

Ain't Nothing Better than Fried Chicken

Sometimes bad things happen.

A Dramatic Monologue

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

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

Stories from Langford *Every town has its secrets.*

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

Two Act Drama, 1M, 1W, Simple settings, 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, Monologues, 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.

Ain't Nothing Better than Fried Chicken © Copyright 2023, James Hutchison

The author asserts moral rights.

CAUTION: Ain't Nothing Better than Fried Chicken – Sometimes bad things happen. is fully protected under the copyright laws of Canada and all other countries of The Copyright Union, and is subject to royalty. Changes to the script are expressly forbidden without the prior written permission of the author. Rights to produce, film, or record, in whole or in part, in any medium or any language, by any group, amateur or professional, are retained by the author who has the right to grant or refuse permission at the time of a request.

Production Enquiries

To secure performance rights please contact the author, James Hutchison, at:

e-mail: james.hutchison@hotmail.com

Web: www.jameshutchison.ca

Please Note: Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play including radio, television and internet advertising.

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.

Ain't Nothing Better than Fried Chicken – No matter how hard you try, bad things are still gonna happen.

A Dramatic Monologue by James Hutchison

ISBN: 978-1-7388727-4-9

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Earl – a handyman

SETTING

A small city park down by the river.

TIME

The last week of August 2015

STORY OF THE PLAY

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.

NOTE

Few stage directions have been given as movement and when the actors take a drink of orange juice or eat a bite of fruit will be discovered in the rehearsal process and will be different for different productions.

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.

Stories from Langford: Every Town has its Secrets.

Ain't Nothing Better than Fried Chickens is one of six monologues included in the play *Stories from Langford*. You can download each individual monologue or the entire play from www.jameshutchison.ca.

Scene 1 – BACK ROADS: 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 – SMILE FOR THE CAMERA: 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 – AIN'T NOTHING BETTER THAN FRIED CHICKEN: 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 – BAD HABITS: 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 – DANDELIONS FOR BECKY: 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 – TWELVE YEARS: 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.

For Andy

ACT ONE: AIN'T NOTHING BETTER THAN FRIED CHICKEN**SCENE i: A SMALL CITY PARK DOWN BY THE RIVER**

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 noooooobody 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.

Curtain