

## The Keeper of Black Rock Light

—*Catherine Moore: Lighthouse Keeper: 1817-1878*

Pa needed me to trim the wicks, he said,  
eight lamps guzzling whale oil

might save a hundred ships

in fogbound Long Island Sound,  
and at twelve I swapped childhood

for something more essential,

this island's straggly spit of land,  
a forty-foot tower.

I was schooled by gale and storm,

slept in boy's clothes, face turned  
to the tower's light

should the wind dare

swallow our flames.

Our shelves were lined with books,

and I sang land songs

as I hoed a geometry of peas and beans,  
sculpted eiders, ring-necks, and mallards

from sea-tossed

blocks of pine. My playmates  
were chickens, lambs,  
and two Newfoundlands,  
their gentle natures disguised  
by sticky-burrs, the pungent scent  
of rockweed and mussel.  
Now and then I rescued  
a fisherman from the surf,  
fed him soup, prayed  
he not die there  
in front of my homely fire.