

## wading through twilights

It was under a Florida palm one summer,  
one that burned up in the rest of the childhood  
hidden in my chest, that I admitted how  
I was afraid of the ocean and the way all her  
waves kept trying to grab my ankles with  
such a delicate grip. Papaw heard, laughing  
with the beach sway and rolling through feathered

dunes. He told me he'd hold my hand and help me  
walk until my knees learned to pray in a way the  
ocean could forgive. Left foot—pause...seagulls bray,  
another foot—he pulled me past their frothing call  
to turn back before I learned I couldn't  
turn away at all.

We made it knee-deep and I could still feel  
the ground shifting between my toes. Papaw promised  
we wouldn't go far, but he must have seen something  
trembling with strength under my quaking calves,  
because he tightened his grip and pulled me past the waiting  
waves. God, was I pissed back then—when my fear was met  
with a laugh that kept rolling as I followed,

but it's been a few years now since I last heard  
the way that grin loved to light up his sun-loved face. If I'm  
being honest, I've been feeling out of my depth, Papaw, and lately  
I keep thinking about that summer, and how July used to burn  
with the safety I felt back when your persistent pull knew exactly  
when to lead me from my own shallows.