

The National



SYNOPSIS

Like any industry, the library circuit has its own superstars, and small-town librarian ROWENA O'MARLEY dreams of becoming one of them. Unfortunately, however, ROWENA is held back by her darkest secret: her dyslexia. Her only allies are her friend JANICE, a kind-hearted alcoholic with a dead end job who shoots squirrels while counting logging trucks, and her pet budgerigar OSKAR, who she has taught to recite self-help manuals.

In a twist of fate ROWENA is selected to become a judge of the prestigious children's book award, The National, and she is catapulted into the limelight. She is all the more excited as she'll be working along side chair-of-judges, SANDRA NOLAN - literary superstar and her personal hero. With four other judges they begin a whirlwind tour of small-town libraries and rundown motels where 100 children's books are pared down to an eventual winner.

ROWENA is quickly introduced to the "group-dynamic and it is clear that her supposed hero, SANDRA NOLAN, has all the other judges under her thumb. SANDRA patronises ROWENA'S every opinion and as ROWENA begins to doubt her ability she begins to lie about her credentials. It soon becomes a battle of the wills between SANDRA, preferring one book to win, an ROWENA another. Growing increasingly frustrated, ROWENA realises she has to learn to play this game – and boy does she learn it fast. By threatening to expose the secret affair of two other judges and by sleeping with a third, ROWENA rustles up some support for her preferred book. But with a bit of blackmail SANDRA wins one judge back and, only days away from the award ceremony, the women and their two books are locked in a stalemate. Then out of the blue SANDRA pulls out her trump card – she takes ROWENA aside and threatens to expose her dyslexia. ROWENA is crushed and her only option is to resign from the panel.

No longer a judge, and exiled to the depths of her library's archive, ROWENA has an epiphany. She decides to expose SANDRA, and what better place to do this than at the award ceremony – live on television! With a newfound strength ROWENA breaks into the award ceremony and gets up onstage. But with lights blazing and television cameras rolling ROWENA is completely overcome by fear: all those voices from her childhood that told her she was a good for nothing who couldn't spell come flooding back to her. But from within the cacophony a tiny little voice emerges: OSKAR, ROWENA'S budgerigar, reciting self-help mantras. ROWENA regains composure and in front of the rolling cameras she tells the world of her dyslexia and how SANDRA NOLAN expelled her from the judging panel because of it. The audience is completely stunned, but their silence gives way to applause – here standing in front of them is their brave new literary superstar! But ROWENA'S moment of glory does

not last for long as SANDRA comes flying from the wing taking her out as though they are rugby players. As the two ladies roll across the stage a gun shot echoes in the hall. The confused audience hold their breath. A drunk JANICE has turned up and shot SANDRA!

They say it is bad to speak ill of the dead, and this couldn't be more true than in the case of the late SANDRA NOLAN. The media heralds her as a hero and a martyr and ROWENA is quickly vilified. She loses her license and is fired from her library and JANICE is set to jail, although she's not complaining because she was missing her old mates and the food.

With few options left ROWENA decides to take JANICE'S old job, and she and OSKAR move to JANICE'S shed by the old highway to count logging trucks. Life moves slowly out there, and ROWENA now has all the time in the world to read the great novels she never read before. Having overcome her dyslexia, ROWENA now has Shakespeare and Dickens to keep her company, and she no longer dreams at night of being a superstar in the librarian world.

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Sex, Lies and Librarians