

an excerpt from
THE BOOK OF KELL
by Amy Briant

wherein our heroes attempt to cross a bridge spanning San Francisco Bay (no, not the Golden Gate)

The first five miles or so were easy. There were places where the middle lanes had collapsed, but we could still ease our way along the side. There were a few spots where we had to jump over small gaps, the water visible below. All in all, so far, so good, although I was acutely aware that every mile we walked was a mile we'd have to walk back if we found something that blocked our progress.

As usual, I was highly alert and checking behind us, in front of us, on both sides and keeping an eye on the sky as well. But I saw nothing. Heard nothing but the wind and the waves and the birds. Big metal power towers on concrete pedestals ran parallel to the bridge, their bases white with guano. Cormorants were clustered on several of these. The birds ignored us, but they got me thinking about nests and eggs. And dinner, always one of my favorite topics.

The view was astounding. The bay was vast and we could see miles of it on either side of the bridge. A delicate mist hung over the East Bay, but in the distance, we could discern the ghostly, bombed-out skyline of Oakland. No skyline in San Francisco, of course, but the remains of the Bay Bridge could be seen to the north. From a distance, these sights were striking, beautiful even--as long as you didn't know the ugly history. I was never much for history myself. Lots of the grown-ups were stuck in the past, obsessing over things they couldn't change. I was all about the present. If we could survive that, we'd make it to the next bit of future.

But walking on the vast, deserted bridge, with the vistas of bay, sky and land to feast our eyes on, was something I knew even then that I would never forget. It was gorgeous, even on a cloudy day with intermittent sprinkles to refresh our faces. East had unearthed Mr. Giovanni's yellow slicker from her pack, but I always liked the feel of a little rain on my skin. The tantalizing eastern shore grew closer with each step. The air, so fresh and clear right off the water, was cold, yet invigorating. Like it was infused with extra oxygen or something.

Ahead was yet another tangle of abandoned vehicles, this one larger than usual. Looked like some big trucks, including an eighteen-wheeler, were at the center of the wreckage. Eight, maybe ten rusted-out vehicles were scattered across the bridge, forming a wall of metal that would have blocked anything substantial from getting through.

But we were small. We approached the line of cars with caution, but they were empty hulks. We threaded our way through, then found out why everybody had slammed on the brakes and crashed together in a pile.

The bridge ended. A fifty-foot section was simply gone, no doubt at the bottom of the bay, covered with barnacles. And/or minivans. Fifty feet of no bridge, then the structure picked up again, looking robust and saucy on the other side. So near and yet so far. The water surged underneath us, mere feet below. I'd seen pictures in books where the water was considerably lower beneath the bridges, but global warming had melted a lot of ice over the years. San Francisco Bay, along with the world's oceans, had noticeably risen as a result.

Fifty feet of air to the other side...