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Dramatic Publishing

TRAINING WISTERIA

A Play in Two Acts
by
MOLLY SMITH METZLER



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(TRAINING WISTERIA)

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For Joan and her wisteria

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Training Wisteria was first presented by the Boston Playwrights' Theatre in Boston, Mass., on October 3, 2002, with the following:

CAST

Lynn: **Paula Langton***
Stephen: **Kim H. Carrell**
Dylan: **Ben Sands**
Rachel: **Lisa Grossman**
Kacie: **Mehera Blum**

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CREW

Artistic Director/Producer: **Kate Snodgrass**
Director: **Sidney Friedman**
Assistant Director: **Rebecca Mayer**
Technical Director: **Marc Olivere**
Scene Designer: **David Reynoso**
Lighting Designer: **Jeff Brewer**
Costume Designer: **Lisa Geiger**
Audio Designer: **Martha Goode**
Stage Manager: **Hannah Cohen**
Assistant Stage Manager: **Gregg Livoti**
Assistant Lighting Designer: **Steven McIntosh**
Master Electrician: **Caleb Magoon**

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: The family's backyard.

SCENE 2: A bench in a nearby park.

SCENE 3: The family's backyard.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: The family's backyard.

SCENE 2: An isolated table in a local tavern.

SCENE 3: The family's backyard.

TRAINING WISTERIA

A Play in Two Acts
For 2 Men and 3 Women

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance.)

DYLAN 18. A senior in high school.

RACHEL 20. A freshman at a private New England
college.

KACIE . . . 13. An eighth-grader at the local public school.

LYNN 47. A third-grade teacher, and the mother of
Dylan, Rachel and Kacie.

STEPHEN 50. A mathematics professor at an elite
university, and the father of Dylan, Rachel and Kacie.

TIME: A sunny Saturday in early June of 1995.

SETTING: The fenced-in backyard of a middle-class family in the Hudson River Valley of New York state. The back of the house is visible, with a stoop or steps leading to the back door. Above the door is an outdoor light with a dead light bulb. Center stage, there is a family dining area: an outdoor table, chairs, and mismatched lawn furniture, set up as a sort of patio. Farther away from the house is a neglected compost pile and a badly painted shed. Scattered on the ground are signs of home improvement: paint cans and roller, a shovel, a rake and garbage cans.

It's the eve of Dylan's high school graduation party, and his mom, Lynn, is in home improvement overdrive. This is her first party since she and Stephen divorced, and she has twenty four hours to rectify a year's worth of neglect, train a new wisteria tree, and assemble her three children. But when Lynn's Ivy League daughter, Rachel, awakes from her first night on the couch, she sees the reality of Lynn's divorce-shorn home and calls her on it. Golden-boy Dylan conceals self-destructive scars under his sleeves; adolescent Kacie is suffering through estranged visitations with Dad; and frazzled Lynn is only nurturing her wisteria. Desperate to reach Lynn, Rachel exposes her brother's self-mutilation as the "cry for help" that she believes it is.

SCENE 3

Lights come up on the backyard. DYLAN is playing Gameboy and drinking a beer, which he is successfully concealing. LYNN is inside the shed, rattling things about. RACHEL comes out of the house, dressed for the day. She carries a pretty dress on a hanger and looks irritated.

RACHEL. Where in the love of God is the iron! (*DYLAN points to the shed. RACHEL walks to the shed, then talks to the shed.*) Mom? Where's the iron? It's not in the hall closet, where it's been for two decades.

LYNN (*from within*) Why?

RACHEL. Why? Because I'd like to iron my wrinkly dress for tomorrow!

LYNN (*from within*). Um, I don't know. Look around. Look, um...around.

RACHEL. Oh, that's perfect. (*To DYLAN.*) I don't suppose you know the mysterious new home for the iron?

DYLAN. Are you high?

RACHEL. Forget it. Nothing is in the right place! (*At the shed.*) Mom, I'm going to the mall to buy an iron and

spray starch. I need my own anyway. Do you need anything?

(LYNN comes out.)

LYNN *(to DYLAN)*. What time do you have?

DYLAN. T minus thirty minutes till Kace lands back at base, Sarge.

LYNN. Good. *(To RACHEL.)* What did you say to me? What do you want?

RACHEL *(slowly)*. I'm going to the mall to get a few things.

LYNN. The hell you are! We have less than twenty-four hours to get things in shape back here.

RACHEL. I'll only be an hour. My dress needs to be ironed and you lost our iron. Look—

LYNN. I said no. *(LYNN takes DYLAN's Gameboy and throws it in the trash. To DYLAN.)* And that game is history, Dylan. I'm serious. And for the love of Jesus, do I have to ask you again?

DYLAN. Ask me what, Ma.

LYNN. The same blessit thing I've been asking you to do all morning: that damn compost!

DYLAN. You got it, babe. I was just resting up.

LYNN. How about Mom. Not Ma, not babe, not Madre, not say whats, just plain old respectful MOM.

DYLAN. You got it, Mom. *(LYNN goes back into the shed. DYLAN digs his game out of the garbage.)*

RACHEL *(to DYLAN)*. What's her problem?

DYLAN. It's Saturday.

RACHEL. And we're restricted from the mall on Saturdays?

DYLAN. Yep.

RACHEL. That's absurd.

DYLAN. Yep.

RACHEL (*noticing the beer*). So you just sit here and get ploughed?

DYLAN. Hey. Smoke 'em if you got 'em.

(LYNN comes out of the shed, furious.)

LYNN. I CAN'T FIND ANYTHING I NEED IN THERE!

DYLAN. What are you looking for, Ma. Mom.

LYNN. A sledgehammer! Everything's so bloomin' organized, the most obvious things don't catch your eye. What'd he—alphabetize it?

DYLAN. One sledgehammer. Coming up. (*DYLAN goes into the shed. He emerges immediately with a sledgehammer.*)

RACHEL. What do you need that for, Mom?

DYLAN (*giving it to her*). Here.

LYNN. Move. (*LYNN goes to the shed and takes a huge bang at it with the sledgehammer. DYLAN and RACHEL exchange looks. She does it again, more forcefully.*)

DYLAN. Whatcha doin' there, buddy?

LYNN. The wisteria looks so ordinary and blah over there.

DYLAN. It looks retarded anywhere back here. Why are you beating the shed?

LYNN. The shed is BOLD, and it's in the way of the ideal wisteria placement.

RACHEL. What do you mean, Mom?

LYNN. We just have to get rid of this dumb shed. Problem? Solution! Ugly? Beautiful! Old? New!

DYLAN. No. NO. NO. NO. NO. NO. NO! Mom, listen to me. Listen to the words coming out of my mouth: we are not taking the shed down so you can plant some bush!

LYNN (*to DYLAN*). Why not? The shed is ugly anyway.

DYLAN. The shed is functional! *Functional!* Where are you going to put the stuff in the shed?

LYNN. I don't know. We'll build a new shed after the party...in the meantime, we can hide the stuff around the side of the house.

DYLAN. Are you fucking kidding me?

RACHEL. Mom, not to point out the obvious, but you just made Dylan paint the shed.

LYNN. Yeah, badly.

RACHEL. But, clearly, you're going to ruin everything in the shed if you dismantle the facade. It will crumble.

LYNN. I can't stand to look at it! (*LYNN keeps banging the shed. She is starting to break through a board.*)

DYLAN (*in dispatch voice*). Ah, HOUSTON! COME IN HOUSTON! We've got a wild one. (*To LYNN.*) She's taking down a shed, alone, with a sledgehammer, so she can plant (*To LYNN, about wisteria.*) THAT?

LYNN. Precisely.

DYLAN. You leave me no choice, woman. There comes a time when a man has to put his foot down...

RACHEL (*to LYNN*). I think you're going through some sort of an adjustment here, or something, but I think it's dangerous, at best, Mom.

DYLAN (*dispatch voice again*). Houston? You're breaking up, Houston. Yeah. I'm gonna have to go in. (*DYLAN begins gathering up his Gameboy, stereo, cap, gown and beer [hidden].*)

RACHEL (*gently, to LYNN*). Maybe we should set some realistic goals? Perhaps we should clear it out this weekend, and then take it down some other weekend? You can sit over here and we can discuss it...

DYLAN (*as final words*). Rachel, tell Kacie she can have my Hans Solo second-edition figurine. You may have my Metallica box set. (*Loudly, to the gods.*) I will sacrifice myself! I am lamb to the slaughter! I am Obi Wan Kenobi! (*DYLAN goes into the shed dramatically, like a martyr. LYNN, mid-hit, is forced to stop beating the shed.*)

LYNN. Dylan, get out of there. Dylan. Dylan? Goddammit, come on. DYLAN! GIVE ME A BREAK! (*Softer.*) Dylan. Please? (*LYNN knocks on the door reasonably. His game is heard from inside the shed. Exasperated, LYNN sits down.*)

RACHEL. It's for the best, Mom. Who knows what you were about to smash.

LYNN. People are coming tomorrow.

RACHEL. Yes, but that's all our stuff. We should go through it carefully. You'll just create more work for yourself.

LYNN. What part of "people are coming tomorrow" is unclear? I have twenty-four hours, Rachel, that is all.

RACHEL. Everyone coming tomorrow knows that you're going through a time of... (*Carefully.*) Well, no one expects you to be perfect. Now, I think you should take a deep breath, unwind, and come to the mall with me. We can get fro yo and catch up.

LYNN. What else.

RACHEL. What else what?

LYNN. What else. I'm not rational. I can't take a shed down. I'm no fun. My yard is a mess. What else.

RACHEL. I was just trying to—

LYNN. You were just trying to what? Go have a sundae. Dylan and I will take care of things. Take care of OUR lawn. (*Loudly.*) Joke's over, Dylan. Come out, now! We've got work to do.

RACHEL. Wait a second!

LYNN. Buy me three irons so I don't lose them all. And staple gun them to the hall closet so I don't wreck your storage system.

RACHEL. What are you talking about?

LYNN. LET'S GO DYLAN! NOW!

(DYLAN comes out of the shed. He is wearing a bicycle helmet in a colorful shade, and he has tucked a gardening spade into his belt. He swaggers like a cowboy.)

DYLAN. Ready, Madre? (*Pulling out the spade.*) DRAW!

LYNN. Compost.

RACHEL (*slowly, sadly*). Mom, I didn't mean it like that. I just think you aren't being logical—

LYNN. Why don't you apply your logic to throwing out the stuff in the shed. (*LYNN goes to the compost, grabs the shovel and begins shoveling at the top layer. RACHEL goes in the shed. DYLAN sits beside the compost Indian-style, with the spade.*)

RACHEL (*from within shed*). So you have no need for the hibachi grill? This is considered garbage?

LYNN. Yep.

RACHEL. You don't want to grill at some point?

LYNN. Toss it!

DYLAN. Yeah. We don't need that.

RACHEL. Trainer wheels?

LYNN. Toss.

RACHEL. Croquet set.

LYNN. Toss.

RACHEL. Storm windows.

LYNN. Toss.

DYLAN. Who needs those? (*DYLAN has begun "shoveling" with the spade, making baby scoops.*)

RACHEL. Birdhouse?

LYNN. Toss.

DYLAN (*wiping his head*). Feelin' the burn, there, Ma.

RACHEL. Easel?

LYNN. Toss.

RACHEL. You don't want your easel, Mom—

LYNN. No.

RACHEL. Birdbath.

LYNN. Toss.

RACHEL. Chalk. Skateboards. Softballs.

LYNN. Toss.

RACHEL. Tennis rackets.

LYNN. Toss.

RACHEL. I learned to play with this one.

(RACHEL comes out of the shed with a child's racket.)

RACHEL. Dad sawed half the handle off so I could hold it, see?

LYNN. Toss.

DYLAN. KEEP! Yo, give it here, Rache.

RACHEL. Yea, we're keeping it. It's sentimental.

DYLAN. Look, Mom, we've just scored ourselves another shovel.

RACHEL. Hey!

DYLAN. It works good. *(Using the shovel in one hand and the tennis racket in the other, DYLAN attacks the compost pile.)*

RACHEL. Dylan! Give it back!

DYLAN. Hey, Mom, I think I'm on to something! This is gonna revolutionize the compost industry.

RACHEL. Cute. Give me the racket

LYNN. And I'll take the shovel. *(DYLAN hands LYNN the tennis racket.)* The real shovel. *(RACHEL grabs the racket. DYLAN bypasses LYNN and starts shoveling.)*
Give me that shovel, Dylan.

DYLAN. No, I'm doing it!

LYNN. Give me the godblessit shovel, Dylan!

DYLAN. No! I'm doing it! *(LYNN grabs the shovel and starts shoveling.)*

RACHEL *(to DYLAN)*. You just stomp around with your dumb Gameboy—

DYLAN *(to RACHEL)*. Butt out, loser! *(To LYNN.)* Mom, graduation isn't a big deal, for chrissakes. I don't give a rat's ass about it. No one does. Your dumb shed and your dumb yard and your dumb plant...your dumb plant isn't going to grow in this hellhole. Do you hear me? Stop shoveling! STOP IT! Would you stop shoveling!

LYNN. What! You resent doing anything for me, I'm gonna do it myself.

DYLAN. GIVE IT TO ME. It's MY job.

LYNN. Well, you're fired. *(DYLAN and LYNN have a tug-of-war over the shovel.)*

RACHEL. Jesus! You guys are both certifiable! Who cares? *(To LYNN.)* It's garbage. GARBAGE!

LYNN. It's not garbage, it's our yard. We live here.

RACHEL. You're right, I don't. And thank God!

LYNN. What the hell is your problem, Rachel?

RACHEL. My problem? My problem? No, Mom, the question isn't what's my problem! *(RACHEL storms over to DYLAN and yanks his sleeve back aggressively.)* You want to talk about problems? Real problems? Look at this. *(DYLAN pushes her arm away violently.)* You're fighting over garbage while he has a perfectly straight line of burns down his arm. Intentional. Self-mutilation. Look. *(Beat. LYNN does not move.)*

LYNN. Let me see. *(Beat.)* Let me see your arm, Dylan.