

BALKERNE BLUES – By Lucy Tate

I've been sat here for almost three hours now, thinking, contemplating really. How easy would it be? The flow of cars is steady, never a moment that there ceases to be a rev of an engine ringing in my ears. Not that I'm paying any attention to it.

All I can really see is that stupid gate.

The Roman walls, with Roman bricks, and the people too – I see them. Slaves and soldiers alike, all pulling together, placing each rock, each stone, each piece with care. Or maybe it's fear. I can't tell the difference anymore.

All I know is that I see them, the Celts, the Iceni tribe, Boudicca. That's what he used to call me, you see, on account of my fiery hair and even more fiery resolve. I used to think of myself that way, a fire, burning day and night to get my way. I could've taken down houses, towns, even cities with my passion – all hail Boudicca, risen again!

Now I know.

I know that my fire is gone, I can barely take on my own mind, let alone an empire. No. I am far more like these Roman walls, sturdy for what feels like centuries, but if you look closer, if you really cared enough to look, what would you see?

An archway, an empty gaping hole. Misshapen rocks, barely holding themselves together, teetering on the very edge of their time here, ready and so willing to let it all fall away. You'd see a patchwork job, bits of new concrete, no heart, no soul, a poor replica of what a Roman wall should be. There are parts that have crumbled completely. Buckled under the pressure. Why is there so much pressure? Do people not understand that a Roman wall was not meant to withstand this?

Roman walls were not built for big, clumpy combat boots or stiletto heels. They were not built for huge signs and banners to advertise its historical worth. They were not built for school trips, or spilt lunches, or snazzy photos for your Instagram. Not for tourist shops, or staging plays, or leaning on while you wait. Not for climbing, or jumping, or running, or posing. Roman walls were not built for you to step on, or laugh at, or gawp and throw stones at.

These bricks and stones were made for so much more: they endure. Come hell or highwater, they endure. Come peace or raging war, they endure. Come tribes and weapons and hatred and hardship, they endure. They endure, they endure, they endure, they endure. So maybe, just maybe, I am made for something more!