The Mountain Marathon (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Nobody in our small town expected the mountain marathon to become such a serious event. It had started years earlier as a friendly race between neighbours, and half the runners used to stop for cake halfway. Then a sports company offered to sponsor the race, and everything changed almost overnight. The money arrived with conditions, and the organisers were asked to specify exactly how it would be spent. Suddenly there were timing chips, printed numbers and a website with photographs of last year's winners.

My sister Nadia decided to enter, mostly because she wanted to prove something to herself. She had been training all spring on the long slope behind the old railway station, running up it until her legs shook. I went with her once and gave up after twenty minutes, while she carried on at the same speed for another hour. What impressed me was not her fitness but her patience; she never seemed bored by the repetition. She said the training had become almost spiritual for her, a kind of quiet thinking time rather than a physical task.

The weekend of the race brought grey skies and a slight wind, though the forecast had promised sunshine. At the starting line, a photographer asked her to hold a bottle so the logo of the sponsorship was clearly visible. She laughed about it afterwards, but at the time she looked uncomfortable. There was a split among the runners about whether the race had lost its old character. Some people complained bitterly, almost out of spite, that the town no longer owned its own event. Others pointed out that without the money, there would be no medals, no water stations and no first-aid specialist waiting at the finish.

The route climbed steeply for the first eight kilometres, then dropped down a muddy track towards the lake. Rain had made the stones treacherous, and I watched two runners slip badly on the descent, though neither was seriously hurt. Nadia later told me that her right foot began to slide sideways on every corner, which cost her a lot of energy. She had to concentrate on each spot of the path rather than on her overall time. Near the lake, a volunteer handed her a cup so quickly that she managed to spill most of the water down her shirt.

She finished eleventh, which was far better than she had hoped. The view from the top, she insisted, had been absolutely spectacular, worth every painful hour of preparation. Not a single soul complained about the weather at the prize-giving, because the atmosphere was so warm. In spite of all the arguments about money and logos, the race had kept something of its old spirit. Nadia says she will run it again sometime in the next few years, once her knees have forgiven her.

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