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
CHAPTER TWO: FRAGMENTATION

Coppice Blue

Faavidel

Literature - Persian Fiction – Novel

Coppice Blue

By FAAVIDEL

Fall 2024
Editions: 999

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Chapter two
Fragmentation

4.

Turn on the vacuum cleaner so they won't hear the sound

I was 23 years old, in my third year of university. At that time, we could connect to the internet through a dial-up system. I don't exactly remember what we used the internet for, but the most important part for me was Yahoo Messenger chats, which made communication with friends easier and... my blog. I wrote on it under a pseudonym and had readers. Until that time, there was nothing resembling a boyfriend in a serious relationship in my life. Although my same-gender friends said I was lucky and effortlessly attracted suitable options, I only formed a closer and more intimate connection twice. Once in my second year of university and again, some time after I became closer to two people from the blogging community. Both were educated and attractive guys; the kind that would make me throw my hat in the air. But in both cases, without realizing it, I was acting strangely. I seemed like a proud being who deemed no one worthy of myself. It was the fear of being unworthy and of being freed that kept me distant, and the relationship always remained at a superficial level. That's why both ended before things went beyond café conversations and late-night chats at my request and returned to their previous state. Not having sexual relations at that age was not strange in Iran; if it were the opposite, I would

have had to answer for it. Back then, traditional and religious constraints in society—more than today—prevented young people, especially girls, from recognizing their natural needs; to the extent that they didn't even understand their own needs. I was the same way. I didn't make an effort to refrain, but the feelings that should have emerged in me did not appear. In the midst of this, something within me created a deep repulsion; so much so that at the height of my hidden fragility, I seemed like that hard and unattainable being.

One day, a friend introduced me to the [1]Orkut social network on the internet. For a world where Facebook and Instagram had not yet appeared, it had a very fresh and interesting visual space. I filled out my first profile there; it was a strange list and felt new to me. I wrote about my interests, hobbies, and expertise. For the first time there, I answered questions that no one had asked me until then. I also uploaded pictures of myself. I didn't really know why I did that, but I had become interested in that space. When I joined the site, I realized I had entered a world that many had been involved with for months. Orkut was an up-to-date and fresh network of communication that was very creative and entertaining. It wasn't long before I heard from a friend that she had found her high school friend there; suddenly a spark ignited within me.

I had tried many times to find Alborz through the ways I knew, but I had not succeeded. A few months after moving, I went to the old house and inquired about any possible letters from its new residents.; there was nothing waiting for

2. Orkut (2004-2014) was one of the first social networks, launched by Orkut Buyukkokten, a Turkish engineer at Google.

me there. I thought perhaps the letters had reached my father, and he did not want to pass them on to me so that I could forget the bitter days more easily; unaware that a large void in my soul would remain empty forever. I often asked him about my uncle, and in response, he said that after those hard days and misunderstandings, my uncle no longer wanted to reconnect, and their relationship had more or less been cut off. My uncle was right. After the disaster that had occurred, how could he forgive my father? I tried to find the address of Alborz's uncle among my father's letters and documents, but I was unsuccessful. Later, I learned that after aunt Ella left, my uncle had largely severed ties with relatives living in Iran. Therefore, all my efforts to recover my old friend were in vain; but suddenly, I sat in front of the screen with trembling hands and thought about the possibility of finding Alborz on Orkut. I carefully typed Alborz and Arasteh into the name search section in English and pressed the Enter key. I hoped he hadn't created his profile under a pseudonym like many members did. Among similar names and unrelated images, a black-and-white photo of a young man with sharp, handsome features, tousled straight hair, light skin, and bright almond-shaped eyes appeared before me; in a small square frame, he was looking at a 45-degree angle with a faint smile.

I could hear the sound of my heartbeat in my head. To keep my eyes from burning, I had to blink occasionally, but other than staring at the image, I couldn't do anything else. I checked his profile; he was a master's student in architecture at University College London (UCL) and was interested in books, photography, and playing the piano. It was him! Oh my God! I was looking at his photos; as always, they were artistically taken images of landscapes and ordinary subjects with a unique perspective, along with some fresh pictures of himself in the

college and work environment. At 26, he had become so handsome! There was also a picture of him playing the piano, and a few other old scanned images. His family! My aunt and uncle and two children, three and six years old, in their arms. Another image of all three together; auntie, unlike her usual self, had short hair and a slender figure, embraced by Alborz and uncle on either side. Aunt during the days of illness and chemotherapy in a house that I never set foot in; the days after they left our home. That picture was one of their last three-person photos together. My eyes filled with tears. Suddenly, I came to my senses. It was Thursday, and both Mom and Dad were home. I got up to close my room door; I didn't want Mom to come in and spoil my mood. Mrs. Parvin entered my room with a vacuum cleaner; I let out a silent scream and covered my mouth with my hand. She was startled by my sudden reaction and took a step back; "Oh dear! You scared me! Did you see a cockroach?".

I wanted to talk to someone and tell them that I had found him. I had somewhat familiarized Mrs. Parvin with the world of the internet. Her children still didn't have a computer at home, but her knowledge was increasing day by day, and she had recently wanted to get one for them. Dad wanted to give them a computer as a New Year's gift. Sometimes I would tell her about new features, searching, chatting, and how people communicate online. She would say, "You show me something new on this television every day!"

I pulled her into the room. I plugged in the vacuum cleaner and turned it on. It made a loud noise; "What are you doing, dear? I'll turn it on myself!".

I placed my index finger on my lips and invited her to silence. Excitedly, I whispered in her ear; "I found him, Mrs. Parvin!".

She frowned. She mouthed silently; "Who?".

I took her hand and led her towards the screen and showed her the pictures. My eyes sparkled with joy! Mrs. Parvin was stunned with a furrow between her brows. She had always been upset about our separation. Now her eyes were wide open, filled with tears, staring at the photos, and she had placed both hands over her mouth; "It's him! Oh My GOD! It's him!".

I laughed; "Yes, it's him."

With the back of her index finger, she tapped my desk a few times; "Mashallah! How tall he is! How handsome he has become! God bless him, how much he resembles Mrs. Elaheh! He hasn't changed much! All his beauty must have come from his mother. I think his height has come from Mr, Farhad. Right? He has become just as handsome as him!". I nodded in agreement. She continued; "So what did he say?".

" Still nothing! I just want to message him".

"Hurry up, girl! Why are you stalling? See how his life is! Ask about him! Oh God, thank you!"

She turned and took the vacuum cleaner to the other side of the room and got back to her work;

"Mrs. Parvin! You're not going to tell Mom and Dad, right?!".

She frowned and snapped; "Am I crazy, girl? Focus on your work!".

With excitement and a bit of anxiety, I sent him a message; "Hello". No matter how hard I tried, I had nothing to say; at least until he showed up. I went to my blog and replied to some comments. I had become well-known with the short stories I wrote there and had readers. With each new piece I wrote, comments would pour in; many of them were word games from readers and friends that appeared under my writings, creating a

small social network; and those days, it was one of my biggest entertainments. Until nightfall, I checked Orkut multiple times to see if Alborz had seen the message. I hoped he would see it soon. It was past midnight, and I wanted to pick up my book and occupy myself with it until I fell asleep. Before that, I checked Orkut once more to see if there was any news, so I could turn off the computer and... there was a message waiting for me; "I can't believe it! Is it really you?".

Just those three words; no greeting. He had seen my profile ten minutes ago and sent me that message. I wrote down my Yahoo email address for him; "Come to Yahoo Messenger! I'm waiting".

What a time we had with Yahoo Messenger back then! The messenger was on. I sat for a moment with my hand under my chin; my body was cold and numb from excitement. How should our conversation begin after all these years? Once again, I warmed myself by looking at his pictures; at some of his paintings. Both familiar and unfamiliar. It felt like I had quickly become close with a stranger. Suddenly, a new window popped up in front of me; "Hi kiddo!".

My heart sank, and my hands trembled. How was I supposed to talk to this very familiar stranger after eight years? I couldn't falter; "Look who's here!". We both laughed with two colons and two parentheses. I wrote; "Finally found you!".

"Damn! Where have you been? Do you know how much I've searched for you?"

Talking was so difficult. I wrote; "No!" What kind of response was that?

"My last shot was Orkut. I made this silly profile hoping to find you. But when I saw you weren't there..." He

continued; " I thought you had renounced the world!" and added a wink.

I wrote two colons and two parentheses "Of course I am".

"Doesn't suit your appearance!"

I sent an embarrassed emoji. He continued, "I've looked at all your photos 200 times in these few minutes. Do you know how much more beautiful you've become?"

I didn't know. Was I beautiful enough to become more beautiful? This time I was truly embarrassed. I tried to say something appropriate; "Really? You too!"

"Does that mean I've become prettier? Thank you!"

He said and sent me a smiling emoji. Oh no, it got worse! Why had I become like this? I felt silly and foolish; it was still obvious that he was three years older than me. I lost my train of thought! He seemed as relaxed as before, while I was stuttering. He was writing. I didn't say anything so I wouldn't make things worse. He sent another message; "Forget it! I'm worse off than you. You have no idea how excited I am about finding you!"

I breathed a sigh of relief. He was still joking to ease the awkwardness like before. "I missed you, crazy!"

"Ah! You have no idea about my heart!" After a pause, he continued, "Honestly, how much did you listen to 'Yavare hamishe momen?"[1]

"Oh! That album of your father's misery! I made myself miserable with it! Just like you!"

"No way!? Ever since I came to London, it's just been fun!"

His response was clear; otherwise, why would he mention that album at the beginning of our conversation? We paused for a moment, and he continued, "Tell me everything! About all

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2. A famous persian song by Dariush

these damn years I haven't seen you! Tell me about all these eight years!"

"Then forget about sleep tonight!"

"It's just the beginning of the night here. Not to mention that you've taken away my sleep so much that even if I want to, I can't sleep."

I felt the same way; full of excitement and... adrenaline. I was happy to have found him; to talk and listen to him.

"By the way, I see you're still painting!"

He was referring to the images of some of my paintings that I had posted in my Orkut photo gallery. I remembered his paintings in his album. I was glad about the change in our conversation. Talking about these things was easier for me. I said, "Yeah, just like you. So tell me, what's the story behind those blue doors and windows in your paintings? Wasn't the tree and the blue nature enough? Did the door and window also need to be added? "

I was waiting, just like before, for him to remind me of his favorite color, which was green, that he used in his paintings. He sent a few smiling emojis. "I want to confess something to you! You were right all these years!"

I got worried. I asked, "About what? What do you mean?"

"Here, no one calls that color green! They call it 'Coppice blue!' Have you heard of it?"

"No! How interesting! How come?"

"The story is really fascinating. There's a village called Snushil around Broadway, which is a pristine and beautiful place. The villagers have been using this color for their fences and doors and windows for over 100 years. You should see it there, Afra! It's amazing. The first time I

encountered that scene, I was just thinking about you and our arguments over green and blue!"

"It's kind of like our north in Iran. Remember? That light turquoise blue they use for most of the doors and windows?"

"Yeah, exactly! Just like that. It's as if it's some sort of unwritten tradition for them!"

I said thoughtfully, "But why Coppice?"

Alborz responded, "Well, you know. Coppice means fence. My assumption is that because they've used this color for their fences over time, whenever they wanted to refer to it, out of habit, they would say 'the Coppice blue!' Which blue? The one used in the fence! The important thing is that it's Coppice BLUE and not green!"

And he sent another smiling emoji. Meanwhile, I was thinking about the meanings of the word 'Coppise' in English. I said, "Coppice has other meanings besides fence. Forest, grove! Don't you think the reason is that others across the world saw the greens of the forest and grove in the sunlight's shadows as blue?"

He laughed, and this time he answered thoughtfully: "It's certainly possible! Such quirks can be found all over the world!"

I said, "Hmm! I prefer to call it grove blue instead of fence blue!"

For a moment, he didn't respond. After about a minute, he wrote: "How beautiful! I had never looked at it from this angle, Afra! So you still know how to give words a meaning more beautiful than they are!"

Fortunately, he couldn't see me blush. Once again, one of my virtues had been mentioned, and I felt embarrassed. "Look at us, talking about this after all these years in our first conversation!" I said.

That night, instead of reminiscing about childhood and its bitter days, we talked about our years of unawareness. Then I

asked about my uncle and his career change due to working with Alborz's uncle's company. I had nothing to say about my parents except that both had worked hard and had become renowned specialists, with their clinic sometimes full of patients until 10 PM. He talked about his last year at UCLA and the official start of his job, while I recounted events from after high school up to that day. I was happy that he was on a path he loved and that eventually a rebellion occurred that should have happened in our home. I was glad he had reached what he wanted there and had a good life. Alborz, during our conversation, makes every effort to avoid using English vocabulary as much as possibl; except for times when we spoke English like before, or when a word was forgotten in Persian, he would use its English equivalent as a substitute.

That night I realized that after his trip, he had sent me three letters; he had also called several times, but they said we had left there and they didn't have news of our new place. His father, like my parents, had not helped him either. After all those incidents, uncle did not agree with his son's mind being stuck in past relationships and perhaps thought it was better for him to grow in a new world. For this reason, Alborz had gone through a difficult period accompanied by a wave of depression, and after a while, he had found himself again in university, sports, music, and university performances.

We continued talking until just before Mom and Dad woke up, and then we reluctantly said goodbye. He pointed out my mom's harsh and defeated behavior and said, "Has the Gestapo officer still not handed over her weapon?"

I replied, "She puts it under her pillow at night! Her bullets are running out."

"I really don't want one of us to splatter our brains on the wall in the last days of the war!"

I wrote, "I'm available after nine at night. Come whenever you can! Don't leave me unaware of you!"

"Great! I'll be home in the evenings too. Message me when you come. I might be invisible."

How excited I was that we had found each other again and could sit together in the dark without interruption. Contrary to my mom's misconceptions, during my teenage years, I wanted nothing more than companionship and shared space with Alborz and his family. I wanted someone who would give me a sense of being; I wasn't begging for love and attention. With him and his family — as an ordinary human in the flow of everyday life — I was being played with and experiencing life in its true sense. I saw myself with them. From then on, we talked many nights and days, gradually traveling back to memories; we spoke of bitter and sweet days and the wounds I had covered them with. He said that the bitter memories of his childhood and adolescence — until before his mom left — were related to my mom's behavior towards me; he was right. Alborz's family treated him with utmost respect and companionship. At home, he shone like a precious stone and received attention; quite unlike me. Now I knew that I had become the sad story of his life in adolescence, and my struggles at home were not without impact on what had happened up to that day.

Slowly, our boldness grew, and eventually... we reached the departure of my aunt; His mother, to that great relief. For the first time since her departure, we spoke of her together and shed tears. After all those years, we had gained control over ourselves and could recall her more easily. The only issue we didn't touch upon was the reason for the families' separation. Every time we

reached that point, the course of the conversation would change with a joke from either of us. My reclusiveness in the gazebo was one of his favorite topics. Whenever I broke down in tears, he would remind me of the gazebo and its wooden floor, which had swollen from the constant moisture of my tears. The more we spent time together, the deeper our conversations became. I knew that all those years apart had turned us into different people. But what formed the foundation of our personalities, which had connected us in childhood, remained unchanged. We were still the same pages separated from a book; our worldview, aesthetics, and our world were still the same. From the experience of human relationships and observing artworks to listening to music during our time apart, we would discuss for hours without fatigue about the books we had read separately and critiqued.

One night, he asked for my phone number, as the next day was Sunday; at six-thirty in the morning our time, he called me on my cell phone, based on the statistics he had from the past and precisely at the moment my parents had left the house. I was so flustered and stuttered so much that not only did Persian feel foreign to me, but speaking itself had become the most difficult task. His voice carried both the notes of childhood and adolescence as well as maturity and manliness; his calm tone and slowness of speech had not changed; he had a way of speaking that made his Persian sound different and more appealing. Those who immigrate at a young age and enter academic environments while having less interaction with the Iranian community often find themselves caught up in this dual accent. He had stayed awake after midnight to talk to me early in the morning. We were both excited! He teased me quite a bit. He said he had been anxious before calling, fearing that my voice might have become like my mother's; ringing, harsh, dry, and soulless. And as soon

as I said hello, he expressed his gratitude to the universe. After that, our phone conversations became a regular occurrence. He never let me call him; he said it was easier and cheaper for him. My Sunday mornings were free until noon, and Alborz was also off work and would often call before noon. One day, I called Mrs. Parvin and handed her the phone without saying anything. I knew how eager she was to hear Alborz's voice. She put the phone to her ear and hesitantly said, "Hello?" Alborz's voice came through; "Hello, Mrs. Parvin!" Without a doubt, she recognized that tone and voice. Mrs. Parvin clapped her hand to her chest; "Oh my God, Look at you my little boy! let me adore you for your greeting!"

"I adore you for being so lovely!"

Tears streamed down Mrs. Parvin's face as Alborz showered her with his sweet words and affection. His kindness was just like my aunt's; pure and flowing with a hint of uncle's spice. A few days later, Alborz surprised me with my uncle's voice. As soon as I heard it, tears flowed down my cheeks; my kind-hearted uncle, my passionate and emotional uncle! He still felt like a loving father to me, and experiencing those days was incredibly sweet.

One day while chatting with Alborz, I was engaged in a phone conversation with one of my college friends; one of those late-night study discussions to review important content from our notes. It took a bit longer than expected. When I returned to my conversation with Alborz, he abruptly asked, "Was that your boyfriend?"

I replied with a laughing emoji; "No way! Where would I find a boyfriend?!"

"Come on, kid! Is that even possible? You! Not having a boyfriend?"

"For now, it is. What about you?"

"I'm like a cactus."

A cactus? Beautiful and thorny? Untouchable? That was my definition; I didn't know about him. He didn't say anything more; I didn't ask either. He changed the subject, and honestly, I was glad. I don't know why talking about that kind of relationship was difficult for me; we both somewhat avoided discussing it. I never thought that in the world he lived in, his relationships would only lead to simple friendships, and considering his personality, I couldn't picture him that way. Without a doubt, there was a sweet girl like him who accompanied him and filled his solitude. He was three years older than me and lived alone in his own home. In a world much freer than mine, with his attractive appearance and warm demeanor, he couldn't be alone like me. But as we progressed, I became sure—unlike his father at the same age—his surroundings weren't very crowded, and he wasn't partying. His close friend Noah, whom he had met since the early days of college, was a constant presence in his two-person hangouts and other activities. During the week, after their work, they would go swimming and play tennis, while most weekends were spent studying, designing, playing music, or chatting with me. He wasn't much into bars or parties; once or twice a month he would attend a gathering with friends, but that too was more about conversation, watching movies, and performing music, occasionally ending up at a pub. Recently, when he sometimes ditched his time with friends to chat with me, it became a topic among them; apparently, Alborz was the only one among them without a girlfriend. At first, I suspected he might have come out of a relationship, but I didn't ask him. Conversely, he didn't inquire much about my situation either. He knew that due to the networks I had built for myself and my reputation

in college, my social spaces were always bustling around me. Sometimes he teased me that someone as beautiful, smart, and capable as me might have caused a bloody massacre behind her until that day. But gradually he became sure that for reasons he also knew, I still hadn't had a close and intimate relationship with anyone. I was a master of "long-distance friendship" relationships.

A few months passed like this. Eight months after our first conversation, a new feeling began to awaken in me; something I had never experienced before. All day long, I was caught up in our conversations and imagining him in my daily life. No one in my relationships and surroundings mattered to me as much as he did. Sometimes my heart fluttered for him, and at times I overflowed with joy at his presence! At night, sometimes shameful thoughts would come to me. I couldn't believe it! With Alborz? When I saw that he would ask about me as soon as he got home, recounting his day with enthusiasm or sharing his concerns or sometimes calling just to play music for me, sugar melted in my heart. It was a strange experience! I didn't know what it was that drew me towards him and filled me with hope for life. Until that day, this feeling had not awakened in me with anyone else. One night in the middle of our conversation, suddenly his mood changed as if he were upset about something; he said goodbye and left. The week before that, his behavior had been strange. At times it seemed like he was upset with me and darted away like a quick animal, and at other times he was just the person I always knew. I couldn't sleep until morning. My mind was restless. I occupied myself with something for my blog. A few minutes after posting a short story on it, out of habit, I sat with Yahoo Messenger open and my status set to invisible.

I don't know how many times I thought about our conversation from the previous night when he suddenly showed up again.

"Are you there?"

I glanced at the clock. It was seven in the morning for us and midnight for him! During that time, even though our days had a few hours of difference, sometimes when I was online at unusual hours, he would suddenly show up. I wrote, "Can you tell me how you know I'm online?"

He referred to our teenage years and said, "Your footprints, my dear! The smell of the fruit juice in the fridge, filled Yahoo, and [1]Blogspot."

I remembered that the text I had posted on my blog a few minutes earlier had shown my exact stats. But what was he doing on my blog at midnight? His hand was revealed. I asked, "Aren't you sleeping?"

"Not lately!"

"Is something wrong?"

He paused for a long time; "I think so."

"Do you want to call and talk about it?"

"No. That would make it harder."

"Should I be worried about you?"

"With the intelligence I know you have, you should have been by now!"

Yes, I had been worried, but for myself. My heart stirred again, and a feeling awakened that had been trembling my heart these days. Something inside me was restless like a child banging against the walls. My hands had gone cold; it felt like anxiety but stronger. I didn't want to show it. I didn't

2. Blog Spot is one of the most popular and powerful blogging platforms on the internet, which started operating in 1999.

want to give in and reveal myself. I asked, “What’s the problem?”

His silence felt like a century; “It’s obvious! It’s you!”

“Me?”

“Do you mean you didn’t understand? Since when do I have to decode my feelings for you?” I didn’t say anything; fear gripped me! Had he become aware of my feelings? Was that why he was running away from me? I had nothing to say. I had forgotten Persian again. He continued, “All these years, I didn’t want any close relationship, but I didn’t know why. I started many relationships, but they all remained superficial.” He didn’t want any close relationship? Until that moment, he hadn’t confessed this about his relationships to me. His next message came; “My therapist said that my mom's death and the events of those years were a kind of shock that seemed to have caused my coldness and indifference. I tried hard, but nothing made me so happy that I wanted to continue, nor was anything sad enough that…” He paused and continued again; “Until that night when you messaged me. Like ice melting off my skin, my mood gradually changed. Every time after our conversation, I wanted… to socialize with the whole world. I don’t know why I found excitement for that boring life. I came alive like a child.” He kept typing; “Maybe… maybe I remind you of your painful past, but you…”

I intended to say nothing, but without thinking, I quickly wrote, “You don’t!” His words were heavy for me. He and his family were the only bright points in my dark past. They were the light shining through the thick curtains of life into my home. He typed quickly. I decided to remain silent while he was writing. He paused for a moment, and after a few seconds, his messages started pouring in one after another; “Afra! You are

the best days of my life! A kind of enthusiasm and hope for life! A window to the light…" Me? Light?

"But I want you to know, what I've been experiencing in this past month or two has very little to do with the past. It's a fresh feeling about a new person... not someone I've known since childhood!"

"It's hard to explain. Until just a few days ago, I couldn't believe it myself. On the other hand, this relationship is very valuable to me, and I don't want to lose it again with what I'm about to say. So please, if it upsets you, just ignore everything! Okay?"

"I'm not as good as you at crafting beautiful sentences and using words well, but..."

"But I think..."

"That I'm..."

He didn't continue. He typed a few times but didn't send a message. It seemed like he was writing and erasing. My heart was certain it was about to stop. Another century passed in silence, and he was still writing, and finally, his message came; "I'm experiencing love for the first time with you." My heart... it no longer beat in my chest; it was pounding itself against the ground and ceiling. I felt a severe wave of nausea. I read his last sentence over and over again. Wasn't this the feeling I had recently been experiencing towards him? When had he realized this feeling? Did he know that I...?

A message came; "Are you there?"

I wrote; "Yes."

"Did I mess up? Should I not have said that?"

I didn't respond. I was speechless.

"You asked why I'm awake; this is your answer! Forget it! I made a mistake."

I remained silent.

"Do you want me to go?"

I quickly wrote; "No!"

"Then please say something."

A while passed in silence, and finally, I started typing. I didn't know what I was going to say. I just typed whatever came to my mind:

"I remember..."

"Once when we were very little..."

"I don't quite remember what our moms were talking about. But the topic was us and my mom's usual worries."

This time it was his turn to be silent. I kept writing;

"Aunt Ella said that kids who grow up together and are not restricted from normal interactions never go wrong in their relationships. My mom said she didn't want their world to be limited to each other at all. Of course, as they grow older, their distance increases, and their choices become different. Your mom said as long as they don't take after their fathers. Something like that."

"I don't know what they were basing that on."

"But..."

"Maybe if we hadn't separated, this wouldn't have happened. It seems that the years of distance and separation took their toll. We met again as two new people, and fresh feelings arose between us."

"That's true! The distance increased, and that connection was cut off."

"But for me..."

"For me, it has started from a different place than it was for a while now. Something new from another land with stronger and deeper feelings. Something that makes my body shiver!"

"Honestly, until just now when you mentioned it, I didn't even know what to call it!"

I said this and ended my last message with a red heart. I hoped he understood what I meant. I couldn't confess more clearly than that. He didn't send a message; this time it was my turn to check on him. I had reminded him of his mother. Maybe it wasn't right at that moment. He talked about feeling good, and I made him sad. I asked, "Are you there?"

His message came; "Poor your mom!"

"How so?"

"We really disappointed her badly!"

I laughed. This meant my guess was right, and he was trying to lighten the mood for himself; "Didn't I tell you?" He said.

I wrote; "Tell me what?"

"That you speak better than I do!"

"No, actually. Those who know how to talk say it briefly!"

He wrote immediately; "Was it Dostoevsky?"

"Well done! But you're braver and more straightforward than me."

"Wait, let me see! Did I understand correctly? You mean you just admitted that you've fallen in love with me for a while now?"

With an embarrassed emoji, I wrote; "Yeah, I think so!"

"You silly girl! If I hadn't started this discussion, how long were you going to avoid bringing it up? Damn it, at least you could have given me a hint so that saying it wouldn't be so hard for me. Look at me! I thought you'd erase me from the pages of existence any moment! I've had no sleep or food for two weeks because of you!"

I considered myself incapable and unaware of love and affection until that day. Love was something strange and new for me. Even though my aunt and uncle had a significant impact on me, I had never seen anything like that in my parents' relationship. I cried involuntarily. Fortunately, Alborz couldn't see me. I wrote to him; "I don't know. I thought now your world is very different from mine, and my feelings might be one-sided, and bringing them up might either make me look ridiculous or take this relationship away from me!"

He replied; "Sweetheart! Oh, babe! That's why I'm saying you're silly. It's natural! I thought the same way!" I felt shy. It was the first time he used a loving and personal term for me; it seemed he had deliberately kept away from it until then. I also had no idea about his romantic affection. But it seemed I needed to get used to this tone of his. He continued; "I wish I were with you right now and after this confession, showered you with kisses!"

I never thought my ears and cells would hear romantic words, which maybe everyone experiences at some point in life, for the first time from Alborz. I wrote; "I wish!" He fell silent for a moment and then started writing again. A few seconds later, a message came;

"Remember the moments we spent together in a white room; the curtains were fluttering.

Return again in your imagination to the concert where the sound of music breathed.

In the autumn park, you collected pine cones, and the leaves covered the wounds of the earth.

Praise this imperfect world!"

In the midst of my tears, I was filled with joy; a piece of poetry by Adam Zagajewski,[1] the Polish poet and writer, whose book we had gifted to my aunt for her birthday in the seventies. I wrote, "I can't believe it! Do you still remember this?"

"You can't even imagine! I brought it with me here!"

"Don't think I didn't notice you edited the poem!"

With a laughing emoji, he said, "Can't I sometimes be a little silly and absent-minded without you catching me?"

"But it was appropriate."

"That's Appropriation![2] What do I lack compared to Dushan? Our park didn't have oaks; we had plenty of pines, though."

He continued, "Get up, My love! Wipe your tears and go take care of your life! I'm going to sleep for a couple of hours after a few days. I feel lighter!"

My tears! My hand was out for him. Was I the one catching him now? We said goodbye. I took a deep breath and got up from the chair. It had been years since I felt that lightness; I was light and full of commotion. I had never experienced such a feeling in my life.

Thus began my romantic life, at the computer. We knew each other, but due to years of separation, we were unaware

1. Adam Zagajewski is a linguist, writer, translator, university professor, and one of the most renowned contemporary poets in Poland, considered a leading figure of the New Wave poetry movement in the country.

2. Appropriation is a movement in art where the artist makes a work their own by making slight changes to a well-known original artwork and aligning it with their personal taste. Appropriation has also been associated with a movement based on copying and forging famous works. The first instance of this was in 1919 when the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp displayed Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the Mona Lisa with a mustache added, presenting it as his own new artwork .

of the changes in temperament that had developed in us after maturation, and gradually a new familiarity formed between us. It was a strange feeling to know someone you had previously known! He was very kind, calm, and patient like my aunt, and full of enthusiasm and humor like my uncle. His affectionate tone and choice of words always reminded me of my uncle's behavior with my aunt; it was the result of my aunt's and uncle's spirit. The magic of his words was enough to take me into dreams with him. Sometimes, seeing Alborz made me loathe myself. I would think if he was so influenced by his parents, perhaps I resembled my dad and mom to that extent; which I didn't want to be. Undoubtedly, they also possessed many good qualities that I couldn't see due to the emotional failures that were directed at me by them. Those same qualities that made them beloved and dear to my uncle, aunt, and many others around them. Those characteristics of noble and responsible people that many of them unconsciously grew within me as well, but what I saw with the eyes of those days was something else. They had neither peace nor love nor empathy and affection for me. They were like modern technologies full of applications and capabilities but empty. I always felt that if I cut off the professional data wires in their brains, they would be nothing more than two lifeless, soulless bodies. But Alborz believed that our lives together were not without impact on each other; he wasn't wrong. I'm sure I haven't been unfair to my mom if I say that I learned love and affection from the warmth of my aunt's embrace. All my emotions reached their home. Their home was a classroom for me; a classroom of love.

Slowly, we began to feel a greater closeness to each other. Our conversations took on a sensitive and hidden direction. He was still a bit more at ease, while I, due to the closed world I had

grown up in, felt awkward and sometimes incapable of expressing myself. But as we progressed, it seemed that I was becoming more visible and rediscovering the self-confidence I had lost in my childhood. Everything was easier with him. It was during those days that I saw myself through his eyes and perhaps became a bit aware of my intelligence, abilities, and outward charm. It felt as if I only believed it when he said it. My family's behaviors had led me to underestimate myself so that I would never feel adequate in any area. Although at school and university, I was always admired until that day, without knowing that I was becoming their model and with my abilities, I was helping many disciples, yet I did not believe in myself. When others spoke of my virtues, I would dismiss it or flee. Because at home, I was always considered a "foolish, stupid, and ungrateful" being who squandered her family's efforts. When they spoke of my beauty, I would lose my composure; because I never saw any unique outward superiority in myself. With my straight black crow-like hair, fair skin, small bony nose, prominent cheekbones, large brown eyes with scattered hints of green—which seemed large for my face—and long eyelashes matching my hair, along with my average height, I thought I was nothing special. But according to Alborz, I was a combination of my mom's and dad's beauty! Many things from my past had transformed my view of myself. Later, when I asked my mom about the reason for this, she said that first, I should have known that I was beautiful, and second, if she reminded me of it, my focus would be distracted from what I should have been concentrating on at that age. My God! It would have been better if she had just said one sentence: "I didn't know how to compliment someone," and that would have been enough.

5.

The Sweetness of an Impossible Meeting

A sweet smile filled Aban's face, and she constantly reacted to my sentences in different ways; "My dear! We finally reached the happy place of the story. It's time for love; I was waiting for it. I don't know why, more than being sure that this happened between you two, I wanted it to have happened."

I nodded in agreement with a smile and thoughts of those days; "It was the sweetest days of my life."

"I understand what you're saying! As you said, that several-year gap in the height of your youth didn't have an impact on your feelings for each other."

"Uh-huh! You wouldn't believe how much more creative I was during that time. I think the works I did back then—with all that youthful excitement—are among my best."

" So that was the mood of your first novel!"

"Exactly. Something I had never experienced before. "

"I never thought that behind that drama and sci-fi story, there would be a long-distance romance; especially with a childhood friend!"

"That year was one of the best years of my life; the moment of the new year, our birthdays, that summer! Oh wow, that

summer! All its occasions were full of excitement; full of moments for two. We had become two new people."

"No wonder! I told you earlier; the first time I saw you, you were everything to me; amazing and unattainable! Most importantly, the spark of intelligence and independence was in your eyes! Now I finally understand where it came from.

"How strange! The days when I saw you were one of the worst periods of my life. You were just like that for me; full of calm and capability. I thought it had been a long time since someone like you had been missing in my life. That's why I wore my attractive mask to impress you."

She laughed; "Forget it! Tell me about that summer, which had a wow factor!"

I didn't understand her meaning and looked at her with a frown and a question. She said, "You just said it yourself!"

"Oh!" My smile widened. Caught in the struggle between shyness to say and not say, I nodded my head up and down. Excitedly she asked, "Did he come to Iran?" And without delay, as if she had read my mind, she raised her index finger as a warning; "Don't censor it! Afra! You're telling me everything! This part can't be without details. Just so you know!"

Now that my life and relationship with Sam had become suspended, I could more easily recall those moments in detail. It seemed that until then, I hadn't allowed myself to revisit them. I swallowed my lump in my throat and continued.

One or two weeks later, Mom announced that they wanted to go to France for a week at the beginning of summer, and if I wanted to join them, I needed to apply for a Schengen visa for that date. At that time, we already had a house in Nice, and every year, we would go there for a few

days during the summer and sometimes during the holidays. Mom and Dad had multi-entry Schengen visas due to their jobs and numerous travels, but I only got one when necessary. Sometimes, I didn't accompany them. My joys were no longer with them unless it was when I accompanied them to see childhood friends. Their trips were always meticulously planned and predetermined because both of them needed to adjust their office and hospital schedules for travel. Anyway, they were going, and it was up to me to decide. When I told Alborz the news, he said, "Ah, our trips! I wish Dad and I could come from this side and be together there again!"

"How strange that being together has become an unattainable dream! It's not impossible, but if the adults find out, they will definitely create obstacles." I was lost in thought when his message came after a moment of silence: "Afra!"

"Yes?"

"What if they don't find out?"

For a moment, I was stunned; "What do you mean?"

"Oh sweetheart, I love how you pretend to be clueless whenever you don't want to believe something.!"

"Don't mess with me! Just tell me!"

"If you come with them and I know the exact dates of your trip, I can somehow make it to you! No one will find out. Just you and me!"

My body shivered. I couldn't believe it was possible; "Wow! So it can happen? If I know I'm going to see you, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment to come."

"Of course it can happen, my dear! I'm dying to see you, and now that you're getting so close to me, how could I let this opportunity slip away?"

Our travel dates were confirmed, and I kept giving Alborz updates moment by moment, and he planned it so that he would be with me for exactly that week. I couldn't believe I was going to see him! He was the only real image in my world that I was eagerly waiting to see. Meanwhile—just a week before our trip—one of Mom's colleagues got involved with her father's stroke, and since another doctor in the department was on leave, Mom reluctantly agreed to cover his shifts. That's why we returned the tickets and postponed the trip by a week. It wasn't good news; Alborz had also booked his ticket and hotel at the same time, and now he had to cancel everything too. He wrote: "That's bad! Forget about the ticket and hotel! The problem is that I have to be at work next week. Thinking that I wouldn't be around for a week, they scheduled my appointments for next week. At the beginning of the week, I have to go to Sheffield for a day and come back." At that moment, there was no one more despondent than me in the world.

Despairingly I said, "Can't you reschedule it?"

"When exactly are your travel dates?"

"Next Wednesday until the following Thursday."

"Damn it! We have a meeting on Thursday and Monday. I also have to go to Sheffield on Tuesday. It's such a situation that I can't back out right away. My credibility with them will be ruined."

I had nothing to say; he was right. It seemed that the dream of seeing him would remain unattainable. A message came: "But there is something we can do that I think is better than nothing."

"Whatever it is, it's better than nothing, Alborz! Tell me!"

"I can come see you for the weekend and then return, so that I'm back in London by Monday morning."

It was too short, but much better than nothing. I said, "My dear! That's great! I know you have work, and the time you're taking is very valuable to me."

"Now we have to condense everything we wanted to do in that one week into two days."

"I'm ready to just sit and watch you."

"Come on! My body and soul are dying to touch you, and you want to sit and watch me?"

I laughed; I was getting less embarrassed. I liked this side of him. He had often clearly and openly stated what he wanted and what he would do if I were beside him. There was no scene that I hadn't imagined with him in my dreams. It was strange that only when it came to him, I became so shamelessly restless and wanted him; "You are stunning in any state!"

"Aha, that's it. Now I'll be so stunning for you that you won't have seen anything like it in your dreams! I just hope you can keep your eyes open!"

"Don't do this, Alborz! You're going down a rough road again!"

"It's not my fault. The roads of any kind are beautiful with you!"

"But seriously, we need to plan somehow so we don't run out of time. I want to wander around the city with you again like tourists. I've missed seeing those views with you! I want to see if they look the same in my adulthood!"

In my life, time had never passed as slowly as it did until our meeting in Nice. Finally, Wednesday arrived, and it was time to travel. At the airport, I was anxious. I remember Dad saying, "What a good thing you did coming with us! You needed it!"

Mom sarcastically said, "But I don't know what's going on; some one is more eager for this trip than usual!"

I said, "I found one or two of our mutual friends online; I'm going to meet them!"

She frowned and raised her eyebrows, as if it were interesting to her, and nodded her head up and down. She knew well that mutual friends meant non-Iranian friends from my childhood with Alborz. We had friends we would play with every time we went there. Now they were also going to university and had returned home for the summer, and I had been in touch with them for a while through Yahoo Messenger. I wanted to see them, but the excitement coursing through me wasn't because of meeting them.

Our house was in the Cimiez [1] area, next to Aunt Bita's house, and during our trips to Nice, we either hosted them or they came to our house. But if I wasn't spending time alone in our yard during the day, I would go to the beach and the promenade, warming my head with a book and the sun. Sometimes I had small entertainments with Mattia and Sofia—my cousins, who were five and ten years younger than me. Since I was 19, I occasionally went to Juan Les Pins[2] in the evenings with a few friends. During those days, I saw my friends less often because we were all at the age of entering youth, and our concerns had changed. Most young people had gone to other cities and occasionally returned to Nice for holidays with their families. I also preferred my solitude. Sofia and Mattia were never my true playmates with Alborz. My relationship with Mattia became a bit closer when he had just turned 18; that was through Yahoo

1. Cimiez is one of the classic and luxurious areas of the city of Nice.
2. Juan Les Pins is a coastal area located about twenty kilometers from the city of Nice, where young people go for recreation, drinking, and beach activities..

Messenger. The last time I had seen him was three years ago when he was 15 and still a teenager. We didn't know each other very well, and I didn't know how trustworthy he was. He was a lovely boy, but my connection with none of my relatives and friends compared to my teenage years with Alborz.

During that trip, I kept Alborz updated with every detail moment by moment. Our communication was mostly through email and Yahoo Messenger, and outside of the house through text messages and sometimes short phone calls; calls were expensive back then. Most of the time, except for the first couple of days when we were with Aunt's family, I spent the other days apart from family plans; I spent my days in the yard or at the beach studying and writing and my evenings with friends in cafes and bars. Mom always disagreed with my lifestyle, but I had Dad's support in this regard and was able to be on my own. During that trip as well, I stayed on my own on Thursday and Friday. Alborz was supposed to arrive at the hotel on Friday night, and we planned to see each other for breakfast on Saturday and spend the rest of the day together until Sunday evening. I got to know Mattia better during that trip. He was trying more to get closer to me those days, I still feel less connected to him. It was Thursday evening; they were our guests, and Mom had called me for dinner several times while I was engrossed in conversation with Alborz. Mattia poked his head through the doorframe of my room and said abruptly, "Tell your boyfriend that if you don't come to the dinner table right now, your mom is going to take action!"

He said this and was about to close the door when I called out to him. He understood Persian but was very weak in conversation. On the other hand, my French wasn't as good as

my English. We sometimes spoke in French but mostly in English. I said, “Mattia! Come here for a second!”

He turned around, came into the room, and stared seriously into my eyes. I said, “Who told you that I chat with my boyfriend?”

"Are you a kid or kidding me? Don’t tell me you want me to believe that from morning till night you’re flirting and fawning over your 'regular friends'!

Regular friends! I didn’t say anything and just looked at him. He continued, 'I don’t know why you’re chatting secretly, but don’t worry! My mouth is sealed!' He was right. Because our family—unlike other Iranians at that time—wasn’t that strict in this regard. They had a kind of open-mindedness; sexual relations, like all Iranian families, were a red line for them, but they weren’t against not having contact with the opposite sex either. On the other hand, my relationship with Mom wasn’t close enough for me to tell her about my friendships; it was one of those mother-child conversations that had always been denied to us. Although my reason for being secretive didn’t relate to the nature of my relationship. The matter was about a special person I couldn’t talk about with anyone; let alone with Mom. Even now, I couldn’t accept the risk of revealing my secret to Mattia. I wanted to distract him, so with a mischievous smile, I said, 'So you’re into that too?'

He smirked and said, 'I’m not a potato!'

I looked him up and down. With a frown on his forehead and curly golden-brown hair and penetrating gray eyes that he inherited from his father, along with his tanned skin and tall stature, he was a beautiful combination. Undoubtedly, girls would be falling over themselves for him. I said, 'Well,

you're not a potato! You look more like marzipan chocolate than a potato!'

He loved marzipan chocolate. He laughed loudly and turned toward the door; 'Oof, what a combination! I want some! Hurry up before Aunt turns us into marzipan!'

6.

The unbearable lightness of being

Finally, Saturday morning arrived, I stepped out of the house pretending I was going to hang out with friends. Mom and Dad were also guests at one of their friends' houses that day. So no one suspected where I was going. My meeting with Alborz was in front of a café along the Promenade des Anglais[1] that we had previously visited with our families. I couldn't believe I was meeting Alborz! I would finally see him! My heart was racing! The nausea wouldn't leave me alone. Since the night before, I had only eaten an apple. In the morning, I put a piece of chocolate in my mouth to avoid fainting from low blood pressure. After much hesitation about what to wear and how to do my makeup and hair, I left the house in the simplest way possible. With my hair in a ponytail, a loose white champion

1. Promenade des Anglais is a seven-kilometer stretch along the Mediterranean Sea in Nice, filled with seasonal beaches, cafes, and restaurants overlooking the shore.

tank top that showed parts of my purple sports bra, and light green cotton shorts that were a hand's breadth above my knees, purple Adidas sneakers, and a small backpack slung over my shoulder. I was so preoccupied that I forgot to grab the gift I had gotten for him. I set off a little earlier to arrive slightly before Alborz; I wanted to watch him come. Just when our meeting place came into view from afar, my heart raced! He stood lost in thought facing the sea; in navy blue shorts down to his knees, a white shirt loosely draped over his shorts billowing in the wind, and gray sneakers. He was young and well-built, magnificent just like his name! This image was of that sorrowful teenager I had said goodbye to in the park, and every single cell in me recognized him; but now I saw him with different eyes. It was as if he was calling me to a rediscovery; igniting my very being! All he had to do was glance to his left to see me. Lost in him, I walked towards him slowly and shakily."

I wanted to inhale all the air on the way to him and entrust it to every part of my being. I was only about 30-40 steps away from him when it seemed he felt my gaze on him and suddenly turned towards me; he took off his sunglasses, swept his hair back with a quick motion of his hand, and lowered his hand gently. Perhaps he was measuring me against the last image he had of me in his mind. I was rooted to the spot. My breath had caught under his gaze; it was as if I were a melted chocolate floating in his space, and he, as if I were a work of art, stood mesmerized and staring. Neither of us knew what our next move would be.

I don't know how many seconds or minutes passed, but gradually our dazed looks turned into laughter. He shouted, "Look at you! My soul! My life! My whole universe! "

Like a child, he opened his arms in excitement, and I flew into his embrace, closing the distance between us. Oh... the suffocating warmth of him! The familiar scent of his body, now mixed with a masculine blend of pine and burnt wood from a rain-soaked forest; my fingers sank into the muscles of his back. His arms wrapped tightly around me, holding me so close that my feet lifted slightly off the ground. He buried his nose in the space between my neck and hair. He took a deep breath and whispered in my ear, “You’re so damn beautiful! You smell like heaven!”

His voice was choked and velvety, filling my ears. It was real; not behind words or over the phone. My heart had burst, and I was crying. I managed to say, “But I thought you still smelled like lemon and mint gum!”

He laughed. He exhaled and pulled back; “Let me see you!” He stepped closer to my chest. He held my face in his hands, and we locked eyes. His beautiful eyes were wetter, but his smile didn’t fade. He placed a kiss on my forehead and looked at me again; then he moved to my eyes, nose, chin, and cheeks. After each kiss, he paused and returned his gaze to my eyes. Just when I could no longer bear his brief kisses, while still holding my face with both hands, he pressed his lips against mine, and there was nothing in the world except the beating of our hearts. I felt his pulse in my mouth. My hands tangled in his hair— that breathtaking mess— and I pressed his face to mine; as if I wanted to consume him. Then I pulled back and looked at him intently before showering him with kisses again. We stayed tightly embraced for several minutes. My head was on his chest, and his heartbeat was the only sound in the world. I said, “I don’t want anything else from this world. I want to stay right here forever.”

He took a deep breath in my hair and placed a kiss on the crown of my head. He grabbed my chin again, leaned down, and placed another kiss on my lips, resting his forehead against mine. With a shy smile, he said, “But I can’t last forever. If I don’t eat something in the next few minutes, I’m going to pass out right here. Since yesterday afternoon until now, I’ve only had a cup of coffee with a croissant. Seeing you just now has taken away energy equivalent to several nights and days from me. My legs have become weak!”

So it wasn’t just me who was overwhelmed by the anticipation of seeing him. I realized my vision was fading to darkness. We went to a café for breakfast and sat at a small table in a 90-degree corner; our knees brushed against each other, and we could feel each other's warmth. I couldn’t take my eyes off him for a moment. A young man whom I had known since childhood and whom I now loved, and recognized again, was sitting in front of me. He held my hand on the table and gently caressed the back of it with his thumb; a simple gesture that evoked a familiar feeling of safety within me, but this time, amidst the calmness, my body was heating up. His fingers framed my hand; those beautiful and graceful fingers.

He stared at me for a moment, and at the instant his eyes filled with emotion, causing his breath to hitch, he turned away from me and gazed at the rolling waves on the shore; then he looked back at me again. I knew those eyes well when they were exposed and innocently looked away. But this time, it was different. My childhood friend didn’t have that matchless look of infatuation in his eyes. I wanted this beautiful presence with all my being. I swallowed my lump of emotion and broke the silence; “It’s unclear who’s older now!”

He looked at me with longing and seemed to want to say something, but he didn't. He closed his eyes for a moment, took a deep breath, and said, "You don't know how happy I am to see you! You don't know how many times I dreamed of this moment!"

I knew; because I was experiencing it myself. A tear slid down my cheek and dripped onto the table. As if trying to prevent the fall of a fragile crystal object, he suddenly leaned towards me, extended his hand, wiped my face, and brought my other hand that he was holding to his lips and kissed it; "No, no, no! I'm sorry! Let's not be sad for these two days. I don't want to think about before or after this meeting at all. I just want us to enjoy being together. Okay?"

As he said these words, he held my hand against his lips and kissed it between phrases. His breath on my skin was exactly what I wanted; so that the cells of my body would remember it. I nodded in agreement and smiled. I turned my palm over and began to caress his cheek with my fingers. He tilted his face and surrendered himself to my touch. I was touching his masculine skin and shaven face, and as if speaking to myself out loud, I said; "This face, now with the stubble and masculine curves, is the most beautiful image in the world."

The clown within him awakened. He stepped back a little and quickly scanned me from head to toe across the table with precision and said; "You mentioned curves? You have no idea about the curves right in front of my eyes!" He raised his eyebrows and continued with admiration; "I'm amazed at how sexy you've become!"

His gaze moved between my eyes and breasts, and he smiled mischievously. My heart melted for him! I was laughing in astonishment. I had recently seen this part of Alborz; ever since we confessed our love, he reminded me of it in his own words

every moment. I loved this special look of his; it was a kind of flirtatious humour that returned to our newly intimate space. He had even mentioned it before in the photos I had sent him during our chats.

Now, he was sitting in front of me wearing a beautifully tailored white linen shirt, buttoned up and collarless, which was beautiful in its simplicity.With two buttons undone below his neck, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, shorts, and that tousled hair along with the sparkle in his eyes and his sweet Persian accent, he had become like a mischievous and naughty little boy. I said, "Pervert!"

He continued in the same tone; "Yes, well! I'm a super pervert for you! As you know, I've developed a deviation towards you for a few months now, and I don't think this feeling will diminish for the rest of my life."

I pointed to his appearance; "It's quite obvious!"

He looked at himself and innocently said, "I really tried to have a decent appearance for the first date and come like a gentleman, but I don't know why it didn't work. Of course, the weather here didn't help!"

So he was also caught up in choosing an outfit for our first date, just like me! I said, "Your choice is excellent! You're a gentleman in every way!"

He raised his index finger as if reminding me of something and said, "Of the pervert kind!"

I teased him with a smile; "Do you think it's called deviation?"

His smile faded, and he said very seriously; "Not at all. I don't doubt this feeling for a moment. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever experienced, Afra!" He paused and continued while scrutinizing my face; "Don't tell me you have doubts?" The thought of this question seemed so far-fetched that I

burst out laughing; "What are you saying, you crazy person? Don't you see how crazy I am for you? My eyes see nothing but you! You've made me blind!"

His lips were still brushing against my hand. He was gazing into my eyes, and his look felt like a sharp knife against my skin. More people had entered the café, the music that had been low until then suddenly rose, and Julio's song "It's Unfair to Leave Me"[1] filled the space, bursting forth our memories. It felt as if we were both revisiting shared images that made our eyebrows raise and we broke into laughter.

"You are like someone who has a tendency to be incompatible!

But in moments of anger and irritation,

your beauty becomes even more pronounced!

This is how I suddenly lose myself in front of you.

But I am a victim of an unjust punishment.

In a few moments, you will no longer be here.

It is not fair for you to abandon me!"

We became those silly old selves again. We sang along together and threw clownish antics at each other. My eyes fell on the food menu; "What do you want to eat?"

"What do *you* want to eat?"

I was looking at the menu. I frowned and said hesitantly; "I don't know."

"I'll choose your food; you choose mine!"

"Deal!"

"But whatever you eat, I'll eat both your share and mine."

I shook my head and exaggeratedly said, "How fair! Agreed!"

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2. se mi lasci non vale, Julio Iglesias

We more or less knew each other's choices; even those we hadn't tried together before. As the minutes passed, I felt nothing but joy and happiness in my soul. I can't remember what we were saying, but we were in high spirits. Breakfast was served, and I attacked it with a fierce appetite that had returned to me after years of lack of desire. I said, "I see you didn't bring your camera!"

"To be honest, I forgot. I wanted to bring that little digital one. I have a silly phone that takes decent but useless pictures. I can use that."

He held his phone up in the air and showed it to me. I was laughing. It was just like my own phone; a Nokia 5700, one of the best designs of that year. We had both bought it a month ago. Its youthful design and special features for music playback had captivated us. At that moment, he took one or two pictures of me. His eyes were on the phone; "Perfect! I'll email them to you."

An hour later, we began to stroll side by side, creating new images from old memories; this time romantic ones. It was strange that until then, I hadn't let anyone into my life. My connection with Alborz in this new atmosphere was even beyond my imagination. That part of us that had fallen for each other was a new and unique human aspect of ourselves, bringing us gradually to ecstasy. In another world, it gave wings to both of us, and that familiar aspect from childhood became our safe haven. I was in a different space with him. With him, I was a different version of myself; free, happy, and calm. In those brief moments, the thought of his absence again clawed at my soul. He was just like me, but neither of us acknowledged it. The sadness of saying goodbye tomorrow—at the end of every laugh and joy—gripped our throats, and at that very moment, one would save the other

with a kiss and caress or playful words and jokes. We went to the daily market and briefly recalled memories amidst the scent of flowers. Fearing the sight of a familiar face, we quickly left there. As we passed by the shops, he suddenly said, "Wait here for a minute; I'm going into this store and will be back soon. Okay?"

I nodded and watched him. He dashed into a store that seemed to be a Nikon and Canon dealership along with other photography brands like a little boy. I was sure he was looking for a way to print the photos he had taken of me and might return with two printed images; one for himself and the other for me. After three or four minutes, he came back with a small box. Excitedly, he showed it to me and said, "Look what I found for you!"

Back then, during the competition among digital cameras, Fuji had released several fancy Polaroid models for lovers of classic photography at not-so-cheap prices that hadn't yet entered Iran. I had seen their images in magazines. Now one of them was in Alborz's hands. I shouted in excitement, "Wow Alborz! What did you do?"

"Come on, hurry up!"

He took my hand and we went to a row of stairs where we sat down. I opened the box, and there was a baby-blue Polaroid camera with rounded corners in front of me. It felt like I was seeing a child, and I said, "It's so cute!"

Alborz nodded proudly, as if he had designed it himself and was now being modest about it. Although this feeling was justified; his choice at that moment was very clever. As if he had remembered something, he raised his eyebrows and, with a mischievous smile, said, "We just have to burn or eat the photos we take with it at the end; so there’s no evidence of our meeting."

I replied without hesitation, "Absolutely not! It's important to me that no one sees them at this stage, but I'm not afraid of them getting revealed."

His expression turned serious. Calmly and submissively, he said, "My love! I agree with you, but honestly, I'm more concerned about you. I don't want being with me to cause you trouble, babe!"

Trouble? Because of being with him? I said, "What is our crime, Alborz? Being together? While we've been together our whole lives? Now it's become something we shouldn't do just because they asked us? So what about us? Doesn't it matter what we want"

He was staring into my eyes, examining me carefully; "You know I love this courage of yours? That when you're sure something is right, you become bolder and put everything on the line!"

I teasingly said, "Just my courage?"

It seemed as if his penetrating eyes were ignited from within; he took a deep breath and placed his lips on mine. His kiss was fire! He whispered in my mouth, "Everything about you! Things you don't even think about!"

I couldn't believe it; it felt like a dream! We were sitting on the stairs in an alley, kissing each other. This atmosphere was worlds apart from the experience of our best moments in Iran; especially with Alborz! Oh! I was crazy about him for loving me like this! He took the camera from my hands and captured our first selfie right there. Two in a row; one for himself and one for me.

An hour later, we were sitting on blue chairs eating our third ice cream cone, and I was telling him about the novel I had just started. Now I was talking like old times, and he was listening and brainstorming as always. Sometimes, before I

could swallow my ice cream, he would interrupt me, hold my chin, and snatch the ice cream from my mouth under the pretense of a kiss. I laughed, "This isn't fair at all. You're eating both your ice cream and mine!"

His head was tilted back towards the sky, his eyes closed as he savored the stolen ice cream, and it seemed he had an image in his mind as he mischievously said, "If you knew how good it is, you wouldn't complain!"

His movements reminded me of Uncle Farhad's humour. I brushed his hair away from his forehead and gently said, "Has anyone ever told you that you look a lot like your dad?"

His eyes were still closed; "Oh! Your hands on my scalp feel so good!" It seemed a memory was passing through his mind as he continued with a smile, "Sometimes he tells me. He says except for one or two things, the rest of your quirks are just like mine! I think he's mistaken; evidence is gradually showing that the others have taken after him too!"

"What's that one or two things?"

He glanced at me from the corner of his eye, a look of satisfaction on his face from the secret he held, and said slyly, "I'll tell you!" Then, without missing a beat, he continued in an attempt to distract me, "Back then, Mama Ella always said your good traits came from your dad!"

"Oh My dear! She couldn't see what an angel she was!"

He let out a deep breath and shook his head several times. Remembering Auntie always changed our mood, but we had promised not to be sad. I consciously changed the subject; "You were in such a hurry, you didn't tell me where your hotel is."

He pointed backwards with his head; "West End Hotel." I raised my eyebrows and took a quick glance. The hotel building was visible from a distance; I exclaimed, "West End Pomona?"

"Uh-huh! A suite facing the sea with a great terrace!"

A suite? For just these two days? When he spent most of his time outside? He was not one for extravagance! Before I could say anything, he continued; "Don't look at me like that! It was the only option available. After I canceled the previous hotel reservation because of Auntie's lovely plan, most hotels were fully booked for the weekend in that short time. Have you forgotten it's high season? Of course, for a thousand and one reasons, it's a suitable option. But still, it could have been smaller."

"It must have a good view too!"

"Very good! If you want, we can go and I'll show you."

I hesitated. As he studied my face, he continued; "But you know! This view right in front of me, I wouldn't trade it for any other view in the world."

My gaze wandered over each feature of his face. With a smile, I said, "Me too!" I was still looking at him doubtfully. He read my expression and this time he brought up the topic; "Where should we have lunch?"

"I know a new place."

"Let's go there!"

After lunch, we went to our favorite little bookstore; Cats Whiskers in Lamaratine. A small bookstore that had both new and second-hand books in English and had been our hangout since childhood. I remember that day we wandered separately around the bookstore and picked out a few books; I paid for his books and he paid for mine. And in the end, at my suggestion, we swapped the books; my selections became his and his selections became mine. I don't know why I was worried that day someone would see Alborz and me together. We weren't looking for trouble. Alborz said, "Do you want to take a taxi to go to Jean Lippan? Auntie and others never go there."

The city of Nice, with all its bars and beaches, has a more family-oriented atmosphere, but Jean Lippan, 40 minutes away from Nice, was a more diverse hangout for young people. I agreed because we felt at ease there.

A little while had not passed when we were sitting in a small bar, our heads slightly warmed by the strawberry margaritas in front of us. The beach was crowded, filled with couples and groups in colorful swimsuits, surrendering themselves to the sound of the waves and the sunlight. Alborz nodded towards the sea and said, "If you want, we can go into the water!"

I looked at myself from head to toe. I hadn't planned to go to the beach that day; "I didn't bring anything with me."

"Me neither. But we can buy some here."

"Honestly, it doesn't matter to me. I just want to enjoy being with you to the fullest. Just sitting here is the best for me, but if you want water, let's go."

As he leaned in for a kiss, he whispered, "I want you!" And I wanted him too. I don't remember much of our conversation in those moments except that we were both trying to escape the crowd; we preferred the silence and solitude of being together. We stepped out of the bar and headed toward the beach. He thoughtfully asked, "You said you want to make the most of being with me, right?" I didn't quite understand what he meant and looked at him questioningly. He asked again, "Is your pocket empty?" I confirmed with the same question mark above my head. Without hesitation, he took my hand and, while running, pulled me along behind him. Afraid of falling, I ran alongside him. When we reached the water, he suddenly dropped my backpack, which he had been carrying on his shoulder filled with our books, onto the ground. He emptied his pockets right there; then he picked me up like a child from my waist and ran towards the water. All this time, I was screaming and laughing with joy

and excitement at what he was doing. Hearing my voice in that moment felt fresh even to me. When the water reached his waist, he let me go. I screamed from the cold water on my skin. I sought refuge in his arms and said in a shrill voice, "You crazy fool!"

In between kisses, he said, "Now we can go back to the beach!"

We returned and sat for a while on the sand under the sun to dry off. I was shivering but still overflowing with excitement and joy. I couldn't remember the last time I had experienced this feeling! We had had our share of craziness together in the yard of our house and on this beach, but joys like this had been erased from my life forever during those years of family separations. After they left, everything took on a serious and seemingly rational form. Now I was experiencing it again with him. As usual, he caught me while I was lost in thought. He turned towards me, tightened his arms around me, and stared into my eyes in silence; it was clear that he was having the same conversation in his mind. Gradually, his gaze seemed to caress me like a child, turning into admiration once again. His hand moved quickly over my arm, warming my skin. I was still shivering. He pulled me closer and embraced me between his legs; in the warm and soft cage of his arms and body. He buried his face in my neck and as if tasting something delicious, took deep breaths and growled appreciatively. My shivering increased, but this time not from the cold but from the warmth of his presence. He whispered in my ear, "If you're really cold, let's go get some clothes. It might take a long time for these to dry!"

I happily replied, "No! It's fine! After a little while, I'll get used to it."

And that’s how it was. A few minutes passed—when we were still wet and no longer dripping water from our bodies—we went to a quieter part of the beach with our fourth ice cream and a bag full of snacks and unhealthy drinks with Coke at the top of the list. Sometimes carefree like children and sometimes like intoxicated adults, we let ourselves go wild as much as we could until we finally collapsed on a bench shaded by a solitary tree; we were warm in conversation. That day, we spent most of our time around there. Occasionally we would walk along the beach or go buy drinks and then settle down in another corner where we would take turns resting our heads on each other's laps. The moment was precious, and there was so much to talk about. Although we had chatted a lot before, that face-to-face meeting had opened up another window of conversation for us; just like before, we shared ourselves and everything that could be turned into words. My words with Alborz never seemed to end, and time passed like a storm.

"Can you read me a bit from a book?"

I said, "Sure. I'll read first, then you! You choose!"

"No! Not from the ones we bought! The one you brought from home!"

"How do you know I brought a book with me?"

"I know a crazy person who never goes anywhere without their book."

I took his hand and gently caressed his fingers with my thumb; "I wish we could go somewhere where you could play piano for me!"

He smiled wistfully and said, "Your expectations are getting higher than our 24-hour opportunity."

That day, I was reading the English version of "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" by Milan Kundera. Although

his English was much better than mine, he insisted that I read while he listened. He had read the book before and that day he made me read parts of it for him while he caressed me. I read until a few minutes before sunset. I was lying on the sand, and he was propped up on one elbow beside me. We had taken off our sneakers and were burying our bare feet in the cool sand, while he used his other hand to stroke my face and hair. Sometimes he would gather a handful of my hair and, with his eyes closed and taking a deep breath, he would inhale it as if imprinting its scent in his lungs. The sky was getting dark. I said, "Isn't it strange?"

While he was using a lock of my hair to pretend to have a mustache and pressing his upper lip against his nose, he asked, "What?"

"That we had experienced these hugs, kisses, and caresses together for years before, but now it feels like we have no memory of them; their power is so different now; they feel so fresh!"

He paused for a moment, as if searching for an answer in my hair, still brushing and arranging it with his fingers. With his usual gentle smile, he said, "Well sweetheart, that's because you really have no memory of them! You know better that the hug and kiss your body reacts to today are not the same as the ones you experienced with your childhood friend!" His voice was melodious and soothing. He had read my thoughts. After a pause, he continued, "You see? Even the tone of his voice is new to you because you've never heard it before! When love comes into play, your brain drives in a different way!" He wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me closer; his gaze wandered over each feature of my face. He placed a kiss on my lips and whispered, "Now everything about this body is new to me. When you fall in

love with someone's mind, you want to discover their body too! You want to experience everything with them! You want to see the world anew through them!"

Of course, I wanted to experience everything with him; he was my entire world. I arranged his hair on his head; although it was unmanageable. This hair had settled on Alborz's head in an attractively messy way for years. It was one of those styles that when you ran your hand through it, your fingers would leave imprints like a comb, and as a minute passed, it would return to its previous state. I said, "I think discovering you will take me a lifetime. You've got yourself into trouble!"

"The pleasure is mine!"

Slowly, the time to return was approaching. Dad had called and reminded me not to be late getting home. We were both standing in silence, lost in watching each other, feeling the sadness of tomorrow being our last day and the excitement of having one more day together. He picked up the thread of my thoughts and asked, "What time tomorrow?"

I wanted to tell him what had been on my mind since noon. I had no doubt about its correctness, but I was a bit afraid of the consequences. I said, "Can I...?" I hesitated.

He tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear and gently caressed my face with his fingertips, saying, "What? Tell me, my love!"

I took the plunge; "Can I come to the hotel tomorrow? Your suite?"

He looked at me in silence. I knew my request was unclear. I cleared my throat and continued, " Can we just see each other there? I want it to be just you and me; just the two of us."

A smile blossomed on his face, and it seemed his mind was at ease; "I would love that, my dear! I've hesitated to tell you several times, but I thought maybe you wouldn't want to!'

"So if I hadn't said anything, you wouldn't have invited me?"

He looked away and scratched his head for no reason; in a way that you know he wasn't really scratching, just doing it to buy some time. He said softly and innocently, "Well, you didn't show any interest in seeing my terrace this morning. Maybe tomorrow, if I get a chance, I would try my luck again." He leaned towards me again.

Referring to the night when we had confessed our feelings; our love, I said, "This time, I was brave."

In between kisses, he whispered, "Of course! Come early! I'll be waiting for you for breakfast."

That night I returned home and anounced that I had plans with friends for the next morning and wouldn't be seen until evening. I also shared the ups and downs of my not-so-small lie in a few text messages with one of my friends. I couldn't even imagine losing my short opportunity to spend time with Alborz due to Mom's growing distrust. Fortunately, there were no complications! The next morning, I left home with a peaceful mind. We were having dinner at my aunt's place, and it was decided that I would go there at night. There was no bargaining about not going because Alborz had a flight at ten-thirty PM, and I could only be with him until seven. At best, if he allowed it, I would accompany him to the airport. After that, I would have to return home.

7.

The Trance of a Dream

I didn’t realize how I arrived at the hotel and found myself at Alborz's room door. The door opened, and I jumped into his arms; The kisses were such that it felt as if we were afraid of losing each other for a moment, and in another moment, It felt as if we were the air inside each other's lungs, and without each other, we would cease to exist. Someone rang the doorbell; for a moment, I felt worried! Alborz pulled away from me and went towards the door; "Don't worry. I told them to bring breakfast up.'"

My eyes finally wandered around; a contemporary and minimalist space that was very innovative for those days. A hall with light gray carpeting, a round dining table for two made of beech wood, two gray single armchairs, and a dark blue three-seater sofa, with a standing lamp between them and a coffee table in front of them. Against the wall, there was a console and next to it, a full-length mirror, with a television stand mounted on the wall, perpendicular to it. The other wall opened to the bedroom through a three-meter wide archway framed in the same color as the dining table. From where I stood, I could see the large double bed; the light from the windows illuminated its neatly arranged white bedspread. At the end of the hall, there were floor-to-ceiling windows; their white curtains billowed in the sea breeze. The sound of Ella Fitzgerald's piece "All The Things You Are" filled the space. In those days, we always drifted through Swiss radio stations on jazz and classical channels, and sometimes country music. As the hotel staff set

the breakfast table, I unconsciously walked to the terrace adorned with flowers and plants, where the sea painted more than half of the frame blue. The sound of waves and Ella Fitzgerald's song enveloped my ears.

"You are the promised kiss of springtime
That makes the lonely winter seem long
You are the breathless hush of evening
That trembles on the brink of a lovely song!...".

The sea breeze left a trace on my skin like a silk cloth; it danced with my hair and left a sound of its presence in my ears and on my dress that made me feel good! With my eyes closed, I watched the path of the wind; when it passed over my bare feet, it crept under my skirt, puffing it out, and disappeared in an instant. How strange it was! Alborz and I had never experienced a hotel in this city, and now we were both seeing the city from this perspective for the first time. Perhaps he had thought something similar when he came to this terrace. The view before me and the gaze that weighed on me from behind brought me back to reality. I turned around and saw Alborz leaning against the terrace doorframe, arms crossed, gazing at me. I looked at him in silence for a moment, and before the sadness of separation could come over me again, I pointed to the table on the terrace; "Can we have breakfast here?"

His face lit up with smile and excitement; "Why not, love? Today is perfect for anything. I thought you might not be comfortable because of the wind; otherwise, I would have suggested setting it outside!"

As we were setting the table, he picked up the remote and turned off the radio; "Why did you turn it off? It was nice!"

As if confessing, he said; "Honestly, I really don’t want my memories from these two days to be tied to any voice other than our own. But if you want, I can turn it back on."

" No, no, not at all! I agree. A silence that your voice breaks is a treasure for me too!"

His eyes brimmed with affection; he was thrilled and was studying my face with admiration. He took my chin before kissing me firmly and said, "Oh, you're killing me with your words. "

I sat in silence during breakfast. I was staring at him, immersed in thoughts we were supposed not to speak of; but how could we? Every time I looked at him for too long, he would avert his gaze and close off his eyes from me; he knew I could read him. He too was trying not to let sorrow in. Despairingly, I turned my gaze away from him and stared at the sea, chewing a piece of bread over and over again. The warmth of his fingers on the back of my hand brought me back to reality. I turned around; he was asking with a nod what was wrong! He was waiting for me. I said nothing. Gently and soothingly, he said, "Babe, tell me! Don't be so hard on yourself!" I didn't know what to say. As I continued to look at him, he picked up a piece of bread, put some cream and a little honey on it, and handed it to me; "Tell me, my love!"

I said, "Alborz! What do you think is going to happen with us?"

He measured my question, buying a little more time by calmly chewing the bite in his mouth, and mischievously whispered, " Probably gets serious in tight spots!"

He tried not to laugh, but his answer indicated that my question was also a concern for him. Despairingly, I said, "Don't be ridiculous! I asked seriously."

This time he became serious; "Just like you said yesterday, we don't deserve to end up in bad places, Afra! I see no reason for it. We have a lot of joy to demand from this life. Don't worry! We'll think of something. It won't stay like this!"

I remembered that on the day of their move from our house, he had expressed his worry in our yard using the same phrase: "It won't stay like this!" He was right! It didn't stay that way; but it turned upside down and got worse! This time there was hope in his eyes. I felt a bit reassured. I put the bread and honey in my mouth while simultaneously taking the crispiest piece of bread from the basket, placing a piece of cheese on it, and offering it to him. Instead of reaching out his hand, he opened his mouth and took the piece of bread along with my fingers into his mouth, letting out a moan of satisfaction. Suddenly as if he had remembered something, he stood up and went to the room. He quickly returned with a small red velvet box and sheepishly said, "I ordered this for you when we decided to meet here. I forgot to bring it yesterday." He held the box in front of me. I calmed down and smiled. His smile made me laugh too, and he asked, "Why are you laughing?"

I stood up. I went to the living room and brought out his gift box from my handbag. I held it towards him and said, "Because I forgot to bring this with me yesterday."

He laughed again. He brought the box close to his ear and shook it, looked at it, placed it on the table, and quickly said, "You open it first!"

I lifted the lid of the box. What I saw was a delicate gold chain with a three-page gold notebook hanging from it, measuring two by one centimeters. On the pages of the notebook, images of musical notes were engraved on the

staff lines, as if it were a transcription of a piece. The name of the piece was engraved so small that it was hard to read. My gaze shifted back and forth in astonishment from Alborz to the notebook and the notes on it. He had his hand under his chin and accompanied me with a smile. I looked closer. Yes! I recognized those notes. I had seen that familiar arrangement many times when he played them in front of me. I was thrilled; "Serenade!"

"It could have been something else? At first, I wanted to engrave one of the silly things I composed for you, but I thought it should be something we have a memory of together."

Excitedly, I said, "Even though your silly things are great, this is so beautiful, Alborz! What an amazing idea! Thank you! It's the best gift I've ever received." And I immediately added, "Of course, after those colored pencils!"

He stood up, took it from my hand, and went behind me. He kissed my hair and guided it to the side while simultaneously placing it around my neck, locked it, and planted a kiss on the back of my neck. A shiver ran through my body! He whispered in my ear, "Now it's my turn." He said and sat back down in front of me. Hearing those four short words from his mouth at that moment felt like connecting my body and soul to a three-phase electric current.

Distractedly, I said, "But your choice is more thoughtful!"

He said proudly, "We'll see." He opened the box and held a black leather bracelet in his hand, with two golden clasps shaped like capital letter A's on either side. Alborz had loved woven and leather bracelets since childhood. He raised his eyebrows and looked at me as if he didn't know what to do. I stood up, took the bracelet from his hand, and placed it around his wrist. I brought the letters from both sides of the bracelet together and tied it on his wrist in a special way, so that it would interlock and fasten.

Now, the lock of the bracelet had a large letter "A"; without it being clear, it had one like itself underneath.

I said, "Fortunately, it fits! It looks good on you!"

He was staring at the bracelet with his mouth open in astonishment; " Can you open and close it one more time?" I burst into laughter at his reaction; he looked like a bewildered child! I opened it and did the same thing again. He said, "This is so gooood! God! I love it! Now whose choice was more thoughtful?"

I was still standing next to him; he stood up and embraced me. As he tightened his embrace around me, I breathed in his scent and said, "I stole the design from Grandma's bracelet, which has now reached Mom. Hers has two leaves that also fit together."

He leaned down and whispered in my ear, "Thank you." He brought his lips to my earlobe and, while inhaling my scent, placed a gentle and long kiss behind my ear. Blood surged through my veins; the feeling that had not left me since the moment I saw him was now reaching its peak. A slow, audible exhale escaped my throat, resembling a faint moan. With my eyes closed, I turned my head in search of his lips, and his mouth enveloped mine. I held his head and neck in my hands and pulled him closer to me. Our hands roamed over each other's bodies, grasping tightly. I could no longer bear to be away from his body. Before I could say what I wanted from him, he placed his hands on my sides and lifted me off the ground. Like a sturdy tree, he embraced me and carried me to the bedroom. I wrapped around him like a vine. We both knew well what we wanted and what we were doing. Long before, I had expressed my heartfelt consent to him in our online conversations.

The first times are always the hardest. It was natural that I had no memories of the superficial and limited kisses and embraces I had experienced up to that point compared to what Alborz was giving me. Before this, I had thought that such relationships were not for me at all, but just his breaths and fingers, even his words from afar, were enough to ignite me. I had never been so close to anyone else; he had several experiences before me but had never told me about his other relationships. It seemed that an unpleasant feeling stirred within him, and as far as I knew, those experiences were not passionate.

Without letting me go, he stood by the bed. I placed my feet on the ground. We drowned each other in kisses again. I was wearing a white linen sleeveless short dress that was being loosened from my body by the row of buttons on its back; I didn't realize when he freed me from it. While guiding me onto the mattress in his embrace, he descended alongside me. Our hands explored each other like thirsty beings moving across another's body. His hands were on my body; those experienced fingers knew well how to caress and glide. It was the first time someone held me like that with their lips and hands. The light in the room was too bright. I didn't know how I looked under all that brightness. Alborz did not miss a moment of praise and admiration amidst kisses and caresses; his attention to every part of my body was such that it felt like he was examining a precious stone and then picking up another one. As he moved lower from my neck and chest, with trails of kisses across my body, he reached the center of the universe. His hands and mouth seemed to land on the strings of my bare body like notes of a single piece, tightening my breaths. I held his head in my hands and pressed him against myself. His tongue and fingers were overwhelming for my nerves, beyond my capacity to handle. I stifled my voice; I didn't know what the right thing was. In the midst of it all, the

whisper of his words finished me off; "Relax, my love! Let me hear your voice... let go!"

In another moment, a volcanic eruption occurred, and Alborz brought me down into the expanse of his hot lava. In an instant, everything went black; it felt as if I had died and then returned to life. Gradually, my breaths calmed down, and I came back to myself. His hand was still there; unmoving. I opened my eyes and saw his beautiful and kind face before me. He was gazing at me just a few millimeters away, staring intently into my eyes.

With a kiss on my lips, he gave me a smile; "Hello!" I had never imagined myself in this state before anyone. I was embarrassed by what he had seen in me, but there was no place to hide; I looked away. He took my chin and held it; we locked eyes. Gently, he said, "Look at me! You are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

I uttered a sentence that had settled in the corner of my mind and that I had wanted to ask him many times during our chats but had been unable to; "So the ones you were this close to before me weren't beautiful?"

He seemed to expect this question. He quickly and, as always, honestly replied; "First of all, I wasn't that close. Secondly, yes, they were beautiful; but not as much as you are to me!" He was caressing my side. A crease appeared between his eyebrows. Surprised and without malice, he said; "Do you really want to know what happened?" I nodded in affirmation. He had every right to be surprised. This kind of conversation—especially in Iranian culture—is not accepted; no one talks about past relationships. Having past relationships makes no sense at all. On the other hand, few people would be willing to engage in such a difficult conversation in that state—in the most intimate moments

they experience for the first time with their love. Because what comes next—in that fragile situation—could be harmful. But I truly wanted all of him along with what was in his mind. I understood that he might have gone through any experience. To me, saying and hearing it—especially in our relationship, provided it was by the will and choice of both—brought us closer together. At least, that was how it was for me with him.

He took a deep breath; it seemed difficult for him. He continued looking into my eyes; "I had told you before; during the first two or three years of college, I was lost in a daze. From 20 until a year or two ago, to prove my normality to myself, I had two relationships. But with neither of them did any feelings develop. Not that you should think I didn't have feelings for them because I was waiting for something else; as I said, it was due to the shocks I experienced during my teenage years. In fact, this fire had been extinguished from somewhere else. They were just a kind of biological and chemical movement. Over these years, I had become almost sure that I had a technical problem." He gave a bittersweet smile and continued; "Dad always said this issue didn't come from him." I smiled back. So this was the issue he had referred to yesterday while eating ice cream. As if he had heard my voice, he said; "Yeah, that's it! He always says you can't imagine what I did with your mom!"

"Oh Darling! Those two were the most beautiful!"

Alborz nodded with his head and continued, "Until I found you, and my whole life got better. A few months later... Afra! During this time, from the moment I realized I was in love with you, I was restless for you like an 18-year-old. I finally understood what my dad meant. I had never seen myself this way and had no idea about this side of my personality. In the early days, I thought I had gone crazy. This side of me was even strange to myself. I remember a little before I realized what you

had done to me—maybe a week before my confession—one night while I was playing music for my dad, he said your music sounds different. He literally said you fell in love and don't even know it!"

With regret, I said, " Hmm! Look at me. Ever since I fell in love with you, I haven't seen you play the piano the way you do when you're in love!"

"It's not a big deal. For now, my hands are busy with another beautiful instrument!"

His fingertips played on my jaw and cheek, and his thumb brushed my lips; "Now do you believe me? I'm like you; it's the first time I'm experiencing this feeling. You're showing me a new side of myself! A being that I love more than myself and feel closer to. This is my true self, Afra; not that cold person!"

I stood up and turned towards him; now it was my turn to shower him with kisses. I took off his t-shirt; I was mesmerized by him. His fair skin glowed in the light of the room, the angles of his face and body were carved with meticulous care, like the sculptures of Rodin.[1] His eyes, which saw nothing but me, were deep and clear like two hazel marbles, and his hair formed a soft, shiny mass of dark and light brown. He was that lovely combination of youth and beauty for me. I had never been in this position with anyone before, and I had never seen a man like this; but in those moments, I trusted my feelings and knew how to drive him crazy just like he did to me. Of course, I succeeded; he didn't give me more than a few minutes before he was

1. Auguste Rodin was a French artist and the most influential sculptor of the late 19th century, who laid the foundations for modern sculpture in the 20th century. He is remembered for his unique and exquisite marble figures.

driving me to the edge of madness again. I called out to him, and when he looked at me, I pleaded with my eyes for him. He still hesitated. With his mouth and one hand, he returned to caressing my tits. Just at the moment when I was surrendering with a vulnerable body under his touches, gasping for breath, he paused for a moment and looked into my eyes and asked, "Are you sure?"

With longing, I said, "Alborz! How many times are you going to ask me, damn it?"

He sealed my mouth with his kiss. Then, with his free hand, he lifted my bent knee up. A few seconds later, with a pain of fullness, I saw him within myself in overwhelming pain and pleasure; just like my connection with him. With a deep sigh, I gasped for breath. This experience was like all my other lived experiences; before engaging with it, I had read about it many times. While doing it, I floated myself in it with anxiety. In this case too, with access to external resources, I knew some things. In the absence of sexual education in Iran, the awareness of young people—like their parents—hung at the intersection of ignorance and instinct, leading at best to secretly watching scenes from Hollywood movies for girls and illegally produced porn films for boys. Due to widespread censorship in literature and education, there were no complete or effective writings available. Families also did not discuss this topic with their children. They themselves had not received any education to accept it as a necessary subject for conversation. A combination of tradition, religion, and shame had led them into a poisonous silence on this matter, the consequences of which are still evident in human relationships today. I too approached it with a mix of what I had learned and my instinct and Alborz, who made everything easier with him.

His voice brought me back; "Open your eyes, my love

! Let me see you!" I opened them. With concern, he asked, "Are you okay?" I nodded in affirmation. He whispered," Whenever you feel too much suffering and pain, just tell me to stop. Okay babe?" I agreed again. His eyes were carefully examining mine; it was as if they were his guiding light, and by observing my reactions moment by moment, he gently moved forward within me, filling my emptiness. What a strange feeling it was! It was unlike anything else in my life! His eyebrows were furrowed, his lips were straight, and his jaw was clenched from the pressure of his teeth; it seemed like he was enduring a tough situation. He said, "How good it is here!"

I laughed painfully; "Your face doesn't say that!"

"I wish I could take a picture of you so you could see your own face! A masterpiece!"

I pinched his arm playfully and pulled him closer, letting out a moan of pain and satisfaction. He immediately said, "Well done! Let your voice out! Let me remember these moments with your sweet voice!"

"So this is how the story goes!"

"You've not seen anything yet!"

Suddenly his expression changed; "For God's sake, breathe, Afra! Let yourself go, babe! I can't hold on like this for long." With a smile, I breathed and finally let go. He closed his eyes for a moment, as if gaining control over himself, taking several deep breaths. When he looked at me again, he seemed calmer. He whispered, "As much as I can, I won’t move so you can get used to it a little!"

I couldn't believe that the range of words between us had reached this point; so personal and intimate and... forbidden. We remained in silence and stillness for a few minutes. There was nothing in the world except the sound of our breaths and

kisses and his presence within me. Gradually, he began to move and proceeded tenderly. And thus, my first experience reached its peak with great attention and calmness. We embraced each other completely and became one. I wanted to engrave those moments in my soul just like the hours before. The supportive, playful, patient, and lovable character of Alborz never left me even in those moments. He made me laugh in the depths of pain, and at the peak of laughter, he gave me pleasure.; and it was astonishing how intimate this was between us! Even in the most private moments with him, the unspeakable became easy to express; things I had never imagined in words were heard from him and shared with him. I wanted him just as he was.

A few moments later, as we lay in each other's arms in the calm after the storm, I had pressed my cheek against his chest and was incredulously realizing that I still wanted him. I reached down to my painful area; there was a tissue on it. I didn't know when Alborz had placed it there. I had a slight bleeding, but it wasn't as bad as I had thought. When I lifted my head, he was looking at me; "Did you suffer a lot?"

I struggled a bit with myself and then, with a shy smile, I confessed, "If you do it one more time right now, I can give you a more accurate answer!"

It was my first experience, mixed with curiosity, love, and youth. Now I know that everyone at that age and situation feels the same way, but that day was strange for me. Alborz's breath had just returned to normal. Hearing my request, he looked at me in surprise; while trying to hold back his laughter, he said, "Do you really want it?"

I put the pillow over my face so he wouldn't see my embarrassment, which had been overtaken by audacity and infatuation. He let out his laughter; oh, the sound of his laughter!

He had found a new subject for amusement. From behind the pillow, I said, "Don't laugh! I know you're worse!"

He was still laughing. He lifted the pillow and, with a hand on my butt, pulled me tightly to his erection and held me tight. He rubbed his lips against my ears again. In a husky voice, he whispered, "This is me! I have nothing to hide; especially when I see you like this." And once again, we intertwined...

An hour later, I was sitting in the bathtub with my back to him, and he had wrapped his arms around me. I had a glass of Krug Rosé in my hand, and I was drinking with Alborz, and he was gradually pouring from the bottle for us; I had already tasted this champagne before, which is one of the most exquisite blends. In Iran, where standard alcoholic beverages were not easily accessible, we mostly drank homemade wine, but my father's knowledge and experience in identifying the best flavors always provided us opportunities during our travels. The drink Alborz chose in those moments was something beyond previous experiences, and in his embrace felt like paradise itself. The taste of raspberry and strawberry and the bite of bubbles on my tongue, the warm water and fragrant foam with the scent of jasmine enveloping us up to our necks, my head on his chest and his hands caressing my body, the warm trail of the drink in my veins, the warmth of the water and his hands—all of it soothed my burning pain.

What we did was break the laws and traditions; even at this moment as I write these sentences in the book, it is a crime. Perhaps this story may not seem so complicated to someone who is not Iranian and does not live in a Muslim society; it might even be imagined as laughable and impossible for a woman to have no sexual relations until the age of 24. But for someone born in Iran, any sexual

relationship without a marriage certificate is considered an unforgivable sin. Even if, like my family and many other Iranians, you did not have religious fanaticism, establishing a sexual relationship before marriage at that time was not accepted within any family framework; not even among my peers. Girls, out of fear of losing their honor and being ostracized by society and their future husband, did not engage in such matters, and boys—even if they had secret relationships—preferred that their future spouses had not experienced anything like this. Unless, like Alborz, they viewed the issue with an open mind in an equal space for both genders. In Iran, even now, a woman's body belongs to her husband from the moment she is born; neither she nor any other man has claim over it. However, that does not mean that no one experiences sexual relationships before marriage; we all know that when it comes to restraint and fear, excess and negligence take root. Out of fear of judgment, sometimes they would resort to any means except choosing the main path and would take refuge in every lie and concealment rather than confessing to what they had done. Even today, many resort to underground methods to hide that part of their private life. In my mind, this was where the line between free thinking and promiscuity was drawn. For me doing something within a framework and with complete self-awareness and awareness of the person involved, on the condition of accepting the consequences in the future, was not promiscuity; it was commitment and responsibility. I was not following any tradition in my culture in this regard either. Until that time, I had not experienced any intimate relationship, but I believed—though not in every relationship—that when my heart was captured one day, my body would remain too. The body also wants its share. Heart and soul go together; one does not move forward while the other is merely a spectator or imagines it.

Alborz was the one with whom my heart and soul were aligned. He was of my kind, and his fundamental values were the same as mine; he cherished them, and I had decided without any concern about how my relationship with him would be in the future, and I had no doubt about it. How many times did I live that I should deprive myself of something I considered my share? I wanted everything that was in the season of love with Alborz. Although this matter would later become a great secret and consume much energy, I was satisfied with what I had done.

We also had lunch on the terrace; since we weren't planning to share our day with anyone. I was sitting cross-legged at the table in Alborz's Coppice blue t-shirt. He was across from me in a simple navy t-shirt and light jeans. My gaze fell on his hand on the table; on his slender, tapering fingers. Unconsciously, I reached out my hand toward him and traced over his fingertips; "These fingers hold the memory of hundreds of pieces of music in their cellular memory!"

" From today, the memory of your beautiful details has been added to them."

I pretended to be amazed; "What a combination!" He was chewing slowly and looking at me with admiration. He pointed to his t-shirt; "You look so much prettier in this color. It suits the green shades of your eyes! The combination of those jade marbles amidst the blues of the forest will stay in my memory forever!"

"I don't understand why you need to take four t-shirts for a 48-hour trip!"

"Because I suspected I might have a poor down and out guest whom I would have to lend one to."

I laughed; "How many times have I worn your clothes? Do you remember?" With his sweet smile, as if recalling a memory, he nodded his head; "A few times, in our trips to the North. The casualties of your adventures always exceeded Aunt Leila's predictions."

With a smirk, I said; "Is it called a prediction when we go by the river for water play and she forgets to pack clothes for an eight-year-old? Or when you expect a ten-year-old to pack their own travel bag and not even come to see what they packed? Unless Mrs. Khanom and your mom came to my rescue."

"Forget it! Aunt's suitcase is still packed by Mrs. Parvin until today. What do you expect?"

He was right; it was a shame for our time to be spent on those memories! My food was finished. I had leaned my bare knees against the table and had pulled my t-shirt up to under my eyes, breathing in it. The scent of his body on the fabric was cleansing my sense of smell; "Can you give me this t-shirt?"

He said very seriously; "No way!"

Surprised and disappointed, I said; "Why? Since when have you become so stingy?"

He replied with a hint of disappointment; "Don't be unfair! This t-shirt, when it smells like you, is my best souvenir from this trip."

I gave a bitter smile; "Fairness! The only thing that's not in our story."

"Don't choke up, my dear! For me, this frame is the most beautiful scene in the world. Don't let it become sad! I want it to stay in our minds in the best way possible!"

"I don't think it can compare to the frame that's right in front of my eyes!"

He shrugged and mockingly said, "A cracked window!"

I got up and walked around to him behind the chair. I leaned down and pressed my lips against the back of his neck and inhaled his scent again; "A window with bulletproof glass that opens to heaven."

He pressed his head against my lips; "Ah. That's you! Go get the camera, we need to capture today's selfies. It would be a shame if our evidence wasn't complete!"

I brought the camera and sat on his lap. He had pushed the chair back and was waiting for me; "You take it!"

I wrapped my arm around his neck and with my other hand adjusted the angle of the camera. Alborz had his head on my neck, and at the same time, with his hands—one in my thighs and the other on my side—he was tickling me. We took several photos in every way; each one sillier than the last. I loved all of them. Among them, there were a couple that I liked more; Alborz's face was three-quarters turned in the curve of my neck, with a playful smile and his eyes on the camera. I was also cheerful; my head held high and my gaze on the camera. This was us together. Alborz's hand was caressing my bare leg while he watched the photos in my hand; "Look at this! You look like a miracle!"

I said, "Did you notice how much your face has changed since yesterday?"

"Really? No way! I was looking at you with this perspective. Look at your face!"

I didn't understand. But he seemed freer and happier. I gazed blankly at the photos. I stood up and walked to where there was a full-length mirror on the wall. I had heard that a girl's face after her first experience of intimacy—provided there is love and pleasure—becomes clearer due to the release of happiness hormones and a sense of satisfaction; but I had never seen it in anyone with my own eyes. At that

moment, I saw my face in the mirror, with its bright skin stretched from youth and satisfaction. My straight, raven-black hair had come down a bit below my breasts, my large, jade-green eyes sparkled with boldness and audacity, mingling with the green and blue shadows of my T-shirt, while my lips were red from the heat of kisses. I saw Alborz in the mirror holding me from behind, his deep and piercing eyes examining me. He rested his chin on my shoulder next to my face; "Do you see her? How beautiful she is?!"

I placed my hand on the prominence of his cheek; "The boy is more beautiful than the girl!" and hesitantly said, "Do you think it's because of today's activities?"

One of his hands gently moved up from my stomach and grasped my breasts over my clothes, teasingly tickling my nipples, which had become swollen and visible through the fabric due to his repeated touches and presence. My eyes closed. He whispered in my ear: "I don't think it's just that. Because the story started yesterday."

He took my hand and led me to the three-seater sofa; "Come here, let me show you!" He brought the envelope of photos from the previous day off the console. We sat on the sofa and spread the photos out on the table; "Take a look at these! You're right! My change is obvious!"

He was right. The wave of relief and joy grew with each image; a combination of trust and what infatuation had done to us. This was us together. From the moment we experienced the tranquility of being next to each other, youth shone in us like a star's light in the sky. Even at that moment when I was beside him, seeing the photos made me long to be together again! What if this comfort stayed with us? Didn't we deserve it? Why did this relationship carry so many questions? This time without

choking up, tears streamed down my cheeks; "Oh, sweetheart! Don't let these tears fall! Come here! Your place is right here!"

He pulled me toward him, sat me on his lap, and embraced me. With my knees on either side of his thighs, I let myself go and cried my heart out. A little later, he pulled me back so we could see each other's faces. While wiping my tears, he confessed hopelessly; "When I go back, until our next meeting, I'll go crazy with memories of these two days. But we shouldn't dwell on these thoughts for too long. Soon we'll create more memories without worry! I promise you!" I smiled and wanted to kiss his lips when my nose started running, and I pulled back; he laughed, and then I did too. "Let's go find a gazebo. What do you think?" As I wiped my nose with the back of my hand, he said; "Here! Use this!" He brought my head close to his chest and quickly wiped my nose with the front of his T-shirt. Then he mischievously pointed at the wet and sticky circle on his shirt; "Another souvenir! I won't even give you this booger."

This time I kissed him; hot and feverish. His hands roamed over my body, igniting a fire within me; I wanted him again. I took off his T-shirt; "I want to touch you!"

As soon as I said this, he took off my T-shirt as well, and we were bare against each other again. I wanted all of him; inside and out. "Afra! Afra, wait!" He was struggling with guilt over his desire and whispered; "You're not okay! You're sore! You'll get hurt!"

"It doesn't matter. From tomorrow, I'll have plenty of time to rest. I don't want to regret these moments."

He whispered in my ear, "Yeah? Where did your shyness go?" I could hear his smile in his voice. As I ran my hand over his body, I whispered, " How can they last next to you?"

He laughed loudly. He leaned his head back against the couch and surrendered, "Wow! The fearless brave one!" And so it was that we became one again and again in the expanse of kisses, breaths, and love for each other. It was strange for me too how effortlessly I became one with Alborz on every topic without trying, and my space shifted from strangeness to intimacy!

After a few minutes, I was lying still in his arms, watching the sunlight through the windows as it slanted more and more. I hated all the hours of the world; I didn't want any hands to move. Without asking him, this time it was Alborz who read my book; for the first and last time, naked and free in each other's embrace. I sat tired and drained on his knees, my face on his chest, one arm around his waist, and a green apple in my other hand that we took turns biting into. He also had one hand caressing my body while the other held the book that we were exploring together. Anyone who saw us in that state would doubt our sanity; that in such a short time together, part of our opportunity was spent reading a book. This action was part of our shared and valuable everyday life that we had been away from for years. He read for an hour, and when he closed the book, he laughed and said, "It's better that I'm leaving; otherwise, at this rate, God knows what our next position could have been!"

"My mom is missing!"

"I was just thinking about that," he said while shaking the empty aluminum wrapper of the condom in the air, "Where is she to see her daughter emptying five magazines on her first experience?"

When my mom's name came up, my body trembled at what I had done and the fear of facing her worldview—if she caught wind of the situation! I pushed all these thoughts aside and,

feeling satisfied while my face was on his chest, "With all the extras and side dishes! I said."

"Hm! The sides are something else!

I let out a sound from my chest and rubbed myself against him. Alborz moaned in satisfaction, and I continued. Playfully, I said, "Yeah, sweetheart! Let your voice out! Let me hear you!"

"Ah, Afra! Don't do this, please! We don't have time anymore. We should slowly get up."

I pleaded, "Just five more minutes?"

He laughed, "Forget about time and me! You look completely worn out, girl!"

I stood up. Suddenly, I was furious and choked with emotion; " Let me die from it! Let me remember today! So much that I can find a way to escape this damn situation through the pain! In fact, tonight, I'll tell them everything; it's not worse than the medical entrance exam."

He pulled me back into his embrace and gently soothed me, "Shhh! My love, you're wise and patient! You never jump in without thinking! Just hold on a little longer! Let's think about it more. We'll find the right way. Maybe first I should come to Iran and talk to my aunt and uncle to see where they stand. I think after these two days of experience, even if we want to, nothing will be the same as before, and that's really good."

He paused for a moment. Took a deep breath and said calmly, "I wish I knew what my aunt's problem is! Maybe I should talk to your dad first."

"What about your dad?"

"That's exactly it! That's why I'm saying we shouldn't rush. There are some things in the middle that I don't understand. My dad loves you very much, but I feel a fear in

him about this relationship. It needs to be clarified. Anyway, forget it!"

He took my face in his hands again. There was a mischievous glint in his eyes; "For now, we have something more important to do." He kissed my lips and between kisses whispered enticingly, "In these last few minutes, I have to make someone remember today for a long time!"

I laughed tiredly and surrendered myself to him...

It was around six o'clock. We had put on our clothes and were sipping the last drops of our drinks in each other's arms. I said, "If you don't mind, I want to come with you to the airport." He became stubborn again; "Don't even think about it!"

"Why not?"

He pursed his lips and weighed his answer; "For two important reasons. Um... which are both selfish. First, if you come to the airport, then at that time of night you'll want to go back home, and I'll worry."

" First of all, it's not a long way; I'll get home quickly by taxi. And when you're not around and my life is like this, how come you're not worried?"

"Well, at those times, I'm not the reason you're out. But if I know, I'll definitely worry. When I say selfish, that's what I mean!"

I played with the chain around my neck; "And your second reason?"

"Should I say it?"

"For me to be convinced, it's necessary!"

He was staring at me, his jaw and lips tense as if he were touching his teeth with his tongue and reaching for words. He averted his gaze and, as always, answered honestly but sadly; "Saying goodbye to you at the airport is hard for me! It bothers

me! If you allow me, I'll drop you off and then return to the hotel to pack my things."

It was hard for me too; very! But I didn't want to leave him alone in the hotel; "No, my dear! I won't allow it. You'll be late! We'll get ready together and go downstairs and take two taxis. Each of us will go our own way."

This time he nodded in resignation and said reluctantly; "Get up, my love! Get up so that, against my will, I have to hand you over to the Gestapo! By the way, don't be too cheerful in front of your mom tonight! You saw how she sniffed around! She might give you a hard time! Just go and get some sleep! I don't want you to get into trouble!"

"We're guests at my aunt's tonight; I've decided to go there too."

" At least it's crowded around them, so you're not the center of attention!"

A few minutes later, while tears streamed down my face, I was in a taxi heading to my aunt's house. I could still feel the imprint of Alborz's hands on me when he embraced me one last time in front of the hotel, and his last words echoed in my ears. This goodbye was even more painful than the farewell during the moving day. Back then, they were my entire life, and I was being torn away from them. Now I wanted him in a different way; it felt as if a part of my body had been cut off without anesthesia, and my body and soul ached from his departure, crying out from the separation. The trace of his tears was still on my neck, and the breeze outside was blowing over it, sending shivers down my spine with the remnants of his scent on my skin. Now there were even more voids that could only be filled by him.

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