

READERS LOVE

*This Book Made Me Think of You*

‘Sometimes the book you need just finds you. I sobbed, I laughed and I cheered. I’m sure everyone who reads it will love it!’

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‘One of the most precious and moving stories I’ve read in a long time. From the very beginning, Libby Page’s writing swept me away. This is a book I will return to often, and I can’t recommend it highly enough’

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‘I love, love, loved this book. It was charming, heartwarming, soul-crushing and cosy, but most of all it was a beautifully told story’

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‘How can I possibly sum up my feelings for this book? Utterly gorgeous . . . The exact tonic I needed without knowing I needed it’

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‘If you’re looking for a story that captures your heart, sparks your imagination, and even offers up some fantastic literary treasures along the way, you really need to pick this one up’

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‘Is *This Book Made Me Think of You* Libby Page’s best novel yet? Absolutely yes’

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‘I was wholly unprepared for how this book was going to hit me’

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‘I was completely drawn into the emotional journey, not just Tilly’s, but the lives of everyone around her. Moving, uplifting and impossible to put down’

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‘This book made me want to tell everyone to go out and get a copy and READ IT!’

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# This Book Made Me Think of You

LIBBY PAGE



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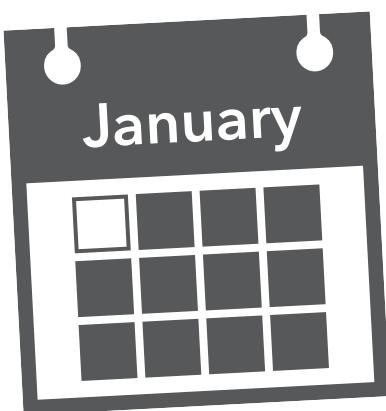
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In memory of Fred Cutting and Sally Lane,  
who both loved books





*Book Lane Recommends*

**Books to read when you don't feel like reading**

 *Dear Reader: The Comfort and Joy of Books*  
by Cathy Rentzenbrink

 *Cold Comfort Farm* by Stella Gibbons

 *Tilly and the Bookwanderers* by Anna James

 *The Very Secret Society of Irregular Witches*  
by Sangu Mandanna

The right book in the hands of the right person at exactly the right moment can change their life forever. At least, that's what Alfie has always believed. It's hard not to when you spend six days a week in a bookshop and have witnessed more times than you can count the magic of someone entering your shop as one person and leaving with the possibility of becoming another held in paper between their hands.

But Alfie isn't thinking about changing lives when he pulls up outside Book Lane on his battered red bicycle early one January morning. He's thinking about the fact that his glasses are misted with rain, his trousers are drenched and there are three enormous and very soggy cardboard boxes waiting for him on the doorstep.

'Bloody books,' he mumbles under his breath as he digs about in the pockets of his bottle-green duffel coat for his keys.

'Bloody door.' The key sticks as it always does before finally creaking open, letting a gust of cold wind and the dishevelled bookseller into the shop.

Alfie drags the deliveries out of the rain and scoops up the post, flicking through the assortment of bills and dumping them on his desk with a sigh. Closing the shop in the quiet period between Christmas and New Year had felt like a good idea at the time. But now Alfie has only an hour to go until opening, and a whole carpet of pine needles to sweep, several boxes of books to unpack and a window display to change,

swapping festive romances and comforting cookbooks for healthy recipe books and self-help manuals.

People are always telling Alfie that he has the best job in the world. But what they think being a bookseller entails – reading all day – and what it actually involves are quite different. They'd be surprised by just how much heavy lifting and dusting is involved.

A scratching sound draws Alfie's attention to the back door.

'Happy New Year. It's just us this morning, Georgie,' he says as the cat flap swings open and the furry, mottled grey face of the neighbourhood's stray appears in the opening.

Georgette shakes the rain from her fur and hops on to a pile of special edition Jane Austens on the counter, settling herself and watching with a faintly judgemental expression as Alfie gets to work.

Eventually, with the display refreshed, the radiators clicking, lamps glowing cosily and the nutty smell of fresh coffee in the air, Alfie looks around, satisfied. Even after all this time he can't help but feel a stirring of anticipation as the shop awaits its customers, books waiting patiently for covers to be stroked, pages to be flicked through and selections to be made.

Just as he is about to open up, his attention falls on the Book Lover's Calendar that was a Christmas gift from a customer and is pinned to the shop noticeboard, open on the new year and illustrated with an image of a woman reading in a pool of lamplight. Today's date is circled in red, the words 'PHONE NIGHTINGALE' written in capital letters. He glances at the shelf that is reserved for books awaiting collection. For once it is empty apart from one solitary book wrapped in brown paper and tied with ribbon. It has sat there for a long time, unmoving as a rotation of titles came and went around it.

'What a way to start the year.'

Sweeping a scattering of paperwork to one side on his desk

unearths a leather-bound book the size of a particularly comprehensive dictionary. Alfie flicks through the crinkled pages until he finds the number he needs. As he picks up the phone he thinks back to the promise he made over a year ago. He had almost forgotten that this day would eventually arrive. That he'd have to make this call.

He pauses for a moment, his finger hovering over the dial button. Because he's worked as a bookseller long enough to know how transformational books can be. But he also knows from personal experience that some people don't want their lives to suddenly change. And he has a feeling that the call he is about to make will turn this customer's life completely upside down.



The dentist's hand looms above Tilly's face and she tries to focus on the shade of the dentist's deep aubergine manicure instead of the glimmering silver instrument delving inside her mouth.

'Had a nice Christmas?' Dr Jafari asks as she rummages amongst Tilly's molars.

Tilly attempts to mumble a non-committal response.

'Mouth open nice and wide, please.'

She opens wider, grateful for the excuse not to have to explain that she spent Christmas Day at home with a tub of Quality Street to herself.

'Of course, Christmas is a terrible time of year for dental care,' Dr Jafari continues brightly. 'All that sugar and red wine. It's good that you're getting your check-up in now because we'll get pretty busy soon. Chipped fillings. Ulcers. Root canals. Abscesses.'

The dentist rolls off each malady as cheerfully as if she were listing the names of her grandchildren.

‘Everything seems fine for you, though,’ she adds wistfully, withdrawing her hand from Tilly’s mouth.

‘Well, that’s a relief.’ Tilly swings her legs off the chair, her brown leather boots with the red laces touching down on the shiny floor.

She tucks her long ginger hair behind her ears and shrugs on her tweed coat with the mismatched colourful buttons, thinking as she does that it’s strange that this woman has just been so close that Tilly noticed her chapped lips and could smell her violet-scented perfume and yet they likely won’t see each other again for at least a year. She doesn’t even know Dr Jafari’s first name.

‘Excuse me,’ says Dr Jafari, ‘I think your phone is ringing.’

She points at Tilly’s satchel which is steadily vibrating.

The number is not one she recognizes but as she steps out into the waiting room she answers with a polite, ‘Hello?’

At first there’s silence, then a cough followed by a low and unfamiliar male voice.

‘Um, hello. Is that Matilda Nightingale?’

‘Who is this, please?’

There is a child sat nearby with her head bowed over the pages of a book, forehead furrowed in concentration and teeth biting down on her bottom lip. It’s an expression Tilly knows well and for a moment the memory of reading like that, totally absorbed, is so all-consuming that when the man on the other end of the phone speaks again she wonders if she has perhaps imagined the words.

‘I’m Alfie Lane, the manager of Book Lane. The bookshop in Primrose Hill. I’m calling as we have an order here for you to collect.’

‘But I haven’t placed an order.’

Not only has she not set foot inside her local bookshop for a long time, but it has been over a year since Tilly picked up

a book – unless you count the manuscripts she edits at work, which she doesn't.

‘The order was placed for you by Joe Carter,’ comes the voice on the other end of the line at the exact moment that the woman ahead of Tilly in the queue steps aside and the receptionist calls, ‘Next, please.’

‘Did you say Joe Carter?’

She can feel her chest tightening and she is suddenly very aware of the smell of mint mouthwash and latex gloves. Despite the concrete-grey day outside, the waiting room feels cloyingly, oppressively hot.

The receptionist drums her nails on the desk. ‘Can I *help* you?’

Tilly stumbles forward, holding the phone away from her face as she tells the receptionist her name.

‘That will be sixty-five pounds, please.’ Tilly fumbles for her card and hands it wordlessly over as the gravelly voice on the other end of the phone says, ‘Yes. I have an order here for Matilda Nightingale, placed by Joe Carter.’

‘But that's impossible.’ The edges of her words catch like sandpaper against Tilly's throat.

In an instant she sees Joe in her mind, his wide, open smile, his short blond hair covered by a baseball cap in the summer and a beanie in the winter. Average height but broad shoulders and an athletic physique from growing up on the baseball field and, in later years, from playing softball in Regent's Park with his colleagues. The bump on the middle of his nose where he broke it as a kid, trying to win a bet with his brothers that he could climb to the top of their garage roof. The sound of his voice, cheerfully teasing as Tilly arrived home with a bulky paper bag, asking if she'd really bought more books and whether he'd soon have to move out to make room for her collection. Or soft and croaky in the mornings, reaching out for her and telling her that he loved her.

‘I think it would be best if you came into the shop so I can explain,’ says the man on the other end of the line. ‘I think I would find it easier than doing this over the phone, if you don’t mind.’

Tilly had a plan for her last day off that involved restocking her empty fridge, catching up on her inbox and maybe treating herself to a good cry in the bathtub. But the pull of Joe’s name is too strong to resist.

‘OK. I can be at the shop in five minutes. But I’m telling you now, there’s no way Joe could have ordered a book from you.’

The shop manager offers no further explanation. He simply says that he will see her soon, before hanging up.

Tilly steps out on to the cold London street just as the thick grey clouds part for a moment and a solitary beam of sunlight shines down on the damp pavements, making them glitter. Tilly hugs her coat tightly and glances up at the sky.

‘This has to be a mistake, right, Joe?’