

# Bright Star Synopsis & Character Descriptions

“Endearing and emotionally sweeping, ‘Bright Star’ is a no-frills, narrative-driven musical that’s less about flash and more about its human-connective qualities, the very ones that will likely touch audience members in a much more cerebral, satisfying way. While it is seemingly intimate in execution, just below its rustic surfaces lay a more epic, modern-minded musical that’s mired in heartbreak and tragedy—but yet still ultimately enveloped in hope, triumph, and love.”

## Act 1

Bright Star begins with an introduction of Alice Murphy reflecting on her past, introducing her story, self, and determination (“If You Knew My Story”). The show then transitions to Billy’s arrival back in Hayes Creek after fighting in World War II. He reconnects with his community, including his father Daddy Cane and his old friend Margo. Billy finds that his mother passed away while he was gone (“She’s Gone”) and decides to leave Hayes Creek to pursue his true passion: writing. Billy, filled with energy and optimism, travels to Asheville to try to get his writing published in the Asheville Southern Journal (“Bright Star”). In Asheville, he meets a driven and witty team of people at the Asheville Southern Journal: Alice Murphy, Lucy, and Daryl. Billy’s youthful spirit combined with Lucy and Daryl’s attempts to get Alice to go out and celebrate the end of the war compel Alice to remember her adventurous youth in Zebulon (“Way Back in the Day”).

The show then shifts to Zebulon in 1923, where Alice is beginning a relationship with Jimmy (“Whoa, Mama”). After spending time with Jimmy, Alice returns home to find her mother and father disappointed in her free-spirited and individualistic nature (“Firmer Hand/Do Right”). Jimmy returns to his home to find a similar conflict; Jimmy expresses a desire to explore the world around him while his father, Mayor Dobbs, wants Jimmy to follow directly in his footsteps (“A Man’s Gotta Do”).

Back in 1945, Lucy, Daryl, and Alice review Billy’s writing, and Alice buys one of Billy’s stories because she sees his potential. Billy returns to Hayes Creek to let people know that he is moving to Asheville to pursue a writing career. Margo meets this news with happiness for Billy measured with sadness at his leaving (“Asheville”).

The show moves back in time to the Zebulon Couple’s Dance, where Jimmy and Alice acknowledge their love for each other (“What Could Be Better”). Later, Alice meets with Dr. Norquist and discovers that she is pregnant. The mayor learns that she is pregnant and tells Jimmy; Jimmy expresses his love for Alice while Mayor Dobbs is determined to deal with the problem himself. Alice’s love and happiness for her unborn child come into direct conflict with her community’s opinions of her pregnancy (“I Can’t Wait”). She knits her unborn baby a sweater and expresses her excitement to Jimmy. Despite Jimmy’s support, Alice is ultimately pushed to hide her pregnancy due to the pressures of the community.

In 1945, Billy and Alice discuss his writing as Billy feels he’s not achieving the success he expected. Alice provides blunt feedback that often comes as a surprise to Billy, but they both connect on the earnest emotion behind his writing.

In 1923 again, Alice’s child is born and Mayor Dobbs arrives to convince her family to give the baby up for adoption. Mayor Dobbs and Stanford convince Daddy Murphy to take Alice’s baby away from her, despite pleas from both Alice and her mother (“Please, Don’t Take Him”). Without anyone else knowing, Mayor Dobbs then throws the baby off of a moving train in a suitcase, blinded by his determination to preserve his family’s tradition (“A Man’s Gotta Do Reprise”).

## Act 2

Act 2 opens with Alice attempting to move past the tragedy of losing her child. Despite her grief, Alice is prompted by her mother to pursue an academic career by attending college at Chapel Hill. The two time periods of Bright Star collide as Alice in the 1920s and Margo in the 1940s each find the motivation to move forward with their lives (“Sun’s Gonna Shine”). Then, in 1924 Jimmy Ray discovers what his father did and decides that, knowing their child is gone, he can never face Alice again (“Heartbreaker”).

In the 1940s again, Billy meets Lucy and Daryl at the Shiny Penny, and Lucy encourages him to let loose and enjoy his time in the city (“Another Round”). Their time at the bar ends in a kiss between Billy and Lucy, leaving Billy contemplating what he wants. The next day, Billy learns that one of his stories is being published in the Asheville Southern Journal. Alice leaves on a trip to Raleigh, deciding to make a stop in Hayes Creek to have Billy show her around the places he has been writing about.

In Raleigh, Alice stops at a government clerk’s office to try to find an adoption record for the son taken away from her years ago, but finds no record of the child or of Jimmy searching for him. Alice then finds Jimmy living in Raleigh. Jimmy finally tells Alice what happened to their son, and they grieve together (“I Had A Vision”). Billy returns home to Hayes Creek, and he and Margo confess their love for each other (“Always Will”). Alice goes home to Zebulon to see her father again. Daddy Murphy expresses his regret for what happened with Alice’s child, and to comfort him, Alice lies to him, saying her child was adopted and raised by a happy family.

Alice then travels to Billy’s home to meet his father. She sees a familiar suitcase in his home and then the baby sweater she knit so long ago. At her urging, Daddy Cane tells the story of finding Billy as a baby in a suitcase that had been thrown off a train. Alice 3 realizes that Billy is her child (“So Familiar”), and despite Billy’s reluctant reaction to this discovery, she is relieved and grateful to find her child (“At Long Last”).

Back in Asheville a month later, Alice has reconnected with Jimmy and tells Lucy and Daryl about Billy and how she is going to be patient to wait for him to approach her. Billy arrives at the Asheville Southern Journal, ready to connect with his birth parents. Overwhelmed with the joy of reconnection and love, both Margo and Billy and Alice and Jimmy decide to get married. The community rejoices as they look into a bright future together (“Finale”).

## Character Breakdowns

**Alice Murphy (2 Actresses):** Alice is portrayed both as a late teenager in the 1920s and an older version of herself in the 1940s. As a young woman, she constantly works to create her own powerful voice despite being stifled by gender norms in her town. In her thirties, she is hilariously blunt and honest, demanding respect both because of her intellectual capacity and confident attitude. She is more reserved than her romantic younger self, but she still retains her caring spirit and adventurous side.

**Jimmy Ray (2 Actors):** Jimmy is portrayed both as a late teenager in the 1920s and an adult in the 1940s. As a teenager, Jimmy Ray is eager to explore the world, learn, and find something meaningful to do with his life. He is confident and witty, matching Alice’s adventurous spirit as their love for each other grows. In the 1940s, Jimmy Ray still has his confidence and playfulness but is filled with guilt and a fear that he can’t fix what has been broken in his life.

**Billy Cane:** Billy is a young man who has just returned home from World War II. He is filled with an energetic optimism and youthful passion for life, determined to see beauty in the world despite the hardships he faced in the war. At times naive and idealistic, Billy's energy propels him to follow his aspirations. He is self-assured and remains hopeful that his eloquent writing can contribute something important to the world.

**Margo:** Margo is a young woman in Hayes Creek who runs her own bookstore. She is kind, clever, supportive, and hard-working. She is always there for Billy when he needs her and strives to be someone that others can lean on. She values the community around her, which she finds both in her own bookstore and in Billy. Margo at times struggles with the balance between remaining hopeful and being realistic, but she grounds herself through her work and connections with others. 4

**Mayor Dobbs:** Mayor Dobbs is a powerful man consumed by his ideas of tradition and structure. He wants the best for his son, Jimmy Ray, and believes in the power of consistency, however, he is willing to do anything to keep the image of his perfect life. He acts as a counterpoint to Alice's core beliefs and the messages of the show, demonstrating how societal pressures can infringe upon doing what's best for loved ones.

**Daddy Murphy:** Alice's father. In the 1920s, he struggles between his love of tradition and social standards and his love for his daughter. While Alice forges her own individual path, Daddy Murphy looks to the Bible to gain clarity, but he later realizes how he failed to account for his daughter's needs. In the 1940s, Daddy Murphy begins to understand his daughter's view of the world and wishes to repair what has been broken.

**Mama Murphy:** Alice's mother. More so than Alice, she has been forced into the gender roles presented by the small town of Zebulon. However, she fights as best as she can for Alice and what she believes is right. She takes immense care to protect her daughter however she can, attempting to do so in the frame of her town's social standards.

**Daddy Cane:** Daddy Cane is incredibly kind and faithful. He raises Billy to be strong and optimistic. Daddy Cane comes from a humble background, but he wants the best for Billy, who is his whole world, and does all he can to make sure Billy can live the life he wants.

**Lucy Grant:** Lucy is a young woman who works for Alice at the Asheville Southern Journal. With her witty lines and lively nature, she is often a source of much needed levity, and lights up the room whenever present. An uncompromising "modern woman," she is unapologetic in her convictions, giving her a magnetism that draws others to her

**Daryl Ames:** Daryl works for Alice at the Asheville Southern Journal. He is often drily sarcastic, but is always ready to let loose and party. Being a formidable editor, he is hard on Billy's writing, but also harbors insecurities about his own work which he pens in pseudonym and hopes will one day earn the respect of Alice.

## **Ensemble Characters**

**Stanford:** Mayor Dobbs' lawyer. He is very professional and hard-working. He is caught up in the same societal expectations as Mayor Dobbs, enforcing every one of the Mayor's wishes. The community in Zebulon is very important to Stanford, and he feels strongly about upholding its standards and traditions.

**Florence:** Florence works at Margo's bookstore. She is a very supportive friend to Margo, always willing to help out. She is a romantic and often gets caught up in dreams.

**Edna:** Edna works at Margo's bookstore as well. She is energetic, hard-working, and optimistic. Along with Florence, Edna is an essential part of the strong community surrounding Margo.

**Max:** A young resident of Zebulon who frequents the bookstore. He's naive and very earnest. His blossoming relationship with Edna displays a sense of community and continuity in the town beyond the main plot.

**Dr. Norquist:** As Alice's doctor in Zebulon, Dr. Norquist values the picture of a perfect community and, along with Mayor Dobbs, tries to preserve Zebulon's image. At times valuing that preservation above Alice's own wellbeing, Dr. Norquist's influence on Alice displays an important conflict in the show.