

# The Librarian

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For generations parents have told their children, “Do not cross your eyes. They will stay like that!” For generations children have continued to twist their grins into ugly grimaces, grab their ears and pull them forward, wrinkle their noses, and cross their eyes to create absurd faces for their friends and parents. But they have always heard their parents’ voices echoing in the back of their minds, “Your eyes will stay like that ... your eyes will stay like that ...” and so they have released their eyes from their strained, crossed positions. The fear was too strong and too ingrained in them.

Except for one small child who had no fear. Sybil was the smallest of her friends, but she was the bravest. Her long, dark hair was usually in a ponytail that was constantly awry and coming loose from its ribbon. She nearly always wore sneakers so she could better run and climb. Sybil would clamber up the tallest tree while her companions gazed up at her skinny, ten-year-old legs dangling from the high branch she sat upon. She would walk directly toward the roaring lions at the zoo and determinedly stand face-to-face with the largest one while he stared at her from behind his cage’s bars. She would carefully pick up the spider that her mother had shrieked at and shied away from, and she would place him on the doorstep outside their home.

With Sybil’s bravery came a powerful imagination. She was not simply climbing a tall tree; she was climbing the tallest tree in all the land in order to see the path of charred villages a mighty dragon had left in its wake. She was not simply staring down a caged lion in the zoo; she was making peace with the King of the Jungle so she could continue her quest to find a lost baby elephant. She was not simply removing a disgusting spider from her mother’s presence; she was rescuing him because she could hear his pleas to save him and allow him to return to his family.

One sunny afternoon, after school had ended, Sybil and her friends were playing tag in the neighborhood park. Sybil noticed that one of her sneakers had come untied, so she called, “TIME OUT!” to her fellows as she bent down to adjust her laces. “I NEED TO TIE MY SHOE!” she shouted as they raced around her. Seth came rushing toward her and tapped her on the head as he sprinted by.

“TAG! You’re IT!” he yelled gleefully as he dashed away from Sybil.

“SETH! That is NOT fair!” Sybil told him angrily as she stood up. She placed her hands on her hips and demanded that he take it back. She could see him laughing as he ran, dodging the swings and the slide. He circled around her, sticking his tongue out and making the other



children laugh. Sybil stamped her foot in frustration and lunged at Seth. He pedaled backwards and missed Sybil's outstretched arms. He stuck out his tongue again, this time accompanied by his outstretched hands placed beside his ears, his fingers wagging. Sybil made the same face back at him, but she crossed her eyes to make her mocking face a bit better than Seth's.

Another little girl, Madeline, had paused in her running to stop and laugh at Seth and Sybil's funny faces. Her laughter broke when she saw Sybil's face contort. "Sybil!" she gasped at her friend. "You can't cross your eyes like that! My mom says that they'll STAY that way!"

Sybil straightened her face and looked at Madeline. "I don't believe that," she told her.

"It's true," Madeline insisted. "My mom said that when she was little one of her friends did it, and she STILL has crossed eyes even though she's really old now."

Sybil crossed her arms defiantly. "I don't think so," she told Madeline, Seth, and the other tag players who had gathered around them now. "I think your mom made it up just to scare you."

"But my grandmother says the same thing," Julia chimed in. The other children nodded along in agreement, and soon everyone was chiming in with stories their parents and older family members had told them. Sybil's eyes narrowed, and her frown deepened.

"I'm going to do it!" she announced to the horror of her friends. "They're not going to stay crossed, you'll see!"

"No, no! Don't do it, Sybil!" they all chattered – except for Seth.

He took a step towards Sybil and studied her closely. "Go ahead," he said. "I dare you."

Sybil took a deep breath, looked around at the crowd of children surrounding her, and crossed her eyes. The crowd silenced and stared at the skinny ten-year-old girl.

"See?" she told them after a few seconds. "I can put them back in a second if I want."

"Then do it," Seth demanded.

"Okay, I will. In a few more seconds. I'm gonna break a record," Sybil proudly told her audience as the crowd began to count down to the release. "Ten! ... Nine! ... Eight! ... Seven! ... Six! ... Five! ... Four!"

Sybil gasped. Her eyes snapped back to their normal positions and the crowd groaned.

"You only had a few more seconds!" Seth said, and the crowd began to chatter furiously. Madeline noticed the look of alarm on Sybil's face.

"Sybil? Are you okay?" Sybil did not respond, but instead stared past the circle of children surrounding her as if she could not see them, but instead saw something much more frightening. "Sybil?" Madeline



asked again, this time stepping towards her friend and grasping her hand. Sybil recoiled from the touch, but she seemed to burst back into reality.

“I ... I have to go home,” Sybil said quietly before she turned her back to her friends and their abandoned game of tag. She raced towards her house before anyone could stop her.

Sybil had seen something rather shocking while her eyes were crossed. She had seen the double vision of her friends standing around her that comes with the crossing of one’s eyes, but that, of course, wasn’t the shocking part. After having crossed her eyes for a bit of time, the double vision of the world around her had begun to fade and turn to greys and then to black. Sybil saw nothing for a moment—complete blackness. A moment later another picture began to take form, but not in the warped way of crossed eyes. It was a clear view of a large room with wooden paneling, high ceilings, low-lit lamps on rich wooden tables, and rows upon rows of empty shelves. It looked like a library.

Just as the picture was sharpening, a figure began walking forward from the shadows of an aisle of shelves. It was then that Sybil gasped and forced her vision back into its normal position. The brave girl who never turned down an adventure or challenge was scared and confused.

Half-formed thoughts tumbled around her brain as she rushed to her home a few streets away. At her doorstep, she inhaled deeply and took a moment to compose herself before she saw her mother. After a quick hello and a drink of water, Sybil found herself sitting on her bed in her room.

“I have to do it again,” she told Dolly, her German Shepherd, who had followed the girl into her room. “I have to know what that was.”

Dolly cocked her head to the side as she tried to understand Sybil’s words, sneezed, and then lay down on the rug beside the bed. Sybil sighed and fell back onto her pillow. She lay there for a moment before she clasped her hands loosely across her stomach and crossed her eyes.

The double vision of the girl’s ceiling soon faded into grey, then blackness, then the scene of the library. This time Sybil was prepared for it. She looked down and her body was there; she moved her hands in front of her face and she saw them clearly. She was not simply gazing into the scene—she was physically there. She looked around and took a step forward into the cavernous room.

“Hello?” she asked. She both did and did not want to know if anyone or anything else was present. There was no response, so she asked again, this time louder. “Hellooooo?!”

“Shhhhhh!” a voice came from the shadows to her left. An older woman emerged from the dark. Her grey hair was twisted into a tight knot on the top of her head, and she wore glasses on a chain around her neck.



Her clothing consisted of a high-collared, cream-colored button down shirt, a straight navy blue skirt that stretched to her stocking-covered calves, and an oversized light pink cardigan embellished with wildflowers and imitation pearls embroidered around the neckline.

“Who are you?” Sybil asked.

“I’m your librarian,” the woman said as she walked toward the girl. Sybil took a step back. “No need to worry, Sybil, dear,” the woman smiled and said. “I mean no harm.”

“Oh, okay,” Sybil said cautiously. “Well, where am I, then? And ... wait ... how do you know my name?”

The woman’s warm smile broadened. “We’re in your library. Few people know how to access their libraries, but I am glad you have done so. Each individual has a library, and each library has a librarian who keeps the stories.” Sybil looked around her. All the bookcases but one were empty. She walked toward it. It was labeled BIOGRAPHY and there were several numbered volumes on the shelves. She reached out to touch one.

“Sybil,” the woman said, and Sybil paused. “You must not touch them.”

The girl frowned and left her hand outstretched towards the volumes. “Why not? It’s my library, isn’t it?”

“Those are the rules,” the woman said simply. “I do not question them, and neither should you. Should you choose to disobey them, it would be ... a tragedy. And I certainly don’t want to have that on my hands.”

Sybil considered her options for a moment, and decided that she would rather stay. She lowered her arm back to her side.

“Thank you,” the librarian said. She motioned toward a thick wooden table with two chairs on either side. “Please sit and we can chat for a minute before you must return.” She pulled the chain on the small lamp that was sitting on the table, and it lit up as she took a chair and sat down. Sybil glanced longingly once more at the books on the shelf, and then joined the woman at the table.

“Why aren’t there any books here? If it’s a library, there should be more books,” Sybil told the old woman.

“They’re still being written, Sybil,” the woman told the girl. “As I said before, this is YOUR library.” Sybil considered the statement for a moment, and then glanced back over to the volumes on the BIOGRAPHY bookcase.

“So those are my biography books?”

“Yes.”

“Who writes them?”

“Well, you are the author, technically speaking. You choose your actions. I just record them.”



“Why are there so few books? I’ve made up tons of stories in my head. Can’t you write those?” Sybil asked. The librarian laughed.

“Sybil, dear, you’re only ten years old. There is a lot of writing to still be done. I’ve included some of your better stories, but they are tiny compared to the adventures I’m sure you’ll experience outside of your head. Soon you’ll have volumes and volumes sitting on the shelves here. Mostly here on the Biography shelf, but I hope you’ll give me a chance to write some Romance. Or a Western! If you travel, do go west. Or Horror! But then again ...though Horror would be fun to write, I hope for your sake I don’t have to.” She chuckled at her musings, and again when she saw the look of disgust on Sybil’s face.

“I don’t WANT a romance. And maybe I’ll go EAST instead of West!” she retaliated, her face scrunched up in a scowl.

“I’m well aware,” the librarian said quietly. She looked at the small silver watch she wore on her wrist, and then looked up at the young girl before her. “Now it’s time for you to get going. Although you’ve only been here for less than ten minutes, in your world it’s been close to twenty. Nothing you have said here has been said aloud in your world, but you do appear to be sleeping quite deeply. It’s best to be sure you won’t be disturbed in your world when you visit the library and me. People, mothers especially, sometimes become panicked when they see their loved ones in such a state.” She pointed towards a large EXIT sign and continued, “Just go through those large doors there, and you know where you can find me again. Goodbye, Sybil. Until next time.”

Sybil took one last, long look at the old woman sitting across the table from her before she stood up from her chair and walked towards the large double doors illuminated by the glowing sign above them. She glanced back behind her where the old woman had pulled down a large book and had begun scribbling away in it with an old-fashioned fountain pen. Sybil pushed open the heavy doors, and found herself staring back at her bedroom ceiling.

