

Until Five

Name _____

Date _____

Read the text carefully and answer every question clearly.

Mr Harris put the shop key beside Ellis's mug, as though it belonged there already. He needed someone to run the bookshop on Saturdays while he visited his father. Ellis knew the customers, understood the till and had been working there for eighteen months.

'I'd trust you with the place,' he said.

Ellis picked up the key. At nineteen, he was used to being asked to carry boxes or cover the lunch break. Nobody had ever asked him to be responsible for the whole day. He said yes before Mr Harris had finished explaining.

On the bus home, he opened the timetable for the drawing course he had booked. It ran on Saturday afternoons. He had paid the deposit with money from the shop, imagining a portfolio that contained something besides unfinished sketches on receipts.

He began a message to the course tutor, asking whether he could join another term. Then he deleted it and wrote to Mr Harris instead: Could we go through the hours tomorrow?

The next morning, Ellis brought his course timetable. Mr Harris looked surprised. He had assumed Ellis would welcome the extra work; Ellis had assumed that asking about arrangements would make the offer disappear.

They worked through the calendar. Ellis could cover two full Saturdays before the course began. After that, he could open the shop, but someone else would have to take over at lunchtime. They also agreed what he would be paid for the additional responsibility.

Mr Harris left the remaining afternoons blank. He would need to speak to another assistant.

On the first Saturday, a regular customer arrived to collect an order. She glanced at Ellis behind the counter, then towards Mr Harris's empty chair.

'Are you in charge now?'

Ellis checked the name on the parcel before handing it over.

'Until five,' he said.

Comprehension questions

1. What Saturday commitment had Ellis already booked before Mr Harris offered him the extra responsibility?

2. What working arrangement did Ellis and Mr Harris agree for Saturdays after the drawing course began?

Reflection questions

1. How does the position of the key beside Ellis's mug help shape the opening offer? Support your interpretation with Ellis's immediate response.

2. What does the change from messaging the tutor to messaging Mr Harris suggest about Ellis's priorities? Use details from the story.

3. How does the final reply, 'Until five', bring together Ellis's new responsibility and the conversation about his hours? Explain your interpretation.

Opinion questions

1. Would you have accepted the key immediately, as Ellis does, or asked about the hours first? Explain your choice in light of his experience at the shop.

2. Was the timetable a useful thing for Ellis to bring to the conversation? Give a reason based on the agreement they reached.

3. Do you think covering two full Saturdays and then only mornings is a fair arrangement here? Consider both Ellis's course and Mr Harris's visits.

4. Would you advise Ellis to postpone the drawing course if no other assistant could cover the afternoons? Explain your view using what the course means to him.

5. Should Mr Harris have discussed the extra pay when he first offered Ellis the key? Explain your judgement using the responsibilities described.
