

Let Each Man Remember

There is a terrible hour in the early morning
When men awake and look on the day that brings
The hateful adventure, approaching with no less certainty
Than the light that grows, the untroubled bird that sings.

It does not matter what we have to consider,
Whether the difficult word or the surgeon's knife,
The last silver goblet to pawn, or the fatal letter,
Or the prospect of going on with a particular life.

The point is, they rise; always they seem to have risen
(They always will rise, I suppose) by courage alone.
Somehow, by this or by that, they engender courage,
Courage bred in flesh that is sick to the bone.

Each in his fashion, they compass their set intent
To rout the reluctant sword from the gripping sheath,
By thinking, perhaps, upon the Blessed Sacrament,
Or perhaps by coffee, or perhaps by gritted teeth.

It is indisputable that some turn solemn or savage,
While others have found it serves them best to be glib,
When they inwardly lean and listen, listen for courage,
That bitter and curious thing beneath the rib.

With nothing to gain, perhaps, and no sane reason
To put up a fight, they grip and hang by the thread,
As fierce and still as a swinging threatened spider.
They are too brave to say, it is simpler to be dead.

Let each man remember, who opens his eyes to that morning,
How many men have braced them to meet the light,
And pious or ribald, one way or another, how many
Will smile in its face, when he is at peace in the night.