

Microwave! In the Cafeteria

A Comedy in One Act

by
Bradley Walton

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It appeared without warning on a Monday, its origins shrouded in mystery. A week later, it had vanished without a trace. But across the days between, it changed cafeteria life in ways that no one could have imagined. It was a microwave oven, so ancient and decrepit that some believed it to have come from an Egyptian pyramid. Now, in a series of hilarious monologues suitable for stage or online presentation by a gender-flexible cast of 1 to 18 performers ...its story will finally be told.

CHARACTERS

(18 roles any gender. Doubling possible.)

VANESSA / VIC: A student reporter for the school broadcast news.

JASON / JANICE: A student who got sick after finding out where his burrito had been.

MS. / MR. BROOKS: The custodian who cleaned up Jason's mess.

MR. / MS. RYAN: The head custodian who buys a microwave oven for the cafeteria.

BRET / BRIT: The first student to use the microwave.

SHEILA / SILAS: The second student to use the microwave.

JOE / JOSIE: A student who tries to cut in line for the microwave.

MICHAEL: A massive football player who becomes the gatekeeper to the microwave.

SUSAN / SAM: A student who is not happy with how Michael is running things.

SHELBY / SHELDON: A student who thinks the school should buy more microwaves.

ISABEL / ISAAC: A student who burns her finger.

CARL / CARLA: A student who tries to warm up a brownie.

SHAWN / SAVANNAH: A student who was in line behind Carl.

PRINCIPAL: Possibly never set foot in the cafeteria.

CAFETERIA MANAGER: Resents the presence of the microwave.

BRYCE / BRANDY: A student who never gets a chance to use the microwave.

ZEKE / ZADA: A student who thinks that a mummy broke into the school.

MR. MURPHY: A custodian who believes in capitalism.

CASTING NOTES

It is possible for one person to play all of the characters onstage with no costume changes by using different voices, postures, and mannerisms for each character.

Although Michael is specifically male, large and muscular, the character would work well if played humorously by someone small and/or of a different gender, standing on a block or footstool, and bulked up with muscle padding. (Like something from a superhero Halloween costume).

STAGING

The play is performed on a bare stage. No props are required (except maybe a block or footstool for the actor playing Michael).

The playwright suggests the monologues be delivered alternating between the left and right sides of the stage with a simple lighting shift each time. However, other positioning, blocking, and transitions between characters are totally fine.

Because the play is composed entirely of monologues, it should be easy to perform online with the cast members acting from their own homes. A combination of in-person and online performance might also work. For example, if a cast member was unable to attend in person but could perform from home, their role could be live streamed to the performance space.

COSTUMING

Characters should be dressed to match their character type: Student, custodian, principal, or cafeteria worker.

A muscle suit (like something from a superhero Halloween costume) may be needed for Michael.

Microwave! In the Cafeteria

(AT RISE: VANESSA on a bare stage.)

VANESSA: I joined my high school's broadcasting club hoping that I could do stories with actual substance. I had a dream of being, "Vanessa Bedlinski, school investigative reporter." Instead, I wound up doing features about stuff like book displays in the library and the lines in the parking lot getting repainted. So when I was assigned a story about the cafeteria getting a microwave oven, I figured it would be more of the same. And I was even less thrilled because the cafeteria is someplace I try to avoid. It's loud, crowded, and the food's always cold. That's why I pack lunch and eat in the broadcasting room. But when I went to the cafeteria to interview people about the microwave—holy cow! I couldn't believe what was happening. One very old microwave, hundreds of students, and total chaos. It was a reporter's dream! And what that chaos led to—I couldn't believe it. Plus, the student perspectives on the microwave—some of them were waaay there—pure gold. But it got better—nobody knew anything about it, or where it came from. Not the principal...not the cafeteria staff...I interviewed tons of people. By Friday, I was just about ready to chalk it up to the tooth fairy when I noticed all of the custodians, huddled in a group, watching what was going on with the microwave. So I talked to them, and lo and behold, the last piece of the puzzle fell into place. Or so I thought. Because the following Monday, there was a mysterious and unexpected twist ending. Nobody had a clue what had really happened, but a lot of people were very unhappy. Except for me. The whole fiasco had turned me into an actual investigative reporter, and after sifting through my interviews, *(If performed online, add "which all wound up being conducted online because the cafeteria was just that nuts,")* I had a story! It started with a sophomore named Jason and a frozen burrito that he'd gotten from his buddy Christian.

JASON: Me and Christian, we've been friends since third grade. So when he says, "I pigged out on chips at breakfast, you want half my burrito?" I'm thinking it's safe. He ain't gonna do me wrong. And yeah, the burrito's kinda lukewarm and soggy and it's got some white powdery stuff on it, but I figure that's the preservatives, you know? Can't have food without preservatives. And it tastes a little funny, but it's a burrito from the freezer—ain't no gourmet Taco Bell food—so I figure you take what you get. But then later after I eat the thing, I'm sittin' in class thinking'...where'd he heat that up? So I text him, and I'm like, "Where'd you find a microwave?" And he texts me back all like, "What?" I'm like, "A microwave! Where'd you find a microwave to heat up the burrito?" And he's like, "I didn't use no microwave. I held it in my armpit all morning." And I'm like, "What?" And he's like, "Armpit. I heat 'em up old school." And I'm like, "Inside or outside of your shirt?" And he's like, "Inside. It's warmer there. Why you askin' stupid questions?" And I'm like, "Please tell me you left it in the plastic wrapper." And he's like, "Nah, it heats up better without the wrapper." And that's when I realized that the white stuff wasn't no preservatives...it was deodorant...I ate half a burrito that'd been marinatin' in Christian's armpit all morning, and you'd better believe—I ran for the trash can.

BROOKS: Any time somebody calls for me, I know it's nothing good. Goes with being a custodian. But this was one for the record books. Two mops, two buckets, four rolls of paper towels, and a whole bottle of Lysol. If I could've taken a fire hose to it, I would've. Even if Jason had made it to the trash can in time, I don't know how much good it would've done. I figured the poor kid had a virus or somethin', but then I heard he got sick because he found out where the burrito had been all morning. Frankly, I couldn't blame him. And it got me thinkin'...holding a frozen burrito under your arm for three and a half hours...that's gotta be uncomfortable. What would drive a person to do that? Well, I guess they wanna eat a frozen burrito, but they need to get it unfrozen, because otherwise, you probably couldn't even bite into it. Maybe you could lick it like a Popsicle, but it'd be lunch the next day 'til you finished, and then it'd be time to start all over again. So what can you do to a frozen burrito besides stick it under your arm, or lick it like a Popsicle? You heat it in a microwave! But there was no microwave in the cafeteria. And I thought...maybe there should be. Me and the rest of the custodians, we talked it over, and all the loose change that'd been cleaned up off the floor since the beginning of the year, well, we were gonna use it to throw ourselves a toaster strudel party in June, but we decided to put it towards a microwave for the cafeteria instead. So the head custodian, Mr. Ryan, he went out shoppin'.

End of Freeview

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