



Source: Dana Canedy, 'Dear son: let this diary take my place', *New York Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 02/01/06.

Tags: [Iraq](#), [water](#), [home](#)

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The wet rushing sound of the brimming drains has been at a constant pitch for the last couple of hours. It's like a train that keeps passing long after it should have been gone, so surprising in its intensity and steady continuance that it makes time strange. It holds me to my chair. I'm resisting nervous urges to get up and fix things, attend to or fret through the long list of tasks waiting for this new year, to keep at bay persistent, anxious intimations of the ends of things, letting it startle me into quiet.

I didn't expect this pelting of rain. Not ever again, somehow, I don't think. It is so completely unanticipated, this deep pouring rush, unexpected, soaking and perhaps illusory and temporary. It's still not nearly enough, of course, but for the moment it has dissolved all my farmer's daughter-terror that things may actually have changed irrevocably and that it may not ever rain again. I am not ready to face that.

This downpour forms a background to a departure, to a flood of memories and to a message from a life in deep and perhaps precarious change at the other side of the world, the motherly desire to control it curbed and soothed by drips landing on unidentified corners of the house. This is the time to wait and sit, leaving the sorting of a guest's detritus, the washing, letter-writing. The rain softens, making a cocoon of warm grey light. I am in a holding pattern now, drawn down deep into long time, to look out, with half-open eyes, at the world brought close by water-filled air and the thick, multi-layered soundscape that the falling rain makes. No one seems to be moving about outside today, and daily work and traffic are suspended.

I can hear our crackling footsteps a week ago, scraping in the dry dirt of the countryside, the resigned murmurings and regretful tut-tuttings in the beautifully laid-out garden—curving paths, a seat with an arching frame above it, its climbing rose dead; circular gardens with 'weeping' trees wispy-now and wilted in the middle with circles of dead stalks, brittle and a dead bone colour arranged around it, from the drought; flat nearly-green-still leaves flopped across concrete garden edges and the lone splash of deep colour, the vividly-glowing purple artichoke flower at the top of its prickly dry stem. Enormous firestorms have ripped through similar ground not far away in recent days and the quiet voice of the farmer hopes the predictions of rain ('between the 26th of February and the 4th of March they say') will come true. I am supremely sceptical and argue with him about

talking about a 'drought' when there's every indication that this will not end in the return of rain any time soon. I am sliding into Armageddon.

For a time now, today, the flow seems to dim, then there's another surge on the roof and the loud, uneasy and irregular spatter that signals a blocked roof guttering. I imagine my hands reaching out the upstairs window and over the shaky roof edge to scoop out leaves and then I feel the imagined cold drops on the back of the newly-gifted silk morning jacket, spreading, icy, between the shoulder-blades and down to the small of my back over the night clothes I have not yet taken off. I predict an awkward slip and inadequate tools and the discovery of rusty metal, loose nails—unforeseen problems that have been lying dormant in the busy dry time, revealed by the emergency of too much of a good thing. There will be a better time to deal with all that. When I'm dressed for the day at least. I can feel the warmth of the cushion inside the back of the chair and the press of my feet on the thick little mat on the floor.

A sigh as the world shifts and a man they call a tyrant looks down at the hands arranging the rope over a sort of scarf at his neck. It has all come to a still point, it seems, and the balance of the world's events changes quietly, deep inside the rowdy chaotic violence of his death. There's another story of loss in the paper, of a woman whose husband and the father of her new-born son has died for his country in the land of the tyrant.

This is the time to just listen to all that. The consequences will show themselves in due course.

Magpies warble. The rain has stopped. It feels possible to consider a life pitched in equilibrium only with the unknowns of the natural world. It is enough, surely, just to deal with that.

In a chair in my house, after the rain, for today at least, and here in my house at least, the days have their pleasures. The apocalyptic dry that has lately begun to creep into the spaces under my skin, around the neck and shoulders and along the forearms, shortening my breath and widening my eyes, has moved to the outer edges of my peripheral vision for a while—a small respite in the turning year. Time to get dressed.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Clare Grant.*