

THE THIRD KNOCK

A Horror/Supernatural 2-Character Screenplay in Hinglish

Genre: Horror/Supernatural	Format: 2-Character Short Film (Duo Cast)	Runtime: 5 - 8 Minutes
Cast: FORMAT: 2-Character Short Film (Duo Cast) Character 1: Preeti (33)	Language: Hinglish	Credit: Story Dil Se Team

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Preeti ko neend kabhi poori nahi hoti thi. Naye apartment mein shift hue bas teen din hue the, aur har raat 3:13 a.m. par ek ajeeb si aadat usse jagane lagti thi—teen identical knocks, bilkul bedroom door ke bahar se. Pehli raat usne socha pipe hoga, doosri raat socha building ka koi tenant, aur teesri raat usne apna phone uthakar recording on kar di. Par jab knocks aate, record mein sirf static hoti. Aur har baar, room ke kone mein rakha suitcase thoda sa aur khul jata, jaise kisi ne andar se kapde saans le rahe hon.

Aaj raat bhi same time. Preeti bed par baithi hai, cardigan ke andar simti hui, haath mein thanda ho chuka mug. Room mein sirf bedside lamp jal raha hai. Bed ke saamne wali locked door par shadows blinds ki lakeeron mein kaat-kat kar gir rahi hain. Uske saamne Laila khadi hai—nayi roommate, neat nightwear mein, hair tied back, calm smile ke saath. Laila hamesha ki tarah politely bolti hai ki usne kuch nahi suna. “Preeti, tum over-tired ho. Sleep deprivation mein brain patterns bana leta hai.”

Lekin Preeti ko pattern nahi, awaaz chahiye. Usse yaad hai kaise knock ke baad kabhi kabhi ek aurat ki halki si awaaz aati thi—“Preeti... darwaza kholo...” Jaise uski maa bol rahi ho. Kabhi uski behen ka tone, kabhi bachpan ke ghar ka woh jhagda jisme pita ne gusse mein kaha tha, “Jo bhi bahar hai, use andar mat aane dena.” Preeti ka gala sookh jata hai. Laila bas sun rahi hoti hai, bahut dhyaan se, jaise koi patient nurse ho.

Phir knocks badalte hain. Teen knocks, aur is baar awaaz uski late mother ki aati hai—seedhi, thandi, aur impossible: “Preeti... keys kahan rakhi hain?” Preeti ka haath keys ki bundle par jata hai. Laila ki nazar us par tik jaati hai, ek second ke liye zyada lambi, zyada hungry. Preeti phone uthati hai, 3:13 a.m. dikhta hai. Uske screen par ek missed call bhi hai—“HOME.” Woh number usne delete kar diya tha. Ya shayad kabhi delete hi nahi hua tha.

Preeti door tak jaati hai, ear pressed to wood. Bahar se koi saans nahi, bas ek aur knock. Is baar door ke andar se. Laila dheere se bolti hai, “Maine kaha na, kuch nahi hai.” Preeti mudti hai aur pehli baar dekhti hai ki Laila ke suitcase ke zipper ke andar se ek purani plastic keychain latak rahi hai—bilkul usi jaisi jo Preeti ki maa use deti thi jab woh college ke liye ghar se nikli thi. Preeti ka rang ud jata hai.

Ab apartment jawab dene lagta hai. Vent se ek kharr-kharr, jaise kisi ne andar se ungliyaan phirayi hon. Lamp flicker karta hai. Locked bedroom door ke neeche se ek thin shadow sarakti hai—insaan jaisi nahi, bas ek lambi, seedhi line, jaise kisi ne khud ko flat karke darwaze ke neeche se ghusa diya ho. Laila ka calm pehli baar toot-ta hai. Woh almost whisper karti hai, “Aaj nahi.”

Preeti samajh nahi pati. “Kya matlab aaj nahi?”

Laila ka smile bahut dheere dheere disappear hota hai. “Tumhein yaad nahi? Tum hamesha 3:13 par darwaza kholne ki koshish karti thi. Har raat. Har raat tum roti thi ki kisi ko andar aane do. Aur har raat main tumhein rokti thi.”

Preeti ka dimag flashback jaisa hilita hai—ek purana corridor, maa ki cheekh, keys ka girna, aur woh ek final knock jiske baad sab khamosh. Us raat kisi ne darwaza khola tha. Phir kuch bahar se andar aaya tha. Ya andar se bahar gaya tha. Ya dono.

Laila suitcase ko kholti hai. Andar kapde nahi, sirf ek folded bedsheet hai jismein brown stains purane ho chuke hain. Neeche ek hospital wristband. Preeti ka naam us par likha hai. Neeche date: years ago. Uski aankhon mein panic bhar jata hai. “Tu kaun hai?”

Laila ka jawab soft hota hai, almost apologetic. “Main woh hoon jo tumhari jagah rehne aayi hoon.”

Teen knocks phir hote hain. Is baar bedroom door slow, inward bend karta hai. Preeti keys gira deti hai. Laila unhe uthati nahi. Woh bas door ki taraf dekhti hai, jaise kisi ko aane ka intezaar ho. Aur jab shadow finally crack se andar slide karti hai, Laila ek step peeche hatkar muskurati hai—ab woh bilkul human nahi lagti.

Preeti samajh jaati hai: saalon pehle jise darwaza kholna tha, woh khuli nahi. Aur jo raat ko knock karta raha, woh kisi aur ko dhoondta raha. Aaj Laila bas replacement thi—ek polite, perfect, unnervingly patient body—taaki jab third knock ho, koi finally answer kar de.