The Painting in the Attic (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Grandmother Eliza died, she left the family a small house, a great deal of dust, and one painting that hung above the fireplace. Everyone in the family had always believed that the painting was worth a fortune. My uncle had told the story so often that it had become a kind of family legend. According to him, a famous artist had given it to Eliza's father as a gift. Nobody had ever thought to question it.

My cousin Daniel, who studied art history, was the first person who found the courage to say out loud what he had suspected for years. He examined the canvas under a lamp, turned it over, and shook his head slowly. The paint, he explained, was far too modern, and the signature had been copied badly. In other words, the treasure above the fireplace was almost certainly fake. There was a long silence in the room after he finished speaking.

My uncle reacted exactly as I had expected. He accused Daniel of being dishonest, of inventing a story so that the family would sell the house cheaply and give him a share. It was an ugly accusation, and it hung in the air like smoke. Daniel did not shout back. He simply said that he had no wish to disappoint anyone, but that the truth mattered more to him than a comfortable story.

A week later, a specialist from an auction house confirmed everything Daniel had said. The painting had been produced in the 1970s by a workshop that had later been investigated for fraud on a large scale. Hundreds of families across the country owned similar canvases and believed the same comforting legend. Our grandmother, it turned out, had been a victim rather than a liar. She had paid a great deal for something worthless, and she had never known.

Once the shock had passed, my uncle apologised. He admitted that it was unfair to blame Daniel for news he had not created, and that fear had made him cruel. He also said something that surprised me: that our grandmother deserved better than to be laughed at. The man who had sold her the painting was not merely dishonest; in my uncle's opinion he was genuinely evil, because he had targeted people who trusted him completely. Nobody argued with that.

We kept the painting in the end. It still hangs above the fireplace in the old house, and visitors still ask about it. We tell them the whole story now, including the parts that make us uncomfortable. Daniel says that a family which can admit its own mistakes has a kind of honor that no expensive canvas could ever buy. I think he is right, and I no longer look at the painting with disappointment.

Woordenlijst

Kelime	Anlam
dishonest	
evil	
fake	
fraud	
blame	
courage	
honor	
disappoint	

disappointment
dismiss
failed
failure
fault
dull
mistake

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