

PENNING

WALLS



JUNE 2017

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Is a wall defined by its structure or its purpose? I thought I knew all I needed to know about walls – from the iconic ones in Berlin, China and Israel to those setting out the boundary of my garden, sometimes breached by a tree or an inquisitive child. But reading the many submissions for this issue of PENning, I realised that walls can also help us to think more deeply about ownership, support, history and division.

Anne Connolly's poem "Mural on a Church Wall", for example, references the mural in Edinburgh by Nihad al Turk (a Syrian refugee), which explores the divisions between place of refuge and home, and those between life and death. Jenni Daiches's poem "wall to wall" contrasts home in peacetime and in war, describing how the function and form of walls change for those caught in conflicts.

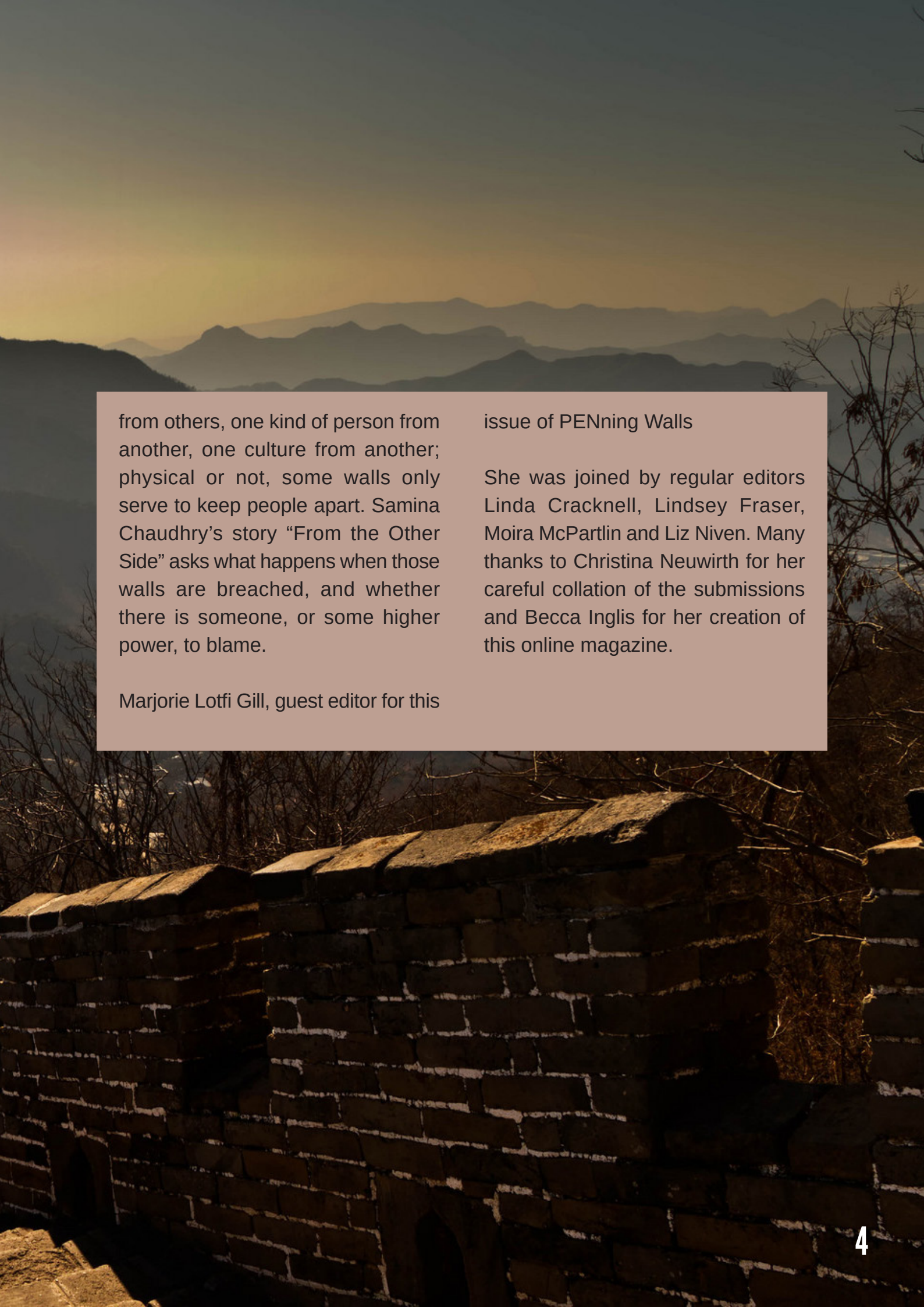
Donald Adamson's "A Gentler Sort" suggests another kind of wall, those

"o a gentler sort/like whan Ah cradle ma grandweans".

And then there are the walls that adults create which children can't see, including the boundaries of land ownership. While only Adamson's "A Slap in the Dyke" references this kind of invisible line-drawing, a few of the submissions raised this truth: children often don't see the divisions (land-based or otherwise) that adults draw between ourselves and others.

What happens when a house falls into disuse? Carin Pettersson's "Within these walls" imagines the stories that the walls of such a house could tell. Another poem, Ken Cockburn's "Chapels", asks whether walls, when "long ago relieved/ of a roof's weight", still count as walls, encouraging the reader to engage in rebuilding them into something new: "pilgrim/add your stone/to this cairn".

And then there are the walls that we build when we separate ourselves



from others, one kind of person from another, one culture from another; physical or not, some walls only serve to keep people apart. Samina Chaudhry's story "From the Other Side" asks what happens when those walls are breached, and whether there is someone, or some higher power, to blame.

Marjorie Lotfi Gill, guest editor for this

issue of PENning Walls

She was joined by regular editors Linda Cracknell, Lindsey Fraser, Moira McPartlin and Liz Niven. Many thanks to Christina Neuwirth for her careful collation of the submissions and Becca Inglis for her creation of this online magazine.

EDUARDO ANTONIO PARRA

FEATURED WRITER

Novelist, short-story writer, and essayist Eduardo Antonio Parra was born in León, Guanajuato, Mexico, in 1965. His stories have received numerous prizes in Mexico and been published, along with his essays, in various Mexican magazines and journals. In 2000 Parra was the winner of the Juan Rulfo Short Story Contest organised by Radio France International.

He received a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation in 2001 and a grant from the state government of Estado de México the following year. His story collection *Sombras detrás de la ventana* was published in France in 2009 after winning the Prix Antonin Artaud. His first book, published in English is *No Man's Land: Selected Stories* (2004).



SOPHIE HUGHES

TRANSLATOR

Sophie Hughes is a literary translator and editor living in Mexico City. Her translations have appeared in *Asymptote*, *PEN Atlas*, and the *White Review* and her reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and *Literary Review*. She has worked as an editor for *Asymptote* and *Dazed & Confused* online, and in March 2015 she co-guest edited a *Words without Borders* feature on contemporary Mexican

literature. She was awarded the British Centre for Literary Translation prose mentorship for 2015, working with Shaun Whiteside. Her translation of Iván Repila's novel *The Boy Who Stole Attila's Horse* is published by Pushkin Press, and she is currently translating Mexican author, Laia Jufresa (Umami, Oneworld, 2016) and Bolivian author Rodrigo Hasbún (*Los afectos*, Pushkin Press, 2016).



THE WALKER

(Extract from Mexico in Words, selected by Gabriel Orozco for the Edinburgh International Book Festival 2015)



That place some call the border; does it really exist? I've asked myself for years, and asked, too, everyone I come across. At the start of this journey, as I rove across arid plains and the mountains could barely be made out in the distance, I was often overtaken by tour groups whose guides assured them

they'd soon reach their destination. Then, as the months passed, these groups petered out and I would come across the odd solitary walker like me who would tell me that the border wasn't far, that I shouldn't lose faith, that riches awaited me on the other side of the river, so wide it looked like a lake,

or a lagoon that resembled the sea, I can't quite remember. 'Riches?' I would think eyeing his rags, his weary face, his hungry expression. And I would walk away from him without saying a word. During her illness, my mother mentioned a nation of people with weird habits, cities of gold, and cruel gods who spoke in an unintelligible tongue. A kingdom, she claimed, protected by walls and wide rivers, with an army who had ways to keep out the dark-skinned barbarians when they attacked. Seeing from my expression that I didn't understand her words, that during woman, my mother, explained to me with a tender voice, as if I were a child still searching out her breast:

'The barbarians are us, son.'

'And my father?' I immediately asked. 'Is he a barbarian too?' She used the little energy she had left to nod, and with a sad smile she added that even despite the wall, the water and the army, since ancient times many of our kind have trespassed the border hoping to get lost in the golden cities of that foreign land.

That conversation, which only comes to me in my dreams, has spurred me on these last months, which inertia transforms into years. But when it turns colder, and my feet turn into heavy rocks, when the sun rages and burns with such wrath that my skin darkens in seconds, when the peasants refuse to break bread with me, or when my

eyes dry out from the thirst, preventing me from seeing the bumps in the road, I get the urge to abandon the way, and I talk to myself saying 'It's pointless to go on. You'll never find what you're looking for, go back.' And yet, back where? And I knock my temples with my fists to remind myself. And I shout. I scorn the mountains and the valleys. I insult the deserts, who listen to my grievances impassively. I stomp across the waters of the river, punishing them for having diluted my memory. And I cry. Oh, how I've wept in desperation, in pain and rage, all the while telling myself that this border is not an illusion; not a vain hope or an idea fabricated by people because they need to have faith in other worlds, a tale made up by mothers as a way of explaining father's absence to their children. But these bursts of outrage soon blow over and the flame of my desire to go back goes out because I don't carry enough references within to know either who I am or where I come from.

by Eduardo Antonio Parra
translated by Sophie Hughes



POETRY

KEN COCKBURN

Ken Cockburn was born and grew up in Kirkcaldy, and now lives in Edinburgh where he works as a poet and translator, as well as running Edinburgh

Poetry Tours, guided walks in the city's Old Town.

<http://kencockburn.co.uk>

JENNI DAICHES

After 23 years working at the National Museum of Scotland in various capacities, Jenni Daiches now freelances, writing mainly fiction and poetry. She publishes non-fiction as Jenni Calder. Her poetry has been published in many magazines and in two collections, *Mediterranean* (1995) and

Smoke (2005). Her most recent novel is *Borrowed Time* (2016), her most recent non-fiction *Lost in the Backwoods* (2013). She has been a member of Scottish PEN for many years, served as president from 2006-10 and is currently on the board of trustees.

CHAPELS

weather-beaten
lichen-tinged
ivy-crumbled

these drystone walls
were long ago relieved
of a roof's weight

messages
to a future
we have become

time has opened them
to everything
the elements offer

pilgrim
add your stone
to this cairn

by Ken Cockburn



wall to wall

once there was a wall
one of four
once there were windows a door
once four walls kept the weather out
and held high a roof

under a roof they slept and prayed
and prepared their food

under a roof and between walls
they made love and laughed and children
entered the world

they watched them grow

once there were four walls and they were all
safe
now dust rubble broken brick
splintered glass on floors where once naked feet walked
safe

now there is no all
all is elsewhere
all is dispersed divided lost

under the earth on dirt tracks on water
some beyond recall
waves rough roads miles weather
wear shoes to holes

now
new walls without windows without doors
new walls in alien eyes
new walls under the sun the stars
and a hard wind blows sand and blossom
and the small birds that take to the sky

by Jenni Daiches

ANNE CONNOLLY

Anne Connolly is an Irish poet living and working in Scotland. Her poems have been widely published in journals, anthologies etc. including four collections of her work. She enjoys performing her poetry, engaging with

fellow authors through the Federation of Writers and reading at numerous Festivals. She finds her work with older people very rewarding and gets a great kick out of Slamming both as a performer and a judge.

ANNE B. MURRAY

Anne B. Murray is a writer and performance poet originally from Glasgow, now based in Stirling. She has had individual poems published in *New Writing Scotland*, *Gutter* and the *Glasgow Herald*, and in anthologies by Luath Press and Grey Hen Press. The poetry pamphlet in which WALL was first published was short-listed for the Calum MacDonald Award in 2010.

MURAL ON A CHURCH WALL, JUNE 2016

In the debating chamber. Holyrood.
A sunshine day and Michael Higgins
honoured to be there, honouring
the sisterhood of small nations.

A compact of eloquence begun
in the soft syllables of mother-tongue
and then a flawless shift into
the universal flow of English.

Returning through the tidal thrust
of summer shopping I paused beside
the wall, the talking gable-end
where eloquence was paint and passion.

Nihad al Turk.

A sea-surge of red.

A sky-sweep of grey
and seven children
gulped away
into oblivion.

by Anne Connolly



WALL

It's twenty years and more since Berlin's fell
 but here in Israel they labour yet
 to build a barricade of stones and sweat
 remembering hatreds, recreating hell.
 The adolescents stone and children yell
 at passing tourists who'd defend the debt
 they understand so little of. They set
 the scene. Of bitterness and rage they tell.
 Fluidity not concrete's what we need.
 The situation's hard enough to bear
 for both sides. Weight of guilt and blame
 cause needless grief, whatever the creed.
 All nations gather. Speak! Unite in care.
 This Wall of hate is futile. Own that shame.

by Anne B. Murray

DONALD ADAMSON

Donald Adamson is a poet/translator, living in Scotland and Finland. He won first prize in the Sangschaw Scots Poetry Competition (translation) 2017 and first prize in the Glasgow Herald Millennium Competition 1999. He was also a prizewinner in the McCash Scots Poetry Competition 2014 and the Cornwall Contemporary Poetry Competition 2016. His collections include *From Coiled Roots* (2014 IDP) and *Glamourie* (2015 IDP), plus a volume of translations from the Finnish of Eeva Kilpi (Arc 2014).



A GENTLER SORT

In the fairgrun o ma bairnhuid
ye peyd saxpence tae enter
a black ceelinder
that birlled ye roon sae quick
ye wir suspendit,
stucken like a flee on a waa.

Noo Ah prefer waas
o a gentler sort,
like whan Ah cradle ma grandweans
leavin them scowth tae wriggle
and rin frae me if ma sangs
dinnae please them.

Or the accaiptin waa
that ma lass fashions, the wey she
gars
time gan slaw in the nicht,
haudin me wi'in her
for as lang as it is her wish
and mine.

Ah wish mair waas cuid be like yon:
enfauldin wi the saftness
o yin sowel haudin anither,
jylin wi the permanence
o a smurach, wrocht frae luve,
wi'oot a brick or stane.

A SLAP IN THE DYKE

We wir aye feart o him,
gaan for a dook in the burn,
crossin his fields – the auld, crabbit fairmer.
He wis weel kent for it –

wavin a stick at ilka bodie he saw
that cam onywhere near his laund,
tellin fowk tae git the hell oot o there
or he'd send for the polis.

Whit did he think we wir gaan tae dae:
cowp his waas or chase his kye?
Steal his aiples, mibbe?
(In yon he'd no be that faur wrang.)

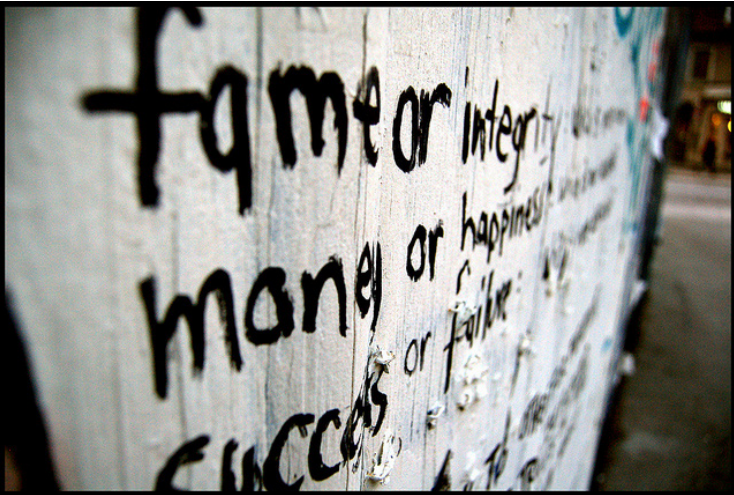
Noo in ma ain eild
Ah feel a bit o sympathy for him:
hivvin ma ain waa-like weys o thinkin –
kinna, whit's-mine-is-mine. But naa –

Memo tae masel: aye tae leave
a yett appen, or a slap in the dyke
for thochts tae enter, cross and splash aboot,
play tig or knichts-in-armour, jouk aroon.





PROSE



SAMINA CHAUDHRY

Born in Manchester, moved to London then Pakistan, and then in 1999 came to Glasgow and have been living here since then. I've been attending creative writing classes at the University of Glasgow since 2012, and have had work published by Scottish PEN, this wurd, the collection entitled *Tales From a Cancelled Country*. Currently I'm completing work on my novel.

CARIN PETTERSSON

Carin Pettersson is a writer, journalist and communications specialist. She is a Swede who grew up in Norway, studied in the US and currently lives and works in the Scottish Borders. She is graduate of the MSc Creative Writing program at University of Edinburgh.



WITHIN THESE WALLS

The wind pushes itself through the cracks in the walls, and dust runs for cover across worn wooden floorboards. The dust will settle down again and again as if to catch its breath before it is off again, running before the wind. A fine layer of dust covers everything, making all the colours look faded, but the grandness of what once was is still visible for those willing to look.

The old window panes rattle as the wind teases them, asking to come in. The windows should have been replaced years ago, but it was never done, like so many other things. The gutters should have been cleaned, the roof mended, the chimney swept. Things are different now. At least the heavy, dark red winter curtains block most of the draught. The curtains rock gently as if they are dancing slowly to music only they can hear. I pull the memories around me like a blanket.

For once I'm happy the hinges on my great oak door are rusted. The wind can battle the door all he wants, but he needs more than ill-placed rage to beat it down. Once the door's brass knocker and handle would have been polished to compete with the sun, and the door would have swung up on oiled hinges,

welcoming everyone into the great hall. Now the door refuses to move, and the grand hall is no longer grand. For decades, this round mahogany table would proudly display beautiful flower arrangements mirroring the passing seasons; the hopefulness of Spring's first tender leaves, the confidence of Summer's bloom, the wisdom of Autumn's final strength and the cold beauty of Winter's triumph. Now the heavy crystal vase sits there forgotten, empty of everything except memories.

In the kitchen the copper pans are green with disuse and age. There are only a few left now, the rest sold off or taken away over the years. Once they would all have been polished to a shine, adding a warm glow to this practical, welcoming kitchen. When the pans were not in use, they lined the western wall, from the smallest cup for melting butter to the largest pan for making stews on dark winter days. The smells from those pots could make anyone hungry, and the well-stocked pantry, just beyond the kitchen, was a feast for the eye. At one point this kitchen employed a cook and two girls, and their constant chatter would join the sound of knives on cutting boards, metal utensils clicking against pots and

the soft rattle of china.

Meals were always served in the dining room under the glittering, crystal chandelier. Before the introduction of electricity, this room was the most magical of them all as the flicker of candles invited the chandelier's prisms to dance across the walls. Many great dinner parties were held here in the trembling, forgiving light where the ladies always looked more beautiful in their evening dresses and the men always looked

more handsome in their suits. Their conversations would rise and fall like a gently rolling sea and float into every corner of the room. I so loved the murmur of voices.

In those days, the party would split up after dinner and the gentlemen would go to the library to smoke and discuss politics, while the ladies would retire to the drawing room where the men would later join them. The ladies would appreciate that hour to themselves and gratefully



sink down into the cushioned, plump sofas and chairs to gossip. I would try to listen in, but to be honest I didn't care much about what they said. I just enjoyed hearing their soft voices as they discussed matters of the heart and the stupidity of men. Most things change, but some remain the same.

The leather-bound volumes used to line the built-in bookshelves in the library. The books changed over the years, from beautiful handcrafted volumes to mass produced paperbacks, but now only few unwanted books remain and the glass doors, left ajar, cannot protect the paper from the invading dampness. The paper is curling and spots of mildew are making their unwanted appearance. The books housed in this library were once a prized collection, but gone are the days when people take pride in reading those printed words that filled them with such wonder and longing. I cannot remember last time someone curled up with a book in this room and settled down for the journey to somewhere else.

The curved staircase is intact, its banister unpolished, but still smooth to touch. This staircase has been both a friend and a foe for the ladies. Lives have changed directions as women glided down these steps, for is there anything more elegant than a woman descending the stairs as her dress floats around her? Countless numbers of men have been seduced by the sight of slender ankles and well-shaped

calves, flashed as fabric danced. It has been a long time since the softness of fabric brushed against these worn steps. I have forgotten what silk feels like.

The five bedrooms upstairs are vacant, each one at a different stage of decay. At the end of the hall is the small room that belonged to the boy who was lost at sea one day when the autumn storm came prematurely to show his strength. The boy had ignored his grandfather's warning, and taken the boat out on the calm seas. It had changed in the blink of an eye. When will they ever learn? The sea is as unpredictable as life itself. The boy's body washed up on shore a couple of miles down some days later. His parents never recovered from the loss, and the room was sealed off, untouched. The boy left his desk cluttered with collected treasures, feathers and shells, books and notes, and a much loved, forgotten teddy is still hiding under the bed, keeping monsters at bay.

Across the hall is the room that has been used as an art studio due to the good lighting, located as it is above the trees with views of the sea beyond. The sun streams in through the big windows, enlightening the inspired. An easel with a half-finished picture is abandoned in the corner. The picture is a portrait of a beautiful woman who no one but me remembers. Her name was Catharine, and she always had friends and lovers, artists and musicians

visiting. Her laughter was rolling and contagious, and she filled every room with life. It became so quiet here after she died in her sleep at 90 because no one could fill her tiny shoes.

It was Catharine who insisting on having a bathroom installed in the small room next to the stairs. At the time, people said it was the most outrageous luxury, but she only laughed and thought it was the most amazing thing to have hot water and indoor plumbing. She loved to take hot bubble baths in the large claw foot tub. It is now stained and filled with grime, but as so much else here, I'm sure if someone took the time to look beyond the surface, they would discover wonderful treasures.

In the master bedroom, the double bed is sagging, not from use but from moisture. There is a leak in the roof above. It should have been fixed years ago when it was only a couple of shingles missing, but it was never done, and now the mould have blossomed greyish green. It could have been pretty, this fungus, if it wasn't so bent on

destruction. It will spread, slowly, gradually, to claim its crumbling kingdom.

In the dark corner of the great oak wardrobe in the room to the left, hangs a red silk kimono forgotten by anyone except the moths who have been feasting on it on and off for years. It really is a shame because the kimono was once a beautiful piece of clothing with delicate embroidery work, and it always made the wearer feel elegant and special. It was a gift from a lover, but when the passionate love affair ended, the kimono was left behind in the darkness like a rejected token of a life lived.

The last bedroom has a dark history, and I wonder if it is embedded in the walls. The last woman who stayed there came as a paying summer guest when money was tight. She was a beautiful girl, but I used to hear her quiet tears at night. Her heart had been broken by painful betrayal and sudden death. One overcast day she walked out into the sea with her arms stretched wide. The

sea kept her in his embrace.

I can still remember the sound of her footfall, a light tapping, always creeping along, keeping to the shadows, her companions. She wore fine shoes with light leather soles. Those shoes and the rest of her things were quietly and quickly removed from the room after her death. Her few possessions were donated to those in need because there was nowhere to send them and no one to tell. Things would have been different if someone had found a need for her, not only her things, but no one saw beyond that pretty face. I hope she found the peace she craved and the forgiveness she deserved in those halls under the sea.

The young autumn wind continues to rage outside, howling, making the dry leaves dance. Tomorrow the garden will look dishevelled, but still beautiful in its coming decay. The innocent Summer winds have made us forget last year's heavy storms, but they will soon come again, screaming, whipping up the sea, bending trees, testing their strength against

everything and everyone. When they arrive one after another, this storm will be remembered like a young fool. It's just an introduction of what is to come, violent only in its newness, not in its strength. I try to identify the rhythm in the chaos.

I still stand here overlooking the sea through the ever changing seasons. I am empty now, slowly falling apart as the elements keep battling me, but I'm not yet completely lost. My bones are good and the foundation solid. The grandness of what I once was is only visible through the shimmering visions of imagination, but I'm still here and that feeling for grandness remains with me like a mirage. I would so love to once again be filled with love and laughter, hear the rise and fall of voices and feel the vibrations of footsteps. I wonder how long it will be, if ever, until someone finds me and occupies these rooms of mine again. I'm here, waiting.

by Carin Pettersson

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

It's a morning I remember like it was just yesterday. It was cold that day and the sky was clear without a trace of clouds. I was wearing a green jacket. The one whose pockets my friends would put their hands in, saying two people could fit easily into it. Gul and me were standing outside the classroom waiting for Miss Sila. Does she not know it's an assembly day? Gul said. I looked out towards the compound. Some of the other classes were already lining up there. Whenever she was late I used to say it's not her fault, it must be the rickshaw driver that makes her late. Gul then talked about going to the cinema that day. He looked at me maybe thinking I would take him. I told him I couldn't. He gradually came down to having chips and coke later in the day. But we already owed the canteen-uncle money from the last two times we

had something to eat. He then came up with the plan of waiting for the uncle's son to be serving the customers. There was a chance he'd most probably entertain us.

Suddenly Gul shouted that the twins were here. Some of the noise and laughter from our class behind us went down. Miss Sila taking small steps in her high heels was walking in with her best friend. Both had the same hairstyles and Miss Sila was trying to keep up with her friend. Someone shouted, 'Free chips and coke if you walk by Miss Sila.'

Gul nudged my arm. 'Quick, you'll miss her.'

'It could mean staying in after school.'
'Not for you.'

Then I saw him, the way his eyes moved and the face and the blanket like thing draped over his shoulders. He was talking to Ramzan baba at the gate. How fidgety he was. I started walking towards them, but when I saw Ramzan baba go back to his chair I thought how could he have let a boy who didn't belong to our school come inside. I heard someone shout my name but I could also hear the sound of the mike going on and some of the children already seated on the ground for assembly that day. That moment I felt as if my feet stopped walking fast. The path to the gate became like a long road whose end you can see but the more you walk the more far it seems.

I don't know but somehow I got to the gate and when I asked the boy the name of his teacher he stared past me looking blankly, and then there was that feeling that there was no going back for him or me.

I had barely managed to push him out of the gate when I saw his hand go inside his blanket. It felt as though the sky had given way to this flash of thunder. I fell to the ground, everything else around me becoming silent. 'God Is Great,' had been his final words, but then who knows whose God became great that day.

by Samina Choudhury



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