The Missing Chapter (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When the library announced that a rare notebook had disappeared, nobody expected the story to reach the newspapers. The notebook belonged to a nineteenth-century engineer, and only a handful of scholars had ever asked to see it. Lena, a doctoral student, was among them. She had been writing her thesis on early railway design for almost four years, and the missing pages were central to her final chapter. Losing them felt personal rather than academic.

The library opened an internal investigation within a week. Staff were interviewed, entry records were printed, and the reading-room cameras were checked twice. It quickly became evident that the notebook had not simply been misplaced on a wrong shelf. Somebody had signed for it and never returned it, and the signature was unreadable. The head librarian, an unhurried woman named Farida, refused to accuse anyone without proof.

Instead she started a quiet inquiry of her own. She asked every reader who had visited that month to answer a short survey about which items they had consulted and when. Most replies arrived within days, polite and unhelpful. Lena, however, remembered something odd: a man who had photographed pages very quickly and left before closing time. Her memory of his face was vague, but she was sure about the date.

Farida compared that date with the entry records and found a single name that appeared nowhere else. A careful examination of the man's request form showed an address that did not exist. This was the first real finding of the whole affair, and it changed the mood of the investigation completely. The police were informed the same afternoon. Farida still warned everyone not to interpret the evidence too confidently, since a false address might simply be a mistake.

Three weeks later the notebook appeared in an auction catalogue in another city. The seller had photographed only a small sample of the pages, but it was enough for Lena to recognise the handwriting immediately. The auction house withdrew the item at once and cooperated fully. Farida's interpretation of the events was later published in a short report, and colleagues in other libraries read it with interest. Lena finished her chapter that winter, and she thanked the librarian in her acknowledgements.

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