The Quietest Café in Town (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Nadia had wanted her own café since she was nineteen years old. She spent four years saving, borrowed money from her brother, and finally signed the lease on a narrow shop near the station. For the first three months, business was slow but steady. Then a large chain opened two streets away, with cheaper coffee and brighter lights, and her customers quietly disappeared.

Her first reaction was to dismiss the problem as temporary. People would come back, she told herself, because her coffee was better and her cakes were homemade. Her brother suggested changing the menu and using social media, but she barely listened. Looking back, she admits that ignoring his advice was her biggest mistake. Pride, she says now, is expensive.

By November the accounts were frightening. She had failed to pay two invoices on time, and the bank had begun sending letters in stiff white envelopes. One evening she sat alone at a corner table after closing, staring at the empty chairs. The room felt cold and strangely dull, as though the life had been drained out of it. She had imagined laughter and conversation, not silence and the hum of the fridge.

Her brother arrived the next morning with two bags of pastries and a notebook. He refused to let her describe herself as a failure, and he refused to let her cry either. Instead, he made her write down every cost, every price and every hour she worked. The numbers were brutal, but they were honest. Somewhere in that long list, they found the shape of a plan.

They stopped competing on price and started competing on everything else. Nadia introduced evening language exchanges, a small shelf of secondhand books, and a Saturday morning baking class for children. A local newspaper wrote a short article about the café, and for the first time in months there was a queue at the counter. Not everything worked; the poetry nights were a genuine disappointment, since almost nobody came except the poets themselves.

When she talks about that winter today, Nadia is careful about how she describes it. She does not say that the chain store ruined her, and she does not pretend that the whole thing was somebody else's fault. She made choices, some of them poor ones, and she learned from them. Her failed attempts, she insists, taught her more than her successful ones ever did. The café is still small, still narrow, and still near the station, but the chairs are rarely empty now.

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