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Build a Bridge Out of Her¹

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In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*,
 when Sir Bedevere, suspecting a witch
 in his midst, asks, “Why do witches burn?”
 Peasant Three infers, “Because they’re made of wood?”
 “So how do you tell,” lobs Bedevere, “whether she’s made of wood?”
 Clever Peasant One conjectures,
 “Build a bridge out of her.”

Build a bridge out of her.
 As I survey the shellacked November landscape,² I say let us all
 build a bridge out of her.

What sort of bridge?

Sus
 pension?
 Suspended between war-----and the promise of peace.

A Golden Gate
 from “Mission Accomplished”³
 to the audacity of hope.⁴

Guantanamo
 remains open, but so do I.
 I Still Hope.

¹ The most updated version of this piece appears in the book *In Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism Beyond Gay and Straight* (Routledge 2015). Earlier versions of “Build a Bridge Out of Her” were presented at the 2010 National Communication Association meetings and published in *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies* (Tillmann 2011; used with permission, Sage Publications: <http://csc.sagepub.com/content/11/5/516.abstract>).

² After Republicans gained control of the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2010, President Obama referred to the election results as a “shellacking.”

³ President Bush spoke in front of an infamous banner reading “Mission Accomplished” in 2003. Though he announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq, the U.S. occupation would continue until the end of 2011.

⁴ *The Audacity of Hope* is the title of President Obama’s second book.

A Golden Gate
 suspending 83,000 tons of east coast steel.⁵
 SOLID, substantial-----yet flexible, agile,
 undulating with the wind, swaying nearly 28 feet,⁶
 before again finding
 her center.

Yes, we can.

Yes, build a bridge out of her.
 But not a Bridge to No w h e r e.
 No, not a bridge to the 50 residents of Gravina Island, Alaska
 who just want to be left the fuck alone. *That's why they live there.*
 No, not a 398-million-dollar bridge,⁷ enough to build
 26 schools, serving more than 16,000 students⁸
 each year.

Build a bridge out of her.
 Oh, but not the Minneapolis I-35.
 No, not the truss arches that
 crum
 ble
 d
 to their knees
 during rush hour,
 August the first, 2007.
 No, not the bridge that
 tum
 ble
 d
 100 vehicles
 and 18 construction workers
 toward the rushing river
 below.
 Thirteen people rushing
 with or to their families
 would rush
 no
 more.⁹

⁵ See Golden (n.d.).

⁶ See Creager (June 7, 2010).

⁷ The proposed "Bridge to Nowhere," eventually scrapped, became a symbol of wasteful spending during the George W. Bush administration; see Schlanger (August 8, 2013).

⁸ According to the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, the average construction cost in 2010 of an elementary school serving 600 students was \$14.8 million; see Data (June 5, 2014).

⁹ See Highway (n.d.).

Build a bridge out of her.
 But no, not the I-35. Not any of our country's
 150,000 structurally-deficient or functionally-obsolete bridges.¹⁰
 Our "representatives" pay for warplanes before commuter trains,
 for AIG before levees.

And so our bridges
 falling
 down,
 fall
 ing
 do
 wn,
 f
 a
 l
 l
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 o
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 n.

Build a bridge out of her.
 Maybe the Hudson River Bridge.
 She carried working men and their families through
 the Great Depression.

Seventy years later,
 on that September Tuesday, this Hudson Bridge,
 re-christened the George Washington Bridge,
 held working men and women as they wept
 for their burning city, their cremated comrades.

Yes, maybe the
 George Washington Bridge.

¹⁰ See Structurally (n.d.).

Oh, but no.
 No, not the George Washington Bridge.
 No, because on the 22nd of September, 2010,
 the bridge out of *her* would have said to Tyler Clementi,¹¹
 “No way. No way no Rutgers Scarlet Knights cheering,
 no Phi Delta Theta fraternizing, no violin impresario playing,
 no not-yet-out gay boy fretting
 leaps from MY arms!”

The bridge out of *her*
 would have said: “My sweet Tyler,
 I just kicked the ass of your dumbass roommate
 and lobbied Congress for you and your future soul mate.
 No way you leap
 from these trusses, boy.”

Build a bridge out of her.
 Oh, but not that bridge in Baghdad.
 Nearly one thousand pilgrims drowned, trampled, suffocated
 on that bridge, on that August day
 in 2005.¹²

Nearly 1000 pilgrims.
 Over 300 more than perished in the South Tower.¹³
 The same number of flag-veiled coffins arrived in Dover
 in the first *eight years* of the Afghan theater.¹⁴
 Nearly 1000 pilgrims on one bridge
 in one city
 on one August day.

Build a bridge out of her.
 Perhaps a bridge over troubled water.¹⁵
 That’s sounding right. I will lay me down.
 Yes, I will lay me down.

¹¹ Tyler Clementi’s college roommate surreptitiously took video of an intimate encounter between Tyler and another young man. After his roommate broadcast the encounter on the Internet, Tyler leapt to his death from the George Washington Bridge.

¹² See Farrell (November 11, 2008).

¹³ See Lipton (July 22, 2004).

¹⁴ See Operation (n.d.).

¹⁵ A nod, of course, to folk singers Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel.

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