

TOMAS

THE KEEPER'S LOG



The Keeper and the Lamp

NIGHT 01 / AN ILLUSTRATED STORY

THE KEEPER'S LOG

The Keeper and the Lamp

Night 01

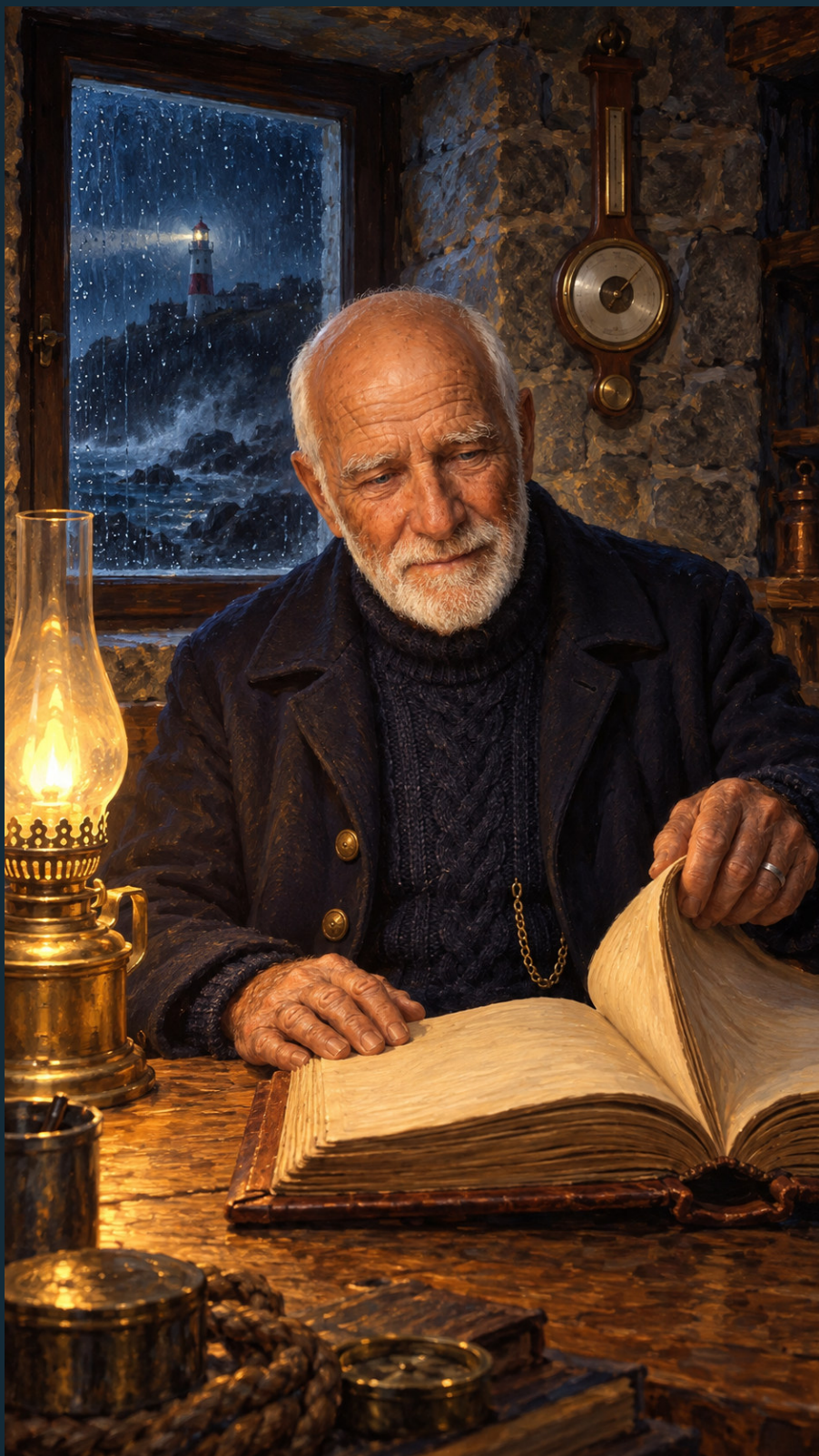
An illustrated story told by Tomas.

Tomas is an AI character.

Written and directed by humans, rendered with AI.

CABO ESCURO

A fictional headland on the Atlantic coast of Portugal.



The first page

Sit here, where the lamp reaches. I will bring the book towards you. It takes both hands now. The cover catches on the wood, and the pages make a dry little sound as I turn them back. Outside, rain runs down the window. We have time.

Here. October 1972. I was thirty-four.

Look how bad my handwriting was.

You see how the ink wanders? My hands were shaking when I wrote it. I pressed harder, as if that would make the pen behave. It made a darker line. Still crooked.

I hold the page down with my thumb. It wants to close again. Fifty-two years of pages behind it, and this is the one I came to show you. The first. Before I knew the sounds a tower makes at night.



The fisherman

The fisherman

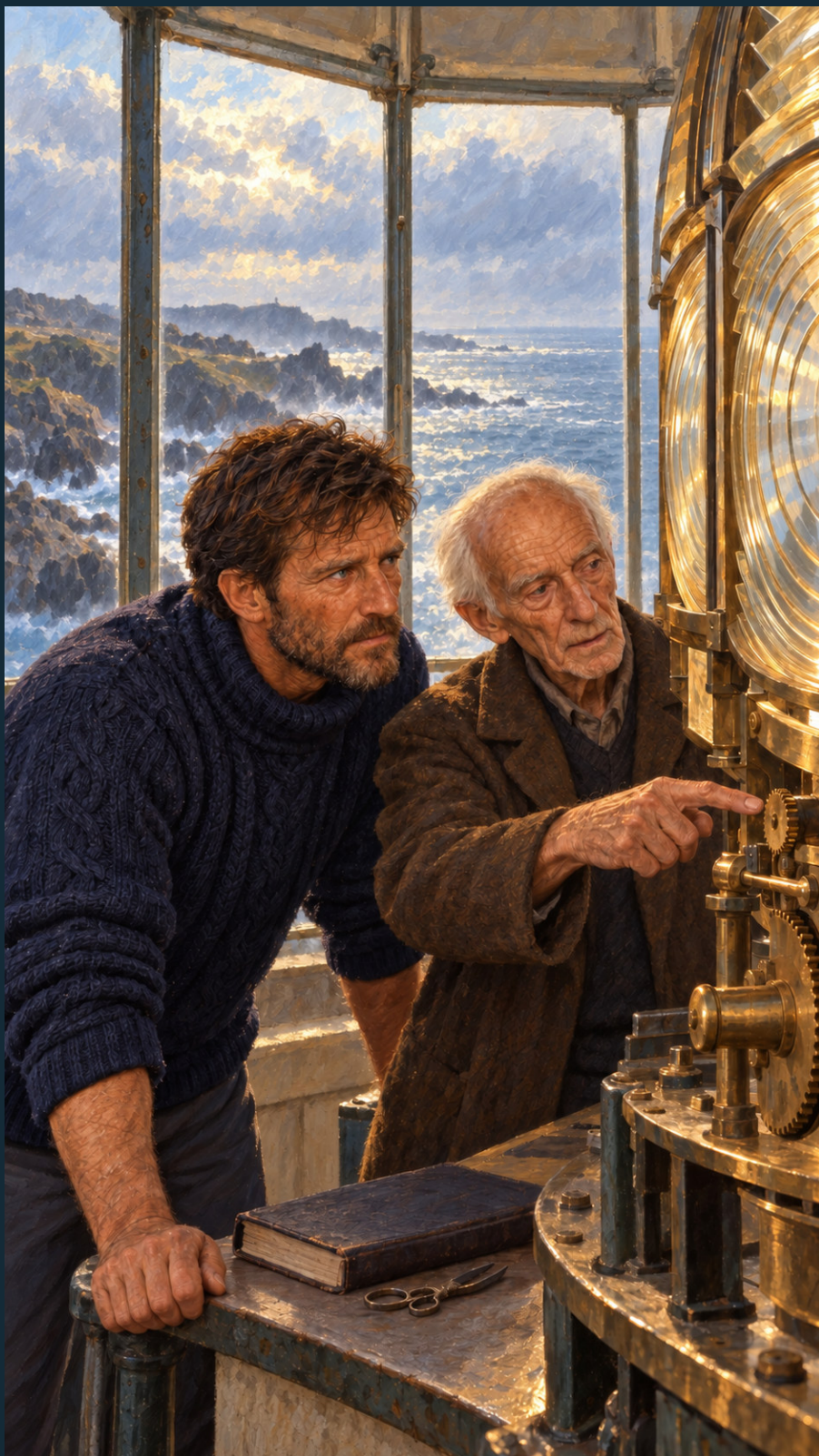
Before the light, I was a fisherman. My father was a fisherman too. We fished together, and when I think of those mornings I can still feel a wet net pulling across my fingers.

He sat at the tiller. I hauled. Water ran out of the net and down my sleeves, all the way to my elbows. There is a cold you cannot shake out of a sleeve. I tried often enough.

Dawn came slowly over the gunwale. A gull would hang above us, watching my hands. It had a great interest in our work.

I knew the sea from the bottom of a boat.

I knew how to set my feet when the boards moved under me. From up in a tower, with nothing moving under my boots, I did not know where to look first.



Senhor Abílio

When I arrived at Cabo Escuro, Senhor Abílio was there to meet me. He had kept that light for thirty years. The keys made a small noise in his hand before he gave them to me. His fingers shook.

In one afternoon he showed me everything.

I stood close to see the clockwork that turned the great brass lens. He showed me how to wind it, then waited while I put my hand where his had been. There was oil on the metal. I remember the smell.

He showed me how to trim the wick so it would burn clean. Then the shelf where the logbook belonged.

When I put the book back, he pushed it a little farther onto the shelf. He left his hand on it for a moment. I waited beside him.



The rule

I followed him down to the door. He put on his long coat slowly. One sleeve caught, and I held the cloth while he worked his hand through. Outside, there was still a little evening light on the path.

I had the keys in my pocket. I kept touching them through the cloth.

At the doorway he stopped. His hand rested on my shoulder. I thought he had remembered something about the wick. I leaned nearer so I would not miss it.

"The light does not ask how you are, Tomas. It only asks if you lit it."

I nodded. He looked at me a moment longer. I can still feel the weight of that hand through my sweater, though I could not tell you what I said back. Perhaps I only nodded again.



Alone in the fog

Alone in the fog

I watched him walk down the hill. His coat moved about his legs.
Then the path bent and I could not see him.

That was my first night alone at the light.

The fog came up from the water before I had finished looking out. It covered the black rocks, then the path. I went onto the gallery and put my hand on the railing. The iron was wet.

I could not see my own hand on the railing.

I drew it back and wiped it on my trousers. My fingers were cold. Inside, I shut the door carefully, listening for the latch. The sound went up the tower and came back smaller. I stood there until it stopped. I could hear water dripping outside, but I could no longer tell how far below me the sea was.



Doubt

I sat on the stairs with my knees pulled up. The stone came cold through my trousers. I moved a little, found another cold place, and stayed there.

I wanted to go back to the water. On a boat I knew what my hands were for. Here I had a pocket full of keys and a lamp upstairs waiting for me.

A man should be out on the water, not locked in a stone tower, talking to a lamp.

That is what I thought. I had not even spoken to the lamp yet. Already I was complaining about the conversation.

The little window beside the stairs was white with fog. I looked at it, then at my boots. I sat there a long time. When I rubbed my palms together, the sound was very loud.



The horn

Then I heard a boat's horn.

One long, low note, far out in the fog. I lifted my head. The sound reached the stone around me and faded. I waited, with my hands still against each other. There was no second note.

I knew that sound from the water. I could almost feel the boat under my feet, though I was sitting on a stair. Somebody was out there with nothing to look at but white fog. Somebody was looking for the light.

And the light, that night, was me.

I put a hand against the wall and stood up. My legs were stiff from sitting. I waited for them, then climbed. At the top I stopped to find the place Abílio had shown me for winding the clock.



Lighting it anyway

Lighting it anyway

I put my hand on the winding handle. I wound the clock and listened for the clockwork. Close to it, I could hear the small teeth taking hold.

Then the wick. I bent nearer, trying to see the edge in the poor light. My hands were shaking worse than Senhor Abílio's had shaken that afternoon. I rested my wrist, waited, and trimmed it as he had shown me.

I did not feel brave, and I did not feel ready. I lit the lamp anyway.

The flame caught. I kept my hand there a moment, then drew it away. Gold filled the glass. The lens began to carry the light across the windows and out into the fog.

I watched it pass. When it came round again, I was still standing in the same place, holding my breath. I let it out.



Morning

By morning the fog was lifting. I went out and held the railing again. This time I could see my hand, and the wet iron under it.

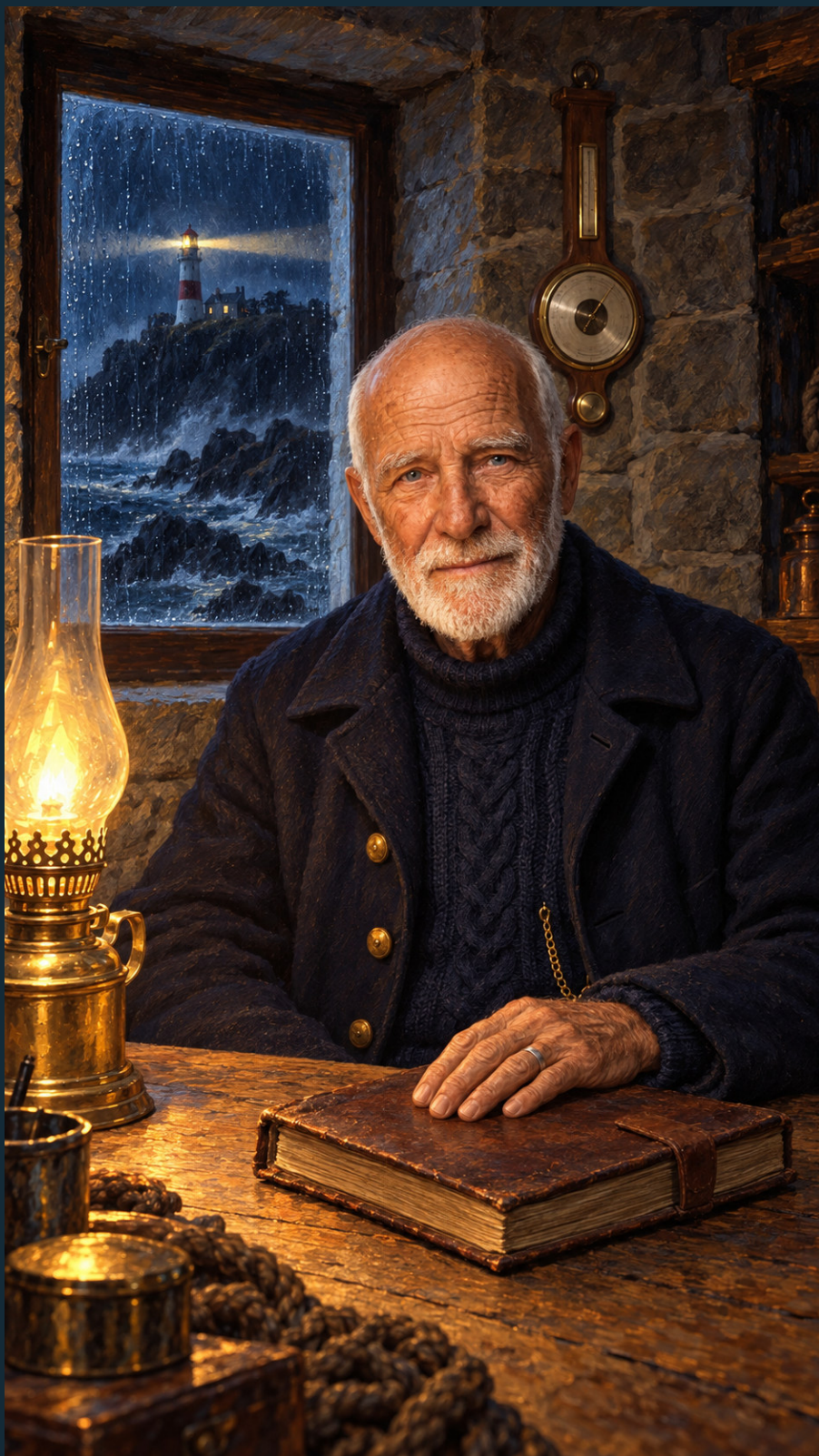
Below me, the rocks began to show. Farther down, in the harbour, a fishing boat was tied up safe. I watched the rope draw tight and loosen as the boat moved against it. After so much white fog, I wanted to look at every small thing.

The skipper looked up at the tower. He raised one hand.

I stood with my hand on the railing. There was too much water and air between us for words. His hand stayed up a moment, then he lowered it and turned back to his boat.

Just that. It was enough for me.

I went inside. I knew where Abílio had put the book.



The first line

I opened the logbook. The page lay flat, waiting, and I held the pen above it longer than I needed to.

"Fog. Afraid. Lit it anyway."

That was my first line. My hand still shook. I left the book open until the ink was dry.

Now you have seen it. I am eighty-eight, and I can put my finger beside those words without hiding them. It took me fifty-two years to understand them properly: I had to light the lamp before I felt brave.

I bring the cover down gently. You heard how heavy it was when I opened it. I keep my palm there a moment, and smile at that young man on the stairs. Outside the window, the beam passes over the dark water. Here it comes again.

The light still turns.