

MELISSA LEAF NELSON

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Father

Over  
where the bulrushes grow  
on the edge of some timberland  
the new home  
two old patchwork quilts

keep them warm.

see out into the night  
the darkness heavy thick

its cool breeze fingers,  
the hushed silence made her  
think of her father  
who had died,

his gentle courtesy.

I remember.  
Tell it again.

so quiet,  
you almost had to read his mind.

still smiling,  
protecting  
through the deepening  
prairie twilight  
into the shadows

as ever.

## ABOUT THE POEM

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“Father” was created from *A Lantern in Her Hand* by Bess Streeter Aldrich (1928). About the poem and the process of composing it, Melissa Leaf Nelson writes:

*A Lantern in Her Hand* was one of my favorite novels in high school. I’ve probably read it half a dozen times. My process in writing this poem was to start with absolutely no direction in mind and to use only the author’s words from the first two pages of Chapter I and the last two pages of Chapter XXXVI to see what would unfold. I wrote down words I liked, but had no idea where it was going until I read the phrase “her father who had died.” That immediately guided me through the rest of the text as I selected words and phrases that reminded me of my dad. Although he’s been gone for 17 years tomorrow (as of this writing), he came back to me as I found this poem. As ever.

