The Rules of the Chess Club (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Daniel joined the chess club at the community centre, he expected quiet afternoons and polite conversation. What he found instead was a small world with its own strict laws. A handwritten list of rules hung beside the door, and every member was expected to obey it without complaint. Nobody had ever questioned those rules, at least not out loud.

The club was run by Mrs Alderman, a retired teacher with an iron handshake and a soft voice. She had spent thirty years teaching history, and she treated the club rather like a classroom. New players had to obtain a signed membership card before they were allowed to play in tournaments. Daniel filled in the form, paid his three pounds, and waited a week for the card to arrive in the post. It was a strange little object made of thick blue paper, and he kept it in his wallet as if it were valuable.

His first opponent was a boy of about seventeen called Marcus, who arrived late, wearing headphones. Marcus played fast and talked constantly. Every time Daniel hesitated, the boy sighed loudly and drummed his fingers on the table. Daniel lost in twenty minutes. He did not mind losing, but he did mind the sighing, and afterwards he said so openly. Marcus stared at him, surprised, and then laughed. To Daniel's relief, the boy did not seem to take offense at all.

Over the following weeks the two of them became friends, though they still argued about almost everything. Marcus occasionally complained that the rules were old-fashioned, especially the one about silence. Daniel disagreed, but he never told Mrs Alderman about these conversations. He had noticed that she reacted badly to criticism, and he had no wish to offend a woman who had welcomed him so kindly. Some battles, he decided, were not worth fighting.

Then came the evening when Marcus knocked a board over during a match and refused to apologise. Several older members called it a serious offense against the spirit of the club. One of them described the boy's behaviour as deliberately offensive, which struck Daniel as far too strong a word. Mrs Alderman listened to everyone in turn, her hands folded on the table. She then announced that the young offender would be suspended for two weeks, no more and no less.

Daniel walked home that night feeling uneasy. He wanted to object to the decision, yet he could not deny that Marcus had behaved badly. In the end he wrote a short, careful letter suggesting that the club needed a proper way of hearing both sides. Mrs Alderman read it twice, said nothing for a long moment, and then admitted that the idea had merit. The next month, a small opening in the wall of rules appeared: a new line about listening before judging. Marcus returned, quieter than before, and beat Daniel again in twenty-two minutes.

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