

Sweet intertidal flesh

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Imagine a modern midden
of mussel shells, mounding
higher with every pot
full of the fruit of the sea
that we humans have feasted on
time out of time.

Simmered in a saucepan
they're creamy, tangy with herbs
and Neolithic wine, cider, bread.
Thrown on a campfire
they steam in their own juice,
delivering sweet intertidal flesh
to the hungry hunter-gatherer.

Back before metal was melted,
blue-black shells were sharp scrapers,
clever little blades, hollow spoons
all silver-shiny inside, no need
to carve wood or polish stone –
a Swiss Army Knife
free from the sea.

Honour the sandy salty strings
of their beards, that cling them
to rope and post and stone. Know
the useful shell held in your cupped hand.
Celebrate the tender flesh today,
remembering that first campfire
by an estuary, that first
warm sweet mouthful of sea.