

Rhys Brookbanks

The Lighthouse Man

From a painting by Bill Burke.

I spent years imagining the lone adventures
of the lighthouse man operating the signal at Pencarrow Head.
As a kid, watching from our house down the coast,
I could have sworn I caught a glimpse of the old man,
struggling around the rocks in an old dinghy,
checking his cray-pots and lines.

My sister had a different view:
to her, the tower was the prison of a princess of the sea,
a mermaid banished from her home,
locked away till a prince arrived,
to brave the road that twisted around the cliffs,
and cunning enough to avoid the dragon
searching the coast for noble and tasty rescuers
(you could hear the growling of its stomach
from fifty metres down the beach).

As I grew older, my lighthouse man became a stoic bachelor.
Driven to his task by lost love, an uncaring family
or a sense of detachment from civilisation,
clinging to a sense of duty to similarly untamed men of the ocean—
those captains who served only the laws and wants of nature,
secure in the assuring durability of their mistress ships.

The years passed, and in danger of becoming a stubborn rock myself,
I returned to that old coast with son in tow.
The light still shone from the tower
yet as I stood at the door,
the dragon's growl and click
became recognisable as the dreary whirrings of an old machine.
But when the inevitable question arose,
it was no time for spoiling fantasises of childhood,

and dashing down the beach,
ran two warriors,
a dragon's flame singeing the soles of their feet,
while an old man looked up from his dinghy behind the waves.

Rhys Brookbanks is in his third year of a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in English and History. Rhys was selected for a creative writing course run by Emma Neale last year and currently co-edits the poetry page of *Critic*, the student magazine of the University of Otago. He has had poetry published in the previous edition of *Deep South* and was invited to read at the Montana Poetry Evening at the Dunedin Public Library.