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# WILLIAM STAFFORD<sup>1</sup>

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## **A Ritual To Read To Each Other**

If you don't know the kind of person I am  
and I don't know the kind of person you are  
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world  
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,  
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break  
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood  
storming out to play through the broken dyke.

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,  
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,  
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty  
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,  
a remote important region in all who talk:  
though we could fool each other, we should consider--  
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,  
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;  
the signals we give--yes or no, or maybe--  
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

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<sup>1</sup> *Wikipedia*: William Edgar Stafford (January 17, 1914 – August 28, 1993) was an American poet and pacifist, and the father of poet and essayist Kim Stafford. He was appointed the twentieth Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1970.