

Remember, words are your life boats,
your conveyances. Kindling words,
load-bearing words. Chameleon, ambisexual words.
Build your bridges across the voids with words.
Maintain them with words. Be ready to fight
anything coming between you
and what you're building.

Each word has a root, a stem to lift it, a calyx
of connotation holding petals posing as truth.
And some are the real thing. Words sail every sea,
stream and sewer. Words walk the city
after midnight, hustle through Harlem, swagger
or stumble or hobble down Wall Street.
I thread Brooklyn Bridge cables with them, strung
with shreds of starlight, riverlight, peoplelight.
Words merge with rain and wind
and pluck the superstructure's harp.
Words orbit earth, gather inventive cosmic dust,
settle in cellars, sift into a lost cat's fur
and wait. Words are all a poet can own, but first
they have to be rescued, warmed, persuaded
to be heard, forget the damage done to them.

Does that excite you? Good, but beware
unreined exhuberance. It teeters high
on a narrow rail above emptiness
unable to break your fall.