

A Letter to My Father at Sea

by K. Carlton Johnson

You lean on the rail, one foot on the second row of chain links,
The sliding sea beneath your feet.
A drenching wind passes, you do not smoke,
it is silent except for the gray pulsing engines.

Are you thinking of your little house, from your bed of waves,
with cathedral ceiling, a fireplace and small mowed yard.
do you recall the picnic, or the summer we visited your sister in Michigan
driving all night in a two-toned station wagon.

I write to tell you, we miss your reliable leadership
behaving as minors, we adjust the drapes, so it is private at home.
where your three children are taught adoration,
the gladiolas perfuming through the front picture window,
repair some of the damage of living in another place.

mother has not resisted with arguments,
either social or educational. Home is home and worthy of gratitude.
we are accessories keeping democracy safe.

loyal to your homecomings, every 8 months or so
We have learned to clean and repair while you're gone,
when the fleet comes home,
to polish and make order.
We have grown to enjoy the time we take
Between the farewells, blocking out
the iron ramp holding the dock
to the ship where you climb and salute,
asking permission to go aboard.
we are in amazement of your shined shoes,
your crispy military bearing,
you are ordered like the flag, proud.
What satisfaction you take in duty,
pain keep us silent,
we light a candle for your protection and return,
so you may resume activities
In the home you have provided.

K. Cathleen Johnson grew up in a Navy family. Her poems have appeared in *William and Mary Review*, *Diner*, *Rattle*, and *BarelySouth*, to mention a few. Currently, she lives on the cusp of Lake Superior.