

Then she touched his cheek and said, "All the years that I've been praying for another child, and all the years that the Lord has told us no, maybe it was all leading to this night. So that our lives would have room for what we've promised."

"Maybe," said Helaman. He watched as she closed her eyes and fell asleep almost at once. And in the few minutes before he, too, slept, he thought of that Colombian family he had imagined earlier. He pictured them standing at his door, all their possessions in a bag slung over the father's shoulder, the children clinging to their mother's skirts, the youngest sleepy and fussing in her arms. And he imagined himself holding the door wide open and saying, "Come in, come in, the table's set and we've been waiting for you." And Helaman saw his wife and children gather at the table with their visitors, and there was food enough for all, and all were satisfied.

## THE WEATHER HERE

*Stephen Tuttle*

1

WHEN MANDELBAUM DOESN'T COME back for what must be days, we assume the worst for him; and although we haven't come to any consensus on what the worst might be, we are collectively relieved that for the first time in recent memory no one is saying anything about the Doppler radar. It was Mandelbaum who was most likely to disagree on any given subject, and so his absence gives us some relief. We have considered that he may have left by choice because he kept saying he was going to; but he said all sorts of things, and we see no good reason to start taking him at his word now. What we know for sure is that he is gone and that we do not miss his complaints.

2

It is because we have become so good at prediction that we feel such confidence in our conclusions about Mandelbaum. We have become expert prognosticators in our time, and we like to congratulate one another for our talents; it is our unique ability, we are sure, to be so good at anticipating the future. We have successfully predicted many things and continue to do so with an ease that does not surprise us. We will not have food again tomorrow, we say, and we are right. We will not sleep and can only vaguely remember ever having done so; again we are unanimous. It will rain again tomorrow, we are sure. We have no precise means of measuring days, but we are in agreement that the fleas come at intervals that feel, roughly, day-like. And when the fleas do come, we have no recourse but to lie in the mud and wait for them to tire of us and move on.

3

It is hopeless for us to waste our energies, and so we return to what we know best. Tanner removes himself and begins pounding away again at the slabs of concrete that are slowly revealing themselves to be the letters H and L. With these letters and a host of cumulonimbus rocks, he is preparing to explain to us, in graphic form, why it is possible though not likely that the rain will subside within five to seven days. It will rain again tomorrow, Tanner tells us, but there is a ten percent chance that change is on the horizon, see. He has found a stick somewhere and uses it to point at the detritus all around his feet. Perhaps this is too much for us to make sense out of just yet, Tanner says. He sits down in an enormous puddle and sets to work on a High Pressure Zone that will, he assures us, make everything clear.

4

We cannot see the sun, but we are not convinced that it is absent. We admit that we cannot see much at all and that the darkness here is something we are still struggling with. We would like to believe that whatever rain clouds are above us are so thick as to block the sunlight from reaching us. But some of us have begun to question whether or not we ever had a sun to begin with. When Villagran mentions the sun, he has started using his fingers to suggest quotation marks to remind us that he was the first to theorize that the sun we are so determined to remember may never have existed in the first place. Is it not possible, Villagran has asked us, that the sun is just a myth we have so fully embraced that we have forgotten that we have never had a sun? I mean, really, Villagran has said to us.

5

We have walls but nothing above us. Mandelbaum called this place a ruin. He said that the broken stones around us were evidence enough that something better had once been here but that now things had all gone to pieces. We did not share his surety that the presence of crumbling walls necessitated the history of something better. We hypothesized that this had been the site of good intentions never completed, or that these walls were all that this place was ever meant to show for itself. Like Mandelbaum we also wished for a roof over our heads, for

some protection from the elements, but we did not share his opinions on most other things. These walls are all we know, and they were enough to send Mandelbaum searching for something more. We know, of course, that our best efforts should involve more than aimless wandering and that we must wait things out. Once the rain has gone we will be in a better position to think clearly, to assess our situation, and to make plans for our future. We agree completely that Mandelbaum was an impetuous and impatient man.

6

Orton and Halston are standing shoulder to shoulder, faces turned at the sky while the rain pours over them. Does Orton know the difference between Partly Cloudy and Partly Sunny, Halston wants to know. The rain hits his body with a force, and he takes it, eyes open but blinking frequently. Orton's eyes are closed, and he smiles. Of course Orton knows the difference, what does Halston take him for? Halston happens to take him for a fool, Halston says, because he knows, as Orton obviously does not, that there is no difference between Partly Cloudy and Partly Sunny. Semantics, Halston says, that is your difference. Ah, Orton says, ah. But have you forgotten that it can be Partly Cloudy at night whereas it is unlikely that it will ever be Partly Sunny when the sun is nowhere to be found. And here, Halston says, what would you say we have here? Orton does not open his eyes to say that we have rain. You see my point then, Halston says, you see that I am right and that you have simply been misleading yourself? No, Orton says, I see no such thing. All Orton sees is rain. And all Orton wants to know is if Halston really believes that his semantics matter in a situation like this, in a situation where it is obviously Fully Cloudy and not sunny at all.

7

It was Mandelbaum's contention that all of us here are dead. He was wrong, of course, and we proved it to him a dozen different ways. Will a dead man complain about the fleas that will not stop biting him? Will a dead man talk to other dead men? Will a dead man make predictions about the weather? He would hear none of our arguments. He could not remember eating or sleeping or whether he had a family, and these things were proof enough, he told us. We took it as our task to con-

vince him that he was wrong, and that his failing memory was certainly not reason for such skepticism. He was alive, we told him, because his hair was still growing. He was alive because he had the energy to conjecture in the first place. Because dead men do not wonder if they are dead; dead men know as much. He was quick to tell us that he knew a thing or two about life and death and that this was like no life he knew anything about. He was a nervous man, Mandelbaum.

## 8

Fitzpatrick is convinced that the rain is coming to its end. He cites, as his evidence, the lack of foliage and ground cover. This much rain can exist only in an ecosystem that is lush and tropical, he tells us, and the lack of greenery suggests that it has rained too long, that the ecosystem has lost its balance. These things correct themselves, Fitzpatrick says, these things most certainly correct themselves. Villagran calls Fitzpatrick a buffoon and tells him that not one of us has ever said so much about something he knows so little about. You are absolutely and exactly wrong, Villagran says. He says that this rain will create an environment in which the flora will thrive and bloom. Hollinger agrees with Fitzpatrick and Villagran enough to say that he too anticipates an end to the rain. But Hollinger fears that the rain will be followed by a drought, a period as dry as this one is wet. How long has it been raining? Hollinger asks us. How long? We have no concrete answer, but we agree on certain things. We agree that it has been raining for a long time, a very long time, longer than any of us can remember. And how long, Hollinger wants us to tell him, can we remember? And what can we say to this but that we cannot remember a time before this time, that we have no memories that do not include rain. Exactly, Hollinger says, and soon enough, we will have no memories that do not include a dryness so extreme that we will curse the lack of moisture then as much as we curse the overabundance of it now. We admit to ourselves that Hollinger's logic is not so convincing as we had hoped it might be. But we are less concerned with his logic than we are with his conviction. We tell Hollinger that we see his point, and that it is a good one. Except Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick says no, no, no. Fitzpatrick says he cannot agree with Hollinger's hollow and obviously flimsy argument, which is based on nothing but unscientific hypotheses. It is useless,

Fitzpatrick says, to assume that this rain has come to us without some cause. And that cause, he says, is the plow. The plow? Hollinger says, I see no plow; can you please show me a plow? My point, Fitzpatrick says, is that this ground has been plowed, that it has been made ready for this moisture, and that this rain is a natural response to the plow. There is a circularity you must admit to, Fitzpatrick says to us, and we say that yes, we would like to admit to a circularity. But wait, Hollinger says, why must we admit to anything so vague as that? Why must we agree with you before you have proven anything? But that's just the point, Fitzpatrick says, I have already proven everything. And so we applaud Fitzpatrick, we admire his resolve and his cunning, we cheer his name, in the rain, waiting for the ecosystem to correct itself. Except for Villagran, who is sulking.

## 9

We find it odd that while the rain seems to maintain a certain consistency we are sometimes able to speak at conversational levels, but just as often, we must yell in order to be heard. Tanner is most disturbed by these changes because his voice is so soft. He tells us, when he can, that the problem is one of focused attention, and that we would be able to hear him quite clearly if we would make half an effort. The rain is louder, Tanner says, when we allow it to be. This sort of explanation is exactly the sort of thing that gets Halston all worked up. It is Halston's opinion that we are not in a position to enact much change and that we can do little more than accept the rain. The rain, Halston argues, is constant, and it does us no good to look for minute distinctions between one moment and the next. Our position, he says, is unchangeable, and the sooner we accept that the better. But what Tanner wants to know is why it is, if our position is so helpless, that Halston is always the last one running around when the fleas come, and why he refuses to simply let them do what they will do.

## 10

Mandelbaum spoke so often of the Doppler radar that we began to fear for his sanity. While it is true, as he often said, that a little technology can go a very long way, we were not prepared to spend our days waiting for a radar system that could only tell us what we already know.

What we know is rain, and what good is technology that simply restates that which is clear to us? Rain is rain, we told Mandelbaum, and we need no technology that will tell us nothing more than that. Mandelbaum said that there was something more than rain and that he was going to find it. He said that he could not stand the fleas any longer.

## 11

The fleas come in enormous waves that cover the ground completely. They come by the millions and cover every inch of our bodies until we are so thoroughly bitten that nothing remains for the fleas to bite. We have tried to hide ourselves from the fleas, to run from them or cover ourselves; but they move more quickly than we can hope to, and they are more patient than we ever gave them credit for being. We have come to respect the fleas for their incredible sense of timing. They are capable, these miniscule little beasts, of avoiding the rain that so thoroughly drenches us, and they know just how often to return to us, just when our itching blisters have begun to recede. Villagran suggests that we take a lesson from the fleas, that we find a means by which we can avoid the rain by keeping on the move. We have made attempts at Villagran's plan but have only made ourselves tired and hot, soaked through by rain and sweat. Fitzpatrick and Tanner were never convinced that such a plan could work in the first place because we are, they thought, too large and too slow as men. What we need, they both said, is a roof. Villagran has not stopped running, though, and although he looks more tired than ever, we have come to admit that he does look faster than ever before.

## 12

Tanner suggests that it is perhaps our lack of historical context that is making things so difficult for us. He proposes that we make a list of the things we can remember and that we all agree on. Tanner is convinced that it is only through consensus that we will ever achieve anything worthwhile, and he speaks so loudly that we find it hard to disagree. And so we begin. We have no means of writing since the mud at our feet will not maintain its shape, but we feel confident that we can create a verbal consensus among ourselves. Orton remembers the last wave of fleas, and how they have made it difficult for him to walk. Hal-

ston remembers rain and nothing else. Hollinger remembers Mandelbaum and his constant longings for technology. Villagran remembers the words Low Pressure Zone but admits that he cannot now make sense of them. Tanner remembers his clothing when it was more than the torn and ragged cloth that it is now. Fitzpatrick remembers a time when he thought the end of rain was near. We agree that we have the sense of a time before the rain, but not one of us can conjure an image from that time or a sense of whether it was any better than this time. We agree that Mandelbaum has been gone for quite a while now and that his return, which once seemed imminent, seems less likely now than ever. We agree on a lot of things, but then Orton wants to know if he's the only one who remembers making this list before.

## 13

Fitzpatrick says that his knee no longer hurts and that he had given up on his hope for an end to the rain but that this is something to really believe in. His knee, he says, is never wrong. Halston finds it odd that Fitzpatrick would not have mentioned his knee before if Fitzpatrick is willing to invest so much in its ability to predict the future. For his part, Fitzpatrick cannot remember mentioning his knee either, but he is sure he must have because it has bothered him so much. His knee, he tells us, hurts when the rain is coming, and the fact that it has hurt for so long has always meant that more rain, in addition to whatever downpour we were in the middle of at that moment, was on its way. But now, he says, now. Now that his knee is pain free he has something concrete to deal with. The rain is coming to an end, Fitzpatrick says, and the proof is in my joints. But wait a minute, Halston says, wait a minute, are you sure it ever didn't hurt before? Are you even sure which knee it was? And Fitzpatrick is sure, so very sure, so completely sure that the pain was in his left knee, and so what if his right knee hurts a little bit now, if it causes him to limp a little more than any of us can remember, so what if there's a new pain in a different joint, his left knee is pain free and that should count for something.

## 14

Mandelbaum liked to use the term Higher Power. He said that we should at least consider the possibility of punishment, that we should

give some thought to things we had done before we got to this point. He said that we had all said and done things for which we could not be forgiven and that he needed no more explanation than that. He said that we needed the rain to cleanse ourselves, that it was a metaphor for something, and that the fleas were also a metaphor but that he wasn't sure what they stood for. He said that we needed to find some answers to some questions and that the Doppler radar was going to provide those answers because when had it ever done us wrong, when had technology ever been less than what we needed? He said that we were being punished for misdeeds and that our pasts were catching up to us. He said that this place was the opposite of a resting place, that it was a restless place where we would never know peace again, because we had hurt people, and done them wrong, and presented as truth things which we knew were not.

15

We agree, when we set our minds to agreeing, that certain things are not so bad, that the fleas are fine if they get what they want, and that the rain is not so hot or so cold as it might be, and that the mud feels good between our toes and in our hands. We agree that our skin is never dry or cracked and that we are never thirsty and that we cannot remember exhaustion that was not quickly relieved. We agree that things are not so bad as Mandelbaum would have had us believe. But we cannot help wishing he were here. We cannot help feeling that his contrariness was important to us and that we are somehow diminished by his absence. We cannot help but hope that even now he is returning to tell us more firmly than ever that we are receiving our just rewards. We want Mandelbaum to correct us and remind us that the rain is not to be enjoyed. And we want him to long for technology that he cannot have. We can see him there, just beyond our field of vision. We can see that he is coming back to us and that he is bringing with him the first clear skies we have ever seen. We can see that Mandelbaum has found some means by which to call an end to our problems, to rid us of our infestations, to allow us, for once, something better than this.

## CALLING AND ELECTION

*Jack Harrell*

JERRY SANGOOD STEPPED OUT OF HIS car and into the darkness of the church parking lot. The sky above was black, without a moon. A thick cloud cover hid the stars from view, and Jerry felt the darkness like a hardened pit growing inside his brain. He shut the car door and stood for a moment in the far corner of the parking lot, near a row of Lombardy poplars as old as the town itself. The Mormon pioneers who had founded this part of Idaho had favored these narrow trees that grew tall and hearty in the sandy soil. They planted hundreds of them in long rows to break the relentless winds. Standing against the darkness of the trees, Jerry watched Bishop Gordon of the Third Ward switch off the lights inside the church. The bishop walked out through the darkened entryway and locked the glass doors, stopping a moment to look behind him into the stillness of the building before he turned and went toward his pickup.

As Bishop Gordon started his truck and pulled away, Jerry Sangood knew he had a choice. He could shake off this moment. He could go home and pray for the safe return of his good wife, who had flown to California to help their daughter and her new baby. He could pray for a way to tell his wife what the doctor had found that afternoon in the X-ray. But even if he did, even if he turned and went home to pray in his secret chambers, God would still be waiting, patient as the Wasatch Mountains, for Jerry to return to this moment. In a week or a month or a year, God would send someone to ask Jerry to put his hand to the plow without looking back.

As the taillights of the bishop's pickup disappeared in the darkness, a dull pain coursed its way up the back of Jerry's neck. At least now it