The Jar from the River Valley (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Dr Amina Farouk had spent eleven years studying broken pottery, and she had never once regretted it. Her colleagues teased her about it, but her expertise in ancient ceramics was respected far beyond the university. So when a museum in the north asked her to examine a strange clay jar found by builders, she cancelled her holiday and took the first train.

The jar sat in a locked room behind the main gallery. Its external surface was covered in fine cracks, yet the painted birds along the rim were still bright after two thousand years. Amina put on gloves and turned it slowly under the lamp. She had come with no particular expectation, which was probably why the shock was so pleasant. The decoration did not belong to this region at all. The birds were exotic, the kind found in trading ports far to the south.

That single detail changed everything. If the jar had travelled, then the valley had been part of a trade route nobody had mapped. Amina spent the next week in the archive, and by Friday she had persuaded the museum to fund a small expedition to the building site before the concrete was poured. Six students volunteered, mostly because the work sounded more exciting than their summer jobs. She warned them that exposure to cold rain and mud was the real experience of archaeology, not treasure.

The dig began badly. Rain filled the trenches, and one student sprained an ankle on the second day. On the fourth morning, however, a spade struck something hollow. It took nine hours to extract the object from the wet clay without damaging it, and by the time they finished, everyone was silent with exhaustion. It was a second jar, almost identical to the first. Amina refused to celebrate until the laboratory confirmed the date.

The results, when they came, did more than confirm her theory. Chemical analysis of the residue inside would eventually expose a long-forgotten trade in perfumed oils. The story reached the national newspapers within a month. Amina disliked interviews and always looked for the nearest exit when the cameras appeared, but she understood that public interest kept research funded. Her only excuse for avoiding one television programme was that she had a lecture, which was true, though the lecture was not until the following day.

Both jars are now displayed together in a glass case near the museum entrance. It is the most visited exhibit in the building. Amina insists that the students' names appear on the label beside her own; she has strong opinions about senior researchers who exploit the young people who do the digging. The label ends with a sentence she wrote herself, one that visitors often photograph: the exploration of a valley nobody thought was important reminded us that history rarely stays where we expect it.

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