

I must go down...

I must go down to the seas again
I'd really rather not
I'm just a kid with a delicate tum
But my dad wants to sail his yacht

He built it all himself, you know
And loves to take it boating
But I'm a little landlubber
Who's seasick when he's floating

My brother seems to like it though,
In fact he's pretty keen
His face is glowing healthy red
While mine's a bilious green

The voyage seems to last for hours,
I can't wait till it's over
But we've set off from Brighton
And the destination's Dover

The weather's turning colder
My hands begin to freeze
But I can warm them on my head
That's down between my knees

The boat just won't stop rolling
The sea's got pretty rough
Why won't they let me stay at home?
"Enough!" I cry, "Enough!"

Fifty years later...

I must go down to the seas again
I'd really rather not
My wife likes swimming in the sea
Whenever the weather's hot

Or even when it isn't:
She's very tough, you know
Happy to wear a bathing suit
When the weather's ten below

"Why don't you come on in?" she says
"It really isn't cold"
I say I see an iceberg
But no, she won't be told

I paddle somewhat gingerly,
water up to my calves
but she just plunges blithely in
- she won't do things by halves

The water's turning colder
My feet begin to freeze
She says "You'll soon get used to it,
Just do it for me – please?"

My eyes have started rolling
I'm feeling pretty rough
The water's reached above my legs!
Enough!" I cry, "Enough!"

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A Good Beach

**Sand yachts skitter up and down
Like insects, clattering dragonfly wings.
The sand is flat; a good surface for wheels,
Smooth, no rocks to impede progress.**

**The yachts race around one another joyfully,
The wind whipping their sky blue sails.
They celebrate the good beach with its perfect sand.**

**The surf is gentle, a good beach for paddling,
It has a shallow, sloping shoreline, good for wading ashore.
The pebbles on the beach are smooth and are the colour of eggs.
They are sometimes stained with rust, like blood.**

**Where the beach ends, the land rises up
In mangled, grassy tussocks.
A military band can be heard faintly from the cemetery,
The sound caught by the wind and
Tossed over the sand.**

**A small group of old men look out over the beach, remembering.
La férocité dort sous le sable
The sand is no longer flat.
The shells are made of brass and cleave the air.
The wind and waves cannot be heard over the scream of artillery and the
cries of the dying.**

**The waves never stop.
The wind never stops.
The sand re-forms smooth and clean with each tide.
This is Omaha.**

©Hilary Walker

I wrote this after a visit to Omaha beach in Northern France on the anniversary of D-Day in 2002. The beach really does look like this now.

From Dunwich Heath Sunset

**February late afternoon
in low sun
that covers the sand dunes
where we stand above the sea.**

**The black buckled shape of us
stretches out over the dune
in advancing earth shadow.**

**We look towards
the greying beach beneath us
watch waves shattering
against pebbles.**

**The white surf
leaps and twists
in the fists of the wind.
With stolen sunlight
flaring saffron and amber
in the shallows.**

**We turn to warm our hands by it
even after the sun has gone.**

**And still stand huddled together
in the last light of the day
now cupped in barbed branches
of scattered Gorse bushes
the yellow darts of petals
dissolving slowly into night.**

**And from somewhere out there
the restless surf
almost lost on the wind
a bell knelling the day to a close.**

Horses

Immense cloud mountains oppress the flinty sea
Stirring the sky
Restless jostling wavelets irritate the surface
Like demented flies on a horse's shivering flank
Sunlight turned down, dimmed, ready for the scene.

Cloud water released.
Exodus from the air.
Deluge, soaking the sand, denting the waves.
The sea embraces the new ones,
And soothes them with salt,
All the while beating stones
on the torn hem of the ragged land.

A battle of horses are coming
Hammer of hooves branding the sand
Frantic heart drum
Storm wrenched manes whipping the crackling air

Gaping nostrils
Eyes rolled wide
Ears ironed flat
Their mouths adorned with foam
And the hot heave of breath.

I see then that I've been living on the edges of my life
Peripheral vision, missing the point.
The wide arc of the soul not invited in
Waiting while the fabric thins and fades
Afraid to gallop in the storm
Afraid to place my footprints on the sand.

Mussels at Whitstable

**All that long August afternoon
on the beach
we watched the sea retreat
out of the reach of the children
who ran after it with dinghy's and lilo's
kites and shrieks of laughter.
But it beat them and they returned
breathless and shivering
to dry sand and towels.**

**Then we strolled out
over the dregs of the sea
onto the wet flat slap of sand
until we stumbled across a sea field of mussels
stretching out to the water line.**

**They lay knotted
like black treasure
spoils from an old pirate ship,
clinging to stringy seaweed and rocks
sheltered from the sea breeze
and predator gulls.**

**So we bent to our work
our bodies hooped to the beach
plucked them sharp and hard
into our hands
gathering in the crop
until we could carry our cache no more
and bought them back
to the dry rise of the beach.
with black plastic bags, sacks and buckets.**

**And later after the sunset
we boiled water, crushed garlic
and poured strong French white wine over them
and sat in the hush of the evening
eating the summer soft
salt sea sweet sting of mussels.**

On Aldeburgh Beach

**On Aldeburgh beach
The crunchy pebbles
Drift and roll,
Drift and roll,
Shouldering each other
For space.**

**On the watery sand beneath
As the shifting mass
Of mighty, rounded rock
Heaves and settles
Heaves and settles,
The silvery salty water
Slides and slips
Between the seaweed-slimey stones
And sandy creases.**

**Along this beach
The marram grass
Pushes through
Spiking the sand
With unexpected sharpness
And through it,
Long and straight,
Runs the sandy path to
Southwold...
A place of sometime silent
Echoing, beauty.**

**And...standing spread
Isolated...upon the shingle,
A giant shell
Of ribbed and ridged silver steel
Gently rusts
As roll upon roll
The waves come...in.**

The Planet's Brine

The planet's brine

Held fast to it's

Corrugated face

By gravity

Lunar fly-past

Perpetually adding energy

Through moonish pull

Earth's own winds

Creasing and pressing

Amplifying the motion

Solar power

Pulsing though,

Sparking life

Creation and evolution

Adding inestimable variety

Microscopic to monstrous

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Humanity contributing

Flotsam and jetsam

Enough to corrupt the system

Terminally

The Sea

I bought my grandson

This book

About sea creatures

He loves sharks

(Even more than dinosaurs)

Fascinating sea

Full of life

Mighty whales and tiny krill

Sharks for ever out to kill

We love all dolphins

Until we find

That orcas are the largest of their kind

Crabs and molluscs and sea snails

Starfish octopus and squid

Not to mention lobsters

Or corals plants and sea weeds

We are fascinated by

The eternal beat of the sea

Like breathing or your heart

Thumping

The pounding of the sea

We are on the edge

Screaming gulls

Lazy seals on rocks

Stinging jellyfish

Smelly seaweed and rotting cod heads

Fish and chips

Ice cream cones

Sand between the toes

Oh I do like to be beside the seaside

The Sea

Touched

By sun and moon.

Lifeless

Yet alive.

Swaying

Swirling

Rolling

Engine of emotion:

Petrol breath

Growling deeper

Deeper

Deeper still.

Stilling for a moment

To catch

A pause

Between thoughts

Tumbling

Turning

Churning

Crashing in and down

On the ocean bed

Of consciousness

As I lay

Listless,

Yet alive,

Alone.

Sea Saw

Shushing sounds of waves a-breaking
Rippling rills that reach the shore
Bringing dredged up flotsam with them,
Sea shells from the ocean floor.
Bringing hordes of Viking longboats
In the wake of Angles, who
Settled here and intermarried,
As invaders often do.

Though this is an island nation,
“Precious stone” in “silver sea”,
It has not repelled all boarders
In its gene pool’s history.
As the moon’s pull draws the water
To the sparkling crystal sand
So the lure of mythic virtues
Draws the stranger to our land.

Unlike the Romans, hostile soldiers
Come to conquer and subdue,
Nor the Norse or Norman forces,
Who came armed and plundering too,
They are hungry, poor and seasick,
Seeking rest and sanctuary,
Seeking refuge in our homeland
From their own lands forced to flee.

Sitting at the water’s edge, wise
King Canute said ‘It can’t be stayed!’
Shush now, hear the sea come rushing
With shells and sometimes hand grenades.
Crumpled waves or plate glass sheen, the
Sea’s the source, where we were made.

Worthing

**Marbles roll around a biscuit tin.
A lisp of waves bypass Goring
To instead come ashore and rattle the pebbles
In the gaps between the groynes at Worthing.**

**Seagulls' startled shrieks,
A ha-ha-ha chorus, like granny's laugh.**

**I don't mind the gulls or the stones,
Or the dog barks or the children arguing.**

**I just struggle with that smell.
What is it? Salty slime?
Is somebody boiling cabbage?
Exhausted Odor-Eaters from a teenager's trainers?**

**It's a sickly sweet sufurous scent,
And I'm back in the school hall
Pinching my nose to escape the stink bomb
That Baker let off on the last day of term.**

The Seagull

**His white paper shape glides down the evening sky,
Ended, his foraging in furrowed russet fields;
The head turns and, from the throat, a cry -
Haunting, melancholy, as the still air yields
To his graceful flight, this last gull home;
Home to the sea, the fresh washed shore,
As the colour fades the azure dome,
He wheels and turns, where the waves through the dark
caves roar,
Down past the headland, into the lucid bay,
There, to land and bob and rise, with the pulsing tide,
To float and preen and doze, with the passing day,
Or stalk the beach, where long, dark shadows stride,
To stand with his companions, row on row,
Head into wind, one foot tucked high,
Breast tinted pink by distant sunset glow,
Awaiting some sign for one to rise and fly;
Then all take wing and to their stations go.
Now, as I walk the sand, they're lost to sight –
Only a feather, here and there, like flakes of snow,
Bright at my feet before the night.**

Pebbles

**No Trump on the shore and no 'Bollocks to Brexit,'
No Boris PM – just the glistening sea.**

**No earthquakes, disasters, no Middle East wargames,
just granite, sand, water, a vast sky – and me.**

**Thank God for the shoreline, for waves crashing inwards,
for making me feel like a pebble or shell –**

**so tiny compared to the greatness of Nature
for millions of years being thrashed by the swell.**

**No Trump, Putin, Boris with heads big as pumpkins,
with hearts for the richest, contempt for the poor;**

**with fiddled expenses, with tax havens, lovers,
with pussy-grab hands, no respect for the law.**

**I stand on the beach and am awed by the hugeness
of sky stretching onwards – how far who can tell?**

**Thank God for the shoreline, with waves crashing inwards.
For Trump, Putin, Boris are pebbles as well.**

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Sea

Emily Dickinson wrote,
“Bring me the sunset in a cup” –
But I can view the sunset
From my kitchen window.
I need the sea in a mug,
Placed on my desk beside me.
A mug of driftwood and rocks,
Of sea-glass and shingle.
Of wind bearing the brackish tang of seaweed
And carrying the salty screech of gulls.
Of pale, scudding clouds against a grey horizon
And the steady, jealous pull of the tide:
A patient smoothing of sharp edges.
A mug of something for doleful, land-locked days,
To anchor me to myself.

© Caroline Brooker

Sea Lover

Eyes squint, as you sweep rhythmically towards me,
the debris of the night before, following in your wake
As you come closer, I teasingly dodge your grasp
My toes curl into the cool sand and I move away, fast

The sound of your approach is measured, but relentless
As you stretch across the shore, without a care
Knocking over indiscriminate people like skittles
Who are foolish enough to just stand and stare

Whilst the sun is setting, we finally meet, I lie supplicant beneath
I gasp as my body welcomes your silky touch
Your warmth envelops me,
I crave and desire what you offer very much

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