

THE POETRY OF COURAGE

Class THREE: THE COURAGE TO BELIEVE

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

BY John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

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IN SPITE OF WAR

Angela Morgan

In spite of war, in spite of death,
In spite of all man's sufferings,
Something within me laughs and sings
And I must praise with all my breath.
In spite of war, in spite of hate
Lilacs are blooming at my gate,
Tulips are tripping down the path
In spite of war, in spite of wrath.
"Courage!" the morning-glory saith;
"Rejoice!" the daisy murmureth,
And just to live is so divine
When pansies lift their eyes to mine.

The clouds are romping with the sea,
And flashing waves call back to me
That naught is real but what is fair,
That everywhere and everywhere

A glory liveth through despair.
Though guns may roar and cannon boom,
Roses are born and gardens bloom;
My spirit still may light its flame
At that same torch when poppies came.
Where morning's altar whitely burns
Lilies may lift their silver urns
In spite of war, in spite of shame.

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WILD GEESE

Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

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TRY TO PRAISE THE MUTILATED WORLD

By Adam Zagajewski

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.

You've seen the refugees going nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

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GATE C22

By Ellen Bass

At Gate C22 in the Portland airport
A man in a broad-band leather hat kissed
A woman arriving from Orange County.
They kissed and kissed and kissed. Long after
The other passengers clicked the handles of their carry-ones
And wheeled briskly toward short-term parking,
The couple stood there, arms wrapped around each other
Like she'd just staggered off the boat from Ellis Island,
Like she'd been released from the ICU, snapped
Out of a coma, survived bone cancer, made it down
From Annapurna in only the clothes she was wearing.

Neither of them was young. His beard was gray.
She carried a few extra pounds you could imagine
Her saying she had to lose. But they kissed lavish
Kisses like the ocean in the early morning,
The way it gathers and swells, sucking
Each rock under, swallowing it
again and again. We were all watching ---
passengers waiting for the delayed flight
to San Jose, the stewardesses, the pilots,
the aproned woman icing Cinnabons, the man
selling sunglasses. We couldn't look away. We could taste
the kisses crushed in their mouths.

But the best part was his face. When he drew back
And looked at her, his smile soft with wonder, almost
As though he were a mother still open from giving birth,
As your mother must have looked at you, no matter

What happened after ---if she beat you or left you or
You're lonely now--- someone once gazed at you
as if you were the first sunrise seen from Earth.
The whole wing of the airport hushed, all of us trying
To slip into the woman's middle-aged body,
Her plaid Bermuda shorts, sleeveless blouse, glasses,
And little hoop earrings, tilting our heads up.

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RAIN, NEW YEAR'S EVE
by Maggie Smith

The rain is a broken piano,
playing the same note over and over.

My five-year-old said that.
Already she knows loving the world

means loving the wobbles
you can't shim, the creaks you can't

oil silent—the jerry-rigged parts,
MacGyvered with twine and chewing gum.

Let me love the cold rain's plinking.
Let me love the world the way I love

my young son, not only when
he cups my face in his sticky hands,

but when, roughhousing,
he accidentally splits my lip.

Let me love the world like a mother.
Let me be tender when it lets me down.

Let me listen to the rain's one note
and hear a beginner's song.

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FROM BLOSSOMS
By Li-Young Lee

From blossoms comes
This brown paper bag of peaches

We bought from the boy
At the bend of the road where we turned toward
Signs painted Peaches.

From laden boughs, from hands,
From sweet fellowship in bins,
Comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
Peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,
Comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
To carry within us an orchard to eat,
Not only the skin but the shade,
Not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
The fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
The round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live
As if death is nowhere
In the background; from joy
To joy to joy, from wing to wing,
From blossom to blossom to
Impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

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VIGIL

Phillis Levin

Why not wake at dawn? Why not break
From the coffin of night, whose nails
Are the only stars left. Why not follow
A tear like a comet's tail, and trail
The grief of a year until it ends--
Who knows where. Why not wake
At dawn, after all is gone, and go on?

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