

Translucent

Category: Behind Closed Doors

written by Dina Paul | March 30, 2026

For thirty years, I worked on other people's crises: fighting at 3:00 a.m. for an inpatient bed, sitting with families as addiction took another son, pushing for emergency housing, walking into nursing homes rank with neglect. I lived in a visible world of action and consequence.

The end came in my home office. Even behind the flat safety of a screen, I could no longer hold the frame of a telehealth call. My body became a lead weight sinking into the chair, pulled down by a force I couldn't name. The pain on my face was a map I could no longer fold away. I closed my laptop for the last time and moved to my bedroom.

That life now seems so far away—a photograph of myself, flat and distant, as if I were someone I once knew. Sometimes it returns the way a smell does: sudden, familiar, and gone before I can grasp it. My radius has narrowed to the monotony of a homebound loop.

I think of my grandmother. At age 88, she was hit by a car, and her physical universe folded into a single room. When my own life had hungry momentum, I brushed off her stillness as "being old." I didn't realize that she was a scout. She had already crossed a threshold I am only now beginning to see.

My companions are amber pill bottles and the blue light of a screen at 3:00 a.m. The old noises—the sirens, the pacing, the clipboards—have faded away. I remain here, thinned out, translucent.

But translucent is not nothing. It is a filter of friction. Light passes through, but it is mixed with the metallic taste of exhaustion. I am a body holding the dichotomy: the leaden and the luminous, the iron rod in the spine and the prayer in the marrow. The pain does not leave; it simply turns me toward the hidden things.

I am not absent. I am being gathered.

Dina Paul

Asheville, North Carolina