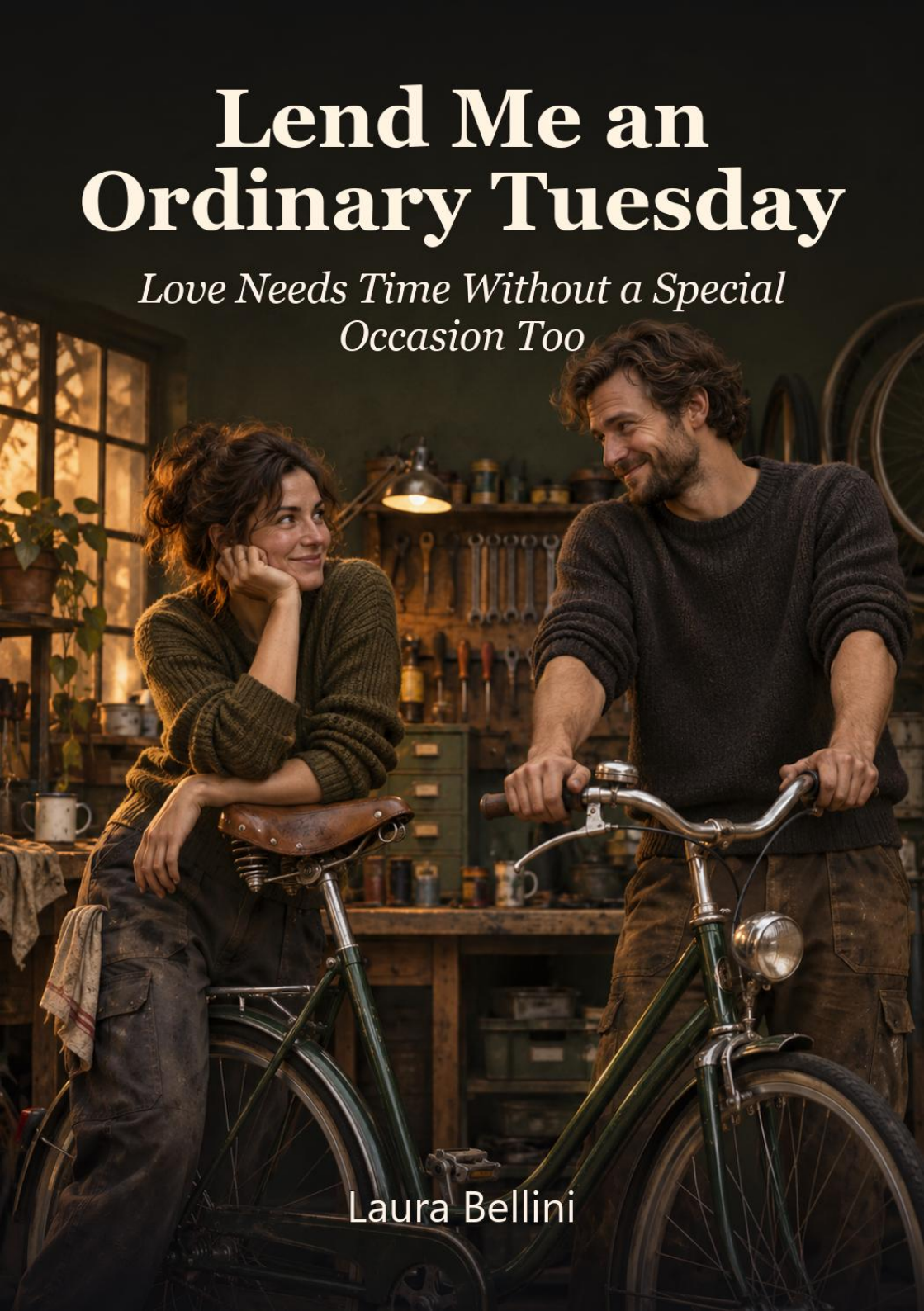
Lend Me an Ordinary Tuesday

Love Needs Time Without a Special Occasion Too



Laura Bellini

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Love Needs Time Without a Special Occasion Too

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INTRO

Nothing was supposed to happen on Tuesdays.

At least, that was the rule I had been trying to establish in my life ever since I realised that if I didn't leave myself at least one day free from other people's expectations, I would soon start treating my own apartment like a waiting room between one obligation and the next.

Tuesday belonged to me. No exhibition openings, no meetings with artists, no calls from curators, and no polite conversations with people who always needed something done yesterday. No glasses of prosecco consumed while standing, no smile I had to maintain even when my feet were aching from walking in high heels. No events requiring the perfect lighting, the right arrangement of chairs, and someone capable of anticipating that a person would inevitably forget to bring an extension cord.

I was thirty-four, and I was increasingly learning to appreciate things that didn't need organising.

That particular Tuesday, I wanted to collect some prints from the photography studio, buy fresh bread, get home before six, and sit down at my table with my laptop. An exhibition proposal I had been working on for several weeks was waiting for me. It was important, ambitious, and promising enough that I had no intention of allowing anything to distract me from refining it. I needed silence, concentration, and a few hours during which nobody would ask whether I could just take care of one more thing.

Unfortunately, Warsaw had its own opinion about my plans.

On a street I had known for years, roadworkers had dug up the pavement precisely where I usually cut through on my way to the studio. I had to walk around the entire block, navigating between cars parked along the narrow roadside. The air smelled of wet concrete, coffee from the little café on the corner, and something yeasty drifting out of the bakery. Television sounds came from the ground-floor apartments, while an elderly woman in a navy coat was trying to convince her dog that a puddle was not an appropriate place for an afternoon rest.

An ordinary neighbourhood. An ordinary day. Exactly what I needed.

The folder containing my prints was heavier than I had expected. I shifted it to my other hand and stopped outside a small bicycle repair shop to adjust the strap of my bag, which was slipping off my shoulder. Through the open door, I could see a man leaning over a bicycle. The sleeves of his dark shirt were rolled up, and there was a smear of grease on his forearm that he clearly hadn't had time to wipe away. He worked calmly, with the concentration of someone who didn't need to check his watch every three minutes to know what he was doing.

That was when one of my presentation boards slipped out of the folder.

The wind caught the sheet before I could grab it. The paper skidded along the pavement and came to a stop beside the front wheel of a bicycle standing just inside the workshop entrance.

"Your paperwork is making a run for it," the man said.

He picked up the sheet before I could bend down. He didn't crumple it or grab it in the middle. Instead, he held it

by two corners, as though he instinctively understood that a piece of paper could mean more to someone than it appeared to.

"Thank you. Although this isn't exactly paperwork. It's several hours of my life printed in A2 format."

He glanced at the board, then at me.

"Then it's a good thing it didn't end up under the wheel."

"That would have been a rather expensive repair."

"For the paper or for you?"

I smiled before I had time to decide whether his question deserved an answer.

His voice was calm, and there was something about the way he looked at me that reminded me nothing of the conversations I was used to having at professional events. He wasn't trying to make an immediate impression. He wasn't looking for an opportunity to tell me something about himself. He simply waited for me to take back what belonged to me.

He looked perhaps a little under forty, with dark hair and the face of a man who didn't have to check every morning whether he looked sufficiently presentable. He wasn't untidy. Just seemingly uninterested in proving anything to anyone.

"Do you have more of these?" he asked, nodding towards the other sheets sticking out of my folder.

"I hope they won't all try to escape."

"Experience has taught me that things have a way of doing what we least expect."

"Are you talking about paper or bicycles?"

"Paper, today. Bicycles usually just need the right adjustment."

I took the board from him and slipped it back into the folder.

"That makes it sound as though everything can be fixed."

"Not everything. But some things are worth giving a little time."

I didn't know why I remembered that particular sentence. Perhaps because he had said it without any special emphasis, without expecting me to recognise it as something profound. Or perhaps because I hadn't given anything time for quite a while. Everything had a deadline, a purpose, and a place in my calendar.

I glanced at my watch. I needed to get going.

"Thank you again."

"You're welcome."

I had walked a few steps when I heard him behind me.

"Watch out for the wind. It has its own plans today."

I turned around.

"So do I. And I intend to stick to them."

This time, his smile was more pronounced.

"Good luck."

I didn't ask his name. He didn't ask mine. It was a brief, ordinary exchange, one of those conversations that should have faded from memory before I reached the end of the street.

And yet, when I arrived at the studio, I found myself thinking for a moment about his hands carefully lifting the sheet. About the fact that he hadn't tried to help me more

than necessary, even though he could have. About the way he had managed to joke without turning the conversation into a performance.

Then my phone rang.

It was Mrs Helena from the local community centre. We had known each other for several years because I had once organised a small photography exhibition there featuring pictures taken by local residents. She remembered me as the woman who could find space for an exhibition even when the only available wall was the one behind the storeroom door.

"Łucja, I'm sorry to bother you," she began. "I know you're very busy, but I'd like to ask you for something."

The very beginning of that conversation didn't bode well for my Tuesday.

"Go ahead."

"We'd like to organise something for the people in the neighbourhood. A small festival. Music, a few local vendors, perhaps some workshops for children, something to eat. We don't have a big budget, but we have a venue and a few people willing to help. What we're missing is someone who could bring it all together."

I looked at my open laptop. On the screen was the unfinished exhibition proposal, with a list of things I still needed to revise beside it.

"Helena, I really can't take on another event right now."

"I know. That's why I'm not asking you to do everything yourself."

"That's usually how these things start."

There was a brief silence on the other end, followed by a quiet laugh.

"You're right. But this time, we have someone else involved. He runs a bicycle repair shop not far from here. He's agreed to help with the organisation and bring in some local vendors. He's stubborn, but apparently he knows half the neighbourhood."

I remembered the man standing in the workshop doorway. The dark shirt, the grease on his forearm, and his remark about things that deserved a little time.

"What's his name?" I asked before I had time to consider why I wanted to know.

"Klemens Lis."

I leaned back in my chair.

So he had a name.

"Łucja, you don't have to make a decision over the phone. Come to a short meeting tomorrow. You'll hear about the idea and see whether it makes sense. If you decide it's not for you, we won't try to persuade you."

I should have refused. I had enough work, ambitions of my own, and carefully established boundaries. I didn't want another undertaking in which people confused my professional skills with unlimited availability. On the other hand, Mrs Helena wasn't asking me to sacrifice my entire life. She was asking for one conversation.

"All right. I'll come to the meeting. But I'm not promising anything."

"Of course. Thank you."

After hanging up, I sat motionless for a moment. Outside, someone was closing a metal gate. A cyclist passed along

the street, and a man emerged from the bakery opposite with a paper bag tucked under his arm. The world hadn't changed in the slightest. Only my peaceful Tuesday had begun to expand rather dangerously to accommodate other people's plans.

I returned to my project, but my thoughts no longer seemed willing to arrange themselves into neat columns. I put the meeting in my calendar for Wednesday, then added an end time. I wasn't about to let a small neighbourhood festival turn into another full-time job.

That evening, when I finally got home, I placed the folder beside my desk and took off my coat. A reminder about tomorrow's meeting was waiting on my phone. I swiped across the screen as though I could somehow move everything that might come with it further away as well.

Once again, I remembered the workshop, the open door, and the man who hadn't tried to keep me there any longer than I wanted to stay.

I didn't know whether Klemens Lis would turn out to be someone I could work with. I didn't even know whether his calmness was a genuine character trait or simply the way he happened to look while repairing a bicycle.

What I did know was that, for years, I had been able to find time for everything that mattered professionally. Other people's dreams, other people's deadlines, other people's celebrations. Making room for something that couldn't be entered into a schedule had always been considerably harder.

I closed my laptop and switched off the lamp.

Perhaps tomorrow I would manage to convince Klemens that the festival needed proper planning and that my boundaries were not up for negotiation.

But why, before I had even really got to know him, had I started wondering whether he might also know how to make time for me when there was no event to organise?

Chapter 1 - Conditions That Were Never Part of the Plan

At five thirty on Wednesday afternoon, I stood outside the entrance to the community centre with my notebook, laptop, and the firm belief that I would be on my way home within an hour. Just in case, I had entered six thirty as the meeting's end time in my calendar. I disliked leaving empty spaces in my schedule for other people's needs. Too often, if I failed to establish when a conversation was supposed to end, someone managed to find three more things that absolutely had to be discussed.

The community centre occupied a single-storey building between a pharmacy and a grocery shop. Inside, it smelled of coffee, paper, and floor polish. Notices about children's activities, a book exchange, and a search for someone willing to look after an elderly dog covered the noticeboard. Someone had left a pot of basil on the windowsill. It looked as though it had been waiting for a more responsible owner for several days.

Mrs Helena greeted me at the door with the kind of enthusiasm usually reserved for securing a sponsor for an entire festival, rather than welcoming someone who had spent the previous evening wondering whether to cancel the meeting altogether.

"I knew you'd come."

"I said I would come. I didn't say I would stay."

"That's already something. Come on, we've got coffee."

She led me into a larger room. Three people were sitting around a long table. I recognised Mrs Jadwiga from the

neighbourhood library, a young man wearing a sweatshirt with the logo of a local sports club, and another man whose face was familiar, although I couldn't remember ever having spoken to him. Klemens Lis was sitting at the far end of the table, his hands resting on the back of his chair. He was wearing a dark sweater, and his hair looked as though he had run his fingers through it rather than used a comb.

He looked up when I entered.

"Good afternoon, Miss Paper."

"Good afternoon, Mr Wind."

Mrs Helena looked at us with interest.

"You two already know each other?"

"We had a brief encounter on the pavement," I explained, taking the empty seat.

"An encounter that ended with the rescue of some important documentation," Klemens added.

"One presentation board," I corrected him.

"I wouldn't diminish the achievement."

I sat opposite him. I had no intention of analysing that exchange, although I noticed that he had a habit of answering in a way that left the other person room for a comeback. He didn't try to dominate a conversation, but neither did he retreat simply to keep the peace.

Helena spread several sheets of paper across the table.

"All right. Let's get started. The idea is simple. We want to organise a neighbourhood festival. One Saturday, preferably towards the end of next month. Music, local vendors, small stalls, perhaps some workshops. Something that will

encourage people to leave their homes and discover that there's more happening in this area than they might think."

"And the budget?" I asked.

Helena named a figure that made me instinctively straighten my back.

"That's all?" I asked to make sure I'd heard correctly.

"For now, yes."

"We won't fit professional sound equipment, hired facilities, technical support, and performers' fees into that amount. And that's without even considering promotion."

"That's why we want to use what we already have," Klemens interjected.

I opened my notebook.

"Meaning?"

"People. Places. Skills. Not everything has to be rented."

"Not everything has to be rented, but everything has to work. If we invite musicians, we need suitable performance conditions. If we invite vendors, we have to provide space for them. If we're organising children's workshops, we need responsible adults, materials, and a safety plan."

"I agree."

I looked at him, slightly surprised.

"Really?"

"Yes. I just don't want us to start with a list of things we can't do."

"Where would you suggest we start?"

"With what we can do."

He said it without irritation. In fact, I was surprised that he hadn't tried to convince me my questions were excessive. Instead, he slid a sheet of paper towards me. It contained handwritten names of several local businesses.

"Here's a bakery that might prepare something for a food stall. A pottery studio. There's also an older gentleman who makes wooden toys. He doesn't sell them in a shop, but he'd be happy to show people how they're made. And here's a cycling group that organises rides around the neighbourhood."

I studied the list. It wasn't particularly long, but it contained names and telephone numbers, with short notes beside some of the entries. It didn't look like something he'd scribbled down five minutes before the meeting.

"Have you spoken to them?"

"Some of them. The others said I could call."

"So we don't actually have any confirmations yet."

"We have interest."

"That's not the same thing."

"I know. That's why we need someone who knows how to turn interest into a concrete plan."

I noticed Mrs Helena smiling discreetly over her cup. I wasn't sure whether she was more pleased with his argument or relieved that she hadn't needed to ask for my help herself.

"Before we move on to the planning, I'd like to see the location," I said. "Where exactly is the festival supposed to take place?"

Klemens unfolded a map of the neighbourhood. He had marked several locations with coloured pens.

"Here we have the square next to the community centre. There's enough room for stalls. We could put a small stage here and leave this section for the children. The problem is vehicle access."

"And access to electricity," Helena added.

"And toilets," I pointed out.

"Those too."

For the next twenty minutes, we discussed how the available space could be used. I began sketching a simple layout for the event, marking pedestrian routes and possible locations for vendors. Several times, Klemens moved my pen slightly to indicate solutions that took local residents' habits into account, details I had overlooked.

"Don't put a stall here," he said, pointing to a spot beside a low wall.

"Why not?"

"People walk through here on their way to the market on Saturday mornings. If we block this passage, we'll have complaints before the event even starts."

"We could direct them around the other side."

"We could. But then we'd block access to the shop."

I shifted the plan and checked the distances.

"You're right. I'm glad you mentioned that."

He didn't comment on having been right. He simply returned to his own notes. I liked that small gesture more than I cared to admit.

At one point, the young man sitting beside Helena spoke up hesitantly.

"What about a competition for the best-looking bicycle?"

Klemens turned towards him.

"We could. But we don't have to turn everything into a competition. We could also create a space where people can show what they've done to their own bikes. No judging."

"That would be cool," the young man admitted.

"That's what I'm getting at," Klemens said. "I don't want us to organise an event where people come, look at a few things, and then go home. I'd like them to have a reason to talk to one another."

"It's still an event with a defined schedule," I pointed out. "We can't expect spontaneity to organise itself."

"I'm not expecting that. I just don't want us to schedule every minute."

"Not every minute needs to be scheduled. But we do need to know what we're going to do if something goes wrong."

"And do you always know?"

"Usually, I know what to do when something goes wrong."

"That must be exhausting."

I looked at him.

"What?"

"Constantly anticipating every possible problem."

I didn't answer immediately. He had a point, but I wasn't going to make it that easy for him.

"Someone has to do it."

"Of course. Just not necessarily one person."

A brief silence settled over the room, broken by Helena offering everyone another coffee. I declined. I'd already had enough caffeine, and I was becoming increasingly aware that this meeting was heading somewhere I hadn't anticipated.

When we returned to the practical details, I took a sheet of paper and wrote down three main areas: programme, logistics, and promotion.

"If I'm going to be involved in this, I need a clear division of responsibilities. I can't be the person ultimately responsible for everything that doesn't get done."

"Agreed," Klemens said.

"And I need the contact details of everyone you've already spoken to."

"You'll get them."

"I want to be able to approve the programme before anything is announced."

This time, he didn't answer immediately.

"Why?"

"Because I'll be responsible for ensuring the event is coherent. If something is promised to the residents, we need to be certain we can deliver it."

"I understand. But I won't agree to having every idea approved by one person."

"I'm not talking about every idea."

"That's exactly what it sounds like so far."

I felt my patience beginning to wear thin.

"Klemens, I don't know all the people involved or all the conditions yet. I can't promise everyone complete freedom to do whatever they want."

"And I don't want the residents to become nothing more than people carrying out your concept."

"I have no intention of treating them as employees."

"In that case, we won't have a problem."

"We already do."

Mrs Helena cleared her throat.

"Perhaps it's a good thing that you see things differently. Łucja pays attention to the details, and Klemens knows the people. We need both."

"We also need someone who can make decisions," I said.

"And someone who remembers who we're making them for," Klemens replied.

I didn't like the fact that his words sounded reasonable. I liked even less that I couldn't easily argue against them.

I closed my notebook.

"I suggest we don't settle this today. I'll prepare a preliminary schedule, a cost estimate, and a proposal for dividing responsibilities. Then we'll see whether we can work according to a shared set of rules."

"Fine. But I'll prepare a list of people and possibilities, not just confirmed participants."

"All right."

"And I'd like us not to announce anything without talking to them first."

"If they have no influence over what we're organising, it's difficult to expect them to get involved," he added.

I looked at him for a moment before nodding.

"We can organise an open meeting. But I need some basic proposals beforehand."

"Fair enough."

He stood and began gathering the papers. When I reached for my bag, I noticed that he had placed a sheet on the table with my name written beside a telephone number.

"Where did you get my number?" I asked.

"From Helena. I asked her for it before the meeting so I wouldn't have to pass all the information to you through three different people."

I looked at Mrs Helena.

"You didn't tell me."

"It didn't occur to me that it would be a problem."

"It's not. I just prefer to know who you're sharing my contact details with."

Klemens immediately pushed the sheet towards me.

"If you'd rather, I won't text or call you. We can arrange communication through Helena."

He didn't sound offended. He didn't try to convince me I was overreacting. He waited for my answer as though it genuinely belonged to me.

"You can message me about the organisation," I said. "Let's just stick to the practical details."

"I'll try not to send you messages about the weather."

"That would be very helpful."

He smiled, and for a moment I had the impression that we were talking about something other than the festival, something I couldn't quite put a name to yet.

It was already getting colder outside. I put my laptop away and headed towards the bus stop. Klemens came out a moment after me, but stopped beside his bicycle, which was leaning against the fence.

"Łucja?"

I turned around.

"Yes?"

"You don't have to take this on if you don't want to. Really."

"I know."

"I just wanted you to know that I don't expect you to do all the work for everyone."

For a moment, I didn't know what to say. I was used to requests that began with assurances that it was only a little thing and ended with several more hours of work. His words didn't sound like an attempt to secure my agreement. They sounded more like information he considered important.

"We'll see how it goes," I said.

"We will."

I continued walking. It wasn't until I reached the bus stop that I noticed something written in my notebook, beside the first budget assumptions. It was a sentence I didn't remember consciously deciding to write.

Don't plan everything for everyone.

I wasn't sure whether it was his idea or my reaction to it. Either way, I intended to find out whether it was possible to put it into practice without losing control of the event.

And, above all, without losing my Tuesday.

Chapter 2 - A Map of What Is Possible

The following morning, at nine o'clock, I already had a spreadsheet open, two draft layouts of the available space, and a list of potential costs. For the first half hour, everything went according to plan. It wasn't until I reached the section concerning performers that I realised I didn't actually know how many we needed. I also wasn't certain whether the festival should have one main stage or several smaller activity areas.

Usually, I made those decisions after talking to a client. This time, the client was a group of residents I hadn't yet met, along with a man who apparently believed that not everything needed to be settled around a table.

At ten twenty, a message arrived.

Klemens: I've got a list of people and a few suggestions. Could we meet at the site and walk around the area? It'll be easier to show you what I mean.

I glanced at the clock. I had a telephone call scheduled for eleven, followed by work on the exhibition. I could spare an hour, provided it didn't turn into half a day.

I replied:

Łucja: Today at 12:30. I have an hour at most.

His answer came almost immediately.

Klemens: That'll be enough. I'll wait by the community centre.

He didn't add a joke. He didn't ask whether I could come earlier. I considered that a good start.

At twelve twenty-eight, I arrived. Klemens was standing by the fence, talking on the phone. When he noticed me, he ended the call and slipped his device into his pocket.

"Punctual," he observed.

"One of my few virtues."

"Then it's a good thing I managed to be on time too."

He was wearing a navy jacket and a light-coloured scarf. A toolbox stood beside his leg, and a canvas bag hung from his shoulder. He didn't look like someone who had come out for a leisurely walk. More like someone intending to fix something before I had even managed to ask what was broken.

"Shall we start with the square?" I asked.

"From the workshop side. I'd like to show you something."

We walked along the street. After a few minutes, we reached a place where the pavement widened beside a small green square. There were two benches, a rubbish bin, and a bicycle rack. Klemens pointed to the open space between the trees.

"This could be the first part of the event. Not a stage, just a meeting place."

"What exactly do you have in mind?"

"A table, a few chairs, maybe a swap point. Books, plants, small household items. People bring something they no longer need and take something else in return."

"That requires organisation. We need to establish rules for accepting items and decide who's responsible for anything left behind."

"I know."

"We'll also need someone to supervise the stall."

"I know two people who'd be happy to do that."

"Confirmed?"

"One is. The other hasn't committed yet."

I wrote that down in my notebook.

"What about the music?"

"I was thinking of two small performances. One local band and one person playing the guitar. Nothing that requires a big stage."

"That still means we need sound equipment."

"I have a friend who might lend us some."

"And if he can't?"

"Then we'll find another solution or change the programme."

"I'd rather not change the programme at the last minute."

"Neither would I. But we can't plan this as though we had enough money for every possible contingency."

I stopped beside one of the benches.

"Klemens, I understand that you want to create something accessible to people. So do I. But if we're organising an event, we need a basic plan and a backup option. Otherwise, we won't even know what we're promising."

He looked at me attentively.

"All right. Let's do it that way."

I hadn't expected him to agree so quickly. I'd already prepared an argument in my head that, as it turned out, I wouldn't need.