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Burning Bird

A play

John Donnelly

Samuel French — London
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BURNING BIRD

Commissioned and first presented by Synergy Theatre Project at the Unicorn Theatre on 14 November 2012 following a tour to schools across London.

Daisy	Simone James
Tyrone	Valentine Olukoga
Bev/Yvonne	Debbie Samuel
Morell/Roy	Michael Smith
Mr Akhtar/Mr Johnson	Anil Kumar
Miss Lyons/Jacqui	Catherine Nix-Collins

All other parts played by the company

Director	Esther Baker
Designer	Katy McPhee
Lighting Designer	Shane Burke
Costume Designer	Sophia Simensky
Sound Designer	Sarah Weltman
Video Designer	Chris Beston
Casting Director	Nadine Rennie CDG
Company Stage Manager	Rupert Carlile
Assistant Stage Managers	Ronnie Actil and David Frederick

Synergy
Theatre Project

Artistic Director	**Esther Baker**
General Manager	**Jennie McClure**
New Writing Manager	**Neil Grutchfield**
Education Manager	**Kirstin Shirling**

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Children and Performance Legislation

For any productions utilizing children, producers will need to be aware of the appropriate child safeguarding and children in performance legislation in place. For details of the requirements you should contact your local County Council child performance advisor.

CHARACTERS

Daisy
Tyrone
Bev
Morell
Mr Akhtar
Teresa
Miss Lyons
Mr Johnson
Inspector
Jacqui
Yvonne
Landlord Mick
Roy
Girl
Girl 2
Writer
Guy

The action of the play takes place in various locations around South London

Time—the present

Production Notes

The company should create the world of the play.

Scenes should be announced by the company.

Entrances, exits, pauses and stage directions should be inferred from the text. Occasionally, for clarity, these are provided.

A hyphen (–) denotes a line taken by a member or members of the company.

A slash (/) denotes the point at which the following cue begins.

The company should acknowledge the audience throughout and often will address them directly.

BURNING BIRD

— Whose story is this?
— 'Cause someone's always in charge.
— And you got to ask yourself why they're telling the story.
— This is a story about Daisy.
— And who is Daisy?

Daisy Leave me alone!

— Daisy is in bed.

Daisy I'm sleeping.

— As you can see, she's not really sleeping.

Daisy Not any more I'm not.

— This is her friend Tyrone.

Tyrone Hello, I'm Tyrone.

— Just said that.

Tyrone Sorry / I thought you wanted me.

— And her mum, B —— I'm talking!

Tyrone Sorry.

— And Bev.

Bev Oh stop.

— Bev is Daisy's Mum.

Bev I get embarrassed.

— And Morell.

Morell All right.

— Some of these people you will like more than others.

Morell How you doing?

— Will you stop it, man?

Morell I'm just talking.

— Always doing this.

Morell Making conversation with the nice people.
Akhtar I am Mr Akhtar.

— He not got a first name?
— We don't know his first name.

Akhtar Ravi.

— But we don't need to know that.

Morell Everyone just calls him Mr Akhtar.
Akhtar My wife calls me Ravi.

— We don't meet your wife.

Akhtar She's in the hospital, gall bladder, I'm worried / it's ——

— There are other people in the story.
— Played by us.
— There's reporters.
— Police.
— Bus conductors.
— Rioters.
— They ain't rioters.
— People causing a civil disturbance.
— Kicking in JD Sports more like.
— Nicking some trainers more like.
— We will bring all these people into this, this — what is this?
— This is a pub.
— This is a retail shopping outlet.
— These are the school gates.

— This is a classroom.
— The junction of a road.
— Ting ting.
— This is Mr Akhtar's shop.
— Ting ting.

Akhtar One bloody Asian in the play, they give me a corner shop.

— Ting ting.

Akhtar Will you stop doing that?

— Every time someone comes in or out.
— Ting ting.
— It makes that noise.
— Ting ting.

Akhtar Stop doing that!

— This is Morell's car.
— Vroom Vroom!
— What is that?

Morell That's my ride.

— That ain't no ride, just a person making a broom broom noise.

Morell Trust me, it's a ride.

— What? You run out of budget?
— This is all these places and more.

Daisy Uh, pervert, this is my bedroom, how about some privacy?

— All right all right.
— This is a play in ten scenes.
— Ten!
— Short scenes.
— Short-ish.
— It starts with Daisy at home and it will end with Daisy at home.
— There will be thrills and spills.
— Cars and bars.
— People on the streets.

— But by the time Daisy gets home ...
— Everything will have changed.

Scene 1

— The first scene!
— Which begins with —

Daisy Bart Simpson is looking at me. He has a skateboard tucked under his arm and in the middle of the skateboard there is a digital readout that says —

— Seven-thirteen a.m.
— That's thirteen minutes past seven in the morning for anyone old, like over thirty.

Daisy Light creeps round the curtains, bathes my face in warmth. Last few seconds before ——

— Beep Beep Beep Beep.

Daisy Ain't normally good in the morning, ain't normally good full stop but today it's different, today I'm ——
Bev What's that racket?
Daisy Jump the stairs, two, three at a time, hear my mum call ——
Bev Like a herd of elephants in my house.
Daisy Front door. Check the mat —

— Nothing.

Daisy I look on the side next to the bills and leaflets for some scratchy new takeaway with food poisoning on the menu.

— Nothing.

Daisy Nothing.
Bev It's probably nothing.
Daisy Mum pokes her head round the kitchen door, unlit fag in her mouth.
Thought you'd quit?
Bev I have, just need something there, you know, and I don't chew gum.
Daisy How come you need a lighter if you don't smoke?

Bev Come get your toast.
Daisy Don't want toast.
Bev Butter and Sunpat.
Daisy I don't want butter and Sunpat.
Bev Come get your tea.
Daisy Don't want no tea.
Bev Made it milky, two sugars, how you like it. Made it in a pot.
Daisy My mum she makes the best tea.
Bev It's true my tea is good, milk first then the water.
Daisy It ain't here.
Bev First post ain't never come at this time, darlin'. Don't worry, it'll come. I'm sure.
Reporter A black male was shot by police yesterday afternoon.
Daisy Some craziness north of the river.
Reporter The thirty-one year old, believed to be jobless, was known to the police.
Bev So young.
Daisy Thirty-one is old!
Bev Ain't that much younger than me.
Daisy Exactly.
Bev I don't care what he done, you can't go round shooting people.
Reporter Tensions running high in the capital, police and spokespersons from the community are appealing for calm.
Bev Spokespersons of the community?
Daisy I stare at the letterbox.
Bev Only time these persons start speaking is when there's TV cameras pointing.

Bev notices Daisy is staring at the letterbox

Bev Darling. You OK?
Daisy This is the thing with my mum, right, she always got to poke her nose in. Why can't she leave me be? It's 'cause she's lonely. I'll tell you what she needs, right, she needs a man. I know why she got that hungry look about her, I know how come she all itchy and scratchy in the mornings ——
Bev My little girl may act all tough but don't be impressed. I worry about the company she keeps, where she goes. I had her too young. And by the way, that is a lie, I do not need a man, making me sound like some alley cat.
Daisy She got that look.
Bev All right, maybe it has been a while, but I am not some sex maniac, all right.

Daisy Like she about to say something dumb.
Bev Maybe this'll cheer you up.
Daisy What is it?
Bev It's from me. Open it.
Bev For your interviews.
Daisy What interviews?
Bev University?
Daisy Mum, I'm Year Ten!
Bev I want you to make something of yourself.
Daisy We can't afford university.
Bev You can get a loan.
Daisy You gave me a folder on my birthday?
Bev You gotta do something, can't just sit on your backside all your life. It's faux leather.
Daisy Oh faux leather!
Bev Would have got real leather but I know you don't like that. See you're wearing the earrings Dad gave you last year.
Daisy You got a problem with that?
Bev I'm just saying, don't get disappointed / if he doesn't ——
Daisy Don't say it! Don't!
Bev I'm just saying, don't get your hopes up.
Daisy I'm gonna be late.
Bev Daisy ——
Daisy Oh you want me to be late for school now?
Bev Darling, be careful out there, news says there might be trouble later. Come straight home.
Daisy I ain't no child.
Bev You don't know what's good for you.
Daisy You can talk, you're the one smokes cigarettes.
Bev That's totally different.
Daisy Is it now?
Bev Make sure you keep your phone on!

Scene 2

— Ting Ting!

— Scene Two.
— In which Daisy tries to buy crisps and a drink but is thwarted due to insufficient funds.

Akhtar Wait!

Daisy What?
Akhtar You see the sign?
Daisy Come on, man.
Akhtar What does it say?
Daisy I ain't wearing my hoodie up.
Akhtar The other sign.
Daisy One child at a time.
Akhtar When she is gone, you can come in.
Daisy That's Teresa, always giving me the up and down eyes like she better than me. Hurry up, man, I'm waiting.
Teresa I'm choosing.
Daisy Well choose faster.
Akhtar No trouble please.
Daisy Come on, Mr Akhtar, I just want a drink and some crisps.
Akhtar When your friend has gone.
Daisy She ain't my friend. Look at her, taking her time on purpose, trying to make me late. (*She kisses her teeth*)
Akhtar Every time kids come in, they cause trouble, always stealing, always taking things. That's why I have the sign.
Daisy One in, one out, like we're criminals or something, like we second class, got to stand here in the doorway like a lemon.
Akhtar I have kids of my own, grown up now. I know it's hard, they have nowhere to go, but I'm not a charity. One pound twenty-eight, I don't care how hard your home life is. You're not going to convince me that stealing a can of ginger beer is a result of a deprived childhood.
Daisy (*to Teresa*) What's that look about? You got something to say to me, you best say it.

— Ting ting.

Akhtar These bloody accounts never add up, probably 'cause of all the chocolate bars that just walk out of here of their own accord. Please take your hood down.
Daisy It's an item of clothing, not a lethal weapon.
Akhtar No helmets, no hoods, that's the rules, you don't like them, go somewhere else.
Daisy Treat me like I'm worthless.

Daisy obliges with her hood

Akhtar Thank you. Are you going to buy anything?
Daisy Crisps and a coke.
Akhtar Do you not have breakfast?

Daisy Who are you, Jamie Oliver?
Akhtar One pound nine pence. That's one pound seven. Two pence more.
Daisy It's all I got.
Akhtar Two pence more.
Daisy I'll owe it you.
Akhtar Credit's what got this country in so much damn trouble, you want something you pay for it.
Daisy I come here all the time.
Akhtar You want crisps and a drink, those aren't in your price range, these ones are.
Daisy Don't want Chipsticks, want Monster Munch.
Akhtar Well I want a house in the country and Arsenal to win the league but sometimes life isn't fair, come on, two more pence or the cheaper ones.
Daisy This shop is only here because we come in here, look how you treat us.
Akhtar She has a point. Kids buy all their sweets from here. Between them and the strange men who come in for the naughty magazines on the top shelf, that's my customer base. Confectionery, naked ladies, and tobacco, this is what makes this country great.
Daisy Maybe this is the day I snap, tell him what I think of his signs and his looks and his attitude.
Akhtar We all have to make a living. My wife is not well, she's in hospital. Her gall bladder, nothing serious, but — thank God for the bloody NHS. They say she needs an operation. Things aren't going so well with the shop. I don't sleep.
Daisy Half a mind to tip his display over, take my drink, throw it straight through his window, that'll show him.
Akhtar Maybe I'm being too hard on the girl, she's just a child. Maybe I'll let her off, just this once, maybe I'll ——
Daisy Forget about it.

— Ting ting!

Akhtar No pleasing some people.

Scene 3

— Scene Three.
— In which Daisy makes a paper crane and gets in trouble with one of her teachers.

Tyrone You see it on the news? Daisy, you see it on the news, Daisy?
Daisy Tyrone waits at the gates, like he does everyday. Sits next to me in Art and Science. I like him. He lets me copy his homework. See what? As if I don't know. As if everyone ain't talking about it.

— Heard he was a gangster.
— Heard it was revenge.
— Heard he wasn't carrying a gun.
— Heard he was a terrorist!

Tyrone That guy who got shot, that was bad, man.

— They don't shoot someone for no reason.
— No smoke without fire.
— He was just some guy minding his own business.

Daisy Everyone's an expert.
Tyrone Gonna be people out in force.
Daisy Says who?
Tyrone Chatrooms, BBM is going off! Word is they might let us out school early.
Daisy Why they do that?
Tyrone Temperature's rising, you get me? Feel the steam coming off the sidewalks.
Daisy He does this, Tyrone, he gets excited, starts talking like an American.
Tyrone There's gonna be a curfew, I'm telling you.
Daisy Ain't gonna be no curfew, this ain't no police state like, like —

— Syria.
— Egypt.
— Cyprus.

Daisy Thank you. You need to stop watching the news. It gives you ideas. Ain't no terrorists in South London! North London, mind you, that's a whole different story, but South London, just kids with Blackberrys and attitude.
Tyrone What you reckon, Daisy, it goes off will you go and have a look?
Daisy Wants so hard to be one of them bad boys, T. But he's just a puppy.

— Vroom vrooom! Vroom vroom!

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