A Detour Through the Hills (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Daniel had planned the drive for weeks, and he had chosen the coastal route precisely because everyone told him it was slower. His sister Ines, who had flown in the night before, was less enthusiastic. She had imagined a motorway, a service station and lunch by two o'clock. Instead, she found herself on a narrow road with stone walls on both sides and barely enough space for a single car.

The first hour was uncomfortable. The climb out of the valley was so steep that the engine complained at every turn, and Ines gripped the door handle without saying anything. Then the landscape opened. Below them lay a bay of extraordinary blue, and beyond it a line of distant islands that seemed to float rather than sit on the water. Daniel pulled into a gravel space beside the road and switched off the engine. Neither of them spoke for a while, which was unusual for both.

After that, Ines stopped checking the time. Every curve in the road revealed something new: a chapel, a field of yellow flowers, an old man leading two goats. They passed a village where the houses were plain and white, with no decoration except the geraniums in the windows. At the far end stood a magnificent old church, far too large for such a small place, built when the fishing trade had made the community rich. Daniel wanted to photograph everything; Ines simply looked.

They stopped for lunch at a restaurant with a terrace overlooking the sea. The owner apologised that the menu was short, but he was flexible about the time, and he agreed to cook for them even though the kitchen was officially closing. The fish arrived whole on a dish shaped like a leaf, and it was, Ines admitted, the best meal of her year. Afterwards they walked down a path to a small bay where the water was shallow enough to see the stones on the bottom. Ines took off her shoes and stood in it until her feet went numb.

The road back over the hills followed a long curved ridge, and the sunset turned the whole sky orange. From the top they could see the entire coastline they had travelled. It looked gorgeous from that height, far more impressive than it had felt from inside the car. Daniel said quietly that this was why he had refused to take the motorway. Ines admitted, for the first time in years, that her brother had been right about something. They reached the hotel three hours later than planned, tired, sunburnt and entirely satisfied. The next morning, over coffee, Ines asked whether they could take the same road home, and Daniel simply smiled and reached for the map. The plan for the return journey was already grand, involving a lighthouse, two more villages and no motorway at all.

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