A Letter in the Wrong Drawer (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Daniel had not intended to open the drawer at all. He was searching for a spare key in his grandmother's writing desk when his fingers touched a bundle of envelopes tied with string. What prompted him to untie the string, he could never afterwards explain. Perhaps it was simply the handwriting, which he recognised immediately as his father's.

The letters were forty years old. Reading them, Daniel discovered a version of his family that nobody had ever described to him. His father, at nineteen, had wanted to study music in another country, and his grandparents had forbidden it absolutely. There had been a quarrel, then silence, then a slow, careful peace that lasted the rest of their lives. In one letter his father wrote a single line that Daniel read three times: "I do not blame you, and I hope one day I can honestly forgive you as well." Nothing in the house had ever revealed that such a conflict had existed.

That evening he drove to his father's flat with the bundle in his coat pocket. He had rehearsed several ways to address the subject, but in the end he simply put the letters on the kitchen table. His father looked at them for a long moment and did not deny writing them. Instead he made tea, sat down heavily, and said that he had wondered for years whether they had been destroyed. Daniel asked him to clarify one passage that he had not understood, about money and a train ticket to Vienna. His father laughed for the first time in the conversation.

"I have to confess something," he said. "I nearly went anyway. I had the ticket in my pocket at the station." He explained that his mother had come to find him on the platform, not to argue, but to appeal to him as a son rather than as a rebel. She had promised nothing, demanded nothing, and simply waited. He had walked home with her. For years he had regarded that decision as the great mistake of his life, and only much later had he understood it differently. Daniel listened without interrupting, aware that a single careless remark could end the conversation immediately.

They talked until well after midnight. His father showed him an old photograph, a cheap violin, and a programme from a concert he had once played in a village hall. When Daniel finally stood up to leave, his father said that he was glad the letters had survived, and that he approved of Daniel reading them. On the drive home, through empty streets, Daniel thought about how much of a family remains unspoken, and how easily an entire life can be shaped by one conversation on a railway platform.

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