The Shelter on Mill Road (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Nadia first walked past the empty building on Mill Road, she assumed it had been abandoned years earlier. The windows were boarded up and the gate hung loose on its hinges. Yet a neighbour told her that the place had once been a small animal shelter, closed down after its owner moved abroad to look after her sick mother. Nadia could not stop thinking about it. That evening she began writing a plan on the back of an envelope.

Her idea was simple, though not easy. She wanted to reopen the shelter as a place where families could adopt dogs and cats that nobody else wanted. To do that she needed money, volunteers and permission from the council. She spent three weekends cleaning the yard alone before anyone else appeared. Then a retired electrician offered to come and activate the old lighting system, which had been switched off for so long that the switches had rusted. His aid was the first real kindness the project received, and Nadia never forgot it.

The council was cautious. An inspector arrived, walked slowly through every room and wrote a long list of problems. The heating, he said, was not adequate for animals in winter, and the kitchen had never been adequately ventilated. Nadia listened, took notes and asked what the actual cost of the repairs would be. The figure he mentioned was frightening, but she refused to give up. She promised to alter the building's layout so that the small rooms became one large, warm space.

Raising the money took nine months. A local bakery agreed to sell cakes for the shelter every Saturday, and a school ran a sponsored walk. Nadia's brother, who worked in a hardware shop, found affordable paint and timber that the shop could no longer sell. Additionally, a builder offered his labour free of charge for two weeks. Slowly, the project began to look possible. When the roof was finished, Nadia stood in the yard and cried, partly from relief and partly from exhaustion. She had also, by then, acquired a surprising amount of practical knowledge about plumbing.

The shelter opened on a cold morning in March. Volunteers accompanied each visitor around the building, explaining how the adoption process worked. Two families left that day with a dog. Nadia had been warned that the first year would be hard, and it was; she worked long hours and slept badly. She sometimes joked that the shelter had become an addiction, because she could not stay away from it even on her days off. Afterward she admitted that the joke was not entirely a joke. Still, the advance number of animals rehomed in that first year came to eighty-four. It was not a fortune, and it did not change the world altogether, but for eighty-four animals it changed everything. Every additional hour she gave felt worthwhile.

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