To an Athlete Dying Young

By A. E. Housman

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

Today, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsman of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears.

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laureled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.

n/a

Born in Worcestershire, England, A(lfred) E(dward) Housman was profoundly affected by his mother's death when he was 12. Housman lived a quiet life as a scholar. He was a brilliant classicist, first appointed Professor of Latin at University College, London, then Trinity College, Cambridge. During his lifetime he only published two volumes of poetry: A Shropshire Lad and Last Poems. Housman died in 1936 in Cambridge. A posthumous collection, called More Poems, was edited by his brother Laurence Housman.

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