Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize 2011 winner

Several Ways to Fall Out of the Sky

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Forget to take your wings from where they hang in the hall, the brass hook

silent as a question mark beneath silver feathers.

Remember to collect your wings, having noticed the post-it note on the bench

that says 'wings'. But, in your haste to take flight, forget to fasten their buckles.

Become mesmerised by the sun, bigger now than the world below.

Forget to flap.

Ignore any doubts about low-flying above a somnolent bay where a ploughman

works doggedly on in furrows of soil, and Daedalus calls out your name.

Lose faith in the universe, the laws of physics, the invention of flight.

Forget to breathe.

Consider the way gravity swings the planets round, pulls tides up shores,

draws blood from women.

Discover profiles of loved ones in the clouds - your mother with her back

half-turned, your daughter dissolving as you wing towards her.

Remember unwashed clothes, wisdom not yet taught to kids, pets gone

hungry, the goldfish, the goldfish…

Be totally unable to remember the author of The Grapes of Wrath; only that

the Japanese translation was The Angry Raisins.

Find remorse weighing heavier on your shoulders than wings.

Fly into the flight path of pelicans that peck at your hair for their nests –

which throws you right out.

Crash into Mt Sugarloaf, graceless as a kettle crash-landing the moon.

Seek out the floor of heaven, the face of God.

Soar too high in winter. Feel ice freeze your wings over, as it does to all other

high-fliers: winged horses, ghost ships, over-ambitious angels.

Fall asleep in the air. Remember this: no one knows who you are.