

## **This Is an Elegy**

I.

This dark year, we buried our elders.

We knew we would outlive them, mourn them, but not like this.

This was not their time. Death does come for all

But we can agree it does not come with equity.

We all must walk that lonely road

But many do not cross so easily.

Far from their safe houses

They slipped away surrounded not by kinfolk

But by attending angels, all veils and shields, tender but still strangers.

Their wings were gloves,

And our elders left alone with no bare hands to hold.

So it is with many of our soldiers on this wall

All those across this land who fell

Who were robbed of a good death, their hands empty

Or held by strangers, or a gun.

Heroes sacrifice a chance to cross the veil in peace, bathed in love.

Some of these granite names surely fell in battle,  
Others, perhaps in accidents or by diseases of the clime  
Their bodies betraying them before they reached the fight  
And many have come home from where they served our country  
To live their lives and die  
Flanked by family and friends, blessed with a good death.

But in the noises of today, flags in the wind  
The notes of taps so sweetly blown, your breath all made of honor  
And nostalgic reverence  
This day where we say freedom isn't free and we call these ghosts heroic  
Let us not forget our lonely ones  
Who came home and still died alone  
Don't be afraid to speak the whole truth:  
Suicide. Homelessness. Substance abuse. Crisis of the Soul. Trauma.

We all must walk that lonely road  
But many do not cross so easily.

II.

Each human on this earth is guaranteed one life,

A precious thing, a fragile bird, a candle flame,  
A treasure chest of days and weeks and years, like jewels.  
Our honored ones, they gave out portions of their diamonds  
Or handed America their entire lustrous prize,  
Spilled their blood like rubies  
or gave away their days  
Meant to be spent with husbands, wives,  
Hours meant for watching their children grow.  
These are the things sacrificed in service,  
And for this gift, we offer them our love.

III.

What, now, is our consolation?  
You gave your life for this young nation?  
A call answered? A family left?  
Your absence leaves them bare, bereft.

How are we to soothe ourselves  
When we've been told that war is hell,  
Burning houses' ashes fly,  
Comrades staring at the sky.

As Creedence says, our unfortunate sons  
Will wear the helmets, hold the guns  
Enlisting, perhaps, to have a chance  
To change their luck and circumstance

Or to make their homeland proud  
Because the message is so loud  
That heroes help to keep us free  
And protect democracy

Like the diamonds of our lives  
The truth here has so many sides.  
Shine light through them, and you will find  
It shattered, split, and undefined.

In this moment, let us bind  
And balm these wounds in flesh and mind  
With reflection, strength, and souls attuned  
to faith, and hope, and gratitude.