

So many little deaths cast up, broken, honed  
to glistening pearl, graceful swirls of nautilus  
revealing its innermost chambers

long emptied, digested and nourishing anew.

Ageless beat of waves breaking onto sand,

retreating over shell shards, sounding

the staccato clatter of a thousand snake rattles.

Pick up still-wet pieces, watch the sheen dry,

the rainbows fade to memories of sunlight,

beach, and pall-bearing breakers

pulsing the cycle of life and death and life.

Half-clams whistle down to angel wings—

only the hinge's root where one bonds

to the next is strong enough, survives

the grinding dance of surf and sand.

Waves drum a hymn, my mother's heartbeat

engrained since womb days, soothing

though her beat has passed to me now,

and mine will to sons. When the time comes

toss my rough-edged remains into the tide.

*Judy Whitehill Witt*