

Threshold by Chris Corvan

This all begins when you open a door to a breathtaking scene: wide green fields, skies painted with the most incredible sunset colors — reds, yellows, purples. A massive oak tree stands with branches stretching out. As you follow the branches to the horizon, you see the edge of this field, assuming it's a steep drop since you can't see what's beyond the edge.

Next to the tree, a man stands on the edge of the cliff. When you approach, you see he is watching the waters crash against the rocks below. Looking down, you realize how far it is, feeling like the edge of the world. Without looking up, the man asks you, "Have I seen you before?" You shake your head, and with a smile, he introduces himself as 'Chris.'

The two of you chat for a bit, talking about life, love, and the beauty hidden in the mundane surroundings. After what seems like hours, he looks at you and asks a simple question: "Are you here for the tower?" With a slight smile and head tilt, he gestures to the door behind you that you never noticed — a plain red door with a black handle. The frame is oddly constructed on the side of a giant castle made of stone and concrete. You strain your neck as you try to see the top of the castle. It appears to be about four levels high.

As Chris opens the door and ushers you in, a simple building layout is before you. A square room, with three doors on each wall, and some stairs leading up to the next level at the back of the room. As you cautiously walk around, your gaze lingers on a few of the doors. Upon each one is a plaque with only a few words on it. You see "The Girl," "The Father," and "The Sky."

"Each one of these doors contains one of the universes I've created and abandoned," Chris tells you, looking at each plaque with a mournful smile. "Each one leads to a different world with people living their lives, waiting for me to decide their fate. And hoping it's their time to come out. I haven't opened them in a while, but they're never forgotten. So I keep them here."

Without a sound, you proceed to the back of the room. Near the stairs, there's one door that stands out — no plaque, no handle. Just a metal door. You get closer, and from inside, you hear this faint whisper.

"Look at Chris. He's hurting. He needs help. He needs MY help. Just open the door and let me help." You notice Chris is watching closely but doesn't say anything, just motions to the stairs.

The next floor is the same layout as the first, but no doors. Instead, you see crystal clear glass walls. You peer in and see ever-repeating scenes of pain — a bullied kid, arguments between parents, heartbreaks, and the comforting of a friend mourning the loss of her mother at the age of 16.

“These rooms hold every painful moment in my life. Every late-night thought, every mistake that comes back to haunt me. They’re never far from me.” Chris touches the glass of the room with a man holding the ashes of his father while sitting on the edge of a hill.

“I leave the doors as glass because, painful as they are, I can’t forget those emotions. They’re mine. They’re my scars, my regrets, my thousand cuts that have made who I am.” As he talks, you once again see that strange metal door by the stairs.

“Look at this man. Why keep his pain so close? It’s not right. He’s wounded. Tortured. Only we can help him. Just open the door and let me help him.” The voice urges.

“Ready to keep going?” Chris asks, nodding toward the stairs.

On the third floor, things are the same, but the lights are dimmed. Here you see thick wooden doors with tiny peepholes. As you peer into them, you see scenes of joy and happiness unfold — a man holding his kids, standing with a loved one on top of a mountain, a group of teenagers laughing and talking on a hill in the middle of the night.

“These are my good emotions. The moments that remind me to believe in the goodness within. They don’t show up as often, but they’re always here when I need them.”

Near the stairs, that mysterious door is there again. No voice this time, just a silent invitation, a pull of force, willing you to open the door.

Without a sound, you make your way to the fourth floor. This room is almost completely dark. No light is visible, no sound save from your own breath. You realize you’re alone. Chris is nowhere to be seen.

After your eyes adjust to the darkness, you see a single door freestanding in the middle of the room. A familiar large, metal door. From behind it, you hear a soft, rhythmic breathing. Approaching the door, you lean in close, and that’s when the voice speaks to you.

“I’m Chris’s only friend. He doesn’t trust me like he used to. He thinks that I don’t help him. However, I’ve been here since he was a kid, watching him grow. Watching every failure. Watching every time he quits. It’s my job to make sure he keeps going. Now, it’s time. Let me out, and let me do my job.”

Your finger barely grazes the door, and it explodes into a hundred thousand pieces, sending you flying back. A maniacal laugh surrounds you as flames erupt through the door, consuming everything around you. A being made of darkness and fire swirls around the room alighting the walls and floor. Your instincts kick in; you need to get out of here quickly! Down the stairs, floor by floor, the sound of laughter, fire consuming, wood crackling, glass shattering, screams, explosions, madness!

You try to escape as quickly as you can. Knowing you caused the destruction of this place with nothing more than a touch. Why would that creature even be there? Nothing that evil should exist! You see the entrance and want nothing more than to feel the fresh air fill your lungs.

You burst through the door to the wide green fields, and the massive oak tree with Chris standing next to it.

“You opened the door, didn’t you?” Chris says, not looking at you, admiring the view. An apology hangs on your tongue, but it’s caught among a million questions you want to ask, so no words come out. “It’s okay. It’ll be over soon.”

Chris gently grabs you by the arm and turns you around to face where once was a tower of concrete, now reduced to sticks and stones scattered across ash. Eventually, the fire dies out, and Chris leads you to where the first floor was. He kneels by one of the burned doors, as tears roll down his cheeks.

“That was my curse, my demon, the only friend I never lost. It does this occasionally. Something sets it off, and it destroys everything. Reduces everything I am into nothing. There’s no way to predict it, no way to control it. Each time it leaves nothing but ashes of what I was.” You help Chris pick up wood and move stones as he continues,

“However, like my cuts and scars, it’s a part of me. I can’t get rid of it. It’ll always be here. Over time, I’ve learned that even though it destroys everything it touches, it gives me something I need. A chance to remember. To rebuild, memory by memory, emotion by emotion. When I take the time to do it right, I strengthen my own belief in who I am. The determination to build it stronger and add another level to the tower.”

Brushing off his hands, Chris heads back towards the tree.

“I keep all these things close because they all define who I am. The good, the bad, and the destruction. I may not be the smartest, kindest, or greatest person to ever live, but I’m trying every day to be better. And that’s all I can ask of myself.”

Gesturing to the door you entered from, he gives you one final smile. “You can head out now; this part is done. I got this from here. Thank you.”

Unsure what to say or even if you should say something, you turn back to the door and turn the handle.

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You nod your head.