

Old Friend
(For Arthur Milgrom)

Nov. 14, 2010
Dropped D

The last time that I saw you, you were walking slow
Trying to make it up some phantom hill
It was quiet in the Manville bar, we kept our voices low
You picked at your food and I got the bill

D G D
A G D
D G D
A G D

I figured that I owed you after all those years
With that old Guild you gave me for a song
“I’ve had an interesting life” you said, and I held back the tears
“So far so good,” I joked, but it came out wrong
Old friend, old friend

A G D
Em D A
D G D
A G D
G D G D

Words were your protection and you used them well
Like flowers offered up to fortune’s flame
You knew every shibboleth and every joker’s spell
To make us think you bought into the game
Yet those who called you funny and those who called you smart
Saw but the ripples of a pool
Quiet ran the current of your deep good heart
With a kindness that wasn’t taught in school
Old friend, old friend

The first time that I saw you, we were just sixteen
Waiting for the mystery to begin
There was sadness in your smile, a hint of scars unseen,
Some whisper of rough weather rolling in
But if the sky had opened then and a hand wrote out in rhyme
“The fairest summer promises the fall,”
Would I have believed it, would I have spent the time
To see I’d cry when you got the call?
Old friend, old friend

What is the weight of a single day?	A D
The cost of an hour in the sun?	G D A
I was counting up the circles that our glasses had made	D G D
The next time I looked up you were gone	G down to D

Arthur and I met in high school around 1960. We shared an interest in Latin, jokes, and honest talk, and we remained friends for fifty years. He had a warm presence and a razor-sharp mind that did not suffer fools gladly. I wrote this to be sung at his memorial service.