

Another Teenage Cliché

By Gregory T. Burns

NOTES

Teenagers, at times, are walking billboards for stereotypes. In his chilling short story, Gregory T. Burns introduces us to a high school senior, Joe, who tries to avoid the labels often associated with his peers. This selection may be performed by a male or female and may be entered in Prose Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. It is critical for the performer to not give away the ending at the beginning of this selection. The audience should get a sense that Joe is an atypical teenager, someone who marches to his own drum; therefore, one of the first tasks for the performer will be to determine the identity of the narrator. Is the narrator someone who knew Joe? Is the narrator a fellow classmate? Is the narrator a secret admirer? Perhaps the narrator is one of Joe's teachers or his counselor. Make a strong choice, because the narrator's relationship with Joe will affect the believability of the story being told. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons simply suggest where to turn the pages of the manuscript.

This is the story about a teenager named Joe. While other teenagers hang out at the mall, go to the movies, and retake driving tests, Joe works part-time at a local nursing home. Joe doesn't seem to fit in with any of the other teenagers his age. No, Joe is a *loner*, which is fine with him, because it gives him time to think about things, *important* things—things that really matter in life—*real* life. So while his classmates are dating and worrying about how many designer labels they own; while they gossip about who is dating whom, and who is trying out for the fall musical; while other teenagers go to parties and participate in extra-curricular activities after school, Joe more-or-less keeps to himself.



Every day in school, Joe tries to be as inconspicuous as possible; and while he isn't one to crave attention, Joe is *very* aware of those around him. He knows them. He knows them all, and in a way, Joe feels like he knows his classmates better than they know themselves. Take his life skills class, for example. This one girl, Karen, who sits in front of him, is pregnant. She's not sure who the father is, *but* he's definitely a member of the varsity soccer team, because according to her best friend and confidant, a girl everyone calls *Twilight*, Karen has never had an intimate relationship with a boy before or *since* that impromptu keg party, where she thinks she hooked up with three boys, but it might have been four, because

at one point during the party, she got a little tipsy and sort-of-lost count. Then, who can forget Tyler, the guy who has made fun of Joe ever since they were in fourth grade together, when during the celebrated *Field Day* that year, Tyler tripped Joe during the tire-roll race. Tyler then told everyone watching that poor Joe lost the race because he was ‘*tired.*’ Everyone laughed. As stupid as that joke was—every single one of them laughed. Joe remembers that. Joe remembers that day like it happened yesterday. Tyler still makes fun of Joe from time-to-time, but Joe has learned to tune him out. Besides, not everyone considers Tyler to be the up-and-coming *Will Ferrell* anymore. And saving the best for last, Jules, the girl who shares four classes a day with Joe, tells anyone who will listen what an individual she is, even though she’s never, and I mean *never* been seen on or *off* campus without at least three other wannabes by her side at all times. She hates her parents and proclaims to be a poet, because she’s just learned guitar and writes her own songs.



Looks and appearance are important at Joe’s school; after all, looks and appearance are important at all schools. That’s probably Joe’s saving grace from being labeled a freak. Joe is nice looking, handsome, most would say. In fact, one time, a man from a New York modeling agency handed Joe’s parents a business card. He asked if Joe had ever done any professional modeling, or acting—or if he sang. All of Joe’s responses were in the negative, of course, but his parents kept ribbing him, like Joe was some sort of celebrity. That embarrassed Joe. After all, he’s never liked attention. Joe’s parents told him how proud they would be, if they could see his picture in a magazine—or him starring in one of his mom’s favorite soap operas. Joe loves his parents, and he would like to make their wishes come true, but he’s far too reserved to be a model or an actor or, heaven forbid, a singer. No. Joe is a loner. Everyone accepts that. Even Joe’s parents know that. As far as Joe’s classmates are concerned, if Joe wants to hang out by himself, so be it. After all, what high school doesn’t have a loner or two, right?



Now, all teenagers have secrets. Joe is no exception. But while all of his peers are pairing off and going steady, or going out on group dates, or holding hands between classes and sneaking kisses behind opened locker doors, Joe remains single. To everyone’s knowledge, Joe has never had a girlfriend; however, there is one girl who interests him. She’s interested Joe ever since the second day of seventh-grade, when she walked into his English class. The teacher introduced her to everyone and told the class to