

# *What Could Be More Necessary Than Poetry or the Sea?*

by Lin Nelson Benedek

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My husband recites long-out-of-favor Longfellow and I know  
why I'm here.

Longfellow brought him to words and words brought him to me.  
Sandpipers scuttle shoreline, tracks in wet sand.

*The sea awoke at midnight from its sleep . . .*

*And round the pebbly beaches far and wide . . .*

I never thought it was coming for me, this violent, beautiful sea.

“By which magic does the earth breathe?” the professor asks.

“Define the forces of nature, including the fifth we call  
*quintessence*.”

Last night we sat out with a crescent moon and a smattering of stars.  
I almost fell asleep to the rhythmic crashing and low hollow sounds, salt  
spray in my nostrils and on the arms of the wooden chair and on the  
cushions. I'm not going to pretend. Most of my adventures take place in  
my imagination; more ventures inner than outer. I probably shouldn't be  
telling you this: Home is my muse.

In the morning dolphins leap in the surf close in.  
I'm drawn here by the light,  
bright with no seeing.

Mr. Boynton gave us each a poem to memorize.  
"Abou Ben Adhem" was mine.

Mr. Boynton taught us from a chaise in the front of the room after  
his heart attack.

"Name five coastal towns. Name the seven seas, the seven winds."

Once the forces of nature were one.

We all die sometime.

My first epiphany, at ten: My family, asleep. I'm sitting on a balcony on a  
cliff looking out over the sea. At dawn. Under the spell of sea-surrender.  
Feeling greater and smaller than I ever have. All of it and none of it are  
me. All of it and none of it are mine.

We know nothing and we know everything.