

## All In a Row

by Kaytie Rose Thomas, from South Carolina but living in Aberdeen, Scotland

Nobody collects mussel shells,  
or at least that's what I said,  
that day we were on the beach,  
as he picked through the bits  
and bobs the sea had left  
excised and washed up  
like the baby teeth of the sea.

"In Asia," he told me, "there are  
mussels that are gem-green."  
Like emeralds, like his birthstone,  
and then I imagined a crown  
full of mussels, imagined  
some kind of mermaid,  
something mythical.

I looked more carefully then,  
tuned my eyes to see the curves  
of black and blue, like bruises  
amid the sea glass and shells.  
Hours before, in the restaurant  
by the sea, we cracked the shells  
wide open with our fingers.

Our sticky, salty fingers,  
white-wine smiles, sea-kisses—  
at the beach I imagined myself  
with the mussel-shell crown,  
all the emeralds, jewel-teeth.  
Nobody collects mussel shells  
except us, he said. Except us, I said.