

The Rain

By Manouchehr Rimer

For the past two weeks in Edinburgh, it's been raining old people, and now, for the first time since he's been there, the young man has seen it happen right in front of his eyes.

About twenty paces before him, splattered on the bloodstained cobblestone path beside the black church, lies the dying body of an 80-or-so-year-old man which just fell out of the sky. The young man's nerves jerk a little when he perceives that the wrinkly man is still writhing and wriggling like a capsized cockroach on the ground. The fleshy sack lies flat on his stomach. His loose bare skin, bruised in some parts, punctured in others, molds itself to the grooves of the cobblestone. His hoarse hurling cries echo down the street while he gargles on his own blood. His right arm protrudes forward like a dying insect's antenna revealing a sharp white bone sticking out. Controlling his nerves, the young man brings his camera to his eye, but the lens's focus is not optimal at such a distance.

The young man looks at the black church roof, the cracked tiles still wet and red from where the old man's fall was broken. He missed the nets by nothing. His legs shaking ever so slightly, his heart pounding, he takes a light-headed step towards the splattered cadaver, clutching his nice camera firmly in his sweaty hands. He notices, or thinks he notices, the gray haired man painstakingly looking up at him as if the sound of his echoing footsteps against the cobblestone floor could allow the dying corpse to focus on something other than his pain. His milky eyes meet the young man's gaze. The latter looks to see if there is anyone else around, but besides the convulsing, contorting carcass wailing in pain and himself, the early morning street is empty. It's not like he could call an ambulance anyways; he knows that the ambulances in Edinburgh no longer respond to calls regarding old people who fell from the sky.

The young man squats next to the old man. Between the screams, he can hear the wheezing sound of his punctured, collapsing lungs. He puts the camera to his eye again and begins focusing on different parts of the old man's body. First his feet, curled in tightly; the left one has resisted the impact of the fall far better than the right one which has a deep red gash about halfway through. He points the camera to the legs, and for a moment, thinks the old man had one knee shorter than the other, before realizing that the bone in the left leg has been snapped to a forty-five degree angle. A deep blue bruise paints the right hip, and a blacker, yet smaller one stains the left side of his lower back, he catalogues. Part of him wants to see how this aged body reacts differently if he prods one as opposed to the other. He counts under his breath the number of spinal vertebrae he can see sticking out from beneath the loose fitting skin – there are four. The left shoulder is clearly dislocated. It squirms a little each time it is moved by the old man's panting breaths. The back of his head seems surprisingly intact. Crouched like this, above the old man curled up on his stomach, it almost looks as if he is kissing his feet.

"Let's flip you over," the young man says as he firmly grips the non-dislocated shoulder in minor consideration for the old man. The old cadaver is surprisingly light, and flips over relatively painlessly (for the young man, that is). Crouched now, by the old man's side, he declares: "Better to die looking up at the sky." He puts the camera back up to his eye now examining the front of the naked man's body. Similarly to the back, there are all sorts of interesting bruises, marks, and gashes. However, what catches the young man's attention is a tattoo. A serpent, or perhaps a dragon, wrinkly and black laying atop the folded skin of his droopy chest. Of all the old people who fell out of the sky, or at least the descriptions of them broadcast on the news down in London, he's never heard of one with a tattoo. He focuses the camera

on the ink, half covered by a gulp of blood the old man has just coughed out. He tries to snap a picture, but the button feels too heavy to press. He looks at the serpent for a moment, and the camera becomes too heavy to hold. It drops to the ground.

He looks at the old man now with his naked eyes. He looks at him squirming on his back. He looks at his eyes darting across the sky in fear and shock. He notices the pulverised purpled fingers curling around the bloody wet cobblestone. He looks at the pool of blood forming between the old man's crusted lips. He hears the gurgles of him drowning in his own blood. He notices the corpse has deep tan lines, red sunburns, on his neck and shoulders, from years of exposure to the sun. He looks at the corpse and though he knows that it's destined for a mass grave, or a communal cremation, he asks him a question: "What is your name?"

Though the old man has not stopped wailing this entire time, the young man is convinced that the cries are now an attempt to answer his question, though he is also convinced he will never understand them. These Octogenarians are studied, when, sometimes, they're caught by the nets. They panic, in a state of everlasting panicked, terrified psychosis. They can't talk, they only babble in tongues incomprehensible to even the most gifted linguists. They can't even sit still. No one knows where they come from, or where they will go. Some are sent to psych wards, sedated with medication, some are released into the wild, and others put out of their misery, put to death. He looks up to the waning dark cloud above him which seems empty and reassures himself that there aren't any more coming down right now. He knows that this is not always the case. There have been instances of geriatric rain (as the news outlets have coined the phenomenon), of up to fifty bodies at once. A carnal deluge of bristle bone, of tenderized muscle, graying hair, and wrinkled flesh.

A tear, singular, streams down the young man's cheek as the whincing old corpse reaches out to him, bone sticking out of his arm, fingers falling off. He continues to babble in his foreign language through his blood filled mouth. "What's your name, old man? What's your name?" The tear rolls off his cheek. Rains down and splats onto his right shoe. His nice new white shoe now stained with a tear, and the streaks of blood streaming from the old man's arms. He takes the red, wet, outstretched hand and feels the rugged, warm, worn skin against his own cold palms. For an instant, a micro instant, a fraction of an instant, he could have sworn that the old man's cries had been slightly, ever so slightly assuaged. Though not enough to hide the sound of a parking truck, or the sound of the echoing footsteps from the trash collector coming to collect his bounty. He only notices when, with a sudden, violent stomp to the head, the trash collector puts the convulsing old body out of its misery. The wailing fades. The old man stops jerking, stops whimpering. Not even the sound of his weak, drowning lungs can be heard. The clouds begin to part as the city begins to wake up. The old hand lets go and falls to the ground. The young man looks up. "You can't catch them all," the collector says behind his Edinburgh accent with pressed lips and a shrugging half smile.

He lugs the corpse off of the blood seeped cobblestone and onto his shoulder. He begins to walk back towards his truck with heavy steps. The old man's torso lies sprawled across the collector's back. Blood drips out of his mutilated head and patters onto the ground, leaving a bright red trail. His arms, detaching, pulverized by the fall, swing lamely from side to side. One must imagine that they enjoy the fall. It is the natural order of things, seemingly, for these old people to fall from the sky. Like a hawk enjoys the flight, like a wolf enjoys the hunt, and like a ram enjoys the fight. If these old people weren't falling from the sky, they probably wouldn't even exist, and the old man and the young man wouldn't have met. As a matter of fact, it must be beautiful, he allows himself to think for an instant, to fall above Edinburgh on a quiet morning like this. To see the city from up there, in its full beauty, face to face from

above. He'd seen it from above too, it's true, but his view had been impaired by the glare of his neighbour's reading light against the thick window of the plane. He wonders how differently the imposing gothic structures might allow themselves to be seen, small and vulnerable, from atop? He wonders about the nakedness of the winding streets, of this intimate secret view of the city reserved only for the seagulls and the raining old. One might imagine after all that they do enjoy the fall

He picks up his camera, lens cracked from having been dropped, but still functional and takes a picture of the old man on the trash collector's shoulder.

For the past two weeks in Edinburgh, it's been raining old people, and now, the young man can say he's seen it with his own eyes. He had a snake tattoo and tan lines.