

SHH...

By Don M. King

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ISBN 978-1-60003-695-8

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SHHH...

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A Full Length Comedy Farce

Synopsis: Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of dog, it's too dark to read." ---Groucho Marx.

Pleasant Plains Public Library is in deep trouble, and it will take a minor miracle to save it. Or perhaps a group of classic life-sized books and some ornery teens can help? Red Lawson, head librarian, has a tough choice to make. Stay and save the library from destruction? Or move on to manage *Gourmet Gadgets*, the brand new electronics chain next door? It doesn't help that the handsome owner of the store, Avery Kindle, has hand-selected Red for the job. But what will it take to enlighten her? Picture classic books like *Little Women* and *Moby Dick* jumping right off the shelves to work their "magic" and prove to her and some neighborhood teens that books are still valuable and worth reading. This charming farce takes the audience on a journey they're almost sure they've figured out until the surprise ending proves them all wrong. The show offers actors of all ability levels a wonderful chance to play some memorable characters including Theo the Thesaurus, Webster the Dictionary, Cindy/*Cinderella*, and Scarlet from the *Scarlet Letter* not to mention Red, who has her *own* plan for the library's resurrection. But will it all fall apart as the books and teens combine forces to influence Red's decision?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 FEMALES, 8 MALES, 1 EITHER GENDER.)

MR. AVERY KINDLE (m).....A middle-aged, rich philanthropist who owns his own chain of electronics stores called Gourmet Gadgets. He wants Red Lawson to come work for him as his new store manager instead of working at the library. He's doing this so the library will shut down, and he will have the only information center in the city. He sees her as a love interest. *(123 lines.)*

- MOBY (m)..... The classic book *Moby Dick* by Melville. This character takes on the personalities of the people in the novel especially Captain Ahab. He hasn't been checked out of the library for years, and he takes it personally when books are "put down." (47 lines.)
- DYST (m) The dystopian novel *The Maze Runner* by Dashner. He's in love with Cindy. (*Cinderella*.) He's sweet but can be annoying sometimes. He's the male version of a ditz. Let's just say that Barbie may be smarter than he is sometimes. (101 lines.)
- WEBSTER (m)..... A dictionary. To use a terrible pun, this character is wordy and highly intelligent. He's kind of the leader of the books. (75 Lines.)
- THEO (m)..... A Thesaurus. He's upset because so many people think he's a dinosaur instead of a book. He likes his synonyms, but he can get annoying with them sometimes. (83 lines.)
- WINTHROP (m)..... 15 A rich teenager who has no need for books. He desires everything to be electronic, but his sister and he are neglected at home. He's been spoiled, but he eventually sees the errors of his ways. (97 lines.)

BUTCH (m)..... 17 He is a teenager who is a video game addict. He thinks the world should be one big video game. He is also an electronic genius and computer hacker. (113 lines.)

WOODY FOREST (m)..... 17 A teen who loves books, but he doesn't know how to read because he had early-life trauma that kept him from learning properly. He does have a secret, however. (81 lines.)

DELL (m/f)..... He/she is a PC computer who doesn't understand the need for books either. He/she is sarcastic and puts down the books in the library and Mak every chance he/she gets. (62 lines.)

RED LAWSON (f)..... A young thinking, attractive middle-aged woman who grew up around education and reading, but she thinks the grass might be greener down at the electronics store instead of at the library. She's not found many men interested in her because she's usually smarter than they are. (304 lines.)

CINDY (f)..... The classic fairy tale children's book *Cinderella*. She's tired of people falling in love with her because of her name and popularity. She doesn't want to be judged by her "cover." She's not your typical dumb blond. (115 lines.)

- MOCK (f)..... The classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Lee. Speaks with a southern accent. She's the most practical of all the books and helps try to keep the chaos at a minimum. If there's a wise character in the crowd, it's Mock. (67 lines.)
- SCARLETT (f) The classic novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne. She feels like she's a misunderstood book. She's British, sexy, and sarcastic at times. Her character adds comic relief. (42 lines.)
- MAK (f) A Mac computer who accepts reading and the fine arts much more so than Dell. Mak is always at odds with Dell as they argue much like Abbott and Costello. Of course, she always holds the facts over Dell's head that she can't get viruses, or so she thinks. The role was written for a female, but it could be played by a male. (71 lines.)
- LIL (f) The classic novel *Little Women* by Alcott. She thinks women spend way too much time on themselves with make-up and hair-cuts. Women should go back to the basics and embrace their inner and natural beauty instead. Lil is a logical thinker but slightly old-fashioned. (72 lines.)
- DAWN MORNINGSTAR (f) 16 An adopted teenager who's never known either of her parents. Books are her friends, and she lives in her fantasy world much of the time. She's well-adjusted and very bright, but some kids treat her as an outcast at first. (89 lines.)

ADDIE MITCHELL (f)17 A wealthy teen who's in love with herself and is up on all the latest fashion trends. Deep down, she's very lonely. All the guys think she's hot, but none of them want to date her because she's too hot. She learns a valuable lesson about herself after she reads *Little Women*. (66 lines.)

ANNA MULRONEY (f)15 A teen movie-lover. She'd rather see a movie than read a book any day even though she's a quick-learner and a great reader. She's been blessed with a good sense of humor. (94 lines.)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act 1

Scene One: Tuesday morning. Kindle's proposal. Interior of the Pleasant Plains Public library. The books fight back and develop a plan.

Scene Two: Later that same afternoon at Pleasant Plains Public Library. Do talking books and teenagers mix? Are sixteen minds really better than one?

Scene Three: Wednesday. The teens put their plan into action.

Scene Four: Later that afternoon. Red signs the contract.

Intermission

Act 2

Scene One: Thursday the same week. One day away from the big meeting with the mayor. A "better" plan.

Scene Two: Friday morning. Reading books makes a lot of sense.

Scene Three: One week later. The library has been closed for good. The plan is triggered.

Scene Four: Saturday the next day. Virus is out of control. Library is saved.

SET

When I first envisioned this play actually living and breathing on the stage, I had in mind a kind of a Disney cartoon set of a library. The bottom floor of the library can resemble a normal library with two square coffee style tables and chairs DSL and DSR, and a larger computer table MSR, where actors convene quite a few times, and of course some regular-sized bookshelves. The rear perimeter of the set should be a single-layered section on a platform with giant books. One large double back shelf with big books on it could suffice if you don't wish to line the sides with shelves. These platforms for the books need to be wide enough to allow people to walk in front of the large book shelf to look at the books. Some books remain stationary and are just painted or positioned onto the two-level shelving system. Other books must be able to maneuver up and down the stairs easily. Books, talking or otherwise, should be appropriately sized for each actor with places for the arms and legs to come out. Think bookshelf point of view with the titles written on the binding and the stage left side as well. Feel free to design your books to fit your actors best. There needs to be at least one set of stairs up to the second level of books, but two would be preferred on both sides of the large bookshelves. RED's desk should be placed USL facing the audience with a typical office chair behind it. The desk is messy with a phone and a computer on it. One of the tables in the library has normal-sized computers on them, along with the giant computers placed so it looks like they are positioned on the table. Suggestion: You may wish to choose smaller actors for the roles of the computers. Please refer to included drawing of their positions. Try to imagine it this way. If you looked at a library in a home for giants, this is what the set should look like around the perimeter with the interior resembling a normal person's idea of one. The set never changes other than getting cleaned in one scene and some of the giant books missing when they are checked out.

COSTUMES/MAKE-UP

RED, KINDLE, and the TEENS can wear modern day clothing. KINDLE is always well-dressed in a suit because he obviously has a lot of money. RED dresses like a business woman/librarian. Her hair is pulled up, and it is not necessary for her to be red-haired. She got her name from her great grandma who was called Mildred, so she just shortened it to RED, plus the fact that she loves books. (*Read.*) Each different day we see the teenagers, they should have something new on. KINDLE could have a goatee or be clean-shaven, and RED is a young looking middle-aged pretty woman whose smile lights up a room. KINDLE needs to be handsome like a James Bond character minus the sunglasses. He's the villain, but he *does* have some redeeming qualities that eventually emerge. The talking books should be custom-fitted to the actors playing the roles. These can be made out of a book frame with foam fabric draped around it. Actors must have use of feet and arms/hands, and their heads/faces must come through the top and be the same color as the book or some contrasting color to capture their expressions correctly. The way I picture the books is with the bindings facing the audience. This way when they are side by side on the shelf, the audience can still see their faces and not their profile. The titles of the books must be written on the front bindings and the left side as well. These titles can be stenciled on for a nice clean design. Artistic geniuses will love the challenge!

SOUND EFFECTS/SPECIAL

- Landline telephone ringing
- Countdown clock ticking/computer
- Flash-pot pyrotechnics- I do NOT recommend using homemade flash-pot devices built with round fuses and ceramic lighting fixtures. The effects of this scene can be simply accomplished using lighting and a zapping sound effect, and it would be just as effective. No-concussion type flash-pots are available online should you decide to go this route. Check with your local costumer who may be able to help as well. Remember: safety is key. Some fire codes require flash pot operators to have a license to operate.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Feel free to play the human characters a little younger or older if you wish. All the books must have separate personalities, so when the chaos of Act Two comes along, and they switch voices, it adds to the comedic effect. This play was originally designed for high school, but it could be easily adapted for middle school or community plays. It's family entertainment with a moral much like many of the Disney shows of years past. The actors playing the novels should never forget that they're books rather than people, although their facial expressions and interactions are critical to the overall effect of the illusion. Acting is reacting. When the books don't have lines they should be reacting to the rest of the cast or develop a simple stage business that does not interfere or distract from the ongoing dialogue. Other than the complexities of creating the set and novel costumes so the actors can navigate safely, the play should be rather easy to produce. There aren't a lot of hand props or food eating scenes like in some plays. Above all, this play is a farce. If you spend too much time saying, "*Well, that could never happen.*" you will lose the magic of the show. Heck, if we can watch a full-length movie with singing and dancing chipmunks interacting with humans, why not a play? Have fun with it, and your audience will too!

PROPS

- A variety of desk accessories
- Local newspaper/pencil
- Regular books for bookshelves
- Woman's purse
- Medium sized tables (2.)
- Clipboard/pencil
- Large table
- Cell phone/Bluetooth if possible (*Kindle.*)
- Chairs (*At least 20.*)
- Moby Dick* DVD
- Computer table (*At least one.*)
- Regular cell phone (*Red.*)
- Red's work contract
- Genealogy book
- Posters (*Reading encouragement.*)

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

First Performance: James A. Garfield High School, Garrettsville, Ohio

Red Lawson: Megan Hadzinski

Avery Kindle: Logan Dean

Cindy: Paige Vanderhoff

Moby: Ryan Everett

Mock: Riley Chafin

Dyst: Cody Petrie

Scarlett: Cassidy King

Webster: Chandler Bee

Mac: Megan Ryser

Theo: Garrett McArdle

Lil: Rebecca Smith

Winthrop: Eric Splinter

Dawn: Ali Franklin

Woody: James Workman

Anna: Erica King

Dell: Joel Pierce

Addie: Aubrey Gissingner

Butch: Levi Milko

Director: Don M. King

Asst. Director/Stage Manager: David Soukenik

Production Asst.: Zach Fiest

Scenery Design/Artwork/Costumes: Kristine Gilmer, Annette Carlisle, Mrs.

Kelly Bissler, Kaleigh Gilmer, Chris Radwanski, Erica King, Abby

Hahn, Tommy Bissler, Carly McLoskey, Katie Gembicki, Sam Buganski

Sound: Roger Pierce, Dana Kropp

Artwork Programs/Posters: Edana Rankin

Lights: Andrea Sheller, Emma Bates

Stage/Curtain: Danielle Konecek

Make-up: Hannah Kirk, Emily Hughes, Erin Shea, Ashley Anderson,
Kayleigh Foster

Act One, Scene 1

SETTING:

Present day. The small town of Pleasant Plains, New York. One interior set: The Pleasant Plains Public Library

AT RISE:

RED LAWSON is milling about the library with a newspaper and a pencil in her hand. SHE is reading the help wanted section of her local paper. SHE works her way around her desk and eventually sits on the front left corner with her feet still touching the ground. SHE's a pretty middle-aged woman with her hair up and quirky glasses and dressed like a professional business woman but not designer clothes.)

RED: *(Curious.)* Hmm...Help wanted. Night-time receptionist for night club. Sounds intriguing. Must be able to handle money while dancing 'round a pole... Oh...I don't think I'm qualified for that one. *(Beat.)* I'm terrible with money. *(She crosses that one off with her pencil.)* Hey! Here's another one! New electronics chain. Gourmet Gadgets. Seeking professionally motivated person to manage new facility in Pleasant Plains, NY. That's right next door! *(SHE circles this number.)* If interested call 212-718-9234. That sounds promising. *(SHE yawns and stretches and makes her way back to her rolling chair. It's obvious SHE's bored and tired, so SHE lays her head down on her desk for a nap.)*

The "BOOKS" remain on the shelf, but some open their eyes and begin to talk. All the books will come alive at this point and "dance" like the "Pips".

WEBSTER: *(Singing the Gladys Knight tune.)* "She's leavin'."

MOCK: *(Echoing.)* "Leavin'."

WEBSTER: "On that midnight train to---"

MOCK: Shhh! Someone's comin'!

The BOOKS who opened their eyes wait. Nobody enters after ten seconds, so THEY continue their conversation.

THEO: *(Whispering.)* False alarm.

WEBSTER: Yeah.

MOCK: *(Worried.)* She can't leave us! We'll all be doomed! This place will close down, and we'll end up in someone's stinky basement.

WEBSTER: Or worse yet! A garage sale!

CINDY: Oooo...yeah! We can't let *that* happen!

LIL: *(Scared.)* I don't wanna be a discount book!

DYST: I'm too young to burn!

CINDY: We gotta change her mind!

MOCK: Wait! I hear somethin'! Someone really *is* comin' this time!
Shhh...

MR. AVERY KINDLE, electronic entrepreneur, enters dressed in his fancy suit and tie. HE looks as if HE just stepped out from GQ Magazine. HE's a handsome middle-aged man with a great taste for clothing. HE quietly approaches RED who is sleeping at her desk.

KINDLE: *(Clearing throat.)* A-hem! Yoo-hoo! Anybody home?

RED: *(Wakes from nap.)* Oh...I'm sorry. I was just...just...

KINDLE: Admiring the rich texture of the desk?

RED: *(Fixing HER hair, straightening HER clothes.)* No. Well, let's forget about me, shall we? Red Lawson. How can I help you?

KINDLE: Avery Kindle. *(Shakes HER hand.)* Owner and founder of the Gourmet Gadgets chain. We're moving in right next door, and I've been doing some research about the area. Seems like Pleasant Plains Public Library has been here for quite some time.

RED: Why, yes. Yes it has. Almost fifty years, but I've only been here for---

KINDLE: *(Examining the messiness of the desk and the rest of the library. HE moves behind RED to the right of the desk. RED stays seated.)* Four years, two months, and *(Glances at his watch.)* two hours, if we don't count your ten-minute nap. *(HE smiles.)*

RED: Well...I *have* been working some long hours lately. We only have three other workers besides me, so it's always busy, busy, busy 'round here. *(Straightening her desk.)*

KINDLE: *(Sarcastic.)* Yes. I can see. I had to fight quite a *crowd* just to get to the front door.

RED: (*Picking up on HIS sarcasm.*) Well, it's Tuesday. We're *always* a little slow on Tuesdays, but wait until all the senior citizens wake up. And it's summer now. The teenagers will flood the place! There won't be a place to sit down.

KINDLE: (*Glancing around at the emptiness.*) Perhaps--- you're right. It seems like ever since *you* became head librarian things have picked up some. You've added some unique programs for young children and brought in some rather famous authors. You're quite the business lady.

RED: (*Embarrassed.*) I try. (*Changing subject and rising.*) So, is there something I can do for you today, Mr. Kindle? (*Moving toward HIM SR of her desk.*)

KINDLE: (*Sneaky.*) As a matter of fact there is. I'd hate to whisk you away from this *extraordinary* vocation, but I have a proposal for you. How would *you* like to manage my new store? I'll pay you *five* times what they're paying you here! I *need* someone like you, Red Lawson. Someone who knows the community. What people want. What people expect.

RED: Actually--- just this morning I saw your ad in the paper, and I was thinking about calling.

KINDLE: (*Taking out HIS fancy cell phone.*) Well, my dear, go ahead and call. (*HE smiles again thinking HE has HER right where HE wants HER.*)

RED: But you're right here in the room with me. You've already offered me the job, right?

KINDLE: Yes, but I'd like to *check* you out...uh—check out your phone skills. Make sure you can handle yourself when upset customers call.

RED: (*Awkwardly.*) This...this is silly. (*Gets out HER phone for a second then puts it away.*) I need some time to think. I have a *lot* of hours invested in this place. It's like a second home to me really.

KINDLE: Have it your way. You have my number. Let's say by Friday? That'll give you a few days to notify your next of kin, clean out your locker, and join me for the experience of a lifetime! (*Moves to exit.*)

RED: (*Seeing HIM to the door.*) Thank you. I appreciate the offer. I really do.

KINDLE: You're welcome. Remember. The offer won't last forever. You'll need weeks of training and be ready to go by August. It's a new world, Red Lawson. *Books* are obsolete. Electronics are the future and beyond. You deserve a promotion. Just think, you'll have a much bigger office *and* a padded desk. Much better for napping, huh? (*Sarcastic laughing.*)

RED sits back down in HER chair behind HER desk and ponders HER decision. SHE leans back in HER chair this time and falls asleep once again. We hear occasional snoring from HER. All the BOOKS make their way off the shelves and on to the main stage. They continue their previous conversation.

CINDY: (*Pacing DSR.*) This is baaaaad! This is *real* bad. She's gonna abandon us! There's no fairy tale ending here. No prince on a white horse. She's too smart for *this* place. She needs a *new* challenge. Something to keep her here, ya know?

THEO: Oooooo---that guy's such a phony! A fake! A wolf in sheep's clothing! A...a...

LIL: Stop with the synonyms already! You're driving me nuts! Who do you think you are a thesaurus?

THEO: As a matter of fact---

DYST: Thesaurus? Isn't that a dinosaur?

THEO: No! I'm NOT a dinosaur! I'm a book! You know, a manuscript? A...novel...a....

All the BOOKS stare at him for a few seconds as HE continues to annoy them with more synonyms

THEO: Sorry. I could switch to antonyms, if you'd like.

ALL: NO!

MOCK: Let's just get back to our dilemma. How are we going to convince little miss "grass is greener" Lawson to stay? What do we have that a fancy electronics store doesn't?

All the BOOKS pause for some moments of awkward silence. At times, certain BOOKS appear to have an answer and make a variety of noises as if to say something, but nothing comes to mind. Soon SCARLETT breaks the silence.

SCARLETT: *(British.)* Well...SEX!

ALL: What?

SCARLETT: *(British accent.)* SEX! Sex sells, right? You can't get any more controversial than the *Scarlett Letter* when it comes to sex now, can you? Hawthorne was infatuated with it! So is America.

WEBSTER: So how does sex keep Red here with us? She's never had a boyfriend in her life! Each time she tried, they dumped her. She was way too smart for them. I just don't think sex is the answer. Any other ideas?

MOBY: *(Finally making his presence known /gruff like a sea captain.)* What about adventure? *(Swishing imaginary sword.)* She'd fall for that book, line, and sinker! No? She's bored. Let's send her out on a whale hunt! Raging seas! Pirates! *(Stares out at audience as if they're the ocean.)*

THEO: *(Not recognizing HIM but moving closer to him.)* Uh--- who are you again? I've not seen you on my shelf before.

MOBY: *Moby Dick!* At your service! Drop anchor, boys!

SCARLETT: *(Joining them.)* Um---- could we just call you Di...?

MOBY: *(Stopping her in her tracks.)* Moby, ma'am. I prefer Moby. Just plain Moby. Kinda like Prince.

MOCK: *(Crossing DSC in front of center table.)* Well, now that we've got almost all the sexual innuendos out of the way, could we get on with it? There's just gotta be a way for us to convince her that we're NOT obsolete! What happens when the electricity goes out? Like the blackout of 2003? Who was still here just waiting to be read? By flashlight!

ALL: We were! Yeah!

DELL: *(Rising from table and stepping through the crowd of BOOKS center.)* And...books never get viruses! Well, maybe you do, Scarlett. But---

WEBSTER: Well...well...well... Look who's decided to join the conversation. Mr. Know-it-All himself! *You* got any ideas on how to keep Red working here?

DELL: Of course. You should have turned me on sooner.

MOCK: What do you mean? Who turned you on now?

ALL: (*Glancing at SCARLETT.*) SCARLETT!

SCARLETT: Hey! It's my job! I was *written* to be nasty. Can't help it!
(*SHE smiles.*)

THEO: So, what's your fantastic idea?

DELL: Well...I don't know if I want to share it now. I'm just feeling all *kinds* of love in the room.

ALL: Dell! Tell us what we can do!

MAK: (*Jumping in as well from DSL.*) You guys know you can't count on *him* for anything. He's as slow as Helen Keller in a corn maze. Let me help.

DELL: Hey---you! Just go back to your artsy fartsy crap and let the *real* wizard figure this out. You're *terrible* with common sense stuff.

MAK: Oh, yeah?

DELL: Yeah!

All the BOOKS and computers huddle up CS to come up with a solution except for CINDY and DYST who move DSL to speak.

DYST: (*Nonchalantly.*) Hey. How's it going? How come I haven't seen *you* 'round my neck of the shelf? Classy book like you.

CINDY: Name's Cinderella. They call me Cindy for short. Classic fairy tale. I'm normally in the juvenile section. Someone musta misplaced me.

DYST: That's okay. You brighten things up 'round here. I'm *Maze Runner*, but I go by Dyst. That stands for *dystopian*. (*CINDY and DYST say this word at the same time.*)

CINDY: *Dystopian*. I know. The opposite of utopian. Been around a lot longer than you have.

DYST...and still quite the beauty!

CINDY: Oh, I bet you say that to all the pretty books.

DYST: Well...to be honest, you're normally not my *type*.

CINDY: Why's that?

DYST: Well... (*Rapping.*) "I like big books, and I cannot lie!" (*They laugh.*)

CINDY: (*More interested.*) I see. So, where do *you* normally hang out?

DYST: Y.

CINDY: Because I'd like to know. You know, just in case we might like to talk again.

DYST: I told you.

CINDY: Told me what?

DYST: Where I like to hang out. In fact, unless someone checks me out, I don't move too much.

CINDY: Why?

DYST: That's right.

CINDY: What's right? (*Pause.*) Oh, I'm so confused!

DYST: I can tell. Let me see if I can help.

CINDY: Wait! Please allow me. When Ms. Lawson finds you out of place on the wrong shelf she takes you back and places you where?

DYST: Y. (*Pause.*)

CINDY: (*Pause.*) Well...okay. If you don't want to tell me, I understand.

DYST: (*Realizing what's happening.*) Ohhhhh! I see what's wrong.

CINDY: You do?

DYST: Of course.

CINDY: Would you like to fill me in?

DYST: (*Messing with her now.*) Y? (*CINDY gets upset and turns away from HIM. SHE is very frustrated. Pause.*) Wait! Okay! I can't take this anymore. (*Smiling.*) Have you ever heard of the Dewey Decimal System?

CINDY: (*Still confused.*) The gooey huh?

DYST: Noooo! Dewey...with a D! He designed this numbering system to help libraries keep their books in order, but *some* books don't get a number.

CINDY: Why?

DYST: Exactly! (*Laughing...and CINDY finally gets it.*) I hang out in section Y for Young Adults.

CINDY: That was mean. I'm really sure I don't like you now! Go flirt with *Anna Karenina*. She's a much bigger book than I am!

WEBSTER: Okay. Everyone! Cindy? Dyst? We've got an idea! Let's... *(The BOOKS FREEZE. THEY are all in a variety of places now in multiple poses. DELL and MAK have made their way back to their tables before the teens arrive.)*

Library door opens and TEENAGERS rush in full of energy. Suddenly the library is full of patrons. There is so much noise that RED wakes up and sees all the books frozen and off the shelves in a variety of poses. Somewhat puzzled, SHE shakes the cobwebs from HER head and pinches herself to make sure SHE's not dreaming. Needing to quiet the noise from the teens, SHE dismisses the odd positions of the books and runs around tapping each one as THEY each move carefully back to their areas. The patrons aren't paying any attention to the moving books at all.

RED: *(RED does a double-take at the books as THEY head back then continues straightening her desk and cleaning the tables DSL. To audience.)* Whoa! I need to get more sleep. I'm starting to see things. *(To TEENS.)* Shhh! Shhh! I'm so sorry! I musta dozed off a bit. I'll get everything back in order.

WOODY and DAWN wander around looking at books. WINTHROP, BUTCH, ADDIE, and ANNA jump on the computers and begin playing games and watching videos etc. All the BOOKS open their eyes occasionally as THEY listen to the teenagers' conversations.

DAWN: *(Near bookshelf SR, talking to WOODY. SHE's obviously excited.)* So, what kind of books are you looking for today? I love fantasy!

WOODY: Oh, I dunno. Sometimes I just like to get a book with pictures, ya-know? We already read so much in school. I kinda wanna take a break over the summer.

DAWN: Yeah. I know what you mean. But as soon as school's out I can't wait to get lost in something I don't *have* to read. Teachers can pick some boring books sometimes. Who cares about 15th Century England? This is 21st Century New York!

BOTH walk over to the shelf where DYST is located. Of course, since this is a farce, THEY treat these giant books as if THEY are just a part of normal life. Almost as if they're supposed to be there for some reason.

WOODY: Hmm... *(Points toward DYST.)* This one looks pretty cool.

DAWN: *Maze Runner?* Yeah! I've read it three times! You should check it out! Lots of action.

WOODY: Any pictures?

DAWN: Nope. Great story though. Monsters. Future world. I think you'd like it!

ANNA: *(Shouting over to WOODY.)* Or you can just wait for the movie to come out! That's what I do! Movies are so much better than books! Reading takes too long!

DAWN: So, you gonna get it?

WOODY: *(Embarrassed because HE doesn't remember which one IT was.)* Uh...sure. Which one is it again?

DAWN: It's right here, silly. *(It dawns on DAWN that WOODY doesn't know how to read very well.)* Hey, wait a minute. You want picture books because you don't know how to read.

WOODY: *(Trying to stand up for himself.)* I do too! It's just...I've read all year long!

DAWN: *(Points to another book.)* Okay. So what's the title of *this* book then? *(Pointing to To Kill a Mockingbird.)*

WOODY :(
To...K...k...i...ll...a...m...m...o...s...c...c...that's a K
sound...inj...b...i...r...d. *(HE pronounces the i in bird with a long vowel sound instead of a short vowel.)* Must be a foreign book.

BUTCH: *(Sarcastic.)* Hey, Woody! You better order that movie soon! You're gonna have a lot of watchin' to do before school starts back up next year!

ANNA, WINTHROP, ADDIE, join in with making fun of WOODY. They all laugh. WOODY runs DSR and sits at table with his head down. HE is visibly upset because HE can't read very well.

WINTHROP: Hey, Anna? What's the difference between a boring person and a boring book?

ANNA: I don't know.

WINTHROP: You can shut the book up! (*THEY all laugh again.*)

During this time, the BOOKS have been listening carefully to all of this conversation, and THEY have had just about enough of the put-downs.

MOBY: (*Talking like a pirate and moving down from his shelf.*) All right, ye scallywags! It's time to teach ye all a lesson or two, and then I's just might make ye walk the plank!

The TEENS playing on the computer ignore him until DELL and MAK, the computers, join in on the fun. RED begins to re-trace her movements just before the BOOKS came to life pantomiming rising from her nap. SHE's still perplexed but acts as if things are supposed to be this way.

DELL: (*Animated now rising and scaring the teens.*) Hey, watch where you put those fingers Butchy boy! I've got sensitive keys!

BUTCH and the GANG all leap up from their chairs afraid for the moment but also quite curious too.

MAK: (*Sarcastic.*) Hey, Anna Montana? Who dressed you this morning? Your little brother?

ANNA responds acting insulted. RED moves from her desk to investigate the commotion. SHE approaches the talking computers and books not exactly sure of what's going on.

BUTCH: Wow, Ms. Lawson! Where'd you get the robots? They're pretty cool! Can I program them?

RED: (*Not knowing how to respond yet.*) I...I...well...robots? I mean...you kids. Always joking around.

MOCK: (*Searching for a way to explain.*) We're *all* a part of a brand new *program* here at the library this summer! (*MOCK looks around at all the rest of the talking books/computers.*) Isn't that right, guys?

LIL: Sure. Ms. Lawson's just being...uh...I can't think of the word.

THEO: Modest?

LIL: Yes! Modest! This was all *her* idea ya know. She thought it would be a great way to get people back into the library and reading books and stuff. Looks like it's working.

ANNA: Not for me. (*Heads for the movie section.*) I'm checking out three movies and I'm outta this place, robots or not. Though they *are* kinda cute and all, in a kind of a Steven Spielberg kinda way. "ET phone home!"

LIL: (*Moves toward HER.*) But why, dear? Just look around you. You have all the adventure, action, mystery, and suspense right here in the pages! You don't need the movies!

ADDIE: (*Coming to ANNA's rescue.*) Oh, really? So, which book are you again? (*Looking at her title.*) *Little Women*? Where's the suspense in that book, huh?

LIL: (*Excited.*) Oh, have you read me?

ADDIE: Of course. Who hasn't? I used it to help me sleep at night. (*SHE laughs a truly annoying laugh.*)

LIL moves next to MOBY who comforts her.

CINDY: Well, what about me then? Cinderella? I'm a love story with magic and princes and costume balls! Every young girl's fantasy. And there's a happily ever after.

BUTCH: Not to burst your magical pumpkin or anything, but in real life, there *aren't* many happy endings. *Fairy* tales mean a whole *new* thing these days, if you get my drift.

MOBY: Aye! *Now* can I make them all walk the plank? They're makin' me skin crawl.

ANNA: (*Giggling.*) Ha...that's because there's a two inch layer of dust on ya 'cuz nobody's checked *you* out for years! (*MOBY reacts insulted.*)

All the TEENS join in the joking except for WOODY and DAWN. They work their way back into the conversation at this point.

DAWN: But you have no idea what you're missing! I've been to Rome, Spain, England, Paris, the jungles of South America, outer space!

EVERYONE: Outer space?

DAWN: Yes! In books! And I never had to leave the confines of my home! Just open the pages and disappear for a while.

WINTHROP: Well, that's what I do when I'm playing games or listening to my iPod. I escape. I don't need to leave my room either.

DAWN: But it's not the same. You've all seen it before! You get that new game, new music, and play it for a few days, and then pretty soon it's not as much fun anymore. So you gotta run out and get something else. It's a vicious circle, really.

ADDIE: And reading books ain't? Books take too much time! I've got boys to chase and parties to go to. A reputation to uphold. (*Moves DSL.*)

SCARLETT: (*Following HER.*) Have I got some news for you, my dear. Reputations will only get you so far.

ADDIE: What do you mean?

SCARLETT: Well, the main character in my book, Hester, is accused of adultery, but because she refuses to reveal who the father of her child is, she is forced to wear the letter A on her garments. She has a child, Pearl, with this mystery man, who grows up a good portion of her life not knowing her *real* father.

ADDIE: (*Sounding more interested now.*) So? What happens? It sounds just like a soap opera!

SCARLETT: The father turns out to be none other than the Reverend Dimmesdale, who eventually confesses his sin to the town before he dies. So, who people believe you to be needs to *match* who you really are or you'll be a hypocrite. Need I mention that *your* name starts with the letter "A."

ADDIE: (*Contemplating.*) Oooo---Yes. I see.

ANNA: (*Still looking at the movie selections.*) You see what? A bunch of robotic books telling tall tales! Let's take Harry Potter, for instance. Why read over 800 pages of British mumbo jumbo when you can get the gist of the story from seeing it on the screen? Lord of the Rings! Same thing! I could go on.

MOCK: But...you miss all the wonderful details! The descriptions, the insight into the characters, what they're thinking, how they feel. You can't put *half* of that into a movie. There's no room or time. *Thousands* of books have helped to change the culture of the world! No movies' ever made that claim.

RED: *(Finally adding to this discussion.)* Yes, my motto has always been "Never judge a book by its movie." In fact, I think I have a poster of it somewhere in my desk. *(Moves back to desk and opens it.)*

WEBSTER: STOP! Hold it! This has all been a quaint little talk and everything, but did all of you know that Ms. Lawson is thinking about leaving the library?

TEENS: Huh? What? You can't go! We'd miss you!

RED: *(Acting suspicious.)* Leaving? Me? Why...where'd you get that idea?

THEO: A Mr. Avery Kindle? The Gourmet Goofball who came in here to offer you a job as manager? Remember?

RED: Oh, that. I--- haven't---*decided* anything yet. I'm just weighing all my options, ya know?

ANNA: But---if the library closed, where would I get my one dollar movie rentals?

BUTCH: Yeah, or my X-box games?

RED: *(Making her point clear.)* Well--- there you go. That's my point *(Moving CS to gather with the rest.)* Nobody comes in here to read anymore!

DAWN: *(Feeling slighted.)* Ahem!

RED: *(To Dawn.)* Sorry. I've done *everything* I can think of to bring people through the doors, and it worked for a while, but now there are just too many distractions. And---I *deserve* a promotion. I've gotten one raise since I've been here!

WOODY: So, you're gonna give up? Just like that? When I was ten years old I was kidnapped. Away from my family for five months until my captor made a mistake and I squealed on him to an off-duty detective. I *never* gave up hope.

RED: Oh, I wish it was all that simple. I really do. (*Obviously hiding some information from them.*) But you see, we haven't passed an operating levy for the library in three years. Pretty soon, we may not be able to *afford* to stay open. But at least we'll have Gourmet Gadgets next door. It'll have new *electronic* books and games and everything everyone wants!

MOBY: Aye. But there are some things it *won't* have too. (*Pause.*)
Us.

The BOOKS all mope back to their shelves and take their places. The GIRL BOOKS are sniffing a little. DAWN and WOODY walk around trying to comfort them, but it's no use. All of them close their eyes and shut down. RED can't stand the emotion, so SHE orders everyone out to allow her some time to think. All TEENS exit as RED plops herself back down into her chair and places her head into her hands. Lights fade.

Act One, Scene 2

AT RISE:

Later that evening, RED is working to file away some more books when the telephone on her desk rings. She walks to the desk to answer. Sitting on the corner of the desk facing the audience she speaks with the library's founder and current mayor of Pleasant Plains, New York.

RED: Hello? Pleasant Plains Public Library. Red Lawson speaking. How can I help you? Oh---good evening, Mayor Johnson. How have you been? I see. Uh, huh. Me? Oh, I've been doing fine. A little tired. What's that? This Thursday at 7PM? In your office? In a couple of days? Sure. I have no other plans. I have the early shift that day. Sir, may I ask what this meeting is all about? The library's funding? Okay. I understand. I'll just wait until the meeting. Thanks. Thanks for calling. See you soon. (*RED surveys the library as if SHE might be saying goodbye. SHE retrieves her purse from her desk drawer, sighs a deep sigh, then leaves.*)

BLACKOUT.

Soon after the blackout we hear the BOOKS talking. Lights come up dim and gradually increase throughout the scene. They all remain on their shelves this time stepping out occasionally when they speak.

THEO: So, *that* was our plan? I don't think it worked.

WEBSTER: No kidding. What gave you that idea, genius?

THEO: Well---

MOCK: Are you two finished? At least we tried. Did you really think a bunch of talking robotic books were gonna convince her to stay? Looks like she's already made up her mind. We're history.

DELL: (*Mocking her accent.*) We're history.

MOCK: Hey! Are you *mocking* me?

DELL: If the name fits...

LIL: No. For a change, Dell's right. We can't give up that easily, can we? Just look at that kid who got kidnapped. *He* made it back to his parents. It took *years* for me to get published. What if Louisa May Alcott just gave up? Or Alexander Graham Bell? Or Michael Jordan?

MOBY: I'm with you, mates. I mean, outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read. (*HE smiles.*) The world still needs us, don't they?

MAK: Of course they do. Computers are only as good as the people who *repair* them. There's always some new virus or worm that comes along and *messes* things up. Unless you're me, that is.

DELL: You keep braggin', and I'll *find* a way to mess you up. Don't worry.

MAK: Go ahead and try! You don't have the hard drive to follow through! You're such a mouse!

DELL: Oh, yeah! Why don't you go paint a picture or write some music or something? You're using up perfectly good electricity.

DYST: Shhh! I hear footprints.

CINDY: (*Correcting HIM.*) Footsteps.

DYST: The back door! Everybody, back on the shel---

The BOOKS scurry back to the shelves where they belong. Soon all the TEENS who were in the building that morning have arrived once again through the back door this time.

BUTCH: ---All right! We're in! Time to get this place back in shape. Then I'm gonna figure out how those books work. They were awesome!

EVERYONE: Yeah!

ADDIE: Hey, shy boy (*Referring to WOODY.*)? Thanks for coming. Don't worry. We won't make you read anything. (*Other TEENS laugh except for DAWN.*)

MOBY: Hold it right there, you scoundrels!

All the TEENS freeze. They're convinced that their movements are what triggered the books' voices once again. They move slightly to see if the books respond. They don't, so they break and go back to straightening the shelves, sweeping the floor, and cleaning RED's messy desk. BUTCH walks by MOBY and waves his hand back and forth with a dust rag in front of his face, but MOBY keeps his eyes closed. As soon as BUTCH turns his back, MOBY kicks him in the backside much like he's pushing him overboard on a ship. BUTCH lands on his feet then dashes back up to MOBY's shelf again.

BUTCH: Hey, guys? Did you see that? This book kicked me! Knocked me right off the platform!

ANNA: Yeah, sure. I don't think the robots are programmed for violence, but in your case, they might make an exception. (*SHE laughs.*)

BUTCH: (*Shocked.*) I swear! I waved my hand like this in front of its face, turned around, and then he---

MOBY tries it again, but this time BUTCH catches his foot and stops him.

BUTCH: Gotcha! See? I told you he kicked me!

Soon ALL the books back Butch down off the shelf and surround the TEENS like a gang. They move the TEENS DSR into the corner.

WEBSTER: Just what do you think you're doing here? After hours?

ADDIE: (*Trying to take charge.*) Relax, Web, we're just trying to help.

WEBSTER: The name's Webster.

ADDIE: Sorry. All I could see in the dark was W-E-B.

MOCK: Trying to help, huh? By doing what?

DAWN: Well, we got to thinking that the place has been looking kinda shabby for a few months now, so maybe *that's* why more people haven't been showing up lately. It's like, Red *knew* she'd be leaving or something. She doesn't seem to care anymore.

DELL: How'd you get in here anyhow?

WINTHROP: Back door. Red's been so ditsy lately she forgot to check it. Butch blocked it open with a wedge.

THEO: With a golf club?

WEBSTER: (*Dumbfounded.*) Seriously? He means a block of wood you place under the door to keep it open. See? You may have *all* those words inside of you, but you still need *me* to keep you level.

MOCK: Enough! You? The quiet one? What's your name again?

WOODY: Woody. Woody Forest.

MOCK: (*Letting a quick giggle escape unintentionally.*) Woody Forest? Were your parents like Smokey the Bear or rangers or something?

WOODY: No. Comedians. Both of them. Mom quit the stand-up when she had my sister and me, but my dad's *still* telling jokes. Mom writes for a newspaper now.

LIL: What's your sister's name?

WOODY: Windy.

ANNA: Just wait. It gets better. Ask him what his dad's name is?

MOBY: So? What is it, like Green or something?

WOODY: No. It's (*He stage whispers.*) Rain.

MOCK: Rain? You're kidding? And I thought Sonny and Cher's kids had some strange names.

THEO: Well, at least you haven't spent most of your life on the false list of paleontology. So many people rank me right up there with T-Rex, Brontosaurus, Thesaurus. *I'm* the one *most* kids can't quite picture.

MOCK: That's nothing. I was checked out by a drunk one time. He thought I was a Mexican drinking book. *Tequila* Mockingbird.

WINTHROP: Did I ever tell you guys about the time I decided to learn Chinese?

ADDIE, ANNA, BUTCH: No. What happened?

WINTHROP: Well, my father bought this expensive book that recommended you *digest* the words slowly because it was such a difficult language.

ANNA: So, what's so strange about that?

WINTHROP: After about an hour of studying, I was still hungry.
(*Smiling.*)

ANNA: Funny. At least you didn't have to go through elementary school with *my* name.

ADDIE: What's wrong with *your* name? Anna's a common name.

ANNA: Anna Mulroney. (*She waits for a response but doesn't get one yet.*) Anna Mulroney? Say it out loud quickly. (*She does.*) Animal Roney.

BUTCH: That *almost* beats the New York City mobster who got caught making illegal bets for people. The headlines read: Bookie Monster Gets Thrown in the Can! (*EVERYONE laughs.*)

WEBSTER: (*Incredulously.*) Focus! Focus, humans! (*The books stare down the TEENS who have gotten way off track.*) As *educationally* stimulating as this conversation is right now, we all still have a common problem to solve. (*Beat.*) Reminds me of the Dr. Phil house.

DAWN: (*Still not "getting" it.*) I find television to be *very* educational. Every time someone turns on the set, I go in the other room and read a book.

WEBSTER: (*Frustration growing.*) That's nice, but can we just get back to the matter at hand? In a few days, Red will be gone, and we'll all be homeless. We can't let that fancy electronics store win out!

BUTCH travels around the room secretly trying to figure out how the books are able to interact and talk. He sneaks up behind LIL and tugs on what he "thinks" is a computer module.

BUTCH: Ah-hah! I found it! (*Pulls.*)

LIL: Ouch! (*SHE whips around and smacks him in the face. BUTCH goes down to one knee.*) You touched my ending! How dare you?

BUTCH: Your *ending*? I thought it was your mother board!

LIL: You leave my mother out of this!

ALL BOOKS: Yeah! You leave her mother out of this!

THEO: Or---we'll lock you up for harassment! Book him, Moby!

SCARLETT: (*Moving closer to Butch.*) You can touch *my* ending any time you want, mate.

BUTCH: (*Moving to consider it then.*) Noooo! You don't understand! I just wanna know what makes all of you tick? What computer animation program they're using.

ALL BOOKS: Computer? Program? Huh?

MOCK: We're all just stories, young man. All except for those two. They're just *reference* books.

THEO/WEBSTER: Hey!

DELL: We have tons of programs inside us. Maybe you'd like to touch our endings too.

MAK: Huh? He's not touching *anything* on me!

ANNA: But---how? How is it all of you are talking to us? It's just not normal.

DYST: Not *normal*. Novel. (*Waits for a response.*) Get it?

CINDY: Dyst? You're not helping.

DYST: Sorry.

DAWN: I've got an idea! All we need to do is show her how much she's needed around here. (*Books and TEENS gather around her CS.*) You know, let's say tomorrow I come in asking for something I *know* she'll have to work to get for me. And maybe the next day someone *else* comes in. We just keep rotating.

ANNA: I get it! I think I saw a movie like that once. I'm sure there are tons of movies I could ask her to get.

BUTCH/WINTHROP: Yeah! And music or video games!

MOCK: Hey, this could work.

DAWN: (*Frustrated.*) No! Weren't *any* of you listening? Red said the library wasn't doing much business because people weren't *reading* anymore! If we're going to do this, we have to ask for *books* not movies or music or video games! That's the worst thing we could do! She'll leave for sure.

WINTHROP: Books? I don't *do* books. Can I use an iPad?

DAWN: No!

BUTCH: I haven't read a book since the second grade, and it was mostly pictures. You'd a loved it, Woody.

LIL: She's right, ya know? We *have* to get her to see that staying here is so much better than working at a store. So, I suggest for a *start* that each of you come in one at a time tomorrow and pick one of us. Some of us, sorry Moby, haven't been outta here in years! It'll be an adventure!

WINTHROP and BUTCH surround SCARLETT, and they both talk at the same time.

BUTCH/WINTHROP: I'll take *her!*

WINTHROP: Oh, no you don't! I saw her first! *(They fight over her pulling her back and forth.)*

BUTCH: You did not! And I almost got to touch her...her...

THEO: Binding! *(Smiling.)*

BUTCH: Yeah! Her binding!

SCARLETT: My ending! My ending!

BUTCH: Same thing.

WINTHROP: No, it's not! Besides, she's over 250 pages. You'll be a *grandfather* before you finish! *(Both continue to fight over SCARLETT.)*

BUTCH: So? At least she's good looking----for a book.

CINDY: What am I, chopped liver?

DYST: I hate liver! *(CINDY stares at him.)* But I love yours---I mean--you! You're beautiful!

CINDY: Well...I'm NOT going home with you now, am I? You *live* in the same place I do!

DYST: It was worth a try.

WEBSTER: *(Not believing his ears.)* STOP! Are you two finished? First come, first served! How's that? We don't have much time! Thursday's coming fast.

ADDIE: Let's go before they make *me* check out a book. They got anything in this place about make-up and fashion?

ANNA: I dunno. Why don't you ask *Little Women* over there?

ADDIE: Naw---that's okay. She's a little too frumpy for me.

LIL: Frumpy? Well---I---I---uh---Theo? A little help here?

THEO: Ah, yes frumpy. Dowdy. Plain. Unattractive.

LIL: Well---I never!

ADDIE: I can tell! And you probably never will either. *(Laughs.)*

LIL: Humpf!

TEENS exit the way they came in. *BOOKS* position themselves back onto their shelves. *Pause.*

DYST: So, do you think it'll work?

BOOKS: Sure. (*Pause.*) It's *bound* to.

BLACKOUT

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