

ROBERT DOW

## My Manhattan

When you think twin towers do you think stories?  
One story stacked on top of another, each story a floor,  
each floor a field, each field an acre of people, each tower  
a hundred sown fields, each one a stack of golden wheat,  
each one a silo, each one a stack anchored in bedrock,  
and each one a shadow cutting across the world like a scythe.  
Think of each as a human being. Each one a sun.  
Think of one as light and one as shadow.

I am exhausted. And so not towering.

I want to shut up and drink a Manhattan.  
Straight. And icy cold. With a twist. No cherry.  
Here is a twist.  
When you think of the towers do you think of them twisting on themselves?  
Each one, in its time, twisting inwardly, collapsing.  
Do you think of them as giving? They gave.  
Ruth said her tower had give, sway. Withstood forces.  
Had its own weather.  
Do you think of each as a torch?  
Did you see each one struck and each burning?  
Do you still see them falling.  
Do you still hear them falling.  
I want to be cut free from them and I want to be cutting, stinging sharp.  
Quick as a man with a greased, glinting scythe standing tall  
in a field of wheat cutting through the world.  
I am turning from the towers. My heart has turns.  
Does your heart turn?  
Do your eyes turn from the vision?  
I want to cut away from the towers. Cut to them as a pair  
of stacked ships sinking. Cut to the story of a blue box.  
The small blue box on a shelf. In the blue box, a velvet sack  
containing an urn that might contain Ruth.  
I am sometimes in the sun and too much in the dark.

We lived on York.

444 York Ave, New York, New York. The dark is a kingdom.

An ark of a kind, the dark is not unlike being inside a velvet sack.

When I finish my Manhattan I will be in a sack of a kind.

I am raising my Manhattan. Lifting it high, its lemon twist on the bottom.

# When I Got Down to the Burning

When I got down to the burning  
tip of Manhattan I did not know  
what to do, so I sat on my bicycle and stared  
into the dust, the ash. Envelopes, spools of receipts,  
crumpled tickets, contracts, wills were falling  
on no one in a parade. The paper sounded like paper falling.  
There was no sky, no clouds. The ash fell out of nowhere.  
I breathed through a mask.  
I was there looking for her. To look for myself.  
I saw the ash falling. The ash covered the street  
until there was no street. I was awash in ash.  
No one was there that I could see.  
The towers were not there. The ash was warm.  
The air hot. A fire hydrant, a phone booth, cars were ashed.  
Imagine that what was falling was not ash but pollen.  
Make it so. Wish it. Close your eyes. Make it pollen.  
Pollen of thousands of flowers.  
Make it the pumice of that pummeled world.  
I imagine Pompeii. Dresden. Hiroshima. I imagine bowls.  
And cups, a body, a hand reaching out of the ash.  
The bicycle tire tracks filled with ash. My arms and hands,  
the face of my wristwatch in ash. I was ashen.  
I imagined I looked ancient.

There were jets of flame in a city block of windows.  
The jets burned beyond control.  
Out of the falling ash walked a large fat man wearing a flag  
like a cape. When he reached me I looked into his eyes  
and asked, How do we get out?  
He did not answer. He did not seem to have eyes.  
He walked on in his flag. When he was out of sight  
I could not be sure I'd seen him. My eyes burned.  
I did not want to imagine what the ash might be.

I imagined it was Ruth.

A green neon sign burned in a window. *World of Golf*.

Everything, I knew, would crash and harden into something new.

I pedaled the bicycle through the thick ash.

I pedaled out that bloodless, enshrouding place and found myself  
in the clear. Blue, cloudless sky. Chinatown. Canal Street.

There were dragons. Ducks and pigs and chickens hung in windows.

There were stalls with tables packed with fish packed in shaved ice.

Water bubbled from a black hose. I washed my hands.

Ash ran from my fingers and flowed into the gutter.

Fish by the hundreds, by the thousands were laid-out in ice  
tail to jaw, body to body, fin to fin to the infinite.

I picked one up and held it in both hands.

The fish, a bluefish, felt firm, still alive.

# You with Me inside You

You with me inside you and your mouth open and you screaming and your breasts shaking and your body heaving and your mouth wide open and you not leaving the fucking tower and you staying and not leaving and you alive inside the tower. You leaving with the tower.

Dying in the thing. And I'm here in this collapsing with you inside me and you not here in any form but this form.

And I want to end it. I want to put an end to you. Go.

Please do go. Kiss off. Go away. Do not stay. Do not linger.

I told you, leave. I did. I said, leave that tower. Why you did not listen I will never know. You had your own will. And stayed.

Did you scream?

I think I heard you.

I was dreaming.

You left nothing behind. Which is what you are now.

Is this distasteful? I have no taste for this. This is far too serious, I know. I was left with bags of your stuff.

Bags and bags. Piles of bags. I might have screamed.

Lift. I want to use the word. Lift, as in rise, to transport by air. Soar.

And still you're here, and so far, far from fading.

I am inside you and I am speaking. Are these words yours?

I have so few answers.

Is this me carrying you, elevating you?

I am looking for a way out.

Is this the way?