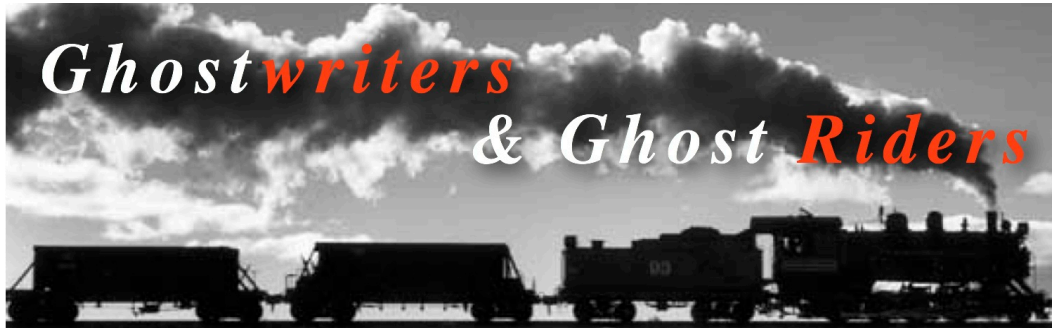


PERUSAL SCRIPT



A CHAMELEONS' MURDER MYSTERY

by **Jim Christian**



Salt Lake City

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GHOST WRITERS AND GHOST RIDERS

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CAST OF CHARACTERS -- 4M 4W

CHARLIE STEIGEL -- HVRR employee - nickname: "Choo-Choo Charlie" - event host and storyteller - graduated in theatre from Snow College - is proud to be the only "working actor" from his class

BINGO BEEKMAN -- his parents wanted a dog - Charlie's "groupie" - works for the Midway Sanitation District - washes garbage trucks - clings to any extremist theories, i.e., ghosts, UFOs, conspiracy theories, unicorns, etc.

WILLADEAN MINKUS -- ghost aficionado - traveling the country with her sister, Kitty on a quest to find America's greatest haunts - gregarious and inquisitive -- travels in an RV - from Wahoo, Nebraska - works with troubled teens

KITTY MINKUS -- Willadean's equally eccentric sister - energetic and chatterbox - a genuine packrat - suffers from hayfever - has a "bottomless" purse filled with everything from notebooks and cameras to maps and medicines - works in a nursing home

MIRANDA MINES -- local psychic - in constant communication with the "other side" - wants to help troubled spirits "cross over" to their eternal rest - runs the only "new age" gift boutique in the Heber Valley (doubles as a bait shop and taxidermist.)

STU KEPPLER -- Hollywood agent - transitioning into producing with his first big picture about one of the ghost legends of the HVRR - high-energy and high-stress - little fish trying to swim with the big sharks - never lets his cell phone leave his side

SHEILA ROBBINS -- rising Hollywood starlet - Stu's girlfriend and project - EXTREMELY low I.Q. - reactionary and emotional - is more concerned about her appearance and comfort than anything else

BUSTER COATES -- rogue-ghostbuster - has a vendetta against the forces of the supernatural - his parents were snatched by a poltergeist from the Bridal Veil Falls gondola (that's the REAL reason it was closed down) - definite "take charge" attitude

PLACE: Depot of the Heber Valley Historic Railroad

TIME: Now

EVENT: The Ghost Train Excursion

GHOSTWRITERS AND GHOST RIDERS *A CHAMELEON'S MURDER MYSTERY* by Jim Christian

Characters: 4m 4w Synopsis: This play originated as a special charter of the Heber Valley Historic Railroad that runs up Provo Canyon to Heber City, in Utah, telling the tales of many ghosts and other hauntings along its legendary rails. It can work on any type of train trip anywhere across the country. It can also work in a theatre or a small or large room. The assemblage of characters ranges from locals to Hollywood figures to dabblers in the supernatural ... leading to a chaotic conflict of interests ... and death by fright! Or is it? (**ORDER #3088.**)

The permission is hereby given by the author and publisher to any producing group to adapt the Utah references in this script to your local train and railroad history. (We would love to see what you come up with!) Jim Christian must still be given credit as the author of the play. You may, if desired, add the name of the person who adapts the script to your local references in the following manner:

Ghost Writers and Ghost Riders
by Jim Christian
and
"George Spelvin" [insert your author's name]

1 -- COCKTAILS

(The action begins with Bingo, Miranda, and the Minkus sisters entering and mingling. Bingo, is chatting with the crowd in great anticipation of "Choo-Choo Charlie" and his stories. Miranda drifts about the room, reading the energies of the space and the people. The Minkus sisters are busily organizing all of their cameras, recorders, itineraries, and notepads and pumping the audience for any ghost stories that they might know about the tram. They also comment on the dry air and use Kleenex and nasal spray. Eventually, Charlie bursts into the room, blows a train whistle, and jumps up onto one of the benches. He is dressed in overalls, an engineer's cap, a work shirt and kerchief around his neck.)

2 -- AFTER COCKTAILS (Act 1)

CHARLIE: *(calling out in stretched tones)* A-A-A-ALLLLLL ABO-OO-OARD for a FRIGHTENINGLY good time!

BINGO: *(applauding and jumping up and down)* YAYYYYYY!!!!!!!!!!

CHARLIE: *(everything that Charlie says as a part of his spiel is accompanied by exaggerated gestures, obviously over-rehearsed and geared to the level of pre-schoolers)* Hey, everybody! I'm Charlie Steigel, but around these parts I'm better known as...

(Makes an arm gesture to simulate the movement of locomotive wheels.)

... "Choo-Choo Charlie!"

BINGO: *(gesturing and speaking simultaneously with Charlie)* ... "Choo-Choo Charlie!" YAYYYYYY!
(He begins clapping and jumping again.)

CHARLIE: *(pleasantly)* Hi, Bingo!

(The Minkus sisters capture everything that Charlie says and does with rapt attention as Miranda looks at him with a mixture of superiority and scorn.)

CHARLIE: Tonight's excursion is a very special one... "**The Ghost Train.**"

[NOTE: every line of Charlie's which appears in boldface and underlined is mimicked aloud perfectly by Bingo complete with gestures and inflection]

Ever since the **earliest days** of the **Heber Valley Historic Railroad** there have been **tragic** and **mysterious** experiences which have **plagued its history.** Tonight ... I'll be telling all about **some of the scariest legends, and who knows? We may even encounter one of the countless spirits that haunts our rails.**

(Having had enough of Bingo's unwelcome assistance, he musters as much cheer and patience as possible before speaking.)

You know, Bingo ... I don't really need your help to do this ... and I don't think these people are especially interested in hearing from you.

BINGO: *(barely phased by the chastisement)* Oh, I'm sorry ... but I just get so excited! I can't help myself. I mean, you're SUCH a good storyteller! I always get...

(With a grandiose gesture)

... TRANSPORTED ... into mystic realms and secret places.

(Charlie is obviously flattered by the compliment.)

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WILLADEAN: (*chiming in*) I think you're absolutely right, honey. And since he's such a good storyteller, why don't you go hide in one of those secret places and we'll let him get on with things, okay?

BINGO: (*after a beat*) You're mean.

KITTY: (*stooping to his level*) And you have a stupid name.

WILLADEAN: (*ever the big sister*) Kitty, don't start anything.
(*To Charlie.*)

Now, Mr. ChooChoo, where were you?

CHARLIE: (*back in his storyteller mode*) Well ... I was just about to set the stage for tonight's mystifying journey.

(*During the next speech, Bingo constantly fights impulses to join in ... Charlie keeps checking him and it turns into a game of "Red Light, Green Light".*)

The first haunted place ... we'll be passing through ... is the crossing... at Casperville Road.

(*Charlie holds up a warning finger to Bingo.*)

Late one night in 1952 ... little Tommy Birkenshaw was riding his new birthday bicycle all alone...

BINGO: (*to a bystander*) I love this part!

CHARLIE: ... and as he crossed the train tracks on Casperville Road, his front tire got stuck in the rails! The engineer driving the train that night saw little Tommy in the light from the headlamp ... frantically trying to wrestle his precious bicycle free! The engineer shouted, blew the whistle and clanged the bell, but Tommy wouldn't give up!

BINGO: Run, Tommy! Run!

CHARLIE: The screaming of the locomotive brakes pierced the night ... but it was too little ... too late. Tommy's twisted bicycle was discovered tangled in the undercarriage of the train ... but as for little Tommy...

(*Bingo gasps.*)

... he vanished ... without a trace. Nothing was ever found!

(*Suddenly perky and cheery again.*)

So keep a sharp eye out tonight near Casperville Road. You might just spot a little ghost in a propeller beanie!

MIRANDA: (*surging from the crowd*) For the love of heaven! Let little Tommy sleep!!!!

CHARLIE: (*genuinely frustrated*) Oh, no...

MIRANDA: (*wagging a finger at Charlie*) You are despicable! Violating the sanctity of the netherworld! Shattering the peaceful rest of the dead! Exploiting their tortured souls!

BINGO: Ghosts are fun.

(*He has opened a bottle of grape soda and takes a big gulp.*)

MIRANDA: Imbecile! What right do we have to keep them prisoner with our morbid curiosities and greed!
(*To Charlie.*)

How DARE you continue to make your filthy lucre from the suffering of others?

CHARLIE: Lady! It's just a job! I didn't get cast at Lagoon¹ again so I'm stuck here.

MIRANDA: That changes nothing! You are still a party to this cosmic conspiracy and you will suffer mightily

¹ LAGOON is a local amusement park that hires actors for several different performance spaces around the park.

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when all is made right!

WILLADEAN: (*introducing herself*) Excuse me. Ma'am? I'm Willadean Minkus and this is my sister, Kitty.

BINGO: Willadean and Kitty Minkus? Now who's got the stupid names?

KITTY: You do!

WILLADEAN: (*warningly*) Kitty...

MIRANDA: (*extending her hand*) I'm Miranda Mines. Psychic. Spiritualist. Daughter of the universe.
(*Willadean shakes her hand.*)

BINGO: She runs the local taxidermy business.

MIRANDA: I help release the spirits of our little woodland creatures over to their veterinary Valhalla!

BINGO: It's also a bait shop.

MIRANDA: (*to Bingo*) Worms don't have souls.

WILLADEAN: Well, Miranda ... it sounds to me like you have a wonderful inroad to the spirit world.

MIRANDA: They speak to me. I don't even have to seek them out.

(*Bingo makes "crazy" circles around his head behind Miranda's back.*)

WILLADEAN: Fascinating! My sister, Kitty, and I are on sort of a "spiritual quest" ourselves!

MIRANDA: (*intrigued*) Really? Do you know the "Crystal People"?

WILLADEAN: No. We're going all over the country in search of the most famous haunted places in America.
We started in Spokane, Washington...

KITTY: And we're going all the way to New Orleans!

WILLADEAN: We have charted an absolutely fascinating journey for ourselves ... Alcatraz --

KITTY: The Lost Dutchman Mine...

WILLADEAN: Boot Hill...

KITTY: The Devil's Promenade...

WILLADEAN: Gettysburg...

KITTY: Bobby Mackey's Music World...

WILLADEAN: And the Domino's Pizza in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

(*Willadean and Kitty clap and giggle with anticipation and glee.*)

Thirty haunts in thirty days!

MIRANDA: GHOST HUNTERS??!!

KITTY: Well...

WILLADEAN: Sorta.

CHARLIE: (*retreating*) Uh-oh...

MIRANDA: (*her anger welling*) How VILE! How TAWDRY! How DISGUSTING! You're no better than ...
(*Gesturing to Charlie.*)

... HE is!

KITTY: We're just going on vacation!

MIRANDA: (*accusingly*) And when do the DEAD get a vacation? Hmm?

BINGO: Summer?

MIRANDA: (*climbing onto the bench she mounts her soapbox full steam*) How can we possibly hope to live in harmony with the spirit world when we are constantly creating chaos with the cosmos! Are they only there to entertain us? To act as our court jesters? To put on paranormal puppet shows at our every whim? Anyone

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who tries to wring joy from their misery is begging for their wrath!

(At this point, Stu bursts into the room full throttle with Sheila trailing behind -- he is talking a mile a minute on his cell phone and she is fishing through her purse for a mirror and brush.)

STU: *(into the phone)* No! No! NO! Keanu is a completely unacceptable option. We need someone who speaks English. Get me that Banderas guy and then we can talk!

SHEILA: Stu?

STU: *(to her)* Not now, Sheila.

(Back into the phone.)

What about that kid from "Punk'd"?

(He opens a bottle of saline spray and squirts it up his nose.)

SHEILA: Are there potties on the train?

BINGO: Yeah ... but you'll want to use the ones in the depot.

SHEILA: Okay.

(She heads for the restroom.)

STU: Sheila!

(He has capped the nose spray and jiggles it in her direction -- she takes it, puts it into her purse, and enters the restroom -- Stu speaks into the phone.)

What? Whatever! Just don't bring that Timberlake brat around again!

(Hangs up -- seeing Miranda.)

Are you in charge?

MIRANDA: Hardly!

(She gets down from the bench.)

STU: I'm lookin' for the ghost guy.

CHARLIE: *(hopping back up onto the bench)* That'd be me...

STU: *(producing his business card)* Stu Keppler ... K-Star Management. I'm here about your ghost.

CHARLIE: *(reading the card)* Hollywood? Are you an agent?

STU: Yeah.

CHARLIE: *(with false modesty)* You know ... I'm an actor.

STU: *(unimpressed)* Then act like you're telling me about your ghost.

CHARLIE: Oh! Well, I just told everyone about Tommy and his bicycle...

STU: Not that one. The other one.

CHARLIE: You mean the railroad crew who lost their lives in the big flood of...

STU: No. The other one.

CHARLIE: The phantom signalman of Soldier Hollow...

STU: Wrong!

(Snapping his fingers.)

C'mon ... we're burnin' daylight here...

CHARLIE: The spirit of the bridge...

STU: No.

CHARLIE: The blue...

STU: No.

CHARLIE: The old...

STU: No.

CHARLIE: The bride...

STU: BINGO!!!

BINGO: Yes, sir?!!!

STU: What?

BINGO: You said my name.

STU: I said, "Bingo."

BINGO: That's my name.

STU: It's a stupid name.

KITTY: Ha!

STU: What moron gave you a crummy name like that?

BINGO: *(after a beat)* My parents wanted a dog.

SHEILA: *(emerging from the restroom)* Stu, I'm ready.

STU: Sheila, sweetie ... c'mere. This guy's gonna tell you the story I was talkin' about.

SHEILA: Him? He's cute.

STU: Okay, tiger. Spill.

CHARLIE: *(a little unsurely)* Okay ... normally I don't tell this part until we get up to...

STU: Just do it!

CHARLIE: Right!

(Charlie switches into his "serious actor" mode and begins.)

The fateful night of <current date>, 1913, one of the train conductors, Caleb Ricks and his new bride, Susannah, were taking a honeymoon excursion up to Bridal Veil Falls, but the conductor who was working that night just happened to be Zeke Brady, Caleb's rival for Susannah's affection. Now those two boys had never gotten along even when they were working side by side on the train, but when Susannah entered the picture, all heck broke loose!

BINGO: *(with supportive enthusiasm)* All heck!

CHARLIE: *(losing it momentarily)* Shut up, Bingo! This could be my big break!

BINGO: *(totally carried away)* And when Zeke saw the lovebirds, he attacked Caleb between the last two cars of the train...

CHARLIE: *(with increasing ferocity)* STOP IT!

BINGO: *(he begins reenacting the fracas)* They grappled with fury and rage...

CHARLIE: *(grabbing Bingo and being pulled into the fray)* YOU STUPID JERK!

BINGO: ... RAGE AND FURY!

CHARLIE: I HATE YOU!

BINGO: UNTIL THEY FINALLY FELL TO A HORRIBLE DEATH UNDER THE WHEELS!!!

(He now has a flailing Charlie in a headlock.)

STU: *(to Sheila)* What did I tell you?

BINGO: SHREDDDED!

STU: This picture will be a blockbuster!

BINGO: MUTILATED!

STU: You're gonna be a star, baby!

CHARLIE: I WANT YOU DEAD!

STU: We'll call it "Bloody Conductors with Loco-Motives!"

MIRANDA: A movie? A vulgar motion picture?

(She lunges for Stu driving him into the center of the melee.)

My parents died on this train!

SHEILA: STU!!!

KITTY: Get him!!!

(She and Willadean try to capture as much of the brawl as possible.)

MIRANDA: You monster!

(They scuffle for a moment until Stu regains control.)

STU: *(clutching Bingo by the scruff of the neck, he flings Miranda and Charlie across the room)* ARRGGH!!!

(Panting heavily.)

I ... I ...

(Suddenly clutches his chest with his free hand.)

Oh, son of a - SHEILA!!!

SHEILA: STU???

STU: Get the nitroglycerine!!!

BINGO: Nitro-... AHHHH!!!!!!

(He screams like a woman.)

He's gonna blow us all to smithereens!!!

(He tears himself loose and runs screaming out of the depot.)

SHEILA: *(produces a pill bottle from her purse)* Here, Stuey! Hurry!

STU: *(taking the bottle and slipping a pill under his tongue)* Ow!

(He braces himself against the wall.)

KITTY: What's the matter?

SHEILA: Stuey has the "Prince's Medal of China"...

STU: *(correcting her)* "Prinzmetal's angina"...

SHEILA: "Prinzmetal's angina." I have to give him nitroglycerine tablets so he doesn't have a heart attack.

(To Miranda.)

You almost killed him!

MIRANDA: Well ... he provoked the spirits! And the spirits provoked me!

WILLADEAN: *(to Sheila)* Why do you carry his pills? Shouldn't he keep them himself?

SHEILA: He doesn't like unflattering bulges in his jeans.

BUSTER: *(bursting into the room wearing an elaborate technological device)* All right! Where are they?

(Leaping onto the bench and seeing Stu.)

Did they do this?

SHEILA: *(indicating Miranda)* No, SHE did!

BUSTER: *(scrutinizing Miranda)* You mortal?

MIRANDA: That is my current cosmic state.

BUSTER: Aw, nuts. C'mon! Where's the spooks?

MIRANDA: *(outraged)* SPOOKS?

KITTY: Who are you?

BUSTER: Buster Coates.

(Strikes a superhero pose.)

Ghostbuster! I'm here to kick some supernatural tail!

(Kitty and Willadean giggle with delight.)

MIRANDA: *You have no right to...*

BUSTER: *(abruptly)* Sister! Spooks made me an orphan ...

(Looking toward the train.)

... and word has it that they might just be hiding on THAT train!

KITTY: Seriously?

WILLADEAN: *(to Kitty)* C'mon! We've got to find them!

(They gather their gear and rush out.)

MIRANDA: *(hurrying after them)* And I must set them free!

STU: *(following her with difficulty)* Hey! Not before I get the film rights!

SHEILA: *(trailing after him)* Stuey?

BUSTER: *(pointing sharply at Charlie)* You!

CHARLIE: Huh?

BUSTER: Fire up the engine, Casey Jones! I'm takin' names and spankin' spooks!

(He struts out.)

CHARLIE: *(trying to recover the situation)* Okay, everybody ... umm ... we've got coloring maps for the kiddies ... and pizza and ... ghosts ... I guess ... and ... oh, just go.

(He waves everyone toward the train. As people exit, they see Bingo crouched by the train, ears plugged, eyes squeezed shut.)

3 -- DINNER

(Aboard the train, there is extensive activity as follows:

- *Willadean and Kitty find Charlie and Bingo and pump them for information about the story of Caleb and Susannah*
- *Miranda moves throughout the train taking energy readings and querying the guests to see if they have seen, sensed, or heard anything*
- *Charlie finds Stu and tries to make amends accompanied by an excessive display of sucking up and brown-nosing -- Stu tries to get more details about the story of Caleb and Susannah but can't seem to cut through Charlie's "audition"*
- *Sheila misplaces her purse*
- *Kitty finds Sheila's purse and adds it to the contents of her tote bag*
- *Bingo goes around the train with his tape recorder trying to obtain an EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomenon.)*
- *Sheila tries to tell people about Stu's film project but she doesn't really have much of a clue*
- *Willadean and Kitty review their travel itinerary and talk it up with the guests*
- *Buster scours the train like a CSI agent taking readings, extracting evidence, cross-examining*

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the guests -- all with hair-trigger response to anything suspicious

- *Stu complains about his dry nose and tries to find Sheila and her purse*
- *Stu find Bingo and gets an earful about Caleb, Susannah and Zeke*
- *Miranda and Buster frequently argue about spirits and how they should be treated [NOTE: Miranda also converses with spirits aloud from time to time]*

4 -- AFTER DINNER (ACT 2)

5 pages

5 -- RAMBLES

6 RESOLUTION (ACT 3)

4 more pages to the end of the play