

## SPARE THE ROD

Russell Arben Fox

*Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.*

—Psalm 74:2 (KJV)

At 7 a.m. on a Monday morning, I talked with Death on a mountain.

IT'S HARDLY A MOUNTAIN. IT'S BARELY A HILL.

*I'm writing this, and so I can call it a mountain if I want. Besides, I'm from Wichita, Kansas; a sudden forty-foot-elevation hill is a genuine geographic landmark.*

SO YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOING TO PRETEND THAT YOU'RE NOT THE AUTHOR HERE.

*Nope.*

IN THAT CASE, I SHOULD CONGRATULATE YOU ON FINDING THE RIGHT FONT FOR MY VOICE.

*Thanks. I had to hunt around for the html code for it.*

I APPRECIATE YOUR ATTENTION TO DETAIL. WILL ANYONE UNDERSTAND THE REFERENCE?

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*Among the people who might actually read all of this, all the way through, namely my extended family? Probably not; I'm not sure any of them are Pratchett readers. But I'll put this up on a blog, and probably plenty of those readers will appreciate it.*

THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW. TO RETURN TO MY EARLIER POINT, YOU SHOULD MAKE IT CLEAR THAT YOU'RE NOT, IN FACT, ON A MOUNTAIN, WHATEVER YOU MAY WANT TO CALL IT, BUT RATHER AT THE TOP OF A HUGE PILE OF DIRT IN THE MIDDLE OF A VACANT LOT ACROSS THE STREET FROM YOUR HOTEL.

*It's been here long enough that it's covered with sagebrush, tumbleweeds, bromegrass, and wild mullein. It's practically part of the natural landscape by now.*

YOU COULDN'T REMEMBER ALL THOSE NAMES. YOU HAD TO LOOK THEM UP LATER, WHEN YOU FINALLY GOT AROUND TO WRITING THIS.

*But I recognized the plants; I saw them all the time growing up around here. I just couldn't remember what they were called.*

The same thing happened the previous night, while at the viewing for my father's body. A few hundred people came, and it seemed as though every person whose face I could dimly recognize remembered my name: old family friends, Scout leaders, congregation members, people from the neighborhood. No one showed any disappointment that I usually couldn't quite place them, but I was disappointed with myself all the same, for two hours straight. It's September 26, 2016, and I'm back at my boyhood home of Spokane (now Spokane Valley), Washington. Yesterday my six brothers and I, with the invaluable help of our oldest sister's husband Michael, who knows the funeral business inside and out, dressed my father's perfectly healthy seventy-three-year-old dead body in his temple clothes. Today, he'll be buried.

*Ok, Death, I'll start. You've surely had this pointed out to you hundreds of billions of times over the millennia, I know, but I'm going to mention it*

*again: do you realize just how unfair, how nonsensical, how—and I do not say this lightly—UNJUST your labors often are? Taking life away from man strong enough, healthy enough, to awaken every weekday morning before 5 a.m. to play eighteen holes of golf before putting in a full day’s work? A man in better physical shape at age seventy-three than practically all nine of his children and all fifty-seven of his grandchildren? A man with no history of heart trouble? A man with a wife of fifty-one years who struggles with pain, depression, arthritis, and more, whom he has built his later years around supporting? A man neck-deep in financial entanglements he was trying to straighten out for his posterity? A man with an older sister who has survived multiple strokes, yet keeps on going? A man dying of a massive heart attack, which hit without warning, while playing golf, with a shopping list in his pocket and e-mails he’d already sent that morning from his phone awaiting reply? How random can you get? A Death Eater hitting him with an Avada Kedavra curse is almost more believable than what actually happened.*

YOU’RE ANGRY.

*You make people angry! Good grief, you made his younger brother, my Uncle Chuck, one of the sweetest, quietest, most retiring, least aggressive and least critical men I’ve ever known, actually upset with God!*

HE WASN’T REALLY UPSET WITH GOD.

*Oh is that so? That’s surprising; I thought you’d be experienced enough to know that it’s not especially helpful to go around telling people they’re misunderstanding their own feelings!*

I’M OLDER THAN ANY HUMAN COULD EVER BE, AND THUS I CAN SPEAK WITH AN AUTHORITY OF EXPERIENCE TO A DEGREE THAT NONE OF YOU CAN. BESIDES, YOU KNOW I’M CORRECT.

That’s true, I do know it. Uncle Chuck wasn’t really angry—he admitted as much in his tearful, beautiful prayer that ended the family visitation with Dad’s corpse before his funeral, really the most moving part of that whole dreadful day. I’m not really angry either. Some people might genuinely feel

anger over a death, seeing it as some sort of betrayal, a violation, an act of vindictive harm. But for us, for all us Foxes I think, the angry “whys” were an expression of loneliness, of fear. Fear and doubt about what it’ll mean to live our lives, to take care of Mom, to raise our kids, to continue in the faith, to “keep on keeping on” as Dad would always say, without Dad actually *being here*, as he always has been. He was such a constant presence, such a competent resource, such a confident and charismatic—and commanding—patriarch. He was a better man than I, better than Chuck, better than anyone I’ve ever known. That may be rude thing to say, and probably both improvable and irrelevant, but it would be ridiculous to pretend that I believe anything otherwise. He was the giant whose shoulders I stood upon, the rock and raw material that my life’s choices have been carved out of. Even those choices that resulted in my taking a path distant from my father’s preferences were laid with cobblestones that I retrieved from streams he had first forged. As different as I was from him, the innumerable ways in which I took my bearings from him put all our small, particular differences to shame. Or so it seems today.

I have a book with me on the mountain, a book about grief and grieving by Melissa Dalton-Bradford, given to me by a dear friend before we got on the plane a day and a half ago. I’ve been reading out of it continually, book-marking a few passages. This is one, from near the end:

“Fear not” is a divine injunction straight from God. God Himself, whose sufferings outstrip all the accumulated sufferings of the infinitude of creation, greets us with those words . . . “Fear not” is God’s steely, conquering command: “Fear, be not! Fear, be gone!”

To exorcise fear, God floods the darkness of this world with His blazing presence. And wherever His presence is, not only can fear not remain, but confidence, peace, contentment, wholeness, strength, and light—all cousins of joy—can flourish. Does the pain of the loss disappear? No. Does my yearning for my son cease? No. Not in the least. But what does happen is that alongside—or better, from within—the pain and

yearning comes a sense of being loving upheld by God. The terrifying free-fall of fear ends, just in time, in His hands.<sup>1</sup>

I NOTE THAT YOU'RE NOT INCLUDING THE AUTHOR'S REFERENCE TO THE "WEeping GOD."

*Yeah, I'm kind of conflicted on that point.*

DO YOU THINK GOD DOESN'T SHARE YOUR SORROW OVER THE FACT THAT IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO COLLECT YOUR FATHER?

*I think—I hope—He does. I'm just not sure it's helpful to imagine God's sorrow through such human, ordinary imagery as tears.*

DO YOU DISREGARD THE STORY OF JESUS, THE INCARNATE GOD, WEEPING BEFORE LAZARUS'S TOMB IN THE PRESENCE OF MARTHA AND MARY?

*Not at all. But does that story suggest that Jesus was "sad"? As in, distraught, unhappy, wretched, bitter, depressed? I can't relate to that, I'm afraid. Jesus was showing empathy, because He is the perfect empathizer. And yes, I suppose that means that He was moved by the bitterness, the unhappiness, which Lazarus's death occasioned, and to be so moved, if I'm not going to reduce God to some wholly instrumental being, must mean that He truly experienced some emotion that intruded upon Him, that overcame Him. But that's all wrapped up in the mystery of an omniscient God who nonetheless suffers for and with us, the mystery of the atonement. I'm not really comfortable with such a presumption of weakness, of subjectivity, being extended into His mystery. God feels compassion, that I am certain of. But whether He is, Himself, a subject to those feelings, I doubt. The firmness expressed in this passage—"steely, conquering command," "blazing presence"—thus feels more true to me.*

YOU LIKE A STRONG GOD. LIKE HOW YOUR FATHER WAS STRONG.

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1. Melissa Dalton-Bradford, *Collected Voices: For the Grieving and Those Who Would Mourn with Them* (Sanger, Calif.: Familius Publishing, 2014), 228–29.

*Don't psychoanalyze me on this point, Death. I can quote Paul, Augustine, Luther, even Neuhaus or McConkie to back me up.*

THOSE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE STRONGLY DISAGREED WITH EACH OTHER ON MANY POINTS, ESPECIALLY THE LAST TWO OF THEM.

*But they would have all agreed on the most important thing: that God is complete and that His love and instructions for us are perfect, not a work in process.*

DO YOU EVEN BELIEVE THAT?

*I'm not sure what I believe. All I know is that, as much as it runs against many of my political and moral dispositions, I've never been able to help suspecting that it might be true all the same.*

THAT WHAT MIGHT BE TRUE?

*That God has only one, sole revealed Kingdom on earth, and that therefore every other kingdom, every other family, every other marriage or relationship or personal standard of behavior or collective set of goals or construal of reality that stands apart from that kingdom, is simply wrong. Wrong, and therefore something you ought not bring into your life. That's what my father believed was true—no, that's what he knew was true, and I'm not confident enough in my own doubts to be certain that I can discount someone else's certainty. Especially when so much evidence supported him. His own successes in business, in church, in his family—he attributed them all to his obedience, to his commitment to the modern Mormon order of things, to the scriptures and prayer and holding firm to the iron rod.*

I WONDERED WHEN THAT WOULD MAKE AN APPEARANCE.

*You can't think about my father without thinking about it. Or at least I can't.*

BUT ISN'T IT THE CASE THAT JIM FOX BECAME MORE HUMBLE, MORE FLEXIBLE, MORE OPEN-MINDED AS THE YEARS WENT BY? IT'S NOT AS

THOUGH THERE WASN'T CONTRARY EVIDENCE TO HIS CONVICTIONS IN HIS OWN LIFE, EXAMPLES THAT PUT ASTERISKS BESIDE HIS TRACK RECORD.

*I reject that way of putting things, Death. That's a way of framing the question that assumes from the outset that all those Iron Rodders, all those orthodox and obedient Mormons, just aren't as humble, or flexible, or open-minded—all good things!—as we Liahonas are. The whole explosion in the Mormon blogosphere over those videotaped meetings with church leaders a few weeks back, with the Mormon senator who is described as "church-broke"—so many people who said that was appalling, who insisted that submitting completely to the authority of the church is a denial of one's agency. My basic sympathies are on their side, and yet ... are they just reading a different New Testament than I? One where Paul doesn't start off the Book of Romans describing himself as a "slave" to Jesus Christ? The one where submitting, becoming meek and humble and childlike, isn't the constant refrain of the prophets and of Jesus Himself?*

YET YOU DISPUTE THAT READING.

*Only as the only valid one. The scriptures include many voices—for every sin-obsessed Romans there's a service-oriented James, for every law-focused Deuteronomy there's a grace-hinting Micah, for every confident Nephi there's a haunted Jacob. Just because I can read one part of the canon against another doesn't mean that there's something necessarily invalid about a reading that disagrees with what my basic sympathies want to be correct. Because they might not be. Dad was absolutely "church-broke," through and through—and he had a great life, one that resulted in a huge amount of good being done in the lives of many. Can I really say with confidence that it wasn't his "church-brokenness" that enabled that? No, I can't. I may doubt it, I may question it, my basic disposition may point away from that conclusion, but I can't dismiss the possibility. The Liahona critique of the Iron Rod is too easy.*

SO YOU'RE HAUNTED BY HIS STRENGTH, AND THE FACT THAT HIS STRENGTH MAY HAVE BEEN GROUNDED IN HIS OWN DETERMINED SUBMISSION TO WHAT HE WAS CONFIDENT WAS TRUE.

*Basically.*

ALL OF THAT WOULDN'T STOP YOU FROM, FOR EXAMPLE, POINTING OUT THAT HE WAS RARELY MEEK AND HUMBLE AND CHILDLIKE IN THE WAY HE WENT ABOUT DOING ALL THOSE GOOD THINGS.

*No, Dad wasn't a particularly humble person. But he was someone who would always listen to what you had to say and treat you with respect. No, he wasn't at all flexible on those things he was certain were revealed truth—but he was very flexible on anything he assumed wasn't, and you'd be surprised at what that included. And open-minded? If you mean by that "likely to change one's mind," then he wasn't that, especially when it came to politics—but if by open-mindedness you're suggesting compassion, acceptance, and love, then I'm sorry, but my father's willingness to serve and help others, regardless of their situation, knew almost no bounds.*

ALMOST.

*Well, yeah. I mean, Mother Teresa he wasn't. But neither am I.*

YOU SOUND PRETTY DEFENSIVE ABOUT ALL THIS, WHICH IS ODD, CONSIDERING THAT YOU'RE ONLY ARGUING WITH YOURSELF.

*It's an argument I've been having with myself for decades, and I've gotten very good at it. Even with Dad's death, it may not end.*

I had woken up early this morning with a headache—a headache that will continue and worsen throughout at the day, getting the point where I have trouble holding up my corner of my father's casket as we carry it to the grave, and I end up having to flee all the reminiscing and photo-taking at the luncheon after the funeral and throw up back at the hotel. At the moment, I was sipping a hot chocolate, hoping that the heat and caffeine hit, combined with the Excedrin and the cool just-post-dawn



breeze that whips around me as I stand at the top of the mound across the street from the hotel nearly the whole extended family is staying at, will help my head. It won't, but hope springs eternal. Finishing the hot chocolate, I realize I need to pee. Looking around, I find a steep, perhaps seven-foot-deep depression on the top of this man-made, weed-covered hill, and I slide down in to relieve myself.

AN ESSAY ON YOUR FATHER'S DEATH AND YOUR OWN EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH IT, AND HERE YOU ARE WRITING ABOUT URINATION.

*People are always confusing orthodoxy with piety, confusing strictness with humorlessness, confusing having high expectations with being straight-laced and puritanical. Don't tell me you do that too?*

SINCE YOU'RE WRITING MY WORDS, YOU'LL HAVE TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION.

*Okay, fine, sometimes they do go together, but it's not like we Liahona Mormons, we doubters and cynics and questioners, don't often fulfil our own ugly stereotypes—condescension, indecisiveness, superficiality—as well. When I'm honest with myself, I can see that I grew up in an environment that mostly put the lie to all the typical accusations lobbed at True Blue Mormons. My Dad wasn't a Puritan, he wasn't Javert: he was fun. That warning about "loud laughter" in the temple ceremony? Never a problem in our house. Irreverence, earthiness, even bawdiness was more common than not. The man loved his Rook games, his water-skiing, his movies, his Louis L'Amour novels, his grilling, his ABBA and Neil Diamond and Frank Sinatra, and most of all his golf. Sure, the discipline was harsh sometimes; harsher than I've ever been willing to make use of on my own children, that's for sure. But it was limited to, comparatively speaking, only a very, very few rules. Some matters in the family could never be questioned, and some conflicts became downright ugly at times, especially as the family grew and mixed with others and produced another generation of its own ... but for the most part ours was a loose, loving family, where the expectations,*

*as iron-clad as they may have been, were few in number. Dad never called it this, but we were a family attended by grace, by the sort of blessed, even irreverent, confidence that conviction brings.*

DOES CONVICTION ACTUALLY BRING BLESSINGS?

*I don't know. Personally, I suspect not.*

YOU THINK GRACE, MIRACLES, BLESSINGS, ALL THE REST—YOU DON'T THINK THERE'S ANY WAY TO AFFIRMATIVELY BRING THEM INTO YOUR LIFE. THEY COME, OR NOT, AS GOD WILLS IT, RIGHT?

*Mostly, yes.*

AND YOUR FATHER DISAGREED?

*Very much so. He held to obedience, to the promises entailed by his broad reading of Ether 12 and D&C 82. Obey and endure and stay confident, for the knowledge and rewards will invariably follow.*

SOUNDS SOMEWHAT PURITAN TO ME.

*But he never experienced, or communicated, any of the salvation panic that was a constant in Puritan culture. He was never panicked at all, really. And he passed that ease on to us. Maybe it was hard to work out a willingness to obey, to identify with that willingness to obey, but the obedience—the church attending, the calling accepting, the tithing paying, the blessing giving, the meeting running, the service performing, etc.—itself? That came easy, gracefully, without angst or stress, like business dealings or public speaking or anything else.*

EXCEPT IT DIDN'T FOR YOU.

*Well, some of it did.*

BUT NOT THE “OBEDIENCE BRINGS FOR BLESSINGS” PART.

*No, that didn't, at least not entirely. And maybe it didn't entirely for any us; I don't really know. Maybe I'm not the only one who feels like I'm*

*always faking it, always aspiring toward something I'm not even sure I believe in, but kind of want to believe in, or feel like I ought to believe in, nonetheless. Maybe we're all in the same boat, just assuming that Dad's confidence and conviction and ease with obedience would come, well, easily to us, eventually, if we could just get things right.*

A LOT OF “WE” AND “US” THERE—ARE YOU ACTUALLY TALKING ABOUT ALL YOUR SIBLINGS?

*Of course.*

I'M NOT SURE YOU ARE. LOOK AT YOUR LANGUAGE—RUNNING MEETINGS, DEALINGS IN BUSINESS, AND SO FORTH. THE PRACTICES YOU'RE ASSOCIATING WITH YOUR FATHER'S CONFIDENCE AND GRACE ARE, IN AMERICAN MORMON CULTURE, OVERWHELMINGLY MALE ONES.

*Well, they don't have to be.*

BUT THEY MOSTLY ARE, NONETHELESS. DON'T FEEL BAD; I'M NOT TRYING TO CATCH YOU OUT. AFTER ALL, YOU'RE A MALE, RAISED IN A HOME THAT WAS VERY MUCH A PATRIARCHAL, MALE-DOMINATED, PRIESTHOOD-DEFINED UNITY. YOUR SISTERS MIGHT SEE ALL THE THINGS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT IN CONNECTION WITH YOUR FATHER AND HIS IRON-RODNESS SOMEWHAT DIFFERENTLY.

*Maybe—but honestly, in listening to their language, in seeing the value they found in my father's life, I kind of doubt it.*

YOUR SPOUSE AND YOUR SISTERS-IN-LAW, THEN.

*Well, okay, sure. Coming into a family where certain key beliefs and practices were firmly modeled (and sometimes disciplinarily enforced), but which a great deal else was simply allowed to go on automatic, to follow an unwritten order, if you will, was not easy. Some of the sisters-in-law struggled with it more than others; some struggle with it still. None, though, I think, discredit its power, or its value.*

BUT YOU YOURSELF DISCREDITED IT, SOMETIMES. YOU TOOK YOUR WIFE'S SIDE, AND STOOD AGAINST YOUR FATHER, IN THE MATTER OF NOT HAVING CHILDREN RIGHT AWAY AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF YOUR MARRIAGE, AND THAT DISCREDITING CONTINUED FOR THE NEXT TWENTY-THREE YEARS.

*Because, when conflicts arose, my first allegiance is to my wife. And besides, sometimes I thought Dad was wrong.*

A REASONABLE DECISION. SO WHY DO YOU SOMETIMES FEEL DEFENSIVE ABOUT IT?

*Because I only thought he was wrong; I didn't know it. I still don't know it. And now I probably never will. His decisions, his determination—as much as I couldn't share in, couldn't agree with so much of it, it always haunted me, was always something that I would return to him and talk about, again and again. Until now.*

It's beginning to be late in the morning; the long shadows of the rising sun are shortening. There will be a funeral today, and my headache isn't going away. I look around from my perch on the mountaintop

[EXCUSE ME, DIRT PILE.]

and scan the surroundings of Spokane Valley. I can see quite a bit over the roof of the hotel across the street: nearly a dozen water towers, highway on-ramps and off-ramps, and hills covered with trees. Above them all, a few miles to my north, I can see Fox Hill, the property my father bought back during one of the family's economic upswings (which were always inevitably followed by downswings). On the bluff at the southern edge of that hill, stands the green-roofed log cabin my father had built, envisioning it as a compound that children and grandchildren (and eventually great-grandchildren) could treat as a home away from home, a center-point for family reunions and memories through the decades. It looks, from this distance, like part of the natural shape of the hill that spreads out beneath it. Like a huge brown and green

rock, surrounded by scrubs, pine trees, and prairie grass. That home won't go anywhere, at least not anytime soon, I know—Mom, and all the children, are committed to making sure of that. But nothing lasts forever, as much I want it to. I miss him already, very much. Over the past week, I've found myself weeping in big, gasping bursts, shocking myself by how much it hurts. I suspect that this will be a terrible day, that between my headache and my tears, I'm going to be a wreck. Just a couple of months ago, when I was last visiting Fox Hill for a reunion, I awoke with a headache, and I went wandering the trails around the homestead. It helped. I wish I could do that now.

DO YOU FEEL HOMELESS?

*No. I have a home; Melissa and I have a family, and we've made a place for ourselves in Wichita.*

THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

*You're talking about a heimat, a place of origin, the place where, as Robert Frost put it, "when you have to go there, they have to take you in."*

APPROXIMATELY, YES.

*Well, then still no, I'm not homeless. Dad may be gone, but Mom remains, the family remains, all the memories and places are still there, and they'll all still be open to everyone one of us. But yes, things will be different. The conversations will be different. And the arguments that I have in my head? Well, they'll change. They'll change a lot.*

DO YOU FEAR THAT CHANGE?

*Everyone fears change.*

NOT EVERYONE.

*Well, sure, some people like being wanderers, loners, discoverers, disconnected individualists. Our culture makes heroes out of them; our politics and economy celebrates outsiders and disruptors; the whole world,*

*in sometimes seems, is ruled by cosmopolitans who prize the abstract, the theoretical, the mathematical, and make little place in their hearts for the homely. Not me. I may not be a total homebody, but I always want to know in what direction my home lies, and what's waiting for me there.*

YOU'RE NOT A ROLLING STONE.

*You know that Dylan's song is expressing pity and contempt for people who found themselves living such a life, don't you?*

A LIFE WITHOUT BELONGING, WITHOUT IDENTITY, WITHOUT PLACE.  
AN UNSETTLED LIFE.

*Yes. The prospect of losing that is a fearful thing. I guess I'm scared of what's going to end with Dad's passing. I'm fearful of what it'll mean for me, for my family, for Mom, for all us Foxes. I'm not scared of the old homestead being sold or the reunions changing or anything like that, I think; I'm just ... worried we'll lose our way home. Or that I will, at least.*

IF YOU DON'T MIND ME SAYING, THAT SOUNDS A LITTLE WEAK.

*But I am weak; I know that! I feel myself to be subject to changes and structures and needs and forces and people and sins that are beyond me, beyond my reach, and after years of praying about them and philosophizing about them, I no longer feel impelled to interrogate why they oppress me and not others, why I understand them the way I do when others do not. That's just my lot in life, my thorn, my burden, my struggle. And perhaps my blessing. Another thing that differentiated me from Dad, I guess.*

IT MAKES YOU DEPENDENT, IN A WAY HE NEVER WAS.

*Not on people, but he was on God. And that's something we all should be. That's one thing I can do right, one thing I can do like Dad: grasp hold of and plea for the support of God.*

WHOSE TEACHINGS AND DOCTRINES AND AUTHORITY YOU CONFESS YOU DOUBT AND STRUGGLE OVER AND OFTEN FEEL UNCERTAIN

OF, HOWEVER MUCH YOU REMAIN COMMITTED TO THIS COMMUNITY THAT YOU'VE INHERITED, AND WHICH YOU HOPE THEY ARE WOVEN INTO.

*Yes, I doubt. But I hope too. Better doubt and hope than fear. Holding on to my doubts is a way of holding on to that which I think, I hope, that just maybe, sometimes, I am able to believe. Fear is what causes you to stop holding on, stop trusting, stop hoping, entirely.*

I AGREE.

*Well, I'm delighted to hear that, at long last. I wanted to have this essay finished weeks ago.*

YOU FIRST HAD TO FIGURE OUT WHERE YOUR ROD WAS, OR WHERE IT WOULD BE, PERHAPS.

*No Death, there you're wrong. It hasn't gone anywhere. I just . . . needed to find a new way to talk about it. To argue with it, I guess.*

WHICH IS YOUR WAY OF HOLDING ON TO IT, I SUPPOSE.

*You got it, sir.*

That evening, after the funeral, after the tears, after the headache had mostly burned itself out, nearly all the siblings—eight brothers and sisters and spouses, with one family opting out to spend time with their own newest grandchild, Dad's first great-grandchild, whom she will never know—gathered for a late meal. We took over a private room at a restaurant, and we ate and joked and laughed and pondered the future. I was still a little light-headed, but happy. I wished Dad could have been there to charismatically command us, as he'd always done before. I wish our rod could have been spared. But he did his work well, and he truly, grandly, loved every minute of it. If we want to continue to feel the direction provided by his work within us, we might as well do the same.

But there is another part of us . . . that will look around for love. It might only glance at first, eyelids low, fearing what it will or will not find. But

in time, it will scavenge like a beast dying of hunger. It will yowl to the empty clouds and bray across the flat horizon for love. It will howl from the bottom of its lungs rendered rigid and brittle from cold. It will limp and then collapse and then belly-crawl for love.

And there, right there, love will be.

Right there, next to us, will be love holding out its everyday arms. Its stranger or next door-neighbor or school-administrator-made-brother arms.

Right there on the hinge we will find it so that, instead of closing our eyes and waiting to die of the cold, we fall into the radiant reach of love. And we are held.<sup>2</sup>



James Russell “Jim” Fox, February 11, 1943–September 19, 2016. *Requiescat in pace.*

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2. Dalton-Bradford, *On Loss and Living Onward*, 82.