

Father

by Niamh O'Farrell-Tyler

We collected mussels on the beach.
Crushing slippery shells beneath my feet, I walked cloud-like with you
Over the grey sands.

You told me it was hard work, while the sea scraped metallic at the shore,
Slate, and fluent as body language,
And your failing eyes scanned the rocks. Shadows moved under the waves like organs,
And the wind tore away with us, carved the lines on your face. You would not leave until the
bucket was full.

When you'd stolen all you could from the rock pools
(Cold and sudden water, shallow as breathing)
You waded into the sea to look at the jutting limestone, jagged against the milky sky.
You were stooped against the pull on your boots,
Growing older every second,
Never grayer the whole rest of your life.

When you returned, your voice was full of salt. I helped you back up the cliff path,
Bucket rattling with shells,
You moving slow as the tide, aching to the bone.