The Lighthouse Keeper's Contract (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Mira accepted the job at the lighthouse, she was told it would be strictly temporary. The keeper had fallen ill, and someone was needed for six weeks at most. She packed two suitcases, expecting to be back in the city before the autumn storms arrived. Her friends laughed at the idea of her living on a rock in the sea.

The island turned out to be far busier than she had imagined. Supply boats came with surprising frequency, sometimes twice a week, and each captain wanted tea and conversation. There was an ongoing argument between the coastguard and the council about who should pay for the new radio equipment. Mira listened politely to both sides and repaired the old radio herself. She began to understand why the previous keeper had stayed for so long.

At first she counted the days. The duration of her contract was printed clearly on the paper taped above her desk, and she crossed off each morning with a pencil. Then, somewhere around the third week, she stopped counting. The light itself demanded attention every single night, and her visits to the lamp room became so frequent that she could climb the stairs in complete darkness. Lately she found herself sleeping better than she had for years.

The weather changed overnight in the middle of October. She went to bed under a calm sky and woke to waves crashing over the lower rocks. The boat that should have collected her was temporarily unable to leave the harbour, so she stayed another fortnight, then another. When the council finally wrote to her, the letter offered something she had not expected: a permanent post, with a proper salary and a full-time commitment of forty hours a week. She read it three times.

She wrote back the same evening and asked for a few days to think. In truth, she had already decided. People assume that nowadays nobody wants such isolated work, but Mira had discovered a kind of peace that the city had never given her. Her mother, who had spent a lifetime in the same crowded street, could not understand the choice at all. "You'll change your mind shortly," she said on the telephone, laughing.

That conversation happened eleven years ago. Mira still lives on the island, and she has permanently abandoned any plan to return. Visitors sometimes ask whether she regrets it, and she always gives the same answer. "I arrived for six weeks," she tells them, pointing at the lamp. "Nowadays, I can hardly remember the person who packed those two suitcases." The keepers who came before her belonged to a different era, when everything was done by hand, but the sea has not changed at all.

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