



AUTHOR PROFILE

Sude Kurt

Level B2

Genre Horror-thriller

03.17

03.17

When she woke up, the first thing she noticed was the silence.

But not an ordinary silence.

Not the familiar quiet of the night—

the distant sound of a car,

water moving through the building's pipes,

the wind brushing against the window...

None of it was there.

It was as if the world had been waiting for her to wake up,

and now it was holding its breath.

Her eyes stayed fixed on the ceiling.

At first, she thought she couldn't move.

Then she realized—she didn't want to.

Her body wasn't heavy.

She wasn't paralyzed.

It just... felt unnecessary.

The digital clock beside her blinked with a red light.

03.17

Her heart started racing.

She didn't know why, but that time hit something deep inside her.

As if this moment had been lived many times before,

but chosen to be forgotten.

She closed her eyes.

"You're sleeping," she told herself.

"It will pass soon."

It didn't.

The air in the room changed.

It didn't grow colder.

It didn't grow warmer.

It thickened.

The walls seemed a little closer.

The ceiling felt lower than it should have been.

Her breath wasn't filling the room—

it was filling her.

She sat up on the edge of the bed.

When her feet touched the floor, she shivered.

The ground wasn't cold,

but it wasn't familiar either.

It looked like her own room, but...

like a painting where one detail had been drawn wrong.

The clock blinked again.

03.17

"Okay," she whispered.

Hearing her own voice was more comforting than she expected.

She stood up.

When she took her first step, the sound of her heartbeat echoed in her ears.

With every step, it felt like someone was taking another step behind her—

but when she turned around, there was no one there.

She moved closer to the door.

The door...

It was usually white.

Now it was gray.

A dirty, faded gray.

As if it hadn't been opened in years.

She stopped as her hand reached for the door handle.

A feeling.

Not clear, but sharp.

If you open it, you won't be able to come back.

It sounded ridiculous.

But she didn't pull her hand away.

She opened the door.

The hallway...

It wasn't the hallway of her home.

It was longer.

Narrower.

And along the ceiling, a red light pulsed—like a heartbeat.

Every time the light turned on,

the hallway seemed to stretch a little farther.

Every time it went dark,

the walls felt like they were trying to close in.

Footsteps echoed.

Her own footsteps.

But the echo...

There was one too many.

At the end of the hallway, there was a door.

Half open.

From the gap, it wasn't darkness that leaked out—

it was nothing.

Not black.

Not shadow.

Emptiness.

And from inside that emptiness...

came the sound of breathing.

It wasn't human breath.

But it wasn't animal either.

More like...

something that had forgotten how to breathe for a long time, and was trying again.

She took a step forward.

Her heart felt too big for her chest.

Her stomach tightened.

But she didn't close her eyes.

As she got closer to the door, she noticed something.

On the walls of the hallway...

there were marks.

Handprints.

Scratch marks.

Some small.

Some large.

All of them pointed toward the door.

All of them...

had tried to escape.

"Is anyone there?" she said.

Her voice scattered through the hallway,

twisted,

came back—

but it wasn't hers anymore.

There was movement behind the door.

As if someone was looking at her from the inside.

But not stepping out.

The red light flashed again.

In that moment, something certain formed inside her.

Not a thought.

Not a feeling.

A truth.

Anyone who opened this door

would never wake up in the morning.

She stepped back.

The hallway trembled.

The walls groaned.

The light sped up.

The door...

opened a little more.

And right then—

she opened her eyes in her bed.

Her breathing was ragged.

Her hair was damp with sweat.

Her heart was pounding wildly.

The clock...

Red light.

03.17

But this time...

something else was blinking too.

Her phone.

A message notification.

Unknown number.

“You woke up too, didn’t you?”

When she picked up the phone, her fingers weren’t shaking.

That scared her even more.

The screen was too bright.

Too clear in the darkness.

As if it were the only real thing in the room.

Unknown number.

One sentence.

“You woke up too, didn’t you?”

She didn’t reply.

She turned off the screen.

Placed the phone on the edge of the bed.

Her heart was still fast, but not uneven.

This wasn’t fear.

It felt more like preparation.

Her eyes drifted to the clock again.

03.17

At the same second, the phone vibrated again.

This time, she didn't turn it off.

"You don't have to answer."

"But we both know you're awake right now."

Her throat went dry.

"This is a game," she told herself.

"A stupid coincidence."

She looked at the screen.

The message field was empty.

The cursor was blinking.

She typed.

She deleted it.

Typed again.

Who are you?

She didn't send it.

The phone vibrated.

"Names don't matter."

"The time does."

For a moment, she wanted to throw the phone away.

But she couldn't.

What time is it?

She sent it.

The reply came instantly.

"03.17"

In that moment, the silence in the room pressed down again.

The phone's screen seemed to give off a colder light.

How do you know?

Three dots appeared.

They disappeared.

Appeared again.

There was a long pause.

As if the other side wanted to be sure too.

"Did you see the hallway?"

The second she read it, her stomach tightened.

She didn't need to say anything anymore.

She gripped the phone tightly.

Yes.

This time, the reply took longer.

"The door was open."

It wasn't a question.

It was a statement.

She closed her eyes.

Remembered the gap in the door.

The flickering red light.

The breathing.

Yes.

Three dots again.

This time, longer.

"The first night is always like this."

First.

The word echoed in the room.

How many people are there?

No reply came.

She waited.

She thought minutes had passed,

but when she looked at the clock, only twelve seconds had gone by.

The phone vibrated.

“I haven’t counted yet.”

“But you’re not alone.”

She sat on the edge of the bed.

Her feet touched the floor again.

This time, the ground was familiar.

Why are we going through this?

She regretted sending it the moment she did.

That question was too big.

The other side didn’t answer.

Three dots appeared.

They stayed there for a long time.

“People who ask that usually wake up earlier on the second night.”

Second night?

This time, the reply came almost instantly.

“Yes.”

“And each time, the door opens a little more.”

She placed the phone on the bed.

Tried to breathe without looking at the screen.

That’s when she noticed something.

The phone’s vibration...

was in the same rhythm as the clock blinking.

03.17

The screen lit up once more.

“Don’t try to sleep.”

“Some people did.”

“They don’t answer anymore.”

There was something else under the message.

A small detail she hadn’t noticed before.

The time the message was sent:

03.17

She turned off the phone.

But the darkness didn't return.

The red light of the hallway

kept flickering behind her eyes.

And for the first time, she thought this:

Waking up might have been the biggest mistake.

She startled when the morning alarm went off.

This time, the sound was real. Too clear. Uncomfortable.

She opened her eyes.

The room was the way it should be.

The walls were in their old places.

The door was white.

The clock had a black screen.

She picked up her phone.

No notifications.

The messages weren't deleted, but there was nothing new either.

She opened the last conversation.

The sentences were still there.

“Don’t try to sleep.”

“Some people did.”

Her finger stayed still above the screen for a moment.

Then she locked the phone.

She went to the bathroom.

Looked at herself in the mirror.

She looked tired, but not sick.

No dark circles under her eyes.

As if the night had never happened.

But when she turned on the water, she noticed it.

The sound of the tap...

For a second, it sounded like the silence from the night.

She pulled her hand back immediately.

Turned the water off.

“You’re being ridiculous,” she said to herself.

She made sure her voice was loud enough to hear.

On the way to school, the streets were crowded.

People were talking, laughing, rushing somewhere.

Everything was moving.

Only she wasn't.

On the bus, she sat by the window.

Looked at her reflection in the glass.

For a moment...

it felt delayed.

She blinked.

It fixed itself.

The lesson started.

The teacher's voice was there, but the words weren't.

She looked at her notebook.

The pages were blank.

She picked up her pen.

She needed to write something.

But what?

At the top of the page, without realizing it, she wrote:

03.17

She dropped the pen.

Looked around.

No one had noticed.

But someone sitting in the back row lifted their head.

Their eyes met.

A brief moment.

Very brief.

But there was something in that look.

Not recognition.

Remembrance.

The boy said nothing.

He looked back down.

Her heart sped up.

"Coincidence," she told herself.

But that word no longer convinced her.

During lunch break, she checked her phone.

Still no messages.

Just as she was about to put it back in her pocket, the screen vibrated.

Unknown number.

“Daytime is harder.”

She looked around.

No one was looking at their phone.

Why don't you text at night?

This time, she didn't wait for an answer.

The screen lit up immediately.

“At night, everyone is awake.”

“During the day, you're alone.”

What if I'm at school?

There was a long pause.

“Then it's the most dangerous time.”

She stared at the message.

There was a question she couldn't bring herself to ask,

so she didn't type it.

She turned off the phone.

That's when something happened.

Someone stepped out from the door at the end of the hallway.

The boy she had locked eyes with earlier.

As he passed by, he stopped.

He was very close.

He spoke quietly.

His voice was almost a whisper.

"Did you see it last night?" he said.

Her heart nearly stopped.

"Wh—what...?" was all she could manage.

The boy didn't look at her.

"The red light," he said.

"The door."

Then he walked away.

She stood there, staring after him.

The crowd swallowed him almost instantly.

That was when she understood.

The one sending the messages wasn't alone.

And she wasn't the only one who had been chosen.

She didn't count the time until nightfall.

But the clock was waiting for her.

That evening, when she lay down on her bed, she didn't turn the light off.

She tried not to sleep.

Her eyes burned.

Her head grew heavy.

The clock made no sound.

But she could feel its presence.

Her eyes closed.

Unwillingly.

And the hallway returned.

But this time...

the door was more open.

The red light was steady.

It wasn't flickering.

And the breathing coming from inside the door...

was closer.

Much closer.

This time, the hallway was clearer.

She could see the texture of the walls.

The cracks in the plaster, the shadows gathered in the corners...

Everything was too detailed.

Dreams weren't like this.

The red light stayed on.

It didn't blink anymore.

That meant time wasn't moving here.

She took a step.

Her footsteps echoed.

The echo... didn't lag behind.

This time, she was alone.

She stopped in the middle of the hallway.

It was instinctive.

As if there were an invisible line.

She looked at the door.

It was more open.

But still not fully.

What came through the gap wasn't darkness.

Darkness is something.

It has a definition.

This... didn't.

The sound of breathing came again.

Close.

Very close.

As if it wasn't coming from behind the door—

but from the door itself.

“Would you like me to hold your hand?”

The voice didn't come from anywhere.

Not from the walls.

Not from inside her head.

From somewhere in between.

She wanted to ask, "Who?"

But her mouth wouldn't open.

Her throat locked.

She took another step.

That's when she noticed.

The marks on the walls...

They were different from the ones she had seen before.

Some were layered on top of each other.

Again and again, in the same spot.

As if someone had tried to escape from the exact same place, over and over.

"If you stay here," the voice said, "it hurts less."

There was no threat in that sentence.

No comfort either.

Only information.

Her heart raced, but she didn't step back.

This wasn't courage.

It wasn't curiosity.

It was the inability to leave something unfinished.

She moved closer to the door.

The light hit her face.

Red made her skin look sick.

She reached for the edge of the door.

And right then—

a footstep echoed from behind the hallway.

A single step.

Then another.

She turned her head.

Far back in the corridor,

where the red light couldn't reach,

a silhouette stood.

It was human-shaped.

But unclear.

“Don't,” the silhouette said.

Its voice was muffled.

Tired.

She wanted to ask, "Do I know you?"

She couldn't.

The silhouette took a step forward.

It didn't enter the light.

"I got close on the first night too," it said.

"The second night... it becomes very convincing."

The breathing from the door quickened.

As if it were impatient.

"Go back," the silhouette said.

"You still have time."

She wanted to say, "What about you?"

"Why are you here?"

But the question never reached her tongue.

The door opened a little more.

Inside—

a face appeared.

It wasn't clear.

But it was very familiar.

It looked like her.

In that moment, everything stopped.

The breathing.

The light.

The sounds.

And only one thought remained:

If I open the door,

the one who wakes up won't be me.

She pulled back.

The door slammed shut suddenly.

The hallway went dark.

It felt like falling into an empty space.

When she opened her eyes, she was in her bed.

There was no sun.

But it wasn't night either.

The room was gray.

She reached for her phone.

The time:

03.16

One minute.

Her heart sped up.

The screen vibrated.

Unknown number.

“You got very close to the door.”

“I might not be able to hold you back next time.”

Her fingers froze above the screen.

She typed a reply.

Who are you?

This time, the answer didn't delay.

“One of the ones who made it through the third night.”

The time changed.

03.17

And the air in the room...

thickened again.

Before the third night arrived,

time stretched in a strange way.

The days didn't blur together.

On the contrary—

every second moved heavier than it should have.

When evening came, she turned the lights on early.

Closed the curtains.

Tried to make her room feel familiar.

She sat on the edge of the bed.

Straightened the sheets.

Flipped the pillow.

She had done these things before.

But this time, it was different.

This preparation wasn't for sleeping.

It was for staying awake.

She placed the phone on the desk.

The screen was facing down.

Notifications were off.

She listened to the clock.

There was no ticking.

But she could feel it.

Time was getting close.

She tried counting her breaths.

One.

Two.

Three.

She lost it on the fourth.

She looked out the window.

The streetlight was on.

No one stood beneath it.

For a moment, she looked at her reflection in the glass.

The face was hers.

But the eyes...

They were waiting for something.

The clock screen lit up.

Her heart sped up, but she didn't panic.

She knew this feeling now.

Waiting.

The phone didn't vibrate.

No message came.

That made her tenser.

She lay down on the bed, but didn't close her eyes.

Stared at the ceiling.

Watched the small crack above her.

The crack...

It looked a little longer.

She blinked.

It was still there.

The clock lit up again.

03.15

The sound of the room changed.

This time, the silence was thicker.

As if the walls were absorbing sound.

She cleared her throat.

She was glad she could hear her own breathing.

The phone vibrated.

Once.

Then stopped.

She didn't open the screen.

She waited.

Another vibration.

This time, she looked.

"Tonight will be quieter."

She didn't reply.

"Silence won't distract you."

Her fingers pressed against the edge of the screen without thinking.

What will happen?

She sent it.

Three dots appeared.

They didn't disappear for a long time.

"The door won't speak."

That sentence...

wasn't comforting.

"So your decision will be clearer."

Her heart pounded against her chest.

What if I don't open it?

The reply took time.

The clock lit up.

03.16

"Not opening it is a choice too."

"But not everyone is as strong as they think."

She slowly placed the phone beside the bed.

Closed her eyes.

"Stay awake," she told herself.

"No matter what."

But the body tired before the mind did.

Her eyelids grew heavy.

Her breathing deepened.

For a moment...

nothing happened.

Then—

The hallway.

This time, she didn't walk into it.

She was already inside.

There was no light.

No red.

Only gray.

The walls were closer.

The ceiling was lower.

The door...

It wasn't hiding anymore.

It stood directly in front of her.

Closed.

But trembling.

As if something behind it

was shifting impatiently.

There was no sound of breathing.

That was worse.

She took a step.

Her footsteps didn't echo.

The hallway swallowed the sound.

She stopped when she reached the door.

She didn't raise her hand.

That's when she noticed something on the door.

Thin scratches.

Nail marks.

Some new.

Some very old.

Some...

layered on top of each other.

"You've made it this far."

This time, the voice was clear.

Close.

Right behind the door.

“Those who want to go back

always stop like this.”

“When there’s only one step left.”

The door shook very slightly.

A thought passed through her mind.

Uninvited.

Maybe opening it is easier.

That thought frightened her.

She wanted to step back.

Her feet didn’t move.

The door slowly—

very slowly—

began to open.

This time, there was no face behind it.

There was emptiness.

But inside that emptiness...

stood a silhouette.

Its back was turned to her.

Its shoulders were slumped.

It felt familiar.

“I did,” the silhouette said,

“open it on the third night.”

There was no regret in its voice.

No anger.

Only exhaustion.

“I thought there was nothing behind the door,” it said.

“But it turns out...”

It didn't finish the sentence.

The silhouette turned its head slightly.

She couldn't see its face.

But she felt this:

That silhouette...

had woken up once.

And was no longer fully awake.

The hallway trembled.

The door opened a little more.

And in that moment—

she opened her eyes in her bed.

Her breathing was uneven.

Her heart was racing.

She grabbed her phone.

The time:

03.17

A notification.

“No one died tonight.”

A pause.

Then a second message.

“But someone opened it.”

She stared at the screen.

For a long time.

Then she typed.

Who?

No reply came.

The clock continued blinking quietly.

And in that moment, she understood:

The third night was over.

But the real story...

was just beginning.

The next day, as the sky grew dark, a message arrived.

A single sentence.

"Today. 18.40. Same place."

She didn't ask where that place was.

She didn't need to.

The old study room behind the school.

Unused for a long time.

Fogged-up windows,

a door that was always half open.

She had never been there before.

But she knew she had to go.

As she walked down the hallway, her footsteps echoed too loudly.

As if the school didn't want them there at this hour.

She stopped in front of the door.

Placed her hand on the handle.

Took a deep breath.

Opened it.

There were six people inside.

None of them were speaking.

The chairs weren't arranged neatly.

Everyone sat apart from one another.

Spaces between them.

Left on purpose.

The first thing she noticed was their eyes.

They all looked the same.

Sleep-deprived, but awake.

Afraid, but not running.

She closed the door quietly.

No one said "welcome."

A girl lifted her head.

Her hair was tied back, her hands clasped tightly on her knees.

"Seven," she said

"That makes seven of us."

Her voice was flat, almost emotionless.

A boy sat near the window.

He kept looking outside.

"If the first one didn't die," he said,

"then it means we still have time."

No one laughed.

Someone in the back cleared their throat.

"Let's not start with names," they said.

"There's no need."

Strangely, that sentence relaxed everyone.

"Alright," said the boy by the window.

"Then let's start with this."

He turned his head.

Looked at each of them, one by one.

“Which night are we on?”

There was a brief silence.

Then someone whispered.

“The fourth.”

Someone else added.

“For some of us, the third never ended.”

That sentence changed the air in the room.

One of the girls—sitting in the far corner—clenched her hands.

“Who opened the door?” she asked.

No one answered.

This silence was heavier than the others.

“Not fully,” someone said.

“Just... letting it in.”

A chill ran through her.

She remembered the silhouette from the night before.

“Then,” she said slowly,

“why are we here?”

This time, the answer came more clearly.

“Because we can’t endure it one by one,” someone said.

“And because when one person opens it, it affects all of us.”

The boy standing closest to the table pulled a notebook from his pocket.

Its pages were filled with scribbles.

“I started drawing,” he said.

“Every night. The hallway.”

He opened the notebook.

They all leaned in.

No one touched it.

The drawing...

looked like hers.

The same length.

The same door.

But there was one difference.

There were seven marks in front of the door.

"The first night, there were six," the boy said.

"Then it became seven."

"What does that mean?" someone asked.

No answer came.

Only this was said:

"It doesn't mean we're not alone anymore."

"This," he said as he closed the notebook,

"means we're being called together."

At that moment, a footstep passed outside the door.

They all flinched at the same time.

No one spoke.

The footsteps stopped.

And one of them,

for the first time, formed a clear sentence:

"If one of us doesn't go," they said,

"then all of us will."

Who said it didn't matter.

Because that sentence now belonged to all of them.

The footsteps were brief.

But they were enough.

Mert, who was closest to the garden door, noticed it first.

He didn't speak.

He just turned his head.

Ela followed his gaze.

Then Lina.

Selin's shoulders tensed.

Kerem closed his notebook.

Arda looked like he was about to stand up, then stopped.

Seven pairs of eyes locked onto the same spot.

Someone had passed in front of the door

that separated the garden from the school hallway.

They hadn't run.

They weren't in a hurry.

The light had only cut out for a moment.

Then it came back.

“Did you see it?” Selin asked.

Her voice was a whisper, but it wasn't shaking.

“Yes,” Lina said.

One word.

Ela didn't move from her seat.

But she didn't take her eyes off the door.

“It wasn't a student,” Mert said.

“You could tell by the way they walked.”

“If it was a teacher, why didn't they stop?” Arda asked.

No one answered.

Kerem slowly stood up.

The sound of his shoes on the stone floor of the garden was too clear.

“Did any of you,” he said,

“see the door open?”

Ela shook her head.

“No.”

“Me neither,” Lina said.

“But—”

She didn't finish the sentence.

"But what?" Selin asked.

Lina swallowed.

"When they passed... they didn't look at us."

That was strange.

"Anyway," Mert said,

"we don't even know who it was."

Ela spoke then.

Her voice was calm, but the sentence was heavy.

"They acted like they knew."

Everyone turned to her.

"What do you mean?" Arda asked.

"We were there," Ela said.

"Looking.

But they... walked as if being watched

wasn't even a possibility."

Kerem frowned.

“So?”

“So,” said Ela,

“either he didn’t see us—

or he was used to seeing us.”

The garden light flickered again.

This time, longer.

Selin instinctively grabbed her arm.

“Tonight,” she said,

“everyone had promised.”

“What promise?” Arda asked.

“Not to be alone.”

A silence followed.

Mert took a step toward the door.

Ela spoke immediately.

“Mert.”

He stopped.

She didn’t say don’t go.

But her tone meant the same thing.

Mert turned back.

"If you think someone is watching us," he said,

"is staying here really safer?"

"No," Lina said.

"More honest."

Kerem looked at the door once more.

"The one who passed," he said,

"didn't walk like he was in a corridor."

"What do you mean?" Selin asked.

"Like in a dream," Kerem said.

"Those who walk through corridors...

don't rush."

That sentence settled over the garden.

Ela stood up.

This time, no one stopped her.

She walked toward the door.

Her steps were slow.

On purpose.

When she reached it, she stopped.

She didn't reach out.

She looked inside through the glass.

The corridor was empty.

But the light...

was red.

Ela turned back.

Her expression hadn't changed.

"Tonight," she said,

"The door won't stay in the dream."

"Are you sure?" Arda asked.

Ela shook her head.

"No."

That answer was honest.

At that moment, the phones didn't vibrate at the same time.

They vibrated one by one.

First Selin.

Then Lina.

Then Mert.

Ela checked hers last.

Unknown number.

"You're late."

Then a second message came.

"But you're still together."

Ela lowered the phone.

Looked at the others.

"Tonight," she said,

"no one is sleeping."

No one objected.

Because they all understood at the same time that the one passing by the door was not just a single person.

Someone passed in front of the door again.

This time, not fast.

Not running.

Not hiding.

Just... passing.

Lara realized she was holding her breath, but didn't release it.

As if making a sound would make that silhouette stop and look at her.

Mert's head was the first to turn.

Like a reflex.

As if he had lived this before.

Ela didn't stand up, but her shoulders tightened.

"Again," she said, almost whispering.

"Right?"

Arda didn't answer.

His eyes were fixed on where the door was.

Because this time, the difference was this:

The person who passed by the door did not come back.

Lina pressed herself closer to the edge of the bench.

"Just now... did it stop?" she said.

"I mean, for a moment while walking?"

Selin slowly nodded.

"Yes."

Kerem felt his teeth clenched together.

“This isn’t a coincidence anymore.”

The lights in the courtyard were steady.

There was no wind.

The trees didn’t move.

But the area near the door...

that place was full.

Lara wanted to look away.

But she didn’t.

She didn’t tell anyone the thought passing through her mind:

It’s not that someone noticed us...

They’re waiting for us.

Mert stepped forward two paces.

“Don’t get closer,” Ela said this time, her voice firm.

Mert stopped, but didn’t step back.

“The first time, it just passed by,” he said.

“The second time, it slowed down.

The third time, it will stop.”

“The third time?” Selin said.

“Yes,” Mert said.

“Because if someone keeps coming back to the same place, it means they’re thinking of staying there.”

Silence spread.

No sound came from the door.

It didn’t open.

It didn’t close.

But Lara noticed something:

The reflection of the light on the glass of the door had changed.

Someone was there.

Still.

Lina whispered,

“It’s watching us.”

Kerem lifted his head.

“No,” he said.

“It’s counting us.”

That sentence dropped over the courtyard like a weight.

Seven people.

In the same place.

At the same time.

And for the first time, Lara felt this:

This story didn't want them one by one—

it wanted them together.

Another footstep was heard near the door.

But this time, it didn't pass by.

This time, the sound was clear.

A single step.

Then it stopped.

Lara's throat went dry.

This time, there was no uncertainty to escape into.

The sound was close.

Real.

A shadow appeared on the glass of the door.

It wasn't sharp, but it was no longer faint enough to deny.

Ela stood up.

“We’re here,” she said.

Her voice didn’t tremble.

That didn’t mean she wasn’t afraid; it only meant she had decided not to step back.

Arda instinctively looked at Lara.

As if, because she was the narrator, she was supposed to carry the weight of this moment.

Lina held her breath.

Selin’s fingers tightened around the edge of the bench.

Kerem didn’t move where he stood.

Mert was measuring the distance between them and the door.

And then—

A sound came from behind the door.

It wasn’t speech.

It wasn’t a whisper.

It was someone breathing.

Long.

Intentional.

Meant to be heard.

The first thought that crossed Lara's mind was this:

It's not trying to scare us.

It's testing us.

"Say something," Selin said, unable to carry the silence any longer.

"Who are you?"

No answer came.

But the shadow on the glass of the door shifted.

To the right.

Then it appeared again.

"The first time, it passed," Arda said in a low voice.

"The second time, it slowed down.

Now it's stopping."

Mert nodded.

"Because now it's not running away."

Ela stepped toward the door.

This time, no one stopped her.

"If you know us," she said,

“stop hiding.”

At that moment, the person behind the door moved for the first time, truly moved.

A hand,

from behind the glass,

rose very slowly.

The fingers weren't distinct.

But the hand's presence was certain.

Lara's heart raced.

Because the hand seemed to be looking directly at her, hovering in the middle of the door.

And then a voice came.

Clear.

One word.

“Lara.”

It was neither shouted nor whispered.

Yet everyone in the courtyard heard it.

Lina recoiled.

Selin's lips parted, but no sound came out.

Kerem's face tensed.

Arda cursed under his breath, half-breathing.

Mert slowly turned to Lara.

“Not us,” he said.

“It’s calling you.”

Lara couldn’t move.

Because at that moment, she realized:

their gathering in the study courtyard tonight was no coincidence.

There were seven of them, yes.

But the story,

for the first time,

had centered on one person.

The door handle went down.

And this time, the door began to open.

It didn’t creak.

This caught Lara’s attention the most.

It was a door that had been used for years; it should have made a sound.

But it didn’t.

It was as if it had been oiled long ago.

As if someone had prepared it for this moment.

The door opened a few inches.

A yellowish light spilled into the courtyard.

Neither strong nor weak.

It simply... existed.

The person behind the door didn't step forward.

Mert reflexively stepped ahead.

Lara noticed, but didn't stop him.

Because for the first time, she wanted to allow someone to stand in front of her.

"You know its name," Mert said.

"That's not enough."

The shadow behind the door shifted.

But the face was still not visible.

"Enough," Ela said.

"Tell us why you brought us here."

There was a moment of silence.

Then the voice from behind the door spoke again.

This time, closer.

"I didn't bring you here," the voice said.

"You were already coming."

Lara shivered inside.

There was no threat in that sentence.

But there was certainty.

Arda shook his head from side to side.

"Nonsense."

"No," said the voice.

"Because I was the first to pass.

The second time, you noticed me.

And now... you are standing exactly where you are."

Selin whispered involuntarily:

"The third stage."

The door opened a little more.

This time, the shoulders appeared.

A dark coat.

Like someone from inside the school.

But at the same time, not.

Lina's voice trembled:

"Why were you watching us?"

A brief pause.

Then the answer came:

"Because you were watching too."

Kerem frowned.

"Watching what?"

"Each other," the voice said.

"And, without realizing it... me."

Lara's heart raced.

Because at that moment, she remembered something clearly:

The footsteps behind her in the corridor,

before they went up to the study courtyard.

At that time, she hadn't turned to look.

Now she knew who it was.

But she still didn't know the name.

“What’s your name?” Lara asked.

This time, the voice didn’t respond immediately.

The person behind the door took another step.

The face was still not fully visible,

but it was no longer hiding either.

“Names,” said the calm voice,

“are not the beginning.”

Mert lost his patience.

“Then what is?”

A short silence followed.

Then:

“A meeting.”

The word fell into the middle of the courtyard.

Heavy.

Not easily carried.

Lara took a deep breath.

For the first time, not from fear,

but deliberately.

“Is it over?” she asked.

“Or is it starting now?”

The person behind the door lifted their head.

And for the first time, Lara saw their eyes clearly.

There was no threat in the gaze.

No excitement either.

It was simply:

Wait.

“Now,” the person said,

“it truly begins.”

The person at the door paused for a few seconds.

Their eyes were on Lara, but they didn't stop at one look.

They examined each of them in turn: Mert, Ela, Arda, Lina, Selin, Kerem.

As if measuring what each felt, what each hid.

Then, quietly, they stepped back.

There was no rush in their steps,

but step by step they exited the courtyard and merged into the darkness.

Mert kept his eyes on the door.

"They're gone," he said quietly.

But his voice carried unease.

Ela was still standing.

"This doesn't mean it's over," she whispered.

"You felt it, didn't you?"

They were watching us, but before leaving..."

She paused, struggling for words.

"...it was like they left a message for each of us."

Lara looked at the door one last time.

It was empty,

but its shadow still seemed to move within the light.

There was no wind,

but the leaves still trembled.

"This is just the first test," she thought.

Arda stepped back and shoved his hands into his pockets.

"For someone to control things like this..."

it's not normal."

Kerem remained silent.

But Lara noticed his gaze was still fixed on the door.

"He's paying attention," she thought.

"Just not admitting it."

Selin pressed her trembling hands against the edge.

"What... are we doing here?" she asked.

The fear in her voice spread to everyone.

Lina took a deep breath.

"Maybe we should do something now," she said.

"Instead of just standing and waiting..."

And at that moment, the seven of them looked at each other.

With their eyes alone, they agreed:

We can't be passive anymore.

Lara realized that.

As the narrator, she didn't control them,

but deep down, she took responsibility.

"Alright," she said quietly.

"Let's move."

Everyone exchanged small glances.

The person behind the door was gone,

but their presence still affected every step.

Mert stepped forward.

"First task," he said,

"check the courtyard.

We need to know who's looking where, which spots create shadows."

Ela nodded.

"And if they come back... we need to be ready."

Arda shrugged.

"Ready... but how?"

Lara answered quietly:

"Together."

And at that moment, the seven realized:

Tonight, they were no longer alone.

The shadow that had once existed behind the door had gone.

But its effect, like a completed test,

settled heavily on all of them.

And the silence in the courtyard now offered a space not just to wait,

but to plan.

The shadow behind the door was gone.

But the silence didn't last long.

Mert quickly scanned the courtyard.

"There's something hidden," he said.

His steps hit the stones.

"Look!"

Ela raised her hand, stopping Mert.

"Stop! Don't move. Maybe it's back."

Lara's chest tightened.

But this time, she wouldn't just watch—she would guide.

"Start from the right corner," she said.

"Step by step. Make no sound."

Kerem moved behind the bench.

Selin stood beside him.

Arda and Lina exchanged a look—no words needed.

Their eyes said it all: preparation, caution, waiting.

For a moment, everything froze.

There was no wind. The leaves were still.

But in the very center of the courtyard, the shadow still quivered, as if it moved even when unseen.

Mert quietly took a few steps.

The stones cracked under his feet.

The shadow suddenly shifted to the right.

“There!” whispered Ela.

Everyone’s eyes locked.

Lara stepped forward.

“Stay calm!” she said.

“Just watch. Don’t move.”

The shadow suddenly accelerated.

It crossed the courtyard diagonally.

It seemed to have no target,

but Lara realized one thing: someone was testing them.

"The door!" Mert shouted.

"Maybe it's coming back!"

The shadow moved toward the door.

But it stopped in front of it.

It took a step, then pulled back.

As if giving them a sign.

Ela held her breath.

Arda slowly shrugged.

Selin trembled but didn't retreat.

Kerem was silent, but his eyes glimmered.

Lina took a deep breath.

Lara thought:

This is just a sign.

A test.

And now, we're part of it.

The shadow stepped away from the door.

It wasn't fully visible,

but the tension it left behind sharpened the air.

Mert stepped forward.

“What do we do now?” he asked.

Lara took a deep breath.

“We don’t follow it,” she said.

“But we won’t leave this place.

We’re all together.

And if it comes back...”

Ela nodded.

“...this time, we’ll be ready.”

The courtyard fell silent again.

But this silence was no longer still;

it was the silence of preparation and tension.

For the first time, Lara realized:

Tonight wouldn’t end.

But now, the seven of them had truly become a team.

Suddenly, the shadow emerged from the door.

This time it was fast, not slow.

As soon as Mert stepped forward, the shadow darted left and right, hitting the courtyard stones.

Under the light, it cast short, sharp shadows.

Ela took a step back,

but Lara immediately held her.

“Stop! Stay calm... but watch!”

The shadow moved toward the seven of them.

Mert stepped forward,

“Stop!” he shouted,

but his voice was lost in the wind.

Arda leapt from behind the bench to follow the shadow.

But the shadow suddenly changed direction,

passing in front of Arda and speeding toward Lina.

Selin seemed about to scream,

but Lara grabbed her hand.

“Stop!” she said firmly.

“We won’t lose control!”

Kerem took a step forward.

The shadow passed right beside them.

The sound of stones hitting the ground made everyone flinch.

Ela cautiously stepped forward to follow the shadow.

Suddenly, the shadow stopped,

right in the center of the seven,

leaning slightly, its gaze fixed on Lara.

Lara's heart pounded.

But this time, she didn't retreat.

She stepped forward and shouted:

"You can't hide anymore!"

The shadow darted sharply to the right, and Lara reflexively moved behind Mert.

The shadow froze for a second, then spun quickly in the middle of the courtyard and suddenly returned behind the door.

Mert, Arda, and Ela were out of breath.

Selin, Lina, and Kerem were still frozen in place.

But they all knew the same thing:

Tonight, they would no longer just wait.

Lara took a deep breath.

"Alright," she said.

“We won’t play by its game. We’ll make a plan. Now.”

Mert nodded.

“We have to trust each other.

Tonight... we move together.”

Ela pointed at the shadow.

“Can we approach it... instead of just watching?”

Lara thought for a moment.

Then, in a determined voice, she said:

“Yes. But everyone will be ready. No one moves alone.”

Arda clenched his teeth.

“Okay, but first... we need to know where it’s standing.”

A light flickered from behind the door.

The shadow was still there,

but it was no longer a threat—

it was brave enough to initiate action.

Lara’s eyes were on the door,

her hand firm with determination.

"Let's start," she said.

And the seven stepped forward slowly, ready to make their first move in the courtyard.

Lara took a deep breath, watching the shadow out of the corner of her eye one more time.

"Alright," she said, her voice steady.

"We're done waiting. Now we'll make a plan."

Mert nodded.

"First, let's assign tasks.

Everyone needs to know what to do."

Ela stepped forward:

"I'll follow the shadow. Wherever it goes, I'll advance carefully and report."

Arda smiled:

"Okay, I'll block it from the right side.

In a way, I'll create an area it can't pass through."

Selin frowned:

"Lina and I will watch the door.

If it comes back, we'll see it first and warn everyone."

Kerem spoke quietly:

"I'll stay in the center.

I'll be the connecting point.

Communication will stay clear. No one will lose track of anyone."

Mert quickly added,

"I'll also support Ela while she follows the shadow.

If needed, I'll intervene."

Lara watched them all and, in a determined voice, put the final point:

"Alright. Tasks are set. But stay alert.

Every step is connected. No mistakes. We move only together."

Ela nodded, Arda approved, Selin and Lina quietly nodded.

Kerem took his hands out of his pockets and took a deep breath.

Lara thought:

This is just a plan. But it's the first step.

The rest will become clear when we confront the shadow.

The courtyard was silent.

The shadow was still distant,

but it was no longer just an observer;

it had become the target.

Lara quietly gathered the seven of them.

“Okay, everyone in position?” she asked.

Mert and Ela nodded.

Arda scanned the area with his eyes.

Selin and Lina were by the door, Kerem stood in the center.

Lara gave a signal, and they began to move.

Ela followed the shadow.

She stepped silently, careful of the crunching stones.

Mert moved right beside her, ready to support if needed.

The shadow moved slowly but cautiously across the courtyard.

But the coordination among the seven of them affected it.

Every movement was measured, every gaze recorded.

Arda blocked the right side.

The shadow suddenly veered right, but Arda's presence stopped it.

Ela stepped back, Mert provided support.

Selin and Lina watched the door, ready in case it returned.

Kerem monitored both groups, maintaining coordination.

Lara directed:

“Ela, shift left, keep Mert beside you.

Arda, stay fixed on the right.

Selin, watch the door.

Lina, continue monitoring the right corner.

Kerem, cover the gaps.

Everyone ready?”

Heads nodded once more.

There would be no more waiting.

Everyone was in position, and the shadow had to be contained.

Suddenly, the shadow accelerated.

Stones flew, leaves scattered across the courtyard.

Ela quickly followed the shadow, Mert moved alongside her.

Arda blocked the right path, the shadow tried to retreat but had no escape.

Selin and Lina kept watch by the door; the shadow momentarily aimed for the door, but both were ready.

Kerem closed the gap in the center, limiting the shadow’s movement.

Lara took a deep breath.

This was the first real confrontation.

The plan was working.

The shadow stopped in front of the door.

It didn't retreat.

It was now measuring the seven of them—but they had also initiated action.

Ela whispered, "Did we do it?"

Lara replied,

"Not yet.

But the first move is ours.

Now it's the shadow's turn."

The shadow seemed to take a deep breath and stepped forward.

The courtyard had now fully turned into a battlefield.

The shadow was cornered but broke the silence.

Suddenly, it lunged across the courtyard with a striking move.

Ela leapt aside, but now there was no running; the shadow was trying to scatter them.

Mert reacted immediately, moving to intercept the shadow.

Arda moved from the right, blocking its path, but the shadow jumped sideways, passing him once more.

Lina and Selin at the door were ready.

The shadow moved toward the door, but both made a move to block its passage.

Kerem stayed in the center, quickly covering the gap and limiting its maneuver.

Lara shouted quickly:

“Ela, steer it left!

Mert, provide support!

Arda, maintain pressure from the right!

Selin and Lina, stay at the door!

Kerem, cover the gaps!”

This time, everyone was active.

The shadow wasn't just moving; it was countering the strategy of the seven.

The courtyard became chaotic in an instant.

The shadow lunged forward and deflected Ela.

Mert blocked the shadow, Arda reinforced from the right.

Kerem and the two at the door maintained coordination.

Lara thought:

This was no longer a game.

The real confrontation had begun.

The shadow suddenly paused.

But this pause felt like preparation for a new, unexpected move.

The seven held their breaths, each committed to their role.

Ela whispered,

“This is more dangerous than the beginning.

Now it’s not our turn—it’s its turn.”

Suddenly, the shadow made an unexpected move:

It targeted Ela, creating an opening in the courtyard.

Mert immediately stepped in, but the shadow moved fast and agile.

Arda intervened from the right, but the shadow passed him, appearing in front of Selin.

Lina blocked the door, preventing a possible escape.

Kerem tried to maintain balance in the center,

but the shadow was determined to scatter the seven.

Lara took a deep breath and quickly gave instructions:

“Everyone, change positions!

Ela, slide left, Mert stay beside her!

Arda, continue pressure from the right!

Selin and Lina, stay ready at the door, Kerem, intervene from the center!”

The shadow made a swift leap,

trying to flank Arda and threaten Ela.

Mert and Kerem closed the gap.

For a moment, everyone held their breath.

Lara thought:

This is our greatest test yet.

Plans are working, but one mistake... could end everything.

The shadow stepped forward,

and the courtyard fully transformed into an action scene.

Mert and Ela cornered the shadow,

Arda and Kerem provided support,

Selin and Lina secured the door.

Lara whispered quietly:

“Tonight will end... either with us, or with the shadow.”

The seven readied themselves, filled with determination and coordination, for their final moves.

The shadow was trapped in the courtyard but still moving.

This time, it was not just testing—they were being attacked.

Ela quickly slid left, Mert stayed right beside her.

Arda increased pressure from the right, Kerem coordinated the center.

Selin and Lina secured the door.

Lara quietly observed them all, giving instructions at the most critical moments.

The shadow lunged forward suddenly.

It bypassed Ela and faced Mert, throwing off the shadow's target with a single move.

Mert moved to constrain the shadow, but it twisted sharply, slipping past Arda.

Lara shouted quickly:

"Everyone, change positions! Left, right, center!"

The shadow repeated its move, and the seven coordinated their actions.

Ela and Mert cornered the shadow, Arda and Kerem provided support,

Selin and Lina secured the door.

But the shadow, using an unexpected tactic, took advantage of the courtyard stones, creating a new escape path.

Ela followed the shadow quickly, Mert tried to block it.

Lara realized: this move showed that the shadow had a plan.

Arda whispered,

"This is not just a test... now the real battle begins."

The shadow surprised Ela and lunged toward Mert.

But Arda and Kerem reacted swiftly, cornering the shadow into a narrow space.

Selin and Lina at the door intervened, blocking any escape.

Lara thought silently: "Tonight, it will end here."

But everyone's role is critical.

Ela took a deep breath and continued tracking the shadow.

Mert cornered it, Arda pressed from the right.

Kerem secured the center, Selin and Lina waited at the door.

And then—the shadow paused.

But this pause felt like preparation for the final move.

Lara whispered,

"Get ready... now either we all win, or the shadow does."

The seven had the shadow cornered, but now they were surrounded by a gray mist and emptiness.

Lara stepped forward, facing the shadow:

"Who are you? Did you start the beginning of this dream?"

The shadow paused for a moment, then slowly lifted its head, revealing a face—the face of Lara herself.

The seven froze, their breaths caught.

"Yes..." said the shadow-Lara,

"The one who opened the door... it was always you."

But you... never truly existed.”

Ela, Mert, Arda, Selin, Lina, and Kerem opened their eyes,

but their surroundings seemed to have vanished.

“You... we... were always parts of the dream,” said shadow-Lara.

“None of you were real. The one who opened the door, the losers, the ones chasing the shadow... were all illusions created inside the dream.

And here is the truth: you will never wake up.

Because this dream... will last forever.”

In that moment, the seven began to vanish one by one.

Yet at the same time, in their minds, they saw the shadow again.

Every movement, every breath—they were all repeated inside the dream.

Lara thought: “None of us ever truly existed... we were trapped in a dream.”

And the one who opened the door... it was us, always us.

The End