The Clock from Aunt Vera (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Marcus was thirty-one when he learned that he would inherit his great-aunt's house on the edge of the moors. The letter arrived on a Tuesday, and he read it twice before he believed it. Aunt Vera had lived alone there for forty years, and he had visited her perhaps six times in his life. She had never seemed wealthy. The solicitor explained that the house itself was worth a small fortune, although it needed serious repair.

His sister Elena, three years his junior, took a very different view of the news. Their opinions on almost everything differed, and this was no exception. She thought they should sell immediately; Marcus wanted to keep the place, at least for a while. They argued about it for weeks over the phone. In the end they agreed to travel north together and decide once they had seen it. They chose a date in early October and booked two nights at a village inn.

The train departed from London at seven in the morning. Elena slept most of the way while Marcus stared at the flat fields sliding past the window. The house, when they finally reached it, stood alone beyond a low stone wall, with nothing but grass and sky behind it. Inside, everything smelled of old paper. On the kitchen table lay a photograph of a young woman aged perhaps twenty, laughing, with a bicycle beside her. It took them a moment to recognise Aunt Vera.

They spent the afternoon opening cupboards. In the front room they found a box of letters, all written to Vera by a man in Canada, and a clock that had stopped at ten past four. Elena, who had arrived with the firm determination to sell, grew quieter as the hours passed. Marcus said nothing, sensing that the circumstances had changed and that pushing her would be a mistake. When the light began to fade, they lit a fire and sat on the floor with the letters spread around them like leaves.

The last letter was dated the anniversary of Vera's wedding, an occasion that, as far as anyone in the family knew, had never taken place. Whatever the truth was, it lay senior their reach now. Marcus felt a sudden desire to protect the house rather than profit from it. He suggested that they hire a local builder, fix the roof, and open the place in summer for walkers who needed cheap beds. Elena laughed, then stopped laughing, then said it might actually work.

They drove home on Sunday with a plan and a stopped clock wrapped in a towel. Over the following two years they became, rather to their own surprise, the hosts of a small guesthouse that never made much money but was always full. Elena, being the more organised being of the two, handled the bookings. Marcus cooked. On the first date of Vera's death they invited the whole village for supper, and someone remarked that no deserved in the world could have written a better ending. Marcus thought his great-aunt would have said they ___ it, and he was inclined to agree.

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