

Keepers

A lighthouse stands on a rocky island at night. The lighthouse is illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. The sky is dark with some clouds, and the sea is turbulent with white-capped waves crashing against the rocks in the foreground. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and greys, with the warm light of the lighthouse providing a focal point.

A One Act Play

Bob Davidson

Keepers - Bob Davidson

Keepers - Bob Davidson

Keepers

A One Act Play

by

Bob Davidson

(c) copyright Bob Davidson 2014
(written between 28th May and 16th June 2014
from and idea discussed at a writers workshop at
Birnam Institute Players on 26th May 2014)

Keepers - Bob Davidson

Cast

JIM - Lighthouse keeper in his mid forties

BILL - Lighthouse keeper in his mid sixties... probably the boss

FERGUS - Lighthouse keeper in his mid twenties

MATTY - 20 year female.

The curtains open and the lights come up on the living quarters of a lighthouse. It is the living room, if you like, if lighthouses have living rooms. There's a table a couple of easy chairs a couple of kitchen chairs and some other bits and bobs. The sleeping quarters and kitchen are accessed through a doorway stage left. Upstage centre is another doorway leading to a staircase which goes up to the lamp and business end of the building. Stage right is a door to the outside world and the staircase down to the store room and jetty. This door is secured by a steering wheel type affair which is birked round to bolt the door against the elements. There is also a couple of porthole style windows to the outside. Being a lighthouse, the walls of the set (if any) form a semi-circle and are probably whitewashed brick (maybe) There are few home comforts really. It is 1984. Two of the guys are on stage when the curtains open. BILL is sitting quietly at the table listening patiently to JIM who is mid rant. He is clutching a piece of paper which turns out to be a telex...

JIM

Penzance?... Penzance!

BILL

Ye dinnae hae tae go...

JIM

Course I hae tae go. What else can I dae? It's a'right for you wae yer golden handshake... early retirement, Ca' it what ye will. You'd only twa year tae go anyway. I'm only half way through. I've still got bairns at the skail. Penzance!... It's a'right for the boy...

BILL

... Fergus...

JIM

Aye... whaur is he? Is he still up at the lamp?

Bill nods...

Gawd he's taking his time is he no'?

BILL

He's daein' fine...

JIM

... anyway he's jist five minutes in the door. He's got his whole life ahead o' him. He'll get another job nae bother. I didnae even ken it was a real place...

BILL

Whaur?

JIM

Penzance... whaur d'ye think?

BILL

Oh aye, it's real enough... you never heard o' The Pirates Of Penzance?

JIM

Aye... the opera? Of course I huv... I just thocht it was a made up name, that's a'.

BILL

Ye get braw ice-cream doon there...

JIM

Whit?

BILL

Cornwall... they dae braw ice-cream... and pasties...

JIM

Well I'd just as soon hae a Forfar bridie if it's a' the same wae you.

BILL

Me and Morna used tae go doon there quite a lot... when we were first married. Took twa days on the train. That was no' long efter the war. Used tae hae a week in the same guest hoose in Fowey. Cost us a fortune mind. Five or six years we did that. Then it got that she couldnae manage the journey and then... well... And that was that...

JIM

Buggers never even thought to tell us in person... just a bloody telex.

BILL

Well we're half a mile off shore Jim, they cannae exactly drive up and ring the doorbell.

JIM

We've got boats have we no'? (*suddenly twigging*) That's how we only got half the supplies last month. I wonder how long they've been planning this. They're no' even gonnae automate the thing. Thirty six year you've been a keeper, in a' your experience, Bill, could we dae withoot the Redrock Lighthouse?

BILL

Och, they'll ken what they're daein' They'll hae it a' worked oot nae doubt.

JIM

Do they hell ken what they're daein'! And oh my goodness it's amazing what the offer o' early retirement can do... a golden handshake? A bribe mare like... that's a' it is. Gawd, you were easy bought. Ye ken fine we cannae do withoot this lighthouse...

BILL

Jim! Jim, there's ay changes, and if there's one thing I've learned in my thirty six years o' being a keeper, it's that you're best just tae shut up and dae as yer telt...

JIM

... a yes man...

BILL

... that's no' what I meant and ye ken fine that's a load o' havers. I've never been a yes man. I've stood up for you on many occasions. If it hudnae been for me you'd have been oot on yer lug many's a time. A' I'm saying is, that there'll be plans in force that we ken nothing about. Ye ken what thae modern lamps are like... they'll be increasing the intensity o' the lights next tae us tae provide the same cover or something...

JIM

... or something? Aye, well... a' I'm saying is I didnae become a lighthouse keeper tae sit in some windowless box in Cornwall, flicking switches and answering the phone. I dinnae care how guid their ice-cream is... I dinnae even like ice-cream.

He has another look at the telex...

Three weeks notice... Three weeks! Right! So you think it's going to be three weeks dae ye?

He chucks the telex down on the table and crosses to the upstage centre doorway and shouts up the stairs...

FERGUS?... FERGUS!

BILL

What are ye daein'?

JIM

I'm going tae tell Fergus to switch off the lamp...

BILL

... are ye hell...

JIM

It's going off in three weeks time... what's the difference?
FERGUS...

BILL

... and until the last second o' that three weeks is up... that lamp stays on!

JIM

And why's that, Bill? Eh? Why's that? Cos ye ken bloody fine it's madness tae switch it off...

FERGUS appears down the stairs, he is wearing a set of oilskins...

JIM

... what kept ye?

FERGUS

I was getting the weather... what were ye shouting for?

JIM

Oh... Bill here was wanting ye tae switch the light off...

FERGUS

Eh? We cannae dae that... what for?

JIM

See... even he kens we cannae put the lamp oot. Ony one wae half a brain can see that.

FERGUS

I dinnae hae half a brain...

JIM

Naw... a quarter maybe. Och, I'm away oot for some air...

He goes to exit up the stairs...

BILL

Jim, you leave that lamp alane...

JIM

Aye, dinnae worry... I'm no' as stupid as a' that.

JIM exits, up the stairs...

FERGUS

He's taking it bad eh?

BILL

Aye, he is that. Still, I cannae say I blame him. The blighter's right of course, they cannae shut this place... utter madness. In oor quiet wee way, Fergus, we'll have saved thousands o' lives.

FERGUS

Ma mother used to say that you never fully appreciated something until it was gone.

BILL

Aye, she's no' far wrong there... what's the weather doing?

FERGUS

Wild, and getting wilder...

Fergus hands Bill the weather report...

... what'll you do, Bill, you know, when we're closed down?

BILL

We'll I intend to live till I'm a hundred, and play a lot a bowls. Keep the gerden kindo tidy. Make soup.

FERGUS

I'm thinking of applying for the Merchant Navy.

BILL

That's a great idea, Fergus. No' that there's anything wrong wae being a keeper, and they'd relocate you, I think they're duty bound to, but naw, you go for it son. Good career, the merchant navy, you'd see a bit o' the world tae, instead o' being stuck in one o' these things...

FERGUS

I think I will...

BILL

Now, let's hae a look at this... (*he examines the weather report*) nine fifty sooth o' Iceland... nine fifty good god that's low eh? It's no' often I've seen it as low as that. We're in for a breezy night... force eight to ten. Maybe better bring the washing in Fergus m'boy. Batten the hatches. Extra cocoa... Mmm... nine fifty eh? When's high tide?

FERGUS

Twenty one thirty four

BILL

Och well, nothin' we huvnae had afore... nick doonstairs Fergus and make sure that store room door is bolted shut or what little supplies we've left will end up in Newfoundland. There'll be high seas the night and a force ten to contend wae...

FERGUS nods and exits through the outside door, stage right. BILL is seated at the table checking the report again as the lights fade. When the lights come back up FERGUS and BILL are seated at the table each with a mug of cocoa. There is a storm raging outside with suitable SFX. Suddenly there is a call from off...

JIM

FERGUS!

FERGUS leaps to his feet and exits quickly through the upstage centre door to the upstairs. BILL remains at the table, slightly uneasy and agitated, until FERGUS returns slightly breathless...

FERGUS

There's a boat...

BILL

... what kind o' a boat?

FERGUS

Yacht... maybe 14 feet... mast's gone, hundred yards west. Jim thinks there's someone on board, drifting our way...

BILL

... alert the coastguard right away...

FERGUS

Jim's already tried, radio's doon, so's the phone, telex, everything...

BILL

Bugger... I'd better come up for a look...

BILL goes to exit upstairs, but recoils as JIM appears...

JIM

And just what the hell are you two finding to speak about? There's a boat out there!

JIM heads over towards the outside door to where there are some sets of oilskins hanging. He begins pulling on a pair of trousers...

BILL

And just where do you think *you're* going?

JIM

It's drifting this way... if it smashes into us, Fergus and me just might manage to grab the poor soul that's on board...

BILL

... now wait a minute...

FERGUS

... I'm quite happy to go...

BILL

(to Fergus)

Wheesht the noo... *(to Jim)* Jim Laing, I'm no' happy wae you risking yer ain life but I'm bloody sure yer no' risking the boy's...

JIM

(continuing to get dressed)

I'll rope Fergus tae the handrail and I'll rope masel' tae Fergus...

FERGUS removes a coil of rope from a hook on the wall...

... we've got tae give it a try, Bill. Upstairs and keep an eye on that boat in case it goes under...

BILL

... aye well see and make sure you dinnae go under, that's a force ten oot there.

JIM

Ach, a force twelve, now that would get me thinking but no' a force ten... nothing more than a gentle zephyr. I mean, what's the worst that could happen?

BILL

You could droon...

JIM

Na, no' me and Fergie... are ye right son?

FERGUS nods as he ties the rope around his waist. They exit, BILL watches them go and then rushes up the stairs. The lights fade, when they come up shortly afterwards BILL is back standing at the outside door. The storm SFX are at their peak. BILL is reeling in the rope until eventually JIM reverses in through the door, followed by FERGUS - they are carrying a body...

JIM

Clear the table, Bill... clear the table quick...

BILL

... it's a lassie!

JIM

... the table Bill, for Christ's sake...

BILL

Ye cannae bring a lassie intae a lighthouse!

JIM

Oh, dinnae gie us any o' that shite, we cannae leave her oot there...

BILL

(clearing the table)

Bloody hell... closure'll be the least o' worries noo. The whole damned thing will fa' in the sea. There'll be a curse on us a'...

JIM

Oh shut up man... Right, Fergus, canny noo...

They lower the body gently onto the table and stand exhausted for a few moments, looking at the girl...

FERGUS

Do you think we should take her clothes off?

BILL

NO!

JIM

What for, Fergie?

FERGUS

Well, look at her... she's soakin' through... she'll catch her death.

JIM

I think we're too late, Fergus m'boy... I think she's already caught it...

FERGUS

...eh?

JIM

She's dead.

FERGUS

A' that for nothing. I've never seen a dead body before... wonder who she was?

JIM

Dunno... she looks a bit hippy though eh? D'ye no' think? I mean that coat definitely came from a charity shop and my granny used to

wear boots like them. And that wissnae yesterday. What dae ye reckon, Bill?

BILL

I reckon you should get her oot o' here... shouldnae hae brought her in, in the first place.

JIM

Oh, you're no' still on about that superstitious rubbish?

BILL

No, I'm on about the common decency o' no' havin' dead bodies lying on the table I eat my meat off.

JIM

The dead anes dinnae hurt ye, Bill.

BILL

Oh, ye dinnae need to tell *me* that... get her oot o' here.

JIM

As soon as the storm passes eh? Fergie and me'll take her doon tae the store room... she'll be oot o' the way there. We can get the Polis tae come and pick up the body.

FERGUS

How auld d'ye think she is?

JIM

Dunno, twenty maybe? Maybe no' even as auld as that... She's a bonnie girl...

FERGUS

...aye. How long d'ye think she's been dead, Jim?

JIM

No' long by the look o' her. Poor lass, half an hour earlier and she might o' made it...

JIM lays his hand on the girl's forehead and she gasps a huge breath of air, frightening the life out of the three men...

JIM

Jesus Christ, she's alive... Fergie get a blanket. Dinnae just stand there man...

The girl lies there sobbing quietly and breathing deeply...

You're okay darlin'... just you lie still, you're okay noo...

FERGUS returns with a blanket and they cover the girl carefully. BILL stays well out of the action fretting quietly away from the others...

FERGUS

D'ye think she'd like a cup o' tea?

JIM

Would you like a cup o' tea, dear? Something to drink eh? Are you thirsty? She's bound to be parched...

MATTY

(in a whisper)

D'eau...

JIM

Dough... What does she mean by that? Money? She cannae be needin' money. Dough, it'll be bread, she's maybe hungry.

FERGUS

I've got a cousin called Doe..

JIM

Whit?

FERGUS

Well, that's no' his right name, but that's what he gets called. Doe...

JIM

Well, I hardly think she's asking for your cousin... go and get her a glass o' water, smartish... and a biscuit or two. Bill, would you maybe nick up and try the radio or the phone or telex, if it's working, see if you can get through tae the coast guard... get a lifeboat oot here as soon as... We'll hae tae get her tae a hospital pronto.

BILL stares from across the room at the girl...

JIM

Bill? Did ye hear me? Are you okay man... I've never seen you like this afore?

BILL

Aye.. aye I'm fine... What was it again? A lifeboat... right, right I'll just go.

BILL exits up the stairs as JIM leans over the girl, she speaks...

MATTY

S'il vous plait... s'il vous plait...

JIM

S'il vous plait? Are you French?

MATTY nods as FERGUS returns with the water...

JIM

Fergus, just the man - I've got a job for you.

FERGUS

I brought her some oatcakes and cheese.

JIM

Guid lad. You speak French eh?

FERGUS

Well, no' really. I mean I got 'O' grade, but that was a few years back.

JIM

Well that's mare than I did, so... speak tae her.

FERGUS

Eh? What'll I say?

JIM

Anything, just put her at her ease...

FERGUS

Em, right... *(he clears his throat)* Je m'appelle Fergus, et j'aime faire du velo...

JIM

What was that? What did ye say?

FERGUS

I told her ma name was Fergus, and that I like going out on my bike...

JIM

What did ye tell her that for?

FERGUS

Well, it's all I can remember. I only got a "C" and I just scraped that. And that was six years ago...

BILL enters.

JIM

How'd ye get on?

BILL

Nothing, not a thing. The phone's dead and there's nothing but static on the radio, no doubt because the aerial's missing...

JIM

What?

BILL

It must have blown off its mounting, there's just the cable left blawing in the gale. Any joy wae the lassie?

JIM

Aye, she's French... Fergus gave her an oatcake and cheese and telt her he likes going oot on his bike.

BILL

Did ye now, Fergie? What did ye tell her that for?

FERGUS

It's a' I could remember...

BILL

Fair enough... *(in Matty's direction)* do you speak English m'dear?

MATTY

Yes... a little.

BILL

This is Fergus and he likes going oot on his bike...

MATTY

Oh... that is nice.

BILL

What's your name dear?

MATTY

Mathilde.

BILL

(beginning to stare at the girl as he moves closer)

Mathilde?

MATTY

Oui...

BILL

Oh my god... Mathilde?... Matty?

MATTY

Oui, Matty...

She slumps...

BILL

Holy Christ...

JIM

What's the matter, Bill?

BILL

Oh god no... oh good god no... no, no, no...

JIM

... do you *know* her, Bill?

BILL

Eh?... and how would I ken her?

JIM

Well what was a' this wae the name business?

BILL

What?

JIM

Well, she said "Mathilde", and you said "Mathilde", and then you said "Matty?", wae a question mark at the end. And she said "oui, Matty" I maybe cannae speak French but I ken that oui means yes.

BILL

Well... it's just short for Mathilde isn't it? It's like Matilda...

JIM

So you're saying that you just guessed?

BILL

Aye.

JIM

I'm bloody sure you didnae. What's going on, Bill?

BILL

I don't know...

JIM

Who is she?

BILL

I told ye, I don't know...

JIM

... well I don't believe ye... (*keeping his eyes on Bill*) Fergus, gie her another oatcake and a sip o' water. And dinnae try oot any more o' yer French - she'll be confused enough as it is, and that makes two of us... What do you make o' her gear, Bill?

BILL

Eh?

JIM

Her clothes? Bit hippy looking eh?

BILL

I don't know if they are or no'...

JIM

Well, have a look, what d'ye think?

BILL

I don't want to look at her...

JIM

... how no'?

BILL

I just don't...

JIM

... bring back memories?

BILL

You huvnae a bloody clue what your talking about...

JIM

I'm just trying to work out how you would know a twenty year old French girl. No' that there's anything wrong wae knowing a twenty year old French girl. No, there's nothing wrong wae that. It's denying knowing a twenty year old French girl that's got me interested.

BILL

Just leave it, Jim for god's sake... we'll look efter the girl, keep her warm, fed and watered until a boat gets tae us and we can hand her over. But, until then can we please just keep the heid?

FERGUS

She cannae have sailed a' the way fae France can she? She's maybe a student or something, in Glasgow... they hae foreign students...

JIM

Aye, maybe... that would maybe explain the clathes. Aye that makes sense. Is that how ye know her, Bill? Maybe bump intae her in a pub in Sauchiehall Street?

BILL

Bugger off...

JIM

When were you last on leave? Let me think... three months ago... I'm beginning tae put two and two together here...

BILL

... aye, and your coming up wae bloody twelve. I'm warning you, Jim, just leave it, you're way off the mark.

JIM

Three months ago in Glasgow waiting on a train hame, bit o' a thirst... and a hunger, if you know what I mean...

BILL

... shut it, Jim...

JIM

... in for a pint and a nip, when up comes a bonnie wee thing... foreign lassie, student maybe, like Fergie says. A hard up student lassie looking for some cash... buy hersel' a new coat instead o' that thirty year old thing she's wearing...

BILL

I'm bloody warning you, Jim, you ken bugger all what your talking about. You're way oot o' order...

JIM

... a deals done, and the deed. Only thing is she ends up pregnant... so what does she dae? She sets off to tell the father...

BILL

... you bastard...

BILL lunges at JIM and there is a brief struggle until JIM overpowers BILL...

BILL

She's not pregnant!

JIM

Aye, so *you* say...

BILL

She isnae pregnant... God, I'm auld enough to be her grandfaither... Right! Do you want to know who she is? Dae ye?... Well, dae ye?

JIM

... aye, aye we do... don't we, Fergus?

FERGUS

Well, aye... I suppose.

BILL

Right, let me go... just remember that you wanted to know, that's all.

If you like what you've read so far and would like to buy a copy of the complete script or would like to perform the play, please get in touch.

Thanks for reading,

Bob Davidson