

The Fog of the Forties

O blue ladies of The Bronx, the Waves,
my borough-loyal mizzens, for you
I would have lashed myself to the prow
as I watched your legs on well-oiled hinges
strut past Jerome Reservoir to Hunter College,
home of brainy women philosophers.

A high command of daughters,
you were ready to ride destroyers
carrying aircraft to the landlocked Infantry.

I envied your invulnerable Kotex
your jaunty smiles like medals
pinned to an Admiral's chest.

O blue ladies of The Bronx,
you'd never get bumped by boys
destined for coeducation
or have the wind knocked
out of your sails,
stricken by shyness.

Your virginity was a treasure
painstakingly built
like a boat inside a bottle,
out of matchbooks
and swizzle sticks,
a mixed blessing,
sent out to sea
with a message,
nautical but
nice.

I would wait for you in violet twilight
to anoint me with a smile.
Instead, each day I'd sail
at dawn's earliest light
into swarms of pimply girls
at junior high, discontented
with the world. I wanted to walk
to the end of the dock
and jump off into my life.

I wanted to emerge immortal
and flecked with foam
in an immaculate uniform.

Even today I swim out alone
to where the boats go,
clap shells to my ears
to hear surf pound,

Japan to Valparaiso

hoping to hear the waves,
their faint receding roar.

Barbara Unger-Sakano