

Library Wars

A Short Play

Written by

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A One-Act Play

Blue Moon Plays

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LIBRARY WARS

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Cast of Characters:

DIRECTOR (Ms. Delilah Stone), professional attire
MR. FREDI (Alfredo), gray-haired, suit and tie
MR. COGBURN, middle aged, golf clothes
MRS. BROWN (Hidiza), Black, confident demeanor
MS. LASSITER (Sheila), professional attire, perky
MS. KROPATCHEK (Elisa), casually dressed, motherly
SHERIFF SIZEMORE, never seen (voice on Zoom call)
MEMBER OF PUBLIC 1, (MAN WITH CASE), hipster
MEMBER OF PUBLIC 2, MALE, WORK CLOTHES
MEMBER OF PUBLIC 3, FEMALE, MIDDLEAGED, IN WHEELCHAIR
MEMBER OF PUBLIC 4, F/M/OTHER, YOUNGER, CASUAL CLOTHES
MASKED INTRUDER, MALE, DARK CLOTHES.

SETTING: CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT. A TABLE WITH FOLDING CHAIRS HOLDS A MONITOR. A CLOCK READS FIVE TO SEVEN. SEVERAL MORE CHAIRS ARE PRESENT. A SHELF OR CART OF BOOKS UPSTAGE. A "READ" POSTER ON WALL.

AT RISE: DIRECTOR AND MR. FREDI ENTER.
DIRECTOR CARRIES BINDERS, YELLOW PADS, AND PENS.

DIRECTOR: I made orientation binders for our new members, Alfredo. And Sheriff Sizemore -- he's one of

the new appointees -- can only attend via Zoom this evening. He'll try to make it next month.

MR. FREDI: Sounds good, Delilah. Did you bring the recorder?

DIRECTOR nods. Arranges the table, setting out binders and pads and pens, a small digital recorder, fussing with the monitor. A Zoom screen comes up but no one's visible yet.

MRS. BROWN and MS. KROPATCHEK enter, chatting casually. Each carries a binder. DIRECTOR greets Hidiza and Elisa by first names; obviously old friends.

When they're seated the three new members enter.

DIRECTOR: Good evening. We've prepared briefing binders for our new members, with essential references. And there's a state oath of office (hands it around) you need to sign, as a trustee.

MR. COGBURN: (Glances suspiciously at seated members.) Are you guys the former members?

MR. FREDI: The continuing members, if that's what you mean.

MR. COGBURN: Where are the former ones?

COGBURN and LASSITER finish signing oaths and hand them to DIRECTOR.

MR. FREDI: That's whose seats you're taking. I'm Alfredo Fredi, the chairperson. This is Mrs. Brown, Hidiza Brown, and Elisa Kropatchek. They're been serving for some years. The library director, Ms. Stone, serves as secretary during Board meetings.

MR. COGBURN: Huh. How many years?

MR. FREDI: A good many. Reappointed several times. Mrs. Brown is a retired librarian. MS. KROPATCHEK's a public-spirited citizen. You might know her husband Mike, from the furniture store.

MS. LASSITER: The one downtown, or the one in the mall?

MS. KROPATCHEK: Actually we own both locations. (She and LASSITER shake hands)

DIRECTOR: Mr. Fredi raised most of the funding for our southern branch. Back when the state said the literacy rates there were too low to need a new library.

MR. FREDI: (To seated members) Please welcome our new members. They were appointed by the County in place of those who supported, um, the former director. Can you each say a few words to introduce yourselves?

MS. LASSITER: Sheila Lassiter, with Breakstone Realty. (Hands out cards.) Breakstone breaks records!

MR. COGBURN: Don Cogburn. Chamber, VFW, retired Army. (shakes hands all around. The earlier members seem reluctant, but comply.)

MR. FREDI: And don't forget Sheriff Sizemore, who'll be joining us via Zoom. (To DIRECTOR) is that working yet?

DIRECTOR: (To screen) Can you hear me?

Four more people file in. They halt and stand looking uncertain. One carries a long black case.

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 1 (MAN WITH CASE): This is a public meeting, right?

DIRECTOR: All our board meetings are open to the public.

MR. FREDI: Unless we have to go into closed session to discuss personnel matters.

DIRECTOR: (points to chairs) Take a seat, please. We'll be calling for comments shortly, after we come to order and approve the minutes and so on.

The four public members take seats to the side. MAN WITH CASE sets it down carefully by his boots.

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 2: (asided) That a rifle, buddy?

MAN WITH CASE: Trombone.

MR. FREDI: I see we have a quorum. All right, everyone, the meeting will come to order. (They

quiet.) Has everyone read last month's minutes? They were included in your email package. (Board members nod.) Corrections or additions? (looks around.) Do I hear a motion to accept?

MRS. BROWN: So move.

MS. KROPATCHEK: Second.

MR. FREDI: All in favor?

BOARD MEMBERS: Aye. (together)

MR. FREDI: Opposed? (No objections.) The ayes have it. Treasurer's report.

DIRECTOR: He called in sick. Unable to make it tonight.

MR. FREDI: We'll defer until next month, then. (Refers to binder.) Next on our agenda is the director's report.

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 2: When are the public comments?

MR. FREDI: Immediately after the director's report, ma'am.

DIRECTOR: I'll update regarding our southern branch first. Patrons are complaining about broken concrete in the walkways. Our older guests find it a tripping hazard. Unfortunately, we have no funds for repairs.

The good news is that patron numbers and circulation figures continue to rise, up five percent over last year. Also, there are always seven or eight students waiting to use the new computers we bought with the USDA grant. Residents also use them to apply for jobs, research medical information, and file for social security and unemployment benefits.

For the main branch, our security system here in the main library is still out of order; there's a part for the cameras that isn't manufactured anymore. The lights in the back alley are still out. Also, the leak last week in the air conditioning unit ruined the carpet behind the circ desk. Jack spread cat litter but he's afraid of black mold.

MRS. BROWN: That would be very bad for the collection. Is there any way to bring in a dehumidifier?

DIRECTOR: I've asked our Friends group if they can help us rent one, Hidiza. Unfortunately, as you know, the County cut our budget by ten percent this year. So we're very limited in how we can respond to unexpected expenses.

MS. KROPATCHEK: We have a portable unit at the downtown store. I think we could loan it for a few days, if you send someone with the van.

MRS. BROWN: But they cut it by ten percent last year, too. At the same time they gave the police two hundred thousand dollars for an armored car.

SHERIFF: (from monitor: Incomprehensible sentence, badly distorted over speaker.)

MR. FREDI: I'm sorry, we're not hearing you very well here, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: (incomprehensible)

MR. FREDI: I think what he's trying to say, Hidiza, is that the county supervisors sort of lost confidence when our previous director was convicted of embezzlement. Before Director Stone came to us from Ohio.

(A moment of contemplative silence.)

MS. LASSITER: (Brightly) Well, that's why we were appointed, to bring this organization into line. (Smiles around sweetly.) I think we'll all agree that the essentials, such as our schools, police force and jail, road maintenance, have to come before a luxury like a library. After all, we have the Internet now!

The older members stiffen. FREDI and the DIRECTOR exchange glances.

MRS. BROWN: (Ironically) Yes, that's certainly a trustworthy source of information. But, you know, not every county resident has access. Especially our many disadvantaged families.

The MAN WITH CASE shifts the black case by his boots. Crosses his arms. Looks displeased.

MR. FREDI: Good point. Moving to old business . . .
Next is a second reading of the dress code. Page 12?
(They leaf through binders.) Current policy reads:
"Patrons must wear shoes and be covered from the
waist up. Midriff-baring tops are not acceptable." Any
proposed changes?

MRS. BROWN: I had one. The way it reads now,
swimwear is not acceptable. What if they come in, in
a bikini?

MR. FREDI: Come on, Hidiza. No one would go to the
library in a bikini.

MRS. BROWN: What if they came in from the lake?
We have tourists visit, during the summer.

MR. FREDI: Okay, tourists. . . .

MS. LASSITER: We do have a good deal of visitor
traffic, hotel guests, restaurant patrons. Welcoming
them's just good business. That's not a bad
suggestion, to allow swimwear. With some kind of
coverup or top, of course.

DIRECTOR: As long as they wear shoes.

MR. COGBURN: And pants.

MR. FREDI: Excuse me?

MR. COGBURN: "Patrons must wear shoes and be
covered from the waist up." What about from the waist
down? Is it okay to come in butt-ass naked as long as
you have a T shirt on?

Members react. Finally mutter embarrassed assent.

MR. FREDI: Can we make that a motion? Someone?

MS. LASSITER: I so move.

MR. COGBURN: Second.

DIRECTOR: What was the motion?

MR. COGBURN: That we, uh, amend the dress code to allow swimwear, with a coverup, and they have to wear pants or skirts or something like that, too. Below the waist.

MR. FREDI: All in favor, say aye.

BOARD MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. FREDI: All opposed, Nay. (No objections) The ayes have it. (Consults agenda.) That takes us to the public comment portion of our meeting. Are there any comments?

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 1, MEMBER OF PUBLIC 2:
(both raise hands, 2 slightly earlier)

MR. FREDI: (Points to 2) Yes? And please state your name.

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 2: Hi, My name's Jerry Finn and I got a question about some books my kid brought home. Some of them were, I'd say, pretty . . . pretty graphic, some of them. I wanted to know what

kind of librarian lets a kid walk out of there with that kind of, pardon my French, that kind of smut.

MR. COGBURN: That's a question I'm interested in as well. Sir, I'm glad you brought it up, thank you for attending and . . . bringing that up.

MR. FREDI: Madame Director, would you like to address that?

DIRECTOR: Yes, Mr. Finn. Connie, at the front desk, told me you had returned a book titled ABNORMAL and registered a complaint. We're reviewing the volume now.

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 2: I turned in FOUR books. All about sex and queer stuff and changing your God-given gender. What does that mean, you're "reviewing" it? I'm a parent. I have rights. And one of those rights is to protect my daughter, who's only fourteen, against crap like that.

DIRECTOR: Indeed you do have parental rights, sir, but the library exists to serve everyone. That said, we have a protocol, when titles are challenged, and that title is currently under review.

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 3: Is it still on the shelves?

DIRECTOR: Until our review is complete, yes, ma'am, it is.

MR. COGBURN: I'd like to know what this "pro-to-col" consists of. Who's reading it? Who ordered the book? Who makes these decisions?

DIRECTOR: If you will turn to page 28 in your binder, you will find a description of our process when a book or audio title is challenged.

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 3: (Flourishes iPhone) I downloaded this app that tracks bad library books around the country. Books that are sick, books that make innocent kids hate themselves because of what their ancestors're supposed to have done. Do you want me to read what it says about ABNORMAL?

DIRECTOR: I don't think that's --

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 3: (reading from phone)
"ABNORMAL continues this author's grat-uit-ous and detailed normalization of anal and oral intercourse, self-abuse, bondage, sadomasochism, homosexuality, ped, ped, pederasty, and even less well known violations of Biblical guidance and basic hygiene. At all costs, force your school and local libraries to remove this disgusting graphic novel, if you have your innocent child's welfare at heart."

DIRECTOR: I really don't believe --

MRS. BROWN: Have you read this book, Ma'am?

MEMBER OF PUBLIC 3: I'm not about to lower myself to read trash like this.