

OPENING WORDS

from *The Burial at Thebes, a Version of Sophocles' Antigone*, by Seamus Heaney

ANTIGONE

I disobeyed because the law was not
The law of Zeus nor the law ordained
By Justice, Justice dwelling deep
Among the gods of the dead. What they decree
Is immemorial and binding for us all.
The proclamation had your force behind it
But it was mortal force, and I, also a mortal,
I chose to disregard it. I abide
By statutes utter and immutable-
Unwritten, original, god-given laws.
Was I going to humour you, or honour gods?
Sooner or later I'll die anyhow
And sooner may be better in my case:
This death penalty is almost a relief.
If I had to live and suffer in the knowledge
That Polyneices was lying above ground
Insulted and defiled, that would be worse
Than having to suffer any doom of yours.
You think I'm just a reckless woman, but-
Never, Creon, forget:
You yourself could be the reckless one.

READING

Courage 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.

The 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,
if you faced the death of bombs and bullets
you did not do it with a banner,
you did it with only a hat to
cover your heart.

You did not fondle the weakness inside you
though it was there.

Your courage was a small coal
that you kept swallowing.

If your buddy saved you
and died himself in so doing,
then his courage was not courage,
it was love; love as simple as shaving soap.

Later,
if you have endured a great despair,
then you did it alone,
getting a transfusion from the fire,
picking the scabs off your heart,
then wringing it out like a sock.

Next, my kinsman, you powdered your sorrow,
you gave it a back rub
and then you covered it with a blanket
and after it had slept a while
it woke to the wings of the roses
and was transformed.

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.

CLOSING WORDS

From *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers* - Thomas Merton

Sooner or later human duty presents itself in a form of crisis that cannot be evaded. At such a time it is very good, almost essential, to have at one's side others with a similar determination, and one can then be guided by a common inspiration and a communion in truth. Here strength can be found.