



Source: AFP, 'US uranium deadline for Iran', *The Australian online*, 05/10/06.

Tags: [discomfort](#), [plants](#), [seasons](#)

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The first flake fell on Kara's navy windbreaker. She pushed Julian's stroller past the Bare Lot and paused only a moment to brush the flake from her shoulder.

The Bare Lot lay between a bank and a jeweler's. It was still referred to as bare, though a cedar elm had grown in its center before anyone living had been thought of. Surrounded on three sides by red brick, it was visible only from Main Street, divided from it by a low iron fence. The lot got most of its attention from the Mediterranean restaurant across the road, for passersby were more likely to check the temperature on the bank's digital clock than to take in the elm. Even on a warm day.

After the first flake fell, it was days before the second followed. Ron saw it at eye level as he and Allison passed the Bare Lot, and he looked inquisitively to the sky. In the next few days, more flakes fell, unnoticed in the air but glinting on the sidewalk, catching pedestrians' eyes. In the coming weeks, the flakes fell more frequently, and now, the passersby weren't passing. They were stopping. Rory, Augusta, Alex, Astride, Allen, Angelina, all, everyone, stopped.

'What is it?'

'Is it coming from the tree?'

'Is it paint? Is the paint peeling?'

'No, it's from the exhaust fan.'

'No, no, it must be the chimney.'

'No, it's an experiment.'

'It's art.'

More weeks, more flakes falling, more people stopping, mired, slushing through the piles collecting on the ground in front of the Bare Lot.

'Is it silver?'

'It can't be silver. It must be lead.'

'Is it coming from the tree? Is it calcium?'

'Magnesium. It's a—'

'No, it's silver. It's raining silver.'

More weeks, more months, many moons. The flakes of rain fell at a constant pace, the piles grew. Children, having no leaf piles at their disposal, would have jumped willingly into the silver tufts, but parents detoured hurriedly to the other side of the road. The silver flakes took over cars parked in front of the Bare Lot. Parked cars were removed.

The Bare Lot filled. The wind carried the raining silver south, to the post office, north, to the pharmacy. A year after the first flake defiled Kara's shoulder, the pedestrians walked down Main Street with silver flakes in their hair, in their eyes. The flakes got into their shoes and were tracked into apartments. One night, Challie pulled a flake out of her soup bowl. The next night brought the first meeting.

First, they took measurements. Then, measures were taken. Orders were given. Orders were taken. Orders were followed. Still, the flakes fell.

More years. The streets now were tinted, obscured by them, and tires rolled like perpetual stamp pads, leaving silver tread marks miles beyond Main Street. Building faces were speckled, graffiti sparkled, windows were clouded.

Kjerstin took a handful in her pocket and brought it into the bank. The bank refused to take it.

'It's silver. It's a—'

'No, mam, it can't be. We can't take it.'

Frazer inhaled a few when laughing at a joke, and was taken to the hospital. Sam, visiting her sister, broke out in a rash after drunkenly rolling in the flakes on the ground. Scout suggested that she and Kjerstin take handfuls into cafes and shops and the library and leave them on the seats of benches and chairs. Then, the second meeting.

They threw ideas onto the table. Fists weren't thrown, but blame was. Sighs were heaved. Buttons pushed. Legislation pushed. Still, the flakes fell.

Kara, and her shoulder, had moved away. More years, and Kjerstin and Scout were gone. PJ circulated fliers, citing references in literature and ancient texts to questionable substances falling from trees and/or the sky, heralding the Coming. Ambreen stood in the Bare Lot amid the silver flakes, inviting others to join her. They stared at PJ, and across the street, PJ stared at them.

'Is it coming from the tree? Is it really coming from the tree?'

'Yes, it's coming from the tree.'

'No, it's a message. Messages don't come from trees. It's a—'

'No, there's no message. It's a tree, and it's raining silver.'

Before, even, the third meeting, allegiances were taken, lines were drawn, plans were drawn, plans weren't followed, plans fell, like the flakes, and the passing years. Then, the third meeting.

Silence was asked. Names were asked. Names were given. Orders were given. Time was allotted. Time passed.

Still, the flakes fell.

The flakes fell on the streets until the streets were streets no more. The children who had longed to plunge into manageable piles now, as adults, avoided that part of town on their way to work. The children grew, the children left, and still, the flakes fell.

The flakes fell into heaps, the wind blew the heaps, the flakes were a layer of ambiguous substance crusting the earth, flattened by time, as even as a still pool. Still, they fell.

Then, the fourth meeting.

One statement was made. One order was given. This order was taken, followed.

On the day that followed, nothing happened.

The following day, the flakes still fell.

The morning that followed marked the day that the first flake had fallen on Kara's shoulder, so many years ago. So many years, before anyone living had been thought of.

Two buildings, which used to house a bank, and a jeweler's, were razed. Piles were pushed from the Bare Lot. Still, the flakes fell.

The elm was cut.

The rain ceased.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ella Longpre.*