The Bakery on Mill Street (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

The bakery on Mill Street had been in the same family for four generations, and everyone in the neighbourhood knew its smell before they knew its name. When old Mr Ferreira died in February, the ownership of the shop passed to his granddaughter Ines, who was twenty-six and lived two hundred miles away. She had never planned to be a baker. She had a good job, a small flat, and no idea how to make bread that anyone would pay for.

Her mother explained the situation over the phone. The shop needed a decision within a month; otherwise the lease would go to a chain of coffee bars. Ines listened, made notes, and asked for a week to think. That week she barely slept. She kept remembering the origin of her own name, which her grandfather had chosen, and the way he used to lift her onto the counter when she was small. She felt that she owed him something, though she could not have said exactly what.

When she finally arrived in town, she wore a plain grey outfit, as if dressing simply might hide how nervous she was. The two remaining employees met her at seven in the morning. Over strong coffee she asked them to outline the main problems, and they did so honestly: the ovens were failing, the accounts were a mess, and nobody had raised prices since 2019. It was worse than she had feared, but at least it was clear. She wrote everything down in a notebook and promised to come back the next day with a plan.

Not everyone welcomed her. A local businessman had already offered to buy the building, and he was firmly opposed to the idea of a young outsider keeping it. He began telling people that the bakery would close by autumn anyway. Two of the older customers decided to oppose him publicly at a residents' meeting, arguing that the street would lose its heart along with its bread. Ines had not asked for their help, and she was moved by it. The outcome of that meeting surprised everyone, including her: the council agreed to delay any sale for six months.

The following months were hard. To overcome the shortage of money, Ines sold her car and worked sixteen-hour days. She learned to shape dough from a retired baker who came in twice a week and criticised everything she did. Slowly the ovens were repaired, the prices were adjusted, and a queue began forming again on Saturday mornings. Overall, the first year was exhausting rather than profitable, yet she never seriously considered giving up. On the anniversary of her grandfather's death, she baked his old recipe for the first time and gave it away free until the trays were empty.

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