

MY STEP-FATHER SHOWS ME HOW TO CLEAN AN ABALONE

**GARRETT
BRYANT**

he sets the abalone shell-side down
on the table—slick

with mucus, the mantle striped
black, gray—fleshy
tendrils flutter like millipede legs

my step-father grabs the ab iron—2 inches
flattened metal a foot long—

you slip the edge between the mantle and shell

he says *and you give a couple shoves*—he thrusts
the iron hard, once

twice—*until it sticks*—

he slides the iron, circling—*then, you twist it*

like this—the edge of the shell—*til it*

pops—a loud, sucking-pop
and the meat, the animal, begins slipping
out of the shell—*grab the guts*

like this *and yank em off—*

he hands me the body, still
alive—about the weight of a pineapple in my palms

*this is called the cap—*he points to the white hump
recently connected to the shell—
it's the filet mignon of the ocean—

he turns it over—*this is the foot, vital*
to its survival, that holds onto
its surroundings, its home—rocks,
*other abalones—*how often we unfasten

ourselves from what we are—*you can tell how healthy it is*
by how well it holds on—

pearl and turquoise in the soft afternoon
the abalone's shell, empty on the table, glistens