

## The Loving Librarian

Everyone in the town of Tristis<sup>1</sup> knew that Mrs. Saevus<sup>2</sup> was the most horrible librarian to ever walk the earth. Whenever she read to children during story time, they always cried. Whenever someone raised their voice inside the Tristis Public Library above an almost inaudible whisper, she marched over to them and told them to get out. And whenever someone brought up over ten books to the checkout counter, she always sternly demanded that they return at least half back to the shelf due to inconveniencing others. Kids and adults alike feared going to the library whenever Mrs. Saevus was there, which she was. A lot.

So, when the news reached about every ear in Tristis that Mrs. Saevus had broken her leg from slipping on slick ice, everyone in Tristis felt immensely relieved. A replacement librarian took her place until she recovered. Her name was Mrs. Amans<sup>3</sup>. She wore flowy floral dresses and silver cowgirl boots that would sparkle radiantly. She did not make children cry. She let people talk freely. She let people check out as many books as they wished. No one feared going to the library anymore.

But you know the unfortunate nature of rumors. Sometimes they aren't true. So, I decided to have a look for myself to try and discover if this so-called Mrs. Amans was even real. I headed out early on a frosty Monday morning to be able to catch Mrs. Amans before the school bus came. I walked down the streets of Tristis, the wind like a bitter embrace around me. I passed the bakery, which smelled enticing, the barber's shop, the antique store, past my church, and arrived at our old Tristis Public Library. It was an ancient red brick building, and there were minute shrubs planted around the perimeter of the building, although there was currently more snow visible on them than actual bush. I stamped my boots on the stone walkway winding around the bushes, then headed inside.

It was nice and toasty inside, and there were tall, standing shelves of books lined up in symmetrical lines down the front, as usual. The walls were a buttery yellow color, and the carpet was a striped gray. I made my way to the front desk. Three other people were in line before me, so I patiently waited my turn.

The first two people in line were a little boy and his mother. They both had dark, curly hair and olive skin. Mrs. Amans was checking out a book for them when the boy's mother paused abruptly. "George, did you remember your costume for the school luau?" This was an event that took place at the elementary school every year. "Oh no! I forgot!" George's head drooped like a wilted flower. "Will this help?" Mrs. Amans questioned, pulling a vibrant pink lei from her desk drawer. "The children and I have been making these in my craft hour to celebrate this momentous occasion!" Mrs. Amans passed the flowery necklace to George, who immediately looped it around his neck. His mom stammered a thank-you as she and George walked out of the line.

The second person in line was a man who looked to be about 20 years old holding a steaming chai latte. Mrs. Amans greeted him kindly. "Hello, Jeremiah! I just wanted to let you know that the computers on your left have a new game on them that you might enjoy." "What game?" Jeremiah

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<sup>1</sup> *Dreary* in Latin

<sup>2</sup> *Cruel* in Latin

<sup>3</sup> *Loving* in Latin

wondered curiously as he handed Mrs. Amans one of the books he was returning. “Oh, it’s a Rubik’s Cube solving app. I hope you will enjoy it.” Jeremiah looked shocked. “I……I’ve been wanting to be a speed cuber since I was seven!” And he skipped away to his left to fire up the computer as if he were seven again, careful not to spill his latte.

I watched as Jeremiah began his game and was suddenly snapped away from my technology stupor by Mrs. Amans. “May I help you with anything?” I turned to face her. She was wearing a flowy turquoise dress smothered in elegant white lilies, and I could just picture her sparkling boots, too. “Are you perhaps searching for a book about mechanics?” she questioned. Mechanics? Mechanics! I had completely forgotten about my mechanics test at school today! “Yes,” I replied, feeling frantic. “No need to fret,” Mrs. Amans reassured, pulling a weathered book from her desk drawer. “I think this would be helpful to you; don’t you agree?” I nodded vigorously as I took the textbook from her outstretched hand. The lengthy title read *Mechanics for the Middle Schooler, a Brief History of the Grandfather Clock*. “I would advise you to read this on the bus.” And I read it on the bus, as she said. I read the entire book. And when I got my test back the next day at school, my grade was an A+.

The next day, I visited Mrs. Amans again. No one in the town of Tristis could seem to have enough of her expertise and wisdom. She gave them whatever they needed, even if they hadn’t asked for it. It was as if just knew, and she cared. A lot. Crowds flocked to the Tristis Public Library to talk to her. One day, Mrs. Amans handed out free mugs of hot cocoa inside of the building. The next day, it was free sugared maple donuts. And she organized a toy drive even though it was after Christmas. The town of Tristis felt so much lighter and brighter. Other local businesses were inspired by her, too. The bakery gave out free day-old bread. The barber’s shop gave out free haircuts to kids. The antique store gave out generous discounts on Fridays. Tristis was bursting at the seams with love.

But, as everyone knew would happen eventually, Mrs. Saevus announced that she would be returning to the library on a Friday of the second week of February, but the town begged, even pleaded with Mrs. Amans to stay at the library, but she kindly refused. “I intend on traveling the world,” she told them. On her final day at Tristis Public Library, about everyone in Tristis showed up to the building that day. The roads were ironically icy, and the wind was frigid, so when we walked in, it was a delight to spot a table laid out with sugared maple donuts and mugs of hot cocoa. Mrs. Amans gathered everyone in a large circle around her desk after they had feasted for a while. She wore a yellow gown embroidered with pale pink roses, and her silver cowgirl boots shimmered. I spotted George among the well-wishers in the circle, wearing his fluffy pink lei even though the luau was over. I waved at him, and he waved back. Jeremiah was also in the circle, but I caught him stealing glances back to the computers. I waved to him, too.

Just then, Mrs. Amans began her speech. “Hello, fair folk of Tristis. Thank you for coming today. For a month, I’ve been your replacement librarian, as poor Mrs. Saevus’s leg was broken, as you all know. I won’t be staying at the Tristis Public Library, though.” Everyone heaved a depressed sigh. “But I would like to leave everyone with some words of encouragement,” Mrs. Amans continued. Everyone perked up significantly. “The world is like a closed book until you have enough courage to open it up and see what’s inside. Each chapter in your life is like a new chapter in the book of life. It might not always be perfect, but hopefully this chapter can remind you of the beauty lurking behind the next page. Don’t fear what is ahead, for I believe that there will be many blessings yet to come.” I think in that moment, everyone exhaled, not realizing that they’d been holding their breath. I’d been holding mine. “Now, I’d like to leave

you with a parting gift." Mrs. Amans produced a light-toned pink rose from her desk drawer, and to my surprise, handed it to me. "Use it well," she whispered in my ear.

The next day, Mrs. Saevus returned to her position in the Tristis Public Library. I brought a small cup of water to the library that day and placed the lovely rose in it on Mrs. Saevus's desk. "What's that?" she snapped, glancing at the flower warily, her beady eyes narrowed.

"A rose," I answered. She sniffed disapprovingly. "Well, did you turn into a florist overnight?"

I smiled. "Maybe. It could be lurking behind the next page of the book of life, who knows?"

She raised a pencil-thin eyebrow. "Book of life?"

I nodded.

"Where'd you hear that?" she questioned suspiciously.

"The loving librarian," I replied.