Two Letters in a Shoebox (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When their mother moved into a smaller flat, Elena and her sibling Tomas were asked to clear out the attic. Neither of them had been up there for years. Among the boxes of winter coats and broken lamps, they found a shoebox tied with string, and inside it were two letters written in their father's handwriting.

Elena read the first one aloud. It described a summer in 1978, a bicycle, and a girl in a blue dress who later became their mother. The romance in those pages was almost embarrassing to read, full of long sentences about the sea and the stars. Tomas laughed, but Elena noticed that he did not put the letter down. Their parents had always seemed practical rather than romantic, and this side of them was new.

The second letter was different. It was written eleven years later, and it mentioned a woman neither of them knew. There was no proof of anything, only a careful, guilty tone, but both of them understood immediately that their father had been describing an affair . They sat in silence for a long time. Elena felt a strange pity for her mother, who had stayed and said nothing for so many years.

They argued about what to do. Tomas wanted to burn the letters; Elena wanted to keep them. It was their first serious disagreement since childhood, and it lasted almost an hour. What finally relieved the tension was a phone call from their mother, asking whether they had eaten anything. Her ordinary, slightly impatient voice reminded them that she was still very much alive and still in charge.

In the end they decided to ask her directly. Elena expected shouting, or tears, or perhaps shame that such an old secret had been discovered. Instead their mother put on her glasses, read both letters slowly, and said that she had known about the second one since the week it was written. They had discussed divorce at the time, she explained, but had chosen to stay together and rebuild what was left. She said it without self-pity, as if describing a repair to a roof.

Tomas asked whether she had ever regretted the decision. She said that she had, sometimes, but that the bond between them had eventually grown stronger than the damage. Elena felt an unexpected relief wash over her; the family she remembered had not been a lie after all. Tomas, who rarely showed emotion, put his hand on his mother's shoulder, and she patted it twice, briskly.

Later, walking to the car, Elena thought about her own friends and peers , most of whom knew almost nothing about their parents' private lives. It seemed a shame that people spent so many years assuming their families were simple. She told Tomas that she felt relieved , not because the secret was small, but because it had been faced honestly. He agreed, and said he was glad they had not burnt anything. They drove home with the shoebox on the back seat, and neither of them spoke much, although the silence was a comfortable one. Their mother had asked only one thing: that they show her the same sympathy if she ever needed it.

Woordenlijst

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anger
amusing
astonishing
apology
aggressive
joy
panic
scare
shock
shocked
shocking
terrify
hurt
pity
shame
relief
relieve
relieved
sympathy
affair
romance
divorce
sibling
peer
bond
disagreement

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] 6 [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

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