

**TO THE WOMAN, NOT TRYING TO FLY, WHO FELL WITH HER
LEGS CLOSED, ARMS PRESSED AGAINST THE FRONT OF HER
BODY, WHILE PRIMLY CLUTCHING HER PURSE**

September 11, 2001

I.

You didn't topple, cartwheel or plummet. You believed
that your descent, while swift, would end tenderly,
and that there would then be things to attend to.
While others fell past you, screeching for mercy
and splayed like stars, you aimed your pinpoint of body
towards a future that included checkbooks,
snapshots of squirming children,
a scarlet stump of lipstick.
There would be need for these things again.
Your keenly ordered mind couldn't help but see the vertical
drop as mere inconvenience. You didn't hurtle, flail or pinwheel.
Your eyes straight ahead, your sweet drumming heart
struggling toward a fuss, you were most concerned with decorum,
the proper way for a lady to manage adversity. I watch your fall
and ready myself, for I have been called a lady too.
I will be here to help you to your feet,
to brush strands of the sky from your eyes.

II.

For poets, these are difficult days.
We have at our disposal every letter of every syllable
of every word ever written or spoken in any language,
but when I attempt to bellow the word *fly*, I discover
that it can no longer conjure sound.
There's the man with his skin fused to his shirt.
Perhaps he can tell us why.
There are hands, shoes, cell phones, sudden gifts
in the grit and rubble. Maybe they hold a clue.
There is that blue Toyota Camry sitting for nine days
in the train station lot in Tarrytown, there is *have you
seen him her them he was she is brown eyes limp tattoo*,
there are those thousands of mothers suddenly convinced
that their children had learned to (*fly*),
and chose that one fierce moment
to do so

III.

My granddaughter is obsessed with the drawing of stars.
Each point must be perfect, meticulously measured,
twinkling beyond all reason. We have experimented
with the most efficient ways to manufacture whole
crayoned parades of starlight. We fill entire pages
with nighttime skies where no fiery wink is allowed to flaw.
"Why are you so worried about how the stars look?" I ask.
Grandmaaaa, she says, in that slow exasperated whine
that makes me feel feeble and clueless and utterly loved,
*A star has got to be perfect
before God lets it fall.*