The Last Day on the Floor (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

For thirty-one years, Marta had walked through the same gate at half past six in the morning. The factory sat on the edge of a small town, and almost every family there had someone inside it. When people asked her what she did, she never hesitated: she gave her occupation as machine setter, and she said it with pride. Her hands knew the equipment better than her own kitchen. Now, however, she had exactly nine working days left before her retirement began, and the thought unsettled her more than she liked to admit.

The company had originally been built to manufacture agricultural tools, mostly ploughs and simple hand equipment sold to farms in the region. Over the decades the manufacturing side of the business had shifted towards precision parts for medical devices. Marta had lived through every change. She remembered the year when half the workforce was sent home for three months because orders had collapsed. She remembered the strange silence in the corridors, and the relief when the machines started again. Those difficult years had taught her something about loyalty that no training course could teach.

Her proudest moment had come at forty-two. A supervisor's post opened up, and although she had no formal qualifications, the plant manager offered her the promotion because nobody else could calm a panicking night shift so quickly. Some colleagues doubted her at first. Within a year, though, her quiet leadership had turned the most chaotic section of the plant into the most reliable one. She rarely raised her voice. She simply noticed things, and people trusted that.

The younger staff loved her, particularly Dario, a twenty-six-year-old operator who had joined straight from technical college. He could operate the newest computer-controlled machines with astonishing confidence, yet he still asked her advice about everything else. Twice he had almost handed in his notice after arguments with the production director, and twice Marta had persuaded him not to resign in anger. She reminded him that a bad week is not a bad career. He listened, mostly.

On her final Friday, the workplace looked different. Someone had hung paper banners above the coffee machine, and the smell of cake competed with the usual smell of oil. Management had cancelled the afternoon workshop on safety regulations so that everyone could attend the farewell. Marta was handed flowers, a card signed by more than two hundred people, and a small engraved plate that would probably occupy a shelf in her hallway for the next twenty years. She made a short speech, forgot half of it, and laughed at herself. Then she walked the length of the shop floor one last time, touching each machine as she passed. Dario followed her to the gate, holding the flowers she had already forgotten twice, and promised to call her whenever something broke that nobody else could fix. It was, she thought, a remarkably professional way to say goodbye: no drama, just work well done and handed on.

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