

20 BOOKS IN SEARCH OF A READER

By Bradley Hayward

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CHARACTERS

(2-21 actors, any gender)

LIBRARIAN mostly calm and usually patient, any age

STUDENT multiple personalities, 12-18 years old

NOTE: The actor playing the LIBRARIAN should remain the same throughout, but the STUDENT could be played by a single actor, a different actor in every scene, or any combination in between.

SET

A high school library. There is a large desk with many books and a computer on it.

PROPS

Books, books, and more books

Library card

Five dollar bill

Sword

Cape

Vampire fangs

Skull

Bag of chips

COSTUMES

LIBRARIAN: Conservative work attire; perhaps a comfortable sweater vest or a pant suit

STUDENT: Typical teenage clothing; perhaps blue jeans, a sweatshirt, and a backpack

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There is a lot of room in the text to build on, so please do so. The idea was to give actors and directors the liberty to find as many funny nuances in the dialogue and absurd bits of business as humanly possible. The script comes perilously close to going off the deep end anyway, so go ahead and take the plunge!

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THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: Hello.

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: Fine, thanks.

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: A good book.

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card.)

STUDENT: Here you go.

LIBRARIAN: Thank you.

STUDENT: You're welcome.

(LIBRARIAN takes a hand held scanner and scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Good news. You don't have any late fees.

STUDENT: Wonderful.

(LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: Here you are.

STUDENT: Great.

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: It will be on time.

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Thank you.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: Hi!

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: Awesome!

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: *Alice in Wonderland!*

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card.)

STUDENT: You got it!

LIBRARIAN: Thank you.

STUDENT: Happy days!

(LIBRARIAN scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Good news. You don't have any late fees.

STUDENT: Sweet!

(LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: Here you are.

STUDENT: Wicked!

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: Can do!

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Woot!

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: *(lethargic)* Mmm hmm.

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

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STUDENT: Meh.

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: *Catcher in the Rye.*

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card. SHE sighs loudly as SHE hands it over.)

LIBRARIAN: Thank you.

STUDENT: Uh huh.

(LIBRARIAN scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Good news. You don't have any late fees.

STUDENT: Whatever.

(LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: Here you are.

STUDENT: Not like I'm gonna read it.

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: Good one.

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Yeah, right.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: *(loudly)* What?

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: *The Miracle Worker.*

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

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STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: Your library card.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card.)

STUDENT: Here.

LIBRARIAN: Thank you.

STUDENT: What?

(LIBRARIAN scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Bad news.

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: You owe five dollars in late fees.

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: You can't check anything out.

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: You can't check anything out.

STUDENT: Why?

LIBRARIAN: You owe five dollars.

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: You owe five dollars.

STUDENT: Can you spot me?

LIBRARIAN: Sure.

(LIBRARIAN reaches into her pocket and hands STUDENT a five dollar bill.)

STUDENT: Thanks.

(STUDENT hands the five dollar bill back. LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: Here you are.

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: What?

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Huh?

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: I don't want to hear it.

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: Awful! I just came from Wal-Mart and you won't believe how stupid the people are there! I wanted to rip everyone's head off and punt them into the automotive section. Then there would be a collection of stupid heads from stupid people in a big bin next to the stupid windshield wipers. And do they really need to shout over the loudspeaker every ten seconds? "All cashiers to the front." Hang up. "An associate to jewelry." Hang up. "Wet mop to toys." Hang up. "I'm very angry at the world and want to kill myself." Hang up.

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: *In Cold Blood.*

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

STUDENT: I lost it.

LIBRARIAN: You'll have to find it.

STUDENT: Make me.

LIBRARIAN: What's your last name?

STUDENT: Krochtengle.

(LIBRARIAN types in her name. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Bad news. You owe ten dollars in late fees.

STUDENT: Does it look like I have ten dollars? Because I don't have ten dollars. If I had ten dollars, I wouldn't have to work at Wal-Mart. Then I wouldn't have to be nice to all the stupid people whose heads I would like to see severed and sold.

(LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: Next time.

STUDENT: Sucker.

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: You can kiss this book good-bye.

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Hang up.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

STUDENT: (*talking to herself*) Hello. Hello. How are you today? Fine, thanks. What can I get for you? *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.* Your library card, please.

(*STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card.*)

Here you go. Thank you. You're welcome.

(*LIBRARIAN scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.*)

Good news. You don't have any late fees. Wonderful.

(*LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.*)

Here you are. Great. It's due in three weeks. I'll return it. Enjoy. Thank you. You're welcome.

(*STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.*)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

STUDENT: Hello?

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: How are you today?

LIBRARIAN: Fine.

STUDENT: What can I get for you?

LIBRARIAN: You tell me.

STUDENT: *Catch-22.*

LIBRARIAN: Have you read it?

STUDENT: No.

LIBRARIAN: Then I can't give it to you.

STUDENT: Why not?

LIBRARIAN: You have to read it first.

STUDENT: How can I read it unless I check it out?

LIBRARIAN: You can't.

STUDENT: So you're saying I can't check it out until I've read it, but I can't read it until I've checked it out?

LIBRARIAN: That's right.

STUDENT: That stinks.

LIBRARIAN: It does.

STUDENT: What am I supposed to do now?

LIBRARIAN: Figure it out.

STUDENT: How?

LIBRARIAN: No clue.

STUDENT: Crap.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: *(in a happy daze)* How little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue.

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: There will be little rubs and disappointments everywhere, and we are all apt to expect too much; but then, if one scheme of happiness fails, human nature turns to another; if the first calculation is wrong, we make a second better: we find comfort somewhere.

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book! When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library.

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card.)

STUDENT: One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other.

LIBRARIAN: Thank you.

STUDENT: We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be.

(LIBRARIAN scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Good news. You don't have any late fees.

STUDENT: A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of.

(LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: Here you are. *Pride and Prejudice.*

STUDENT: Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: How quick come the reasons for approving what we like!

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: Beep, beep.

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: Boop, boop.

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: One. Nine. Eight. Four.

LIBRARIAN: 1984?

STUDENT: Dee, dee.

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card.)

STUDENT: Doo, doo.

LIBRARIAN: Thank you.

STUDENT: Mee, mee.

(LIBRARIAN scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Good news. You don't have any late fees.

STUDENT: Hap, hap.

(LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: Here you are.

STUDENT: Dot, dot.

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: Zip, zip.

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Zap, zap, zap, zap, zap, zap, zap, zap, beep, beep, beep,
beep, beep, beep, beep, boop, boop!

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: Dear Kittie. She said hello to me.

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: She asked how I was doing. Should I have said? I did not.

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: I am confused. Scared. Yet hopeful.

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket and takes out a library card.)

STUDENT: I gave her my card. Should I have done so?

LIBRARIAN: Thank you.

STUDENT: Cursed, yet blessed, I am with cherished hopes.

(LIBRARIAN scans the card. SHE looks at the monitor.)

LIBRARIAN: Bad news.

STUDENT: I withered at her words.

LIBRARIAN: You owe us twenty dollars in late fees.

STUDENT: To return the books would have been a task filled with danger.

(LIBRARIAN scans a book and hands it to STUDENT.)

LIBRARIAN: For you, I'll waive it.

STUDENT: A wonderful person I had found. So jolly and kind!

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: I will be forever grateful.

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Good people, indeed.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, calmly typing on the computer. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: Ahoy!

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: Avast ye matey! Show me where you bury yer treasure!

Arr!

LIBRARIAN: Let me guess. *Treasure Island?*

STUDENT: I've come to hornswaggle your booty! Or walk the plank you shall!

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

(STUDENT reaches into her pocket draws a huge sword.)

STUDENT: Arr!

LIBRARIAN: Nevermind. You can have it.

(LIBRARIAN tosses her a book.)

STUDENT: Shiver me timbers!

LIBRARIAN: Bring it back whenever you want.

STUDENT: Hearties, landlubber!

LIBRARIAN: Enjoy.

STUDENT: Yo ho ho!

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, typing on the computer. STUDENT mysteriously stands up from under the desk, behind LIBRARIAN, covering her face with a cape. SHE slowly creeps forward as SHE bares her fangs. SHE is just about to bite LIBRARIAN's neck when SHE is interrupted.

LIBRARIAN: Don't even think about it.

STUDENT: *(with a Transylvanian accent)* What?

LIBRARIAN: You know "vhat."

STUDENT: Don't worry. I von't bite.

LIBRARIAN: You were just about to. I have eyes in the back of my head, you know.

STUDENT: You do?

LIBRARIAN: Of course. I'm a librarian.

STUDENT: I just vant to drink your blood. Is that too much to ask?

LIBRARIAN: *Dracula* is checked out. So put those fangs back in your mouth and move on.

STUDENT: Checked out?

LIBRARIAN: For months. There's been a run on vampire books lately.

STUDENT: Those vords are like a stake in my heart.

LIBRARIAN: Try again in three weeks. I doubt it will come back on time, but you can try.

STUDENT: Very vell. Vake me vhen it's back.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT descends back under the desk. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, typing on the computer. SHE's getting a little bit ticked off and hits the keys a little bit harder than usual. STUDENT enters and stomps like an ape as SHE approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

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STUDENT: Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig! Bash him in!

LIBRARIAN: Oh, brother.

STUDENT: Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!

LIBRARIAN: I hate this book.

STUDENT: I am lord of the flies!

LIBRARIAN: Yeah, yeah. Your library card, please.

(STUDENT produces a human skull from behind her back.)

STUDENT: This head is for the beast! It's a gift!

LIBRARIAN: How thoughtful.

(LIBRARIAN takes the skull and hands STUDENT a book.)

LIBRARIAN: Here. Now get lost.

(STUDENT chants and does a tribal dance.)

STUDENT: Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig! Bash him in! Kill the
beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!

*(STUDENT continues as SHE exits. LIBRARIAN flaps the skull's mouth,
as if it was talking.)*

LIBRARIAN: What a stupid story.

(THE LIGHTS FADE.)

***THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN is not there. STUDENT enters. SHE
looks around, but doesn't see anyone.***

STUDENT: Hello? Is anybody here?

(SHE peers over the desk.)

Hello? Are you there?

*(SHE climbs up on the desk and stands on it. SHE looks left. SHE looks
right.)*

Where is everybody? I'm looking for a copy of *The Outsiders*. Does anyone know where it is?

(SHE kneels on the desk and goes through the books.)

The Scarlet Letter. No. Watership Down. No. The Hobbit. Barf. Aha! Here it is.

(SHE takes the book and hops off the desk.)

Hello?

(SHE digs into her pocket and pulls out a library card. SHE sets it on the desk.)

I'm going to leave my library card here if anyone wants it.

(SHE crosses her arms.)

I hate my life.

(STUDENT exits in a huff. LIBRARIAN pops up from behind the desk with a bag of chips, grinning wickedly.)

LIBRARIAN: He, he, he.

(SHE crunches down on a chip. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, typing on the computer even harder. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Not you again.

STUDENT: Please, miss. I've traveled many miles for *The Grapes of Wrath*.

LIBRARIAN: You owe us a fortune.

STUDENT: I am aware. But we have no funds to speak of. Our crop is dry as a bone.

LIBRARIAN: Cry me a river.

STUDENT: Find me a river.

LIBRARIAN: I laugh in your direction. Ha!

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STUDENT: I've already given you my automobile. My tools. My pride.
What else do you want?

LIBRARIAN: Your library card.

STUDENT: I sold it for bread.

(STUDENT reaches into her pockets and pulls them out, empty.)

See, miss?

LIBRARIAN: I see.

STUDENT: 'Tis our story and we would like to read it.

(LIBRARIAN holds up a book and taunts him with it.)

LIBRARIAN: Neener, neener, neener.

STUDENT: In exchange for our late fees, would you take our
Roseasharn? She is weakly, annoying, and we can do without her.

*(LIBRARIAN considers this. Then SHE scans a book and hands it to
STUDENT.)*

LIBRARIAN: You have a deal.

STUDENT: I will bring this back. With Rosasharn.

LIBRARIAN: In three weeks.

STUDENT: The very day her baby is due to be born.

LIBRARIAN: I pray her water breaks on your crop.

STUDENT: Many thanks.

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

***THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, typing on the
computer. SHE smacks the keys even harder. STUDENT enters
and approaches the desk.***

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: *(mocking her)* "Hello."

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: "How are you today?"

LIBRARIAN: What can I get for you?

STUDENT: "What can I get for you?"

LIBRARIAN: Your library card, please.

STUDENT: "You're library card, please."

LIBRARIAN: Why are you doing that?

STUDENT: "Why are you doing that?"

LIBRARIAN: It's annoying.

STUDENT: "It's annoying."

LIBRARIAN: Stop mocking me.

STUDENT: "Stop mocking me."

LIBRARIAN: I mean it!

STUDENT: "I mean it!"

LIBRARIAN: You're not a mockingbird.

STUDENT: "You're not a mockingbird."

LIBRARIAN: That's it!

STUDENT: "That's it!"

LIBRARIAN: You asked for it!

STUDENT: "You asked for it!"

(LIBRARIAN picks up the scanner and zaps STUDENT in the forehead.)

Like that's gonna hurt me.

LIBRARIAN: "Like that's gonna hurt me."

(All of a sudden, STUDENT grabs her throat as if SHE was choking. SHE struggles to breathe, clutching to the desk for dear life. SHE finally falls to the floor, dead. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, typing on the computer. SHE's really banging on the keys now. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Bleep.

STUDENT: Bleep.

LIBRARIAN: How are you bleep?

STUDENT: Bleep, thanks.

LIBRARIAN: What can I bleep for you?

STUDENT: *The Adventures of Bleep Bleep.*

LIBRARIAN: *The Adventures of Bleep Bleep* has been banned.

STUDENT: By bleep?

LIBRARIAN: The bleeps.

STUDENT: What bleeping business is that of the bleeps?

LIBRARIAN: Bleep if I know.

STUDENT: You should tell those bleeping bleeps to bleep off.

LIBRARIAN: I already bleeping bleeped.

STUDENT: You bleeped?

LIBRARIAN: Bleep straight.

STUDENT: Why would the bleeps ban *The Adventures of Bleep Bleep?*

It's bleeping bleep!

LIBRARIAN: Bleep Bleep says bleep too many times.

STUDENT: Bleep?

LIBRARIAN: Bleep.

STUDENT: Bleeps anyway.

LIBRARIAN: You're bleep bleep.

(STUDENT exits. THE LIGHTS FADE.)

From the darkness...

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: Where am I?

LIBRARIAN: How are you today?

STUDENT: Lost.

LIBRARIAN: We are all lost in this brave new world.

STUDENT: Where is the light?

LIBRARIAN: Long since gone.

STUDENT: I have come for a book.

LIBRARIAN: There are no books.

STUDENT: No books?

LIBRARIAN: No libraries. No library cards.

STUDENT: What happened to them?

LIBRARIAN: Poof!

STUDENT: What about my late fees? I know I had many.

LIBRARIAN: They're on your record. And you'll pay.

STUDENT: But how? And where?

LIBRARIAN: You'll see.

STUDENT: I can't see. There's no light.

LIBRARIAN: Believe me, you'll pay. You'll see.

STUDENT: I will?

LIBRARIAN: You're welcome.

THE LIGHTS RISE. LIBRARIAN sits behind her desk, typing on the computer so hard that the keys could break off. STUDENT enters and approaches the desk.

LIBRARIAN: Hello.

STUDENT: I am in a hurry!

LIBRARIAN: How are you?

STUDENT: I am freaked!

LIBRARIAN: What can I get you?

STUDENT: *I am Legend!*

LIBRARIAN: You are what?

STUDENT: It's about the apocalypse!

LIBRARIAN: The end of the world?

STUDENT: Quick!

LIBRARIAN: Why?

STUDENT: It's coming!

LIBRARIAN: What's coming?

STUDENT: The end!

LIBRARIAN: Your library card.

STUDENT: There's no time!

(LIBRARIAN hands STUDENT a book.)

LIBRARIAN: Here you go.

STUDENT: Save yourself!

LIBRARIAN: It's due in three weeks.

STUDENT: We won't be here in three weeks!

LIBRARIAN: Why not?

STUDENT: We won't be here in three seconds!

LIBRARIAN: Oh, come on.

STUDENT: I am serious.

LIBRARIAN: I find that very hard to –

(THE LIGHTS ABRUPTLY FADE.)

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