

## Watercolor

*At home you will need something more ...*

-Welcome Aboard: A Service Manual for the Naval Officer's Wife

I can no longer see it, but when I was a child I sensed  
a smiling face in this picture. A sailboat abuts the dock.  
A person kneels, elbows on the gunwale, speaking with the sailor.

Both are simple stock fill-ins of people, the inverted triangle  
of a torso, the brown strokes of legs. Their hats, I think,  
looked to me like eyebrows on a smiling face. There is no

mastery here, it was from my mother's first and last  
watercolor class, years before my birth. But the colors  
are pleasing, the light blue of the water, and the way each

horizontal brushstroke recalls a wave. The sky  
a different shade of blue, with purples and grays, and white  
spaces left for clouds, the hills on the far shore rounded, womanly.

Now I see, those are the San Diego hills--she must have  
painted this in Coronado, newly married, following the directive  
of optimistic busy-ness for the new wife:

*At home you will need something more than housework to keep  
you occupied ... take a course in a language, sewing, weaving,  
pottery making, bridge. Of course!*

She wasn't teaching, this tour was too short.  
So she took a watercolor class on that cozy island  
where my father rode to work on a scooter and was home

every evening. How I wish I could have lived there for a bit, but  
my father's withdrawal from Vietnam, but not the Navy, meant  
no more ship duty for him, and we were sent East. Still,

I have this bright picture of the time before the war. I see  
my mother's hand in the brushstrokes, her dark hair in the trunk  
of the tree, her likeness in the birds vanishing into the California sky.