

THE POETRY OF COURAGE

Class One: THE COURAGE TO TAKE RISKS

THE GUEST HOUSE

By Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor....
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at the door, laughing,
And invite them in.
Be grateful for what comes
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.

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MOTHER TO SON

By Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you
Life for me ain't be no crystal stair
It's had cracks in it and splinters
And boards torn up
And places with no carpet on the floor.
Bare.
But all the time I been climbing
And reaching the landings
And reaching the corners
Sometimes in the dark.
So boy, don't you turn back
Don't you sit down on the steps...
I'm still going, honey,
I'm still climbing
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

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A RAINY MORNING

By Ted Kooser

A young woman in a wheelchair,

wearing a black nylon poncho spattered with rain,
is pushing herself through the morning.
You have seen how pianists
sometimes bend forward to strike the keys,
then lift their hands, draw back to rest,
then lean again to strike just as the chord fades.
Such is the way this woman
strikes at the wheels, then lifts her long white fingers,
letting them float, then bends again to strike
just as the chair slows, as if into a silence.
So expertly she plays the chords
of this difficult music she has mastered,
her wet face beautiful in its concentration,
while the wind turns the pages of rain.

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THE RUNAWAY

By Marcy Heidish

On moonlit evenings like this one,
Purpled with the newborn dark,
She takes the safe swamp-land trail,
Walled for miles by rustling reeds.
There she tramps on spongy ground
With her whole life on her back
Until she knows for sure she is lost.
She can't hear the voice of the river,
Her guide, so she must reach into
The skies for a light to lead her.
Lifting her hand to the North Star;
She touches it, trusts it, taps it;
The star opens like a window,
Leading her to a different path
Where the way is clear and the
The life on her back is blessed.

Dedicated to Harriet Tubman

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A ROMANI GRANDMOTHER

By Marcy Heidish

In a line of painted wagons you
were born. "On roads," you said,
"We lived, we died." A "Gypsy"

Compania was your first tribe.
There you did and did not thrive.

At fourteen you ran into the dark,
leaving kin and that old man you
must wed — to Bucharest you fled
alone, never allowed to go home.

You sewed to pay your passage
sailing with scarves and an icon.
You, frail as forsythia, firm as fists,
took your icon through Ellis Island.

Old when I was young, you were
doll-like and diamond-hard
smelling of paprika and peaches
you sewed my father's "breeches."

Now I face aging and think of you;
I am ashamed to admit what's true:
You journeyed into the Unknown
and I fear traveling to God alone.

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COURAGE
(Excerpt)
By Anne Sexton

It is in the small things we see it.
The child's first step,
As awesome as an earthquake.
The first time you rode a bike,
Wallowing up the sidewalk.
Your first spanking when your heart
Went on a journey all alone.
When they called you crybaby
Or poor or fatty or crazy
And made you into an alien,
You drank their acid
And concealed it....

Later,
When you face old age and its natural conclusion
Your courage will still be shown in the little ways.
Each spring will be a sword you'll sharpen,
Those you love will live in a fever of love,

And you'll bargain with the calendar
And at the last moment
When death opens the back door
You'll put on your carpet slippers
And stride out.

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THE DANCER

By Marcy Heidish

At six I started ballet.
It shaped the shadow
I was when I began.
It formed my shyness
into pirouettes
no one could touch
not the bullies at school
not the shouting at home
until that home broke
and the bullies moved on.
Now my soul was free
leaping into perfect arcs
high above any floor.
I saw this in the mirrors
at the studio where I flew
to new heights, unafraid.
I danced the great stories
of the Firebird and Giselle
they let me into the magic
where I stayed many years
Now, at forty, I must quit.
The bullies are gone
The old home is gone
But I still need the magic.
My body is weaker
I strain as I try to fly.
Am I brave enough
to go on? Risk a fall?
Well, it's not my magic.
I know it never was.
The dance is the magic.
I'll summon my courage
to serve what saved me.

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NEW WINGS

By Glenis Redmond

I am a daughter of the dust
I am the sister of the yam
I come from a long line of serious brown women
that don't take no mess or apologize for living.
I am the birth of the morning earth,
deep, rich, and free.
My middle name, Gale,
Describes how I move in this world,
sometimes graceful, other times stormy.
Glenis, Welsh for valley,
I have dwelt in for too long
I am a raven
I am a crow
I am a nappy bat
I am a mosquito
Call me anything black
that has wings
and flies.

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