

LIMINAL

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Life is an endless hotel, a sprawling apartment building with rooms you never quite choose but must learn to live in. Each door opens to a slightly different version of yourself— some suffocating, some feral, some cracked wide open. You move through the halls, carrying memories like luggage too heavy to walk with, yet too precious to set down, wondering which room will finally feel like home.

I set out to become whole.

Not happy. Not loved. Not even sane. Just whole. A shape that could sit still in its own skin without cracking, without spilling the insides, without the seams giving way. I thought the end would come like a pristine envelope, sliding silently under the door: *Here, your arrival. Your true self.* Instead, I found rooms.

The first was pink and unbreathing— the kind of pink that clogs your throat, smothering every word. Floral wallpaper in suffocating patterns that whispered secrets I wasn't ready to hear. Mirrors hung crooked, as if the gods had lost interest and turned their gaze away. I wore lace gloves in that room, folding my fingers until they ached, biting my tongue to ribbons to keep the truth locked inside. Polished. Fastidious. *Meticulously controlled. Impeccably composed.* That girl was a fragile sculpture, carved from porcelain so thin it shattered slightly with every forced smile. Her laughter was the sound of drowning— quiet, desperate, trying to keep her head above a sea of silence. My grandmother called it girlhood. I called it war. The air was carefully powdered and perfumed, too tight a skin pressed over limbs that longed to break free.

The second room smelled of antiseptic and rotting oranges. I spoke in baby-blue riddles to therapists who tilted their heads like art critics— their eyes dissecting, labeling, measuring. Hysteria. Melancholia. A touch of genius. A touch too much. No, that's not quite right. They took notes as I bled words onto paper, fragments of what once was, until there was nothing left to say. I burned journals in the sink and called it therapy. I was meant to be malleable. My skin thinned under the weight of their analysis. I swallowed lightbulbs, desperate to feel a little light inside. It was warm. My thoughts clinked like glass inside my chest.

I found a voice wrapped in velvet warnings; a sermon dressed in skin. Something sacred and sick all at once. In that room, I became small— smaller than my name, smaller than my shadow. But my anger grew teeth, jagged and raw, gnawing a door through the wall. I left. I left. *I ran.*

In another room, I bled on canvas, pouring my loneliness in streaks of blue and crimson. I smoked my despair into spirals that curled and burned, painted women whose eyes were vacant lots— emptied out, barren of hope. Eyeless, mouthless, but loud. They stared from gallery walls, demanding nothing, expecting everything. They owned too many cats for any sane human. And in their modicum of sound, they screamed. That was freedom, I thought. The freedom to disappear into something even darker than the rooms.

Later, there was the quiet room. Gray as fogged glass. I slept too much. I forgot how to answer phones, remember names, taste strawberries, or tell the difference between dreams, nightmares, and reality. My body was static, moth-bitten, aching with absence. I stopped writing. That terrified me more than the knives. Silence is a murder weapon insidious. No one ever suspects it.

But the room after that— the next one— had a window. Just one. The size of a hand. It was framed by rust, the glass cracked like a festering wound that didn't quite hurt. Every morning, I kept my eye to it, as if the world beyond could offer me something real, something I could touch. It was so ordinary, so fragile, that I wept— until I was laughing, drowning in my own tears. I wept like someone newly thawed, my body cracking open, letting the cold in. Pigeons flapped their wings against the window, traffic buzzed like a muted hum, a man sneezed on a bench, oblivious to my grief. I loved it. I loved it all. I wanted to clutch it in my hands and keep it there, forever. Hunger crept back into my ribs like an old tenant returning, claiming a space I thought I had abandoned.

I started to walk again. Down streets. Through pages. Into conversations that tasted like homemade food, wrapping me in the gentle warmth I'd been aching for. I found a voice inside me that wasn't begging or breaking— it was just becoming. Quietly, at first. But louder, with every step I took.

And now—

I live in all those rooms. They jostle inside me, pressed close like nesting dolls, stacked in places I can't reach. Sometimes the pink one wins, and I smile too hard, say too little, let the mask linger a moment longer. Sometimes the Gray one drapes over me like a wet coat— heavy with silence, damp with regret. But I know where the windows are now. I open them. I let the cold sting me back to myself.

I never reached the end I imagined. I never found the final, pristine envelope with my name on it. But I've learned the rooms. I've learned their names, their scents, their rhythms. And I have survived the journey between them. *Isn't that something?*