The Case of Amina Bakr (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Amina Bakr had crossed three borders before she reached the small northern city where the trial would eventually take place. She had arrived as a refugee five years earlier, carrying a plastic folder of documents and very little else. The officials at the immigration office had asked her the same questions many times, and each time she had answered patiently. Now she worked nights at a bakery and studied law during the day. She often said that the city had given her a second life, even though it had not always been kind to her.

The trouble began on a wet Tuesday in November. A man had shouted at Amina in the street, told her to go back where she came from, and pushed her against a wall. Several people saw it happen. When the police arrived, the man claimed that she had insulted him first. Amina insisted on reporting the attack, because she believed it was clearly racist and not simply a private argument. Her friends warned her that such cases rarely went anywhere.

The young attorney who took her case worked for a small legal charity above a launderette. He explained that the law treated violence differently when hatred was part of the motive. He also warned her that racism was hard to prove in court, since witnesses often remembered words imperfectly. Amina listened carefully and took notes. She had learned long ago that patience was more useful than anger.

The trial lasted four days. The court heard from a shopkeeper, a bus driver and a student who had filmed part of the incident on her phone. The defence argued that the accused was a decent man who had simply lost his temper. He was unemployed and living on welfare payments, and for two months he had even been homeless, sleeping in his car after his landlord evicted him. His lawyer suggested that his difficult circumstances explained his behaviour. The prosecutor replied that hardship was no excuse for attacking a stranger.

The jury withdrew on Friday afternoon and returned after only two hours. Their decision was unanimous. The judgment of the court was that the attack had been motivated by hatred, and the man was sentenced to eight months in jail, with the final part suspended. Outside the building, journalists asked Amina whether she felt satisfied. She said quietly that she did not enjoy anyone's punishment, but that justice mattered more than her personal feelings. She added that the case had never really been about one angry man.

In the weeks that followed, the local newspaper published a series of articles about racial tension in the region. Community groups organised meetings in schools and libraries. Amina was invited to speak at several of them, and she always began by describing the bakery rather than the courtroom. She talked about her colleagues, who came from six different countries, and about the customers who now greeted her by name. Every minority community in the city, she argued, had a story of arrival that deserved to be heard. Someone in the audience asked her whether she still felt like a stranger. Amina smiled and said that she had stopped counting the years.

Try our 6-step method for free and make these words stick.

Listen to this episode online: https://course.interactivelessons.nl/local/podcast/episode.php?id=26350

Start this course for free: https://course.interactivelessons.nl/mod/quiz/view.php?id=1787