Con Chapman

The Ophelia of Deep River

Ophelia, made mad by the murder of her father,
Took to singing snatches of song; before long she
Was weaving garlands of flowers and weeds, climbing
A willow along a river in Elsinore to hang them there.

Among the flowers were long purples, orchis mascula,
Also known as dead men’s fingers, or among the vulgar,
something far grosser; a too-strong attraction to a
father, perhaps, was reflected in that choice.

You went down to the water with a purpose, unlike
Ophelia, who fell into the water when a branch broke.
She floated, unaware of her peril, her clothes holding
Her up as she sang, suspended, until at last she sank.

I think you heard overtones of your own as alone,
You wandered the banks of Deep River, a father who made
Piano keys, whom you loved too much and blamed
at the same time, since he was taken from you not by
deadth, but by his own choosing.
Where Ophelia fell, you leapt.
The River Where His Lover Lies

The river where his lover lies
is not too wide from bank to bank.
The water eddies here and there
as it flows down into the sea.

The ferry carries cars across
from Chester on one shore to Lyme.
The surface of the water’s calm,
there’s not a lot they have to say.

He took the boat so they could see
the swans that swim along in pairs.
They mate for life, he’d said; the plank
was lowered, so were her eyes.

Something was amiss that day,
some inner peace, some needed balm.
He calculated there was time
to stem the tide, avert the loss.

The water made her paleness stark
against her hair, as she sank down;
and now he has to damn or thank
the river where his lover lies.

Erothanatos
Were Your Pockets Full of Stones?

I suppose I know now why
you chose the river, reading
that Virginia Woolf put stones
in her pockets to sink herself down.
She was for you a perplexing guide,
she with fierce pride
in her womanhood who
drowned herself rather than
spoil her husband’s life.
At the end she heard voices
that kept her from working,
from even writing a
suicide note properly.
You too wandered off alone
and I wonder, as you
reached the water’s edge,
were your pockets full of stones?

About the Poet

Con Chapman is a Boston poet whose work has appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Light*, *Spitball* and other general circulation and literary magazines. He is currently writing a biography of Johnny Hodges, Duke Ellington's long-time alto sax, for Oxford University Press.