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POETRY

# Load-Bearing

Jussi P. Laine

*"Load-Bearing" is a previously unpublished free-verse poem written in response to the current global preoccupation with borders—as spectacle, as policy, as anxiety. Watching walls, fences, and surveillance systems become both symbols and symptoms of something harder to name, the poem asks what is actually being defended, and by what. It suggests that the true infrastructure of a society is invisible: trust, reciprocity, and culture worn smooth by use, rather than the beautiful watchtowers catching the light. Drawing on beat-influenced cadence, irregular line breaks, and historical touchstones, the poem moves from the visible architecture of borders to the unphotographed foundations—human relationship—that actually hold things together.*

**Jussi P. Laine** has spent two decades studying borders; the fences, the fear, the space between "us" and the long vowel of "them." By day he is a Professor of Multidisciplinary Border Studies at the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland—a title heavier than most of his sentences. But the academy, he'll admit, was never built for the things that matter most: voltage, reciprocity, the stranger's face you didn't look away from. So sometimes the footnotes get abandoned for the line break instead. "Load-Bearing" is what happens when a border scholar stops writing about the thing and starts writing from it.



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**Load-Bearing**

What carries a society
leaves no shadow —

we have been squinting at the wrong thing,
friends,
the beautiful photogenic geometry of it,
the fence gleaming in the press conference light
while the real thing
was happening
in the gaps
between people
the way it always has
the way it always does
the way it will
when the cameras leave.

a border is memory, dig it —
not the surveyor's mark, not the hyphen
bureaucrats insert between nations —
the body knowing,
the gut knowing,
that bassline
you feel
before you hear,

fear riding underneath everything
like a second weather.

three in the morning
the algorithm decides
what you dream —

*us* the language says,
and then the long vowel
of *them* —

and still the fence goes up,
tall, expensive,
staged —
*we are doing something*
*we are doing something* —

ask the Romans,
ask the Ming,
ask anyone
who tried to make stone
do the work of trust —

the wall holds nothing
that is already
leaving
from within.

voltage —

that's what it is,
nearly invisible,
running between people
in the dark,

the willingness
to believe
another will act rightly
when the lights go
and the systems
buckle —

reciprocity, man —
justice, belonging, hope —

not the words,
the actual *thing*, the lived thing —
the way you help
without keeping count.

culture runs
under the language,
surfaces
when the official words
run out —

*we do not abandon*
*we do not close our eyes*
*we do not stop*
*seeing the face*
*imagining the future*
*still*
*unwritten —*

So what holds, then — what *holds* —

how do you hold
memory and future
at once?

the way a body does.
the way a song does.
the way a people does
when it decides —

build your walls,
run your long patrols,
your algorithms,
your beautiful watchtowers
catching the light —

the strongest borders
are not the ones
that separate —

they are the values
worn smooth by use,
the stranger's face
you did not
look away from,

the foundations
nobody
photographed.