

Laura Jensen

Minus Tide

May 3, -0.1

Beneath my hat my face
a vision of sun-brushed

eternity: goddess from the sea.
And in my hands

the earth-shaped
snail. The boathouse

admiral graces me
with a nod —

*yes, the snail is still alive
in there. If I were you*

I'd put him back.
His sun-touched face

bright with attention, he is
muttering about

touching
stranded wildlife . . .

May 4, -1.6

Sun all morning.
I come upon

the earth-shaped snail
once again.

His foot is as
displayed in the Shellfish Book

at the library
yesterday afternoon,

the snail as it walks
across the sea floor.

A draped train
about his open edge.

I play
the snail a song.

A Swedish song my mother's
family played.

The waves half-
cover him

with gravel and sand.
I walk on.

May 5, -2.7

Some raindrops. And it is cool.
I search, but do not see

the earth-shaped snail. Only
Orientals with buckets,

clam shovels. A lady,
a girl, and a child.

When I find the snail,
still covered by sand

I play songs.
The sun does not come

out, but the filter of clouds
fails — the colors

far across the water
are true as daylight

with no shadow.
It is cool, it is cold. I stay.

And a student
walks my rim of water.

He reaches down. And
Hey, hey, hey, hey!

*I think someone is alive
in there, I instruct. Often*

*the shells on the beach are
occupied!* As he disappears, his back

of gray denim,
concrete camouflage, is painted

HANDS OF DEATH.
I sit down and weep.

The radio
instructs on

all these students' sense of
self-esteem.

May 6, -3.2

While I play the Swedish songs
I wonder if the earth-shaped snail

is trapped
in sand and rocks.

I wonder who wonders. Is it
Mr. Seagull,

nearly grown, places of brown?
Or is it Mr. Snail?

(Or is it Mr. Rogers?)
Is not the snail entrenched?

Just down the beach rolls in
a fascination —

another, its body
stepped half-out.

Back at the earth-shaped snail
a frill of mucous

tissue above the sand level.
Chilled, like soft Jell-O to touch.

And it shudders below very fast.
Alive. Today

two Oriental women
walk past to take long

scraps of seaweed
to use in recipes.

May 7, -3.2

Sunday. A couple
bends over the space

as I walk toward the earth-shaped
snail. I call but she

picks it up. *It is alive,*
and very loud I explain,

over the pleasure inboards.
He says something to her

In Japanese.
I say very loud,

above the pleasure inboards,
Jag talar inte mycket Svensk.

I do not speak much Swedish.
But nobody chuckles.

May 8, -2.8

Sunday washed up on the walk back
the body of a cat. Today a hawk.

When at last I have eaten
my cheese sandwich

and have slowly found
the earth-shaped snail,

I just sort of want
a Hershey bar.

May 9, -1.9

At the thick wooden railings
near the Pt. Defiance boathouse

in damp and cold that penetrates
a sparrow fluffs its feathers

into a coat.
Past the new boathouse,

past the first definition of beach
that ends at the bulkhead stair,

I estimate forty and more
adults and children

set like a ring with many small stones
at the space of the earth-shaped snail.

The snail has dug him in deep.
At a glance he is a smooth place,

the top of a smooth rock
among pebbles and barnacles.

I sit on my top layer
of sweatshirt,

eat a sourdough roll
as the clusters of birthday

crunch around me.
And then I play the Swedish songs.

My hands are stiff with cold.

Reprise

And did he tumble in for the new moon?
And does he wax into the sand?

Lewis Moon Snail
Drake Moon Snail — three to five inches,
the one yellow-brown.