

John Pijewski

Carson Beach, Boston, July 1962

The men who wear their shirts at the beach.
Elderly, bristled white, like beach grass
Frozen incongruously. All along the water line
In this bowl-shaped bay there's not one wave.

The placid underpinnings of a life so serene—
Those men in their shirts could nod off and never
Come up. The background is the familiar urban
Landscape: only one skyscraper prods the sky.

The subway's three blocks away, or what would be
Blocks if houses stood their ground in a park.
In the bath house five cents will get you a locker
And enough water to drown. Naked men and boys

Strut as though their sleek bodies were born
Out of the sea; outside they walk too fast
Or too slow—they pull at their collars and sleeves.
Beneath a tree, farthest from the water,

My father lies on his side, propped on one elbow,
And whistles. He says in '24 at a pond three
Kilometers past his father's farm, his friends
Tossed him in; he struggled, went down, came up,

Almost went down for good. Since then he's been
Content to watch. A towel at the most.
The only time I saw him naked, he was standing,
Dry, in a back room, staring out a window.