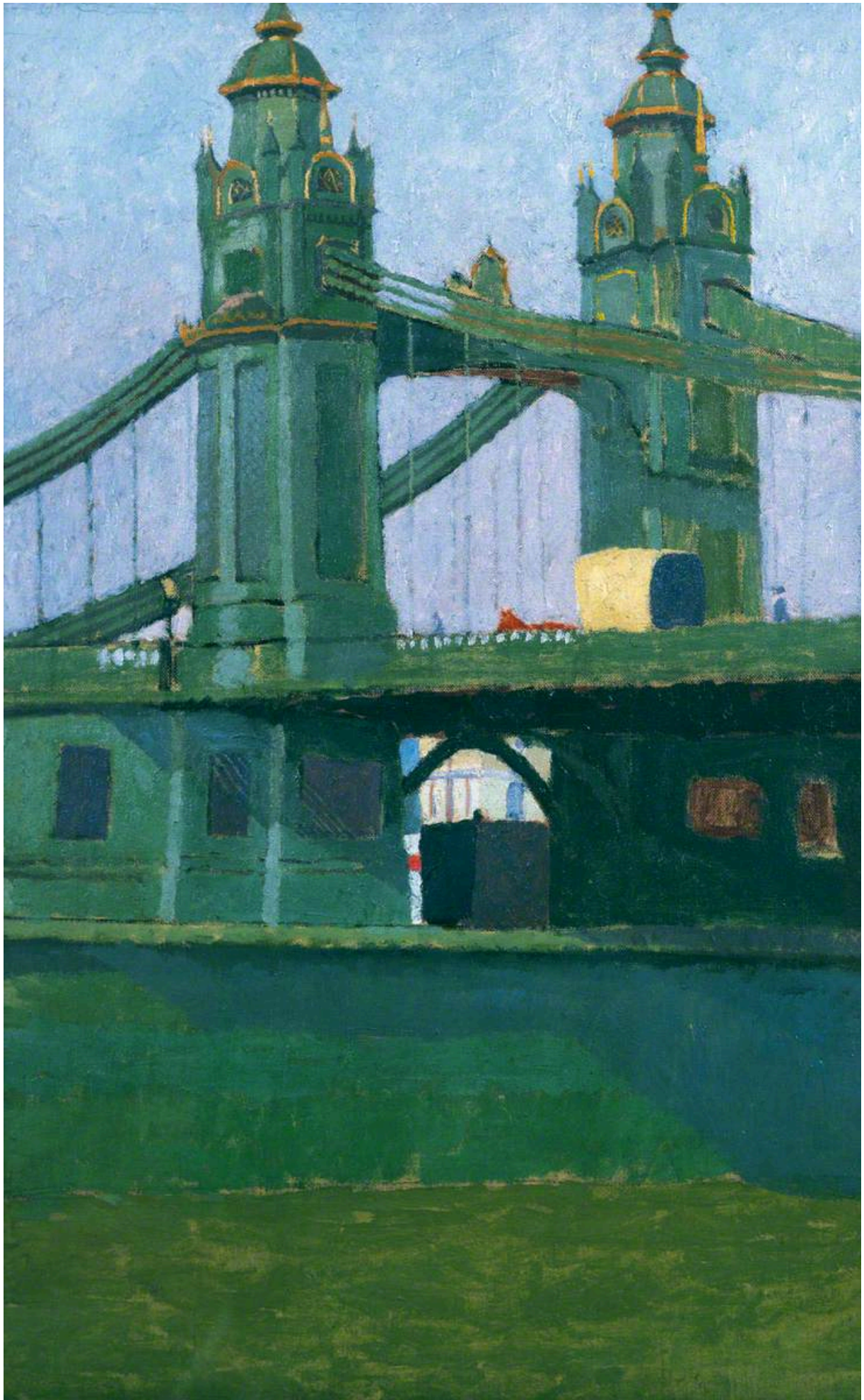


Above and Below

by [Letitia Cary](#) (October 2023)



Hammersmith Bridge, Malcolm Hammond

Above and Below (Hammersmith Bridge)

We'd just walked over Hammersmith Bridge
Arm in arm, when Jonathan saw
That a brazen half-moon was rising
Behind smoky clouds; dim and obscure.
From the suspension of Victorian steel
He watched the play of shadow above,
But beneath was a scene he failed to see:
A performance of passionate love.
A young woman with curly auburn hair
Wrapped tightly around her muse
Against a pillar exposed at low tide,
Into each other I watched them fuse.
Hiding behind some metal machine
For dredging the River Thames' spoils,
He kissed her forehead and tenderly ran
His fingers down her copper coils.
All their conductors electric-charged,
Their current surged right through
The lightbulbs spangling the bridge's cables;
Not drunken lust, but love, I knew.
"It's quite the scene," "the moon, you mean?"
He said, for he'd missed half the show.
Which brings me to his flaw, hyperopia:
He looks above, and never below.
"I didn't notice them," he confessed,
When I described just what he'd missed:
The meeting of two lovers, discrete, who
Under Bazalgette's masterpiece kissed.
He hadn't thought to look down there,
On the walk home I asked him why.

He admitted to me, quite tellingly,
That he was preoccupied with the sky.
It speaks to that disposition of his
That's ever lost in academic abstraction;
Such that he scarcely sees God's works
Down below; His providence in action.
He's focused on pure Platonic ideals,
Transcendent forms, that which is permanent;
Such that he cannot see divine sparks
Flying beneath the heavenly firmament.
That's why he never quite notices it:
The natural magic of the immanent world;
And that's why he and I don't quite fuse
Like the boy and his auburn-haired girl.
For me, that flash of galvanic love
Brought light to the murky Thames;
While in the sky he seeks immaculate stars
In the sludge I seek broken-glass gems.
And though what resides above and below
Can find themselves complementary,
He and I are just optically misaligned:
He does not see what I see.
Though celestial discs we both admire,
Beyond that focal point of our periphery—
In the rest of our vision—we so depart;
He does not see what I see.

To be Angels in East Anglia

Sometimes I feel like we can only love each other in heaven.
Heaven as in
The docklands by the River Great Ouse;
Where power stations, looking out to the Norfolk coast,
Keep themselves to themselves. And silos stand in solitude.

Where you can forgive the cold air because it's from the North
Sea;
Where we walked alone together, on that brumal Sunday morning—
At-ease, untroubled—
In the presence of no one, only seagulls.
Heaven. Its gates, the port with a faded sign that reads
"King's Lynn Shellfish;"
Its heights, that mountain-peak of metal debris.
There, in the maritime wasteland, we were at peace.

Back in this world, there's always something to confront us:
Their corrosive words and stares. The guilt.
It's if we weren't *meant* for it.
As if we were never supposed to experience something so
sublime.
Not since the Fall, or — in another myth — when the soul was
split
In two. Twenty years apart. We were not meant to meet in this
life.
But we did. And in doing so we defied every law.
So now I'm dreaming of the one place we can be free;
Where lone pylons reach for clear blue skies
And in every oil slick there is a rainbow.
Heaven, or the dregs of East Anglia.
Sometimes I feel like we can only love each other there.

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Letitia Cary is the pseudonym of a writer from Oxfordshire, England. She takes her name from the 17th century noblewoman who hosted The Great Tew Circle, a group of theologians and poets who discussed controversial ideas with her husband Lucius, the 2nd Viscount Falkland.

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