

BEYOND THE WALL



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The air in the room felt heavy, thick with the scent of old paper and the hum of the city outside as the rain tapping against the windowpanes in a run-down coffee shop that was once a book store. Cantara leaned forward, her fingers gliding along the carved edge of a mahogany table near the back top of this shop. Her eyes shimmered with something between curiosity and boredom, staring at a strange picture on the wall.

"Most people," she began, her voice a soft vibration that seemed to ripple through the quiet, "spend their entire lives tracing the borders of their own awareness. They circle the walls of convention, always staring at the bricks but never seeing the spaces between them—the mortar that binds us to what we call reality."

Miok didn't look up from her tea. She watched the steam curl into the air, a miniature ghost rising from the cup. "Walls can be a sanctuary as easily as they can be a cell," she countered softly. "They protect the things worth keeping, even if they isolate us in the process."

Tim tilted his chair back, balancing on two legs with a casual, practiced recklessness. He gave a sharp, knowing nod. "Exactly. Boundaries are just lines in the sand, aren't they?" A grin tugged at the corner of his mouth. "Boundaries are illusions, anyway," he said. "Lines in the sand that vanish with the tide. The trick is remembering you're the one who drew them."

The silence that followed was punctured by a jagged, exhausted sound. Chris slumped into a leather armchair, rubbing his temples as if trying to massage away a mounting headache. For a moment, quiet settled like dust. Then the calm cracked.

"Good grief," he muttered, voice rough with fatigue. His eyes flicked open, dull but edged with humor. "My patience for metaphysical riddles is officially exhausted. But irony? That I'm fully stocked on." He flung a lazy hand toward the door. "Let's talk about something else—preferably something that doesn't involve walls, consciousness, or enlightenment. I'm dying of profundity here."

– *T Newfields*

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