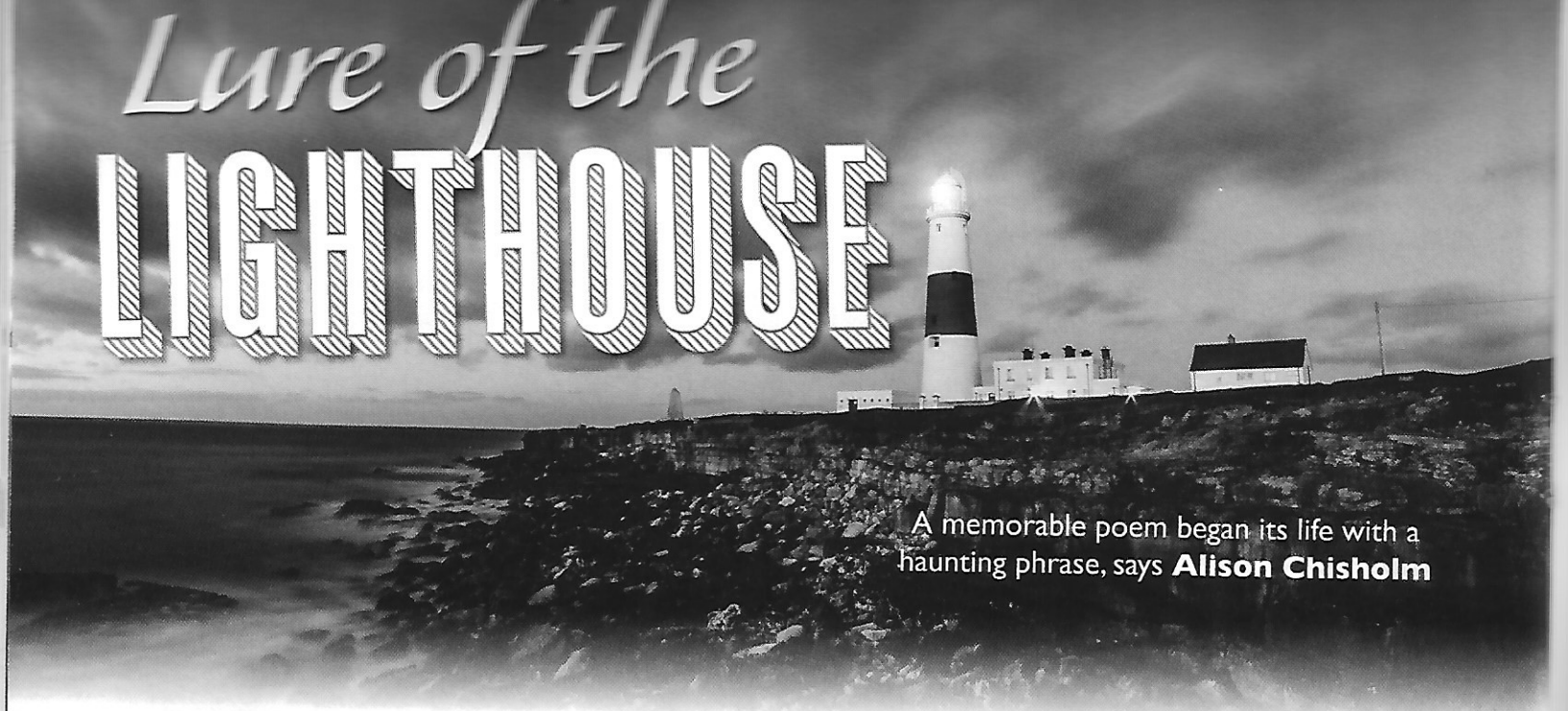


Lure of the LIGHTHOUSE



A memorable poem began its life with a haunting phrase, says **Alison Chisholm**

Sometimes the idea that will become your next poem presents itself to you in a rush of tumbling phrases and images that need to be picked through before any kind of order can emerge. On other occasions one specific part of the poem arrives and tells you how it is to be used. This was the experience of Jill Stanton-Huxton of Buckingham when she wrote *The Lighthouse*.

Jill was visiting Strumble Head lighthouse in Pembrokeshire when a line insinuated itself into her thoughts and would not let go. She describes: 'We arrived at dusk when the automatic beacon had just been turned on – it created an eerie atmosphere as the spotlight scanned the coastline and the sea.

'As I was watching it and listening to the waves crashing on the rocks below the words "watching and waiting, waiting and watching" came into my mind – and that was the starting point for the poem. I knew, almost immediately, that I wanted to use these words between the stanzas of the poem. I liked the rhythm of the words which reminded me of the repetitive ebb and flow of the tide.'

The presentation of these lines makes three points. First, they confirm that they are destined to be part of a poem. That may sound blindingly obvious, but to put the point into context, the writer has moved into poetry from a background in short stories, non-fiction articles and a children's book. The choice of poetry as a medium is not necessarily

automatic... but the incantatory quality of the phrase reflects its meaning in the idiom and voice of poetry.

Right from the start, the poet acknowledges that these lines will appear between stanzas, dividing the text of the poem as it moves through the content. So their placing and purpose is established.

Thirdly, the mood of the poem has been set down by the lines' cadence and the onomatopoeic sound of the murmuring tide. The stage is set for a lingering, thoughtful treatment. The slant rhyme devices of repetition, full consonance in the w and ng sounds at the beginning and end of the key words, and the persistence of the unaccented rhyme -ing, all add up to sound qualities that will underpin the poem's message.

With the refrain in place, the writer needs to establish stanzas between its repeats; and it's logical to mould these to present a different angle on the scene in each, presenting packages of information to surprise, delight or inform the reader.

THE LIGHTHOUSE

*Around some twisted corner
Banked up to the coastline
I can see you winking at me
Your one eyed pupil like a
Cyclops, dilating, hypnotising*

*Watching and waiting
Waiting and watching*

*How I long to be like you
Alone and free, solid in your*

*Solitude, as the wind wraps itself around
Your whitewashed face and a hundred
Thousand stars fall from the night sky*

*Watching and waiting
Waiting and watching*

*And on summer days when the
Horizon mingles sea and land a
Feint line with no tear and
The seabirds circle overhead
I will lose myself in the nothingness*

*Watching and waiting
Waiting and watching*

*Then sometime when the mist is clear
I will dive into the salted waves and
Wash myself like driftwood on the shore line
I will have no fear of being shipwrecked
I know you will be there*

*Watching and waiting
Waiting and watching*

We move on from the first stanza of description to a second that brings the narrator's thoughts into the scene. The third focuses description in a different direction, and introduces a surprise at the end. The longing of stanza two has become reality, with the narrator moving forward in the determination of *I will* rather than the dreaming of *How I long*. The final stanza shows the narrator testing the lighthouse, imperilled by that dive to embrace the sea's purification with total confidence, expressing *no fear* because *I know you will be there*.