

“Stepping Stones”
A one-act play
By Chelsea LeValley

Sample of Stepping Stones notes: Where we pick up in this sample is Amy and James, best friends and more in high school are hiking on their “waterfall hunt” while reconnecting at a rather kismet encounter at summer camp. We are about half way through the script and some supernatural things have occurred but have been waved off...

James wanders off a bit toward the edge.

JAMES: Would you get a load of this place. Amy...

AMY: What.

JAMES: I want you to see this.

James comes back to help her stand and get over to the edge, she’s fine but accepts his help

AMY: I’m fine.

Looking at falls

Well, we made it. Mission accomplished. (looks at phone or watch) Oh good, and just in time. We’ve got about an hour to get back down before dinner is on.

As Amy turns to go back to her backpack to leave, James throws a stick off the edge of the cliff. The stick flies back up and knocks him off his feet, hitting him in the head.

JAMES: Woah.

AMY: What?

JAMES: This stick just...nothing.

AMY: Okay.

Amy starts to leave again.

JAMES: Let’s jump in.

AMY: Huh?

JAMES: Let’s jump in it. For old times sake.

AMY: Are you crazy?

JAMES: No, lets jump in.

AMY: No way. Did you just hear me tell you we have an hour. We’ve gotta go. (beat) And its too high to jump. This is like 10 feet higher than Red River Gorge and that was high.

JAMES: No its not.

AMY: Yes it is.

JAMES: This is the same height as Red River Gorge. (hearing her)
No way.

AMY: Actually, this is probably twice as high as Red River Gorge. (hearing him) No way.

JAMES: Amy, don't be a wimp.

AMY: I'm not. This is seriously...HA. No This is dangerous. You're gonna get yourself killed someday with your charades... I've always told you that.

JAMES: You always say that.

AMY: This is not a joke. Lets head down.

JAMES: Amy come on. If you're not living on the edge...

AMY: (*joking*) You're taking up too much space, Oh alright, fiiiiine.

JAMES: REALLY?

AMY: No! If you think I'm gonna lemming you off this cliff you're crazy.

JAMES: This is not higher than the Gorge. I'm telling you, you're just seeing it differently. You're seeing the world differently now isn't that what they say happens in college? I don't know. Worldviews changing. Well, it's changing your perception of cliff jumping. (Amy starts to leave) Do you remember our handshake?

AMY: WHAT? No.

JAMES: Do you remember it?

AMY: No probably not.

JAMES: Try. Come on.

(Amy relents. Some adlibs and mumbling or humming as they work on their old handshake, fumble around and eventually do it. Its elaborate and ridiculous and totally pumps them up and unites them.)

AMY: That's so ridiculous. Why do we remember that.

JAMES: Adventure of A and J.

(He gets close to the edge, backs away and out of total nervousness, starts belting out a ridiculous song and jumping around, something silly. Amy joins in until she crumples laughing while James finishes with more gusto. Whatever it is its nervous playfulness.)

AMY: (*with laughter*) I forgot how you used to do that.

JAMES: What?

AMY: That, that, bust out in song thing like that.

Beat as James hurries over to his bag, gets out his water, and takes a healthy drink. Amy watches.

JAMES: So how you gonna jump?

AMY: I can't believe we're doing this.

Amy goes over to her bag as well and gets out her water bottle for a drink too.

JAMES: YES! That's my girl!! She's back!

AMY: Not for long. This is insanity. We're gonna get in trouble. We'll probably not only miss dinner but also band practice and Kerrick will be pissed.

JAMES: He'll get over it. And so will they.

AMY: I don't know if I can do this.

JAMES: I'm doing superman.

A tame waterfight underlies this banter.

AMY: I was gonna say superman.

JAMES: I called it first. No copy.

AMY: (smiling) Fine.

JAMES: Just do a cannonball...It's a lot more safe. *(He takes off his shirt or shoes and heads to the edge of the cliff)* Won't break your toes. Your feet, your ankle, or your legs.... Shatter your toes.

AMY: Would you please...just. shh.

She takes off a layer as well and walks up next to him on the edge.

Pause. They look over the edge together. There is adrenaline and breath and he takes note of her in a sports bra or tank top, the one less layer.

AMY: *(backing away from falls)* Ahhhhk. I can't do this.

JAMES: You can.

AMY: No I can't.

JAMES: You can do this. We're doing this.

AMY: I really hate this.

JAMES: No you don't.

AMY: Yes, yes I do.

JAMES: Why, how could you hate this you love this.

AMY: I hate this pressure to do something I don't want to do. To prove I'm whatever I'm supposed to still effing be.

JAMES: I think you do want to do it, you're just scared. People get more scared as they get older.

JAMES: Just, here, *(he holds her hand)*. Just go with me.

Pause. They look at each other.

JAMES: Do you want to count to three?

AMY: Not really.

JAMES: Okay how about we count three to zero.

AMY: Doesn't matter. I can't...I can't do this.

JAMES: Yes. You can. Amy. Please. Don't make me go alone this time.

AMY: Okay.

JAMES: Okay. You ready?

AMY: *(beat)* I am ready. As much as I'll ever be.

JAMES: Three...t-if I get to zero and you don't jump neither of us are getting out of this without serious damage. Understand?

AMY: Yes.

JAMES: You gotta jump out far enough and to the right.

AMY: Don't hold my hand it's too scary.

AMY: A and J Adventures. Huh. Wanna try to walk on it?

JAMES: Yeah. Its just...bruised now. Feels like its bruised, that was too weird with the blood...I thought we might actually fly back up, HA! I don't know.

AMY: What?

JAMES: Cuz I threw a stick in and it flew up...I don't know it must've hit something down there. But the blood...

AMY: Maybe your body is just used to healing quickly.

JAMES: Yeah I've had enough injuries by now ha.

AMY: Yeah. (*She helps him walk, he can now walk on his own.*) This is nothing compared to the time you broke your kneecap at the plaza.

JAMES: Or how about the episode where I broke my tailbone skimboarding in mud puddles.

AMY: HAHA ooo. I think the worst for me was when I blew up that tomato on the driveway with the roman candles and it burned my hair. I reeked for days.

JAMES: Oh yeah!! Yuuehk. Then we exploded the cantelope.

AMY: Yeah. Your mom came outside like JAAAAAMES??

JAMES: HAha. Always.

AMY: She was not happy about that cantelope's death.

JAMES: She made me pick every piece up after you left.

AMY: I remember you told me that! I'm still sorry!

JAMES: Nah it was worth it to see her face.

Pause

AMY: Remember when we put on red shirts and that white beard you had and went to your dad's party as Mr. and Mrs. Claus.

JAMES: (performing it) HO HO HO HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!

AMY: HAHA I know so ridiculous.

JAMES: How about the episode with loon-launching.

AMY: I will never forget that. Those girls outside that bar screaming and looking up the hill for us all mad. Probably thought we were little kids.

JAMES: Oooo we just barely escaped the cops that time.

AMY: I was so scared.

JAMES: (mimicking) We were like, "hello officer." And all serious pulling away from the crime scene.

AMY: (remembering) What else did we almost get caught for?

Beat

JAMES: ...Forking.

AMY: ...Forking.

AMY: Yes.

JAMES: Forkin' lawns!

AMY: I forgot we did that. So weird.

JAMES: So badass. You're gonna be so angry because I'm sticking plastic cutlery into your grass. I'm so mean.

AMY: Haha!

JAMES: Better than toilet paper.

AMY: And eggs.

JAMES: Oh yeah, eggs are mean.

Beat

AMY: We had some fun.

JAMES: Yes we did.

AMY: We should fork the lawn behind the dining hall here.

JAMES: Ooooo we should!!

AMY: Yeah I don't know where we're gonna get the plastic stuff though, this camp is like Survivor. You're stuck on this island.

JAMES: Seriously. Maybe we could use the ones in the dinning hall

AMY: Ohhhh! YES!

Beat

AMY: We're never gonna make dinner.

JAMES: Oh shit! No. We aren't.

AMY: Do you think they'll be worried.

JAMES: They'll get over it.

Beat, no one moves to leave

AMY: Can we talk about something we don't talk about?

JAMES:no.

AMY: No?

JAMES: I don't know... I don't what you're going to say.

AMY: Exactly.

JAMES: Amy-

AMY: Can I please...

JAMES: Don't worry about it-

AMY: -so remember how we went on a break...

JAMES: Here it goes-

AMY: -when we said we were going on a break...

JAMES: I don't wanna-

AMY: I know you said, "It wasn't a break, obviously."

JAMES: Well it wasn't.

AMY: No, to me. It actually...it actually was a break.

Pause

Just turned out to be a longer one than I expected.

Pause.

JAMES: We don't have to talk about this.

Maybe than we expected...

JAMES: Amy-

AMY: I'm sorry. I wish that I had never...Gah. Sometimes I wish, that I had handled things differently.

JAMES: Its okay. It's so far over. We don't need to talk about it.

AMY: Okay.... Okay. Okay.

Pause.

JAMES: Breaks are so stupid.

AMY: So is not saying I love you until you know you're gonna marry that person.

(beat) Remember that? I heard you say it on the phone to your girlfriend this morning. I know you don't say it to your mom like that. So are you guys getting married? *(Beat)* Are you?

JAMES: She cheated on me.

AMY: What?

JAMES: She told me on the phone today.

AMY: What are you serious-

JAMES: She slept with...this friend of mine from church. Yeah. Its messed up.

AMY: Oh my gosh. I'm sorry. Wow. I hate that that even happens, in the church no less. *(shakes her head)*. That's when it seems like a religion. If the reason you're going to church is to seek God how does it get to that point?

JAMES: Yeah. Well. Nobody's perfect. People go to church because they know they're not perfect. It should have the most messy people in it.

Beat

AMY: So you're forgiving her?

JAMES: Yeah.

AMY: Did you have sex with her?

JAMES: No. *(pause)* No we didn't. *(beat)* But, we did other stuff. So. Yeah.

AMY: You love her.

No answer

You don't love her.

JAMES: I don't know if I...I loved... why are you asking me this?

Amy laughs to herself and walks away

JAMES: What?

AMY: That day we were on the bike path. Dressed in ridiculous 80s gear. Do you remember that day?

JAMES: *(nods)* We were so ridiculous.

AMY: It was hilarious.

JAMES: We had that water fight.

AMY: That's right! And it was summer and the sun was hot and we were sweaty and I didn't care that we were smelly or anything. I was...just... so attracted to you and we were best friends and I just...I just knew. I looked at you and the world slowed down for a moment. The sun lit up your face, your hair was messy, all standing up, and you were smiling, so big at me from your bike. It was all green behind you and all yellow light on your face and it was radiating onto mine and I could feel it. I just...felt it and I knew. I loved you. I knew, I loved you.

Pause

But I couldn't tell you. So. It just started to drive this wedge between us. It was a secret I couldn't share with you but it was a good secret...ha, but your rules made it feel dirty. Or wrong.

Pause

JAMES: Why didn't you just tell me?

AMY: I don't know I didn't tell you 'cuz I wanted to respect your desire to hold out on using those important words. I admired your decision on that...but it just didn't work, for me. Made us strangers.

JAMES: You told me how to live my life, not to bother you. That I was too immature.

AMY: I am sorry. I am sorry that I said that. That I didn't value what we had enough.

Beat

JAMES: Remember I took you to my prom? After you broke up with me?

AMY: Yeah.

JAMES: (laughing) What a numbnuts. What the hell was I thinking.

AMY: I don't know but I loved it. I was hurt the whole time that you were talking about that other girl that you said liked you and she kept glaring at me and flirting with you and I was hoping she would die and go away and maybe we would end the break and get back together.

JAMES: (with exasperated humor) WELL YOU NEVER TOLD ME THAT!

AMY: WELL! I wasn't ready to tell you that! At the time!

JAMES: Well that doesn't help us does it!

AMY: Well I'm telling you now. Now I am ready to tell you that.... So... there. I was hoping we'd get back together. That night.

JAMES: And then we didn't.

AMY: No we didn't. Our lives went separate ways.

Beat

And now, here we are.

JAMES: For two weeks. Then back to normal. You in North Carolina and me in Ohio. Nothings really changed.

AMY: It can. I would jump again. If we went back up there. Would you?

JAMES: Amy.

AMY: I'm not afraid anymore. I know what we have. I am not ready to let it go this time.

JAMES: Okay. Okay.

Amy comes closer to him. He stops her.

I have a girlfriend.

Beat, Amy is rejected.

JAMES: Amy- Just. I think. You were, you are, my dream girl on the inside. But Dita? She's my dream girl...on the outside.

(long pause. They might just be looking at each other. Maybe not.)

AMY: On the outside...

(long pause)

(gently) What does that mean.

(No answer.)

You're saying you're not attracted to me?

JAMES: No.

AMY: That's what it sounds like.

JAMES: No I am saying I—I'm attracted to you. Was attracted to you. But, I just also had a certain thing I liked, physically. Its stupid.

AMY: What you like **short brunettes instead of curvy athletic blondes? (*whatever is opposite of the girl you cast*).

JAMES: (shrugs.) I guess.

AMY: I can't tell if I should feel awful about myself right now or if you're just remarkably shallower than I ever thought you were.

Dream girl on the inside just not on the outside? So people have to be perfect for you?

JAMES: Just...don't take this so-Ugh.

AMY: Then why did you tell my roommate at this camp that you thought you would marry me one day? Why did you do that?

JAMES: Because, you're the kind of girl I want to marry.

AMY: So..so...(she laughs) so you're just hoping I'll shrink down to a size zero, get dainty, and sprout brown hair? I mean what am I supposed to do with that?

JAMES: I don't know, Amy. I'm just trying to be honest with you and you're like jumping down my throat. I don't why I am attracted to that, girls like Dita, but, I am. I'm just still looking for someone who is both, I guess.

AMY: (mockingly romantic) If I could have you on the inside and Dita on the outside it'd be perfect.

JAMES: Sort of like that not like that though.

AMY: I just...(she laughs)...this is not at all what I expected. Talkin about dream girls and fantasies. Well shoot, James, I would like it if you had your personality but also dark brown hair and buffed out pecs but that doesn't override my...interest in you. I mean isn't this shallow, am I crazy?

JAMES: I guess. No I don't think so. Maybe...Maybe its not possible to have both. But I am just trying to figure it out.

AMY: Both what?

JAMES: Both things.

AMY: Both your dream girl on the inside and the outside.

JAMES: Yes.

AMY: Great.

(Seething. Beat)

JAMES: I'm sorry.

AMY: So I am just supposed to wait around until you find out of that is a possible thing or not, both perfect on the inside and outside for you, how you've imagined your fantasy girl to be. Maybe you should stop looking at porn.

JAMES: I don't even look at porn. You don't know what you're talking about.

AMY: No I don't.

JAMES: No. You don't. So...don't tell me what I should or shouldn't do. I don't look at porn. Its disgusting to me. Okay?

AMY: You're telling me you've never looked at porn.

JAMES: No. No I'm not. I did, at one point, but never again. I'm done with that.

Amy stands and goes to the rocks. She skips a rock. There is a moment of silence here except for the water falling. James moves closer to her.

AMY: All this time. I have wondered....this whole last year. I would meet people and they'd want to go out and I would...but I always left at the end of the night thinking....This would have been so much more fun if it was with James. And all I could do was beat myself up for losing what I had with you. Why can't we turn back time so I could tell myself then what I know now....you don't meet a soulmate twice.

James is quiet.

AMY: But now I know. None of that matters. Because I'm not your ideal... perfect girl on the outside. So, no need to keep wishing and wondering. But, I guess that's what you're doing, wishing and wondering if there's that perfect match outside and in for you out there.

JAMES: I don't know....It's a weird thing. To me too.

AMY: Ha. Well, I wish you could just skip past all those girls you're gonna try and find that with before you end up wondering if I would've been right for you. Cuz I don't know but I've done enough dating to know what we had is something rare and...hard to replicate.

JAMES: Yeah. I haven't found it either.

Beat

AMY: So should I keep waiting?

JAMES: I don't know. If you want to?

AMY: I don't want to wait. I want now.

JAMES: I'm not ready.

AMY: Okay.

JAMES: What's that movie? Best man or something? That'll probably be me...running down the aisle at your wedding, chasing you down to see if you'll run away with me. AMY: I think that wedding was in Ireland. Not a bad idea.

Amy skips a rock.

AMY: Did you ever love me? You wrote Love, James in that poem you put in my locker. I wondered if...

JAMES: I did. I wanted to tell you.

AMY: But you didn't.

JAMES: No I didn't. I wanted to say it.

AMY: When I was with you, for the first time in my life, since my parents divorced, I thought... if I were to marry James, marriage might not feel like the end of the world. I pictured us in a ski bungalow high up in the mountains away from the rest of the world and laughing...just laughing a lot.

I thought, marriage with James might really be the beginning of the greatest adventure yet. The true A and J epic.

JAMES: A ski bungalow?

AMY: Yeah.

JAMES: That would be fun.

Amy picks up a rock. She throws it across the water. It skips more times than normal. We see her squint and try to see if that really happened.

AMY: WOAH! I just got like 6 skips.

JAMES: You did not.

AMY: Sure did. Watch.

She picks up another stone and skips it. Same thing happens again. We hear the skips in a sound cue.

JAMES: Woah. Nice. I didn't think you were very good at this.

AMY: I'm not actually.

She massages her shoulder socket as if it might be her throw that is exceptionally good right now. James, not noticing, starts hunting for rocks too and picks one up and throws it. It skips more than usual.

JAMES: Twelve skips! Read 'em a weep.

AMY: I've never seen you get that many before?

JAMES: Well now you did.

AMY: We found the quarry for perfect skipping rocks.

James skips another. Amy notices. James looks at her. Bewilderment.

JAMES: Did you see that?

AMY: (Amy nods) Twenty one?

JAMES: I barely even threw it. WHAT the heck.

AMY: I don't know this is ...weird. Haha.

JAMES: Lets skip em side by side see...

AMY: Okay.

They prepare rocks.

JAMES: Ready?

AMY: Yes. You?

JAMES: Yes. Three, two, one.

Their rocks skip at the same time, James skips more times than Amy's but both skip more times than they normally ever could or perhaps that gravity would allow. After about thirty skips we hear the rocks crash into each other and sink.

Pause

AMY:I've never seen that in my life. Did you see that?

JAMES: Yes. What was that thirty skips and then crashed into each other before sinking.

AMY: How is that...

The sound of the falls changes.

JAMES: I feel like mine skipped more times than yours though. Mine might have been 42 times to your 30.

James is looking at Amy still. Amy notices something is happening with the falls.

AMY: I feel like the water is falling up. Look at the falls.

JAMES: What?

AMY: Is the water falling up? Look at it. It is.

JAMES: (he sees it too) What the hell.

AMY: It's totally falling up. How is that even---

JAMES: possible.

They look at the falls. James looks at Amy.

To be continued...