

**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.