A Bicycle Trip to the Old Chapel (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

My uncle Daniel is a historian who has spent thirty years studying the villages along our river. Last August he asked me to come with him on a two-day cycling trip, and I agreed without thinking about the weather. He promised me quiet roads, cold lemonade and at least one story I had never heard before. What he did not promise was a comfortable journey.

We left at six in the morning. Before we set off, he checked my helmet twice and tightened the strap under my chin, because he refused to move a metre until he was satisfied. The first hour was easy, but then the road began to climb. The hill was so high that I had to push my bicycle for the last few hundred metres, and by the top my shirt was completely wet. Daniel, who is sixty-one, arrived two minutes ahead of me and pretended he had been waiting for hours. I found this less hilarious than he did.

At midday we stopped at a farmhouse where an old woman sold bread and honey from her own bees. She poured us water and told us that her grandfather had kept the hives in the same field. My uncle asked her about the chapel we were looking for, and she did not hesitate for a second before pointing towards a line of trees. The building was almost completely hidden behind them, she said, and most visitors cycled past it without noticing anything at all. Her humor was dry and she clearly enjoyed watching strangers get lost.

We found the chapel an hour later. It was small, grey and older than anything I had seen in the region, and Daniel spoke about it as if it were a holy place, although no service had been held there since 1954. Inside, our voices sounded strange against the stone. An iron hook still hung near the door, probably for a lamp, and a wooden bench stood under the window. My uncle photographed every wall and made notes for almost an hour while I sat outside in the shade. Villagers used to come here in autumn, he explained, before they went hunting in the woods beyond the hill. In hard winters, when hunger was a real danger, the meat they brought back kept whole families alive.

The journey home was, to be honest, pure hell. Rain started at four, my heel was rubbing painfully against the back of my shoe, and the last twelve kilometres were straight into the wind. Daniel sang the whole way, which did not help. Some men used to hunt wild boar in these fields, he shouted over the noise, and I shouted back that I would rather be at home with dry socks. We arrived after eight, soaked and starving; hence, my aunt had made an enormous pot of soup. Hopefully next summer he will suggest something involving a car.

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