

The Test

It wasn't even half an hour later that everyone had packed their belongings and were ready to leave. It had been a long day. The candidates walked out of the building. Some were talking, some were laughing. David was caught in his thoughts and was still trying to process what had happened. He looked at the clouded sky and thought that the weather was perfectly in sync with his mood.

"Hey man," Rob caught up to him. David looked at him then stared in front of his feet again.

"You okay?"

~

{3 hours earlier}

The clicking of the pen was what was bothering David. He had been sitting silently in the hallway for half an hour with strangers, waiting for someone called Dr. Melkonian. The girl sitting next to him was nervous, she kept fixing her hair, her blouse, her skirt, and then she started to click her pen. After a while, she would start over again. There were other people there too, but no one else seemed to notice.

Looking around the room, David saw only white. It was almost like being in a hospital, except the smell of drugs and fresh blood was missing. Some pictures were hanging on the walls, but nothing too exciting. There were three doors. The first door was the door they all came in through. The remaining two were a mystery to everyone in the room.

Clickclack.

There it was again; the world's most annoying sound. David looked at the girl, trying to make eye contact, but he failed. He ignored her and looked at the other people in the room. Everyone was trying hard to stay calm, but it wasn't working.

Clickclack

That was it. That was the final straw. David turned to face her and opened his mouth to give the girl a piece of his mind, but was interrupted by one of the doors opening. Everyone straightened and jolted up. Three people walked out with their heads high; two men and a woman. One of them was a man that looked to be in his mid-fifties.

He was wearing a dark blue suit with a white, nicely ironed shirt and a maroon tie hanging from his neck. David assumed that that was Dr. Melkonian. He could've been wrong, but the man did look a lot like a man of power. The other man was slimmer and taller than "Dr. Melkonian." He was wearing a similar suit but he was missing a tie. He had a bushy mustache, just above his lips, which had some grey and white hairs. The woman, who seemed younger than the two men, was wearing a grey suit with a matching skirt and a white blouse. She had thick dark hair which was held up by a tight bun. *She seems nice.* David thought. He was finding ways to comfort himself. He didn't want to admit it, but he was also nervous.

The trio made their way to the ten standing candidates. The closer they got the more nervous everyone felt.

Why are we here?

What are we going to do?

Will I make a fool of myself?

Everyone's thoughts seemed all over the place. Someone had to say something.

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen," the man spoke,

"I am Dr. Melkonian." *I knew it,* David smirked to himself.

“Some of you have heard of me. This is Dr. Menderes, my partner and good friend. And this is also one of my great friends, Dr. Anderson, she is a psychologist, who volunteered to help us with our experiment.” He smiled. The way he spoke was comforting. Dr. Melkonian had a soothing voice that calmed David and possibly all the others. It was quiet for a couple seconds and no one knew if they were allowed to speak.

Hesitantly and slowly, one of the guys raised his hand, “What are we going to do, exactly?” David looked at him with raised eyebrows. The boy spoke with an unfamiliar accent and that got him thinking. *Who are all these other people?*

“I assure you, all your questions will be answered,” Dr. Menderes spoke for the first time. He had a surprisingly high tone. He seemed like one of those men, who you can’t make jokes with, but his voice and movements said something else.

“Now, if you’ll all just listen to Dr. Anderson, she’ll explain everything.”

“Yes, she’ll tell you everything you need to know.” Dr. Melkonian spoke again as he gestured to Dr. Menderes.

“We are going to go set up. Good luck to all of you.” And that was that, and the two men were out of the room with a blink of an eye. There was a moment of silence, and a couple of whispers. The candidates were all looking at each other, studying the facial features.

“All right,” Dr. Anderson finally spoke as she opened the folder in her hands,

“Now, I’m going to explain this once, so listen carefully.” She started to hand out a couple of pages of paper to them.

“These are the rules. Don’t break them.” She looked at David straight in the eye and gave him his “rules.”

David nodded and smiled sheepishly until she moved on to the next person. He looked down and saw a blank piece of paper was the first page. He was about to flip over to the other page when he heard the psychologist speak again.

“Don’t open them yet.” She handed the last piece of paper to the guy at the end of the row and turned to the rest.

“Now, please follow me.” She didn’t wait for any responses and before they could even react, she started moving and the sound of her clicking heels began to echo.

No one moved and looked at each other in confusion. The ten were very confused, but as the sound of her heels were starting to fade, they rushed after her. She led them to the third mysterious door and came to a halt. Again silence.

“When inside, find a seat. Read your rules first and,”

“What about our task?” A guy from the back blurted out. He was a skinny guy with a darker skin tone and a shaved head. Dr. Anderson raised her eyebrows at him, causing him to gulp. After giving him a stare down, she spoke again.

“The task is exactly that. Figure it out. That is your task.” She stepped away and gestured for the candidates to enter the room. They slowly and cautiously entered and saw 10 chairs around one big round table. The candidates spread out and looked around while listening to the psychologist. There was a giant mirror hung on one of the walls and a couple of paintings. There was nothing comfortable about this room.

“Don’t speak until reading your rules,” she instructed as the candidates began settling down.

“You won’t see me or the others until the task is finished. Good luck to you all. You may begin.” She was out of the room, leaving everyone confused as ever. David blankly stared after her for a while and when the door closed he stared at that too. He then slowly looked at the paper in his hand. Before he could turn the page to read, the shaved headed guy spoke again.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?!” he half yelled and started to mock her,

“The task is to figure out the task?! This is ridiculous.”

“I agree,” spoke another boy. “We’ve been waiting for an hour for this stupid assignment, just so we can get a little note that says we volunteered here.” He scoffed.

“Unbelievable.”

“Hey,” spoke the girl that was clicking her pen,

“She said read the rules first and then speak. Now if you idiots don’t mind, I’ll do just that.” David held back his laughter and there were some snickers around the table. The two boys looked taken aback. They didn’t even have a chance to think of a response back that she had already began reading. David was surprised at the way she spoke. He was definitely not expecting to ever agree with that girl. He cleared his head and stared at his paper again and finally turned the page:

The task is to understand the task.

- 1. Don’t tell anyone where you are from.**
- 2. No violence, whatsoever.**
- 3. Teamwork is required.**
- 4. Rule 1 may be broken if a candidate knows the answer of the task.**
- 5. Everything is a clue.**

G

David furrowed his brows. This was strange. Very strange. He looked around the room hoping that the others weren’t as confused and puzzled as he was. Unfortunately, the same look was plastered on almost all the candidates. It was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. No one moved or spoke. A snickering came from one of the boys at the table. Everyone had turned their attention toward him. He soon started to laugh like a maniac.

“Care to enlighten us on what’s so funny?” Another girls spoke from the other side of the table. His laughter slowly died down and as he wiped away his tears he chuckled before answering.

“This is absolutely ridiculous. That guy was right.” He pointed at the boy with the shaved head.

“There has to be an explanation for this,” spoke the pen girl, “we just have to figure it out.”

“Well, do you have suggestions?”

“I don’t know.”

“None of us know!”

“What are they trying to prove?”

Soon almost everyone was yelling and pointless bickering filled the room. David tried to block out all the noise and fighting. He stared down at his paper again. He flipped it over to make sure her didn’t miss anything. He sighed and looked around the room. The people all looked unfamiliar. **Everything is a clue.** That’s what the rules said. *So why these people? Why me? Why can’t they know where I am from?*

“Who do you think you?”

“Hey!” David spoke up, but no one heard him or they decided to ignore him.

“Hey!” he yelled louder. “If all of you would shut up maybe we’d understand what is going on here.” The room grew quiet again.

“Since you seem to know everything, why don’t you tell us what’s going on?” said a girl with her arms folded and her eyebrows raised.

“Believe me,” David said, “I know as much as all of you know. But I also know that fighting isn’t going to help us figure it out.”

“Yeah, he’s right,” the guy sitting next to him agreed and nodded his head, “We all want the same thing so we should just talk.” Some nodded their heads and some shook them in disbelief.

“Well, firstly, I think we should know each other’s names,” a girl spoke up. She was sitting two chairs left of David and she had long brunette hair and dark eyes.

“My name’s Mary.”

“I’m Robert, but Rob for short.” The guy sitting next to David, who had agreed with him before, continued.

“I’m David.” He spoke and it continued in a circle.

“George.” The guy with the shaved head.

“Emin.”

“Lale.”

“Anna.”

“Dilara.”

“Michael.”

“Lily.” spoke the girl with the pen. Silence filled the room yet again.

“So any of you have any ideas..?” Lale spoke up after seeing that no one else was talking, she continued. “Well, I think that there has to be a reason why we are here, and others aren’t. How did you all know about this experiment?”

“I received an email suggesting me to volunteer to take part in this experiment. And that’s when I applied.” Michael said. He was a guy with dark brown eyes and dirty blond hair.

“Was everyone invited to apply?” George asked looking around the table. There were nods all over.

“Well, now we know that they wanted us here. The questions is why?”

“We have to understand what all of us have in common...” Lily stated the obvious. Emin shifted in his seat and decided to speak. “I don’t know what your rules’ sheet says, but mine says that ‘everything is a clue.’ And there is a number on the bottom of the page.” Everyone looked at their own pieces of paper. David had noticed that there was a **G** o n the bottom of his paper but he hadn’t thought it was important.

“Mine is a letter.” David announced.

“I have a letter too!” Dilara declared.

“Mine’s a number,” Anna said.

“So is mine.” Robert said and everyone else nodded their heads.

“Ok, now listen to me,” Anna finally spoke. She took a blank piece of paper and a pen from her bag. “In a circle, tell me your number or letter.”

“9” Lale was the first to start.

“4”

“1”

“G”

“1”

“1”

“4”

“0”

“A”

“And finally mine,” Anna scribbled down, “2”

“It could be an anagram,” Robert suggested and the quietly finished, “with numbers and only two letters.” “Try rearranging them.” Mary suggested to Anna.

“Are you kidding?” Anna blurted. “Do you know how many possible codes there are for eight numbers and two letters?”

“It was just a suggestion.” Mary scoffed. “Do you have any bright ideas?”

“There’s no need to fight, ladies,” George stepped in, “I’ve been thinking. Dr. Anderson said she was a psychologist right?” David nodded and wondered what he was thinking.

“Well, then we know that this test or experiment has to do with psychology.”

George continued with a smile of realization,

“I even think that that mirror on the wall,” he gestured toward the mirror. “is two-sided. Those three doctors are probably watching and laughing at our cluelessness.” The candidates’ looked at the mirror with wide eyes. It could be a possibility but they couldn’t know for sure.

“Can you pass that around?” Emin pointed at the paper with the numbers on it.

“Maybe someone will recognize it.” Anna looked at it one last time and passed it On.

“What other rules do you have?” Rob asked. “One of mine is that we must have Teamwork.”

“What if this is some psychological game?”

“Like what?”

“Look around you,” Dilara announced, “There are exactly five boys and five girls. Maybe we have to team up, gender wise.”

“That’s a bit sexist.” Lale scoffed.

“That’s not the point,” Anna shrugged off, “What if the experiment is to see which gender is more likely to figure it out. The smarter gender.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Michael said as he rubbed his forehead. “Should we give it a try?”

“No!” Mary blurted out in disbelief. “That’s a crazy idea!”

“I don’t see you making any effort in helping us.” Lily fought.

“Let’s try it.” George suggested.

“You’re serious?” Emin asked.

“No,” Rob disagreed, “If we were meant to get divided then why’d they give us all different numbers?”

“Yes,” David nodded, “Exactly. We all have a piece of the puzzle.”

“Since when are you two such good friends?” Michael exclaimed pointing between David and Rob. Both the boys looked at each other in shock.

“It’s because he doesn’t share stupid and irrelevant ideas.” Rob fought back.

“Hey! Leave him alone.” Dilara spoke up. “We don’t want to insult each other.”

“Now look who’s got a ‘friend’?” David said to Michael sarcastically.

“Shut up.” Michael growled through his teeth.

“All of you need to learn to get along!” Lale cried out.

“Ok, look,” Michael said slowly, “I’m sorry, but just try to understand that this is really nerve-racking.” Rob studied his face then shared a look with David before speaking.

“I get it,” he nodded his head, “Let’s just try to get along and solve this puzzle.” He held out his hand to shake. Michael, at first hesitated but then shook his hand.

“Can I see the numbers?” Lily asked as she held out her hand. It was passed around until it ended up in Lily’s hands.

“What could they mean?”

“Maybe a date?” Lale suggested.

“What kind of a date would we all have in common?” Dilara asked.

“Birthday, maybe?”

“When is your birthday?” Mary asked in general.

“June 3rd,” Michael answered.

“Well, it’s not a birthday because mine’s is on August 28.” Lale groaned in defeat. The piece of paper had ended up in front of David. He kept looking from the numbers to the rules. No one seemed to notice his silence as they continued to discuss the possibilities. David was so caught up in his thoughts, he hadn’t noticed that Dilara was now sitting next to him studying the numbers as well.

“What do they mean?” David muttered to himself.

“Have you tried putting them in order?” Dilara asked.

“I thought about it but let’s try...” **01124459** Soon enough, while the rest were discussing Emin had joined them.

“Why don’t we put the letter together and the numbers together separately?” He suggested. David looked at the paper with a blank expression.

“I think it’s kind of strange that I can’t tell you where I am from,” Lale started,

“Why wouldn’t they want anyone else to know?”

“So maybe whatever this is, has to do with where we are from.” Anna suggested. This gained David’s attention. *It is quite strange that we can’t say where we are from...* he thought.

“I think you’re right.” David said. Everyone turned their attention towards him.

“Think about it. We can say whatever we want in here, but we can’t say where we are from. That has to mean something.”

“Everyone just look at the numbers again,” Lily said. Mumbles and movement followed. Looking at the numbers one by one, David did see something familiar but he just couldn’t put a finger on it.

“A date.” Rob said simply.

“What?”

“It’s definitely a date!” He exclaimed with excitement as realization hit him. He quickly fumbled around the table to find a pen and started to write something on the bottom of the page. Everyone was stretched out on the edge of their seats, trying to catch a glimpse of what he was scribbling down. Soon enough the pen stopped writing and Rob turned the paper towards the rest of the group. **04 24 1915 AG** David froze in his seat the moment he saw the arrangement. He wondered if everyone had understood the scribbles. No one dared to speak. Not because they didn’t want to but because there was nothing to say. What seemed like a forever, George built up the courage to speak first and turned to the candidates.

“Where are all of you from?”

“We’re not supposed to answer that que” Dilara started but was cut off.

“The rule can be broken if he knows the answer.” Michael spoke. He looked at the faces around the table and answered.

“I’m from Armenia.”

“Who else here is Armenian?” George asked while looking around and raising his own hand. David slowly raised his hand along with Anna and Mary. After a moment they all put their hands down.

“Is this some kind of joke?” Lily asked. “I’m guessing all of you are from Turkey.” She asked the remaining candidates. They all nodded their heads in sync. She sighed and rubbed her temple. Emin covered his mouth and began to snicker. Some looked at him funnily. *There’s nothing funny.* David furrowed his brows. Emin’s laughter was the only sound in the room as everyone watched with disturbed and confused faces. His laugh then continued to turn into a hysterical laughter. As Mary began to snicker and laugh too, so did Dilara and Lale. Soon everyone had joined in the clueless laughter. Tears had formed in all of their eyes. The laughter stopped as soon as the doors opened. This time, it was Dr. Melkonian and Dr. Menderes who came through the doors. They both had a pleased smile plastered on their faces.

“Good job,” Menderes started, “I am proud of the way each of you handled yourselves in order to understand our goal here.”

“What is your goal, exactly?” Dilara bravely asked.

“As you know, five of you are Armenian, while the rest are Turkish,” Melkonian said with a smile,

“We have started this project to see if people from the two nations would be able to get along and help each other, if they didn’t know the nationality...”

“Yes, this project has been recorded,” Menderes pointed to the cameras on the walls which were hardly noticeable,

“Your participation helped show that both Armenians and Turks are willing to help others. This fight that has been going on for over a hundred years needs to end. We know what happened, but it’s time now so understand that the Turkish civilians today are normal people like you.”

“There were fights between you, and some candidates stood up for others,” Melkonian spoke again.

“The ten of you were not the only volunteers we had, there are others too who also went through this same room with the same rules. The footages of today will be used in a new documentary about the Armenian Genocide and the two countries. The film will air on April 24. I hope all of you understood the meaning of our experiment.”

~

It wasn't even half an hour later that everyone had packed their belongings and were ready to leave. It had been a long day. The candidates walked out of the building. Some were talking, some were laughing. David was caught in his thoughts and was still trying to process what had happened. He looked at the clouded sky and thought that the weather was perfectly in sync with his mood.

“Hey man,” Rob caught up to him. David looked at him then stared in front of his feet again.

“You okay?”

“Yeah,” David smiled, “This was just kind of unexpected.”

“I know what you mean,” Rob sighed as he put his hands in his pockets.

“But to be honest, I see things more clearly now.” He explained. “Look, I was hoping we could hang out. You seem like a good guy, and we shouldn't let our nationality come between humanity.”

“Look,” David sighed, “I know that after what happened, I should want to get to know you. But I just can't.” Sadness filled Rob's eyes but he tried not to show it too much. He nodded his head as a goodbye and went his way. Not long after, everyone had gone. David was still walking and thinking, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes focused on his moving legs. Thunder crackled in the sky, but he hardly noticed. He loved his country very much; the people and the history. It had been only five years since the genocide received worldwide recognition, and that was a big accomplishment for Armenia. However, the relationship between the countries was never fully restored. The sky crackled once more, as rain started pouring down. David stopped in his tracks and looked up at the sky. He felt like he was part of the rain. The pain and loss of the Armenian people filled his heart and he couldn't step away from under the rain. He raised his hands, closed his eyes and just simply felt the rain. It was like being in a trance. He would've stayed that way if a car hadn't honked at him from the side. He looked to his right and saw Rob getting out of his car with an umbrella above his head.

“Do you need a ride home?!” He yelled over the sound of the rain hitting the pavement. David was so shocked that he couldn't form words.

“You're going to catch a cold!” Rob continued.

“It's just a ride! Get in the car!” He said and started to make his way to the driver's side.

David hesitantly walked toward the car and slowly opened the door. *A fter the way I talked to him, he still wants to do the right thing?* He sat in the car seat for a while, not saying anything and just staring at the road ahead.

“Where to?” Rob asked. David looked at Rob's face and studied his face for seconds. Before he could answer, the sound of the rain slowed down. The two looked out the window.

“You want to get some coffee?” David suggested suddenly. Rob's eyes slightly widened in surprise but he nodded quickly.

“You know there was this one time, when I was stranded in the middle of nowhere and rain just starts pouring...” David tuned out his voice but was still looking at him when he realized that before being a Turk, the man sitting next to him was a human being. He wouldn’t admit it but somehow, somehow, whatever had happened in that room with those people had changed everything inside of him. David couldn’t help but feel slightly more relaxed and inspired. He smiled to himself and kept on listening.