The Stamp Room Upstairs (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

My great-uncle Bertrand lived alone in a narrow house at the end of Mill Lane. He was a stamp collector, and the upstairs room where he kept his albums smelled of dust and old paper. As a child I was allowed in only on Sunday afternoons, and only if I washed my hands first. That rule was compulsory in his house, and he never once made an exception for me.

He worked with enormous patience. Every stamp had to be studied closely under a magnifying glass before it was placed in the album. He said that half the value of a stamp lay in details that careless eyes never noticed. The work demanded such concentration that he could sit for two hours without speaking a single word. I found this strange at first, but the silence of that room slowly became a source of comfort to me, especially during the year my parents were arguing.

Bertrand was a conservative man in most things. He wore the same grey jacket for twenty years and distrusted anything that had been invented after 1970. He also read a great deal about conservation, and he gave money every month to a small organisation that protected wetlands. His arguments about the wasteful consumption of paper and plastic were repeated at every family dinner, whether anyone was listening or not. My mother said he constantly turned a pleasant meal into a lecture.

One autumn he entered a national contest for private collections. The rules were surprisingly complicated, and the application form ran to eleven pages. Photographs had to be taken from fixed angles, and each album needed a written history. He grumbled that such competitions were commonly won by rich men who bought their collections rather than building them, and for several weeks he half believed there was a conspiracy among the judges to keep amateurs out. I told him he sounded like the villain in a cheap comic book, and to my relief he laughed.

In the end, the completion of the application took him four months of steady evening work. His hands shook a little as he sealed the envelope. He did not win the main prize, but the judges gave him a special mention for a combination of rare Portuguese stamps that nobody else had thought to display together. The letter arrived on a wet Tuesday, and he read it three times without expression. Then he pinned it above his desk, where it stayed for the rest of his life, a constant reminder that patience is occasionally rewarded.

Woordenlijst

??????	??????
closely	
collector	
combination	
comfort	
comic	
commonly	
completion	
complicated	
compulsory	
concentration	

conservation
conservative
conspiracy
constant
constantly
consumption
contest
convenience
convention
conventional
convert
cop
cope
counter (long flat surface)
cowboy
craft
creature
crew
crucial
cue
cure
current
cute

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