

A Stone That Wasn't for Sale



At the community greenhouse, Amina was preparing for a sale of young plants. She had washed the pots and set a small paper label beside each one. Her neighbour Leif, a retired postmaster, volunteered to write the names in his careful block letters.

In a low enclosure by the back window lived Moss, a tortoise with an excellent view of the preparations. Amina had recently brought him a handsome wooden shelter with a curved roof. Moss had shown little interest in it.

"He has a house better than mine," Leif observed. "Does he know?"

Moss walked past the shelter and settled instead on an ordinary flat stone. The stone lay where a narrow beam of afternoon sunlight reached the ground.

Amina put her hand on it. "Ah. Still warm."

Leif watched the tortoise close his eyes. Then he took one of the spare plant labels and wrote, in the same precise lettering he used for seedlings, NOT FOR SALE.

"That's a very official stone," Amina said.

"I spent thirty years labelling parcels. It feels wrong to leave anything so popular unidentified."

They set the label just outside the enclosure.
When the plant buyers arrived, Moss remained on his stone, unconcerned by his new title or the attractive little house behind him.

To remember

1. Amina and Leif label plants for a greenhouse sale
2. Tortoise Moss ignores his fancy new shelter
3. He settles on an ordinary sun-warmed stone
4. Leif labels the stone NOT FOR SALE, and Moss remains unimpressed.