

MY FATHER, SWIMMING

Waist deep in ocean, he was not my father.
His wetblack skin gleaming unfamiliar,
laughter spilling loudly from open mouth.
The hands that I had come to fear
acquiesced, deliquesced in seawater. I watched him
anticipate the splash of each wave
upon him, as though amazed.

He'd never been a child.
Those were shrouded years,
as the sole black altar boy at Dorr Memorial,
the one dark child on the diamond
of Walter Flynn Field. Watermelon eaten in secret,
forbidden by his father. Reticence was demanded.
This austerity is the father I know.
How could it have been him, swimming?

My father was volcanic, his eruptions capricious.
He'd have me retrieve his leather belt,
before bending me over his knee.
But in the water, I saw him surrender fierceness,
his large palms drawing circles around himself
a solitary space for something, someone, soft & safe.