

## Unit I: “The Heroes Among Us”

### Journal Entry #1: “Happy With Your Station”

Are you the kind of person who is happy with your station... with where you stand in the world? Is your “station” suited to you, or do you feel dissatisfied with your lot in life? Should we “play the hand we’re dealt,” or should we strive to be something more? Should we really be satisfied with what we have and what we are? Discuss fully, and surprise me.

### Journal #2: “Reflection of the Dragon: a Guided Imagery “

Your leg has healed, for the most part, from your most recent encounter with Ailedore, the last dragon on the list. He is the twelfth dragon the king had charged you to kill, and he had burned you fairly severely on your right foreleg. You sit on a broken piece of granite and rub your leg, the scars beginning to ache in the cool evening air. The king’s orders for you to single-handedly kill the twelve most ferocious dragons in all of Helgeland seemed preposterous to you at the time. The sentence he handed down for theft was usually loss of a hand, and two weeks in the stockade. Since you are—were—a royal guard and protector of the highest degree, he spared your hand and the public humiliation. Instead, he sentenced you to what he knew would certainly be a death sentence: twelve beasts, twelve severed heads delivered to the twelve spires of Helgeland in twelve weeks, and you get reinstated to your position with full honors and royal forgiveness. If fewer than twelve heads are atop the spires by the end of the allotted time, then your head will adorn one of the spires.

So the burns from your earlier fight with Ailedore have all but healed, and you have nineteen hours to kill the beast, decorating the spire with his head. You lace up your shoe and ponder Ailedore the dragon. He is a most puzzling creature. The other eleven dragons were challenges, to be sure, but Ailedore is quick, lithe, and absolutely enormous! Just his appearance fills you with mortal dread, and that’s truly saying something since you have deftly destroyed eleven of the damnable creatures in as many weeks.

But it’s something else, as well. There is something about this particular dragon that the other beasts lacked. Something intangible and difficult to articulate. None of them feared you in the least; it wasn’t that. None gave up until the very second of their deaths; it wasn’t that. None seemed old, decrepit, or ready to die; it wasn’t that. It was something else, something on the tip of your brain, ready for you to understand it, ready for you to take the knowledge and use it to your advantage in battle. It’s no use; you just cannot light that candle of thought. It just won’t come to you.

The first eleven were struggles to be sure. Pyrotov, the first, and the only female of the eleven, was protecting her newly laid eggs, and she wasn’t giving up without a fight. And Ignitus, the fat brown male you fought near the ocean last week, actually landed on you when struck by the killing blow, and pinned you, breathless, to the beach for hours. You had to dig out from under him, beginning only with one index finger. They were all challenges, and all took

several exhausting hours to destroy. But this final one, this Ailedore... he has a quality about him that you just can't...

"Oh, well," you say aloud as you prepare your sword and bow for the final onslaught. You know this is to be the final battle, for you have only eighteen and a half hours left for your quest, and it will take nine, at least, to make your way back to the spires of Helgeland.

You feel you will defeat Ailedore this time, though, for you saw a chink in the armor, a certain weakness; you noticed that he raises his head and closes his eyes right before he breathes his blast furnace upon you. This is a definite advantage. As you inspect the razor-sharp edge on your broad sword, you see your reflection in the polished steel. You stare at yourself and wonder if this is the last time you will see your own image. You are about to wax reflective, and mourn for a future that may never be, when you catch a glimpse of something green and insipid slithering in the reflection. Ailedore is here.

His silence alarms you to the point of shock. You hesitate for half a second, then spring to your feet, sword aloft, body poised for battle. Your hauberk shield doesn't quite block the beast's infernal breath, and you are scorched about the upper arm and hand. You shriek in pain, and land a fierce sword blow across the dragon's nose. He reels and fends your next blow off with his scaly tale. This sends you flying across the granite field, and you land in a heap, bruised and dusty.

You look across the barren field of rock at the charging dragon, and the realization hits you like a falling drawbridge. You finally understand what it is that makes this dragon different. You are filled with sorrow, anger, and certainly dread. You stand to face your nemesis from a new perspective, because what you have finally realized about Ailedore is that...

*\* Finish the scenario.*

*\* What quality does Ailedore have that differs from the rest?*

*\* Why is that quality important regarding this fight?*

*\* How will this end?*

*\* Is the king involved further?*

### Journal Entry #3: "The Best Policy"

You've heard that honesty is the best policy. What the heck does that mean? Discuss honesty. What does it mean to be honest? Is it simply telling the truth, or are there elements of honesty that transcend telling the truth? Are you honest? I've heard people say, "Yeah, she's pretty honest." Are there degrees of honesty? *Honey, does this dress make me look fat?* Are there times when you should withhold some of your honesty? How important is total honesty?

## Journal Entry #4: "Heroic Free Verse"

Do your best and write a good 10-line free verse poem about a hero. Remember, this is free verse, so it cannot rhyme or have an easily discernible rhythm. Be prepared to be proud of this work, and to read it aloud. The poems (for example) are on the next two pages.

### The Knight

By Adrienne Rich

A knight rides into the noon,  
and his helmet points to the sun,  
and a thousand splintered suns  
are the gaiety of his mail.  
The soles of his feet glitter  
and his palms flash in reply,  
and under his crackling banner  
he rides like a ship in sail.

A knight rides into the noon,  
and only his eye is living,  
a lump of bitter jelly  
set in a metal mask,  
betraying rags and tatters  
that cling to the flesh beneath  
and wear his nerves to ribbons  
under the radiant casque.

Who will unhorse the rider  
and free him from between  
the walls of iron, the emblems  
crushing his chest with their weight?  
Will they defeat him gently,  
or leave him hurled on the green,  
his rags and wounds still hidden  
under the great breastplate?

*[Adrienne Cecile Rich (May 16, 1929 – March 27, 2012) was an American poet, essayist and radical feminist. She was called "one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century".]*

### He is More Than a Hero

By Sappho

He is more than a hero  
he is a god in my eyes—  
the man who is allowed  
to sit beside you — he

who listens intimately  
to the sweet murmur of  
your voice, the enticing

laughter that makes my own  
heart beat fast. If I meet  
you suddenly, I can't

speak — my tongue is broken;  
a thin flame runs under  
my skin; seeing nothing,

hearing only my own ears  
drumming, I drip with sweat;  
trembling shakes my body

and I turn paler than  
dry grass. At such times  
death isn't far from me.

*[Sappho: Only a handful of details are known about the life of Sappho. She was born around 615 B.C. to an aristocratic family in Greece.]*

*My Queen**by T. King*

I can still see her.  
The blood in my eyes has not  
blotted her out entirely.  
She, bright among the rabble in the tournament box,  
like the sun breaking free from the gray clouds...

The lance came swiftly, more swiftly  
than I imagined, for who can best me  
when I fight for my lady, my Queen?  
I need barely look at my opponent,  
And her love and courtly favor will sustain me.

I need not be King to win her heart,  
nor lord, nor master to carry her token,  
a silken handkerchief held aloft  
from my own spear... my lady, my Queen,  
the wife of my Lord and Liege...

But like thunder, or a log falling from  
a tree whose top is long beyond sight,  
his lance snapped my helmet back, my head back,  
my God her beauty blinds me, might I  
just kiss her once, King, once to say goodbye?

But her eyes dance with another knight, her champion,  
and her smile to his glorious, upraised fist glows  
again like the sun for which I fought, for which  
I now bleed, and I still see her, my love, my Queen,  
as the crowd's cheers fade and night buries me in its deep shadow.

**Journal Entry #5: "Betrayal"**

Define "betrayal." What must a person do for that act to be considered betrayal? Define "friend." What qualities must a person possess to be considered a friend? Discuss what happens when friends are betrayers. How can we define the emotion that goes with this? Perhaps some of these words are appropriate in your discussion: trust, love, selfish, anger, jealousy, selfless, loyalty, true, thought, usurp, injury, empathy.

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**Journal Entry #6: "This Above All..."**

Polonius, a character in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, says to his son, "This above all: to thine own self be true." This sounds like great advice. Discuss how we can actually do this. What does it mean to be true to ourselves? Is this the height of selfishness? Is being true to yourself making sure you get your way, or making certain that you achieve all that you heart desires? What methods should we employ to be true to ourselves? What if we can't? Discuss the meaning and extenuating circumstances regarding being true to yourself.

**Journal Entry #7: "The Parcel"**

Your kitchen shift is over, and you are about to leave the castle and go home. It's been a tiring day, and you long to take a hot bath and settle in for a quiet evening. You imagine the hot water and a good book by candle light wringing the stress from your mind, and the tension from your knotted body. King Claudius had ordered a special feast to be prepared, and you all had to work overtime.

You have been carrying a parcel wrapped in brown paper, and now you tuck it under you arm to partially conceal it. You are not really concerned about getting caught with this package, considering who gave it to you, but you feel the strange need to get it mostly out of sight anyway.

You look about you, and can feel the cold rolling off the castle's interior walls in waves, and you wish you had brought a cloak or a warmer tunic. As you walk along the echoing halls to the stairway, you rub your arms and try to make rings out of the steam that you exhale. You see the smooth stone steps ahead of you, and you pick up your pace to create some body heat. You ascend the steps, and at the end of the second floor corridor you see Rosencrantz and Guildenstern whispering with the king.

*Let me think... which one is which again?* you ponder, as the three of them turn their backs on you and begin walking away. *I can never remember which one is Rosencrantz and which one is Guilden—*

You are abruptly stopped in your reverie by a small, older man who slams into the back of you. He has obviously been running, for the blow nearly knocks you to the floor of the castle corridor. Something he has been carrying (it looks to you like a large prayer book and several other small packages and parchments) falls to the floor, and he angrily gathers it back into his arms and grunts away. He leaves you in the hallway without so much as a "sorry" or "pardon me." This does not surprise you, since you work as a servant among nobility and royalty, but that fact does not make it feel any better to be treated like you do not exist.

You get up off of the icy floor, your anger now keeping you from feeling the chill, and are immediately seized by the unmistakable tenor of panic. The parcel which was concealed beneath the arm of your doublet is gone! That older gentleman (*What's his name... Polonia, Paloneisis?*) has obviously mistakenly taken it with him! When he struck you from behind, you must have dropped it while trying to keep from hitting the floor. The shock of the experience must have made you momentarily forget about the parcel.

You cannot imagine a worse thing to happen to you, or a worse person's hands into which the package could fall. You fear for your future and, in fact, for your very life, because carefully wrapped in the folds of that parcel is...

*\* Finish the scenario.*

*\* Discuss what was in the parcel, and why it is so important.*

*\* Show why it is that you worry so about having lost it into the hands of that particular man. Who is that man, anyway?*

**Entry #8: "All Men Are Created Equal"**

Thomas Jefferson said all men are created equal. Discuss what that means to you, and discuss whether Thomas Jefferson would be satisfied today regarding his dream of equality. That is, do you think he would feel like we uphold that truth nowadays? Explain why or why not...

**Journal Entry #9: "Sub-Human"**

Hitler labeled the Jews in World War II as "sub-human." He took every shred of dignity and humanity from millions of people during the Holocaust. Explain why it is wrong to label people this way. What universal human laws did Hitler break by calling the Jews animals? Discuss your opinion on human equality. Do all people deserve respect and the right to exist? Finally, how do you think you might have responded to the label if you had been a German Jew in 1942?

Journal Entry #10: "Poetry Exercise" #1

### Eating Poetry

Mark Strand, 1934 - 2014

*Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.*

*The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress.*

*The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.  
The dogs are on the basement stairs and  
coming up.*

*Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs burn like brush.  
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet  
and weep.*

*She does not understand.  
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,  
she screams.*

*I am a new man.  
I snarl at her and bark.  
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.*

Answer the following questions regarding "Eating Poetry" by Mark Strand.

**Please write in complete sentences only!**

1. List 3 words or word phrases from the poem which indicate how something looks (imagery that a person could see).

2. Explain what Strand might mean by "the dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up".

3. Explain why you think the dark is "bookish" (from the last line).

4. Explain why something doesn't make any sense. Quote the line, and tell why it's confusing.

5. Could the act of eating poetry be a metaphor for something else? Please discuss how this concept could mean something other than actually eating the pages of a book which contains poetry.