The House on Bridge Street (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When the old cinema on Bridge Street was sold, nobody in the neighbourhood knew what would happen to it. Then a developer sent a letter to every household, describing a proposal for twelve flats and a car park. Most people read it, sighed, and threw it away. Ines, however, kept hers on the kitchen table for a week and looked at it every morning.

She had studied programming at university and worked from home, so the street was both her office and her view. The prospect of losing the building she had loved since childhood made her strangely angry. On Saturday she printed forty copies of a short letter and pushed them through her neighbours' doors. She was careful not to invade anyone's privacy, so she asked only for opinions, not for signatures.

Twenty people came to the first meeting in the church hall, including a retired teacher who had played in a punk band in the eighties and still wore his hair short and spiky. He made everyone laugh, and then he made everyone think. He suggested that they should propose a different use for the cinema instead of simply saying no. Ines wrote the idea on the board: a community space with a café, a small stage and a room for classes. The teacher warned them that anger alone would achieve nothing.

The group decided to proceed carefully. They read the planning rules, collected old photographs and asked a lawyer for advice. Their pursuit of a better plan lasted eight months, and it was often boring rather than exciting. Some evenings only four people turned up. Ines admitted later that she continued pursuing out of stubbornness, not because she believed they would win. One journalist described them as protesters against progress, which she thought was purely unfair, since they were offering an alternative rather than blocking everything.

The council's final decision remained a puzzle until the last minute. In the end the developer agreed to keep the front of the building and rent the ground floor to the community group. It was not a pure victory, because eight flats were still built upstairs. Still, on the opening night of the café, Ines watched the retired teacher play three loud songs on a borrowed guitar and decided that compromise had its own value. The neighbours who had once thrown the letter away were now queuing at the door, and she chose, purely out of politeness, not to remind them.

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