

Mr. Linden was the librarian of the Harrisville Public Library, and he was well known for his peculiar ways. It was not that he was unkind, or angry, or mean, he was just... unsettling. He was an old man with a bent back, and his face seemed to permanently have a blank expression on it. Never sad, never happy, never angry, but just blank. Well, his face was blank when it came to humans, at least. When he was around the books, on the other hand, his face adopted a gentle and almost fatherly look. Rumor was, he whispered to them and even sang them lullabies!

Mr. Linden chose to not be social, and to the little town of gossip mongers, that made him the worst type of person. The type of person who thought they were too high and mighty to have a lengthy conversation with anyone. Worse than his standoffish behavior was the fact that he was so *different*! He did not say hello to any of his neighbors, his garden was never even watered, and he refused to participate in any community events.

In truth, Mr. Linden was just very dedicated to his job. He would go to the library early in the morning and come back home at midnight. What kept him at the library so long, no one knew. Few people went to the library, and those who went were scared off by Mr. Linden's demeanor. He was quite hostile to the patrons of the library who "didn't treat their books right" as he said. Whenever people would try to check out books, he would give them a lecture on how to take care of the book, how to treat the book, and even *what to feed the book*! The people would be so alarmed at his absurd instructions that they would mumble something about not being able to check out the book and leave as soon as possible.

Linden was a very bad librarian, as far as the citizens of Harrisville were concerned. Since he had become the librarian of the Harrisville Public Library, he had strongly discouraged the few citizens who wanted to check out a book from taking the books out of the library. Wasn't it a librarian's job to encourage people to read?

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At the monthly town meeting of Harrisville, the topic of the library came to attention. Several townsfolk thought that the management of the library (ie. Mr. Linden) was lacking.

As one citizen of Harrisville said, “The library is horribly managed. Our children should be able to check out a book without getting a lecture on how to feed it. *How to feed it!* You know, yesterday, my Johnny, being the little bookworm he is, went to the library, and Mr. Linden would not let him check out a book. He said last time Johnny had checked out a book, Johnny hadn’t fed the book correctly and let it starve! It is completely bizarre and if you ask me, that old man is going senile. Senile, I tell you! I demand the committee to do an evaluation of the library and find some *appropriate* management for the library. I speak for the vast majority of Harrisville when I say, I absolutely do not want that crazy, old man in the library!” Seeing as most of the residents in town had more or less the same opinion, the committee had to respond.

The committee decided to send an inspector to the library. They chose an inspector named Simone Gorly. Simone Gorly was very thorough and they knew she would do a good job. Ms. Gorly was a severe woman and she considered almost everyone to be beneath her. As a result, she did not have many people who liked her, much less friends. Nonetheless, she was a hard worker and did her job with utmost precision. Once Ms. Gorly found out about her assignment, she was quite happy. She had no appreciation for a fine book and was prone to only watch television.

On the Monday after the town meeting, she went to the library at 8:00 AM sharp. The library was a large building with a large rotunda filled with books classified by the Dewey decimal system and books of different genres were kept in rooms that lead into the rotunda. The

library was grand, but there was something odd about it. There was an eerie silence and it was completely empty. It is true, Ms. Gorly thought. *No one* comes here. *Why would they?*

A clearing of throat alerted Ms. Gorly to an old man in the corner. *Funny*, she thought. She could have sworn that he wasn't there a minute ago. "Good morning, Mr. Linden. As you must know, I'm here to inspect your library and how it's being managed. I have received many complaints of mismanagement of the library. I will be here over the course of the next few weeks. I would like you to do everything you normally do and I will observe how the library functions."

To her utmost astonishment, Mr. Linden said nothing. He simply nodded and turned back to arranging the books on the shelves. He didn't look happy or displeased, rather, his face looked blank.

"Excuse me!"

"Yes, Ms. Gorly?" Mr. Linden said in a cracked voice.

"I expect to be shown around. I will not wander around by myself. Please start the tour."

His brow furrowed and he frowned. His eyes grew more intense and she saw suppressed anger. He gave her an annoyed look and moved out of the rotunda. Ms. Gorly followed.

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The tour first started in the Fiction room where the books were carefully organized by the authors' last name. During the tour, Ms. Gorly asked many rather crass about how Mr. Linden managed the library.

As the days went on she inspected every room and every corner of the library. She found no technical error, but something about the books still seemed... odd. On Wednesday, she was in the middle of checking if the biographies were in the correct order, and the biography of the

*Zodiac Killer* jumped out of the shelf! It physically jumped! It launched out the shelf and hit her square in the nose and all Mr. Linden did was smirk and pick up the book. Her nose was bleeding for an hour! It almost seemed like he whispered “good boy” to the book, but that couldn’t have happened.

In fact, many of the odd occurrences that had been complained about by residents had happened to herself too! Once she had been skimming a book, and she dog-eared a page in order to keep her place. The next thing she knew, the book flew out and clamped her on the ear while Mr. Linden laughed coldly. The next day, Ms. Gorly was inspecting the mystery books and she took one out. She put it back in the wrong spot and soon after the book flew out of the shelf and beat her so bad Ms. Gorly was sure her organs were rearranged.

Poor Ms. Gorly had never experienced anything like it. Every night as she lay in bed she wondered what was happening in the library! Perhaps, Mr. Linden was playing a practical joke on her? If that was the case, she would have him immediately fired! Or perhaps, she was starting to see things. However, she dismissed this thought swiftly, as she knew that she was perfectly fine. Ms. Gorly thought to herself, *I am just making myself nervous. Mr. Linden is the one who is crazy, not me! Tomorrow is the last day of the inspection. I will just complete my inspection and get that oddball fired, or even better, put in a home!* She was sure that all the library needed was a new librarian. The library itself was fine, but Mr. Linden was clearly not. He probably had lost his mind working in solitude for so long.

On the last day of her inspection, Ms. Gorly wanted to check out a book. This was the aspect she had heard the most complaints about, so she wanted to see what would happen. She approached Mr. Linden and said, “I want to check out a book in order to see your process. If I am to be honest, I have found you hostile and unhelpful in the duration of my inspection. This is

your last chance to prove to me that you shouldn't be removed from this job. Please suggest a good book that I can take home."

All Mr. Linden said was "I would suggest *The Invasive Plant Species Anthology*. Take proper care of the book. She's one of my favorites to check out to pests- I mean people. She likes eating half a cockroach every night. And absolutely do not mistreat her. Trust me, if you do she will take action and there will be dire consequences. Please treat her with the kindness that she treats you with."

"Mr. Linden!" she said sharply.

"Please do not waste my time by telling me this nonsense. Books do not eat! Books do not treat people with kindness! Books do not take action! Tomorrow I will be submitting a report to the Council, and you will be removed from your job!"

Mr. Linden just smiled mysteriously and checked out the book. He gave it to Ms. Gorly and said to the book, "Do your job, sweetheart."

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Once Ms. Gorly got home, she started the *Invasive Plant Species Anthology*. It was so dull that she almost fell asleep. It was full of facts and diagrams and had absolutely nothing entertaining in it. She suspected that Mr. Linden had given it to her because he knew she would hate it. She threw the book on her nightstand in dismay and watched TV for the rest of the night. Ms. Gorly had definitely mistreated the book. She had dogeared it, tossed it, used the page about English Ivy as a coaster, and *hadn't even read it!* Before she went to bed she actually considered *feeding it* as Mr. Linden had said, but she had laughed at the absurd thought.

Now, if Ms. Gorly had forgotten to feed the book but had treated it with respect, the book might have let her go. However, the *Invasive Plant Species Anthology* had a sweet spot for revenge... and the perfect target was waiting right there next to it, asleep and unsuspecting.

From inside the book crept the English Ivy, the leaves slowly unfurling and the stem bursting through the spine. It grew with determination and was soon 10 feet long. The Ivy stretched out, testing if it was long enough to wrap around the neck. It was.