A Bakery on Mill Street (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Tomas had dreamed of opening a bakery since he was nineteen, but he had never imagined how much paperwork stood between him and his first loaf of bread. The empty shop on Mill Street was cheap, bright and perfect. He signed the lease in October and assumed he would be selling croissants by Christmas. His sister, who worked for the city council, laughed and told him to buy a large folder.

The first obstacle was the food business registration, which had to be completed online and then confirmed by an inspector. Tomas filled in the form twice because he had misread a question about drainage. Two weeks later a woman from the health office arrived with a clipboard and walked slowly around the kitchen. She explained that a national regulation required all commercial ovens to be fitted with an extraction hood of a particular size. His oven had none. The repair cost him almost a month of savings, but the inspector was friendly and gave him useful advice.

Next came the question of the tables. Tomas wanted six of them on the pavement outside, under the plane tree. The council would not permit this until he applied for a separate document, and the application itself took five weeks. Meanwhile, an old notice on the wall of the building appeared to prohibit any outdoor seating at all, though nobody could say when it had been written. His sister found the original file, discovered that the notice had expired in 2009, and the objection quietly disappeared. Tomas began to understand why she had recommended the folder.

There were smaller battles too. Because he wanted to sell wine with the evening soup, he had to obtain a license from the licensing board, and the meeting was held in a room where the heating could not be adjusted at all. He also had to prove that he had completed a food hygiene course, so he framed the certificate and hung it beside the till, partly out of pride and partly because inspectors like to see it immediately. A neighbour joked that the wall now looked like a doctor's surgery.

On the morning of the opening, Tomas arrived at four o'clock. The ovens hummed, and a thermostat he had installed himself would regulate the temperature to the exact degree the recipe demanded. By seven, the smell of butter had reached the end of the street. An elderly customer asked him whether all the official trouble had been worth it. Tomas thought about the year he had spent arguing with forms and said that it had been like waiting for a court to pass a sentence, except that in the end everybody won. Then he wrapped her bread, and the queue moved forward.

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