

AEROELASTIC FLUTTER | *Alex Manley*

It's November 7th, 1940. A three-legged Cocker
Spaniel named Tubby is going along for a car ride.

He's in the back, being returned to his owner by
her father. They are approaching a long, narrow

bridge over a lake. By now, you might have a sense
of foreboding about the venture. All these short,

clipped sentences. There's a website for this thing,
for movies: DoesTheDogDie.com. But it would be

nice to know, for instance, does the dog die
at some point in this poem? Most of the time,

the answer would be no, but in this particular case,
the dog does die. I am sorry—I just wanted to warn

you now, near the beginning, so it wouldn't hurt as
much later. It's the shock that gets you. Speaking of

foreknowledge, they say the future unwritten, you never
know what you're gonna get, but do you ever think about how

physics never takes a day off? Water always finds its level,
objects fall the way they should, or sometimes

float, light keeps refracting at just the right
angle. Every blueprint drawn is an article of faith,

a prayer to predictability: how grass grows, how
paint dries, how bodies begin and end. Is it not

strange to find, that in a world like this, a little
two-word phrase like *aeroelastic flutter* can bring

down a concept as concrete as a bridge? They
called it *Galloping Gertie*, and I get it. Can you

imagine anything more traditionally feminine
than a bridge that bends instead of breaking?

Some days, you find yourself atop of a mountain,
musing to your new exclusive romantic partner

about the biological mechanics and nervous system
logics of a wagging tail, or looking downhill at a man

tackling a woman on the grass and saying, *Is that a—
okay, it's either a mugging or a date.* I mean,

that's the thing with heterosexuality, right.
Did you ever wiggle a pencil back and forth

as a child, to watch it become rubbery, to watch it bend
the rules of physics? Yeah, just like that. Around then,

we learn to delineate *boy* from *girl*, the way a river rushes
to delineate one bank from another, and any structure built

to connect the two is an act of playing God, a feat of preening
Icarus hubris, begging Bruegel to paint up a new natural disaster.

On YouTube, a crackling newsreel shouts:
No structure of steel and concrete can stand

*such a strain; steel girders buckle and giant
cables snap like tiny threads. There it goes!*

*Engineers are divided as to the cause of the
disaster. Some claim it was the use of solid*

*girders; others differ. But whatever the reason,
Tacoma will rebuild—this time a bridge that will*

not provide a super thrill in the news! You see a
man on a nighttime street, cornering a woman, his

hand at her throat. Her hands at his waist. Oh,
they're making out. A Tinder match-turned-friend says

now, the wreckage of the bridge serves as an artificial reef.
New culture always builds on old. Online,

another writer's accused. Some days, it gets to be so dark,
you feel like male art is just evil leaving the body.

When the bridge finally gave in to the wind's
wolf-whistling, the only car on it had a

three-legged Cocker Spaniel in the backseat.
A photojournalist was already there to capture its

oscillations. He reached into the car (the driver
had zig-zagged his way to safety) but Tubby

snapped at him, breaking skin. If you escaped
from a disaster but didn't save your daughter's

dog, would it feel better or worse than dying?
There's such a thing as survivor's guilt, I've heard,

but I don't know if it works for different species. A
few clicks later, I'm watching drone footage of

whales spinning along the central axis of the
sagittal plane, then looking up things about

bilateral symmetry, or how flippers are water
wings, or how cetaceans evolved from dog-like

things. Wondering where we would be without
evolution, or what we would see without the

mechanics and logics of the surveillance state.
I did feel weird about saying *owner* early in the

poem, as if animals can have owners—and not
simply humans they trust, and humans they don't.

Do you ever think about how we are all just a super
thrill in the news for somebody else? Or, better

yet, would you bite the hand that saves, rather
than let a strange man take you by the collar?

Look—now even this couplet is snapping in half.