

Michael McDowell

## Clam Tide

On clamming weekends  
the countryside rises and drives to the coast  
hoping to dig dinner.

Razor clams know to keep their necks down,  
but when the tide goes out  
and the sun sets a flatiron of spilled orange juice across the horizon,  
then it's hard not to wiggle the digger,  
chew a little sand, and  
spurt hello to the world in a parabolic arc.

My son and I descend with the rest of the world  
onto the October beach.  
As far as the eye can see, kids, parents, graybeards  
meditate the glistening wet sand with bent heads,  
looking for outward signs of inner life:  
a dimple here, a doughnut there.

Clam licenses pinned to shoulders flutter in the wind.  
Surf roaring in the background,  
we send sand skyward  
with clam shovels and tubes.

The clams race deeper faster.  
We drop to our knees  
and dig the last sloppy foot with our hands,  
heads bowed toward the ocean,  
the entire wet beach our prayer rug.