

## Burning Bright

Rob, an introverted terrified High School freshman, struggles to assemble a social identity by enrolling in theatre classes, and through various walk-on, non-speaking parts, he fights to gain acceptance, and ultimately lands the role of Romeo in the senior year production, but it's not the transformative experience he hoped

### **Who is your ideal audience and what would you like them to come away with?**

The show is for everyone who is not cool in school and who was forced to evolve. They will come away purged of the bitterness of high school, and proud of that they also endured.

## Setting

Eldorado High School- Cafeteria and Performing Arts Center, Albuquerque NM, 1979

## Characters:

**Narrator**, Adult Rob

**Rob**, 14, a high school freshman

**Beth**, his older sister

**Lisa**, her best friend

**Karen**, Lisa's sister

**Troy**, a shrimpy freshman

**Kevin**, a hispanic/navajo freshman

**Roy**, a huge freshman, techy

**Miss Baksa**, 30's, junior teacher in Drama Department

**Drusilla**, a vampy busty freshman, 15 going on 35

**Beth Moore**, an eager drama student, freshman

**Kirk**, a surfer/slacker, freshman

**George Nason**, late 40's head teacher in Drama Department

**Anja**, eager, take-charge freshman, transplant from Wisconsin

**Dad**, Rob's father

**Nick Mann**, freshman, Rob's neighbor, transplant from Philly

**Coach Stell**, Texas-style high school Track coach

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Narrator

The most important day of my education occurred about two weeks before High School actually started: **Registration Day**. In the first week of August , I had to interrupt my barefooted summer, and be driven to school on a Tuesday by my older sister:

Beth

You should pick an outfit that will show what an awesome summer you've been having having, but not look too dressy, or like you wanna be at school.

Narrator

Apparently, High school required you to assemble a new identity. I didn't even know where to begin.

Beth

You have to get in the Registration line early, Rob, I'm driving and I'm picking up Lisa and Karen, so don't sleep late tomorrow or you'll screw everybody's Class Schedule up. For the year! We don't want to get put in A Lunch like idiots.

Narrator

What? I might screw everything up? How? I barely slept thinking about what a huge Lottery the lunch schedule was. Something I might do, or fail to do , would either raise us all among the Cool people or cast us among the Socially Damned. But I had no idea how to sway the outcome. In the car the girls explained it all:

Lisa (brushing hair)

Luckily, you're Registering early with the Juniors and Seniors, so just tell them we carpooled, and they have to let you register early.

Karen (smacking gum)

That's the only good thing about being the middle kid.

Beth

I better not get A Lunch again like I did last year. Eating at 11 in the morning, with the ROTC kids, and the marching Band, and the dorks who take afternoon enrichment classes at the U totally gags me. It totally wrecked my social life. All the cool people have B lunch.

Narrator

So, terrified of making a false move, I closely followed my sister and her friends

Beth (*jingling keys*)

Rob walk behind us and try NOT to look like a Freshman .

Narrator

As we approached the Registration line, the cafeteria floors glistening with a cocktail of bleach, prison soap and mildew . Through the glare I spotted some familiar faces.

Rob

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Hey I know those guys at that table from my 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I'm just going to say hi. Will you save my place in line.

Beth

Yeah but I'm not waiting, we're going to see the China Syndrome at 12:30 and don't invite those creeps

Rob

Hey Troy, Hey Roy, Hey Kevin.

**Troy:** Hey

**Kevin:** Hey

**Roy:** Hey

Rob:

Kevin, you totally have like a mustache alerady. .... So did you guys **register** yet?

Troy:

Of courshe. My mom'sh volunteering, so she got ush in early. What's your homeroom?

Rob:

I don't know yet. What are you guys playing?

Roy:

Dungeons and Dragons

Rob:

Oh. Cool(Silence)

Troy:

Uhh! Elf Wizhard, You're now defeated by the Ishe Dragon. You lose half your Dexterity points, Roy.

Roy:

Dammet.

Narrator:

Roy stood up to retrieve the twelve sided dice that had fallen under the table, and I saw he had grown about a foot over the summer.

Roy

So where's your locker Rob?

Rob

I don't know yet. Where's yours?

Roy(hiking up his pants )

In the Science Building

Rob

ohhh....cool.

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Roy

It's not the worst. Upperclassmen usually get the best lockers, in the Humanities building, because it's exactly halfway between the Freak Wall and the Jock Wall, so you can be friends with both. (*hikes pants again*)

Troy:

Plush, the Humanities building is closest to the Senior's parking lot, so they can go to their car between classes to get stuff.

Roy

The Science Hall has a soda machine, and the back door practically goes right off-campus. So you can get excused to go to the bathroom, and ak-shlee get pizza.

Kevin(Spanish accent)

Most freshmen either get the Language building lockers, which is really far from the buses, or the Vocational building—

Troy

--- which is gross. I heard that restroom is where girls sometimes give each other abortions, and stuff.

Kevin

Troy, are you totally making that up? How would you know?

Troy

Well I heard about this one girl that tried, I think because she got pregnant by a teacher

Kevin

I heard about that too, and it wasn't a teacher, it was her camp counselor. My sister knew her, but she moved Colorado.

Troy:

Yeah, whatever..My lockers over in the Math building. You have to be super quiet there, because the head math teacher Mr Avery doesn't like people making noise with their combination lock.

Roy

He suspended my sister once for slamming her locker because homeroom already started!

Kevin

I also hear if you walk too close to the Freak Wall, the Freaks will try stab you with a drug syringe to get you addicted.

Rob

Rilly? ...I better go. ummmm.. They're saving my place in the line....See you guys later.

Troy

Hey Rob, that's the line for B lunch, you should try to get put into A Lunch.

Beth (*jingling keys*)

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You guys let's take Art. Rob hurry up pick an elective. You can't take auto shop unless you have a car to take apart. So you can either take Woodshop, Band, or Chorus. Do NOT take Botany, they make you grow a stupid tumble weed in a styrofoam cup.

Rob

Okay.Maybe Introduction to the Theatre.....

Karen (*smacking gum*)

Really?! Why?! I took that and Miss Baksa hated me.

Narrator

Miss Baksa, was a bubbly, gangly blond about 30 years old who wore floral hippy tops, and had feathered hair like Goldie Hawns.

Miss Baksa

Okay everyone, let's pipe down, I've a couple of announcements. Mr. Nason is holding auditions for Glass Menagerie this Wednes-y and Thursd-y after school, and I hope you'll all audition. There are only four parts, but he does need understudies too.

Also, we'll be holding some auditions of our own in class next week, for our end of semester performance. The good news is, we'll be doing four short pieces, so everyone will get a chance to be on stage. And, it will all be Reader's Theatre. Can anyone tell us what Reader's Theatre is? Yes, Drusilla?

Drusilla

It's Reading a play out loud. (*moue*)

Miss Baksa

Yes Exactly. We don't have to memorize the script, unless you really want to. And we're going to perform them five times in one day, so you'll need to get signatures from all your regular teachers to be absent from your other classes. Question, Ron?

Rob

Who will we be performing in front of?

Miss Baksa

All the Freshman and Sophomore English Classes. And your parents are invited too, if they can come during the day. So I'll have the scripts in class for you to look at on Thursd-y and Frid-y, and on Mond-y afternoon I'll post the cast list for you. Now, for the audition I'd like you to memorize a one-page speech, it can be anything you like, a newspaper article, a poem, or a stage speech, even a recipe, and you'll recite them in class at the audition

Ok. Everyone take off your shoes. Now the first thing we'll do is a plie'. And again, slowly, feet pointed sideways. Ron hold onto the wall so you don't fall over. Very good Beth Moore, I can see you've done plie's before!

Baksa

Let's all form a circle. We'll take turns clapping in rhythm, and passing the clap around and, when someone misses the beat they have to drop out of the circle .

*(Rapid, esclating Clapping like flamenco)*

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Narrator

It was down to Beth Moore versus Drusilla Marshall. Finally, Drusilla broke a sweat, and nearly dropped from exhaustion

Baksa

Okay! Beth Moore is the last one standing.

Beth Moore (sobbing hysterically)

I won, I WON (sniffle)

Drusilla(aside)

Why is she crying

Baksa

Ok, Beth, it's not a competition. Now Mond-y is our Reader's Theatre audition, so you should all be working on your memorized speeches. Our four plays are, Pullman Car Hiawatha, Spoon River Anthology, Albion's Dream and Pfeiffer's People.

Kirk

Maaaaan, They're all just a buncha long speeches. Pfeiffer's People is the only one that's funny

Miss Baksa

Kirk! Please read all the plays, and they are not to be taken home with you. Everyone, please don't write in the books until you are cast, and then only use pencils, no ink!

Narrator

Toward the end of the class, Mr. George Nason, the senior drama teacher, came in from the scene shop with a paper in his hand.

George

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like you ALL to congratulate Miss Beth Moore, for getting the part of Laura yesterday in The Glass Menagerie this November. Let's ALL give Beth Moore a round of applause.

Narrator

We clapped half-heartedly, and Beth stood up and did these corny little Shirley Temple curtsies. And cried.

That weekend I worked and worked on memorizing my speech, something I had found in an old book of my parents called Homer's Odyssey. Then suddenly Monday came

Miss Baksa

All right, now we'll start our official auditions with our memorized speeches, and Mr. Nason here will help me typecast you all. Beth Moore has asked to go first, acting out the recipe "My Grandmother's Cinnamon Rolls.

Narrator

So Beth Moore pantomimed every part of baking the cinnamon rolls, and when they came out of the oven, she thanked her grandma and cried.

Baksa

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Great gestures, Beth. Who's Next? okay, Ron.

Rob

Rob...Umm... This is from the Iliad by Homer "Then the goddess, grey-eyed Athena, answered him: "Father of us all, Zeus, thou son of Cronos, **high** above all lords, aye, verily that man lies **low** in a destruction that is his due; so, too, may any other also be destroyed who does such deeds. (←look→ ) But my heart is torn for wise Odysseus, hapless man, who far from his friends has long been suffering woes in a sea-girl isle"

Baksa

Let's have you do it again Ron, and this time I'll give you some gestures. When you say high, raise your one arm to the sky, and when you say low, lower the other arm.

Rob

"Father of us all, Zeus, thou son of Cronos, high (arm)above all lords, aye, verily that man lies low (arm) in a ..... I forgot the rest.

Baksa

Okay you can sit down now

Rob(*soliloquy*)

Damn. Well when the time comes to read aloud, I'll really show her what I can do

Baksa

Now, I'll ask **some of you** to read a speech from Pfeiffer's People.

Narrator

The same funny speech over and over, until by the fifteenth person it was no longer even remotely funny. I kept waiting for my turn. I knew I could hit all the beats that others missed, and correct all their mistakes. But my turn never came, she never called on me to read for Pfeiffer's People! And then it was over.

Miss Baksa

Okay, everybody need to get all 30 scripts back into the box, or I WILL keep you into the next period, or as long as it takes to get them all back. Let see: 25-26-27-28, I'm still missing one Pfeiffer's People and one Albion's Dream. Anybody? Nobody? Kirk? Okay everyone, thank you for auditioning so well. Come back after lunch and I'll have the cast list posted on the drama department door. Now get outta here.

Narrator

So between 6th period Math and 7th period Phys Ed, I ran down to the Performing Arts center, nearly nauseated with excitement to see what part I got.

Rob

Let's see....not in Pullman Car Hiawatha..... Nope, Not in Spoon River Anthology .....darn! Not in Pfeifers's People.... oh there I am, Albion's Dream.....the Percussionist....hmmm, percussionist, that sounds somewhat cool , I guess.

Miss Baksa

Albion's Dream is a sort of experimental post-modern apocalyptic protest poem. It doesn't matter if you don't understand it, it should be enough for you that I love it, and I'll give you your gestures. As the

opening piece in the show, Albion's Dream will be staged first, so the six of you need to line up in the stage right doorway, then come in.... Keep in single file, no smiling! And march the stage apron. The main curtain will be closed, with the furniture for the other plays behind it. Your music stands should be evenly spaced on the stage. Tom, can we mark their places with spike tape? Except for the Percussionist, he should be separated from the readers by a gap. No, farther. Farther. .... Farther.... Well he doesn't have to be fully lit, he's the Percussionist. Okay, so you've done the entrance, then you'll hold these places for the full piece, until the final RING RING RING, Then you're going to pick up your music stand and exit in a single file please. No! stage left, the way you came in. Percussionist, you also need to clear off the little table with your instruments. No! take it all at once. "Clear off" means take the table AWAY.

Narrator

Most days, Miss Baksa would let us break into cast groups to rehearse on our own, while she staged this or that piece. So we rehearsed those moves once in October, and for the remaining 6 weeks, we spent each Tuesday class practicing in our own group apart from rest.

Our favorite rehearsal location was to sit on the floor at the back aisle of the theatre, near the entrance to the lighting booth hidden behind the gold velour drapes. Anja, a studious pretty redhead, took charge immediately.

Anja

You guys, let's don't skip over the percussion. What's your name ...Ron? Rob? Maybe you should at least clap out the drum beats or something, so we can get used to where they are. And can you say, "ring" in place of the triangle, until you have the instruments.

Kirk

Gyahh! that's kinda stupid, Anja.

Narrator

By stopping and saving a space for me, Anja won my loyalty.

Drusilla

"Tyger, Tyger burning bright, in the forests of the night"

(clapping) drumbeat -drumbeat- drumbeat

"Did he smile his work to see. Did He who made the Lamb make thee?"

Ring, ring, ring,

Kirk

Ummm...you guys....Why is the Tyger burning? Who burned it?

NARRATOR

Kirk had his feet up on the chairback, that is until Mr. Nason walked by us.

George Nason

Please take your feet OFF the theatre seats, this is **not** your mother's living room. If you disrespect the theatre, it will disrespect you.



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Drusilla

Mr Nason, I saw you in Ten Little Indians this summer. I thought it was a really good production

George Nason

Why thank you Drusilla. I'm glad to see that at least one of you has manners.

Kirk

He treats this place like it's a church.

Drusilla

Well maybe it is, to him

Rob

You guys, Who's Mr. Nason out there smoking with?

Anja:

That's my neighbor, Tom Akers. He's a junior.

Drusilla:

I can't believe Mr Nason lets people smoke.

Anja

Oh he doesn't let anybody else smoke with him except Tom. They know each other from doing Albuquerque Little Theatre together. Tom's mom was also in Ten Little Indians

Kirk

This one time I tried to bum a light off Mr Nason and he was like: I don't approve of young people smoking. It will stunt your growth. He seemed like he was teasing but he wouldn't give me his lighter. I think he's a homo.

Miss Baksa

Albion's Dream cast , I hope that noise means you're rehearsing back there! Remember your Gestures

Drusilla

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright, in the Forests of the Night

Kirk

What immortal hand or Eye, Framed thy fearful simma- --summa—smarterie?

Drusilla

(Sigh, lipstick) It's Symmetry, Kirk

Rob

Ring-Ring-Ring

Anja

You guys, maybe we should ask Miss Baksa, to give us more gestures .

Miss Baksa

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Okay everyone, Don't forget that your homework for this weekend is to write a review of The Glass Menagerie. I want at least three pages of what you liked and didn't like about the acting, directing, sets, costumes. Tonight is opening night, and there are only three shows. I suggest you see it tonight or Friday, so you don't have to spend Sunday writing your paper. They are due at the beginning of class on Monday morning, no excuses. Now everybody let's wish Beth Moore a good performance. Break a leg Beth!

Narrator

So that night I made my Mom drive me back to the theatre, it was weird to be at school at nighttime. I sat by myself, mentally taking notes on things to mention in my paper, to prove that I saw the play.

Rob

“When the Act II lights came back on, Beth Moore mostly dragged herself around the stage talking about Blue Roses and crying. At one point she and this big football player started dancing, and knocked over some furniture, which I thought was pretty clumsy. Then Beth cried some more. The guy who played her brother Tom seemed to be mad a lot, but I couldn't figure out why. The best one was Joan Spurlin, a tall sassy junior who is known for being the most witty and sarcastic girl in the Eldorado drama department, and she played their mom, Amanda. I guess she was mad that they lived in such a small apartment, but even I could see that they were only using half the stage, and it could have been a bigger apartment, if they wanted. When Beth Moore came out to bow at the end, some lady, probably her mom, actually gave her a bouquet of blue.... Carnations. And some people gave a **standing up** ovation.”

Narrator

Miss Baksa gave my review an A minus and the comment .”Good!”

We spent the next two weeks of class rehearsing our Readers Theatre show and I finally got a triangle and a drum to practice with, a few times.

Then the day came for us to perform. It was weird doing the show five times in one day. During the first show, my friend Nick Mann waved at me from his seat, and I had to grit my teeth so I wouldn't giggle. Albion's Dream suddenly seemed like being in church: “Ring, Ring, Ring” The second performance was really boring, and by the third show, we were all ready for some fresh air. Us boys did not want to be seen in the cafeteria wearing stage makeup, so we sat behind the theatre with our sack lunches. Mr Nason came by on his way to his classroom.

Mr Nason

“Gentlemen do not eat in their costumes”

Narrator

It was kind of funny the way he said it, and we all looked at each other because we couldn't tell if he was fake mad or real mad. After lunch, I saw my English class come and sit in two rows on the right. No one seemed to recognize me though, standing up there ringing my triangle in the shadows, or forgetting to sometimes, if I was looking at the audience. It hardly seemed to matter when I made mistakes that day, the cast just kept on reading. And the Tyger kept on burning.

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The holidays were approaching. Miss Baksa and Mr Nason were busy rehearsing a Readers's Theatre of their own to perform. **A Christmas Memory** by Truman Capote. Even though they were both completely the wrong ages to play the southern orphan boy and his elderly aunt, it was actually a very good, and the first piece of theatre that made me almost cry. Seeing her perform, I forgave Miss Baksa for the insult of the Percussionist, and she gave me an A- minus for the semester. One of the last things she announced to us before the Winter Break was:

Miss Baksa

I'm directing The Matchmaker next semester, it's a comedy that the musical Hello Dolly was based on. So I hope you will all come to the auditions the second week of January.

Narrator

I really wanted to try out for that play, but my dad said,

Dad

You just joined the Track Team and now you want to miss practice? Quitters never win, **my friend**, and winners never quit.

Narrator,

Then at Track Practice One warm day in January, my neighbor Nick Mann said:

Nick (*philly accent*)

Rob, I sore you in that pyay, yast semesta. I yiked your drum, but I didn't reayey get what the pyay was abiw'. Was it fun to do?

Rob

Kind of, but not really,

Coach

[Breeet Breeet] Okay Team, Warm-ups Over! (spit) Distance runners, report to the north field with Coach Wood. My Throwers: hit the weight room, and Sprinters, were going to git yer butts in shape for heptagonals with some windsprints. (spit) When I blow my whistle once, it means you can Walk [Breeet] Two whistles means Sprint [Breeet Breeet] Now move!

Rob (*Running*)

Hey Nick, I might have miss Track Practice on Wednesday  
[Breeet]

Nick (*Walking*)

What for?  
[Breeet Breeet]

Rob (*Running*)

There's this play I'm trying out for after school instead. It's called The Matchmaker.  
[Breeet]

Nick

Okay

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[Breeeet Breeeet]

Rob (*Running*)

But my mom can still maybe give you a ride home at 4:30 , I'll get out at the same time you get out. Hey, maybe you can say the lines with me in the ride home tonight. There's this part, of this guy Cornelius, who lies all the time. It's really cool. Do you want to come to tryouts with me on Wednesday?

Nick

Nahhhh, I don't yike to read out youd.

Narrator

So the following Wednesday, I quickly changed out of my 7<sup>th</sup> period PhysEd clothes and sneaked out of the gym before the Coach Stell could see me, and went to the Matchmaker audition. My heart was racing, and I realized I was the only freshman boy there with all the upperclass drama jocks. I sat quietly waiting to be called on, while everyone else fawned on Miss Baksa, Paula can I read this part? Paula can I try that scene next? Paula wouldn't it be funny if...? Finally, Paula, Miss Baksa called on me to read Ambrose. It wasn't Cornelius, the role all the other guys wanted, but it was okay.

Then my mom came to drive me home, and I spent the evening in suspense, graphing quadratic equations, and staring into the fireplace.

Thursday morning, on the schoolbus, Nick Mann sat next to me.

Nick

Hi Rob, how did the tryouts for da pyay go?

Rob

I donno, we'll find out today.

NARRATOR

I didn't dare go look at the Drama Door at 8am. Or after homeroom. Finally, in third period, Drusilla congratulated me, and I said "What for?"

Drusilla

You got a part in the Matchmaker, I think?

Rob

No don't tell me, I want to go see it for myself, I didn't even know it was up?

Drusilla

Yeah, Paula posted it last night before she left.

Narrator

I was out of breathe when I got to the Drama Door , but didn't see my name on the list. Well, Beth Moore was there, so I wasn't going to let her see me cry.

Cornelius- Ryl Adamson, Dolly-Greta Stockebrand, Ermengarde-Marie Hansen, Gertrude- Beth Moore. Ohhhh jeez, Maybe Drusilla was kidding, I'm not even on there.

10/13/10

Beth Moore

Sure you are! see, right there at the top: Cast, In order of Appearance, Ambrose Kemper- Ron Martin ...Congratulations, Ron! (sobbing)

Rob

Thanks, It's Rob though. Don't cry, Beth Moore. Can I borrow a pen?

Narrator

It turned out that my part was over 30 lines long! Miss Baksa made being in the Matchmaker so much fun. We wore these old-fashioned costumes. People tried new things every night to make each other laugh. Best of all, people waited for me to say my lines in all the right places, and nobody skipped over me. "I **will** marry your niece Mr. Vandergelder. I make a very good living as an artist."

And weeks later, as I was walking out of the theatre lobby on opening night, with my family, Mr George Nason, who had acted in Ten Little Indians and A Christmas Story and countless other plays, and who I had never before spoken to, in my whole life, said to my Mom and Dad,

George Nason

This is a very talented young man. I hope he plans to take my Acting and Directing Class next year?

Rob

And so I did, for three years in a row! Even my Dad was proud. I didn't run Track ever again.

THE END