

THE ROAD NOT FINISHED  
(An Evening's Chance Encounter)

New in town? I'm Hart Crane. Haven't seen you  
at any of Sam's soirees before. He mentioned  
you write poetry too. Are you blessed or cursed?  
Is booze a boon or bondage? Is sex driving,  
draining or definitive? Do you wish I'd shut up  
and go annoy someone else? Why, thank you. Glad  
you liked "White Buildings." No, I've never been  
to Africa but I don't shy away from images  
of other cultures-- twisted horizons, a carcass  
quick with flies, another man's stinking shoes.  
Poetry transports you anywhere, anywhen, anywhy.

At present, I owe my best work and my life to Sam.  
Priceless Samuel Loveman, New York bookstore owner  
who reads his wares and understands what he hawks.  
One Manhattan night like this-- good company,  
wine, music, laughter-- I suddenly deflated  
like a punctured tire, wobbled to the edge  
of the roof garden-- intending to jump.  
And there was Sam-- a fast firm grip on my arm  
from behind. Relentlessly, silently pulling me  
back. And I hated him for it. The next day  
I couldn't thank him enough for saving me.  
It was an epiphany. And my stanzas, my verses  
transcended mere rhetoric.

Oh, the reprieve won't last forever.  
And I'll never be the mythos master I want to be.  
But for now my words are alive again--  
singing, pulsating with illumination  
of all the colors in white.  
Words are all I've got-- the same weary words  
everyone has, but I strip off their linty clothes,  
pry up layers of plating, pierce the rusty armor,  
expose their nakedness shot with pumping veins  
or sometimes the multiple faces  
of flashing amethyst-- like a just-split geode  
I'm the first human to see.

You say you know what it's like to hit bottom?  
Most poets do. Seems to be part of the package.  
Don't blame your parents. Mine couldn't bear  
each other beyond eye-blink attraction  
and the first belch of fact. Caramel-coated cur are  
for a mother, hide-bound ledger book for a father.  
They can't help who they are.  
You can't help who you are, poet.