

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.

