

# Losing Shells

Jessica Young

It's when I happen upon a cemetery of sorts—all these little houses, some broken, some submerged, a few glinting in the afternoon light, first catching my attention—that my love for the shells diminishes fast as wavebreak. What I'd spent painstaking hours searching the pullback of the waves for—head turned toward, back bent down—here I find en masse. This one twisted, golden, this one spiraled, the color of bruises. Spotted, turreted, decayed, still shimmering, all empty, all magnificent beyond everyday encounter. But now there are so many of them to fawn over, there are too many of them. Now my search must be specialized, and I look for the ones like castles—ivory, stone-like. As I look, my feet move over the others, hundreds, that just a day ago I prized. I hear them break under my shoes, their architecture crumbling. Then even the castle shells lose appeal as I think of them pushed by a current to one patch of beach I'm sure to find soon. I suppose I could be enchanted by the gathering—how remarkable for them to be here, clustered, like this. They must be of equivalent density, shape, that the waves could move them in a group. That they're not covered by sand, kelp, that the wind and rain subsided after two days, and I find myself here, now, among them. But a rarer thing is a more beautiful one, and I walk from the beach, pieces of shell caught in my sole, empty-handed.

# We weep beside the willow because

*for Steve*

Jessica Young

- ... it is a burden, to coexist  
with loveliness.
- ... the years go by  
and much of what we want—lilacs spilling  
over the driveway, a piano with 88 tuned keys, a written  
testimony of our grandparents' lives—it  
doesn't happen.
- ... only children get lullabies;  
only children get sung softly  
to sleep.
- ... we become diluted, living  
these versions of ourselves.
- ... at some specific instant in time, the dogwood tree  
in the sideyard is half-dead, and here we are  
wanting to know when.
- ... of all the theoretical gorgeousness.
- ... whether we measure them or not,  
months pass.  
When one ends, another begins.
- ... there are those we love  
and there are those we want to love, and  
they are different.
- ... these may not be the right answers  
but they're the ones we know.
- ... we are happy  
sometimes.  
We experience happiness  
weather permitting.
- ... now is as good as never.
- ... thirst drives us to flood ourselves  
with soda, wine, coffee, and  
still we dry out.

# Sul Ponticello

Jessica Young

The slick spruce presses  
into ribs, strokes out  
a voice, coaxes a glissando  
from tightly-wrapped  
strings. Coaxes my head  
into position so wave upon  
wave can rub my eardrum  
smoothly; so I might take inside  
chills from the col legno; the flip  
of the bow comes down  
harsh. Playing pauses: peg  
grasped and slowly twisted, tuning  
up and down, slides the notes  
into place by matched  
vibrations. Gut-strings  
rubbed with rosin, sticky  
for friction. The bow glides taut,  
drags lithe, across all  
four strings—seemingly  
weightless. And the neck  
falls back, caught  
by shoulders,

but no, this is too easy, this way.  
Shoulder muscles, oh, always, and  
unconscious nibble on lips.  
So confident—so obvious: like the body  
and pegbox, tailpiece and frogscrew,  
f-holes and fingering. What of  
his vinyl cello case with silken stickers  
there still from the fourth grade?  
What of the thought of impressions,  
surely painful, in fingertips from pressing  
so firm, so long onto aluminum strings?

# Realty

Jessica Young

I am looking for a house with four walls; each must have a door, full-sized, shut, greased up, ready to be opened in either direction; the ceiling must have two. Where there is not a door, there is verse. Walls covered in verse, sprawled with something familiar. Children's verse, perhaps. Songs. No misspelled words, no lines misquoted.

Nothing wrong, then. No sharp objects, nothing a body can't be tied to. No chairs without arms, tables without legs—nothing there one blink gone the next. No mirrors, no picture frames, no surface that reflects. The locks the only shiny things. The locks warded, intricate yet simple. Audible. I am looking for a house with locks

that make noise, with wards inside that grate against themselves, going *crick/crack/crunch*. As I turn the key, I should be able to feel the elements struggling—resistance of metal on metal. I am aware skeleton keys can undo much of this, but like anything we can keep behind a door, what I am locking away can easily be undone, itself.