



# THE DREAM OF THE BURNING BOY

BY DAVID WEST READ



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LARRY ..... Reed Birney  
DANE ..... Josh Caras  
STEVE ..... Matt Dellapina  
KYLE ..... Jake O'Connor  
CHELSEA ..... Jessica Rothenberg  
ANDREA ..... Kristie Dale Sanders  
RACHEL ..... Alexandra Socha

## **CHARACTERS**

LARRY — A high-school English teacher, around fifty.

DANE — A student, late teens.

STEVE — A guidance counselor, late twenties.

CHELSEA — Dane's girlfriend, late teens.

KYLE — Dane's friend, late teens.

RACHEL — Dane's sister, late teens.

ANDREA — Dane's mother, around forty.

## **PLACE**

A small high school in suburban America.

## **TIME**

The present. Spring.

There is always the possibility that even our painful and terrifying dreams may, upon interpretation, prove to be wish-fulfillments.

—Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

# THE DREAM OF THE BURNING BOY

## Scene 1

*A high-school classroom. The end of the school day.*

*Larry Morrow, a patient academic in his fifties, sits across from Dane Bentley, a 17-year-old student.*

LARRY. What do you think you deserve?

DANE. I think I deserve ... better.

LARRY. Okay, should I just write that on your paper, then? "Better?"

DANE. No, I —

LARRY. I can't give you "better," Dane. I can give you seventy, or eighty, or ninety. Or maybe I should give you perfect? Would that be better? If I just gave you perfect?

DANE. I'm not asking you to give me perfect. I just want to talk.

LARRY. Well, good. Let's talk. The subject of your paper was the role of Virgil in *Dante's Inferno*, correct?

DANE. Yes.

LARRY. And the title you chose was ... (*Picking up Dane's paper.*) "Losing my Virgil-ity: My First Date with Dante."

DANE. (*Smiles.*) Yeah.

LARRY. Which immediately suggests to me that you're not taking this paper, or this class, very seriously.

DANE. No, I am ...

LARRY. Well, you're *not* ...

DANE. No, I am. I really am, I just ... I've had a lot on my mind lately.

LARRY. I understand that, Dane, but do you have any idea how much I have on *my* mind?

DANE. A lot?

LARRY. A lot. But I still find time to do my work. I still find time to grade your papers. And I can't start grading everyone differently based on how much they may or may not have on their mind. Do you understand? I can't give you special treatment.

DANE. I don't want special treatment. (*Dane rubs his forehead, a headache coming on.*)

LARRY. I'll look at it again, if you want. You can come back tomorrow and we'll chat about it some more, okay?

DANE. Okay. Thanks. (*Dane gets up to go, and is briefly overcome by a sharp, stabbing headache.*)

LARRY. Are you all right?

DANE. Yeah.

LARRY. Too much stuff on your mind.

DANE. Yeah. I should — go. (*Dane heads for the door ...*)

LARRY. Dane?

DANE. Yeah? (*He stops and looks at Larry.*)

LARRY. See you tomorrow.

DANE. Yeah, see you then. (*He exits into the hallway. Larry turns away, and then — BANG — the sound of a body crashing into a locker. Larry gets up ...*)

LARRY. Dane? (*... and charges out the door. Blackout.*)

# THE DREAM OF THE BURNING BOY

by David West Read

4M, 3W

Since the sudden death of his favorite student, high-school teacher Larry Morrow has been falling asleep at his desk and dreaming. The school's guidance counselor is hanging inspirational posters designed to help everyone "process their emotions." The student's sister and friends — more agitated and hormonal than usual — find little solace in Dante's *Inferno*. And as Larry's dreams intensify, a shocking secret is exposed. A secret that will change everything. Searing yet surprisingly funny, *THE DREAM OF THE BURNING BOY* is about finding the strength to move on ... and the courage to live without regret.

*"... sensitive ... surprisingly humorous ... Read has an ear for economical, real-sounding dialogue, creating believable and moving characters."*

—Associated Press

*"... eloquent, affecting ... moving."*

—The New York Times

*"David West Read doesn't just summon one vision of [grief]: he unlocks six. All different and yet all the same, they drive this lean ... work that plumbs bottomless sadness as few plays in recent memory have ... [Read] lets these people tell their own stories in their own words — both those they can spit out and, even more frequently, those they can't. The results aren't always pretty or precisely ordered, but death's nature is to impose temporary disorder on those left behind. It's in how the remaining characters learn that, and learn to progress beyond it, that is the real point."*

—Talkin' Broadway

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