

Stories from Langford

Every town has its secrets.

Back Roads

Smile for the Camera

Ain't Nothing Better Than Fried Chicken

Bad Habits

Dandelions for Becky

Twelve Years

by James Hutchison

Also available from www.jameshutchison.ca

A Christmas Carol – Two versions available. *Every man has the power to do good.*

When Scrooge's nephew Fred finds some letters Scrooge had written to his sister Fan a long time ago the past is unlocked, and Scrooge learns how his fear of poverty and pursuit of wealth have cost him a chance for love and genuine happiness.

CAST OF 10+ - Two Act Drama, 6M, 4W, Multiple Sets, 100 minutes

CAST OF 25+ - Two Act Drama, 15M, 10W, Multiple Sets, 100 minutes

What the Dickens! *Even Scrooge got a second chance.*

When Marty Fisher gets caught kissing his stage manager Samantha and the actor playing Scrooge shows up drunk Marty has to scramble to save the opening night production of a Christmas Carol and his engagement to his fiancée Tami.

Two Act Comedy, 6M, 3W, Multiple Sets, 120 minutes

Under the Mistletoe *Not every romantic evening goes as planned.*

Two couples in their late fifties, one long time friends and the other having just met, try to navigate the tricky road of love, sex and desire while spending a romantic night in the Christmas Themed Suites at the Prairie Dog Inn.

Two Act Romantic Comedy 1M, 1W or 2M, 2W Single Set, 120 minutes

Heart of Stone: A Jessica Quinn Mystery *Trusting the wrong person can be deadly.*

When Jessica Quinn uncovers the truth about her father's killer and the truth behind a woman claiming to be the long-lost daughter of her client Mary McConnell more than one person ends up dead.

Two Act Mystery, 7M, 3W, Multiple Sets, 120 minutes

Death and the Psychiatrist *Even Death Could Use a Friend*

Feeling depressed about having a job where no one likes him Death goes into therapy with Dr. Thompson in order to help him cope with his guilt.

One Act Comedy, 3M, or 2M, 1W, Single Set, 50 Minutes

500 Bucks and a Pack of Smokes *How much is your life worth?*

Calling off a hit he put out on himself because he mistakenly thought he was dying proves to be more difficult than Donny expected.

One Act Comedy, 3+ 2M, 1W, Multiple Sets, 60 Minutes

Plus, other One Acts and 10 Minute Plays including The Blood of a Thousand Chickens, 500 bucks and a pack of smokes, Never Give Up, Written in Stone, and Elvis is Dead.

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James Hutchison writes comedies, dramas, and mysteries. He also interviews other playwrights, actors, and directors about the business and creative aspects of theatre, film, and television. You can read his interviews on his blog and download his plays at www.jameshutchison.ca.

Stories from Langford – Every town has its secrets
A Full Length Drama in One Act or Two by James Hutchison

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ACT I

Scene 1:	Mitch	a writer
Scene 2:	Simone	a middle-aged woman
Scene 3:	Earl	a handyman
Scene 4:	Carol	a daughter
Scene 5:	Trent	a younger man
	Joshua	an older man
Scene 6:	Nora	a photographer

All the male characters are played by a single actor.
All the female characters are played by a single actress

SETTING - LANGFORD

ACT I

Scene 1:	a backyard with a fire pit
Scene 2:	a community hall
Scene 3:	a small city park down by the river
Scene 4:	a kitchen
Scene 5:	front porch of an old house
Scene 6:	a living room

TIME – SUMMER

The last week of August 2015

NOTES

- **Intermission:** An intermission can be scheduled between scene 3&4 if desired.
- **Design:** The play can be presented as simply or as elaborately as desired depending on the vision of the creative team working on the production.
- **Character action:** In all the scenes, the characters can do any number of activities while talking. For the most part specific stage directions have not been included and those that have may be altered or changed to suit the production.
- **Readers Theatre:** The play can be presented as a staged reading. This would lend itself to an event where there is a limited amount of rehearsal time or only a single evening's presentation.

STORY OF THE PLAY

The Short Synopsis: Six characters from Langford tell stories from their lives: stories about, jealousy, revenge, love, and forgiveness.

ACT I

Scene 1: Mitch just wants to get drunk with his friends, roast marshmallows, and burn every copy of, *The Story of Langford: A Century of Progress*, the book he was commissioned to write by the Mayor.

Scene 2: Simone is busy getting things ready for her parent's 50th wedding anniversary while she talks about Debbie Fisher and how much the two of them hated each other and how she caught her father cheating at the Green Gables Motel when she was sixteen and how that forever changed the relationship between her and her father.

Scene 3: Earl is eating fried chicken and potato salad, on a hot summer day, in the park, while remembering, how twenty years ago, all that trouble started and people ended up getting killed.

Scene 4: On a hot summer day during the Harvest Festival Carol is packing a picnic basket and talking about wanting to leave Langford when she was growing up and having to come back years later to look after her sick mother.

Scene 5: Trent Bowers is painting his fence and talking about the first summer he and his wife Tammy moved into the old neighborhood and how every Sunday morning they'd wake up and find a dandelion bouquet wrapped in a white ribbon on the bottom step of their front porch.

Scene 6: Nora is celebrating her twelfth wedding anniversary alone, drinking wine, and talking about how cities and buildings and mountains and trees and animals and people all have souls and that sometimes you can capture that soul in a photograph.

NOTE: If desired you could have an intermission between Scene 3 and Scene 4.

NOTE: Language warning and adult themes.

For Andy & Elaine

STORIES FROM LANGFORD

ACT I - SCENE 1: Back Roads

Setting: Backyard with a large fire pit. There is a stack of firewood and a beer cooler. A bag of marshmallows and a few roasting sticks. It's been another hot summer day and even though it's now early evening the heat of the day remains.

At Rise: MITCH enters carrying a box of books. This is a box from the publisher and contains several copies of his book *The Story of Langford: A Century of Progress*. He also carries a can of gasoline and some matches. MITCH sets the books down. He grabs a beer from the cooler and cracks it open and takes a long and much needed drink.

MITCH

The thing is you never really know what's going on in someone else's fucking head. Half the time, I'll bet, they don't even know. People are always doing fucked up shit like jumping off rooftops or pouring gasoline on a campfire – hell YouTube is full of people being stupid. I just don't think people are all that rational when you come right down to it. Nope. I think we're more creatures of instinct and impulse. The worlds just fucked up crazy, and if there is a God – then he's fucked up crazy too.

MITCH takes a long drink of beer.

So, tonight I'm going to do something a little fucked up myself. I'm going to have a huge bonfire. That's what the gasoline is for. And I'm going to have a bunch of my friends over and we're going to get a little fucked up, play a lot of loud music, roast some marshmallows, and

burn a whole lot of fucking books. And I know you're not supposed to burn books, but I can burn this one, because I wrote it, and trust me, I know what a fucking piece of shit it is. The universe would be a far better and happier place if I could burn every fucking copy of this book and make it disappear from existence. But that's not gonna happen now because nowadays no matter how many copies I burn, this tedious, meaningless and stinking pile of shit is going to live on in a Kindle edition for generations to come as a glorious and ever lasting testament to my failed, uninspired, and fucked up career as a writer.

MITCH takes a long drink of beer and then starts to stack some firewood.

When people find out I'm a writer they want to know if I've had anything published. And I have, obviously. I've had all kinds of things published over the years, but its not the sort of thing they're thinking about. Nope. They're thinking about real books – literary fucking masterpieces – like *To Kill a Fucking Mockingbird* or *A Fucking Farewell to Arms* or *How the Fucking Grinch Stole Christmas*.

They're not thinking about books like *How to Transform Your Fucking Mind in Thirty Days and Become a Fucking Genius by Doctor Fucking Einstein Zimmerman* or *Alice Fucking H. Camille's How to Write, Publish, and Market a Best-Selling Novel in Less Than a Fucking Year!* or *Jack Fucking Carlson's How to Make a Million Fucking Bucks in Real Estate by Working Five Fucking Hours a Week*.

Those are some of my most successful books even though my name isn't on the cover of those master pieces. Nope. I'm a writer for hire. A ghost writer. A fucking hack my father would say.

MITCH takes a drink of his beer.

When I first met Jack Carlson – the fucking King of Real Estate – he was running these seminars out of the back of his shitty little Pinto over at the Shamrock Hotel. He'd rent out a conference room and for thirty-nine bucks you got a three-hour seminar, a crappy cup of coffee, and a stale muffin – plus a signed copy of you guessed it – his fucking book.

And he'd get up on that stage in his purple polyester suit and tell all these suckers about how successful he was and how much money he'd made and how much money they could make if they just followed his formula for success and signed up for his one-year correspondence course where he taught you even more fucking real estate secrets on how to make a million bucks. I don't know one person who ever bought his book or took his seminar that became a fucking millionaire.

Of course, now days Jack Carlson shits money. But when he hired me to write his book he only had the one suit and that crappy car and he paid me five hundred bucks up front and when the book was finished he was supposed to pay me another two grand – but the fucking cheque bounced. So, I told that little shit I was gonna take him to court and he said, "Listen Mitch there's no reason to do that. There's no reason to get the law involved. Tell you what I'm gonna do – I've got this big deal going down and if you invest that money I owe you you'll make a

fortune. Me and my partners we're building an 18-hole golf course up at Lake Crystal. This is gonna be a gorgeous place. We're calling it the Emerald Greens – how's that for a classy name – The Emerald Greens and we're gonna build a five-star hotel with a casino, a floating restaurant, and a marina. All you need to do is let me take that two grand I owe you and invest it for ya, and you'll make ten times the money I owe you.”

I said, “No fucking way. I'll take the cash.” And he said, “Hasn't your dad taught you anything. Never say no when an opportunity knocks on your door.” And a week later he sends me a fucking share certificate worth two thousand dollars in the mail. There was no fucking resort. There was no fucking golf course. It was just one of his fucking scams. He'd hold these investment seminars and get people to cash in their pensions and buy shares and then wouldn't you know it – a couple of years later the company goes bankrupt and all the fucking money disappears.

MITCH sits on the cooler and takes a drink of his beer.

I don't totally blame him though. People are greedy. People are always looking for the get rich quick scheme or the easy road to self improvement. But the truth is you can't suddenly become a fucking genius in a month, and there's no way in hell you can become a best-selling author in less than a fucking year, and you can't make a million dollars in real estate by only working five fucking hours a week. The path to success and self improvement, for most of us, involves a lot of hard-work, determination, and perseverance. At least that's what my fucking dad was always

telling me. “Mitch if you want to be a success you have to put your back into it. You have to put your nose to the grindstone. You have to be more like your brother, Chuck.”

My fucking brother Chuck owns a plumbing company. His secret to success was to marry the boss’s fucking daughter, and when his father in-law died of a heart-attack him and his wife took over the business. But that little fact always seemed to escape my dad.

My dad was no great success. After high school he got a job working for the city one summer fixing potholes and that’s where he stayed. Spent forty-five years working for the city and when he retired – they gave him a fucking gold watch. We were all there. Me. My mom. My brother and his wife and everybody was congratulating him and telling him how lucky he was and then two years later he goes and kills himself. See what I mean. That’s just fucked up. Why would you do that? Why wouldn’t you get help?

After my dad retired mom said he slept all the time. And then he got fat. And he’d always had a problem with booze and that just got worse and then she left him. She went to live with her sister down east and that winter my dad gets in his fucking Ford F150 and drives into the country as far as the gas tank will take him and on a backroad in the middle of no where in the middle of winter he downs a couple bottles of Scotch he had with him and lets himself freeze to death. What kind of a sick fuck does that? Jesus. We didn’t find him until the spring. That was ugly.

I don’t think I’ve seen my brother more than twice since the funeral. Ma moved back into the house and I go over there most weekends and help her out with the yard work and the garden but

this summer, oh my God, it is so hot. The garden's not doing so well, but I still go over there anyway because I like spending time with my mom. She always said I should do what I want. She always said I had talent. She didn't say I should be more like my fucking brother.

Besides that's not what I want to do. I don't want to be a plumber or run a fucking company. I want to write fucking novels. I want to be a best-selling author. That's my fucking dream. But you gotta write the book first, right? And I've written lots of books, but I've never written a novel. Some stupid thing always gets in the way, you know, because it takes a lot of creative energy to write a book and after you spend your day working on some shitty self-help book or some stupid book for a corporation that wants to whitewash the history of their success you don't have much fucking energy left for anything else.

Mitch takes a drink of his beer and then goes back to building the fire.

The closest I came to getting a book done was about seven years ago. I'd taken this job up at the Langford Technical Institute teaching business students marketing and communications. I didn't really want to be a fucking teacher, but the pay was pretty damn good, and they had this great program where you worked for four years, and they held back twenty-percent of your pay, and then you could take the fifth year off, and get paid to do whatever the fuck you wanted.

So, that's what I did! I took a year off so I could write a fucking novel. I was finally going to write something good and honest and real. And I got about halfway through that fucking book when I met this girl, Eileen. Oh, my God, was she a beauty. Long brown hair and gorgeous

brown eyes. I loved her smile, and she always smelled like Ivory soap. I fell for her hard, and we spent the rest of that year travelling around, going to the beach, being in love, and at the end of the year instead of having a novel – I had a wife.

I should have finished the novel because the marriage didn't last. She loved to travel and have fun, but she wasn't too interested in having to work for a living or staying in one place. Then the Tech laid off a bunch of people including me, and I had to go back to making a living with my writing, and ever since then I've spent all my creative energy writing fucking web copy, advertorials, and crappy books like this one: *The Story of Langford: A Century of Progress*.

Mitch finishes his first can of beer, tosses the empty aside, opens the cooler and grabs another one and cracks it open.

A Century of Progress is one of the few books I've written that actually has my name on the cover and was commissioned by our fucking Mayor and the Langford shitty council to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth fucking anniversary of the city.

That's right, the one hundred and fiftieth fucking anniversary of the city. They decided to call it, *A Century of Progress*, because they liked the title even though it doesn't make any sense. And when I pointed that out, the fucking mayor told me to shut up and do my job, because I was just the writer, and if I wanted to get paid – I'd do what I was told.

So, I did what I was told. I was told to include a profile of our first Mayor, James McBride and talk about what a man of vision he was. How it was his smart negotiating skills and keen

business sense that brought the railroad here and helped fuel the city's first economic boom. What they wouldn't let me put in the book was the fact that he was a drunk, a gambler, and a known wife beater. And as far as I know, the only fucking business he ever cared about was lining his own fucking pockets. You see, the Mayor and a bunch of his cronies got together, and they forced all the Chinese off their land down by the river, and then the Mayor and his buddies bought it up real cheap because they knew the railroad was coming through and when it did – they made a fucking fortune.

Of course, that kind of thing doesn't happen now days, does it? No, today we have laws in place to make sure people in power don't take advantage of their fucking position. Which is kind of odd, because our current Mayor, Claire Barker and a bunch of other respectable Langford businessmen and women along with fucking Jack Carlson – the fucking King of real estate – formed a partnership called the East Side Redevelopment Corporation – and they bought up most of the land just east of city hall. That land was zoned residential, so they got it cheap and then – when that new stadium deal went through last year and they rezoned it commercial – they made millions.

But of course, that's not in the book either. No instead I tell you about Langford's first electric streetcar and the origins of the fucking Langford Harvest Festival. Does anyone even care about the Langford Harvest Festival and how it began? I doubt it.

You see the reason I'm so pissed off about the whole thing is because when they offered me the book they said I could tell the real story of Langford, you know. The good and the bad. But when

I submitted my first draft and the Mayor got hold of it she called me into her office and told me this wasn't what they were looking for. They wanted something that reflected on the good and friendly image of the city not something that might reflect badly. And so, I changed it and wrote the book they wanted. *A Century of Progress* – is the sanitized and incredibly boring tale of a fucked-up prairie metropolis. Because of course nothing bad ever happens in Langford. No. Nobody ever gets murdered or beaten up or cheated in Langford.

Mitch takes a drink of his beer sets it down and then picks up a copy of his book.

The thing is in a place like this there are a million stories about men and women just trying to make their way in the world. Stories about love and tragedy and hopes and dreams. That's the kind of a book I want to write. Those are the kind of stories I want to tell. But you won't find any of those stories in this fucking book. No, this book, is how I paid the rent and got my fucking car fixed.

Mitch tosses the book into the fire pit.

And so, that's why I've decided to sacrifice all of these shitty books to the literary God of fire and hope that somehow – I can be purified. Because I can't keep doing this – I can't keep writing this shit – I want my life to mean something, you know. That's why I'm gonna take the next six months off and finish that fucking novel I started. I just gotta make the time, right. So that's what I'm gonna do. I'm selling this place – moving in with my mom – and I'm going to write my novel. Or maybe if not that novel then – maybe something new. Something about Eileen and me

and the year we were together and in love, because even though it didn't last, I think I learned something about life that year. Or maybe I should write about my dad because that's a pretty fucked up thing to do to your family.

Anyway, I gotta get this fire started. We'll be burning books and telling stories around the campfire tonight because that's what we do, right? We're always telling stories. Stories about our life our hopes our dreams our failures. Stories are always about the struggle – the struggle to go after what you want or to figure out what it means to be alive or what's worth fighting for or what we should do when we're feeling hopeless. It's about searching for answers and getting knocked on our ass and still having the guts to get back up again. Because it's not about giving up. It's about living. It's about living with the consequences of our actions and learning from our mistakes, right. That's what it's about. It's not about giving up.

End Scene

ACT I - SCENE 2: Smile for the Camera

Setting: Collingwood Community Hall in Langford
mid afternoon.

At Rise: A photo montage is playing on a screen cut to the sounds of Louis Armstrong's As Time Goes By or some other sentimental tune. Simone is watching the video. The montage ends with two photos. One photo is of her parents wedding day and another photo of them today. The screen ends with Happy 50th Gordon & Ruth.

SIMONE

I don't know why people think that just because some couple has been together for fifty years that they love each other. I'll bet you, good money, most of them don't. I think most of them hate each other. I think at the end of their lives – having never divorced – they end up being together – and even if they hate each other, I'm guessing, they'd rather be with someone instead of being alone – because loneliness is a far worse thing to live with than hate.

My grandfather and my grandmother never made it to their 50th. No, my grandmother had a sweet tooth, and she had diabetes, and she couldn't resist chocolate. I didn't really know her because she died before I was born. But it doesn't really matter because my granddaddy and me we got along just fine. It was my granddaddy that taught me how to hunt and use a gun, because he believed that hunting is a useful skill.

You see my grandfather came to this country when he was no more than five years of age and that first winter, he told me, the whole family would have starved to death if my great grandfather hadn't known how to hunt and use a gun. There was nothing around them for miles

and once the snows came there was no way they were going anywhere until spring. They ate rabbit mostly, but my great grandfather shot himself a deer around Christmas, and they had a big feast. They had been blessed by the Lord.

Now, I know some people – especially those vegans and vegetarians – like my sister Emma and her husband Clive – think hunting is a savage pursuit, but I'd rather know how to use a gun and defend myself than be left to the wolves. And in spite of my sister's taunts, hunting does not make you a blood-thirsty savage. No. Hunting teaches you the natural order of things. There are the hunted and the hunters. That's just the way the good Lord made it. And it's been my experience that if you don't stand up for yourself people will take advantage of you.

And I know the good Lord says you should love thy neighbour, but I sure as hell don't feel any love for Debbie Fisher, and I know for a fact, that she doesn't feel any love for me. My Mama told me not to worry about her because eventually everyone just rolls up in a corner and dies. "Just because you feel like she's done you wrong, Simone, don't you worry about it because come judgement day she'll have to face the Lord and answer for her sins." Judgement day couldn't come fast enough in my opinion. That was just my momma's bizarre way of offering encouragement and support. I think what she meant to say was – that no matter what anyone else says or does to us we shouldn't let them stand in the way of our dreams.

But that's not what she said. No. She said, "Simone, that Debbie Fisher – you don't worry about her, sweetie. Eventually everyone just rolls up in a corner and dies. Your grandmother did. Everyone does. Winston Churchill, Charlie Chaplin and Marilyn Monroe – they all died. Albert

Einstein. Dead. Schopenhauer. Dead. Mozart. Dead. And your father. One day, he'll be dead too."

My mother and father don't get along too well. Which is kind of strange when you think about it because they got along well enough to have seven kids. I'm the oldest and my brother Conner is the youngest. Being the oldest means you grow up looking after your brothers and sisters. You don't get much time for childhood games. No, you're the one your parents depend on to do the baby sitting and help with meals and get the younger ones to bed.

And my dad, in spite of my mother's prediction that he would eventually die, has yet to do so. No mom and dad are both still alive. And tonight, they are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary.

Anyway, this Debbie Fisher – the one my momma told me was gonna die – she's nothing but a God Damn liar and a cheat. And I know some people feel sorry for her because of what I did to her, but I don't. It was God's judgment, and she brought it upon herself.

I guess it all started when I ran for class president my senior year of grade school and Debbie Fisher decided she wanted to run too, and the first thing she did was start a rumour about me and my best friend Angela. She said we were lesbians. She said we'd been caught kissing in the cloak room. I went up to her at recess and told her off, but she said she had nothing to do with it.

And then her friend, Emerson Tucker, called me a muff diver. I didn't even know what a muff diver was at the time, but that didn't matter. I didn't like being called one. So, I took a swing at him and I hit him in the left eye. He started bawling, and the teacher came running over, and everyone was screaming and yelling and acting like a bunch of idiots, and they took him to the nurse's office because he had a cut above his eye, and he was bleeding all over.

Boy, did I get into trouble over that. I spent a month in detention. The Principle said I would have to learn how to control my temper, and that I couldn't go around hitting people. He even made me write an apology. So, I wrote, "Dear Emerson. I am sorry that I hit you and injured your eye, and I forgive you for taunting me and calling me a muff diver. My temper got the better of me, and I do hope you can forgive me."

I wanted his parents to know what he had said to make me so angry. He had to wear an eye patch for a month after that. He sure as hell never called me names again. Of course, he wasn't the one I should have hit. I should have smacked that Debbie Fisher across the face. If I had done that maybe she wouldn't have felt brave enough to cross me again.

The worst thing was they put me in another class away from my friends. They said I was a troublemaker. A disruptive influence. I wasn't the troublemaker, but I'm the one that got punished for it. How fair is that?

The weird thing is – turns out Emerson Tucker is gay. So, I don't understand why he was picking on me if he thought I was a lesbian. If anything, he should have been on my side, don't you

think? Of course, he didn't come out until he was in his thirties. He was one of those gay men that married a straight woman. He married Blair Underwood and they had two kids, and then suddenly he leaves his wife and kids and takes up with another man. I guess that's another couple that won't be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, that's for sure.

Simone puts up some 50th Anniversary decorations.

You know, there's a lot of planning and preparation that goes into one of these things. You have to order the food, and rent the hall, and invite the guests, and book the band, and get a photographer. I have a photographer coming that a friend of mine recommended and she's going to do the photographs and put together a video. She already did that video you saw earlier. I'm not a big fan of those videos. They always have some sappy song playing while they show all these pictures of Mom and Dad and all the kids growing up. Fifty years of life in five minutes. And everyone's always smiling for the camera. Ever notice that? Their life could be falling apart, but you point a camera at them, and they put a stupid smile on their face and pretend that everything's fine.

My mom's best friend from high school Emily Carson is coming all the way from London England. She married an Englishman named Lionel. He was in banking and shortly after they were married, he died under rather mysterious circumstances on a Mediterranean cruise. I suppose he just got drunk and fell over, but you know how people like to gossip – especially since his wife got a whole lot of insurance money. And as far as I know she has never worked a day in her life since. Most of us don't have that kind of luck. Most of us have to work for a

living. And I know that sounds cold, but I'll bet you if Lionel was alive today, they'd probably be long divorced by now.

Simone grabs a big cake box and places it on a table. She gets two more big cake boxes during:

The other day my cousin Jennifer called me up to discuss the plans for the evening and she suggested that we should have a sit-down meal instead of a buffet. Well, she's not the one paying for it, so she doesn't get to voice her opinion. We're having a buffet. It's easier, costs less money, and people can go back for seconds. If she really wanted to help she could have picked up the cakes. She only lives five minutes away from the Clearwater Bakery but apparently, she couldn't fit it into her busy schedule. So, I had to go pick up the cakes myself. I ordered a chocolate, a vanilla, and a lemon swirl. And when I told my mother I was ordering the cakes from the Clearwater Bakery – do you know what she said to me – she said, “Oh, a store-bought cake – why didn't you bake the cakes yourself?”

Now she knows I don't much like baking. Some women do. I don't. My mother never did. I don't recall my mother ever baking one thing when we were kids. Not a single cookie. Everyone else's mother would bake cookies and cinnamon buns and fresh pies and cakes but not my mom. Nope. Any pie we ever had she bought frozen from Franny Potts Pies. My mother was not the best of mothers and my father was not an ideal parent nor was he an ideal husband.

He was a cheater.

The thing about a cheater is they play the victim and they twist things so it looks like you're to blame for what they're doing. A cheater will tell you, they're misunderstood, or they're married to the wrong person, or they're just looking for love because they're in a loveless marriage. Well maybe that's true but when you've got a family you're not just cheating on your wife or your husband – you're cheating on your kids. I mean, how do I know my dad was really out of town on business or working late when he was supposed to be doing something with me or my brothers and sisters? No, I'll bet you he was in a sleazy motel screwing some woman's brains out.

You see my father used to teach down at the Tech in the Automotive department. He was a mechanic. Good with his hands. And he was a handsome man. He still cuts a rather dashing figure for a gentleman in his seventies. He was always tinkering with cars and motor bikes, and when some woman in the neighbourhood needed help with her car – he was always happy to lend a helping hand.

Now when you're a kid you hold your father in high regard, but when you get older you sometimes get a chance to see your parents for who they really are. And when I was sixteen a group of my friends and I were hanging out at the Waffle House across from Motel Village. They called it Motel Village because it had a bunch of motels and restaurants all in the same area. It got a bad reputation, but about fifteen years ago they tore down all those cheap motels and put in a Hilton and a Best Western and a bunch of others. It's a lot classier now. Anyway, we had a day off school and we were going to catch a movie and maybe go bowling, but we got hungry so we went for something to eat. I was with my friends at the Waffle House when I see

my dad and this woman – a neighbor of ours – drive up in his car and check into the Green Gables Motel. I mean, I knew from what my mother had implied, and the fights I had heard, that my parents were not a happy couple, but to see my father breaking his marriage vows with that other woman sure made my stomach turn.

So, I decided I'd walk over there and sit on the hood of his car and wait for him and that woman to come out. I just told my friends that I'd changed my mind about going to the movie and that I'd meet them later at the bowling alley. I said I was going to head over to the tech to see my dad. Which was sort of true. So, I got myself a coke from the lobby and I waited. I wasn't sure what I was going to say or what I was going to do, but I didn't like the idea of my dad sleeping around. He was sinning and by association he was making me a part of his sin.

So, about an hour later my dad and this woman leave their room and head to the car, and when they see me – they stop dead in their tracks. Boy oh boy my dad didn't expect to find his daughter sitting on the hood of his car after he'd been screwing around with one of the neighbor's wives. The shame on his face was telling and he couldn't look me in the eye. You see if you aren't doing anything wrong then you feel no shame. Now me on other hand, I felt a certain sense of moral superiority. I was in the right. He was in the wrong. The world was black and white at that moment. There was no grey.

I said, "Hi dad. What are you doing here with Mrs. Carmichael?"

He just mumbled some answer I couldn't understand. So, I said, "Tell you what pop, why don't you and I go home and see mom and tell her what you've been up to." You should have seen the fear in his eyes when I said that. Oh, my word, my father's a big man but he seemed pretty small and insignificant standing there with that woman beside him that day in the parking lot of the Green Gables Motel. He tried to explain things, but I wasn't interested in his excuses and I said, "Come on Dad let's go. I think Mrs. Carmichael can find her own way home. Can't you Mrs. Carmichael? I'm sure you can take a taxi or a bus."

That day changed the relationship between me and my dad. When people do something shameful and they get caught it taints things you know. I mean if he wasn't my dad, I'd have nothing more to do with him. And I know some people say you should forgive and forget, but I'm not one of those people. I don't forgive and forget. I get even.

From that day on I made my father promise not to screw around, but I don't know if he kept his promise or not. Once a cheater always a cheater, I say. But in order to secure my silence about Mrs. Carmichael, anything I wanted I got. If I needed a ride across town – I got it. If I needed some money to go shopping – I got it. If I wanted to go out for Chinese food – we went out. Now some people might say I was taking advantage of the situation, but I don't care. I don't like cheaters.

And this Debbie Fisher she didn't just cheat me out of being class president. No. All through school she made my life miserable. And then after high school she goes and marries Todd Lexington. Todd Lexington was the boy I thought I was going to marry. He had money, and his

father was a rich lawyer. I met Todd the summer I worked at Lake Crystal at one of the resorts there. We started dating and things got pretty serious pretty fast, and I fell in love, and I thought Todd was the guy I was going to spend my life with, but then he met Debbie, and she set her sights on him, and he broke up with me.

I think he went after her because he was always pressuring me to go all the way – you know. Why are guys like that? Some women too. They are slaves to their passions. I don't understand it, but then maybe I just have a little more self-control than other people. I wanted to wait. Now that might sound old fashioned to some, but it isn't. I know lots of girls who wait. Boys too. Not everyone is sex crazed, you know. And besides I see sex as something sacred. Something that should be shared only between a husband and a wife like the good Lord intended. But this Debbie Fisher – I'll bet you she was only too happy to spread her legs for him.

The following summer on the 21st of June they got married. A June wedding – how original is that? I hate the 21st of June. That's a day that I rip from my calendar. I was angry, and I was hurt, and I prayed to God that He would give me a chance to put things right. And He did.

You see Debbie and Todd liked to go back packing. They'd go out into the woods for a weekend and go camping. They especially liked Pine Lake, and a couple of years after they got married I spotted the two of them up near Pine Lake on a ridge over by Castle Mountain. Pine Lake is a beautiful area, and I'm pretty familiar with it because that's where my granddaddy taught me to hunt. I shot my first deer there. I still go hunting there three or four times a year.

So, I started thinking about all the things she had done to me and all the things she was going to do to me, and I thought – I could take a shot at those two out here in the woods and no one would be any the wiser. Hunting accidents happen all the time. Now I want you to understand it's not like I sat around for a couple of hours thinking about it. No. It was a quick decision. It was maybe thirty seconds between the time I saw them and the time I took the shot. It was reflex. I was acting on instinct – protecting myself from future harm.

So, when they topped the ridge, and I could get a clear shot I aimed – said a prayer – and squeezed the trigger. Of course, lots of people get shot and they don't die and Debbie, by the grace of God, I suppose, was one of them. She was hit, and she was hurt, and she was bleeding. But she wasn't dead. Todd was running around like an idiot screaming his head off. I came out of the woods about a hundred yards ahead of them acting all upset and said, "Oh, my God what have I done." You see that's the beauty of this thing I didn't have to hide the fact that it was me that shot her. No, I could just hide behind the story that it was a hunting accident.

Todd was screaming at me and screaming at her and not being much help, so I took charge. I got the bleeding stopped so she wouldn't bleed out, but the bullet had lodged in her lower back and done a lot of damage to her spine, and with us being so far out in the woods that by the time we were able to contact the park services and get her airlifted to the hospital, she lost the use of both her legs.

There was an investigation, of course, and I had to answer a lot of questions. Some people said I did it deliberately, but they had no way of proving anything. Besides, I had a couple rabbits with

me that I'd already shot that day, and with my history of hunting my story was solid. I said I took a shot at a deer that I was tracking and that I didn't see them until after I had fired. And besides, if I had really wanted to kill Debbie why wouldn't I take another shot? Why would I reveal myself? Why would I offer her first aid and stop the bleeding and save her life? In the end, I was cleared of any wrongdoing. The official report said it was just an accident. These things happen.

About a month after the shooting I went to the hospital to see Debbie. She didn't want to see me, which is understandable, but I said that it was important that I speak to her, and I had something I desperately needed to say. I said I wouldn't stay long, and I begged her to give me a chance to make things right. It took a while, but she finally agreed to let me stay, and I'll bet you she thought I was going to apologize and ask her to forgive me.

You see the whole point of getting even with someone is to let them know who is responsible for their misfortune. Otherwise, why do it?

So, when the nurses left, and we were alone, I leaned over and whispered into her ear, "that next time I wouldn't just put her in a wheelchair – I'd put her in her grave."

Thing is I knew there wasn't going to be a next time. I knew she'd never cross me again. Oh, we've run into each other over the years, but she avoids me whenever we do. But the most interesting thing is that after that incident people started treating me a little different. Some were a bit hostile and cold, but most people were real friendly, in fact, they seemed to go out of their way to be nice to me. They sure didn't argue with me that's for sure.

And then a few years after the accident Todd and Debbie got divorced. I guess he didn't like being married to a cripple. Which just shows you how shallow a guy he is and how fortunate I was not to marry him in the first place. My own husband Randy is a school teacher. We met at the shooting range. He likes guns too. We're a long way from celebrating our fiftieth wedding anniversary but our twenty fifth is coming up next year and we're planning a big trip to South America.

Oh, and that Mrs. Carmichael that my dad was screwing around with. She took up with some other guy and when her husband Lyle found out about it he took a butcher knife to the both of them. That was no accident. That was cold blooded murder. He hunted them down. Kicked in the door of the motel they were in and killed them both. My daddy never said anything about Mrs. Carmichael's murder, but I think he realized what a lucky son of a bitch he was that it was his daughter that saw him at the Green Gables Motel and not Lyle Carmichael.

Anyway, it's getting late, and I've got to go pick up my mom and dad. This is a big day for the two of them. They get to be the center of attention. And even though I know my mom and dad hate each other, I'm sure for tonight anyway, they'll put on a brave front and smile for the camera.

End Scene

ACT I - SCENE 3: Ain't Nothing Better than Fried Chicken

Setting: A small park around lunchtime in a neighborhood near the river. The park has benches, and paths, and shrubs. It's a bit overgrown and looks a little on the neglected side.

At Rise: EARL is dressed in work clothes. He has his cooler and a toolbox beside him. He is eating fried chicken, potato salad and drinking iced tea from a thermos. Earl eats his lunch and drinks throughout the action. He takes a big bite of crispy chicken and gets lost in the experience before speaking.

EARL

Mmmm. Mmmm. I love fried chicken. It's good hot, and it's even better cold. There ain't nothing I like more in this world than fried chicken. Fried chicken, and potato salad, on a hot day – with a cold beer – there ain't nothing better. White man, black man, Chinaman and Jeeew, I don't know nooooobody that don't loooove fried chicken.

EARL takes another bite of chicken.

And if you're feeling down about something, I guarantee you, a crispy piece of fried chicken will soon have you feeling right with the world. Cause the world, she don't change – so trying to change it don't do a damn bit-a-good. Hell, the worlds already full of people trying to change it. Trying to make it a better place. But no matter how hard you try; bad things are still gonna happen. They just do. Papers full of em. That's why I don't really think it was anyone's fault what happened. Not really. Not once you know all the facts. Things just got out of hand, you know.

EARL takes a drink.

Funny thing is, they're finally going to shut down that old chicken factory. People been complaining about that place for years. On a hot summer day – like this one – the smell coming from that place would melt your eyes and burn your throat. It was rancid. Raaaaaancid. Wasn't so bad in the winter but come the summer – oh my Lord, what a stench.

EARL takes a bottle of water and wets a cloth and wipes the wet cloth across the back of his neck and face to cool down as he talks.

I remember one day back – oh must have been more than twenty years ago now – just before all the trouble started – I was helping out my buddy Norm – his fence had blown down. Norm didn't live more than a block away from the Sunrise Chicken processing plant. The smell didn't bother him. Or so he said. The house was cheap, and that's all he cared about. "Give it time Earl. Just give it time. You can learn to live with just about anything in this world – if you just give it time."

Anyway, Norm and I were putting in new posts – we spent two whole days fixing up that old fence. And it was hot. The air was hardly moving and the smell from that chicken factory – drifted down the street and hung heavy in the air. And when I got home – oh Lordy, let me tell ya – even though I'd been sweating in them clothes for two whole days you couldn't smell my sweat at all – all you could smell – was the stench of dead chickens. It was in my hair and on my skin too. I washed those jeans and that shirt to get the smell out. But it wouldn't go away, so I

ended up tossing both of them into the trash. And my hair – well I tried all kinds of different shampoos and soaps, but none of them worked. So, I shaved my head, and I liked the look of it.

Funny thing is people look at you different when you got a shaved head. They don't mess with you the way they do when you got a full head-a-hair. You want to mess with someone – you want to be a bad ass – then shave your head. Not that everyone with a shaved head is a bad ass. I sure as hell wasn't. But it does give you that...option – if you know what I mean.

Now, the way I figure it, they should have shut down that Sunrise Poultry Processing plant a loooong time ago. Before the city got so big and grew up around it. But they didn't do that. Instead, they put up a ten-foot-high fence all around it. But that fence couldn't hide the smell. And that summer – just before all the trouble – the smell was heavy in the air. You could taste it. Dead chickens rotting in the sun. That plant should have been shut down loooong before all that trouble started and people ended up gettin' killed.

Norm says he blames the magpies, but I said it weren't the magpies that set fire to that house and burned all those people inside. No magpie lit that match. No magpie nailed shut the windows and doors so they couldn't get out. No, that was – (*beat*) – people that done that. The good citizens of Langford.

Some people said Ryan Smith did it. But I know for a fact, Ryan Smith didn't do it. But I don't mind people thinking that. It was his daughter that got raped – or so she said – so he had good reason to do it. Only thing is, that Chinese boy – he didn't rape that girl. No that was one of the

neighborhood boys. And she weren't raped. She got pregnant and she got scared and when her father found out – she said she had been raped. At least that's what I heard. She had brought shaaaaame on her family and rather than tell the truth she said that Chinese boy had raped her during the Harvest Festival down by the river. Cops even hauled his yellow ass in for questioning, but he said he didn't do it. They kept him in jail for a week trying to make him confess, but he never did. So, they had to let him go. It was the girl's word against his. And when she died, they didn't have no case.

It was her own fault she died anyway. When she found out she was pregnant she got some back-alley abortionist to do his dirty business. So, there was no baby and there was no way of checking to see if that baby was half Chinese. Only thing is, she got some kind of infection and a month later she joined her unborn child.

“Into the hands of Jesus, she went,” so said my grandmother. I don't much believe in Jesus. But my Grammy's old and she grew up going to church and believing in all that Jesus mumbo jumbo. The thing is, even though that girl had lied – her father believed her. Her father blamed that Chinese kid for her death. I figure it was him that took a couple of shots at that boy's house a night or two after his daughter died. Nobody was hurt, but the message was clear – we don't want you in our neighborhood, and if you know what's good for ya – you'll get out.

And I bet ya, if they'd left then and there – they'd still be alive today. But they didn't. What I don't get is why anyone would want to stay anywhere they wasn't welcome? That don't make

no sense ta me. But some people do funny things. Sometimes when you push – instead of backing down – they push back twice as hard.

EARL walks over to where the back door was.

Right here is where the back door was. This here park is where it happened. Wouldn't even know there'd ever been a house here now would-ya? They tore up the foundation and landscaped everything. There was a plaque in the centre of the park dedicated to the memory of that family, but somebody's gone and tore it out. Not everybody thinks they should have built this park and dedicated it to that boy and his family's memory. Ryan Smith ain't the only one who thought that Chinese kid raped his daughter.

Now me, I don't have no trouble with Chinese – or Asians – as they like to be called now. But I ain't real fond of em. They seem kind of pushy ta me, ya know? And they're cheap. Some of them are real cheap. I did some work for that family when they first moved in. The house needed some fixing up. Roof was leaking. They had some plumbing problems.

Well, I fixed it up. I did a good job. I did extra. I'm a hard worker. When I do a job, I do it right. And doing it right means I spent a little more on materials. You know got better stuff. But when old Mr. Wang came to pay his bill he wouldn't pay for the extra cost of the materials. He said, he would pay me what I quoted him and that I – had decided to buy more expensive materials without asking him.

Now, that's true. I didn't ask him. But hell, it wasn't a lot-a money. We're talking maybe a hundred – a hundred and twenty bucks at most. But he wouldn't budge on it. Wouldn't even give me a God damn tip.

Most people would have slipped me an extra fifty but not old Mr. Wang. No, he was too God damn cheap. The thing is, I had some debts I needed to pay off and so I worked hard – cause I thought maybe he'd recommend me to some of his Asian friends. But he never did. Now, maybe old Mr. Wang was used to getting ripped off from where he came from, but I don't rip nobody off – no siree.

That's the real reason why people didn't like 'em. It didn't have nothing to do with them being Chinese. It was because they was cheap. And that old Chinaman, he sure as hell didn't like us white folk. He didn't care much for blacks either. He was always worried someone was gonna break into his house and steal all his precious belongings. That's why he had me put those security bars on all them windows and doors of his. He didn't trust or like nobody and noooooobody liked him.

I guess the whole thing started when Gwen Hopkins found one of those bloody chicken heads on her front porch. She had a big beautiful crab apple tree in her backyard. And the apples that came from that tree were like bitter-sweet honey. Only thing is that crab apple tree was big, and it had grown to such a size that nearly half of it hung over onto Mr. Wang's property. So, when he went and cut off those branches – without asking Gwen Hopkins if it was okay – which it wasn't – she was ready to lynch him. And she had every right to do that in my opinion.

Before that Chinese family moved into that house it belonged to Sam Holloway. Sam, he loved that tree. Looooved the shade it provided. Looooved those sweet juicy apples. But that crab apple tree stopped producing fruit once that old Chinaman cut her up. The next summer nothing. Weird eh – how do you explain something like that? You can see it from here. Hardly a leaf on it – looks more dead than alive – ain't much good for nothing but firewood now.

Of course, Gwen Hopkins has been dead almost five years herself. Cancer. Nasty stuff she had. She went real slow like – reeeel slow. Wasted away to nothing. I figure, if you're going to die better to make it quick.

Anyway, Gwen took old Mr. Wang to court for cutting up her tree and she won. Oh, he was mad about that, but the judge said that tree originated on Gwen's property and that he had no right to cut it up without her permission. So, he had to pay her five hundred bucks in damages. That turned him boy. Made him real bitter. Figured he'd been ripped off. But I figure he didn't get nearly what he deserved for destroying that tree. That's the real shame of it. A tree's a living thing too – you know. You shouldn't just go chopping it up.

Thing is, if Mr. Wang had been a little more neighborly – maybe none of this would-a-happened – maybe people would-a-felt different – maybe somebody would have stepped forward and given him a hand when that fire broke out.

Anyway, it was Gwen found those chicken heads on her front porch and she thought it was some kind-da Chiiiiiiiineeeese voooodoo. Or at least that's what she called it. She figured that old Mr. Wang was trying to put a curse on her or something.

Then more chicken heads started turning up. That's a disturbing thing to find sitting on the hood of your car when you head out to work in the morning. Not everybody believed it was that Chinese family, but enough of them did. Gwen even complained to the police and they did a bit of investigating. Even talked to Mr. Wang, but he said he didn't have nothing to do with it.

And then that Smith girl got raped and – well things got kind-a-ugly.

My own lady left me around that time because I used to drink a lot. I don't drink no more. Gives me a temper – a wicked temper – and I end up spending too much on booze and not going to work – and it sure as hell can make your life a mess – but I'm cleaned up now. I've been sober for nearly twenty years. But, that summer – I was drinking a lot. And I owed money. And my tools – the way I make my living – well I'd gone and done something stupid. I'd gone and used them as collateral to get a loan and then I missed a payment or two and they came and took my tools. Well how the hell can a man make a living if he don't got no tools I ask ya? And a week later my old lady walks out on me. And even though I knew she'd been thinking about leaving me because of the drinking and such it was me losing my tools and not being able to go to work that was the last straw.

Thing is – that hundred or so bucks that Chinaman owed me would have made a big difference you know. God damnit! I mean, if I knew he wasn't going to pay for the better materials I would have never spent the money. Why would I? But I do good work. And I'm proud of the work I do. That's your reputation you're talking about, so you can't go messing around with that. But that God damn Chinamen, he sure as hell messed around with mine.

Pause

You know, most of the time I don't even feel like it was me that started that fire. I was drunk. I was mad. I wasn't myself. Now I ain't a violent man, but if you wrong me then you deserve to pay. I didn't expect them people to die. I just wanted to scare them you know. Problem is it took the fire department more than half-an-hour to respond after the alarm went off. And that house she buuurned like the devil. Hotter than hell. The fire chief – was Ryan Smith's brother you see – Kyle. That's how come everyone thinks Ryan Smith set that fire. They figured he and his brother Kyle had planned the whole thing. And I wouldn't have blamed him if he had – but, like I said he really had no reason to. He just thought he did.

Anyway, the way I figure it, if the good citizens of Langford had really cared about those people – that fire department and all them firefighters wouldn't have been so slow to show up. And the police – well, they wouldn't have shut down the case after three months. No, I ain't the only one to blame for those people's deaths – besides they should have moved away when they had the chance – that's what they should-ah-done. Stupid old Chinaman.

Of course, I learned my lesson. I can't drink. When I drink it changes me. Makes me more willing to do the things I'm thinking about. Gives me the courage to hurt those that have hurt me. I only wish I'd stopped drinking before my old lady left me. Sometimes I feel real bad about the way I treated her. But I got myself a new lady now. And things are looking good. We've been together nearly fifteen years. And let me tell ya – she makes some mighty fine friiied chicken.

EARL starts to clean up his lunch items as he gets ready to leave.

Funny thing is, after that family burned – the chicken heads were still turning up. Even more than before. People was finding them in their gardens and hanging on their clothes lines and in their lily ponds. Whole neighborhood was sure the ghost of the Chinaman had come back from the grave and was cursing every last one of them.

Well, turns out the Sunrise Poultry Factory had gotten a little sloppy with their trash and one of them containers where they put all the chicken heads from the slaughter had a broken latch and the magpies could get at them there chicken heads and fly off with them. And them ooold magpies – well most of them live down here by the river and they'd fly around with them chicken heads in their beaks and end up dropping those chicken heads aaall over the neighborhood. Funny, isn't it – how people get things wrong.

Anyway, I had to buy a new set of tools. The damn pawn shop sold my old ones. I've had these ones a long time now, but they aren't nearly as good. My dad had given me those other tools,

you know. That's what made them so special. I did manage to get a couple of things back but not much.

I don't live in the neighborhood no more. I'm just here doing some work. A lot of rich people moving in. I figure that's why they're shutting down the factory. Rich people have a bigger say in this world about what happens than the rest of us do. And I'm betting one of these days – this park won't be here neither. Hell, most people don't even remember what happened – and if they do – they don't care. The way I figure it, they'll put two or three big condos in here and some rich Asian guy and his skinny wife will sit out on their deck eating goat cheese and drinking wine from the Cimarron Valley. Funny how things turn out, uh?

Anyway, I ain't getting paid to sit around a park all day talking about the past. I should get back to work. Mmmm Mmmm that was good chicken. Ain't nothing better.

End Scene

(If desired an intermission can happen between this scene and the next.)

ACT I - SCENE 4: Bad Habits

Setting: A small compact kitchen with a table and chairs. The kitchen is part of a small bungalow style townhouse with two bedrooms and a single car garage. It is late afternoon.

At Rise: CAROL is in the kitchen packing a picnic basket. As she talks she adds food and napkins and plates to the basket. But at the moment she's just opening a fresh pack of cigarettes. As she removes the wrapper, she closes her eyes and inhales deeply.

CAROL

Oh my Lord, that brings back memories. We all have a few bad habits. Smoking is one of mine although I don't smoke anymore. Well not very often but right now – today – boy oh boy do I need a smoke. Things have gotten a little weird between me and my mother. Not that they weren't always a little weird. And not that I don't have a few good memories of my mother.

She lights the cigarette and takes a long drag and savours the moment.

When I was growing up my mom would pack up a picnic basket just like this one and fill it full of fried chicken, fresh baked biscuits and a home-made-deep-dish apple pie and we'd go down to the river so we could watch the fireworks during the Harvest Festival.

Lots of families did that in those days. The kids would play. There'd be peanut scrambles and three-legged races and you'd make some new friends, and the adults would visit and drink beer...even though they weren't supposed to drink beer...not in a public park...but during the harvest festival rules get bent a bit.

Back then everyone smoked. I did – when I got older. My sister did and so did my brother. He still does. And my mother had a pack a day habit when we were growing up. People smoked in restaurants and in cars and in airplanes and in movie theatres. You smoked at your desk. You smoked while you worked – you didn't take smoke breaks.

Carol takes another drag on the cigarette and enjoys the sensation.

The first harvest festival was held in 1936 and was a five-day celebration at the end of August including a rodeo, a carnival, a pie eating competition with a hundred-dollar prize, and fireworks every night. And that first year, I am proud to say, a Sunday school teacher named Franny Potts was the winner of the pie eating contest. Franny Potts is my grandmother, and she won the pie eating contest every year from 1936 to 1947. Twelve years. A record that still stands today. And get this – they have a statue of my grandma down on the fair grounds and the first Monday of the Harvest Festival is known as Franny Potts day. And on that day there are pie eating contests all over the city. They still have a pie eating contest down at the Fair Grounds and this year top prize is twenty-five thousand dollars.

The contest is sponsored by Franny Potts Pies. Now Franny Potts Pies, according to their motto, are as good as grandma used to bake. And it just so happens that my grandma was a good cook, and so's my mom. And the most popular Franny Potts Pies are blueberry, apple, and rhubarb. The President of Franny Potts Pies is Thomas Gillette. He's not even from Langford. Nope. He's an Easterner – from Torrington Connecticut. He showed up in Langford in 1946 after the war and went to the fair grounds and saw all the fuss being made over my grandmother and he decided to trademark the name Franny Potts and launch Franny Potts Pies. He paid my grandma to be the spokesperson for his company, and when she signed that contract she didn't realize she

was signing away any ownership of her name or her image. All he had to do, apparently, was pay her five hundred dollars a year until the day she died.

My family has never been very happy about that because after grandma died we didn't get a dime. That didn't sit right with us so the family sued but we lost the case, and now Franny Potts Pies are worth millions, and you can get Franny Potts Pies as far away as Argentina and Hong Kong and on every single box is my Grandma's face and her name. That doesn't seem right to me but what's right and what's legal aren't always the same thing.

This year at the Harvest Festival Thomas Gillette was the honorary Parade Marshall. The Mayor – who just happens to be his granddaughter – and the whole city council along with our leading corporate citizen Thomas Gillette were all on horseback leading the parade. Thomas Gillette is ninety-six years of age and still able to ride a horse. I guess cheating an old woman and her family out of what's rightfully owed them is good for your health.

Carol stubs out her cigarette.

So, because of that, my mother grew up in a relatively poor family and my grandfather – so my Aunt Violet says – was a heavy drinker. Any time he had a job he lost it. And any time he had money he drank it. So, when my mother met my father and he asked her to marry him she jumped at the chance to get married and get out of that house.

My father was a big man, and he was strong, and he worked down south in the coal mines, so my mom and dad would write letters to each other. My mother kept those letters in a cardboard shoe

box in the top drawer of her dresser. She kept them because after my father died that's all she had to remember him by. I don't remember a whole lot about my father because I was pretty young when he was killed.

According to Aunt Violet, my dad had gone out with a bunch of his old Korean war buddies and they drank too much, and they were driving too fast, and they rolled the truck – and my dad along with three other fellas were in the back of the pick-up, and they were thrown from the vehicle and killed. Back then people thought nothing of riding in the back of a truck. So, my mom was widowed with three kids to support and she had to get a job. She went back to school and took typing and bookkeeping and ended up working as a secretary over at the Tech in the automotive department.

After my father died my mother was pretty depressed and lost and that's why she turned to God. At least that's what Aunt Violet says. Now I don't have a problem with people turning to God for comfort, but I do have a problem with people turning to God so they can judge others, and after my mother joined the Universal Church of Christ she became very judgemental.

CAROL packs some napkins and paper plates and some drinks into the picnic basket.

The Universal Church of Christ was founded by Pastor John. Pastor John and his followers were very specific about the kinds of people that God was going to let into heaven and the kinds of people that God was going to let burn in hell. Bacon eaters went to hell. People with tattoos went to hell. People that married outside of their race or religion went to hell. Gay people went to

hell. Communists too. The only thing Pastor John hated more than gay people with tattoos were communists.

Now I don't really think God cares about whether or not you eat bacon have a tattoo or you're gay. Besides we'd eaten bacon before my mother joined the Church and she sure as hell didn't seem to have a problem with it then. And get this – my cousin Wilbur – Aunt Violet's son – he's gay and three years ago I went to his wedding. He married his long-time partner Emmerson Tucker. They met at a singles dance during the Harvest Festival a long time ago.

After my mom joined the Church I used to go over to my friend Pam's house for sleep overs because her mom used to make us pancakes and bacon whenever I stayed over. And when my mom found out she grounded me for a month and stopped my allowance. So, I got a job working as a waitress at the Waffle House over in Motel Village on weekends. Working there I could eat as much bacon as I wanted. And best of all I had to work Sundays because Sunday was our busy day. My mom said I would go to hell if I didn't go to Church and I said if there's bacon in hell I'd be happy to go. She didn't talk to me for a week after that.

CAROL lights another cigarette.

Most of the time we never talked anyway. We fought. We fought about the clothes I'd wear and the friends I had. I'd stay out late, and she'd be waiting for me when I got home and as soon as I walked in the door the interrogation would start, so I'd just leave and go over to Pam's. We'd walk down to the corner store and buy some smokes and sneak a couple of her dad's beers. Then

we'd go hang out with some of our friends down by the river. We never did anything too crazy you know. I just hated living with my mom because she was always in my face about something or other.

After high school, I took the broadcast radio and television course up at the tech and that's where I met Simon. Simon was a year ahead of me and he was my first serious relationship. He liked Italian food, Buddy Holly, sex, and the Rolling Stones, and so did I. The only problem with Simon was his religion. He was Jewish. It didn't matter to my mother that I was in love with Simon because as far as she was concerned my dating a Jew was against the word of God. And Simon's parents couldn't agree more. They wanted their son to marry a nice Jewish girl, so they could have nice Jewish grandchildren.

So, my mother and his parents weren't very happy when we got engaged and moved in together. My friend Pam said we should have eloped. But we didn't.

After Simon graduated he lucked out and got hired here in Langford to be the overnight guy on CKLM the River because his dad knew the station manager. After I graduated, I wasn't so lucky. I had to go back to being a waitress. Then after about six months of applying every where I finally got a job offer to be a promotions producer at a little radio station out on the west coast. I wanted to take it, but Simon didn't want to move because Langford is a bigger market, and he was making some decent money. He wanted me to stay and get married and have kids and get a job here, but I wanted us to move to the coast so we could get away from his parents and my

mother. So, we talked it over and we decided that I should take the job on the coast and we'd do the long-distance thing and see how that worked for the time being.

It didn't work. A year later it was over. We just stopped calling each other because every time we got on the phone we'd end up in a huge fight. His family said if I loved him, I'd convert. But I didn't want to convert. I didn't want to spend my life pretending to be Jewish when I didn't believe in their faith anymore than I believed in Pastor John and his. And at first – yeah - it felt good to break up. Because all the pressure was gone. All the disapproval and all the arguing. My mom was happy. His family was thrilled. But I was miserable, and I was mad because I figure my mom and his family broke us up.

So, after that I didn't really keep in touch with my mother too much. Oh sure, I'd send her a card on Mother's Day and once in a while I'd come home for Christmas. Besides, my sister was living here and so was my brother, so it wasn't like she was abandoned. We just never got along, and I was happier without her in my life, and I'm sure she was a hell of a lot happier without me in her's.

CAROL takes a long drag on her cigarette.

My mother used to live in Riverbend – just east of city hall. That's where I grew up. It was a nice neighborhood. People weren't rich or anything, but you felt safe. Then, I don't know, about ten or twelve years ago The East Side Redevelopment Corporation started buying up homes and they'd just rent them out to anybody. So, drugs started moving into the area and prostitution too

and then everybody was selling their homes, but my mother – being the stubborn woman she is – wouldn't sell. You see my dad and her bought that house when they first got married so it meant a lot to her. But then the crack houses appeared, and the property values fell and by the time my mother did sell she got less than half of what her house had been worth five years earlier.

Then – get this – they rezone the whole district commercial and that big stadium and entertainment complex gets approved by city hall and it turns out the mayor, Claire Barker, the grand daughter of Thomas Gillette, is a silent partner in the East Side Redevelopment Corporation. She had a numbered company set up offshore to hide the fact that she was one of the owners. They ran a little story on it in the paper when all that financial information got leaked onto the internet about rich people and their offshore accounts.

So, last year at the fair grounds during the pie eating contest the mayor was there and my mother was there, and my mother decided it was a time for a little payback and she grabbed one of those Franny Potts blueberry pies and nailed the Mayor right on the kisser. It's the only time I've ever known my mother to prefer blueberry to apple.

The crowd cheered, and my mother got hauled off to jail and charged with assault and was sentenced to thirty days, but the judge said she could serve her time under house arrest. Only my mother wouldn't go home. My mother said she was quite happy to serve her time and be a guest in the city jail since it was the city that had demolished her home when she had been forced to sell.

That got some press coverage and then somebody posted a video of the mayor getting hit with the pie on YouTube and the story took off and get this – ever since then the mayor and her business partners have been under criminal investigation. If there's any justice in the world the Mayor will be run out of office and pay for what her and her family has done to ours. But I'm not holding my breath. It seems to me, that if life has taught me anything, it's that rich people never pay for their crimes.

And then not too long after that my mother had a stroke, and she couldn't live on her own. I was working down east for Harper Media at the Antique Channel and I got laid off – and because my sister and her husband live half the year in Phoenix and my brother travels a lot with his work – the burden fell to me and I ended up moving back to Langford and now – all these years later – me and my mom – we're living together.

CAROL takes a final drag on her cigarette and stubs it out.

She's doing a lot better now than when she first had the stroke. She doesn't need the walker. She can get around with a cane and her speech is almost back to normal, but she has problems reading. So, last week she asked me to read her some of those letters her and dad wrote to each other.

So, get this – she called him – her great big old cuddly bear, and he called her – his sweet little doe – and when I read that I burst out laughing – not because it was funny but because I didn't expect it. I just never thought of my mom as a young woman in love, and I realized that after my

father died my mother never remarried. I don't even remember her ever having a boyfriend. Except, there was this one guy from the tech used to hang around the house whenever my mom had car trouble. He was an instructor in the automotive department, and they knew each other through work, but I don't think they were anything more than friends. I'm sure if she'd wanted to find another husband she could have. But according to my Aunt Violet my dad was her one true love, and I don't think she ever found anyone else she loved as much, and I think his death is what made her so angry and bitter with the world.

CAROL finished packing the picnic basket and closes it up.

So, we were sitting in the living room the other night having a cup of tea and I'm reading those letters to her and out of the blue she asks me about Simon. She says, "Whatever happened to that boy you dated when you were going to the Tech?"

And I said, "Well, we broke up because you didn't like the idea of me dating a Jewish man." She didn't say anything for a couple of minutes and then she goes, "Did you love him?"

And I said, "Yes, of course I loved him."

"More than you've ever loved anyone else in your whole life?"

And I said, "Yes."

And she said, “Well Carol, if you loved him, you would have married him.”

I said, “It’s not that simple.” I said, “You and his family did everything you could to make us miserable and break us up. You didn’t want us to get married.”

And then she goes, “Yeah I think you’re right about that. We didn’t want you to get married. But my mother and father didn’t like your dad and I married him anyway. He was German, and we were English, and God forbid you should marry a Kraut. His family practically disowned him when we got married, because we were Protestant, and they were Catholic. We got married down at city hall with your Aunt Violet and Uncle Tom as witness. If you love somebody you marry them it doesn’t matter what your family thinks.”

I said, “Thanks for the advice ma, but it’s about forty years too late don’t ya think? And she said, “I don’t know. He’s on Facebook. Why don’t you ask him?”

Okay now I knew he was on Facebook. I mean who hasn’t Googled an old flame or an old enemy? Right? So, I sent him a friend request. And he accepted. And he sent me a message and we exchanged phone numbers and last night he called. I almost went through a whole pack of these things yesterday waiting for that call. And I decided, that if he was available and it felt right, I was going to ask him if he’d like to pack a picnic lunch and go down to the river with me and watch the fireworks tonight. I figured, if there was even a chance of something with Simon this time I wasn’t going to pass on it, and I wasn’t going to let anyone stand in our way.

So, we get on the phone and start talking and after about five minutes I'm thinking – "Oh my God, was I really in love with this guy? Was I really that stupid and naive?" I mean, all Simon could talk about was himself and how much money he had made and how his investments had paid off and how smart and successful he'd been. I was so busy blaming my mother and his family for our breakup all these years that I'd completely forgotten what an egotistical, self-centered asshole he could be.

Everything was always about him and what he wanted to do, and when I moved away he didn't like that. No. He didn't want a woman that was strong and independent. He wanted a wife that would stay home, look after the kids, and get him his beer. That's not me now and it wasn't me then. So, when he suggested we get together I said I was busy, and I'd get in touch. I told him I had to run because my mother had a doctor's appointment.

So now, instead of taking Simon down to the river to go see the fireworks and have a picnic I'm going to take my mom. You see ever since we started living together again I'm starting to understand that the reason I can't get along with my mother isn't because we're different it's because we're too much alike. Not alike in opinion but alike in personality. Stubborn you know. Pigheaded my mom would call it.

The thing is when you're a kid you don't really think about your parents being somebody just trying to muddle their way through life. But when you get older your perspective changes. You start to realize that everybody's just doing the best they can and that everybody's dealing with

some kind of pain and sometimes people make mistakes – say stupid things – hold grudges – never forgive – who hasn't been guilty of that?

And so, even though I know my mother and I are still going to fight and yell at each other and get mad and stomp around the house – at this late stage in our relationship I've decided that forgiveness is a far better way to live than arguing about who's right and who's wrong.

There, all packed. Perfect night for fireworks.

End Scene

ACT I - SCENE 5: Dandelions for Becky

Setting: Front Porch of an old house late afternoon.

At Rise: TRENT has been painting his fence a bright yellow in the hot afternoon sun. He's just finished for the day and is cleaning up his brushes and putting the lid on the paint can. Sitting on a patio table nearby is a pitcher of lemonade and a couple of glasses and a bouquet of dandelions in a mason jar.

TRENT

I love the color yellow. Yellow is the color of sunshine. And yellow is the color of love. Most people think it's red. But they're wrong. It's yellow.

When Tammy and I first moved into this place it was pretty run down. It needed a lot of work and we didn't have a lot of money, so we did most of the work ourselves. The country was going through a recession and I couldn't find a job. I had a degree in education and a diploma in drafting and I couldn't get work. And it's not like I didn't send out resumes and make phone calls and knock-on doors and ask for favors but the job market was tight. Thousands of people were out of work and I was one of them.

I did manage to get a temporary job down at the old Wellington Department Store in December. Do you remember those? You could find anything you wanted at the Wellington Department Store. They had a hardware and furniture – groceries and a pharmacy. Everything you wanted, they had. And it was a great place to work too. They treated their employees well and paid a decent wage, but...they got into trouble.

You see, when old man Wellington died, and the kids took over the company – the kids decided they didn't want any hardware or groceries. No – they wanted to focus on clothing and fashion. They didn't like the idea of being the head of a grocery store. It didn't really fit with their image. They wanted to be part of the fashionably elite. So, that's what they did. They got rid of the furniture and the groceries and the toys and sold nothing but clothes and shoes and jewellery.

Ten years later they went out of business.

Maybe selling groceries wasn't such a bad thing after all.

But the year I worked for them they still had a toy department. I was a twenty-seven-year-old stock boy in the toy department with a degree and a diploma and twenty thousand dollars of student loans to pay back. But I didn't mind, really. I liked my job. It was fun. The people were fun. I liked going there every day and just doing something physical – something that didn't take a lot of mental power – something you could do and walk away from and not take home.

That's the problem with a lot of jobs – you take them home – and when you do that it can poison your family life. I've seen a lot of couples torn apart because the work becomes the obsession and the goal is to retire wealthy and free from financial worry. The only problem is they get so focused on the end game that they forget about looking after the things that really matter. You know – things like family. And even though this place wasn't anything fancy it was big enough for us and we were pretty excited to have our own home.

But then something strange started happening that first summer we moved in. We thought it was the neighborhood kids playing some kind of prank on us for some reason because every Sunday morning there'd be a big dandelion bouquet wrapped in a white ribbon sitting on the bottom of the front step. Tammy and I just thought they were having some fun with us, being the new people on the block, and that once they got tired of their little game – they'd stop. But they didn't. Every Sunday – the dandelion bouquet would appear.

That really bothered me. I didn't like the idea of me and Tammy sleeping in our bed and some stranger poking around outside – even if it was just a bunch of kids. So, on the first weekend in July, Tammy and I sat out on the porch, deep into the night, waiting to see who the dandelion bouquet delivery man would be.

We were sipping on lemonade and gin and just passing the time. Not that crappy sticky sweet frozen stuff you buy from the grocery store. That's not lemonade. That's nothing but liquid sugar. No, my Tammy and I make lemonade the old-fashioned way – with real lemons and cane sugar. Natural sugar – it's not processed – it's raw sugar – better for you. And then you add some gin – a little mint – and you've got yourself the perfect summertime drink. Tammy sat with me until about one and then she got so tired she couldn't keep her eyes open and went to bed. But I wasn't going to go to sleep. I was going to catch this guy and find out who he was and what he was up to.

When I woke up the next morning – the sun was already rising, and those damn dandelions were sitting at the bottom of the step. Whoever he was he'd come and gone in the middle of the night while I was snoring away on the porch. Man, I was mad at myself for falling asleep. Now I'd have to wait an entire week before I could try and catch this guy again.

So, the next Saturday, I slept all day, so I wouldn't fall asleep that night. And I sat, more in the shadow, so I couldn't be seen. I think the first week I hadn't sat far enough back – and he could see me and knew I was there – and just waited until I fell asleep before sneaking over and leaving those dandelions. Well, that wasn't going to happen this time. No way.

Tammy didn't sit with me that night. She was mad at me over some stupid thing, so she went to bed. Things were a little tense between us that summer. Like I said, I couldn't find a job, and Tammy was finishing her degree and working two part-time jobs, and that meant she was exhausted all the time. We'd been fighting about a lot of stupid things – you know – me not putting my shoes in the closet – her leaving the garage door open when she went to work – little things that add up, and I could feel her slipping away from me.

I felt kind-a worthless not being able to find work, and that soured me a bit, and there was a distance growing between us that frightened me and instead of fixing things I'd get angry and make things worse. Why do we do that? Why when we're hurting – do we hurt others? I don't understand it. But I was doing it, and for the first time in our marriage I could see doubt in her eyes, and I was scared.

I was deep in thought – thinking about Tammy when a voice said, “I take it, young man, you have been waiting for me.”

Well, I almost jumped right out of my skin and I yelled a yell that shattered the silence and woke the neighbors and set the hounds a howling. “Jesus! You scarred the hell out of me!” I said.

And this old guy, he just laughed and said, “I sure as hell didn’t mean to scare ya, but I figured I might as well introduce myself since you seem determined to meet me. Joshua Harcourt Dean at your service, sir.”

Joshua Harcourt Dean – how’s that for a name?

“Trent Bowers at yours,” I said.

He told me that Tammy and I had done a nice job of fixing up the old place and that it was good to see young people moving back into the neighborhood. He was standing there holding a dandelion bouquet wrapped with a white ribbon. So, I asked him what the deal was with the dandelions and he paused...set them down on the bottom step and said if I got him a glass, of that fine-looking lemonade, I had there – he’d tell me. “I think that’s a fair exchange, don’t you,” he said. “A glass of lemonade to hear a story.”

So, I gave him a glass of our home-made lemonade and told him it had a healthy dose of gin in it.

He said that's the way he liked it and he took a drink of his lemonade and sat across from me and didn't say anything for a long moment.

TRENT pours a glass of lemonade and then takes a long drink and transitions to JOSHUA.

JOSHUA

You write the story of your life by the choices you make. Now I haven't always made the right choices. Everybody makes mistakes and some of those mistakes are little things. Things that don't matter much, but when it comes to love, you don't want to make a mistake. No sir – that you do not want to do.

Now, this house used to belong to the Carter family. I lived over on the next block. I grew up in this neighborhood, and I knew the Carter family, and I knew Becky Carter from the second grade.

Becky was the first girl I ever kissed.

We used to sit in the front seat of her dad's Oldsmobile pretending we were flying an airplane and heading to Africa. We were on an adventure and on one of those adventures we kissed. I liked it, and Becky liked it too, but we were at an age when kissing wasn't high on the agenda. No, riding bikes, playing baseball, and just running around the neighborhood was how we spent most of our days.

Becky and I stayed friends all through school. She had her boyfriends, and I had my girlfriends, but I cared about Becky in a way I never cared about any other girl. We liked each other. We enjoyed each other's company. We were happy going for a swim or catching a movie or just sitting out on the porch late at night talking about life. The trips to Africa were replaced with talk of career and family. We sat on this porch many a night discussing our futures but never talking about the possibility of a future together.

And then she went off to College, and I went into the army. Now you want to change a man – you put that man in the army. You will find clarity of purpose. You will understand your place in the world. That was two years of the most grueling, but I believe character building, time of my life. I was fortunate that I never saw combat but being in the army gave me a different perspective. I grew up. I became a man. And growing up means knowing what you want in life. And when the other guys would head into town to chase a little skirt I'd stay behind because, truth be told, all I could think about was Becky – and that first kiss – and I wondered what it would be like to kiss her now that we weren't kids.

That's when I knew I truly loved her. I was too blind and too much of a fool to see it when we were together but now that we were apart she was all that I thought about.

Becky and I would write to each other. She'd tell me about college and how her family was doing and how annoying her sister was and how much of an ass her father could be. He wasn't much for girls and college, but Becky's mother was very excited and very proud of her daughter.

Anyway, I decided I should tell her how I felt – to let her know what was in my heart. I wouldn't put that in a letter you understand. You don't put that kind of news in a letter. No that's something you do face to face. I figured I'd go see her. You know. Take her out. Move the conversation in the right direction and when the time was right let her know. Oh man was I nervous. I thought basic training was hard but thinking about telling Becky how I felt was terrifying.

Thing is, before I could tell her how I felt she'd gone and met herself some guy in college named Jason. And this Jason was better with words and expressing his feelings than I was. And he told her how he felt. And before I knew it, Jason and Becky got engaged. When she wrote and told me – I couldn't eat for a week. I didn't know what to do. After that, I didn't write her too much. I started so many letters wanting to tell her how I felt but I never did send any of them. Just threw them all in the garbage.

And I'm not ashamed to admit it but I spent a lot of nights wishing all kinds of terrible things would happen to her fiancée. Car accidents, heart attacks, alien abductions – nothing was beyond my imagination – and in each and every case poor Jason met a horrifying and terrible end.

So, the summer I got out of the army and came back home was the summer Becky was getting married. I hadn't seen her in two years but knowing that she was engaged I wasn't sure I wanted to see her. Jason was a couple years older than her, and he came from a pretty good family. They sure as hell weren't any Rockefellers but they had a lot more money than me.

Becky and I ran into each other, about a month before her marriage, down at the pharmacy in Wellington's Department store. She was happy to see me. Gave me a big hug. Broke my heart but feeling her wrapping herself around me was heaven.

She asked me why I'd stopped writing and I made some excuse, but I could tell she didn't believe me. She didn't push me on it...but she gave me a look – you know...a look like you're not telling me everything. And then we chatted for a bit. It wasn't easy. It was the first time since we'd known each other where we couldn't talk. I knew what I wanted to say but didn't know how to say it. So, we said goodbye and she made me promise that we'd get together and see each other again.

And we did. We saw a lot of each other over the next couple of weeks. We'd go out with old friends from High School and just hang out. And I got to know her fiancée Jason pretty well. She wanted us to be friends, but I didn't have too many friendly thoughts about Jason.

The problem with Jason is – he's a nice guy. Now if he'd have been one of those self centered egotistical controlling bastards that so many women end up marrying I wouldn't have had any problem telling Becky exactly how I felt. I'd be saving her from a life of misery and pain. But he wasn't like that. I could see that he loved Becky and he'd make her a good husband. But they weren't married yet – so I decided I was going to tell her how I felt. Nice guy or not, I wasn't going to pass on a chance for happiness.

So, the weekend before her wedding, her and I and a bunch of our friends had gone out to the movies for the evening to see David Lean's *Doctor Zhivago* which was playing at the Plaza. You ever seen that film? It's all about this poet during the Russian Revolution and his love for a woman. Well, the whole time I'm watching that movie I'm thinking I got to say something – if this movie isn't a message from God I don't know what is. So, after the movie, the whole group came back to Becky's place. And as it got later everybody cleared out. Even Jason left, and I found myself alone with Becky sitting on the bottom step of this porch.

So, we got to talking about life and love and I put my arm around her and she leaned into me and I think she sensed where the conversation was going – because just as I was working up the courage to say what I needed to say to her – she turned to me – and told me she was pregnant. She was going to have Jason's child and because of that they had decided to get married.

Well, what could I say to that? How could I steal another man's woman let alone his child? Here I was working up the courage to tell her how I felt and she goes and tells me she's pregnant. I felt the bottom drop out of my world because I knew then and there that I couldn't say anything – even if I wanted to. I just put my arm around her and held her close and we sat there until the sun rose and she went inside.

Becky got married and her and Jason moved up north and a few years later. I got married to a good woman. We had a family. Raised two fine children. My son, Martin is a military man. And my daughter Amy is a geologist. Both married. Martin more than once. Six grandchildren between the two of them. Oldest is thirty-three and the youngest is thirteen. And Becky and I –

well we kept in touch. Christmas cards, birthday cards, that sort of thing. Once in a while we'd write a long letter to each other. And when the internet came along we used e-mail. We had quite the correspondence over our lives. We shared a lot. Thoughts about world events, turning 40 – turning 50 – trips we'd take – places we'd seen – thoughts about marriage and happiness and choices we'd made.

And in time I got used to the idea of her being with someone else – even if I didn't like it. Of course, I always wondered what would have happened if I'd said something. But I didn't.

Becky died about ten years ago. My own wife took ill and she's up at the Memorial clinic where they can give her the care she needs. She doesn't remember things. Her mind's gone. I'm a stranger to her. Half the time she thinks I'm her brother Phil instead of her husband. Anyway, when Becky died Jason came to see me.

He brought me a letter from Becky. A letter she had written and asked to be delivered to me. And her husband – Jason – good guy that he was – saw to it that I got that letter. I think Jason always knew how I felt, but he never said anything. He always made me feel welcome in their home when we would pass through and visit.

You know when Becky and I were kids I would bring her a bouquet of dandelions. Some people look at dandelions and see weeds, but I don't. Becky didn't. Becky and I saw flowers. We would gather up dozens of dandelions and cover the porch in dandelion bouquets. We'd fill jars and jars full of dandelion bouquets and place them all over the porch. And on that night, a week before

her wedding, when we talked long into the early hours of the morning we wandered about the yard and I picked her a big bouquet of dandelions and she took the white ribbon from her hair and tied them up together and held them as we sat on the bottom step.

That's why ever Saturday night as long as there are dandelions in bloom I leave them here on your door step. It's here on this doorstep all those years ago that I should have told the woman I cared about how much I loved her. I have regretted that decision every day of my life. It is always better to speak your heart and have it broken than to live a life and to never know.

TRENT

The old man finished his lemonade and put the glass down. I waited, as long as I could, and then I had to ask, "What was in the letter?" He looked up at me and smiled.

JOSHUA

The three words I never had the courage to say to her: I love you. Those three little words can change your world if you're willing to speak them. Don't ever be silent about what's in your heart, son. You want some advice from an old man – you tell the woman you love how you feel. Otherwise, some other man will. Married or not, a woman likes to know that she's loved.

TRENT

By now the sun was rising and he thanked me for the lemonade and wished me well and told me that if I had found the woman I loved I was a lucky man.

After he left I took that bouquet of dandelions, he had brought, into the house and put them in a jar and took them upstairs and set them beside our bed and waited for Tammy to wake up. When

she did and she looked at me through sleep filled eyes and asked me if I had met the dandelion delivery man. I said – I had – and that we had spent the night drinking lemonade and talking about life.

She asked me if I had learned anything, and I told her I did – and I told her I loved her. I told her that I loved her and that I didn't say it nearly enough and that I wanted her to know how important she was to me and how lucky I felt to have her in my life.

The strange thing is, after that weekend, I never saw the old man again. Joshua Harcourt Dean simply vanished. Sometimes I think I dreamed the whole thing. Sometimes I think Joshua Harcourt Dean was just the result of a little too much lemonade and gin. But that doesn't mean he was wrong even if he never existed any place but my imagination, and so every Saturday during the summer I bring my Tammy a dandelion bouquet and tell her how much I love her. She thinks I'm a bit of a fool, but I don't care. There is no shame in being a fool for love.

End Scene

ACT I - SCENE 6: Twelve Years

Setting: We are in the living room of a comfortable home. Several cardboard boxes are stacked to one side. There is an open box that still needs to be filled. An open and half full bottle of red wine sits beside a half-filled wine glass on a side table. A camera bag containing an SLR camera is off to one side. Sitting beside the camera bag is a copy of the book *The Story of Langford*. It is late afternoon and the summer heat clings to the house.

At Rise: NORA enters carrying a bunch of items to put into the cardboard box. She puts these into the box as she talks.

NORA

I don't know why we collect all this stuff. Most of its junk. At first, I was going to have a garage sale, but I didn't really feel like doing all the work, you know. Sorting through stuff. Putting price tags on things. Having to make small talk. And putting my life on display so bargain hunters and neighbors could dig through my memories. So, I just boxed everything up and called Goodwill and they're going to come by and pick it up tomorrow. I've spent the whole summer throwing stuff out and boxing things up.

NORA takes the glass of red wine and takes a drink.

This has been one of the hottest summers I can remember. We've hardly had any rain since the end of June and this heat is killing everything. There's this big poplar in front of my parent's place. When I was a kid me and my friends would play under the shade of that tree all summer long. It was big then and it's three times as big now but even that big old tree can't take this heat. Last weekend my mother said they got up Sunday morning and half the leaves had fallen off

overnight. If we don't get rain soon that tree won't see another summer. We need the rain to wash away all this dust and make things fresh and alive again. Sometimes I wish there was a rain that could wash away all the dust and dirt in our own lives – wash away all the pain – and all the regrets. But there isn't any rain that can do that. Only God can wash away our sins and heal our pain.

NORA empties her glass and then refills it.

When Russ and I first got married we spent our honeymoon in the Cimarron Valley because we both love wine and some of the best wines in North America come from that area. It has volcanic soil and that's good for grapes.

About half a mile from where we stayed – down by the lake – there's this little bistro called The Happy Grape. It's a small place. Maybe ten tables. It's rustic you know. Two sides of the restaurant can be opened up so you can look out over the water and the food is amazing. That's because they grow all their own vegetables and make their own breads and pastas – Antonio and his wife Rita make everything from scratch.

Russ fell in love with the place – being a chef – and we decided that when things were right and we had enough money we'd start our own restaurant. We even talked about moving to the Cimarron Valley and having a life there. Maybe even having our own vineyard and making our own wine. Antonio and his wife make their own wine. They use it mostly for the restaurant, but you can buy it if you want. So, we bought a case. A case of their Cabernet Sauvignon and we

made a promise to have a bottle of that wine on our anniversary every year for the next twelve years.

NORA takes a drink of wine. Then she sets down the glass and finishes packing up the giveaway box.

Of course, when people get married they think their marriage is going to last a lot longer than twelve years. I know I certainly did. My parents has. They've been married for forty-three years. Forty-three happy years. They still hold hands. How many couples do you know that have been married for forty-three years that still hold hands?

My brother got married a couple years ago and so far, so good, but my sister Karen, hasn't been so lucky. Three husbands so far. And because I'm a wedding photographer I've photographed every one of her weddings. I do weddings and family portraits and corporate head shots. Soulless photography I call it because most of the time people aren't really themselves in a photo like that. They're too aware of the camera.

The best way to shoot someone is to get them doing something – doing what they do in life. That way they forget about the camera and concentrate on what they're doing and you have a far better chance of capturing who they really are. But that's hard to do at a wedding because weddings are such an orchestrated event that people aren't really themselves at a wedding.

And if you're photographing a wedding you don't get to enjoy it...you're working...and if it's family you're working for free. So, I told Karen – that's my sister – that wedding number three

was the last one. If she dumps this guy and marries again she'll have to find someone else to take her wedding photos.

NORA folds up the cardboard box and sets it with the others.

My own wedding wasn't a big thing we just had some family and a few friends. Russ and I met at the tech. I was taking photography and he was in the culinary arts department and I had an assignment to shoot food and he was my contact and so we got to know each other and eventually he asked me out to a movie and from that day on we were inseparable. We got married in less than a year. My sister thought that was impulsive. But my mom and dad said "Nora, there's no reason to wait when you meet the right one." We spent our first anniversary going white water rafting. On our fifth we spent a week in Oahu. And now here on our twelfth I'm spending it alone.

NORA fills her wine glass and empties the bottle.

I don't remember what we did on our third anniversary. I have been racking my brain, but I don't remember. All I know is we were together because we had made a promise to be together every year on our anniversary no matter what.

NORA takes a drink of wine and picks up The Story of Langford.

And, speaking of anniversaries, this year Langford is celebrating its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary and I did all the photographs for a book they just published called *The Story of*

Langford. And I know a lot of the stuff in here are those soulless portraits I told you about – you know things like the Mayor standing in front of city hall with a big grin on her face – but there are a couple of sections in the book where they let me do whatever I wanted.

I did a whole series of night shots called Reflections and the cool thing is they kept them in the book. You see cities and buildings and mountains and trees and animals – they all have souls. I believe everything has a soul not just people. And if the light is right and the moment is right you can capture that soul in a photograph. That's the magic.

I did all the photographs and Mitch Davis wrote the copy. And last week Mitch invites me and a bunch of his friends over to his place to celebrate the launch of the book – or so I thought – because when I get there – do you know what that asshole is doing? He's burning the book. He's just tossing them in the fire pit and every time he throws one into the fire his friend Gavin – who I don't much like – shouts, "Burn baby burn!" And then everybody claps and cheers and laughs.

I grabbed a cooler full of beer and dumped it on the fire and I told him he had no right to burn that book. And he said he had every right because what he had written was shit and it deserved to be burned. And I said, "maybe it is shit but you've got nobody to blame but yourself. If you didn't like working on the book you should have quit." And he said, "Well I needed the fucking money." And I said, "That's no different than me shooting a wedding. Maybe it's not the work I want to do but when someone hires me to shoot their wedding I do it and I do a damn good job. And if someone hires you to write a book you do it and you do a damn good job otherwise you

don't take the money." And I said, "If you don't want these books – I'll take them." And then he says, "You don't understand." And I said, "Like hell I don't understand!"

That's what really pissed me off boy. He saw this book as his – not ours. Which doesn't make one bit of sense because you know damn well most people just look at the photos anyway. And it's not because the writing is shitty it's just...dull. I said, "Look don't go blaming the mayor or anyone else if you're not happy with what you've written. It's just a job and if you want to write something better there's nobody stopping you." And I grabbed that box of books and turned to leave, and he said, "Wait don't leave. I'm sorry. You're right."

Okay, when a man tells you you're right and he's wrong that's a man worth getting to know, don't ya think? I made him promise not to burn anymore "fucking" books no matter how shitty the writing was. And so, I stayed – even though I had caused a huge scene and all his friends were staring at us. I stayed and grabbed a wine cooler and we just started talking. He told me about this girl Eileen. I think he still loves her. He says he doesn't, but you know what it's been a long time and he still thinks about her.

NORA drinks her wine as she talks.

So, I told him about Russ and how we met and how we spent our last anniversary together. A couple of summers ago Russ wasn't feeling right. You know he was just tired all the time. And at first, we brushed it off, you know. Thought maybe he had the flu or working late at the restaurant was just getting to him, but when it wouldn't go away he finally went to the doctor and that's

when we got the news. He had leukemia. Leukemia. No history of it in his family. The doctors said his chances of survival, with treatment, were about forty maybe fifty percent. Not great odds but still enough to give you hope, right?

So, we went home. We did a lot of crying and a lot of praying. We told the family and said we were going to fight this thing and with God's help we were going to beat it. So, Russ started chemo that Christmas. Now chemo is hard on the body and has all sorts of nasty side effects and for some people it works. It kills the cancer but for other people it just makes them sicker, and it didn't work for Russ. He was nauseous all the time. Couldn't keep anything down. He lost a lot of weight. The cancer got real aggressive. And then it got to the point where I couldn't look after him at home, so he went into the hospice and that's where he spent last summer.

The first couple of weeks he was there weren't so bad. He was pretty lucid, and we had a lot of time together. Then he started to slip away. He started to sleep a lot. Stopped eating. I'd try and feed him, but he wasn't interested in food. And then his body started to shut down. That's when you know you're close to the end. On our anniversary, I just sat beside him all night long holding his hand drinking our wine and telling him how much I loved him. And the next morning he was gone. You know you feel so empty those first few hours after someone you love dies. And then you just feel numb for a long time.

Pause.

That's why this stupid book was so important to me. It let me forget what I was feeling and focus on something else. It gave me a purpose. So, I told Mitch my story and he felt like shit because he didn't know about Russ. And then he told me about his writing and how much he wanted to write a novel, but he wasn't sure what to write about and then we got talking about the real stories here in Langford and we started kicking around some ideas.

So, the next morning, hungover and all, we went down to the railyards, me with my camera, and him with his note book, and there's this old train station there that doesn't get used anymore and we thought that would be a great place to start and we get there and there's an old security guard there – Lyle Carmichael – the guy must have been eighty years of age or more and according to him working for the railroad was what he loved to do more than anything else in this world. He was never going to retire. He was going to work until the day he died.

He was wearing a wedding ring, so I asked him how his wife felt about that and he said he didn't know. He said he hadn't seen her in more than forty years. He said he came home one day and she had left him for another man. He was pretty angry at first and he got drunk and that got him into some trouble with the law and he went to jail for a time and when he got out he got a job working for the railroad. He said he still misses her but nowadays he takes a more philosophical approach to life and just figures that sometimes marriages don't last but sometimes – if you're lucky – you can find work that you love and that can last a lifetime.

NORA grabs her camera bag and pulls her camera out of the bag and makes sure it's ready to take out and shoot some photographs.

So, he gave us a tour. They're in the process of turning the station into a railway museum. He says it's haunted and he's seen some pretty strange things there late at night. But I think he just likes to tell ghost stories. So, I took a bunch of shots while Lyle told us about his life and the railroad and Mitch made a bunch of notes and then we spent the next couple of days picking the photos we liked, and Mitch wrote up a couple of stories...and we had a little project. So, we're going to start doing that a couple of times a month and we're going to get a web site and put the photographs up on the web site along with the stories about the people we meet and who knows. We'll see what happens.

NORA snaps her camera a few times and checks the settings.

My husband Russ had always wanted to run his own restaurant, but he never did. It's a lot of work and there's no guarantee of success – most restaurants fail – but we should have at least tried, you know. Instead of just talking about it. We just kept putting it off. So, when Russ was in the hospice, he told me to start doing the kind of work I loved and to stop shooting weddings and corporate events all the time. And then about a week after he died, I get a call from this city councillor whose wedding I had done a few years ago and he asked me if I wanted to work on a book the city was going to publish, and I said, "Yes."

And that's how I meet Mitch and now the two of us are starting to do the kind of work we've always wanted to do. And I know some people would say that's just a coincidence, but I'm not so sure about that because when you love someone, and they love you back I don't believe that love stops when they die. It lives on and I like to think that maybe Russ had something to do

with me working on this book and meeting Mitch. I like to think that somehow, he made it happen.

NORA puts the camera in her camera bag and gets ready to head out the door.

Anyway, Mitch is going to pick me up in a couple of minutes. We're heading down to the fairgrounds. It's the last night of the Harvest Festival. We're going to go down to the grounds and wander around and see who fate puts in our path. Because everyone has their own story. Everyone has triumphs and regrets. Everyone has lessons learned and battles lost, right? That's life. That's stories from Langford.

End Play