

Hole

A Short Play
By
Stephen Bittrich

Hole was published in [The Best Ten-Minute Plays 2011](#) .

The play was first performed at The Drilling Company, Hamilton Clancy Artistic Director, in New York City in a one-act evening titled *Faith* with the following cast:

Murphy Dan Teachout
Brody Billie Davis
Millsap Darren Lipari

The play was directed by David Marantz.

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To contact the author, write to SBittrich@aol.com.

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the drilling company PRESENTS:

HOLE

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"HOLE"

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SETTING:

The dark. The hole. 700 feet deep inside blessed terra firma. The light becomes another character in this piece. It is recommended that as much as possible lighting instruments discovered on stage by the characters illuminate the scene -- matches, a lantern, a cap light.

AT RISE:

We hear a man playing a little harmonica intro and then singing in the dark. This is Murphy. He sings

the first two verses of "GOLD FOR FOOLS," an Appalachian Love Ballad. (Music and lyrics by Stephen Bittrich available separately.)

MURPHY

(singing)

*Oh, Sally, sweet Sally loved a young miner boy
When he took her a-courtin' she acted quite coy.*

*He said, "Sally Sweet Sally, please give me a kiss.
I'm going down in the hole, down to the abyss."*

*She said, "When ya come home, I'll save ya a peck.
Just bring me some gold ta put 'round ma neck."*

Chorus:

*So down the deep shaft when the young miner boy
Ta seek him some gold for his love and joy.*

*But the hole it caved in, and the boy ne'er came home.
And Sally Sweet Sally heard the news at the gloam.*

*"Yer young boy is dead now, his body's been found.
He's been bloodied and battered, his flesh took a pound."*

*"So we cleaned him up nice and gave him fresh duds
Cleaned up his face, hands and his feet from the blood."*

Chorus:

*His fist was clasped tight with the strong grip of death.
And inside a gold nugget held 'til his last breath.*

(A match lights. MURPHY, an older grizzled miner is the first to yell out--)

MURPHY (cont'd)

Hey!

BRODY

Air's good. I checked the meter.

MURPHY

You find some tobacco, girl? That why you feedin' that fire some of our blessed air?

(BRODY, a compact and tough female miner around 33ish answers, match to her face)

BRODY

I think I just unearthed the supply kit with the extra lantern.

(MILLSAP, a young wide-eyed miner in his mid-twenties chimes in)

MILLSAP

Good girl! Oh my dear Lord! And food and water too?

(SHE opens the supply case in the dark and turns on the lantern. Light flashes up on her face and then she takes it downstage and shines it on the other two. MURPHY is center)

MILLSAP (cont'd)

And the Lord said, let there be light.

(SHE finds food in the case)

BRODY

What do you want for supper, Millsap?

MILLSAP

Lord be praised. How's about some fried chicken and potato salad?

BRODY

Yeah, that'd be nice. How's about some peanuts and some water?

MILLSAP

That'll do.

MURPHY

Nice girlie. Every condemned man should be afforded a last meal.

BRODY

Stop yer bitchin', Murphy. That leg ain't so bad.

MILLSAP

Yeah, Murphy. Yer more of a woman than Brody is!

(Silence. The TWO OF THEM
stare MILLSAP down for very
different reasons, then...)

MILLSAP (cont'd)

I didn't mean that, Brody.

(THEY all voraciously devour
the newly found treasure of
food and drink)

MILLSAP (cont'd)

We should conserve the battery and only use it certain
times.

MURPHY

Won't make no difference. Leave it on. Them new batt'ries
will last for a fortnight. We'll be dead in 3 days.

BRODY

I don't accept that. Now that we have light, I'm gonna
find a way out. You can believe that.

MURPHY

Well, you should make peace with yer maker nonetheless.

(SILENCE)

MILLSAP

Play another one, MURPHY.

(MURPHY plays about 6 bars of
a little ditty, then launches
into one of his familiar
stories...)

MURPHY

Ya know if it t'weren't for John Red Deer, a barrel-
chested, full-blooded Comanche Indian and my partner
working a hoist while we was dragline mining up at e Creek
in '78, I mayn't be able to grace you with the dulcet tones
of this here fine instrument. No, sir.

(HE moves his fingers in the
light)

Where you see 10 fine digits ... I mighta gone down ta
seven that day.

(beat)

Don't take two men ta run a hoist, but I was a dandy, as
green as a new blade of grass, my first day on a mining job
of any kind. Why I was greener than Miss Ima Jean here.

(BRODY rolls her eyes at him)

And John Red Deer drew short straw and got ta be my wet
nurse while I learnt the trade. They used to raz the
dandies something awful back in them days, so when the
hoist came asunder, split in two, I first figured mebbe I
was the butt of some bad joke. But two men were riding the
bucket down the seven hundred foot shaft, and it tweren't
no joke. I yanked on the emergency brake, all for nought,
cuz that burst apart too. As the drum unfurled like a
giant leviathan on the end of a harpoon line, those two men
in the bucket were surely off to meet their maker. Without
a thought, John Red Deer pushed me outta the way like so
much laundry, grabbed up some nearby guide timber, and
levered it in between the frame and the drum, ripping off
three-a his fingers in the process. But devil be damned he
still pulled that makeshift lever down with the might of a
man possessed and halted the drum. The men down the shaft
were saved. The men down in the hole were save from a run
away bucket. And because John Red Deer had pushed me outta
the way, I didn't get any of my fingers tore off on my
first day as a miner.

MILLSAP

Well, thank the Lord for John Red Deer.

MURPHY

(to MILLSAP)

Back in them days, you'd never see a person of the female
persuasion in the hole. Bad luck.

BRODY

Oh can it, Old Timer. We ain't on the high seas, and this
ain't your ship, Captain Ahab. So don't give me that bad
luck shit.

MILLSAP

Yeah, Murphy. Ease up.

MURPHY

Fer as I can see it, she don't need you ta answer fer her,
boy. She's got a tongue sharp enough to cut diamonds.

(Beat)

Well...yer right Missy, it tweren't bad luck...just bad mining. Retreat mining is a fool's game, but the man above, and I don't mean Jesus, I mean, Luther Bilkis, our beloved CEO of Bilkis Bourbon Mines, has been a mining this way for decades.

MILLSAP

My Aunt Gemma says retreat mining is like living in house made out of pick up sticks and takin' another stick out every night before you lay down to sleep. 'Bout all I could do ta keep her from followin' me ta work every day ta give Luther Bilkis a piece-a her mind.

MURPHY

Yeah. That sounds like her.

MILLSAP

You know my aunt?

MURPHY

We used ta go...dancin'?

MILLSAP

What?? She never told me that!

MURPHY

Oh ho, you catch that, Girlie? He didn't like that -- thinkin' about me and his Auntie! Don't worry, boy, a gentleman don't kiss and tell.

BRODY

I found a cap light.

(Brody turns on the other
lamp, and it shines up in her
face)

BRODY (cont'd)

It works!

MILLSAP

Lord be praised.

MURPHY

Tweren't the Lord. I put that lamp and grub in there. I check that kit every day.

(SHE fixes it on the hard hat
and fixes the hat on her
head, shining the light
toward the men)

BRODY

I'm gonna go survey the cave-in a-fresh now that we got
light again.

(MILLSAP rises to get the
other lantern to go with her)

MURPHY

Don't let Millsap touch the lantern!

MILLSAP

That was an accident! I said I was sorry!

(MILLSAP and Brody are face to
face center stage. The light
from her cap light shines in
his face and reflects back
onto her face)

BRODY

Don't worry about it, Millsap. I'll be right back. Stay
with MURPHY.

MILLSAP

Be careful.

BRODY

I'm just gonna look. Piece of cake.

(SHE exits toward the cave-in.
MILLSAP looks after her)

MURPHY

(after a moment)

Yeah, she likes ya.

MILLSAP

Ya think?

(MURPHY grins from ear to ear)

MURPHY

No!

MILLSAP

Oh keep quiet!

(MURPHY plays around on harmonica. THEY sit for a moment without speaking. Just music. MILLSAP folds his hands and starts to pray, rocking back and forth ever so slightly)

MURPHY

Ain't nobody comin'.

MILLSAP

No, they're coming, Murphy. I know they are. The Good Lord wouldn't let us die down here. I got things ta do.

MURPHY

Like lose yer cherry?

MILLSAP

No, I done checked that offa my list...smart ass.

MURPHY

Boy, just because Miss Brody talks ta me like that, don't think that you can. Watch yer mouth.

MILLSAP

Sorry. How's your leg?

(MURPHY ignores the question)

MURPHY

As sure as you have faith in the good Lord and the good will of mankind, so I have faith in the devilish and wicked nature of a man. And Luther Bilkis surely has a place set at Satan's great table in hell when his time comes. You know as well as I this mine was cited with 467 safety violations last year, 156 of which was deemed ta be serious in nature. That ain't too much different than the year a'fore and the year a'fore that. What runs this mine and most every mine is greed, plain and simple. And if we get outta here, it won't be due to the good graces of Mr. Bilkis.

(beat)

They'll call off the search in 4 ta 5 days if they don't break through. Cuz they'll figure we run out of water, run

out of oxygen, or run outta life.

(Brody has returned for part
of this)

BRODY

Well, it's a good thing I don't have ta believe in God nor
the questionable nature of man. Just myself. I think I
found a hole I can fit through.

MILLSAP

No! Really?

BRODY

You may be able ta "butter yer bread yet," Millsap.

MILLSAP

I told you I ain't no virgin-- ! Oh forget about it.
Anyways, I should be the one ta go.

(Brody prepares to leave,
clipping the light to a
miners hard hat, finding some
rope)

BRODY

You can't fit.

MILLSAP

And you can?

BRODY

Yes.

MURPHY

The hole ain't stable. And it may come to point. Like
venturin' into a funnel. If there was a hole straight
through, they'da found it already.

BRODY

You got better options? Besides waitin'?

MURPHY

No ma'am, Miss Brody.

BRODY

Well, ain't that nice? Suddenly I'm not "girlie" or
"missy." I'm Miss Brody.

MURPHY

You get through that hole, I'll call ya the Queen-a
England.

THE PLAY CONTINUES FOR ONE MORE PAGE.

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SBITTRICH@AOL.COM