**Dover Beach**

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits;—on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar

Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,

At their return, up the high strand,

Begin, and cease, and then again begin,

With tremulous cadence slow, and bring

The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago

Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought

Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery; we

Find also in the sound a thought,

Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

 —Matthew Arnold

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

 **Neither Out Far Nor In Deep**

The people along the sand
All turn and look one way.
They turn their back on the land.
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass
A ship keeps raising its hull;
The wetter ground like glass
Reflects a standing gull.

The land may vary more;
But wherever the truth may be—
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?

 —Robert Frost

 **The End of March**

 *For John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read: Duxbury*

It was cold and windy, scarcely the day
to take a walk on that long beach
Everything was withdrawn as far as possible,
indrawn: the tide far out, the ocean shrunken,
seabirds in ones or twos.
The rackety, icy, offshore wind
numbed our faces on one side;
disrupted the formation
of a lone flight of Canada geese;
and blew back the low, inaudible rollers
in upright, steely mist.

The sky was darker than the water
—*it* was the color of mutton-fat jade.
Along the wet sand, in rubber boots, we followed
a track of big dog-prints (so big
they were more like lion-prints). Then we came on
lengths and lengths, endless, of wet white string,
looping up to the tide-line, down to the water,
over and over. Finally, they did end:
a thick white snarl, man-size, awash,
rising on every wave, a sodden ghost,
falling back, sodden, giving up the ghost. . . .
A kite string?—But no kite.

I wanted to get as far as my proto-dream-house,
my crypto-dream-house, that crooked box
set up on pilings, shingled green,
a sort of artichoke of a house, but greener
(boiled with bicarbonate of soda?),
protected from spring tides by a palisade
of—are they railroad ties?
(Many things about this place are dubious.)
I’d like to retire there and do *nothing*,
or nothing much, forever, in two bare rooms:
look through binoculars, read boring books,
old, long, long books, and write down useless notes,
talk to myself, and, foggy days,
watch the droplets slipping, heavy with light.
At night, a *grog a l’américaine*.
I’d blaze it with a kitchen match
and lovely diaphanous blue flame
would waver, doubled in the window.
There must be a stove; there is a chimney,
askew, but braced with wires,
and electricity, possibly
—-at least, at the back another wire
limply leashes the whole affair
to something off behind the dunes.
A light to read by—perfect! But—impossible.
And that day the wind was much too cold
even to get that far,
and of course the house was boarded up.

On the way back our faces froze on the other side.
The sun came out for just a minute.
For just a minute, set in their bezels of sand,
the drab, damp, scattered stones
were multi-colored,
and all those high enough threw out long shadows,
individual shadows, then pulled them in again.
They could have been teasing the lion sun,
except that now he was behind them
—a sun who’d walked the beach the last low tide,
making those big, majestic paw-prints,
who perhaps had batted a kite out of the sky to play with.

 —Elizabeth Bishop

 **With Kit, Age 7, At The Beach**

We would climb the highest dune,
from there to gaze and come down:
the ocean was performing;
we contributed our climb.

Waves leapfrogged and came
straight out of the storm.
What should our gaze mean?
Kit waited for me to decide.

Standing on such a hill,
what would you tell your child?
That was an absolute vista.
Those waves raced far, and cold.

‘How far could you swim, Daddy,
in such a storm?’
‘As far as was needed,’ I said,
and as I talked, I swam.

—William Stafford

**At Compo Beach**

Drastic in its claims upon
Our two-dimensioned holiday
Where sea and sky so neatly hinge,

Your body standing in the sun
Becomes a site of sudden change,
Accuses where we would applaud,

And criticizes every hour
Of light with shadows adequate
To prove the flattened air a fraud.

You walk across the stony beach,
Appropriately negligent
Of effort, and in spite of each

Inhuman task I summon up
To justify men being here,
Facility, I see, is all:

Where one tall bather is enough
To be our season’s Centaur, just
By wading slowly out to where

The sea’s green fur begins at length
To grow against you, and your own
Accustomed skin gives way to end

In a flourish of salt, swart hair.
How well the unsaddled ocean serves
As stallion half to the human beast!

And for the time we idly stare,
You leave Connecticut behind
With an obsolete shirt and socks and us

On shore—to join the heroes you
Have never heard of in the sea,
Irrelevant as any myth

To all our merely human loves.

 —Richard Howard