

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss.*

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## A Path of Fear

A story from Hector

Someone once told me to follow my fears to find my beliefs. At the time, I didn't understand what that meant. I'm not sure I do now, but I do know that following your fears is not for the faint of heart.

With my eyes opened to the possibilities of recognizing my fears as something that could be followed, it didn't take long for me to spot then lurking around. That very evening I noticed the first one.

We had gathered at the temple. After some singing and announcements we were asked to stand and greet each other. I knew some of the people standing near me and I greeted them, I saw Mary, a close friend, and I gave her a hug. I turned to the next person and it was someone I didn't know.

"Hi," He stuck out his hand. "Jim."

I stumbled with my reply, my name catching in my throat. I forced my name out, "Hector," weak and shaky, and shook his hand. I turned and met the eyes of another stranger. This time I

forced out my name before he could speak, but I could feel the tension in my voice. This brief encounter was over quickly, but its effects lingered.

I sat there in the pew and wondered at what had just happened. I had been afraid. Not of meeting someone who might be hostile, who might pull a sword on me. I was afraid of meeting someone who was with me in the house of God. If I couldn't feel safe there, then where?

I sat there and wondered what it was I was afraid of, and I was afraid of where that wondering might lead me. It wasn't clear what I might be afraid of so I set about eliminating things that I wasn't afraid of. I wasn't afraid of touching someone or catching some disease. Not of being judged, we were just saying hello. Not looks or dress. Then the fear poked its head around the corner.

I was feeling sad because my roommate was traveling and I was alone. I was feeling weak because I didn't know how to be happy on my own, but that's not what I was afraid of.

I was afraid that in the simple act of greeting someone new they might ask that all too common question, "How are you doing?" A question that I would have to lie about or admit to a complete stranger that I wasn't doing well. If someone I knew asked, I could say my roommate was traveling and they would give me a sympathetic nod or smile, but to a stranger the comment would be out of context. Somehow, with a friend I could leave the truth half said, but with a stranger I would either have to ignore the question or let them know something about me.

So there was my first fear. I sat there for the rest of the hour thinking about what lay behind this fear. Was it that I didn't want someone to think less of me, or that I didn't feel like I had the right to feel lonely in the midst of a hundred other people, or that I didn't want to have to admit to myself that I was alone.

After service I was feeling low. I had thought about being alone, about how I didn't have anyone to talk to about how alone I felt, about maybe that I wasn't worth getting to know.

I felt like I needed the reassurance of a hug. Of another person holding me and letting me know that things were going to be okay, that I was worth knowing and caring about.

I walked outside and looked around for someone that I could go open up to and let know that I was hurting and needed a word of encouragement. I stood there, looking from face to face. Some faces I knew, some I had seen once or twice. I didn't see any of my friends, except Mary. I thought about going up to her, but she was talking with someone else. I waited, but then I started making excuses. She was busy. It might seem inappropriate to give her two hugs the same day. What would happen if I told her how I was doing? Would I break down and cry in the middle of a crowd.

I walked away from her. Got a drink of water. I looked for another friend, but I realize now that it was already too late. My fear was stronger than I was. I was feeling even lower and if I admitted that sadness I would fall even farther. I would have to trust in someone else. I would have to risk showing everyone else that I didn't have all together. I saw another friend. He was scanning the crowd looking for someone so I told myself he was too busy and I left.

The really sad thing was, as I walked down the empty street toward my house, that I realized

how hurt Mary would be if she knew that I had needed her, but that I chose not to let her help me. How I had chosen not to be part of the body. How her gifts of compassion and comfort, her calling from God, had gone unused.

Now I sit and write this out. Looking at my fears and my beliefs. My fear of being alone. My fear of admitting that I need others, of the fact that I'm not in control of my feelings. That I could be rejected as worthless.

And there it is, my belief. I'm not worth anything. That I have no value.

But, despite these fears and this belief, there is another belief that I know is true. One that I've been coming to know. It is that my connections with other people are the most important things to me. The giving of my strength to others and receiving strength from them. I am valuable as a friend.

It is this belief that has convinced me that I have to reach out to Mary, to admit to her my fears and my needs. To tell her how important her friendship is to me. I could just wait until the opportunity arises, but I know that path is littered with excuses – that it will never be the right time. So I know that I have to make it happen. I have to take control of my fears and do what I know I need to do for myself.

I have to talk to her, and be open with her, knowing that I will end up crying, and feeling weak, and embarrassed, but also knowing that I will be loved and encouraged and prayed for.

And that's what faith is. Knowing your fears and knowing that they are based on your beliefs, and while still believing that they are true, you walk towards them knowing that you can get past them and that there is something better on the other side.

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Not wanting my determination to fade, and not having the opportunity to see her, I decided to send her a short note. It was a way to skirt around my fears. I didn't have to worry about stumbling when I spoke with her, or running out of courage halfway through. In writing a note I could say what I needed to say and rewrite it three times to get it just right. Then all I had to do was find the courage to hand the note to a boy to deliver.

And so I sent the note off and waited for Mary's reply. Nervous and excited – thinking about the possibility of beating one of my fears, or at least proving that I can act despite my fear.

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I waited a week to hear back from Mary. The first couple days weren't bad – she was busy. The

next couple caused me to worry – What if I had said something to offend her in my letter. What if she wasn't really my friend. The following two days I reminded myself that I had just asked to talk to her – that I hadn't told her it was important or needed to happen quickly. Then I got a letter back from her letting me know that she did want to meet with me and that she had been super busy, and that we should meet the following evening.

I felt silly for doubting that she would want to get together. Of course she would, she values our friendship, because she values me. It's me who keeps feeling like I'm not valuable. Sometimes I wish I could just see myself through other people's eyes.

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We met the following evening. We didn't meet for dinner – the breaking of bread together. We just met under one of the giant maple trees that line the promenade leading to Rangefield Castle.

The evening air was warm, the breeze rustling through the leaves, the sound of music drifting by from a half dozen taverns and inns.

We exchanged pleasantries, asked about each other's lives. She shared her life with me – her kids, her hectic day, her tiredness.

As we talked I knew what I wanted to say and searched for the courage to start. Finally I said, "Well ..."

"Breath," she said.

I closed my eyes and took a few breaths. Steadied, I started. I told her about greeting people at the service, about my loneliness, my fears, wanting to talk with her afterwards, but walking away because of my fear.

My eyes were heavy with moisture and when I told her about how I was afraid that she would have been hurt if she had known I walked away from her when I needed her, the moisture turned to tears.

I told her how important her friendship was to me, how I felt like a kindred spirit with her because of all the people I know, she is the one who carries her emotions closest to the surface – like I do. She smiled and said, "We carry our emotions of our sleeves," and I agreed.

We talked a little bit more, moving away from the subject, but I felt fear again. I had to say that I was still afraid that I had hurt her, now that she knew I had walked away without trusting her to help me.

She assured me that she wasn't and that I needn't worry about asking for a hug or a shoulder to cry on. She would be there.

It gave me a feeling of peace. It was something I already knew. It was what I had believed and that I had faith to act on.

I had chosen to believe something that my fears told me wasn't true. I stepped out in faith to act on that belief and walked straight into my fears. I faced more fears on the path I had chosen and as I met each one, the next one was easier to face.

As I reached the end of this particular path, as Mary was reassuring me that she would be praying for me, I was looking back and wondering what it had been that I was so afraid of. I have a God that loves and values me. I have friends that love and value me. Still I doubt that I have worth.

What started out as a prompt to look at my fears turned into a journey, and now I've completed the first leg. I find myself hoping that the next paths will be easier, but afraid they will be harder.

When Mary asked me if looking at my fears was a good thing, I had to pause. I told her that it had been easier to live in ignorance, but that I felt like I could see the light at the end of the tunnel and that my life would be better for having dealt with my fears.

The peace I felt after talking with Mary is the proof I'm clinging too, to keep me walking.

By Douglas G Clarke