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Life Within Walls

There are some walls that crumble with ease. They accept their fate, returning to the life and minerals below. Reclaimed by the land, licked by the wind and weather, eventually tumbling to the bottom of the valley or stream. These walls embrace uncertainty, fluidity, and change. Their impermanence is foreseen.

They provide shelter, land, and mineral nutrition to many forms of life. Ferns, mosses, and lichen grow on their surfaces. Birds and insects store their eggs knowing safety is provided. Bulbs and roots grow, surrounded by shells, flint, ceramic shards, chalk and earth. An entire world accumulates inside.

Life finds itself enclosed by walls, warm and protected by rain. Sleeping without fear, the walls define our second skin. Present in our origins, even in our cells, walls are elemental to the survival of bodies within.

A scalar shift in empathy hides in the irregularity of the wall. Creating groves from rain and weathering, the stones are rough and rugged. Expanding with warmth, contracting with frost, the stone begins to crumble. Leaves compost into earth and lichen breaks down the stone to turn into soil, forming a miniature ecosystem for life to thrive.

The stone itself is also made of life. Shells and skeletons gather on the ocean floor for an unimaginable time. Millions of years go by to form limestone, chalk, or slate. If not life then minerals from other stars, under heat and pressure, resurface to be found under our feet. Sedimentation, formation, pressure, heat creating non-uniform textures for life to reside on and within.

Some say the stone is alive, growing like mosses or frost. The geometries resembling branches, or networks of neurons, the growth of salts and copper appears like a being as it moves and grows in space.

Collected gently on the surface, rather than extracted, the walls are assembled from the stones found on the fields and in the forests. Crumbling from the bedrock. Picked up by hands, dependent on the strength of the body, they remain relative in size. Piles accumulate near where they were found, ready to be stacked dry or with clay based mortar and fibres.

As we dig the foundation we come across roots, eggs, insects, and mice. The soil is life. Underneath the wall the earth provides a habitat of its own. To be born as a tiny curled up chafer grub, or to die in large groupings of snail shells, many lives and their stories unfold here.

As the wall is stacked, stone by stone, it reflects the builder's character. The technique is embodied with years of accumulated knowledge. The waller must understand the gravitational pull of our planet and how the immediate landmass will move in years to come. Leaning into the earth or onto itself, the wall has a batter. 'Restful' and 'looking up at the sky,' each stone must be positioned to hold still and guide water down, not in. The face of the stone looks out.

Built to last for a few hundred years, the wall is created with as much rigour as possible. Yet, it is also

built knowing that their will be a future of disassembly and ruin. It is a given that the wall will crumble with time, a returning to the earth. This acceptance gives opportunity for the wall to be easily re-stacked. Dry stone, as well as clay and fibre based mortars, allow for a future reassembly. It becomes a cyclical way of life for the wall. It is built, then crumbles, then built again, then crumbles, and so forth.

In some cultures walls have been a place of offerings - holding shells, beads, and other objects. Even food, bones and seeds have been found within some walls, suggesting these communities gave up valuable and desirable artifacts in hope for a secure shelter.

The walls become archives, momentarily holding many previous lives inside their mass. These mounds of matter suggest thresholds and occupiable spaces, as well as presenting active deposits of culture - both human and nonhuman.

Many generations of beings create the walls - building and growing with what is found. The walls appear as soft, malleable accumulations of gatherings, providing momentary collections of lives lived within.





