

Sean Forbes

## *Isla Providencia*

*First Prize, Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest*

On his final trip to Providencia  
I asked my grandfather to bring back  
a piece of the island, so he wrapped

a conch shell with three towels, deep  
in his suitcase among plastic jars  
jammed with stewed plums and orange rinds.

*A gift of hidden sources—make of it what  
you wish, he says, placing this common  
Caribbean souvenir in my lap, leaving me*

to imagine Henry Morgan discovering this shell,  
cupping it over his right ear, swaying to the sirens'  
cunning whistles, declaring Providencia his final

resting place. My grandmother tells me that a Lazy Hill  
woman's dying wish was for a conch shell to be laid  
on her grave since she loved the mollusk's tough muscle.

I pretend I am a Carib warrior, inserting my fingers  
into the shell's curved aperture, like Poseidon, wielding  
this weapon above my head against British and Spanish.

How easy the turn to violence. The shell's beige,  
pink and ivory no longer protective covering,  
but the blood and bone of pirates, Indians, slaves.