

AMONG TREES

By

Clay Robeson

28 Plays Later

Day 5

February 5, 2021

ACT I

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP - A FOREST - NIGHT.

The stage is mostly empty, lit from above with leafy gobos in blues and greens. The backdrop should be silhouettes of tree trunks. Center stage is a singular rock, big enough for three to sit on slightly uncomfortably. THE NARRATOR remains off stage for the duration of the show. She has a soft, motherly voice, and speaks as if telling a bedtime story.

NARRATOR: At night, Billy liked to walk. He would slip from the window in his bedroom, still in pyjamas, and make his way, sneaker clad, to the stone clearing that was just far enough away from his house that he could no longer see the back porch lights.

YOUNG BILLY enters quietly, with a flashlight gliding smoothly over the stage, almost gracefully, as if it were soaring between the trees and the ground. YOUNG BILLY leads himself to the stone center stage, which he scrambles up. He turns off his flashlight and stares up at the canopy above him. An owl's call is heard.

NARRATOR: This was his quiet place. His thinking place. If his family had been at all religious, this would be his church, and at least once a week he would come here in the middle of the night to worship.

Another flashlight shines from offstage as if someone was approaching. YOUNG BILLY doesn't notice, even as it occasionally illuminates him.

NARRATOR: As Billy grew, this one practice became the center of his world. Everything else could change, but this would ever be the same.

TEEN BILLY enters in the same way, wearing the same pyjamas, making his way to the same stone, turns off his flashlight, and scrambles to his own perch upon it. An owl's call is heard.

NARRATOR: When his mother died, he found solace here, falling quickly back into the same patterns, searching the trees for sleeping birds, or wide eyed owls preparing to hunt for their dinner. Here, he communed with them. Their strength became his own, and he imagined himself soaring with the predators in search of a meal.

YOUNG BILLY and TEEN BILLY both stand upon the rock and spread their arms wide, head thrown back and eyes closed. They sway in tandem, as if they were soaring through the sky. As this happens, another flashlight appears, but neither billy notices.

NARRATOR: And when they soared, it was as if there were no other cares in the world.

Through the next bit of dialogue, ADULT BILLY enters in the exact same pyjamas, turns off his flashlight, and joins the other two on the rock just in time for an owl's call to sound. Then they jump.

NARRATOR: Drifting between trees, up, down, ever watchful of the ground beneath, looking for the movement that would tell them that their supper awaited. And when they finally saw it, they would fold their wings... and POUNCE!

The three jump together, landing on their feet in a line, oldest to youngest. Another flashlight, brighter and much more harsh flashes on and bounces erratically about for a few moments before OLD BILLY (in matching pyjamas that are torn at muddied at the knees) rushes on stage. He moves quickly to take his place at the head of the line, but stumbles and falls, his flashlight skittering across the stage, destroying the symmetry and silence of the moment.

ADULT BILLY: What the fuck, old man?

YOUNG BILLY: Language!

TEEN BILLY: Relax, squirt, no one is here to hear it.

OLD BILLY scrambles to his feet, dusting himself off.

OLD BILLY: I'm sorry that I'm late. I got lost.

TEEN BILLY: You got lost?

All three of the others look skeptical.

ADULT BILLY: How the fuck did you get lost?

YOUNG BILLY: POTTY MOUTH!!

TEEN BILLY: Seriously, kid. Chill.

YOUNG BILLY: Mom said that swearing is for classless oafs who will never amount to anything.

TEEN BILLY: Oh yeah, well mom is dead, so who is going to stop us.

OLD BILLY and ADULT BILLY react in an "oh
shit don't tell him that" manner. YOUNG
BILLY takes a step backwards, as if struck.

YOUNG BILLY: She's what?

TEEN BILLY realizes what he just said and
backpedals.

TEEN BILLY: Oh, uh... nothing. Nothing. Don't-- don't worry about
it.

YOUNG BILLY: What did you say?

ADULT BILLY: He didn't mean anything by it, he just--

YOUNG BILLY: WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU JUST SAY?!?

The other three stare, aghast, at their
young counterpart.

ADULT BILLY: I never swore like that before.

OLD BILLY: No. Not until dad sold the house, and moved us to
Berkshire.

Both YOUNG BILLY and TEEN BILLY turn on OLD
BILLY.

Y & T BILLY: He WHAT?

ADULT BILLY: Well shit.

OLD BILLY starts to climb up on the rock.
He sounds slightly panicked.

OLD BILLY: Listen guys. Forget we said anything. Let's get back
up on the rock and fly.

TEEN BILLY: Wait a minute. How the hell old are you?

OLD BILLY stops, sighs, and climbs back down.

OLD BILLY: Sixty three.

TEEN BILLY: Are you fucking kidding me? We're still doing this shit at sixty three years old?

YOUNG BILLY: That's some serious bullshit right there.

ADULT BILLY: Hey, language.

YOUNG BILLY: Bite me, poop eater.

OLD BILLY: Hey hey hey, let's calm down for a minute. There's no reason to fight. We're here to fly. We're here because this is what brings us peace when we're upset. Look, I'm sorry I'm late. I don't get back here to do this too often anymore, and since they tore the house down--

Y/T/A BILLY: THEY WHAT?!?

OLD BILLY: Oh, fuck.

ADULT BILLY: They tore the house down??

OLD BILLY nods.

OLD BILLY: Yeah. A few years ago. It's an apartment building now. With a pool.

TEEN BILLY: Oh my god. How the hell did we let that happen?

ADULT BILLY: This is obscene, that house was on the national historic registry.

TEEN BILLY: It was a fucking landmark! My name is carved in the cement of the back patio! I--

YOUNG BILLY stomps his foot and pushes his way into the center of the group.

YOUNG BILLY: What the actually fuck is going on here? Do you mean to tell me that we've been coming here pretending to be an owl for... what's sixty three minus eight?

TEEN BILLY: Fifty-five.

YOUNG BILLY: For FIFTY-FIVE YEARS?!

Everyone turns to look at OLD BILLY. He squirms a little under their gaze before speaking.

OLD BILLY: Yeah.

YOUNG BILLY: Well that's just fucking sad now, it's it?

TEEN BILLY: Seriously.

ADULT BILLY: I never really thought about it like that before.

OLD BILLY: Yeah...

YOUNG BILLY: What the hell happens to us that THIS is what we fall back on? I mean, sure, it calms us down, but shit, I'm eight fucking years old, it's expected. (To TEEN BILLY) What's YOUR excuse? (To ADULT BILLY) Or yours?

YOUNG BILLY turns to OLD BILLY.

YOUNG BILLY: And don't you even fucking talk to me. Jesus Christ.

TEEN BILLY: Where did we get that mouth?

ADULT BILLY raises his hand, meekly.

ADULT BILLY: My bad. I spend way too much time playing online first person shooters. I just get frustrated sometimes.

TEEN BILLY: STILL?! Good god, do we ever get a girlfriend?!

ADULT BILLY looks away and doesn't answer.

OLD BILLY: No.

TEEN BILLY: Oh my god, seriously?! Do we ever even get to...

TEEN BILLY glances at YOUNG BILLY then
back, awkwardly.

TEEN BILLY: You know...

OLD BILLY and ADULT BILLY look sheepish.

ADULT BILLY: I pay for it sometimes.

OLD BILLY: But only when I'm really lonely.

YOUNG BILLY: Oh. My. God. You people are so fucking sad! How did
this happen to us?

TEEN BILLY: I don't know. When mom died--

ADULT BILLY: I just sort of shut down--

OLD BILLY: This was the only place I felt safe.

TEEN BILLY: The only place I felt... okay.

ADULT BILLY: I guess I just sort of

OLD BILLY: Got stuck here.

All four of them stare at each other for a
few moments. OLD BILLY looking sad. ADULT
BILLY looking guilty. TEEN BILLY looking
worried. And YOUNG BILLY looking seriously
pissed off.

YOUNG BILLY: Well, damn.

OLD BILLY: You can say that again.

YOUNG BILLY: Well, damn.

ADULT BILLY: What are we going to do?

YOUNG BILLY: Well I'm going to stay the hell off this rock.

TEEN BILLY: And I'm not going to tell dad to go to hell when he wants me to go to therapy.

ADULT BILLY: And I'm not going to let myself get stuck playing video games for my entire life.

OLD BILLY doesn't speak. The other three turn to look at him, slowly. He takes a step back.

YOUNG BILLY: Well, old man?

TEEN BILLY: What are you going to do?

ADULT BILLY laughs. OLD BILLY takes another step back. ADULT BILLY follows suit.

ADULT BILLY: He's not going to do anything.

YOUNG BILLY and TEEN BILLY turn their ire on ADULT BILLY. OLD BILLY takes another step back, he is starting to fade into the shadows. ADULT BILLY takes another step back.

YOUNG BILLY: And why the hell not?

OLD BILLY vanishes off stage. ADULT BILLY takes another step back. TEEN BILLY laughs and takes a step back.

TEEN BILLY: Because he doesn't have to.

YOUNG BILLY looks at TEEN BILLY like he's crazy. ADULT BILLY vanishes off stage. TEEN BILLY takes another step back. Realization suddenly crosses YOUNG BILLY's face.

YOUNG BILLY: Oh.

TEEN BILLY vanishes off stage.

YOUNG BILLY: Because he doesn't have to.

YOUNG BILLY turns to look at the rock. He steps forward. Places his hand on it and looks up towards the canopy above. An owl's call is heard. He looks over his shoulder in the direction the other three left, turns slowly and walks off stage as the lights...

FADE TO BLACK.

Brief 5- Due by 6 Feb at 10:00am UK time

Today we're going to look at petrified trees.

Petrification is a sort of fossilisation process that happens to dead plants underground when there is no oxygen to allow for the decomposition of the material, and as a result, instead of disappearing, it completely transforms and becomes a mineral... ending up being a stone that is the exact carbon copy (or rather mineral copy) of the tree.

There are some places in the world where you can walk through an entire forest that has been petrified... oooh... spooky!

Therefore, for today, let's find inspiration from this incredible process, the idea that every part of you changes from vegetable to mineral, from a living thing to a stone. Although personally, I just like the image of all these trees shivering with fear.

For the final bonus points of the week - if yesterday we had lots of characters, today maybe focus on just the one - doesn't need to be a monologue, but perhaps all the other characters revolve around one main character. In fact, this play might work with the whole 'person lost in the woods' trope...