

Here's an Ocean Tale

By Kwoya Fagin Maples

My brother still bites his nails to the quick,
but lately he's been allowing them to grow.
So much hurt is forgotten with the horizon
as backdrop. It comes down to simple math.

The beach belongs to none of us, regardless
of color, or money. We all come to sit
at the feet of the surf, watch waves
drag the sand and crush shells for hours.

My brother's feet are coated in sparkly powder
that leaves a sticky residue when dry.
He's twenty-three, still unaware of his value.
It is too easy, reader, for me to call him

beautiful, standing against the sky
in cherrywood skin and almond
eyes in the sun, so instead I tell him
he is handsome. I remind him

of a day when I brought him to the beach
as a boy. He'd wandered, trailing a tourist,
a white man pointing toward his hotel—
all for a promised shark tooth.

I yelled for him, pulled him to me,
drove us home. Folly Beach. He was six.
He almost went.

Source: *Poetry* (July 2021)