

Make Way

By

Dave Osmundsen

2018

4 Arnold Court
Pompton Plains, NJ 07444
(973) 557-0656
osmundsend@yahoo.com

Cast of Characters

- A: Male, late teens/early twenties
- B: Female, late thirties/early forties
- C: Male, late fifties/early sixties

A, B, and C are sitting on chairs surrounding a fire pit. There are large piles of books next to the chairs, which they casually throw into the fire throughout the play. As soon as the lights are up, we hear a buzzer sound.

B

Ten minutes, gentlemen. Anyway, you were saying?

A

So he just ghosts me for no reason, then last night calls me like he didn't ignore my last five texts-

B

Have you talked to him about it?

A

Not yet. I'm going to tonight.

C puts his hand to his lower back and grimaces.

A

Your back OK?

C

Yeah. I'm just too old for this crap.

B

Have you been doing the exercises I sent you?

C

Yeah. Every morning. No change.

A

Are you taking any pills for it, or...?

C

You name a pill, I'm on it. My wife just started calling me a pill popper!

C laughs sadly.

B

How is your wife doing?

C

She's good. Yeah. Having a bit of a hard time finding a job since...

B

Right, right.

C

I remember when a degree in English actually meant something.

C picks up a book.

Heh. This was her favorite book to teach. "Great Gatsby."

B

Great book.

A

Oh yeah. We were supposed to read it in English, but me and reading is like...

A shakes his head as if to say "not simpatico". C throws the book into the fire.

C

I told her multiple times she could always get a job here, but she refuses. She thinks this "Make Way" mandate is bullsh-

B shushes C violently. The three stop throwing books into the fire for this next segment.

B

What did I say about-

C

It's my wife. Not me.

B

If Bill walked by and heard you-

C

OK, OK-

B

-you could get taken away. Remember what happened to Terry?

Silence.

C

I won't mention it again. Sorry.

B

I understand a lot of people have thoughts about the mandate. But we're not getting paid to talk about them. We're being paid to burn these books.

A
Ten bucks an hour...

B
(Ignoring A)
And I'm being paid to *make sure* you burn these books. Got it?

A and C nod their heads. The tension settles down. They continue throwing books into the fire. They do this for a minute or so. Maybe they glance at a few titles. Or maybe not.

A picks up a book and examines it. He recognizes it.

A
Oh my God!

C
What?

A
I've actually read this book.

A shows B and C the book.

B
"King Monstrous." Haven't heard of it.

C
Me neither.

A
It was like my favorite childhood book. It was about this King, King Monstrous, who wanted his son, Sid Monstrous, to marry this girl named Glenda so he, the King, could get with her mother, Windalyn-

B
You read this when you were a kid!?

A
I was an odd child.

A flips through the book.
But yeah, I used to read it like, every day. When we got rid of my copy for the mandate, I never thought I'd see it again. I looked in every single library for a copy. They never had it. They would have books *like* "King Monstrous"-one librarian tried to get me to read "King Lear"

(MORE)

A (cont'd)

and "Richard III", back when you could still get copies of them. But I could never find "King Monstrous". I wonder how this got here...

B

This reunion is really sweet, but we don't have time to get all mushy over weird-ass books from our childhood. Into the fire, please.

A

Can't I just... hold onto it, a little longer? It's like, the only book I actually... *liked*.

C

Let him keep the book a few more minutes. It clearly means a lot to him. If I ever came across a copy of "The Grapes of Wrath" again, I'd want to hold onto it a little.

A

Yeah. Please?

B considers.

B

Alright. But I'd better see that book in the fire by the time we're done here.

A

Thank you!

A sets the book down by his chair.

B

Now go a little faster to make up for the time you just wasted. I don't wanna have to tell Bill that you put us behind.

A takes an armful of books, and drops them all into the fire.

A

There. All caught up.

Silently, A, B, and C continue throwing books into the fire for a few moments. C touches his back again, in pain.

A

You sure you're OK?

C

(To B)

Actually... Do you think I could maybe a leave a little early?

B

If it were up to me, I would. But you know Bill. He wants all or nothing from us.

A

We have less than ten minutes left. I can take his books off of him.

B

That's very nice of you. But Bill would tear me a new one if he found out I was letting people go early.

A

He's been in pain all day.

C

No, it's OK. I'll be alright. I've stuck it out to the end in worse situations.

A

You sure?

C

Yeah, I'll be alright.

B

Sorry. Like I said. If it were up to me...

The three continue throwing books into the fire. C comes across a copy of "Charlotte's Web".

C

Oh look. Another "Charlotte's Web".

B

That's probably the five hundredth copy I've seen since I started here.

C

I loved this book.

B

I loved it too, but there were more copies out there than people who actually wanted to read it.

A
Now no one will get to read it... That's kinda depressing.

B
(To A)
Please. You've never even read "Charlotte's Web."

A
Yeah, but...

B
I mean, what kind of *childhood* did you have?

C
A monstrous one, apparently!

C makes a rim shot gesture. B rolls her eyes.

B
The puns! What did I say about the puns!?

C
Sorry. Couldn't resist.

A
I kinda wish I read it now. Actually, since I've started this job, I've seen some books that look pretty cool. A few I wanted to sneak home, but then I remember what happened to Terry, and...

B
Right.

C
Even as a teacher, I wish I read more. I don't know, I could never just sit still and read, you know?

B
I read a lot when I had my daughter. During her nap times, I somehow found time to read *Gone with the Wind*. And *The Thorn Birds*. And *Twilight*. I really liked *Twilight*.

C
My daughter was *obsessed* with those books.

A
I always called it the Apple Book. Because the cover of the first book had those hands holding out an apple? So I always called it the Apple Book.

Buzzer sounds.

B

Five-minute warning. Alright, we gotta hurry up now. Less talk, more burn. Time to say your last words to "King Monstrous", kid.

A picks up the book he had set aside. He looks at it tenderly, somberly, almost like a mother holding a dying baby. B and C continue throwing books into the fire. A long moment.

A

I just didn't think it would be so short. You know? Like, I figured I might find this book again one day, but I didn't think I would have to...

B

What did I just say? Less talk, more burn.

A

You know what's weird, and kind of messed up? This could be the last copy of this book. Like, the last ever copy of this book. The last opportunity the person who wrote this will get their words read by another human being.

C

There could always be another copy out there.

A

After the "Make Way" mandate, I doubt it. Make Way for what, you gotta think...

B

It's not for us to tell the powers-that-be what to get rid of.

A

I might be the only one who has ever read this book now. At this second, I might be the only one who can *still* read it.

B

So what? It matters to you, that's one thing. But if we're being honest, it doesn't matter to me.

She indicates C, who continues throwing books into the fire pit.

I doubt it matters much to him either.

C

Don't get me involved. I'm just trying to finish up here as quick as I can.

B

What *will* matter, though, is if Bill walks by, sees you holding onto a book like a baby or something and not throwing it in with the others. Need I remind you of Terry?

A

Terry was stealing books and mouthed off to Bill before they took her away. I'm just... taking my time with this book.

B

If you're fine with Bill walking by and taking you away, that's your thing. But think of the bigger picture. People are starving. They're out of jobs. They're trying to live without electricity. We don't have time to be concerned about what books survive or whatever. Even ones that we read compulsively when we were five.

A

But... it meant a lot to me. Didn't "Charlotte's Web" mean a lot to you? Or "The Thorn Birds"? Or "Twilight"?

B

Those were all books I enjoyed. Doesn't mean I don't do what I'm being paid to do.

A

But... they were like, your favorite books. And now you're killing-

B

Don't give me some sentimental tripe about how I'm killing myself by burning copies of some book. I'm just trying to get by and do my job. And part of my job is making sure that you two are doing your jobs. And if Bill finds out you haven't been doing your jobs, he'll find out I haven't been doing my job. And if Bill finds out I haven't been doing my job, I get taken away. Again, big picture. What's it gonna matter if someone can't read a book with talking animals, or *Monstrous Kings*, in twenty years? There will be new things once we get rid of all this old crap. That's what the Make Way mandate is for. New innovations. New ideas.

A

What new ideas? Before they shut the grid down, they said they were going to promote all sorts of new ideas. But it's been a year, and all we've done was burn books!

B

And that's a tragedy, huh? We were able to burn every copy of "Mein Kampf". Ever hear of that thing? Or "The Little Red Book"? "The Ruhnama"? Those books were written by dictators to tell their people what to do. And sure, you could argue about how their thoughts were valid to them, but oh, what

(MORE)

B (cont'd)

they were able to get their people to do... You know there are people out there saying we should *keep* those books around? For "educational" purposes? They say we have to "learn from them". But what if some lonely kid read them and got some ideas? Better to just get rid of the books than to risk that, I say. Plus, they're just terrible books.

A

But "King Monstrous" wasn't written by a dictator. And you're wrong! It mattered to other people.

B

Can you introduce anyone else it mattered to? If you can, I'll shut my mouth.

Pause.

A

No.

B

There you have it.

A

But it made me want to be a better person. It made me think I could do anything.

B

And that's the other thing. You got books telling young folk they can do everything. Setting up false expectations. Telling people they have powers they don't. That all you had to do was believe in yourselves. And now look at you. I saw how you young people tried to fight the mandate. But where are we right now? What are we doing? This time, you all failed. That's the circumstances you're under now. You can either fall in line, survive, and start over with the rest of us. Or you can steal a book and end up like Terry. Which sounds better to you?

Buzzer sounds. Different from the ones we've heard before.

B

Two minutes. Last chance before we put this fire out.

B and C continue throwing books into the fire. A doesn't. He continues holding onto "King Monstrous." Standstill. A hugs the book to himself. He then walks slowly to the fire pit, kisses the book, then drops it into the fire.

B
Excellent. Now let's put this fire out, yo!

The three take water buckets and throw the water on the fire, putting it out. The three of them look at the ashes of the flames, the ashes of the books they've burned. The charred pages, bindings, etc. It is almost mournful. Almost. Buzzer sounds. End of day.

B
Good work today, gentlemen.

B starts to exit. She says to A:

B
Let me know how your thing with that guy goes.

B exits. A and C stare at where the fire was for a few more minutes. A exits, nearly in tears, leaving C alone onstage.

C
Yep. I'm too old for this crap.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY