I started Early – Took my Dog –

And visited the Sea –

The Mermaids in the Basement

Came out to look at me –

And Frigates – in the Upper Floor

Extended Hempen Hands –

Presuming Me to be a Mouse –

Aground – upon the Sands –

But no Man moved Me – till the Tide

Went past my simple Shoe –

And past my Apron – and my Belt

And past my Boddice – too –

And made as He would eat me up –

As wholly as a Dew

Upon a Dandelion’s Sleeve –

And then – I started – too –

And He – He followed – close behind –

I felt His Silver Heel

Upon my Ancle – Then My Shoes

Would overflow with Pearl –

Until We met the Solid Town –

No One He seemed to know –

And bowing – with a Mighty look –

At me – The Sea withdrew –

—Emily Dickinson

**Rooms**

I remember rooms that have had their part

In the steady slowing down of the heart.

The room in Paris, the room at Geneva,

The little damp room with the seaweed smell,

And that ceaseless maddening sound of the tide—

Rooms where for good or for ill—things died.

But there is the room where we (two) lie dead,

Though every morning we seem to wake and might just as well seem to sleep again

As we shall somewhere in the other quieter, dustier bed

Out there in the sun—in the rain.

—Charlotte Mew

**Ebb**

I know what my heart is like

Since your love died:

It is like a hollow ledge

Holding a little pool

Left there by the tide,

A little tepid pool,

Drying inward from the edge.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay

**At the End**

Few possessions: a chair,

a table, a bed

to say my prayers by,

and, gathered from the shore,

the bone-like, crossed sticks

proving that nature

acknowledges the Crucifixion.

All night I am at

a window not too small

to be frame to the stars

that are no further off

than the city lights

I have rejected. By day

the passers-by, who are not

pilgrims, stare through the rain’s

bars, seeing me as a prisoner

of the one view, I who

have been made free

by the tide’s pendulum truth

that the heart that is low now

will be at the full tomorrow.

—R. S. Thomas

**Low Tide, Late August**

That last summer when everything was almost always terrible

we waded into the bay one late afternoon as the tide had almost finished

pulling all the way out

and sat down in the waist-deep water,

I floating on his lap facing him, my legs floating around him,

and we quietly coupled,

and stayed, loosely joined like that, not moving,

but being moved by the softly sucking and lapping water,

as the pulling out reached its limit and the tide began to flow slowly back again.

Some children ran after each other, squealing in the shallows, near but not too near.

I rested my chin on his shoulder looking toward the shore.

As he must have been looking over my shoulder, to where the water deepened

and the small boats tugged on their anchors.

—Marie Howe

**Corryvreckan**

*“a depe horlepoole quhairin if schippis do enter thair is no refuge but death onlie”*

*Alexander Lindsay, A Rutter of the Scottish Seas, c. 1540*

Thickening in these narrows to some height and speed,  
squeezing through the Great Door, Dorus Mhor,  
the sea’s so high it’s climbing over itself to get through.  
They call these “the overfalls.” A sluice through a bottleneck.  
A great seething. The frenzy of water feeding on water.  
  
Seen from above, the tidal race is a long army moving fast  
across a plain as flat and grey as a shield of polished steel,  
to reach, at the end, the terrible turbulence of battle.  
A blue stream turned to a gutter of broken water:  
water that’s stood its ground, churning; sea  
kept back and held in standing waves:  
walls of water, each as tall as a church door,  
endlessly breaking on the same point—  
each wave swallowing its own form  
and returning, re-making itself, chained there  
on its own wheel, turning black to white to black.  
  
The sea gets stranger beyond the sentry waves—  
a round of slow slack-water, barely moving,  
ringed by raging white: a close,  
oily calm, unnaturally smooth, like a metal blank.  
Then you see them—these  
errors on the still surface—sudden  
disturbances, boils that bulge and blister, burst,  
small holes that appear, whirling open  
as if a hundred sink-plugs had been pulled.  
Then the huge round rises up: dead-level, streaming,  
upwelling, holding its shape like some giant plate  
that’s been lying just under the water  
being lifted up fast and then  
dropped back down, the sea  
sucking in after it,  
from all sides, into its absence, waves  
shearing over, folding in to the core, the depth  
and the great black gullet of loss.  
The maelstrom. The long throat of Corryvreckan.  
The opened body of water that today we rode across.

—Robin Robertson