

## Chapter 4: Shadows That Follow

By Rayan Siddiq

**The house had been silent for years, yet that night it breathed again.**

Aariz stood at the threshold, fingers brushing against the chipped wooden door. The paint had faded to a tired gray, and the brass handle was cold, unfamiliar—yet painfully known. Every visit to this place pulled memories from hiding, memories he had buried deep beneath time and distance.

As the door creaked open, the smell of dust and old paper filled the air. Moonlight slipped through broken windows, casting pale shadows across the floor. Each step echoed louder than it should have, as if the house itself was listening.

This was where it all began.

Aariz moved toward the study, the heart of the house. Shelves lined the walls, sagging under the weight of forgotten books. Many were journals—his mother’s journals. He had avoided them for years, afraid of what truths they might whisper.

Tonight, fear felt smaller than curiosity.

He pulled one journal free. Its leather cover was cracked, the edges worn smooth by countless hands. As he opened it, a folded letter slipped out and landed softly at his feet.

His breath caught.

The letter was addressed to him.

*“If you are reading this, Aariz, then the past has finally found you.”*

The handwriting was unmistakable. His mother’s words trembled on the page, alive despite the years.

She wrote of secrets—of choices made in silence, of sacrifices never spoken aloud. She wrote of a man whose name had been erased from their lives, a man tied to the fire that had changed everything. Aariz’s hands shook as he read, each sentence peeling away another layer of the truth he thought he knew.

The echoes of the past were not gentle.

They were sharp, demanding to be heard.

A sudden noise broke the stillness—a soft thud from upstairs. Aariz froze. The house was supposed to be empty. His pulse quickened as another sound followed, slow and deliberate, like footsteps.

He closed the journal, heart pounding.

Someone else was there.

Gripping the letter, Aariz stepped back into the hallway. Shadows shifted along the walls, stretching unnaturally as the moon slipped behind clouds. Every instinct screamed at him to leave, but his feet refused to move.

The past had waited too long.

Whatever—or whoever—was in this house, it was connected to the truth he had just uncovered. And Aariz knew one thing with terrifying clarity: once the echoes began, they could never be silenced again.

He took a breath and climbed the stairs, carrying the weight of memories that were no longer his alone.