The Night the Bakery Burned (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Nobody in our street had expected anything unusual that evening. The old bakery on the corner had been closed for years, and children sometimes played in the yard behind it. At about ten o'clock, my neighbour knocked on my door and pointed at the roof, where a thin orange flame was already moving along the edge of the tiles. For a moment I stood completely still, unable to feel anything at all except surprise.

Then everything happened very quickly. Somebody called the emergency number, and within six minutes the first firefighter arrived with a heavy hose over her shoulder. She shouted at us to move back, and we obeyed immediately. A bright flash from the camera of a young man annoyed her, and she told him firmly that this was not a show. He apologised and put his phone away. The heat was so strong that we could feel it from the other side of the road, and small pieces of burning wood fell into the garden like a cheap firework display at a village festival.

My fellow neighbours gathered on the pavement in their coats. Old Mr Bennett, a quiet figure who had lived here since the 1970s, told us that the bakery had once been the busiest shop in the district. He remembered its owner well and had always had complete faith in the man's honesty. According to him, the bakery had never been able to feed the whole neighbourhood, but it had come close on Sunday mornings. Someone laughed nervously, and for a few minutes the mood was almost friendly, as if we were waiting for a bus rather than watching a building burn.

By midnight the fire was under control, and a dark trace appeared on the wall where the ceiling had collapsed. An officer collected our names and wrote them in a small file, promising that an investigation would follow. He asked whether anyone had seen children in the yard that afternoon. Nobody had, or nobody wanted to say so. He asked us for one more favor: that we should stay away from the ruin until the structure had been declared safe. We all agreed, because the walls no longer looked firm at all.

The next morning a small building firm arrived to measure the damage, and their report mentioned a repair figure so high that the owner immediately gave up the idea of rebuilding. Later, the local newspaper printed a long article and invited readers to send in their feedback. Most people wrote that the bakery should be turned into a garden. One person suggested a monument, which struck me as a strange fantasy, since nobody had died. I still walk past the empty corner every day. Sometimes I imagine the smell of fresh bread, and I wonder whether anybody will ever fix that sad, black gap in our street.

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