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The Shell Mall

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Christopher Tozier

The Shell Mall

Fort Myers, Florida, 1977

From the rubbish outside,
I pocket the interior
slick pink twist of a conch shell,
its mathematical impossibility
rubbed down to mere equation,
now thrown out for its imperfection.
The heart must be made of this

enameled glass,
this flawed concentricity.
Inside, hundreds of old women with hats pick
through bins of dried pufferfish,
expensive red angel wings,
cool moonshells,
augers, netrites, cowries
and deadly fire cones;
the soft animals
knifed through
and scooped back to the Indonesian water,
stripped entirely of their art.

It must be done this way, cruelly,
or else the shoppers must accept the surf-pounded edges
and the bored suck-holes from predators,
the cracks, the dun finish
that comes from being humane.
Only by pulling life too soon
from its quick pearly spirals,
do we allow its perfection,
opal throats, aubergines, favriles,
some little thing after death that remains
remarkable.