

# The Language of Rain

A story about creativity, language, and the beauty found in simplicity.

**B2 Level**

**Adults (17+)**

**Story**

**14 Pages**

**45 min**

Lena Fischer, a celebrated literary translator, cannot finish a Portuguese novel about a fisherman and the sea. She travels to Cabo Espera, a small fishing village, where she meets Manuel Soares — a wise old fisherman who teaches her that translation is not about reproducing words precisely but capturing the feeling underneath them.

## Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and comprehend a literary short story at B2 level
- ✓ Learn 20 advanced vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise reading for detail, inference, and theme
- ✓ Analyse character motivation and narrative structure
- ✓ Answer comprehension questions to demonstrate understanding

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# 1 Read the Story

## Chapter 1: The Translator's Block

Lena Fischer had translated twenty-seven novels, nine collections of poetry, and one memoir about a woman who sailed solo across the Pacific Ocean. She spoke five languages fluently. Words were her profession, her passion, and — until six months ago — her sanctuary.

But something had changed. The novel in front of her — a beautiful piece of Portuguese fiction about a fisherman and the sea — had defeated her completely. She understood every word. She could analyse the grammar and explain the cultural nuances to a room full of academics. But she could not make it sing in German.

Her editor, Klaus, had been patient at first. Then firm. "Take a break, Lena. Go somewhere. Get out of your head." But the right words would not come. Translation, which had once felt like a conversation between two languages, now felt like an interrogation — harsh, forced, and exhausting.

## Chapter 2: Cabo Espera

Lena found the village by accident. Cabo Espera was a fishing village on the southern coast of Portugal, home to four hundred people, a single restaurant, a church with a blue-tiled facade, and a harbour where brightly painted boats rocked gently in the swell.

She rented a small white cottage on the cliff above the village. There was no television, no reliable internet, and no sound except the wind, the sea, and the rain — because it rained, relentlessly, for the first five days.

On the sixth morning, the rain stopped. Lena walked down to the harbour and sat on a stone wall. An elderly man with sun-darkened skin was mending a net nearby, his thick fingers moving with surprising dexterity. "You look like someone who has lost something," he said.

## Chapter 3: Manuel

His name was Manuel Soares. He was seventy-eight years old and had been a fisherman since the age of fourteen. He had a deceased wife named Rosa who he still spoke about in the present tense, and a dog called Vasco who was, according to Manuel, the laziest animal in all of Portugal.

Lena began visiting the harbour every morning. Manuel was the most unassuming storyteller she had ever met. He simply told his stories — about storms he had survived,

fish he had caught and lost, the morning Rosa had appeared at the harbour with a basket of bread and a smile that was worth more than every fish in the ocean.

One morning, Lena told Manuel about her translation problem. Manuel pointed at the sea. "What colour is the water today?" "Grey. Green. Maybe a little blue." "And yesterday?" "Silver." "The sea is always the sea. But it is never the same sea twice. Your problem is that you are trying to make the sea the same colour every day."

## Chapter 4: Learning to Listen

Lena had always approached translation as a precision exercise — matching words, preserving structures. She had prided herself on fidelity. But perhaps she had been so focused on accuracy that she had forgotten about beauty.

The next morning, instead of translating word by word, she closed the book and wrote what she remembered — not what the words said, but what they made her feel. The result was imperfect. But for the first time in months, the German text sounded alive.

She worked for three hours without stopping, translating from somewhere deeper — from the feeling of the rain on the terrace, the smell of salt in the harbour, the cadence of Manuel's voice. When she read back what she had written, she felt a sensation she had almost forgotten: satisfaction.

## Chapter 5: The Storm

Three weeks into her stay, a storm hit Cabo Espera. Lena walked down to the harbour expecting it to be deserted. But Manuel was there, watching the ferocious waves, the boats' hulls glistening with rain.

"A fisherman who is afraid of storms is like a translator who is afraid of difficult words. You do not avoid them. You learn to read them."

That evening, she wrote the best passage she had ever translated. In the original Portuguese, the prose was understated. But beneath the simplicity was an ocean of feeling. Her German translation captured something essential — the quietness, the solitude, the fragile beauty of a man watching the sea at dawn.

## Chapter 6: Departure

Lena finished the translation on a Tuesday afternoon. Klaus called the next morning. "This is extraordinary. It doesn't read like a translation. It reads like the book was written in German."

She went to say goodbye to Manuel. "You came here looking for words," he said. "Did you find them?" "Not exactly. I found something better. I learned to stop looking for words and start listening to what was underneath them."

Manuel nodded. "That is the difference between a good fisherman and a great one. A good fisherman catches fish. A great fisherman understands the sea." He paused. "Come back in the autumn. The sardines are better then." Lena laughed. "I will," she said. And she meant it.

## Epilogue

The translation was published the following spring to widespread critical acclaim. One reviewer wrote that it was the finest literary translation of the decade. Another said that reading it felt like standing beside the sea.

Lena kept a photograph on her desk — Manuel sitting on the harbour wall, Vasco sleeping beside him. Whenever she struggled with a difficult passage, she would remember what he had taught her: that the most important things cannot be translated. They can only be felt.

And every autumn, she returned to Cabo Espera. She sat on the harbour wall with Manuel, drank coffee from his flask, and listened to the rain — because rain, she had discovered, has its own language. And it speaks to everyone, in every tongue, without ever needing translation.

## 2 Key Vocabulary

These words from the story will help you expand your English vocabulary.

Word	Type	Definition	Example
<b>memoir</b>	<i>noun</i>	a written account of personal experiences	<i>She published a memoir about her childhood.</i>
<b>sanctuary</b>	<i>noun</i>	a place of safety, comfort, or refuge	<i>The library was her sanctuary from noise.</i>
<b>accusingly</b>	<i>adv.</i>	in a way that suggests blame or guilt	<i>She looked at him accusingly.</i>
<b>nuances</b>	<i>noun</i>	subtle differences in meaning or expression	<i>A good translator understands the nuances.</i>
<b>rearranging</b>	<i>verb</i>	organising differently; putting in a new order	<i>She spent the morning rearranging furniture.</i>
<b>interrogation</b>	<i>noun</i>	a period of intense questioning	<i>The police conducted a lengthy interrogation.</i>
<b>harbour</b>	<i>noun</i>	a sheltered area where ships anchor safely	<i>The boats returned to the harbour at sunset.</i>
<b>relentlessly</b>	<i>adv.</i>	without stopping; in an unstoppable way	<i>The rain fell relentlessly for three days.</i>
<b>corrugated</b>	<i>adj.</i>	shaped into parallel ridges and grooves	<i>The shed had a corrugated iron roof.</i>
<b>dexterity</b>	<i>noun</i>	skill and grace in physical movements	<i>The surgeon's dexterity was remarkable.</i>
<b>deceased</b>	<i>adj.</i>	no longer alive; dead	<i>The family held a private funeral for the deceased.</i>
<b>unassuming</b>	<i>adj.</i>	modest and not attracting attention	<i>Despite his fame, he remained unassuming.</i>
<b>precision</b>	<i>noun</i>	exactness and accuracy	<i>The watchmaker worked with extraordinary precision.</i>
<b>fidelity</b>	<i>noun</i>	faithfulness and loyalty to the original	<i>The translation maintained great fidelity.</i>
<b>faltered</b>	<i>verb</i>	became unsure or unsteady; hesitated	<i>Her voice faltered as she spoke.</i>
<b>cadence</b>	<i>noun</i>	the rise and fall of the voice; rhythm	<i>The poet's cadence made every line musical.</i>
<b>ferocious</b>	<i>adj.</i>	very fierce, violent, or intense	<i>A ferocious storm battered the coast.</i>
<b>glistening</b>	<i>adj.</i>	shining with reflected light	<i>The streets were glistening after the rain.</i>
<b>understated</b>	<i>adj.</i>	expressed in a restrained or subtle way	<i>Her understated elegance was admired.</i>
<b>essential</b>	<i>adj.</i>	absolutely necessary; fundamentally important	<i>Water is essential for all forms of life.</i>

## 3

**Comprehension Quiz**

Choose the best answer for each question.

**1. What was Lena's profession?**

- A) She was a novelist.
- B) She was a literary translator.
- C) She was a university professor.
- D) She was a journalist.

**2. Why could Lena not finish the Portuguese novel?**

- A) She did not understand Portuguese.
- B) She had lost the ability to make the translation feel alive.
- C) The author refused to cooperate.
- D) Her publisher cancelled the project.

**3. Where did Lena go to recover?**

- A) A mountain village in Switzerland.
- B) A fishing village in Portugal called Cabo Espera.
- C) A coastal city in Brazil.
- D) A remote island in Greece.

**4. What was Manuel's occupation?**

- A) He was a retired teacher.
- B) He was a fisherman.
- C) He was a boat builder.
- D) He was the village mayor.

**5. What metaphor did Manuel use?**

- A) He compared translation to cooking.
- B) He compared it to making the sea the same colour every day.
- C) He compared it to building without a foundation.
- D) He compared it to singing in the wrong key.

**6. How did Lena change her approach?**

- A) She started using translation software.
- B) She stopped translating word by word and focused on feeling.
- C) She hired an assistant.
- D) She switched to a different novel.

**7. What did Manuel teach Lena about silence?**

- A) That it was boring and unproductive.
- B) That it was a kind of language that did not need translation.
- C) That fishermen must always work in silence.
- D) That silence was a sign of sadness.

**8. What does 'fidelity' mean in this story?**

- A) Faithfulness and loyalty to the original.
- B) The quality of a sound recording.
- C) A type of financial investment.
- D) Physical strength and endurance.

**9. How was the completed translation received?**

- A) It was rejected by the publisher.
- B) It received widespread critical acclaim.
- C) It was praised but never published.
- D) It was only popular in Portugal.

**10. What is the central message?**

- A) Learning languages is essential for travelling.
- B) The most important things can only be felt, not translated.
- C) Fishing is an underappreciated profession.
- D) Germany produces the best translations.

## 4

**Answer Key**

1. B) She was a literary translator.
2. B) She had lost the ability to make the translation feel alive.
3. B) A fishing village in Portugal called Cabo Espera.
4. B) He was a fisherman.
5. B) He compared it to making the sea the same colour every day.
6. B) She stopped translating word by word and focused on feeling.
7. B) That it was a kind of language that did not need translation.
8. A) Faithfulness and loyalty to the original.
9. B) It received widespread critical acclaim.
10. B) The most important things can only be felt, not translated.

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