

# **Bad Habits**

**Sometimes we end up where we started.**

**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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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).

Bad Habits – Sometimes we end up where we started.

A Dramatic Monologue by James Hutchison

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## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

Carol – a daughter

## **SETTING**

A Kitchen

## **TIME**

The last week of August 2015

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

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.

## **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.**

*Bad Habits* 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: BAD HABITS****SCENE i: A SMALL COMPACT KITCHEN EARLY EVENING.**

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 – get this – 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 used to meet in a converted warehouse down on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue near the Greyhound Station. At one time they had over a thousand members. The Church 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 and she was always after me to be baptized and become a member of her church.

Now the Universal Church of Christ used to raise a lot of money in order to help spread the word of God in Communist countries. But get this - turns out a lot of that money never made it behind the Iron Curtain. No, it ended up in the Bahamas along with Pastor John and his twenty-year-old girlfriend Brenda.

After that scandal The Church fell apart and my mother lost faith in organized religion. But my mother didn't give up on God. No, she kept her faith. In fact, my mother believes it was the power of prayer that helped her beat breast cancer. She lost both her breasts and had to take chemo, but she beat it. She thanks God and prayer, but I think modern medicine might have had something to do with it.

*SIMONE takes a drag on her cigarette.*

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 too 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 (mom) 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.

*Curtain*