

# **Back Roads**

**People do crazy things.**

**A Dramatic Monologue**

**by James Hutchison**

Also available from [www.jameshutchison.ca](http://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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### **Production Enquiries**

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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](http://www.jameshutchison.ca).

Back Roads – People do crazy things.

A Dramatic Monologue by James Hutchison

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## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Mitch – a writer

## **SETTING**

A backyard with a firepit.

## **TIME**

The last week of August 2015

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

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.

## **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.**

*Back Roads* 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](http://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: BACK ROADS****SCENE i: BACKYARD FIREPIT.**

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 back road 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.

*CURTAIN*