

## The Bridge on Tay

Dec 29th, 1879

a few days after the terrible Firth of Tay accident

When shall we three meet again? (Macbeth)

When shall we three meet again?  
Around the seventh hour at the bridge's dam  
At the middle pillar  
I will extinguish the flames.  
Me too.  
I come from the North.  
And I from the South.  
And I from the sea.  
Hey, it will be a dance,  
and the bridge, it must go down.  
And the train going on the bridge  
at the seventh hour?  
It will go with her.  
It must.  
Hey, it must.  
Junk, junk, is the making of man.

On the north side, the bridgekeeper's house,  
all windows look to the South,  
and the bridgekeepers without rest and peace  
look anxiously down to the South,  
stare and wait for the light  
over water saying, "I come,  
I come in spite of the stormy night,  
I, the Edinburgher train."

The bridgekeeper alerts, "I see a fading light,  
on the other side. It must be him,  
mother, please, put aside the bad dream,  
our Johnny comes and wants his tree  
and what's left of lights on the tree.  
Match the candles for the Holy Christ,  
this year he will be with us twice,  
he is to be here in eleven minutes.

Indeed it was the train. By the south tower  
it passes and steams against the storm.  
And Johnny says, "Still the bridge,  
that's nothing now, we will force over it!  
A sturdy boiler, and double steam,  
be they winners in this battle.  
How it's blowing, whistling, ghusting,  
we will manage, manage the elements."

"Our pride is our bridge!  
I laugh when I think back in times  
to all the fragile misery  
with the lousy old ferry boat.

Some a Christ's Holy Night  
did I spend in the ferry's booth.  
I saw our window lovely lit  
and could and could not be over there."

On the North side, the bridgekeeper's house,  
all windows look to the South,  
and the bridgekeepers without rest and peace  
look anxiously down to the South;  
because fiercer became the stormy play  
and now, as if fire came from heaven down,  
it glows in downracing beauty  
over the water, down there...and night fell again.

When will we three meet again?  
At midnight, on mountain peak.  
At the deep moor, at the oak trunk.  
I come.  
Me too.  
I will cite the number.  
I the names.  
And I the pain.  
Hey, like tinder broke the beams.  
Junk, junk, is the making of man.

Theodor Fontane 29 Dec 1879  
(Original in German: "Die Brücke am Tay")