

OCEAN VUONG

Telemachus

Like any good son, I pull my father out
of the water, drag him by his hair

through sand, his knuckles carving a trail
the waves rush in to erase. Because the city

beyond the shore is no longer
where he left it. Because the bombed

cathedral is now a cathedral
of trees. I kneel beside him to see how far

I might sink. *Do you know who I am,*
ba? But the answer never comes. The answer

is the bullet hole in his back, brimming
with seawater. He is so still I think

he could be anyone's father, found
the way a green bottle might appear

at a boy's feet containing a year
he has never touched. I touch

his ears. No use. The neck's
bruising, I turn him over. To face

it. The cathedral in his sea-black eyes.
The face not mine but one I will wear

to kiss all my lovers goodnight:
the way I seal my father's lips

with my own and begin
the faithful work of drowning.