# The Chocolate Competition (B2 · English B2)

## Tekst / Transcript

Nadia had never intended to enter a chocolate competition. She had spent eleven years working in a bank, counting other people's money and dreaming, quietly, of something sweeter. Then her old school mate Danny sent her a leaflet in the post with a note scribbled across it: "You'd win this easily." The leaflet advertised a regional contest for amateur chocolatiers, and the prize was a small silver medal and three months of free workshops with a famous pastry chef.

She read the rules twice. Competitors had to submit six pieces, all of them the same size, and the judges would check every measurement with a ruler before tasting anything. That detail alone nearly frightened her off. Nadia's kitchen was not a laboratory, and her scales had been bought in a supermarket. Nevertheless, she paid the entry fee, which also gave her a year's membership of the national chocolate society. She told herself it was research, not ambition.

For the next month she practised almost every evening. The hardest part was learning to melt the chocolate slowly, because if the temperature rose too fast, the surface turned dull and grainy. Danny came round on Sundays to taste her failures and, in his words, to protect her from herself. "You need a plan," he said one evening, spreading a sheet of paper across the table and drawing a rough map of the competition venue that he had found online. He marked the judging tables, the kitchens and the door she should aim for if everything went wrong. Nadia laughed, but she kept the drawing. In the margin next to the sketch he had written the times of every round in neat capital letters.

The morning of the contest was grey and cold. A mass of competitors crowded into the hall, most of them carrying enormous plastic boxes, and the air already smelled of sugar and nerves. Nadia noticed that a surprising majority of the entrants were older than her, which was oddly comforting. Two women near the entrance wore matching aprons in bright orange, clearly a team. Nadia had only her own apron and a box of six dark chocolate squares, each filled with salted caramel of a medium softness, neither runny nor stiff. She had also, for the first time in years, put on makeup, mainly because Danny had told her the local newspaper would be there.

The judging took three hours. One judge, a retired soldier who now taught martial arts at a community centre, asked her the most difficult questions and ate the slowest. Nadia watched him and tried to breathe normally. When the results were announced, she had not won; she had come second, beaten by a young man whose orange chocolate was, she admitted honestly, better than hers. Yet the making of that afternoon changed something. On the train home she began to sketch a shop front, and Danny, half asleep beside her, muttered that a business was clearly in the make. Within a year she had left the bank. It took her another two years to master the technique that had defeated her that day, but she never entered a kitchen nervously again.

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