

Leaving

By Daniel Zaharopol

Character List:

- Steve, 18.
- Bill, 27.

Lights up on a house porch. A boy, Steve, about 18, storms out of the house, slamming the door. He's dressed in a short-sleeve polo shirt and white Hanes house-socks. After a moment of indecision, Steve turns around and goes back in. Silence for a moment. Then:

STEVE

(Yelling from off-stage.)

I'm getting some orange juice!

Steve returns from inside, slamming the door again. He's carrying a glass of orange juice. He slumps down, and sets his orange juice down — too hard. It spills.

STEVE

Oh, fuck.

Bill, dressed in a button-down shirt and pants (though not overly formal) emerges from the house.

BILL

Don't swear.

STEVE

Let me guess. You just told mom and dad "I'll talk to him."

BILL

Yes, actually.

STEVE

Then let me give you a hint. I appreciate the honesty, but "yes, actually" is the wrong answer to that question.

BILL

I *do* want to talk.

STEVE

Not now, Bill. Really, don't bug me now.

BILL

(Sitting down.)

It was quite a fight.

STEVE

Don't you take a hint?

Look, all I wanted to do was spend my last night with some friends. If I can't do that, could I at least spend it alone?

BILL

You're being kinda melodramatic.

STEVE

Come on.

BILL

Don't you think you're getting too old for these teenage angst adventures?

STEVE

(Cold.)

I'm sure I am.

BILL

(Beat.)

Okay, okay, I'm sorry.

STEVE

Y'know, I'd say you were doing better with the brotherly love than you were mocking my angst, but you really weren't. How about you leave me alone?

(Pause.)

BILL

Mom'll be mad, you know.

STEVE

Like she isn't already. And anyway, it won't be the first time.

BILL

Nope.

Among her many other causes for complaint, your socks're gonna be all dirty.

STEVE

That won't be the first time, either. Does it look like I'm in a mood to talk?

BILL

Your feet are all over the leaves and those helicopter seed-things.

STEVE

What is wrong with you? Go away!

Plus, it's not my fault they're all over the porch.

BILL

Right, well, we'll just blame that on the trees; they really shouldn't be dropping leaves, it's so unseemly...

STEVE

It wasn't my job to sweep the front porch.

BILL

Yes it was.

STEVE

Oh. So it was.

BILL
(Pause.)

Excited about tomorrow?

STEVE

Yes. Go away.

BILL

Big day.

STEVE

So it is.

BILL

You packed?

STEVE

Yeah. Already spoke to my roommate, just packed what we need.

BILL

You already know who your roommate is?

STEVE

Yes, they sent it to us by *e-mail*. It's a way of sending messages over long distances, you might've heard of it.

BILL

What dorm are you in?

STEVE

I dunno.

BILL

They didn't tell you your dorm?

STEVE

I don't remember my dorm! Why is this so important?

BILL

Just talking.

(Holds out his hand to shake, or else pats Steve on the shoulder:)

So. Good luck at Duke.

STEVE

(If the hand was held out to shake, taking it. Regardless, a disbelieving look. Then:)

Sure, thanks.

BILL

I remember when I went up to Cornell. It was so crazy. You were eight years old and you were so upset. And I was just sitting there, trying to get some quiet time so I could "think about the future." Hunh. All those big thoughts you think when you're eighteen.

STEVE

I was nine.

BILL

Huh?

STEVE

I was nine years old when you went to Cornell.

BILL

Oh. Sorry about that.

(Beat.)

Isn't it crazy looking at all these cars passing by? All these people going about their lives. You have to wonder when their last big decision was. Their last big change. Wonder what big thoughts are going through their mind.

STEVE

Yeah, I'll bet you do.

BILL

So you're not going to hang out with your folks tonight, huh?

STEVE

I already told you. I'm going for a walk.

BILL

To think things through.

STEVE

Uh-huh.

BILL

Like I just said.

STEVE

I guess so.

BILL

But aren't you already thinking things out here, on the porch?

STEVE

Well, I guess I need to think things out some more. Alone. Away from certain prying brothers!

BILL

But what you're really going to do is run off and spend one more night with your friends.

STEVE

I never said that.

BILL

That's why mom's going to be so mad at you.

STEVE

Would you just leave me alone?

BILL

Hey, I won't tell mom.

Okay?

(Beat.)

STEVE

Okay.

BILL

You don't have to push me away so much.

STEVE

I'm not pushing you away.

No, I am pushing you away. I want to be alone right now.

BILL

Before you sneak off with your friends.

STEVE

I just want. to be. *alone* right now.

BILL

You know the mountainfull of trouble you're going to get into for this, right?

STEVE

If I were going to do something like what you propose, yeah, I can imagine how much trouble I'd get into.

BILL

Mom'll take it as a sign that you're already headed for trouble in college, now that you're bucking her authority already.

STEVE

Well, there's not very much she can do about it, now is there?

BILL

No, I guess there isn't.

Do you think I'm going to try to talk you out of it? Is that it?

STEVE

I'm not thinking anything. Would you please just leave me alone?

BILL

You know, I did the same thing before I went off to college. I don't suppose you remember.

STEVE

No, I don't.

BILL

Mom and dad actually saw me drive off with my friends — they pulled up right here and I was out the door before they could stop me.

STEVE

Mom must've been so mad.

BILL

Fuming. My plan wasn't nearly so neat as yours. You're probably getting picked up a couple blocks from here, not in plain sight like me. You always were more clever.

(Beat.)

I went out with Sarah, and Jake, and Mike. We went off to this bar and billiards place—

STEVE

—The Shot.

BILL

The Shot, that's right. Jake knew the bartender there, so we could get some drinks — not a lot, just a little. And we played, for a while, and reminisced, and had a good time. It was a good sendoff.

STEVE

Yeah.

Did you stay in touch with them? After you left?

BILL

Not so much. Jake, yeah, a bit. We still see each other sometimes. But med school keeps me busy, and Jake's in the army, so he doesn't get much time off.

STEVE

Gary's thinking of joining the army.

BILL

Gary, huh? That fits. He'll have to lose a few pounds first, though, won't he?

STEVE

Yeah, he will. He's working out.

(Beat.)

So what about Sarah and Mike? Did you stay in touch with them?

BILL

Not really.

Sarah and I were kind-of going out. But only kind-of, because we were both leaving at the end of the year. We called the night a bit early at The Shot, and Sarah was driving, and I was the last one she was dropping off... well, one thing led to another, and a few months down the road I felt too awkward to write to her. One of those things, I guess.

STEVE

And Mike?

BILL

He started dating Sarah after I left.

STEVE

That would do it.

BILL

Yeah, it would. I still haven't figured out if I regret that whole night. If maybe I should've stayed with the guys a bit longer instead of one night with Sarah, maybe I would've stayed in better touch.

STEVE

Maybe.

BILL

But I guess sometimes you just have to do things you regret.

STEVE

Yeah.

BILL

Hey, is Janet coming tonight?

STEVE

Yeah, she is.

BILL

Cool.

(Pause.)

You were nine, huh?

STEVE

Nine.

BILL

Long time ago.

You know, Steve, I am sorry I wasn't here. I mean, here for you, growing up. God, that sounded sappy.

STEVE

It didn't mean that much to me.

(Beat. Bill gets up, heads to the door.)

BILL

Maybe I'll go in.

(Mini-beat.)

Hey, do you want more company with your friends? Would you mind if I came along?

STEVE

Looking to watch over me?

BILL

No. I'm not too old to enjoy sneaking out.

STEVE

And you won't tell me what to do, or threaten to tell mom about stuff?

BILL

Nope.

STEVE

You'll let me spend time with Janet if I want to?

BILL

(Brief pause.)

Yeah.

STEVE

(Beat.)

Okay.

BILL

Okay?

STEVE

Yeah.

BILL

Okay.

STEVE

I'll take my glass in. Then we should go.

BILL

Sounds good.

Steve gets up with his glass. He comes out with a paper towel, and wipes up the orange juice. Bill, while Steve is away, is thinking, perhaps pacing, perhaps just staring off into the distance. When Steve is around, Bill observes him, or perhaps just stares into the distance. Steve goes back in, and comes back out.

STEVE

Okay?

BILL

No. No, I think maybe I shouldn't go.

STEVE

What, and you think maybe I shouldn't go either?

BILL

I won't tell mom or anything.

Just, y'know.

(With a small chuckle/outblowing of breath.)

Maybe I'm too old and all.

STEVE

Okay.

BILL

Yeah. Go.

(Steve starts to walk away.)

BILL

Hey, listen, if you get back and you can sneak me out... want to go for ice cream afterwards? I know a place that's open all night.

STEVE

Yeah. Sure. That'd be fun.

BILL

Great. See you, then.

STEVE

Yeah. Bye, Bill.

Steve walks off. End of play.