



WHEN SILENCE IS NOT A HABIT,
BUT A SURVIVAL STRATEGY.

VOICES IN THE SHADOW

NOVELLA

ALAN LEZAN

Prologue

As dusk descended over the rooftops of Berlin like viscous ink, the sallow, yellowish light of the kitchen lamp carved Ronahî's face out of the darkness like a sharp-edged frame. Outside, the rain whipped—a pale, rushing curtain against the window-pane. Inside, the phone rested on the countertop: black, heavy, motionless as a monolith. Nobody dialed numbers here anymore; smartphones knew everything, stored everything. Yet in certain corners of this world, remembering could bear the weight of a threat.

The screen lit up with the name: *Uncle Sîdar*. Ronahî raised her finger, letting it hover in the cool air for a single heartbeat before touching the glass.

The ring back tone kicked in. Every single, monotonous beep sounded washed out, as if rolling through a dusty valley a thousand miles away.

A static hiss, then the catch of a breath.

“Ronahî...” Sîdar's voice was nothing more than a raspy whisper. He usually possessed a voice like rolling thunder—a man who never hid his words. But now, every word from back home seemed to force itself through a fine-mesh filter, as though even the stones of the houses had ears.

“Uncle, how are you?” Ronahî asked. Involuntarily, she dropped her voice. It wasn't a habit formed in the comfort of Berlin; it was a reflex born in Dersim.

“We are good... good,” came the scraping sound through the earpiece. This *good* was no state of being. It was a shield. A refusal to invite further questions.

“Is there any news about Diyar? And Astêra... how is she?”

Sîdar was silent. The line turned into an abyss, at the bottom of which lay only the paper-thin shadow of his breath.

“Here... don’t talk too much,” he murmured finally, barely louder than the hiss of a flame. ***“Don’t even start with politics. The phones...”***

The sentence drifted away, unprompted. Sentences about the situation over there had remained unfinished for as long as anyone could remember.

3

Ronahî felt an invisible band tighten around her throat. The spacious Berlin kitchen shrank around her, pressing against her chest as if she were suddenly standing in a low, freezing cellar built of cloddy earth.

“Last week, they took the neighbor’s son,” Sîdar whispered, pressing the cell phone tight to his lips. “A single word on the phone. The next morning, he was staring down rifle barrels. People still talk... but the moment the shadow falls over the situation, everything freezes. Even in the coffeehouse... if someone raises their voice, it’s instantly: *The walls have ears, let it go.* And the table disperses.”

A cold cramp shot through Ronahî’s gut. This was no mere story; it was an atmosphere of paranoia that had settled over daily life like mildew.

“Uncle... where is Diyar?” her voice trembled.

No answer. The silence swelled into a wall.

“Ronahî... don’t come here,” it finally burst out of him, brittle and sharp all at once. “Nobody should come. Words choke in your mouth here.”

Ronahî’s hand froze against the casing. The protective backdrop of Berlin blurred: Jandil’s annoyed laugh, the heavy rug of bass from Renas’s room, her parents’ cozy murmuring from the living room—it all flashed briefly like an old photograph before receding into an unreachable distance. Two worlds, two realities, two forms of silence were tearing at her simultaneously.

“Uncle... the last time I was there, you were laughing,” she whispered. Her voice was nothing more than a fragile thread desperately reaching back into the past.

4

A heavy exhale sounded like dry leaves. “Even laughter has turned poison. Anyone who laughs out loud makes themselves suspicious. Everything lies in the shadow. Even the voices.”

Hot tears welled in her eyes. On the display, the seconds silently ticked upward, yet time between them seemed frozen.

“Will they find Diyar?” she breathed. It wasn’t a question; it was a cry for help into empty space.

“I don’t know,” Sîdar’s voice rasped across the distance. “Some people simply disappear. And some disappearances... don’t even have a name.”

Inside Ronahî, the lights of Berlin went dark. In her mind's eye, the faces of her brothers appeared—Jandil's mocking "*Abla, home country stuff again?*" and Renas's angry "*Don't go there, it's suicide!*". To them, the homeland was a distant coordinate, an abstract construct. To Ronahî, it was a whispered horror crawling through a microphone.

"Uncle..." she whispered stubbornly. "I'm coming."

Sîdar's voice snapped, suddenly hard as granite: "Don't come! Voices wither underground here. Stay where you are. And even there... guard your tongue."

A brief, dry snap. The connection cut off.

Ronahî remained motionless, the cold, black glass resting in the numbness of her fingers. Outside, the rain ran relentlessly down the pane, distorting the city's sea of lights into blurred patches of color. Berlin glistened out there—yet the land inside her was cast entirely in darkness.

5

A soft creak of the floorboards. Noah appeared in the doorway, bathed in a gentle glow. "Just silence again?" he asked softly.

She gave no answer. Some silences grow so immense within that no word in the world is strong enough to carry them.

That night, Ronahî understood: there are countries that speak out loud. And there are countries that smother their own voices in the shadow. And it is precisely those shadowed voices that hold the power to shatter an entire life without making a sound.

1 — The Light of Berlin, the Darkness Within

The Berlin morning light seeped through the cracks of the curtains like a pale white blade. Ronahî stood motionless in the kitchen, trapped in the monotonous gurgle of the coffee machine. Outside, the city still slumbered under a veil of mist, but the roaring noise inside her head had long since awakened.

Jandil shuffled in. His hair was disheveled; his eyelids heavy with sleep. “Abla... is it something about back home again?” he grunted, letting himself drop heavily onto a kitchen chair.

Ronahî remained silent. She pressed the button. As the dark stream filled the mug, a thick, bittersweet steam rose, enveloping the countertop.

6

Jandil fixed his eyes on her, his pupils narrowed. “I heard you last night. You were whispering. Were you on the phone with Uncle again?”

She set the cup down. The porcelain clinked softly against the stone. “Yes. Sîdar... the situation is getting to him.”

Jandil waved it off, an annoyed sigh slipping from his lips. “It’s always burning over there. Doesn’t matter when you call—always the same drama. You’d think they were just working themselves up into a frenzy.”

Ronahî whipped around. Her gaze hit him like a blow. “They are not working themselves up.”

The words fell like lead into the room. The air between them seemed to freeze instantly.

At that moment, Renas shuffled in, ripped his headphones off, and slammed them onto the table. “What’s with the mood in here again?” he grumbled. “Homeland drama for breakfast?”

Ronahî hesitated for a heartbeat. “Diyar is nowhere to be found.”

The casual edge in Renas’s features vanished in an instant. “What do you mean... nowhere to be found?”

“They don’t know anything,” Ronahî whispered. “Nobody dares to open their mouth. Astêra... is dying of fear.”

Renas sat down, the knuckles of his tightly clenched hands turning white. “Abla... you’re working yourself up over something over there. That’s a completely different world. We live here.”

7

A silent ache cut through Ronahî’s chest. “I didn’t grow up there, but that soil makes up half my bloodstream.”

Jandil shook his head in disbelief. “That’s not a half. That’s a black hole waiting to swallow you whole. You’re just too blind to see it.”

Ronahî looked away. A black hole... Maybe he was right. Yet some abysses didn’t spring from the place of one’s birth—they formed where people were forbidden to speak.

A silent shudder: the phone on the table vibrated. The screen lit up brightly.

Astêra: Ablâ... please be careful. Everyone is on the verge of collapsing.

Renas skimmed the lines and groaned. “See? That exact stuff is eating you alive.”

Ronahî pressed the side button. The screen went dark. “The news isn’t eating me alive. It’s this damn silence.”

Jandil knitted his brow. “What kind of silence?”

She stepped up to the kitchen window. Outside, the golden morning light broke through the clouds, reflecting off the wet streets; in the distance, a tram squeaked rhythmically. “Over there, words starve in your mouth,” she whispered against the pane. “Even over the phone, you hear how sentences break off. As if even the vowels are afraid to die.”

8

Renas leaped to his feet. “Ablâ... you cannot go there under any circumstances!”

She didn't turn around. “I don't *want* to go there. I *have* to.”

The sentence hung in the room like a barrier. Jandil stepped close to her. “No! You don't have to! You were born here; your life belongs here. Over there... for us, that’s just a damn story from the past!”

Ronahî closed her eyes. “Not for me.”

Renas’s abrasive tone crumbled. His voice suddenly sounded tiny. “Ablâ... I’m scared for you.”

Ronahî turned slowly and looked into his frightened eyes. “Me too.”

The burning light of Berlin flooded the kitchen, yet between her brothers and herself lay an invisible, ice-cold shadow.

The cell phone in her hand buzzed again. A text from Noah: *We need to talk. Now.*

Ronahî inhaled the cool kitchen air deep into her lungs. “I’m leaving.”

“Abla... listen to reason, please! Think about this!” Jandil called out after her.

Renas stepped into the hallway. “That place isn’t calling you, Ronahî. You’re creating that call yourself!”

9

Ronahî stepped into the corridor, slipped into her shoes, and placed her cool hand on the doorknob. She paused without turning around.

“Some voices,” she whispered out into the dark stairwell, “crawl out of the shadows. And you cannot ignore them.”

She pressed the handle down. The brilliant Berlin morning light struck her face like a wave. But the land within her had long since sunk into deep darkness—and it was demanding its price.

2 — The Noise of the City, the Roar Within

The streets of Berlin still carried the cutting chill of early morning. The metallic hum of the tram tracks drifted through the streets like a thin, glassy melody, accompanying the sluggish heartbeat of the awakening city. Ronahî hurried through the streets, yet the rush of her steps could not drown out the restless, menacing roar in her chest.

In front of the small café where Noah worked, she slowed her pace. The thick, warm scent of freshly ground coffee pouring through the open door onto the pavement was one of the few reliable anchors Berlin offered her. But today, an invisible veil hung over this familiar aroma—a heaviness that rose from deep within her, suffocating everything in its cradle.

Noah saw her enter. A smile hovered at the corners of his mouth, but it bounced off the shadow on her face and instantly melted away.

10

“Come,” he said softly, laying a cloth on the counter. “Let’s sit in the back.”

Ronahî took a seat. Her fingers interlocked in a white-knuckled grip. Noah sat across from her; his gaze dug into her features, desperately searching for answers.

“Last night... something happened again, didn't it? Over there.”

A barely perceptible nod. “I spoke with Sîdar.”

Noah's expression darkened. "Your voice on the phone... it sounded distorted. As if you were afraid someone was standing right outside your door."

Ronahî looked down at her trembling hands. "Over there, everyone talks like that. Fear is their accent."

A long second of silence. "Diyar is still nowhere to be found?" Noah whispered.

Her throat tightened painfully. "Yes."

Noah inhaled sharply. "Ronahî... this is destroying you. It's eating you alive."

She lifted her head, her gaze burning. "The disappearance isn't what's eating me alive. It's this lurking, murderous silence." 11

Noah knit his brow. "What do you mean by that?"

The words spilled out of her helplessly: "The people over there have forgotten how to speak in full sentences. They hesitate. Every thought breaks off halfway. As if even the syllables were cowering before the shadows in the room."

Noah's eyes filled with concern, and behind it flickered a helpless terror. "And you... you are walking with your eyes wide open straight into that shadow."

Ronahî remained silent. Noah had unearthed a truth she barely dared admit to herself.

The door chimes chimed softly—a delicate, almost melodic tone. A regular customer walked in, strolling casually between

the tables. For a fleeting moment, this ordinary Berlin back-drop felt like the promise of a quiet, unburdened life.

Then the silent vibration of her phone shattered the illusion.

The screen flashed. *Astêra: Abba... something happened. Call me. Please.*

Ronahî's heart battered against her ribs like a trapped bird. Noah stared at the notification, the color draining from his cheeks. "What's wrong?"

She leaped to her feet. "I don't know."

Noah stood up too, reaching for her shoulder to hold her firm. "Ronahî... please. Don't do anything reckless."

12

Ronahî closed her eyes for a single heartbeat. "I'm thinking constantly. But thinking doesn't protect anyone over there."

Noah's voice trembled. "You belong here. With me. In Berlin."

She shook her head slowly. "I belong to two worlds. And both are pulling at me."

Tears shimmered in his eyes. "Eventually... it's going to tear you apart in the middle."

Ronahî turned away, pushing open the glass door. "Maybe I have to break first to be there."

The roaring noise of Berlin crashed over her like a wave—the rattling of buses, the hum of traffic. Yet beneath the noise of the metropolis lay a far deeper, darker rumble.

The roar from the mountains of Dersim.

As she rushed down the street, she unlocked her screen. The text blurred before her eyes: *Abla... something happened. Please call.*

Ronahî stopped dead in the middle of the sidewalk. She tried to breathe, but the cool city air suddenly tasted of dust and ash.

In that single instant, the bright light of Berlin seemed to fade away completely—cold, foreign, and miles away.

13

3 — The Emptiness Behind the Whisper

As Ronahî hurried across the wet pavement, the faint glow of the display burned in the palm of her hand. Astêra's message sounded like a muted cry for help: *Abla... something happened. Can you please call?*

The mutilated brevity of the lines constricted her throat. Astêra usually invented flowery excuses to cover up the family's worries. A sentence this sparse was like a omen of doom.

Ronahî ducked into a gloomy doorway. The cool brick pressed bleakly through her coat. She took a deep breath and touched the green icon.

The ring back tone drilled into her eardrums. Once. Twice. Three times.

A click.

“Abla...” Astêra gasped out. Her voice trembled as if she were peering frantically over her own shoulder, even in the safety of her four walls.

“What happened?” Ronahî squeezed out, instinctively ducking her head.

An ice-cold pause. Then, barely audible: “Diyar’s phone turned up.”

Ronahî’s heart skipped a beat for one cruel moment. “Where? Who has it?”

“On the bank of the creek.” Astêra’s breath whistled shallowly through the line. “The casing is smashed. The glass shattered. And inside... everything erased. Empty.”

14

Ronahî pressed herself tighter against the rough bricks. The familiar noise of Berlin shrank to a distant, meaningless murmur, as if an invisible hand had slid a heavy wall between her and the world.

“Did the police... note anything down?” she asked, fear creeping through her veins like frost.

Astêra’s whisper narrowed to a paper-thin thread. “They say nothing at all. ‘We’re looking into it,’ that’s all. But the people in the village... everyone looks away as if they knew. But no one dares to speak the name aloud.”

A wave of nausea rose in Ronahî. “And Sîdar? What is Uncle doing?”

A choked breath in. “He’s broken. Last night someone knocked on the window. Asked shadow questions. He won’t tell me who it was. He just repeats like a mantra: ‘Not another word. Everyone keeps your mouths shut.’”

A chill ran down Ronahî’s spine. The colorful sea of lights in the capital, the monotonous roar of the tram, the distant, care-free laughter of passersby—all of it suddenly felt like a cynical facade.

“Abla...” Astêra pleaded, trembling. “Don’t come here. Please. Don’t do it.”

Ronahî closed her eyes, feeling the throbbing in her temples. 15
“I... I can’t just sit here. I have to come.”

Astêra’s tone shifted abruptly, turning sharp as a razor blade: “No! If you step foot in this land... the same darkness will swallow you whole.”

The sentence echoed like the drop of a guillotine.

Before Ronahî could answer, the hard, definitive click of a severed connection sounded.

She stood motionless in the shadowed doorway. Life on the street rolled past her unbothered, yet she felt completely detached from the world.

Then a warm hand gently touched her shoulder. Ronahî flinched.

Noah stood before her. His features were etched with deep concern. “You talked to them, didn't you?”

A silent nod. “They found his mobile phone.”

The color drained from Noah's face instantly. “That... bodes no good.”

Ronahî looked away, staring into space. “There hasn't been anything good over there for a long time.”

Noah stepped closer, gently taking her hand. “Ronahî... let me come with you. If you really fly out, you're not walking this path alone.”

She shook her head slowly, but firmly. “This path tolerates no companions.”

16

Noah's voice broke. “You don't have to endure this alone!”

Ronahî inhaled the cold Berlin air, but it already tasted of the dust of Dersim. “Some paths don't choose two people. They demand only one.”

Noah opened his mouth to speak, but the plea caught in his throat.

Ronahî switched off the screen. Black. Yet the darkness within her spread relentlessly.

In that single instant, it became painfully clear to her: Berlin was now merely a shell that no longer held her. Dersim was

not calling her with words—it was tearing at her soul with silent force.

And with every hesitant breath, the voice from the shadow crawled deeper into her flesh.

4 — The Rift in the House

No sooner had Ronahî pulled the apartment door shut behind her than the heavy, stale air in the hallway choked the breath from her lungs. A paper-thin, bitter veil of cold tobacco hung in the room—her father’s silent brand whenever restlessness drove him out onto the balcony.

She stepped slowly into the living room. Her mother sat rigid on the sofa, the knuckles of her tightly intertwined hands turned stark white. Her eyes were fixed on the flickering television screen, taking in not a single image. Renas stood like a statue by the window. Jandil leaned against the edge of the table, clutching his cell phone so tightly it looked as if he meant to crush the plastic.

As if on cue, all three turned toward her.

Her mother spoke first. “You called again, didn't you?” she whispered. Her voice sounded brittle, like thin glass on the verge of shattering.

Ronahî nodded silently. “Yes.”

Jandil slammed his phone onto the wood. “Abla... Astêra’s message. We saw the screen light up.”

Renas swallowed hard. “Diyar’s phone... turned up.”

Ronahî’s gaze anchored itself into the parquet floor. “Yes.”

A faint sob escaped her mother. “May God help us,” she murmured with trembling lips. “The boy... he’s still just a child.”

The balcony door creaked. Her father stepped inside. As was so often the case, a dense armor of silence cocooned him, but today that silence weighed so heavily that the air in the room seemed to melt.

“What did Astêra say?” he demanded, his voice raspy and ice-cold.

Ronahî forced herself to breathe. “Something happened. But she doesn’t dare speak it aloud. She just begged... that I don’t come.”

18

Her mother bolted upright. “You will not set foot in that country!”

“Mama...” Ronahî tried to start.

“No!” her mother cried out, tears welling in her eyes. “That land no longer belongs to us! We sacrificed everything to be here. You grew up here. Going back means certain ruin!”

Renas stepped protectively between them. “Abla, try to understand! Over there, every word chokes you. How do you expect to survive in a place where merely breathing makes you suspicious?”

Jandil's anger erupted. "You always do this! The second a spark ignites over there; you want to run straight into the fire! But that homeland devours its children. Why can't you see that?"

Something in Ronahî's chest tore in two. "I'm not running into the fire," she said, barely louder than a whisper. "I... already carry this fire inside me."

The sentence echoed like a thundering boom. Her mother buried her face in her hands. Her father slowly lowered his head, while Renas closed his eyes in pain.

"I wasn't born there," Ronahî continued, her voice growing noticeably calmer, almost eerily so. "But the horror they keep buried in silence... it is screaming in my chest."

19

Her father lifted his eyes. They were two dark abysses. "What is kept silent over there... eats away a person's soul."

"My soul has belonged to that shadow for a long time," she replied softly.

Her mother hurriedly wiped her wet cheeks. "What are you going to do?"

Ronahî stared at the floor. "I don't know."

Renas stepped close to her, his voice pleading: "Abla... please. Promise us you'll talk to us before you do anything crazy."

She nodded slowly. "I will talk."

Yet the promise tasted of ash. Words didn't bring missing people back.

At that moment, the phone in her pocket twitched. A short, sharp buzz.

A single line flickered across the cold display:

Sîdar: Ronahî... urgent. Do not call. Do not write. Wait.

Before her brain could fully register the words, the message vanished. Deleted. Gone without a trace, as if it had never existed.

Ronahî's heart constricted. Her family's frightened eyes rested on her, but Ronahî was already gone. She was no longer standing in that warm living room in Berlin.

20

Outside, the glittering city light poured over the streets. But within the four walls of the apartment, the shadow had grown—thick, cold, and relentless. And step by step, it pushed Ronahî across an invisible line from which there was no returning.

5 — A Stranger in the City

The next morning, Ronahî sat on the subway to work. The Berlin rush hour played its familiar script: teenagers with the bluish display light of smartphones glued to their cheeks; older people buried in newspaper pages; commuters silently and hastily chasing after their day. In the midst of this pulsating mass, Ronahî felt like a foreign body, like a ghost among the living.

As the train plunged into the gloomy black of the tunnel, the window reflected her face. Beneath her eyes lay deep, bluish shadows—as if the horror of the previous night had eaten its way into her skin.

With clammy fingers, she pulled her mobile phone from her pocket. Sîdar's message was gone without a trace. Auto-deleted. As if her mind had merely invented it.

Yet the gravity of the words burned deep into her memory: *Urgent. Do not call. Do not write. Wait.*

It was no longer a mere warning. It sounded like an uncompromising threat.

The train braked with a screech. Ronahî stepped off and pushed her way through the crowd toward the office complex. The reflective glass facade caught the cool morning light, yet the metropolis's glare failed to dissolve the darkness in her chest.

When she stepped into the open-plan office, Lena waved cheerfully at her. "Morning, Ronahî! You don't look good at all—sleep badly?"

Ronahî forced an expression onto her face that was meant to look like a smile. "A little restless."

Lena adjusted her chair. "News from the family back home again?"

Ronahî froze in mid-stride. Lena's question was harmless, a well-intentioned bit of everyday small talk—and yet it cut like

a knife into an open wound. It felt as if every word about her origins were transforming into a potential danger.

“Yes,” she squeezed out curtly.

Lena nodded sympathetically. “A tough spot over there. You’ve mentioned it often.”

Ronahî looked away. *Tough* was the wrong word. Her homeland had gone silent. It had degenerated into a place where voices were devoured in the shadow.

She flipped open her laptop. The harsh beam of the screen struck her face, but inside her head, Sîdar’s raspy whisper thundered on an endless loop: “*Everyone keep your mouths shut.*”

22

She tried to work, but her thoughts kept drifting. Every line of code, every email, every routine task slid like a sheer curtain before her eyes, behind which the horror lurked.

A shadow reaching out for her.

During her lunch break, she fled to the street. She stopped in front of Noah’s café. Her heart beat heavily. She hesitated, her hand on the doorknob. Looking Noah in the eye meant facing the cruelty of her inner turmoil completely defenseless.

She pushed the door open. Noah’s face lit up briefly, but the smile died instantly when he saw her features.

“Another blow to the face?” he asked softly, concern etched deep into his forehead.

Ronahî shook her head. “No. Nothing at all. The silence is back.”

Noah knit his brows. “That’s even more dangerous.”

She sat down on the barstool. “The message was deleted. Just like that.”

Noah’s gaze turned rigid. “What message?”

“From Sîdar.”

An suffocating silence settled between them. Noah leaned over the counter, his voice barely more than a breath. “Ronahî... this is taking over your life. This isn’t normal.”

“Normalcy doesn’t exist over there anymore,” she whispered. 23

Noah looked at her, and sheer horror reflected in his eyes. “You’ve already made the decision... you’re flying out.”

Ronahî caught her breath. He had spoken aloud what she had been trying to push away from herself.

“I...” her voice caught in her throat.

Noah’s voice broke, his knuckles showing white. “Ronahî... if you go down there, I lose you to that abyss.”

She closed her eyes to avoid seeing the pain in his gaze. “Maybe... I’m already lost.”

“Don’t say that!” he pleaded, reaching for her hands. “That’s not who you are!”

Ronahî inhaled the warm air of coffee, but she felt only coldness. “I live in two worlds, Noah. But I can’t breathe in either of them anymore.”

Tears welled in his eyes. “Don’t leave me behind.”

Ronahî stood up, slowly withdrawing her hands from his. “I’m not leaving you behind. But something... something is pulling me with silent violence.”

She pushed open the door and stepped out into the cold.

The Berlin daylight burned on her skin, but the roaring in her ears swelled into a hurricane. It was no longer a silent hum. It had a destination. A coordinate.

It was pulling her relentlessly toward Dersim.

24

6 — Between Two Cities

When Ronahî arrived home, the key turned heavily in the lock—hesitant, as if even the cool apartment didn’t want to let her in. As she kicked off her shoes in the gloomy hallway, muffled, charged voices drifted from the living room. Jandil and Renas were arguing.

“You don’t get it at all!” Jandil hissed. “If this keeps up, Ablâ’s actually going to pack her things and fly out!”

Renas’s answer sounded harsh, almost desperate. “She’s not going anywhere. We won’t let her.”

When Ronahî crossed the threshold, the clash of words snapped off more abruptly than a severed thread. A thick, caught silence settled over the room.

“What are you talking about?” Ronahî asked softly. Her voice was dull, shattered by exhaustion.

Jandil avoided her gaze, staring at the baseboard. “Abla... we’re just damn worried about you.”

Renas stepped forward, his brow furrowed deep. “Not just about you. About those over there, too. If you fly out... we can’t protect you, Abla. Nobody can protect you there.”

Ronahî inhaled the heavy air of the room. “I’m not going to be protected.”

25

“Then why?” Renas pressed, the knuckles of his clenched fists turning white.

She remained silent. There were no words in the German language that could convey the weight in her chest.

Jandil shook his head, stepping right up to her. “Abla... you were always our anchor. But now... it feels like something invisible has taken hold of you.”

“Nothing has taken hold of me,” she parried, looking away.

“It has,” Renas contradicted relentlessly. “Our homeland.”

The word cut through the room like a red-hot wire. It hit Ronahî like a silent shock.

“The homeland hasn't taken hold of me,” she breathed against the suffocation in her throat. “It’s... screaming for me.”

The sentence hung heavy in the room. Her mother appeared in the doorway. Her face was lined with grief, eaten away by years of fear. “Ronahî...” she pleaded, her voice breaking completely. “We fled so that you could live. You were born here! Over there... that is no longer our home!”

Ronahî looked at her, her heart constricting. “My home stands on two soils, Mama.”

Crushed, her mother closed her eyes. “Nobody can stand on two shores at once without drowning.”

Ronahî said nothing in return. Her mother spoke the truth. But the truth offered no protection against the undertow.

26

A sharp tone split the air: the cell phone on the table vibrated against the wood.

A single line from Astêra flashed across the cold display:

Abla... the man who last saw Diyar was taken. Dead silence in the village. Everyone is trembling. Please... do not enter this country.

Ronahî’s breath caught. Jandil had looked over her shoulder; every trace of color drained from his face. Renas snatched the phone, skimming the letters with wide eyes.

“Abla...” he whispered, completely broken. “This... this is the end.”

Ronahî gently took the phone back. “Yes.”

A low, desperate whimper escaped her mother. “You must not fly out! They will extinguish you like a candle!”

Ronahî closed her eyes, searching for a foothold in the darkness. “Maybe... that is the only place left where my voice still carries weight.”

An icy shiver ran through everyone present.

At that moment, the apartment door trembled beneath a frantic, heavy knocking. Everyone flinched.

Ronahî walked to the hallway and pulled the door open. Noah stood outside. His face was a pale mask, his eyes widened in sheer panic.

27

“We need to talk,” he gasped out. It was the voice of a drowning man watching the hand of the person he loved above all else slip away.

“We’re talking,” she said tonelessly.

Noah stepped inside. The brothers backed away silently, but the atmosphere in the hallway only grew more suffocating. He stood directly in front of her, gently grabbing her upper arms. “You... you’ve already booked the ticket, haven’t you?”

Ronahî didn’t return his gaze. And that silence burned like a confession.

Noah’s voice trembled uncontrollably. “Ronahî... if you get on that plane, I lose you to a mass grave.”

Hot tears rose in her eyes, burning on her cheeks. “I don’t want to lose anyone, Noah.”

He pulled her close, pleading into her hair: “Then stay! Please, stay here!”

Ronahî shook her head slowly. “Some paths... you have to walk, even if they break you.”

Noah sobbed aloud, tears running down his face. “This path will destroy you!”

Ronahî inhaled the cool soullessness of the room deep inside herself. “Maybe... I have to be destroyed first to find the truth.”

28

The sentence sliced through the room like a guillotine.

Her mother collapsed onto the chair; Renas buried his face in his hands; Jandil held his breath; Noah closed his eyes and turned away in agony.

Ronahî stepped to the door. She slipped into her shoes, placed her ice-cold hand on the knob, and looked back one last time.

“I’m not standing between two cities,” she whispered into the silent horror of the room. “I’m standing between two kinds of silence. And one of them is going to kill us all.”

She pressed the handle down. The harsh, cool night lights of Berlin flooded the stairwell.

Yet the land inside her chest had already sunk into complete darkness.

7 — The Waiting Room

Ronahî found no sleep that night. The bed was a desolate field of rustling sheets; every restless turn only amplified the leaden weight in her bones. Outside, the Berlin night churned through its familiar background noise—the distant metallic hum of the tram, the rhythmic click of a bicycle chain on asphalt, the dull slam of a front door. Familiar, comforting sounds. Yet the voices inside her head drowned out everything else.

Astêra's breathless whisper. Sîdar's broken, mutilated sentences. Diyar's shattered cell phone in the mud of the creek.

29

They haunted her consciousness like ghosts, reaching into her thoughts with ice-cold fingers.

By morning, the edges of her eyes burned deep red. As she poured herself a glass of water in the kitchen, Jandil walked in. Worry was carved deep into his forehead. "Abla... you didn't sleep a wink, did you?"

Ronahî made no sound. The silent pause hit like an answer.

Shortly after, Renas shuffled in, brushing hair from his brow. "Abla... if you're slowly dying in front of us like this, no one in this house is getting any sleep either."

Ronahî slammed the glass onto the countertop. "I'm fine."

Jandil let out a laugh—a dry, bitter sound. “Nothing is fine! Your eyes are looking right through us. You’re already somewhere else.”

Ronahî slowly lifted her head. “I’m just trying to think.”

Renas stepped close to her, his features sharp. “Thinking doesn’t change a thing. You’re going to make a decision, Abba. And we’re suffocating from the fear of that decision.”

Something inside the protective wall of her chest broke apart. “I’m terrified for my life too!” she gasped out.

The confessing tremor in her voice immediately crumbled the harshness in her brothers’ faces.

A dull knock at the apartment door made all three flinches. Silent glances crossed the room. 30

Ronahî walked into the hallway and pulled the door open. Noah stood outside. His eyes were dark and swollen; sleeplessness had carved itself into his face as well.

“Can we talk?” he asked, his voice brittle.

Ronahî nodded silently. “Come in.”

They went into the living room. The brothers remained in the kitchen—yet the silence in the hallway betrayed that every fiber of their hearing was strainingly turned toward the room.

Noah sat across from her on the edge of the sofa. “I spent the entire night tearing my head apart,” he began, without looking

her in the eye. “I don’t want to argue with you anymore, Ronahî. I don’t want to push you into anything.”

She remained motionless, listening to his faltering breath.

“If you have to book that ticket... then I can’t stop you.”

The words fell like stones. Something deep within Ronahî collapsed into itself. It felt as if a massive door had swung open—and behind it lay only a bottomless abyss.

“I...” she started, but her breath failed her.

Noah leaned forward, gently taking her cold fingertips. “Ronahî... whatever is eating you alive from the inside—I’m desperately trying to understand it. Maybe I don’t even need to understand it. But God knows, I don’t want to lose you.”

31

Hot tears rose in her eyes, burning on her cheeks. “I don’t want to lose anyone, Noah. No one.”

He lowered his head, his features distorted with pain. “Then why are you playing with the thought of flying out there?”

Ronahî pulled the heavy air into her lungs. “Because a crime is happening in silence over there. And the longer I sit in this safety... the more the horror festers in my own veins.”

Noah’s voice trembled. “And this horror... is dragging you there.”

A seamless nod. “Yes.”

Noah closed his eyes, as if hearing a final verdict. “If you go... I am powerless. I can’t protect you over there.”

Ronahî’s whisper was barely more than a breath. “Over there, no one can protect me.”

The sentence hit Noah like a physical blow; his features unraveled completely.

At that moment, a sharp buzz sliced through the silence. The phone on the table quivered.

A notification flashed:

Astêra: Abba... the next one is gone. The streets are dead. Nobody dares say a word. Don’t come. I beg you, don’t come.

32

Ronahî clicked the screen dark. But Noah had already skimmed the lines.

“That’s not a call for help,” he whispered, appalled. “That’s a final warning!”

Ronahî turned her face away, staring at the baseboards. “Sometimes warnings pull you in far deeper than pleas.”

Tears welled in Noah’s eyes. “Ronahî... please.”

She stood up rigidly, stepped to the large living room window, and looked down. Outside, the fresh morning light of Berlin poured over the facades; passersby hurried to the subway, schoolchildren laughed on the corner.

Yet the scenery no longer reached her. It was as if she were standing behind thick bulletproof glass, behind which a foreign, unrealistic life played out. A glassy protective shell.

“Berlin...” she whispered against the cool pane. “Berlin is just a waiting room now.”

Noah’s shadow stepped behind her. “What you’re waiting for in this waiting room... is going to execute you.”

Ronahî closed her eyes, feeling the wild pounding in her temples. “Maybe I have to search for something first... before I let myself be erased.”

Noah’s voice broke completely. “What on earth do you want to search for there?”

33

Ronahî turned around slowly. Her pupils were two dark, bottomless craters.

“The voices.”

Noah knitted his brow in confusion, despair written across his face. “Which voices, Ronahî?”

She breathed the answer into the cold room: “The voices they buried in the shadows.”

8 — The Deepening Rift

Ronahî stayed in bed that day. When the shrill ring of the alarm split the room, she pressed mute and tried to sink back into the pillow—yet her thoughts refused to cooperate. She lay rigid on

her back, her eyes fixed on the crack in the ceiling, while the thundering in her chest rose like a black wave, breaking over her and taking hold once again.

Inside her head, the barren rock massifs of Dersim crashed head-on into the sterile concrete backdrops of Berlin. Two worlds, two faces of the exact same silence, two shattered lives... And her caught right in the middle, compressed like a paper-thin thread threatening to snap at any second.

The phone quivered on the nightstand. Ronahî flinched as if a gun had gone off.

No message from Astêra. The display showed a new line from Sîdar.

*Sîdar: Ronahî... interrogated again. Everyone is silent. No-34
body dares say a word. Diyar's phone... completely erased.
Empty.*

Below it, after an agonizing gap, another sentence:

Don't come here. But... there are things you need to know.

Ronahî's breath caught. The words stood there like a gap in a locked door—a dark slit behind which lurked either ruin or the truth.

A cautious creak at the bedroom door. Ronahî sat up and swung her legs out of bed.

It was Renas. The edges of his eyes were dark and swollen; the night had left its mark on him as well.

“Abla...,” he murmured softly. “Can we talk?”

She nodded silently. “Come in.”

They went into the living room. Renas let himself sink onto the sofa and remained silent for a long time—as if he had to weigh every single syllable on a pair of scales.

“Abla...,” he finally began, his voice raspy from lack of sleep. “You’re going to fly out. Aren’t you?”

Ronahî said nothing in return. And that silence hung in the room like a signature beneath a verdict.

Renas continued without looking at her: “I know you. When a shadow lays siege to your heart... you won’t rest until you’re holding the knife in your hand.”

35

She turned her gaze away, staring out the window. “This isn’t a riddle you can just solve.”

Renas shook his head. “Maybe not. But you’re going to consume yourself anyway.”

Something in Ronahî’s chest constricted painfully. “I... I just want certainty.”

Renas’s features hardened abruptly. “Certainty has put many a person over there into the grave.”

The sentence struck like a blade into wood.

At that moment, Jandil stepped into the hallway. “Abla... please. Don’t go there. Don’t do this to us.”

Ronahî looked from one brother to the other. On both faces burned the exact same panic. An ancient family fear. The fear of losing a piece of themselves to the abyss.

“I’m not abandoning you,” Ronahî whispered. “I’m only following... an echo.”

Jandil hurriedly wiped his sleeve across his eyes. “What damned echo?”

She took a deep breath. “The voices.”

Renas knitted his brow. “Which voices, Ablâ?”

“The voices they locked in the dark,” she breathed.

36

An icy draft seemed to glide through the room; the brothers stared rigidly at each other.

Another knock at the apartment door. This time a fast, desperate hammering. Noah.

Ronahî pulled the door open. Noah’s cheeks were ash-gray, his eyes feverish. “We need to talk. Now.”

She let him in. Before the brothers could react, Noah pulled her into the kitchen by her wrist and pressed the door shut.

“Ronahî...,” he gasped out, his hands trembling uncontrollably. “You’ve already booked that plane ticket in your head. Don’t tell me you haven’t.”

She avoided his piercing gaze. "I haven't decided anything yet."

Noah shook his head violently. "Don't lie to me! I can see you slowly dissolving!"

Her throat constricted. "I just need to... understand."

Noah's voice broke, tears welling in his eyes. "And that understanding will destroy you, damn it!"

Ronahî closed her eyes to avoid seeing his face. "Maybe I have to break first... before I can learn what's left."

Noah took a step back as if she had struck him. "What do you hope to find down there, Ronahî?"

37

She opened her eyes; her pupils rigid and deep. "Diyar's silence."

A choking sound escaped Noah's throat. "That path leads straight to ruin."

"I've been living in ruin for a long time," she replied softly.

Noah stared at her, appalled. "I don't want to lose you to that silence!"

And I don't want to lose anyone! screamed silently within her, but only a brittle whisper crossed her lips.

The undertow had finally turned into a hurricane.

In that single instant, Ronahî felt with merciless clarity: the security of Berlin was nothing more than an illusion, a faded image behind glass panes. Dersim was no longer calling her with tender memories—it was tearing at her very existence with ice-cold claws.

And that tearing was demanding its toll.

9 — On the Brink of the Fracture

That morning, Ronahî forced herself out of the house. The charged, heavy air in the apartment, the feverish gazes of her brothers, the silent, weeping of her mother—it all threatened to crush her. Stepping out onto the frosty streets of Berlin seemed like the only way to catch her breath, if only for a few moments.

38

Yet the subway station welcomed her with a quiet shock. Amid the noise of commuters boarding, two police officers had pressed a man against the tiled wall to check his papers. A fleeting, panicked fear nestled in the stranger's features—a face Ronahî knew all too well.

She tore her eyes away. Yet that faceless horror burned itself into her mind: it was the exact same expression as in Diyar's last photograph. The look of a person whose words had been severed in their throat.

The train rattled into the tunnel. Ronahî's pulse raced.

In the office, Lena walked up to her, a smile on her lips that froze instantly. "Ronahî? For heaven's sake, is everything alright?"

A mechanical nod. “Just... sleepless.”

Lena slid a folder toward her. “The customer documents need approval. Can you take a quick look?”

Ronahî took the paper, but the black lines blurred into meaningless strings of characters. Her thoughts hung idly in the distance, trapped elsewhere. In Dersim. With Diyar’s tracks. With Sîdar’s erased fragments of sentences.

A sharp, long vibration in her coat pocket.

The display showed a voice message. Sender: Astêra.

With trembling fingers, she fumbled for her headphones and pressed play.

39

At first, only a harsh, biting rush of wind filled the earbuds. Then a breath that sounded more like a rattle. Astêra’s voice, paper-thin and dissolved by panic:

“Abla... another one. This time... the one who spoke up. He named names. They took him... dragged him from the house...”

A crackling background noise. Then another, deeper voice cut across the frequency—familiar, yet completely broken. Sîdar.

“Ronahî... do not touch this soil. Something is lurking here... deep in the shadows...”

The file cut off. A monotonous static remained.

Ronahî's lungs constricted. The headphones slipped from her numb fingers and hit the carpeted floor. Lena rushed over, startled by the horror on her face.

"Ronahî! What on earth is wrong?"

No sound obeyed her anymore. An ice-cold lump sat in her throat.

Lena placed a worried hand on her arm. "Should I call a doctor? Or your brother?"

Ronahî shook her head rigidly. "No... I need... fresh air..."

She stumbled out of the room, through the foyer, and onto the street. The Berlin daylight burned cold and foreign in her eyes.

40

Another buzz. No name. Only an unknown number.

A single line on the screen:

Do not speak.

An icy shiver ran through her gut. Ronahî spun around. Passersby hurried past her indifferently, no one sparing her a glance. And yet, she felt the physical weight of an invisible eye on her skin. A shadow reaching out for her from a thousand kilometers away.

"Ronahî!"

Noah came running toward her, his hair disheveled, his eyes full of terror. He snatched the phone from her paralyzed hand

and skimmed the line. What little color he had left drained instantly from his face.

“This is no longer a coincidence... this is a direct threat!” he gasped out, choked up. “Someone is watching you here in Berlin!”

Ronahî’s lips trembled. “I... I can’t wait anymore.”

Noah grabbed her firmly by the shoulders, his voice trembling with despair. “No! Don’t you understand? Right now of all times, you must not go there under any circumstances! It’s a trap!”

Ronahî closed her eyes. “If I remain here... I will erase myself.”

41

Noah’s hands dug into her coat. “That path leads straight into a mass grave, Ronahî!”

She opened her eyes and stared at him rigidly. “I’ve been standing at the bottom of that grave for a long time.”

In that single, terrible instant, the final shackle shattered. There was no going back, no discussions, no hope for safety.

Berlin was nothing more than a hollow phantom. Dersim was no longer asking for her steps—it was pulling her toward itself with an unyielding, absolute gravity.

And that fall was no longer a choice. It was the only way left for her.

10 — The Corrupted Line

That morning, the office door remained closed for Ronahî. As she illuminated her phone's display with a trembling thumb, a notification jumped out at her: *I new voice message — Sîdar.*

Her pulse thundered instantly in her temples. She pressed play. The file opened with a flat, rattling breath.

“Ronahî...” Sîdar's voice rasped through the speaker, brittle and riddled with panic. “Last night they struck again. The man who sank Diyar's phone in the mud of the creek... he talked. He spilled everything. And that conversation... someone recorded it.”

A harsh, static hiss tore through the audio track. Then a stranger's voice—distorted by mortal terror—pushed itself across the frequency. 42

“I... I was there! I saw who took him! But I can't— if I name the name—”

A hard crackle. A whipping noise, as if a cable were being ripped from the socket with brute force. Then silent emptiness.

Ronahî's fingers froze on the glass. That was no longer a vague rumor, no anxious whispering from afar—it was the relentless acoustics of a crime. The darkness had been given a face.

A frantic, heavy knocking at the front door jerked her from her paralysis. Noah stepped inside. His cheeks were ash-gray, deep red rims beneath his eyes.

“Ronahî...” he gasped out quickly, without taking off his shoes. “The criminal police contacted me tonight.”

Ronahî recoiled, her heart constricting. “What? Why you?”

Noah breathed in raggedly. “Your name... it surfaced. In the investigation file regarding Diyar’s disappearance. Because of family ties. They’re playing it down, talking about pure routine... but it means this thing crossed borders a long time ago. They are here, Ronahî. Right in the middle of Berlin.”

An icy chill crept through Ronahî’s veins. The shadow from the barren gorges of Dersim was no longer a thousand kilometers away—it had laid itself silently across the asphalt of the capital and was reaching for her life.

Noah stepped right up to her, his hands trembling uncontrollably. “This thing... it’s devouring you whole. And I’m completely powerless. I can’t protect you anymore.”

43

Ronahî slowly lifted her head. The uncertainty that had paralyzed her for days had vanished completely. Her pupils were rigid and steel-like.

“I never asked anyone to protect me,” she whispered.

Noah’s voice broke completely. “Then why are you doing this to yourself?”

Ronahî unlocked the display and held the phone out to him. “Listen to it.”

Noah listened to the static, the pleading of the stranger's voice, and the abrupt snap of the recording. As the sound died, his head sank slowly. The determination drained from his posture.

"That... that is brutally real," he breathed into the void.

Ronahî's whisper cut through the room: "I'm flying out."

Noah no longer argued. He stopped fighting. He merely closed his eyes as a silent tear ran down his cheek.

"Then..." he managed with difficulty, "may the shadows spare you."

For the first time, Ronahî saw no desperate struggle in Noah's eyes, no pleas, no barriers—only a painful surrender to the inevitable. A quiet, tragic acquiescence.

44

In that single instant, her resolve turned to stone. The path was mapped out, and the journey into the silence had begun.

11 — Silent Preparation

That night, Ronahî sat motionless on the edge of the bed. The crumpled suitcase lay wide open on the floorboards—empty as an open wound. It was not clothes or utensils that filled the dark fabric shell, but the invisible, suffocating weight of a final decision.

A dull illumination of the display jerked her from her paralysis. A new message from Astêra.

Abla... someone passed along a photo. Taken one day before Diyar's disappearance. He's standing on the old bridge. Next to him, a figure. The face is completely blurred... But the features, Abla... this person knows you.

With ice-cold fingertips, Ronahî tapped the document. The picture opened sharply: Diyar stood at the stone railing of the gorge, his gaze fixed rigidly on the rushing depths below. Right beside him rose a tall silhouette—a faceless phantom whose contours dissolved in the twilight. Yet the slightly tilted head, the prominent line of the broad shoulders... An icy shiver ran through Ronahî deep to her core.

This profile was not unfamiliar to her. The shadowy figure had a fading face in her memory.

Around midnight, the bedroom door creaked. Noah entered quietly. In his hands, he held a worn, battered notebook with a leather cover. 45

“These... these are contacts and notes on independent journalists in the region,” he whispered, handing her the booklet. “Maybe it will buy you a hearing over there. Or protection.”

Ronahî took the book from him. Their fingers touched. In Noah's clouded gaze, there was no longer the desperate fear of the past few days—it had been replaced by a quiet, reverent respect for her decision.

“Take care of yourself, Ronahî,” he said, his voice breaking as a tear ran down his cheek. “And... please come back to me.”

Ronahî nodded slowly, feeling the throbbing in her chest. “As long as there is something left of me that can return.”

As the first pale gray twilight crept over the rooftops of Berlin, the zipper of the suitcase snapped shut. Ronahî stepped into the hallway, pulled the heavy apartment door into the lock, and turned the key one last time. The colorful, shimmering sea of lights of the capital melted behind the pane of the stairwell into meaningless specks of color.

And for the first time—silent, yet sharp as a scalpel—the certainty cut through her inside:

The path into the darkness had begun.

12 — Beneath the Munzur

That morning, Ronahî slipped out of the apartment even before the first glimmers of dawn. The streets of Berlin no longer resembled a real city, but rather a gigantic, icy waiting room. The spring air was biting and cool—yet the frozen chill in her own veins weighed heavier.

When she unlocked the display, a solitary message from Astêra was already waiting:

Abla... someone pulled something out of the deep.

Ronahî's pulse raced instantly. Beneath the words lay an image file.

The photo had been taken on the rocky banks of the Munzur. Half-buried in the wet, dark mud of the river bend lay an object. A mobile phone.

The glass completely shattered—exactly like Diyar’s.

With trembling fingers, Ronahî zoomed in close on the display. On the scratched back of the casing, a deep groove was burned in—the exact same irregular scratch that Diyar had once carved into it himself.

Astêra’s next line popped up:

The finder... just stares at the ground. He refuses to say a single word.

Ronahî gasped for air. That was no longer a vague phantom image, no speculation from afar. It was tangible proof.

In that very same moment, a new notification flashed. No caller ID. Sender: Unknown number.

47

A single, ice-coldly phrased line:

The water does not hide everything.

A rigid shiver crept up her spine. Ronahî spun around on the empty street. No passerby looked in her direction, no one spared her so much as a glance—and yet the palpable weight of an invisible presence rested like a heavy hand on her shoulders.

A shadow walking through Berlin with her.

The device in her hand quivered again. A voice message. This time it came from Sîdar.

She pressed the phone to her ear and played the file.

Sîdar's voice sounded brittle, decomposed by panic. "Ronahî... this device wasn't angrily hurled into the current. It was carefully placed in the shallow water. Like a monument. Like a message to us all."

A sharp, whipping static tore through the frequency. Then a stranger's whisper pushed itself into the foreground—dull, distorted, shadowy.

"Do not speak. Listen."

The connection cut off abruptly.

Ronahî froze in the middle of the sidewalk, the breath catching in her chest. It was the exact same gloomy voice as in the disturbing message before. But this time it sounded sharper. Closer. More immediate. **48**

She clicked the screen dark, staring silently out into the building canyons of Berlin.

And in that single, crystal-clear moment, she understood:

Remaining in this safety no longer existed for her.

She had not yet checked her suitcase in at the airport. The final step had not yet been taken.

Yet inside her chest, a silent, dangerous metamorphosis took place:

The paralyzing fear gave way to a burning, unyielding certainty.

And that certainty swung the door to the darkness wide open.

13 — The Photograph

That night, Ronahî sat motionless in the darkness of her room. The suitcase still lay like an open wound on the floorboards—empty, unfathomably heavy. It was not clothing that filled the dark fabric shell, but the relentless, silent weight of a final decision.

A cold illumination of the display tore through the gloom. A new message from Astêra.

Abla... someone sent a photo. Taken one day before Diyar's disappearance.

49

With a trembling thumb, Ronahî touched the image file.

The photo opened sharply: Diyar stood on the old stone bridge above the gorge, his gaze fixed rigidly on the rushing depths below. Right beside him rose a tall silhouette—a faceless phantom whose features were completely lost in the shadow of a hood. Yet the slightly tilted head, the prominent line of the broad shoulders... An icy shiver ran through Ronahî deep to her core.

She knew this shadow. Its contours dug into her memory like a buried recollection.

The phone quivered again. Astêra:

This person knows you, Abla. They spoke your name.

Ronahî's breath caught, the air freezing to ice in her lungs. Someone in the shadowy gorges of Dersim had her name on their lips. Someone who had stood by Diyar's side twenty-four hours before his trace vanished without a trace.

It was no longer a distant calling. It was a bloody, invisible umbilical cord.

A quiet creak tore through the silence. The bedroom door opened a crack. Her mother entered silently. Her face was marked by the traces of the past days, yet the panic had vanished from her features.

"You are making your preparations," she whispered rigidly.

Ronahî looked at her. "Yes, Mama."

50

This time no hysterical tears flowed. Her mother slowly sat down on the edge of the bed, the floorboards groaning softly under her weight.

"Some paths," she said, her rough voice barely louder than a breath, "do not call out loudly. They just wait patiently in the dark."

Hot tears rose in Ronahî's eyes, burning on her cheeks. "I will try everything to come back."

Her mother reached for Ronahî's ice-cold hand and held it tightly. "And if you return as someone else... or not at all... I will still understand you."

The sentence echoed like an absolution in the room. Something in Ronahî's chest, which had been painfully constricted for days, dissolved. Her family was no longer an obstacle throwing itself desperately in her way—it had become a quiet, sorrowful foundation releasing her into the abyss.

14 — The Path

In the morning, the suitcase stood fully packed in the hallway. Ronahî pulled the heavy apartment door shut behind her, and with the dull click of the latch, the promising lights of Berlin were left behind.

As she descended into the gloomy vault of the subway, the platforms pulsed in their usual rhythm: people rushing sleepily to work, sipping from paper cups, or locking out reality behind giant headphones. No one here had any inkling of the barren gorges of Dersim. No one felt the weight of Diyar's name. No one heard the ice-cold scream hidden behind the shattering of a muddy mobile phone in the riverbed silt.

51

A painful thought sharpened in her mind:

In some worlds, fear is invisible. In others, it is omnipresent—yet whoever speaks it aloud dies.

The train jolted into motion, rattling through the dark tunnel tubes. Then the phone quivered in her coat pocket.

Sender: Astêra.

A sparse line, typed as if in rage:

Abla... the shadow has struck again. The next one is gone.

Ronahî's inside froze into a block of ice. The metallic thrumming of the train instantly shrank to a dull, muddy hum. The sharply outlined order of the German capital collided head-on with the bottomless darkness of the homeland.

A second illumination:

This time the horror grazes every courtyard—yet the silence lays itself over their mouths like cement.

Ronahî pressed the side button, clicking the screen dark. She transferred at the station, switching to the express train to the airport. Every step across the linoleum, every mechanical hand movement, every laboriously etched breath weighed a ton.

52

In the passenger cabin of the aircraft, the sky above the runways hung in a dirty, wet gray. The turbines revved up with a deafening howl, the fuselage trembled, then the wheels separated from the asphalt.

Ronahî pressed her forehead against the cool windowpane. Between the rushing wisps of clouds, her own reflection filled the glass for a fleeting moment. Deathly pale—yet with eyes in which no hesitation nested anymore.

And that ice-cold reflection breathed back at her:

The path has been stepped upon.

Berlin shrank beneath the wings into a tiny pattern of gray stones. The protective hum faded. The darkness stepped forward—and fear itself became the foundation of her journey.

Epilogue — The Lost Voices

The road from Elazığ up to Dersim dug the hundredweight load only deeper into Ronahî's chest. The silent rigidity of this rugged mountain world was no romantic tranquility of nature—it was the stony deafness of a multi-layered fear. A silence that had lain unshaken on the slopes for decades; people nipped their words in the bud because collective memory knew precisely what happened to those who opened their mouths.

On the wooden ferry from Pertek, the wind whipped across the cool, pitch-black water. As Ronahî stared over the railing into the depths, the waves did not reflect her features, but a washed-out, foreign countenance. The face of an erased person. The faded features of a human who had once been someone's brother, someone's son, someone's companion. 53

When she finally reached the village, Sîdar's house stood shadowlike in the dusk. The wooden door leaned wide open. Inside lay a scene of abrupt abandonment: an overturned chair, a half-full, cold teacup, a shattered mobile phone on the floorboards.

As Ronahî picked up the casing, the display glowed one last time.

Final recording ready.

She pressed play.

Sîdar's voice sounded fatally exhausted—an exhaustion deeply drenched in panic.

“Ronahî... in this region, people do not simply erase themselves. They are erased.”

Then pitch-black silence. And suddenly another sound pushed itself across the microphone—dull, ice-cold, cutting. An authoritative force. The unyielding acoustics of state power.

“Be silent.”

The file cut off.

Ronahî froze to stone. That voice was no longer an intangible realm of shadows. No vague premonition. It was an incontrovertible fact.

At that moment, the rotten floorboards creaked outside. A silhouette pushed into the doorway, its face completely hidden inside a hood.

54

“I...,” the figure whispered brittly, “am the last person who spoke to Diyar while he was still alive.”

Ronahî’s knees threatened to give way. “What did he say to you?” she whispered.

The shadow lowered its head. “A name.”

Her heart skipped a beat. “Which name?”

“Yours.”

The wind outside howled. The darkness crept deeper into the room.

The phantom took a step toward her. This time its voice echoed more cuttingly through the hallway: “And he left me with something else.”

Ronahî’s throat constricted. “What?”

The shadow breathed: “That I am next.”

An icy lump sat in Ronahî’s throat.

The figure continued mercilessly: “Most who perish without a trace in these gorges... perish because their eyes saw something. Diyar lifted the curtain. And that something... is still flowing through the streets.”

Ronahî backed away, wavering. For the first time, the abstract horror took on a tangible, lethal shape. 55

The shadow spoke one last time: “The door stands open, Ronahî. But behind it waits no mysterious riddle. Behind it lies a naked truth. And that truth burns in everyone’s minds. But no one dares to speak it aloud.”

The house sank completely into night. The wind died down abruptly. A leaden silence buried every sound.

In that single, terrible instant, Ronahî understood:

This story was no adventure and no isolated fate. It was the requiem of a wounded land. And the silence of this land was not the silence of an individual—it was the suffocating roar of thousands.

Afterword — The Geography of Fear

In the 1990s, people in this geography did not simply disappear of their own accord—they were vanished without a trace. Everyone knew the fate of those who spoke up. The silent yielding was therefore not a habit, but the only remaining survival strategy.

Some bodies washed ashore on the rocky banks of rivers. Many were never found. Some even lost their names in bureaucratic silence.

Yet a single verdict united them all: they had spoken.

Ronahî's story may be fiction. But the paralysis she feels, the silence surrounding her, and the shadow pursuing her—all of that is an unyielding reality for anyone living in this geography. 56

The disappeared are not mere numbers in files. They are scars. They are silence. They are bearing witness.

And this narrative is only a single, incomplete face of that eternal witness.