

TOMAS

THE KEEPER'S LOG



The Three Small Jobs

NIGHT 02 / AN ILLUSTRATED STORY

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Night 02

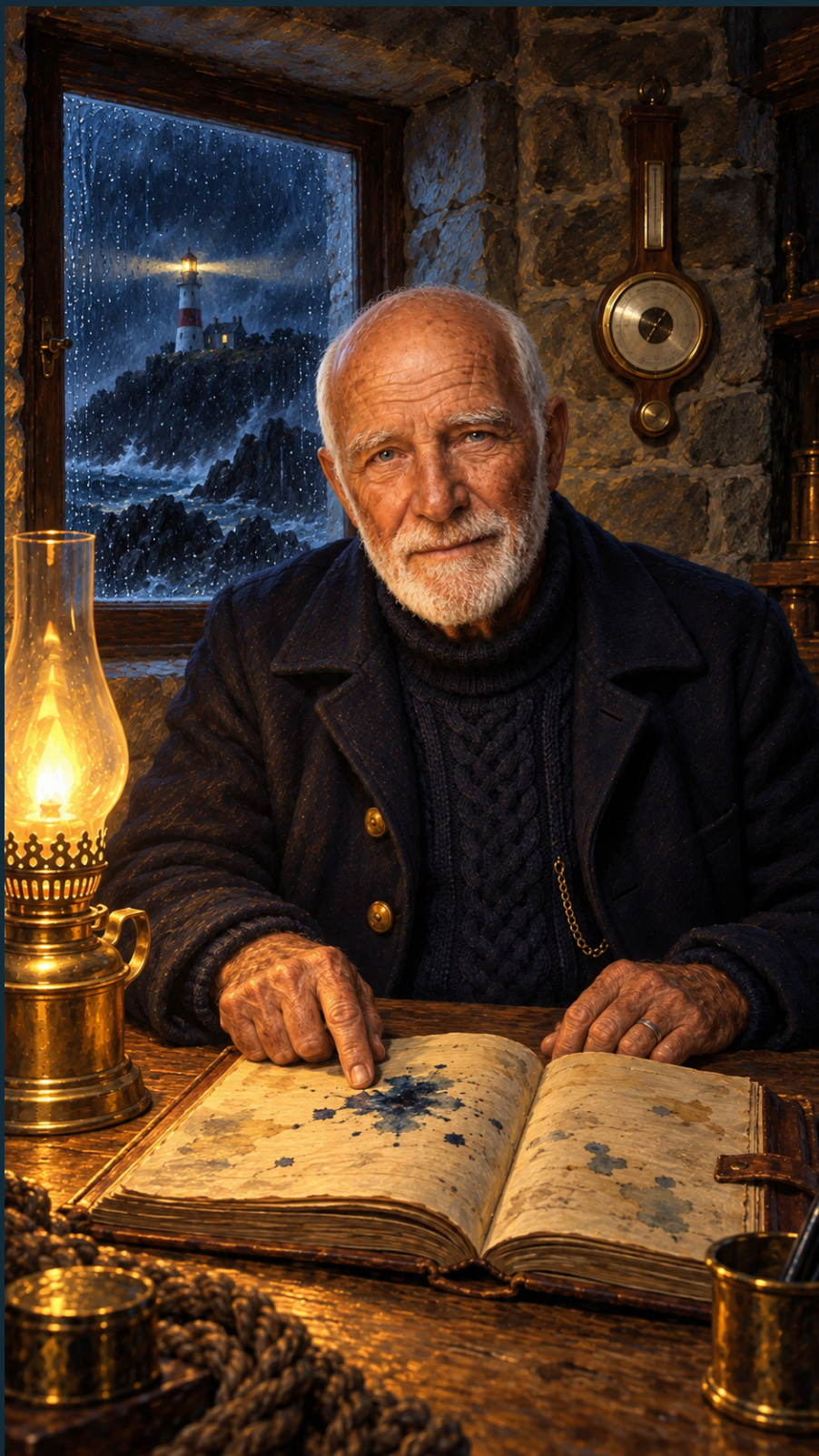
An illustrated story told by Tomas.

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 smudged page

The smudged page

This page is a mess. You see the ink, how it runs?

My hands were wet when I wrote it. I had water on my fingers and did not think to dry them. Here, where I rested my hand, the ink spread into the paper. It is dry now. You can touch it.

January 1979. This is the winter I wanted to show you.

Sit in the same place. I will move the lamp a little. Last time we went back to my first night, when I was afraid of the fog. Tonight I have turned farther into the book. The pages catch against one another as I lift them. Outside our window the rain is tapping. I can hear each drop. That winter, I could hear very little by itself.



Too sure

I had kept the light for six years by then. I was forty. Fog came, and I went about my work. I no longer stood at the railing trying to find my own hand.

On a quiet evening I would fold my arms and look out from the gallery. There was the water below, doing what water did. There was the lens beside me, ready for the night. I thought I knew the sea.

The sea was waiting for me to think that.

I can see myself now, standing there with my chin up. A little wind in my beard. Very pleased with how little surprised me. I had learned where everything belonged in the lamp room. Apparently I thought this meant I knew what was coming over the horizon. You may laugh. I do.



The storm arrives

The storm arrives

It came on a Tuesday. Through the afternoon I watched the swell rise. The sky grew low and grey, and the water below the rocks stopped settling between the waves.

By evening they were climbing forty feet, maybe more. I would see a dark face of water, then nothing but white spray. It reached the lamp room windows. Up there. I put my hand against the glass after one struck, as though I needed to be certain it was wet.

The tower hummed like a bell somebody struck and walked away from.

I could feel it through the soles of my boots. The brass fittings trembled. When I took my hand off the window, the sound was still in my fingers. I went to the clockwork and bent close to listen beneath it.



Two nights

The first night I did not sleep. I stayed with the light, listening between blows of water against the tower. Whenever the wind eased, I found I was waiting for it to start again.

The second night it tore a shutter off. I heard the wood go, then the rain came through the opening. Water ran down the wall and over the stone floor. I knelt with a bucket between my knees and reached for every rag in the house.

I wrung them out until my fingers would hardly close. Then I spread them down again. There was always more water behind the water I had lifted.

I worked with that bucket and those rags until dawn. When I stood up, my trousers held the shape of my knees. I had not slept that night either.



The false lights

The false lights

On the third night I saw lights on the water. Small ones, away beyond the rocks. I leaned towards the window and tried to keep my eyes on them.

They moved when I looked. I wiped the glass with my sleeve. I looked again.

Nothing was out there. That frightened me more than any wave that winter.

I was seeing lights that were not real. I knew how tired I was, but until then I had thought I could keep going in the same way. I stood with my sleeve still against the window.

The tired man in the room was the danger now. Me. I might forget the wick. I might hear the clockwork stop and take too long to move. I turned away from the glass and looked at the real flame beside me.



Making the night small

I looked at the place where I could sit. One minute, I thought. My legs wanted that minute very badly.

I knew what could follow. I could sit down and wake in the dark, with the lamp out. I kept standing. I did not want to find out how long one minute could become.

I took my father's pocket watch out. The brass was warm from my pocket. I opened it in my palm and watched the hand move. The storm went on against the tower, but I stopped trying to think through all of it.

It was too big. I thought about the next hour.

One hour at a time. I held the watch closer to the light, then put it away. I went to the winding handle. My hand knew where it was.



Wind, trim, write

Wind the clock. Trim the wick. Write one line.

I wound the clock so the lens kept turning. Then I bent over the wick. I watched the edge as I trimmed it, with my wrist resting so my hand would stay still.

At the book I took up the pen. The paper dragged a little under the nib. I wrote my line and looked at it before putting the pen down. I was still awake.

When the hour ended, I began again.

Wind the clock. Trim the wick. Write one line.

The handle was hard against my palm. The scissors needed my eyes close to them. There was ink on my finger. Outside, the wind changed its noise, then changed back. I checked the time. Another hour. I put my hand on the handle once more.



A real light

Just before dawn on the third night, I saw a light on the water. I stayed at the window and watched. It fell behind a wave, then came up again. I waited for the next rise, and this time it was real.

It was the Maria Clara. A small wooden trawler from our village, with three men aboard. Their engine was dead. They had a scrap of sail up and were steering home by our beam.

I watched the light as long as I could see it. Each time a wave hid it, I leaned forward. I could do nothing with my hands at the window. I went back to the lamp and checked the flame.

The lens carried the beam out across the water again. In the grey before morning, the boat came closer to the harbour.



Zé

At first light the Maria Clara crept into the harbour. I watched until I could see she was in. Then the three men came up the hill to the tower.

They were soaked. Water dripped from their clothes onto the stone at the door. I remember looking down at it. More water, after all that work with the bucket.

Zé was the skipper. He came towards me and took my hand in both of his. He did not speak. I could feel how cold his fingers were, and I kept my hand where he had put it.

I do not know how long. Long enough.

The other two men waited behind him. I looked at Zé, then down at our hands. When he let go, I stood in the doorway a moment longer before I went back inside.



The last line of the storm

I went to the book with my hands still wet. This was the last line of the storm:

"Third night. Clock wound. Wick trimmed. Light turning. Still here."

Here it is, under my finger. I can read it even where the ink has run. Senhor Abílio said the light only asks if you lit it. That winter I found the second half: it also asks if you kept it lit.

When the whole thing is too heavy, I leave the rest for now. Carry the next hour.

I begin to close the book, but the next page slips under my thumb. You see the smaller writing there? Much neater than mine. That was Inês's hand. I stop with the cover half raised. Next time, I will read you her line.

The light still turns.