

Edited and published by: Forge Journal, www.forgejournal.com
Publication date: Summer 2015
Issue: Volume 9, Issue 1, print

<http://forgejournal.com/forge/2015/07/05/to-the-manhattan-bridge/>

To the Manhattan Bridge

The doors open, the passengers exit. Enzo stands back and lets the other travelers get on. Then, slowly, he approaches the door and reaches for the frame. He takes a wide, awkward step inside the subway car.

“Stand clear of the closing doors, please.”

The doors close and he clings on to the pole bracing himself for the jolt of the departing train.

A friendly high-school girl notices the shaky old man struggling to keep his balance. While everybody else seems to ignore him, she stands up and offers him her seat. Enzo self-consciously lurches through to where she just stood up and thanks her. He sits down and looks at her smiling face once more. Then, he slowly sinks back with a light feeling in his stomach. *She is pretty*, he thinks. He feels shy.

Enzo looks the other way so as to not meet eyes with the nice girl again. All the seats in the car are taken and only a few passengers are standing. He looks at the reflection in the window across the aisle and sees himself. Skinny and old. Hunched over.

As he begins to lose himself in a pensive gaze, he suddenly feels a tiny warm squirt in his crotch. He tenses up and blushes. *Oh, no.—I hope it doesn't smell.—I should be fine. It's just a little bit of pee.* He clenches his legs and feels lightheaded. For the last four months he has been getting noticeably weaker. Eventually, he went to the doctor but all the test results indicated was that he should avoid strenuous activity. That was not it. Enzo could feel his body growing more and more tired. Every movement was shorter, his grip had become less firm, and sleep wasn't refreshing anymore. *It's been a very long time.*

The loneliness had its part in amplifying the little itches and aches. When his wife, Amy, had still been alive, they had joked about their various ailments, had cheered each other up when they felt down, and had made fun of worried neighbors who had been commiserating with them about the treatments and therapies they had been undergoing. Because, after all, they had been OK. Nothing serious.

Until Amy had to stay in the hospital for a week. And then another. And then Enzo asked to have a folding bed next to her. A week passed. And then another. And then it got serious. Amy was not responsive anymore. And then, one morning, she was gone.

The train comes to a halt. It's past Atlantic-Barclays.

The conductor shouts his announcement through the speaker, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we are being held due to a police investigation at Borough Hall... we apologize and should be moving shortly."

Disbelieving murmurs and whispers of exasperation hiss through the train. Somebody jumped. Enzo stares out the window at the tunnel wall in the darkness. *They gave up*. That was his first thought whenever he heard about suicides on the subway. *Don't give up striving for the beautiful things. That's why you're here*.

This had been Enzo's attitude when he had come to New York 63 years ago. During a summer of joyful leisure in the city, he, a visitor, fell in love with one of its struggling mass. Amy. Soft and anxious Amy. From then on they would struggle side by side; two crying children holding on to each other, waiting for their parents before the night falls. And ever after—after they had proven themselves worthy, this city would shower them with its boon—something beautiful.

And now Amy is gone. And Enzo is calm. Too exhausted to keep fretting. Tired, tired, tired of the ever-changing movements of the city with which he lost pace. Forced to stay behind and feel the exhaustion in his sinking body. He feels weak. Not weak for a moment in need of rest. Weak like a disappointment or a broken promise. He feels weak like a whimper. Weak like a jump in front of a train.

And he feels as if he's falling into the hard plastic seat. Again, a light feeling in his stomach, but different than before. The aches go silent. With every shallow breath he seems to sink deeper. He feels as though he is sitting, standing, and lying down at the same time. Then, from somewhere in his mind a spark comes that pulls him together out of the void of his sinking and he startles faintly—like a cold shiver when coming out of the shower. *Not on the train. Amy. Not underground in the darkness and grime. I want something beautiful*. The train begins to move again and Enzo is a motionless observer of the tunnel's shadows washing by ever faster. Just like the train, he can't turn back. He can only hold on a little longer, hold on for the bridge. Enzo tries to stay solid in the car, feeling weightless, massless. *The bridge is coming. Hold on*.

A couple of soft jerks signal that the train is approaching the bridge. It gets brighter. Enzo gathers all his determination. His limbs feel as though they are dissolving from his body. He leaves them be, aiming his eyes toward the front of the car, waiting for that dawn of light when the train goes onto the bridge.

First, pillars flashing by. Then, a geometrical dance of steel beams cutting the bright light of the setting sun. *Just a little longer. She will be there*. Enzo holds himself together not wanting to leave. The light begins to fill the car and his tension eases. And he feels good. *Don't give up striving for the beautiful things. That's why you're here*. And he is here. The evening sun setting beside the southern tip of Manhattan and the glare blinding him. Everything is completely quiet now. As he looks into the light, he remembers Amy's face. Beautiful. He didn't give up. And he can let go.

His eyes remain open, turned toward the setting sun and the jerks of the car shake his body as the train passes the rail junctions. The car and its passengers. In anticipation of the next stop. Roll off the Manhattan Bridge. Which stands fast with its two tall pillars in the cold East River. Separating Manhattan from Brooklyn. Two islands nestled against this piece of coast. Under this sky that silently looks on to our strife.