Not Drowning

by Bill Yarrow

The young boy writhes in the screaming water, terrified by what's not there: the bottom sand. He winds himself around your neck and climbs up your head. You don't so much save him as not drown yourself. You were a buoy. You kept afloat until the tide pushed you into shore. As you emerge from the water, he's still hanging on to you, saying, "You saved my life! I owe you." You tell him that he doesn't owe you anything. I didn't do anything, you say. It was the tide. "The tide pushed us in." He's not listening. He doesn't care. He's got a hero and he's not letting go. He follows you around for weeks. At nine years old, you learn how cloying gratitude is.