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Criminal Mischief

By
WILLIAM CAMERON

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Criminal Mischief was premiered by The Sauk (Jonesville, Mich.) in February 2024.

CAST:

ALICE FORD Tiffany Thatcher
SPENCER BISHOP Jacob Weldon
FRED MASON Josh Lightner
ANGIE BISHOP Savannah Bruton
RUSTY Summer Housler

PRODUCTION:

Director Trinity Bird
Stage Management Allison Tappen
Dramaturgy David A. VanCleave
Set and Design Joella Hendrickson
Properties Design Travis Blatchley
Marketing Materials/Photography Lisa Cook & Patrick Cook
Assistant Stage Manager Morgan Francis
Sound Board Manager Scott Keef

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“*Criminal Mischief* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by The Sauk in Jonesville, Mich.”

Criminal Mischief

CHARACTERS

ALICE FORD: A detective lieutenant, late 30s.

SPENCER BISHOP: Angie's husband, early 40s.

FRED MASON: Spencer's half-brother, early 30s.

ANGIE BISHOP: Spencer's wife, 30s.

RUSTY: Spencer and Fred's mother, 60s.

SETTINGS

ACT I takes place in a variety of locations—two police interrogation rooms, a hospital room, a bar—all easily indicated by minimal furniture and area lighting.

ACT II takes place in the modestly furnished living room of Spencer and Angie's home. A functional front door is visible. A door on one side of the room leads to the kitchen and a hallway on the opposite side leads to other areas of the house.

For Nancy Bach

Criminal Mischief

ACT I

Scene 1

(ALICE FORD, dressed in pants, a shirt and leather sports coat with a holstered gun visible, speaks into a small voice recorder.)

ALICE. Detective Lieutenant Alice Ford responding to report of shots fired at one-one-seven Pellerman Road, private residence. Thursday, May nineteen, eight-fourteen a.m. Arrived on scene eight-twenty-three, accompanied by uniformed officers Smith and Barker. Shooting victim Frederick Mason, thirty-one, taken by ambulance to Pinecrest Hospital with single gunshot wound to left shoulder. Suspected assailant Spencer Bishop, forty-two, taken into custody. Suspect and victim are half-brothers.

(ALICE clicks a button, turning off her recorder as the lights rise on SPENCER BISHOP in a police interrogation room, nervously waiting. ALICE enters behind him and places a can of soda in front of him.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. Couldn't find any Dr. Pepper. I got you a ginger ale.

SPENCER. Oh.

(SPENCER cracks open the can, takes a sip and sets it back down immediately.)

ALICE. Need anything else?

(A forlorn look at the ginger ale, then SPENCER shakes his head. ALICE sits opposite him.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. OK. Tell me what happened.

SPENCER. Well ... um, see it was ... I can't quite ...

ALICE. Just start from the beginning.

SPENCER. The very beginning? Because the very beginning is different from the beginning. See, I think of today as the beginning, but not the very beginning. The very beginning goes back to ... well, before today. But when *you* say the beginning, I'm not sure what you—

ALICE. How about you start from when you shot your brother?

SPENCER. My half-brother. And it was an accident.

ALICE. An accident?

(SPENCER nods, ALICE sighs.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. What a surprise. OK, Lee Harvey, where'd you get the gun?

SPENCER. From Fred.

ALICE. Your brother?

SPENCER. Half-brother.

ALICE. And he gave you the gun?

SPENCER. No, I wouldn't say he *gave* it to me.

ALICE. You stole it from him?

SPENCER. No, I wouldn't say I *stole* it from him.

ALICE. What *would* you say?

SPENCER. See, this is why I think we should go back to the very beginning, because—

ALICE. Mr. Bishop, this is not a joke. I take gun violence very seriously.

SPENCER. Me too. I never would've—

ALICE. You know how many people die from guns in a single day in this country?

SPENCER. I don't know the exact figures but I know it's—

ALICE. A hundred. More'n that! Your brother's not one of 'em, fortunately, because you missed but—

SPENCER. And I'm so glad I did, believe me, I never wanted to hurt Freddy and, besides, I didn't really shoot my—

ALICE. We got the gun, Mr. Bishop. We got your prints. We got your brother with a bullet in his shoulder. From where I sit, I got you on attempted murder.

SPENCER. Murder!? No! I would never—

ALICE. Yeah, a lot of people would never until all of a sudden they would and then they do.

SPENCER. Why would I shoot my brother?

ALICE. Half-brother.

SPENCER. Why would I shoot my half-brother?

ALICE. You tell me. What motivation might you have to shoot your half-brother?

SPENCER. None. I love Freddy!

ALICE. Love! Gimme a break! You know how many women take a shot at their husbands just for leaving the toilet seat up? So, tell me what really happened, or you and me are gonna have a problem.

SPENCER. OK. (*He takes a sip of his ginger ale.*) You sure there's no Dr. Pepper?

(*ALICE gives him a look.*)

SPENCER (*cont'd*). Sorry. So ... Fred ... um, he came to the house and ... see, I haven't really seen him or talked to him since—(*He stops himself.*) Never mind. So Fred—

ALICE. Wait. Since what?

SPENCER. See, this is what I meant by ... the *very* beginning.

ALICE (*leaning forward, a bit menacing*). Since what, Mr. Bishop?

SPENCER. Since I found out. See, Fred he ... (*Clears his throat.*) He's in love with Angie.

ALICE. Who's Angie?

SPENCER. Angie's my wife.

ALICE. Ahhh. Fred, your half-brother that you shot this morning, he's in love with Angie, your wife.

SPENCER. Yes.

ALICE. That changes things, doesn't it?

(*SPENCER sighs.*)

ALICE (*cont'd*). OK, this Angie, did she return his affections?

SPENCER. Oh yeah, she returned 'em. She returned 'em a bunch of times. Mostly on Wednesdays.

(ALICE makes a note in her notebook.)

SPENCER *(cont'd)*. I travel on Wednesdays. Work.

ALICE. I see. How long have you known about the affair?

SPENCER. Two weeks. Well, more like seventeen days. Let's see, today's the nineteenth, so—

ALICE. And yet you still contend you had no motive for shooting your—

SPENCER. No, I ... I mean, I guess you could say I had a motive and ... I guess you could say I shot him, but it was an accident! See, Fred came over this morning and said he needed to talk to me and I said OK and then he walked into the front room. I followed him in and said, "What do you need?" And that's when Fred pulled a gun out of his back pocket and pointed—

ALICE. Wait, wait, wait! He pulled a gun out of his ... so Fred brought the gun to the house?

SPENCER. Yes.

ALICE. Why didn't you just tell me that to begin with?

SPENCER. Because! I've never been ... arrested or whatever this is and I've ... I've never shot anybody and ... and I'm worried about Freddy, and ... *(He picks up the can of ginger ale, guzzles and slams it back down.)* This is warm! And it's not Dr. Pepper, which I specifically requested!

ALICE. This is not a restaurant, Mr. Bishop!

SPENCER. Then why did you ask me what I wanted, and when I said I wanted a Dr. Pepper why did you say, "Comin' right up!" when you intended all along to bring me a less desirable beverage choice!!

ALICE *(rises and crosses to the door)*. Calm down, calm down! *(She opens the door and calls out.)* Get me a cold Dr. Pepper, stat! *(She slams the door closed.)* Mr. Bishop, are you OK?

SPENCER. I don't understand why I'm even here. I didn't do anything wrong!

ALICE. Mr. Bishop, calm down. Can you do that for me? Calm down.

(SPENCER takes a deep breath.)

ALICE (*cont'd*). Atta boy. Now, real slow ... Fred pulled the gun out of his back pocket ... right?

SPENCER. Yes. He, um ... he pulled the gun out of his back pocket. He pointed it at me. I said, "Is that a gun?" He said, "Oh yeah, it's a gun." I said, "Why do you have a gun?" He said, "Why do you think I have a gun?" I had no idea why he had a gun, so I said, "I have no idea why you have a gun." And then he started crying.

ALICE. Crying? Why was he crying?

SPENCER. He cries a lot.

ALICE. So, what did you do?

SPENCER. I stood there.

(She looks at him, incredulous.)

SPENCER (*cont'd*). He had a gun, his hands were shaking, he was crying. I didn't want him to shoot me!

ALICE. What happened then?

SPENCER. He shot me.

ALICE. He shot you?!

SPENCER. He shot *at* me. He missed.

ALICE. Two shots were fired?

SPENCER. Yes. One by him, one by me. But him first.

ALICE. The only bullet we know about was in your brother's shoulder.

SPENCER. His bullet hit the piano.

ALICE (*making a note*). The piano.

SPENCER. Angie plays. She's very good. She's been working on some of Scott Joplin's—

ALICE. So he fired the shot after he started crying?

SPENCER. Right after.

(ALICE goes to make a note)

SPENCER (*cont'd*). Well, not *right* after but very close to being right after. I would say, one, he started crying then twooooo ... and threeeee—BANG!

ALICE. So, he fired the gun, dropped the gun, you grabbed the gun and shot him?

SPENCER. Yes. No. Well, see, he dropped the gun right after he shot it and—well, not *right* after. I would say, one, bang ... then twooooo ... and—

ALICE. He dropped it or you knocked it out of his hand?

SPENCER. He dropped it. He was crying and when the gun went off, I think it scared him, and he dropped the gun.

ALICE. And you picked it up?

SPENCER. Yes. I was afraid if he got the gun he would shoot again and maybe hit me this time or put another hole in the piano. It's a really nice piano.

ALICE. So, that's when you shot him?

SPENCER. Yes. No! That's when he jumped at me and tried to get the gun from me, but I had a tight grip on it, so he pushed me, and I fell backwards over the ... um ...

ALICE. Chair?

SPENCER. No.

ALICE. Stool?

SPENCER. No.

ALICE. Coffee table?

SPENCER. Cat!

ALICE. And that's when you shot him?

SPENCER. That's when the gun went off.

ALICE. A gun doesn't go off unless you pull the trigger.

SPENCER. Then I must have accidentally pulled the trigger because Freddy had just pushed me and I was on my back and he was hovering over me.

ALICE. And that's when you shot him.

SPENCER. It was an accident!

(ALICE regards him for a moment, then makes a few notes.)

SPENCER *(cont'd)*. I really don't think Freddy meant to pull the trigger. His hands were shaking so hard and he was so ... oh, Freddy. *(A discouraged sigh.)* I didn't even know he owned a gun.

(He shakes his head and sighs. Lights up in a hospital room. FREDDY MASON lies in bed, bandages over his arm and shoulder. He is hooked up to an IV.)

SPENCER (*cont'd*). How is Fred? Is he gonna be OK?

FREDDY. It hurts to get shot.

ALICE. You got lucky. It's not a life-threatening injury.

SPENCER. Oh, thank God.

FREDDY. Still hurts.

ALICE. We're waiting for word that he's safely out of surgery, at which point I will speak to Mr. Mason and get his side of the story.

FREDDY. My brother shot me. That's my side of the story.

(Lights out on SPENCER as ALICE crosses into the hospital area.)

ALICE. It was your firearm, am I correct?

FREDDY. I have a permit.

(FREDDY punches the TV remote. Loud game show music, "Come on down!!")

ALICE. I didn't ask if you—

(FREDDY hits a button, TV gets louder. ALICE grabs the remote and clicks the TV off.)

ALICE (*cont'd*). Who owns the firearm that was used in this morning's shooting?

FREDDY. Uhhhhh ... me.

ALICE. Why did you take the gun to your brother's house?

FREDDY. Is it against the law to take a gun to my brother's house?

ALICE. If it's for the express purpose of shooting your brother, yes.

FREDDY. That was not my express purpose.

ALICE. What was your express purpose?

FREDDY. Did you ask Spencer his express purpose? He's the one who shot me. *(He pushes a button connected to his IV.)*

ALICE. Mr. Mason, did you fire—

(FREDDY pushes the button more furiously.)

ALICE (*cont'd*). Mr. Mason?

FREDDY. Damn thing doesn't work.

ALICE. What doesn't work, sir?

FREDDY. This button thing. Supposed to give me a painkiller dose.

(Pushes the button quickly and angrily.) Stupid thing!

ALICE. Are you in a great deal of pain right now, sir?

FREDDY. Yes! It hurts to get shot. Guy gets shot in the movies—like Indiana Jones! He gets a bullet in the shoulder, then he drives a truck and punches a guy. No way could he drive a truck and punch a guy after—

ALICE. Do you think this is funny, Mr. Mason?

FREDDY. No! I'm just saying that in the movies—

ALICE. Bad enough we got the crazies using nightclubs and classrooms for target practice, we gotta worry about people being stupid with guns.

FREDDY. I agree. Who do those people think—

ALICE. Like you!

FREDDY. Me?

ALICE. How long you owned that gun, Mr. Mason?

FREDDY. Uhhh ... couple of days.

ALICE. So you take a loaded pistol you barely know how to use, you point it at your brother—

FREDDY. Half-brother.

ALICE. And you pull the trigger! That's what I call being stupid with guns.

FREDDY. Yeah but ... Spencer shot me!

ALICE. Who fired the bullet that we dug out of the piano twenty minutes ago?

FREDDY. Uhhhhh ... me.

ALICE. Right.

(ALICE makes a note as FREDDY pushes the button on his IV device.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. Get it going?

FREDDY. Uh, yeah. Think so.

ALICE. So, to be clear, you shot the piano.

FREDDY. Well, I—

ALICE. You dropped the gun.

FREDDY. Uhhhh—

ALICE. And you started crying.

FREDDY. No, I didn't start—did Spencer say I started crying? That son of a—

ALICE. But you did drop the gun, as opposed to Spencer taking it away from you.

FREDDY. Yeah, I dropped the gun.

(ALICE writes a note.)

FREDDY *(cont'd)*. Or ... you could kinda say he took it away from me.

ALICE. Kinda?

FREDDY. Yeah. See, I dropped the gun and *then* he took it away from me.

ALICE. You mean he ... picked it up.

FREDDY. Yes. He picked it up ... and *awaaay* from me. *(He suddenly sits back in bed. A distant smile.)* I think the painkillers are kicking in.

ALICE. Mr. Mason, is it true that you've you been sleeping with Angela Bishop?

FREDDY. Your head looks really big right now.

ALICE. Your half-brother's wife. You're having an affair with her?

FREDDY *(with a jaunty, slightly loopy smile)*. I know! She's so beautiful.

ALICE. Angela Bishop?

FREDDY. Yes. And she loves me. And I love her. And she loves me. And someday—

ALICE. Did Angela Bishop ask you to kill your half-brother Spencer Bish—?

FREDDY. Huh?

ALICE. Did Angela Bishop ask you to kill your brother?

FREDDY. No ... I don't know ... I can't concentrate. My brother SHOT ME TODAY!!

ALICE. Mr. Mason—

FREDDY. YOUR HEAD IS BIG!! YOU'RE SCARING ME!!

(FREDDY's head falls to the pillow, his eyes close.)

ALICE. Mr. Mason?

(FREDDY snores loudly. A beat as ALICE pulls out her recorder; speaks into it.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. Interview with Mr. Mason inconclusive.

(Lights up on SPENCER. There is an empty Dr. Pepper can in front of him, and he is cracking open another as ALICE re-enters the room.)

SPENCER. Is Freddy OK?

ALICE. He's fine. He was a little incoherent when I spoke with him.

SPENCER. Incoherent?

ALICE. Pain medication can make anyone a little distracted.

SPENCER. He's in a lot of pain?

ALICE. Well, it hurts to get shot—

(SPENCER sighs.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. But I spoke with his doctor who assured me that the bullet didn't do any serious bone or tissue damage.

(SPENCER sighs, relieved.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. He'll be fine, Mr. Bishop.

SPENCER. Call me Spencer. Mr. Bishop sounds so ... old.

ALICE. OK. Spencer.

SPENCER. That's better.

(ALICE drops a pad and pencil on the table in front of him.)

ALICE. Spencer, I need your wife's phone number.

SPENCER. Angie? Why?

(ALICE looks at him, waiting him out. He writes the number on the pad.)

SPENCER *(cont'd)*. May I go?

ALICE. It'd really help us out if you could stick around for a bit longer.

SPENCER. Why?

ALICE. Just ... help us out.

(SPENCER nods as ALICE picks up the pad and pencil.)

ALICE *(cont'd)*. Thank you. See you've got your Dr. Pepper. Is there anything else I can get for you?

SPENCER. Something to read, maybe. Oh, and can I make a call? I left my cellphone at the house this morning, you know, in all the craziness.

ALICE. Sure. Follow me.

(ALICE starts out.)

SPENCER. Or better yet, could you call someone for me?

ALICE. Who?

SPENCER. My mother. She needs to know about this, but I don't really ... I mean, I'd rather not have to explain it myself.

ALICE *(dropping the pad and pencil on the table)*. Write her number down.

SPENCER *(as he writes)*. Thank you. I know I'm being a coward, but I just don't think I can face ... never mind. *(Handing her the pad.)* Here's the number.

(She starts to take it; he pulls it back, writes some more.)

SPENCER *(cont'd)*. Although now that I think about it, she might be ... here.

(Finished writing, he holds out the pad. She reaches for it. He pulls it away again.)

SPENCER *(cont'd)*. Or better yet ... try this number first.

(He writes, hands her the pad. She takes it, trying hard to stifle a laugh.)

SPENCER *(cont'd)*. This is her cellphone, although she's notoriously bad about charging her phone, which can make it hard to reach her, but I gave her a pretty stern talking to about it

last week, and she promised she would try and do better. So, try the third number first and then if there's no answer, try the first number—that's her home phone—and then the second number, which is my office because sometimes she just shows up there out of the blue and my secretary ... well, never mind. So, third number first, then the first, then the second. Three, one, two.

ALICE. Three, one, two. Got it.

SPENCER. Thank you.

(She starts out again)

SPENCER *(cont'd)*. Oh, and what's your name?

ALICE. Detective Lieutenant Ford.

SPENCER. Detective Lieutenant Ford. What's your first name?

ALICE. My first name?

SPENCER. Well, you called me Spencer, so I figured ...

(SPENCER shrugs, a short beat.)

ALICE. Alice. My name is Alice.

SPENCER. Nice to meet you, Alice.

(SPENCER smiles, and ALICE cannot help but smile back.)

Lights fade on them and rise on the hospital room where FREDDY lies asleep.

ANGIE BISHOP walks surreptitiously into the hospital room. She carries a Starbucks cup, finishes her coffee off with a loud slurp and throws the cup in the garbage. She stops, looks around and edges close to FREDDY.)

ANGIE. Freddy.

(No response. She taps his shoulder.)

ANGIE *(louder)*. Freddy.

FREDDY *(stirring)*. Huh?

ANGIE. Is your mother here?

FREDDY. Honey, where you been?

ANGIE. Is your mother here?