

Inside the home we can hear movement. Men hollering, boots in motion—bullets,
tiny shells
scattered across the fields.
I rush, on foot, to the city.
HOT air & HOT money—I always hated the city.

I seek out the cure-all, but honey is low and the doctor's gone missing.

At last, I find her.
She's shelling peas.

I'm shy and she knows it. So the queen pulls me inside.

Closemouthed.
Uncommunicative.

Jars of nails and claws; seashells line the ceiling.
Her hands are hard.
She is bone, mostly.
What is left of her skin drifts towards the ground.

She pokes my exterior.

I am delicate—I am coming-of-age.
I am layers of nacre. The queen is Mother-of-pearl.

It is time for me to run-on;
time to recover my world senses.

Now, to the beach. But first, the bar.
Doctor John. *You're here.*

More cocktail sauce, one more platter full of shells.

He sees through my hard shell;
begs me to come out of my shell.

Finally, to his office.
Another jar opened. This time, the beetle—*dendroctonus frontalis*.
Its wing cases are removed.
Soaked.
Applied.

The fighting continues.
Projectiles fly overhead.
Artillery shells—I pay them no mind. They do not fight for me.

Darling, smile. The guests are arriving.

Grilled oysters—*hors d'oeuvres*.

Don't be impolite.

I know this etiquette.

Don't you love your children?

I prefer solitude.

The process is complete.

No longer a delicate egg, but firm, like the mollusk's shell.

I pull apart my shell, stretch the mantle wide.

Naked on the beach—my hard surface reflects the sun.

I abandon my body, my shell—water, embrace me, this body, your pearl.