

New Adventures

BETWEEN THE

Shelves

WORDS BY KAYLA DEAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOAG BIN

Bookshops have always felt like home to me, whether they're the major chains or the quirky little places where you find the most unexpected of books. One of my favorite places to venture is the latter, where an artificial bird sanctuary hangs from the wooden beams that strike across the ceiling, packed bookcases are arranged by alphabet, not taste, and a bunny dwells by the back cash register, never mind the printing press that's near the front of the store.

Yet no matter what bookstore I find myself in, the books ultimately matter more than anything else. There's



something sublime about staring at a bookcase adorned with scintillating titles — some in sans-serif, others in bold handwriting. Like people, they're all different types: trade paperbacks, hardcovers with pristine dust jackets, older books wrapped in cloth covers. When I'm in my favorite bookstore, I like to forget what section I'm in and just focus on the tomes that fill my vision, picking up whatever book interests me. But sometimes I just like to intuit what they might be about before I make the choice of which one I'll adopt for my own little library.



Oftentimes, I can't resist reading the book flaps to not only discover the potential of the story within its pages but also to find out more about the author. Yet my absolute favorite thing to do is read the very first sentence of every book I can find, seeking out those inimitable openings that captivated just the right person and changed another's life. It's the possibility of reading someone's words, of connecting to a kindred spirit whose work just might confirm my belief in all that is essential.

Like us, these books are all in dialogue with one another. They may be silent sitting upon the shelf, but as soon as we open the pages, they resonate with us in more ways than we can quantify. Their words build within us. It might be the voices from the past, like Jane Austen, the Brontës, or Virginia Woolf, but it can also be those new writers who confirm that words will always matter. The print book still lives and their language is what stories are made of.

Since most of my weekends consist of trips to the bookstore, this thought rises to the wavy surface of my thoughts regularly. As a writer, I find that the elusive dreaming space that forms the inspiration we so desperately seek can be found in something as simple as a pile or row of books. Sometimes the simplest things inspire us to keep creating, even the very placement of the books on the shelf, moved by an enterprising bookseller into the view of their frequent patrons.

That's where the real power is. You see, a really incredible book is like a house. The cover is the façade, which inspires something in us, like love at first sight. The first sentence is the welcome mat, the trail of language that leads me inside. The characters are the reason I stay in that great big structure of a story. They're the ones who make it feel like a home that I can return to no matter how many years go by. Yet that beginning place we find ourselves in, among the quirky, nascent touches that make a bookstore a place of wonder, started that journey.

I once read about a linguist who said that language is like a big wave trying to approach truth. The more precise the word, the closer to truth we find ourselves. To me, a bookstore is filled with that knowledge. In our lives, we may never get to read every book we want to read. We may not even read every book we desperately need to read, yet the sum of everything the world knows can't fit into our favorite one-room bookshops. We'll never read all the books.

That possibility, that hope that we can discover beauty and truth not only from an idyllic mountain view but also in the corner bookstore? That's why I visit bookstores for inspiration.

Kayla Dean is a Vegas-based writer who reports about arts and entertainment. She also interviews writers and blogs about living a creative life on kayladean.com. Find her on Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest (@kayladeanwrites).