

PAUL LISICKY

ROPE BRIDGE

Bob got the urge to jump up and down on the rope bridge. Half-way out over the gushing creek—was that so strange? “Don’t even think about it,” said Pete, who opened his eyes long enough to see the pressure of holding it back trembling the corners of Bob’s mouth.

But the shock of great height: could Pete pass some of that into Bob? And play: could Bob pass some of that into Pete? Maybe then they’d smell the water on the plants, taste the mist in their mouths. And Bob wouldn’t have to shimmy ahead, swinging the bridge from side to side.

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We always thought it was permanent. The smell of sidewalk, ripe and true the second summer rolled around. And whether it got there through dog, or person, or alien from outer space was beside the point. You either had to say, ah, New York, or take your opinions elsewhere. Besides, wasn't it a freakish night, and who knew what wonder we'd careen into up ahead?

And now? I don't need to belabor the point. It's stupid to be-moan something just because it isn't there. And even if it was, I'm sure those with the guidebooks wouldn't even be able to smell it if it wasn't approved of first. Oh, there I go again. Let them have their joy. Let them marvel that they're not being mugged, that we have the same stores they have, that they can walk down the street, behave exactly as they want to, and feel they're in a movie. Anyway, let's be clear: who among us isn't up there, on the upper deck of those tour buses, looking down, or maybe not, to see what we can see?

And up from the subway deep comes the creature of the night: half woman, half man, dressed head to toe in pink. Pink track-suit, pink lips, pink brows arched high above the ravenous eyes. Seventy-five feet tall, though no one can yet discern the tugboat features. And from its moving mouth comes the gruff, correcting message: *I am always greater than you. Watch me eat.* And throws an armload of us down on the sidewalks we thought clean.