

Fixing the Footbridge in Dykstra Park

Classy guys, these short barrel-chested
middle-aged Spanish construction workers.
All day they've shagged their skinny butts
and wonderful faces—some real schnozzes
among them—replacing bad wood
in a narrow bridge over the Green River.

Festive in orange vests with white safety bars
on the backs and silver hard hats emblazoned
with American flags, they are industrious
as dwarves in an old Scottish fairytale; true
gentlemen, compadres from somewhere
near Barcelona. Courtly, precise, no nonsense
among them, not a swear word or rude tattoo.

Up and down they go in their yellow cage,
knocking bolts from wood so rotten it crumbles
like old bread, using hand signals to communicate
as baseball players do. *Team* players. And oh,
their equipment! Shiny wrenches long
as your arm, sledge hammers
heavy enough to ring anybody's bell.

A blue forklift the size of a small building,
silver cable coiled thick as the driver's waist.
A yellow crane holds up the entire swinging weight
of the bridge, some 60,000 pounds pressure,
they tell me; a smaller one wrestles old beams
out and new ones in—a ticklish business.

At any moment they could lose the whole thing
into the river— the beautiful hard-hatted men
in the yellow cage left swinging through nothing,
the water dark green below, sluggish
as the mind of a bigot or a shark.

But—predictable miracle—the tower rights
itself, the straps tighten, the bolts go in easy
as toothpicks through jello, and the bad instant
passes. You know it by the subtle shift
of their shoulders, the joint buttless swagger,
that bravura air.