



Photograph by Walker Evans

**THE
BRIDGE**

A Poem by
HART CRANE

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*From going to and fro in the earth,
and from walking up and down in it.*

THE BOOK OF JOB .

II

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

"— Pocahontus, a well-featured but wanton yong girle . . . of the age of eleven or twelve years, get the boyes forth with her into the market place, and make them wheele, falling on their hands, turning their heels upwards, whom she would followe, and wheele so herself, naked as she was, all the fort over."

THE HARBOR DAWN

INSISTENTLY through sleep — a tide of voices —
They meet you listening midway in your dream,
The long, tired sounds, fog-insulated noises:
Gongs in white surplices, beshrouded wails,
Far strum of fog horns . . . signals dispersed in veils.

*400 years and
more . . . or is
it from the
soundless shore
of sleep that
time*

And then a truck will lumber past the wharves
As winch engines begin throbbing on some deck;
Or a drunken stevedore's howl and thud below
Comes echoing alley-upward through dim snow.

And if they take your sleep away sometimes
They give it back again. Soft sleeves of sound
Attend the darkling harbor, the pillowed bay;
Somewhere out there in blankness steam

Spills into steam, and wanders, washed away
— Flurried by keen fifings, eddied
Among distant chiming buoys — adrift. The sky,

THE BRIDGE

Cool feathery fold, suspends, distills
This wavering slumber. . . . Slowly —
Immemorially the window, the half-covered chair
Ask nothing but this sheath of pallid air.

*recalls you to
your love,
there in a
waking dream
to merge
your seed*

And you beside me, blessed now while sirens
Sing to us, stealthily weave us into day —
Serenely now, before day claims our eyes
Your cool arms murmuringly about me lay.

While myriad snowy hands are clustering at the panes —

*your hands within my hands are deeds;
my tongue upon your throat — singing
arms close; eyes wide, undoubtful
dark*

*drink the dawn —
a forest shudders in your hair!*

— *with whom?* The window goes blond slowly. Frostily clears.
From Cyclopean towers across Manhattan waters
— Two — three bright window-eyes aglitter, disk
The sun, released — aloft with cold gulls hither.

*Who is the
woman with
us in the
dawn? . . .
whose is the
flesh our feet
have moved
upon?*

The fog leans one last moment on the sill.
Under the mistletoe of dreams, a star —
As though to join us at some distant hill —
Turns in the waking west and goes to sleep.

VAN WINKLE

Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate:
Listen! the miles a hurdy-gurdy grinds —
Down gold arpeggios mile on mile unwinds.

*Streets spread
past store and
factory — sped
by sunlight
and her
smile . . .*

Times earlier, when you hurried off to school,
— It is the same hour though a later day —
You walked with Pizarro in a copybook,
And Cortes rode up, reining tautly in —
Firmly as coffee grips the taste,— and away!

There was Priscilla's cheek close in the wind,
And Captain Smith, all beard and certainty,
And Rip Van Winkle bowing by the way,—
"Is this Sleepy Hollow, friend — ?" And he —

*Like Memory,
she is time's
truant, shall
take you by
the hand . . .*

*And Rip forgot the office hours,
and he forgot the pay;
Van Winkle sweeps a tenement
way down on Avenue A,—*

THE BRIDGE

The grind-organ says . . . Remember, remember
The cinder pile at the end of the backyard
Where we stoned the family of young
Garter snakes under . . . And the monoplanes
We launched — with paper wings and twisted
Rubber bands . . . Recall — recall

the rapid tongues

That flittered from under the ash heap day
After day whenever your stick discovered
Some sunning inch of unsuspecting fibre —
It flashed back at your thrust, as clean as fire.

*And Rip was slowly made aware
that he, Van Winkle, was not here
nor there. He woke and swore he'd seen Broadway
a Catskill daisy chain in May —*

So memory, that strikes a rhyme out of a box,
Or splits a random smell of flowers through glass —
Is it the whip stripped from the lilac tree
One day in spring my father took to me,
Or is it the Sabbatical, unconscious smile
My mother almost brought me once from church
And once only, as I recall — ?

It flickered through the snow screen, blindly
It forsook her at the doorway, it was gone
Before I had left the window. It
Did not return with the kiss in the hall.

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt,
Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate. . . .
Keep hold of that nickel for car-change, Rip,—
Have you got your "*Times*" —?
And hurry along, Van Winkle — it's getting late!

THE RIVER

*... and past
the din and
slogans of
the year —*

Stick your patent name on a signboard
brother — all over — going west — young man
Tintex — Japalac — Certain-teed Overalls ads
and lands sakes! under the new playbill ripped
in the guaranteed corner — see Bert Williams what?
Minstrels when you steal a chicken just
save me the wing for if it isn't
Erie it ain't for miles around a
Mazda — and the telegraphic night coming on Thomas

a Ediford — and whistling down the tracks
a headlight rushing with the sound — can you
imagine — while an EXPRESS makes time like
SCIENCE — COMMERCE and the HOLYGHOST
RADIO ROARS IN EVERY HOME WE HAVE THE NORTHPOLE
WALLSTREET AND VIRGINBIRTH WITHOUT STONES OR
WIRES OR EVEN RUNNING brooks connecting ears
and no more sermons windows flashing roar
breathtaking — as you like it . . . eh?

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

So the 20th Century — so
whizzed the Limited — roared by and left
three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slip-
ping gimleted and neatly out of sight.

The last bear, shot drinking in the Dakotas
Loped under wires that span the mountain stream.
Keen instruments, strung to a vast precision
Bind town to town and dream to ticking dream.
But some men take their liquor slow — and count
— Though they'll confess no rosary nor clue —
The river's minute by the far brook's year.
Under a world of whistles, wires and steam
Caboose-like they go ruminating through
Ohio, Indiana — blind baggage —
To Cheyenne tagging . . . Maybe Kalamazoo.

*to those
whose addresses
are never near*

Time's rendings, time's blendings they construe
As final reckonings of fire and snow;
Strange bird-wit, like the elemental gist
Of unwall'd winds they offer, singing low
My Old Kentucky Home and *Casey Jones*,
Some Sunny Day. I heard a road-gang chanting so.
And afterwards, who had a colt's eyes — one said,
"Jesus! Oh I remember watermelon days!" And sped
High in a cloud of merriment, recalled
" — And when my Aunt Sally Simpson smiled," he drawled —
"It was almost Louisiana, long ago."

THE BRIDGE

"There's no place like Booneville though, Buddy,"
One said, excising a last burr from his vest,
" — For early trouting." Then peering in the can,
" — But I kept on the tracks." Possessed, resigned,
He trod the fire down pensively and grinned,
Spreading dry shingles of a beard. . . .

Behind

My father's cannery works I used to see
Rail-squatters ranged in nomad raiillery,
The ancient men — wifeless or runaway
Hobo-trekkers that forever search
An empire wilderness of freight and rails.
Each seemed a child, like me, on a loose perch,
Holding to childhood like some termless play.
John, Jake or Charley, hopping the slow freight
— Memphis to Tallahassee — riding the rods,
Blind fists of nothing, humpty-dumpty clods.

Yet they touch something like a key perhaps.
From pole to pole across the hills, the states
— They know a body under the wide rain;
Youngsters with eyes like fjords, old reprobates
With racetrack jargon,— dotting immensity
They lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast
Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue —
Is past the valley-sleepers, south or west.
— As I have trod the rumorous midnights, too,

And past the circuit of the lamp's thin flame
(O Nights that brought me to her body bare!)

*but who have
touched her,
knowing her
without name*

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

Have dreamed beyond the print that bound her name.
Trains sounding the long blizzards out — I heard
Wail into distances I knew were hers.
Papooses crying on the wind's long mane
Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,
— Dead echoes! But I knew her body there,
Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair.

Under the Ozarks, domed by Iron Mountain,
The old gods of the rain lie wrapped in pools
Where eyeless fish curvet a sunken fountain
And re-descend with corn from querulous crows.
Such pilferings make up their timeless catage,
Propitiate them for their timber torn
By iron, iron — always the iron dealt cleavage!
They doze now, below axe and powder horn.

*nor the
myths of her
fathers . . .*

And Pullman breakfasters glide glistening steel
From tunnel into field — iron strides the dew —
Straddles the hill, a dance of wheel on wheel.
You have a half-hour's wait at Siskiyou,
Or stay the night and take the next train through.
Southward, near Cairo passing, you can see
The Ohio merging,— borne down Tennessee;
And if it's summer and the sun's in dusk
Maybe the breeze will lift the River's musk
— As though the waters breathed that you might know
Memphis Johnny, Steamboat Bill, Missouri Joe.
Oh, lean from the window, if the train slows down,
As though you touched hands with some ancient clown,

THE BRIDGE

— A little while gaze absently below
And hum *Deep River* with them while they go.

Yes, turn again and sniff once more — look see,
O Sheriff, Brakeman and Authority —
Hitch up your pants and crunch another quid,
For you, too, feed the River timelessly.
And few evade full measure of their fate;
Always they smile out eerily what they seem.
I could believe he joked at heaven's gate —
Dan Midland — jolted from the cold brake-beam.

Down, down — born pioneers in time's despite,
Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow —
They win no frontier by their wayward plight,
But drift in stillness, as from Jordan's brow.

You will not hear it as the sea; even stone
Is not more hushed by gravity . . . But slow,
As loth to take more tribute — sliding prone
Like one whose eyes were buried long ago

The River, spreading, flows — and spends your dream.
What are you, lost within this tideless spell?
You are your father's father, and the stream —
A liquid theme that floating niggers swell.

Damp tonnage and alluvial march of days —
Nights turbid, vascular with silted shale
And roots surrendered down of moraine clays:
The Mississippi drinks the farthest dale.

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

O quarrying passion, undertowed sunlight!
The basalt surface drags a jungle grace
Ochreous and lynx-barred in lengthening night;
Patience! and you shall reach the biding place!

Over De Soto's bones the freighted floors
Throb past the City storied of three thrones.
Down two more turns the Mississippi pours
(Anon tall ironsides up from salt lagoons)

And flows within itself, heaps itself free.
All fades but one thin skyline 'round . . . Ahead
No embrace opens but the stinging sea;
The River lifts itself from its long bed,

Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow
Tortured with history, its one will — flow!
— The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow,
Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below.

THE DANCE

*Then you shall
see her truly
— your blood
remembering
its first
invasion of her
secrecy, its
first encounters
with her kin,
her chieftain
lover . . . his
shade that
haunts the
lakes and hills*

The swift red flesh, a winter king —
Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?
She ran the neighing canyons all the spring;
She spouted arms; she rose with maize — to die.

And in the autumn drouth, whose burnished hands
With mineral wariness found out the stone
Where prayers, forgotten, streamed the mesa sands?
He holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne.

Mythical brows we saw retiring — loth,
Disturbed and destined, into denser green.
Greeting they sped us, on the arrow's oath:
Now lie incorrigibly what years between. . .

There was a bed of leaves, and broken play;
There was a veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride —
O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;
And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride. . .

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

I left the village for dogwood. By the canoe
Tugging below the mill-race, I could see
Your hair's keen crescent running, and the blue
First moth of evening take wing stealthily.

What laughing chains the water wove and threw!
I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper; I
Drifted how many hours I never knew,
But, watching, saw that fleet young crescent die,—

And one star, swinging, take its place, alone,
Cupped in the larches of the mountain pass —
Until, immortally, it bled into the dawn.
I left my sleek boat nibbling margin grass. . .

I took the portage climb, then chose
A further valley-shed; I could not stop.
Feet nozzled wat'ry webs of upper flows;
One white veil gusted from the very top.

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge;
Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends
And northward reaches in that violet wedge
Of Adirondacks! — wisped of azure wands,

Over how many bluffs, tarns, streams I sped!
— And knew myself within some boding shade: —
Grey tepees tufting the blue knolls ahead,
Smoke swirling through the yellow chestnut glade. . .

A distant cloud, a thunder-bud — it grew,
That blanket of the skies: the padded foot
Within,— I heard it; 'til its rhythm drew,
— Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root!

THE BRIDGE

A cyclone threshes in the turbine crest,
Swooping in eagle feathers down your back;
Know, Maquokeeta, greeting; know death's best;
— Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack!

A birch kneels. All her whistling fingers fly.
The oak grove circles in a crash of leaves;
The long moan of a dance is in the sky.
Dance, Maquokeeta: Pocahontas grieves . . .

And every tendon scurries toward the twangs
Of lightning deltaed down your saber hair.
Now snaps the flint in every tooth; red fangs
And splay tongues thinly busy the blue air . . .

Dance, Maquokeeta! snake that lives before,
That casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout, horn!
Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore —
Lie to us,— dance us back the tribal morn!

Spears and assemblies: black drums thrusting on —
O yelling battlements,— I, too, was liege
To rainbows currying each pulsant bone:
Surpassed the circumstance, danced out the siege!

And buzzard-circleted, screamed from the stake;
I could not pick the arrows from my side.
Wrapped in that fire, I saw more escorts wake —
Flickering, sprint up the hill groins like a tide.

I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms,
And stag teeth foam about the raven throat;

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms
Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat.

O, like the lizard in the furious noon,
That drops his legs and colors in the sun,
— And laughs, pure serpent, Time itself, and moon
Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!

And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny
Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent
At last with all that's consummate and free
There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent.

.

Thewed of the levin, thunder-shod and lean,
Lo, through what infinite seasons dost thou gaze —
Across what bivouacs of thine angered slain,
And see'st thy bride immortal in the maize!

Totem and fire-gall, slumbering pyramid —
Though other calendars now stack the sky,
Thy freedom is her largesse, Prince, and hid
On paths thou knewest best to claim her by.

High unto Labrador the sun strikes free
Her speechless dream of snow, and stirred again,
She is the torrent and the singing tree;
And she is virgin to the last of men . . .

West, west and south! winds over Cumberland
And winds across the llano grass resume
Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned
O stream by slope and vineyard — into bloom!

THE BRIDGE

And when the caribou slant down for salt
Do arrows thirst and leap? Do antlers shine
Alert, star-triggered in the listening vault
Of dusk? — And are her perfect brows to thine?

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,
In cobalt desert closures made our vows . . .
Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,
The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.

INDIANA

The morning glory, climbing the morning long
Over the lintel on its wiry vine,
Closes before the dusk, furls in its song
As I close mine. . .

*. . . and read
her in a
mother's
farewell gaze.*

And bison thunder rends my dreams no more
As once my womb was torn, my boy, when you
Yielded your first cry at the prairie's door. . .
Your father knew

Then, though we'd buried him behind us, far
Back on the gold trail — then his lost bones stirred. . .
But you who drop the scythe to grasp the oar
Knew not, nor heard

How we, too, Prodigal, once rode off, too —
Waved Seminary Hill a gay good-bye. . .
We found God lavish there in Colorado
But passing sly.

The pebbles sang, the firecat slunk away
And glistening through the sluggard freshets came

THE BRIDGE

In golden syllables loosed from the clay
His gleaming name.

A dream called Eldorado was his town,
It rose up shambling in the nuggets' wake,
It had no charter but a promised crown
Of claims to stake.

But we,— too late, too early, howsoever —
Won nothing out of fifty-nine — those years —
But gilded promise, yielded to us never,
And barren tears. . .

The long trail back! I huddled in the shade
Of wagon-tenting looked out once and saw
Bent westward, passing on a stumbling jade
A homeless squaw —

Perhaps a halfbreed. On her slender back
She cradled a babe's body, riding without rein.
Her eyes, strange for an Indian's, were not black
But sharp with pain

And like twin stars. They seemed to shun the gaze
Of all our silent men — the long team line —
Until she saw me — when their violet haze
Lit with love shine. . .

I held you up — I suddenly the bolder,
Knew that mere words could not have brought us nearer.
She nodded — and that smile across her shoulder
Will still endear her

POWHATAN'S DAUGHTER

As long as Jim, your father's memory, is warm.

Yes, Larry, now you're going to sea, remember
You were the first — before Ned and this farm,—
First-born, remember —

And since then — all that's left to me of Jim
Whose folks, like mine, came out of Arrowhead.
And you're the only one with eyes like him —
Kentucky bred!

I'm standing still, I'm old, I'm half of stone!
Oh, hold me in those eyes' engaging blue;
There's where the stubborn years gleam and atone,—
Where gold is true!

Down the dim turnpike to the river's edge —
Perhaps I'll hear the mare's hoofs to the ford. . .
Write me from Rio . . . and you'll keep your pledge;
I know your word!

Come back to Indiana — not too late!
(Or will you be a ranger to the end?)
Good-bye. . . Good-bye. . . oh, I shall always wait
You, Larry, traveller —
 stranger,
 son,
 — my friend —