

The Lighthouse Keeper (Baltic coast, Poland)

Mrs Kowalska:

“When he arrives, I help him out of his jacket. And then he takes my arm, he knows me, he knows the routine, and together we walk slowly into the kitchen, where he sits down on the wooden bench. I’ve already prepared oat flakes with fruit – he’s particularly fond of strawberries – and coffee. He drinks plenty of black coffee, but you wouldn’t notice. I mean, it doesn’t make him any more talkative. He stays at my place for around an hour, sometimes longer, then I listen to the news, and maybe he listens, too. I don’t know. Then I help him back out into the corridor, put his jacket on. He wears a green winter jacket, the one Mrs Stajkowska got for him, from the charity shop. Then I put his scarf round his neck for him. A bright red scarf, the one Mrs Stajkowska knitted for him. She thought about the colour beforehand. To guard against getting lost again, she said. Adam, that is, not the scarf.”

Mrs Stajkowska:

“I fetch Adam from Mrs Kowalska’s place. Mostly

I have to tie his shoelaces because she misses them. Her mind is always slightly elsewhere, I don't know where it goes, hopefully to her children and her husband. She never does his anorak up properly, either. She only helps out so to avoid any bad talk.

When Adam arrives, I give him herbal tea, with rosemary, something to warm him up, and then he goes to sit in the living room. He knows he's allowed to take any of the picture books from the shelves. We've travelled a lot over the past few years, Józef and I, and we always brought back nice books. His favourite is the one with photos of lighthouses. Which is why the book is already out, on the little table next to the sofa. And he gets decent bread and cheese from me, too. A few oat flakes isn't enough for a big man like him!

He stays with us until around midday, mostly I look after him, and sometimes Józef when he has a day off. And Jerzy, our youngest – all the others have already flown the nest – he sometimes sits with Adam and looks through a book with him. That's nice. I mean, Adam really isn't to be envied. And so we do our bit – you don't get to heaven for nothing, do you?"

Mrs Jaworska:

“I give him lunch. Mrs Stajkowska drives him over in her car. It’s only a few paces, but Adam walks so slowly. And he’s scared of the wind. We’ve got plenty of wind here at the coast. I don’t keep him waiting – as soon as he arrives the steaming pot is on the table. As punctual as in the army, my husband always says. Adam doesn’t talk. Only the names of ... of things like “Ikea”, “McDonalds”, “Salamander”, new names, he sometimes mumbles things like that to himself. Funny really. In any case, I give him a proper midday meal; I only use fresh stuff, I don’t cut any corners there just because Adam has no family and’ll never be able to give anything back. And for Adam, I think it’s particularly important for him to eat something decent. Which is why I got him some beetroot juice, specially, Mrs Krystek gives it to me for free now she knows it’s for Adam. She said she wanted to make a contribution. And she gave me some colourful pills too. Against arteriosclerosis. Adam’s quite old. She didn’t want anything for them either. But I always give half of them to my father-in-law, because he’s already had trouble with his ticker. Not like Adam. I think any woman would do the same. Especially since the pharmacy

is hardly on the verge of financial ruin. And anyway, that's all Mrs Krystek does for Adam. Nothing more."

Mrs Krystek:

"I really don't have the time. Though I do feel sorry for him. Everyone knows people like that usually get sent to an asylum. But I just couldn't manage, my husband works the night shift, and my daughter drives a motorbike and puts purple highlights in her hair. I've got my hands full! Although, sometimes I think ... well anyway, I can't manage it. But when Mrs Jaworska comes, I always give her something for Adam. For free, of course. Courtesy of "Lighthouse Pharmacy". And on that score I'm really not petty. I worked out a while back that Mrs Jaworska gives most of the medicine to her father-in-law. But I can't say anything, of course, because I never look after Adam."

Mrs Matuszewska:

"I don't like him, that Adam. We all had to take quite a lot, back then. Suffered. Here. And we've also, how should I put it, we've got over it. Pulled ourselves together. Not everyone can end up

like ... well, like Adam has ended up. And now people are outdoing each other in playing the good Samaritan. Each wanting to be better than the next. From Mrs Stajkowska – they've got money from the workshop – Adam's always getting things I can only dream of. And Mrs Jaworska cooks and cooks and cooks – I wouldn't have the time, I have to help my husband in the flower shop. When Adam comes to me for lunch, I put a stock cube in some boiling water – that's what I eat too, honestly. I don't make anything better for myself. Then we both spoon up our soup, I mean, I give him bread, too, of course. And then I take him with me to the flower shop. It's better for him than just sitting round all day alone on a sofa in the living room looking at picture books. And if he breaks something there's hell to pay. After the business with Stajkowska's vase, the fund for Adam was started. It was her idea – after Adam swung a thick book and knocked over some ugly vase at her house. Since then, we've all been paying 80 zlotys a month. Stajkowska manages the fund, too. The state doesn't do enough, simple as that. We have to stick together, but I think the cakes are over the top. It'd be better if they brought me a piece for my birthday!"

Reverend Gruszecki:

“At five or five thirty in the afternoon I pick Adam up from the flower shop. He always looks at me longingly. He sits there the whole afternoon on an uncomfortable dirty plastic stool that Mrs Matuszewska stands on to reach high-up plants. Sits there all day long. Maybe Mrs Matuszewska thinks her conversations with customers are interesting for him, but Adam doesn't even understand them anymore. He just mumbles the names of the old ships, the big ships from back then, at least that's all I've ever heard him saying. And if he picks a petal off a rose, then Mrs Matuszewska is really angry! Runs over to Mrs Stajkowska and makes her pay for the rose out of the fund! And not cheaply! And she's always pressurizing Mrs Stajkowska to let her take over the fund because her shop is where most things get broken. It's no wonder, if you take a deranged person, who also happens to be a giant, and put him in a tiny, overfilled flower shop and order him to sit still for hours on end! So I take Adam with me when I come from the parish hall and we go to my house. It's quite a way, but it's right along the coast. Sometimes I have to tell him not to drag his

feet because he stirs up so much sand. But it does him good to walk out in the fresh air once in a while and not just sit around in front of all those cut flowers.”

Mrs Zanska (the priest’s housekeeper):

“I always walk out to meet them. ‘Our reverend’ stays on the beach for a while, with his telescope. Adam is often frozen through. Such a big man – and he gets cold so fast! I take his hand, I just do it, and we make a beeline for the living room at home where it’s cosy and warm, and I put some music on for him. Then I do the washing up and do this and that, my children are there too – they’ve got used to him. I’ve been helping out at the reverend’s house for more than ten years now. And we villagers stick together. It really isn’t easy, but you can’t leave Adam on his own. And certainly not by the sea. That’s why ... I don’t really want to say this ... no, the reverend means well. But ... I really don’t think he should take the path by the sea with Adam, I mean, they could take the other path, down by the elder bushes ... I think the reverend doesn’t actually realize, he thinks Adam must love the sea the same way he does.”

Jan Zanski (housekeeper's son):

"It's a shock for me every time I find him sitting there. The moment I open the door, bang!, there he is. With his strange eyes that look through you as if you're not there. I think he's totally creepy, and I know my sisters think he's nasty, too. We don't say anything, of course! But I'd prefer it if our mother could at least tell us in advance: Adam's coming again today. I've got nothing against him. But it is weird having someone around where you never know if he understands what we're saying, or nothing at all. It makes me scared. Dino, too."

Dino (German shepherd dog):

"I don't like to eat when Adam strokes me. He always does it. But it feels like he doesn't mean me. Could be stroking any old dog. Maybe even a carpet or a wall. He strokes me, my mistress praises him for it, but he looks through me. Out of the window. And I can smell that's he's afraid."

Mr Kloczowski:

"Fat Mrs Zanska – the priest's lover, as everyone knows – brings Adam to our place when he can't sleep at their house. Her kids are always inviting other children to sleep there so that the sofa and

the couch are occupied. Mrs Zanska's children are afraid of Adam.

We don't have any. Whenever I think of children, I immediately think of the ones Adam pulled out of the water back then. Day after day. New ones kept on getting washed up. Sometimes I would help him. At the time he was still the lighthouse keeper, watching out for ships. The big German ships. The Gustloff, the Steuben, the Goya. They were all torpedoed by the Russians at almost exactly the same spot. Just a few hundred metres off the coast here, near Stolp – on their way to Lübeck or Kiel. Us Poles were always in-between – always in-between and always in the thick of it. And I helped Adam. I wore my father's raincoat. We fished them out with long metal poles.

Good that my wife and I didn't have any –."

Adam (pulling the curtain closed, singing almost inaudibly):

"Sleep. Window. Sleep. Sleep. Window. Sleep. If you'll just quieten down, wind, then I'll sleep too."

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