

Meat and Shell

When the doctor tells you the bad news, you collect his words, which drop like peanuts into your lap—peanuts you intend to give to the squirrels. You consider eating one or two, but these are peanuts to be buried in the earth, and forgotten, for the winter, or forever. You'll dig one up someday, unable to remember how you allowed the pile to build, like a mini peanut pyramid, upon your thighs. You, looking at the doctor attentively, quizzically, nodding, making the *emm-emm* sounds that say *I'm listening* and *isn't this interesting* while the floor of your stomach drops like an elevator cut loose and hurtling down the shaft. Meanwhile, you are being pelted in the face with peanut words: malignancy, metastasis, dysplasia, bad blood counts, and organs going awry—parts you didn't know you had, parts you'd be fine to be rid of, no loss there, *come take them*, you think, nodding pleasantly, good naturedly, plummeting toward the Earth's center, meeting the stench and bitter taste of it. How lovely the dirt that holds you, the dirt in which you're buried, meat and shell. How far you've traveled, effortlessly, from light, from land, from the sweet claws that held you. What bliss, you think, to be savored again someday, resurrected in the brilliant light of day only to be greeted by the mandibles of your captor. Ask the doctor. Ask the doctor how this one turns out.