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# *The Mysterious Librarian*



# Chapter 1

## *Books and Mouse Droppings*

It all began one Tuesday in May, at noon on the dot. Mayor Mark Peevish had plonked his huge bottom on his chair and planted his feet on his desk. He was about to tuck into a ginormous pastrami sandwich when suddenly there appeared a strange old lady right in front of him. She was very tall and very skinny and seemed to come out of nowhere. She was wearing a massive hat and a long blue dress, which was quite elegant, although it had seen better days.

“I’ve come... umm... I’ve come for the post of.... umm... librarian,” she muttered in a mousy voice.

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Mark Peevish was so surprised that he nearly choked on his sandwich. He put his feet back on the carpet, and his magnificent tower of sixty-four slices of meat, dripping with mustard and fat, collapsed all over his desk.

A few minutes later, she had been hired. For the first time in its history, the town of Saint-Anatole had a librarian. The mayor couldn't quite believe it. They had been advertising for the post in a local newspaper for the last thirty years, but no one had ever shown any interest, because the library was not much bigger than a broom cupboard, and the few old books it had were covered in mouse droppings.

That beanpole of a woman must be bonkers, the mayor thought when the new librarian had left his office. What was her name again?

He picked up the contract to have a look. Having wiped off some bread crumbs, he found her signature in between some splotches of mustard: *Miss Charlotte*.





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“Blinking beaver hats! She doesn’t even have a surname,” the mayor said to himself, a little bemused.

But then he shrugged his shoulders and began to put his sandwich back together again. Actually, he was no more interested in the library and its new librarian than he was in determining the sex of a blue-footed booby. What Mark Peevish enjoyed was bossing about his secretary, watching boxing matches on the telly and stuffing his face with pastrami sandwiches. He had never opened a book in his life.

# Chapter 2

## *A Most Peculiar Librarian*

Miss Charlotte uttered a shrill cry when she entered the teeny-weeny library. A fat, juicy spider had just brushed against the tip of her nose.

A few minutes later Miss Charlotte was busy removing spiderwebs, sweeping up mouse droppings and dusting off books. When the little room was clean at last, the new librarian, in her beautiful, neat handwriting, drew up a list of everything that was there:

- *One hundred and sixty-three complete books*
- *Two hundred and two mouse-eaten books*

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- *Seven huge black, hairy spiders*
- *Two smaller ones (possibly baby spiders?)*
- *Five mice*

Chuffed with the work she had accomplished, Miss Charlotte rested a little while. That's when her eye fell on the biggest spider of the lot. It was sitting on a book and didn't move.

“Poor little darling! You look all depressed!”

The spider slowly moved its long trembling legs, whereupon Miss Charlotte concluded that it had replied: “It's true.”

She felt a pang in her heart and delicately picked the spider up and put it in her hand.

“You are not as ugly as all that,” she said, to cheer it up. “Don't worry, I'll find you a little corner.”

A few minutes later the new librarian left a note underneath the door of the mayor's office.

*Dear Mr Peevish,  
We must absolutely buy some new books.  
A thousand dollars will be enough to start*

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*with. Please be so kind as to slip the money under the library door.*

*With sincere thanks,*

*Miss Charlotte*

Immensely proud of what she had achieved, the librarian left the Town Hall, whistling a tune. She was a bit tired after all that hard work, but she was convinced she was really going to like her new job. And more than anything else, she couldn't wait to meet the local children.

“I'm sure they'll be there tomorrow,” she said, hurrying along joyfully.

That evening, Leo, the son of the woman who owned Saint-Anatole's pet shop, wrote a letter to the girl he had been dreaming about ever since last summer. He had already written tons of letters to Marie, but they had all ended up in the waste-paper basket. This time, however, he had a perfect excuse to actually put his letter in the post.



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*Dear Marie,*

*Do you remember me? I'm Leo... the boy who removed those leeches from your back last summer at the Explorers' Camp.*

*One evening, when we were all sitting around the campfire, you told us a story of a very tall and very skinny old lady who was always talking to her pebble called Gertrude, which she kept under her hat. She covered for your old teacher for a few months before she disappeared. You told us she was very, very strange. And very kind too. We all had the feeling you liked her a lot.*

*Do you think it is possible that your old teacher could be the same person as our new librarian? Late this afternoon a lady just like the one you described came into our pet shop. She said she was our new librarian. Her voice was as soft as a kitten's fur and she seemed VERY odd indeed.*

*Believe it or not, she wanted to buy... spider food! My mum thought she was joking, but she was dead-serious. In the end she left the*

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*shop with a massive bag of mouse food, which she transported to the library on a little cart she pulled along.*

*Her name is Miss Charlotte, and she really is a lot like the lady you talked about, except that she doesn't have a pebble. I know this because she took off her hat to scratch her head.*

*Write back soon,*

*Leo*