The Long Way Back (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Martha was told that she had cancer, she did not cry in the doctor's office. She sat very still, staring at the small plastic model of a lung on the desk. Later, in the car park, her hands began to shake so violently that she could not put the key in the lock. Her son Daniel drove her home in silence, and neither of them mentioned dinner.

The first weeks were the hardest. The treatment left her exhausted, and her immune system grew so weak that a simple cough from a stranger frightened her. Twice she developed an infection that sent her back into hospital for several days. The doctors adjusted her medication each time, explaining patiently which tablets she had to take with food and which ones on an empty stomach. Martha kept a small notebook beside her bed and wrote everything down, because she no longer trusted her memory.

What surprised her most was the quality of the nursing care she received. The staff on the ward worked long shifts, yet they always found a moment to sit on the edge of her bed and talk. One young nurse, Priya, told her about a patient who had been treated in the same room three years earlier and who now ran marathons. "She was a survivor too," Priya said, "and she looked far worse than you do." Martha laughed for the first time in a month. She began to understand that hope, in a hospital, is passed from one person to another like a shared blanket.

After the operation there was a long red wound across her chest, which the nurses cleaned every morning. It seemed to heal more slowly than anyone had promised, and Martha grew impatient. A dietician visited and insisted that she eat more protein, since her body needed building material to repair itself. Fish, eggs, beans — Martha ate them all without enthusiasm, but she ate them. Her son brought soup from home in an old thermos flask, and she never told him it tasted of nothing.

The worst part, she later admitted, was not the physical suffering but the loss of independence. For eleven weeks she was almost entirely dependent on Daniel for shopping, washing and even walking to the bathroom. She had raised him alone; now he was tying her shoelaces. Her doctors kept repeating that the disease, once deadly, was no longer the automatic sentence it had been a generation ago. Better drugs had made real recovery possible for most patients, provided they were treated early enough.

Slowly, things changed. She started physical therapy twice a week in a bright room full of coloured mats, where an instructor made her lift small weights and laugh at herself. Stress, she was told, could harm the body almost as much as the illness, and she learned to breathe properly again. She gave up the cigarettes she had secretly kept in a kitchen drawer for years, finally accepting that they were harmful in a way no argument could excuse. Her recover took nearly two years altogether, and it was never a straight line. On the morning she walked to the market alone, carrying her own bag, she thought that survival was not a dramatic thing at all — it was simply one ordinary Tuesday after another.

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