

Sharon Olds, The Dead and
the Living (New York:
Knopf, 2000)

Best Friends

(for Elizabeth Ewer, 1942-51)

The day my daughter turned ten, I thought of the
lank, glittering, greenish cap of your
gold hair. The last week of
your life, when I came each day after school,
I'd study the path to your front door,
the bricks laid close as your hairs. I'd try to
read the pattern, frowning down
for a sign.

The last day—there was not
a mark on that walk, not a stone out of place—
the nurses would not let me in.

We were nine. We had never mentioned death
or growing up. I had no more imagined
you dead
than you imagined me
a mother. But when I had a daughter
I named her for you, as if pulling you back
through a crack between the bricks.

She is ten now, Liddy.
She has outlived you, her dark hair gleaming like
the earth into which the path was pressed,
the path to you.