The Bakery on Mill Street (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Nadia had never planned to become a businesswoman. She had studied economics at a small university, mostly because her father insisted that numbers would always be useful. For six years she worked in an office, writing reports that almost nobody read. Then her aunt died and left her a narrow, dusty shop on Mill Street, and everything changed.

The building needed work. Nadia sat at her kitchen table one rainy evening and wrote out a careful budget on the back of an old envelope. Paint, an oven, a counter, two months of rent: the numbers frightened her. Her saving from the office job would not stretch that far, and she had no wealthy relatives left. She went to three banks before one of them finally agreed to give her a loan , though the manager warned her twice about interest rates. Signing the papers felt like jumping into cold water.

The first winter was hard. Every expense seemed larger than she had expected, from electricity to flour, and she watched her savings in the bank disappear week by week. Worse still, prices everywhere were rising. Inflation had reached its highest level in decades, and customers began counting their coins at the counter. A neighbour who had spent thirty years in retail told her bluntly that half the shops on the street would close before spring. Nadia refused to believe him, mainly because she had nowhere else to go.

Slowly, things turned. A local newspaper wrote about her almond bread, and queues formed on Saturday mornings. Her weekly revenue doubled, then tripled. She hired two students and paid them properly. A woman who introduced herself as an economist came in one morning, ate three pastries and explained that the country was probably heading into a mild recession , but that small food businesses often survive such periods surprisingly well. Nadia listened politely and offered her another coffee.

By the third year, an investor from the city approached her with an offer. He wanted to open five identical bakeries and was ready to provide the funding himself; all she had to do was share her recipes and her name. It sounded generous. He even suggested that she could buy stock in the new company and become a part-owner. Nadia asked for a week to think, and during that week she barely slept. Expansion would mean new debt , new risks, and possibly losing control of the thing she had built with her own hands.

In the end she said no, though she thanked him warmly. Instead she used her own profits to pay off the last of her debts , which took another eighteen months of patience. Then, on her fortieth birthday, she signed a mortgage and bought the flat above the shop, so that she could walk downstairs at five in the morning without stepping into the rain. Her accountant called it a sensible investment , because property in that street was becoming valuable. Nadia simply called it home. She kept a small fund aside each month for repairs, hired a third baker, and stopped worrying quite so much about the future.

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