

Sleep Story Script

A narrated bedtime story for adults — a slow walk through a coastal village at dusk. Written to be read, not performed, with nothing in it that asks the listener to do anything.

22 min · 5 segments

Twenty-two minutes, five segments. A story, not a practice — there are no instructions in it after the first minute, and nothing to follow.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Flat narration, not story-time voice. No rising inflection at the end of sentences — that's what keeps people awake.
- The temptation to perform grows as the detail gets richer around the harbour. Resist it.
- 22 minutes is a long single take. Mark two or three points where you could stop, breathe and pick up cleanly.

01. Before the story

1 min 30

[the only instructional part — keep it brief, then never speak to them directly again]

This is a story for going to sleep. There's nothing in it to follow and nothing to remember, and if you drift off in the first two minutes you haven't missed anything worth having.

So get comfortable. Do the last of the shifting about now. Let your eyes close. *[pause for 15 seconds — drop your volume here and leave it down]*

The story is about a village by the sea, in the hour after the sun has gone.

02. The road down

5 min

[slow, level narration — no rising inflection, no story-time voice; a flat delivery is what puts people under]

The road into the village comes down off the hill in a long curve, and it is old enough that the stones have gone smooth in the middle where everyone walks. Grass grows along both edges. It is the colour grass goes at the end of a hot week, more straw than green, and it lies over rather than standing up.

There is a low wall on the seaward side. Not built so much as stacked, one flat stone on another, by somebody a long time ago who is not remembered. Some of the stones have small ferns growing out of the gaps. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

The light has gone from the sky but not from the water. The sea is holding the last of it, the way water does, so the horizon is brighter than anything above it. Nothing out there is moving except the swell, and the swell is slow. It gathers, and it turns over, and it goes quiet, and then a long time later it does it again.

The air smells of salt, and of the dry grass, and faintly of somebody's dinner further down. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

Further along, the road passes a gate that has been tied shut with blue rope for years. Behind it a field goes down to a stand of pines. The pines move a little, all together, and then stop.

03. The square

6 min

[stay flat; the temptation to perform grows as the detail gets richer — resist it]

At the bottom the road opens into a square, though square is a generous word for it. It is more a place where four narrow streets stop meeting each other. There is a plane tree in the middle with a bench built round its trunk, and the bark comes away in patches so the trunk is grey and cream and grey again.

A string of small bulbs runs from the tree to the corner of a building and back. Two of them have gone. Nobody has replaced them and nobody minds. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

On the far side a café has put out six tables and taken four of them back in. A man is wiping down the last two, not hurrying, folding the cloth over and using a clean part of it each time. When he finishes he stands for a moment with the cloth over his shoulder and looks at nothing in particular, the way people do at the end of a shift.

A radio is playing somewhere behind him, turned down so low that only the shape of the music arrives, none of the words. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

A cat crosses the square without any urgency at all. It stops halfway, sits, considers something, and goes on. It disappears under a parked van and does not come out the other side.

Above the café a window is open and a curtain moves in it, in and out, in and out, on whatever breeze is coming up off the water. *[long pause — 30 seconds]*

04. Down to the harbour

6 min

[sentences get shorter through this segment; let the gaps grow with them]

One of the streets goes down to the harbour, and it is steep enough to have steps set into it every so often, worn in the middle like the road above. The walls on either side hold the day's heat and give it back slowly.

The harbour is small. A stone arm goes out and curls back, and inside it the water is almost flat. Eight or nine boats sit on their moorings, and because there is no wind to speak of they are all pointing more or less the same way. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

Their ropes go slack and then tight and then slack again. Every so often a halyard taps against a mast. It is not a rhythm. It happens, and then it doesn't for a while, and then it happens twice.

The water moves against the harbour wall. Not waves. Just the sea breathing in a small enclosed place. *[long pause — 30 seconds]*

At the end of the stone arm there is a light. It turns. Green, and then nothing, and then green again, and the green lies down on the water in a long soft line each time.

Green. And nothing. *[pause for 25 seconds]*

And green.

05. Thinning out

3 min 30

[no ending, no resolution, no goodnight by name — the story should simply run out]

The lights in the village go off one at a time, in no order, over about an hour. *[pause for 30 seconds]*

The café chairs are stacked. The curtain still moves. *[pause for 40 seconds]*

The boats point the same way. The rope goes slack, and tight, and slack. *[pause for 45 seconds]*

And the sea turns over, and goes quiet, and a long time later does it again. *[stop here; let the recording run 30 more seconds, then fade]*

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