

Blake Braswell

Writing Portfolio

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INTRODUCTION

My creative writing and directing background has been in developing interactive shows and experiences for guests. In this writing portfolio, you will find a murder mystery I developed for the Zeno Creative Entertainment Group's inaugural *Murder in the Mansion* season. There is also a two-man comedy version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* that I adapted for an interactive Christmas show at the Powel Crosley Estate in Sarasota, FL. The show has since been produced at theatres in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

I am also an ASCAP songwriter. I have included the lyrics to two of my original songs. Links to recordings have been included with the lyrics.

Murder in the Mansion:

Ace Holes

By

Blake Braswell

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Cast of Characters

Joshua Stephens— *Yankee Railroad Tycoon*

He is an ex-Union officer who served during the war, and is now involved with the railroad. His dealings appear to be rather shady. He jumped into the railroad business a year after the war ended. After an initial large investment, his returns have been huge. He is a wonderfully fun (if ego filled) host.

Pearl de Vere— *Head Madam*

A Can-can girl that had a wild fling with Joshua Stephens a few weeks ago that ended with them getting married secretly. This leaves her with all of his money should anything happen to him. Pearl loves to gamble, and she has talked Mr. Stephens into providing her buy-in to join this large game he hosts every year. Mr. Stephens does this because he is so assured of winning the pot anyway. Pearl de Vere also secretly knows Buckshot Willy. They met at her former job in a house of ill repute a few months ago. Upon a bit of drink, Willy told her of his aspirations to get revenge on Mr. Stephens. Pearl talked him out of killing Mr. Stephens, and instead suggested they should work together to ruin him financially and take a huge chunk of his money by getting Willy into Mr. Stephens' large buy-in poker game. She helped Willy get the money to play and they agreed to split the pot upon one of them winning. Mr. Stephens would lose twice his normal amount of money.

William Wabash Wentworth Williker aka “Buckshot Willy”— *Gunslinger*

He is a Wild Bill Hickok type who served as a very talented head scout under Joshua Stephens during the Civil War. He was involved in an attack on Confederate remnants fleeing with gold from the Confederate Treasury during the final days of the war. His scouts secured the gold and handed it over to Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Stephens. The next day the gold was reported missing, and the Gunslinger was blamed for conspiring with local plantation owners to hide the money and take it for themselves. There was a massive interrogation and search for the gold at the Chennault plantation, but nothing was found. Lack of evidence kept Willy from being convicted, but he was dishonorably discharged from the military, thus ending a very promising career. Since then he has gambled and worked as a gun for hire. Willy has worked hard with Miss de Vere to win enough money (or take it) to get invited to this game so that he can get revenge against Mr. Stephens for ruining his reputation and military career.

Beauregard Gustave Alphonse Sebastien Dionysius Chennault— *Southern Gentleman*

He is from old plantation money, a southern gentleman who was a Confederate officer during the war. It was he and his brother that were accused of conspiring with Buckshot Willy to steal the Confederate gold and hide it at their plantation. When this happened, Beauregard was still out in the field serving the Confederacy. His brother was imprisoned and the family plantation was searched and then burned to the ground. The brother died of sickness before he could be released due to a lack of evidence. Beauregard is using this game as a chance to get back at Mr. Stephens and to get back some of the money his family lost.

Percival “Percy” Thrillington— *English Dandy*

Percy is a thrill seeking Englishman who has traveled to America to seek adventure. He came to the U.S. right at the end of the Civil War hoping to have some picnics while watching battles. When it was clear the Confederacy was going to lose right before he arrived, Percy donated a large amount of his family’s wealth to the Confederate cause to keep it going long enough to be able to see a battle. Percy was assured that regardless of who won the war, he would be repaid. He was in Louisiana to retrieve the money at the end of the war when he heard word that the Confederate remnants that were bringing the money to him were attacked by Lt. Col. Joshua Stephens’ group, and that the money went missing. Suspecting Mr. Stephens’ may have the money, he plans to win it back at this game. This seems the most exciting way to retrieve his family’s money. Percy loves the thrill of poker and the gunfights that can ensue. He is excited by even the smallest hint of adventure, even if it isn’t the smartest one.

Detective James Burch— *Dealer*

Our dealer is the host of the evening. He is also an undercover Pinkerton agent who is here to investigate illegal dealings with the railroad. As the dealer, he is surly and seems to have no time for the bloated personalities of those coming to play today’s game.

Time

It is 1871 at Mr. Stephens' mansion.

ACT 1

The Murder

SETTING:

It is the night of Joshua Stephens' annual large buy-in poker game. This game, being held at his own manor, is the largest pot he has hosted. The buy-in is set at \$25,000. The game itself is being played in the Chapel with several guests attending the event.

(Miss de Vere escorts the guests into the Chapel. The Dealer is waiting by the poker table. Once everyone is settled, Miss de Vere begins.)

PEARL

Hello, everybody! I do hope that you have been enjoying yourselves. Mr. Stephens is always so excited to host this big ol' poker game of his. In fact, Joshua is off getting ready for the game right now. That man is so particular when it comes to playing his cards. He has to settle down all alone and have one glass of his favorite whiskey to set his nerves just right. I suppose in a game of luck, superstitious rituals do have their place. As for me, I'm as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full o' rocking chairs. I could use a stiff drink before starting myself! Now before I go, I would like to formally introduce you to tonight's dealer. This here is Jim, and he's one of the best dealers I've ever met. He'll explain exactly what's going on this evening. See ya'll in a bit.

(Miss de Vere exits)

DEALER

Hello, ladies and gentlemen. As you are well aware, tonight you are here to witness one of the largest buy-in poker games that has ever been held. Before we begin this evening, I'm going to fill you in on exactly how this event shall proceed. The buy-in has been posted at twenty five thousand dollars. For the sake of security, the players have

met with me individually to hand in their money, which has been stored in a secure location. I am the only person with access.

The game tonight is five-card draw. The players will each be given twenty five thousand in chips to play with at the table. The flow of the game will run as such:

The players ante up. Starting with the player to the dealer's left, the dealer deals each player five cards, face down. Everyone picks up their cards from the table and looks at what they have. There is a round of betting, starting with the player to the dealer's left. When the betting is done, those who are still in the hand have the option to trade in one, two, or three cards from their hand for new ones. After everyone receives their new cards, there's another round of betting, starting to the dealer's left. After the betting is completed, players show their hands and the best hand wins the pot.

Any questions? *(Immediately)* Good! Now at this time, I would like to formally introduce the players.

Coming first to our table, we have a player from the Missouri area that is known for his work with a pistol or a knife just as much as his card playing. Please welcome William Wabash Wentworth Williker, or as he is more commonly known: Buckshot Willy.

(Buckshot Willy enters into the Chapel from back of the house to join the DEALER on stage. He turns to face audience.)

BUCKSHOT

Hello everybody. It's an honor to be joining these fine folks here for a good upstanding game of poker.

DEALER

Speaking of an upstanding game, Mr. Williker...

BUCKSHOT

That's Buckshot Willy.

DEALER

Right...so sorry...Mr. Willy.

BUCKSHOT

Buckshot!... Buckshot Willy.

DEALER

(Pause)... now, as I was saying, since you are looking forward to an upstanding poker game, I'm going to have to ask you to relinquish your firearms.

BUCKSHOT

I reckon that's all right. Here ya go. My two Navy Colts. These here are my prize possessions. I'm a gonna be trusting you to take good care of 'em.

DEALER

Well...I 'reckon' I can handle that.

(The DEALER stares at BUCKSHOT for a moment)

I'm going to need you to hand over ALL your firearms.

(BUCKSHOT shrugs and pulls out another hidden pistol to lie on the table. The DEALER gives BUCKSHOT another look. The gunslinger then pulls out another gun then another until he is done.)

That it?

(BUCKSHOT pulls out one final long knife and adds it to the pile.)

BUCKSHOT

I reckon.

(BUCKSHOT takes a seat at the table as the DEALER clears all the weapons.)

DEALER

Well, now that we have that settled, ladies and gentlemen I would like to introduce you to our next player. We shall now bring to the table a visitor from across the Atlantic. Not content with the tame and civilized games of his native England, he has brought his skill, his luck, and his family's considerable fortune to play here this evening. Ladies and gentlemen, I invite Percival Thrillington to the table.

(Percy enters from the back of the house and makes his way to the stage)

PERCY

(As he is making his way to the stage) Thank you, thank you. This is all so very exciting. For me? Oh, you humble me with your applause. Oh, this is soooooo exciting! Gonna play some poker!

DEALER

Welcome to the table, Mr. Thrillington.

PERCY

Oh, thank you! I'm so excited to be here. This is all just so.....exciting!

DEALER

Yes, so you've said. Now, as I explained to Grapeshot Williker...

PERCY

Buckshot! Buckshot Willy!

DEALER

Ah yes, so sorry Mr. Buckshot, sir. Now, Mr. Thrillington, I'm going to have to ask you to relinquish any weapons you may have upon your person.

PERCY

I have no weapons sir.

DEALER

Well, I will have to inspect you then.

BUCKSHOT

He ain't got no weapons.

DEALER

And how do you know that?

BUCKSHOT

(BUCKSHOT eyeballs PERCY up and down)

Trust me. He ain't got nuthin' dangerous on him 'cept his mouth. Now let's get on with this.

DEALER

Very well, if you will take your seat, Mr. Thrillington.

PERCY

Oh yes, of course. My seat! How fun. Hello Mr. Buckshot Willy. What a grand name. May I call you Bucky?

BUCKSHOT

No...

PERCY

Just Willy then?

BUCKSHOT

No...

PERCY

I simply must find a nickname for you.

BUCKSHOT

Dag blame it! It's just Buckshot Willy!!!

PERCY

Oh excellent! How I love your frontier lingo.

DEALER

Are you serious?

PERCY

I reckon. Ha! You see what I did there? I used some of that frontier lingo.

DEALER

Never mind. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce the next, and hopefully more normal, player of the game. The epitome of a southern gentleman, this Louisiana man has been honing his skills on many a riverboat. I'd give a longer introduction, but his name takes up enough time as it is. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Beauregard Gustave Alphonse Sebastien Dionysius Chennault!

BEAUREGARD

(BEAUREGARD enters from back of house)

Why I say, thank you everybody. Such a warm response, I do declare. *(As he reaches stage)* I am so happy to be here. It's nice to be playing a game of poker in something that doesn't sway with the currents. Poker shouldn't always require the players to have sea legs. Why I remember this time when I was trying to bluff my way through a rather large pot, and I could barely focus because the boy in front of me was turning so green. Just when we were about to go through a final round of betting, he got that big eye thing, then his mouth opened, and mind you, we had just eaten a whole ton of Crawdads, I tell you, we were covered in....

DEALER

WELL THANK YOU! So much for hoping for normal. Please take your seat, Mr. Chennault.

BEAUREGARD

Oh, please. Just call me Beauregard.

BUCKSHOT

Don't bother. He ain't gonna get it right no ways.

PERCY

Darn tootin'! Ha! I did it again.

DEALER

I think I can handle Beauregard. Now please, I need to keep these introductions going. At this time, I would like to call forth the next player. In a game ruled by men, she has taught many a boy a lesson when it comes to their poker games. Please welcome Miss Pearl de Vere!

PEARL

(PEARL enters from back of house and makes her way to the stage)

Hello, hello, hello! It's good to see you all again. I have to say I visited Mr. Stephens' liquor cabinet and calmed myself right down. Isn't it so exciting to have everyone here?

PERCY

Yes!

PEARL

So exciting to be so close to starting the game?

PERCY

Yes!!

PEARL

Can't you just feel it?

PERCY

Yes!!! Yes!!! Yes!!! I want to feel it!

(All silent for an awkward pause)

PEARL

I feel so...uncomfortable right now.

BUCKSHOT

You ain't gotta sit by him.

DEALER

Please!!! Can we just move on? This is ridiculous. Everyone just sit down and be quiet. I feel like I'm trying to corral zoo animals here.

(Everyone sits)

Is everyone good? That all? We done with the comments here?

BUCKSHOT

I reckon.

DEALER

This is just painful. Alright. Now, I would like to introduce the man of the evening. He hosts a large game every year, and this year is the biggest he has ever hosted. He is a true American hero that served proudly as a Lt. Colonel during the Civil War and helped ensure a victory for this glorious nation...

BEAUREGARD

Hmmph! Another biscuit and two more rifles and we'd a won the damn war!

DEALER

His heroism didn't end with the conclusion of the war. Afterwards, he set forth to help rebuild this war torn nation by expanding the railroads. I gladly introduce to you a true gentleman, our first one of the evening, retired Lt. Col. Joshua Stephens!

(DEALER initiates applause from the crowd. As applause dies down, it is apparent the MR.

STEPHENS has not entered. The characters look at each other confused.)

PEARL

Why there is no way my little Joshua is going to come up to such a pathetic applause. Come on everybody! Give the man of the hour a proper welcoming.

(PEARL starts a rousing the crowd into a huge welcoming applause for MR. STEPHENS)

PEARL

Joshua?... Come on out, honey. You are making a scene!

DEALER

Maybe I should go see if I can find him.

PEARL

No, he's probably up in his study relaxing with his whiskey a little too much. I'm sorry everyone. How embarrassing. I'll go get him right now.

(PEARL runs out the back of the audience to find MR. STEPHENS. The DEALER moves to the table to prepare the game as he speaks to the audience.)

DEALER

Ummm... sorry ladies and gentlemen. I don't know why I'm so surprised we are off to an odd start. Guess it's my overwhelming optimism.

(PEARL enters from back of house in hysterics.)

PEARL

Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!! Oh help!!! Please help!!! Somebody!!! Anybody!!! My Joshua, my sweet, sweet Joshua!

EVERYONE

What is it? What's wrong, etc.....

DEALER

Miss de Vere, what's happened?

PEARL

He's dead! Somebody's *killed Mr. Stephens!!!*

(There is a brief pause for the info to sink in. The players at the table all eye each other and then begin to jump quickly from the table. The DEALER pulls a pistol from a hidden compartment in the poker table and levels it at the players.)

DEALER

Nobody move!

(BUCKSHOT has actually drawn faster on the DEALER. The only problem is that he has no guns and is pointing fingers at the DEALER.)

PERCY

How exciting!

DEALER

I'm glad those fingers aren't loaded. Now everybody just sit down. You say he's dead? Are you sure?

PEARL

What do you mean 'am I sure'? I think I would know a dead man when I see him.

BEAUREGARD

I'm sure she's seen her share of stiffs in her day.

BUCKSHOT

I reckon.

PERCY

I reckon, as well!

DEALER

Would you all just shut up! Someone may be dead here. Now, I want all of you, including you *(to audience)*, to just stay where you are. I'm going to go check this out. Nobody leave this room. Pearl, where is the body?

PEARL

(In hysterics) Oh, Joshua, poor Joshua...I found him up in his study.

DEALER

I'll be right back. Everyone just stay calm.

(DEALER exits back of Chapel to go investigate the body. Everyone else left on stage just looks at each other for an awkward moment.)

BEAUREGARD

Well, this has just put a damper on the evening.

PEARL

How can you be so calm?!

BEAUGEGARD

Forgive me if I don't show a large amount of sympathy for the rich Yankee.

PERCY

Oh my! I was hoping for an exciting evening, but this is just the tops!

BUCKSHOT

What in the...?! Does everyone in England talk like you?

PERCY

I reckon!

BUCKSHOT

Ughhh....

PEARL

Would you stop! This is serious.

BEAUREGARD

You're dang right it is. If Mr. Stephens has been killed, then the murderer has to be among us right now.

(The DEALER bursts in from the back of the Chapel.)

DEALER

Nobody move! Mr. Stephens has been killed, and that means that the murderer is among us right now!

BEAUREGARD

Told you. Now boy, besides that pistol of yours, what makes you think you ought to be in charge here?

DEALER

The name is Burch, Detective James Burch of the Pinkerton agency. I was sent here to get a good look at Mr. Stephens and his business dealings. I didn't realize I'd be investigating his death. Time is of the essence. Suspects need to be interrogated to get to the bottom of this.

BEAUREGARD

You gonna interrogate everyone in this here room?

BUCKSHOT

We're gonna be here 'till next week.

PERCY

A week!? How thrilling.

DEALER

It won't take that long. I only have four suspects to interrogate. The four of you.

PEARL, BUCKSHOT, BEAUREGARD

How dare you!... How do you mean!... You gotta lotta nerve!... etc.

(As the hubbub dies down)

PERCY

I'm a suspect? Oh, this can't possibly get any better. Shall there be a gunfight?

(All look incredulously at PERCY)

DEALER

What is wrong with you? Don't answer! That's right, only the four of you are suspects. Judging by the condition of Mr. Stephens' body, his murder happened sometime after all these folks moved in here to watch the card game and sometime before the final player was introduced. That rules out these fine folks and myself, and leaves just you four as the ones waiting outside who could have done it. I can have the answer in no time.

BUCKSHOT

Even if it is one of us, you think you can figure this out quickly, and all by yourself.

DEALER

Not by myself. I'm going to have some help (*indicating audience*) from these folks. Now ladies and gentlemen, if I'm going to figure this out, I'm going to need your assistance. You've had the opportunity to interact with these suspects far more than I have. I'm going to need you all to come up with questions so that we can interrogate these suspects and get to the bottom of this.

(DEALER begins to take questions from audience for the interrogation period.)

ACT 2

The Interrogation

ACT 3

Wrap Up and Confession

DEALER

All right, I think I've heard enough to figure this all out. Thank you for all the help with your questions. I believe this is all starting to make sense now. *(To CAST)* Everyone up, and in a line. Now it's time to close this case.

Percival Thrillington. How many people here think it was Percy who committed the crime? *(Response can vary depending on how many think it was PERCY)* Well, I'm not surprised because so do I. It is true that you have the least personal connection with Mr. Stephens. I don't believe you held any ill will against the man personally. However, you did "borrow" a large sum of your family's money. That money was to be repaid under any outcome of the war. You thought you would be safe investing for your own entertainment. When the money didn't show up, you stayed here in the U.S. Not because you hadn't gotten your fill of excitement, but because you weren't going to be able to return to your family until you had recovered as sizable portion of their money back. So you started playing poker to make the money back. It was taking longer than you wanted, but you had done well enough to attract attention and find out about this tournament. Your fortunes turned around, because this game would net you enough money to finally get back home. Blind luck landed you at a game where you found out the man hosting it was the person responsible for taking your family's money in the first place. This changed everything. Suddenly the game was personal. Suddenly you had to win. Suddenly you...

PERCY

Did it! Yes, I did it! It was like a story from an exciting adventure novel. My nemesis was going to be sitting right in front me. The hero always wins in those novels so I thought I

would give myself some extra insurance to make sure it was me who was the hero. I went up to Mr. Stephens study and I poisoned his whiskey. But I only put enough in to make him sick. Not kill him. I still wanted to play against him; I just didn't want him to be at the top of his game. I had no idea this would happen. I had no idea...

DEALER

That it would NOT kill him!

PERCY

What?!!!

DEALER

That's right. You didn't kill him. You made him sick, that's for sure. He left plenty evidence of that in the waste basket. So while you might be guilty of trying to cheat, you certainly didn't kill Mr. Stephens.

PERCY

Whew...that was a little too exciting.

DEALER

But someone else has had a more exciting time leading them here. Isn't that right, Buckshot Willy?

BUCKSHOT

I reckon.

DEALER

I reckon, as well. In fact, I reckon a whole heck of a lot. You had a lot of personal ties to Mr. Stephens. He was responsible for the very downfall of your career. You could have been a general by now. But no, he had you falsely accused of stealing the Confederate gold. You've been forced to live the life of a hired gun, a vagabond, only surviving by the speed of your draw. All the while, Joshua Stephens has been living in the lap of luxury. That's why you hate him so much, and that's why...

BUCKSHOT

I did it! That no good horn-swaggalin, side windin', son of a biscuit deserved every bit of it. He robbed me out of everything. He weren't gettin' away with it, no way no how! I saw

the dandy over there coming down the steps so I snuck up to Joshua's office. The door was cracked open and I went inside. Just as I got a bit o' way into the room, Joshua stepped into the room behind me. I turned around fast and stabbed him right through the ribs. So that's right! I done it. I...

DEALER

Missed him!

BUCKSHOT

I ain't never missed nuthin'.

DEALER

Except those English grammar classes. Now, make no mistake, your stab was right on to hit Mr. Stephens. The only problem was that this was in the way (*DEALER holds up MR. STEPHENS's ledger*).

BUCKSHOT

But he keeled right over.

DEALER

I'm sure he did. The force of your stab hitting his ledger broke his ribs. Mr. Stephens fell right over and probably sounded like he was dying right as you scampered back downstairs. You hurt him, but you certainly didn't do enough to kill him. But then, you would know that, wouldn't you, Beauregard?

BEAUREGARD

What are you trying to get at, boy?

DEALER

You know that Buckshot didn't kill Mr. Stephens because you went up into his room after Buckshot had already come down stairs. You found the door open, and saw that Mr. Stephens was standing by the window at the rear of his office. The window was open and he looked like he was leaning out to get some fresh air. Understandably so after having his ribs broken. Mr. Stephens was completely oblivious as you came into the room due to his pain. You were able to walk right up behind him, and with his head hanging out of the window, you slammed the window down on his head. Not once, but twice, putting a large crack in the window, leaving Mr. Stephens' body stuck in the closed window. You had your revenge, didn't you? You have always blamed Lt. Col. Joshua Stephens for the death of your brother, and for the loss of your family fortunes.

It wasn't enough to try and beat him at a game of poker to win some of your family's money back; you had to take it one step further. You had to...

BEAUREGARD

Kill that rascal! He's been running around all these years living it up. Well, what comes around goes around. You harm a Chennault, and there will be a reckoning! Money my family can get back, but my brother dying in that Yankee prison cannot be forgiven! I ain't afraid of facing the consequences. So go on, boy. Arrest me for...

DEALER

Trying to kill Mr. Stephens. You gave him a good knock, but that wasn't the fatal blow.

BEAUREGARD

What? Why of all the dim wittery bull...

DEALER

Stop right there, Mr. Chennault. We have a lady present. Before I hear more about what you did, let me talk to her. Now, Miss de Vere, how did you find Mr. Stephens body?

PEARL

Well I found it to be a very strapping and vigorous body, but I don't see how that kind of talk is appropriate here.

DEALER

No, Miss de Vere, I mean how did you come to find Mr. Stephens was dead?

PEARL

Oh. Well I went up to Joshua's study, and I found that he wasn't there. When I noticed that the window was open, I went over to shut it. Upon seeing that the window was cracked, I looked outside and saw poor Joshua in broken heap outside. That horrible Beauregard must have thrown him right out.

DEALER

I suppose he might have done just that.

BEAUREGARD

Now boy, I say hold on there one danged ol' minute.

DEALER

Calm yourself, Beauregard. I said you might have done that. But I believe something else happened. Now then Miss De Vere, I think you really did go up to Mr. Stephens study to see why he wasn't here for the game. And I think you were surprised to find him half conscious, trapped in a closed window. I believe that you went to his aid and opened the window. But then, you had a thought. You stood to win a large portion through your dealings with Buckshot, but you could make even more if your new husband wasn't around anymore. Just as he thought you had come to help him, you shoved Mr. Stephens right out of the window. Why share when you can have it all?

PEARL

It was just so easy. He was right there, hanging out of the window. Just one little push and all the money was going to be mine. It's like I didn't have a choice. I had to do it.

DEALER

Just as I thought.

BUCKSHOT

Just as you thought?

PERCY

I dare say your skills of deduction border on the unbelievable.

BEAUREGARD

That's the smartest thing he's said all night. He's right, ya know. How in God's creation did you figure out that's what happened to Joshua Stephens?

DEALER

He told me.

(MR. STEPEHENS enters from SL. He is noticeably beat up and a bit out of it. There is a pause, then a huge reaction from the cast.)

ALL

What? How in the...? Where...?... etc...

MR. STEPHENS

Surprised?

(PEARL screams and faints)

PERCY

I thought you had been pushed out of a window.

MR. STEPHENS

I was. A tree, a bush, and the ground broke my fall. You all thought you could take down Joshua Stephens, but you were wrong! Ha! You scheming devils! Detective Burch, I want these people arrested for attempted murder.

DEALER

That's the first order of business.

PEARL

But, sweetheart. Surely you don't mean little ol' me?

MR. STEPHENS

No mercy, Mr. Burch. I want no mercy shown to these blaggards!

DEALER

The law shall show no mercy on the guilty. You are all under arrest for the attempted murder of Joshua Stephens.

MR. STEPHENS

Good. Now get them out of here and get them to jail. I want them out of my sight.

DEALER

I'm afraid you'll have to come along, Mr. Stephens.

MR. STEPHENS

Ah, yes, for my deposition to the authorities.

DEALER

No, Mr. Stephens. I'm afraid I'll be arresting you, too on the charge of stealing money that belongs to the federal government.

MR. STEPHENS

What? Money I don't know what...?

ALL

He knows.

MR. STEPHENS

Oh. Well, this is a bit of a quandary. However, I think there is a solution. Higgins!
Lights!!!

*(Blackout. After a moment there are two
gunshots. Lights come back up and everyone
has a gun in their hand. The DEALER is lying
dead on the poker table. Everyone looks at
each other, then the audience, then guns. They
quickly put the weapons away.)*

PEARL

(To audience)

Well, hasn't this been a lovely evening?

(END)

A Christmas Carol

A Comedy with two Actors

Adapted by Blake Braswell

Original work by Charles Dickens

Version 2014 Full Version

(CHARLES DICKENS speaks a few holiday greetings and welcomes the crowd as they take their seats. The actor playing DICKENS will also play MARLEY, and the GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST, PRESENT, AND YET TO COME. Once crowd is set, and signal from stage manager is given, DICKENS wraps up his pre-show with the following speech.)

Dickens: I have endeavored in this Ghostly little story, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt your houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

(End of pre show – lights out)

(Lights up on SCROOGE in counting house)

Dickens: Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grind-stone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster.

(Lights up on DICKENS)

Marley was dead to begin with. Dead as a doornail. Mind you! I don't know what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a doornail. Scrooge knew Marley was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole friend, and his sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain. The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

(SCROOGE crosses into the audience isles as though he is leaving his office and walking home. Along the way, he picks an audience member to be his nephew FRED)

Scrooge: *(To FRED)* Merry Christmas...? What? Who said that? Oh look, it's my nephew Fred.

(Prompt guest to stand)

What is that? Want to wish me a Merry Christmas, eh?

(Get FRED to respond)

I suppose you'll be wanting me to come to your Christmas dinner?

(Fred Response)

Well go ahead, wish me a merry Christmas.

(Prompt FRED to say 'Merry Christmas')

Bah! Humbug! Out upon Christmas and your Christmas dinner. If I could work my will, every idiot that goes about with a Merry Christmas upon his lips, would be boiled in his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart! Good afternoon, nephew!

(SCROOGE leaves FRED and continues his walk home when he picks a SOLICITOR in the audience)

Scrooge: *(To SOLICITOR)* What!? What!? Stand up if you are going to talk to me. Collecting money for the poor, hmmm?

(Prompt guest response)

Well I don't make merry at Christmas myself, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses? My taxes pay for those establishments, and they cost enough. The poor must go there. And if they would rather die than go there, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Good afternoon!

(SCROOGE continues his walk home, he is almost back to stage when he finds BOB CRATCHIT)

Scrooge: Oh look, it's my employee, Bob Cratchit.

(Prompt BOB to stand)

What's that, Bob? You would like the whole day off tomorrow for Christmas, I suppose?

(Prompt BOB to answer)

It's not convenient - and it's not fair. If I was to dock you half-a-crown from your pay for it, you'd think yourself ill used, I'll be bound. And yet you don't think me ill-used when I pay a day's wages for no work. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December. But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier the next morning. *(Glaring at BOB)* Now....sit down...

(SCROOGE goes back to his home. He pulls out keys to open door muttering about the three people he has just dealt with. He does not notice that MARLEY'S face is on the door, holding the round door knocker in his mouth.)

Marley: *(Muffled and hard to understand due to knocker ring in his mouth)*

SSCCRRRRGG!

Scrooge: Ah!

(SCROOGE jumps back and swings his cane at the face of MARLEY. The cane smacks hard against the door looking like it hits MARLEY square across the face. MARLEY drops knocker from his mouth, and his face disappears back behind the door.)

Marley: *(Sounds of pain fading away from behind door)*

Owww! Ahhhhh...ooooo...etc...

(Sounds fade and SCROOGE bends down to pick up knocker ring. Looks back at audience.)

Scrooge: Humbug! Bah. Just faulty knocker and the moonlight.

(SCROOGE uses keys to enter his house. Once on stage, he continues to ad lib and mutter about the SOLICITOR, BOB, and FRED that he met in the audience. Use this time to reference specific things the guests did. Throughout this, SCROOGE is getting putting on a robe and nightcap. He settles into his big arm chair)

Scrooge: I'm getting a bit peckish. Think I'll prepare some gruel. Gruel is cheap, and cheap is good.

Marley: *(from offstage)* SCROOOOGE!

Scrooge: Humbug!

Marley: SCROOOOGE!

Scrooge: It's humbug still. I won't believe it!

(MARLEY enters scaring SROOGE to death)

Scrooge: I know him. It's Marley's ghost. How now...? What do you want with me?

Marley: Much

Scrooge: Who are you?

Marley: Ask me who I was.

Scrooge: Who were you then? You're particular for a shade.

Marley: In life I was your partner Jacob Marley.

Scrooge: Can you...can you sit down?

Marley: I can.

Scrooge: Do it then.

(MARLEY sits and stares directly ahead, not looking at SCROOGE)

Marley: You don't believe in me?

Scrooge: I don't.

Marley: Why do you doubt your senses?

Scrooge: Because a little thing affects my senses. A slight disorder of the stomach...you may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of the grave about you, whatever you are. You see this toothpick?

Marley: *(Still staring straight ahead)* I do.

Scrooge: You're not looking at it.

Marley: But I see it notwithstanding.

Scrooge: Well, I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you! Humbug!

(MARLEY stands, wails, and swings his chains)

Scrooge: Mercy dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

Marley: Man of the worldly mind - do you believe in me or not?

Scrooge: I do. I do. I must. You are fettered. Tell me why.

Marley: I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link and yard by yard, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you? Or would you

know, the weight and length of the coil you bear yourself? It was as heavy and as long as this seven Christmas Eves ago. You have labored on it since. It is a ponderous chain.

Scrooge: Jacob –Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob...

Marley: I have none to give. Nor can I tell you all that I would. Very little time is permitted me. Oh! Look upon me, Ebenezer. Captive, bound and double ironed. No space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused!

Scrooge: But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.

Marley: Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business. Charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business. At this time of the rolling year, I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed star which led the wise men to a poor abode. Hear me! My time is nearly gone.

Scrooge: I will. I will. But don't be hard upon, Jacob, I pray.

Marley: How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day. That is no light part of my penance. I am here tonight to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.

Scrooge: You were always a good friend to me. Thankee.

Marley: You will be haunted by three spirits.

Scrooge: Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?

Marley: It is.

Scrooge: I think I'd rather not.

Marley: Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow when the bell tolls one.

Scrooge: Couldn't I take them all at once and have it over, Jacob?

Marley: Expect the second on the next night at the same hour, the third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more, and look that for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us.

(SCROOGE, shaken up, prepares for sleep. Muttering to himself, ad lib as he falls asleep in his chair)

(Bells tolling one o'clock)

(PAST enters, he is dressed in flowing white robes with a garland of holly around his head. He flits into the room with a big smile. If the audience reacts to his prancing and outfit, the actor stops, breaks character back

into DICKENS, and looks disgusted at crowd. He then quickly snaps back into PAST. He speaks light and upbeat like a child. He wakes up SCROOGE by flicking at his ear, then his nose inching his own face closer to SCROOGE. SCROOGE wakes up.)

Scrooge: Aahhhhhh!!!

(SCROOGE recoils in his chair as PAST playfully laughs at his reactions.)

Are you the spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?

Past: I am.

Scrooge: Who and what are you?

Past: I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

Scrooge: Long past?

Past: No, your past.

Scrooge: What business brings you here?

Past: Your welfare.

Scrooge: Well thank you, but I cannot help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end.

Past: Your reclamation then. Take heed, rise and walk with me.

(PAST and SCROOGE step offstage into the audience. The lights on SCROOGE'S room fade as the lights come up within the audience. PAST motions his hand across the crowd.)

Past: Do you recognize this place?

Scrooge: *(Looking around at the audience.)* Recognize it? Good heaven, I was bred in this place, I was a boy here.

Past: Your lip is trembling, and what is that upon your cheek?

Scrooge: A pimple. Nothing more. Lead me where you will, spirit.

Past: You recollect the way?

Scrooge: Remember it, I could walk it blindfolded.

Past: Strange to have forgotten if for so many years. Let us go on.

(PAST and SCROOGE go into the audience. SCROOGE leads the way as he begins to recognize people in audience as school mates.)

Scrooge: Look! It's all the boys from the schoolyard! Johnny Smith, little Frankie Thomas, and...

Past: *(Interrupting)* These are but shadows of things that have been, they have no consciousness of us.

(PAST finds an audience member to be YOUNG SCROOGE)

Look here, the school is not quite deserted. A solitary child, neglected by his friends and family, is left there still.

Scrooge: Oh, spirit! It is myself as a child, left quite alone upon Christmas Eve.

(SCROOGE falls sobbing upon YOUNG SCROOGE, doing his best to make the guest uncomfortable. SCROOGE is comically inconsolable)

Past: Scrooge. Scrooge. SCROOGE! *(Snaps SCROOGE out of his despair)*
Scrooge, let us see another Christmas.

(PAST leads SCROOGE to a woman in the audience has chosen to be SCROOGE's sister.)

Look who came to see her older brother.

Scrooge: Fan! It is my young sister, Fan! She came to bring me home for good and all. Home forever and ever. She said father was so much kinder than he used to be. That I was to be a man, and never come back to this school again, and that we would have the merriest Christmas in all the world!

Past: Always a delicate creature whom a breath might have withered, but she had a large heart. She died a woman, and had as I think children.

Scrooge: One child...

Past: True, your nephew Fred.

Scrooge: Yes...

Past: My time grows short, quick.

(PAST leads SCROOGE to another woman in the audience. She should be sitting beside the audience member that SCROOGE referred to as FRANKIE THOMAS)

Do you recognize this fair young girl?

Scrooge: It is Belle! My beautiful Belle! My first love!

(SCROOGE tries to run to BELLE and embrace her, but is stopped by PAST.)

Past: It matters little. Do you remember you displaced her with another idol – a golden one. And with a full heart, for the love of who you once were, she released you. And look, she has moved on to little Frankie Thomas

Scrooge: Spirit, show me no more. Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me.

(SCROOGE begins to make his way back to stage, back to his house.)

Past: I told you these were shadows of the things that have been. That they are what they are, do not blame me.

Scrooge: Leave me. Take me back. Haunt me no longer!

(SCROOGE goes to his home and returns to chair gets back into his sleeping position. PAST exits as SCROOGE says the next lines.)

Scrooge: Oh, Spirit. Why would you torture me? How I miss my sister. And my Belle. My beautiful Belle!

(SCROOGE looks out at audience towards BELLE.)

Frankie Thomas!?! Really? Bleaaah....

(SCROOGE settles into sleep muttering)

(Bell tolls one)

(SCROOGE wakes up, stands while holding his cane like a weapon, and looks about for the signs of a spirit)

Scrooge: Come to me, spirit. I'm prepared for anything! *(waits)* Nothing? *(waits)* Well, I wasn't prepared for that.

(While SCROOGE looks around house, PRESENT enters and sits in SCROOGE'S chair)

(PRESENT bursts onto stage, dressed in a very short green robe worn over his DICKENS costume. It is more like a shawl with white fur trim, and barely comes down to his elbows. He is also wearing a green Santa hat with white fur.)

Present: Ebenezer Scrooge!

(SCROOGE is scared to death by the loud greeting of PRESENT)

Come in! Come in and know me better, man! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me. You have never seen like of me before?

Scrooge: *(Looks him up and down)* Never

Present: Have you never walked forth with the younger members of my family? My elder brothers?

Scrooge: I don't think I have. I'm afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, spirit?

Present: More than eighteen hundred.

Scrooge: A tremendous family to provide for. Spirit, conduct me where you will. If you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.

Present: Touch my robe.

Scrooge: You mean your tree skirt?

Present: Just touch it!

(PRESENT moves quickly, pulling SCROOGE with him into the audience. PRESENT picks out people to be the CRATCHIT family. Pick the same BOB that SCROOGE picked at opening of show. He then picks other people to be the rest of the family. They don't need to sit near each other. Pick the tallest person possible for TINY TIM.)

Present: Look, Scrooge. It's the Cratchit family. There's Bob and Belinda, the young twins, and of course the youngest of the Cratchit's, Tiny Tim. Stand up, Tiny!

(When tall guest stands as TINY TIM, PRESENT is taken aback by his size.)

Wow, you aren't so Tiny. Been working out? Moving on. Look, Scrooge, at the entire family enjoying their small feast purchased with Bob's meager salary. There never was such a goose, its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness were the themes of universal admiration. And as their Christmas dinner comes to an end, listen as Tiny Tim observes: *(cue TINY TIM for "God bless us, everyone!")*

Scrooge: Tiny Tim is so frail and sickly. Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

Present: I see a vacant seat in the poor chimney corner and a crutch without an owner carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, the child will die.

Scrooge: No, no. Oh no, kind spirit. Say he will be spared.

Present: If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, none other of my race shall find him. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Come, my life upon this globe is very brief, it ends tonight.

Scrooge: Tonight? Are spirits lives so short?

Present: Tonight at midnight. The time is drawing near.

Scrooge: Spirit, have the Cratchit family no refuge or resource?

Present: Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?

(PRESENT exits. Scrooge slumps down in chair)

Scrooge: Oh, spirit, you use my own works against me. I had no idea of the Cratchit family's condition. Of poor Tiny Tim, and his abuse of Human Growth Hormone.

(Bells ring 12 times. With each ring, SCROOGE gets more and more frightened.)

(FUTURE enters. He is a figure of dark black robes that seem to absorb the light. His face cannot be seen under the hood.)

Scrooge: I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come? You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us. Is that so, spirit? Ghost of the Future, I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear your company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me? Lead on, spirit.

(FUTURE leads SCROOGE to tombstone)

Scrooge: Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?

(FUTURE points to tombstone)

Scrooge: Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead, but if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!

(FUTURE points to tombstone)

Scrooge: *(SCROOGE reads)* Ebenezer Scrooge...! No, Spirit! Oh no, no! Spirit hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this if I am past all hope? Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life! *(FUTURE slowly starts to exit)* I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!

(SCROOGE falls back away from tombstone and collapses into chair. Lights out.)

(Bells)

(Lights fade up to bright morning as SCROOGE awakens yelling some of his previous lines)

Scrooge: I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. (*SCROOGE realizes he's awake*) I am here . I'm here! The shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will! I don't know what to do! I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. Merry Christma...wait, I don't know what day of the month it is! I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hello, you there?

(indicating audience member)

What's today my fine fellow?

(prompt Christmas Day response)

It's Christmas Day! I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. An intelligent boy! A remarkable boy! *(or girl if female guest is used)*

(SCROOGE readies himself to leave and runs into audience)

Scrooge: (to FRED) Hello, Fred. A Merry Christmas to you! Keep that Christmas dinner warm, I'll be seeing you this afternoon. Oh, and that Christmas pudding your wife makes? *(smiling at FRED)* It makes me yak. So let's just give that to the dog. Ha ha ha! But don't tell her! Ha ha ha! Merry Christmas, Fred!!!!

Scrooge: *(to SOLICITOR)* Hello my fine fellow. Whatever the largest donation is you've received, put me down for double the amount. No, triple it!

(SCROOGE approaches BOB. His demeanor calms as he approaches BOB and speaks to him sincerely.)

Scrooge: Merry Christmas, Bob! A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you, for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling family. I'll start today by sending your family a turkey that's twice the size of Tiny Tim.

(Looking back at tall guest that was chosen for TIM.)

And that's freaking huge!!!!!! *(laughing)* Merry Christmas, Bob! Merry Christmas!

(SCROOGE runs around the audience quietly wishing a Merry Christmas to everyone he can, as DICKENS returns to the stage to narrate. Through this speech, SCROOGE will make his way back to stage to stand next to DICKENS for the final line.)

Dickens: Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; And to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed...

S & D: God bless us, everyone!

(End)

POINT OF VIEW

Lyrics and music by Blake Braswell

Recording can be heard at:

<http://www.blakebraswell.com/singer-songwriter/>

The truth gets me in trouble,
Mine's not the same as yours
You see brick walls
I see open doors

All the traps you set,
Never capture me
The only thing they've done
Is kept you from being free

Why don't we have, the same point of view
Why can't I look at things, just like you do
The steps we take are from two different dances
Full of stumbles and falls, with no second chances
At all----

It feels like we came close
A time or two
That's why I tried so long,
To learn my part written by you

Two actors on the same stage
In two different plays
Trying to fight through their lines,
No matter what's in the way

The shows are over, the audience is confused
Time for the final bow, there's nothing left to do

Too bad our truths never got along
Too bad you know me now that your gone
Too bad our truths never got along
Too bad you know me now that I'm gone
Gone, gone, gone

ANYMORE

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The story ends, it's sad but true
Second place is the best place for you

I've heard you whine, I've heard you moan
But the bed you've made, it is your own

You tried to blame anything you can
Your work, your friends, your mom, your dad
I wonder when the truth you'll see
It was a lot more you and a little less me

I don't have to worry that's for sure
Cause you're not my problem anymore

Had to watch everything I did
When I tried to help, you said I was treatin' you like a kid
Well I guess I should've let you fall
No need to help when you don't need none at all

Don't know why you needed me
To complete your world and make you happy
First a frown and then a grin
Well your mood, it changes like the wind

I don't have to figure it out no more
Cause you're not my problem anymore

Once second I'm your man
And the next I'm someone you can't stand
It's a crazy game
You got me playing in

But when it's all said and done,
You'll see I'm the one that's gonna win

Cause I don't have to keep any score
Cause I'm not playing anymore

You tried to blame anything you can
Your work, your friends, your mom, your dad
I wonder when the truth you'll see
It was a lot more you and a little less me

I don't have to worry, that's for sure
I don't have to worry, that's for sure
I don't have to worry, that's for sure

Cause you're not my problem anymore
You're not my problem anymore
You're not my problem anymore