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At the mouth of a staircase, the sidewalk shadowed by the structure itself, by the cloistered dark of the 4 a.m. city. Just enough light for a patterning gleam from the starry mica at the soles of our feet. A siren, fire engine, Doppler arc, towards and then away, away. Away. A dog’s bark, a starburst ring of breaking glass.

By Erica Wagner  Shoreditch, UK  18 June 2019
Moving towards the four main cables as they rise from the anchorage, you are ready to be plucked in a net of wire. Wires powerful, ductile, flexible, unspooled for mile upon mile in cables, stays, and suspenders; the cables themselves just as they were on that opening day, unchanged and unaltered, so that to touch their cool curved surface is to travel in time. And now, as we walk hand in hand into the wire’s welcome, we ascend—the blood flowing through the bridge breathing between land, river, and sky to carry itself over and across. We catch the scent of the river’s breath. Now the sun begins to pick out warm rose in the stone towers, granite and limousine, igneous, sedimentary, the deep stuff of the Earth itself, element in element. Do you turn to kiss me, or do you not? Keep walking. On we go.

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“The central or fifth division of the bridge floor is called the Elevated Promenade, because its principal use will be to allow people of leisure and old and young invalids, to promenade over the bridge on fine days, in order to enjoy the beautiful views and the fine air. I need not state that in a crowded commercial city, such a promenade will be of incalculable value.”

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The first lovers—no, of course we are not the first, nor will we be the last. But love dissolves into something wider, richer—“myself disembigurated, every one disembigurated, yet part of the scheme”—so as we move towards the tower now, the first floor, the Brooklyn tower, the bedded deep beneath the river’s mud and down to the dark rock, its hidden foundation reaching out to the deep pine forest of Georgia that rendered its timber, thick with pitch, to be hewn and burnt there underwater, a wooden roof to support the tons of stone upon its back. The tower reaching out to sea, to England, to Lombardy and Liguria, Saxony and Prussia, Siberia and Ukraine, supported on the backs of those who toiled in the hot thick air, blood gone tight in their veins. The tower soaring, higher in those early days than anything anywhere—pinacle, beacon, its cathedral arches setting their gaze on what was called “the New World.”

And as we continue onward, to the centre of the span.

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“Rebuild the bridge? Why rebuild it? It is already carrying six to eight times the amount of traffic of its early days. It is carrying elevated lines and a host of other things that it did not carry in the beginning. There is no necessity to rebuild. It will last 100 to 200 years. Isn’t that long enough?”

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It had been years, you told me, since you had come to the Bridge. You had no special reason to cross, you said; anyway, it was easier to take the subway. The 2 train from Clark Street; sometimes you got your hair cut, you said, in the barber’s by the station. Or the C train from High Street. I told you I liked that station because the black letters on the white tiles spelt out HIGH HIGH HIGH. But still, I would walk wherever I could, even through the crowds in high summer; you didn’t like that, to feel yourself surrounded by the press of bodies, milling strangers. It brings it all back to me, you said once; what it was, what all was, I didn’t have to ask.

Now the sun spreads its light over the river, shimmering towards the west. And just then—just here—you lift your joined hands and set them around a slender vertical suspender, a twisted rope of wire just an inch or so in diameter. Its slender line falls from the main cable, makes a web with the diagonal stays as comforting as any cradle. And we are rocked in wire, for my palm against the slim steel strand feels the heartbeat of the Bridge, the whole structure moving under its load, “instinct with motion,” just as alive as you are.

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Why cross a bridge? One answer, the most obvious one, is that you need to get from love to shore. From east to west or east, you have a destination in mind, an appointment to keep. “Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costume how curious you are to me!” It is a quintessential minute, this ability to walk on water, to follow a path where once there had been no path, where once there had been only greenwater river—not a river, in fact, but a fast-flowing tidal strait, the Sound River, as it once was called, the old name pouring the rush of water down from Long Island Sound through Hell Gate—Hell Gate!—and towards the bay where the North Atlantic waits.

This “provisional” city, Henry James called it. He was dismayed at the bridge over the river in 1906, Brooklyn Bridge had been named after the approach, a roof of steel over our heads. You could almost miss the path, where once there had been only greensilver river—not a river, in fact, but a fast-flowing tidal strait, the Sound River, as it once was called, the old name pouring the rush of water down from Long Island Sound through Hell Gate—Hell Gate!—and towards the bay where the North Atlantic waits.

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Moving through the streets on foot, the bright new cable cars ring their bells, the traffic lights clicking through their rhythm for the broad and empty avenue. Along through the scrabbled grass of the little park and then down again, under the approach, a roof of steel over your heads. You could almost miss the cut through which the steps rise, not least in this dawn dark. But we know where we are, where we are going, why. Your shoulder brushes mine as you turn, and I turn too, up the stairs and into the Bridge.

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“The contemplated Work, when constructed in accordance with my design, will not only be the greatest Bridge in existence, but it will be the great Engineering Work of this Continent & of the Age.”

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Why did we wake? The deep chamber of sleep released us together, and in silence we rose from our damp sheets. I watched you walk naked to the window, why did we wake? To see you face to face, to come here, through the quiet streets of the Heights with their fruit-sweet names: Cranberry, Orange, Pineapple. White clapboard, old brick along Hicks, a turn east towards Cadman Plaza, the traffic lights clicking through their rhythm for the broad and empty avenue. At dawn, the world breathes and opens, allows for the fireflies to feel the breeze, the souls to come together. As the sun rises, the birds begin to sing, the sky fills with color, the world awakens.

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Looking out over the river, you can see the Brooklyn Bridge, a massive structure that spans the river. The cables and towers are visible, and the sunlight reflects off the steel. The bridge has been in operation for over a century, and it remains a symbol of New York City. As you gaze upon it, you can’t help but feel a sense of wonder and awe. The bridge is a testament to human ingenuity and the power of engineering.

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At dawn, the world breathes and opens, allows for the fireflies to feel the breeze, the souls to come together. As the sun rises, the birds begin to sing, the sky fills with color, the world awakens. The sun rises over the river, and the bridge becomes a silhouette against the sky.

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The bridge is a symbol of New York City, and it has been featured in many works of art and literature. One famous poem about the bridge is “Crossing Brooklyn Bridge” by Walt Whitman, which was published in 1860. The poem describes the experience of crossing the bridge and the beauty of the city.

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