

2003

The Bridge at Arta

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Recommended Citation

Starbuck, Kathryn. "The Bridge at Arta." *The Iowa Review* 33.1 (2003): 28-28. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5683>

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KATHRYN STARBUCK

The Bridge at Arta

Its arch at my back, the heat
and dust wrapped 'round my arms, my
neck strained. Why do I remember
all this? At the shrine of the gentle
Thessalian, a river of light once
allowed me to cross under
the bridge in Arta, to dip my hair into
the water, to walk on with him, my
own small miracle.

I was 26 years old and not yet
a pilgrim though I already had
a full quiver. It was a safe journey.
Tree-lined pathways, the occasional
pause to view a martyr's cave,
the last long lap of smooth stones,
then, weary and moist, one more mile
and the castle on that hill was real.
The gates stood open.

The visiting children of Arcadia danced
in silhouette against the whitewash, their
blood-red aprons glistened in afternoon
light. The bagpipe and the clarinet
could not hear each other. They
howled out-of-sync. Ah, was this not a life
to be missed? Hisses, booms and sparkles.
Farewell kisses. Birds in cages
for sale. Fifty cents a pair.