FRONT FLIP HALF TWIST

CLIVE JAMES

In the video from Wales, my granddaughter
Steps to the wall’s edge. Just a yard below
The beach begins, a long way from the water.
A pause for thought. She then proceeds to throw
A cartwheel through the air, and, when she lands,
Stand upright on the sand, all done no hands.

She came to her miraculous mastery
Of this maneuver by a strict process –
She still insists it was no mystery –
Of more and more to reach down less and less
Until, one day, the finished thing was there,
Made manifest entirely in mid-air.

I, who no longer fly, feel I am flying
When I watch her describe that graceful arc,
So perfectly alive. I can’t be dying
If I see this. The sky will not grow dark
While she spins through it, setting it alight,
Making my day by staving off the night.

Play it again. A poem that has taken
Its final form is radiant like this.
Beginnings left behind, but not forsaken,
Its history beyond analysis,
What starts by growing slowly, like a pearl,
Takes off and turns into a whirling girl.