

ARCTIC LIBRARY

By Bradley Walton

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CHARACTERS

(18 roles: 4 Females, 1 Male, 13 Either)

JODY / JAY COLEMAN (m or f)	The library secretary
APRIL PLOTT (f)	The librarian
STUDENT 1 (m or f)	
HEATHER MENDENALL (f)	A student
MR. / MS. STILLER (m or f)	A teacher
STUDENT 2 (m or f)	
DONNA (f)	The cafeteria lady
ROY / ROSIE (m or f)	A member of the maintenance crew
BOB / BARB (m or f)	A member of the maintenance crew
FRED / FREDA (m or f)	A member of the maintenance crew
WILLY (m or f)	A member of the maintenance crew
STUDENT 3 (m)	
STUDENT 4 (m or f)	
STUDENT 5 (m or f)	
STUDENT 6 (m or f)	
STUDENT 7 (m or f)	
JESSICA LEVIN (f)	A student in a skimpy outfit
DR. MATTHEWS (m or f)	The superintendent

DOUBLING

The actors in the roles of DONNA, ROY, BOB, FRED, WILLY, and MATTHEWS can double in the roles of STUDENTS 1-7, STILLER, HEATHER, or JESSICA.

STUDENTS 3-7 can be combined into three or four roles.

The play can be performed with as few as 9 actors: 3 females, 1 male, 5 either.

STAGING

The set is very simple: A library circulation desk, which may be a large desk with a chair and a computer. There is also a coat rack and a rolling cart of books.

The director is welcome to add bookshelves, tables, and other elements to give the appearance of a high school library, but these are completely optional.

PROPERTIES

Personal Properties

2 freezer bags of cookies – DONNA
sandwich in baggie – WILLY
saw – BOB
ladder – FRED
chewing gum - FRED

Onstage properties

box of tissues
roll of masking tape
telephone
library books
letter opener

COSTUMES

PLOTT, COLEMAN, and STILLER are nicely dressed as school staff members. In addition, PLOTT and COLEMAN are both wearing coats. Later in the play, STILLER will have a very heavy coat such as a parka, or possibly a snowmobile suit.

DONNA is a member of the cafeteria staff and dressed in work clothes with an apron.

ROY, BOB, FRED and WILLY are members of the school maintenance crew and are dressed in coveralls.

JESSICA is a teenager wearing as little as decently possible.

HEATHER is dressed in typical teenage attire. She should be wearing more clothing than JESSICA.

DR. MATTHEWS is dressed in a suit.

STUDENTS 1-7 are dressed in typical teenager attire.

Thanks to Mary Monts.

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AT RISE: A library circulation desk — a large desk with a chair and a computer. Among the items on the desk are a box of tissues, a roll of masking tape, a letter opener, and a phone. Behind the desk is a standing coat rack, and nearby is a rolling cart full of books. APRIL PLOTT stands behind the desk, checking a book out to STUDENT 1.

PLOTT: That'll be due February 3.

STUDENT 1: Thanks.

(As STUDENT 1 hurriedly exits, JODY COLEMAN enters, crosses behind the circulation desk, removes her coat, hangs it on the coat rack, and pauses.)

COLEMAN: Sweet mother of Indiana Jones. It can't possibly be as cold in here as I think it is.

PLOTT: It can. It is. And you know what? My work day starts twenty minutes earlier than yours.

COLEMAN: So it's not my imagination?

PLOTT: Jody, no matter how long you suffer through this cold today, I will have suffered twenty minutes longer, and I will resent you for it. Remember that.

COLEMAN: Not a hoax? Not a dream? Not an imaginary story?

PLOTT: You're referencing something, aren't you? You're referencing something, and I have no idea what you're talking about.

COLEMAN: What makes you say that, April?

PLOTT: Because there's no conceivable reason for you to pretend you're in a story. And because nobody normal talks like that.

COLEMAN: Normal is a figment of your imagination.

PLOTT: The stuff that comes out of your mouth sometimes ... it can be a little over the top.

COLEMAN: We work in a high school. With real, actual teenagers who get into fights when someone doesn't return a text message. My vocabulary is nowhere near the top. The kids around us, they cleared the top ages ago and were last seen heading into deep space where they will eventually spawn with aliens who will bloody well return their text messages if they know what's good for them.

PLOTT: See? That. That's exactly what I'm talking about.

COLEMAN: Instead of complaining, you should learn from me. You'd be a more interesting person. (*sits at the computer and types something*)

PLOTT: Remember, I'm older, colder, and grumpier than you.

COLEMAN: Do you have any clue why that is? The colder part, anyway? I mean, it's fifteen degrees outside. If anything, they should have turned the heat up in here, not off. (*looking at the computer screen*) No ...

PLOTT: What is it?

COLEMAN: Have you checked your email today?

PLOTT: No. I've been too busy freezing. Why? Did the furnace break?

COLEMAN: Worse.

PLOTT: What's worse than the furnace breaking when it's fifteen degrees outside?

COLEMAN: (*pointing at the computer screen*) That.

PLOTT: (*looking at the computer screen*) This. From our superintendent, Dr. Matthews, which says ...

COLEMAN: Which says that it's fifteen degrees outside. So they're turning the heat off.

PLOTT: (*reading*) The school system's new energy conservation measures saved the division eight thousand dollars in the month of November.

COLEMAN: So I'm guessing all those days the past month when it felt like it was sixty-five degrees in here ...

PLOTT: ... it's because it was sixty-five degrees in here.

COLEMAN: And now they've made the connection that the less money they spend, the more money they have. Spending less money means using less fuel, meaning colder rooms. Colder rooms equals bigger savings. And the colder it is outside, the bigger the potential savings. Let's hope they don't decide to turn on the air conditioning.

PLOTT: Your logic is dubious.

COLEMAN: Public education is a government entity. Logic is irrelevant.

PLOTT: It's not this cold in the hall.

COLEMAN: The library is one of the biggest rooms in the school. They can save mega bucks by turning off the heat just in here.

PLOTT: It seems kind of extreme.

COLEMAN: This is a high school, remember? Extreme is a way of life here.

PLOTT: I can't think the powers that be would intentionally leave the library temperature in the thirties. The superintendent's daughter is a student here. What if she came to the library?

COLEMAN: She'd be cold. Daughter or no, I can't think they'd pass on such an easy cost-saving measure.

PLOTT: Why are you so eager to assume the worst in people?

COLEMAN: Because it's a lot more fun than assuming the best.

PLOTT: Do you think I should call maintenance?

COLEMAN: Do you really think it'll do any good?

PLOTT: If the pipes burst, that would be bad.

COLEMAN: Fixing burst pipes would cost money. They'll probably just put salt on the carpet and tell us not to eat the yellow snow.

PLOTT: That's gross.

COLEMAN: I work around teenagers. I come by it honest.

PLOTT: I'm calling maintenance.

COLEMAN: Go for it. Can't hurt. Might be good for a laugh.

PLOTT: (*picks up the phone and dials*) Roy? This is April in the library.

It's kind of cold in here. Yeah, I figured it was chilly all over the building. But it seems maybe too cold in this part. Excessively.

Sure, I can fill out a work order ... but it's pretty bad. Could you come check it out when you have a chance? Thanks. (*hangs up*)

Hmm. I shouldn't have said that.

COLEMAN: What?

PLOTT: "When you have a chance."

COLEMAN: We're going to be burning each other for warmth by the time they get here, aren't we?

PLOTT: I was trying to be polite.

COLEMAN: Polite doesn't keep you warm. Heat works better.

PLOTT: We'll wait a little and see if they show.

COLEMAN: You're the one who's been here twenty minutes longer.

PLOTT: And I deeply resent you.

(*HEATHER MENDENHALL, a student, enters.*)

COLEMAN: Hi. Welcome to Hoth. We're setting up the rebel base right now. Wampas are in the computer lab, so you might want to steer clear of there.

HEATHER: Oh, my gosh. How cold is it in here?

PLOTT: Cold enough that you paid more attention to the temperature than Ms. Coleman. Which deepens my fears that we're going to die of hypothermia before the end of the day.

HEATHER: How can you stand it?

COLEMAN: We just sit here and suffer. It's pretty easy once you get the hang of it.

HEATHER: Can I renew my books?

COLEMAN: If the buttons on the keyboard aren't frozen stuck, sure.

HEATHER: Are they?

COLEMAN: No, but it's probably just a matter of time.

HEATHER: So can I go now?

COLEMAN: I need your books or your name.

HEATHER: Heather Mendenhall.

COLEMAN: You know, your last name sounds an awful lot like menthol. Menthol and Halls cough drops. I don't suppose you were a throat lozenge in a former life? The concept of penetrating vapor action on a large scale is incredibly appealing right now.

HEATHER: What?

PLOTT: Ignore her.

HEATHER: I'm really, really cold. Can I go, please?

COLEMAN: How big is your family? If we packed them all in here, maybe we could warm the place up.

PLOTT: Yes, you can go.

HEATHER: Thanks. (*exits*)

PLOTT: Feeling particularly obnoxious today?

COLEMAN: I'm so cold that if I don't laugh I'll probably cry.

PLOTT: And your tears would freeze to your face, giving you the appearance of a 1960's *Star Trek* alien, which I'd have to look at for the rest of my already interminable day. No. We don't want that.

(*MR. STILLER enters.*)

COLEMAN: Mr. Stiller. We bid you welcome. Enter freely, and of your own will.

PLOTT: You're referencing something again.

COLEMAN: It's a classic. If you don't get it, it's your own fault.

STILLER: Is it cold in here?

COLEMAN: Figment of your imagination. In fact, we were just considering putting on swimsuits and gluing ourselves to the windows to work on our tans.

PLOTT: Ms. Coleman is kidding.

COLEMAN: Ms. Plott's right. I am kidding. We could freeze ourselves to the windows faster than the glue would dry.

STILLER: So it is cold?

COLEMAN: Cold is relative. If you compared the temperature on top of Everest to the temperature on Jupiter's moons, you'd find you could cook burgers without a grill in either place, whereas here, the burgers would remain frozen. We're waiting for the next ice age to come along so things will warm up.

STILLER: I was going to ask if I could bring my class to the library later today.

PLOTT: But now you're reconsidering?

COLEMAN: Let me ask you this ... how much do you hate them?

STILLER: I don't hate my students.

COLEMAN: But sometimes don't they drive you at least a little bit nuts?

STILLER: The job has its moments. We all know that.

COLEMAN: And some students give us more moments than others. Do you have any particular classes who give you endless waves of moments that slam into the beach of your life like a 180-day hurricane?

STILLER: Are you suggesting that I bring my classes to the library as a punishment?

COLEMAN: We have an unusual situation in the library today. We might as well make the most of it. When life gives you lemons, make frozen lemonade, you know?

PLOTT: Ms. Coleman is kidding. We don't want kids to have negative associations with the library.

STILLER: Oh, back when Mr. Burman worked here in here, I used the library as a punishment all the time.

PLOTT: You can't be serious.

STILLER: I am completely serious. The kids hated him. I hated him. But after a few trips down here, all I had to do was threaten to bring my kids to the library and they'd behave. My second block is kind of unruly. It might be good to have something to hang over their heads. I'll see how they're behaving themselves today.

PLOTT: Sure. Just let us know.

(STILLER exits.)

PLOTT: Oh my gosh. We're going to let a teacher bring kids here as punishment. I am so mortified.

COLEMAN: Hey, it's not your fault it's freezing.

PLOTT: But I feel like the library should be a nice enough place to offset the cold, and it's not!

COLEMAN: If you could shrink Disney World small enough to fit in this room, it still wouldn't be nice enough to offset the cold. Don't worry about it.

PLOTT: If Disney World fit in this room, the rides would be too small for anyone to sit on.

COLEMAN: Sure people could sit on them. There'd just be lots of wedgies.

PLOTT: That wouldn't be nice.

COLEMAN: I wasn't being serious.

PLOTT: I don't want people to think I'm a bad librarian.

COLEMAN: The temperature of the library does not reflect on you personally.

(STUDENT 2 enters the library.)

STUDENT 2: Holy cow, it's freezing in here. *(to PLOTT)* What's the matter with you? Are you trying to make me get sick and die?
(exits)

COLEMAN: People only think that it does.

(STILLER enters.)

STILLER: I just passed Jessica Levin in the hall. She ignores the dress code all the time and today she looks like a rapper's backup dancer on a beach trip. She's in my second block. We'll see you then.

PLOTT: Sure. Happy to be of service.

(STILLER exits.)

PLOTT: We suck.

COLEMAN: We do not suck.

PLOTT: I suck.

COLEMAN: You don't suck.

PLOTT: I'm letting this happen.

COLEMAN: You're letting a class come to the library! That's your job.

PLOTT: But it's for the wrong reason!

COLEMAN: This place exists for students to come here. That's all the reason you need.

PLOTT: This place exists for students to come and check out books and do research. Not to make them wish they'd worn clothes to school.

COLEMAN: That thing you just said? I'm not going near that.

PLOTT: Thank you.

COLEMAN: Don't mention it.

PLOTT: I suck.

(Pause.)

COLEMAN: This is ridiculous. *(starts rummaging around in the desk drawers)*

PLOTT: What are you doing?

COLEMAN: I'm going to get a letter opener, find the superintendent, pretend he's a taun-taun, and make myself warm.

PLOTT: Don't say things like that. Someone might hear you.

COLEMAN: Don't tell me you actually understood what I just said?

PLOTT: No, but I could tell it wasn't nice.

COLEMAN: Making us freeze our butts off isn't nice.

PLOTT: If you go have a confrontation with Dr. Matthews ... that probably wouldn't be a good idea. I mean, if you have to, at least calm down first. Be careful what you say.

COLEMAN: The thing about this cold is, it's liberating. The physical conditions are so deplorable that it seems pointless to hide behind a façade of civility.

PLOTT: It's probably not even Dr. Matthews' fault. There's got to be some kind of problem. They can't seriously expect us to be *this* cold. Maybe we should call maintenance again.

COLEMAN: You're assuming something is actually broken.

PLOTT: This is insane. Something has *got* to be broken.

COLEMAN: What's insane is that the school board is attempting to raise funds by negotiating with Santa Claus to bring his base of operations to this library.

PLOTT: I'm going to try again.

COLEMAN: Sure, why not? At the very least, it gives us an excuse to annoy someone in another part of the building. If we have to be miserable, there's no reason they should be happy either.

PLOTT: I'm going to do what I should have done the first time. (*picks up phone and dials*) Roy? It's April in the the library. Yeah, it's still cold in here. How's your schedule looking? Think you'll make it here today? Uh-huh. I see. Look, it's grim here. If I asked really nice, could you move us closer to the top of your list? No, I tried to fill out a work order, but I was shivering too hard. Please? I'll give you cookies. You like cookies? Good. Chocolate chip? I can make that happen. How soon can you be here? We'd be dead by then ... no cookies. You want cookies, I need you here inside the next fifteen minutes. I will have the cookies in hand. We have a deal? Excellent. See you soon. (*hangs up the phone*)

COLEMAN: You're bribing them with cookies?

PLOTT: If that's what it takes. (*picks up the phone again*)

COLEMAN: Who are you calling now?

PLOTT: The cafeteria. (*speaking into the receiver*) Hey, Donna? This is April in the library. You know those cookies I've got in the back of the walk-in freezer? Yeah, the Ziplock bags from four years ago. Any chance you could bring me two of them in the next few minutes, please? You're an angel, thanks.

COLEMAN: You keep a stash of cookies in the cafeteria freezer for emergency situations?

PLOTT: It's good to be prepared.

COLEMAN: Did something prompt this?

PLOTT: Yeah. The year before you started here.

COLEMAN: What happened?

PLOTT: Kid got sick.

COLEMAN: And didn't make it to the bathroom?

PLOTT: When you get hit with abrupt, explosive sickness, wherever you are *is* the bathroom.

COLEMAN: Yuck.

PLOTT: It took three hours for me to figure out I had to negotiate with the custodians if I wanted it cleaned up the same day. Never again.

COLEMAN: I never realized the custodial staff was that mercenary.

PLOTT: Generally, they're not. But the library wasn't the only place the kid had been.

COLEMAN: Oh.

PLOTT: It was a matter of jockeying for position on their to-do list.

COLEMAN: Why didn't the kid just go home?

PLOTT: Honors student.

COLEMAN: Geez, they can be such a pain.

PLOTT: Vying for the valedictorian slot in a very competitive race against two other kids. He'd tell his teachers he was going to the nurse, hide out in the bathroom until the bell rang, go to his next class until he got sick again, then repeat the process. When the custodians figured out there was a pattern, they staked out the bathrooms, so he came here.

COLEMAN: Lucky you. So did he make valedictorian?

PLOTT: He did. But I heard he dropped out of college the next fall when he found out he had actually think for himself instead of regurgitating facts to meet the state's standards of learning. Couldn't take the pressure.

COLEMAN: So he messed up the carpet and in the end, it was all for nothing.

PLOTT: No-good honors punk.

(DONNA, the cafeteria lady, enters. SHE is carrying two freezer bags of cookies.)

DONNA: Here you go, April. *(hands PLOTT the bags)*

PLOTT: Thanks, Donna.

DONNA: I thought you you'd forgotten about these.

PLOTT: Nah. We've just been lucky and I haven't needed them.

DONNA: Let me guess — they're for maintenance.

PLOTT: What tipped you off?

DONNA: When I handed you the bag, your fingers were the same temperature as the cookies.

COLEMAN: You got any food you need stored after they don't fix the temperature?

DONNA: Do you really want piles of meat product stacked around the library?

COLEMAN: The wampa's gotta eat something, and anyway, we've been meaning to redecorate.

PLOTT: (*sarcastically*) Everybody knows it's easier to study when you've got slabs of beef watching over you.

DONNA: Sure. I got beef product, chicken product, turkey product, fish product, ham product and pork product.

COLEMAN: What's the difference between ham product and pork product?

DONNA: Same as the difference between ham and pork. Why?

COLEMAN: Doesn't the "product" part blur the line just a little?

DONNA: More than a little.

COLEMAN: So ... do you actually know the difference?

DONNA: Not really. No.

COLEMAN: And you feed it to the students?

DONNA: That's my job, yeah.

COLEMAN: Did you get picked on a lot when you were a kid in school?

DONNA: All the time.

COLEMAN: I bet you love your job.

DONNA: Yeah, I do.

COLEMAN: That's so awesome.

DONNA: It is.

PLOTT: I'll see you later, Donna.

DONNA: Stay warm.

PLOTT: We'd have to be warm to stay warm. At this point, we'll settle for making it through the day.

DONNA: Good luck. (*exits*)

COLEMAN: I see you're coming around to my way of thinking.

(*The maintenance crew—ROY, BOB, FRED, and WILLY—enter. FRED is chewing gum.*)

BOB: Wow. It's really cold in here.

COLEMAN: If this was an animated movie, there would be singing mice skating in our toilet.

FRED: You reckon we should check the temperature?

WILLY: The thermometer might break.

PLOTT: Roy, glad to see you. Thanks for coming.

ROY: You got something for us?

PLOTT: (*handing him one bag of cookies*) Here.

ROY: (*looking dubiously at the bag*) These cookies are frozen.

PLOTT: The library is frozen. See a connection?

ROY: Is this all?

PLOTT: There's more. You get half now for showing up, half later when you fix the problem.

ROY: Assuming there's something to fix.

COLEMAN: Told ya.

PLOTT: You seriously think there's not a problem?

ROY: Well, obviously, there's a problem. But look around. You've got single-paned windows, plus the room is huge, and I can tell you the insulation is what you'd expect from the contractor that offered the lowest bid. From an energy efficiency standpoint, this whole place is nothing but one big problem.

COLEMAN: But not an insurmountable problem. Right?

ROY: Look, there are certain things people just weren't meant to do. Breathe underwater. Lay eggs. Marinate pudding. Am I'm not too sure we were really meant to control the temperature in here.

COLEMAN: Depends on what you're trying to marinate the pudding with.

ROY: We're standing on the first floor. The building is two floors and the library ceiling goes all the way to the roof. It's all spacious and pretty, but warm air rises. (*points up*) If there is any heat, it's way up there.

COLEMAN: So what you're saying is, if we could make the roof collapse, the warm air would come down to us.

ROY: I'm saying I can't build you a new library, and if we determine that the problem is the construction of the building itself, we still want our cookies.

PLOTT: Right. Okay. Do what you need to do.

(The MAINTENANCE CREW moves away from the desk and looks around the library.)

PLOTT: Boy, I hope they find something.

COLEMAN: I wonder if we could fit a nuclear reactor in here if they don't?

PLOTT: I don't think that would fly.

COLEMAN: Okay. What's your position on book burning?

PLOTT: Normally, I'm against it. Today, depending on the book, I'd be willing to negotiate.

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