

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 1
CHAPTER TWO: FRAGMENTATION

Coppice Blue

Faavidel

Literature - Persian Fiction – Novel

Coppice Blue

By FAAVIDEL

Fall 2024

Editions: 999

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Chapter One

Fragmentation

A Family That Fell Apart

It was a tremendous shock; Aunt Ella went to the hospital One of the days in mid-March and never returned home! She stayed in the hospital for just over three weeks. I hardly remember anything from those difficult three weeks, that terrifying New Year, that year I wished would never turn over, except that we were all in shock and silence. I went to the hospital several times to visit my aunt.; that great and unique spirit who lay exhausted and frail on the hospital bed. I also saw Alborz there; thin, disheveled, and full of sobs and tears. The hospital had become his home. Finally, after three weeks, the tragedy occurred. Aunt Ella left us forever due to advanced lymphoma. I don't remember when or how I heard the news of her passing; but I was devastated. Aunt Ella was someone whose absence I could never fathom. I never envisioned life without her. To be honest, now that I look back on those days, I feel that if I had lost my mom at that age, it wouldn't have hurt as much. But Aunt Ella was a wound that would remain on our souls forever. Perhaps no event could tear us apart as much as losing that kind being.

On the day of Aunt Ella's funeral—on the morning of April 23—we buried a piece of our soul and spirit. No one hid their tears. We all wept bitterly, and in that large wave of friends and acquaintances I didn't know, I could only see Uncle and Alborz. Like me and my parents, they were shattered and broken. A bomb had fallen on us, and we were destroyed; each of us a thousand pieces! That day, I had no idea about their state, but later— as time passed— the constant absence of such a beloved woman and such an unparalleled mother

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turned into a catastrophe in my mind. Three days later, I saw Alborz with his friends and relatives' children at the mosque for the third day ceremony. He hadn't gone to school since those last days of March until that day. We didn't talk much; we mostly stayed together in silence in the mosque courtyard. I remember we were sitting on the steps at the entrance. When we were alone, he said heavily and choked up, "We're going to leave Iran; for good." My heart sank again! I looked at him; my eyes widened in disbelief. He was staring at something in the infinite distance in front of him. I knew why he wasn't looking at me; just like those times we were in the gazebo and he would gaze elsewhere, avoiding my eyes so I wouldn't read his feelings; but I did read them. His gaze was filled with sorrow and disbelief that settled deep within him, floating him in a world without his mother; "A little before Mom got sick, they had made this decision; but it wasn't final. Even Dad thought we'd go for Mom's treatment; but it didn't happen."

I asked the most ridiculous thing I could, "Where are you going to go?"

"After the personnel change at the company, Dad isn't happy with the construction projects here. He says they're messing things up and doesn't want to have any part in their plans; he's become their dissenting voice. Uncle always wanted to send Dad a job invitation from his company, but Dad wouldn't accept it. In the end, he gave in. He says this way is better for both of us."

He was talking about the uncle who had an architecture firm in London. Again, I didn't respond. He said the uncle had said it was better this way for "both." Both?! I couldn't believe they had become two! He was also astonished by what he was saying. With long, delicate fingers, he ran his hand through his hair. I missed seeing them on the piano. He continued softly; "With this situation, I'm not going to go to pre-university here anymore. I have a year or two for military service; we can either buy it or put up collateral. Once I get my diploma, we'll go. Maybe I'll study architecture there."

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Hearing what he said made me nauseous. I couldn't believe how everything had turned upside down! First, the moving out of our house, then the hasty departure of my aunt, and now, the uncle and Alborz were supposed to go so far away that I would never be able to see them again. Maybe they couldn't bear not seeing my aunt in every frame of the city. But what would happen to me? I knew what life was like without my parents, but never without those three; without those two! In the months that followed, astonishing and terrible events had piled on me, and finally, another piece of news. My face was wet with tears again. I said nothing; I had nothing to say. Alborz had lowered his head and was playing with a thread on his black jeans. He was also crying in silence. This had become our situation. In every person's life, there aren't many people with whom one can cry without shame or judgment. We were that kind for each other; we understood one another with all our hearts. We were both torn pieces of a book. I don't remember us having any other conversation that day. We were both bewildered and lost. It seemed that all those incidents had dried us out so much that we couldn't comprehend anything else. In the days after the funeral, we didn't talk much; we had sunk into a deep silence. Perhaps it was the aftermath of a shock that had reached us at that moment. I cried a lot, but Alborz's situation had worsened compared to mine. Sometimes even when I spoke on the phone, he wouldn't realize it. He, who was filled with emotion and feeling, became less emotional or reactive in those later days—even showing little response to sadness; it was as if he had been numbed.

Gradually, a deep and wide chasm opened between us. I was also too young and distressed to understand what was happening to us. My connection with him diminished more and more; we both got used to loneliness and distance. I no longer knew how he spent his days at night. I had immersed myself in lessons, books, hidden stories, and sometimes my paintings; just like him, who had sought refuge in his studies, books, and music. Even on our birthday, we had nothing to say to each other. We congratulated each other briefly and devoid of

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feeling. Life had sunk into silence and darkness. There was nothing that wouldn't remind us of aunt and our happy memories. Our silence was born from pain; a pain that was too much for us and plunged us into a perpetual stupor. Unbeknownst to us, we were just at the beginning of that painful path.

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When I reached this point, I cried quietly for a while; as if I had lost my aunt again. Once again, like before, wherever I looked, I saw her. My aunt had become a tree, she had become leaves, she had become a bird in the sky; she had become the breeze, the sun, and the sea. Aban was crying with me as well. What she heard didn't even fit into her furthest imaginations. She took a shaky and deep breath; "What a tragedy! I can't believe it. I can't even imagine it."

Our lives all entered a new phase after my aunt left. For me and Alborz, during our teenage years—after that move—it was the worst thing that could happen. For him, it was worse than for me.

"That's why you never liked the New Year's holidays!"

"After my aunt left, we never had a joyful Nowruz again. No holiday felt like a holiday... except for one year; and that was very brief."

A faint smile lingered at the corners of my lips. Aban wiped her nose with a tissue and asked, "What was it?"

"Not right now, but I'll tell you!"

And I continued.

*

At the end of the summer that year, on one of those days when Ms. Parvin and I were alone as always, someone rang the doorbell. Ms. Parvin was busy cleaning, and I was in my room doing my English homework. Before I could move, she pressed the intercom button and

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cheerfully said, "Come in, my son!" I looked at her questioningly from the end of the hallway; with a sympathetic smile, she said, "You have a guest, my dear girl!"

"Who is it?"

She didn't say anything and went to the kitchen window, waving her hand with a smile toward the yard and my guest. I walked toward the front door and there, in the middle of the yard, I saw Alborz. His head was held high; he had his hand behind his neck and was staring at their old house. Perhaps he was floating in a flood of memories. Seeing him again in that yard felt like a dream. I was excited but stayed there for a while without bothering him. A spark ignited in my heart; how much he had grown. It felt like years had passed since the last time we saw each other. He looked a bit thinner and taller, his shoulders seemed broader, his light hair shone brighter in the sun, and his sunburned face had just been freshly shaved. What did I really feel for him back then? With him, I felt security, joy, and life. He was a part of me that had been separated from me; just like my aunt and uncle. We were leaves on a branch. I didn't know how to define it, but it was everything I wanted from life. It was a kind of affection that until that time—and even to this day—I had never experienced with anyone else in the world, and back then it was so pure and innocent. He finally sensed my presence and without turning his head, he looked toward me. He smiled; just like he used to do since childhood. But perhaps like all his smiles back then, it was heavy, sad, and empty. He was no longer the cheerful and lively teenager I knew. I had lost my happiness somewhere in a corner of the house for years, but I wasn't used to seeing him like this either. Before I could say anything, he said, "How long has it been since we saw each other that you've grown so much?"

I walked toward him and smiled, saying, "Take a look at yourself in the mirror; you'll understand!"

He hugged me tightly. I barely reached above his shoulder. He took a deep breath; "I missed the smell of fruit!"

I said, "The fruits are starting to rot in there!"

He released me and said softly, "Dad talked to Uncle; we decided to send you useful books from the library with a truck in two or three days!"

I stared at him in shock. If it were another time, I would have hugged him again and celebrated what I heard with joy. But now... knowing the reason made it just add to my sorrows. I heard myself asking another one of those silly questions; "Don't you need them yourselves?"

He shrugged; "We're leaving now. We're taking some with us. But we set aside many for you. Some are theory and specialized books that Dad gave to his friends." How terrifying! Those books were as precious to them as eyes. The fate of that library had become like our families! Before I could say anything, he pointed to the gazebo and walked toward it; "Is there still paper and charcoal here?"

I followed him but didn't respond because his question sounded more like a statement: "Now there's also a place for me here in this gazebo." The gazebo was a symbol of sorrowful days. I didn't ask him to come inside because I knew he wouldn't want to—especially after all that had happened.

We sat in the gazebo for hours, drawing and chatting; just like old times, we talked about books, my writings, our friends, and a little about the future. Ms. Parvin was happy to see Alborz, and I was sure she wouldn't tell Mom anything about those moments. She always looked out for us. After my aunt left, she still visited Uncle's house and sometimes told me about their silence. She was always on our side. She served me and my guest strawberry drink, chocolate ice cream, and jelly—Alborz's favorite. Alborz had brought me two CDs; on each one, he had recorded four or five of his best performances along with a couple of his improvisations. They were all so

melancholic that they revealed the state of his days back then. For a long time after he left, I listened to those pieces every day. We had our lunch there; it was pasta! The beloved food of both of us. It was only then that a bitter truth slapped my face like the winter wind: Alborz no longer ate my aunt's cooking! For a while now, Ms. Parvin and sometimes Uncle had been cooking. There were no more cakes or afternoon snacks. Their home was filled with unfillable voids left by my aunt, and Ms. Parvin knew it well.

During my English class time—without mentioning anything about skipping it—we left the house and went to the park; just like a regular day. I knew he had come to say goodbye, and I wanted to engrave each moment in my soul. But in that situation, there was nothing I could do except be present in the moment. Sometimes we laughed, but we weren't happy. We also spent a long time in silence; with words that we had spoken silently from the past until that day. That day, I felt that we both had begun a new phase of life. Perhaps maturity was such for us; in a way that shaped our present like this. We agreed not to leave each other uninformed; although it was he who would have to check on me. Because it was assumed that I would remain in my usual place and would be unaware of his new situation. At that time, email was a new phenomenon, and having an email address depended on having a special job position. For about a year, both of us had computers at home, but we hadn't yet practically engaged in that kind of communication. In any case, if we wanted to stay in touch, the phone and letters were still our options.

That evening, Uncle Farhad came to the park to meet Alborz. It seemed he already knew we were at the park. At the moment of farewell, just before they got in the car, Uncle's kind face looked bruised and troubled. The departure of Aunt had aged him at least 10 years, and it seemed he was suffering from a pain that clawed at his soul as he saw my and Alborz's wet cheeks. Other details of that day have faded from my memory; except for the fact that this meeting —

with the lingering warmth of their embrace and the scent of their perfume in my soul and body — was our last encounter in adolescence. A few days later, they left Iran for good.

Shortly after their departure, in another surprise, my parents announced that they had bought a house close to their new clinics and that we would soon move to a better neighborhood and put our old house up for sale; the house of my childhood and my shattered memories! A house and neighborhood that still felt comforting to me with all its signs of my identity up until that time; my friends, the swimming pool, the language school, Alborz's tennis club, our schools, the park, the stream, the sidewalk, the restaurant, and even the local pizzeria. Everything I had from childhood and with them in that house. It was strange! Dad and Mom had a large plot of land in that area, but instead of building a house there, they bought a ready-made one. Once again, I didn't understand the reason for this haste. As always, a new decision was made without me, and I was informed at the last minute; without considering its consequences. I was bewildered again. I thought only about how, given the possibility of a break in Dad's relationship with Uncle, how Alborz would find me? Even if he sent me a letter, perhaps someone wouldn't let it reach me. Sometimes I think my family did that to sever my connection with my childhood and the remaining relationships from that period forever. I was deeply depressed and disordered during those days, and Mom thought she was taking me to a new world. She said soon I would feel better and that the new school year in high school would start excellently. The school year! They had fallen asleep; while they knew what my pain was. Perhaps they thought children do not grasp much of the events around them or that such traumas only affect adults; they were unaware that bitter events manifest differently for each gender and age group. Maybe they knew and had no other solution for it. In any case, we moved to the new house; the same place where Dad has

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been living alone until now. A large house without a yard that has a 50-meter terrace.

A few days after moving, the three of us went on a trip for the first time; On the occasion of visiting Aunt Bitá in France. Until that time, all our trips had been with Uncle's family; I couldn't imagine traveling without them. This trip was supposed to improve our spirits after the bitter events we had gone through, but it didn't work out that way for me, nor for Mom and Dad. Even there, we were filled with each other's memories. The photo of the six of us standing with our backs to the beach hurt my heart next to Aunt Bitá's other framed pictures. Throughout the trip, I listened to Julio's voice from my CD player, and my tears wouldn't stop in the absence of those three.

"I feel cold in silence, in loneliness
I will probably have a painful week!
One day you laugh, one day you cry
One day you live, one day you die...
One day everything is good, and the next day it's not
That's life!"

I didn't want any corner of that place without them; the traces of our summer dreams from atop the Château¹, the scent of flowers at the market², the old winding alleys, the Mediterranean breeze, lounging on blue chairs³, the beautiful stones along the beach, and even its sunset. How could I accept that we wouldn't go to London afterward to see Alborz's uncle? Especially since he was there too. Did Alborz see us around London? When he walked along Regent's Canal, did he

1. Chateau, Castle of Nice

2. The daily market of the city of Nice with fabric awnings.

3. The blue chairs on the sidewalk are a symbol of the city of Nice.

remember the day he fell there and had to wander around the city with torn and wounded knees until they bought him new pants? Did he remember that same day when he spilled his ice cream on my clothes so we could both be new together? Did he go to Regency Café with Uncle to reminisce about those days? And a thousand other questions. There wasn't a moment when my hopeful yet despairing gaze was lifted from a point in the infinite northwest of where I stood. It was so empty and distressing; I had gotten closer to them but was in the farthest possible state! That trip was the worst trip of my life.

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After a long silence, Aban said with furrowed brows and a questioning tone, "I don't understand one thing. So, did Dad and your uncle completely cut ties? To the extent that they didn't have any addresses for each other? Is that even possible?"

"Back then, I thought it was like that, but later I realized their relationship hadn't completely severed. Sometimes they would check in on each other; but Uncle thought that this distance and lack of news was for Alborz's own good during those times. Mom wasn't interested in our relationship at that age and her imaginary troubles. Everything went in a direction where we kept our distance in a controlled manner so that we could focus on our studies and distance ourselves from those bitter days. Every time I asked Dad about them, he would somehow evade the topic."

"We're talking about the second half of the 1370s in the Iranian calendar and the 1990s in the Gregorian calendar. At that time, families like yours had mobile phones. So you didn't have Uncle Farhad's mobile number to somehow get in touch with him? Or did Alborz not have your dad's number so that you wouldn't be dependent on a landline? For example, if he called your dad and asked about you, wouldn't he connect you two?"

"Uncle didn't care about his Iranian number; when they left, his number changed. I didn't have it either. But even if we assume Dad felt sorry and connected us through Alborz's call on his mobile, my bad luck was not just one or two instances. Dad gave his line to Mom around those days and got a new number for himself. You can guess what could have happened if Alborz had called!"

"He would have been shocked to hear your mom's voice and would have gone silent. Wow! Just like that!"

Aban's reaction had long since passed from emotional responses and had become entirely silence, empathy, and sorrow; "What happened to your Maple tree?"

Until today, I hadn't even thought about its fate once. Things got to a point where that tree no longer mattered to anyone. "In a way, it was like the same disaster that happened to me! I hope at least when they were demolishing the house, they moved it somewhere."

"What a pity! I wish your dad had thought of it! Or for instance, after all these years, you could have gone and seen if the tree was still in its place?"

"Yes, what a pity! But such endings are specific to stories and films; not the real world. I told you, nothing cinematic happened in my life. Everything was very ordinary; even its bitterness was so ordinary that one would believe the whole world was experiencing the same thing."

"I disagree with you here. As you said yourself, you've always tried to make the bad events of your life seem normal for yourself to survive them. But forget it! Don't stray too far from the discussion! Start from there. From school and your mom!"

"Ugh... school and lessons with mom were my gradual death!"

The Beginning of My Life Without Them

My mother's sensitivities and her nagging about my grades were still in place; before high school, it was about getting into high school, and after choosing a field, it was the concern of passing the medical entrance exam and getting into university! Fortunately, in high school, there was no insistence on handing report cards to parents; especially for someone like me, whose family situation made their absence acceptable. As a result, whenever my grades fell short of my mother's ideals, her response was a package of letters and numbers Letraset and a printer! I had become quite skilled at it. During those years, my life revolved around studies and school, along with my mother's scoldings. Due to family pressure, I chose the science track. A French language class was added to my other joyful activities. I was in a world to which I felt no connection. My drawings and writings were still my only sources of happiness. My mother discovered my treasure of writings one or two more times, and once again, my days turned dark. Her beatings no longer hurt me. My pain lingered somewhere deep within me. The older I got, the harder it became for me to believe that she still sometimes raised her hand against me out of anger. I no longer feared her and looked at her behavior with more contempt. My educated yet ignorant mother had a problem with herself, not with me. The situation I found myself in was a result of my family's

weaknesses, not mine. My mother was not my weakness; she was my constraint. It was something I had no power to change, yet I didn't know that I had no right to blame myself for it. Now, after all these years, reflecting on those days, I have learned not to regret it anymore.

Back then, they took me several times to their psychologist friend for treatment of my withdrawal; which was not very common at that time. My mother did not accept this knowledge at all but would do anything to prove her behavior was right. The doctor, unaware of everything, tried to untangle my condition by exploring my past and present. To some extent, I told him that I wanted to live with those three individuals who shone like a light upon me. But how could I tell someone who was my mother's friend that she was not that lovely and kind being outside the house? And that half of my pain until then stemmed from feeling rejected by her! How could I confess about my aunt and dad...? And then about my aunt's death? How could I talk about the truth of being separated from my best friend? About the world of words that did not end with him; while discussing it had been somewhat forbidden for several years? I didn't understand how my mother expected my problems to be resolved; especially in that military regime she had created for me. As long as I felt that all those sessions were reported back to my mother, most of my hours with the psychiatrist remained fruitless; it was still me and my mother's anger. Sometimes I would still wallow in self-pity. There was no aunt left to help me, no piano sounds, no gazebo to take refuge in, and no one to come there to comfort me. Sometimes at night, I would fall asleep imagining Alborz in his new life; busy with university and his new world, having risen again from his sorrow and being happy and fulfilled.

The day after one of those times when my mom really hit me, I asked Ms. Parvin if she also hit her children. She said, "I don't want

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to, but sometimes when they drive me crazy, I have no choice but to hit them. And then I regret it."

She had less than five grades of education, but it was interesting that she admitted her regret. I said, "If you regret it, then why do you hit them?"

"Mothers hit their children out of love and affection, my dear!"

"Why don't they hug them with love? Why don't they kiss them? Or show them affection?"

"They do those things too, but when they get angry, it's different. They have no choice!"

"You know my mom! In our house, there's no sign of kisses or hugs or that love you're talking about! And then, my aunt! Do you remember? Antie never even hit Alborz, not even when she was angry!"

She sighed. "Dear Elaheh was different from everyone; she was an angel. You won't find anyone like your aunt in this world!"

"So you also agree that my aunt was unique!"

She nodded in agreement. "She was a piece of the moon! She perished!" A lump formed in my throat. I couldn't help it. Whenever her name came up, a sadness enveloped me. "I miss her so much!"

She ran her hand over my head. "We all miss her, my dear!"

3

The War I Won

I fell silent. After all these years, I was still missing my aunt. We were quiet for a while. Then Aban said, "All these years, whenever I asked about your studies and university, you always dodged the question. In fact, you avoided talking about a lot of things; that was your way. But I'm curious to know how you managed to keep your promise and not study medicine under those circumstances? If you don't want to talk about it, that's fine!"

"The fact that I avoided talking about many things and you still maintained our friendship is somewhat regrettable! How could you be friends with someone you didn't know anything about for so many years? Though maybe it's for the best, because you might have run away!"

"My dear, I make friends with the essence of people, not their memories!"

She was right; she truly was like that. This time I answered her because I could share it.

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I was in pre-university and attending medical entrance exam preparation classes. But most of my time was spent on literature and artistic subjects. My only joy came from the times I spent with my beloved books. I couldn't even imagine myself in medical school, yet like a tamed horse, I studied my lessons to avoid awakening my mom's

anger. At that age, I hardly had any close friends except for those I knew at school, with whom I had built superficial daily relationships. It was interesting that most of them accepted me because of my awareness and abilities, and they thought that I did not consider them worthy of friendship and close connection. But the idol they saw in front of them was merely a hard and hollow shell. Sometimes some of them would come to our house, but they didn't know much about me; they always saw me as a mysterious being. After all these years, I know well that what makes people seem mysterious and unattainable to each other is essentially the fear of connection, vulnerability, abandonment, and absence. The more unspeakable things a person has, the more mysterious they become!

At that time, my best moments were spent in the library; a vast part of my hidden life that I shared with no one. On the other hand, my arguments with my mom had increased more and more at home. Sometimes I would express my thoughts, and as soon as she approached me, I would take refuge in my room and lock the door. Other times, I would stand in front of her, letting her do whatever she wanted so that I could leave sooner and get back to my work. I felt that when I confronted her with the ugliness of her behavior and her inability to control her anger, she would feel ashamed. A few times during our fights, I reminded her that it was she who needed a psychiatrist and serious treatment all those years, not me. At that point, she would freeze in place; every act of violence afterward confirmed my hypothesis. Our conflicts had taken on a new face. My dad, however, remained a spectator in his safe and neutral position. Only when the train of discussions went off the rails would he make his presence known and gently conclude the argument in his own way.

Until that time, I believed there was nothing waiting for me in the fields of experimental sciences. On the other hand, I couldn't imagine myself in the humanities at university either. I had always loved the intersection of art and literature; a place where the two connect. In

truth, I was unaware of how it related to me. If my uncle, aunt, and Alborz had been by my side, I would have quickly freed myself from this doubt. I had no guidance and was alone in choosing my path; but unknowingly, I was led to the path I should take. One day, while wandering in a bookstore, a new light shone on my life. On the new releases table, I saw the screenplay of "Destination." Until then, I had never read an Iranian play or screenplay. My limited readings of Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Beckett had left me confused about my path, but perhaps they weren't enough to fan the flames. I stayed in the bookstore for an hour, reading parts of the screenplay; it felt as if I were flipping through my notebook of thoughts, and the fragmented points of my mind were connecting on those pages. That day, I bought the screenplays of "Destination," "Travelers," and "The Earth,"¹ and by the next morning, after reading all three, I was freed from all doubts; the path ahead became so clear that I felt rejuvenated with excitement to embark on it.

That year, without my family's knowledge, I simultaneously applied for both sciences and art in the university entrance exam. But on the day of the sciences exam, I resolved not to attend the test. Instead, I went to the local library; like many other days, I immersed myself in reading books on art and world literature there. The next day, I told them that out of curiosity, I had participated in the art entrance exam as well. My mom reluctantly allowed me to go to the session, complaining about my interest in wasting time.

When the exam results came out, I knew it was time to cut off my gradual death once and for all. The night before the results were announced, when Mom and Dad returned from the clinic, I approached them after practicing many times and confessed that not only had I not participated in the sciences entrance exam, but I would never do so,

1. All three are written by Bahram Beyzai, a prominent Iranian writer, director, and playwright.

and medicine was the last thing I thought about in life. I spoke and did not run away, allowing them to do whatever they wanted in that moment. Because the winner was me. Mom's face turned pale with shock and anger; she didn't move from her spot and said, "What?" At that moment, I felt she might do something that we would both regret later; nevertheless, I stayed.

Dad, stunned by what he had heard, angrily said, "You've gone crazy, girl! You've lost your mind!"

I replied, "Anyone else in my place would have lost their mind in this house over the past 18 years!"

Mom lost her temper, stood up, raised her hand, and slapped me hard across the face; "Shut up! Since when have you become so rude and insolent? What do you want to do if you don't get into medicine?" I didn't flinch. Looking her in the eye, I said, "That's exactly why I took the art entrance exam—to not get into medicine. I want to study screenwriting. I neither took the medical entrance exam this year nor will I ever again. Enough of all the pressure you put on me!" I felt proud of myself. Perhaps this audacity and courage was due to the beatings that had numbed me!

Mom said, "You messed up! You could sit another year and study and die; you have to take the medical entrance exam and pass!"

"Then I'll just kill myself! I'm ready to die rather than read that garbage for another minute."

I didn't understand what happened next because she had taken action. I quickly made my way to my room and locked the door before she could reach me. Although I had experienced physical punishment throughout my life, I never remembered how the beginning of those painful scenes felt. Perhaps the fear, pleading, and fragility of the victim provoked the punisher to continue their reaction. That night too, I stood at a point similar to those moments; but this time, without feeling weak! Mom was infinitely furious. From behind the door, she

threatened that as soon as I left the room, she would show me what I deserved! In all those years, I had never seen her like that. My reaction had intensified her anger, and like a losing warrior, she threatened me in various ways. There was no longer any sign of Dad's apparent support or his calls for calm. What mattered was that I had made my decision and announced it, and I would give up anything in my life to achieve it.

After three weeks of Mom's silence, I surrendered again to counseling sessions with that same psychologist friend. It was funny; she never felt the need for those sessions because of her strange behavior and moods; perhaps because it brought her down from a position of power. But like many families, whenever she wanted to prove the validity of her baseless arguments to me, she confidently took me there; it never required my cooperation either. I had no choice but to comply. Mom didn't know that I was the one managing those sessions. If I gave in, her friend would find out about her shortcomings, and her social credibility would be ruined. She was so unaware that she didn't even consider that there might be a flaw in herself. In her mind, she had chosen the best parenting methods for me. I suspect that the psychologist friend was fully aware of Mom's parenting methods and perhaps had no problem with them. Back then, everyone agreed that a little physical punishment was a good seasoning for raising children. Just like many common methods today that may be recognized in future years for their deficiencies and destructive roles.

In that meeting about my field of study, I cooperated a bit and talked. In the end, it became clear that it was better to let me study what I loved. Mom was sure that just as I would thank her later for many of her strictness, I would someday regret having surrendered to changing my field and perhaps confront her for not forcing me into studying medicine. I laughed to myself. She didn't know me at all. How could I possibly regret it? I had chosen this path since childhood.

I knew very well what I wanted. Mom gave in and didn't speak to me for a long time. This time, Dad also expressed his dissatisfaction. They both said they felt all their years of effort for me had been in vain and that they seemed to have lost me. In their opinion, I should have made my aunt Bitu my role model and become like her. They said, "They are ashamed that their only child is going to amount to nothing."

I didn't care. For years, in a self-imposed isolation, I was no longer present at their gatherings nor alongside them and their friends. It seemed to me they had lost me years ago; back when they could have been my refuge but instead became the source of my fear and anxiety, leaving me abandoned in the world of childhood. At that time, if it hadn't been for my aunt, I don't know what would have become of me, and after her departure, I hadn't really been present for years, yet they still didn't see it. For years, I had remained silent and in solitude. It didn't occur to them that during those long years, I was being overlooked like a special and respected prisoner in a domestic confinement, having lost three things: the right to choose, the feeling of worthiness, and the ability to connect properly with kindred spirits! So what value did it have to be someone who was always absent, regardless of their profession?

Back then — just like all my peers in that era — I lived with my parents, but in such a way that I hardly ever looked them in the eye. Even less often did opportunities arise for us to gather around a meal. Mom's and Dad's dissatisfaction was also influential. From their perspective, I was finished, while from where I observed myself, I stood at the beginning of my life; a place I had dreamed of since childhood. I had found peace; like a mountain climber who, after days of trekking through ice, places their feet in warm water. Perhaps it was my first hope after years of despair. I wanted to know what my aunt, uncle, and Alborz would think of me if they were around. I always envisioned their presence beside me during important moments in life; they were an inseparable part of me.

The final results of the university entrance exam came out, and I was accepted into the Dramatic Literature program at the University of Art. That night, instead of congratulations, a small version of the Crusades unfolded in our home. I thought I had accomplished something exhausting, and after a lifetime of studying and wasting my time in another field, I had finally achieved that success. On the other hand, I felt like an artist who believed they had delivered a flawless professional performance and had tomatoes thrown at them. That day was one of the best days of my life. Although I faced my mother's anger and resentment, filled with sentences of blame, disappointment, and despair, I kept reminding myself, "You succeeded, and you reached what you knew and wanted!"

From that day on, my mother's barbs and sarcasm were relentless; she no longer asked me anything about my studies or university. Whenever she saw me engrossed in reading something, she would pass by with a smirk and worthless remarks: "She's gotten herself caught up, thinking she's studying! The incompetent, foolish girl." Occasionally, my father would come to me and start a conversation that seemed more about wanting to know when I would regret my choices and retake the entrance exam.

It didn't matter; I was used to being alone in my home and family. Life had no other definition for me. So I was very happy. The university environment was exactly where I wanted to be and where I belonged. I found good friends, and after a long time, I felt there were people with whom I could talk and who understood me. I spent many hours at the university. During those years, I gradually entered the official realm of writing. Sometimes I wrote short stories or critiques on literature and cinema and submitted them to professors. One of my critiques was published in a film magazine, and before that, my short stories had been printed multiple times in serials.

I wrote my first play after several experiences in magazines and a few experimental theaters for an official performance, and at 22, I

penned my first screenplay for a television film. Unlike my personal life, I was fortunate at university and had good relationships with my professors. It was during those days that I began writing my novel. Throughout that period, my parents were unaware of my activities; they didn't care at all. I don't think they even flipped through the magazines scattered around the house where my published writings appeared. It seemed they had an unspoken agreement not to see me; at least until my path diverged from theirs.

My relationship with them worsened from what it was. As long as they thought they were watching over me, I was disheveled and alone; now, in their minds, I needed a little neglect. I, who was somewhat content in my new world, found that my way of communicating with them did not significantly change my situation. Instead, more than half of my days were spent in places where I wanted to be. I neither sought their encouragement nor felt nostalgic for their punishment.

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I took a deep breath and looked at Aban. "I'm really glad I chose this path in life. I don't know what would have happened to me if I had lowered my head like a tamed child and studied medicine like they wanted me to. Maybe I would have become a useless doctor sitting at the other end of the world, prescribing a standard, risk-free treatment for all my patients, referring them to my colleagues for serious diagnoses, and when I had no patients, sitting behind my desk, doodling flowers and birds with my pen on my letterhead."

She laughed. "I actually know a doctor just like that. But I doubt that the only difference between your past and theirs is that you rebelled and they didn't! I'm starting to like you! Good for you! What courage you had, girl!"

"Can I say something irrelevant? Ever since these memories have been coming back, I'm starting to realize what I heard during those mindfulness sessions. It's like new paths are opening up before my eyes. It's incredible, but it seems it took me 12 years to understand

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what they taught me there. Despite the new challenges in life, for the first time, I feel full of solutions."

"Maybe it's because you're going to become a mother and it's necessary for your capabilities to increase."

Why did she say that? It was unexpected from her. I exhaled and ignored it. Maybe if I had heard that just a few days ago, I would have foolishly felt happy, but at that moment, I felt nauseous. "Don't you want to know what happened next?"

"Actually, I wanted to ask about Alborz. Did someone finally give you an update on him?"

A smile spread across my face. I liked something about recalling those questions; my dreamy days after years of emptiness and lack of events when life, though briefly, showed me its brighter side.

To be continued...



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

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

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

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