The Auction at the Old Mill (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

The old mill had stood empty for eleven years, and everyone in the valley assumed it would simply fall down. Then a notice appeared in the newspaper announcing that the building would be sold at auction. For Nadia, who had grown up two streets away, the news came as a genuine blow, because she had always imagined turning the mill into a bakery. She had exactly forty thousand pounds, and she was fairly sure that would not be enough.

Her father tried to talk her out of it over dinner. He argued that the roof was ruined, that the river flooded every spring, and that the nearest border crossing into the next region was too far away to attract customers from the city. Nadia listened politely and then explained that the local council was offering grants for restoring historic buildings. Her father shook his head. "You are bound to lose your savings," he said quietly, and she noticed how tired he looked.

On the morning of the sale, the hall was already crowded. A developer from the capital sat in the front row with his lawyer, and behind him were farmers, neighbours and a few curious spectators who simply enjoyed watching people spend money. Nadia's hands were shaking. When the auctioneer opened the bidding at twenty thousand, three people raised their cards at once. The price climbed steadily, and each time the number rose, her stomach tightened a little more.

At thirty-eight thousand the room went quiet. The developer's lawyer whispered something, and the developer folded his arms and stopped bidding. Nadia lifted her card one final time. She half wanted to beg the auctioneer to hurry up before her courage disappeared completely. The hammer fell, and for a second she was blind to everything around her, seeing only the dusty floor in front of her feet. Her neighbours were clapping before she understood that she had beaten the developer by a single raise.

The following two years were a long battle against damp walls, missing tiles and slow paperwork. There were mornings when she could hardly bear the noise of the builders, and evenings when she fell asleep at the kitchen table with a pencil still in her hand. Her father, who had predicted disaster, arrived every Saturday with tools in the boot of his car. He cleared the yard, chased a bat out of the roof space, and repaired the fence using an old cricket bat as a hammer when he could not find anything better.

The bakery opened on a bright morning in April. The grant money had finally arrived, which turned out to be far more beneficial than anyone had expected, because it paid for a proper oven. Sales in the first month were strong, and a article in the regional paper gave the business a further boost. "I'd bet that half the valley has already been through that door," her father said, and for once Nadia did not argue with him.

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