving her hand for me to stop and keeping my thanks and apologies to myself. At the same time, her gaze fixed on the tray, and she traced her finger over a paint stain in the corner. She asked, "By the way, where is Sima?"

"Her father passed away; she had to go stay with her family for a few days. I thought it was the best time for her to take a long leave since things are like this."

"What's your dad doing for cooking and cleaning? Isn't it hard for him alone?"

"He gets food from outside, and the building caretaker helps him with cleaning for a few weeks."

She force-fed me juice and went for another dish, which I pushed back with a grunt. I wanted to sleep. In the midst of the zoo-like atmosphere, I was spinning around; alone. There was no familiar face around me. I ran towards the exit door but couldn't find it. I changed my path again; it felt like I was trapped in a maze. No matter which way I went, I hit a wall or an obstacle, but there was no sign of a door. The sounds of the animals were loud and intertwined. Exhausted and desperate, I took every empty path among the crowd in hopes of reaching somewhere better; I didn't make it. Right there, I sat down with my knees hugged to my chest and lowered my head onto my knees. A crane's scream went up nearby. As always, my body ached. A Chinese panda sat across from me, unable to move at all. Someone

called my name. The shadow of a giraffe fell on my frail body. I looked up. It was him; at ten years old. With that sweet smile that made his eyes shine brighter. His hair was falling over his face as always, and in the sunlight, his light brown highlights turned golden. He stretched his little hands towards me to lift me up...

Suddenly, I woke up to something moving around me. My eyes fell on Sam. Like someone caught in the act of doing something wrong, he seemed flustered and was looking at me; "Sorry for waking you up! I was just trying to tidy up the nightstand so that when you woke up, I could bring you your lunch."

"When did you come? Did Aban leave?"

"I arrived about an hour ago. When I got here, he was gone. Was everything okay? Did anything go wrong?"

Everything was okay; perfectly fine. Except for me, who was once again losing my mind and running back and forth in the zoo in front of him, confused and agitated. I said, "Yeah, it was good. I just have pain right now. Fortunately, this time I know exactly what to do about it!" He sat on the edge of the bed and held my knee in a way that seemed to indicate I had said it hurt right there. He hesitantly asked, "Does it hurt a lot?" The warmth of his hand reminded me of that strange caress I had experienced in the recovery room. Dreaming of such things with unrelated people happens to all of us. I had experienced it many times, but always felt foolish after imagining that ridiculous connection. This one was different. I hadn't seen him in any dreams for years, and now he had returned like this!

I felt embarrassed again, especially with Sam next to me. I pushed my thoughts away and said, "No, not so much that it's unbearable."

"But your face looks like you've seen a cockroach!"

Did that mean I was scared? He understood correctly. With the last dream, I hadn't jumped out of bed dramatically and cinematically, sweating and screaming, waiting for someone to hold me and calm me down, saying, 'It's nothing; you were just dreaming.' But when I woke up, I was trembling inside. Not because I was lost in the zoo, but because of the images and sounds I had been experiencing since that morning, which were shaping my feelings and were supposed to be gone. But right from the moment I woke up with his whisper, when I closed my eyes again, I saw him in my dreams, and even in my waking state, waves of memories flowed toward me, chaotic and without beginning or end. Memories that until that day, I had buried many of them in forgetfulness. Each time a piece of it would return, and I still couldn't believe that I had once lived through them.

I said, "It must be from the nausea. I'm trying not to throw up. What about you? Were you able to see your new workplace?" A lie! What could I say? What should I say about something he knew nothing of? It would have been better if that box had never been opened for him; he had no share in my clichéd past. He stood up and said, "Yeah. Nothing special. It was a big lobby like the others; full of shiny stones and ugly columns. I'll go get your lunch."

I was leaning against the crown of the bed, thinking about the path we had walked until that day. For 14 months, our lives had been affected by our not-so-sweet new pastime. Previously, for over three years, our attempts to become parents through various specialists' suggestions and complex, costly, and sometimes painful tests had been fruitless. No logical reason for our infertility had been found in the tests, but eventually, Dr. Keyhan's decision — who had also gone through possible trials in his own way — led to the decision to undergo IVF¹. Keyhan was known for his skill and expertise in this field, and his diagnosis made us determined on this path. Sam had never insisted on becoming a father but had always been supportive. One day he said, "If we're going to have a child, it will come in the usual ways. If it hasn't come after all that effort, why should we resort to artificial and painful methods?" Especially since most of the burdens fell on my shoulders. Prior to that, we had also been caught up in having the necessary relationship at the right time and calculations to target the correct date. Our emotional life over those three years had been heavily influenced by formulas and numerical calculations, making it very robotic. Sam would say, "When I see ourselves, I think of Woody Allen's 'Match Point'."² He feared we might end up like them, and he would have to shoot someone at the end of the story. In any case, at the final stage, for the same reason of not

1 .In Vitro Fertilization or IVF is fertilization outside the womb or fertilizing the egg in the laboratory.

2 .Match Point by Woody Allen, which was nominated for the Oscar for Best Screenplay in 2005. The screenplay of this film was written under the influence of the book Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

wanting to be just a mere companion or a halfway friend with IVF, he agreed because as he put it, his role in this process was only to nurse me a few times and deliver the sperm sample container at the right time, and that was it. He was right, and until that day, he had made every effort to accompany and empathize with me.

Just when we decided to take action, COVID-19 took over the world. In the first few months, all other treatments were pushed to the back burner with the assumption that this illness would be a guest for a few months and then leave. It had been five or six months when treatment programs gradually returned to normal. It became clear that COVID-19 had no intention of leaving us anytime soon. Therefore, other priorities could also restart with stricter adherence to health guidelines. Based on the doctor's suggestion, we began the IVF process.

Eighteen months ago, as I walked the entire route from the clinic to home with tear-filled eyes, I watched myself in disbelief as I found myself on that path; the same night that two bags full of expensive medications were handed to me at the pharmacy. Was I asking the universe for something strange? I didn't understand why the experience of becoming a mother, like millions of other women and having a child like millions of other children in this world, was so complicated for me. How difficult it is for some to have certain things while others find them accessible. That night, I arrived home and felt a strange shiver throughout my body. The next morning, I woke up with a fever and couldn't smell anything; the monster of the century had become my guest.

Mom—like always—started her blame game upon learning about it; that I hadn't been careful and hadn't taken precautions, and look what has happened now. Thank God she didn't know anything about our attempts at parenthood; otherwise, she would undoubtedly find another reason to blame me for that too. Less than two hours after my conversation with her, a bag full of her approved medications arrived at my doorstep via courier. I was sure that this was the only way for me to survive. Would she empathize? Feel sorry? Send food? No! Not at all. Mom wasn't into emotional matters. She didn't have time for such things. Mom's feelings were summarized in the prescriptions she wrote and in the approval stamp at the bottom. Her attention was solely on those medications that she sometimes sent me via courier.

My dad, with his usual hidden kindness, inquired about my condition. He advised me to take mom's medication and constantly check my blood oxygen levels, and... Over the years, this kind of talk from him had gradually given way to a relative calmness. After two or three days, Sam also fell beside me in bed; with the same symptoms. A few hours had not passed when another prescription arrived via courier.

With our clear condition, there was no need for a PCR test. The only way to save ourselves was rest and monitoring the situation. I remember on the second day of Sam's symptoms appearing, mom and dad showed up at our door at six in the morning; both of them came to us before their first surgery that day. They didn't have much time for wasting around. They came to visit us, but they seemed more

like two emergency doctors there to check on us. With masks and shields, they examined both of us from a distance to reassure themselves that the issue was at the level of a severe but manageable flu. To be honest, we didn't expect more from them. Their time was precious, and their entire lives had been dedicated to treating hundreds of sick people with love. Both had spent most of their days and nights in clinics and hospitals over the years. During those months, they were so exposed to COVID and its patients that our illness seemed normal to them as well. Especially since we had no underlying issues and, compared to what we had seen and heard, we were more like minor cold sufferers. Aside from some vitamins, I wasn't taking their prescribed medications; I was fairly sure I didn't need them. According to them, because we both exercised and had strong lungs, the likelihood of our illness becoming severe was low. I was running about six kilometers daily and doing aerobic exercises. Sam was also a professional yogi.

During those days, we had banned Ms. Sima from coming over; however, with the list we provided her, every other day when she went to dad's house, she would prepare our meals right there and send them via courier while we were isolated at home for a month, away from people; like thousands of others around the world. Our illness was mild but presented a compact and complete display of that deadly disease and was exhausting enough. That's why the IVF process was put on hold; I sent the medications to the fridge for the right time when, if we survived, I would go to meet them. This is life; just when you think you are going on a pleasant trip with a precise plan, you are forced to put

your suitcase down upon hearing about snow and icy roads and road closures!

Two months after recovery, we resumed IVF. Perhaps someone from outside would say, is it necessary to undertake this during these difficult days of illness? Perhaps my inner self would say that for every human, normalizing the complexities of life in daily routines is the first condition for survival. Meanwhile, all our efforts in the modern world are still directed toward meeting our basic needs in new ways.

* * *

Sam placed my food tray on my lap. I could have eaten my lunch at the dining table in the kitchen, but considering past experiences and the pain within me, I thought it best to put less pressure on myself this time. Seeing the food made my face scrunch up; "It's too much!"

"It's not, you can eat it all!

He glanced at my face and assessed me from head to toe; "I swear you women are crazy! You mak yourselves sick on purpose."

"Don't you think you've given me this before? If you don't understand and don't want to empathize..."

With sarcasm and humor, he said, "Yes, yes. If you don't want to empathize, please be quiet! I got it. Sorry!" he said and left the room. In our eight years of marriage, most arguments ended just as

quickly and silently. This behavior sometimes reminded me of my own home and the tensions between my parents, along with that silence that usually flowed from the suffocation and unvoiced protests in the house. Sam and I didn't have loud arguments, but our silence reconstructed those scenes. Sometimes I felt that his attention and concern for me were merely out of habit and respect; not love or anything akin to the early years of our relationship. On the other hand, I always imagined that a shared life was nothing more than this. Everything seemed normal to me.

My stomach was severely swollen; just like last time. At that time, no one had told me what pain I would endure after the puncture procedure. They had said it was a minor procedure and that I would recover with a day or two of rest and could continue with my daily activities. But right from the first night, I faced a painful belly that was three times larger than before, and I couldn't move for even a week afterward. Then I realized that rare cases after this surgery experienced severe swelling and pain, sometimes requiring hospitalization. The medications were a combination of subcutaneous and muscular injections, suppositories and oral drugs that prepared the body for a period of producing more and better-quality ovums. Then, with continuous monitoring, the exact day of the procedure would be determined. A month later, I took the puncture or ovum retrieval surgery for the first time; the same procedure that was repeated that day. I consumed the bags of medications from the fridge one by one and injected myself. Injection was the only thing I had learned from all my parents' medical skills. I didn't want to submit myself to clumsy and curious injectors when

they were not accessible. Those who ask irrelevant questions and constantly rub their hands on their noses; wearing a dirty coat resembling a butcher's apron and shuffling in orthopedic slippers in the injection hall. I had been accustomed to my father's cool hands since childhood, which smelled of soap.

Except for Aban, no friends or acquaintances were aware of my condition during those days; not even my parents. This decision was made by Sam and me together. I had no interest in the pitying, persistent, expectant, or even worried gazes of those around me; especially when there was nothing they could do. I didn't find the situation so tragic myself. I had accepted that every person travels a path to achieve their desires, and mine was just this. Life had taught me never to demand my wishes with helplessness and wailing. During those days, Sam couldn't be by my side due to his job commitments; that's why we informed Aban. Now at least we were explaining to one other person—besides ourselves. In my new life, she was my only old and close friend. I had no close friends left from my past. A friend in that life was a strange and unattainable being.

I had been writing on the bed for a while. I glanced at the clock; it was past six. I got up. I went to the bathroom and found Sam in the studio, engrossed in painting. He always returned peace to his body and soul with color and brush, no matter the circumstances. That day, his face was slightly tense; I couldn't read anything from it. My eyes fell on the canvas in front of him. Since he had started painting for money—not just to make a living—his work had become more like a duty; something akin to pop music or the buildings of sell-

and-build architects. It resembled what the masses liked, bought, and paid for. Ever since he signed his first contract for a multi-piece painting in the lobby of a tower and tasted the sweetness of a hefty paycheck, he rarely pursued his heartfelt work. Now he was known as a painter of walls or wall paintings for hotel lobbies, towers, cafes, and sometimes houses designed by his architect friends. With his keen intelligence, he easily grasped the pulse of the client and, through the connections he had among the designers and architects of the projects, good clients often came to him. His income was high, but he knew well that even if the client and audience were satisfied, most of his works lacked artistic value.

Usually, when he was busy painting, I didn't go to his workspace. The floor in that part of the house had gray epoxy flooring; it was full of tall and short paint cans and covered in drops of paint, some of which were still wet. That was his planet, and I was his neighbor. I stood at the threshold of the door; his eyes fell on me. He pointed with his chin to a large canvas leaning against the wall a little further away and said, "I finally started it. It had my brain locked up badly. How is it? Of course, this is one of four." I stumbled forward a bit. This one seemed more complete than the one on the easel. I scrutinized the painting with my gaze and said, "What am I supposed to see in it?" A fresh spark rippled in his eyes. With a quick movement, he wiped his hands and spun around in his swivel chair, then rolled himself over to me. He pulled me toward him and held me between his legs so that I wouldn't have to stand completely on my own feet. One side of his lip curled up insidiously. He looked at me with narrowed eyes and said, "You tell me! What do you see? There's no way

you'll guess this time!" He knew well that I would try to guess. As always, he wanted to challenge me more. I squinted my eyes to see better. His paintings were always filled with intertwined geometric lines that met with shades of light and dark to create an image; he called them the architecture-pleasing designs. I stared at him and then at his painting. The last time he had teased me like this, I had found an abstract image of me and him among our blue sheets on the bed in the triptych before me. He hadn't let me see his work until the last moment. It was supposed to be placed on the wall of the hotel lobby. The image of that private moment of ours was hidden in geometric shapes that had gone out of form, with shades of blue and symbols that only he and I could see. What the audience saw was a play of colors from the desert sky with rolling sand dunes in the sunlight; just as poetic! A cliché image that everyone liked! Sometimes he did things like this. Usually, the real story was hidden behind what he painted, not what attracted the audience or impressed the client with the subject they had ordered. To be honest, I loved something that he hid for himself in each painting, but the part that deceived viewers and consciously lowered the dignity of his art to sell it troubled me greatly. In fact, drawing these designs was easy for him, and with them, he could gain the satisfaction of various social classes; there was good money in it, and that was enough. But I was more after those paintings through which I recognized him, which flowed sincerely from within him; what bared his character to me, and I saw less of that in those days.

My eyes were wide open. This time, I couldn't believe what I saw among the lines. It was the vast, white space of the park on a snowy day, and I was running hand in

hand with him; we were in red and blue overalls! Coppice Blue! Our childhood! But how could Sam have drawn this image? This picture was a corner of my world without him. An image from the past that even I hadn't remembered until that day. I was in the first grade. It had snowed so much that schools were closed, and that day after gathering the snow from our yard, we placed a big snowman by the pond in the middle of the yard. We took several photos next to it, and in the evening, along with my uncle and aunt, we went to the park and joyfully lost ourselves in the white world of snow covering the ground and the hills of the park. My breaths were short, and I looked at the painting in disbelief. Sam had raised his eyebrows and was staring at me from beside my face; "What's wrong? It's not that scary. Don't you remember?" Gradually, the painting swayed before my eyes like several spilled containers of paint on the ground. I finally realized what Sam had drawn; the image in front of me was the interior of a public restroom at a rest stop related to our last trip before COVID came. The restaurant was under renovation, and its restrooms hadn't been gender-segregated yet. That day, Sam had seen one of his architect colleagues there. The small world of humans; seeing an acquaintance in a public restroom on the road! It couldn't get more ridiculous than that. In such a random place! That meeting was so exciting that I took a photo of their encounter in the restroom right there, and she also took a photo of me and Sam in the same frame. Now, in the first piece of this four-part series, Sam had erased our images and only drawn the restroom space. The red and blue shapes beside the frame were actually a mop and broom that had filled the background of the pictures that day. I had made it too chaotic with

my madness. This image was yet another of Sam's games with his paintings; a manifestation of our shared memories in another form. I held my swollen muscular belly with one hand to keep it from shaking with my laughter. His gaze was triumphantly moving from me to the painting with a broad smile; "I knew you'd find it!"

"Crazy! You drew a public restroom on the wall for people? You're filling the walls of the city with our memories. At first, I thought it was a snowy day with two kids walking in the middle."

"That's not a bad idea. It could be that too. The client has given me free rein. He said he wants something minimal and empty!"

I wiped the soles of my flip-flops and headed to the bedroom; "It better be what your client wants. Please keep my idea to myself." He followed me into the room; "Are you bleeding too? Your face is really pale."

"Not too much yet. It's just starting."

He leaned against the wall with his arms crossed, a frown forming between his eyebrows. I was sitting on the bed, and he was scrutinizing me. It seemed his mind was preoccupied; he shook his head. Maybe he was trying not to give me his usual lines; "I'll go get something for us to eat. By the way, when do we need to go pick up your embryo card?"¹

"Sunday morning."

1. The embryo, which is the developing cell from the moment of fertilization until the end of the eighth week, is called an embryo, and after that, it is referred to as a fetus. Usually, after the puncture procedure or ovum retrieval and fertilization with a sperm sample in the laboratory, several embryos are formed, which are frozen on the third or fifth day after fertilization and prepared for implantation in the mother's body. Their identification includes an archive code, the names of the parents, and their number on a card given to the parents, which is called the embryo card.

On the way to the kitchen, he said loudly, "Let's see how many fish the doctor has caught for us this time."

"It depends on your fishing hook too."

"Heh! My hooks are unbeatable; professional and skilled!"

"Yeah, right."

I checked my phone. I had a message from Aban; "How are you?"

"I'm better. I've gotten busy with my work."

"I'll come by to see you tomorrow after my class."

I had known Aban for over a decade. I met her in one of the mindfulness¹ courses I attended years ago. As she said, we soon realized our paths were intertwined. Since those years, she had been practicing yoga professionally and seriously. Before COVID, she spent every day teaching at different gyms, but during the pandemic, her private classes, like everyone else's, were held online. In any case, a large part of her time still went to teaching, which she loved. I sent her a thumbs-up emoji; I wasn't in the mood for pleasantries and conversation. My mind was occupied with images racing through my brain. What was wrong with me? What was happening? I didn't understand!

That night until morning, I woke up several times with troubled dreams and the same subjects. Although the anesthetic, painkillers, the pain that hadn't subsided, and the swelling in my stomach did not affect the quality of

1. Mindfulness is a psychological process through which an individual can intentionally and consciously focus on the present moment. It is a modern approach for more effective engagement with life, leading to relief from pain and enriching one's experience of living.

the images and their subjects. Sam was in his studio until the birds woke up and their morning chatter filled the room, busy with his work. It was completely bright outside when he collapsed onto the bed.

To be continued...



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