

# Of Molluscs

By May Sarton

As the tide rises, the closed mollusc  
Opens a fraction to the ocean's food,  
Bathed in its riches. Do not ask  
What force would do, or if force could.

A knife is of no use against a fortress.  
You might break it to pieces as gulls do.  
No, only the rising tide and its slow progress  
Opens the shell. Lovers, I tell you true.

You who have held yourselves closed hard  
Against warm sun and wind, shelled up in fears  
And hostile to a touch or tender word—  
The ocean rises, salt as unshed tears.

Now you are floated on this gentle flood  
That cannot force or be forced, welcome food  
Salt as your tears, the rich ocean's blood,  
Eat, rest, be nourished on the tide of love.

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May Sarton was born in Belgium, and immigrated to the US during World War I. She attended one of the country's first progressive grade schools, and received a scholarship to Vassar, which she declined to pursue acting. After failing as an actress, Sarton dedicated her energy to writing. She received some critical praise initially, but later reviews were often negative and caused her much personal despair. Over many decades, she managed to develop a sizable audience for both her poetry and her prose. In her poetry, she does not hold to any particular subject or form, writing in both free verse and meter, and about topics ranging from her personal love affairs to the student protests at Kent State.

