Tuesday at the Riverside Clinic (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

The Riverside clinic opened at half past seven, and by eight the waiting room was already full. It stood between a bakery and a launderette, and most of the people who came through its doors had known the building all their lives. Dr Owusu, the senior physician there, liked to say that she treated neighbours rather than patients. She had worked in a large city hospital for a decade before deciding that healthcare made more sense when it was delivered close to home.

That Tuesday began with Mr Bennett, a retired bus driver whose hearing had been failing for years. He refused to admit it, of course, and shouted his answers as though everyone else were the problem. Dr Owusu wrote him a referral and warned him gently that ignoring it would only make daily life harder. Then came a young mother worried about her son's eating habits, and they spent twenty minutes discussing nutrition rather than medicine. The doctor drew a plate on a piece of paper and divided it into colourful sections.

By mid-morning the corridor smelled of coffee and wet coats. A teenage girl arrived with her father to collect the results of tests for a blood disorder that had caused her to bruise very easily. The news was reassuring, and the father shook Dr Owusu's hand twice. Afterwards, a man in his fifties asked whether he really needed to take a vitamin supplement every winter, and the doctor admitted that in his case, working night shifts underground, he probably did. She sent him across the road to the pharmacy, where the pharmacist knew half the town by first name.

The afternoon was heavier. A patient living with AIDS came for his regular check, and the two of them talked about how much had changed since the nineties, when the diagnosis had felt like the end of everything. Another man was waiting to hear when his knee surgery would finally take place; the surgeon had promised October, but the list kept growing longer. Dr Owusu could not shorten it, so she offered him better painkillers and an appointment with a physical therapist who ran classes in the church hall. He said he would think about it, which she understood to mean no.

Her last visitor was Grace, who had become disabled after a car accident five years earlier and now used a wheelchair. Grace never came to complain about her disability; she came to complain about the ramp outside the post office, which was far too steep. She also mentioned, almost casually, that she had lost weight, and that the local programme for obesity had helped her more than any lecture ever had. The two women talked until the light outside turned grey. When Grace rolled out into the street, Dr Owusu locked the door, switched off the lamps and thought that medicine, on days like these, was mostly listening.

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