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Distances at Sea

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Distances at Sea

for S.T.

I let my eyelids hover unshut like things adrift
in case a ship should pass at such distance I'd see it;
mine was a small boat.

My gunwales welcomed a wash
of the smaller fish casting themselves
sideways, flattening, clearing the sides

like high-jumpers in order
to take bites from my legs.
In that vastness they smelled my weakness.

How close the ships looked though
I couldn't make out a single person on board at that
—what *was* distance now

anyway?—only the dark
shape rising from the surface.
I thought they should see me.

In my body I felt just as big.
I saw many ships, many days, and then the one
that, as I waved my handkerchief

faster, turned—
it grew larger.
The one who spotted me might

for a moment have looked up and then
beckoning his mate that a man in a flat boat
was—*over there*

look—readjusted his eye
to the scope. And he would go on
looking awhile

for a man among white caps riffing
like handkerchiefs until he was convinced
that he had made me up.