

LOS LIBROS MALOS
(The Bad Books)

A short play
By D. Richard Tucker

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CAST

LIBRARIAN (M or F, 25+), a compassionate public servant.
MIGUEL (M, 20+), an illegal immigrant.
DANA (M or F, 20+), a conscientious tax payer.

SETTING Front desk of a library.

TIME The present

MIGUEL is at the library's circulation desk, with several books, having just turned in his library card application to the LIBRARIAN, who has been going over the details.

LIBRARIAN

All right, and I'll need some form of proof of residence, a water bill or something, addressed to your home.

MIGUEL

(producing envelope)
I have my cable TV bill.

LIBRARIAN

That's perfect.

LIBRARIAN examines bill and stamps card.

LIBRARIAN

All right Mr. Serrano, that just about-

DANA (off stage)

Hold it!

MIGUEL and LIBRARIAN look around.
DANA rushes in.

DANA (cont'd)

Do you know what's going on here?

LIBRARIAN

I'm just issuing-

DANA

No, you don't get it. This man is an illegal alien.

LIBRARIAN

I'm sorry?

DANA

Miguel Serrano?

MIGUEL

Yes.

DANA

(to LIBRARIAN)

I told you. This man is in the country illegally.

LIBRARIAN

But he just received his library card.

DANA

He's not authorized to have one.

MIGUEL

I have identification.

DANA

Like what?

LIBRARIAN

(looking at card)

It's aMa-tric-u-la..Coun...selor....

DANA

A Matricula Consular de Alta Seguridad?

LIBRARIAN

Right.

DANA

Do you know what that is?

LIBRARIAN

It's ...umm...

DANA

The Mexican government issues that to any one of their citizens who is outside of Mexico.

MIGUEL

But I was-

LIBRARIAN

It is considered by the city council to be an appropriate piece of identification.

MIGUEL

See.

DANA

But that's issued to all Mexicans, regardless of whether or not they're here legally.

MIGUEL

Is there a problem?

LIBRARIAN

Are you protesting that this man is checking out books from the library on the basis that he's not residing here legally?

DANA

I'm not protesting – I'm making a citizen's arrest.

MIGUEL

I don't think you can do that.

LIBRARIAN

Look, umm...I've already checked out the books to him. Is it really such a big deal?

DANA

Yes! He's depriving our natural born citizens the opportunity to read those books.

LIBRARIAN

Okay, umm...Mr. Serrano...I really hate to do this...but-

MIGUEL

(begging)
Please! You do not understand. They do not have such books as these in my country.

LIBRARIAN

See - he just wants to read.

DANA

Then let him go somewhere else to read, but not in our tax-funded libraries.

MIGUEL

But I cannot get these books in Mexico. In my town, there are very few books, and some one is always reading them.

LIBRARIAN

(to DANA)
You know, it doesn't really seem fair-

MIGUEL

In Mexico, I can't find enough books to satisfy me. The books here are more interesting and provide greater reading pleasure.

LIBRARIAN

Do you really want stop him from reading?

DANA

But he's illegal!

MIGUEL

Where is your compassion? I am just a simple man, looking for a book, and a chance to read. Is that asking too much? In my country, I could never experience the joy of Charles Dickens and Harry Potter. Here in United States you have everything – Newsweek... Nora Roberts... Archie comics. Why can't I be part of the American dream?

DANA

(shouting)
Because you don't belong here!

LIBRARIAN

(looking around, to DANA)
I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

DANA

Why? I'm an American citizen.

LIBRARIAN

But you're causing a disturbance. Yelling in the library is strictly forbidden.

DANA

Oh! So if I raise my voice, you'll toss me out - but this guy walks into the building - illegally - and check out some books - illegally - and you give him a flyer for your continuing education programs.

LIBRARIAN

(to MIGUEL)

We have an excellent program for English as a Second Language.

DANA

I'd hate to see what happened if I lit up a cigarette.

LIBRARIAN

Don't do that - this is a no smoking facility. Smoking is strictly forbidden.

(to MIGUEL)

We also have free help for tax return preparation.

MIGUEL

I don't need that.

DANA

All right, I didn't want to get ugly, but I guess I'm gonna have to pull out the big guns.

DANA produces a sheaf of papers, and thumbs through them.

DANA (cont'd)

Lake Avenue Branch, "The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Spanish edition," checked out on August 17th, never returned.

MIGUEL

Umm, that was-

DANA

Fourth Avenue Branch, "Wuthering Heights, Spanish translation," checked out July 2nd, never returned.

MIGUEL

Look, I -

DANA

Peterson Street Branch, "The Joy Luck Club, in Spanish" checked out May 22nd, never returned.

LIBRARIAN

How do you know this?

DANA

(flashing an identification card)
Dana Dewey, Vice President, Friends of the Library.

LIBRARIAN

(to MIGUEL)
These books.....Is this true?

DANA

Sixteen dollars and forty-five cents in outstanding overdue fines.

MIGUEL

Do you offer amnesty?

DANA

What happened to the books, Miguel?

MIGUEL

(pause, then reluctantly)
I sent them home to my family.

DANA

See what I mean – he’s taking good American books and shipping them out of the country!

LIBRARIAN

But....he’s just checking out the books that Americans don’t want.

DANA

And how about this?

DANA produces a book opens it and thumbs through the pages.

DANA (cont’d)

He checked this out on April 4th. Look, rip...tear.....coffee stain....folded corner!

LIBRARIAN

(to MIGUEL)
You did this to “The Great Gatsby?”

MIGUEL

In my country, things are different. In Mexico, we own the books. We are men, and the books belong to us.

LIBRARIAN

But they can't be treated this way.

DANA

It gets even worse –

DANA produces another book.

DANA (cont'd)

“Curious George Takes a Job.” Look at page twenty-six.

LIBRARIAN thumbs through book and looks up.

LIBRARIAN

There is no page twenty-six.

DANA

Exactly.

MIGUEL

I am a man, and if I am not happy with the book, I slap the book around...show the book who is boss. It is a part of our national tradition.

LIBRARIAN

You can't just rip out the pages you don't like. It's one thing to bring your customs into our country, but our books are not used to being treated like this. You have to do a better job of assimilating into the community.

DANA

If you multiply that by thousands, maybe millions of illegals in libraries across the country, it's nothing less than terrorism.

MIGUEL

I am not a terrorist – I am a reader!

DANA

If you allow the illegal immigrant to check out books, it won't be long until we can't tell the difference between our citizens and the rest of these illegal readers.

LIBRARIAN

But shouldn't everybody have a chance to read?

DANA

I'm not fighting his right to read – I'm opposed to his illegal infiltration into our public library system!

MIGUEL

You don't understand! You build fences around your libraries – you try to keep us out, but the opportunity to curl up with a good book belongs to every man. This is not about politics. This is about morality! You cannot deprive a human of the chance to enjoy a good novel or flip through the pages of a magazine. Regardless of my heritage, I deserve the same right to pursue good literature!

DANA

And you can pursue it in Mexico – not here.

MIGUEL

Why is your American society so advanced in some things and yet you've barely moved past your racism of the 1800's?

LIBRARIAN

Racism?

DANA

This isn't about racism. It's about this foreigner taking things that aren't his.

LIBRARIAN

(to DANA)

I'm sorry, but you'll have to go now.

DANA

What?

LIBRARIAN

We don't allow racism here.

DANA

What?

LIBRARIAN

Racism is strictly forbidden. Please leave – before I call security.

DANA

You've got to be kidding.

LIBRARIAN picks up the phone.

LIBRARIAN

I said "Leave."

DANA looks around a moment and concedes defeat. DANA exits. There is a long awkward pause, and then LIBRARIAN picks up the books and hands them to MIGUEL.

LIBRARIAN (cont'd)

These will be due on the 14th of next month.

MIGUEL

Thank you.

LIBRARIAN

Is there anything else I can do for you today?

MIGUEL

Um...could you tell me...how can I join Oprah's book club?

Blackout.

END