The Letter in the Bookshop (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

The bookshop on Colby Street had been losing money for eleven months. Tom, who had inherited it from his aunt, kept the lights low to save electricity, and the grey November rain made the whole street look depressing . Customers came in, shook the water from their coats, browsed for ten minutes and left again without buying anything. By the end of each day he felt genuinely miserable , although he never said so to his sister.

His sister Nadia visited every Thursday with soup and unwanted advice. She was relentlessly optimistic , the kind of person who believed that every problem had a solution hidden somewhere behind it. Tom loved her for it and was occasionally furious with her for the very same reason. That Thursday she suggested he organise readings, book clubs, anything to bring people through the door. He told her he was too tired to think.

What Tom had not admitted to anyone was that his depression had returned. He had been treated for it in his twenties and had assumed the illness was behind him. Now the old symptoms were back: the early waking, the heaviness, the sense that nothing he did mattered. He was desperate to keep the shop open, not only for the money, but because it was the last thing connecting him to his aunt.

One wet afternoon a woman came in and asked for a book of poems that had been out of print for decades. Tom searched the shelves for twenty minutes while she waited, and she was remarkably patient , examining the old maps on the wall without complaining once. When he finally found the volume behind a stack of atlases, she was delighted , holding it as though it were made of glass. She explained that her late husband had read those poems to her when they were young.

Then she noticed the handwritten notes his aunt had pinned beside certain shelves, short recommendations written in careful blue ink. She read several of them and said, quite sincerely , that she had never seen a shop cared for with such attention. Tom was more sensitive to that remark than he expected to be, and he had to turn away for a moment. He told her about his aunt, and about the eleven bad months.

The woman returned the following week with four friends, then with eight. Within two months, a small group was meeting in the back room every Tuesday evening to discuss poetry. They were passionate readers who argued loudly about translations and stayed far too late. Tom started sleeping better. He still had difficult days, and he no longer pretended otherwise, but he was no longer desperately waiting for the shop to fail. Nadia, of course, claimed the whole thing had been her idea.

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