

## Passing and Meeting

We were sea-faring men, you and I. Another year, we might have been rivals—crossed each other, even—but the sea gave full and plenty, through that winter. We'd weathered worse. We learnt with leathered fingers, angled tightly, wanting water; fed each other fishflesh, wrung and writhing. You were wet, and I was shipwrecked nightly.

Love and death, tired titans! Each makes a horror of the other. We were kids that went to war for one another—wrote each other,

*“Love, I would not leave you lightly”*

*“You are a better muddied gun than I”*

*“Tomorrow I die. Live. Love another boy. And keep my letters.”*

We were women that rose together, steamed in the sun, to rub our linen raw before we bent big arms about each other, aching. I was run-off, running muddy from the scrubbing stone—I was fat and ashes, wrongly rendered—till some bit of bedding pulled us taut together; joined us, in its laying. Forehead to forehead, there we faced each other, frozen breath a folded ghost between us, and our tubs ran over. Some things stay the same. We stripped the sheets and, lines untied, undid each other tidy.

We learned early how to lose each other. Ballast-bellied, so it goes: we capsized slow, and drowned in shallow water—O, but we learned early how to love each other. I was drenched. Time spun me dry, and older, scaled and salted, smeared and tallowed, pointlessly I pitched to change the rudder:

*“I dreamt I met you in the night & rode you home  
through German Bight & Humber.”*

Like ships passing in the white sheets of Dover, we shuddered together, left each other wanting; wanting, found a way back to each other.