



Limbo

A. Manette Ansay

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From childhood, acclaimed novelist A. Manette Ansay trained to become a concert pianist. But when she was nineteen, a mysterious muscle disorder forced her to give up the piano, and by twenty-one, she couldn't grip a pen or walk across a room. She entered a world of limbo, one in which no one could explain what was happening to her or predict what the future would hold.

At twenty-three, beginning a whole new life in a motorized wheelchair, Ansay made a New Year's resolution to start writing fiction, rediscovering the sense of passion and purpose she thought she had lost for good.

Thirteen years later, still without a firm diagnosis or prognosis, Ansay reflects on the ways in which the unraveling of one life can plant the seeds of another, and considers how her own physical limbo has challenged—in ways not necessarily bad—her most fundamental assumptions about life and faith.

Luminously written, *Limbo* is a brilliant and moving testimony to the resilience of the human spirit.

Limbo Details

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Author : A. Manette Ansay

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From Reader Review *Limbo* for online ebook

Julie Miller says

Memoirs are my very favorite type of book, and *Limbo* is a perfect example of why that is. I was transported and felt connected to Ansay completely. The only issues I ever have with memoirs is that sometimes the writing isn't up to par in spite of a good story. No problem here, Ansay is a flawless writer. I especially like how she describes how she comes to grips with her illness without insisting on finding "meaning" or a sense that she was destined for this or that there is some spiritual significance to her illness. I very much identified with her Catholic upbringing-- and ultimate rejection of Catholicism and all of her reasons why. I appreciated her descriptions of her German family influences. Lastly, being a transplant to Wisconsin, it resonated with me because I recognized the rural Wisconsin sensibilities of many people I've befriended here. I have not read any of Ansay's fiction, but I can't wait to start reading it now.

Maya says

I've read a lot of memoirs and most of them I really disliked. Often I feel that they are over-the-top stories of abuse or neglect and if they are in fact close to what actually happened then it is just too depressing to want to read about. I always also wonder if the bad things that happen are given so much more importance and play in a memoir that it does a disservice to the memoirists real history.

Limbo is not like this. I really enjoyed Ansay's book in which she weaves together bits of her childhood, early adulthood, her father's early adulthood, and her mysterious illness. She uses repetition in a really effective back and forth way that mimics how often issues in life reoccur. And she is neither self-pitying nor self-aggrandizing.

In fact, I enjoyed her writing so much that I've added her novel "Vinegar Hill" to my to-read list.

Callie says

Her quotes about writing are good. Here's some I want to remember:

EM Forster said that writing a novel is like driving a car at night with the headlights on: you can't see your final destination, but you can see enough to make the whole trip that way.

Meaning is the color of whatever lens we happen to wear when we look at our lives. Like fiction, meaning evolves out of our own fascination and need, a structure we invent from facts that, on their own, would add up to very little. Like fiction, it tells a story that may or may not have anything to do with our lives. Yet if we tell the story well enough, it becomes believable. It becomes true.

I wrote for myself, out of wonder and fascination, in the absolute freedom of anonymity. And in doing so, I rediscovered the spirituality I thought I had lost along with my Catholicism. Only now, that spirituality was articulated in a new way. Where once, I would have altered my perceptions of the world to fit the contours of

my faith, I now shaped narrative worlds that reflected my honest perceptions--worlds filled with contradictions and blurred edges. Worlds filled with questions rather than answers. Worlds that often served as windows into a larger sense of mystery.

Laurie says

This biography will certainly not appeal to everyone. For me it is a window into my people, the Luxembourgger immigrants to the American MidWest who are rarely written about. Also, the author's exploration of how to live with unexplainable, constant pain was incredibly helpful to me at the time. Inexplicable things happen and they don't mean anything, they are just, and must be lived with.

Jessica says

Eh. I was really interested to read this story because of everything the author went through and how she was able to move on with her life.

BUT - man...the constant negativity from start to finish of the book made it so difficult to finish. I'm not sure why I expected a more upbeat, uplifting tone, but I did (so sue me), and I was sorely disappointed.

She had more than her share of tragedy, yes, but she also had family and friends and a religion that she turned her back on. I don't know, it just all got to be a bit much.

Jessica says

I have lost my ability to star-rate books and also my interest in reviewing them.

I really enjoyed this but I'm not an objective reader, in this instance because I know and adore the author, but also much more generally. I mean, I can't believe I used to write book reviews all the time on here. That now seems pretty much impossible and insane.

Reading reviews of this book reminded me about how everyone's crazy. I always forget this and am repeatedly shocked when I see other reviews on here of books I've read. It makes you wonder why writers bother writing anything, I mean, best case scenario some lunatic shambles by and picks up your book and has some completely bizarre response to it.

Anyway. I'm keeping my own deranged opinions about the books I read to myself for awhile.

Sad, but I suppose it makes time to do other things.

Jimmi says

I first read A. Manette Ansay's novel "Vinegar Hill" several years ago and thought it was amazing. Since then, I have read several other books by this author, and have enjoyed them. I can't say the same about her memoir, however. I have been trying to read the book over the last year, and each time I put it down again

and again. It was hard to see the connection between the descriptive, engrossing novels I was used to reading, and the meandering, scattered thoughts that detailed her failed professional music career and loss of faith which eventually led her to choose writing "Writing fiction began for me as a side effect of illness, a way to live beyond my body when it became clear this new, altered body would be mine to keep." She parallels her own undiagnosed illness with her father's TB illness at the age of 19. It was painful to read about her own ongoing pain issues, which reminded me of my dad and his health problems, and unfortunate that there was no resolution of these problems at the end of the book, like there is in her novels. "The truth is this: I do not know my destination. All I know is the circle of light is just ahead, its shifting geography. And suddenly, more than anything else in the world, I want to write down what I see. Because it isn't a shame so much as a wonder, if only because it's so far away from anything I might have imagined or dreamed. The way my father's life is different from what he had imagined, coming in from the field, coming home from the san, and thinking it was all over for him when, in fact, it was only beginning."

Suzanne says

For those who love autobiographies about unusual lives, of those who have conquered trial and tribulations to keep to a life worth living.

I turned every page in this book with fervour, interest and worry. I was interested in this book as the author is a author of popular fiction books in the USA. I would love if Manette would write more non-fiction books as I could not put her early life story down.

Beautifully told story. A real gem of a book.

Dave says

My 3rd by the author, but the first in 15 years. Like the other two, the book was OK. There was unintentional comedy when she talked about being traumatized by the idea that God is male. Really? I never lost my shit because Mother Nature is a woman. For someone who's been through such a horrible physical ailment you came off pretty weak there.

The best part of the book, one that would likely make for a good novel, is the author leaving her small town in Wisconsin for a music school in Baltimore. The city is Wire-ish gritty; she gets propositioned walking down the street by men who assume she's a hooker; she loses her faith; and her musical ambitions begin to look unattainable as her body fails her.

Julie says

She is such a beautiful writer and such an inspiration for anyone dealing with a disability.

Elizabeth Andrew says

A moving story about a young pianist struck by an odd muscular disease, and her transformation into a novelist. There are some exceptional moments of beauty in this story. Here's my favorite:

My coat hangs on a peg by the door; I put it on, step outside into the sudden silence of a vast cathedral. The cold is stunning. Radiant. My eyes smart and tear. Snow has erased the roof of the barn, the shed, the milk house. The winter sky presses down, the color of smoke, and I smell the burning barrel as I follow the partially shoveled path toward the barn, follow the harsh rasp of my sneakers. Somewhere, a crow coughs. A loose shingle flaps. Around me, the fields hold the absolute weight of sleep, fringed by yellow stubble, a few dark clots of earth.

A word shapes itself in my mind: HOLY. It splits the crude shell of the word I've been taught and emerges, shimmering and whole. God is here, in these dormant fields, in the bald-headed woods beyond. God is in the crow's call, and the watery shadows cast by the barn. God is in my restlessness. God is in my love of this place and my fear that I will never find the courage to leave it, that it will smother me gently and sweetly and indifferently, like a sleeping parent rolling over upon a child. God is in the thrum and hush and spin of the world beyond. God is a moment like this one: reverent, transcendent, when the very air seems to shine.

Jovis says

At first sight of the book, I got curious how a memoir could be entitled "Limbo". I read the back cover and left still wondering why. I just really had to read what's inside.

"But the human body, like the life it leads, is ultimately, a mystery, and to live my life without restraint, to keep moving forward instead of looking back, I have had to let go of that need to understand why what has happened has happened, and indeed, is happening still."

This book contains admirable wondering and coming to terms to the unanswerable why. She was able to draw the reader to see her past as a pianist and the changes that happened since the 'disabling'.

What I learned from reading this book is this: It is unknown what life holds ahead of us. It may be magical or tragic or simple in all aspects. The suspense allows us to hope and it's our choice that we do. No matter what, life goes on. No matter how uncertain, just hold on.

Heidi says

This is probably a book I wouldn't have read except that it was a book club choice. The positive-- well-written and she's best when she's discussing her family and childhood. The negative-- it was all-over the place and quite frankly the inner turmoil of her devotion to catholicism seemed forced in at times and almost repetitive. I do think the author's willingness to let go and live in the now (which led her to another career) was very admirable and touching as well, but it felt like a short story married with a religious essay.

Haddayr says

This is an interesting, beautifully-written book about a woman growing up in rural Wisconsin in a very catholic family and community, and how it shaped the way she viewed many things: one of them disability. And it's a story about how she became disabled. She has been disabled for, I believe, 16 years, and still has no diagnosis or prognosis, which is why I was so interested in the first place.

Ansary is a lyrical writer. Her descriptions of training for a future as a pianist, the strange reaction of her hometown to her "thinking she's too good for them," her feelings about disability and her friends and family, were all very interesting.

To be honest, though, I would have pruned this book by about 1/3. She makes her point, and then she brings up 4 more examples from her life. Repeatedly.

I heartily recommend the book. But I confess toward the end I started skimming her childhood memories.

On a personal note, I was fascinated how a girl in a conservative catholic home and town got the same messages about strength and fault and blame and disability that I got in my atheist, predominantly urban or suburban home (I did live on a farm for a while, but it was a totally different experience and really a very small part of my life).

Rachel says

It took me a little while to get into the rhythm of this book, but once I did it was quite lovely. I've had this book on my shelves for 10 years or so and am glad I finally read it. I got the impression that it would be much more about her illness than it was. She does write about her illness, but it's so much more than that.
