Poets usually write elegies — that is lamentations for the dead — for people they know. But in this elegy, Annie Farnsworth of Arundel addresses a person she has never met except in a newsreel. Perhaps you saw him, too, on a grim day of September in 2001.

For the Falling Man

By Annie Farnsworth

I see you again and again tumbling out of the sky, in your slate-grey suit and pressed white shirt. At first I thought you were debris from the explosion, maybe gray plaster wall or fuselage but then I realized that people were leaping. I know who you are, I know there’s more to you than just this image on the news, this ragdoll plummeting— I know you were someone’s lover, husband, daddy. Last night you read stories to your children, tucked them in, then curled into sleep next to your wife. Perhaps there was small sleepy talk of the future. Then, before your morning coffee had cooled you’d come to this; a choice between fire or falling.

How feeble these words, billowing in this aftermath, how ineffectual this utterance of sorrow. We can see plainly it’s hopeless, even as the words trail from our mouths — but we can’t help ourselves — how I wish we could trade them for something that could really have caught you.