The Mill on the River (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

For thirty years the old paper mill stood empty beside the river, and everyone in town assumed it would eventually be pulled down. Its windows were broken and its walls were black with damp. Then a small group of local architects announced a plan to transform the ruin into a centre for young businesses. Most people laughed. A few, however, were curious enough to attend the first public meeting in the library.

The woman who led the project was called Nadia, and she had spent her early career in city planning. She explained that the town was already going through a transition from heavy industry to services, whether anyone liked it or not. Factories had closed one by one, and young people were leaving. Her argument was simple: an empty building generates nothing, while a busy one pays for itself. The council, which had a surprisingly progressive majority that year, agreed to fund a feasibility study.

Progress was slow at first. Builders worked through two cold winters, and the roof alone swallowed a third of the budget. Nadia had to transfer money from the marketing fund to the structural work, which annoyed several people on the committee. There were arguments about parking, noise and rent. Yet gradually, month by month, the shell of the mill began to look like a real workplace again. Fresh glass replaced the broken panes, and the brickwork was cleaned until it turned a warm red.

The first tenants moved in on a wet morning in October. A software designer, a furniture maker and two food companies signed contracts on the same day, and by Christmas nine desks were occupied. What surprised Nadia most was the atmosphere that began to emerge inside the building: people who had never met were sharing tools, contacts and customers. Within a year the mill had established a reputation far beyond the region, and journalists were arriving to write about it. Visitor numbers rose dramatically after a national newspaper published a photograph of the riverside terrace.

Of course, success brought new problems. The waiting list for space grew long, and the committee began discussing an expansion into the neighbouring warehouse. Some residents worried that rents in the whole district would rise. Nadia listened carefully to these concerns, because she knew that a dramatic change of this size affects everyone, not only the people who benefit. At the anniversary party she made a short speech from the metal staircase. She reminded the crowd that the mill did not generate jobs by magic; it simply gave people a reason to stay. Then she noticed a small but important shift in the way her neighbours spoke about the town. They no longer said "this place is finished". They said "come and see what we are building".

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