

Sharon Olds, The Dead and

the Living (New York:

Knopf, 2000)

## Of All the Dead That Have Come to Me, This Once

I have never written against the dead. I would  
open my  
shirt to them and say yes, the white  
cones still making sugary milk,

but when Grandfather's gold pocketwatch  
came in by air over the Rockies,  
over the dark yellow of the fields  
and the black rivers, with Grandmother's blank  
face pressed against his name in the back,

I thought of how he put the empty  
plate in front of my sister, turned out  
the lights after supper, sat in the black  
room with the fire, the light of the flames  
flashing in his glass eye  
in that cabin where he taught my father  
how to do what he did to me, and I said

No. I said Let this one be dead.  
Let the fall he made through that glass roof,  
splintering, turning, the great shanks and  
slices of glass in the air, be his last  
appearance here.