

## KEEPERS OF THE BAILY LIGHT (FOR BILL LONG)

Theodosia Garrison

The keepers are gone, this watchroom deserted.  
Just a few books left in the small wall cabinet  
Marked Carnegie Libraries for Lighthouse Service:

A crime paperback, Lloyd's Register of Ships,  
Her Majesty's Sea Captain's Medical Guide  
And a 1955 Radio Signals Admiralty List.

Four times a minute a three-quarter second flash  
Ranges across sandbanks, drifting nets and unlit buoys  
To where twice each sixteen seconds the Kisk replies.

A fly settles on a daybook crammed with letters,  
Berating P Cunningham in 1959 for taking a taxi  
From Crookhaven to Cork when a bus was cheaper,

Cutting L.J. Kennedy's 1966 hackney fare in half,  
Requesting personnel to wear white-topped caps  
And S. O'Sullivan to vaccinate against small pox.

These folded letters, the brisk officious terms  
Are the sole remnants of the confraternity of men  
Who struggled with solitude, gales and regulations.

But microscopic clues remain in their fingerprints  
That annotate the margins of curt communiqués  
Like the notes bored scribes left on medieval gospels.

Thoughts pinned like moths in each crinkled fold:  
"I crave wood to carve with, I crave my children."  
"I only feel safe here beyond the world's reach."

"Christ, I can't bear another watch on my own,  
Lights of distant ships in this prison of silence,  
I want to scream and tear these walls down."

"The doctors and their tests, maybe they are wrong."  
"My son is drinking hard and I can't stop him,  
I could not be there and now the chance is gone."

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The trapped fly takes flight, its buzzing magnified,  
In that curved room where men played solitaire,  
By the vast unlit windows bereft of watching eyes.