VOKLA

ADULT READERS

Lost in Translation



ENGLISH STORYBOOK / B2

VOKLA Press · Free student edition

A family mystery



Leyla had been working as a translator for eleven years, but she had never been asked to translate a family secret. Daniel Hale, a retired engineer from Bristol, had found a box of letters in his mother's attic after her funeral. They had been written in Turkish by his father, a man Daniel had never really known. "He left us when I was two," Daniel explained on the phone. "My mother had the letters translated back then. The last one says he was never coming back. I'd just like to understand why."

One small stain



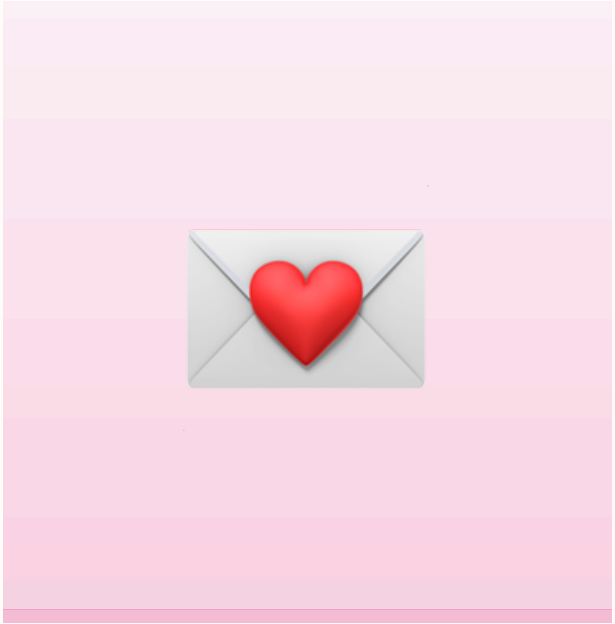
The letters arrived by post a week later, tied with a faded blue ribbon. Most of them were cheerful and full of ordinary details: the price of bread in Izmir, a cousin's wedding, a song he had heard on the radio. The final letter was different. It was shorter, and the handwriting looked rushed. In the middle of the most important sentence there was a dark stain, as if someone had knocked over a cup of tea. The old translation read: "I won't come back." Something about it didn't sound right to Leyla.

Reading between the lines



Leyla read the letter aloud, again and again. The grammar around the stain didn't quite fit. The verb was clear enough: "dönmem," I won't return. But the space in front of it was far too wide to be empty. She took the page to the window and held it up against the afternoon light. Slowly, faint letters appeared beneath the stain: s, e, n, s, i, z. "Sensiz," she whispered. Without you. The sentence wasn't "I won't come back." It was "I won't come back without you."

Without you



Leyla called Daniel that evening. For a long moment, there was silence on the line. “So he wanted us to go with him,” he said at last. “And my mother believed the first translation.” Leyla explained that a single stain had changed the whole story, and that the first translator couldn’t have seen the word without strong light. Three months later, a postcard arrived from Izmir. It showed a crowded family table by the sea. On the back Daniel had written: “Met my father’s cousins. Thank you for finding the missing word.”

AFTER THE STORY

Back to the story

1 **What made Leyla think the old translation might be wrong?**

2 **Why do you think Daniel's mother never travelled to Izmir?**

YOUR TURN

Think of a message that was misunderstood, in your life or in the news. What went wrong, and how could it have been avoided?

THREE WORDS FROM THE STORY

stain • a dirty mark that is difficult to remove

faint • very difficult to see, hear or smell

rushed • done too quickly, without enough time