

It all began with a library.

It was a simple, everyday library, its windows streaked with water stains from the spring heavy rains. It stood rather lopsided, with a crumbling white concrete facade and a set of heavy wooden doors.

Monica was a cheerful, curious girl with long blonde hair and clear, wide blue eyes. She loved the library and was friends with the librarian, Mr. Linden.

It all happened one day, when Monica ran out of books to read. She rode to the library on her bike and stepped inside the wooden doors. Instantly the smell of paper, leather, and dust hit her, creeping up her nose and making her sneeze.

It didn't take Monica long to find a book. Scanning the shelves, one specific book caught her attention. She picked it out and stroked the wrinkled leather on its cover as she read the title printed in golden letters: The Book of Death.

As she was checking out the book at the counter, Mr. Linden took her library card and gasped when he read the title of the book. He stared at Monica, his brown eyes stretched wide. He hesitated to give the book back to her. "I don't know if I should give this to you. You have to be careful with this book," he warned. "It's very dangerous."

Monica nodded slowly, not really knowing what he meant. "Please, can I check it out? I promise I'll be careful," she begged, and reluctantly he agreed.

That night, Monica read the book eagerly, taking in the descriptive words and the surprisingly realistic pictures. She fell asleep at midnight with the book still clutched in her hands and her reading lamp still on.

The next morning, Monica's parents were horrified to find her dead in bed.

Monica's skin was a pale ash-gray and her face was a startling blue color. Deep marks crisscrossed across her neck, as if someone, or something, had strangled her. Strangely, scattered leaves littered the floor. Lying open on the floor was the library book, The Book of Death, from Mr. Linden's library.

He had warned her about the book. Now it was too late.

A detective rushed to the scene and immediately began a thorough investigation in Monica's room. It was an extremely unusual case, and he studied the evidence in confusion. "What could possibly have happened?" he wondered as he examined the neck wounds on Monica. They cut deeply into her flesh, as though something had wrapped string around her and strangled her.

The detective's hand brushed against something sharp and he glanced down to find it touching a leaf. It was a vine leaf, small and edged with spiked barbs.

Mystified, his eyes fell upon an open book on the floor and he stared at the page it was turned to. A sudden chill crept down his back when he saw the picture on the page. It was a long, spindly vine stalk covered in the same vine leaves like the ones scattered across the room. What did it all mean?

Wanting to investigate further, the detective brought the book back to the police station to read it. He read the book late into the night and, worn out from a hard day of investigating, fell asleep slumped over his desk. He had been reading a page about cockroaches before he fell asleep.

He was shocked in consciousness by the sensation of something crawling over him. Jerking awake, he found in horror that huge cockroaches were covering him. Cockroaches just like the ones in the book he had been reading last night!

Realization swept through him. The book was evil and had to be destroyed! Frantically, he brushed the stinging cockroaches off his body, only to find thousands more pouring out of the page of the book and onto him.

In a last desperate attempt, he whipped out his lighter, deftly flicked the wheel, and held it to the book, setting it ablaze. The tiny flame quickly exploded into a bonfire that greedily devoured the pages until nothing was left but a pile of ashes.

"It's over," he thought with an overwhelming pang of relief. "The book will never harm anybody again."