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Learning to Play - Playing to Learn

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It was my third time teaching at the University of New Hampshire's Performing Arts Day. After having just finished the exercise "Mirror", I asked a simple question: "How many of you have ever done this exercise before?" Eight or so of the eleven high school students in the room raised their hands. "Good," I said, "now can you tell me why we do it?" After a few glances around the room at one another, nobody could give me a solid response. I wasn't surprised; in fact, it's what I was expecting. It was, to be fair, the entire reason I was teaching the workshop in the first place.

I've heard it said myself, time after time, by students, parents, and administrators alike: that theatre classes just "play games" and that they are "easy A" courses. And to a certain degree, that is true – what lies at the heart of theatre is play. Theatres are, after all, expected to mount plays. One of Merriam-Webster's first definitions of 'play' is "the conduct, course, or action of a game." The word 'game' is present in the definition, and yet it receives flack. However, there is nothing wrong with playing games. I argue that these games not only improve an actor's capability, but they also develop a human's ability to interact with other people and flourish at the hands of social demands. Theatre games and exercises are rooted in dramatic necessity, and if they can be taught with *connections* being made, these mere "games" will provide the bulk of the training and foundation an actor needs to give a successful performance.

The person responsible for creating a large number of the theatre games and exercises in existence is a woman by the name of Viola Spolin. Spolin's philosophy and work was the inspiration for my study and the technique I used to complete it. Viola Spolin was born in Chicago, Illinois on November 7, 1906. Spolin really began her career by studying as a social worker at Neva Boyd's Group Work School in Chicago. This school, also known as the Hull-

House School, used games and improvisational exercises to teach language skills, social skills, problem solving, and self-confidence to European immigrant and inner-city children. Spolin was inspired by Boyd's innovative methods and saw the positive effects it had on the children. Spolin would then work with Boyd again as drama supervisor for the Chicago branch of the Work's Progress Administration's Recreation Project during the Great Depression. The WPA Recreation Project provided employment opportunities for professionals in the arts and culture. Spolin's position required her to work with individuals of many cultures and languages, so she created a structure that could cross the barriers and be easily understood. Using Boyd's work as inspiration, Spolin developed a system of game-based training that centered around the idea of play and fostered an individual's sense of creativity and self-expression. These games and exercises were later organized and formatted into Spolin's system of actor training known as "Theater Games". This was just the beginning of Spolin's hugely successful career. She then went on to found the Young Actors Company in Hollywood in 1946. She directed for Chicago's Playwrights Theater Club "and subsequently [went on] to conduct games workshops with the Compass, the world's first professional, improvisational acting company" (www.spolin.us/violabio). She worked with her son Paul Sills, founder of the prestigious Second City Company in Chicago, to direct workshops and expand her game-driven and improvisational techniques. Spolin consulted for several theaters, conducted workshops for many companies as well as television series, performed on film, and also published several books articulating her theory and organizing her technique. What is special about Spolin's work is that it is derived from the need to solve a problem. "The games emerged out of necessity," Spolin has stated, "...When I had a problem [directing], I made up a game." (www.spolin.us/violabio) Each of the exercises stems from a specific complication that real people - real actors - experienced. These

games may be fun, but they are embedded in purpose. Keeping all of this knowledge in mind, I challenged myself to see if the technique could be applied to high school students as a primary form of training. I then applied the technique again on college-level students with substantially more training. I wanted to know if these games, helpful though they appear, could really be used as a stand-alone form of actor training and what the evident benefits of these exercises would be. (www.spolin.us)

For the first part of this project, I taught a group of eight (later six, as two of the students dropped the camp) high school students in a week-long camp at the University of New Hampshire. Six of my students had experience with theatre, and two of them (the two who did not stay) were from Russia who barely spoke English and had little experience with theatre, certainly none with American training. Each day was broken up into different theatrical segments: stage combat, stage makeup, acting, dance, and then a choice between musical theatre or design. I was responsible for teaching the acting portion of the day, which ranged daily from one-hour to two-hour sections. In total, including the last day which was primarily run work, I taught the students for 7 hours and 45 minutes. Attempting to accomplish a unit of teaching with a technique fairly foreign to students in this amount of time was a daunting task, but it was one I was determined to achieve. The overall goal of the unit was a scene study – students had the option of choosing either a monologue or a scene on which to work. All students chose scenes, so they were paired in groups of two. I began each day with Spolin warm-ups, then focused on the scene studies, and then wrapped up the class. This type of lesson planning, though, was new to me. Generally, I write a lesson plan that has the goals pre-stated and a step-by-step procedure with all the information weeks in advance. This work, though, does not allow for that. I began my planning with a unit skeleton (See Appendix A) which mapped out the warm-ups and warm-

downs I would use each day along with their allotted times. I then left the bulk of the lesson as “Work on scenes”: because Spolin’s work is derived from *necessity*, it cannot be pre-determined (see previous Spolin quote, www.spolin.us/violabio).

I flipped through my Spolin bible *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques* and marked for myself the exercises that seemed to address common problems for high school actors (i.e. body awareness, physical communication, etc.). On the first day of camp, students selected their scenes. On the second day, students presented their scenes to me with no guidance, save for some contextual clues I provided. I observed, took notes, and then went home that night to do the real work. I went through Spolin’s many exercises, finding activities that specifically addressed the issues I had noticed with each particular scene earlier in the day. I jotted them down in order of relevance and assumed usefulness. The next day I would give students time to work their scenes. While the other scenes were off working on their own, or getting blocking help from camp director Raina Ames, I would work one-on-one with a scene having them complete the pulled exercises. Most often the exercises would be for both of the students, but occasionally I would find that one actor needed a solo activity. After working with the scene for a period of time I would let them go off to continue working, new knowledge in mind, while I noted additional areas that needed to be worked on the next day. I would then switch groups and repeat the process. As a teacher, this kind of planning is incredibly time-consuming because of its individualized nature, but I find that this manner really is most beneficial to the students; rather than “blanket teaching” where information is thrown out to address the masses, this technique emphasizes *specificity* in actor needs, which is really quite special.

In terms of success rate, I would say the technique was more effective for some than others, and it could have been much more successful for all if given more time. A complete journal of my observations with the high school students can be found in Appendix B, but I'd like to highlight the beginning and end of the process. After a brief introduction to Viola Spolin and what my goals would be for the week, the very first exercise I completed with the students was a game called "Rhythm", which is a clapping-around-the-circle, think-on-your-toes word game that establishes a steady rhythm and gets students thinking on their feet and paying attention to one another. The first few rounds were very difficult for the students to grasp; the rhythm would slowly increase with their excitement or anticipation, and words were getting dropped or repeated. After each round I would have the students take a deep breath and remind them to *listen* to one another so as to make the multitasking easier. The more I emphasized listening and awareness, the better they got, until finally we made it successfully all the way around the circle. I would say this first game is a great representation of the journey of this process as well as the importance of it. When the students were given a "game", their immediate focus went to speed and personal success (i.e. what am I going to say when it's my turn?), instead of to the actual instructions and working together as a unit. However, when guided and reminded, the students were able to cohesively become a well-oiled team that reached success. With description and explanation, justifications become connections. A good deal of the exercises followed in this fashion. Students would be uncomfortable at first and then finally learn to give in to the doing. Sometimes students would try to be funny and miss the point of the exercise all together. Rather than single individuals out, which Spolin specifically does not allow, leaders or teachers are encouraged to emphasize to the *group* the purpose of the activity and guide them towards success as a team. To quote William James, a philosopher and

psychologist, “A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and life is after all a chain.” (Brainy Quote, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/williamjam165953.html>) I believe that Spolin would agree with James and would also say that it applies to theatre as well. With that in mind, having success with an activity was sometimes easy and sometimes rather difficult. In a game like “Play Ball”, for example, students throw and catch a space prop ball that attains different weights and speeds throughout the activity. The idea is that the “ball” should always be visible to the audience and should be consistent rather than just imaginary in the actors’ individual minds. Some students did very well with this, and it was clear where the “ball” was. With others, they lacked the same focus and consistency. The forbidding of singling out made it difficult to improve the weaker performers. Instead, I had to reiterate the side-coaching and emphasize the goal. While some improvements were made, not all students were successful. By the last day, there was progress. Students were willing to participate, grasped the idea of ‘doing’, and some grew greatly in their ability to be specific and communicate nonverbally, which is a difficult task. Others did not progress as far, but I assign that heavily to the time constraints. It takes a long time to break habits – generally more than one or two hours a day for a week.

As a teaching tool, I was both impressed and slightly conflicted with the technique. As stated previously, the work load and preparation time were very heavy due to the individualized and specific nature of the lessons. The pay-off was worth it in many instances. I did have my questions and conflicts, though. Firstly, Spolin’s side-coaching left me unfulfilled. For each activity, Spolin articulates a specific list of words and phrases the teacher or leader is to use throughout the exercise to guide the actors. It was my understanding that these phrases are to be the sole guidance in this work. At times, this was a comfort. All I had to do was follow Spolin’s instructions and the exercise came together clearly. It was like I had her there to guide my

teaching. At other times, however, it left me frustrated. While observing I would see confusion or points where I needed to clarify or elaborate, but I felt restricted by Spolin's instructions. I tried to stay as absolutely true to the technique as possible, but I did have to make occasional exceptions where I would replace content-less improvisations with the scene content, or I would give content clarification or blocking assistance. Due to the time constraints, I felt these adaptations, along with some stop-and-go rehearsals, were necessary. My frustration came from not knowing and wishing I could ask Spolin my questions – was this allowed in her technique? Or did she only use strictly the exercises to complete scene work? These questions unanswered, I still support Spolin's technique very strongly. I think it emphasizes the doing, keeping the actor out of his or her head, and keeps the process very fun and fresh while incredibly helpful. In terms of using it in my future classroom, I 100% plan to do so. I will just also couple the technique with others I have learned and whatever supplemental work I deem necessary (and hopefully Ms. Spolin will forgive me for that). In my opinion, for high school students the best way to use Spolin's technique is to introduce the work through warm-ups and other individualized activities. With that, one must continue to make connections between activities and practical applications. I advise to keep her exercises on file and when a student faces a theatrical problem, reach into the file and apply it. If the activity works, problem solved; if not, supplement it with another technique. I think regardless of the theatre technique a teacher declares most appropriate, it is always important to keep improvisation and theatre games in the drama classroom – not only for training, but for developmental purposes.

For the second part of my capstone project I put on a performance of my self-written play *The Escapist* [See Appendix D]. This time I was the actor and I was being directed by my esteemed peer Kimberly D'Agnese. I informed Kim of the project at hand and requested that she

implement the Spolin technique wherever she felt it would be useful or wherever she was comfortable doing so. She did so obligingly, but her results were somewhat as expected. I will begin with the positive experiences with Spolin's work. We (my acting partner Alex Ortega and myself) essentially participated in four of Spolin's exercises: Mirror, Three Changes, an improvised scenario, and Listening to the Environment. Mirror was the first Spolin activity in which we participated. At this point we had completed rough staging and were somewhat off-book. Kim decided it was time to introduce Spolin's work because it was time to play, discover, and build on the foundation. It had been a long time since I had been the participator in Mirror rather than the leader, and admittedly I giggled at the start because I was uncomfortable. Being a shy and self-conscious person, I often avoid eye contact for prolonged periods of time (as I would wager most high school students do as well), and this exercise kicked me far out of my comfort zone. However, after the smiling was done and with Kim's guidance, I became very in tune with Alex and began enjoying the exercise. Once it got to the stage where there were no leaders or followers and we were to move as one, I felt incredibly focused and thought we had a strong connection. This exercise, though done at all ages, was successful in my opinion at the college level. It did improve our partnership awareness, our connection, focus and comfort level, all of which are important. Developmentally, it improves eye contact, comfort with self, focus, and human connection. The second Spolin activity we completed was Three Changes – this is an exercise where after staring at your partner for about 15 seconds you must turn around, make three changes to your physical appearance, turn back around and have your partner spot them. This is to be repeated several times. I had done this exercise before, so I knew what was coming. I think it is an extremely fun exercise, and it does challenge the narrow-minded. When you think you've made every change you possibly can you must dig deeper, get creative, and find

something new. It was successful in the sense that it relaxed me even more and honed in my attention to detail, especially in relation to observing my acting partner. These are again important skills upon which to work. Developmentally, it fosters creativity, perseverance, and courage. The third Spolin activity we completed was an improvised scenario. This wasn't a pulled exercise per se, but as it was improvisation, it stemmed from Spolin's technique. Kim had us list qualities of a brother and sister relationship (our relationship in the play) as well as possible scenarios in which a brother and sister could find themselves. We ended up improvising a scene where I, the younger sister, had broken a vase while playing which contained our deceased grandmother's ashes, and our mother would be home any minute. While the scene was silly and lots of fun, it gave us a serious sense of sibling connection. Alex ended up taking the blame in a protector role that established what our relationship was really. It created the love and the sincere connection we needed to feel in order to play honestly. It also increased our energy naturally – by fostering that youth and that sense of play we were automatically awakened to a buzz and vitality. I thoroughly enjoyed Kim's use of this exercise. Because in the play brother and sister never get to create memories together, Kim used this improvised scenario as a means of past action that was really future action. It gave Alex that sense of loss – of what he was missing – in his character's life, and he vocalized that the exercise was helpful to him. The last Spolin exercise we completed was a modified version of Listening to the Environment. In this, Kim played a variety of sounds and music and asked us to breathe and get in touch with our character through the noise of the atmosphere. While Listening to the Environment is normally an exercise done to become aware of the naked environment (i.e. sitting on the stage and listening to the everyday noises that occur), in our version the environment was created and contextual rather than natural. Kim used forest sounds and beautiful but eerie music to resemble

the world of the play. I liked this adaptation because the play takes place in a more fantastical than realistic place.

After two weeks of several-hour rehearsals, it was show time. The performance was successful in my eyes, and I was able to note the areas in which the Spolin work had been an aid. The Mirror was useful not only for my own bodily awareness, but for my connection with Alex as well. Being on stage, I remembered to stay in tune with his body language and what he was communicating to me. The Three Changes allowed me to pay attention to detail. Something small like a shift in weight did not go unnoticed and allowed us to read each other and react with one another naturally. The improvised scenario gave us chemistry on stage. I felt like he was there to protect me – that I could trust him and laugh with him. Being comfortable with your fellow actor breeds a better performance. Listening to the Environment was a great emotional preparation because as soon as the music started at the top of the play I was in the world we had created. It was subtle enough so as not to distract, but present enough to be a reminder throughout the piece of where I was and what was happening. Technically speaking, the light cues and sound cues worked beautifully, especially the first night, and I think mixed with the set and the action of the play it did transport the audience as I had hoped.

Kim did face a lot of restrictions with Spolin's work. She spoke to me several times about Spolin's insistence that her work be done chronologically (See Appendix C). Kim felt that because both Alex and I had taken Acting I and II at the college level, our foundations were strong enough to omit beginning exercises. This made it difficult for her to decide which exercises to pick and choose without breaking the system. I assured her that she need only use what she thought was necessary, and this was a comfort to her. We broke the exercises into two rehearsals, though Listening to the Environment we did as a warm-up several times. After the

Spolin exercises, we stuck mostly to the traditional stop-and-go or running rehearsals with notes to follow. Due to the time constraints of the project – putting up a show in about two weeks – and the fact that it took place in such a specific, non-realistic location, it was much more difficult to incorporate Spolin's work. *The Escapist* takes place in a dream-like forest which the audience must deem as real or not. Because of this, there was no furniture with which to interact, no recognizable occupations, etc. and the physical movements were somewhat specified in the script. Even the characters' interactions, which at the core were ultimately the same as any other show, did have elements of distance. For example, often the characters speak to each other without looking at one another, they daydream, they speak to non-tangible forces, etc. All of these things combined to create a play that was not as compatible with Spolin's work. Had there been much more time and a more realistic play, I think the exercises could have been implemented with greater ease. I'm not sure, though, that they would have aided in a large way. The work we did felt fairly sufficient, and while the Spolin activities were helpful, I'm not sure we needed many more. That being said, it is my belief and argument that Spolin's technique is better-suited for actors at the high school level with less advanced training. This is not to say that using Spolin's technique for a higher-level actor is a waste of time but merely that its efficiency is dependent on more factors such as foundational training and the style of the piece at hand.

I have stated and justified in what ways I believe the Spolin technique is helpful for theatre students of different age groups and why. I have also stated that improvisation and theatre games are a benefit to not only actor training but also to student and human development. I argue that I am not alone in this belief. One such person who would agree with my statement is Professor Carolyn Goelzer. Goelzer is a theatre professor at Cornell University who received her MFA from the Shakespeare Theatre Company's Academy for Classical Acting at George

Washington University. She has been a performer for over twenty-five years, is a three-time recipient of the McKnight Fellowship, is an active ATHE member, and has experience with acting, playwriting, theater arts, interdisciplinary arts, dialects, and voice and movement. Lately, though, her experience has taken her somewhere new and somewhere quite different. Goelzer has participated in a program for education at Auburn Men's Correctional Facility. Trying to implement theatre education, Goelzer is working to improve the attitudes and behavior of male prisoners in the facility using primarily improvisation and theatre games. Men in two of her classrooms gave presentations on their works-in-progress and selected quotes from the teachings of Bain Boehlke to summarize for what it was they were striving: "*At its most compelling, acting is rarely about achieving: it is about striving.[...] Once the destination is reached, your favorite memories of the trip might be of the time you took an unexpected and uncharted turn, or when you'd capsized in rough waters, and buoyed by salt, discovered you could swim*"(Goelzer). From simple icebreakers that go around a circle to exercises where a brown bag is passed around with the instruction that there is a baby chick inside, Goelzer is using these activities as a way to get humans to get in touch with themselves and relate to one another. Unfortunately, as Professor Goelzer informed me, there is not much written language about her experiences there as of yet, but she believes strongly in its positive effects and success (Goelzer).

Yet another positive use of theatre exercises to improve the lives of students is that in the case of the Delaware Valley Friends School. DVFS is a Quaker school for seventh through twelfth graders who have learning differences. People's Light and Theatre, a strong community theatre company, has been partnered with DVFS for several years now and works to implement theatre strategies in the classroom as well as to make theatre part of the culture of the school. One of the most popular aspects of the partnership is the Acting Lab – a weekly, after-school

program for high school students focusing on improvisation and theatre games. Melanye Finister, a company actor who has taught this lab, was inspired by its effects saying, “One of the wonderful things about doing theatre with them is that they find themselves. It’s been really gratifying to see their success and enjoyment and the liberation that they feel by working with the improvisation” (Engaging the Community, p. 9).

If personal accounts aren’t convincing enough, there are statistics that also support such statements. Take, for example, CAPE: The Chicago Arts Partnership in Education, founded in 1992. CAPE is a program that allowed for funding to bring in half-time music or arts teachers to schools in Chicago. The North Central Regional Laboratory (NCREL) agreed to provide evaluation services for the first several years of CAPE’s implementation. More than half of the teachers created integrated units, and theater occupied 25% of CAPE’s instructional time – more than music or dance. When asked if students enjoyed the integrated lessons and if they made learning fun, 86% of students surveyed said yes. NCREL also reported, in comparison to non-CAPE schools, emerging positive trends in the ITBS and IGAP test scores (Champions of Change, p. 51). In addition, another project conducted and analyzed primarily by James Catterall in 1997 surveyed more than 25,000 students and was sponsored by the United States Department of Education. This study was meant to show “...the effects of involvement in the visual and performing arts on student achievement in middle and high school.” (Champions of Change, p. 2). The results spoke loudly to the benefits of the arts on all students but especially to those of Low-SES or socioeconomic status:

[Figure 1: Comparisons of High Arts vs. Low Arts Students in Grades 8 and 10, All vs. Low SES Background from *Champions of Change* (Additional figures and research available in this article; see bibliography)]

Grade 8 Academic Performance	All Students	All Students	Low-SES Students	Low-SES Students
	High Arts	Low Arts	High Arts	Low Arts
Earning mostly A's and B's in English	79.2%	64.2%	64.5%	56.4%
Scoring in top 2 quartiles on std. tests	66.8%	42.7%	29.5%	24.5%
Dropping out by Grade 10	1.4%	4.8%	6.5%	9.4%
Bored in school half or most of the time	42.2%	48.9%	41.0%	46.0%

Grade 10 Academic Performance	All Students	All Students	Low-SES Students	Low-SES Students
	High Arts	Low Arts	High Arts	Low Arts
Scoring in top 2 quartiles, Grade 10 Std. Test Composite	72.5%	45.0%	41.4%	24.9%
Scoring in top 2 quartiles, Reading	70.9%	45.1%	43.8%	28.4%
Scoring in top 2 quartiles, S.S. [History, Citizenship, Geography]	70.9%	46.3%	41.6%	28.6%

Grade 10 Attitudes & Behaviors	All Students	All Students	Low-SES Students	Low-SES Students
	High Arts	Low Arts	High Arts	Low Arts
Consider community service important/very important	46.6%	33.9%	49.2%	40.7%
Television watching: Weekdays --				
Percentage watching 1 hour or less	28.2%	15.1%	16.4%	13.3%
Percentage watching 3 hours or more	20.6%	34.9%	33.6%	42.0%

As can be seen from the data above, students more involved with the arts not only improved in their academic performance but also in their attitude and conduct, watching less television and becoming more concerned with community service. The evidence of the benefits is in the numbers as well as the content. The survey conducted proves that positive changes for students involved with the arts are present and effective not only for the wealthier students (who are generally more exposed to arts culture) but also for students in less-advantageous circumstances (parents with lower income and education levels). This particular study also goes on to examine the results on the later twelfth-graders, proving that “consistent involvement in the arts shows up in increased advantages for arts-rich youngsters over time, through 10th grade in our first analyses and through 12th grade in our later studies” (Champions of Change p.4). The study found that, like the 10th graders, of seniors with high involvement in the arts, 57.4% of students scored in the top two quartiles of standardized testing in comparison with the 39.3% of students with low involvement. The statistics prove time after time, in different circumstances, that the students with exposure to and opportunities in the arts become more successful academically as well as socially (in personal and community-based perspective).

There are tens, probably hundreds, and possibly thousands of articles, books, blogs, etc. that account for, either through personal documentation or statistical study, the benefits of the arts in education, especially for at-risk students. If we consider Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, it explains this to a great degree. Howard Gardner is the acclaimed John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Author of many books and articles, Gardner is best known for his Theory of Multiple Intelligences that suggests that every student learns through different means – logical-mathematical, linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and possibly spiritual, existential, and moral. There is no one way to teach and, to teach effectively to a room full of different-style learners, a teacher must include a variety of these intelligences when students are learning a particular unit. The arts assist greatly in this mission. Rather than have students simply answer questions on paper, if a teacher has students write out a scene that addresses an issue in a group and act it out, the students are learning to write about it, talk about it with one another, and physically feel it, giving them three different opportunities to make connections and help remember the material. There are many companies, theatres, and schools that support the idea of arts-integrated education. One such foundation is the Arts Education Partnership association.

“AEP is a national coalition of more than 100 education, arts, business, cultural, government, and philanthropic organizations. AEP was established in 1995 through a unique interagency agreement between the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education. [...] AEP serves as the nation's hub for individuals and organizations committed to making high-quality arts education accessible to all U.S. students, improving arts education practice, and researching how art influences and strengthens American education.” (aep-arts.org).

The reason groups such as AEP exist is because of the belief, backed by research, that young learners benefit from an arts-enriched curriculum. If students can learn the arts not only in the art classrooms but in the academic classrooms as well, students will have opportunities for a fuller, richer education that allows them to make connections and enjoy the learning process.

The case is strong for the arts in education. It can be acknowledged that not only are there benefits present, but there is justification for why and where they exist as they do. Knowing that arts education is important, it is also important to know which type of arts education is most effective, particularly in arts-centered classrooms. Groups such as the People's Light and Theatre and the program at Auburn Men's Correctional Facility have focused a great deal on improvisation and theatre games. So, what purpose does the Spolin technique have for the development of actors? A good one I would argue, if used correctly. To summarize what has already been addressed, the Spolin technique works strongly for theatre students at the high-school level. Because their training is not too advanced, the Spolin method sets a good foundation. Activities such as "Exposure" provide a good example. "Exposure" is an exercise in which students are advised to stand in front of an "audience" with their only instruction being: "You look at us, we'll look at you." After many uncomfortable giggles and body shifts, the students are eventually given a task such as counting the number of tiles on the floor. Immediately the tension will be released, and it is evident in the students' physical reactions that they are grateful to have been given a purpose. The idea of this exercise is that actors are never simply just 'on stage' – all actors have a purpose, and once you find said purpose, you can become more comfortable in the environment. An exercise like this that addresses an actor's awkward and uncomfortable nature when being watched is greatly helpful to high school

students who are generally quite awkward and self-conscious to begin with anyway. It also begins to give them a sense of focus as actors.

However, for actors on the collegiate level with training already completed, the exercise might be a bit elementary. While it is useful to begin the discussion on actor intent, purpose and pursuing a goal, this would only be the case in some Acting I classrooms – nothing further. Spolin suggests, possibly even insists, that her training go in a chronological and progressive manner – starting with exercise 1 and not going to exercise 74 until you have done all 73 before it. However, I argue that this is not entirely practical. A teacher cannot spend every day doing Spolin exercises – that would be more for an intensive study program. Therefore, I believe Spolin's work is best utilized as a recipe rolodex. You have the recipes you know – the ones that have been handed down through your family, the ones you've cooked many times and know by heart. You know how many pinches of salt and just how much sugar has to be included; but every once in a while, you want to try something new. You're going to a house party, and someone asked you to bring fruitcake which you don't know how to make that well. So you pull out the recipe and give it a try to fix the situation. Perhaps it's a stretch of a metaphor, but the idea is that a teacher will have his or her own base training technique. I, for example, have worked with Stanislavsky and Meisner and want to include that in my students' training. When I see that students are having trouble with something and I need a different take on it, I will look to Spolin's exercises and pull one out that may just do the trick. The warm-ups are always good, and the improvisations are not only fun but teach a good deal as well. They teach observation, awareness, creativity, physical variation, quick-thinking, problem solving and much more.

People may condescend that theatre people play games – and yes, we do. However, I think Spolin as well as all the aforementioned research backs the use of games in the classroom

because they make connections. They connect people socially, can connect academic material, and can connect an activity to practical uses for the actor. “Bus Stop”, a popular improvisation game, is a lot of fun, but it has no real use unless the students understand *why* they are playing it – how can they use it later? If teachers focus on making justifications and connections, I believe the students’ skills will improve faster and with more depth.

As a sole base of training, though, Spolin’s work leaves one wanting more. I think the work serves as great inspiration: directors and teachers can modify the exercises for their own needs, tweak the context, or use them as a supplement to different work. Spolin focuses very heavily on physical communication, space objects/props, and spontaneous creative thinking. However, for technical elements such as staging and for emotional work, I believe there is need for heavy supplementation. At the end of the day, though, I think the aspect on which Spolin most wanted to focus was students and actors learning how to play - not always being told what to do or worrying about the “right” way to do it. Being a perfectionist, this is something with which I struggle from time to time: I am constantly in my head trying to do things correctly, and I can get disconnected. Spolin’s notion of forbidding this was what drew me to her work in the first place. In this manner, Spolin’s work is quite liberating. Like clowning, it allows you to be free, to be fresh, and to be wrong. Having that permission as an actor can be very refreshing and accommodating, allowing you to venture into characters and choices you were previously too scared to explore.

Having spent a good deal of time studying Spolin, there are several things I will take away as a future educator. I know to keep things fresh and new, that there are not always right and wrong answers, and that the body is the biggest asset and tool for a performer. Furthermore, I enjoy her role as a side-coach rather than a “teacher”. In her training, there is a leader who

guides the students but not necessarily one who tells them what to do or how to do it. The peer-like community this establishes is very safe and healthy, and I believe it fosters great work. Spolin did once say, “Do not teach. Expose students to the theatrical environment through playing, and they will find their own way” (www.spolin.us). On that note, the final and largest notion I will take away from this experience with Spolin is to always remember the importance of play: on stage, in education, and in life. In the words of Plato, “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation” (Brainy Quote, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato166176.html>). That is, ultimately, why we do what we do – to reveal the truth, to discover and examine human nature, and to teach and share with the students and the world around us.

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Appendix A

Super Stars Advanced Drama Academy: ActingJuly 2013 – UNH

~Lauren Barton~

Date	<u>Monday, July 8 2013</u>	
Today's Goals:	Introductions "Meet" Viola Spolin Warm-Ups Select Materials Activities	
Beginning 10:00am 10:15am 10:30am 10:45am	Introduce myself/My plans for the week Brief lesson on Viola Spolin/her technique Warm Up: Rhythm Activity: Exposure; Evaluation/Discussion	Side coaching Y
Middle 11:00am	Activity: Feeling self with self; Discussion	Side coaching Y
End 11:10am 11:30am 11:40am 11:55am	Activity: Play Ball; Discussion Select material (scene or monologue(s)) and read over Give brief information about scenes/monologues; take questions Warm Down: Mirror	Side coaching Y
Students' HW:	Begin memorizing	
Instructors' HW:		

Date	<u>Tuesday, July 9 2013</u>	
Today's Goals:	Warm-Ups Activities Present Material – Time 1	

Beginning 10:30am 10:45am	Warm Up: Stretch; Listening to the Environment Activity: Part of a Whole Activity (WHAT); Discuss	Side coaching Y
Middle 11:00am	Activity: Part of a Whole Relationship (WHO) [Show don't tell]; Discuss	Side coaching M
End 11:15am 11:30am 11:55am	Work on materials individually Present scenes/monologues Warm Down: Mirror (Follow the Follower)	Side coaching Y Side coaching N Side coaching Y
Students' HW:	Memorize by tomorrow	
Instructors' HW:	Pull activities for problems	

Date	<u>Wednesday, July 10 2013</u>	
Today's Goals:	Warm-Ups Activities Present Material – Time 2 (Working)	
Beginning 10:15am 10:30am	Warm Up: Stretch; Listening to the Environment Activity: Three Changes; Discuss	Side coaching N
Middle 10:50am	Work on monologues/scenes with partners	Side coaching N
End 11:00am 11:55am	Work scenes & monologues using activities pulled Warm Down: Who started the motion?	Side coaching Y
Students' HW:	Use today's activities/notes to continue working	
Instructors' HW:	Pull activities for problems	

Date	<u>Thursday, July 11 2013</u>	
Today's Goals:	Warm-Ups Activities	

	Present Material – Time 3 (Working)	
Beginning 10:30am 10:45am	Warm Up: Stretch; Feeling Self with Self Activity: Dubbing; Discuss	Side coaching Y Side coaching M
Middle 11:00am	Work on monologues/scenes with partners	Side coaching N
End 11:15am 11:55am	Work scenes & monologues using activities pulled Warm Down: Reverse Shakedown; Discuss costumes/props with partners	Side coaching Y
Students' HW:	Use today's activities/notes to continue working	
Instructors' HW:	Pull activities for problems (if necessary)	

Date	<u>Friday, July 12 2013</u>	
Today's Goals:	Warm-Ups Activities Present Material – Time 4 - Final	
Beginning 12:45pm 1:00pm	Warm Up: Stretch; Listening to the Environment Activity: What's beyond? (WHERE)	Side coaching Y
Middle 1:15pm	Present monologues/scenes	Side coaching N
End 1:40pm	Final Notes/Questions	
Students' HW:	Break a leg!	
Instructors' HW:		

Appendix B

Capstone: Camp Notes

Day 1

Rhythm – students struggled with timing and quickness of thought at first and then wanted to rush pace due to nerves/adrenaline; after several rounds and guidance to listen (multitask) there was success

Exposure – just standing very tense and uncomfortable; task – some instantly relieved, some needed to be given verbal freedom to move, some still very tense; discussion – good awareness of purpose (particularly from Russians) and focus

Feeling Self – some unsure, looked around to see what others were doing (am I doing this right?) but most very internal and aware; wonderful insight (noticed differences between foot in shoe v shoe on foot; awareness of space around them when told; our impact on the space and vice versa)

Play Ball – successful for some, not for others; work does not permit singling out but might have been helpful; students did have pretty good sense though (especially as audience) when the ball was in the space vs in the head and very apparent to me, so successful in that sense; change of speeds heavily impacted consistency

Day 2

Listening To The Environment – decent response, some more attentive than others, interested to see what happens when we do it again

Part Of The Whole (WHAT) – first round shaky, relying heavily on dialogue; with notes and coaching got it by round 3 fairly strongly – needed to emphasize spatial awareness (can't walk through tables)

Part Of The Whole (WHO) – much harder for them to grasp – first went to animals then to relying on dialogue; by round 3 better but not too much specificity; took time to discuss the importance of physical portrayal to audience (briefly)

Brief notes on blocking

Individual work – as walking around, I did feel it necessary to reiterate relationships and context and help the scenes along a bit in terms of character, but not much direction given

Watched scenes – pretty impressed considering circumstances; biggest problem stagnancy and scared of space, several issues to look over

*Note – sometimes I feel comforted by Viola's instructions – you use them, read the side coaching, and it comes together; other times I feel restricted – like I need to give different coaching notes or I need more explanation for myself to give to them; I'm scared of jumping

in/adjusting because I want to stay as true to the technique as possible – sometimes though is necessary (use scene text instead of improv)

Day 3

Listening To The Environment – briefer than yesterday but a good way to get started/get in touch with the environment, more noise than yesterday

3 Changes – fun to watch; point was grasped and understood; went to 3,4,5,7 – skipped to 7 to challenge them; some very creative (Emily, Hannah) but others restricting themselves so I had to make note not to do changes they had already done; always great activity

Romeo and Juliet – gibberish with adaptation – struggled a bit with improv gibberish, when translated to scene it was apparent how much Emily was struggling with physical communication; with notes Libby got better; Emily pushed herself a little but not much; moved on to non-Spolin exercise (at Raina's suggestion) – stuffed animal; at first laughed but then saw the fight/desperation from Emily and saw giving up in Libby – noted and discussed; wandering speech – improv exercise with interruptions (sales person and customer) good improv! Libby great at jumping in, Emily too polite but discussed after; overall good improvement, still needs better physical communication and personal connection

Glass Menagerie – improv scene using imaginary space props on kitchen table (decided beforehand) (p.111) – much more natural and comfortable, discussion, your house!; camera – more physical expression and small subtle additions (Abby smelling flowers getting put down) but could have gone bigger; internal scream (with Abby) – silent scream great (physically into it and felt 'right' things) but scared to go big, right idea though

Crimes of the Heart – contact (p.171) – improv first and very good at contact (though over the top acting, touching was natural); then added to scene – lost some of it but some of it better; speeds – slow, normal, fast alternating – had a little trouble because just off book but did help find new opportunities for contrast and things that worked; helped pace and somewhat build

*Note – in addition to these exercises, I gave notes and Raina worked with groups on general blocking and word flow

Day 4

Feeling Self With Self – wanted to see if any differences doing it a second time; overall consensus that easier to get in touch this time because knew what to do (didn't have to think about it); could pay closer attention/better awareness

Dubbing – first two rounds were a struggle in terms of timing and assumptions (wanted to invent things that weren't happening – words were leading action instead of vice versa) but on third round (possibly because of who was doing what) it was great – the timing was there, adjustments were made when necessary and action lead words; then discussed

Individual time

Glass Menagerie – contact exercise – struggled a little with improv; adapted to scene hard for Abby because of blocking and context but Hannah made some strong and fitting changes; spelling exercise – let them use scripts, struggled (wanted to laugh and go into monotone, had to side-coach to keep them engaged and keep the emotion there; think it could have worked if had more time and they had the scene for longer); discussed

Crimes of the Heart – irritation exercise – went for the comedy so not sure if the focus was grasped; how to hug; non Spolin stop and go run to tweak things

Romeo and Juliet – hands exercise – pushing a car, good effort but struggled a bit and laughed, adapted to scene helped Emily but Libby lost everything; discussion; stop and go tweak run working especially on the physical comedy (build and fall) and relaxing Emily's hands

*Note – scenes are coming along nicely; I'm not sure at what point the stop and go's go against Spolin – did she do them? Did she only run with exercises? For me the stop and go with notes was necessary (especially because of the time constraints)

Day 5

Listening To The Environment – used to this exercise so in tune but getting vague

What's Beyond (WHERE) – some struggled with suggesting the beyond and just focused on where they came from instead of where they were going too; those who got it the specificity was there and I was impressed

Run Scenes

Overall great work given the time and circumstances!

Appendix C

In her response to working with Spolin to direct this capstone, D'Agnese had this to say:

“When Lauren came to me with the idea of her capstone and proposing that I'd be directing in a specific technique, I was excited to get to know a new technique. However, I don't know that I would necessarily classify Spolin's methods (at least the way I learned them) as a technique through which to rehearse and discover aspects about your character, but more of a technique to introduce an actor to the world of acting. Spolin's techniques are very specific about the order in which you must teach your students. Currently, I don't have her book with me since I gave it back, however she had a specific "introduction" step that she insisted **MUST** be used in every process as the beginning step to the rest of her process [Exposure]. This would have been great if I was working with younger students or less experienced actors, but both of my performers had already been through Acting II, and Lauren had already been through Acting III. I found that if I were to start the process with the amount of "basic" exercises, I would have been wasting a lot of time establishing concepts that my actors already understood and employed. I think the style of the play itself also made using Spolin's techniques a bit difficult, since her techniques could have been useful with experienced actors if the play was realistic, or even more so if we were devising a piece. Spolin's techniques focus on improvisation exercises, and though the improvisations would be useful in some circumstances, I think it just didn't fit as a useful technique to employ multiple times within the process. The world of the play demanded a semi-realistic but semi-ethereal atmosphere, but relied on realism to communicate its themes. We spent the first rehearsal experimenting with some of the techniques including mirror, and an improvisation that I expanded beyond Spolin's standards. I then led a couple mental prep exercises for Lauren's entrance, including the incorporation of music and vocal guidance through preparation. Beyond that, I found that Spolin's techniques didn't quite serve the needs of our process or of the play, and therefore I only used them as a jumping off point for the first two to three rehearsals. I think Spolin's techniques could be applied in multiple other situations with different age groups and experience levels better than they fit in with Lauren's capstone.”

Appendix D

THE ESCAPIST

By: Lauren Barton

CHARACTERS

ELLIE - A young woman in her early 20's. She is very fair skinned with sharply contrasting long, dark hair. She is slender, petite, and delicate. There is something beautifully strange about her.

PETER - A young man, appearing also in his early 20's. He is tall and awkward, but purely kind. His skin is fair, his hair dark.

MARIE - A young girl, perhaps 16. She is fair skinned with light hair. Her face is very youthful.

The source of a river deep within a forest. There are trees, plants, and stones all around. Everything is alive, but quiet. The river, too, is quiet. It shines with an inviting blue glow. There should be a stone bench, seat, or higher level right above the source so the actors may sit near it without being in it, while still being seen. The stage is fairly dimly lit for the duration of the show, unless otherwise stated. The lights that are used should preferably all be cool blues, greens, and yellow-oranges.

*The set may be suggestive and simple where necessary. There does need to be water on stage, but a small hidden amount for actors to dip their hands in is adequate. There should be appropriate instrumental music (eerie and beautiful, but never dark) used wherever possible, especially in transitions - the tone of this play was inspired musically by themes from the original motion picture *The Painted Veil*.*

SCENE ONE

Lights up. During the first sequence, instrumental music should play to fill the space. Enter ELLIE USL running with difficulty.

She is upset. She is wearing a light nightgown that has been dirtied by rain and dirt. Her hair is down, damp, and messy. She is barefoot. She holds a journal with black binding. She slows her walk, dazed - she is lost. She begins to look around, entranced by her location. She spots the river - she is drawn to it and it calms her. She walks to it and kneels beside it slowly. She is too scared to touch it so she watches it flow. She begins mindlessly playing with the ends of her hair. Her expression is vacant but content. She then comes to and stands slowly. She looks up at the sky, then back in the direction she entered. She takes a few steps in that direction then pauses. She returns to the river's side. She lies down with only her arm propping her head up. She watches the river again, smiling for the first time. As the music fades and ends, her arm falls, her head follows, and she falls asleep as the lights fade to black.

SCENE TWO

Lights up. ELLIE is in the same place we last saw her. She slowly wakes up and reminds herself where she is. She hesitantly reaches her hands in the river and runs the water over her face and wipes it dry. She looks around then back to the river.

ELLIE:

This water is beautiful - so pure and clean. So refreshing... (She goes to touch it) Yet... (She decides not to) I am hungry though. (She looks around and notices a bush with berries. Without hesitation, but with difficulty, she walks over and begins eating them. She relishes every taste and bite.) And these...these are delicious. What is this place?

Enter PETER USR. He is dressed in light pants, a tan jacket, and a white shirt. He walks up behind ELLIE.

PETER:

It's the escape.

ELLIE screams and turns around to see PETER. She is uneasy.

ELLIE:

Who are you? Where did you come from? How did you find me?

PETER:

(Calmly, with a smile) My name is Peter. I did not find you, I found her. *(He gestures to the river)*

ELLIE:

Her?

PETER:

Yes. One of the daughters of Mother Nature. Isn't she beautiful?

ELLIE:

How do you know it's a she?

PETER:

(With hesitation) She...told me.

ELLIE:

The river did?

PETER:

Yes. *(Pause)* You don't believe me.

ELLIE:

Actually, I do.

PETER:

You do? Why?

ELLIE:

(Laughing) What a silly question. How did you find...her?

PETER:

Same as you. She called for me.

ELLIE:

(Confused) She didn't call for me.

PETER:

Then you wouldn't be here. (*They stare at each other for a moment. ELLIE goes to leave*) Should we sit?

ELLIE:

Ok. (*They sit at the source*) Are you lost too?

PETER:

No. I'm a guide. I help the lost.

ELLIE:

A guide? For what?

PETER:

(*Smiling*) What is your name?

ELLIE:

Oh. Ellie.

PETER:

That's pretty.

ELLIE:

(*Looking away*) Thank you...(*She shivers*)

PETER:

Are you cold?

ELLIE:

A little. All I have is this nightdress. (*She suddenly realizes this to be true and is immediately uncomfortable*)

PETER:

(*Standing*) Don't worry. (*He removes his jacket, which he hands to ELLIE*) Here you are.

ELLIE:

Are you sure you won't need it?

PETER:

I'm sure.

ELLIE:

(Putting it on) Thank you. *(Pause)* Peter, why are you here...exactly?

PETER:

I come here when I'm called.

ELLIE:

(Processing) By...her?

PETER:

(Laughing) Yes. Sorry, it must seem strange.

ELLIE:

A little, but I don't mind. I'm...sort of glad you're here. I hate being alone...

PETER:

Most of us do. *(Pause)* If you're lost - where are you coming from?

ELLIE:

Home. It's, well, it's miles from here.

PETER:

Does home have a name?

ELLIE:

Madison, Virginia. It's a small town.

PETER:

(Startled) Really? I...I've been there before. It was nice.

ELLIE:

You have? What for?

PETER:

I was staying with a friend. *(Pause)* How did you get all the way out here?

ELLIE:

I ran...

PETER:

Well thank you. (*They laugh*) I mean why didn't you turn back sooner?

ELLIE:

I didn't have any- I mean. I'm not sure, heh. I'm bad with directions.

PETER:

I see. (*He spots her journal and picks it up*) Is this yours?

ELLIE:

Yes.

PETER:

What is it? (*He opens it*)

ELLIE:

It's a journal.

PETER:

But it's practically empty...

ELLIE:

Nothing much exciting has happened to me, I guess.

PETER:

Then why did you bring it with you?

ELLIE:

You ask a lot of questions. (*Not wanting him to be offended*)
It's all I have. All I want to remember, anyway.

PETER:

What about your family?

ELLIE:

(*Pause*) I love my family.

PETER:

Tell me about them?

ELLIE:

My mother is the strongest woman I know. And my Dad always could make me smile. They told me I was supposed to have a brother but he passed when he was very little. Before I was born. So it's been just us three.

PETER:

(Unsure) You didn't want to write about that?

ELLIE:

I did...a little. *(Pause)* But I hoped wherever I was going might have something else worth writing about.

PETER:

And? Does it?

ELLIE:

Well I'm not sure I'm there yet...where I'm supposed to be.

PETER:

You are.

ELLIE:

How do you know?

PETER:

Doesn't it feel right?

ELLIE:

(Hopeful) I'd like to think so... *(Thunder is heard)* Oh no...*(She looks up)*

PETER:

It'll be alright... (He puts his hand on top of hers and the lights blackout as another rumble of thunder is heard. When the lights come back up PETER is nowhere to be seen. ELLIE is sitting, stunned, not moving. The journal is gone. Another rumble is heard which breaks her from her trance. She tightens the jacket around her and lies down.)

ELLIE:

Oh.

Lights fade to black.

SCENE THREE

Lights up, bright. ELLIE is kneeling by the river. She stares at it and mindlessly twirls the bottom of her hair. PETER enters behind her USR - he is holding the journal. He stops almost immediately, looks at ELLIE with pain. He runs his hands over his face. With a visible breath and a forced smile, he approaches her and she hears him.

ELLIE:

(Not turning around) Peter?

PETER:

Good morning, Ellie. (He puts down the journal, stands next to her and offers his hand) Are you hungry?

ELLIE:

(Taking his hand and smiling) Starving. *(She attempts to get herself up but struggles. PETER must use two hands to help her up - she stands, then sits on a nearby stone)* Sorry.

PETER:

Please don't apologize - are you alright?

ELLIE:

(Quickly) Yes! Just...yes. I must still be tired from my journey here, that's all.

PETER:

Are you sure you're OK? I can bring something to you.

ELLIE:

I'm fine. *(Smiling painfully)* Fine. Have you seen my journal?

PETER:

Yes, I-

ELLIE:

Oh, good. I woke up and I couldn't find it anywhere. Where is it?

PETER:

I- I picked it up last night. When I heard the thunder. I didn't want it to get ruined.

ELLIE:

Oh. Right. Well, thank you.

PETER:

(Silence) I read it.

ELLIE:

(Unexpectedly calm) Why?

PETER:

I'm sorry...I had no right. I just - I felt like I knew you. But there was more I wanted to know. That doesn't happen often to me. Out here.

ELLIE:

Did you find out what you wanted to know?

PETER:

I think so. *(Pause)* Don't you want to know what I was looking for?

ELLIE:

Not if you found it. *(She smiles)* I'm going to look for something to eat. If I'm not back in ten minutes send a search party.

PETER:

(Laughing) I'll be right behind you.

PETER helps ELLIE up and she walks slowly offstage USR as music fades in. PETER walks to the journal, picks it up, lays it by the river and kneels.

PETER:

(Pause. Quietly - with difficulty) I think you made a mistake. She's not like the others...you know that. Why did you send her to me? *(Angrily)* She needs peace! And joy! How can I do that when I know - when she doesn't know...! Let me go instead! She can take my place! *(Pause; thunder; Peter goes to speak but realizes it is in vain)*

The lights dim slowly as PETER exits following ELLIE. PETER and ELLIE return USR as the music fades. ELLIE is on PETER's back and he tips her up, down, and all around. They are laughing.

ELLIE:

Is that true? Just that little bird and you fell right out of the tree?

PETER:

It caught me off guard! *(Smiling)* I wish it just plain caught me - I still have the bruises to prove it.

ELLIE:

(Trying not to laugh) I'm sorry.

PETER:

It's not so bad. It makes for a good story, right?

ELLIE:

(PETER helping her sit) A lovely one.

PETER:

(Several moments of content silence pass) How are you feeling?

ELLIE:

Better. *(A pause; she smiles)* Better than I have in a long time.

PETER:

You're not tired anymore?

ELLIE:

(Mindlessly staring out at the river) I'm almost always tired...

PETER:

I know.

ELLIE:

You do? (*She breaks her stare at the river, looks down, then looks directly in his eyes*) Do you ever think about death, Peter?

PETER:

(*Startled*) What? Death? Why?

ELLIE:

(*Looking back to the river and taking a moment; she talks to the river and is almost in another place*) It's the only thing in this world we know nothing about. No one can tell us what it feels like. What really happens. We talk about forever and time but...no one quite knows how it feels, do they? Because you don't feel forever... (*Smiling*) Because you're dead.

PETER:

That's all very true. (*Pause*) Are you scared?

ELLIE:

(*Still not very present, she twirls her hair*) I'm scared of being scared when it happens. That I'll know. That I'll be alone. But I'm not exactly scared of *being* dead because I know it will happen, but I don't know what it will be like. (*Smiling again*) It could be...rather nice. (*Pause*) Maybe that's why we don't know. Maybe no one comes back from the dead to tell us about it because they're too busy being happy.....being at peace.

PETER:

(*Smiling, though silently crying; quietly*) That is a nice thought, isn't it?

ELLIE:

(*Breaking her stare and looking down*) Much nicer than the alternative...anyway. I was just curious. (*She looks up at PETER, who quickly stands and turns away from her to dry his tears and pull himself together*) Are you alright? Have I said something wrong?

PETER:

(Turning back to her) No... (Smiling) No of course not. (Pause)
Ellie, could you do me a favor?

ELLIE:

Of course, anything.

PETER:

Can you tell me more about your parents?

ELLIE:

Um, sure. Well my mother is a little taller than me, with my same color hair. She has the most beautiful singing voice. She used to sing me to sleep when I was a baby.

PETER:

I can imagine how lovely that was...

ELLIE:

It really was. And my father is very tall and serious...unless he's with me. (She smiles) Why do you want to know about them?

PETER:

(Choked) Can I tell you something?

ELLIE:

Yes?

PETER:

I - (Long pause) I'd like to take you somewhere tomorrow.

ELLIE:

So what about my parents?

PETER:

They sound like the most wonderful people in the world. I feel like I miss them myself... (He smiles painfully) So. How about tomorrow?

ELLIE:

Is it a surprise?

PETER:

Yes, yes it's a surprise.

ELLIE:

I'd love to.

PETER:

Wonderful. Well you should get some rest, then. (*Thunder is heard. He looks up. Reluctantly*) And...drink some water. I think it will make you feel much better. (*Smiling*) Goodnight, Ellie.

PETER exits USR as the music fades in. ELLIE takes a moment and looks around. She draws a visible breath. She hesitantly dips her hands in the river and sips water from them. She smiles. She drinks again. She stares out at the river as the lights fade out.

SCENE FOUR

Lights up, dim - it is night. The stage is empty. PETER enters USR as the music fades out. He looks to the river.

PETER:

(*Quietly*) Please don't make me do this...I can take care of her...

ELLIE enters USR behind him, smiling. PETER, startled, turns to her.

ELLIE:

Peter, thank you. This might be the best day of my life. Everything was beautiful. I've never seen anything like that waterfall or that sunset. Thank you.

PETER:

Well I don't think I've ever had better company, truly. So thank you. (*Pause. Runs his hands through his hair*) Ellie, I...can't stay with you tonight. There's something I have to do; but you'll be alright...

ELLIE:

Yes I know, Peter. I'll just see you in the morning. (*She smiles*)

PETER:

(Quietly) Yes. Oh! Before I go, I have something for you. *(He pulls out a pen from his pocket and hands it to her)* In case today was...worth writing about.

ELLIE:

(Taking the pen and embracing him) Thank you. *(They hug for a long moment as the music fades in; she looks up)* You know, I've always loved the moon.

PETER:

Why's that?

ELLIE:

Because it reminds us the sun is always shining...even when it's dark. *(Pause; they look at one another)* Have a good night, Peter.

PETER:

You too, Ellie.

PETER exits USR and ELLIE walks down to the river and sits. She looks out at the river for a moment, sips it, then takes her journal and opens it on her lap. She smiles and begins to write as the lights fade to black. Lights fade up very dimly - ELLIE is lying by the river after falling asleep writing. PETER slowly and quietly enters USR. He walks down to ELLIE and kneels. He takes her hand and the lights fade to black.

SCENE FIVE

Lights fade up. The stage is empty, save for ELLIE's journal open and full of writing. PETER enters USR. He moves slowly. He is grieving, but peaceful. He walks over to the river, bends down, and picks up the journal. He turns to the first page and begins reading. He smiles. He pauses and looks to the river.

PETER:

Why must we take them too soon...? *(Pause)* Be kind to her...

He looks back down to the page and continues reading. He picks up the pen and writes briefly. He closes the journal, kisses it, and places it gently in the river. He turns and exits slowly

USR. The music fades slightly, lights focus on the journal, and PETER'S VOICE is heard.

PETER'S VOICE:

I hope this is all you remember. Love always, your brother
Peter.

MARIE enters running USL as music fades up. She is wearing a sun dress. Her hair is up and messy. She is barefoot. Her wrists are slit and bleeding. She slows her walk, dazed - she is lost. She begins to look around, entranced by her location. She spots the river - she is drawn to it and it calms her. She walks to it and smiles slowly. PETER enters USR with the jacket over his arm.

MARIE:

What is this place? (*Lights fade out on DS*)

PETER:

It's the escape...

Lights fade to black as the music slowly builds, then fades out.

THE END

Appendix E

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