Episode 2

The Keeper of Memories

Hello, I'm Richard Winterbottom.

Welcome to Season Two, Episode Two of Rick's Bite-Sized English.

Each week we examine a word or phrase that you can take away to try to build your English and your confidence.

There's a new episode every week, so make sure you follow so you don't miss out.

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From the outside, it was an unassuming place. Two small not-very-clean windows flanked the door, each displaying an assortment of products. The green wooden frames, their paint peeling, suggested it was far from being the newest establishment on the street. Over the door you could just make out the faded inscription ‘since 198*’, the last digit illegible. At night, a grey metal shutter concealed everything. On the pavement in front of the entrance, Gus, the owner’s loyal black cat and chief mouser, kept watch.

This was where Harry Myers, the grocer, carried out his trade.



It was a useful place. What wasn't sold in that shop was unlikely to be found anywhere for miles around. Harry Myers was a butcher by trade, and he always wore a blue-striped apron, but meat was just a small part of his business.

Many rumours about Harry circulated: some said he'd been a trapeze artist in a circus, travelling the length and breadth of Europe. Others claimed he was once a mercenary deep in the South American jungle. There were even those who lent credence to a story that he had trained falcons for a sultan somewhere in

the Arabian peninsula. None of these stories had ever been verified.

Harry was of indeterminate age, but certainly old. Possibly very old. He was very tall and had a slight stoop, and had long, ash-coloured hair that would have benefitted from a wash. He had a penetrating stare. My sister always said he had eyes like a peregrine falcon.

I loved going into Harry's shop. The citrusy smell of the sawdust that covered the floor mingled with the strong tobacco he packed into his pipe. Sometimes there would be the smell of cooking wafting through from the kitchen. This was separated from the shop by a fly curtain, the brightly-coloured plastic strips one of the few visual stimuli in that lugubrious old place.

Two mornings a week he made ice-cream, and I loved the sweet fragrances that filled the shop. When he roasted coffee beans, the aroma was truly magnificent.

Despite his slightly fearsome looks, Harry was a kindly man. When we were children, he always gave us a shiny coin after wrapping our goods up in brown paper and taking our mother's payment.

Although we were always delighted by the gift of a new coin and captivated by the pleasant aromas, these were not the main reason we always looked forward to visiting Harry's store. No, what drew us to the shop was the fact that it was a treasure trove of assorted articles, both items for sale and personal possessions that Harry had collected and decorated his shelves with.

Dominating the shelf behind his desk was a cabinet with two frosted glass windows, obscuring whatever lay within. What could it be that Harry kept in such a prominent, visible place? What did it mean to him? These were the questions that arose in the minds of all who visited the shop.

One day, three regulars, old friends of Harry, came into the shop together. The shop was at its busiest and Harry was cutting into a large cheese for one of his customers.

Without waiting for Harry to finish, one of the men, Wilfred, shouted out:

'Come on Harry, it's high time you told us all what's inside that cabinet'.

'Yes', his friends joined in, 'let's see what you've been hiding in there all these years.'

To everyone's surprise, Harry paused, put down the cheese he was cutting, took a key out of his apron and opened the glass doors of the cabinet to reveal a few photographs, several postcards, a child's drawing, a whole assortment of items, knick-knacks for the most part, things that had been given to him by customers out of gratitude, or simply left behind.

And so it was no great secret after all - just a testimony to his years in the shop and the people he had come in contact with.

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Wilfred says, 'Come on Harry, it's high time you told us all what's inside that cabinet.

Why does he use the phrase 'it's high time?' Well, this phrase is used to indicate that something is possibly overdue and should happen immediately. It carries with it a sense of urgency and often expresses frustration or impatience.

Notice how we use the phrase in a sentence. The phrase is followed by a verb in the past simple, although we are referring to a present or future meaning. This is because the strong recommendation in the phrase is given in a subjunctive or hypothetical mood.

We can also use the phrase without ‘high’ and say, for example, ‘it’s time we went’.This still indicates that something is urgent and needs to be done immediately, although the sense of urgency is slightly less than if we use ‘high’.

Let me know how you will use this language by leaving a rating and review wherever you listen to the podcast.

I’d love to hear from you.

Thanks for listening.

See you next week.

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