

ADMISSIONS



By

David

Taylor

Little

WHY I LIKE IT: *Acting Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes... What a fabulously, delectable story brimming with life! Admissions by David Taylor Little is charged with zingy, biting dialogue that only the likes of brothers (especially one as gay as Caleb) could deliver. At its core though, we get a story of redemption, forgiveness, and healing. What more could make this exchange of brothers even tastier? This story's core message becomes spicier within the lens of our current times; what is the FULL price of a current college education, and what are the lengths we go through to achieve it? (Spacing is playwright's own.)*

Caleb and Grant are sitting in the living room of his apartment. It's a bit shabby. Caleb's in his early to mid 30s, but still has college posters on the wall...all frayed and ripped at the edges. If anything else is in the room besides a sofa and a chair, it's an Ikea bookcase that will fall apart if one more book is placed on any of its shelves. Grant is dressed nicely, he's in his early 30s...and is a little gruff. They're both drinking something non-alcoholic...coffee?...Pepsi...? The air between them is thick...

CALEB

(Takes a sip of his drink. Pause)

GRANT

(Takes a sip of his drink. Pause)

CALEB

Look. You don't need to give me an answer now.

GRANT

(Angry)

But I want to...

CALEB

(Hopefully)

Oh...really?

GRANT

Let me finish! I want to give you an answer now, but it's not the one you want to hear.

CALEB

I...get it. Please, just think about it.

GRANT

Look...I don't want to sound like a jerk, but how is this going to help me, Caleb?

CALEB

(Hurt)

...It's not. It's only going to help me. But who else can I ask?

GRANT

(Angry again)

Yeah...well...if you hadn't screwed everything up...

CALEB

I know! This is all my fault. But this is the only way I can see to get out of the mess. All you have to do is co-sign.

GRANT

You're not dumb, Caleb. You can't think it's that simple.

CALEB

But that's the point. I'm not dumb. I can do this. I can finish the degree this time.

GRANT

What guarantee can you give me of that? You flunked out. Two fucking times in fact. And left me to fend for myself.

CALEB

Seriously, Grant? Dad would have helped you if you hadn't been in rehab when it came time to commit to Penn State.

GRANT

Fuck you, Caleb! You have NO business judging me!

CALEB

No...I don't.

GRANT

At least I STAYED off the stuff.

CALEB

Touche. AND, for what it's worth, I haven't touched it for at least a year.

GRANT

(Sarcastically)

Ooooooh...Look at you go, needle man!

CALEB

Low blow, Grant.

GRANT

Yeah...well...I'd like to apologize, but you made our lives hell.

CALEB

To be fair...so did you...at least until you got cleaned up...which is why I thought that of ALL people you would be more understanding of someone who wants to make a change.

Needing to commit to something new. Relying on the hope of rehabilitation. You've made something of yourself.

GRANT

I have. ON MY OWN!

CALEB

(Hurt and angry at that response)

Maybe in terms of your finances! But you had a lot of help in the other areas.

GRANT

(A pause, and then)

Sorry...

CALEB

Who else was gonna go through 7000 human anatomy flash cards with you at 3:30 in the morning for your test at 8:00 AM? Or carried you home and put you in bed after you closed down O'Doyle's from stress drinking?...I should have a nursing degree myself for all the work I put in with you.

GRANT

I know. Sorry.

There's a long pause. Neither of them know what to say.

GRANT

(Long pull on his drink)

CALEB

Do you remember that vacation we went on when we were kids?

GRANT

You mean that ONE TIME we went on vacation? Yeah. It wasn't great.

CALEB

No. We had that awful car that broke down on the highway?

GRANT

Ugh right? Was that the car where the overhead light came on when you pushed the horn?

CALEB

YUP! Some sort of electrical short.

GRANT

And then those mosquitos that got into the tent through the hole?

CALEB

I had itchy welts ALL over my body.

GRANT

And mom got sick didn't she?

CALEB

Yeah. Threw up all over that memorial...

GRANT

OH RIGHT! We had to run and hide cause those veterans were so pissed at us.

CALEB

(Hesitant to bring this next thing up)

Remember that old lady at the Taco Bell?

GRANT

The one who called you a queer, little faggot? Yeah, I remember that bitch.

CALEB

(Laughing)

You dumped your root beer all over her. Mom was so mad!

GRANT

Yeah...she grounded me for it too. But it was worth it.

CALEB

That's what I remember most from our vacation. You sticking up for me.

GRANT

Really?

CALEB

Yup.

GRANT

Well, I wasn't about to let that crazy bitch get away with such behavior. I looked up to you. And I didn't care that you were gay. Big deal.

CALEB

Yeah. But no one else did that.

GRANT

Did what?

CALEB

Looked out for me like that. It meant a lot.

GRANT

Yeah...well, I loved you.

CALEB

Loved?

GRANT

Love you. Then and now.

CALEB

I love you, too. But you were my little brother. You always behaved like my big brother. Sticking up for me. In school...in church...in front of the other kids in the neighborhood. You didn't have to do that.

GRANT

Yes I did.

CALEB

They could have pummeled you, any one of them.

GRANT

(Laughing)

Uh...no they couldn't...

CALEB

(Also laughing)

I suppose not. How many times did you make states in wrestling?

GRANT

(Doesn't answer...thinking...then:)

Why did you bring that up anyway? The vacation thing?

CALEB

It's the first time I remember you sticking up for me like that. And it made me proud to be your brother. But it also made me sad...that you were the only one willing to be on my side. Mom and dad wouldn't. I'd get yelled at for playing with mom's makeup...even the colors she didn't use. And they wouldn't let me have other boys sleep over...I didn't even know what sex was and they still thought I might do something that would make them ashamed of me. That's why I started drinking. In high school. And that's what led to the drugs. I wasn't trying to make your lives more complicated. I needed an escape from mom and dad.

GRANT

Oh. I never really thought about that.

CALEB

Isn't that why you left with Christine before you graduated high school? To get out?

GRANT

Yeah. But I didn't know that then. I thought I was in love.

CALEB

She was 26 years older than you!

GRANT

I'll try not to judge your drug habits if you try not to judge my girlfriends.

CALEB

Fair.

GRANT

Thank you.

CALEB

But just to be clear, she was a bitch.

GRANT

Agreed...but only I'm allowed to say that.

CALEB

(Rolling his eyes)

Fine! All I'm saying is that we both had our problems with mom and dad.

GRANT

Dad mostly.

CALEB

Yes, dad mostly, but only because mom wouldn't say anything about the way he treated us.

GRANT

And then she up and died.

CALEB

Grant, I want to make something of myself...like you have. In my two attempts at college I actually amassed a few credits I can roll over into a full degree.

GRANT

In accounting?

CALEB

Yes...accounting.

GRANT

Are you sure you want a degree in numbers????

CALEB

Yes. I understand numbers. They never change. They're constant. I can rely on them to be the same every time I come back to them. I need that. Something sure and unchanging.

GRANT

How long is it going to take you to finish?

CALEB

I spoke with an admissions counselor at State. She said I can probably finish in two years.

GRANT

I don't see how that's possible.

CALEB

I'll have to take the full amount of credits I can each semester.

GRANT

Caleb, you couldn't take 9 credits that semester you tried to "pull back." What makes you think you can handle 15?

CALEB

It's actually 18.

GRANT

Seriously! What the/ FUCK

CALEB

AND/ I can do it because I have you to help me this time.

GRANT

Oh...Caleb...I don't know if I have the /time...

CALEB

All/ I need is a study partner...(jokingly) AND someone to carry ME home from O'Doyle's...

GRANT

You can't joke about that, Caleb. I don't do that any more. And neither should you.

CALEB

Sorry...bad joke.

GRANT

(Big sigh)

It's just...a big ask...co-signing your loan.

CALEB

Come on. Dad won't help.

GRANT

You asked him?

CALEB

I tried. He slammed the door in my face.

GRANT

You owe him like \$75,000.00, Caleb! Can you blame him?

CALEB

(Angry)

Maybe if he'd been a better dad I would have finished the first time I fucking started college, Grant! Have you ever thought about that? You went through rehab and he welcomed you back into the fold. I went through rehab and when it was over, all he asked me was, "Are you going back to Paul's house?" It was the apartment I SHARED with Paul! And it wasn't Paul's fault I was in rehab in the first place. He abandoned me, Grant. Dad abandoned me!

There is a long silence between the two. Finally, Grant moves to the sofa and sits beside Caleb. He puts his arm around his brother and Caleb begins to sob. Caleb puts his head on Grant's shoulder. This goes on for a few minutes. Finally:

GRANT

Dad has been shitty to you.

CALEB

He doesn't know how to relate to me...he hasn't since I came out.

GRANT

You came out when you were 7. I mean it was kind of obvious.

CALEB

Yeah I guess/, but

GRANT

But/ nothing. His discomfort doesn't excuse him from being your dad. OR from helping you with college.

CALEB

It's not really his duty to help me with college. Most of my friends had to take out their own loans.

GRANT

But he helped me. Even after I screwed up. And he said he'd help BOTH of us. He has the money to pay for your loans. Have you really been sober for a year?

CALEB

Almost two years, actually. I wanted to prove to you that I wasn't a screw up any more.

GRANT

I've never seen you as a screw up. Just a late bloomer.

CALEB

I want to pay dad back. I don't want to be indebted to him any more. But I can't get a job that pays me enough money to do that without a degree.

GRANT

I thought your current job paid well.

CALEB

At the library?

GRANT

You're not at the convenience store any more?

CALEB

I got fired from there like four years ago.

GRANT

How long have been at the library?

CALEB

Two years. I started about the time I got sober. After Paul left me. I've been working super hard. On everything. But the job doesn't pay enough for me to pay for school. And my credit's shot so I can't take out loans on my own.

A long pause. Grant's thinking.

CALEB

I know I'm asking a lot, Grant. And I won't ever ask again. It took me a lot to bring it up this time, and I don't want to have to do it again. So what do you think? Are you willing to help your big brother out?

Grant sits for a moment in silence. He is about to open his mouth and speak when...

Black out. END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT

SPEAKS: *The inspiration for this short play came from my own struggles with student loans. I was lucky to be able pay for most of my undergraduate college experience from savings, the choice to go to an inexpensive school, and generous (if not wealthy) parents who were also able to help pay the tuition. But graduate school was another story. I racked up over \$100,000.00 worth of loans to get my MFA. The degree is what enabled me to get my current job, teaching at Ball State University in the theatre department. It's a job that I've waited my entire life to obtain. But I was never going to be able to pay it off.*

The current federal administration in the US changed the rules so that I was able to apply for, and receive, an income-based repayment plan, that led to forgiveness of my entire loan amount. Once that happened, I was free to begin thinking about much how this was going to change my life. But it also gave me time to conversely think about how the lives of people saddled with debt, debt obtained by trying to achieve the "American Dream," would continue to be weighed down by debt like a millstone around their neck, to use a Biblical image. I'm even more struck by the fact that many people have thousands upon thousands of dollars of debt and no degree to show for it. They are literally drowning in student loan debt. It's a problem. It's a disgrace. They need help. And relief. The play ends without giving an answer because I have no clue how to fix this problem. I

don't have the chutzpa to suggest how this might be changed and the people in this situation might be helped. All I know is that my life has been forever altered by the forgiveness of my loans. I want that for other people like myself who come from middle class (or lower) backgrounds. Education and the dream of pursuing a career one is passionate about, should be within the reach of ALL people.

AUTHOR BIO: David Taylor Little's plays include Christmas Gifts, Shades of Gay, Arlo Whittaker and the Viola Verdict, Arlo Whittaker and the Petruchio Problem, and The Disappearance of Ezra Clybourne. His work has been commissioned and developed by The Pigeon Creek Shakespeare Company, Ball State University, Indiana Public Radio, and The Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. He is a member of The Dramatists' Guild and earned his MFA in directing from The New School for Drama. David currently teaches in The Department of Theatre and Dance at Ball State University. www.davidtaylorlittle.com