The Bookshop on Miller Street (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When Priya inherited her uncle's bookshop on Miller Street, half her family advised her to sell it immediately. The building was old, the heating system complained loudly every winter, and the profits had always been modest. Yet she had spent every school holiday of her childhood between those shelves, and she could not imagine the street without the green sign above the door.

Her uncle Raj had been an unusual businessman. He gave discounts to anyone who could quote a poem, and he refused to stock books he disliked, whatever the sales figures said. Customers came from three towns away simply to argue with him. He was fond of saying that a bookshop should smell of paper and coffee, never of money. After his funeral, more than two hundred people signed the visitors' book, and many of them wrote long messages about conversations they had never forgotten.

Priya opened again on a Tuesday. She was eager to prove that she could manage the place alone, so she arrived at six in the morning and reorganised the entire history section before breakfast. By ten she had made her first sale. By four she had made her second, and she sat down behind the counter feeling considerably less confident. That was when Mrs Alcott appeared, a retired teacher who had shopped there for thirty years and who was genuinely curious about how the new owner would cope.

Mrs Alcott was sympathetic rather than critical. She did not pretend that business would be easy, but she listened carefully and then offered a piece of advice that turned out to be extremely wise: invite the schools in. Within a month, Priya was running Thursday reading afternoons for children, and the shop was noisy in a way it had never been before. She also installed a sophisticated ordering system that could track stock across several suppliers, something her uncle would have hated and probably admired.

The regular customers stayed loyal throughout that difficult first year, and a few new ones arrived. There was a humorous old gentleman who told the same three jokes every Saturday, and a student who wrote poems on the back of receipts. In December the local paper published an article about the shop, describing it as "a fabulous survivor in a hard trade". Priya cut it out and pinned it beside the till, though she felt slightly embarrassed by the praise.

What surprised her most was not the money, which remained tight, but the affection people showed. Strangers asked after her health. A neighbour left soup on the step when she had flu. She began to understand that her uncle had built something genuine, which no accountant could measure and no larger chain could copy. On the anniversary of his death, she closed the shop early, sat on the floor between the poetry shelves, and admitted to herself that she was ___ happy. Then she stood up, switched off the lights, and locked the green door behind her.

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