The Man in the Blue Coat (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Every Saturday morning, Elena liked to wander through the old market without any particular plan. She never made a list. She simply followed the smell of bread, the noise of the crowd and the colours of the fruit stalls. It was, she often said, the only hour of her week that belonged entirely to her.

At the far end of the market stood a small table covered with second-hand books. The man who sold them wore the same blue coat in every season, and he greeted her with the same short nod each time. Elena knew almost nothing about him. She did not know where he lived, and she had never asked whom he waited for when he glanced at the clock. Their conversations were short but oddly comfortable. He seemed to believe that a good book was vital more valuable than the coins people paid for it.

One morning he asked her what she did for a living. Elena explained that she wrote a weekly column for a small newspaper, mostly about food and neighbourhood life. He raised his eyebrows and told her that her name was widely known in the district, which surprised her enormously. She had always assumed that only her mother read the column carefully. Her own greatest weakness, she admitted with a laugh, was that she never believed compliments. He said that this was a strange fault for a writer to have. It was weird, he agreed, but it was also honest.

The following week the table was gone. Elena asked the woman selling flowers beside it, and learned that the bookseller had inherited a house in the south. Apparently a distant relative, a wealthy old man with no children, had left him everything. The flower seller shrugged and said that whoever receives such luck deserves it, as long as they stay kind. Elena stood there for a while, holding her bag, feeling oddly empty. Some people take up very little space in your life, whereas their absence can still feel enormous.

A month later a parcel arrived at the newspaper office. Inside were three old books and a short letter. The bookseller wrote that he was now living in a large house he did not really need, and that wherever he went, he kept thinking about the market. Money, he said, had not changed him yet; wealth was easier to receive than to enjoy. He added that the way she wrote about ordinary streets had taught him something about paying attention. At the bottom he had written a single line: "Come and visit, whenever you like, and turn the volume of the radio up when you arrive." Elena folded the letter carefully and smiled at the empty desk in front of her.

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