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-laurelled head
   Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
   And find unwithered on its curls
   The garland briefer than a girl’s.

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