

Seahouses

Jodi Johnson

She walked after dinner towards the harbor,
the light of Farne Island lighthouse
beating like a heart against the slow evening.
Where the town grew from red stone over the beach
she saw darkness rising. The houses sank into it
brick by brick. She imagined the halls inside
swimming in blue shadow. One at a time
lights went on in windows. She thought:
behind one a woman is setting forks
carefully beside brown plates, in another a man
sits on a bed, sewing buttons on his shirt.

As a young girl, she had gone clamdigging,
hanging a lamp on a pole and standing on her own
white island. She turned over mud with a pitchfork
to pluck clams from their safe sleep.
Later, the open shells pleased her,
the pale lining glowing in her hand. She believed then
that if someone could force open the tight door in her ribs,
she would shine too.

But now, watching the dark pour over the houses,
she feels it soak into rooms in her spine—
she is filled with small nights. She knows how difficult it is
for people in white windows to know anything of each other,
in hard-edged light.

Sudden bright flashes from the lighthouse
bend briefly over the sea's roof.
They remind her of lightning. She counts
the long black pauses.