

Hail and Farewell

atque in perpetuum, frāter, avē atque valē.
—Catullus

When it's over, he wants to leave
without glasses raised together

at his going, no last salute or *sir*.
I admit to gratitude.

I've never stood at ease in the uniform
stillness of those wives,

dependents as they're known,
the watered silk of their voices

at a ball, or the brides who bend
beneath an arch of sabers.

Although I understand the day
must be lowered ceremoniously,

received into our hands. I understand
we fold these endings

with neat and pointed corners.
Some parties welcome

new arrivals to command.
Some parties are for parting—

they take their names from poems
of the dead. I'm glad he takes

nothing with him when it's over,
not the flowers, not the picture

of a little ship, how it floats forever
in the matte-black frame of war.

As You Were

To become a knot untied, a bowline cut,
a sheepshank slithered from its shape.
To be unpolished brass, a deck unmopped,
a porthole fogging with the weather.
To be unstriped at the shoulder. To be
a hand without salute, a body left in its unease.

To be unmustered, unstanding
at attention. To be not as you were
for years. To be not hole or pit, not
maintenance, not snipe in coveralls,
unstained with engine grease. To be no
angle of attack. To be a missile aiming
nowhere but itself. To be sonar
pinging nothing, signal-jammed.
To be unwatered brown or blue.

To be breath unheld, unfloating
in the sea. To be both naught and not,
voyage without orders, no port of call.

To be unmapped, uncompassed,
points unfixd, no stars to navigate,
and all the sky unglittering and blank.