

Sharon Wood Wortman

Peeing on the Morrison Bridge

One walker calls them bums. Bums, I ask,
What does that word mean? Aw, he says,
I don't mean nothing by it. I was a bum once.
I lived off sidewalks just like them.

He asks more questions than all the others.
How long does it take the deck to lift?
Do I know what important thing happened under
the St. Johns Bridge and could he hold my rivet again?

Around two o'clock he looks at me with textbook eyes.
I have to go to the bathroom, he says, I can't wait.
I point. See that tower up there? Jog on up,
the operator knows we're coming.

Her toilet is a push-pedal job like you'll find on a ship.
He notices everything, tells me he could hear
what he'd done working its way through the pipes.
Back in line, he brags to the others:

I'm the only one who peed on the Morrison Bridge.
On the bus home, everyone crowds around his stories.
He forgets, throws in Fuckin' like it's a proper noun.
The teacher corrects him, then turns to me, says
he is sixteen, learning to get his language straight.