

Clamming

I go digging for clams once very two or three years
Just to keep my hand in (I usually cut it),
And whenever I do so I tell the same story
Of how at the age of four I was trapped by the tide
As I clammed a sandbar. It's no story at all
But I tell it and tell it; it serves my small lust
To be thought of as someone who's lived.
I've a war too to fall back on, and some years of flying,
As well as a high quota of drunken parties,
A wife and children; but somehow the clamming thing
Gives me an image of the louder events: me helpless,
Alone with my sandpail,
As fate in the form of soupy Long Island sound
Comes stalking me.

I've a son now at that age.
He's spoiled, he's been sickly.
He's handsome and bright, affectionate and demanding.
I think of the tides when I look at him.
I'd have him alone and sea-girt, poor little boy.
And pass on the weeping, keep the thing going.

The self, what a brute it is. It wants, wants.
It will not let go of its even most fictional grandeur
But must grope, grope down in the muck of its past
For some little squirting life and bring it up tenderly
To the lo and behold of death, that it may weep

Son, when you clam,
Watch out for the tides and take care of yourself,
Yet no great care,
Lest you care too much and brag of the caring
And bore your best friends and inhibit your children and sicken
At last into opera on somebody's sandbar. Son, when you clam,
Clam.