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CAN WE KEEP IT? How to Make a Best Friend

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CAN WE KEEP IT?
How to Make a Best Friend

A collaborative Senior Project submitted to
The Division of the Arts
Of Bard College

By
Brynn Marie Gilchrist

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2017

This project is dedicated to:

My Mother: For relentlessly believing in me more than I know how to believe in myself.

My Father: For pushing the winds in my favor whenever he can from wherever he is.

Little Brother Nicholas: For being my original best friend, forever and always my protector and confidant.

Littlest Brother Scottie: For being inexplicably wise beyond his years, my voice of reason, a source of endless hope, and a reason to try to make the world a better place.

Big Brother Ryan: For being the first person to tell me I'm smart, and encouraging me to never settle.

Big Sister Jessica: For being my role model, for always taking the high-road and being the most honest person I know.

Vin Roca, Stephen Dean, and Rick Riser: For being my dads, for raising me in the industry I fell in love with, for firing me that one time, and for never giving up on me.

The Whole Fisher Production Family: For being my home.

Jonathan Rosenberg, Miriam Felton-Dansky, and Gideon Lester: For being my ever-supportive mentors in this program and for helping me to make up for the two years I lost to denial.

Anya Freakin' Kopischke: For being the light of my life, the silver lining of every tech week and bad day. For the 4am gas stations runs, the Craken, your dimples, your unbelievable talent and boundless imagination. Thank you for being the best friend I have ever had. I love you to Jupiter and back.

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BORN IN THE BELLY OF THE SHIP

The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship

My first encounter with my beloved senior project partner, Anya Kopischke, was through seeing her magnificent original piece, *Mrs. Babinski in the Kitchen*¹ in April of 2015. I was a brand new transfer student hell bent of graduating with a double degree in psychology and philosophy, and sitting in the audience for the Sunday matinee of Anya's show was the first time I considered changing my major. *Babinski* knocked the wind out of me. I did not know Anya at the time, nor did I believe anyone when they told me one person wrote the book and lyrics, directed it, and created the set. And if anyone had told me at the time that Anya Kopischke would become my creative partner and best friend, I simply would not have believed them.

The following year, after a transformative summer working the Summerscape Festival at The Fisher Center, I had changed my course of study to become a theater and performance major. I quickly began establishing myself in the student theater community as a set designer and technical director and would eventually become the production manager of The Old Gym second semester my junior year. During that semester, the student theater festival *FEST*, was going up in The Old Gym with none other than Anya Kopischke as the set designer. About a week before the festival went up, Anya reached out to me to help her build the set. We forged the relationship of set designer and technical director and discovered that when we throw our individual skills and ideas at a project, we can blow the doors wide open and can accomplish things together we would never have conceived of alone.

¹Mrs. Babinski in the Kitchen. By Anya Kopischke. The Old Gym, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Apr. 2015. Performance.

We are both wildly ambitious, very sensitive, and adamantly persistent. In many creative relationships these qualities can hinder us, but together, both our strengths and weaknesses are gold. That is not to say that our creative relationship is without issues, but no matter what we go through in the process, we always come out stronger as a team and as individual artists in the end.

After *FEST*, Anya and I became inseparable. Next in The Old Gym was a production of *Cowboy Mouth* followed by a production of *Into The Woods* and I was slated to design and build the sets for both. After *FEST*, I asked Anya to assist me on both projects. Following those pieces was Anya's next original work to be shown on Bard's campus, *Belly of the Ship*, which I became the technical director for. Throughout this marathon of tech weeks, Anya and I found our groove together; our inborn stubbornness somehow did not apply to each other, we had a healthy balance of trust and open-mindedness, and our friendship began to flourish and feed into our work as its life-force.

Prior to working on *Belly of the Ship* together, we had concocted this grand plan to have our own senior project festival in The Old Gym. At this point in our lives we were churning out work together like we did laundry and felt that the twenty-five minute time cap and the limitations on the technical design did not provide enough challenge for us. So we told ourselves we wanted to create our own challenges and work on separate projects, curate other works, and ultimately co-produce a festival together. On the one hand, we wanted something bigger, we wanted to challenge ourselves as individual artists on top of pulling off something everyone told us was impossible. Proving "impossible" wrong is, without a doubt, our favorite thing to do. But on the other hand, in everything we worked on together, one of us had always been more "in-

charge” than the other and we were very comfortable within that structure. I think at the end of the day we were too scared to find out what would happen if we had to equally share the power and responsibility of an artistic project.

We came to our senses tech week of *Belly*, completion week of junior year. We had already submitted our proposals for our acutely over-ambitious festival idea and had actually gotten it approved. It was probably hour fifty-something without sleep (an average Wednesday at this point in time) and we took off for an hour to clear our heads. In the abandoned barn in the Tivoli Bays, knowing no one else could understand the exhaustion, frustration and anxiety we were both experiencing about current and future endeavors, we realized it was time to move our ambitions out of The Old Gym and into LUMA, and to do that, we needed to team up.

It could only have been in the wake of *Belly of the Ship* that we began to cultivate the seedlings for *Can We Keep It?*. *Belly* tackles an enormous subject: female friendship dynamics within the tedious process of becoming an adult. The piece was wonderful but flawed, and we thrive on the examination of flaws. Discussion throughout the process of *Belly* gave way to our collective obsession with the mystical age of thirteen.

GOOGLE DOC FOR THE HUMAN RESISTANCE

Square One

The division of labor between Anya and I was settled in our original impromptu meeting/ elopement: Anya would write the script, perform in it, and act as the media designer and I would direct the piece, and act as script editor and set designer. Although Anya and I are both performers, writers, directors, and designers, we knew we couldn’t have it all if we were going to

make this work. My favorite aspect of *Belly of the Ship*, is the writing style; the way Anya animates the late middle school/early high school rhetoric is piercingly true to life, witty, cutting, nostalgic, and honest. As much as I originally wanted to write the script for my senior project, with our partnership on the table, it was no question that Anya would be the playwright. After that decision was made, the rest fell into place as practical decisions.

Our early conversations about the piece we wanted to create took the form of fruitful brainstorming sessions. But at the end of the day, that's all they were - brainstorming sessions. We generated so much content in the form of bulleted lists that this process was almost counterproductive. We hit a point in the planning process where we couldn't proceed without a draft. We needed to be able to reference content to be on the same page about what we were trying to convey. In the broadest sense, we agreed that the piece was to be an honest, unapologetic examination of the joy and cruelty of late-childhood friendships and what the onset of adulthood does to those friendships. Given our talks and bulleted lists and my steadfast trust in Anya's work, I was hands-off in the creation of the first draft.

When Anya and I read through her first draft for the first time, I was in tears. There were a lot of rough edges and pretty big changes to come, but even in its most fetal inception, it was beautiful. I felt overwhelmingly proud of Anya for her incredible work and terrified that I did not have the creative scruples to take this incredible script to the next level through direction and design.

BUT, HOW DO YOU WIN?

Inspecting the Vessel

The script for *Can We Keep It* is organized by acts and each act is a different game. The game structure is representative of social constructs forced upon children. The games themselves do not represent specific societal ideals, but rather the overall understanding that we are taught certain things as children about how we are meant to behave and how we are meant to view others. As children, we tend to believe blindly and only question out of naive curiosity rather than out of serious inquiry that gives us pause to continue.

The rules, in their projection-manifestation, are cast as “adult world.” The force that tells you what to do, how to do it, and when to do it without necessarily being available or approachable. One of our first big questions about the script was “why do they follow the rules?” We racked our brains trying to find a suitable justification, but at the end of the day, that’s the terrifying nature of being thirteen; it is a stage of developmental limbo in which your own values and convictions begin to emerge but you are still beholden to the systems of rules you grew up with because that is all you know.

Throughout the process, Anya and I have struggled to answer the question, what makes something a game? Is the definition hinged on an activity being win-able? Or is it fair to call any structured activity with a set of rules a game? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that a game is an “activity engaged in for diversion or amusement.”² While this helped to validate our use of games, we can not avoid the colloquial understanding that a game is something you play to win.

² "Game." Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017.

As the piece progresses, there is a steady decrease in the clarity of the objective for each game. We begin with Manhunt, a game in which there is one clear winner. The second game, Dance Party, provides a subjective definition for how to win, “steal the spotlight.”³ And by the fifth game, Truth or Dare, there really is no defined winning objective at all. At first we thought this was something we needed to fix, but with our evolving understanding of what the games and their rules really mean to the characters, the widening gap between the objectives of our games and a traditional idea of winning became crucial.

In the piece, there is a much larger focus on when someone disappears than when someone wins. No one ever actually wins any of the prescribed games because in the grand scheme of this world, there is nothing to be gained from completing the objectives. The real game these characters are playing is growing up. You win by exiting the game. By exiting the game, it is indicated that the individual realizes their own autonomy over the game as prescribed. The realization of one’s own power and autonomy is of critical importance in the transition to adulthood.

I’LL JUST TAG ALONG

Surveillance and The Internet

The world of *Can We Keep It?* is the world of childhood. The outside forces in the piece are the rules, and Omegle Guy. With the rules cast as the adult world, Omegle Guy is cast as a defect in the presumed security of the adult world: the internet. Within the prescribed instructions for innocent play provided by the rules, Omegle Guy is a loophole that allows the dangers of the adult world to infiltrate the playroom.

³ See appendix.

We meet Omegle Guy in Act III when the group is “playing Omegle.” Omegle is a website that facilitates video chatting between strangers; you go on to the website and click a button to turn on your webcam and within seconds, a stranger on the other end of a webcam appears. You can end the conversation at any time and the website will spit out a new stranger to talk to. On average, I think about half of the strangers that come up on the screen are men masturbating. When I was in middle school, this website was a loophole in parental controls on family computers and going on Omegle was a staple sleepover activity. It was fun for its transgressive nature but never truly felt dangerous.

Omegle Guy encompasses some of the most insidious dangers of the internet: anonymity and surveillance. His face is a composite image of three notorious sex offenders: his left eye is Donald Trump, his right eye is Bill Cosby and his mouth is Brock Turner. We were originally going to include Bill Clinton as the nose in an attempt to be balanced about the representation of sex offenders, but when Anya began to create the image, she made the artistic choice that the image looked “too human” with a nose. So we decided Bill Clinton was the one to let go because we wanted to highlight figures that have been relevant for their crimes against women in more recent years. The idea behind this image is that the individuals pictured would be difficult to recognize; danger is not so easily recognizable behind the mask of the internet.

Inherent in the presence of the internet, is surveillance. Surveillance is a topic Anya and I were interested in exploring from the very beginning. In a conversation we had about middle school fears, we both mentioned that we had severe paranoia about surveillance. Before webcams and smartphones we were already pseudo-aware of internet surveillance. When I was in middle school, I would receive regular chain emails from friends that had been forwarded a

hundred times telling me that the government was reading everyone's AIM chat logs and that if I didn't pass this email along to twenty other friends that my crush would hate me forever. Naturally since I was twelve and in love with eighth grade hot-shot Jackson Sennett, I forwarded the email to twenty friends. Early conversation about internet surveillance in my generation was shrouded in superstition and therefore plausible deniability. The internet was already new and absurd, and the idea of internet surveillance was a reality yet to be seen and to worry about later. We received this information embedded in a ritual (chain emails) that is superstitious in nature. The fear of being surveilled on the internet was akin to the fear of the dark, and of monsters under the bed. They seemed like out-of-reach, ideological fears at the time.

Being confronted with the danger of surveillance looks nothing like being dragged under your bed by the boogeyman. There is no physical presence to fear. Additionally, the internet age has brought about an entirely new way of communicating with other human beings and the impact of that is variable. For example, when texting your best friend, the space between screens feels small, as if you were passing notes to each other in class almost. But when talking to a stranger on the internet, the space between screens feels so vast that it feels unreal, and just like our parents told us about the monsters under the bed, things that aren't real can't hurt you. So even when directly confronted with a manifestation of surveillance, it comes with a false sense of security, especially to the developing brain of a thirteen year old.

We only see Omegle Guy for about ten seconds, but his presence persists after he is no longer a visual. When the characters are introduced to Omegle Guy, he immediately makes Blake uncomfortable and she shuts down the operation. The airhorn for the next game plays almost immediately after Omegle is turned off and we have entered Act IV, Playing House. After about a

minute of engaging in the new activity, Omegle Guy's voice comes out of nowhere and tries to participate in the game. There is a moment of tension in realizing that he is still listening, watching and able to communicate, but no one asks any questions.

When Omegle Guy returns as a disembodied voice, he has become the manifestation of surveillance in the piece. His renewed presence creates tremendous anxiety for Blake, creates a welcomed opportunity for transgressive behavior for Quincy, and barely phases Logan and Ashley C.

Through the process of making this piece, I have been lucky enough to have a treasure trove of thirteen year old insight on speed-dial - my youngest brother, Scottie. Sometime in early February, I was feeling a little lost about Logan and Ashley C's relationships to Omegle Guy in his surveillance manifestation, I didn't believe that they would be so casual about it. So, I decided to call Scottie to see if he would have anything to contribute. I asked him if kids his age were concerned with internet surveillance and his answer absolutely shocked me. He said, "[internet surveillance] is like rain. You can't avoid it. You can try to protect yourself from it, but you're going to get wet anyways. If you want to have a life and have friends, you gotta use social media. It's just how we talk to each other. I'm not that afraid of the NSA because *everyone's* information is out there, its just a new normal." Somewhere between my experience of being thirteen in 2008 and his experience of being thirteen in 2017, The NSA became a household name, and surveillance became normalized.

This conversation provided a justification for Logan and Ashley C's relationship to Omegle Guy as a disembodied voice. Whether I am drawing from my own experience of

surveillance as a mystical fear, or of Scottie's - surveillance as an inevitability, a casual approach to being watched felt like an eerily appropriate stance for Logan and Ashley C to have.

We don't hear from Omegle Guy again after Blake's disappearance, but there is no defined point where he exits the picture. At first, we thought we would have to invent an end to Omegle Guy, but as the piece began to take shape, we decided that giving him an exit of sorts would negate him as the manifestation of surveillance. It became imperative that there was no conclusion to the presence of his character.

PLAYTIME

Rehearsal Process

Given that the script is strutted as a set of games, most of the work we did in rehearsal was game-based. We tried to model a rehearsal exercise after every game in the piece and it was easier for some than others. All attempts, successful and otherwise in fulfilling their intended purpose, proved extremely useful for editing the script and moving forward in our attempts to generate helpful rehearsal prompts. Although we did not intend to embark on a devising-style process, we knew early on that this piece would not thrive in an environment that was married to the text in every rehearsal.

The first game is Manhunt. This game is the big-kid-version of hide and seek. The Rules are as follows: "1. Begin with one seeker. 2. If caught, turn on flashlight and join seeker. 3. Hide alone."⁴ At first we tried to create a sense of vast space within the confines of Studio North through a series of viewpoints⁵ exercises, but it wasn't enough to bring the high-stakes and fast

⁴See appendix.

⁵Anne Bogart: viewpoints
Michael Dixon-Joel Smith - Smith and Kraus - 1995

pace of the game to life. So we decided to play for real. Unfortunately our rehearsal period was from November through February and we seldom had a nice enough day to try to actually play outside, so we used The Fisher Center instead. I watched the game unfold in the LUMA lobby and realized what I actually wanted to see; I wanted to see the individual through the game. The implementation of tactics and real competitiveness brought out something more honest in the game that I didn't see before.

The first time we played was at the end of a rehearsal, so we didn't have time to take it back into the room to see if anything changed. I assumed I would need to have a conversation with the cast about what I saw and what I wanted them to bring to the table when we put it back on its feet in Studio North, but I didn't have to. The next rehearsal got off to a late start and I forgot to have this chat with them before we ran *Manhunt*, and much to my surprise, it was already different in all the right ways. I learned that my cast responds very well to being set free to play. I think the setting of the exercise made all the difference, not just because we needed a larger space to explore the physicality of a glorified game of tag, but because we needed to get out of the studio. This was a turning point in my relationship with the cast; I began to be able to extend the type of creative trust I have in Anya to all of the participants in the piece.

The second game is *Dance Party. The Rules* are as follows: “ 1. Lip sync correctly. 2. Steal the spotlight. 3. Own it.”⁶ This game is modeled after a game in the reality TV show, *Ru Paul's Drag Race*, called “Lip Sync For Your Life”⁷ The game entails contestants engaging in a lip sync battle. It is just like a dance-off with the added challenge of correctly mouthing all the

⁶ See appendix.

⁷Ru Paul's Drag Race. Produced by World of Wonder for Logo TV. Performed by Ru Paul.

lyrics to the song that's playing. This was easily our favorite game. The way we worked this muscle in rehearsal was by turning off all the lights, turning up the music as loud as we could, and dancing and lip syncing like nobody was watching. We did this for at least ten minutes every rehearsal and every week I would turn the lights up a little bit more to ease the cast into letting their inner freak out when people actually are watching.

The third game is Omegle and the rules are as follows: "1. Find a face. 2. Control the situation. 3. Never get hung up on."⁸ This game is difficult to manifest in a rehearsal activity. It doesn't have an ultimately desired outcome; it functions as a vessel for controlled danger. In place of deriving a rehearsal game from this fraction of the piece, this was a part we talked through quite a bit. Although the nature of the piece is extremely physical, we spent a lot of time sitting in a circle and talking throughout our rehearsal process. While this zapped our energy at times, every conversation either helped us to understand and justify something already present in the script, or it helped us to understand what we needed to change about the script. The conversation surrounding Omegle touched on themes of innocence, naivety, and power structures.

The fourth game is Playing House and the rules are as follows: "1. Form a family. 2. Make the most drama possible."⁹ This was the section of the piece we edited, rewrote, and reworked the most. Anya did everything she could to script controlled chaos, but we learned that there really is no good way to script that kind of bombastic, relentless energy. We tried a series of improv exercises to get to the truth of this section. The first game was in two parts. Part one was

⁸ See appendix.

⁹ See appendix.

creating characters through a game of twenty questions; the cast member whose character we were creating would ask the cast a series of twenty questions about their character like “what’s my favorite food?” or “what am I hiding?”. Part two was throwing all of these newly generated characters into an open ended scene together. Periodically through part two, I would call out different conflicts for them to grapple with in the scene. For example, once they all ended up in one of their houses together in the scene so I called out “you’re all locked in together,” which changed the dynamic of the scene to be more chaotic and melodramatic. We milked this exercise for all it was worth and it didn’t help us to cultivate the controlled chaos we were going for as much as we’d hoped.

We found greater value in short-form improv games like Bus Stop. Bus Stop is a two-player game in which one player begins seated at the bus stop while the other player enters and makes every effort to get player one to move from the bus stop. One day, this exercise led to Catherine Bloom licking Anya’s face and it was perfect. I realized what we were missing in the body language of the group dynamic; thirteen year olds have a very different sense of personal space than we do and the cast had been physically handling each other more like adults rather than thirteen year old friends. Bus Stop remained a staple game in our rehearsal process as a means of finding new ways to invade each other’s space.

Rehearsal games were crucial to the development of Act IV, but this was a section we really had to hammer out with the text. Anya scripted many carefully and calculated overlapping lines in this scene and the cast had to learn the rhythm of the dialogue as if were music. But even when they got it exactly right, it didn’t feel complete. It dragged and it felt like there were empty spaces. Given the tedious nature of overlapping dialogue, we didn’t want to open up the doors to

ad libbing in the scene because we didn't believe it could be controlled enough. But one day, about a week before tech, I asked them to do the scene and throw in whatever they want. It wasn't perfect, but it wasn't far from it. The next move was to continue to run the scene as scripted but ask them to make physical choices as if it were an ad lib round. The following rehearsal, the cast took it upon themselves to ad lib and make new choices when we ran the scene. At the rate their exploration was going, I didn't feel the need to shape it too firmly, they were finding their balance as an ensemble.

The fifth game is Truth or Dare and the rules are as follows: "1. Never ask dare. 2. You only get one chicken."¹⁰ Anya and I were very excited about the prospect of playing truth or dare in rehearsals out of our own middle school nostalgia. We were so attached to the idea that it took us far too long to realize it was not the most productive game. We tried to play true to the rules in the script, but a truth-circle became very boring very quickly. We eventually turned the exercise into a traditional game of truth or dare and we found that the dares were always more fun and broadened our vocabulary of potential physical choices.

Throughout Truth or Dare, Logan is asleep until she wakes up and chooses dare and proceeds to explain the dream she was having. We devised several different renditions of a dance for this portion of the piece and the composite beat became "panel-dance." This is where Logan chooses dare in Truth or Dare and is explaining her dream to Quincy and Ashley C. At first, it was a dance about trying to keep Logan playing within the rules, but we realized that Logan breaks the rules all the time without consequence, so that couldn't be the reason they were trying to stop her. We felt strongly that the other characters on stage should be providing an obstacle for Logan

¹⁰ See appendix.

throughout the recanting of her dream because this is the part of Logan that separates her from the rest of them and largely why she is alone in the end - her imagination is too wild for anyone else to keep up with. So we decided on Quincy and Ashley C taking the approach of “here we go again,” as if this is something Logan does often and they know the drill for how to humor her.

In the beginning, Anya and I decided we did not want to make a devised piece. With this in mind, I had a hard time understanding the balance between the creative input of the director and what the cast brings to the table. For a large part of the process I was very afraid to stray from the script because that felt like entering the world of devising. There was a very clear line between rehearsal exercises and running scenes. It took me a while to realize that every rehearsal process involves something to the effect of devising and that does not make it devised theater.

AND THE POOL WAS ALSO OUTER SPACE

Design

I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up, but if I had to chose a path right now, it would be scenic design. This is mostly why I originally wanted to do my senior project in The Old Gym; I wanted to create an immersive, installation-style set. I wanted to build something as overwhelming as Geoff Sobelle's *The Object Lesson*¹¹, or as enveloping as Daniel Fish's *Oklahoma!*¹². These are two theater pieces I have had the privilege of working on as a stagehand at The Fisher Center that did not adhere to the traditional proscenium orientation of

¹¹The Object Lesson. By Geoff Sobelle. The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Dec. 2015. Performance.

¹²Oklahoma! By Oscar Hammerstein. The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Jul. 2015. Performance.

the stage. I've done two installation-style sets in The Old Gym in my time at Bard and as an aspiring designer, there's just nothing like a forty by eighty blank canvas. So when we decided to work in LUMA I was very nervous about the new challenges I was about to face designing in a professional theater within the confines of a festival.

I wanted to challenge myself to work against the design aesthetic I've been cultivating over the past two years. I realized that most of my style has been born out of necessity, and the style changes depending on the resources available. For example, Anya and I coined second semester junior year as the Era of Twine and Visqueen, and first semester senior year was The PVC Regime. I also tend to think of the design as its own character, as something that sends its own message and has a voice.

In the case of *Can We Keep It?* I wanted to create a larger-than-life, hyperbolized, typical-American-family-basement. I knew right off the bat it was a pipe dream, but this was my starting point. I began to let go of designing the set as a character in it of itself and began to focus on functionality. The next version of the design was a large set of colorful cardboard building blocks - as many as we could fit in our five by five space backstage. I ran with this idea for a few weeks because I fell in love with the idea of the actors building their own set for each scene. I didn't let go of functional purpose of the design, but I had to ditch the blocks. As rehearsals progressed, it became clear that there was never going to be a great enough break in the action of the script for them to be able to take the time to interact with the set in the way I'd imagined. The third version of the design stuck: four white rectangular panels on wheels. The idea is that their world is a blank canvas for them to play on. Throughout the course of the show the panels are: walls,

computers, a closet, dance partners, and they are also used to incorporate the visual of silhouettes onstage.

The panels themselves were largely inspired by the designs of three different theater pieces; Anne Bogart's *The Exalted*¹³, Sarah Rothenberg's *The Marcel Proust Project*¹⁴, and Dan Hurlin's *Demolishing Everything With Amazing Speed*¹⁵. In *The Exalted*, the design employed a heavy use of shadow and projection to manipulate the sense of size in the room. This is partially where I derived my vision for the use of silhouettes in the piece; it allows the bodies of the actors to become part of the design in a way that has an opportunity to play with the scale of the imagery.

The Marcel Proust Project introduced me to concept dual-functioning set pieces on a large scale. Not in the way that you could use the same table as a kitchen table in one scene and a doctor's table in another, but in an absolutely neutral sense. *The Marcel Proust Project* used light boxes that also served as projection screens and this greatly influenced the dual functionality of the panels. The actual design of the panels as white rectangles was inspired by *Demolishing Everything With Amazing Speed*. I found the image of six massive white rectangles on stage to feel both sterile and inviting; it simultaneously evoked a sense of mystery and a sense of honesty.

For act VI, Logan's Dream, Anya and I truly got to design together, we were back in our regular groove. I decided I wanted to base my design off of her media design as opposed to the

¹³ *The Exalted*. By Carl Hancock Rux. The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Oct. 2015. Performance.

¹⁴ *The Marcel Proust Project*. By Sarah Rothenberg. The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Jan. 2016. Performance.

¹⁵ *Demolishing Everything With Amazing Speed*. By Dan Hurlin. The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Jul. 2016. Performance.

other way around, and Anya had already detailed in the script that she wanted space/scuba helmets to be involved. So I had a very solid scaffolding for how to conceive of what to put on stage. Since the projection in this section takes place underwater, my first thought was that the actors had to be on wheels. At first, I wanted roller skates, but then, as the director, didn't like the idea of them putting on roller skates and helmets in the short amount of time between when the game is introduced and when the action begins. So scooters were the next best thing. As for the helmets, I wanted to make them look like the kids could have made them themselves. The helmets are constructed out of gardening foam, pipe cleaners, and tinfoil. I wanted to use colorful pipe cleaners for the internal supports because I was not entirely sure these helmets would hold up, so I wanted to make something of the potential for them to fall apart on stage.

Of the six stages I've had the opportunity to design so far, I've always had the luxury of being my own boss in the process. When the production manager of the space, the technical director and the set designer are the same person, there is no one to say no to the designer but the director. I have learned that no is important. In the real world, the designer will never get everything they want in tech and learning how to compromise on a different scale was a rocky road, but ultimately it benefitted the design. I originally had wanted there to be four panels and we had blocked most of the games around thinking we would have four. It wasn't until the beginning of February that I found out we could only have three. As they say, "necessity is the mother of invention," and as it turned out, the process of re-blocking once we were down a panel completely opened up a lot of our staging and helped everything fall into place in the final weeks of rehearsal.

THE VIEW FROM THE HOUSE

Cheers, Anya

For most of the process of creating and actualizing the piece, I couldn't get it out of my head that it was more of Anya's piece than my own. She wrote an incredible script that was full of very specific stage directions and I barely wanted to change a thing about it. In the beginning of the rehearsal process, I felt like I was just facilitating the actualization of the script rather than having my own artistic input. It was not an issue of Anya being precious about the script or anything of that nature, I was just so stunned by her vivid vision for the piece that I didn't have anything to add.

Although I was much more active in the process of shaping the piece after winter break where we made the majority of changes, I didn't see my own work in the piece until I saw it on stage from a very unfamiliar perspective, the audience. Remembering everything about the original draft and the first rehearsal, it became clear how much work Anya and I put into the piece together. It was incredible to have the before and after in my head - how far we stretched it, the intertwinement of words that I had written and she had written, and how tremendously the group dynamic on stage had changed from the beginning.

I think this piece is the first thing I have ever been truly proud of. More than I am proud of myself, or of Anya, I am proud of *us*. As a type-A control freak, I never thought I'd find myself in a creative partnership this loving and full of promise. My experience working with Anya for the past year has been the highlight of my college career and something I plan to pursue for as long as life lets us. My theater and performance senior project taught me the most valuable lesson imaginable: how to make a best friend.

CAN WE KEEP IT?

By Anya Kopischke

Directed by Brynn Gilchrist

CHARACTERS

They are wearing white thermal onesies (they are provided but might need alterations)

SYDNEY: Nina Tobin

BLAKE: Sarah Carlisi

QUINCY: Catherine Bloom

ASHLEY C: Sofia France

LOGAN: Anya Kopischke

SET AND PROPS

3 Projection Rolling Panels

5 flashlights

3 scooters

3 space / scuba helmets

A box of Dunkin Donuts

TECHNICAL NEEDS

_____ Floor Projector / Hanging Projector

Audio

LIGHTING

_____ 2 “electrical fissure” blackouts

3 backlights for silhouettes

Blue lighting

Pool light

PROLOGUE

Begin in darkness. SYDNEY begins counting from back of house.

SYDNEY

1...2...3...4...5...6... *(she continues counting throughout monologue)*

Light up on LOGAN, hiding DSL. She addresses the audience.

LOGAN

So it's at summer camp, and Ashley H is teaching me how to catch a frog. We're sitting there trying to take a picture and it's taking forever and the frog is dying in my hands, his belly slipping through my fingers and I think he might pop.

While we we're gone, everyone is up by the bonfire having a secret meeting. They always do that. So me and Ashley H come back early, but when we get there, everyone's face is turning different colors and they're writhing around on the ground. Transforming. Aliens! Changing back into their human forms.

Back lights shine on panels. Silhouettes appear behind the panels, writhing like the bodies described. They continue to enact her story.

I run back to my cabin to start a group chat for the human resistance, but I can't connect to the internet and I forgot to lock my cabin door, and the camp counselor comes in, apologizing, saying "we don't usually do check-ups but..." but I know they know. That I know. About the aliens. I pretended like I don't and she's about to leave, but then I see the frog. In my room. Just staring at me. And I say, to the counselor, just for casual conversation, "I think there's something weird with the frogs here." She turns around. My roommates slither out from under the rugs. I was caught.

SYDNEY

70! Ready or not here I come!

Cue: 1 (sound), 1.1 (ceiling projection),

ACT 1. MAN HUNT

Panels move forward. SYDNEY shines her flashlight on the stage. LOGAN runs. SYDNEY comes onstage and begins searching. The hunt ensues.
*After all are caught: **Cue: 1.3 (stop music)***

BLAKE

Can this game just be over?

SYDNEY

(hurt) I love this game.

ASHLEY C

I gotta pee!

LOGAN

I can't tell if I'm sweating or if I peed myself.

BLAKE

Ew! Logan, you're a big girl now.

QUINCY

Blake, it's fine, she's just an old soul.

BLAKE

Uh-huh.

ASHLEY C

(interrupting) I gotta pee is that okay?

SYDNEY shrugs.

ASHLEY C

I'm gonna go. Is that okay?

BLAKE

Oh my god, Ashley C, go.

ASHLEY C leaves.

LOGAN

Where's Ashley H?

Silence. Shrugs all around.

(calling) Ashley H! Ashley H!

_____ *The others join in calling.*

ACT 2. DANCE PARTY

Cue: 2 (sound) 2.1 (ceiling projection)

They stop immediately, move the panels back, they begin dancing / lip syncing to the song. They may bump into each other. It is chaotic.

SYDNEY

(to QUINCY over music) I hate this!

QUINCY

(to SYDNEY over music) What?

SYDNEY

(to QUINCY over music) this isn't fun anymore!

QUINCY

(to SYDNEY, not understanding) Totally!

Music fades, everyone continues dancing / lip syncing. ASHLEY C reenters and addresses the audience DSL.

ASHLEY C

(yelling over music) Were you guys yelling my name! *(no response)* I thought I heard someone calling my name when I was going to the bathroom! *(no response)* Do you think it was Evan confessing his love for me? *(forced laughter)* Probably not! I mean, I don't know

ASHLEY C sees them dancing, begins dancing to herself. SYDNEY is knocked down again. She calls for help but no one hears her. Electrical fissure, blackout. Lights back up but SYDNEY is gone.

ASHLEY C

Were you guys calling my name?

BLAKE

No.

ASHLEY C

I was just going to the bathroom and the window was open-

LOGAN

We can't find Ashley H!

QUINCY

She's very good at hiding.

BLAKE

She's been waiting all night to disappear.

Solemn silence.

QUINCY

(breaking the tension) And then we all die!

She pauses, they wait to die, it doesn't happen.

I've never been good with timing-

LOGAN

Oh my god. I can't die.

BLAKE

Why?

LOGAN

It would be *weird!* They'd have to cancel my birthday! And Christmas.

BLAKE

Logan, no one's gonna cancel Christmas.

ASHLEY C

Well at least I'm the only Ashley now.

QUINCY

Ashley C!

ASHLEY C

It's confusing to people!

QUINCY

That's why you're "C."

ASHLEY C

There's really only room for one Ashley in a friend group.

QUINCY

God, sometimes I wish I would just drown so my mom's worst nightmare would come true.

LOGAN

Your mom is really fucking crazy so...

BLAKE

My mom just produces attractive children. Honestly, I don't know how Aidan and I ended up looking like this, I mean, she's not... pretty.

ASHLEY C

Oh my god, *Blake!*

QUINCY

Blake stop.

ASHLEY C

Wait, where'd Sydney?

The others look around. Now they're getting spooked.

LOGAN

She was just-

Cue: 3 (sound) 3.1 (ceiling projection)

ACT 3. OMEGLE

BLAKE, QUINCY, ASHLEY C, and LOGAN move the panels forward line up in front of them like switchboard operators but on omegle. They call out "penis" when that's what they are connected with, which is all the time.

Until:

ASHLEY C

I got a face! I got a face!

The others crowd around.

LOGAN

Hello.

ASHLEY C

We're on mute.

BLAKE

Oh my god.

QUINCY

Just smile and wave.

LOGAN

What's he even doing?

BLAKE

Let's give him a fantasy.

QUINCY

You're riding through the jungle... on the back of a tiger... you feel his muscles flexing against your thighs...

LOGAN

Then the power of Christ compels you! (*disconnects*)

QUINCY

Logan!

LOGAN

What?

BLAKE

Did it not look like we were having fun?

LOGAN

I don't know.

They resume their search at their respective computers

QUINCY

I got another.

ASHLEY C

Put it on the big screen!

They move the panels back. ASHLEY C opens stage projector. projection of a disjointed face appears on the panels.

Cue 4 (floor projector) 4.1 (voiceover)

OMEGLE GUY

Hey

QUINCY, LOGAN, BLAKE, ASHLEY C

(taken aback) Hello.

OMEGLE GUY

What are you girls up to tonight?

All playfully nervous except BLAKE. They speak sorta over each other in a higher pitch, softer tone than we've heard from them before

ASHLEY C

We're having a fantasy!

LOGAN

We're having a party!

QUINCY

We're just hanging out.

OMEGLE GUY

(Referring to BLAKE) Why's the pretty one so quiet?

QUINCY, LOGAN, and ASHLEY C pressure BLAKE into saying hi. BLAKE tries to play it cool but pretty quickly gets fed up and angry and goes over to the projector and turns it off.

QUINCY

Goddamnit Blake.

BLAKE

Fuck off.

ACT 4. PLAYING HOUSE

Cue: 5 (sound) 5.1 (ceiling projector)

QUINCY

Once upon a time, there was a mom, and a dad, and a baby, and they were very very rich. And Blake is the mom! Her name is Diane and she's destined to be a reality TV star but she really just cuts hair in her basement.

BLAKE

That's just my mom.

LOGAN

But you're so *good* at it!

BLAKE

Fine. Then Quincy is my little baby Lizzie who is "not like other girls."

QUINCY is disgusted. Either snorts or says "Excuse me?"

And she is deeply deeply attracted to our lord and savior Jesus Christ. And only dates men of her faith who are over the age of 40.

ASHLEY C

And Logan is Diane's ex-mother-in-law, Grandma Mamie, and she hunts hippos. Professionally.
With her prized musket.

LOGAN

What happened to my son?

ASHLEY C

He was taken away. By hippos.

LOGAN

Oh my god! Then Ashley C is their long lost sister, Tiger, who was lost in the jungle as an infant
and raised by a family of... monkeys.

ASHLEY C

Monkeys? Not tigers?

QUINCY

And Sydney's the tag along dad!

She remembers. Awkward silence.

Cue: 6 (voiceover)

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

I'll be the dad.

*They are shocked that he is still here and watching!! QUINCY shoots
BLAKE a look both out of worry for her and her own sick sense of enjoyment
that BLAKE is at a disadvantage in the game. We see QUINCY make the
decision to spearhead the game even though her best friend is mad
uncomfortable.*

QUINCY

You're not my real dad, you're just some guy. You just tag along.

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

I'll just tag along.

QUINCY

Whatever.

They move the panels to create the house. The game begins. They address the audience like talking-heads in reality TV.

BLAKE

I'll show you around.

ASHLEY C is gnawing at an old carcass. She shoos ASHLEY C away.

BLAKE (cont.)

It's usually not such a mess. This is where the baby sleeps.

QUINCY

(waking suddenly) I was having a dream! And Jesus and I were... *(smiles coquettishly)*

BLAKE

She's going through some kind of Jesus kick. This is Tiger's room. She shares her room with the bathroom.

ASHLEY C

It gets pretty TOASTY!

BLAKE

And this is Gramma Mamie's office.

LOGAN

Oh Hello. This is where I keep my muskets and my books on muskets and musket care. Anyway, this is not a musket, this is a sword. You know allstate, the insurance company? When you break your car, you send it in, and you get a rental car BACK! See, it's the same way with my musket insurance. I go to the musket man, and give him my musket he gives me a "rental

car!” *(whispers)* the sword

Whispering behind LOGAN. ASHLEY C is playing with QUINCY's hair

QUINCY

Mother she keeps touching me!

ASHLEY C

It's your hair, it's not a part of you, you can cut it off.

BLAKE

There are other things you can cut off...

ASHLEY C

Got your nose!

BLAKE

That's your thumb you idiot!

ASHLEY C tries to bite her arm.

QUINCY

Mom!

BLAKE

What?

QUINCY

I just got a text that said you're terrible!

BLAKE sticks out her tongue and sulks behind panel. QUINCY is alone.

Um, Jesus? Are you there?

Silence.

So, I haven't been to confession in a while, and there's kinda been something on my mind.

Cue: 7 (voiceover)

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

I'm all ears.

QUINCY

Well, this one time when I was 7, my mom's boyfriend gave her this diamond necklace for Christmas. And I was sorta in love with him, you know? So I got kinda jealous. And - (*noticing LOGAN.*) GRANDMA MAMMIE HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN THERE! (*LOGAN shrugs*) GET OUT!

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

So are you confessing to the sin of envy?

QUINCY

No, I'm confessing to eating the necklace to spite my mother.

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

Oh.

QUINCY

Oh Jesus, I'm so sorry for what I've done and I've come to you to repent! What is my penance Jesus?

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

Give me a smile.

BLAKE begins to watch from behind the panel.

QUINCY

(Hesitant but intrigued) Okay... *(Smiles coyly)*

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

What a beauty. Who knew someone so pretty could be capable of such bad things. What else are you capable of?

QUINCY appears intrigued, shifts her body language to very flirtatious and it about to answer when BLAKE stops her.

BLAKE

Quincy! Stop.

QUINCY

Ohmygod Blake, I was having fun.

BLAKE

Can this game just be over? I hate this.

LOGAN

(stepping out) You hate every game.

BLAKE

Yes, I hate every game. I hate this one the most, so stop.

ASHLEY C

We can't stop.

BLAKE

Why not?

ASHLEY C

I don't know.

QUINCY

You used to be so fun.

BLAKE

Oh my god...

QUINCY

(screaming into BLAKE's stomach) Blake! BLAKE B! ARE YOU IN THERE?

BLAKE

Quincy, shut up.

QUINCY

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, BUT WE ALL MISS YOU IF YOU EVER
WANNA COME BACK OUT!

BLAKE

(near tears, really a dig at QUINCY) Grow up.

Cue: 8 (voiceover)

*LOGAN & ASHLEY C move front panels to cover BLAKE. We see her
silhouette.*

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

Do you want to talk?

BLAKE

No.

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

Come on, "Diane," penny for your thoughts.

BLAKE

Stop it!

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

Just calm your pretty little head.

BLAKE

Why would you say that!

OMEGLE GUY VOICE

I just want you to know how special you are.

Electric fissure, blackout. Lights up. QUINCY removes screen. BLAKE is gone. Silence. They wait for an air horn.

QUINCY

Let's watch a movie.

QUINCY & ASHLEY C move panels back. (Cue: 9 [floor projector]) A silent movie flickers behind them. LOGAN drifts asleep. OMEGLE GUY's face appears in the film intermittently. Airhorn, the rules cover up the movie.

Logan (no response)

ACT 5: TRUTH OR DARE

QUINCY

Truth or dare?

ASHLEY C

Truth

QUINCY

Do you ever have that feeling like, you could die at any second, but if it happened, you'd be okay with it? Like... you've lived enough life?

ASHLEY C

(beat) no.

QUINCY

Oh.

ASHLEY C

Truth or dare?

QUINCY

Truth.

ASHLEY C

Have you ever read an entire book just because it was named after a boy you liked?

QUINCY

No. Truth or dare!

ASHLEY C

Truth

QUINCY

What was the book?

ASHLEY C

Luke's Magic Sword

QUINCY

That's disgusting.

ASHLEY C

Not like that!

QUINCY

Sure.

ASHLEY C

Truth or dare!

QUINCY

Truth.

ASHLEY C

Do people think I'm a slut?

QUINCY

No.

ASHLEY C

They really don't?

QUINCY

They really don't.

ASHLEY C

Really?

QUINCY

Do you *want* them to?

ASHLEY C

No! *(pause)* A little. *(pause)* I'm sorry. That's stupid. *(pause)* I just don't think people... think of me. Ever.

QUINCY

That's not true.

ASHLEY C

But it's so easy for people to give up on me. And I keep losing friends, like, Marty got mad at me because I didn't like him and Evan got mad at me because I did and Aidan stopped being my friend because I was hanging out with you guys and... I'm always the one trying to fix things, doing these big romantic gestures trying to get them back but... It's not like I'm not hurt too, you know? But *I'm* okay if they don't apologize because I'm the one who wants to keep them around.

QUINCY

Hey. You always have us.

ASHLEY C

But where's everybody going?

QUINCY

(beat) truth or dare

ASHLEY C

That was a chicken!

QUINCY

No! You didn't ask truth or dare!

ASHLEY C

Fine. Truth.

QUINCY

What do you want people to think when you die?

ASHLEY C

I just want everyone to miss me. *(Pause)* Truth or dare.

QUINCY

Truth.

ASHLEY C

When do you think you're gonna die?

QUINCY

In water. I always think about it when I'm in water. I just feel like it's so dark, there could be ANYTHING in there, and it was wants me to die... and sometimes I think, maybe that would be okay. I mean, you start thinking about your relationships with people and everything you've done, and you start to think, like, you'll be okay if you just leave everything how it is. Right now. But sometimes you're not ready, and then it's just... sad. There's like, stuff you didn't finish, or you're not talking to someone, or weird shit is just going on, like that guy on omegle!

They look around to see if he's still listening.

What would he think if somehow he knew that I just dropped dead. It would be WEIRD, not sad, just WEIRD... like, "I just jacked off to a dead girl..."

So, like, you're never going to do everything you wanted to, it's just the moment you leave things in. And sometimes you're ready and sometimes you're just not.

ASHLEY C

You think it's gonna happen soon?

QUINCY

I don't know. But I don't think I'm ready this time.

ASHLEY C

(beat) Quincy... where's everyone going.

QUINCY

I don't know.

ASHLEY C

I feel like I can picture them so clearly in my head, right here.

QUINCY

I feel like when I picture something perfectly I never find it.

LOGAN shoots awake.

QUINCY

Logan, truth or dare?

LOGAN

Dare!

QUINCY

Logan, you can't say dare!

LOGAN

That's boring!

Cue: 10 (music) 10.1 (underneath sound)

I was having a dream. And you were both there. everyone was there!

MUSIC begins while voices of SYDNEY, BLAKE, and ASHLEY H count down. QUINCY and ASHLEY C try to find the source of the voices. LOGAN moves the panels off stage.

And all that was left of the world was concrete slabs and these aliens that looked like frogs, and we were the last humans on earth.

And the alien spaceship was at the bottom of this pool, but I was so sure that the pool jets were connected to the ocean and that a shark would pop out and eat us whole, but I would never say anything. *(to QUINCY)* So you went in to get the spaceship, but as soon as you jumped in, the frog aliens squiggled out of the pool jets.

We tried to run and tell you, but we couldn't because we were by the pool. Then you pulled us in with you, into the alien spaceship, and the pool was outer space!

I have a new game.

Dollies and helmets roll onstage!

Cue: 11 (ceiling projector)

ACT 6: LOGAN'S DREAM

ASHLEY C

What are the rules?

LOGAN

There aren't any!

QUINCY

How do you win?

LOGAN

I don't know, who cares?

QUINCY

(to ASHLEY C) Okay then... We'll go to Neptune and I'll be the King and you'll be the Queen.

ASHLEY C

I don't get it.

LOGAN

Every pool light is a star, and every pool vent is a black hole, and we're taking the alien spaceship deeper and deeper.

QUINCY

So are we in outer space or are we in a pool?

LOGAN

It's both! It's a dream!

ASHLEY C

I thought this was a game!

QUINCY

Logan, this doesn't make any sense. Your dreams aren't interesting to other people.

There's a shaking

QUINCY

What's that...

LOGAN

Please don't leave me.

ASHLEY C

The pool vent, it's creating a black hole!

LOGAN

I like myself when I'm around you. I've never felt that way before. I think it happened by accident. I can't make that happen again!

QUINCY

(she loses control of the ship) I can't control it! I'm kinda having fun. Is that weird?

ASHLEY C

Yes!

LOGAN

Last summer I would just stay home and watch SVU marathons and eat chips and cheese all day! I didn't know that people DID things together!

QUINCY

I think I gotta go.

ASHLEY C

You're too small, it'll suck you in!!

QUINCY

I know!

LOGAN

You introduced me to everything I love, I can't keep doing those things if I'm always thinking of you... not being here... I thought you'd be here forever.

QUINCY leaves the ship

ASHLEY C

Quincy-

QUINCY is sucked into the black hole. ASHLEY C and LOGAN roll away in opposite directions. The ship disintegrates. They call for QUINCY, they scream, but they are not audible because they are underwater.

ASHLEY C

[One last, sad call for Quincy]

LOGAN

That's what happens when there aren't any rules? I'm sorry, I just got excited because no one was telling us how to play, I didn't think we'd LOSE someone!

ASHLEY C

We didn't lose Quincy. *[beat]* She just left.

LOGAN

But if there had been rules -

ASHLEY C

Rules only matter if you want to play the game *(she realizes that she can leave)*

LOGAN

Why are we the only ones left?

ASHLEY C

Well you've always been a late bloomer and I just have some stuff to figure out I guess.

LOGAN

I'm sorry I never tried to know you better.

ASHLEY C

It's okay. We don't have to be best friends.

LOGAN

But... it's just us. *(beat)* Is this what friendship is for adults?

ASHLEY C

I don't know yet.

LOGAN

Wanna play a game?

ASHLEY C

Logan, you gotta move on, you're a big girl now.

LOGAN

I know...

ASHLEY C

I mean, you gotta stop with this shit, you're a junior in High School

LOGAN

What?

ASHLEY C

You have to stop talking about middle school, you're 22 years old!

LOGAN

No I'm not!

ASHLEY C

You need to move on, you're a 37 year old woman.

LOGAN

Okay! Okay! I'm trying!

ASHLEY C

Logan, look at your life. Look at your choices. You're 53 years old.

LOGAN

I know, but I don't feel-

ASHLEY C

You have to stop acting like you're 13 years old, Logan, you are 75. You're an *old woman* not a teenager!

LOGAN

What does that even mean?

ASHLEY C

I guess this is it, Logan.

LOGAN

Am I dying?

ASHLEY C

I guess this is goodbye.

LOGAN

I'm not ready to die!

ASHLEY C

We all have to move on at some point.

Blackout.

EPILOGUE

Lights up on LOGAN. She cannot tell if she has disappeared or if ASHLEY C has. She searches for the others, but she is completely alone. Sunlight fills the room. She eats breakfast.

CAN WE KEEP IT RULES:

Man Hunt:

Begin with one seeker.

If caught, turn on flashlight and join search.

Hide alone.

Dance Party:

Lip sync correctly.

Steal the spotlight.

Own it.

Omegle:

Find a face.

Control the situation.

Never get hung up on.

Playing House:

Form a family.

Make the most drama possible.

Truth or Dare:

Never ask dare.

You only get one chicken.

Logan's Dream:

None.

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Anne Bogart: viewpoints

Michael Dixon-Joel Smith - Smith and Kraus - 1995