The Ticket in the Drawer (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Martha had never believed in luck. For thirty years she had worked in a small accountancy office in a grey northern town, and she liked numbers precisely because they behaved. Numbers did not lie to you or change their minds. So when her colleague Dev bought a lottery ticket every Friday afternoon and waved it around the office like a trophy, she only smiled politely and returned to her spreadsheet.

"You do understand the probability of winning, don't you?" she asked him once. Dev laughed and said that he understood it perfectly, and that he bought the ticket anyway. He explained that for two pounds he got three days of pleasant daydreaming, which he considered excellent value. Martha had to admit that this was a reasonable argument, even if the mathematics behind it made her wince.

The strange thing happened in November. Dev was ill for a week, and he asked Martha to buy his ticket for him, choosing the numbers at random because he could not remember his usual ones. She agreed, mostly to be kind. On her way home she stopped at the corner shop, picked six numbers without thinking about them, and pushed the ticket into a drawer at the office along with a spare set of keys and several forgotten pens. Then she forgot about it entirely.

Three weeks later a problem began to arise. The local newspaper reported that a winning ticket worth a considerable sum had been sold in their town and had never been claimed. Dev, still coughing, went pale. Martha searched the drawer, found the crumpled slip beneath the keys, and compared the numbers with trembling hands. Five of the six matched. It was not the jackpot, but it was more money than either of them earned in a year.

What followed was an awkward conversation about ownership. Dev insisted the money was hers, since she had chosen the numbers. Martha insisted it was his, since he had asked for the ticket. Neither of them wanted to seem greedy, and neither wanted to be unfair. In the end they agreed to split it, and they also agreed that the whole episode was an extraordinary coincidence, nothing more. Martha refused to call it fate.

Still, something in her had shifted. She had always regarded any decision without solid evidence as risky, and she had built her quiet life around avoiding exactly that. Now she found herself wondering whether a small amount of chance might be worth inviting in. It seemed probable that she would go on working in the same office until she retired, and for the first time that thought made her uneasy rather than comfortable. In February she handed in her notice and enrolled on a course in landscape design. Dev bought her a card, and inside it, naturally, he taped a lottery ticket.

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