

Smile for the Camera

Not everyone knows how to forgive.

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.

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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.

Smile for the Camera – Not everyone knows how to forgive.

A Dramatic Monologue by James Hutchison

ISBN: 978-1-7388727-2-5

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Simone – a middle-aged woman

SETTING

A community hall.

TIME

The last week of August 2015

STORY OF THE PLAY

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.

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.

Smile for the Camera is one of six monologues included in the full-length 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.

ACT ONE: SMILE FOR THE CAMERA**SCENE i: THE COLLINGWOOD COMMUNITY HALL IN LANGFORD MID AFTERNOON.**

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 Principal 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.

CURTAIN