A Week Without the Sea (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Tomás had been a fisherman for thirty years, and he claimed that he could smell a storm two days before it arrived. That autumn, however, the weather made a fool of him. The wind came from the wrong direction, the sky stayed a stubborn grey, and the harbour master hung up a red flag that nobody had expected to see so early in the season.

For five days the boats stayed tied to the harbour wall. The waves outside the breakwater were so intense that even the largest trawler would have been thrown around like a toy. Tomás walked down to the water every morning anyway. He drank coffee in the little café by the ferry office and listened to the older men complaining about fuel prices, insurance and the government.

His wife, Elena, said the enforced rest was doing him good. She was probably right, although he would never have admitted it out loud. The entire house was suddenly full of him: mending nets in the kitchen, repairing a lamp in the hallway, arguing gently with the radio. Elena pointed out that his working hours had always been excessive, and that no man of fifty-eight should be at sea by four in the morning six days a week.

On the fourth evening the wind dropped for an hour, and the harbour fell into absolute silence. Tomás stood at the end of the pier and watched the water settle. He realised, rather uncomfortably, that he had not looked at the sea properly for years. He had looked at fish, at nets, at the fuel gauge, at the sky for weather, but not at the sea itself. Then the wind returned, the flag snapped back into life, and the moment passed.

The storm finally moved east on Saturday night. By Sunday morning the fleet was out again, and the harbour smelled of diesel and salt. Tomás caught less than he had hoped, but he came home in a good mood, which was not entirely normal for him. Elena laughed and asked him whether the rest had changed his character. He said he doubted it, and then he asked her, quite seriously, whether she would like to come out with him one calm morning, just to look at the water.

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