A Map of the Valley (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Daniel took the job as a planning officer, he expected paperwork and little else. Instead, he was sent to the greenest county in the north, where three villages were about to be joined into one growing town. His office was in a converted mill, and every morning he walked down a long corridor lined with old photographs of the valley. The building had no lift, and the heating never worked properly.

His first task was to review a proposal for two hundred new homes. Local people were divided. Some argued that young families were leaving because housing had become impossible to afford. Others insisted that the roads, drains and power lines could not cope, since the infrastructure had not been improved since the 1970s. Daniel read every letter twice. He noticed that almost every household in the older streets had signed at least one petition.

The land belonged to a family whose estate covered nearly a thousand hectares, including woodland, farms and a ruined castle on the hilltop. Daniel visited on a wet Thursday. The owner, a cheerful woman in her sixties, showed him the basement where the family had once stored apples and wine; it now held bicycles and boxes of forgotten books. Then she drove him up the track to see the view. From there, the whole valley looked calm and unhurried.

Over the following weeks, Daniel met almost everyone. He spoke to the imam at the new mosque, which served the growing community near the station, and to volunteers restoring a small Hindu temple that had been built by workers a century earlier. He talked to a nurse who wanted a proper medical facility within walking distance, and to a shopkeeper who feared that the area would soon feel like a dull suburb of the nearest city. Not everybody agreed, but almost everybody was polite.

One afternoon, a farmer took him to a cave in the limestone hills, where cold water dripped from the roof and the air smelled of earth. "People have sheltered here for thousands of years," the farmer said. "We have always built somewhere." Daniel wrote his report that weekend. He recommended approving half the houses immediately and the rest only after the water system was upgraded. His managers at the headquarters in Leeds accepted the plan with a few changes. Some residents were disappointed, and one letter accused him of turning their home into an urban nightmare. Even so, when the first families moved in the following spring, Daniel drove out to see the street lights come on, and he felt quietly proud of his slow, careful compromise.

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