

The Wall

By Gabriel Bergmoser

It started the same way, every morning. He would get out of his single bed in his plain room, sit cross legged on the floor, close his eyes and visualize a white wall. He would let that wall spread until it surrounded him, until he imagined it hardening, more and more layers running over until it was as impenetrable as a fortress. He sat there for an hour until he was sure the wall was secure. Then he could get ready and go to work.

They didn't like him there. This wasn't a guess; he was uniquely placed to know this for a fact, but he didn't blame them. He knew how he must seem. A distant, expressionless middle aged man who sat in his cubicle and never smiled, who had to be told things twice before he heard. They kept him on because he was a diligent worker, but in the days before he'd fully mastered the wall he'd known they thought him creepy. Some joked about how one day he would mow them all down with a machine gun. He found a bitter irony in the fact that his 'creepiness' might well be the one thing that stopped him.

It had only been in recent weeks, as he began to believe the wall was safer, that he was allowing himself to watch television again. It wasn't that he heard anything from the TV, more that emotional reactions might weaken the wall. He was reasonably sure this was not the case; his training was too complete for that, but he had come too far to take any risks. But years had passed and the wall had never faltered. He had even stopped dreaming. Perhaps it was time for some colour in his life again.

He started small, watching only children's cartoons. Sometimes he even laughed, although when he did he found himself immediately checking that the wall was still intact. It never faltered. So he let himself get braver. He moved on

to sitcoms, then dramas. Sometimes he felt moved by what he saw and the wall never so much as shook.

Could he be safe? He didn't want to risk letting his guard down, but the more weeks went past without incident the more he started to wonder if maybe his time had come. Maybe he could relax. He could go out with his workmates; smile, laugh and go home without ever hearing the voices.

Then one day he watched the news.

The boy looked happy and smiling in the photos. He played with toys, had his face painted; he looked like a good kid. Watching the story he wondered if he saw himself before the voices came on. Maybe that was why the boy stuck with him. Really he should never have watched the news. He tried not to after that day, but the boy's face stuck with him, and the fear and tears of a family who had lost their child. A paedophile ring, the police said. Hearing that made him turn off the television and not even watch a cartoon for days. The wall still held, but this was real. It wasn't something he could laugh off.

The next time he watched the news the boy was back. Fears had grown and investigations were going nowhere. Again he turned it off. His heart was racing. Even inside the wall he couldn't escape his own thoughts. Seeking distraction, he found a DVD of what looked like a colourful action movie and he put it on with shaking hands. He sat down and tried to think about what was on the screen in front of him, the simple story of the loner who became a superhero and fought back against injustice. The loner who had power.

No. He shouldn't have watched that either.

He had told himself over and over again, back after the last time, that he had to avoid this. Anything that would threaten the wall was off limits. The problem had always been trying to live any semblance of a real life, something he could only avoid for so long before he started to feel jealous and bitter at the apparent happiness of those around him.

He stopped sleeping. He saw the boy and the hero from the movie. Unbidden, ideas came to him, ideas that were little more than *coulds* and *maybes*, but ideas he knew he shouldn't have, ideas that grew and snowballed until he stopped going to work because there was no point, because the ideas wouldn't stop and the wall started to shake.

But from the moment he saw the boy his mind was made up. Anything after was wasting time.

He read up everything he could find about the story on the internet. He learned the area it had happened, the places the police were investigating. Where he had to go. Then he bought a flight north. The wall felt safer, strangely, as he touched down and caught a bus past towering trees and rugged mountains until he reached the town. He found a café and waited. It wasn't time yet.

After the café closed he walked the streets. He looked and got his bearing but it still wasn't time yet. Not until it was dark and the roads were empty. His heartrate picked up. His palms were sweaty and his mouth was dry. The pounding of his heart shook the wall and he wanted to cry. He didn't know what would happen after this. He didn't think he would like it. But he knew he had to do it.

At midnight, alone in the streets of the town, he tore down the wall.

It took a few minutes. It had been there for so long that it felt part of his mind. But it was, after all, only imaginary and once he knew what he was doing it was easier than he had hoped to clear it away and open his thoughts. He took a deep breath and stood very still as the last of the wall went.

The voices came.

-wish she would just get the fuck out of here and let me-

-one day I'll show them I'll make them hurt for this-

-why does Daddy do this to-

-gonna hold her head down over my cock and even if she struggles I'll-

-I want him more than I've ever wanted-

-the fucking retard should have been drowned at birth-

He started to walk. It took every ounce of strength he had not to put the wall back up as the voices came from every direction, from inside every house, from the minds and dreams of all the people who thought their darkest imaginings were all their own. He would have apologised had he not felt so sick. He never wanted to hear any of this.

They weren't all bad. They never were. Some of them hurt for all the wrong reasons, for the yearning and longing of teenagers desperate for love and the cries of children wanting more from their parents and the gentle warmth of the elderly who had finally found some sort of balance. The things he had only tasted, the things he had never had and the things he never would have. The things that had started bombarding him days after he turned thirteen and weighing down his every day, turning from snippets to a hurricane of voices as the years went on and people called him crazy. But he knew he wasn't. Not yet.

And then there was the filth. The darkest corners of the mind that people hid so well, the most twisted sickening thoughts from the most normal seeming of people. Things that turned his stomach and clenched his fists, the things that had made him hurt people so long ago and run until he learned how to build the wall and thought that maybe he could start again.

He found the house on the outskirts of town, plain and unassuming from the outside. He knew because the voices here were different. There was always a difference between those who had thought and those who had done. And this house was designed to fade into nothingness. So close to where the boy had gone missing, because of course it was. Because this was no insidious organisation. A neighbour, basically, a kindly and well liked local who nobody ever looked twice at. Looking twice would have helped nothing. You had to look deeper and nobody but him could do that.

The voice from inside that house got louder until the other voices were gone and he realised he was standing on the doorstep. He was awake, the man who had done this, and mingled in among his mundane thoughts of tea and television were

the things he had done that day and the day before and for weeks and the things he would keep doing because nobody had even thought to look his way. This person found it funny, even, how he had attended fundraisers for the parents and shook their hands and offered his condolences all the while...

It was too much. The voice was loud enough. He grabbed the door handle and turned it. It opened, of course. Swiftly and silently. This was not a town where you locked your doors. He walked into the warm, homely house where this man lived. He could hear the buzz of the television side by side with the voice of the man who was oh so amused with himself, who was even now thinking that maybe tonight he would walk down into the basement and do it all again, who was feeling the stirring in his loins that said *maybe the time had come again and it was late and he was alone and nobody would stop him and for the first time he could do whatever he wanted-*

There was a hammer in the second kitchen drawer. Not a hammer really; a meat tenderiser. Metal and heavy. He held it tight, feeling the weight. He walked into the living room. The man he found was maybe in his sixties, short and dumpy and unassuming, with glasses and a chubby face. He was just standing when he saw the intruder. His mouth fell open and hung there just a second before the tenderiser collided with the side of his jaw, forcing it out of place with a sharp crack and a wet crunch, shattering bone and tearing muscle.

There was a scream then, but it was silenced quickly. He knew what that broken jaw had done so he destroyed that first, smashing it over and over until it was a bloody mess and shards of white stuck up through it, until the scream became a quiet moan. By this time the creature was on the ground, so he pulled down his trousers and brought the tenderiser down on his cock, then his balls, over and over until all that was left was a mass of destroyed tissue and a pool of blood that soaked the carpet and stained his hands. The creature had stopped moving but his heart still beat and as long as that was the case there was pain he could yet inflict. He kept going until he was tired and sweaty and thoughts of

desperation and wishes for a mother long since dead echoed through his head, echoing because the person they had come from was dead.

It was then he heard the little boy crying.

He found him in the basement. The boy was scared; all he saw was a monster dripping with blood. But he would not hurt the child. He picked him up and carried him out and away from this place. He carried the boy until he found his house and put him down on the doorstep. He knocked and ran.

In a public bathroom he cleaned himself as best he could. He didn't look at his reflection. The voices were still there but they were drowned out now by the images of the person he had destroyed, the life he had smashed apart bit by bit, the childhood he had avenged.

He didn't feel like a hero.

He found a bar that was still open, a little way up the road. A quiet, dirty place with only five patrons. They all looked to be bikers, and their thoughts as they saw him were standard.

-who the fuck is this-

-bit of a weird cunt walking in-

The bar played insipid country music and the neon lights seemed almost pretty at this time of night. He walked up and asked for a double whiskey. The bartender, big and bearded, stared at him for a moment before getting his drink.

-fucking faggot comes walking in here at 3am thinking he can get some service, who the fuck does he think he is as if I don't want to go to bed I should fucking rip him apart the fucking-

There was a pool cue leaning up against a table covered by ripped fabric. He snapped it over his knee and had the sharp end through the bartender's throat the second he turned around to see what that sound had been.

When all the bikers were dead, he took a bottle of whiskey from behind the bar and walked. He kept walking along the winding, lonely road until the sun came up and he smelled the ocean. He turned off the road and soon found himself on a

cliff overlooking the water. He sat there and drank, watching the sea turn the colour of blood. He drank until half the bottle was gone and the sun was fully up and he could hear the sirens behind him.

The voices were back. He closed his eyes.