

THE METHOD ACTING INSTRUCTOR

CAPSULE

She has worked with Gottfried for many years: first as a fellow-student, enthused by his ideas; then as an actor, desperate to please him; now communicating his thoughts and practices to the cast. She dreamed of being the lead in one of his films: instead, she teaches the next generation.

MEETING GOTTFRIED

He was sitting alongside you at the first lecture you went to: a prominent Russian actress talking about what she had learnt from Stanislavsky. Her accent was strong, but you hung on every word – and so did Gottfried.

Afterwards, you went for a drink together. He seemed almost as excited as you.

“I’m going to use this to change film-making,” he said. It was the sort of thing that young, ambitious, idealistic people say: but in his case, you would have to admit, he has achieved it. And it has been actors trained by you that have lit up his movies. Your star has risen, along with his.

Back then, though, you were torn between fascination with him – his long, slim fingers danced as he spoke – and obsession with what you had heard in the lecture. Of course, the craft won out: you couldn’t let yourself get distracted from your mission. But you have sometimes wondered what it might have been like – what would have happened if you’d reached out to touch that elegant jawline.

BACKGROUND

You were destined for acting from an early age – you trained with the best teachers, and served your time in the theatre, before joining the film industry. Sadly, though, your career was brief and ended in disaster – your indiscretions wrecked a project; and despite your undoubted talent, you were seen as screen poison.

You were determined not to leave the industry that you loved, though. During your enforced career break, you read and studied widely, and became aware of the Stanislavsky Method – a naturalistic style of acting that had emerged from Russia. It sought to replace ‘performance’ with ‘experience’ – so that actors would genuinely feel the emotions that their characters were going through, and their portrayals and scenes would be that much more convincing.

It was as though a door had been opened in your mind – a wonderful and powerful insight. You at once started to teach the method yourself. At first, people were wary and reluctant – you were asking them to draw deeply upon their own experiences, to add authenticity to those of their characters. But the way that your trainees delivered on screen was undeniably impressive; and so your reputation as an instructor grew.

You are aware of the criticisms, of course. People say that actors can do themselves psychological harm by embedding too deeply into their characters, or by opening up old wounds in search of experiences to draw upon. But you are confident that, in a supportive and safe context, such exploration need not be dangerous. (Although, of course, not all film shoots are supportive; and perhaps very few are safe.)

- ☹ What is your name?
- ☹ Where are you from?
- ☹ How old are you?
- ☹ What was your family background like?
- ☹ How has your relationship/sexual history been?
- ☹ What’s your current living situation like?
- ☹ How do you feel about your gender?
- ☹ How do you feel about your sexuality?
- ☹ Is there anyone outside the set of *Stolen Moments* who’s important to you?
- ☹ What’s the most significant memory from your childhood?

PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS

THE CAD

He was one of your most promising students, and you were able to help him really get a good handle on his craft. But he seemed like a troubled soul – you wanted to help. You gently asked him about himself – about his past.

He pushed you away, angrily – you must have touched a nerve. You haven't tried to ask again. But you have retained a close interest in him – have remained as kind as you can be. Surely at some point he will need your help, and will welcome it.

THE INGENUE

You saw her screen tests, and were captivated – here was someone who really had a talent for expression! You were desperately excited about the possibility of working with her: she has so much more potential than the pretty-girl roles she's been given so far. And perhaps you can teach her a thing or two about life, as well as about acting, along the way.

But so far, she has not been keen to take up the offer of studying with you. You aren't sure why – most actors would leap at the chance. It's almost as though she's wary of you. Why?

THE RUNNER

She intrigues and frustrates you. She's obviously smart and capable, and could probably do anything that she wanted. So why does she waste her life in dead-end, menial jobs?

You can't resist trying to help her – it's like picking a scab. You know that your kindness and interest can get her out of this rut and onto an upward path – if only she'll let you.

THE SCRIPTWRITER

She wasn't a scriptwriter then – she was a journalist. Early in her career, despatched on a mission to interview you, an up-and-coming actress. But evidently even then she had more serious ambitions.

You thought she was being friendly – the way she seemed to take a real interest in you, and coaxed confidences out of you, over a few cocktails. You talked about your fears, and about your colleagues on *Lonely Hearts*, the film you were working on – their demands and their secrets. The next morning it was a massive exposé – your words, undeniable, all over the newspaper. It was the end of your acting career.

OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

Positive

THE MAN OF MYSTERY – almost too good a student, he’s learned a great deal from you – and you suspect he applies the lessons in real life as well as on camera.

THE VETERAN – despite his age, he’s a quick learner and a good student. You’ve been able to help him find his role.

Negative

THE RIVAL – he seems blind to the obvious benefits of the techniques that you teach. Really rooted in old-fashioned stage acting. What a philistine!

ANGEL

You want to help people get the best out of themselves – to create legendary roles, to leave a lasting dramatic legacy. You have skills, you have understanding; you care about your students, and you want them to have the success that you were denied.

DEVIL

You know how to coax and persuade, when the task becomes difficult and painful – how to get people to open up their deepest and darkest secrets for the sake of the role. You know the psychological risks involved – but still you do it, in service to the craft.

TASK

This is the first time that you’ve been on one of Gottfried’s locations. He has asked you to prepare the cast: to help them draw up what they can from the well of their experiences, to bring maximum authenticity to the screen when shooting starts. He has asked you not to hold back – not to be gentle with them.

The task that she was given will challenge her to: stretch and manipulate the cast in ways that will bend, and may break, them.

Out of character

Your task in Act 1 is to offer acting tuition and support to members of the cast, helping them draw upon their personal backgrounds to inform their roles: to respond to their requests for help, but also to be pro-active in identifying those who might benefit from it. In Act 2, you will probably be expected to continue this work.

DILEMMA

You know that you can push and keep pushing, and the performances will keep getting better and better. Perhaps that's what Gottfried wants? But there will come a point, for each actor, where there might be no way back – where they have become stretched too far to ever return to shape. Can you honestly say that you will stop before that point?