The Slow Road to Fluency (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Marta moved to Bristol, she promised herself that she would learn English properly this time. She had tried twice before and given up. On her first evening, she sat at the kitchen table with a notebook and wrote a plan for the coming year. She divided it into three parts and called the first one the listening phase, because she knew that understanding people would be her hardest task. Her flatmate laughed kindly and told her that plans on paper rarely survive real life.

The next morning she went to the library to register for a free course. The receptionist gave her a form, a small welcome package containing a dictionary and a bus timetable, and a card with her library number printed on it. To use the computers, she also needed a password, which she immediately forgot and had to reset twice in one week. She found the whole process slower than expected. Still, she reminded herself that frustration was normal at the beginning.

Her teacher, Mr Owusu, spoke at a comfortable pace and never rushed the class. Whenever someone struggled with a word, he would pause for a few seconds and let the silence do its work. Marta admired his patience, which seemed endless even when the same mistakes appeared for the fourth time. Every lesson began with a short reading passage taken from a newspaper, and the students had to explain it in their own words. Marta usually understood the general idea but missed the details.

Outside class, she looked for chances to practise. She took a part-time job in a bakery, working three mornings a week, and discovered that customers taught her more than any textbook. Some of them spoke so quickly that she caught only half of what they said; she learned to pick out the key words and guess the rest. In November, the city held a lantern parade through the old streets, and she went with two colleagues from the bakery. They talked for hours in a mixture of English and gestures, and she barely noticed the cold.

By spring, Marta could hold a conversation without translating every sentence in her head. Her progress was partly due to the course, but mostly it came from the small daily conversations she had once been afraid of. She kept a picture of her first class on her wall, taken by Mr Owusu on the last day of term. In it, the students stand in two neat rows, almost parallel to the whiteboard, all smiling awkwardly at the camera. Whenever she feels discouraged, she looks at it and remembers how far she has come.

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