

# The Keeper of Lost Things

A story about undelivered letters, missed connections,  
and the extraordinary weight of ordinary words.

**B2 Level**

**Adults (17+)**

**Story**

**14 Pages**

**45 min**

Arthur Peabody has worked as a postman for forty years. Instead of sending undeliverable letters to the Dead Letter Office, he has quietly collected them in his spare bedroom. On the morning of his retirement, he selects twelve letters and sets out to deliver them. Each delivery reveals a story: a sister's apology that arrived twenty-seven years late, a former employer's confession, and an undelivered love letter from a man too shy to knock on a neighbour's door.

## Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and comprehend a literary short story at B2 level
- ✓ Learn 20 advanced vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise listening with text-to-speech (voice selection, speed control)
- ✓ Analyse character motivation, theme, and narrative structure
- ✓ Discuss themes of communication, regret, and human connection

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## 1

## Read the Story

### Chapter 1: Forty Years of Letters

On the morning of his sixty-fifth birthday, Arthur Peabody stood in his spare bedroom and looked at the shelves. There were fourteen of them, floor to ceiling, each one packed with letters, postcards, and small brown parcels. Some were tied in bundles with string. Others were loose, crammed into shoeboxes and biscuit tins. These were the undelivered letters — the ones that had never reached their intended recipients. Misaddressed, misspelled, insufficient postage, house demolished, occupant unknown, return to sender. For forty years, Arthur had been collecting them.

He had joined the Royal Mail at twenty-five, a shy young man with meticulous handwriting and a bicycle that was slightly too large for him. He had delivered post six days a week, in rain and snow and blistering heat, for four decades. He knew every door, every letterbox, every dog that barked behind every gate. But what he remembered most clearly were the letters that came back. Regulations said he should have sent them to the Dead Letter Office. Instead, he brought them home.

### Chapter 2: The Decision

Arthur had always told himself he was keeping them safe — that one day, he would find the time to track down the rightful owners. Now, standing in his pyjamas on the morning of his retirement, he made a decision. Today was his last day as a postman. And today, he would deliver as many of these letters as he could.

He selected twelve letters. Some he chose because the handwriting looked desperate, the words pressed hard into the paper. Others he chose because they were beautiful — careful calligraphy, expensive paper, the kind of letter that someone had spent a long time composing. He put the twelve letters in his postbag, slung it over his shoulder, and stepped out into the pale October morning.

### Chapter 3: The First Letter

The first letter was addressed to a Mrs. Dorothy Finch at 42 Chestnut Avenue. It had been posted in 1998 from an address in Edinburgh. A woman in her seventies opened the door. "This is from my sister," she said quietly. "We hadn't spoken in years when this was sent. She wrote to me after our mother's funeral. I always assumed she hadn't bothered."

"She passed away in 2012," Dot said. She opened the letter with trembling fingers and read it standing in the doorway. When she finished, she looked up at Arthur with

tears in her eyes. "She was asking me to forgive her. All those years I thought she didn't care. But she did. She wrote this letter, and I never received it."

## Chapter 4: The Apology That Arrived Late

The fourth letter was addressed to a Mr. James Okonkwo. Arthur traced him to Birmingham through the chip shop owner, Maureen. James was eighty-one years old.

"The letter is from my old employer," James said. "He fired me in 1994 because a client complained about working with a Black man." Arthur read the letter aloud: Dear James, I have carried this shame for three years. What I did was wrong, and I knew it was wrong at the time. I chose cowardice over decency. I am profoundly sorry. Geoffrey Hart.

There was a long silence on the phone. "He died in 2001," James said finally. "I always wondered if he felt any guilt." "It seems he did," Arthur said. "It seems he did."

## Chapter 5: The Love Letter

The ninth letter was a love letter addressed to a Ms. Elena Vasquez at 17 Maple Street. The writer and the recipient had lived in the same building. Arthur could make out phrases through the translucent paper: I have loved you since the day you moved into the flat downstairs.

Elena had moved to Barcelona in 2005. The letter writer — a man named David — had moved away shortly afterwards. "He was heartbroken," the neighbour said. "He had been in love with her for years but never told her."

Arthur stood on the pavement holding the undelivered love letter and felt the full weight of what he was carrying — not just this letter, but all of them. Every envelope was a conversation that never happened, a connection that never formed, a moment that slipped through the cracks of ordinary life.

## Chapter 6: The Last Delivery

By five o'clock, Arthur had delivered — or attempted to deliver — all twelve letters. Six had reached their intended recipients or their families. Three had led to phone calls with people who wept, laughed, or sat in stunned silence. Two had proved untraceable. And one — the love letter — remained in his bag, still sealed.

At home, he sat in his armchair and looked at the shelves of remaining letters. He could not deliver them all. But the twelve he had delivered today had mattered. Dot Finch had read her sister's letter and forgiven her. James Okonkwo had received an apology he had waited thirty years for. These were small things. But a letter is just paper

and ink. And it can carry the weight of a lifetime.

## Epilogue

Arthur spent the next three months delivering more letters. By February, he had delivered one hundred and forty-seven. Ninety-one had reached someone who remembered the sender.

The love letter to Elena Vasquez remained on his shelf. He could not find her, and he could not bring himself to open it. Some letters, he decided, are not meant to be read by anyone other than the person they were written for.

And some silences, like some letters, carry their own kind of truth.

## 2 Key Vocabulary

These words from the story will help you expand your English vocabulary.

Word	Type	Definition	Example
<b>crammed</b>	<i>verb</i>	pushed into a space that is too small; very full	<i>The suitcase was crammed with clothes.</i>
<b>intended</b>	<i>adj.</i>	planned or meant for a particular purpose	<i>The gift never reached its intended recipient.</i>
<b>meticulous</b>	<i>adj.</i>	showing great attention to detail; very careful	<i>She kept meticulous records of every expense.</i>
<b>sprawling</b>	<i>adj.</i>	spreading over a large area in an untidy way	<i>The city had become a sprawling urban landscape.</i>
<b>daunting</b>	<i>adj.</i>	seeming difficult and frightening	<i>The mountain climb was a daunting challenge.</i>
<b>strategic</b>	<i>adj.</i>	relating to a careful plan to achieve a goal	<i>They made a strategic decision to expand abroad.</i>
<b>manageable</b>	<i>adj.</i>	able to be dealt with; not too difficult	<i>Break the project into manageable tasks.</i>
<b>handwriting</b>	<i>noun</i>	a person's particular style of writing by hand	<i>Her handwriting was elegant and easy to read.</i>
<b>mislaid</b>	<i>verb</i>	lost temporarily; put in the wrong place	<i>I seem to have mislaid my reading glasses.</i>
<b>formidable</b>	<i>adj.</i>	inspiring respect through being powerful or capable	<i>She was a formidable opponent in any debate.</i>
<b>resonant</b>	<i>adj.</i>	deep, clear, and continuing to sound	<i>His resonant voice filled the concert hall.</i>
<b>complained</b>	<i>verb</i>	expressed dissatisfaction about something	<i>Several customers complained about the service.</i>
<b>obituary</b>	<i>noun</i>	a notice of someone's death with a life account	<i>She read the obituary in the morning paper.</i>
<b>recipient</b>	<i>noun</i>	a person who receives something	<i>The recipient of the award gave a moving speech.</i>
<b>translucent</b>	<i>adj.</i>	allowing light to pass through; semi-transparent	<i>The curtains were made of translucent fabric.</i>
<b>heartbroken</b>	<i>adj.</i>	extremely sad and upset	<i>She was heartbroken when her friend moved away.</i>
<b>stunned</b>	<i>adj.</i>	very surprised and unable to react	<i>The audience sat in stunned silence.</i>
<b>untraceable</b>	<i>adj.</i>	impossible to find or follow	<i>The sender of the letter was untraceable.</i>
<b>orphaned</b>	<i>adj.</i>	left without connection or belonging	<i>The orphaned files remained on the old server.</i>

<b>genuinely</b>	<i>adv.</i>	truly and sincerely; not pretending	<i>He was genuinely surprised by the birthday party.</i>
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### 3 Comprehension Quiz

Choose the best answer for each question.

**1. What did Arthur collect over his forty-year career?**

- A) Stamps from around the world.
- B) Undelivered letters that had been returned.
- C) Old postcards from holiday destinations.
- D) Photographs from demolished houses.

**2. Why did Arthur decide to deliver the letters on his last day?**

- A) His manager ordered him to clear the backlog.
- B) He was moving house and needed to clear space.
- C) He had always meant to return them and chose his final day.
- D) A family member found the letters and told him to.

**3. What was in the first letter Arthur delivered to Dot Finch?**

- A) An invitation to a family reunion.
- B) A request for forgiveness from her sister.
- C) A legal document about an inheritance.
- D) A birthday card from a childhood friend.

**4. Why had James Okonkwo been fired from his job?**

- A) He had stolen money from the company.
- B) A client complained about working with a Black man.
- C) He was frequently late to work.
- D) He had a disagreement with his manager.

**5. What was unusual about the love letter to Elena Vasquez?**

- A) It was written in a foreign language.
- B) It was posted from the same building where she lived.
- C) It contained a plane ticket.
- D) It was addressed to the wrong person.

**6. How many of the twelve letters reached their recipients?**

- A) Three.
- B) Six.
- C) Nine.
- D) All twelve.

**7. What does the word 'daunting' mean in this story?**

- A) Easy and straightforward.
- B) Seeming difficult and frightening.
- C) Extremely boring and repetitive.
- D) Amusing and entertaining.

**8. What happened to the love letter to Elena Vasquez?**

- A) Arthur delivered it to her in Barcelona.
- B) He opened it and read it himself.
- C) He kept it on his shelf, unable to find her.
- D) He gave it to her neighbour to forward.

**9. How many letters had Arthur delivered by February?**

- A) Twelve.
- B) Forty-seven.
- C) One hundred and forty-seven.
- D) Over a thousand.

**10. What is the main theme of the story?**

- A) The postal service needs better technology.
- B) Small acts of connection can carry the weight of a lifetime.
- C) Hoarding is a serious psychological condition.
- D) Retirement is boring without a hobby.

## 4

**Answer Key**

1. B) Undelivered letters that had been returned.
2. C) He had always meant to return them and chose his final day.
3. B) A request for forgiveness from her sister.
4. B) A client complained about working with a Black man.
5. B) It was posted from the same building where she lived.
6. B) Six.
7. B) Seeming difficult and frightening.
8. C) He kept it on his shelf, unable to find her.
9. C) One hundred and forty-seven.
10. B) Small acts of connection can carry the weight of a lifetime.

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