

ONE OF THOSE DAYS

by
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BRRUUURRR!

Saturday morning, and the electric door of the tiny Forest Side library brruuurrrred open, letting in the first customer of the day. Samantha, the Librarian on duty for this three hour shift, stood ready.

“Quick! Quick! There’sadishwasherhangingonthis! whosaid ‘leadonmacduff?’” the customer babbled breathlessly.

“Sorry?” The bemused Samantha blinked.

Taking a deep breath the customer started again.

“ competition...prize...dishwasher...endtoday...lastquestion... who said...’Lead on Macduff’? “

“Ahh”, said Samantha smiling. “Good”.

“Yes, yes I know it’s good, but who said it? It’s a play, I know it’s a play, just can’t remember....”

“No, it’s Good....” Samantha tried to continue but was interrupted.

“SHAKESPEARE! Yes, it’s a Shakespearean play... Shakespeare ... “ She pondered then suddenly, “MACBETH! Yes, that’s who it was - Macbeth!”

“No no! it’s *Good*”

“Yes I know it’s good! The dishwasher is mine! Thanks a lot!” and with that, the customer turned and ran from the library.

“NO” Samantha shouted after her, “the answer is *Good*, Captain Good from King Solomon’s Mines by H Rider Haggard. Macbeth said ‘*Lay on, Macduff*’. It’s a popular misconception...” but it was too late. The customer was gone.

Samantha shook her head sadly.

‘Scuse me.’ a voice said behind her. She turned and faced the new customer, a small wizened lady wearing a long plaid coat.

“Hello, how can I help you?” Samantha asked

“Err, I wos wundrin’ ow much these books cost?” pointing to a pile of three books she had placed on the counter in front of her.

“Oh, these books are not for sale, you can borrow them for three weeks then bring them back when you have read them.”

The customer looked puzzled.

“But they’re not for me, it’s me sister’s burfday and their a present for ‘er.”

“I’m sorry but we don’t sell books, we only loan them out.”

“Huh! Wot kind of shop is this weer you can’t buy books? It’s me sister’s birfday and I want ‘em as a present for her and I can’t buy em? Huh! I won’t come to this shop again!” She turned and headed for the door, mumbling to herself “Can’t buy books? I wont come to this shop again me sister’s birfday and I can’t buy boo...” the doors brruuurrrred behind her.

Samantha sighed.

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Moving to the Returns chute (the place where books are returned overnight when the library is closed) she became aware of a strange smell emanating from the box where the books rested. Gingerly, she removed the pile of books, carefully examining each one, until she came to the one at the bottom of the pile. This was a large colourful book called '*Fragrant Roses of Australia.*' The strange smell seemed to be coming from this book. Carefully, she picked it up and placed it on the counter separately from the other books, and opened it. There inside, on page 198, stuck to a picture of bright yellow rose, were the remains of a fish. Samantha stared in disbelief. It was the back bone and skin of a grilled fish, obviously being used as a bookmark. She had come across various things used as bookmarks - holiday photos, pressed flowers, even once a rasher of bacon - but nothing as bad as this. The fish was stuck to the page, producing the fishy smell. With great care, she tried to remove the skin and backbone, but it crumbled in her hands, making them all greasy – and then the 'phone rang.

Automatically, she reached out, stopping just in time before she smeared the 'phone with grease. Frantically she searched around for the box of tissues kept on the desk for the customers' use, and then remembered she had used the last tissue the day before on a little girl with a runny nose. Sighing, she reached for the 'phone and tried to pick it up with as little finger contact as she could. As she lifted the receiver to her ear - it slipped from her greasy fingers and cut the caller off. Without thinking, she wiped her hands on her blouse. Horrified, she ran to the staff room, smearing fish on the door handle in her haste to wash her hands. As she was doing so, the 'phone rang again. She hurried to dry her hands on a paper towel and ran back to the desk, getting there - just as the phone stopped ringing. She shook her head in disbelief.

Another customer approached.

"Hello, how can I help you?" Samantha asked, with a slightly distracted air.

"I'm looking for a book."

"Well, we have plenty of those here", she replied, regaining her composure and smiling brightly.

"Well, I'm looking for one on roses."

Samantha's face fell.

"You see," the customer continued, "my neighbour Nelly borrowed this wonderful book about roses and their smells, and my garden is in need of a makeover and I was thinking of planting roses, and I want ones that have nice smells..."

"Sorry," interrupted Samantha, horrified "All our rose books are out."

"But Nelly said she returned it here yesterday, through the chute after you were closed."

"Er, yes I remember the book" Samantha replied hastily, "but it has gone out again. Roses are very popular. Especially at this time of year. Summer. People like to garden. Big demand, you know. Sorry. Can't help."

As she said this, her eyes flickered to the right as she noticed the rose book still lying on the counter next to her, in full view. Horrified she saw the customer follow her eyes to the book.

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“Oh look! There it is! I thought you said it had been borrowed again? I’ll take it!” With that the customer picked up the book, fish remains still embedded on page 198.

“Here’s my card.” The library card was offered to Samantha. With no option she could think of, she issued the book to the happy customer.

“I can’t wait to plant some of those lovely roses Nelly mentioned,” as she put the book in her bag. “You know, I think I can smell them already. Bye!”

“Goodbye,” Samantha replied, weakly.

Just as she was about to rest her head in her hands in despair, the phone rang again. Being very careful this time, because the receiver was still a bit greasy, she picked it up.

“Hello, Forest Side sub-library, how can I help you?”

“Is that the library?”

“Er, yes.”

“Cos I’ve been ringing and I think there’s something wrong with your phone. I keep getting cut off or not getting an answer.”

“Oh yes,” Samantha lied, “we have been having problems with it, but you are through now. How can I help you?”

“Well, I am a student in year 9. Oh, my name’s Simon by the way.”

“Hi Simon, I’m Samantha.”

“Hello. Anyway, I have to do a science project. I decided to do my project on Ivan Pavlov, born in Ryazan in Russia on 14th September 1849. You know, the scientist who found out that a dog would drool at the sound of a bell ringing when it thought it would be fed ‘cos it had been conditioned to hear a bell before it was fed, so when it heard the bell it would think it was going to be fed, and so it would start to drool at the sound of the bell...”

“Yes, yes I know who you mean,” Samantha interrupted. It sounded as though he was about to read out his entire project over the phone. “So, what is it that I can help you with?”

“What was the name of the dog?”

“Sorry?”

“The dog, the one that drooled. What was it called?”

“Erm, I don’t really think it had a name.”

“But it must have. My cousin works in a research lab at the University and she said all the animals they use, even the mice and hamsters, have names, so Pavlov must have named his dog. So what was it?”

“Really, I’m sure it didn’t have a name!”

“But it must have!”

“OK, OK.” Samantha sighed. “Hang on a minute and I will go and have a look.”

“Thanks.”

Well, she thought, totally bemused, what can I say? No one knows the dog’s name, it was just a dog. She picked up the phone.

“Hello, are you there?”

“Hi, yes, what was it called then?”

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“Boris,” she said firmly.

“You sure?”

“Absolutely. Ivan Pavlov called his dog *Boris*.”

“Cor, thanks a lot!” The phone went dead.

Samantha hung up. How could she lie like that? What was happening to her? Rubbing her nose she realised her hand smelt of fish again, it had transferred from the ‘phone. She had not had time to clean it. She headed to the staff room to clean her hands and get a cloth for the phone. She washed her hands again and picked up a cloth to take back to clean the telephone. On the way to the desk she was stopped by yet another customer.

“Oh, there you are. I thought the library was empty and we could help ourselves, take books without borrowing them and not bring them back, heh heh!” he laughed.

Samantha smiled thinly.

“Well, I am here and sorry, you can’t. What can I do for you?”

“I’m looking for a book...” he started, and Samantha’s heart sank.

“It’s got a green cover,” he finished.

“You want a book that is green?” she asked puzzled.

“Yes, I saw it in the bookshop the other week and it looked really good,” he said happily. “Oh, and it’s about this big” he continued gesturing with his hands to describe the size. Samantha looked at him as he smiled with happy expectation.

“Let me get this straight, you saw a book in the bookshop the other week, it was green, it looked good and was about this size,’ She repeated his gesture, “And you want to borrow it from the library?”

“Yes, that’s the one! Have you got it?” he was almost jumping with joy now.

“Sorry, it was borrowed yesterday. Won’t be back for three weeks.” Samantha said firmly.

His face fell.

“Oh, never mind then. “ He said dejectedly. “It’s my birthday in two weeks and my wife is buying it for me. I was just being impatient. Thanks anyway.” He left Samantha standing with her mouth open, speechless.

The ‘phone rang.

Samantha rushed to the desk and picked the receiver up, it still smelled of fish.

“Hi Samantha, it’s me Simon again, Another science question. What was Schrödinger’s cat called?”

Samantha banged her head on the counter.

It was One of Those Days.

THE END