



The Walls

poems by
Dave Calder

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the tower

Walked hard. Into the wall.

Jarred curious he looked for explanation.

It was the tower. His eyes

were trapped. Went up and up and up and on.

No balconies, no waving arms.

A sheer shaft sliding down into the sun.

killing the clown

below the sheer stone walls
a bundle of daubed rags
a small bird pecking gravel -
the grey captain twists his belt.
a dull enquiry
blockades his thoughts
a peaked doll on a stick, a dead mans smile;
these things surge through him
wavelike, breaking
at the limits of his sense

a song of the tartars & the scots

a long way up to the top of the hill
with swords & arrows & all
a long way up to the top of the hill
to pillage & rape & spoil
a long way up to the top of the hill. ...
who's built this bloody wall?

a leader

This is no use, he said (bricking up the door)
we're all stuck in here together and
the whole damn wall should go.
And then he called upon us to begin
a new life of scratching out the mortar
with our fingernails. He cleaned his trowel.

punchdrunk

I sit in the walls' corner
the wall sits in mine
seconds pass muffled as towels
a damp hand moves
to ring the bell for time
neither of us looks any better in the mirror or the glass
and the next round will lay us out completely

hard laughter

he went straight up to the wall and
banged his head against it till
he bled; he cried -
I don't know why I do these things
but I suppose I learn from them -

he staggered away. the wall
doubled up, fell about
in a heap
roaring

at 5 to 2 the announcer calmly says
- if you've been listening to

the end of
the world

at one -

it's happened, it's happened
and i didn't notice

all these years we built them
mimicing caves, outcrops of rock -
boxes to contain our nights, our
fears of beasts within ourselves & others :
with scraped & gritty hands we set
one shape above, against, another,
& now our nature is found in these walls
we have covered our faces & the face of our world with them.
it is so hard, not to let where we are be what we are
a tight alley between high tower & corrugated iron
littered with waste we wasted effort to obtain,
the sky partitioned by rain-streaked concrete slabs,
& all that's left of the nomad, the earth-dweller,
is a fenced discontent, a numb hunger
to write our names large against oblivion
& smash whatever stands into the debris we feel
our lives & all future lives have become

builders song *for d, d & b*

look at what i've found!
it fits! just here.

it must be right ...

Cockcrow

Feet on the stair. Three knocks. And so
with his best hat on his head
he opened the door.

Three helmets stood there. Hello Hello Hello
have you a license for that? they said.

His hat looked at the floor
at these wobbly legs, this slouched torso,
dulled face, doggedly unsure,
lifted its lid, muttered no

the cars crawl round the block and
stop. and crawl again like hermit crabs;
and inside the armour
the borrowed shell
weak pink nervous creatures
scuttle along the slit trenches of the streets
searching for a fearful respite to their fear.

old wall

it had become unnecessary
boundaries had changed
the furtive wire supplanted it
moss and grass were weaving themselves
into a net, a veil, a shroud,
and underneath
like a dog seeking a new master,
losing coherence and identity, becoming
more stones on a stony ground
the wounded wall
crawled painfully towards me.

the day slipping away
a slow tide ebbing from the seaward battlements
hoarse moans from a small woman in the next room
how tightly these travellers cling to each other
on the tiles her feet tweak impatiently
we were going tomorrow
we were getting nowhere

Maracas beach

in here we lose the wider view
have become tightened to a table
the shade hardens dull metal
sticky circular stains

his hand sulks smoothly back
to the wet glass his eyes
ignore rebuffs defeat rejection
glance at the roof tin and girders

outside, bodies pass each one
interesting sunlit and warm
- everything, i want everything -
he turns the glass laughs
that was not what he meant to say.

Hotel Londres, Maracaibo

In the dim light of the shuttered room
the electric fan rattles against the midday heat,
and in the damp gloom scarred by nervous thrusts
of half-starved sunlight I can tell
she is looking at the wall; the powdery cell wall.
I can tell we are going into silence as I hear
my voice confessing the fire engines,
fat wives, flash cars, the festival
in the square, laughter shouts bells sirens.
She is feverish, worn by something
I suspect to be myself; everything is closed.

Jose's party

Down steep stairs in the scented dusk, smooth bodies
bob in tiled water, blooded by sunset;
others wearing white speak low on the terrace,
words circle words in an intricate dance.
What will become of all these pretty people?
this laughter, those sly looks, soft mouths?

The red moon rises, teeth gleam in shadows,
fallen bougainvillea float in the pool;
at the cliff's edge young men tease each other:
fear makes a fine exciter of their flesh.
When the final, dangerous, uninvited guests appear,
they will at least be half-expected.

The weakness

The rain speaks to the brick
of streams and clay beds
deep in yielding earth
soggy and well-wormed;
of the long rest below
flat fields and swelling sky
coming before and after
(and the brick shifts and crumbles
eaten in its soft heart

she stretches her woollen socked feet out
towards me, rests them on my knees - i shift -
they're not too heavy, are they - she asks -
woman, i love the weight of you,
the weight of you is always soft

the writing on the wall

in the houses of the rulers
the feasting continues, careless
of the lament sharp as knives
rising outside the knives sharp
as hunger rising outside -
how are the feasters
weighed in the thin balance?
too many are held
in their captivity, enslaved
by their greed their arrogance & .apathy
they are not kings over creation
they have only a house, a car, a television,
inside plumbing & three meals a day
they do not wish to leave the hall
or share the table. but they will not live forever.
the night comes

is this a wall i see barring a way ?

no. it is
a flock of sheep.

if that's sheep, then they must all
be sleeping on top of one another
as carefully balanced as acrobats.
why should sheep do that ?

because they want you to think
that they're a wall
barring a way

i built a wall
of boredom & alcohol
& walked into it headfirst

you look awful
said my fellow sufferers

it's nothing
i replied fiercely
you should see what i did to the wall

the ceaseless circulation of fuming cars and people
down arterial roads and thin-veined alleyways.
creased flesh of walls, goosepimpled tarmac
the windows eye and the eyes behind the windows
cold impotent chimneys abused subways
the listening, hungry doors -
and within the buildings
the pattern is repeated
ganglions of gaspipes ,nerves of cable
notched spine of stair, doors valving the flow
along the passages
the angled turns
into the one room
where you are pulsing
living like a city in yourself

interrogation

the voices are shouting at me from all sides and inside
they are burning me-with the smouldering ash of my past.
the walls stand around silent, pallid and impassive
no smile, no sneer. they are only doing their duty

if you build a wall,
remember what is brick & what is mortar
& leave at least a small hole
through which to see both sides
if you build a tower,
remember how deep it's founded & on what
& where you
hoped to reach
if you build a bridge,
remember what you were trying to join

it is a wall

it is a very well painted wall

it is a wall that plants cling to in a seasons passion

it is a wall wearing a fancy dress of flying buttresses

it is a wall you are happy to lean your back against

on sunny days

it is a wall

go over or round

go under or through

or knock it down

that is all

you can do

with a wall

(you could write on it too

between these four walls

this wall is in the blank of my eye
it shuts out those that I despise
this wall is in the flat of my hand
to crush those I can't understand
this wall supports my mouth's hollow roof
to let lies slip out past silent truth
this wall surrounds the core of my brain:
if the others fall down, it builds them again

an easy choice

the walls enclose their own creatures:
each room, its own hollow beast,
waits to digest us to its purpose
how can we know what a door disguises?

she puts her head around the frame
and grins

well
that seems to be where I'm going through

of yellow, perhaps

a small woman with
an untroubled grave face: the colour of her hair
of the bedspread wrapped
around her, of
the dawn she faces

the slurry snow's still flecked
on rusty rails and the shock heads
of spring dandelions surge over the grit. the gorse buds flare
on the embankment beside the stalled train - ten years on
the same woman is facing me - wisps of silver trapped
in the winter hay of her hair

the clouds start here. thick foam
from the mason's tower to the hill's spine
no grass on the tom land
no leaves on the trees.

slime on his eyes stuck after sleep
in the webs of his story, he with his nose
against the cold window dreaming
as usual of paradise
trying desperately
to make a virtue of failure

even the birds have flown
lips of past, eye of maybe,
hand of present, waving

for ilgc

the high window / sounds rise as smoke
no-one could catch her when she fell
through the mirror into stone & fire
smoke rises as sound / the high window

deserted

dust, dust and ashes.

what i hold in my hand is flyblown and rotting
i sit at a corner of the square and nobody buys

at this hour the fat goes past at this the thin
not a word not a sign
and the sun sweats the fruits of my labour and my fruits say
why were we plucked
why brought here where there is no wet for seed

i sit in silence at the corner
my core is dust is ashes swollen as a dry gourd
beneath my tightening my wrinkling eyes
you can see the rot set in

I go to the wall it says stay in
I go to the wall it says stay out
I go to the wall it says I was made
go speak to my makers
if my meaning's in doubt



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