The Attic Above the Bakery (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When old Mr Farrell died, he left his daughter Ruth nothing but the attic above the bakery and whatever she found inside it. She climbed the narrow stairs on a cold Saturday, expecting dust and disappointment. Instead she found a room that smelled faintly of cinnamon and pepper, as though a spice had been spilled there years ago and never swept away. A wooden basket full of dried lavender stood beside the door.

The electricity had been cut off long before, so Ruth lit a candle and set it on the windowsill. In its light she could see her father's handwriting everywhere: on boxes, on jars, on the wall itself, where he had written measurements with a thick black marker. She sat down on a low stool, pulled a woollen blanket over her knees, and began to open the boxes one by one.

Most of them held ordinary things. There was a packet of tea that had turned to powder, a tin of buttons, and a bundle of copper wire that he must have kept for repairing lamps. In the corner she found his tool bag, and inside it, wrapped in cloth, the enamel badge from his years at the railway works. She remembered him pinning it to his coat every morning. Under the tools lay a small bottle of blue ink, dried solid, and a broken fountain pen.

The real discovery came later. Behind a loose wooden panel in the wall, Ruth's fingers touched paper. She pulled out a thick brown envelope, addressed to her in her father's careful capitals. Inside was a notebook filled with recipes, one on every page, some crossed out and rewritten three or four times. He had never told anyone that he wrote them down. On the inside cover he had glued a grey feather, probably from one of the pigeons that lived on the roof, with the words "for luck" underneath.

Ruth stayed in the attic until it grew dark. She read about breads that needed twelve hours to rise, about the exact moment when steam should be allowed to escape from the oven, and about a cake that his own mother had baked during the war, when butter and fuel for the stove were both impossible to find. On the last page there was a note about his health, a joke about the pill he had to swallow each morning, and a short sentence telling her to sell nothing and to open the bakery again. She noticed a small patch of damp on the ceiling above her head and decided, quite calmly, that she would repair it herself. The following spring, the shop had new windows and a queue outside every Saturday morning.

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