



Rarer Than Gold: The Story of Books

Divya Rathore





Aarav lay on his stomach, a book open, a pencil between his teeth, and his homework notebook still blank. The cozy room smelled of old paper and cardamom tea, with a thin afternoon sunbeam stretching across the carpet. He sighed dramatically, ready for a distraction.



Dadu, with a gentle smile, lowered his teacup and picked up Aarav's book, tracing the printed words. He explained that there was a time when a book like this was rarer than gold. Aarav's eyes widened, completely captivated by this surprising idea.



The scene shifts to a dimly lit stone room, where dedicated monks in simple robes hunched over wooden desks. By the flickering light of candles, they meticulously copied every word and letter by hand. The air smelled of wax and smoke as feather quills scratched rhythmically on parchment.



One monk, his hand trembling from hours of work, accidentally made a large blot of ink spread across a carefully copied page. His face showed dismay as he painstakingly scraped the ink with a knife, making the parchment dangerously thin. One mistake could ruin weeks of effort.



Books were incredibly precious, locked away in churches, stacked in grand palaces, and even chained to shelves to prevent theft. Aarav frowned, realizing that only the very rich had access to knowledge, which Dadu described as having 'walls'.



Dadu then introduced Johannes Gutenberg, a brilliant metalworker with rough, soot-darkened hands, standing in his bustling workshop. Surrounded by tools and the sharp smell of heated metal, Gutenberg examined a small, intricately engraved metal piece, deep in thought.



Gutenberg stared intently at a heavy wooden block carved with words, used in an older printing method. He knew this was too slow and cumbersome. He pondered a revolutionary idea: what if individual letters could move, multiply, and be rearranged?



Driven by curiosity, Gutenberg began experimenting, pouring molten metal into tiny molds. One by one, small, shiny metal letters clinked onto his workbench, each perfectly formed and small enough to rest on a fingertip. He was creating the building blocks of a new world.



With meticulous care, Gutenberg arranged the tiny metal letters into a frame, forming words and lines. He then brushed thick, dark, oily ink over the raised letters, preparing them to transfer their message onto paper. The air in his workshop was thick with anticipation.



Gutenberg pulled the lever of his wooden press, but the first attempts were often frustrating. Paper tore, ink smudged, and letters blurred. His hands were black with ink, his back ached, but night after night, the faint glow from his workshop showed his unwavering determination.