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The Lighthouse off Tillamook Head

Nathan Furr

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The Lighthouse off Tillamook Head

Nathan Furr

*Beacons on high places everywhere
in the world will go on blinking over and over.*

—William Stafford

A dark scrap of lighthouse
huddled up in the ocean,
pounded by waves like hunting dogs
leaping up to snap at its elbows
and throat.

After 87 years the bronze plaque
erected by the Oregon Historical Society
admits it might have been an accident
in planning, trying to build the lighthouse
on the small thimble of rock
a mile from the end of the cape,

confessing the six men by name
who died trying to sink and bolt
down the scarecrow frame of the lighthouse to the stone,
as if it were some kind of mystery story being told.

Even the official report of Accident 15
does not include the dark cabins of the lighthouse crew
along the edge of trees,
their windows full of dim candles
barely lighting the shapes of men throwing shirts,
odd socks, a tobacco tin,
and the thin letters from home
into a cooking stove,
the fire gracelessly licking up the paper
as the foreman picks
on the grease-black company typewriter:
“We regret to inform you. . .”

No plaques and no official reports tell
how the next day the men are out again
their small boats loaded,
slipping side to side in the waves,
or how Accident 16 happens,
the boat lunging
into the rocks
spilling sheet metal and glass,
the giant light intended as a warning
slipping silently from the boat into the dark waves.