**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.