

## The Rising of the Dough



Word count: 5,085

**Fanny de Wit**

Fanny de Wit had been working at the same bakery in Amsterdam for almost thirty-five years. It was located on the corner of Java Street and Borneo Street, right at Java Square in the middle of the Indonesian Quarter, at the final stop of trams ten and seven. The Indonesian Quarter was an old quarter with low-income housing where nowadays mostly Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese immigrants lived, together with Dutch students and Dutch elderly who had lived there all their lives.

Fanny still remembered her first working days in the bakery, as she started there fresh out of the MULO secondary school. In those days, hardly anyone went to university, like everyone seems to do nowadays. Instead her father had told her that she would have to find a job to earn money and support her self.

That first day, she had been so nervous. She didn't know many of the customers, except for people that lived on her street and some friends and family in the neighborhood. She remembered how comforting it had been to see a familiar face in those first few working days. Those familiar smiles made her feel at ease, instead of the suspicious looks from customers she didn't know and who grew impatient waiting for her to slice up a loaf of bread they had ordered. That first day she had to ask how much a loaf of all grain bread was, or how much a sausage bread cost again. It took her weeks before she had memorized all the different types of bread, and not without the help of a little crib sheet that she hid inside her side pocket. Today, the prices were so evident that she laughed thinking back of her starting days.

Now, once again, she had to get used to new faces, new pastries and bread. Before leaving home this morning she had felt uncomfortable like it was her first day at work again. She had to work behind the very same counter that had become her private space but was now intruded upon and was no longer her comfort of familiarity. A new Turkish owner called Fuad ran the bakery now. This was the same Fuad who had worked baking the bread that Fanny sold for years. His niece was to help Fanny during the week from now on. The family-run business of the old owners, Den Oude simply hadn't been profitable enough anymore. It was a miracle that they had been able to hold out for as long as they did in this neighborhood. After a little over fifty years they had to give up ownership of the small family-ran business. In the old days a bakery was a secure livelihood. People

had been eating bread for ages. How could you not earn a living by selling bread? A bakery was a trade that ensured a decent living.

But in the last twenty years, immigrants from Morocco, Turkey and Surinam had moved into the neighborhood. Not that this was a bad thing, no, no, Fanny didn't think anything bad of these people, but she meant to say that much had changed. Not all for the good, and perhaps some didn't fit in Dutch culture. The Muslim women, she observed, submitted themselves to wearing veils, walked behind their husbands and never left the house alone. Moroccan kids hang out on the street all day causing trouble, or selling drugs, cursing and calling passers-by names, calling Dutch girls sluts for wearing a skirt. The Surinam junkies and drunkards hang around the square having suspicious conversations. The neighborhood hadn't exactly moved up in the last few years, and while the immigrants moved in, many Dutch moved out.

From all the old stores in the neighborhood only a few remained now. The candy store was still next-door. But a candy store was an easy type of business. All children loved candy. Candy is an indiscriminating commodity. Maybe they had added some new shapes or different kinds of Turkish Delights to their assortment in recent years, but in the end most of it was just plain old candy.

Then there was the delicatessen-store of Mr. Beauveau at Sumatra Street. People drove from all over town to order and buy their specialty foods there. Mr. Beauveau had barely changed anything to his shop's interior over the last ten years. A specialty store like Mr. Beauveau's was no comparison though to a modest neighborhood bakery, that provided basic necessities like bread. Once she had gone to take a peek, under the cloak of buying a small piece of old cheese, but shocked at the prices, she sneaked out without buying anything. Why would someone not just go to the Dirk?

One thing she liked at the delicatessen was the atmosphere. It reminded her of the old stores she would shop at when she was a little girl. From the top shelves to the ones on the bottom, all the way to the floor, the delicatessen was stacked with specialty goods: oval shaped breads in the window, different types of wines rested against the radiator, which was out of use and gathering dust. Fanny was amazed and gazed at the displays of at least twenty-five different kinds of cheese. Cheese is cheese, how much difference could there be to it? In the small refrigerator in the back of the store,

next to the different colored olives, a whole line of Italian and Spanish hot sausages dangled from a cord, along with marinated fish salads that rested on shelves, none of which she had heard of before but nonetheless looked delicious.

Last, there was the Volendammer fish store in Java Street, but it was impossible for any non-Volendammer to penetrate the Volendammer fish industry. Fish had to be fresh always and came from the auctions every morning. The fish were driven in directly from the harbor in Volendam, thirty kilometers northeast of Amsterdam, and Volendammer fish-stores dominated the fish-market. They dominated not just in Amsterdam, but also in all of the Netherlands. Every morning trucks with small vendor trailers would ride out to all corners of the country from Volendam to sell fresh fish on the local market squares of regional towns and local villages. In addition, regulations prohibited an expansion of the Dutch fishing fleet and it was a public secret that in those traditional Dutch fishing villages like Volendam, any local fisherman, if forced to sell his boat would rather sell out cheaper to his own neighbor or to one of his own and would rather go to the devil without shoes on than give his business to an outsider, let alone a colored foreigner.

Annie from the fish store explained how much of each kind of fish fishers were allowed to catch, and what the penalties were for over-fishing.

'Just imagine if there would be quotas for baking bread,' Fanny responded.

'Oh yes, that would be something,' Annie responded laughing in a harsh Volendammer rolling laughter.

A bakery however was an open and honest trade. Everybody needs bread and all nationalities know how to make it. The Turks one by one had opened up their own bakeries in the Indonesian Quarter. It was tough to compete with them, because Turks only bought at Turkish stores. Dutch people enjoyed discovering new exotic foods and bought Turkish bread or feta cheese at one of the many Turkish grocery stores that popped out of nowhere in every street.

To keep costs down family members helped out in Turkish stores. Wives and children assisted to restock shelves, clean floors, or stand next to their mothers at the register. You would never find a Dutch son or daughter prepared to work on their free afternoons after school or on the weekend in the family business without pay. Times had changed, except in the little family-run Turkish shops where labor laws didn't apply. They opened at seven thirty in the morning and remained open until

eight in the evening when Turkish owners pulled down their window covers. But their doors remained open for late customers until nine or sometimes ten. Who was going to check opening and closing hours? Who would demand extra pay for overtime and keep little children from working beside their fathers? There was no union demanding better wages for family members in Turkish grocery stores. The police didn't bother demanding they locked their front doors on time and many of the Turks worked for minimum wage if not less, because they came from backward societies. In their own country, they worked for one-tenth the wages they earned here doing the same work. Only the Dutch stores complied with the laws and closed their stores in time, paid their employees for any overtime hours and forbade their children to work. It wasn't for one or two generations ago that people fought hard to earn the right for fair pay and social welfare, but the foreigners cared less about the struggles of past Dutch generations.

Initially The Den Oude bakery tried to adjust to the new competition in the neighborhood by expanding their assortment and offering more choices. They introduced sandwiches, French baguettes, chocolate bread, cheese croissants, and they even started selling Turkish bread this last year to try to accommodate Dutch customers who now went to the Turkish stores. But nothing worked and Fanny wondered if in fact the Turks and Moroccans were perhaps not allowed to buy at Dutch stores. She heard about imams preaching that Dutch society was decadent and sick. They propagated the suppression of women and agitated by Dutch liberties. They pleaded for homosexuals to fall off rooftops and women who were too free in their ways to be put back in their proper places. Then there were problems with Moroccans who didn't fit into Dutch society, who committed petty crimes, harassed the old and called young Dutch women on the street whores and sluts. Many immigrants only spoke Turkish or Arab, and they all had some family member or an acquaintance owning their own store. Alas... there was no need to harp about it, but she didn't always think it was right. Times had changed and perhaps that was all that was to it.

Only few of the old customers still lived in the neighborhood. The others had moved to Purmerend, Lelystad or Almere; the newly build suburbs and commuter towns outside of Amsterdam in the polder. The few remaining old customers at least still bought at her bakery, but that wasn't enough to make ends meet. That's how business was now. She didn't want to discriminate, but not everything that had changed was for the good.

And so the day had come that Joop Den Oude, the owner, told her the bakery was being sold to a new owner. It was a shock to her for she had been working for the Den Oudes half her life. In some strange way she never expected that she one day might lose her position.

Why did Dutch people buy Turkish Delights, Turkish bread, Turkish tea, Turkish olives, Turkish fruit, Moroccan couscous, and learnt foreign words to name these new products, while the Turks and Moroccans never set foot in a Dutch store to buy or try for instance a tompoes, Jodenkoeken, a mergpijpe or a simple strawberry pie. They too surely would love a strawberry pie with cream! She involuntarily felt a grudge against foreigners. She couldn't help it. They only married brides from their home countries they flew over.

"Now how can people live together if they boycott each other?" Fanny thought. Some said Dutch women were too independent and foreign brides listened obediently to their husbands. But how could you be a guest in another country and not like the people because they do not do live the way you want them to? Fanny sometimes complained to friends, or would tell her Turkish neighbor, "we let you stay in our country and provide you with all kinds of social services and welfare, we even translate applications and municipal brochures into Turkish and Arabic, but you never buy anything from Dutch stores in return, now that's not fair is it?" But the Turkish neighbor just smiled friendly in return and nodded her head in a way that indicated that her neighbor didn't really understand what she was saying. Her neighbor didn't know much Dutch, even though they had been neighbors for well over ten years now. She would nod, smile lovingly and murmur "goeiedag."

### **Fuad Kizarmak**

Fuad Kizarmak got up at four in the morning. He felt the exciting hum of a big day ahead drumming in his veins. He was tired because he hadn't gotten to bed until ten-thirty last night making sure all arrangements for the next day were taken care of. His nephew had been able to get him a vertical secondhand Döner kebab grill. God willing, he finally had delivered the grill to the bakery by five in the afternoon. He had cleaned the grill all evening, while his uncle made sure it worked perfectly. By nine that night it was like he owned a brand new grill and at a bargain price too.

Today was going to be no less hectic. He planned to start selling Turkish pastries, pitas and breads. He could hardly believe his luck when his former boss, Mr. Den Oude, had asked him if he was

interested in buying the store. He could hardly control himself to cry out, “yes, yes, right away, at any price!” but instead played reluctant by coming across hesitant and unsure, and arguing that there were too many bakeries now in the neighborhood, and that Den Oude’s bakery was quite small. Plus, there were many drunkards loitering in the square who were ruining his fair chance for a good business. Den Oude cut right through his chase and had said: “Fuad, we both know you’re looking to start your own bakery. You’ve been asking around and I’m no stranger in this neighborhood either. I’m sure you will be able to find the money. I’m too old to make new investments or work hard like a young man like you. I like you, you’ve always worked hard for me, and I’ll be fair with you now.” Then Den Oude named his price and it was a take it or leave it offer. Den Oude refused to discuss the price any further, which Fuad thought was very awkward and it made him question whether he really was getting the best offer possible. He knew the turnover and the number of customers, and he had a pretty good idea where to get his investments. The next few days Fuad ran around from uncle to nephew, from friend to friend asking advice and gathering the money he needed. Finally, God willing, he secured his one time opportunity though it would not be without risk. There was no gain without risk and Fuad believed that with hard work it could be done. His whole life he’d worked hard, and if things didn’t go the way they needed to go, he would just work a little harder, a little longer. God always rewarded the devotion of his people.

Since owning the bakery for a few weeks, Fuad had been thinking of the times when he still lived in Turkey. As a young man of nineteen he arrived in Amsterdam about twenty years ago. Half his life he worked for others, saving what he could for himself and his family, and working every hour he could to make extra money. It was not until today that he realized it had had its purpose. The long hours, the mental agony, the exhaustion, the doubts, they had not been in vain. He was not ashamed to admit that he had cried once or twice. He missed his country and his family, and the stares of hatred on the Amsterdam streets made him feel even lonelier.

Fuad thought a lot about the uncertainties he had known, the desolate moments, the times he thought he just wanted to let everything fall out of his hands and return to his home village, to his family, his friends, the landscape of his youth. He knew that a lot of the men he worked and lived with felt the same desire to return to their old lives and the only thing that kept many in this strange cold environment was the idea that they were helping to improve their children’s and family’s lives. Many times, they got through those moments by telling each other stories of their Turkish homes.

They swore to go home once having earned enough money to retire or start a business. But Fuad realized that it had been lies they were telling each other in those moments of desolation in the Turkish coffee house. There were many lies that were eagerly swallowed up by their lonely hearts. They had gotten older, yet kept working the same crazy hours with the same stories of returning home. They had gotten married and the same stories were still told. They had children and build families but still the same stories were told yet with new excuses. Children went to school, got a western education, or went to university sometimes, if God was willing. And as time passed by, their own dreams of returning home made place for their wish to provide better lives to their children. The responsibility of their own lives was replaced by the greater duty of family, and they stopped talking about their old dreams. Silently, they all came to accept their new truths and they stopped talking about return until at some point all talk about return had ended.

One day someone mentioned retirement benefits in Amsterdam. The week after the mosque organized an information evening about home care and financial benefits. A Turkish employee from a care organization gave a lecture and explained that if you had worked for more than a certain number of years you were entitled to financial help and household assistance if you were of a certain age. Of course, everybody talked about it for weeks, and each time somebody discovered something new. Before they knew it, all talked about their future in the Netherlands. Yet homesickness never went away totally and Fuad kept visiting Turkey in the summer whenever possible, bringing back to the Netherlands new impressions that reminded him anew of his old life.

Back then, in Turkey, people made the jump across the Hellespont to Europe, and his family thought he should go. Plans were made, plans were postponed, and plans were made again. Finally, his family put their savings money together for his journey, and a neighbor, who already lived in Amsterdam, found employment for him at a bakery. The first four years, Fuad lived with two other Turkish men from his village in a two-bedroom apartment. He slept on the living room couch and sent all his money home. The two years that followed he saved money to rent an apartment of his own.

The next few years he worked for himself, preparing to get married and bring his bride over. For years he had been alone, although every now and then he met a woman, but it was hard to converse. Dutch people thought and talked differently, lived differently. Dutch women were too

liberal and didn't care what other people thought about them, nor did they seem to care about what Fuad was thinking. To Fuad Dutch women had no respect for themselves, and he could not love someone who did not respect herself. Then he met his bride, they married and he was no longer alone. These were the happiest long shifts he had worked, and none of them had been wasted, praise be to God for the patience Fuad had found. There had been moments of despair and doubt, especially in the beginning.

During a summer stay in Turkey one of his uncles arranged a meeting with his father and proposed for Fuad to marry his niece. Fuad's father agreed and it was arranged for Fuad to meet his uncle's niece and future wife. They got along well right away, and he agreed to marry her. It was a perfect marriage and good for everyone involved. Later Fuad had flown back to Turkey for a big wedding in their hometown. His family built a new house at the edge of their hometown, where they and his wife moved in, while Fuad returned to Amsterdam. There he applied for family reunification and after a long year of waiting and hardship, they were finally together.

Now with the opportunity to buy the bakery once more, the family scraped together their savings for Fuad. Today was the first day of a new life. It was a day that his hard and relentless work would show its true reward. It was going to be more hard work though, but hard work for his children to have a better life. It was a day that God's grace became visible to him. Where a better future for his children started.

Neylan started working in the store today, and he was going to introduce baklava, kadayif, sekerpare and bide. He wasn't sure if Fanny would get along with Neylan, so he wanted to make sure to be around. They had to install the toast rack and the grill for the Döner. There were plenty of other things to get done. The work was not finished, but little by little it would get done. Although, the bakery was a running business, opportunity to improve sales was all around. Fuad couldn't understand, how the prior owner had overlooked the possible improvements that with enthusiasm he discussed to his friends and his wife.

Fanny felt awkward working for Fuad now. She had known him a long time, ever since he started working in the bakery on Sumatra Street. Who could have guessed that on one day this quiet, small man with a moustache who prepared the dough in the early morning hours, would now own the bakery that she was working in! He had always been very correct and polite. It was strange to be

dependent on a man that worked below her in the bakery, making the bread that she sold. But Fuad rarely had been sick and was always willing to fill in for someone who wouldn't show up. When Den Oude was closed on Sundays, he worked at a Turkish bakery down the street.

Fanny couldn't help feeling suspicious about the current situation. Although Fuad had promised he would continue to employ her How long would it take before he replaced her with a friend or family member? Business is business, she overheard him speaking to Den Oude, and she did not believe that Fuad would feel bound to her in the same way as he was bound to his Muslim brothers. It was only a matter of time that the pleas of his Turkish friends for work would weigh heavier than his word to her.

There were many friends she knew who had been laid off in the last years and it was impossible for someone her age to find a new job somewhere else. Not that Fanny thought so, but some of the people blamed the flood of immigrants. Fanny, who had always worked with the Turkish workers, often had defended them. What irony that now she herself was afraid to lose her job and be replaced by a young Turkish girl. Yet, for now, she could only hope for the best, and so far, Fuad had kept his promise to Den Oude and had given Fanny a full-time job in the store.

### **Neylan Kizarmak**

When Neylan graduated from middle school she was seventeen and the first member of her family with a secondary school diploma. She would have loved to continue studying but her father had decided she should either find a job or a husband for they could not afford to support her forever. She had to learn to be responsible and earn some money before she would get married.

Working at the bakery was Neylan's first real job. She had to assist customers, be responsible for the cash register and translate for her uncle. Fuad needed someone he could trust and who spoke Dutch. Although Fuad understood the language, he had trouble with paperwork and documents at times.

Neylan spoke Dutch fluently, Fuad never had to speak much Dutch, most of his bosses only demanded him to work hard and didn't pay him to talk. Besides, he always thought he would return to Turkey as soon as he had saved up enough money. He never took the time to learn the language but only for a few words here and there, enough to understand what he was told to do. Now he

owned his own shop however and needed someone who understood everything. He didn't want to be taken advantage of. Some of the Turkish storeowners he had talked with cautioned him. It was better to start your own business than taking over a Dutch store with all the burdens of an existing business. An existing business has a history of its own that you don't know about.

Neylan however immediately understood that the bakery would do well. She had seen Dutch friends at school spending more money during their lunch breaks on Turkish pizza's or Döner Kebab, than she received allowance. Her parents had insisted that Fuad should employ Neylan once she got out of school. She needed a job and her father could trust her to work at the bakery. At first Fuad was reluctant, but ultimately, after her parents kept insisting, he promised. One evening her mother ran up to Neylan's room and told her the good news. Not all Turkish girls were lucky to have a job and work after school.

Today was Neylan's first day at work. Fuad had shown her around but she still felt awkward without really knowing why. She was excited though, Fuad told Neylan she had to keep in mind that Fanny had been working in the store her whole life. They needed her because she knew the business and many of the Dutch customers. Neylan however felt uncomfortable being around Fanny because she didn't like working with an older Dutch person. They often didn't understand her culture and most often just looked scared or distrustful at her and her Turkish friends, blaming Turks for everything that was wrong with this country, while everyone knew that if the Turks would stop working one day the whole country would be in disarray. Fuad told her that he had known and worked with Fanny when he just arrived from Turkey, and she had been very helpful and patient with him. Maybe she wasn't that bad and so Neylan tried to be as kind as possible towards her. Besides she would be helpful in the first weeks in helping her.

When she had walked in this morning, Fanny glancing at her surprisingly said, "Oh, I thought you would be wearing a head scarf!"

"A hijab, you mean?" she said.

"A what?"

"Hijab," Neylan said in a friendly tone while internally feeling uncomfortable. "That's so stupid to say" she thought but instead smiled and answered, "No, we don't all wear the hijab" She then turned her head away from Fanny and rolled her eyes.

'Alas Neylan, you are probably thinking, that I am an old tart.'

'Old tart? I don't understand,' Neylan politely answered, feeling uncomfortable that an older person made fun of themselves.

'Well, it's a Dutch expression, really.'

Fanny did not say much, but held a rather stiff face, smiling every now and then, trying to make Neylan feel at ease, or perhaps make her self feel at ease. Sometimes she made a comical remark and Neylan would laugh politely while not understanding the humor of Fanny's remark. She asked questions but Neylan didn't know how to answer. She didn't say much.

Around opening time though, when she had become a little nervous, Fanny walked in with a cup of tea for her. She felt calmer after a few sips and after having helped some early customers on their way to work. Maybe, she was too easily annoyed because it was her first day, God forgive her. She turned towards Fanny, smiled and asked, "Do you remember your first day working in the bakery store?"

Fanny's eyes twinkled, "My first day? Well, of course! I was very nervous, didn't know the prices or the different types of bread."

"How do you call this kind of bread again?" Neylan asked.

"Oh, that's all grain bread. Do you believe that I can tell what kind of bread people will buy by looking at their face?" Fanny asked.

"Really?" Neylan asked insecurely as if Fanny was making fun of her.

"You should keep a little crib sheet on you, like at school. That's what I did too."

Fanny looked at the Turkish pastries and laughed.

"You see, in a way today is just like then! I don't understand the difference between these different pastries for instance," pointing to the staple of new pastries that Fuad had brought in this morning.

"The baklava?"

"How? Baka what?"

"Baklava," Neylan felt confident realizing that she was not as ignorant as she had feared and even suppressed a faint giggle as she observed Fanny's helpless face trying to pronounce the word.

Fanny's question made her realize that she knew all the Turkish goods by heart, while she herself had never have seen half of the pastries or bread, Neylan always had helped her mother as a young girl. She pointed her finger enthusiastically.

“And that’s flatbread.”

“Ah, and that?” Fanny was now interested.

“Oh, that’s flatbread too.”

“But it looks different.”

Neylan didn’t know, yes, but still it was called flatbread anyway, just different. She hesitated.

“Or bide!” she said.

Fanny nodded.

“Did you ever eat this?” Fanny pointed to the pastry below her.

“The pudding pastry with the pink glazed top?”

“Yes”

“Well, eh, no, it looks so strange.”

“Strange?”

“What is it called?”

“It’s tompoes, it was my favorite pastry when I was young. On special occasions my mother would get one for each of us.”

“Tompoes?”

Neylan started laughing.

“What kind of name is that?”

Fanny too started laughing, “Yes, it’s an odd name, I guess, but what’s in a name?”