MYKA TUCKER-ABRAMSON

Three Poems from “The Bridge Builders”

These poems are excerpted from a cycle written about the building of a Halifax bridge. The first two talk about Jean Marie Belanger, killed during the construction.—ed.

1. May 1954

Before trains, there were legends, 
bridges built from canoes and broken boats 
strung across the harbour, a thief who carried 
a Micmac chief’s lover half way across 
the pontoon, before he broke the bridge 
into an escape:

That night he learned that the weight 
of a bridge is a risk that he would no longer 
take. His famous curse:

*Three times shall fall,*  
*Like a dying breath*  
*In storm—In silence—and*  
*Last in death*

This is the third bridge. Don’t think we don’t 
know every time we climb up 
laughing at stories of sailors who slipped 
from the beds of Dartmouth 
girls, across the catwalks 
to return before the role call of dawn.

The betting pools of bodies, quick 
crosses when no one’s looking. Is it still 
a risk when it’s not superstition, but a train 
hurtling towards its destination 
one rung at a time?
2. July 1954

Every catwalker will tell you their secret: not to look down, to trust your feet, one man kept a bird’s wing in his pocket to remind him how to fly. Here’s mine: trust nothing, but the ground.

(He couldn’t have known, that day, strung up like Christmas lights across the city, a sudden gale that flung the catwalk, a ribbon,
his tightrope body
an angel cast out.

*He tried to throw himself back; but something huge and merciless struck him on the head and dragged him down on his back.*

“Lord forgive me Everything”)

3. Barrington

In a coffee shop on Barrington, I press my back against glass. She flies through the door to him, her hair burning a red meteor while he, teeters on a chair. I, falling in love between these pages watch as his clench-drawn face tightens than draws apart, how lips part like bridges to let boats pass, kisses so familiar they could bare been ours, the taste of shampoo and old lovers in my mouth.