The Box in the Attic (B1 · English B1)

Tekst / Transcript

Last October my grandmother asked me to clean her attic. The room was dark and cold, and the air smelled of old paper. I climbed the narrow stairs with a torch in my hand. Boxes stood everywhere, and I did not know where to start. Near the window I found a heavy wooden container with a metal lock.

I carried it down to the kitchen. My grandmother sat at the table with a cup of tea and smiled. "Open it," she said. "I have not seen the contents for forty years." Inside there were letters, photographs and a small blue notebook. The photographs showed various places: a beach, a market, a train station in the mountains. I did not recognise anyone in them. My grandmother put on her glasses and began to explain each picture slowly.

The letters came from her older sister, who had moved to Canada in 1968. There was a continuous stream of news in them, week after week, for almost ten years. My grandmother had written back every time. She told me that letters were the only contact between the two sisters, because phone calls were far too expensive then. "Today you contact people in one second," she said. "That is convenient, but we read our letters ten times."

The contrast between the two lives surprised me. My great-aunt wrote about snow, big cars and a noisy factory. My grandmother's village had one shop and one bus a day. I tried to count the letters, but I stopped after fifty. There were simply too many. In the notebook my grandmother had written a short version of each week: the weather, the price of eggs, the name of a visitor.

We stayed in the warm kitchen while the rain fell outside. She let me photograph the letters, so the family could read them too. I wanted to send the box to a museum, but she was not sure. It took me two evenings to convince her that the letters were interesting for other people as well. In the end she agreed, though she kept the notebook. "This is the most valuable thing in the house," she said quietly. "It is only paper, but it holds my whole life." That night I walked home through the cool November air and felt very lucky.

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