

# Climacteric by the Sea

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## 1

A child cartwheels by me on the sand  
where my steps now are staid and heavy.  
Not that I was ever  
a competent cartwheeler  
or steady in a handstand  
—ran like another though  
barefoot along the bare  
ripple-ridged beach  
through the frothing water-edges  
that came and went, that come and go.

Do I make too much of not liking to be old?  
After all, I didn't like being young too much  
(not after I was younger  
than this cartwheeling child)  
yet never lacked, do not lack, delight,  
would be wholly sorry to have missed life  
on this multifarious earth.  
Accepting life entails acceptance  
of death to balance birth,  
of depressing age as well as youth's depressions.

## 2

Sorrow I have known,  
unhappiness,  
fear, anxiety  
and worse corrosions of the soul,  
but never hunger and cold  
—not real cold, let alone  
real hunger—not want  
and the consequent  
stress and distress,  
miseries, misery.

This being so  
have I the right,  
or power, to be a poet?  
I don't know,  
but I can't help it.  
Seagulls cry  
circling, swooping over  
the white, noisy water.  
The call comes from them  
naturally.

## 3

I stand on the balcony.  
Children run and shout  
on the beach, splash and shout  
in the sea. Grown-ups lounge out  
from the pub to drink on the wall  
or sit on the beach or walk,  
young and middle-aged  
and, a class of their own, in pairs  
or singly, greeting each other  
with a kind of masonry,  
subtly apart, the old.

I know I am not a child.  
(Up to a point I know  
—have I ever really, though,  
quite grown up? But that's  
another question.) The thing  
that strikes me oddly now  
is that I have to make  
a conscious effort to take  
the fact that, looking down  
on me from this balcony,  
a watcher would see me  
simply one of the old.