

WATCH IT BURN

TEN-MINUTE MONOLOGUE

By Bobby Keniston

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A ten minute dramatic monologue

By Bobby Keniston

SYNOPSIS: Joey has just confessed to burning down the deserted old elementary school building. To explain such an action, he must go back and tell the story of his very first time setting a fire. This chilling monologue, perfect for forensics competitions, gives us a glimpse into the disturbed mind of a teenage arsonist, and may be performed by either a male or female actor.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male or female)

JOEY or JOANNE (m/f)..... 16 years old. He or she is talking to the police, having just been arrested for arson. Here, he or she talks about the first time setting a fire, and why it has been so addictive.

DEDICATION

For Tracy Sue, who always likes my stories.

AT RISE: JOEY (Or JOANNE.) alone onstage, dressed like an average teenager. He (Or SHE.) has a strange sense of calm at the beginning of the monologue, but may become increasingly manic as it progresses. He (Or SHE.) is in a police station, and should act as if talking to a police officer.

JOEY or JOANNE: Yes. It was me. I broke into the old elementary school building and set it on fire.

Pause.

Why did I do it? Why? (*A small sigh.*) I wish it were easy to explain, but it really isn't. I would have to go all the way back to the beginning. (*Slight pause.*) But I suppose we have plenty of time, huh?

I'm not even sure why I did it that first time. But I was hooked after that. I couldn't stop. Didn't want to stop. If I'm going to be completely honest, though, the first time was kind of an accident. The accident that made me want to keep doing it on purpose.

It was only four years ago, the summer after sixth grade, and I was riding my bike up by the old elementary school. It was deserted, empty, no longer in use. No more teachers, no more students, the actual school had moved across town, and this was just a building now. But the town had kept up the playground outside for the community. Two big slides, a jungle gym, swing sets, even a sandbox.

It was six-thirty in the evening, still light out, but no one was around. I got off my bike and braced it with the kickstand. I took a quick look to double check, make sure I was all alone, then stepped over to the trash barrel near the edge of the green grass, right before the playground's lawn met the deserted school's driveway and parking lot. It was one of those metal trash barrels, painted a pale blue, but near its base you could see wide patches of rust where the paint had chipped off.

Rust is simply a chemical reaction. Just like fire.

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When I looked inside the barrel, it was only a quarter full or so. Papers, banana peels, even a few plastic soda bottles, which are supposed to be recycled, not thrown away. Strange how people always disobey that law, isn't it?

I took the matchbook I swiped from the kitchen cupboard out of my pocket.

Pause.

No, I didn't bring the matches along with any intention of starting a fire. I brought them because... *(Trails off into a small laugh.)* It's so stupid. I'm almost embarrassed to tell you. One of my friends had said to me that if you light a match, blow it out, and then suck the smoke up through your nose, you could get a buzz, kind of like smoking without the cigarette. I was just a curious kid and I wanted to try it. Let's be honest, huh? We all do really stupid things when we're kids.

So I lit my first match, blew it out, and then inhaled through my nose, but all it did was burn my nostrils and make me cough. No buzz at all, unless feeling a little dizzy and nauseous is what constitutes being buzzed. I tossed the dead match into the trash barrel, the smell of sulfur and smoke making its way from my nose all the way down to the back of my throat, like I could almost taste it.

It made me think a little of the smell of burning leaves, a smell that has always made me feel happy and warm. This Autumn family ritual was like a big event in my household growing up. Turning the leaves we had worked so hard to rake into floating sparks in the air, little fireflies of black ash.

I only lit the second match for the sound.

Pause.

You know that sound a match makes when you strike it, and it ignites and flares up for a second? That sizzle sound? Like this; (*Making a sizzle sound.*) Ttssssssssss. Oh, I love that sound! I love it SO MUCH. My own little symphony.

So I struck the second match to just enjoy the sound. But then, instead of blowing it out like I had with the first one, I just shook my hand back and forth, assuming the flame wouldn't survive, believing it had gone out, and I dropped it into the trash.

Then I just climbed on my bike and started to ride off. I decided to ride around the empty school building, check it out a bit more closely. I was bored and didn't really want to go home. I made my loop around, and I guess it's good that I did, because when I pulled around the corner on my way back around, back in view of the playground, I saw huge clouds of dark gray smoke billowing from the trash can. I was so surprised, I almost fell off of my bike.

My first instinct was to take off, ride home as fast as I could. Not my problem, right? It's not like I meant to start a fire. But then my paranoid sixth grade brain took over, and I thought, "What if someone sees the smoke and calls the fire department? Will they find out? Is it possible for them to find out it was me?" I didn't think so, but, I wasn't sure. If they found out, would they believe it was an accident? Would it even matter that I didn't mean to do it? All of these thoughts were pouring into my head, just as more and more smoke was pouring out of the trash can.

I rode fast back onto the playground and jumped off of my bike. I crept cautiously to the trash barrel. The smoke was thick, and it smelled awful. I tried to keep it from blowing into my face, without much success. I could feel heat radiating from a few feet away. I stood on my tip toes to try to look into the top of the barrel. I could see flames licking at the sides of the interior, but they were nowhere near the top opening. Since the barrel was metal, it obviously didn't catch fire. Only the trash was burning.

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I wasn't sure what to do. I didn't see any kind of hose anywhere, and there were no fire extinguishers to be found. I was at a loss until I remembered the sandbox. It was about thirty yards from the burning trash, so I sprinted over there. By some miracle, an unlucky kid had forgotten to take home their little toy bucket, so I grabbed it, scooped it full of sand, and sprinted back. I had to get closer to the barrel this time, and as I did, being very careful not to touch the hot metal or inhale too much of the rancid smoke, something strange happened.

I got a closer look at the fire inside, dancing. I watched it as it consumed the trash, turning it into nothing. I watched it feed and grow, shake and move. I heard its sounds, the crackles, the hiss. It was like I was in a trance. Hypnotized, staring at this beautiful orange substance, so different from all other tangibles on this Earth. I was fascinated at its ability to transform things. How it forced change onto its surrounding environment.

And all that was going through my mind was, "It's beautiful. I made this, I did this, and it's beautiful."

I don't know how long I stood there, but it probably couldn't have been more than a minute before my sixth grade panic broke my reverie. I dumped the sand onto the fire, ran back to the sandbox to fill up the bucket again, and then ran back. It took five trips before I was able to kill the beauty I had created only minutes before. The smoke began to clear, and I returned the bucket to the sandbox. My clothes reeked, and I was a bit winded from the sprinting and smoke inhalation, but I was also exhilarated. I had been the person who started the fire, but I was also the hero who had put it out! I enjoyed that feeling.

But not nearly as much as I enjoyed the feeling of watching the fire burn. Not nearly as much as that.

When I got home, my Mom smelled the smoke on me, of course, and asked me what had happened. I didn't tell her the part about accidentally starting the fire, only how I had put it out. She was very proud of me, made a big fuss, and called the local paper. There was a picture of me shaking a police officer's hand, maybe even one of your co-workers, and a headline reading: LOCAL BOY (Or "GIRL".) PUTS OUT FIRE AT PLAYGROUND. (*Laughs.*) I'm guessing the headline for me now, as I enter my second fifteen minutes of fame, will be a little different, won't it? And I know my mom isn't going to be proud of me this time.

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