

## **Walls of Conviction**

By Benjamin Waddell

I remember the first wall I built.  
I was 5.  
Twice my size,  
it towered over me.

But it kept them out,  
or at least on the other side.  
For without light,  
the shadows disappeared.

The process was laborious.  
It began after they closed their eyes.  
After they stopped watching over me,  
when I was left to my own demise.

I'd crawl into the corner of my bed.  
And then, one by one,  
I'd stack them upon each other, carefully,  
as if they were bricks.

Each night,  
amidst the shadows of my walls,  
I anticipated dawn,  
for at first light, they would leave me alone.

But the fear was relentless.  
Shadowy figures always lurked beyond my parapets,  
and I cowered in their presence.  
They would get me, sooner or later, it was a question of time.

I was convinced.  
Or was I blind?  
Years later, I realize,  
conviction is blinding.

With the morning sun, clarity returned.  
But in the evening,  
my demons came knocking, always.  
And with them, the anxiety.

It crept under my skin unperceived,  
like a virus in the early spring.  
I knew it was coming,  
but I was never prepared.

My fear foddered my delusion,  
and inspired my midnight constructions.  
And as my walls grew,  
my hallucinations became more acute.

Occasionally I slept in the closet.  
I found comfort in the absolute absence of light.  
Cowering in my obscurity,  
my muscles relaxed, allowing my mind to shut down.

But my efforts were in vain,  
for I was certain, they were coming.  
They were preparing their attack,  
waiting for hunger to inspire their hunt.

I wondered, when they caught me,  
Where they would take me?  
Would they kill me?  
Would they slaughter my family?

Would I even remember?  
Or would they simply leave my dead body,  
as evidence that they existed,  
to show others that my walls had failed.

And who were they?  
They who I'd never seen.  
They who I'd never talked to.  
They who knew not that I even existed!

My walls were useless. I knew this. Always.  
But they protected me,  
against my fledgling mind,  
and all that lurked within it.

And such is the nature of all walls.  
They are inspired by fear,  
of the unknown.  
They embody the demons within.

In the end, borders are symbolic.  
Frozen in time, they are visual depictions of our deepest fears.  
And while useless in practice,  
they are not without consequence.

Out of fear, children forgo sleep to ward off shadows.  
Out of fear, grown men go to war with the unknown.  
And out of fear, leaders walk entire civilizations to the brink,  
of darkness.

One day, when I was 8, I built my last wall.  
There was no need, I realized, to stack another pillow.  
For everything I feared was trapped within,  
confined to the partitions of my mind.

They who build walls, I realize,  
are merely children,  
who have exchanged pillows for bricks.  
But their affliction is the same.

Today I do not to fear the shadows on the other side,  
but rather the men stacking the bricks.  
For their convictions,  
have rendered them blind.