

HARIYA

A SECRET OCEAN

SAMREEN NAAZ



BlueRoseONE.com
S t o r i e s M a t t e r
New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

Copyright © Samreen Naaz 2026

All rights reserved by author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author. Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained herein, the publisher assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within.

BlueRose Publishers takes no responsibility for any damages, losses, or liabilities that may arise from the use or misuse of the information, products, or services provided in this publication.



For permissions requests or inquiries regarding this publication,
please contact:

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

www.BlueRoseONE.com

info@bluerosepublishers.com

+91 8882 898 898

+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-93-7825-924-1

Cover Design: Ajay Dhyani

Typesetting: Sagar

First Edition: June 2026

The book shows;

- *Childhood memories
- *Struggles with family and circumstances
- *Emotional growth
- *Long term relation despite challenges

From the author;

Dear readers,

Writing HARIYA has been a journey close to my heart. This story isn't just a state of growing up, friendships and relationship---it is a collection of memories, emotions, and little moments that shaped me. Through Hariya's eyes, I wanted to share the joy, the struggles, the love and the loss that everyone have in their life.

I hope that while reading, you feel the emotions of the character and maybe even see a little your own story reflected here.

Thankyou for letting HARIYA into your world. I'm so happy to share it with you.

With love,

SAMREEN NAAZ

Chapter 1

The beginning of silence

Zerlin lived with her family in her father's village, a place where life moved quietly and everything felt familiar. She was only five years old at that time, a student in L.K.G., at an age when life is meant to be simple, carefree, and full of small happiness. Children her age are not supposed to feel confused or uncomfortable—they are meant to feel safe.

But for Zerlin, something didn't always feel right.

At school, a few boys used to trouble her in ways she couldn't fully understand. She didn't have the words to explain what was happening, but deep inside, she knew it wasn't normal. It left her with a strange feeling—something that made her uneasy without knowing why.

One day, she stood in a long queue near the teacher's desk, waiting quietly for her notebook to

be checked. The classroom was filled with noise—children talking, laughing, moving around without care. It was just another ordinary day for everyone else.

But not for her.

As she stood there, holding her notebook close to her chest, the boy standing behind her did something that made her body suddenly stiffen. It happened quickly, almost unnoticed by others—but for Zerlin, it felt heavy and wrong.

Her fingers tightened around her notebook.

Her heart started beating faster.

She didn't turn around.

She didn't say anything.

Instead, she quietly stepped out of the line and walked to the back, as if trying to escape something she didn't understand. No one noticed. No one asked.

In a room full of voices, her silence disappeared completely.

After a few moments, another boy looked at her and said softly, "You can stand here."

Zerlin hesitated for a second, then nodded. Trust came easily to her—she was too young to question it. She stepped forward again, hoping this time everything would feel normal.

But after a few moments, the same thing happened again.

This time, the feeling didn't just confuse her—it scared her.

Her small heart filled with fear and questions she couldn't answer. Why was this happening? Was it her fault? Was she doing something wrong?

She didn't know.

She couldn't understand.

And she couldn't explain.

So she did the only thing she knew—

She stayed silent. Days passed, and such incidents continued. Some boys even wrote love letters to her, which made her feel even more uncomfortable. She was too young to speak up and too scared to tell anyone.

So, she chose silence.

Despite all this, Zerlin was a bright student. She loved studying and was appreciated by her teachers. At home, Zerlin was deeply loved, especially by her father and grandparents. Their love wasn't loud or shown in big ways, but it was always there—in small moments, in quiet care, in the way they looked at her and spoke to her. It made her feel safe without even realizing it, like nothing in the world could truly harm her as long as she was with them.

In their presence, she felt important. She felt protected. She felt like she belonged.

But happiness doesn't stay the same forever.

During her final term that year, her grandmother passed away.

At first, Zerlin didn't fully understand what had happened. People around her were quieter than usual. Voices became softer. Faces looked different. Something had changed, but no one explained it in a way she could truly understand.

Slowly, the house began to feel different.

The warmth that once filled every corner started fading. The laughter that used to echo through the

rooms disappeared. The small, everyday conversations—the ones that once felt normal and unimportant—were suddenly gone.

Everything became quieter.

Too quiet.

Zerlin would look around sometimes, as if expecting things to go back to how they were. As if the familiar sounds would return. But they didn't.

Instead, there was a silence she couldn't explain.

She didn't have the words to describe what she was feeling, but she could feel it deeply—a strange emptiness, like something important had been taken away.

And even though she was too young to fully understand loss, she began to understand something else—

That some absences don't just leave a space around you.

They leave a space inside you.

And from that moment on, the house was no longer the same.

And somewhere, quietly, neither was Zerlin.

After some time, her father decided to shift the family to the city. They moved to RB City, where they had their own house. However, her father continued his business in the village and could only visit them once a week. Zerlin joined a new school in the city. Everything was new—the environment, the people, the routines. At first, she felt nervous, but slowly she began to adjust. She made new friends and even became more confident than before. Near her home, she found other children to play with. Her days became lively again. Even though she was happy, a part of her still missed the village—the open spaces, familiar faces, and simple life. During holidays, she would eagerly go back to visit. Every Friday felt special because her father would come home, often bringing chocolates for her. On weekends, the family would go out for dinner together. Those moments felt complete, like everything was finally in place. But then, everything changed with the arrival of COVID-19. Due to the lockdown, Zerlin had to return to the village for a year. Slowly, she lost contact with her city friends. The laughter, the daily conversations—all faded away. Even after returning to the city later, things were no longer the same. She rarely met her old

friends, and her life became quieter than before. During this time, she made a new friend named Lena, who lived near her house and studied in the same class. At first, their friendship wasn't very strong. They argued often, especially until fourth grade. Teachers used to say they looked alike, but Lena sometimes behaved differently with Zerlin, which made things confusing. However, time changed everything. After fourth grade, Zerlin's family decided to move back to the village permanently. Her father was living alone there, and her grandfather needed care. This decision brought mixed emotions. Zerlin felt happy to return to her roots, but also sad to leave her friends behind. She informed her friends about her departure. They exchanged farewell gifts, and those moments were filled with emotions that words couldn't fully express. After her final exams, she returned home and saw everything packed. It felt real now—she was leaving. That day, she was fasting, but quietly, she broke her fast without telling anyone. Perhaps it was the emotional weight she was carrying. The journey back to the village was tiring. Her stomach hurt badly, but she chose to ignore it. After reaching home, she

started cleaning her room, trying to settle into her old space again. Later, when she went to the washroom, she noticed something that frightened her deeply—red, jelly-like blood. Her heart started racing. "Did I get cancer?" she thought in fear. She had no idea what was happening. She quickly went to her mother and aunt, asking them to come with her. But since she had already flushed it, they couldn't see anything. Her aunt suspected that Zerlin had started her first period, but her mother refused to believe it, saying she was too young. After some time, when her mother saw stains on her clothes, the truth became clear. There were no sanitary pads available, so her mother gave her a cloth. Zerlin felt scared, confused, and extremely uncomfortable. She didn't understand her own body. Her mother simply said, "This happens to every girl." But for Zerlin, it felt like something unknown and frightening. Her father was asked to bring pads, but he forgot. Meanwhile, Zerlin was still expected to help with household work. She was in pain, experiencing cramps she had never felt before, yet she continued working silently. Her father noticed and suggested she should rest, but her mother insisted she learn responsibilities. That

night, Zerlin went to her uncle's house. She shared her experience with her sisters-in-law, who teased her playfully and asked for a "party." She smiled shyly but still felt confused inside. Two days later, it was Eid. The house was filled with happiness and preparations. One of her school friends came to invite her, but her parents refused to let her go. Later, Zerlin went to meet her grandfather that day, carrying his Eid clothes carefully in her hands. There was a quiet happiness inside her—something simple, something pure. She walked up to him and said softly,

"Dada... look, I brought your Eid clothes. You should wear them."

He looked at her and gave a faint smile, the kind that felt gentle but a little tired. Still, it was enough to make her feel warm inside.

"Hmm... okay," he replied slowly.

She stood there for a moment, watching him, as if just being near him was enough.

He got up to take a bath, moving more slowly than usual. Zerlin didn't think much of it at that time. For her, it was just another normal moment—another small memory in a day that felt ordinary.

But then, suddenly—

He fell.

The sound was unexpected, heavy, and frightening.

Everything changed in that moment.

The house, which had been filled with preparation and quiet excitement for Eid, suddenly filled with panic. Voices became louder, faster. People rushed. Someone called his name again and again.

"Dada! Dada!"

Zerlin stood there, frozen.

She didn't fully understand what was happening, but she knew something was wrong.

Something was very wrong.

From that moment on, nothing felt normal again.

His health began to decline. Days turned into hospital visits. The smell of medicines replaced the warmth of home. Conversations became serious. Smiles became rare.

Zerlin stayed close to him.

She would sit beside him quietly, watching him breathe, as if making sure he was still there. Sometimes she would feed him slowly, carefully,

afraid that even the smallest mistake might hurt him. Other times, she would gently massage his hands, her tiny fingers trying to bring him comfort in ways she didn't fully understand.

She didn't want to leave his side.

Not even for a moment.

One night, unable to hold her fear any longer, she turned to her brother and asked softly, "Will Dada be okay?"

He looked at her and said,
"Don't worry. Everything will be fine."

She nodded.

But somewhere deep inside, she didn't believe it.

There was a strange feeling in her chest—a quiet fear that wouldn't go away.

A few days later, she was sitting in his room.

Something felt different.

The room was too quiet.

Not the kind of quiet she was used to, but a heavy silence that made her feel uncomfortable. She looked around slowly, as if searching for something she couldn't see.

Then suddenly, a cousin rushed in.

"Lock the house," he said quickly.

His voice sounded urgent.

Zerlin's heart started beating faster.

She walked outside and saw her mother crying.

"Ammi... what happened?" she asked, her voice trembling.

Her mother looked at her, tears in her eyes, and said words that Zerlin would never forget—

"Your grandfather is no more."

For a moment, everything stopped.

Zerlin didn't cry.

She didn't speak.

She didn't move.

It felt like time had frozen around her.

The words didn't make sense.

How could someone just... not be there anymore?

How could a person who was there yesterday suddenly be gone?

She stood there, silent, trying to understand something that her heart refused to accept.

But later, when his body was brought home—

Reality hit her.

She saw him lying there, still and quiet, in a way she had never seen before.

"Dada..." she whispered.

But there was no answer.

That's when everything broke.

She cried uncontrollably, her small body shaking with a pain she had never felt before. It wasn't just sadness—it was something deeper, something heavier.

The person she had come back for...

The person who made the village feel like home...

Was gone.

After a few weeks, life slowly started moving again.

Zerlin joined a new school near the village, but she didn't like it. Nothing felt right. Nothing felt familiar.

Within three days, her father decided to send her back to RB City.

Back in her old school, she struggled with her studies. She had missed too much. Her mind felt distracted, her heart somewhere else.

But slowly, she reconnected with Lena.

This time, their friendship became stronger.

They laughed together, shared secrets, and supported each other in ways that made things a little easier. Lena became one of the few bright parts of Zerlin's life during that time.

Still, something inside her had changed.

On the last day of fifth grade, there was a class party.

As always, Zerlin brought biryani from home.

Everyone laughed, ate, and enjoyed.

But somewhere in between the laughter, there was a quiet sadness.

Things were changing again.

And she could feel it.

After exams, she went back to the village for holidays.

But this time, it didn't feel the same.

Something was missing.

Someone was missing.

Her grandfather.

One day, while organizing his clothes, she reached into one of his pockets.

Her fingers touched something small.

She pulled it out.

It was a chocolate.

Her hands froze.

For a moment, she couldn't move.

Tears slowly filled her eyes as memories rushed back—how he would always keep chocolates for her, how he would smile and hand them to her as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

And now—

The chocolate was still there.

But he wasn't.

She held it tightly in her hand, as if letting go of it would mean losing him all over again.

Her chest felt heavy.

Her throat tightened.

And without realizing, tears started falling.

It was such a small thing.

Just a chocolate.

But at that moment, it meant everything.

Because it wasn't just a chocolate.

It was love.

It was memory.

It was him.

For a second, she could almost imagine him standing there, smiling, calling her name, handing it to her like he always did.

But when she looked up—

There was only silence.

She pressed the chocolate close to her heart, holding onto it as if it could bring him back, even just for a moment.

And in that quiet, painful moment, she understood something she had never understood before—

People may leave this world.

But the love they give...

Doesn't leave with them.

It stays behind.

In small things.

In habits.

In memories that return when you least expect them.

Sometimes those memories hurt, because they remind you of what's gone.

But sometimes, they feel warm—like a gentle reminder that even though that person isn't here anymore, a part of them still lives inside you.

Zerlin closed her eyes and held the chocolate tighter.

And silently, without saying a word, she made a promise—

She would never forget him.
Because even though he was gone...
His love was still there.
And maybe, in some quiet way—
He still was too.

Chapter 2

The quite changes



Sixth grade didn't arrive like a beginning.

It didn't feel like a fresh page, or a new chapter waiting to be written.

It felt like something that had already started... and was simply continuing, without asking her if she was ready.

The world around Zerlin didn't change suddenly.

It never did.

Instead, it shifted slowly—so quietly that most people wouldn't even notice it happening.

But Zerlin did.

Maybe because she had already lived through enough changes to understand something most children her age didn't—

Nothing stays the same.

Not people.

Not places.

Not even the way your heart feels.

The first few days of her new class passed in a simple rhythm.

New teachers stood in front of the board, writing unfamiliar lessons.

New subjects filled her notebooks.

New seating arrangements placed her beside people she didn't know yet.

Everything was different.

But nothing felt heavy.

Surprisingly, Zerlin adjusted faster than she thought she would.

She wasn't as scared as before.

Not like the girl she used to be.

There was a quiet strength in her now—something that had grown without her realizing it.

Maybe it came from all the times she had been forced to start again.

Or maybe it came from learning, slowly, that fear doesn't stop change.

It only makes you feel it more.

Soon, she found her way back to something familiar.

Her old friends.

The ones who lived near her home.

The moment she saw them again, something inside her relaxed.

The laughter came back first.

Then the small jokes.

Then the feeling of belonging.

"Where were you all this time?" one of them asked.

"Here only," Zerlin smiled lightly.

"You forgot us, didn't you?"

"No," she shook her head, "I just... had things."

They didn't ask more.

They didn't need to.

Because sometimes, friendship doesn't need explanations.

It just continues.

Around that time, someone new entered her life.

Katy.

Katy lived in the apartment directly in front of Zerlin's house.

Their friendship didn't begin with a big moment.

No introduction.

No special reason.

It started with a voice.

From a balcony.

"Hey... can you hear me?"

Zerlin looked up, slightly confused.

A girl stood across from her, leaning over the railing.

"Yes," Zerlin replied.

"You live here?" Katy asked.

Zerlin nodded.

And just like that—

A new connection formed.

Most of their conversations happened like that.

From balcony to balcony.

Across a small distance that somehow didn't feel like distance at all.

"Say louder, I can't hear!"

"I *am* speaking loudly!"

"No, you're not!"

They would laugh at nothing.

Talk about everything.

And slowly, those small conversations became a part of Zerlin's daily life.

Evenings began to feel different.

The sky turning darker.

The air becoming softer.

And somewhere between that quiet time—

Two voices meeting halfway.

They talked about school.

Teachers.

Friends.

And sometimes, things that didn't even make sense.

But still felt important.

In Katy's apartment, there was a boy who lived one floor above her.

At first, he was just there.

Another face.

Another presence.

But slowly—

Zerlin noticed something.

He looked at Katy.

Often.

A little longer than normal.

"Do you think he likes me?" Katy asked one evening, trying to sound casual.

Zerlin looked at her for a second, then smiled.

"It's obvious."

Katy covered her face. "Shut up."

Zerlin didn't laugh loudly.

She just watched.

She helped them talk.

Helped them understand each other.

Guided small conversations without making it obvious.

Slowly, they got closer.

They started meeting.

Spending more time together.

Smiling more.

And one day, without even realizing when it happened—

They were in a relationship.

At that time, love looked simple.

Easy.

Light.

Like something that just... happens without effort.

Zerlin watched them and wondered, quietly—
Is it always this simple?

But life doesn't keep things simple.
Not for long.

One day, the boy said he was leaving.
"I'm going to my hometown," he told Katy.
"I'll come back soon."

Katy believed him.
Of course she did.
Because when you care about someone—
You trust their words.

Days passed.
Then weeks.

He didn't come back.

No messages.

No calls.

No explanation.

At first, Katy waited.

She checked her phone again and again.

Every small notification made her look.

Every silence made her think.

"Maybe he's busy," she said once.

"Maybe," Zerlin replied.

But slowly—

Katy stopped talking about him.

Stopped waiting.

Stopped expecting.

And that silence—

Said everything.

Zerlin didn't ask questions.

She didn't try to fix anything.

She just watched.

And somewhere deep inside her—

A quiet understanding formed.

Not everything that begins...

Stays.

That thought didn't hurt immediately.

It just stayed there.

Like something waiting.

At home, Zerlin had always been close to her father.

Even if he never showed it openly.

Even if he never said it out loud.

She could feel it in small ways.

The way he noticed things others ignored.

The way he cared without explaining it.

And maybe that's why—

Zerlin had learned to notice things too.

To feel things deeply.

To understand emotions she wasn't old enough to carry.

And then—

One ordinary evening changed something inside her.

It was raining.

Not heavily.

Just soft, steady drops falling quietly.

The kind of rain that makes everything feel slower.

Quieter.

Zerlin sat in her room, holding a few sheets of paper.

She didn't have a plan.

No reason.

But her hands started moving.

Folding.

Adjusting.

Fixing.

She was making something.

A small diary.

It wasn't perfect.

The edges weren't even.

The pages didn't align properly.

But she worked on it carefully.

As if it mattered.

As if it meant something.

Even if she didn't know what.

"Why am I making this..." she whispered softly.

But she didn't stop.

When she finished, she stared at it for a long time.

Her fingers gently touching the cover.

It felt like more than paper.

But she couldn't explain why.

Later that night, she stepped outside.

The ground was slightly wet.

The air felt cool.

Zerlin's relative had took rent down in her home
for their shop.

And downstairs—

Adrone,her relative was there.

He looked like he was about to leave.

Standing near the gate.

Zerlin stopped.

For a moment, she just stood there.

Watching.

Her heart was beating a little faster than usual.

And this time—

She noticed it.

She didn't understand why.

But she didn't ignore it either.

She could have gone back.

Pretended she didn't see him.

But she didn't.

Slowly—

She walked toward him.

"Adrone..." she called softly.

He turned.

"Hm?"

For a second, her mind went blank.

She forgot what she wanted to say.

Then, without thinking too much—

She held out the diary.

"For you."

He looked at it.

Then at her.

Confused.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Nothing... just keep it," she said, looking away.

"Why?" he asked again.

Zerlin shook her head slightly.

"Just... take it."

He took it.

Still unsure.

Still not understanding.

But before he could ask anything more—

Zerlin turned and walked away quickly.

Almost like she didn't want to stay there long
enough to understand her own actions.

That night—
Sleep didn't come easily.

She lay still, staring at the ceiling.
Replaying everything again and again.

The way he looked at her.
The way he asked "why."
The way her own heart felt different.

She closed her eyes.
But it didn't stop.

Because some feelings—
Don't let you rest once they begin.

And somewhere deep inside—

Something had already started.
Life didn't look different after that night.
Everything still moved the same way.
School in the morning.
Home in the afternoon.
Balcony conversations in the evening.

From the outside, nothing had changed.
Everything followed a routine that felt calm,
almost ordinary.

But inside—
Something was different.

Zerlin started noticing him more.
Not on purpose.
Not in a way she could control.

If he walked past, her eyes would follow.

If he spoke, even from a distance, she would recognize his voice.

If he was around—

She just knew.

And even when she tried not to look—

Her thoughts didn't listen.

At first, she told herself it was nothing.

Just a phase.

Just something that would go away.

But it didn't.

Instead, it stayed.

Quietly.

Growing without asking permission.

One evening, she sat on her bed, holding her phone.

The screen lit up her face in the dark room.

She typed something.

Stopped.

Deleted it.

Typed again.

Her fingers felt heavier than usual.

Her heart beating faster than it should.

"What am I even doing..." she whispered to herself.

But still—

She didn't put the phone down.

Finally, after staring at the screen for too long,
she typed:

"I like you."

She looked at those three words.

Simple.

Small.

But somehow, they felt too big.

Her thumb hovered over the send button.

For a moment, she thought about deleting it.

Pretending she never wrote it.

But before fear could stop her—

She pressed send.

The message went.

And just like that—

There was no going back.

For a few seconds, everything felt silent.

Then his reply came.

"Are you joking."

Zerlin stared at the screen.

Her expression didn't change immediately.

But something inside her did.

Because for her—

It wasn't a joke.

Those words had come from somewhere real.

Somewhere she hadn't even fully understood yet.

But she didn't want him to know that.

Not like this.

So she replied:

"Yeah, it's a joke."

And in that moment—

She hid the truth behind something easier.

Something safer.

But hiding something doesn't make it disappear.

After texting him, she called Adrone and said "saranghe". Adrone asked what does it mean? She replied you can search it and decline the call.

Days passed.

And instead of fading—

Her feelings grew.

She started writing letters.

At first, they were simple.

Short.

Careful.

She would sit alone, thinking about what to write.

Sometimes writing a line—

Then crossing it out.

Writing again.

"Is this too much?" she would wonder.

"Will he understand?"

But even with all that doubt—

She still wrote.

And she still gave them to him.

Quietly.

Without making it a big moment.

Along with letters, she started giving chocolates.

Something she never liked sharing.

Not even with close friends.

But with him—

It felt different.

He just smiled and took that.

He looked at her for a moment, like he knew that
was the full truth.

But he didn't say anything.

And that silence—

Became something she started noticing more than
words.

Because he never said yes.

And he never said no.

He just stayed in between.

And that "in between"—

Was the hardest place to be.

Every day, she wondered the same thing.

What does he feel?

Why doesn't he say anything?

But she never asked directly.

Not at first.

Because asking means being ready for the answer.

And she wasn't.

But feelings don't stay quiet forever.

One day, something inside her reached its limit.

She walked toward him, her steps slower than usual.

Her hands slightly cold.

"Adrone," she called.

He turned.

"Yes?"

For a second, she couldn't speak.

Her voice felt stuck somewhere inside her.

Then she said it.

"I'm tired."

He looked confused.

"Of what?"

"Of this," she replied softly.

He didn't interrupt.

"I can't keep wondering," she continued, her voice shaking just a little.

"If your answer is no... just say it."

The words came out quietly.

But they carried everything she had been holding inside.

For the first time—
She wasn't hiding.

For the first time—
She was asking.

Her eyes didn't meet his.
But they didn't need to.

Because everything she felt—
Was already in that moment.

After that, nothing changed immediately.

Days passed.
Like normal.

But something felt different.
Like something was about to happen.

A few days later, she gave him another diary.

"Write something in this," she said.

He looked at her.

This time, he didn't ask why.

He just nodded.

That night, Zerlin couldn't sleep.

Her mind was full of thoughts.

Questions.

Possibilities.

"What if it's no?"

"What if everything ends?"

She turned to one side.

Then the other.

But sleep didn't come.

Because waiting—

Is sometimes harder than knowing.

The next day, he returned the diary.

Zerlin held it in her hands.

For a moment, she didn't open it.

Her fingers rested on the cover.

Her heart beating faster again.

Then slowly—

She opened it.

Inside, his handwriting filled a single page.

"My answer is yes.

But you're too young for this.

First, grow up.

I'm here.

I'm not going anywhere.

Focus on your studies.

I'll wait."

For a moment—

Everything around her disappeared.

She read it once.

Then again.

Then again.

As if she needed to make sure it was real.

Her breath caught in her chest.

Her heart felt too full.

A happiness she had never known before—
Spread quietly inside her.

It wasn't loud.
It wasn't overwhelming.

It was soft.
Deep.
Real.

And for the first time—
She felt like something had chosen her.

From that day, everything felt slightly different.

Not outside.
But inside.

She became more aware of him.

More careful.

More shy.

When she passed by him, she would lower her gaze.

Hide her face behind a book.

Pretend she wasn't looking—

Even when she was.

Because now—

It wasn't just a feeling.

It was something real.

After that day—

Nothing officially changed.

And yet—

Everything did.

There was no label between them.

No clear name.

No defined relationship.

But something existed.

Something quiet.

Something understood without being spoken.

They didn't say it openly.

They didn't show it in front of others.

But in small moments—

It was there.

In the way their eyes met for a second longer than usual.

In the way silence between them didn't feel awkward.

In the way even the smallest interaction felt important.

Zerlin started noticing everything.

Things she never paid attention to before.

The way he stood near the gate.

The way he leaned slightly against his bike.

The way he looked up when she came back from school.

Those moments were small.

So small that anyone else would ignore them.

But for Zerlin—

They meant everything.

Every day after school, she would walk home at the same time.

Around 4 p.m.

And almost every day—

He would be there.

Not always doing anything specific.

Just... there.

At first, she didn't think much of it.

But slowly—

She began to notice the pattern.

Was he waiting?

Or was it just a coincidence?

She never asked.

Because some questions feel too delicate to say out loud.

Instead, she reacted in her own way.

The moment she saw him—

She would lower her gaze.

Open a book.

Pretend to read.

Even if the page didn't change.

Even if she didn't understand a single word she was looking at.

It wasn't about reading.

It was about hiding.

Hiding the way her heart reacted.

Hiding the way her face betrayed her.

Because now—

She wasn't just feeling something.

She was aware of it.

And that awareness made everything more intense.

Days passed like this.

Quietly.

Gently.

Then one day—

Something changed.

He shifted his shop.

Not far.

Just... directly in front of her house.

Now, the distance between them was smaller than ever.

And somehow—

That made everything harder.

Because now she couldn't avoid seeing him.

From her balcony—

She could see him clearly.

And slowly, the balcony became more than just a place to stand.

It became a space where something unspoken lived.

Sometimes, they didn't talk at all.

They just looked.

A small glance.

A slight smile.

A moment of eye contact.

And somehow—

That was enough.

Other times, they spoke without words.

Through small gestures.

Hand movements.

Expressions.

A language no one else understood.

At the same time, Zerlin's life continued around this quiet world.

She spent time with Katy.

Talked to her.

Laughed with her.

And she also grew closer to another friend—
Raya.

Raya lived nearby.

And slowly, she became someone Zerlin could share things with.

"Do you really like him?" Raya asked once.

Zerlin didn't answer immediately.

She just smiled slightly.

"I think... yes."

Raya laughed softly. "*You think?*"

Zerlin looked away.

"I don't know how to explain it."

Because she truly didn't.

What she felt wasn't something she had learned.

It wasn't something she had seen clearly.

It was something she was experiencing for the first time.

Something that felt soft and overwhelming at the same time.

At night, they talked.

Long chats.

Simple conversations.

Sometimes about random things.

Sometimes about nothing important.

But even those conversations—

Felt meaningful.

"Did you eat?" he would ask.

"Yes," she replied.

"You?"

"Yeah."

Short messages.

Simple words.

But behind them—

There was something deeper.

Something neither of them fully explained.

Sometimes, she would read those chats again.

Late at night.

Smiling for no reason.

And sometimes—

Just staring at the screen.

Because even happiness can feel overwhelming
when it's new.

One small habit became a part of her routine.

Whenever he was inside his room—
Zerlin would quietly go downstairs.
Knock on his door—
And run away.

At first, it felt like a joke.
Something playful.

But slowly—
It became something more.

A way of being close—
Without actually being seen.

One day, he opened the door faster than expected.

Zerlin froze.

For a second, they just looked at each other.

"You?" he said, raising an eyebrow slightly.

Zerlin didn't reply.

She just turned—

And ran.

Behind her, she could hear him laugh softly.

That sound stayed with her longer than she expected.

But not everything stayed hidden.

Slowly—

Her mother started noticing changes.

The way Zerlin behaved.

The way she avoided going downstairs when others
were around—

But found reasons to go when he was there.

The way her attention shifted.

"What are you doing downstairs so often?" her
mother asked one day.

"Nothing," Zerlin replied quickly.

But mothers notice things.

Even the ones you try to hide.

After that—

She wasn't allowed to go downstairs as freely
anymore.

And that small restriction—

Felt bigger than it should have.

Because sometimes—

It's not about the place.

It's about the person you're going there for.

Still, life continued.

School.

Friends.

Balcony.

Messages.

Everything stayed.

Until one sentence changed everything again.

After sixth grade—

Her family decided something.

They were going back to the village.

This time—

Not for a visit.

Forever.

Zerlin didn't react immediately.

She just stood there..

She didn't argue.

She didn't ask questions.

She just... carried it inside her.

At first, everything continued normally.

The same mornings.

The same school routine.

The same walk back home.

But now—

Every moment felt different.

She started noticing things she had never paid attention to before.

The way her classroom looked in the morning light.

The way her friends laughed without thinking this might be the last time.

The way her name was called, so normally, like nothing was about to change.

It hurt in a quiet way.

Because nothing around her had changed yet—

But she knew it would.

Days began to feel shorter.

Like time was moving faster than it should.

She would sit in class, holding her pen, but not really writing.

Her mind would drift somewhere else.

"How many days are left?" she once whispered to herself.

She didn't even know the exact answer.

But every day felt closer to an ending.

After school, she started walking slower.

Taking longer routes sometimes.

Not because she had somewhere to go—

But because she didn't want to reach home too fast.

Because home now meant reality.

Packing.

Leaving.

Ending.

Her friends didn't fully understand at first.

"You're coming back, right?" one of them asked casually.

Zerlin forced a small smile.

"Yeah... maybe."

But even she knew—

That "maybe" was not real.

With Lena, it was different.

One evening, they sat quietly together.

No laughter.

No random jokes.

Just silence.

"Is it true?" Lena asked softly.

Zerlin nodded.

"For how long?" Lena asked again.

Zerlin looked down.

"Forever."

That word changed everything.

Lena didn't reply immediately.

Because some words are too big to respond to.

From that day, their friendship felt heavier.

Not weaker—

Just... more aware.

They started noticing every moment.

Talking longer.

Sitting closer.

As if both of them were trying to hold onto something that was already slipping.

At home, things started changing too.

Boxes appeared.

Clothes were folded and kept aside.

Old things were taken out, cleaned, sorted.

"Keep only what's important," her mother said.

Zerlin held different things in her hands—

Books.

Papers.

Small objects.

And every time, she wondered—

"What is important?"

Because some things had no value to others—

But meant everything to her.

She found small memories in unexpected places.

A paper with random writing.

A wrapper from a chocolate.

A small note she didn't even remember keeping.

Each thing felt heavier than it should.

Because it wasn't just an object.

It was a moment.

At night, she couldn't sleep easily.

Her mind replayed everything.

The balcony.

The laughter.

The small glances.

The way her days used to feel full without her even realizing it.

And now—

That fullness felt like something she was about to lose.

She didn't cry every night.

But there was always something inside her chest.

A tightness.

A weight.

Something that didn't leave.

Even her conversations with him changed.

Not in words.

But in feeling.

She wanted to say more.

Ask more.

Hold onto something.

But she didn't.

Because some fears stay unspoken.

"What if things change?"

"What if distance changes everything?"

Instead, she kept things simple.

Normal.

But inside—

Nothing felt normal anymore.

One evening, she stood in the balcony, looking ahead.

Everything looked the same as always.

But she knew—

Soon, she wouldn't be here.

Soon, this view would belong to someone else.

And she would just be someone who once stood here.

That thought stayed with her.

Not loudly.

But deeply.

And slowly—
Without realizing it—
Zerlin began saying goodbye.

Not in words.

But in the way she looked at things a little longer.
The way she stayed in places a little more.
The way she felt everything a little deeper.

Because when you know something is about to end—
Even the smallest moments start to matter.
One of the last days,Adrone gave a farewell gift to
her.

Zerlin took it by smiling.

After giving the gift Adrone said something but
she didn't hear a single word.

She was just lost into him.

The day came,things were packed.Everyone were
ready to leave.

But zerlin was waiting for him.

He didn't come,because he went somewhere for work.

Her mother called,"come on Zerlin it's late".

They leaved.

The village felt different this time.

Not because it had changed—

But because Zerlin had.

The same house.

The same rooms.

The same walls that once felt familiar.

But now—

Everything felt quieter.

Heavier.

It wasn't the peaceful kind of quiet.

It was the kind that makes you feel your own thoughts louder.

At first, everyone around her tried to make things feel normal.

"Unpack your things," her mother said.

"Come eat."

"Don't just sit like that."

Zerlin nodded.

Did what she was told.

Moved from one place to another.

But inside—

She wasn't really there.

Because her mind was somewhere else.

Back in the city.

Back in that street.

Back in those small moments that now felt bigger
than anything she had.

At night, it became harder.

There was no balcony to stand in and look across.
No familiar voices calling her name.
No routine that distracted her.

Only silence.

And memories.

She would lie in bed, holding her phone.
Scrolling through old chats.
Reading the same messages again and again.

"Did you eat?"

"Yeah."

"You?"

Simple conversations.

But now—

They felt like something she couldn't have again.

One night, she typed:

"I miss you."

She stared at the message.

Her fingers hesitated.

Then she sent it.

This time, she didn't hide it behind a joke.

After a few minutes, his reply came.

"I miss you too."

Zerlin smiled.

A small smile.

But even that smile felt painful.

Because missing someone from far away—

Is not the same as having them near.

Days passed.

She tried to adjust.

Helped at home.

Spoke to family.

But nothing filled the space that had been left
inside her.

Sometimes, she would go outside and just stand
there.

Looking at nothing.

"Why are you always quiet these days?" her aunt asked once.

"Nothing," Zerlin replied.

But it wasn't nothing.

It was everything she didn't know how to explain.

At night, her thoughts became louder.

She started remembering everything.

The balcony.

The laughter.

The way she used to hide her face behind a book.

The way he stood near his bike.

Those moments played in her mind again and again.

And every time—

They hurt a little more.

Because now—

They were just memories.

One day, she opened her bag and found something.

A small wrapper.

From a chocolate she had once given him.

Her fingers froze.

She didn't even remember when she had kept it there.

But holding it—

Brought everything back at once.

Her eyes filled slowly.

"Why does it hurt this much..." she whispered.

Because this wasn't just about one person.

It was about everything she had lost.

Her friends.

Her school.

Her home.

Her routine.

Her life as she knew it.

And now—

She felt it all at once.

That night, she cried.

Not loudly.

Not in a way anyone could hear.

But quietly.

Tears falling without stopping.

Because sometimes—

Pain doesn't need noise.

It just needs space.

After that, something inside her started changing.

She became quieter.

Even when people talked to her—

She replied less.

Even when she smiled—
It didn't reach her eyes.

Her mother noticed.

"What happened to you?" she asked one day.

"Nothing," Zerlin said again.

But this time—
Even she didn't believe it.

Because she knew—
Something had changed.

She wasn't the same anymore.

That girl who laughed easily.
Who talked without thinking.
Who lived without overthinking—

She was still there.
But hidden.

Behind thoughts.
Behind silence.

Behind a heart that had felt too much too early.

One evening, she sat alone outside.
The sky slowly turning dark.

She whispered softly—
"Why does everything go away?"

There was no answer.

Only the wind.

Only the silence.

And slowly—

A realization settled inside her.

Some things don't leave loudly.

They leave quietly.

And you only understand their importance—

After they're gone.

From that day—

Zerlin started carrying something she didn't have before.

Not just memories.

But weight.

A quiet heaviness that stayed with her.

And slowly—

Without even realizing it—

She stopped being the same person she once was.

The village felt different this time.

Not because it had changed—

But because Zerlin had.

The same house.

The same rooms.

The same walls that once felt familiar.

But now—

Everything felt quieter.

Heavier.

It wasn't the peaceful kind of quiet.

It was the kind that makes you feel your own thoughts louder.

At first, everyone around her tried to make things feel normal.

"Unpack your things," her mother said.

"Come eat."

"Don't just sit like that."

Zerlin nodded.

Did what she was told.

Moved from one place to another.

But inside—

She wasn't really there.

Because her mind was somewhere else.

Back in the city.

Back in that street.

Back in those small moments that now felt bigger
than anything she had.

At night, it became harder.

There was no balcony to stand in and look across.

No familiar voices calling her name.

No routine that distracted her.

Only silence.

And memories.

She would lie in bed, holding her phone.

Scrolling through old chats.

Reading the same messages again and again.

"Did you eat?"

"Yeah."

"You?"

Simple conversations.

But now—

They felt like something she couldn't have again.

One night, she typed:

"I miss you."

She stared at the message.

Her fingers hesitated.

Then she sent it.

This time, she didn't hide it behind a joke.

After a few minutes, his reply came.

"I miss you too."

Zerlin smiled.

A small smile.

But even that smile felt painful.

Because missing someone from far away—

Is not the same as having them near.

Days passed.

She tried to adjust.

Helped at home.

Spoke to family.

But nothing filled the space that had been left
inside her.

Sometimes, she would go outside and just stand there.

Looking at nothing.

"Why are you always quiet these days?" her aunt asked once.

"Nothing," Zerlin replied.

But it wasn't nothing.

It was everything she didn't know how to explain.

At night, her thoughts became louder.

She started remembering everything.

The balcony.

The laughter.

The way she used to hide her face behind a book.

The way he stood near his bike.

Those moments played in her mind again and again.

And every time—

They hurt a little more.

Because now—

They were just memories.

One day, she opened her bag and found something.

A small wrapper.

From a chocolate she had once given him.

Her fingers froze.

She didn't even remember when she had kept it there.

But holding it—

Brought everything back at once.

Her eyes filled slowly.

“Why does it hurt this much...” she whispered.

Because this wasn't just about one person.

It was about everything she had lost.

Her friends.

Her school.

Her home.

Her routine.

Her life as she knew it.

And now—

She felt it all at once.

That night, she cried.

Not loudly.

Not in a way anyone could hear.

But quietly.

Tears falling without stopping.

Because sometimes—

Pain doesn't need noise.

It just needs space.

After that, something inside her started changing.

She became quieter.

Even when people talked to her—
She replied less.

Even when she smiled—
It didn't reach her eyes.

Her mother noticed.

"What happened to you?" she asked one day.

"Nothing," Zerlin said again.

But this time—
Even she didn't believe it.

Because she knew—
Something had changed.

She wasn't the same anymore.

That girl who laughed easily.

Who talked without thinking.

Who lived without overthinking—

She was still there.

But hidden.

Behind thoughts.

Behind silence.

Behind a heart that had felt too much too early.

One evening, she sat alone outside.

The sky slowly turning dark.

She whispered softly—

"Why does everything go away?"

There was no answer.

Only the wind.

Only the silence.

And slowly—

A realization settled inside her.

Some things don't leave loudly.

They leave quietly.

And you only understand their importance—

After they're gone.

From that day—

Zerlin started carrying something she didn't have before.

Not just memories.

But weight.

A quiet heaviness that stayed with her.

And slowly—

Without even realizing it—

She stopped being the same person she once was.

Chapter 3

Zerlin didn't realize when things had started changing.

It hadn't happened all at once.

There was no clear moment she could point to and say—*this is where everything became different.*

It was quieter than that.

It began in small ways.

Moments that didn't feel right, but didn't seem important enough to question.

Moments she didn't understand—
so she ignored them.

When she was younger, life had felt simple.

Predictable.

Safe.

Mornings meant her mother's soft voice calling her name, brushing away sleep like it was something light and harmless.

School meant routine—standing in lines, writing carefully, doing things the right way.

Home meant warmth.

Everything had a place.

Everything made sense.

Or at least—

it looked like it did.

Because even in those early days, there had been moments that didn't fit.

Moments that made her feel uncomfortable without knowing why.

Moments where her body reacted before her mind could understand.

She didn't speak about them.

She didn't ask questions.

She didn't even try to think too deeply about them.

She simply stayed quiet.

And slowly, without realizing it—
she learned something that would stay with her for years.

Silence was easier.

It didn't ask questions.

It didn't create problems.

It didn't make things complicated.

So she chose it.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Until it became a part of her.

Then life changed.

Her grandmother's death didn't come like something loud.

There were no dramatic moments that marked it clearly in her mind.

It came quietly.

Like something slipping away slowly—
until one day, it was simply... gone.

The house felt different after that.

Not empty.

But not the same.

The small sounds that once filled the space—the soft conversations, the familiar movements—were missing.

Zerlin could feel it.
Even if she didn't understand it fully.

Something had changed.
And this time—
it wasn't something she could ignore.

Not long after, her father made a decision.
They would move to the city.

The village she had always known—
the place that once felt like her whole world—
was left behind.

At first, the city felt too big.

Too fast.

Too unfamiliar.

The roads were louder.

The people were different.

Everything moved in a way she wasn't used to.

She didn't know where she fit.

But slowly—

she adapted.

She started noticing small things.

The way people talked.

The way school felt different.

The way life moved faster—but also gave more space to grow.

She made friends.

Lena.

Raya.

Katy.

With them, things didn't feel heavy.

They didn't require effort.

They didn't make her think before speaking.

She laughed more.

Not forced laughter.

Not the kind that hides something.

Real laughter.

The kind that comes without thinking.

The kind that stays even after the moment is gone.

For a while—

she felt like she belonged somewhere again.

And then—

there was him.

Adrone.

She didn't think about it deeply.

Didn't try to give it meaning.

But she noticed him.

In small ways.

A glance that lasted a second longer.

A moment that felt different for no clear reason.

A feeling she didn't try to understand.

She didn't talk about it.

Not to her friends.

Not even to herself.

But it stayed.

Quiet.

Unspoken.

And somehow—

important.

Then, just when things started feeling stable—

life changed again.

Without asking her.

Without preparing her.

Her family decided to move back to the village.

This time—

it didn't feel like just a change.

It felt like losing something.

Because now—

she knew what she was leaving behind.

The goodbye didn't feel real at first.

Not until the rooms started emptying.

Not until the walls looked unfamiliar.

Not until her things were packed into boxes that
didn't feel like hers anymore.

She stood there—

looking at everything.

Trying to understand how something could be hers
one day—

and gone the next.

Her friends didn't feel like something she could leave.

"How will we talk?" Raya had asked.

"We will," Zerlin replied.

But even as she said it—
she knew it wouldn't be the same.

Lena hugged her tightly.

"You better not forget us."

"I won't," Zerlin said.

And she meant it.

But life doesn't always keep promises the way people do.

The journey back to the village felt longer than usual.

She sat quietly.

Looking outside.

Watching everything pass by.

But she wasn't really seeing anything.

Her thoughts stayed behind.

In places she had already left.

And somewhere during that journey—
something inside her changed again.

It didn't break.

It didn't disappear.

It just became quieter.

Not empty.

Just... quieter.

By the time she reached the village, everything looked the same.

The same narrow roads.

The same houses.

The same slow rhythm of life.

Nothing had changed.

Except her.

Zerlin returned to the village not because she wanted to—

but because life had already decided for her.

And because she had changed—
everything around her felt different.

Familiar.

But distant.

Like something she knew—
but no longer belonged to.

That night, she lay on her bed, staring at the
ceiling.

The same ceiling she had seen before.

The same room.

The same walls.

But it didn't feel the same.

Her mind didn't stay still.

It moved from one thought to another.

From the city—

to her friends—

to moments she didn't want to lose.

She turned to her side.

Closed her eyes.

But sleep didn't come easily.

Because this time—

it wasn't just about a new place.

It was about everything she had left behind.

And everything she didn't know how to feel about.

Morning would come.

School would start again.

Life would move forward.

But inside—
she already knew something.

Things wouldn't feel the same anymore.
Morning came quietly.
It didn't feel like a new beginning.
It felt like something she had to go through.

"Zerlin... wake up. You'll be late."
Her mother's voice was the same as always.
Soft. Familiar.

"I'm up," Zerlin replied, even though she had barely slept.

Getting ready felt automatic.
Her hands moved without thinking.

She wore her uniform, tied her hair, packed her bag.

Everything was done correctly.

Exactly the way it should be.

But something inside her felt distant.

Like she was doing everything—
without actually being present in it.

As she stepped outside, the air felt slightly colder than usual.

Or maybe it was just her.

Her mother walked beside her for a while.

"You'll be fine," she said gently.

Zerlin nodded.

But she didn't reply.

Because she didn't know if that was true.

When she reached the school gate, she stopped.
Students were walking in, talking, laughing, moving
freely.

Everything looked normal.

She stood there for a moment—
just watching.

Feeling like she didn't belong inside that moment.

"Go inside," her mother said softly.

Zerlin took a small breath.
And this time—
she walked.

The corridor felt longer than it should have.

Each step echoing slightly in her ears.

She reached her classroom and stood at the door.
Her fingers tightening around the strap of her bag.

For a second—
she thought about turning back.
Leaving.
Pretending she forgot something.

But she didn't.
She never did.

She stepped inside.

The room didn't go completely silent.
But it quieted enough for her to feel it.

Eyes turned toward her.

Some curious.

Some blank.

Some simply observing.

None familiar.

"This is Zerlin," the teacher said.

"She's new here. Make her feel comfortable."

A few students nodded.

Some smiled slightly.

Most just looked away.

Zerlin stood there, unsure where to go.

Every seat looked like it already belonged to someone else.

Then—

a voice came from the middle row.

"You can sit with me."

Zerlin looked up.

The girl's voice was calm.

Simple.

She nodded and walked toward her.

"What's your name?" the girl asked.

"Zerlin."

"I'm Laen."

That was all.

No excitement.

No instant connection.

Just two names exchanged between strangers.

Classes started.

Chalk moved across the board.

Words were explained.

Students wrote.

Zerlin did the same.

Her hand moved.

Her pen wrote.

Her eyes followed the board.

But her mind—

wasn't there.

It kept drifting.

To another classroom.

Another place.

Where she didn't have to think before speaking.

Where she didn't feel like an outsider.

"Zerlin," Laen whispered softly.

She blinked and turned slightly.

"Are you okay?"

Zerlin paused.

Then nodded.

"Yeah... I'm fine."

Laen looked at her for a moment.

As if she wanted to ask more.

But she didn't.

She simply nodded and looked back at her notebook.

Classes went on.

Teachers came and left.

Subjects changed.

Time passed—

but it didn't feel like it.

Every minute felt slightly longer than it should have.

Not painful.

Just... heavy.

During break, the classroom became louder.

Students stood up, forming groups.

Talking.

Laughing.

Zerlin stayed seated.

She opened her bag and took out her tiffin.

But she didn't eat.

"You're not going outside?" Laen asked.

Zerlin shook her head slightly.

"No... it's fine."

"You don't like crowds?"

"It's not that..."

She paused.

"I just don't feel like it."

Laen nodded.

"Okay."

She didn't push.

And somehow—

Zerlin appreciated that.

After a few minutes, Laen came back and sat beside her.

They ate quietly.

No pressure.

No forced conversation.

Just... calm.

"Where were you before this?" Laen asked after a while.

"In the city," Zerlin replied.

"Oh."

Laen smiled slightly.

"That's why."

"Why what?"

"You look like you don't belong here."

Zerlin didn't respond immediately.

Because somewhere inside—
she felt the same.

"I'll get used to it," she said softly.

Laen nodded.
"Yeah... you will."

But Zerlin wasn't sure.

The rest of the day passed slowly.
Nothing dramatic happened.
Nothing special.

But everything felt like something she had to
adjust to.

When the final bell rang, students quickly packed
their bags.

Relief filled the room.

But Zerlin didn't feel it.

"See you tomorrow," Laen said.

"Hmm... yeah."

Zerlin walked out of the classroom quietly.

The noise of students faded behind her.

Outside, the sunlight felt slightly too bright.

She walked toward the school bus.

Without talking to anyone.

Without looking back.

The bus was already half full.

She stepped inside and looked around briefly.
Then chose a window seat.

She sat down.
Placed her bag on her lap.
Held it tightly.

The bus started moving.
Slowly.
Then steadily.

Outside, the village passed by.
The same roads.
The same houses.
The same life she once knew.

She leaned her head lightly against the window.
The glass felt cool.

Students around her were talking.

Laughing.

Sharing stories.

But she didn't join.

She just listened.

Without really hearing.

Her eyes stayed outside.

But her thoughts—

were somewhere else.

Back to the city.

Back to people who knew her without asking questions.

She remembered laughing freely.

Talking without thinking.

Here—
everything felt controlled.
Quiet.
Measured.

Her fingers tightened slightly around her bag.

She closed her eyes for a moment.

Not to sleep—
just to stop everything around her.

A group of students behind her laughed loudly.

Zerlin almost turned back.
Almost smiled.

But she didn't.

Instead, she stayed still.

Her eyes opening again slowly.

Looking outside.

The road stretched forward endlessly.

And for a moment—

she wondered if everything in her life was doing
the same.

Her reflection appeared faintly on the glass.

She looked at it.

Quiet.

Still.

Different.

Then the bus turned slightly.

And her reflection disappeared.

By the time the bus stopped near her house—
she had already become completely silent again.

She stepped down.

Walked home.

Her mother opened the door.

"How was school?"

Zerlin paused.

"It was fine."

That answer came easily.

Too easily.

It became a habit.

Every day—
the same question.

Every day—
the same reply.

"It was fine."

She went to her room.
Placed her bag down.
Sat on the bed quietly.

The house felt calm.
Too calm.

No noise.
No distraction.

Just her.

And her thoughts.

She lay down slowly.

Just like the night before.

But this time—

something felt heavier.

She missed the city.

More than she expected.

Not just the place.

But the people.

The feeling.

The version of herself that existed there.

She closed her eyes.

For a moment—
she imagined going back.

But reality didn't change with thoughts.

When evening came, she got up.
Helped at home.
Ate dinner.

Everything normal.
Everything routine.

But something inside her didn't feel normal
anymore.

That night—
the silence felt louder.

And this time—

her eyes didn't stay dry for long.

She turned to her side.

Pulled the blanket closer. Morning came quietly.

It didn't feel like a new beginning.

It felt like something she had to go through.

"Zerlin... wake up. You'll be late."

Her mother's voice was the same as always.

Soft. Familiar.

"I'm up," Zerlin replied, even though she had barely slept.

Getting ready felt automatic.

Her hands moved without thinking.

She wore her uniform, tied her hair, packed her bag.

Everything was done correctly.

Exactly the way it should be.

But something inside her felt distant.

Like she was doing everything—

without actually being present in it.

As she stepped outside, the air felt slightly colder than usual.

Or maybe it was just her.

Her mother walked beside her for a while.

"You'll be fine," she said gently.

Zerlin nodded.

But she didn't reply.

Because she didn't know if that was true.

When she reached the school gate, she stopped.

Students were walking in, talking, laughing, moving freely.

Everything looked normal.

She stood there for a moment—
just watching.

Feeling like she didn't belong inside that moment.

"Go inside," her mother said softly.

Zerlin took a small breath.

And this time—
she walked.

The corridor felt longer than it should have.
Each step echoing slightly in her ears.

She reached her classroom and stood at the door.

Her fingers tightening around the strap of her bag.

For a second—

she thought about turning back.

Leaving.

Pretending she forgot something.

But she didn't.

She never did.

She stepped inside.

The room didn't go completely silent.

But it quieted enough for her to feel it.

Eyes turned toward her.

Some curious.

Some blank.

Some simply observing.

None familiar.

"This is Zerlin," the teacher said.

"She's new here. Make her feel comfortable."

A few students nodded.

Some smiled slightly.

Most just looked away.

Zerlin stood there, unsure where to go.

Every seat looked like it already belonged to someone else.

Then—

a voice came from the middle row.

"You can sit with me."

Zerlin looked up.

The girl's voice was calm.

Simple.

She nodded and walked toward her.

"What's your name?" the girl asked.

"Zerlin."

"I'm Laen."

That was all.

No excitement.

No instant connection.

Just two names exchanged between strangers.

Classes started.

Chalk moved across the board.

Words were explained.

Students wrote.

Zerlin did the same.
Her hand moved.
Her pen wrote.
Her eyes followed the board.

But her mind—
wasn't there.

It kept drifting.
To another classroom.
Another place.

Where she didn't have to think before speaking.
Where she didn't feel like an outsider.

"Zerlin," Laen whispered softly.

She blinked and turned slightly.
"Are you okay?"

Zerlin paused.

Then nodded.

"Yeah... I'm fine."

Laen looked at her for a moment.

As if she wanted to ask more.

But she didn't.

She simply nodded and looked back at her notebook.

Classes went on.

Teachers came and left.

Subjects changed.

Time passed—

but it didn't feel like it.

Every minute felt slightly longer than it should have.

Not painful.

Just... heavy.

During break, the classroom became louder.

Students stood up, forming groups.

Talking.

Laughing.

Zerlin stayed seated.

She opened her bag and took out her tiffin.

But she didn't eat.

"You're not going outside?" Laen asked.

Zerlin shook her head slightly.

"No... it's fine."

"You don't like crowds?"

"It's not that..."

She paused.

"I just don't feel like it."

Laen nodded.

"Okay."

She didn't push.

And somehow—

Zerlin appreciated that.

After a few minutes, Laen came back and sat beside her.

They ate quietly.

No pressure.

No forced conversation.

Just... calm.

"Where were you before this?" Laen asked after a while.

"In the city," Zerlin replied.

"Oh."

Laen smiled slightly.

"That's why."

"Why what?"

"You look like you don't belong here."

Zerlin didn't respond immediately.

Because somewhere inside—

she felt the same.

"I'll get used to it," she said softly.

Laen nodded.

"Yeah... you will."

But Zerlin wasn't sure.

The rest of the day passed slowly.

Nothing dramatic happened.

Nothing special.

But everything felt like something she had to adjust to.

When the final bell rang, students quickly packed their bags.

Relief filled the room.

But Zerlin didn't feel it.

"See you tomorrow," Laen said.

"Hmm... yeah."

Zerlin walked out of the classroom quietly.

The noise of students faded behind her.

Outside, the sunlight felt slightly too bright.

She walked toward the school bus.

Without talking to anyone.

Without looking back.

The bus was already half full.

She stepped inside and looked around briefly.

Then chose a window seat.

She sat down.

Placed her bag on her lap.

Held it tightly.

The bus started moving.

Slowly.

Then steadily.

Outside, the village passed by.

The same roads.

The same houses.

The same life she once knew.

She leaned her head lightly against the window.

The glass felt cool.

Students around her were talking.

Laughing.

Sharing stories.

But she didn't join.

She just listened.

Without really hearing.

Her eyes stayed outside.

But her thoughts—

were somewhere else.

Back to the city.

Back to people who knew her without asking
questions.

She remembered laughing freely.

Talking without thinking.

Here—

everything felt controlled.

Quiet.

Measured.

Her fingers tightened slightly around her bag.

She closed her eyes for a moment.

Not to sleep—

just to stop everything around her.

A group of students behind her laughed loudly.

Zerlin almost turned back.

Almost smiled.

But she didn't.

Instead, she stayed still.

Her eyes opening again slowly.

Looking outside.

The road stretched forward endlessly.

And for a moment—

she wondered if everything in her life was doing the same.

Her reflection appeared faintly on the glass.

She looked at it.

Quiet.

Still.

Different.

Then the bus turned slightly.

And her reflection disappeared.

By the time the bus stopped near her house—
she had already become completely silent again.

She stepped down.

Walked home.

Her mother opened the door.

"How was school?"

Zerlin paused.

"It was fine."

That answer came easily.

Too easily.

It became a habit.

Every day, the same question.

Every day, the same reply.

"It was fine."

She went to her room quietly.

Placed her bag down beside the bed.

For a moment, she just stood there.

Not moving.

Not thinking.

Just standing.

The house felt calm.

Too calm.

No loud voices.

No distractions.

Just silence.

She sat on the edge of her bed slowly.

Her fingers resting loosely on her lap.

The laughter from school was gone.

Completely.

As if it had never been real.

She lay down after a while, staring at the ceiling.

The same ceiling.

The same room.

But it didn't feel the same anymore.

Her thoughts didn't stay still.

They moved—back to the classroom, to the bus, to the feeling she couldn't explain.

Why did everything feel so heavy after she came back?

Why did her laughter disappear so quickly?

She turned to her side and closed her eyes.

But sleep didn't come easily.

When evening passed and night grew quieter, the silence felt louder.

And this time—

her eyes didn't stay dry.

A few tears slipped quietly.

She wiped them quickly, even though no one was there to see.

Because even then—

she wasn't used to letting herself feel too much.

She pulled the blanket slightly closer.

Curled into herself.

And once again—

she said nothing. Days slowly started turning into a routine.

The same morning.

The same classroom.

The same seat beside Laen.

From the outside, everything looked like it was settling.

Zerlin answered when teachers asked.

She wrote her notes properly.

She started remembering names.

It looked like she was adjusting.

But only from the outside.

Inside the classroom, she laughed.

A lot.

More than she used to.

At small jokes.

At random comments.

Sometimes even when she didn't fully understand what was funny.

It came easily.

Almost too easily.

One day, during a small joke between classmates, Zerlin laughed louder than everyone else.

For a brief moment, the class went slightly quiet.

Then the laughter continued.

Laen looked at her and smiled.

"You really laugh a lot," she said.

Zerlin smiled back.

"I don't know... it just happens."

But that wasn't true.

It didn't just happen.

It was easier to laugh than to explain what she was actually feeling.

Sometimes, in the middle of laughing, she would suddenly stop.

Just for a second.

As if something inside her reminded her—

that the feeling wasn't real.

But no one noticed that part.

They only saw the laughter.

During group work, when students talked freely,
she joined in.

She replied.

She reacted.

She smiled.

She became part of the moment.

But only for that moment.

The bell would ring.

And everything would change.

The noise of the classroom would fade.

Students would start packing their bags.

Chairs would move.

Voices would slowly disappear.

And with that—

her laughter disappeared too.

By the time she stepped outside the classroom, she
was quiet again.

Completely.

No unnecessary words.

No extra reactions.

Just silence.

"Do you always become this quiet?" Laen asked one day while walking out together.

Zerlin looked at her for a moment.

"I don't know," she said softly.

Laen tilted her head slightly.

"You're very different in class."

Zerlin didn't reply.

Because she didn't know how to explain it.

Or maybe—

she didn't want to.

They reached the school gate.

Laen adjusted her bag.

"I go from this side," she said.

"I take the bus," Zerlin replied.

"Okay... see you tomorrow."

"Hmm... bye."

Zerlin watched her walk away.

Then turned toward the bus.

Alone.

The bus was already there.

Half full.

Students sitting in groups, talking loudly, sharing small stories about their day.

Zerlin stepped inside quietly.

No one really noticed.

She walked to her usual seat by the window and sat down.

She placed her bag on her lap and held it lightly.

A group of students behind her burst into laughter.

Zerlin almost turned back.

Almost smiled.

But she didn't.

Instead, she looked outside.

The same roads passed by.

The same houses.

The same slow-moving life.

But today—
everything felt slightly distant.
Her eyes stayed outside.
But her thoughts went somewhere else.
Back to the city.
Back to the people who didn't need her to pretend.
She remembered laughing there.
Not like this.
Not forced.
Not controlled.
Real.
"Why do I laugh so much here?" she whispered to herself.
There was no answer.
Only the quiet sound of the bus moving forward.
She leaned her head against the window.
Closed her eyes for a moment.
Inside her mind, everything felt louder.
Memories.
Feelings.

Questions she didn't ask.

When she opened her eyes again, her reflection appeared faintly on the glass.

She looked at it.

There was nothing visibly wrong.

But something felt different.

"Is this me?" she thought quietly.

The girl in the reflection looked calm.

Normal.

But inside—

she didn't feel that way.

The bus slowed down.

Her stop came.

She stood up and stepped down quietly.

The road to her house felt longer than usual.

Or maybe it was just her.

When she reached home, her mother opened the door.

"How was school?" she asked.

Zerlin paused for a second.

"It was fine."

The answer came easily.

Too easily.

She walked to her room.

Placed her bag down.

Sat on the bed.

And for a few seconds—

she did nothing.

No movement.

No thoughts.

Just stillness.

Then slowly, her shoulders dropped.

The laughter from school was gone.

Completely.

As if it had never been real.

That night, when she lay down, the silence felt different.

Not empty.

But full.

Full of things she didn't say.

Didn't understand.

Didn't express.

She turned to her side.

Pulled the blanket slightly closer.

Her eyes stayed open for a while.

Thinking.

Feeling—

without fully understanding what she was feeling.

And slowly—

she started noticing something.

Her silence wasn't the same as before.

Before, it felt natural.

Now—

it felt heavier.

Like something was building inside her.

Slowly.

Quietly.

And she didn't know what would happen—

when it finally reached the surface. At first, it started as something small.

So small that Zerlin didn't think much of it.

A few girls in her class began asking her the same question.

"Do you have Instagram?"

Zerlin looked at them, slightly confused.

"No," she said simply.

"Why not?" one of them asked.

"I just don't," Zerlin replied.

"Everyone has it."

"I don't need it."

The girls exchanged glances.

Then one of them smiled in a way Zerlin didn't fully understand.

"Just make one," she said.

Zerlin shook her head.

"No."

At that moment, it felt like a normal conversation.

Just classmates talking.

Nothing serious.

But the questions didn't stop.

The next day—

"Did you make your Instagram?"

"No."

The day after—

"Give your ID."

"I told you, I don't have one."

Again and again.

The same questions.

The same tone.

At first, Zerlin answered calmly.

Then slowly—

she started getting irritated.

"Why do you keep asking?" she said one day, her voice slightly firmer than usual.

The girls laughed lightly.

"No reason."

But there was a reason.

Zerlin just didn't know it yet.

It wasn't about Instagram.

It wasn't about social media.

It was about her.

One day, Zerlin was absent from school.

It was just a normal day at home.

Nothing unusual.

But in the classroom—

something was said.

The boy from the back row, who had been quietly watching her for days, finally spoke.

Not to her.

But to Laen.

"I like Zerlin," he said.

Simple.

Direct.

Laen looked at him, slightly surprised.

"What?"

"I like her," he repeated.

"And... does she have Instagram?"

Laen didn't reply immediately.

She just looked at him for a moment.

Then looked away.

The next day, when Zerlin returned to school,
everything felt normal.

At least on the surface.

She sat beside Laen.

Opened her notebook.

Tried to focus on the lesson.

But Laen kept glancing at her.

As if she was waiting for the right moment.

During break, she finally leaned closer.

"I need to tell you something," she said quietly.

Zerlin looked at her.

"What?"

"That boy... from the back row..."

Zerlin frowned slightly.

"What about him?"

Laen hesitated for a second.

Then said it—

"He likes you."

For a moment, Zerlin didn't react.

She just looked at Laen.

As if the words didn't fully reach her.

"What?" she said softly.

"He told me yesterday," Laen continued.

"That's why everyone was asking for your Instagram."

Zerlin looked away.

"Oh," she said.

That was it.

No shock.

No excitement.

No curiosity.

Just a quiet—

"Oh."

"You don't care?" Laen asked.

Zerlin shook her head slightly.

"No."

And she meant it.

She didn't want attention.

She didn't want anything new.

She didn't have space for it.

Her mind was already full—

with things she didn't even talk about.

But even after that—

it didn't stop.

The boy and his friends started acting differently.

Looking at her more often.

Whispering when she passed by.

Laughing in a way that felt directed at her.

Sometimes, she could feel their eyes on her—

even when she didn't turn back.

It wasn't something she liked.

It wasn't something she wanted.

It was just—

irritating.

One day, while she was writing in her notebook, she heard a voice behind her.

"Zerlin."

She didn't turn.

"Zerlin," the voice repeated.

She closed her pen slightly harder.

Then turned back.

"What?"

The boy was standing there.

Awkward.

Unsure.

"Do you... have Instagram?" he asked.

For a second—

Zerlin just stared at him.

Then she shook her head.

"No."

"Can you make one?"

Her expression didn't change.

"No."

And without saying anything else—

she turned back to her seat.

The conversation ended there.

At least for her.

But not for them.

Days passed.

And then—

something happened that changed everything.

One afternoon, a girl came up to her.

"Is this your account?" she asked, showing her phone.

Zerlin looked at the screen.

Her name.

Her picture.

Messages.

Her heart dropped.

"What is this?" she whispered.

"I thought it was yours," the girl said.

Zerlin's fingers felt cold.

"I didn't make this."

Confusion.

Shock.

Anger.

All at once.

Someone had created a fake Instagram account using her name.

And was messaging people.
Pretending to be her.
She stared at the screen for a few seconds.
It didn't feel real.
"Who did this?" she said quietly.
No one answered.
But deep inside—
she already knew.
That day, she didn't react loudly.
She didn't argue.
She didn't cry.
She just stayed quiet.
But this time—
it wasn't the same kind of silence.
This silence felt different.
Stronger.
Heavier.
The next day, she didn't ignore it.
She didn't stay in her seat.

She didn't pretend nothing happened.

She stood up.

Walked to the teacher.

Each step steady.

Even if her heart wasn't.

"Ma'am... I need to tell you something."

The teacher looked up.

"Yes?"

Zerlin paused for a moment.

Then said everything.

Every detail.

Every confusion.

Every part she didn't understand.

Her voice didn't shake.

But something inside her did.

For the first time—

she didn't choose silence.

And even she didn't fully realize—

how big that moment was. The classroom felt different that day.

Not louder.

Not quieter.

Just... different.

Zerlin returned to her seat after speaking to the teacher.

Her steps were steady.

But inside—

something hadn't settled yet.

Laen looked at her the moment she sat down.

"What happened?" she whispered.

Zerlin didn't answer immediately.

She just opened her notebook.

"They'll handle it," she said quietly.

Laen studied her face for a moment.

"You told ma'am?"

Zerlin nodded slightly.

Laen leaned back in her seat.

"Good," she said under her breath.

But Zerlin didn't feel "good."

She didn't feel relieved.

She just felt... still.

As if everything inside her was waiting for something to happen.

A few minutes later, the teacher walked into the classroom.

Her expression was serious.

"Everyone, stay quiet," she said firmly.

The room settled instantly.

Her eyes moved across the class.

Then stopped.

"Zerlin, come here."

Zerlin stood up.

Walked slowly to the front.

Her heartbeat was louder now.

Not because she was scared—

but because everything suddenly felt real.

The teacher looked at her gently.

"Tell me again," she said softly.

Zerlin repeated everything.

This time in front of the class.

Not every detail.

But enough.

Enough for the room to understand.

A silence followed.

Heavy.

Uncomfortable.

The teacher turned toward the back.

"You," she said, calling out the boy.

"And your friends. Stand up."

Chairs moved.

Slowly.

The boys stood.

Their confidence was gone.

Replaced by something quieter.

Something uncertain.

"Did you do this?" the teacher asked.

No one answered.

"Answer me."

A pause.

Then—

"Yes," one of them said.

The room stayed silent.

The teacher's voice became firmer.

"This is not a joke."

"What you did is wrong."

"Very wrong."

She didn't shout.

But her words carried weight.

"You will meet the principal after this."

"And your parents will be informed."

The boys lowered their heads.

No arguments.

No excuses.

For the rest of the class, no one spoke.

The usual noise didn't return.

Even during the lesson—

everything felt slower.

Quieter.

Zerlin went back to her seat.

Laen looked at her again.

"You okay?" she asked softly.

Zerlin nodded.

But this time—

she wasn't sure if she meant it.

Because something had changed.

Not outside.

But inside her.

She had spoken.

After staying silent for so long—

she had finally said something.

And now—

she didn't know how to feel about it.

After school, the hallway felt different too.

Students glanced at her.

Some whispered.

Some didn't say anything at all.

Laen walked beside her.

"Don't think about them," she said.

Zerlin gave a small nod.

"I'm not," she replied.

But she was.

Not about what happened—

but about what it meant.

When she reached the bus, it felt quieter than usual.

Or maybe it was just her again.

She sat by the window.

Like always.

But this time—

she didn't hold her bag tightly.

Her hands rested loosely.

The bus started moving.

Outside, everything looked the same.

But inside—

something felt unfamiliar.

She didn't feel like laughing.

She didn't feel like thinking too much either.

She just sat there.

Still.

A group of students behind her started talking.

Their voices were softer than usual.

"Did you hear what happened?" one of them whispered.

"Yeah..."

"She told the teacher."

"I wouldn't have done that."

"Same..."

Zerlin heard them.

Every word.

But she didn't turn back.

She didn't react.

She just looked outside.

Letting their voices fade into the background.

For the first time—

she didn't feel like hiding behind laughter.

But she also didn't feel stronger.

She just felt... different.

When she reached home, her mother opened the door.

"How was school?"

Zerlin paused.

"It was fine," she said again.

The same answer.

But today—

it didn't feel the same.

Her mother looked at her for a moment longer than usual.

As if she sensed something.

But she didn't ask more.

Zerlin walked to her room.

Closed the door.

Sat on her bed.

And this time—

she didn't lie down immediately.

She just sat there.

Thinking.

About everything.

About the fake account.

About the teacher.

About the silence in the classroom.

About the way everyone looked at her.

And then—

a new thought came.

Quiet.

Unexpected.

Did things change now?

She didn't have an answer.

She never did.

That night, when she lay down—

she didn't cry.

Not because everything was okay.

But because something inside her felt... tired.

Not physically.

But emotionally.

As if her mind didn't have the energy to feel everything at once.

She stared at the ceiling.

Then slowly closed her eyes.
And for the first time in many nights—
sleep came a little easier.
Not peaceful.
But easier.
Days passed after that.
And slowly—
everything went back to normal.
At least on the surface.
The boys stopped looking at her.
Stopped whispering.
Stopped existing in her space.
As if nothing had ever happened.
But inside Zerlin—
something stayed.
That moment.
That decision.
That shift.
She started noticing herself more.

Her reactions.

Her silence.

Her laughter.

Everything felt more visible to her now.

And without realizing it—

she was changing.

Slowly.

Quietly.

In ways no one else could see.

Not even Laen.

Not yet. Days continued moving forward.

Slowly.

Quietly.

Almost as if nothing had changed.

Zerlin went to school.

Sat in the same seat.

Talked to Laen.

Came back home.

Followed the same routine.

From the outside—
everything looked normal again.
But inside—
something had shifted.
And it stayed.
She didn't laugh as loudly as before.
Didn't react as quickly.
Didn't force herself into moments anymore.
She was still present—
but not completely.
And maybe—
that was the difference.
One afternoon, while sitting at home, she
overheard something.
"We're going to the city this week," her father
said.
Zerlin froze for a second.
The city.
The word alone felt like something distant—
and familiar at the same time.

Her heart reacted before her mind did.

"Really?" she asked, trying to keep her voice normal.

Her father nodded.

"Just for a short visit."

Zerlin didn't say anything after that.

But inside—

everything started moving again.

Memories.

Faces.

Voices she hadn't heard in a long time.

That night, she couldn't sleep properly.

But this time—

it wasn't because of heaviness.

It was something else.

Something closer to anticipation.

The journey felt longer than usual.

Or maybe she just wanted to reach faster.

As the bus entered the city—

everything felt different.

The roads.

The buildings.

The movement.

The noise.

Everything she once lived in.

Everything she once belonged to.

And for the first time in a long while—
she didn't feel out of place.

She met her friends one by one.

Raya.

Lena.

Katy.

The names alone brought something back inside
her.

Something lighter.

Something real.

They talked.

Laughed.

Shared everything they had missed.

And for a few hours—

Zerlin forgot everything else.

Forgot the silence.

Forgot the village.

Forgot the version of herself she had become there.

Here—

she felt like herself again.

But there was someone else.

Someone she hadn't seen yet.

Adrone.

The name stayed quietly in her mind.

She didn't say it out loud.

But she felt it.

Later that evening—

she saw him.

Standing a little away.

Not too close.

Not too far.

For a moment—

neither of them moved.

Just looked at each other.

As if time needed a second to catch up.

Then slowly—

they walked closer.

No words.

Not immediately.

Just presence.

"You came," Adrone said softly.

Zerlin nodded.

"Yeah."

A small silence followed.

Not awkward.

Just... full.

"I didn't think you would," he added.

Zerlin looked at him for a second.

"Neither did I."

They both smiled slightly.

It wasn't a big moment.

But it felt like one.

They spent time together.
With friends.
In small conversations.
In shared glances.
In moments that didn't need too many words.
Everything felt easy.
Natural.
Like it used to be.
That night—
she stayed there.
One night.
But it felt shorter than it should have.
Morning came too fast.
And with it—
the reality she didn't want to face.
She had to leave.
Again.
They were all downstairs.
Her friends.

The same people she had missed for so long.

But her eyes—

looked for one person.

Adrone.

He was standing a little aside.

Quiet.

Like always.

Zerlin walked toward him.

Slow steps.

Controlled.

But her heart—

wasn't.

"Can I... hug you?" she asked softly.

Her voice barely above a whisper.

Adrone froze for a second.

His expression changed.

He looked slightly nervous.

Slightly unsure.

He didn't say anything.

Zerlin felt it.

The hesitation.

So she slowly moved her hand forward instead.

A simple gesture.

For a handshake.

Adrone looked at her hand.

Then at her.

And then—

he held it.

His grip was warm.

Tight.

But not too tight.

Zerlin smiled slightly.

"Bye," she said.

Trying to sound normal.

Trying to keep it light.

But Adrone didn't let go immediately.

His hand stayed.

For a second longer than it should have.

As if he didn't want that moment to end.

Zerlin noticed.

But she didn't say anything.

She just smiled again.

Then slowly—

she pulled her hand back.

And turned away.

The car started moving.

She didn't look back immediately.

She didn't want to.

Because she knew—

if she did—

it would become harder.

But after a few seconds—

she did.

Just once.

Adrone was still standing there.

Watching.

Not moving.

The distance grew.
Slowly.
Until he disappeared.
And just like that—
the city faded again.
The village returned.
The same roads.
The same silence.
The same life.
But Zerlin wasn't the same anymore.
That night—
she didn't stay completely silent.
She picked up her phone.
Looked at the screen for a long time.
Then finally—
typed.
And from that day—
something new began.
Not loud.

Not obvious.

But real.

Late-night conversations.

Long messages.

Small words that carried more meaning than they seemed.

Days passed slowly again.

But nights—

felt different.

She waited for them.

Without saying it.

Without admitting it.

And slowly—

without realizing—

her feelings started growing.

Not suddenly.

Not dramatically.

But quietly.

Like everything else in her life.

And once again—

she didn't say much.

She didn't explain.

She didn't question.

She just felt it.

In silence.

But this time—

that silence was different.

It wasn't empty.

It wasn't heavy.

It was full.

Full of something she didn't fully understand yet.

But something she didn't want to lose either.

And for the first time—

her silence didn't feel like something she was hiding in.

It felt like something she was holding. Evenings in the city didn't feel the same anymore.

Not after she left.

When the noise of the day faded, when people
slowly went back to their homes and the streets
grew quieter—

Adrone stayed back.

Not by accident.

Not because he had nothing to do.

But because there was a place.

A small, ordinary place—

that didn't feel ordinary to him anymore.

The same area where they had once met.

Where everything had felt different.

He stood there sometimes.

Alone.

At first, it felt strange.

Standing without a reason.

Looking at nothing in particular.

But slowly—

it became something else.

Something he didn't question.

One evening, after everyone had left, he walked
there again.

Closed the gate behind him.

The sound of it locking echoed slightly in the quiet.

Now it was just him.

And the silence.

He stood in the same spot.

Looked around once.

Then let his gaze settle.

And without trying too hard—

his mind filled the emptiness.

He imagined her.

Standing there.

The way she used to.

The way she looked at him—
without saying too much.

He took a small step forward.

As if she was really there.

And in that moment—

it didn't feel like imagination.

It felt close.

Too close.

He lifted his hand slightly.

Paused.

Then let it move forward.

As if he was reaching for her.

His fingers hovered in the air—
but in his mind—
they found her hand.

Warm.

Real.

He closed his eyes for a second.

And everything else disappeared.

The quiet place turned into something alive.

He imagined her standing in front of him.

Closer now.

The same distance as before.

The same feeling.

He let out a soft breath.

Then, slowly—

he wrapped his arms around the empty space.

But in his mind—

he wasn't alone.

He could feel it.

Her presence.

Her closeness.

The way she would lean slightly.

The way she would stay still—

not pulling away.

A faint smile appeared on his face.

He imagined her saying something.

Something simple.

Something soft.

"What are you doing?" she would ask.

"Nothing," he would reply.

Even in his thoughts.

They would talk.

Not about anything important.

Just small things.

Random things.

But even that—

felt enough.

After a while, he stepped back slightly.
Looked at the space in front of him again.

Empty.

But it didn't feel empty to him.

He ran his fingers lightly through the air—
as if fixing her hair.

As if tucking a strand behind her ear.

A small habit he had noticed.

A small detail that stayed.

"Don't go so soon next time," he murmured quietly.

There was no reply.

But he still stood there.

For a few more seconds.

Holding onto something that wasn't there—
but felt real enough.

Then slowly—
he opened his eyes fully.

The place returned to what it was.
Just a quiet corner.
Just empty space.

He looked around once more.
Took a small breath.

And then—
he stepped away.

But not completely.

Because even after leaving—
that place stayed with him.

Just like she did.

Not loudly.
Not obviously.

But quietly.
Constantly. Some nights—
sleep didn't come easily.

Zerlin would lie awake,
her room wrapped in silence,
her thoughts louder than anything around her.

Her phone would be beside her.
The last message still open.

The last conversation still fresh.

But sometimes—
even that wasn't enough.

So she closed her eyes.

And slowly—
without forcing it—
she imagined him.

Not far away.
Not on a screen.

But there.
Right beside her.

She would turn slightly,
as if making space.

And in her mind—
he was already there.

She rested her head gently—
in his lap.

The position felt so natural,
as if it had happened before.

Her eyes stayed closed.
Her breathing softer.

She didn't say anything at first.

Just stayed there.

Then quietly—
she spoke.

"Do you know how hard it feels here?"

Her voice in her imagination was softer than in real life.

More honest.

More tired.

"I laugh so much in class..."

she whispered.

"but it doesn't feel real."

In her mind—

his hand moved gently through her hair.

Not fast.

Not distracting.

Just slow.

Comforting.

"I know," he would say.

And somehow—
that was enough.

She smiled faintly.
Even with her eyes closed.

"I wish you were actually here," she added.

A pause.

Then she laughed softly.

"Not like this... like real."

In her imagination—
he smiled too.

"I'm here," he would say.

Zerlin shook her head slightly.

"This isn't real."

"Does it matter?" he replied.

That made her quiet.

Because in that moment—
it didn't.

She stayed there.

Not moving.

Letting the silence between them feel full—
not empty.

After a while—
her voice came again.

"Do you miss me?"

A small question.
But it carried more than it seemed.

In her mind—
his answer came without hesitation.

"Yes."

She didn't respond immediately.

But her fingers curled slightly,
holding onto the bedsheet.

"Then why does it feel like I'm the only one feeling this much..." she whispered.

This time—

there was no quick answer.

Only his hand—

still moving slowly through her hair.

That silence didn't hurt.

It comforted her in a different way.

Because even without words—

she felt understood.

After some time—

she started talking about small things.

About school.

About Laen.

About random moments that didn't matter.

She laughed in between.

Softly.

Genuinely.

Not like in class.

This laughter felt real.

"Today I almost smiled for no reason," she said.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I remembered something you said."

"What did I say?"

"I don't remember exactly..."

she smiled slightly,

"but it stayed."

He laughed softly in her imagination.

"That's enough then."

She nodded,

even though he couldn't really see it.

Slowly—

her voice became quieter.

Her words slower.

The tiredness finally catching up.

But this time—

it didn't feel heavy.

It felt... safe.

Before drifting into sleep,
she whispered one last thing.

"Don't go."

In her mind—
he didn't.

And for the first time in many nights—
sleep came gently.

Not forced.

Not restless.

Just soft.

Chapter 4

Zerlin had always been someone who felt more than she spoke.

Words existed inside her—clear, loud, and full of meaning—but when it came to saying them out loud, something always held her back. It wasn't fear exactly. It was something quieter... something that made her choose silence over expression.

But silence didn't mean absence.

It just meant that everything she felt had to find another way out.

And for Zerlin, that way had always been letters.

She didn't remember when she started writing them.

Maybe it was when she first realized that writing made things easier. That feelings looked less confusing on paper. That emotions didn't interrupt you there. They didn't judge. They didn't ask questions.

They just stayed.

Her father had always been the one she wrote to.

Not because she couldn't talk to him—but because writing to him felt... safer.

More honest.

On his birthdays, she would sit quietly in her room, folding paper carefully, choosing her words slowly.

"Happy Birthday, Papa," she would write.

Then pause.

Erase.

Write again.

Because she didn't want it to sound ordinary.

She wanted it to feel like what she felt.

On anniversaries, she would write again.

Short letters. Long letters. Sometimes just a few lines.

But always something.

And every time she gave it to him, she wouldn't stand there waiting for a reaction.

She would just hand it quietly and leave.

Sometimes he would smile.

Sometimes he would say nothing.

But she noticed something—

He never threw them away.

That was enough for her.

There was a kind of comfort in that silence.

A kind of understanding that didn't need to be spoken.

But not all her letters were light.

Not all of them were about wishes or celebrations.

Once, when she was younger, she had written something she had never said out loud.

A question.

"Why doesn't Mom understand me?"

She had stared at that line for a long time before giving it.

Her fingers had tightened around the paper.

Her heart had felt heavier than usual.

But she still gave it.

She waited.

Not in front of him—but in her own way.

Watching.

Hoping.

There was no written reply.

No direct answer.

But later that day, she noticed her parents talking quietly.

Her mother's voice slightly sharper than usual.

Her father's calmer.

Lower.

Zerlin didn't go closer.

She didn't listen.

But she understood something in that moment—

Some things don't come back the way you send them.

After that, she stopped writing questions.

She still wrote letters.

But only the safe ones.

The ones that didn't ask for answers.

Time passed.

And Zerlin grew.

But some habits stayed.

Like writing.

And like loving quietly.

Then came a day in January.

A day that didn't feel important at first.

Just another day.

But for Zerlin, it became something she would never forget.

She sat in her room again.

A paper in front of her.

Pen in her hand.

But this time—

Her thoughts weren't simple.

They weren't about wishes.

Or celebrations.

They were heavier.

More confusing.

Something she didn't fully understand herself.

She had been feeling things she couldn't name.

A kind of closeness.

A kind of attachment.

Something that didn't feel wrong—but didn't feel
easy either.

She didn't know what to do with it.

So she did what she always did—

She wrote.

Her hand moved slowly.
Words forming one by one.
Without fully thinking.
Without fully stopping.

"I like you..."

She paused after writing that.
Her heart beating faster than it should.

She stared at the paper.
Reading the same line again and again.

Something about it didn't feel right.
But she didn't erase it.

Because at that moment—
It felt true.
Even if she didn't understand it.

She folded the paper.

Held it in her hand for a long time.

Then stood up.

Her steps toward him were slower than usual.

More careful.

"Papa..." she called softly.

He looked up.

"Yes?"

For a second, she forgot everything she wanted to say.

Then she just held out the paper.

"For you."

He looked at it.

Then at her.

Slightly confused.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Just... read it," she said quietly.

He opened it.

The room felt still.

Zerlin stood there.

Not looking at him.

Not moving.

She didn't know what she was expecting.

A smile?

A question?

A laugh?

But what came instead—

Was something she wasn't prepared for.

His expression changed.

Not completely.

But enough for her to notice.

He looked at her.

"Zerlin..." he said.

His voice wasn't angry.

But it wasn't light either.

"What is this?" he asked again.

She didn't answer.

Because she didn't have one.

He sighed softly.

"Do you even understand what you've written?"

Zerlin shook her head slightly.

"No..."

There was a pause.

He didn't shout.

He didn't get angry the way she had imagined.

But he did scold her.

Gently.

"These things... you don't say like this," he said.

"You're too young to even understand it properly."

Zerlin stood still.

Listening.

Her chest felt tight.

But she didn't cry.

Because somewhere—

She understood that he wasn't trying to hurt her.

He was trying to correct her.

To guide her.

In his own way.

But still—

Something inside her felt... off.

Not broken.

But unsettled.

She nodded.

Quietly.

"I'm sorry," she said.

He didn't reply immediately.

Then he just folded the paper.

Kept it aside.

That moment ended there.

But it didn't leave her.

Later that day—

Her mother found out.

"What is this I heard?" she asked.

Her voice sharper than usual.

Zerlin stayed silent.

"Are these things you say to your father?" her mother continued.

Each word felt heavier than the last.

Zerlin looked down.

Her fingers tightening slightly.

"I didn't mean—" she started.

"Then don't write such things," her mother cut in.

"From now on—no more letters."

That sentence stayed.

Not loud.

But final.

No more letters.

That night—

Zerlin sat in her room again.

A paper in front of her.

But this time—

Her hand didn't move.

She stared at it for a long time.

Then slowly—

She pushed it away.

And just like that—

Something that had always been a part of her...

Stopped.

Days passed.

Her father's birthday came.

For the first time—

She didn't write a letter.

Her room felt different that day.

Quieter.

She looked at the empty paper again.

Then folded it.

Without writing anything.

Instead—

She made something else.

A small bouquet.

Carefully arranged.

Each piece placed with attention.

She held it for a moment.

Then went to him.

"Happy birthday," she said softly.

He smiled.

Genuinely.

"Thank you," he said.

That should have felt enough.

But something inside her knew—

It wasn't the same.

Later that day—

Something unexpected happened.

"Come here," her father called.

Zerlin looked up.

Slightly confused.

She walked toward him.

Slowly.

"Sit," he said, pointing beside him.

She hesitated for a second.

Then sat.

Carefully.

Closer than she had ever been.

He placed his hand on her shoulder.

Lightly.

Naturally.

"Let's take a picture," he said.

She nodded.

The camera clicked.

And in that exact moment—

Something shifted inside her.

Her eyes became slightly red.

Not enough for anyone to notice.

But enough for her to feel.

She didn't cry.

She controlled it.

Like she always did.

But she knew—

This moment mattered.

Because it was rare.

Because it was close.

Because it was something she had never
experienced before.

And she didn't know why—

But she felt like she should remember it.

So she did.

She held onto that moment quietly.

Without saying anything.

Because some memories—

Don't need words.

They just stay.

And this one—

Stayed.

That moment stayed with her longer than she expected.

Not because it was big.

But because it was rare.

Zerlin wasn't someone who sat close to her father.

She didn't hug him.

She didn't lean against him.

Not because she didn't want to—

But because that's just how things had always been.

A quiet distance.

A respectful space.

So when he placed his hand on her shoulder that day—

It felt unfamiliar.

And warm.

She didn't move.

She didn't react.

But inside—

Something softened.

That picture stayed in her mind.

Clearer than most memories.

Not because of how it looked—

But because of how it felt.

Days passed again.

Slowly.

Normally.

Life didn't change suddenly.

It never did.

It just kept moving.

School.

Home.

Routine.

Everything looked the same.

But Zerlin had started noticing something—
Small moments stayed with her longer now.

Little things.
Small actions.
Simple words.

They didn't pass easily anymore.

They stayed.

And sometimes—
They hurt.

The last months of seventh grade were going on.

Nothing felt different on the outside.

But inside—

There was a quiet heaviness that didn't leave.

One day, during school—

Zerlin was fasting.

She hadn't told anyone.

She didn't feel the need to.

It was something personal.

Something quiet.

But by the middle of the day—

Her body felt weak.

Her head felt light.

Her hands slightly cold.

She tried to ignore it.

She always did.

But this time—

It didn't go away.

So she turned to the girl sitting beside her.

"Can I have some water?" she asked softly.

The girl looked at her.

Then nodded.

"Yeah, take it."

Zerlin took the bottle.

Her fingers slightly trembling.

Before she could even drink—

A voice came from the front.

"Write her name."

Zerlin froze.

The class monitor stood there.

Watching.

For a second—

She didn't understand.

"What?" she said quietly.

"You're breaking the rule," he replied.

"Write her name."

Zerlin stared at him.

Confused.

Weak.

And suddenly—

Irritated.

"I just asked for water," she said.

"That doesn't matter," he replied.

"Rules are rules."

He wrote her name.

Just like that.

The teacher entered a few minutes later.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Ma'am, she was drinking water during class," the monitor said.

The teacher looked at Zerlin.

"Stand up."

Zerlin stood.

Slowly.

Her head still felt light.

"Why were you drinking water?" the teacher asked.

Zerlin opened her mouth to speak—

But before she could finish—

The teacher raised her hand.

And hit her.

Not hard enough to leave a mark.

But hard enough to stay.

Zerlin's eyes filled instantly.

Not just from the pain—

But from everything.

"Why is he a monitor if he doesn't know how to handle a class?" she said, her voice breaking.

The class went silent.

No one expected that.

Zerlin didn't speak like that.

She didn't argue.

She didn't raise her voice.

But this time—

She did.

Tears rolled down her face.

And for the first time—

She didn't hide them.

Not in front of others.

Not in school.

She just stood there.

Crying.

Because it wasn't just about the water.

It wasn't just about the hit.

It was everything she had been holding inside—

Finding a way out.

The teacher said something.

The class moved on.

But Zerlin didn't hear much after that.

Her ears felt distant.

Her thoughts somewhere else.

She sat down slowly.

Her hands resting on the desk.

Her tears didn't stop immediately.

And for a moment—

She didn't try to stop them.

She remembered something suddenly.

Her old school.

Her old classroom.

Her old teacher.

The one who used to look at her—

And just smile.

No questions.

No pressure.

Just a smile.

And somehow—

That was enough.

Her computer teacher.

Her favorite.

The one who understood her—

Without her needing to explain anything.

But now—

He wasn't there.

And that thought—

Made her cry even more.

That day didn't end loudly.

No one talked about it much.

But for Zerlin—
Something changed.

Not outside.

Inside.

From that day—
She became quieter.

Not suddenly.
Not obviously.

But slowly.

Like something inside her had stepped back.

And didn't return fully.

Days passed again.

Routine came back.

Classes.

Homework.

Even small laughter.

But the heaviness stayed.

At home—

Things were the same.

Normal.

But even there—

Small moments started affecting her more.

One day—

Her father called her.

"Come here," he said.

Zerlin walked over.

He was sitting with her mother.

"Sit," he said.

She sat.

He picked up some food.

And held it toward her.

"Eat," he said.

Zerlin looked at him for a second.

Then took a bite.

It felt simple.

Normal.

But for her—

It wasn't.

Because moments like this—

Didn't happen often.

Then he looked at her mother.

"Feed her," he said.

Her mother didn't respond immediately.

Then she said—

"No."

Just that.

No explanation.

No softness.

Just—

No.

The moment ended there.

But it stayed with Zerlin.

Like everything else.

She didn't say anything.

She never did.

But inside—

Something hurt.

Not loudly.

But quietly.

The kind of hurt that doesn't show—

But doesn't leave either.

Because for Zerlin—

It was never about big things.

It was always about small moments.

And how they made her feel.

And slowly—

Those small moments were becoming heavier.

Even when life looked normal—

It didn't feel like it anymore.

And she didn't know it yet—

But this was only the beginning.

Life didn't stop after that.

It never does.

Days kept moving forward.

Classes continued.

Exams came closer.

From the outside—

Everything looked like it was settling again.

Zerlin studied.

She completed her work.

She sat through classes quietly.

She was present.

But not fully.

Because somewhere inside—

That quiet heaviness had started becoming a part
of her.

Not strong enough to break her.

But enough to stay.

Her final exams came.

She prepared like she always did—

Carefully.

Sincerely.

She didn't rush.

She didn't panic.

She just followed the routine her mind knew.

And slowly—

The exams ended.

Relief filled the house.

For a few days—
Things felt lighter.

Her family decided to go on a trip.

It wasn't something they did often.

So this time—
It felt special.

The journey was long.
But not tiring.

There was laughter.
Small conversations.
Moments that didn't need effort.

Zerlin smiled.

Genuinely.

She sat beside her father during parts of the trip.

Sometimes quiet.

Sometimes just listening.

And once—

He looked at her and said,

"You've grown a lot."

Zerlin didn't reply immediately.

She just smiled slightly.

Because she didn't know what to say.

But she remembered it.

Like everything else.

For a while—

Things felt normal again.

Not perfect.

But peaceful.

But happiness—

Never stays the same.

After about a month—

Something started changing.

It wasn't loud.

It didn't come with warning.

Just small signs.

Her father's hand started swelling.

At first—

No one thought much of it.

"Maybe it's nothing," someone said.

"Just tiredness," another replied.

But slowly—

His blood pressure started rising.

That's when they decided—

To get it checked.

"Everything is fine," they said after the check-up.

Zerlin believed that.

Because she wanted to.

Because she had no reason not to.

But then—

Suddenly—

Everything changed.

He was shifted to the ICU.

Zerlin didn't know.

No one told her.

They kept it away from her.

Like something that needed to be hidden.

"Where is Papa?" she asked one evening.

"He's just getting treatment," her mother replied.

"Is it serious?"

"No," she said quickly.

"Nothing serious."

Zerlin nodded.

But something didn't feel right.

Not because of what they said—

But because of how they said it.

Still—

She didn't question much.

Because she trusted them.

Because she believed—

That if something was wrong—

They would tell her.

The last time she spoke to her father—

Was on a call.

"Papa... are you okay?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"I'm fine."

But his voice felt different.

Slightly weaker.

She noticed.

But ignored it.

Because she didn't want to believe anything else.

"My head hurts a little," he added.

"You should rest," Zerlin said quickly.

"You'll be fine."

He didn't reply immediately.

Then he said softly,

"Hmm."

That was their last conversation.

And she didn't know it.

After that—

Days felt strange.

Not normal.

Not clear.

Just...

Uncertain.

Zerlin started asking small things.

"Did he eat?" she asked her mother.

"Yes," her mother replied.

Only after hearing that—

Zerlin would eat.

Because that's how it had always been.

She couldn't feel okay—

Unless she knew he was.

But something inside her—

Kept feeling unsettled.

Like a quiet fear she couldn't name.

Then one day—

Her cousin came.

"Pack your things," he said.

"You'll stay at our house for a few days."

"Why?" Zerlin asked.

"Just like that," he replied.

She didn't question more.

She didn't think too much.

Because she still didn't know.

That night—

They ate.

They slept.

Everything felt normal.

At least on the outside.

But early morning—

Around 4 a.m.—

Something changed.

Her sister-in-law came into the room.

She leaned close to Zerlin's sister.

Whispered something.

Her sister's expression changed instantly.

Shock.

But she said nothing.

Zerlin woke up slightly.

"What happened?" she asked.

"No... nothing," her sister replied.

Zerlin looked at her.

She knew.

Something was wrong.

But no one said it.

At 5 a.m.—

Everyone woke up.

The house felt different.

Too quiet.

Too tense.

Zerlin went to the kitchen.

Started making tea.

Her hands moving automatically.

Even though her mind was somewhere else.

Then—

One of her sisters came.

Sat beside their mother.

And suddenly—

She started crying.

Zerlin froze.

Her mother looked at her.

"Tell me... what happened?"

Her voice shaking.

Zerlin walked closer.

Her heart beating faster.

"What happened?" she asked.

Louder this time.

No one replied immediately.

Then her brother spoke.

His voice breaking.

"Your... father..."

He couldn't finish.

Then he said it.

"He's no more."

For a moment—

Everything stopped.

Zerlin stared at him.

Not understanding.

Not accepting.

"No," she said.

Then louder—

"No!"

Her voice filled the room.

She grabbed her phone.

Called her uncle.

"Where is my father?" she asked.

"What happened to him?"

Her uncle didn't know.

"No... nothing happened," he said.

"He's fine."

Because even he—

Hadn't been told the truth yet.

Zerlin kept calling.

Her father's number.

Again.

Again.

Again.

Finally—

Someone picked up.

His friend.

"Uncle... where is my father?" she asked.

Silence.

Then—

She heard him crying.

That was enough.

Her hands started shaking.

Her voice broke.

"Tell me..." she whispered.

But no clear answer came.

Still—

She didn't believe it.

She couldn't.

"No... this isn't true," she said.

She stood up.

"I'll pray."

"If I pray... he'll be fine."

She started reading namaz.

Her hands raised.

Her voice trembling.

"Please... bring him back," she whispered.

Again.

And again.

She went to her brother.

"He's still alive, right?" she asked.

"He's breathing... right?"

Her brother looked at her.

Then nodded.

"Yes."

Just to keep her calm.

And Zerlin believed him.

Because she needed to.

She kept praying.

Holding onto hope—

Even when everything else had already let go.

Hope stayed with her—

Even when the truth had already arrived.

Zerlin kept praying.

Her hands raised.

Her voice shaking.

Her words repeating again and again—

As if saying them enough times could change something.

"Please... bring him back."

No one stopped her.

No one corrected her.

Because no one had the strength to.

Time passed—

But it didn't feel like time anymore.

It felt like waiting.

Waiting for something impossible.

Then—

The door opened.

Her uncle walked in.

Zerlin saw him—

And ran.

Without thinking.

Without stopping.

She wrapped her arms around him tightly.

"What did you all do with my father?" she cried.

"How will I live now?"

Her voice broke completely.

The words didn't come out properly.

But the pain did.

Everyone around her was crying.

Voices overlapping.

Tears falling.

But Zerlin—

She didn't listen to any of it.

She just held onto him—

As if someone could still give her an answer.

Then—

The sound of an ambulance.

It stopped outside.

Everything went quiet.

Not silent—

But heavy.

Like the world had paused.

They brought him in.

Wrapped.

Still.

Dressed in white.

Zerlin saw him—

And everything inside her shattered.

"No... no... no..." she cried.

Her voice rising louder with each word.

"That's not him... that's not my father..."

People held her back.

Moved her away.

"Don't go near," someone said.

But how could she not?

She struggled.

Tried to move forward.

But they didn't let her.

Her hands reached out—

But didn't touch him.

After some time—

When her tears slowed—

When her breathing became uneven but quieter—

She wiped her face.

And walked forward.

This time—

No one stopped her.

She went closer.

Closer than she had ever been.

Her hands trembled.

Her eyes filled again—

But she didn't cry loudly this time.

She sat near him.

And softly—

She began to read.

Dua after dua.

Her voice low.

Steady.

As if she was still trying—

Still hoping—

"Papa..." she whispered.

"I'm Zerlin..."

"Wake up..."

But he didn't.

And this time—

She didn't ask again.

Because somewhere—

Deep inside—

She knew.

That this was real.

People around her cried louder.

Her mother.

Her siblings.

Her relatives.

The house filled with grief.

But slowly—

Zerlin became quiet.

Again.

Not because she wasn't hurting.

But because she was.

Too much.

She stood up.

Moved around.

Held others.

"Don't cry," she said softly.

Even when her own voice was breaking.

She became the one—

Telling others to be strong.

Even when she wasn't.

Later—

They took him to the graveyard.

Zerlin went with them.

Walking behind.

Each step heavier than the last.

At the entrance—

They stopped her.

"You can't go inside," someone said.

She looked ahead.

The place where they were taking him—

And for a moment—

She didn't move.

She wanted to go.

She needed to.

But she didn't argue.

She stood there.

Watching.

As they took him further away.

Further.

Until she couldn't see him clearly anymore.

Her hands slowly came together again.

And she started praying.

Nearby—

His friends stood.

Some crying.

Some silent.

One of them—

Stepped forward.

He wasn't from their religion.

But that day—

He stood there.

And prayed.

For him.

Zerlin noticed that.

Even in that moment—

She noticed.

Because love—

Doesn't follow rules.

It just stays.

That day—

She didn't cry loudly again.

She held herself together.

For everyone else.

But night—

Was different.

When everything became quiet—

When people went to their rooms—

When the voices disappeared—

Zerlin lay down.

Her eyes open.

Her body still.

She didn't sleep.

Not even for a moment.

Because her mind—

Didn't accept it.

"He's here," she thought.

"He's just hiding..."

"He'll come back."

She waited.

Listened.

Hoped.

But nothing changed.

The silence stayed.

And slowly—

Reality settled in.

Zerlin turned to her side.

Pulled the blanket closer.

Her fingers tightening around it.

And finally—

Her tears came again.

Quiet.

Unseen.

Because even then—

She didn't want anyone to hear.

Days passed after that.

People came.

Left.

Spoke.

Sat.

Prayed.

But for Zerlin—

Everything felt distant.

Like she was there—

But not fully.

She moved.

She responded.

She existed.

But something inside her—

Had gone silent.

She stopped asking questions.

Stopped expecting answers.

But one question—

Stayed.

"Why?"

She never said it out loud.

But it stayed with her.

Every day.

In every quiet moment.

And another truth—

Came with it.

"How will I live... without him?"

Because he wasn't just her father.

He was her habit.

And habits—

Don't leave easily.

Even when everything else does.

Zerlin didn't think about that day often.

She avoided it.

Pushed it away.

Because she knew—

If she allowed herself to remember everything—

She wouldn't be able to handle it.

So she did what she had always done—

She stayed quiet.

She controlled her tears.

She tried to stay strong.

Because that's what he had always told her.

"Stay happy."

And she tried.

She really did.

But sometimes—

No matter how hard you try—

Tears don't listen.

And in those moments—

Zerlin didn't stop them.

Because some pain—

Isn't meant to be hidden.

It's meant to be felt.

And slowly—

Very slowly—

She learned—

How to live with it.

Life didn't return to normal.

It only looked like it did.

The house slowly emptied.

Relatives went back.

Voices faded.

Footsteps became fewer.

And one by one—

Everything that had filled the space that day...

Left.

But the silence stayed.

Not the peaceful kind.

Not the quiet that comforts.

This silence—

Felt heavy.

Like something was missing from every corner.

Like the house itself knew.

Zerlin noticed it the most at night.

During the day, there were distractions.

People talking.

Work to do.

Small responsibilities.

But at night—

There was nothing to hide behind.

Just her.

And the absence.

She started noticing habits.

Small ones.

The way she would look toward the door—

Expecting him to walk in.

The way she would pause before eating—

As if waiting to ask someone,

"Did he eat?"

And then remembering—

There was no one to ask anymore.

That realization didn't come all at once.

It came slowly.

In moments.

And each time—

It hurt again.

One evening, she sat quietly in her room.

Her notebook lay open in front of her.

Blank.

She stared at it for a long time.

Her fingers resting on the page.

Still.

It had been so long since she wrote anything.

Not because she forgot how.

But because something inside her had stopped.

She picked up her pen.

Held it.

Then placed it back down.

Because writing meant feeling.

And feeling—

Felt too heavy now.

But her eyes stayed on the page.

And slowly—

A thought came.

Not clear.

Not loud.

Just... there.

"If I write..."

"...who will read it now?"

Her fingers tightened slightly.

Because for the first time—

She understood something.

It was never just about writing.

It was about him.

And now—

There was no one to give the letters to.

That realization stayed longer than expected.

Days turned into weeks.

Zerlin returned to school.

Everything looked the same.

The same classroom.

The same students.

The same routine.

But nothing felt the same.

"Zerlin, write this down," a teacher said.

She nodded.

Her hand moved.

Her pen wrote.

But her mind—

Wasn't there.

Sometimes, she would suddenly stop.

Just for a second.

Staring at nothing.

As if she forgot where she was.

"Are you okay?" Laen asked once.

Zerlin blinked.

Then nodded.

"Yeah."

That answer had become automatic.

She didn't think before saying it.

She didn't explain.

Because explaining meant opening something—
She didn't want to open.

During breaks—
She sat quietly.

Not because she had no one.

But because she didn't feel like speaking.

Even laughter felt different now.

When others laughed—
She sometimes smiled.

But it didn't reach fully.

Because somewhere—

There was always something missing.

One day—

A teacher called her after class.

"You've become very quiet," she said.

Zerlin looked at her.

"I was always quiet," she replied softly.

The teacher studied her for a moment.

Then said,

"Not like this."

Zerlin didn't respond.

Because she knew—

There was no simple answer.

At home—

Things changed too.

Not loudly.

But in ways that could be felt.

Her mother became more silent.

Her siblings spoke less.

The house adjusted—

In its own way.

But no one talked about it directly.

No one sat down and said—

"This is what happened."

"This is how we feel."

Everything stayed inside.

Just like it always had.

One night—

Zerlin sat near the window.

The sky was dark.

Stars scattered quietly.

She looked up.

For a long time.

Without blinking.

And for the first time—

She spoke.

Not loudly.

Not to anyone in the room.

"Papa..."

Her voice was soft.

Almost like a whisper carried by the night.

"I'm okay."

She paused.

Then added quietly—

"I think..."

Her eyes filled slightly.

But she didn't let the tears fall.

"I'm trying," she said.

The wind moved gently.

Nothing answered.

But she stayed there.

As if waiting.

Because somewhere inside—

She still believed—

He could hear her.

From that night—

Something small changed.

She didn't become happy.

She didn't become normal again.

But she started trying.

Trying to sit through days.

Trying to respond.

Trying to exist—

Without breaking every time.

And slowly—

Very slowly—

She learned something new.

Grief doesn't leave.

It doesn't disappear.

It stays.

But it changes shape.

From loud pain—
To quiet presence.

From tears—
To memories.

And from absence—
To something that lives inside you.

Zerlin didn't forget him.

She never would.

But she started understanding—

He wasn't just someone she lost.

He was someone—

She carried.

In her habits.

In her thoughts.

In her silence.

And even in the words she no longer wrote—

He was still there.

And maybe—

That's how love stays.

Even after everything else is gone.

Time didn't heal her.

It didn't erase anything.

It just... moved.

Days passed.

Weeks passed.

And Zerlin moved with them—

Not because she wanted to.

But because she had to.

People slowly stopped asking questions.

"How are you?"

"Are you okay?"

Those words faded.

And were replaced by silence again.

The same silence she had always known—

But this time, it felt different.

Deeper.

She stopped expecting anyone to understand.

Because she realized—

Some things can't be explained.

And some feelings—

Don't fit into words.

But even then—

Memories didn't leave her.

They came back.

Unexpectedly.

In small moments.

When she saw someone laughing with their father.

When she heard a familiar voice from far away—

That sounded almost like his.

When she passed by places—

Where he used to be.

And sometimes—

Without warning—

Her chest would tighten.

Her breath would slow.

And everything around her—
Would feel distant.

But she didn't react the way she used to.

She didn't cry every time.

Not because it didn't hurt—

But because she had learned to hold it.

She had learned—

How to carry pain quietly.

One evening—

While cleaning her room—

She found something.

A small box.

Old.

Slightly worn.

She didn't remember placing it there.

But when she opened it—

She froze.

Inside—

Were her letters.

Folded carefully.

Some old.

Some newer.

The ones she had written to him.

Birthdays.

Anniversaries.

Small moments.

Even the ones she thought he never noticed.

Her fingers trembled slightly as she picked one.

She unfolded it.

Her own handwriting.

Small.

Careful.

"Happy Birthday, Papa..."

She couldn't read further.

Because her vision blurred.

Tears filled her eyes.

Not loudly.

Not uncontrollably.

But steadily.

Because this time—

It wasn't just memory.

It was proof.

He had kept them.

All of them.

Even when he didn't say anything.

Even when he didn't respond.

He had kept them.

Zerlin sat down slowly.

The letters in her hands.

Her tears falling quietly onto the paper.

And for the first time—

She understood something she hadn't before.

Silence doesn't mean absence.

He had read them.

He had felt them.

In his own way.

Just like she had always felt him—

Without him saying much.

Her lips trembled slightly.

A small, broken smile forming through tears.

"You did understand..." she whispered.

The room stayed quiet.

But it didn't feel empty anymore.

Because for the first time—

She didn't feel like her words had disappeared.

They had stayed.

With him.

Zerlin wiped her tears slowly.

Carefully folded the letter again.

Placed it back in the box.

But this time—

She didn't close it immediately.

She looked at the remaining letters.

And then—

For the first time in a long time—

She reached for a pen.

Her hand hesitated.

Just for a second.

Then she began to write.

Slowly.

Carefully.

Like she used to.

"Papa..."

She paused.

Her breath slightly uneven.

"I don't know if you can hear me..."

"But I'm writing again."

Her eyes filled again.

But she didn't stop.

"Not because I expect an answer..."

"But because this is the only way I know how to talk to you."

Her hand moved more steadily now.

As if something inside her had opened again.

"I'm trying to stay happy..."

"Like you told me..."

"But sometimes it's hard."

She stopped for a moment.

Closed her eyes.

Then continued.

"I miss you."

That line stayed on the page.

Simple.

But heavier than anything else.

She didn't erase it.

Because this time—

She didn't need to hide it.

When she finished—

She folded the paper.

Just like before.

But instead of giving it to him—

She placed it inside the box.

With the others.

And somehow—

That felt right.

Zerlin closed the box gently.

Held it for a moment.

Then placed it back.

And slowly—

She stood up.

Nothing had changed.

He was still gone.

The silence was still there.

But something inside her—
Had shifted.

Not healed.

Not complete.

But steadier.

Because she had found a way—

To keep him.

Not outside.

But within.

And maybe—

That's what staying really means.

Not being present—

But never truly leaving.

Zerlin walked to the window.

The night was quiet.

Calm.

She looked up again.

Like she had done before.

But this time—

Her voice didn't shake.

"Good night, Papa."

And for the first time—

She didn't wait for an answer.

Because she knew—

Some things don't come back.

But they don't disappear either.

They stay—

In the quiet.

In the memories.

And in the parts of you—
That they helped create.

And that—

Was enough.

Chapter 5

Zerlin never truly healed after her father's death.

Time passed.

Days moved forward.

People slowly returned to their routines.

But for her—

Nothing really moved.

She still felt him around.

Not in a way she could explain to others.

Not in something visible.

But in small moments—

When the house became too quiet.

When she looked at the door without realizing why.

When she paused before eating, as if waiting to ask—

"Did he eat?"

Sometimes, she would sit alone and whisper softly—

"Papa..."

And wait.

Not because she expected an answer—

But because somewhere inside,
she still believed he was listening.

Life outside didn't stop for her.

She moved to eighth grade.

New books.

New class routines.

New people.

That's where Aina came into her life.

Aina wasn't loud.

But she was easy to be with.

Soon, it was the three of them—

Zerlin, Laen, and Aina.

They laughed.

Shared small jokes.

Studied together.

Talked about things that didn't really matter—

But somehow made the days lighter.

For a few hours in school—

Zerlin almost felt normal.

But "almost" was never enough.

Because even while she smiled—
Something inside her stayed unchanged.

The memories didn't fade.
They didn't become lighter.

They repeated.
Again and again.

Her father's voice.
That last call.
That day.

Everything played in her mind—
Like something that refused to end.

And at home—

Things became stricter.

After her father passed away—

Her mother changed.

Not completely.

But enough for Zerlin to feel it.

There were more restrictions.

More control.

More silence.

As if the world had decided—

That without a father,

A girl's freedom should become smaller.

Zerlin didn't argue.

She didn't question much.

But she felt it.

Deeply.

And through all of this—

There was one thing that didn't leave.

Adrone.

He stayed.

Not loudly.

Not perfectly.

But truly.

He understood her silence.

Her mood.

Her way of feeling things without saying them.

And slowly—

He became the one who brought back small pieces
of her happiness.

Sometimes through small talks.

Sometimes through silence.

But he wasn't untouched either.

He cried too.

Because her father had treated him with kindness.

With respect.

Like someone who mattered.

And losing that—

Had affected him as well.

They didn't talk about it much.

But both of them knew—

They were carrying the same loss in different ways.

Days passed like this—

Quietly.

Slowly.

Until one day—

Something changed again.

Zerlin's uncle, who lived in America, texted her mother.

He asked for Zerlin's pictures.

Zerlin didn't think much of it.

"He hasn't seen me in a long time," she thought.

Her mother sent one picture.

But later—

Without saying anything—

She sent more.

Many more.

Zerlin didn't notice at that moment.

But something had already started.

Something she didn't know about.

A few days later—

Her grandmother came to stay.

Twelve days.

It was school holiday.

Zerlin spent most of her time at home—

Watching TV.

Sitting quietly.

Passing time.

Until one day—

Her grandmother sat beside her.

And started speaking.

"Don't laugh in front of boys."

"Don't smile too much."

"Don't use phones unnecessarily."

"Stay away from boys."

Zerlin listened.

"Okay," she said.

Because she already followed most of those things.

She wasn't someone who talked to boys randomly.

Still—

Something felt strange.

Why was she being told all this?

She didn't question it.

But she remembered it.

Later—

Her mother repeated the same things.

"Follow what she said," she told her.

Zerlin nodded again.

But this time—

The confusion stayed longer.

Because something didn't feel right.

And then—

One day—

Everything became clear.

Too clear.

Zerlin texted Adrone.

He replied—

With a screenshot.

And a message that didn't feel normal.

She opened it.

And read.

Her eyes stopped moving.

Her breath slowed.

Because the words in front of her—

Didn't make sense.

Or maybe—

They made too much sense.

Her uncle.

His son.

And one line—

That changed everything.

"Zerlin's marriage has been fixed."

She stared at the screen.

Reading it again.

And again.

As if it would change.

But it didn't.

That's when everything connected.

The pictures.

The sudden lectures.

The restrictions.

Everything.

Her mother had decided.

Without telling her.

Without asking her.

And Zerlin—

Had no idea.

For a moment—

She didn't react.

She didn't cry.

She didn't move.

Because something inside her—

Had gone completely still.

But deep inside—

Something else broke.

Not loudly.

But completely.

For a long time—

Zerlin didn't move.

The phone stayed in her hand.

The screen still open.

But her mind—

Was somewhere else.

Marriage.

The word didn't feel real.

Not because she didn't understand it—

But because she had never imagined it like this.

Not without her voice.

Not without her choice.

She had planned her life before.

Not perfectly.

Not in detail.

But she had imagined something—

Someone.

Adrone.

Not as a fantasy.

Not as something temporary.

But as something she believed in.

Something she trusted.

She had never said it loudly.

But inside—

She had already built a future.

And now—

Someone had decided it for her.

Without even asking.

Her fingers tightened around the phone.

Her chest felt heavy.

But still—

No tears came.

Because this wasn't just pain.

This was shock.

She looked at the message again.

Then typed slowly—

"Is this true?"

Adrone replied almost instantly.

"I didn't know..."

His words felt broken.

Not clear.

Not steady.

Like someone trying to understand something while
it was already happening.

"I just saw this," he added.

Zerlin stared at the screen.

For the first time—

Her hands started shaking.

"What are we supposed to do?" she typed.

There was a pause.

Longer than usual.

Then his reply came—

"I don't know..."

And that—

Was the first moment—

Where both of them felt something they had never
felt before.

Helplessness.

Days after that didn't feel normal.

Nothing stayed in place.

Everything felt unstable.

Zerlin tried to act the same.

She sat with Aina.

Laughed with Laen.

Answered questions in class.

But even she could feel it—

Her smile didn't last long.

Her mind didn't stay present.

At night—

Everything came back.

The message.

The words.

The reality.

She tried to talk to her mother.

Once.

"Ammi..." she said softly.

Her mother looked at her.

"Yes?"

Zerlin hesitated.

Then stopped.

Because she already knew—

This wasn't something she could ask.

Not without consequences.

So she stayed quiet.

Like always.

But silence didn't solve anything.

Because Adrone wasn't silent.

He changed.

Slowly—

But clearly.

He stopped sleeping properly.

Stopped eating the way he used to.

His messages became shorter.

More restless.

"I can't think straight," he wrote one night.

Zerlin read it.

And for the first time—

She felt fear.

Not for herself.

But for him.

"You have to stay calm," she replied.

"I'm trying," he said.

"But I can't lose you."

That line stayed.

Because it was simple.

But heavy.

Zerlin stared at the message.

Her heart beating faster.

"You won't," she typed.

Not because she knew.

But because she believed.

She held onto that belief—

Tightly.

Like something that couldn't break.

"I trust Allah," she added.

And from that moment—

That became the only thing holding her steady.

Not certainty.

Not answers.

Just faith.

Days turned heavier.

Conversations became secret.

Careful.

Limited.

But even in distance—

They stayed connected.

Not through constant talking—

But through understanding.

And even when everything around them started
falling apart—

They tried to hold on.

Because letting go—

Wasn't something either of them knew how to do.

And somewhere inside—

Zerlin knew—

This was only the beginning.

Of something harder.

Something that would test—

Everything she believed in.

Nothing felt stable anymore.

Days didn't pass normally.

They dragged.

Every moment carried tension.

Every silence meant something.

Zerlin tried to stay calm.

She really did.

But things around her—

Were no longer in her control.

One day—

Everything broke at once.

Adrone called her mother.

He didn't think.

He didn't plan.

He just felt.

And when feelings become too heavy—

They don't wait for the right moment.

They act.

He cried.

Spoke without stopping.

Asked her mother—

To let Zerlin stay with him.

To not separate them.

But instead of understanding—

There was anger.

Harsh.

Immediate.

"Why is he calling?" her mother shouted.

"What is all this?"

Zerlin stood there.

Frozen.

Her heart racing.

She didn't know what to say.

Didn't know what to do.

Her mother turned toward her.

"Explain this!" she demanded.

Zerlin tried to speak—

But the words didn't come out.

And then—

Her mother said something that cut deeper than anything else.

"I will kill you if this continues."

The room went silent.

Not quiet—

Silent.

Zerlin felt something inside her collapse.

Not loudly.

But completely.

After that—

Nothing felt the same.

Days passed again—

But now with fear.

Constant.

Heavy.

Then—

One evening—

They met.

At a small café.

It wasn't planned perfectly.

But they needed to see each other.

For a few moments—
Everything felt normal again.

They sat together.

Talked.

Laughed.

Not loudly—
But enough to feel alive.

But even then—
The tension stayed.

Behind their smiles.

Inside their thoughts.

"What are we going to do?" Zerlin asked softly.

Adrone looked at her.

"I don't know," he said.

"But I won't leave you."

She believed him.

Not because she was sure—

But because she needed to.

That day ended quietly.

But the storm—

Didn't.

Her final exams came.

She tried to focus.

Tried to stay normal.

And slowly—

Things started becoming calmer.

Not better—

But manageable.

Until one day—

Everything broke again.

It was during one of her last exams.

Her phone rang.

Her mother picked it up.

It was Adrone's sister.

The conversation didn't stay normal.

It turned.

Sharp.

Heavy.

She spoke about everything.

The relationship.

The calls.

The messages.

Even things she already knew—

She used against Zerlin.

"She has no discipline," she said.

"Why is she calling and texting?"

Every word felt like an accusation.

Every sentence—

A judgment.

Zerlin stood there.

Listening.

Unable to stop it.

Her mother's face changed.

Anger building.

And before Zerlin could react—

She slapped her.

The sound echoed.

Not just in the room—

But inside her.

Zerlin didn't cry immediately.

She just stood there.

Still.

Because sometimes—

Pain doesn't come out instantly.

It freezes first.

Later—

Her mother called Adrone.

Put the phone on speaker.

"Did she give you perfume?" she asked.

Zerlin's heart dropped.

That moment—
Changed everything.

For a second—
A thought entered her mind.

"What if..."

"What if he told everything?"

That thought—
Destroyed her from inside.

Her mother looked at her.

"What is going on?" she demanded.

And in that moment—

Zerlin broke.

Not with anger.

But with belief.

She thought—

He didn't love her.

So she said it.

"I used to love him."

The words came out quietly.

But they carried everything.

On the other side—

Adrone went silent.

Completely.

Because for him—

That wasn't truth.

That was the moment—

Everything slipped.

Zerlin stood there.

Not knowing what she had just done.

Not knowing—

That sometimes—

One sentence—

Can change everything.

The silence after that call—

Was louder than anything Zerlin had ever heard.

No one spoke.

Her mother walked away.

The phone was put aside.

And Zerlin—

Stayed where she was.

Still.

Because something inside her—

Had just shattered.

Not slowly.

All at once.

That one thought—

"That he told everything..."

Kept repeating in her mind.

Again.

And again.

Her chest felt tight.

Her breathing uneven.

But she didn't cry.

Not yet.

Because disbelief—

Always comes before pain.

After some time—

Her mother came back.

Her voice calmer now.

But her words—

Were not.

"He was just doing timepass with you," she said.

"His marriage was fixed two years ago."

Zerlin looked at her.

Her eyes searching—

For something real in those words.

For a second—

She believed it.

Because when pain hits suddenly—

The mind tries to accept anything.

But then—

Something inside her spoke.

Quiet.

But strong.

"No."

Her heart didn't agree.

It refused.

Because she knew him.

Not through words.

But through everything he had done.

Everything he had felt.

Still—

That night—

Didn't let her rest.

She went to her room.

Closed the door.

And finally—

Broke.

Not loudly.

Not in front of anyone.

But alone.

In silence.

She cried in the washroom.

Her hands covering her mouth—

To stop the sound.

Because even her pain—
Had to stay hidden.

That night—
She didn't sleep.

Not even for a moment.

She sat.

Thinking.

Replaying everything.

The call.

The words.

The silence.

And one question—

Stayed.

"Was it real?"

Her heart said yes.

Her mind—

Couldn't decide.

Morning came.

But nothing changed.

She looked the same.

But inside—

She was exhausted.

Still—

She needed answers.

And she decided—

She would ask him herself.

No matter what.

It wasn't easy.

Her phone was restricted.

Watched.

Limited.

But somehow—

She managed.

She called him.

For a second—

There was only silence.

Then his voice came.

Soft.

Broken.

"Hello..."

Zerlin closed her eyes.

Because hearing him—

Brought everything back at once.

"Meet me," she said.

And they did.

When they saw each other—

No one spoke immediately.

Because some emotions—

Don't come out as words.

Finally—

Zerlin spoke.

"Yesterday..."

Her voice trembled slightly.

"For a moment... I thought you didn't love me."

She paused.

Looked at him.

"But my heart didn't believe it."

Tears filled her eyes.

But she didn't let them fall.

"I know you," she said softly.

Adrone looked at her.

And something in his expression—

Broke.

"My marriage talk came before two years," he said.

"But I refused."

"I told them..."

He paused.

Then said it clearly—

"I will marry only you."

Zerlin's breath stopped for a moment.

Not because she didn't believe him.

But because she already did.

"I'm not doing timepass," he added.

That sentence—

Felt different.

Real.

Heavy.

Zerlin nodded slowly.

Because she didn't need more words.

She already knew.

From that day—

Everything changed again.

Not outside.

But inside.

Adrone stopped talking to his sister.

Kept distance from his family.

Zerlin lost access to her phone.

More restrictions.

More silence.

But still—

They didn't break.

They found ways.

Small ones.

Hidden ones.

And when they couldn't talk—

They imagined.

Conversations that didn't happen.

Moments that didn't exist.

A future—

That wasn't near.

But in their hearts—

It was real.

Distance didn't matter.

Restrictions didn't stop them.

Because sometimes—

Love doesn't survive in reality.

It survives in belief.

And they held onto that—

Waiting.

For a day—

That felt very far.

But not impossible.

After that day—

Nothing became easier.

But something became clearer.

They knew what they felt.

And sometimes—

That's all people have.

Zerlin didn't get her freedom back.

If anything—

It became smaller.

Her phone was taken more often.

Her movements were watched.

Her time was controlled.

But she didn't fight loudly.

She didn't argue.

Because she had learned something long ago—

Not every battle is fought with words.

Some are survived in silence.

At home—

She became quieter again.

Not the same silence as before—

This one was different.

Stronger.

She did her work.

Followed instructions.

Stayed within limits.

But inside—

She wasn't the same girl anymore.

She had seen loss.

She had felt love.

She had faced fear.

And all of that—
Had changed her.

At school—
Things still looked normal.

Aina, Laen, and Zerlin—
Still sat together.

They laughed.
Shared small stories.
Prepared for exams.

And sometimes—

For a few moments—

Zerlin forgot everything.

But only for a few moments.

Because reality—

Always came back.

Adrone and Zerlin—

Didn't talk like before.

Not freely.

Not openly.

But they didn't stop.

Some days—

They managed to send one message.

Just one.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm here."

And that was enough.

Other days—

There was nothing.

No calls.

No texts.

And on those days—

They met somewhere else.

Not in reality.

But in imagination.

Zerlin would sit quietly at night.

Close her eyes.

And there—

He was.

Sitting beside her.

Listening.

Understanding—

Without asking questions.

Some nights—

She would rest her head in his lap.

Crying.

Not loudly.

Just enough to release what she couldn't during
the day.

And in that space—

He would stay.

Not leaving.

Not interrupting.

Other nights—

They would talk.

About small things.

Random things.

Like nothing had changed.

And sometimes—

She would laugh.

A real laugh.

Even if it existed only in her mind.

Far away—

Adrone had his own version of that space.

Evenings—

When everything became quiet—

He would stand alone.

In the same place—

Where they once met.

The door closed behind him.

The world left outside.

And in front of him—

He imagined her.

Standing there.

Smiling slightly.

Looking at him the way she always did.

He would talk.

Say things he couldn't say anymore.

Apologize.

Explain.

And sometimes—

Just stay silent.

As if she was really there.

Because for both of them—

Imagination became a place—

Where nothing could separate them.

Days passed.

Seasons changed.

Life continued.

But their story—

Didn't end.

It didn't become perfect.

It didn't become easy.

But it stayed.

Not in promises.

Not in plans.

But in belief.

Zerlin still prayed.

Still held onto faith.

Not asking for everything.

Just one thing—

"Let it be right."

She didn't know what the future would be.

She didn't know what would change.

But she knew—

What she felt—

Was real.

And sometimes—

That's all a person carries forward.

Not certainty.

Not answers.

Just something that refuses to fade.

Zerlin stood by the window one night.

The sky dark.

The wind soft.

Just like before.

She didn't say much.

She didn't need to.

Because some stories—

Don't end loudly.

They continue quietly—

Inside the people who lived them.

And maybe—

That's what staying really means.

Epilogue: If It Was Meant to Stay

Some stories don't end.

They just... pause.

Zerlin didn't know what the future would look like.

She didn't know if things would change,

if people would understand,

if life would ever become the way she once
imagined.

But she still hoped.

Quietly.

Stubbornly.

Not the kind of hope that demands answers—

But the kind that simply says,

"If it is written for me... it will find me."

She had learned that life doesn't always ask before
taking things away.

It doesn't warn you.

It doesn't prepare you.

One day, you are a child—

Holding small happiness in your hands.

And the next—

You are someone who understands silence more
than words.

Zerlin had lost people she never thought she would
lose.

She had faced things she was never ready for.

She had stayed quiet when she wanted to speak.

Smiled when she wanted to break.

And still—

She was here.

Still standing.

Still feeling.

Still believing.

Maybe that's what strength really is.

Not moving on.

Not forgetting.

But continuing—

Even when something inside you never heals completely.

She didn't know if she and Adrone would end up together.

She didn't know what decisions others would make for her.

But she knew one thing—

What they felt was never false.

And sometimes—

Even if the world doesn't understand it—

Truth doesn't disappear.

It stays.

In prayers.

In memories.

In the quiet corners of the heart.

Zerlin looked at the sky one last time.

The wind moved gently.

The night calm.

And for the first time—

Her thoughts didn't feel heavy.

Because she wasn't holding onto fear anymore.

Just faith.

"Whatever is meant for me," she whispered softly,

"will never leave me."

And maybe—

That's how some stories survive.

Not by reaching an ending—

But by refusing to fade.