The Mural on Bishop Street (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Nobody in the neighbourhood could remember when the wall on Bishop Street had last been painted. It stood at the end of a quiet row of houses, grey and cracked, and everyone had learned to walk past it without looking. Then the council announced a small grant for community art, and Marta, who taught drawing at the local school, decided to apply. Her proposal was bold, far more ambitious than anything the committee had expected. She wanted to cover the entire wall with a painting of the river as it looked a hundred years ago.

The committee agreed, though several members privately doubted that one teacher and a group of teenagers could finish the work before winter. On the first Saturday, Marta arrived with brushes, ladders and twelve students. She began by drawing a single line across the wall, dividing it neatly into two halves. Everything above it would show the sky and the hills; everything below would show the water and the boats. The students argued cheerfully about who would work on the upper half, since it required climbing, and who would stay safely on the ground.

Marta gave the older students the lower section, because they were tall enough to reach it without leaning dangerously. The ladder itself was old and slightly bent, which worried her more than she admitted. Every morning she checked it carefully before anyone was allowed to climb. Progress was slow at first. The paint dried unevenly, and the wall absorbed far more of it than they had calculated. By the end of the second week, however, the shape of the picture had begun to appear, and passers-by started to stop and watch.

The hills were painted with brush strokes that moved upward, so that the eye was drawn towards the corner where the sun rose. In contrast, the river seemed to flow downward towards the bottom of the wall, as though it were escaping into the street. Marta insisted that the water should not be a single shade of blue. Her students mixed green, grey and even a little purple into it. The result was surprisingly colorful, and photographs of the half-finished mural began to circulate online.

One afternoon a journalist arrived and asked Marta what the painting meant to her. She hesitated, because she disliked explaining her own work. Finally she said that a town has an inner life as well as a public face, and that murals belong to both. The outer appearance of a street, she explained, tells visitors very little about the people who live there. The journalist wrote it down, and the article that appeared the following week attracted volunteers from across the city. Donations arrived, the paint supply doubled, and the level of interest surprised everyone, including the committee.

By November the mural was finished. A broad ribbon of green ran along the base of the wall, representing the fields that had once bordered the river. Neighbours brought chairs into the street for the opening, and Marta's students stood proudly beside their work, arguing about which section was best. The grey wall that nobody had wanted to look at was now the first thing that visitors photographed.

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