

## Introduction

So when many of us in the United States hear the phrase “The Wall,” today, we only think of one thing. And it’s an issue that is so divisive for so many people, that it’s kind of become taboo. I mean, there are people that I have to be so evasive about this subject with, that I literally only talk to them about my grades.

Of course, that’s part of the reason why I’ve grown so enamored with the idea of walls as symbols, because for people on both sides of this divide, walls seem to symbolize very different things. For some, it’s about protection, safety, defense. About keeping people who would do harm outside it, and people who “make the country better” inside it. For others, it’s about division, othering, homogenization. About the privileged shutting themselves away while others suffer. And these ideas often show up in literature as well.

In Octavia Butler’s “Parable of the Sower,” there is a wall around the main character's neighborhood to keep out thieves and drug addicts. In “The Wall” by John Lancaster, a giant concrete wall is built around an entire island community in order to keep dangerous Others out. In “Mad Max, Fury Road,” there is a wall around the citadel in order to stop others from stealing precious resources from the elite.

Throughout all of these examples, there are those on the inside who have more than those on the outside, who build a wall because they are made to fear what’s outside of it- or who. All of these perspectives though, are from those on the inside of the wall, who figure out only after half the story is passed how much worse it is for those on the outside. I wanted to create a story centered around characters who begin and stay on the outside of these walls, as Rodman Philbrick does in his book “The Last Book in the Universe.”

I wanted to do this, because in my time here at the University of Wyoming, a large part of my studies have been about trying to understand perspectives different than my own. I’ve studied Math,

Education, Creative Writing, Human Development and Family Sciences, and I've been apart of the Honors Program. Many of these disciplines are either all about understanding the perspectives of others, or at least connect diversity to every subject. I read, analyzed, and wrote about the perspectives of people of color in the United States, individuals with special needs, people of different cultures, people who are all across the gender and sexuality spectrum, and individuals who are women. I also learned the philosophical, social, literary, and political influences on these perspectives of those who don't often get a voice, and also to my own perspectives.

In my freshman diversity class in the College of Education, the one that fulfills our *one* diversity credit needed to graduate under our latest University Studies Plan, I decided that my philosophy of education was going to be about social justice and teaching the whole child, which I think a lot of you understand, right? I mean, the Honors College is all about diversity and seeking an understanding of one's place in society. Inspiring students to make a difference to the world in a creative way. I mean, there are some things I learned in Erin Abraham's Taboo class that I never would have learned anywhere else, and not just from her, but from other students as well. And the Creative Writing department shows students how to find their own voices, as well as how to understand, or at least try to understand, the voices of others. Both of these departments taught me not to be afraid of expressing myself, and to not be afraid to fight for things that matter. That I have something to say, and what I say matters, or at least it needs to.

I felt like I had something to say about this idea of the Wall. What I wanted to do with this project was to take those influences from my classes, from dystopian film and literature, and from the events that were and are actually happening, and I wanted to create a dystopian journey novel. I guess at this point you should know that I have *not* finished the novel. I have about fifty pages, and boy was it harder getting there than I thought. I started this project I was like, oh boy, I'm going to get all my research done, draft 200 hundred pages, revise those 200 hundred pages at least seven times, and then

also work part time, take nine other credit hours, and have time to spend with my family. Right? Yeah absolutely not.

No but seriously, this is the longest work that I have ever written, even just at its current fifty pages. And I am thinking about it constantly. In my history of math class, we learned about Archimedes- the mathematician, not the owl- and he could just hold a problem in his mind and keep working on it at all times. Which I definitely cannot do with most math problems. But with this, I find myself thinking about it constantly. I recently read the Handmaid's tale for the first time, and usually when I read, it's as a consumer, not a writer. But now, every sentence, paragraph, book, story, article I read, I'm wondering if and how I could/would/should apply it to my own writing. I'm thinking about it every night before I sleep, while I'm walking to classes or work, sometimes in classes.

And with the length of this project, I find that my process for writing has also changed. Usually, when I work on short fiction, I think about it for a while, then get everything out in one first draft, figuring my characters out in advance, and then in revision changing them so that they're believable. But with this, there was just too much to think about right away. I would write a chapter, then think about who my characters and what kind of world this would have to be for them to be believable. So I'd revise that chapter and write the next one. I'd see some story scrolling through facebook and want to add it in, and so then I'd have to revise those chapters again, and then write the next one where the thing I wanted to happen was in it, and then revise them all again so that it was believable. So because I usually work with short fiction, and I'm talking 1200 to 1500 words, the fact that this one is so much longer is difficult. One of the weaknesses of this project is definitely that I can't hold the whole thing in my head at all times, but am instead working on it in separate scenes. If I didn't have Alyson to keep me on track and help me to see things I would otherwise not have seen, I'm not sure I would have even gotten as far as I have. I'm over here worrying about getting a word or phrase right, or fixing dialogue, or making randomly appearing chairs show themselves earlier, and Alyson is like but where is this

going, where does it all end up? Whenever I haven't known how to proceed, she's made a statement or asked a question that inspires something new.

In one of my classes for my Human Development and Family Sciences minor, we read this book called "Understanding Human Differences" by Kent Koppelman, and one phrase from it really stuck with me. "It is not realistic to believe that it is possible to create a perfect society, but it is possible—in fact, essential—to believe that any society can be improved." To me, stories in any form can be a call to action, urging people to try to understand and work together to find a solution to the problems and injustices facing our society. That's what I wanted to accomplish with this project. So I'm going to read an excerpt, and hopefully, I've somewhat succeeded in this endeavor.

### **Excerpt**

It rises up in front of us. The Wall. Or at least the part of the 1,954 miles of it that I'm currently eclipsed by. Looming overhead, its heavy shadow presses against us, stifling what little movement and sound resounds through the mile long line of would be immigrants into what used to be the United States, but is now just called Northern America.

I feel a hand on my ass. A man behind me.

He's been leering at me since he joined the queue, and for a while, he just looked. Like all the other men. There isn't much else to look at, I guess, since I'm the only female in line, and pregnant at that. I've felt their eyes since I stepped into line weeks ago. Staring at my bulging stomach and swollen breasts under a dirty tank and shorts.

No one else has tried to touch me, staying about half a foot away at all times, which is pretty far when thousands of desperate men are pushing forward trying to prove they are good enough to be a slave. So many would rather that in Northern America than take their chances below the Wall.

This man though, he drags his tongue across sandpaper lips, his eyes hovering over my scraped knees and face cracked and red from living beneath the sun. He steps closer than he should, closing the

space between us and groping my ass. His hot breath coats the back of my neck and I'm plunged into the past. To the first time it had happened, a man touching me when I didn't want him to.

His hands had been all over me, not caring about my age, or the fact that I had tears running down my face. Not caring if I screamed, if I said no, if I fought against him. He seemed to want it like that. So instead I'd shut down. I didn't close my eyes, but I went away all the same, trying to pretend I didn't feel him inside me, didn't feel his hot hands all over my skin.

As I see the man reach for me again out of the corner of my eye, I elbow him in the gut as hard as I can. He doubles over, but he doesn't stay that way for long. Instead, he launches himself at me. His palms collide with the small of my back, pushing me off my balance and into the ground. I try to put my hands out to catch myself, but I'm not fast enough. I fall hard on my stomach, the wind knocked from my lungs.

As I lay there gasping, crying, the man wipes some dirt from his filthy clothes, and steps over me as though nothing has happened. I want to stay curled up in a ball, clutching my stomach. But the line is moving forward, and more people are stepping over me. I can't stop now, not here. Not when I'm so close. So I draw my feet up under me and pull myself slowly to stand. It looks like I've lost four spaces in line. Only four spaces. But it feels like a thousand.

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I've made my way steadily through, and there are only ten people left in front of my now. No one has tried to touch me again. I'm almost there.

I wonder now, how it will happen. Will they ask me questions, or just waive me through? At what point do I say that I'm here under the Blood Law? Will they take me right to the Alexanders? Will they even want me?

Suddenly the pain hits, stronger than ever before. In the walk from the town of La Pared to the Wall, I've had several small contractions. I'd known they weren't real. Through those, I could still speak, still walk, still breathe. With this one, I am having trouble with all three.

No no no no no no. This can't be happening here. The pain tears through my body, beginning at the base of my back and spreading outwards. I try to be silent, but I can't help the moaning that slips from my lips, the heavy breathing and sweat glistening across my forehead. The men in front of and behind me shy away, stepping back as much as they can. It's too soon. I'm supposed to have another two weeks or so. This baby can't come now, not now.

Only six people to go.

I can see an agent not ten feet in front of me, inspecting each man slowly. The man's skin is pasty white, and all stretched out on his thick, bulbous body. The sleeves on his black uniform look like they're cutting off circulation to his arms. They jiggle as he runs them over the brown skin of his current fascination, dark eyes darting over to me as another contraction hits. Puffy lips stretch over his teeth in a grimace as I bend at the waist to try to stave off the pain. It's not enough though, and this time I can't stay on my feet. I drop to the ground, breathing in quick bursts. In, out, in, out, in, out.

Four people.

The man who pushed me is one of the few who have been let through to be processed. That could have been me. I'm still on the ground, but people don't dare step over me here. Not this close to the Wall, where skippers get sent to the back of a mile long line.

Three.

The agent's eyes keep darting back and forth, his examinations not as thorough as they should be. He doesn't even check their teeth before he sends them back below.

Two.

My breath comes in sharp gasps as the contraction ends. I try to stand, but it doesn't work.

One.

The toes of the man behind me digs into my ribs.

None.

The agent walks to me slowly, his stomach wobbling over my face as he attempts to crouch down,

falling onto his knees. His eyes crinkle at the corners, lips pulling down into a frown as he asks in Spanish "Are you okay?"

I almost laugh in his face. Of course I'm not okay. But I only say "The baby is coming."

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My daughter sleeps on my chest, only a day old. One of my arms rests on her back, patting a soft rhythm to the time of my breath. When I pause, she begins to wake. The nurses tell me to sleep when she sleeps, but she seems to need constant help to sleep. And also... I worry. I'm afraid she won't be here when I wake up, or she'll stop breathing and I won't notice because I've fallen asleep. My other arm is secured to the bed frame using two zip ties. I can't even move my toes at this point, how do they think I'm going to run away? But the blue-shirted agent said it was either that or he had to be in my room watching me at all times. I'd rather not have his eyes on me any longer than necessary.

Even with my tapping, she is waking now, grunting and nosing along to my breasts. I slide her down with one arm, her head cradled in my right arm, nose to my nipple. Her cries grow louder now, and she won't latch. The nasally wail grates at me. Her face is crumpled and tense, and I assume mine is the same.

"Oh, silly girl, why won't you latch? I know you're hungry, mija." I try to say this in a calm, soothing voice, but the pitch is off, verging on panic. I can hear it, and I can feel it. So I stop trying to feed her, and instead pull her back up to my shoulder. My arm hurts from the constant pressure on it, making sure she doesn't fall, maneuvering her head back and forth.

I begin again the calming rhythm on her back, and sing in a cracking voice what my father used to sing to me.

"Arrorró mi niña, arrorró mi sol,  
arrorró pedazo de mi corazón.  
Este niña lindo se quiere dormir  
y el pícaro sueño no quiere venir.

Este niña lindo se quiere dormir

cierra los ojitos y los vuelve a abrir.

Arrorró mi niña, arrorró mi sol,

arrorró pedazo de mi corazón.

Arrorró mi niña, arrorró mi sol,

Duérmete mi niña, duérmete mi amor."

I've sung it thrice by the time she's calmed down. Her eyes have closed again. I'm afraid to wake her, afraid that I can't do this. That I can't be a mother, and especially not like this. Every bit of me feels swollen and in pain. I know it's about time for the painkillers, but I have to try to feed her again. I don't want to be dull for this. I'm terrified of dropping her, of not being able to do anything but watch as she tumbles to the ground and cracks her skull. I'm afraid to sleep.

Her eyes are closed as I slowly and carefully move her down to my breast, but I don't think she's asleep. She's waiting. Her tiny nose touches the nipple. She reaches up, and finally, finally, her mouth closes around my breast and she sucks it into her mouth. She swallows greedily, and I feel the milk move from me as she takes what she needs.

Her weight in my arms is soft and warm and right.

But then the world shifts. I hear yelling outside in the hallway, the high feminine voices of the nurses.

"You can't go back there, they're resting."

"It hasn't been two days yet, they still have time."

"We haven't even gotten the gene print results back yet."

Please don't be coming in here, I pray, though I haven't prayed in a while. Please, God, don't be coming in here.

But they do.

The nurses first, trying to block whoever it is. I see their backs at the door, a wall of blue scrubs

**Commented [1]:** My child terrified, my sun terrified,  
It scared piece of my heart.  
This cute girl wants to sleep  
And the rogue dream doesn't want to come.  
This cute girl wants to sleep  
Close your eyes and open them again.  
My girl terrified, my sun terrified,  
It scared piece of my heart.  
My child terrified, my sun terrified,  
Fall asleep my child, fall asleep my love.



blocking the entrance. He looks down on them, his shaved head partially cut off by the doorway, dull grey orange rimmed eyes flashing on his sallow face.

"I need to begin the process now," his voice slithers over every surface in the room, and I can't help but shake. His eyes flicker from the nurses blocking his way to me, the exposed breast my daughter is nursing from. Then to my face.

His eyes widen, eyebrows tilt in. Puzzled, maybe? But the expression is gone in an instant.

"I'm just here to do the interview," he says, trying to push through them. But they don't budge.

"The Administration has rules about this. She gets three days with her child, at the very least, before she's subjected to your questions." The nurse with the sharp nails is the one to speak. Surprising.

"Not when she put in an application claiming Blood ties to the Alexanders," he says. I'd asked for the form yesterday, and submitted it through the Office of Administration. I didn't think they would get back to me this quickly.

They look back at me. And slowly, in shock, they slide out of the room, allowing the man to finally glide into the room. It's not just his eyes that are grey. He's wearing a grey suit as well, slick, like water running over a moldy wall. He moves like water too, fluidly sliding through the door and stepping nimbly around the rocking chair next to my bed.

As he steps closer to the bed, looming over me, his long spindly fingers wrap around a stylus and a data pad, and he shoots me that look again.

"I'm here to complete your asylum interview," he states, his voice slithering over every surface in the room. He speaks in English, with a quiet forcefulness. He feels... coiled. Ready. "Please answer every question truthfully and to the best of your ability. If you do not understand a question, you can ask me to repeat it. Do you understand?"

He looks to me, and I nod, indicating that I understand both the question and the language. I hold tighter to my daughter, my free arm wrapped tightly. She grunts in annoyance, but I don't let up. He looks at her, and all I want to do is cover up. But then he wins, doesn't he?

"What is the name on your official birth document?"

"Lily Alexander. My mother is Kandace Alexander."

"Kandace Alexander?" he asks, his voice growing softer, but not quieter. Just less guarded.

"Yes," I say. There's something in his eyes... That look is back again, but more haunted. "Did you know my mother?" His eyes harden at the question, and he closes off, looking back towards his datapad, entering in something I can't see.

"And have you been gene-printed before?" he asks.

"I don't think so. There isn't much need for it, below the Wall."

"And how did you end up below the Wall?" He purses his lips, clenches his jaws. Does he really hate Southern Americans that much? Do they all think we're animals?

"They never told me the story, besides to say my mother abandoned us."

He pauses while writing, but doesn't look up.

"What city were you born in?"

"La Pared."

"Not a good place."

"No."

"What is your date of birth?"

"June 25th, 2031"

"Seventeen years ago..." he says almost to himself. He looks up at me again, brows furrowed.

He's searching my face, looking for something. I don't know what.

"Are you married?" he asks, looking back to his datapad.

"No."

"And yet you have a child."

"That wasn't a question," I say, raising my eyebrows. What is it to him if I'm not married?

"No, it wasn't," he states, and then continues "Have you ever been above the Wall before?"

"No."

"Why did you decide to come now?"

I look down at my daughter, and say, "Her." She's stopped suckleing now, so I pull her lips from my breast, and cover up, moving her so she is lying stomach down on my chest.

"That's the only reason? Any fear of going back below the Wall? Physical harm, abuse, fear for your other family?" he asks. He actually looks concerned.

"Of course I'm afraid to go back. Have you ever been South before?"

"Why wouldn't you go to the police, or to Administration headquarters? They're there for your protection. Why come here?"

I don't want to tell him everything, but I have to give him enough of the truth that he'll let me stay.

"I did go to the police. I told them what happened. They didn't believe me. Or they did, and they didn't do anything. And the Administration in La Pared? They're the ones we need protection from. No one goes there for help." I can heat rising to my eyes, and clogging my throat. I shift, struggling to pull the thin covers over my daughter and myself. He sees my struggle, and exasperatedly leans over me and yanks the blanket up. I jump at the abrupt movement, the closeness.

He sighs, pulling the rocking chair to the side of the bed and settling into it. "How do you know that Lily Alexander was your mother? Do you have any marriage documents, birth documents, anything besides your word?"

I just look at him, crying softly. Of course I don't have any documents. Mama and Papa had run away together, I don't even know that they *were* married. What if I'm not actually related to them? Only those who have blood ties to the Originals, the colonists, are allowed to enter Northern America as anything other than a slave. What if we've come all this way for nothing? I can't go back to the Padre, can't go anywhere back below the wall, where they'll find me. And her... What will they do to her?

"So nothing then?"

I shake my head, the tears falling. They leave itchy trails down my cheeks, but I can't wipe them.

I'm holding her. I try to keep my chest from hitching, try holding my breath to keep the sobs down, but I can't. She will wake soon, I can feel her stirring. But I can't stop.

His hand reaches out, about to wipe the tears from my face, I think. His eyes are soft, fingers like feathers.

But then the datpad in his other hand makes a noise. He looks at it.

"Ah, your gene prints are in," he says, touching the screen with his stylus. And then he just stops and stares at it for a moment. I can't read his expression, but something feels wrong. Ugly and heavy. And I see it in his eyes when he looks up at me. The closest thing to hatred I've ever seen. Real hatred, not the indifference of all those from Northern America.

"Well..." his voice again carries that coiled softness, and I feel a shiver run down my back. I begin to once again begin to pat a rhythm on my daughters back, to calm myself more than her, though she is waking.

The Grey Man types something onto the datpad, standing gracefully and slowly dragging the chair back to its original place by the door. My teeth are chattering. I can't seem to stop shivering, tears still running. He sets the datpad down on the chair, and I can't take it anymore.

"What does it say," I ask through my teeth, clenching them so I don't tremble.

"It seems as though your application will have to be denied. Your gene print results do not match the Alexanders." He says this calmly.

"What- what does that mean? How can that be true?" I ask. My Papa lied to me? To Abuela? To everyone? "That can't be true. Please, have them do it again. I can't go back there!"

"You won't have to. You've crossed the Wall, been entered into the System."

"I don't understand."

"I must take the child now."

He signals for someone outside the door, and another man comes into the room. Black t-shirt and khaki pants, muscles busting through his neck. Like the Padre's enforcers.

"What? No, you can't take her," I say, holding her close to me. The rhythm I've been patting on her back becomes frantic, and she wakes. Her little grating cry begins again, but I don't care. I hold her as close as I can now. She can cry as much as she damn well wants, if she could just stay with me.

"You broke the law in crossing the Wall without due process."

"You brought me here! I was—"

"It doesn't matter."

"No, you can't have her. She needs me!"

His eyes harden, and the burly man moves closer to me. Panicking now, I try to get out of the bed. I try to move, pulling myself with one arm to the far side of the bed, try to get as far away from them as possible. There is nowhere to run, even if I could.

"You can't just take her," I say, my voice shaking.

"I'm afraid you can't stop me," he says, his voice deathly quiet under the cries.

The black shirt man grabs at me, and he lays hands on my baby before I can stop him. He grabs her around the middle, around her belly, and begins to pull.

"No, stop!" I shout, listening to the change in her cry, the pain in her voice. I promised myself I would never let her hurt like this.

My arms go limp as he lifts her up around the middle.

"Put your hand under her head, you idiot," the Grey Man snaps at him. The burly man immediately does so, sliding a hand under her head and holding her close to him. She looks so tiny in his arms. He grunts, and his beady little eyes have hate in them.

Sobbing, I reach again for her, pulling as much of my body towards her as possible. They both look at me in disgust, and then leave, the Grey Man picking up the datapad on the way out.

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