The Warship in the Channel

My dream ends. Our eyes meet, inquire, then swoop down on grass, rocks, surf; the evening sky bends away on the heaving ocean. A loop of shingle winds around to the west, ends at the burnished hinge of earth and air. The group on the beach below mime a grace none intends. Things shimmer into focus, remain obscure, the mystery of objects will endure.

When I stumble out of my windy dream, conning my thread of light through the dark tunnel of things, you are there. We are abeam of a warship in the channel, a silent mark on the navigator’s chart. We will mean at the right degree to wheel to port, embark on the wild, sundering sea. Our hearts whip like wind on the rip-tide’s ragged fabric to the ship.

Our fortress, this ship, are briefly bound in destinies, moored each to each by silent bonds beyond our human sense. Not a sound betrays the muffled seascape, nothing is sent from the distant ship to tell of her estate. Around her bows the silent spume is folded like a tent. The leveled sun warms us, gilds the western course; erect now, we strain to hear the rough tongue of force.

For there is mayhem in the channel. Behind the calm face of mute beauty, a sleek destroyer lightly arching on the swell of a gilded sea, lurks the creak of bulkheads, the deadly yaw of tons of sliding steel, roaring waters denying visions to the weak. I think of how seamen can without logs, tables set a course, or charm truth out of old sea fables.

— Eric Trethewey