

FALLER

Sabne Raznik

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These poems are fictional.

Forward

Trigger Warning

This will not be an easy book for anyone to read. It was not an easy book to write.

It has been over 20 years since the awful events of 9/11/2001. There are now people alive who were not born yet or can't remember that day. History is beginning to have its way with that day. Consequently, some facts are now disputed. Among these is whether the 9/11 Jumpers were real or myth. This, despite the famous "Falling Man" photo, which is considered the best photo by a journalist in the 21st century thus far. I read an article online that suggested even the surviving family members of these jumpers sometimes deny their existence because of the stigma surrounding suicide.

In those circumstances, I would hesitate to call a deliberate choice to jump "suicide". There was no other exit, and, for many, death was certain regardless. It was a matter of choosing how to die. And that is why there is controversy around using the word "Jumper" to describe these people. Honestly, everything surrounding these people and their stories are controversial. Which is why I held on to these poems for a long time and thought I would never publish them at all. But having decided to do so, I was faced with the dilemma of what to call them. I wanted to avoid the negative connotations inherent in the word "Jumper" as first responders use it. Also, "Jumper" is not inclusive. It fails to consider that some that day were blown out of the buildings or did

simply fall. Not all of them made that deliberate conscious choice, though it is believed that most of them did. In the end, I borrowed a word from the sport of steeplechasing, one that I feel is more accurate, fully inclusive, and carries no stigma: Fallers.

It was difficult to recover remains and identify the victims of 9/11. That was especially true of the Fallers, because their bodies were buried by debris when the buildings collapsed. Sometimes, there was nothing left to find but dust. Conservative estimates are that there were 100 of them. Others say the number is more than 200.

I am, in some ways, still processing my personal traumas associated with that day. And that's what this is. It's not in any way a political statement. And I hope I made that clear when I made one of my fictional fallers say: "It doesn't matter whose fault it is." Nor is it meant to cause pain to anyone who lost loved ones that day. Nor is it meant to trigger anyone who battles depression and suicidal ideation. If that is true of you, I strongly suggest you put this book down now and read no more of it.

I suppose I became especially interested in the fallers because I have cerebral palsy and therefore have spent my entire life falling. I am very familiar with the physics and experience of falling, even from some dangerous heights. Naturally, I am absolutely phobic of heights. But I am also keenly aware of the sometimes ridiculous and irrelevant thoughts one can have when one believes one is falling to one's death. It makes for a pitch-black sense of humour, in the best of cases. I tried not to be funny here, out of respect. But my experience does colour these poems.

I did a lot of research into cases of known documented fallers and their stories. I did not include any of that material. Mostly, my goal was to give these people voices. Each poem represents a different individual

already in the act of falling. After a certain point, the project became too intense, and the language too abrupt, to continue. I guess I got too much in character, as happens to some method actors sometimes, and I had to stop.

Basically, this book is a personal psychological purging. Read at your own risk.

They'll call it suicide, maybe.
But if they do, it's because
They don't know
What I do now.

I hope they never know
What I know now.

I remember reading in school about
The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire,
How some jumped to their death
Rather than burn since there was
No way out.
At the time, I could not imagine
Making that decision.
I don't imagine now.
The world is beautiful
At velocity. Just colour.
Like an abstract painting.

The coworker who always complains
About the copier was standing on her desk
Because the floor burned through her shoes

I was seeking an exit: a way down,
Out of the heat, out of the smoke

I didn't see
The jagged edge of the sheered building

Walked right off

Get a job in the city, they said,
A posh job with some financial institution
In Manhattan. That's where the money is.
That's the life.

What's that to me now?

My skirt –
I need to hold my skirt.

Oh I forgot to put that signed paper
For the teacher in Sally's backpack
This morning.

Sally....

Thirty-two feet per second.
I have almost ten seconds if I don't
Fight it and if the force doesn't rip
The air from my lungs and rupture my heart.
When I land, they'll be precious little left
More than an imprint in the sidewalk.
Hope I don't hit anyone below...

I left a heap of dirty laundry
Next to the bed.
I was late.
Now, that's what they'll find
When they arrive to
Go through my things.
What silly things we think about
When the time for thinking
Is past.

I was afraid to jump alone.

The jacket of my waiter's uniform felt
Claustrophobic
So I threw it out first.

Then a woman from Table 3
Took my hand and we jumped together

Wordlessly.

I left my glasses
Next to the printout the boss wanted
In an hour and my untouched coffee.

Why do I want my glasses?

Why do men never say “I love you”?

The fire department will have tarps. You may not be able to see them up here, but they'll be there. That's what they said during drills. If there is no way down, you just have to trust. Well, I did. I do. I have to. But that's too much trust to give any human. Basic physics: tarps would be useless from this height. Wouldn't they? Too late now. God-sized trust: that's what this was. Craziest thing I've ever done. Leap of faith, they call it. God, do you have a name? Everybody does. Even the fish in the office aquarium have names. The janitor talks to them sometimes. Wish I knew your name. Why did no one tell me your name? Why did I never ask? It'd be so nice to talk to you right now. Like really talk. You can't really talk to somebody if you don't know their name. Can you? I don't care about the big existential questions now. I don't want to know why anymore. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whose fault it is. Anger, punishment, blame: they mean nothing to me. All that matters is a tarp. God, whatever your name is, do one last thing for me, please. One final thing. Please? Promise me it won't hurt.

I quit yesterday.
I'm just here to get my things.
Oh god.
Why would anyone build
Anything this tall
Knowing that when fire
Happens there's no way out?
Today, I became a bird.
Death take me before the concrete
Stop.

I haven't seen you since you were 5.
You probably don't know me now.
I'm sorry, baby girl, that I didn't stop
Everything for you.
There seems no end to time now.
I see a fireman below, someone with a camera.
Do they know what happened here? I don't.
Just a shaking, then a kind of calm confusion,
Then too hot to breathe,
Like we were standing inside the sun.
So much paper around me, like snow.
I am snow now.
I will blanket you every year, baby girl.
That's a nice, cooling thought. Glad I had time for that.
I always loved you.

I'm not screaming.
You're supposed to scream, aren't you?
Should I?
Why? What difference would it make?

I was trying to climb to another level.
Every other way was blocked.
If I could have just made it to the next window down –
But the metal was too hot to cling to.
My hands let go in spite of me.

Do you remember, little brother, how we use to
Drop water balloons off the fire escape?
Count how long they took to fall?
How we tried to film impact and slow down the tape?
Our science projects?
It's like that.
It's okay.
There will no time on impact for the brain to register pain
Or any sensation at all.
Tell mom that.
That there is no pain.
I've never been so sure, so calm
In my life.



Sabne Raznik is an internationally published poet, a former community theatre actress, and an award-winning artist with three full-length poetry collections - *Following Hope*, *Linger to Look*, and *Rabbit Hole*. Smaller books of poems include *Marrow* and *Dreaming of Bono*. She also released a collection of artworks titled *Renaissance: Visual Art 2005 - 2019*. She founded and co-edits *AvantAppal(achia)* ezine. Raznik believes herself to be a supranational poet, in that she feels the arts transcend manmade boundaries. In view of that, her effort as part of the Appalachian Renaissance is to break stereotypes and showcase Appalachian poetry as a living part of the world-wide literary scene, as well as to encourage the underrepresented but thriving Appalachian avant-garde in the global context. <https://www.sabneraznik.com/>