

Kestrel

Caroline Cooper

The Well-Spoken Naval Officer

“My hope is to be good in English and to make my dream of becoming a Navy Officer with proper grammar come true.”

—Heleny Feliz, Grade 9, Literature & Writing, Health Education and Research Opportunities High School, South Bronx, New York

It was not easy,
Getting to this boat.
Rising through the ranks.
Ensuring at every step and turn
That I was the woman for the job
And that my verbs came correct.
No never, not ever,
Did I dangle a modifier.
Because you can't run men
With run-on sentences.
They'll find you out.
Mutiny
On the open sea.
You must give them the solid ground
Of your grammar
Proper grammar.
That is the object
And they are my subjects.
I steer us through treacherous waters
To safety and back to port
Where they unload into bars and women
Shaking their heads as they flirt,
Forced to admit.
Forced, finally, to the truth.
Jesus, guys.
That First Officer of ours
She's got that proper grammar.
Her grammar—have you noticed?
It's really good.
Yes, they sit
Their cold mugs beading
Before the sun comes cresting

To remind them that
We leave at five.
We will leave at five.
By five, we will have left.