

Blue Mussels

by Shara Lessley, Virginia, USA

Of how to begin to collect them,
to patiently clip the fringe binding
each valve together, I know little.

And of what it takes to scrape
the casings of seaweed and grit. I know
only they are to ocean what grass is

to stretches of prairie and meadow,
that is, a piece of something entire,
and when steamed in wine or water,

what they mean to you. So tonight
as you fork out the meat, blue mussel
unhinged, I feel I understand why

one divides in two. Ancient husk.
Pale tongue a salt-lick pressed
by restrictions that shape it.

If I could pry you open. Pluck you
from your watery nest. If I could close
myself inside your airtight chamber,

bed down on your living flesh.
If the softest part of ourselves
wasn't hidden, what of earth or light

might we remember? What speck
of dust would we recall? Back and forth,
back and forth. A near invitation.

Only now does the alabaster dish
seem to me two's division: empty shells
words we've so often rehearsed

and worn the human out of.