The Warning at Bell Point (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Marta had lived beside the sea her whole life, so she believed she knew every mood of the water. Her cottage stood on a low hill above the shore, close enough to hear the waves at night. Below her, the fishing boats of Bell Point rocked gently in the harbor, their ropes creaking in the dark. It was a small place, half forgotten by the rest of the country, and she liked it that way.

That spring, however, strange things began to happen. The narrow stream that ran down the hillside turned muddy and warm, although the weather had not changed. Insects appeared in numbers nobody could remember seeing before, and one evening she counted eleven bites on her arms after a single mosquito had followed her indoors. Even the animals seemed uneasy. A rat ran openly across the harbour road at noon, which no one had ever witnessed in daylight.

Marta mentioned all of this to her nephew Dario, a geology student who had come home for the holidays. He listened politely at first, then more seriously. He explained that the island's volcano had not been quiet for as long as people assumed, and that pressure could build for decades before it began to erupt. He also told her about the old service tunnel under the cliff, dug a century ago, which the council now used for storing equipment. If the ground shook badly, he said, that passage would be the worst place to shelter.

On the twelfth of May, at four in the afternoon, the earth trembled for almost ninety seconds. Cups fell from shelves and dogs howled across the whole village. Then came the silence, which frightened Marta far more than the noise. The sea drew back from the beach, exposing wet stones that had not seen the sun for years, and every fisherman understood at once what that meant. Sirens rose over the rooftops, and someone shouted the word tsunami from the church steps.

What followed was chaos, but organised chaos. People carried children uphill, dragged neighbours from their kitchens, and left their cars in the middle of the road. Marta helped an elderly man climb the last steep path behind her cottage. From there they watched the water return, grey and impossibly wide, swallowing the lower streets in under a minute. Three boats were lifted onto the square as easily as toys. Nobody in Bell Point died that day, and afterwards the newspapers called it a miracle, though Dario insisted it was simply a good warning system and a village that ran fast enough.

In the months that followed, scientists arrived with instruments and questions. They spoke about rising sea levels and about warming, which had already weakened the coast long before the earthquake. They also studied the wildlife around the ruined harbour and were surprised at how quickly birds and crabs returned to the flooded ground. Marta rebuilt nothing. She stayed in her cottage on the hill, watching the water she had always trusted, understanding at last that trust was never quite the right word.

Woordenlijst

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tsunami	
warming	

shore
tunnel
stream
erupt
rat
mosquito
wildlife
harbor
landscape
colony
ancestor
crop
wheat
herb
rural
tropical
dive

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