

## My Father in the Navy: A Childhood Memory

Stiff and immaculate  
in the white cloth of his uniform  
and a round cap on his head like a halo,  
he was an apparition on leave from a shadow-world  
5 and only flesh and blood when he rose from below  
the waterline where he kept watch over the engines  
and dials making sure the ship parted the waters  
on a straight course.  
Mother, brother and I kept vigil  
10 on the nights and dawns of his arrivals,  
watching the corner beyond the neon sign of a quasar  
for the flash of white our father like an angel  
heralding a new day.  
His homecomings were the verses  
15 we composed over the years making up  
the siren's song that kept him coming back  
from the bellies of iron whales  
and into our nights  
like the evening prayer.

"My Father in the Navy: A Childhood Memory" by Judith Ortiz Cofer, from *Hispanics in the U.S.: An Anthology of Creative Literature*, Vol. 2, 1982.