

BEAUFORT COUNTY ELEGIES

The rotting turtle shell I dragged from the beach
to keep as a brother, blue crab husks lining
the sandbox wall. It was a miracle I didn't dissolve
into bleached coral all those hours sifting the road
for abandoned treasures. My mother taught me, traced
the pocks of the coral's stiffened body, smoothed
a thumb over stone-stilled clams, time-clasped.
She drove us miles out to backwood culdesacs
where machines dumped the insides of the sea's
washed-up self so I could dig gleeful on weekends.
I thought everything could bite. I don't blame
little me. For years, I held the ocean in a flour jar:
mounds of shed fangs. I used them to open
up my skin to see the living. For years I slept
with an army green walkie-talkie to guard the tether
between me and my parents in the next room.

Even the docks, stretched into a widening
wet world, slithered with snakes sometimes, like
the ring-necked that came up to us so quick and someone
chopped it in half, just like that, and nothing ended
only quickened—but don't let me tender this
too much. The gerbil I held up by the tail
dropped, his severed limb in my pinched fingers.
Later, in my fume and quiet chaos, I crunched
his small body beneath my knee while I wasn't
looking. I don't mean to say I'm a monster.
I was the small twitching. Inside me, there's still
a four-eyed girl, hysteria fogging up her blue glasses,
holding the tiny, seizing body in her two hands,
saying *you should kill me, Mom, you have to kill me.*