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## THE GHOST OF JEB TAYLOR

An Audience-Participation Murder Mystery  
by  
Eileen Moushey

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### INTRODUCTION

THE GHOST OF JEB TAYLOR was written as a progressive murder-mystery. My troupe has performed it at two locales -both in the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area.

Our first and second performances were along the towpath of the Ohio and Erie Canal. Participants gathered at one point where Scene One was played. Teams/groups were given clipboards with Clue Packets that included: a brief "set up" of the mystery (in case they missed Scene One); a listing of the "ghosts" they were about to meet; a diagram of JohnnyCake Lodge and it's relationship to the Canal; and a solution sheet with the questions each group needed to answer. As the groups walked along the mile we used, they met the "ghosts" who gave their part of the story and showed, on the diagram, where they were when they heard PEARL scream. At the ending point, there was food, drinks and other entertainment for the groups as they mulled over their solution sheets and submitted them. The actors walked in with the last group and played the solution scene.

Our third production was aboard the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway. We played Scene One as before, but then reversed our process. Instead of the audience moving past the actors, the actors circulated among them on the train. And we played the solution scene in each car.

This is the script for that production. It can be adapted to any event that includes movement, or where a presentational event (a "play") is not feasible. It works especially well for outdoor celebrations, centennials, etc. With a little research it can be adapted to any historical area or event, by substituting background, period, occupations, etc.

## THE GHOST OF JEB TAYLOR - BACKGROUND

The Valley Railway began operation in 1880. By 1888, its passenger service between Cleveland and Akron and thence to Washington and Chicago was substantial. Rail travel supplanted the canal as the main source of transportation through the Valley, although the train's path followed the abandoned canal bed.

One regular stop on the Cuyahoga Valley was in Independence at what is now Lockkeeper's Inn. On that site in 1895 stood JohnnyCake Lodge, owned and operated by JEB TAYLOR, a cantankerous old skinflint. There were even rumors that JEB had a deal with certain conductors on the railway. They would find "emergency" reasons to tarry at his stop for longer than usual. Passengers and crew would be forced to stay the night, providing them time to spend money at his establishment, and in return Jeb would give the conductor a cut of the profits. No such device was needed on the night of October 18, 1895. One hundred years ago this night. Rain had fallen steadily for several days, filling the canal and overflowing onto the track area, making it dangerous to proceed. Travelers, trainmen, and local residents congregated at JohnnyCake Lodge. Some were stranded by the circumstances, others were "regulars." Sometime shortly after sunset, all were shocked to hear the repeated screams of JEB TAYLOR's daughter, PEARL. She had gone to light the lamps in her father's counting room and had discovered his body. He had been brutally murdered - stabbed while seated at his table by the window, counting his money. No cash appeared to have been taken, and no motive was apparent. CONDUCTOR SAMUEL A. LANE investigated the case, and though all who were present at the Lodge were interrogated, ultimately no one was charged. The murder remains unsolved.

CONDUCTOR SAMUEL A. LANE made it his personal quest to solve the murder that involved his train. But he failed. He investigated for years and even followed suspects across the country but he eventually went to his grave knowing he had failed.

With the renewed interest in the railway, canal, and the towpath, stories began to circulate. There were numerous "sightings" of a strangely dressed man who walked along the tracks. He disappeared as soon as he was approached, but was seen by too many to be disregarded. Obviously, the railway was haunted.

But even more disturbing was what was happening to SAM LANE, a conductor on the Cuyahoga Valley Line. He told fellow workers and friends of disturbing dreams. Then he said he heard voices. Or rather, a Voice. A voice that claimed to be his great-great grandfather. And finally, this Voice, this being took over the body and mind of SAM LANE IV. CONDUCTOR SAMUEL A. LANE had returned one more time to solve the mysterious death of JEB TAYLOR.

The challenge of those who ride the train tonight is to meet and talk to the spirits of those who were at JohnnyCake Lodge on that fateful evening. Using what they learn, these historical detectives will determine who the murderer is. Only then will the restless spirit of CONDUCTOR LANE and the ghost of JEB TAYLOR be allowed their final reward.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

CONDUCTOR SAMUEL A. LANE/CONDUCTOR SAM LANE - Mid-twenties to mid-thirties. SAM is an academic, shy and rather nervous. He will be "possessed" by CONDUCTOR SAMUEL A. LANE'S personality at times. This transformation will be evident to all as CONDUCTOR LANE is confident, loud, and authoritative. He will serve as Host/Master Detective/Guide for the event.

PEARL TAYLOR - JEB'S Daughter. Thirties. A spoilt brat.

REVEREND JONATHAN HITCHCOCK - Thirties/Forties. An itinerant Preacher and temperance crusader. Hellfire and brimstone.

DR. CHARLES "DOC" RAWSON - Fifties. Kind and soft-hearted. Inebriated a goodly part of the time.

ABIGAIL TURNER - Thirties/Forties. The Fancy Lady. World-weary and cynical but with the obligatory heart of gold.

DAN SCOTT - Twenties/Thirties. The Gambler. A charmer and a scoundrel. Handsome.

THE SMITH FAMILY - The Homesteaders.

JACOB - Forties. Strong, upright, down to earth.

WILLA - Forties. His strong, upright, loving wife.

BETSY - Early teens. Bright, curious daughter.

SARAH WHEELER - Twenties. The serving Wench at JohnnyCake Lodge. Not overly bright.

HENRY WEEKS - Forties. The Teacher. Personable, striking, dramatic. Has an answer for everything.

SIMON PURDY - Twenties/Thirties. The Handyman at JohnnyCake Lodge. A good match for SARAH in the gray cell derby. Shy.

NELLIE "THE WIDOW" SACKETT - Forties. The Cook at JohnnyCake Lodge. Had been up and down the tracks a few times. Determined and capable.

JEB TAYLOR - Fifties. A crusty old miser with a real mean streak. He is either "hidden" and only emerges for the solution. Or, he is among the audience as one of them, and declares that the story of JEB TAYLOR was true - he should know, JEB was his great, great grandfather. He will "disappear" in time to get changed in JEB.

HOSTESS (or HOST)- the Co-ordinator of the event.

## CHRONOLOGY

From the time of the murder

50 YEARS AGO JEB TAYLOR BORN

32 YEARS AGO JEB WEDS FIRST TIME

31 YEARS AGO PEARL IS BORN

20 YEARS AGO JEB BUILDS JOHNNYCAKE LODGE

10 YEARS AGO SIMON TAKEN ON

9 YEARS AGO FIRST MRS. TAYLOR RUNS AWAY

3 YEARS AGO JEB CHEATS DAN

2 YEARS AGO JEB MEETS AND MARRIES 2ND WIFE

1 YEAR AGO 2ND MRS. TAYLOR DIES IN CHILDBIRTH

3 MONTHS AGO SARAH BEGAN WORK AT LODGE

That day

2 PM - TRAIN ARRIVES, PASSENGERS, CREW DISEMBARK

4 PM - 5 PM PASSENGERS, CREW, LOCALS DRINK.

PEARL AND TEACHER TALK.

PREACHER AND FANCY LADY "meet".

JEB PROPOSES TO SARAH.

PREACHER SPOTS SARAH RUNNING CRYING DOWN HALL ON HER WAY TO DINING ROOM

5 PM - 6 PM CONDUCTOR SAMUEL LANE CHECKS ON TRAIN.

HOMESTEADERS TAKE WALK.

JEB ARGUES WITH PEARL, OVERHEARD BY BETSY.

JEB ARGUES WITH TEACHER; TEACHER GOES TO FRONT SITTING ROOM TO WRITE POEM

FANCY LADY HAS SNACK.

DOCTOR VISITS THE WATER CLOSET.

HANDYMAN GOES TO BARN.

COOK GOES TO ROOT CELLAR.

HOMESTEADERS IN ROOM WAITING TO BE CALLED FOR SUPPER.

7:30 PM (or whenever sundown is at that time of year) PEARL SCREAMS.

## SCENE ONE - THE SET-UP

(SAM LANE, and HOSTESS are introduced.)

SAM: Um, good morning...I mean, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. And welcome to the Cuyahoga Recreational..... Cuyahoga Valley Recreational...Cuyahoga National Recreation Valley....welcome to the Park. In a moment we'll be boarding the tra..the tra...the train....(he starts to twitch, shake his head as if to clear it)....The Valley Railway began operation in 1880 and reached its southern terminate...terminus at Wheeling Junction in 18.....Eighteen hundred and.....AUGH!! (he clutches his head) SHUT UP! SHUT UP! LEAVE ME ALONE!...(He screams. HOSTESS rushes to him.)

HOSTESS: Sam, Sam, what is it? What is it? (To audience.) Sam's been under a lot of strain lately, We've been really worried about him....Sam, Sam, are you okay?

SAM: It's that voice! That voice! It won't let me go.

HOSTESS:(To audience) See, he keeps hearing this voice, telling him what to say things, and do things. He really hasn't been himself at all. Sam, Sam, are you there? (SAM has gone limp. Speak to me, Sam, tell me that you're alright.

SAMUEL: As right as rain, little lady, as right as rain.

HOSTESS: Sam?

SAMUEL: Well, actually, little lady, Sam isn't here right now. I am appropriating his flesh and blood for this afternoon. He'll be back a little later on. But I've got some unfinished business here on this very spot, and I needed to borrow the boy's body for a while. Skinny little feller, ain't he?

HOSTESS: Who are you and what have you done with Sam?

SAMUEL: Now keep your powder dry and your corset laced, little lady. Sam is perfectly safe. Hell, he's kin. I wouldn't hurt kinfolk.

HOSTESS: Kin?

SAMUEL: Yessirree. Young Sam is my great-great-great grandson. I'm Samuel A. Lane. I was Conductor on this here train more 'n a hundred years ago.

HOSTESS: You're a ghost?

SAMUEL: I prefer to think of myself as a facilitator for the morbidly challenged. I am what is known to Shirley Maclaine and others as a "channeler". I bring communication from the "other side." I am a guide. But I have come back today for the most selfish of reasons. While I walked this earth, this was my train. I felt personally responsible for everything that happened to it, and everyone who rode it. That's the way we felt about our jobs back then. And that's why I was so sick at heart about Jeb Taylor. He was murdered right here, and somehow, somehow his death was connected to my train. And though I searched far and wide for his murderer and left no stone unturned in my investigation, I failed. And because it was never solved, the ghost of Jeb Taylor is doomed to wander the Earth, denied his eternal reward. He haunts the park, and this train. Haven't you seen him....or heard about others who have? Sightings of a strange old man, dressed oddly, who disappears as you approach. You heard tell about any such

thing?

HOSTESS: Sam told me something about that! A funny-lookin' old guy, wanderin' railway tracks.....

SAMUEL: That's him! That is the ghost of Jeb Taylor! Ol' Jeb had an inn right near this very spot. On October 18, 1895 there was a flood and the train was forced to stop here until the waters receded. The passengers, crew, and locals spent the day in and around JohnnyCake Lo

dge. That was the name of Jeb's place. JohnnyCake Lodge. Well, sometime shortly after sunset on that day, the air was filled with the screams of Pearl Taylor, Jeb's daughter. She had discovered her father's body, stabbed and slumped over the table where he sat, counting his money. Try as I might, I never found out who did it. And until somebody does, Jeb will continue to haunt the railway. I thought maybe you could get these nice folks here to give us a hand in findin' out who done it.

HOSTESS: How? I'd think the trail must be a little cold. And, well, but, but.....

SAMUEL: But, nothing. Get 'em moving. Oh, and just to help you along, I've brought some folks with me.

HOSTESS: More ghosts?

SAMUEL: Hell's bells, woman. Not just any old ghosts. I've brought back all the folks that was at the Lodge that night, just as they were then. There's some passengers on the train some passengers, and some local folks, from the little town of Everitt up a piece. Get crackin'. Get those clipboards and get these folks organized! Time's a-wasting.

(HOSTESS distributes clipboards and Clue Packets as the audience boards the train. The actors are already on board.)

## SCENE TWO - TESTIMONY OF THE GHOSTS

The following pages describe the general remarks of the characters. They will circulate throughout the train and attempt to meet with all participants. When they have done so, they will notify HOSTESS. All "testimony" in CAPS is vital and must not be left out. The rest can be paraphrased, condensed, and adapted to the time frame and audience.

CONDUCTOR SAM: Well, well, well. Welcome, to my train. I've been the Chief Conductor on the Valley train since its first run in 1881. But I've been around trains in one job or another for a goodly portion of my life. And we've transported people from every walk of life for every reason you can think of. I've had farmers and judges and fancy women. I've had people from France who couldn't rightly parlay our lingo. That was a trip, I'll tell ya. I've had bounty hunters on the trail of jailbirds. WHY A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, WE EVEN HAD A FAMILY OF ACTORS FROM CHICAGO. So ya might say I've seen all there is to see.

But I expect you all want to know 'bout is ol' Jeb. He was a rascally ol' dog. Hell, I oughta know He'd been around the train for as long as me. Longer. First, it was just a little whistle stop with produce and the like. Then he built himself a little shack that he called a depot. And finally, 'bout twenty years ago he built JohnnyCake Lodge.

Now the day he died, I remember real well. See, there'd been a good, steady, rain for about five days. So by the time we reached Jeb's place, the water had risen over the banks of the old canal and had flooded the tracks. You can't rightly control the train when it's under water for a while like that. And the ties started loosening up and all. So we had no choice but to stop overnight while the water went down and my crew could check out the track ahead.

All this suited Jeb just fine. More time for folks to spend their money at the Lodge. And ol' Jeb, he did love money. More n' just about anything, I reckon. So he was happy as a fly on....you know. Sellin' food and drink, mostly liquor - to my passengers and crew and some of the "locals"

who were there that day. And he rented a couple of rooms to some of my travelers who felt the need to sleep in a real bed for a change!

NOW JUST AROUND SUNSET, I DECIDED TO CHECK AND MAKE SURE EVERYTHING WAS COPACETIC DOWN AT THE TRAIN. I WAS ON MY WAY DOWN TO THE TRAIN WHEN I HEARD A CATERWAULING' SOUND LIKE THE WORLD WAS COMIN' TO AN END. I swear, it was an unearthly sound. Well, I went runnin' like everyone else, AND THERE, IN THE LITTLE ROOM THAT JEB CALLED THE COUNTIN' ROOM, WAS HIS DAUGHTER, PEARL, STILL SCREAMIN' AND CRYIN'. AND WE COULD SEE WHY. SEE, JEB HAD THIS LITTLE TABLE BY THE WINDOW WHERE HE USED TO SIT AND COUNT HIS MONEY. ONLY HE WEREN'T COUNTING MONEY NOW. HE WAS SLUMPED OVER THAT TABLE WITH A KNIFE STICKIN' OUT OF HIS BACK. AND THERE WAS BLOOD ALL OVER THE PLACE. YOU NEVER SAW SO MUCH BLOOD. IT WAS EVERYWHERE. AND POOR OLD JEB WAS DEADER THAN DEAD.

So that's how it happened. Jeb Taylor. He was a rascal, but we got along fine. Just fine.

THE DAUGHTER: (Sniffing) How'd'ya do? I'm so happy to make your acquaintance. Even if it is under these awful circumstances. Can you believe someone murdered my Daddy? My poor, sweet Daddy. My Daddy who never hurt no one in his whole life. My name's PEARL TAYLOR. MY MOMMA WAS DADDY'S FIRST WIFE. She just up and left us one day. Daddy always said she was jealous on account of how much he loved me. We just went ahead and had her declared dead after seven years. I didn't feel too bad. I still had my Daddy. Why, he gave me everything I ever wanted. Yes, he always loved me best. Even after he got married again, he used to say to me, he'd say, "Pearlie B., you are still my bestest little girl, aren't you?" Fact is, only reason he even got married again was so's he'd have someone to help out at the Lodge. My health has always been just too delicate for me to do anything physical like work and the Cook, the Widow Sackett won't let me in her kitchen anyhow. And that no account Simon Purdy was a poor excuse for a handyman. So poor old Daddy was gonna have to hire more help, and well, we just couldn't afford it. SO DADDY SACRIFICED HIMSELF AND GOT MARRIED AGAIN, TO THAT AMBER, SO HE'D HAVE SOMEONE TO HELP WITH THE COOKIN' AND WASHIN' AND ALL.

But anyway, it'd been rainin', as you know, and everything was all flooded. I had one of my sick headaches so I didn't get up until about three o'clock. Right about that time Conductor Lane and the train pulled in and the passengers and crew came up to the Lodge. Sarah, that's the hired girl, had a hard time keepin' up. Not that she's what you would call an over-ambitious worker. I would have gladly helped out, but I was just being totally monopolized by one of the gentlemen passengers on the boat. He was a teacher, name of Weeks. Henry Weeks. Oh, my. Now, I don't have a lot of experience with gentlemen, but I do think it fair to say that HE WAS SMITTEN. POSITIVELY SMITTEN! Of course, Daddy didn't think he was good enough for me.

But then Daddy wouldn't have thought that the President was good enough for me. But I liked Mr. Weeks. Hmm, yes I did. Daddy would've come 'round. He always did. FOR ME.

Oh, but you want to know how it happened. Well, I was in my room and I saw that it was dusk. I knew that Daddy was countin' the day's receipts. And so I went in to light the lamps for him. And...and....then I saw him there. All bloody. Laying across all the money he'd been countin'. And so I screamed. (She does.) and I screamed again. (She does.) And that's all I remember.

THE PREACHER: Good day to you. I am the REVEREND JONATHAN HITCHCOCK and I travel throughout this land preaching the good book and the evils of demon whiskey. Rum. Gin. Ale. The devil's spittle. All of it. And I say unto you now, if you do not put vice aside and pledge to no longer partake of alcoholic spirits, you will be cursed and cast down into the fiery pit. Spill the evil brew! Now, right now! Spill it onto the ground lest your soul be in torment for eternity. For it is written - he who lives in drunkenness will cry out from the depths of hell, twistin' and turnin' in the flames!! Yea!! And they will be branded with the mark of the devil and be thirsting for redemption even as their skin blisters, blackens, and peels off!! But, brothers and sisters, you know that by then it will be too late for redemption. Too late for anything but the embers of damnation. I say to you now, that the souls of those who drink and gamble and carouse with loose women will be chained burning, parched, scorched by the breath of Satan until the end of time and beyond!!!

This is the message I have taken along the railroad. Some heed the word. Some do not.

And now, brothers and sisters, about this violation of God's commandment. Thou shalt not kill. I knew not this man, this Jeb Taylor. At first, he seemed a sober, God-fearing man. But then I witnessed the goings-on at his establishment. Sodom and Gomorrah had nothing on JohnnyCak e Lodge.. Drinking. Gambling. There was even....a who...fancy lady! I WENT TO MY ROOM TO PRAY THAT I WOULDN'T BE TAINTED BY THEIR WICKEDNESS. IN THE MIDST OF MY PRAYERS, I HEARD A NOISE. IT SOUNDED LIKE CRYING. UPON OPENING MY DOOR, I SAW THE YOUNG SERVANT GIRL, RUNNING CRYING DOWN THE HALLWAY. IT OCCURRED TO ME TO OFFER COMFORT, BUT INSTEAD I RESUMED MY PRAYERS. ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER I HEARD JEB'S DAUGHTER SCREAMING. WE ALL RUSHED TO HER AND SAW....THE BODY. JEB TAYLOR. Hopefully, he repented before the shadow of death was upon him.

ONE MORE THING. THE HOMESTEADER. SMITH. HE LOOKED FAMILIAR TO ME. I can't place from where or when.

THE DOCTOR: Poor ol' Jeb. Serves 'im right, the ol' skinflint. It's a good thing he was dead already, cuz his heart woulda give out if he'd seen all that blood on his money. Tha' was his God, y'know. Money.

Oh, say, how-do. I'M CHARLES RAWSON. DOCTOR CHARLES RAWSON. BUT FOLKS ROUND HERE JUST CALL ME "DOC." Yep, cheapest son-of-a-bitch you'd ever wanna meet. W ouldn' even give an ol' frien' a drink if he was a li'l short, y'know. But do not get the wrong idea. Me n' Jeb. We was like this. (holds up two fingers.) He sold whiskey. I drank it. If he'da been a woman, I'd a married the son-of-a-gun. I expect I liked him better n' most of the folks in town. Between you an' me - sshh - they hated 'im. Hey, and why'da think HIS FIRST WIFE UP AND RAN OUT ON HIM? SHE COULDN'T TAKE IT EITHER. AND THEN THAT LITTLE GAL HE W ENT AND MARRIED. POOR THING. DO YA KNOW HOW SHE DIED? TRYING TO

HAVE JEB'S BABY, THAT'S HOW. HE DIDN'T SEND FOR ME TILL IT WAS TOO LATE. DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO PAY ME, MOST LIKELY. HAD THE FIRST NICKEL HE EVER MADE. POOR LITTLE THING JUST BLED TO DEATH. BABY TOO.

But, hey, that was a year or more ago. Lotta whiskey in the jug since then. Now, I was at the lodge that night. Satan's nightgown, I was at the lodge most nights. Jeb may've been cheap but he still had the best liquor in these parts. I consider myself an expert, you know. I'D SHARED A GLASS OR TWO IN THE BARROOM WITH A MOST AMIABLE GENTLEMEN - A



GAMBLER BY TRADE. BUT THE CALL OF NATURE WAS UPON ME AND I RETIRED TO THE "OUTSIDE" FACILITIES. IT WAS THERE THAT I HEARD THE MELODIOUS TONES OF PEARL WHO HAD DISCOVERED THAT HER DADDY HAD DEPARTED FOR THAT STILL IN THE SKY. UPON REACHING THE COUNTIN' ROOM, I KNEW AT ONCE THAT OL' JEB WAS DONE FOR. HE WAS STILL WARM THOUGH. PROBABLY BEEN STABBED 'BOUT FIVE MINUTES BEFORE PEARL FOUND 'IM.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is all I know. Say, would any of you kind folks happen to have a drop or two that you'd be willing to share with a practitioner of the medical arts?

FANCY LADY: You know what the death of JEB TAYLOR meant to me? One less customer. I'M ABIGAIL TAYLOR. But the boys just call me "Abby". I live in town, but spend an awful lot of time at the Lodge. Jeb and I had what might be called a business relation-ship. He paid top dollar and I closed my eyes and made my mind a blank. A girl has to have some standards. JEB TAYLOR was a skunk. And mean. I know better n' anybody. EXCEPT FOR MAYBE HIS WIVES. I NEVER KNEW THE FIRST, AND FELT DAMN SORRY FOR THE SECOND. HE SURE DID A SNOW JOB ON HER. HE REALLY LAID ON THE CHARM, PLAYED THE SWEET OL' GENTLEMAN. PROMISED HER A HOME AND ALL. THAT'S ALL SHE WANTED. TO LIVE LIKE NORMAL FOLK. LIKE BEIN' MRS. JEB TAYLOR WOULD BE NORMAL. SHE SOON FOUND OUT DIFFERENT. SEE, WE ACTUALLY GOT TO BE FRIENDS, DESPITE MY "ARRANGEMENT" WITH JEB. IT AIN'T THAT SURPRISIN'. I LIKED HER. AND SHE NEVER LOOKED DOWN AT ME.

But that's 'nough about that. I'd been drinkin' at the Lodge after the flood and met some of her passengers and crew. Checking out the prospects, you see. Pretty slim pickings. The teacher was all cow-eyed over Pearl, the homesteader Smith looked pretty happily married, and Dan Scott will only pay for it if you offer him "double or nothin." That left the Preacher fella, who was staring daggers at me. So I sashayed on over and asked if he'd like to take a gander at the wages of sin, up close. They are the worst, those preacher fellas. Rant and rave by day and dance the horizontal two-step by night. I spent an hour in his room, and LEFT JUST AROUND SUNSET. I'D GONE INTO THE KITCHEN, LOOKING FOR A BITE TO EAT, WHEN I HEARD PEARL SCREAMIN'. I got there about the same as everyone else and there was old Jeb. Stabbed. It was not a pleasant sight. That's all I know of the situation.

THE GAMBLER: Good afternoon. Ladies. Gentlemen. Allow me to introduce myself. DANIEL J. SCOTT, Esquire. I answer to Dan, Danny, or as I'm known on the riverboats - Dandy Dan Scott. It is ironic that I am meeting you all here on the train. Twice a year, I travel by train to New York City where I spend a week or more - depending on Lady Luck. Most of the time you can find Dan Scott on the great Mississippi - where I preside over that perfect game of chance - poker. I run a clean, fair, and honest game - which led to my first encounter with Jeb Taylor.

About three years ago, Mr. Taylor invited me to use his Lodge for a friendly game - during one of the train's regular stops. There not being a lot in the way of players it fell to just Jeb and I to play a little two-handed "Hi-Lo". As the card players among you know, this is not so much a game of skill as luck. And I have always been lucky. As I was that night. Soon Mr. Taylor owed me in the neighborhood of six hundred dollars. He'd been drinking steadily....I have foresworn liquor, having taken the pledge several years ago. He offered at this time, to settle the debt by giving me his daughter Pearl. You've met the lady? I declined. He then retired to

find his spectacles and upon his return, insisted on a new deck of cards. His cards. Not wishin' to question his honor, I agreed and play resumed.

My luck did not turn immediately, but gradually Mr. Taylor began to recoup his losses. By two a. m. we were even again and by four I was in his debt for over a thousand dollars. This was all the cash I had on my person. I left on a train the next morning, virtually penniless. It was only later, when I closely examined his cards under a magnifying glass, that I could see the tiny marks upon them. Marks that were visible, I knew, with the help of Mr. Taylor's special eyeglasses.

This, if you will pardon me, ladies, would have earned JEB TAYLOR a bullet in the heart on any riverboat on the Mississippi. I WAS HUMILIATED AND VOWED REVENGE. THAT IS WHY I RETURNED TO JOHNNYCAKE LODGE. IT WAS MY INTENTION TO CONFRONT MR. JEB TAYLOR AND CHALLENGE HIM TO A DUEL. I WAS SITTING IN THE FRONT PARLOR, RELISHING THE MOMENT WHEN I COULD THROW THE GLOVE DOWN IN FRONT OF HIM, WHEN I HEARD HIS DAUGHTER SCREAMING.

Alas, he was already dead. Had my honor been assuaged by the act? I never knew. And we never knew who murdered him. Perhaps that is for the best.

#### THE HOMESTEADERS

JACOB: 'Evnin', evnin'. Glad t'meet you. I'M JACOB SMITH. THIS HERE'S MY WIFE, WILLA YONDER'S OUR GIRL, ELIZABETH.

WILLA: BETSY, WE CALL HER.

JACOB: She's a handful, I'll tell ya. More like a boy sometimes. Her mother has a dickens of a time gettin' her to wear a dress.

WILLA:(Noticing BETSY is wandering off.) Betsy! Betsy! Don't go wandering off and botherin' people. You get back with us, y'hear!

BETSY: Aw, Ma, I'm not gonna bother anyone.

JACOB: See what I mean? She even cut her hair short 'cause she got tired of combin' and brus hin' and braidin' it! Elizabeth! You mind your ma!

BETSY: Yes, Pa.

WILLA: Sometimes she's just a little too smart for her britches, isn't she, Jake? She 'bout drove us crazy on the train. Askin' questions, "why is this" and "what is that" ....

JACOB: I think the teacher fella, Mr. Weeks, got tired of it pretty darn quick.

BETSY: OH, POOEY, HE DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING. Anytime I asked him anything he just told me to look it up. And I said if he'd lend me a school book I would. AND FIRST HE SAYS HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE ANY SCHOOLBOOKS. I told him I'd never heard of a teacher without

school books and THEN HE SAID THAT HE'D SENT HIS BOOKS ON AHEAD. I feel sorry for the children who'll have him for a teacher!

WILLA: Elizabeth! Children shouldn't criticize their elders!

BETSY: Sorry, Ma.

JACOB: Well, you gotta admit, Willa, he IS kinda strange for a teacher.

WILLA: You hush up, Jacob Smith! You're the one encourages the child. Betsy, you do know how you should speak of Mr. Weeks, don't you.

BETSY: Yes, Ma'am. I should speak all respectful.

WILLA: That's right.

BETSY: NOT LIKE MR. TAYLOR AND HIS DAUGHTER WERE TALKIN'.

JACOB: What do you mean, Betsy?

BETSY: Well, that afternoon, when you thought I was takin' a nap in our room, I WENT DOWN THE HALL AND HEARD A FIGHT. IT WAS GOIN' ON IN MR. TAYLOR'S ROOM!

WILLA: Elizabeth! You were eavesdropping?

JACOB: What d'ya hear, Betsy?

BETSY: I heard that Mr. Taylor arguin' with his daughter, Pearl. He was tellin' her to quit moonin' over Mr. Weeks, cause he was just a poor teacher with no money and no prospects and if she thought that he was husband material she was just mistaken.

WILLA: Betsy, you should be ashamed!

JACOB: And then what happened?

BETSY: Well, PEARL just had an awful tantrum. And cried and stamped her foot. And said, "You'll be sorry, Daddy! I can do anything I want to and you can't stop me. Me and Henry fell in love at first sight! You'd better not get in my way!" And then I heard the two of you coming back from your walk so I ran back to our room. If I ever talked like that to you, Pa, I'd be sitting down real careful for a week!

JACOB: That's the truth, little girl!

WILL: We were all together, in our guest room, when we heard the girl screaming.

JACOB: Around sunset.

WILL: Jacob went and saw that Mr. Taylor was murdered. Betsy and I stayed in the room. I'm glad. She pretends to be so tough. But she's just a little girl.

BETSY: Oh, ma.

JACOB: That's the extent of our knowledge of that day. We never saw Mr. Taylor before that, and we never saw any of our fellow travelers afterwards.

SERVING WENCH: How do....How do. I'm SARAH WHEELER and I worked for Mr. Jeb Taylor. I did the cookin' and the cleanin' and the washin' and ...and...well, everything. 'Cept wh at Simon did. Simon's the handy man. Or boy. He's nice. He calls me Miss Wheeler and treats me with respect and all. Not like....Anyway...the reason I came to work at JohnnyCake Lodge is 'cause of my dad. See, he drinks a lot. A lot. Fact is, I can't remember seein' him sober too many times. I think he started after my Ma died. But anyway, he used ta go over and drink at the Lodge, and Mr. Taylor, he'd let him drink on the "cuff". You know, my dad would promise to pay 'im later. Then, one night, my dad fell in - I mean he fell into the old canal - I think maybe he had a drop in 'im at the time - and he broke both his legs. So he couldn't work and he couldn't pay Mr. Taylor. So Mr. Taylor says to him, he says, "Ah, Mr. Wheeler, it's a shame you won't be joining us at the Lodge for a while." This, to my dad who would crawl naked over horseshoe nails and mule dung if a drink were sittin' on the other side. And then Mr. Taylor says, "So, Benjamin, and what kind of arrangements will you be makin' for the payin' of your bill." And my dad, I love him, but I came near to breakin' both his arms then, says, "Well, gee, Jeb, whatta you suggest?" And Mr. Taylor, he thinks a while, and then he says, "Well, Benjamin, you know I've had a rough time of it over there at the Lodge, since my dear wife died. The work's too much for the Widow Sackett and you know how delicate my Pearl is. Maybe your Sarah could come and give us a hand. I'll pay her twenty-five cents a day, minus her keep, and she can work off your debt." Well, my dad didn't look none too happy with this idea, and, of course, neither did I. I told Mr. Taylor I didn't want to. I was grateful for the opportunity and everything, but I just didn't want to. And then, he takes me aside and he tells me, "Listen, Sarah and listen real careful. Your pa owes me money and doesn't have any prospects for payin' his debt. The law takes a real dim view of no-good free-loaders and all it would take is a conversation between me and the Sheriff and your old man would find himself in a heap of legal difficulties. I'd suggest you get your things and your behind over to JohnnyCake Lodge. And I'd also suggest you keep a civil tongue in your head with me and my daughter. Otherwise, I'll introduce you to the hickory switch that I used on my wives. Shut them up damn quick."

I'm not a real bright girl, BUT I KNEW I'D HAVE TO DO JUST WHAT HE SAID AND WORK HARD OR THINGS WOULD GO REAL BAD FOR ME AND MY DAD.

So I was working there for about three months, waitin' on customers and being at Pearl's beck and call. I thought it was as awful as it could get. But I was wrong. 'Cause then I noticed Mr. Taylor watching me. With a funny look. And he'd start brushin' up against me. I told him to stop and he laughed. Then, the day he died, he called me into the counting room. He said he'd talked to my dad and was going to forgive his debt. "Wipe the slate clean, he said..... On the day I married him. I cried. I begged. I reminded him about Widow Sackett, who cooked for us. She'd been sweet on him for years. I didn't dare tell him the real reasons why I didn't want to marry him. FIRST, I REALLY, REALLY HATED HIM. SECOND, I REALLY, REALLY LOVE SOMEONE ELSE. And finally I RAN CRYING TO THE DINING ROOM. AND I SAT THERE THINKING HOW I WAS GONNA TELL SIMON THAT I COULDN'T MARRY HIM. THAT'S WHEN I HEARD PEARL SCREAMIN' AND SCREAMIN'. YOU KNOW WHAT WE FOUND. THAT NASTY OLD MAN DEAD. I DIDN'T KILL HIM. BUT I WAS GLAD HE WAS DEAD.

THE TEACHER: Hello. Good afternoon. I am HENRY WEEKS, TEACHER AND POET. It was a bizarre twist of fate that lead to my passage on the Iron Horse of Death. For that is how I see

it. We were being drawn, irresistibly, into a vortex of passion and death. It reminds me of a play by Gaston D'Ormand - are you familiar with his work? Very sad. Very poetic. The final speech is presented on a bluff overlooking the English Channel which separates the hero, Francoise, from his love, Hortense. Ah, but I digress. I am but a simple teacher with a profound love for the classics and a desire to shape and mold young minds. My passage on the train was to be a time of preparation and reflection. Preparation for a teaching position in the town of Vermillion. I must admit that the name of the town was a big part of the reason I accepted the job. Vermillion. RED. How sadly prophetic this was to be. And this journey was to be one of reflection as well. I am, as stated, a teacher and a poet. To be the former without the latter is to be a flower without a scent, a bird without a song, a canal boat without a mule. If one cannot infuse education with the emotion, the fire, the j'en ne sais que of poetry, one does not deserve the title "teacher" - n'cest pas?

And so I traversed to JohnnyCake Lodge and was stranded by the whims of nature in the good company of my fellow passengers and the crew of the train I nicknamed "The Iron Bottom".... after that delightful rustic character in the Bard's immortal "Midsummer's Night's Dream." But once, again, I digress. Je' regrette.

Upon our arrival we disembarked with such belongings as would be necessary for a sojourn at the Lodge. Before I'd taken three steps, however, I beheld a creature so beautiful, so full of charm and grace that I was struck quite dumb. I could but gesture. (He does.) The Conductor, noticing my state, said, "Oh, her, that there's Pearl, our host's daughter." How perfect a name, I thought, for indeed she was a treasure. Upon finding my voice, I hastened to introduce myself. And immediately, did I see, could I dare to believe, a flicker of interest in her beautiful brown eyes? The rest of the day we were inseparable. We talked and laughed and both knew that this was it. True love. I knew that before this went any further, I needed to speak to Pearl's father and obtain his formal permission to court his daughter. I approached him and asked his permission.

Do you know what he did? HE LAUGHED. YES, LAUGHED AND SWORE THAT NO MOUNTEBANK, NO PENNILESS TEACHER WOULD STEAL HIS PRECIOUS DAUGHTER. AND HE TURNED ME OUT OF THE COUNTING ROOM. I STUMBLED BLINDLY DOWN THE HALL TO THE SMALL SITTING ROOM, AND COLLAPSED IN GRIEF BY THE WINDOW. I AM NOT ASHAMED TO SAY I CRIED.

YES! I WEPT AS I HADN'T WEPT SINCE THE DEATH OF MY BABY SISTER. AND WHEN I COULD CRY NO MORE, I FINALLY LOOKED UP. AND THROUGH THE WINDOW AND THE HAZE OF MY TEARS I BEHELD THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SUNSET I HAD EVER SEEN. TAKING UP MY PEN, I WROTE MY GREATEST POEM. Would you like to hear it?

(He removes a folded piece of paper from his pocket. When unfolded, the opposite side is a wanted-for-murder poster featuring the picture of JACOB SMITH, HOMESTEADER.)

I SAID GOODBYE TO SUNLIGHT  
I BID FAREWELL THE DAY THE BLUE  
HAD TURNED TO PURPLE THE  
MOON WAS ON THE WAY.

THE RED, SHE WAS A-COMIN'

THE ORANGE SPILL WAS IN VIEW  
I TRIED TO TOUCH THE SUN THEN  
AND FELT ITS HEAT ANEW.

THEN IN AN EYEBLINK IT WAS OVER  
NOW THE COLORS WAIT FOR DAWN  
BUT THE PAIN REMAINS WITHIN ME  
LONG AFTER AMBER'S GONE.

I had no more than finished my poem when I heard my darling Pearl screaming. The poor dear, to find her father so brutally slain. It tore at my heart.

But that is all I know of the events at Johnnycake Lodge. Alas, for even though her father was dead, I never saw my Pearl again.

THE HANDYMAN: Hi...I'm...um....PURDY, SIMON PURDY and I worked for Jeb Taylor. You know....the man what got killed. Stabbed. But I din't see nothing, or hear nothing...or...nothing. See, I came to work for Mr. Taylor 'bout ten years ago - right about the time he built the Lodge. I wasn't much more 'n a boy. I didn't have no folks, and Mrs. Taylor - the first Mrs. Taylor. - she took me in. Made sure I was fed, and clothed and all. She was a nice, nice lady. I was sure sorry when she up and left. Couldn't rightly blame her, though. Mr. Taylor used to treat her real mean - he hit her even. I didn't like that - not one little bit. And I tried to stop him. But then he'd lock me in the ice house and he beat me and...well, anyway, I paid him back. See...I.. I helped Mrs. Taylor run away. I watched him and I knew where he kept his money box and when she couldn't stand it no more I told her and together we broke into it and she took all the money with her. That was hurtin' him where he lived, all right! Right in the money box. Now the second Mrs. Taylor was even sweeter and younger and prettier than the first. AND HE TREATED HER EVEN WORSE. I TRIED TO HELP HER. SHE HAD SOME KIN SOMEWHERE AND I MADE SURE HER LETTERS GOT MAILED. 'CAUSE HE WOULD A JUST BURNT 'EM. IT NEAR DROVE ME MAD TO SEE WHAT WAS HAPPENIN' TO HER - SHE GOT OLD-LOOKIN', AND TIRED, AND AFORE SHE'D BEEN MARRIED TO HIM A YEAR SHE WAS DEAD. IT WAS A SIN. AND THEN HE WAS TRYIN' TO LAY HANDS ON MY SARAH. I DIN'T KILL HIM. BUT AFORE HE'D A TOUCHED ONE HAIR ON SARAH'S HEAD, I WOULD A KILLED HIM.

I WAS IN THE BARN WHEN I HEARD PEARL SCREECHIN'. But I wasn't surprised. There was a lot of folks hated him, 'sides me.....That's all I'm saying right now.

THE COOK: How do, folks, how do. THE WIDOW NELLIE SACKETT is real eager to tell you about JEB TAYLOR. My poor, poor, Jeb. Cut down in his prime by some lily-livered coward who wasn't half the man as he was. NOW, IT WASN'T COMMON KNOWLEDGE - BUT ME N' JEB, WE HAD AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN US. AFTER HIS FIRST WIFE ABANDONED HIM 'N PEARL, JEB WAS A LONELY MAN, BEREFT OF FEMALE COMPANIONSHIP, ADRIFT HERE IN THE WILDERNESS. That's why I always felt it was my Christian duty to offer him succor and comfort. Though, if the truth be known, it was a comfort to me, too. After long days

cooking and slaving for the likes of the railroad people and the local folk, it was such a relief to be with a gentleman of Jeb's refinement. I was heartbroke that me 'n him never got around to ty in' the knot. We woulda, sooner or later, though. Matter of fact, THE ONLY TIME JEB EVER

LET ME DOWN WAS WHEN HE TOOK UP WITH A PASSENGER ON THE TRAIN. AND THEN HE UP AND MARRIED HER. SHE BEWITCHED HIM, THAT WAS ALL. WITH HER FANCY AIRS AND BLUSHES AND ALL. IT WAS ALL AN ACT. THAT'S WHAT SHE WAS, YOU KNOW - NOTHIN' BUT A CHEAP ACTRESS. And as it turned out, she wasn't enough woman for him and went and died on him 'for they even had their first anniversary. Shoot, it was only a matter of time before he would turn to me again. Only this time, Nellie is giving out any free samples. JEB TAYLOR WAS GONNA MARRY ME OR HE WASN'T GONNA MARRY NOBODY.

(Sniffing) I WAS IN THE ROOT CELLAR GATHERIN' SOME TATERS AND ONIONS FOR THE NEXT DAY'S MEALS. THEN I HEARD PEARL SCREAMIN' AND RAN IN WITH EVERYBODY ELSE. MY POOR, POOR JEB. What else can I say. It broke my heart.

THE VERY BRIEF SOLUTION SCENE IS NOT INCLUDED IN REVIEW SCRIPTS. IF YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE THE ENTIRE ACTING COPY BEFORE MAKING A DECISION ABOUT PRODUCING, PLEASE CONTACT US:

330-678-3893

[mysteriesbymoushey@gmail.com](mailto:mysteriesbymoushey@gmail.com)

#### PROPS

Wanted poster with picture of JACOB SMITH, looking menacing and bandit-like. Poem is written on reverse side. Diagram with Johnnycake Lodge and environs. You will have to recreate in order to include locally specific places.

WHAT IS INCLUDED WITH THE PRODUCTION PACKET sent electronically.

A premise sheet that we used to give background for one particular production.

Several diagram samples of Johnnycake Lodge.

Several 'suspect' sheet samples - suitable for copying. Participants can use these for taking notes.

A sample of the Full Solution Sheet

A sheet of ballots, suitable for copying, to use instead of Full Solutions.

Directions for making "Wanted" poster.

Template for "Wanted" poster.

Production Manual (It's the same for all our script.)

#### OPTIONAL

For a small fee we can send everything in the Production Packet in printed format.

Including a Production Manual.