

On Falling

In 2006, the year you turned thirty-two, you took a trip to Athens for the first time. On the third day of your holiday the friend you were staying with, who you didn't know particularly well but well enough to stay with invited you to a party to celebrate the opening of a new exhibition where she was showing a film. At the party, you got slightly drunk, not very drunk, just a little tipsy, but enough not to notice the details. In an effort to entertain your new Greek friends, you climbed onto a stool to make a speech, it was very entertaining, very witty until the stool skidded (you did not realize it was standing in water) and broke. You fell not very far, but with all your weight, onto your left knee, on a concrete balcony. Everyone rushed to see if you were all right, you were so embarrassed that you said you were fine, although you were not fine. You saw the fear in your friend's eyes and you heard urgent voices in Greek and somebody helped you into a chair, despite your protests because it was clear that you couldn't stand and after sitting in the chair for a while the host helped you into his bed. You lay there. Your friend came and lay next you. You both started laughing and couldn't stop. You felt an enormous pain. Many hours later, after more hushed conversations in Greek, the host called an ambulance and you were carried out of the party on a stretcher, to a hospital. The doctors only spoke Greek and much was lost in translation, and without quite knowing how it happened, you found yourself lying in a hospital with your entire leg swallowed up in plaster, thigh to foot, bound for nowhere and completely reliant on the kindness of strangers.

Billy, your friend's boyfriend, came at 3am to pick both of you up from the hospital. In the car, on the way home, your friend and Billy had a fight. You wondered if it was because of you. Later, your friend said it had nothing to do with you; he was drinking again. The next day, you were lying on the sofa when Billy's mother popped her head through the window of the living room, making you jump. Your friend didn't seem so happy to see the smiling face of her potential 'mother-in-law'. Apparently she always called unannounced, probably because the house belonged to her. Billy's mother didn't live in the house. It was her old studio where she held art classes for children for many years. She smiled when she saw you drawing butterflies with her old crayons on your cast. You hoped that you reminded her of Frida Khalo. She seemed genuinely concerned about you. She took it upon herself to give the

injections that you needed everyday into your bum. You shared this intimacy without being able to speak one word of each other's language. You were very grateful to her. You were glad that a mother was doing this. It felt safe to be in a mother's hands. Every afternoon, after the injections, your friend would give you a sponge bath and tell you about the affair she was having.

On the night of the party you had met a friend from London at art exhibition opening. A few days later the London friend having heard the news, visited you with flowers and the suggestion of an outing to the beach. You were so tired of lying about the house that you instantly agreed, despite your friend's concern. Your London friend carried you to the car and from the car he carried you to the rocks where you sat and looked at the glittering sea. It was so beautiful it was exhausting and you were relieved to be back in the dimmer light of the art studio. But immediately after you'd arrived your friend told you that she was leaving Billy. Now! And that you had to come too, of course, in fact you both had to be gone, before Billy returned from his mother's place, who would no longer be giving you injections. You packed all your things, and your friend packed some of her things, and her brother arrived, to drive you to her mother's place, a much smaller apartment, with not enough room for three. Her mother gave you her own bedroom and your friend and her mother slept in the living room. You wondered if you had anything to do with any of this. The next day, your friend told you that your fall had everything to do with everything. Taking care of you, had given her the strength to leave a ten year relationship she'd been unhappy in for a long time. Taking care of you made her realize that she could take care of herself, no matter what. She thanked you for falling. You didn't have any travel insurance, because you didn't believe in it so you spent €400 on an MRI, and was told that you didn't need an operation, that you'd only fractured your patella, not broken it, which was good news and worth the investment. You really appreciated the home cooked food and the Greek hospitality but your friend was distracted by the separation and the affair and didn't suggest that you stay longer. A week later, you returned London on crutches, minus the cast, with 4 X Rays, MRI results and a specialist's note advising 6 weeks off work, in Greek.

By Amaara Raheem, Dec 2013.