Eilish’s Lighthouse

The wind howled and raged and the rain and the hail beat my face, my back and my hands cruelly. The charcoal grey sky blurred my vision as I tried to steer with one broken oar, the good one having slipped away an hour ago. The rain whirled around me, every drop feeling like an ice-cold slap. It was just a stupid dare, I thought angrily to myself, shaking with cold and fear in my drenched school uniform. The last oar slipped from my hands and vanished noiselessly in the churning sea. Now I’m alone and helpless.

I’m not far from a rocky shore but it might as well be miles away and I notice that the sea water in this little tub of a boat has risen to my calves. To my right I can just about see through the spray, one wave, bigger than the others, coming for me. The boat pitches and rolls over and with a grasp I’m flung gasping and crying into the water, struggling to breathe, to see, to think.

I can swim but this isn’t a heated pool. I’m not moving in this sea; this sea is moving me.

Then I hear a voice and feel a hand. When I get my head up I see a girl, she looks about ten, my age, very determined, and very pale. Behind her is a lighthouse, throwing its light far out to sea.

“Come on”, she says, and pulls me onto the rocks. “There’s a safe path this way” and, amid the wind and the spray, I follow her on hands and knees on the rough pebbled passage up towards the lighthouse. The cruel wind raged and howled as I stumbled along the rocky path, but the girl led on confidently, practically oblivious to the slippery, sharp rocks, that seemed ready, eager even, to throw us into the raging, black water. I nervously skirted up the rocks, trying to put my blistered feet where the girl put hers, wondering at her ability to glide up the sharp rocks as if they were stairs, normal stairs

After what feels like an eternal climb, we have made it to the top of the rocky path, me stumbling and spluttering, my rescuer serene and untroubled.

I gaped at her as she smiled. “Thank you so much,” I spluttered, “thank you …?”

“Eilish”, she replied quietly, and seemed to step back into the mist towards the lighthouse.

Two days later and with many lectures on safety from Mum and Dad ringing in my ears, I walked up to the Lighthouse after school. As I walked around and realised no one was inside I remembered what our teacher had told us about our lighthouses being automated. A tiny plaque near the door caught my eye: “In memory of Eilish Browne 1897 – 1907 beloved daughter. She lived for others.”