**Chapter Twelve**

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**Break, break, break**

**Virtue  
George Hebert (1593-1633)**

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,

The bridal of the earth and sky;

The dew shall weep thy fall to-night,

For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave

Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye;

Thy root is ever in its grave,

And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,

A box where sweets compacted lie;

My music shows ye have your closes,

And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,

Like season'd timber, never gives;

But though the whole world turn to coal,

Then chiefly lives.

**“Introduction” to *Songs of Innocence*   
William Blake (1757-1827)**

Piping down the valleys wild

Piping songs of pleasant glee

On a cloud I saw a child.

And he laughing said to me.

Pipe a song about a Lamb;

So I piped with merry chear,

Piper pipe that song again—

So I piped, he wept to hear.

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe

Sing thy songs of happy chear,

So I sung the same again

While he wept with joy to hear

Piper sit thee down and write

In a book that all may read—

So he vanish'd from my sight.

And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,

And I stain'd the water clear,

And I wrote my happy songs

Every child may joy to hear

**Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries   
A. E. Housman (1859- 1936)**

These, in the days when heaven was falling,

The hour when earth's foundations fled,

Followed their mercenary calling

And took their wages and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;

They stood, and the earth's foundations stay;

When God abandoned, these defended,

And saved the sum of things for pay.

**Had I the Choice   
Walt Whitman (1819-1892)**

Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,

To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,

Homer with all his wars and warriors--Hector, Achilles, Ajax,

Or Shakspere's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello--Tennyson's fair ladies,

Metre or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect rhyme,

delight of singers;

These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,

Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me transfer,

Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,

And leave its odor there.

**The Aim Was Song   
Robert Frost (1874- 1963)**

Before man to blow to right

The wind once blew itself untaught,

And did its loudest day and night

In any rough place where it caught.

Man came to tell it what was wrong:

It hadn't found the place to blow;

It blew too hard - the aim was song.

And listen - how it ought to go!

He took a little in his mouth,

And held it long enough for north

To be converted into south,

And then by measure blew it forth.

By measure. It was word and note,

The wind the wind had meant to be -

A little through the lips and throat.

The aim was song - the wind could see.

**Old Ladies’ Home   
Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)**

Sharded in black, like beetles,

Frail as antique earthenwear

One breath might shiver to bits,

The old women creep out here

To sun on the rocks or prop

Themselves up against the wall

Whose stones keep a little heat.

Needles knit in a bird-beaked

Counterpoint to their voices:

Sons, daughters, daughters and sons,

Distant and cold as photos,

Grandchildren nobody knows.

Age wears the best black fabric

Rust-red or green as lichens.

At owl-call the old ghosts flock

To hustle them off the lawn.

From beds boxed-in like coffins

The bonneted ladies grin.

And Death, that bald-head buzzard,

Stalls in halls where the lamp wick

Shortens with each breath drawn.

**To a Daughter Leaving Home   
Linda Pastan (b. 1932)**

When I taught you

at eight to ride

a bicycle, loping along

beside you

as you wobbled away

on two round wheels,

my own mouth rounding

in surprise when you pulled

ahead down the curved

path of the park,

I kept waiting

for the thud

of your crash as I

sprinted to catch up,

while you grew

smaller, more breakable

with distance,

pumping, pumping

for your life, screaming

with laughter,

the hair flapping

behind you like a

handkerchief waving

goodbye.

**Constantly risking absurdity   
Lawrence Ferlinghettii (b. 1919)**

Constantly risking absurdity

and death

whenever he performs

above the heads

of his audience

the poet like an acrobat

climbs on rime

to a high wire of his own making

and balancing on eyebeams

above a sea of faces

paces his way

to the other side of day

performing entrechats

and sleight-of-foot tricks

and other high theatrics

and all without mistaking

any thing

for what it may not be

For he's the super realist

who must perforce perceive

taut truth

before the taking of each stance or step

in his supposed advance

toward that still higher perch

where Beauty stands and waits

with gravity

to start her death-defying leap

And he

a little charleychaplin man

who may or may not catch

her fair eternal form

spreadeagled in the empty air

of existence

**The Fifteenth Summer   
James Merrill (1926- 1995)**

Scrambling with a book

The hundred-or-so feet

Up the Australian pine

To a slung-rope seat--

The nerve it took!

Small wonder, often as not

He never read a line,

Flaubert or Howard Fast,

Just pondered earth and ocean,

The odd car’s crawling dot:

Why were we here?

To flow. To bear. To be.

Over the view his tree

In slow, slow motion

Held sway, the pointer of a scale so vast,

Alive and variable, so inlaid

As well with sticky, pungent gold,

That many a year

Would pass before it told

Those mornings what they weighed.

**Because I could not stop for Death   
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)**

Because I could not stop for Death –

He kindly stopped for me –

The Carriage held but just Ourselves –

And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labor and my leisure too,

For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess – in the Ring –

We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –

We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed us –

The Dews drew quivering and chill –

For only Gossamer, my Gown –

My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground –

The Roof was scarcely visible –

The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet

Feels shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses’ Heads

Were toward Eternity –

**Break, break, break   
Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809- 1892)**

Break, break, break,

On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!

And I would that my tongue could utter

The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,

That he shouts with his sister at play!

O, well for the sailor lad,

That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on

To their haven under the hill;

But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,

And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break

At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead

Will never come back to me.