

Straight On To Stardust

Also by Craig Lancaster

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STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

excerpt of a play by
Craig Lancaster

MISSOURI BREAKS PRESS

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Printed in the United States of America

Full book ISBN: 979-8-218-22106-5

Cast of Characters

Clinton Cobb (*mid-forties, blue-collar man*)

Jimmy Cobb, elder (*late seventies*)

Jimmy Cobb, younger (*mid-thirties or so*)

Kay Cobb (*twenties*)

Janine Cobb (*forties*)

Carolina Cobb (*early thirties*)

Gil Allen (*seventies/eighties*)

Brian Shamley (*ten to twelve*)

Man 1 (*mortuary worker*)

Man 2 (*mortuary worker*)

Convenience store clerk

Officer Jonathon Hunter

Susan Cobb (*invalid*)

Casting notes: For Sammy the Dog, Susan Cobb, and the party guests, it's easy enough to reduce headcount and just suggest their presence. The elder and younger versions of Jimmy Cobb never share the stage and thus can be occupied by one cast member. A small troupe could consolidate the roles of Man 1, Man 2, convenience store clerk, and Officer Hunter.

ACT ONE

Scene One

The opening is outdoors, winter, swirling snow and the screaming of wind. A man, north of forty years old, CLINTON COBB, stands at the rear of his late-model pickup truck. He wears a canvas work coat, like you'd see on a construction crew member or pipeline worker—something blue-collar and marked by the rigors of the job.

CLINTON *pulls the collar up and watches as two men come onto the stage, team-carrying a rigid, white-zippered bag. CLINTON lowers the tailgate and pops open the bed cover. He steps back and gives the men room.*

CLINTON: Just set him in there however he'll go.

[The men grapple with the body bag, pushing and

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

hefting, until it's fully in the bed of the pickup. When one of the men goes to close the bed cover, CLINTON steps back in.]

CLINTON: I've got 'er. She can be a little tricky.

[He closes the cover with a knowing flourish and locks it. He turns to the men. One hands him a clipboard, and CLINTON signs his name, then looks at the man.]

You get many like this?

MAN 1: A few. Not many. And not this time of year. It unnerves most folks, hauling somebody around.

CLINTON: He's not somebody anymore, I suppose.

MAN 1: No, I suppose not.

[The second man leaves. The first lingers. From the cab of the truck comes a low, guttural whine. Then a bark. Clinton raps the body of the truck with his hand.]

CLINTON: You just hold on.

[He turns again to the man with the clipboard.]

So that's it, then?

MAN 1: Pretty much.

CRAIG LANCASTER

[MAN 1 *pulls loose a duplicate of the paperwork from the perforation and hands it to CLINTON.*]

The body will be fine for the trip. The cold will help. There might still be some emissions, though.

CLINTON: Emissions?

MAN 1: Gases. Odors. Not much in this cold, I'd guess, but I wanted you to be aware should you have to open—

CLINTON: Nobody's opening nothing until he gets to where he's going.

MAN 1: Very well.

CLINTON: He's staying right where he is.

MAN 1: I understand.

[CLINTON *fixes the man with a stare.*]

CLINTON: OK, then.

[CLINTON *offers a handshake. It's not immediately accepted, a minor offense.*]

MAN 1: Albuquerque's a long way, is what I'm saying—

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

CLINTON: I'm aware.

MAN 1: I mean, you sure you don't want us to ship him? It'd be much simpler for you. Probably wouldn't cost much more, either.

[CLINTON *juts his hand insistently*. MAN 1 *gets the message and meets him, and CLINTON's hand swallows his.*]

CLINTON: Thanks just the same. Cost isn't my concern. Emissions, either.

[MAN 1 *exits from where he came*. CLINTON *leans his weight into the back of the pickup, setting his arms across the bed cover and his chin atop his gloved hands.*]

CLINTON: Simpler, my ass. [*He regards the truck, as if talking to the dead man inside.*] It wasn't ever gonna be that, was it?

[*He pushes himself up, disengaging from the truck bed and its grim cargo. He steps away and addresses the audience.*]

And after, hell, fourteen years of living here, it wasn't gonna be a plot at Mountview Cemetery, either. No way. Or, Jesus, cremation, which would have been a fitting end for the likes of this one. Assholes to ashes, dust to dust. No, he's gotta go back to Albuquerque,

CRAIG LANCASTER

and I gotta take him. [*He turns and calls out to the truck.*] You were clear enough about that, weren't you?

[*He returns his gaze to the audience.*] That hunk of mortuary fodder back there is Jimmy Cobb, James Ardmore Cobb, nineteen-hundred and thirty-two to just here yesterday. Why they tagged him with a middle name that shares a town in Oklahoma, I'll never know. Anyway, he arrived in winter, left in winter, so I guess you could say his timing is exquisite. You could say that, if you didn't know him. And I suppose you didn't. You lucky sonsabitches.

[*The low whine comes again from the cab of the truck.* CLINTON *glances over, annoyed.*]

CLINTON: I know, boy.

[*He goes back to the tailgate and gives it a tug, making sure it's secure.*]

Well, old man, you'll get your wish. And I'll get mine, won't I?

[CLINTON *climbs into the cab of the pickup. The light goes down on them softly. From an adjacent stage, a twenty-something woman, KAY COBB, emerges. The spotlight settles on her, with CLINTON, as if driving, in the softer glow nearby. KAY gestures toward the truck.*]

KAY: That's my father, Clinton Cobb. The sentient,

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

breathing one in the cab, I mean, not the remains in the bed of it.

The story of any family, I suppose, is this odd stew of what we know to be true, what we've been told, and what we have to imagine—on evidence both solid and scant—to make sense of the gulfs between the two. So it is with this story of this family. My family. I know some things. Others know other things. In some cases, we've compared notes and tried to divine the likely truths between the lines. In other cases, we just don't know, and the details that might provide illumination have been carried off to places where they're unlikely to be found. Graves and other deep places, you might say.

Keep that in mind as you consider what's to come. Not everything is as it seems. But everything is. You follow?

[KAY steps back, out of the spotlight, and the scene dims.]

Scene Two

The opening is in a restaurant, a greasy-spoon kind of place with naugahyde booths and Western art on the walls. CLINTON sits on one side of the booth, and a man thirty-five years older, JIMMY COBB, sits on the other. Their postures are rigid, defensive. There is no closeness here.

JIMMY sets his fork into a cutlet on his plate to hold it secure, then he draws his knife across the meat, sawing off a hunk. He takes a napkin and unfolds it on the table, then carefully wraps the piece of meat. He places the napkin in his shirt pocket, then leans back. CLINTON points at Jimmy's plate.

CLINTON: You finished?

JIMMY: Yeah. I don't eat much anymore.

[CLINTON lifts a glass of water and drinks deep. He uses the back of his hand to wipe his mouth.]

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

CLINTON: What are you gonna do today?

JIMMY: Same old.

CLINTON: Yeah. Me, too.

[JIMMY *tilts his head back a bit, as if to frame*
CLINTON *in his bifocals.*]

JIMMY: Thanks for lunch.

CLINTON: Always happy to buy for two. The vet
know you're feeding your dog that way?

JIMMY: You know where my burial paperwork is,
right?

CLINTON: Yeah. Why?

JIMMY: It's in the little safe on the TV stand.

CLINTON: Yeah, Dad, I know.

JIMMY: The key is—

CLINTON: Behind the silverware tray. I know.

[CLINTON *scratches at his watch face, avoiding the*
penetrating stare from JIMMY, then finally looks up.]

What brought this on?

CRAIG LANCASTER

JIMMY: That's right. Behind the silverware.

CLINTON: Yeah. You told me.

JIMMY: Just sit still. I ain't gonna keep you much longer from places you'd rather be.

CLINTON: Dad...

JIMMY: OK. You don't have to do anything but get me down there. Put me in my truck and drive me. They'll take care of the rest.

CLINTON: We've been over this.

JIMMY: Everything's arranged.

CLINTON: I know.

JIMMY: I bought the plot and the headstone before you made me move here.

CLINTON: I know.

JIMMY: I've got the music and the sermon all picked out.

CLINTON: I know.

JIMMY: Flowers. You don't have to do anything.

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

CLINTON: I know, Dad.

JIMMY: Am I boring you?

CLINTON: No. But why are you bringing it up now?
We've been over it. Many times.

JIMMY: I just want to make sure, for when the time
comes. I'm no spring chicken.

CLINTON: No, you're straight-up gristle.

*[CLINTON looks over the rim of his coffee cup and
smiles. JIMMY stares grimly back, until CLINTON
averts his eyes.]*

JIMMY: Bring Sammy. He'd like a nice ride through
the countryside.

*[CLINTON reaches across the table and pats JIMMY's
shirt pocket, holding the meat. JIMMY withdraws,
agitated at the intrusion.]*

CLINTON: The way you feed him, that dog will die
of diabetes long before you're gone.

JIMMY: Never you mind that. He likes it.

*[JIMMY, clearly offended, drinks his water, and
CLINTON stands up from the booth and walks away,
facing and addressing the audience.]*

CRAIG LANCASTER

CLINTON: I wouldn't have been so hard on him if I'd known what was coming and how soon it would arrive. And, yeah, so I'm a big baby to keep banging away at that damn dog of his. I mean, it's a dog, and here I am, purportedly a grown-ass man. We ain't of the same species. We ain't in a struggle for superiority; that question has been decided for all time. It's unseemly, I know, but that dog saw more of the man's good nature than I ever did. Let me tell you, if dogs went to college, Sammy's fund would have been filled to the brimming. That's what I'm saying. Do I hold a grudge? Against the dog and the man? Damn right. Am I silly for holding it? Also damn right, at least as far as the dog is concerned. The man had it coming.

Anyway, what's done is done. And what's not isn't and never will be. Let's move on.

[The scene dims.]

Scene Three

The scene opens with CLINTON in his truck, driving. KAY appears on an adjacent stage, for the audience to see as she speaks into her cellular phone.

KAY: I'd have gone with you. All you had to do was ask. Or tell me.

CLINTON: No reason. You're busy. It'll just take a few days.

KAY: Dad—

CLINTON: Look, Katey, it's no big deal.

KAY: Kay.

CLINTON: I know. Sorry.

[Silence lingers. CLINTON reaches into the passenger area and scratches the dog, Sammy, behind the ears.]

CRAIG LANCASTER

KAY: I guess I just don't get it.

CLINTON: That makes two of us.

KAY: You're consistently glib, Dad. I'll give you that.

CLINTON: I'm not—

KAY: Look, I just don't think this is a good time for you to be alone. I would have come. I would have wanted to come. I wished you'd asked me.

CLINTON: I know.

KAY: I'd have been there if I'd known you were going to do something like this. But, I guess you'd have had to say something, and, well—

CLINTON: I should have. I'm sorry.

KAY: You're halfway to Sheridan. Easy to say you're sorry now.

[CLINTON *bites down on an urge to respond, to keep it going. He scratches the dog again.*]

KAY: Grandpa's really in the back of the pickup?

CLINTON: Yeah, he's back there. Bagged for freshness.

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

KAY: Don't say that.

CLINTON: I owe you another "sorry." I should buy them in bulk at Costco.

KAY: Isn't that weird? Having him back there like that?

CLINTON: I don't know what's weird or not.

KAY: Well, that's not especially deep, is it?

CLINTON: I can't be sorry and deep at the same time.

[Silence settles in again.]

KAY: I wish I'd known him better.

CLINTON: A lot of people wish that, except the people who're sorry they knew him too well. Maybe you ought to consider the grace of your situation and count your blessings. Deep enough for you?

KAY: Again with the lines. It's like you can't help yourself. But I know you can. That's what's so frustrating.

CLINTON: I don't mean to frustrate you.

KAY: Whatever. Yeah, you do. Listen, though. Call mom. I think you hurt her feelings.

CRAIG LANCASTER

CLINTON: Of course I did. It's what I do.

[KAY has had enough. She hangs up the phone without a goodbye. CLINTON, chastened, grimly turns his attention back to the road. He cranes his neck to peer out the driver's-side window.]

CLINTON: Getting bad. Hope this snow doesn't hang us up.

[CLINTON reaches again for the dog, who mumbles contentedly.]

You're missing the countryside, you know. Such as it is. It's the whole reason he wanted you to come. If you were gonna sleep the whole way, you could have stayed home and ordered pizza.

[Another several-second pause]

That's a joke, Sammy.

Maybe it's not the same thing for you—you're just a dog, and besides, the old bastard cut your nuts off before you had the chance—but lemme tell you about being a dad. The first thing you think of is how much better you want to do it than what was done to you. You hear me? You find out you're getting one of these humans, you spend nine months imagining who or what they'll be, you project out a lifetime—your best hope of one, mind you—before they've even drawn

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

breath in the world, and you tag them with a name to keep them sorted out from everyone else. We had one lined up before she even showed up. Katey. A good, solid name. We put some damn thought into that one. We could see her in our mind's eye, and wouldn't you know it, she looked like a Katey. Came out, cried like a Katey. Pooped like a Katey. It fit, that name.

[CLINTON *looks to the dog and shakes his head.*]

But it turns out later that the kid has her own ideas about who she is and what she'll go by, thank you very much, and what can you do? Nothing. It's her name, not yours. Kay Cobb. It sounds like a salad or something, doesn't it? All right, kid. Whatever you say.

[CLINTON *leans forward, peering through the windshield.*]

Gas station coming. You need to go pee?

[*The dog woofs.*]

I do, too. [*Long pause*] I wish you could talk, Sammy. [*A shorter pause*] But I imagine you couldn't have gotten a word in edgewise with that old rascal, so why bother, right?

Well, boy, if you have anything to say, you let me know, all right? Meantime, I'll just keep pushing us

CRAIG LANCASTER

along. I must have been a fool to take this on. You know what I mean?

[CLINTON *looks to the dog as if expecting an answer.*]

You're a good listener, Sammy. Be proud of that.

[*The scene dims.*]

Scene Four

The scene opens in a convenience store, with CLINTON pushing items across to a CASHIER—two hot dogs and a large drip coffee. The CASHIER is laconic, almost dismissive, and CLINTON is impatient.

CASHIER: That your dog that took a crap out there?

CLINTON: I wouldn't call him mine. We're just traveling together. We alternate the driving.

CASHIER: I—

CLINTON: We alternate the music, too. I play Merle Haggard. Dog likes Mozart. He doesn't look like much, but he's cultured.

CASHIER: Look, man, you gonna clean it up? I'm so sick of it, you people who just let your dogs crap all over the place—

CRAIG LANCASTER

CLINTON: The shit you have to put up with, right?

CASHIER: Seriously. [*A pause, as he catches up to CLINTON's mocking.*] Hey, man, you trying to be funny?

CLINTON: No. Was I?

CASHIER: Was you what?

CLINTON: Funny?

CASHIER: Just clean it up, OK, man?

CLINTON: I'll clean it up, sure enough, but a man has to work himself up to such an endeavor, and I feel a little peaked. You got a place where I can eat this delicious meal? I do believe that without sustenance, well, I'd just faint dead away at the sheer exhilaration of sweeping up the rectal discharge of that fine animal out there.

[*The CASHIER, annoyed and defeated, points to a small table and chair in the corner, then leaves his post. CLINTON, self-satisfied, settles in. He eats the hot dogs, three quick bites each, and then takes a long draw from the coffee. It's been a long drive, only to get longer. He looks at the audience, weary, and shows his cellphone, then begins speaking.*]

CLINTON: I hate these damn things. You love

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

them, I know, damn near couldn't live without them, because, hey, if you need to find out what year *Smoke On The Water* came out or how far it is from Glendive to Milwaukee, it's right there at your fingertips. And that's great, as far as it goes, but this [*he waves the phone for the audience*] about tripled the chances I'd be talking with people I don't want to talk to, at times when I don't want to talk to them. Did you ever consider what you were giving up when you agreed to be forever reachable? I don't think you did.

[CLINTON *punches a number into the phone, holds it to his ear, and waits. On an adjacent stage, JANINE COBB steps under a spotlight, holding her own phone.*]

JANINE: Where are you?

CLINTON: Sheridan. Katey said you wanted me to call.

JANINE: You doing OK?

CLINTON: Sure.

JANINE: Snowing?

CLINTON: Janine, there's a whole channel devoted to the weather, so if you really care, I suggest you tune in. What do you want?

JANINE: When were you going to tell me about Jimmy?

CRAIG LANCASTER

CLINTON: I figured Katey would. She did, right?

JANINE: She did, clearly, since you did not, otherwise how would I know? But come on, Clinton. He was my father-in-law for twenty-one years. You could have called and let me know.

CLINTON: And you shared a city with him for four years after that and couldn't be bothered. What do you want from me?

JANINE: The same thing I've always wanted from you, Clinton, and that's just one consideration for what I might want or need before you go off and do what you're going to do anyway. Who knows? Maybe it'll actually change your trajectory one of these days. I won't hold my breath.

CLINTON: Jesus.

JANINE: Fine. Fine. I want nothing. [*She says this staccato and emotionless. CLINTON takes one deep breath, then another.*]

CLINTON: I'm sorry I didn't call. OK? I'm sorry I didn't ask Katey to come. OK?

JANINE: I just wish you wouldn't make it so hard for her.

CLINTON: Jesus, Janine, I'm trying to make it easier.

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

I just want to get Dad down there and be done with it. I'm trying to do what he wants—what I stupidly promised him I'd do—without tangling anybody else up in it. That's all.

[The ferocity of the exchange lays bare the weight of history on both of them. CLINTON seems breathless. JANINE lets the burn sink in and dissipate before she continues.]

JANINE: Did he suffer much? I'd hate it if he suffered.

CLINTON: I don't know. Massive stroke, they said. I don't know if that hurt much. Wasn't a lot to do after I found him. He was in the ICU for a day, and he just kind of went to sleep.

JANINE: I'm glad for that, at least.

CLINTON: It's like he knew. Talked about his funeral the day before. Wouldn't shut up about it, honestly.

JANINE: He always talked about his funeral. I think it's the one thing he looked forward to. *[She laughs, realizing the absurdity.]* That's weird, since—

CLINTON: I know.

JANINE: This will sound bad, I know, but at least it's over, right? His burden is gone. Yours, too. He was so angry at the world, seemed like.

CRAIG LANCASTER

CLINTON: Me. He was angry at me.

JANINE: He resented you because he couldn't care for himself, that's all.

CLINTON: OK, whatever.

JANINE: What?

CLINTON: Nothing.

JANINE: What, Clint?

CLINTON: Just leave it. I gotta go.

JANINE: So go, then. You're not going the whole way today, I hope.

CLINTON: No. Colorado Springs maybe. Hopefully. The rest tomorrow.

JANINE: OK. Be careful.

CLINTON: Always am. Bye.

[CLINTON *ends the call and stands*. JANINE *recedes*. CLINTON *shakes the stilled cellphone at the audience*.]

CLINTON: I hate these damn things. Can't say that would have gone any better if we'd been face-to-face,

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

though, and it might well have gone worse. The phone [*he looks at the item in his hand*] gives some distance, at least, some detachment. Janine and me, we needed that, when it came right down to it. Too much pain when we were in proximity. Too much we both knew and remembered and couldn't shake loose from. Too much love, too, if that makes any sense. Sometimes, I'll be thinking about things and say to myself, "You know, I wish Janine was here so I could tell her about this," and then I realize she's not, and so I look at the phone and think, "Well, I could call her," but I know that wouldn't be the same, so I don't.

[*He looks at the phone in his hand again.*]

You're good for something, I guess.

[CLINTON *places his trash in the can, then heads over to the stage where the truck sits. He scans around, alights on something, then uses a hand covered by a plastic bag to sweep up a handful from the ground. He turns toward the store, showing it. The CASHIER, back at his post, offers mocking applause. CLINTON throws the bag away and gets into the cab. The scene dims.*]

Scene Five

As the scene opens, KAY steps forward from her position on an adjacent stage, and a single spotlight finds her.

KAY: So let me tell you about the prototypical interaction between my mother and my father, whether they stood in the same room or talked by way of cellular towers. Voices were never too pitched, emotions would simmer but rarely boil. Ultimately, there would be kindness in their words even when they'd come no closer to bridging the distances between them. It was annoying, really, because it was all so anticlimactic. You'd get the sense that, maybe, we were closing in on a watershed kind of anger, something cleansing, maybe even something terrible that might lead to some bit of higher ground, then the moment would lamentably pass. Cordiality, that most unsatisfying of manners, would set in again.

What was Dad thinking the day he drove off? I don't

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

know. I don't know because he didn't say. Dad wasn't a sphinx, exactly, but he also never managed to get rich collecting pennies for what was on his head. They say if you don't know what an extrovert thinks, you haven't listened, and if you don't know what an introvert thinks, you haven't asked. I listened. I asked. I don't even know if Dad was an introvert or an extrovert. That's how far in the weeds I was. We all were.

The most unkind thing I ever said to my father is that he didn't know the difference between being around and being present. It's also the most accurate thing I ever said to him. So I let it stand. And I'll keep it standing, even knowing what I don't know now. Because here's the hell of it: The not knowing is more profound.

[KAY recedes, and the spotlight dims, then shifts to the stage where CLINTON sits in his truck, driving. Dusk has fallen outside. After a time, the spotlight widens, revealing a woman with clamorous hair, wearing fashions of the 1970s. This is CAROLINA COBB, CLINTON's mother. She has been dead for years. CLINTON looks over and regards her as if her sudden appearance is unsurprising to him. CAROLINA pets Sammy the dog.]

CAROLINA: He always did like these hairy herding dogs.

CLINTON: That there is Sammy. It's been a long

CRAIG LANCASTER

while since he's herded anything other than kibble. Can't even take a run at the delivery guy now. Poor, impotent bastard.

CAROLINA: Lovely dog. He smells like week-old trash. [*She again pets Sammy.*] So you're taking him home, then?

CLINTON: Sammy?

CAROLINA: Your father. Don't play that game with me.

CLINTON: Yeah. I guess it's home. To him. Not to me. Where he wanted to go, so, you know, I'm the granter of wishes.

CAROLINA: You certainly were for me.

[CLINTON *flushes with warmth at his mother's kind words.*]

CAROLINA: I'm surprised he lasted this long. Seventy-nine?

CLINTON: Seventy-seven. You know this. You'd have been seventy-one. Don't play that game with me.

CAROLINA: Oh, Clinton. You always were such a clever child. It's annoying sometimes.

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

[Some moments pass. They exude contentment at being together.]

CAROLINA: You won't make it past Buffalo today, not in this weather.

CLINTON: I'll make it.

CAROLINA: Whatever you say.

[CLINTON gives his mother a sideways glance, then reorients himself to the road.]

CLINTON: I thought you might show. Glad you did.

CAROLINA: I thought you might have some questions. Thought I could be of some help.

CLINTON: No questions. Just thoughts, I guess.

CAROLINA: We accept that currency, too.

CLINTON: I don't know how to say it exactly. The thoughts are tangled up, every time I try to put some words to them.

CAROLINA: Just say it. We're beyond preambles, don't you think?

[CLINTON tightens his grasp on the steering wheels, his hands at ten and two.]

CRAIG LANCASTER

CLINTON: OK, look. It's not like I'm unhappy he lived as long as he did, but I can't help wondering how it's fair that I got so much time with him and so little with you. You know what I'm saying?

CAROLINA: I know.

CLINTON: You and I could have done more with that time than he and I ever did.

[CLINTON *looks again at his mother. She smiles warmly, then bends down for a closer look at Sammy.*]

CLINTON: Mom?

CAROLINA: I heard you, sweetie. It's hard to explain. Where I am, the concept of what's fair or not isn't as simple as it must seem to you. And time...well, time is both irrelevant and finely understood in a way it wasn't before.

CLINTON: I don't follow.

CAROLINA: Look. Circumstances aren't fair or unfair, OK? They just are. Things happen and don't happen, people are and they aren't, this and that comes and goes, and I think you want to find some sense to it that's simply not there sometimes. Do you understand?

CLINTON: Sort of. I guess.

STRAIGHT ON TO STARDUST

CAROLINA: Let me put it this way. I don't think it was particularly fair that I got sick twenty years before the BRCA1 gene was discovered. But it wasn't unfair, either. It's just what happened. That's where my earthly life fell. I was angry, hurt, violated at the time. It makes better sense when you can see it in a sort of cosmic context.

CLINTON: So it's all chance? [*His anger flashes.*] That's no answer. I was eleven years old. I still needed you.

CAROLINA: I know. But it's like I've told you before: I've been here.

CLINTON: Not in the way I needed you to be. [*He closes his eyes, then opens them again, quick. He looks to her.*] I'm sorry. I don't mean to be hurtful.

CAROLINA: Nothing hurts. Say what you need to say.

CLINTON: That's it, I guess.

[*They ride on. Silence sets in. At last, CAROLINA speaks again.*]

CAROLINA: So he's in the back?

CLINTON: Yeah, he's in the back. Trapped, for once. The old bastard.

CRAIG LANCASTER

CAROLINA: There's something poetic in that.

CLINTON: How so?

CAROLINA: Oh, nothing. Sorry. Just some earthbound grudges stirring up. Forgive me.

CLINTON: So tell me this, at least. Did you love him?

CAROLINA: Sammy? [CLINTON, *highly amused, shakes his head.*] Did you?

CLINTON: I asked first.

CAROLINA: Yes, but I think your answer is more important than mine. You're still here.

CLINTON: Still, I want to know. I've always wondered. The longer I've lived and the longer you've been gone—I mean, somewhere else—the less sense it has made to me. I don't see how the two of you ever added up to anything.

CAROLINA: We've had lots of opportunities to talk about this. Why is it coming up now?

CLINTON: I don't know.

CAROLINA: Son...

CLINTON: I guess I always hoped he and I would

talk about it, but we never did. Now we never will.

[CAROLINA *considers this, then starts in again.*]

CAROLINA: Did you ever wonder why I showed up only sometimes? You never brought it up, so I never volunteered, but you were a perceptive boy, Clinton.

CLINTON: I was just glad to see you whenever.

CAROLINA: Well, there are rules. Rules of engagement, I guess you would call them. I wasn't permitted to come to you until you were grown up. That about killed me. No pun intended.

CLINTON: I see. What else?

CAROLINA: What I could say and not say. What I could reveal. Whether I could intervene, and I couldn't. So you and I, we just chatted. Like we did when you'd come home from school. You remember?

CLINTON: Sure.

CAROLINA: So let's chat. Did you love your father?

[CLINTON *regards her. He swallows hard, collecting his thoughts.*]

CLINTON: I think I did. I was his son, and he was my dad.

CRAIG LANCASTER

CAROLINA: That sounds like some sort of genetic obligation, not love. Little boys love their fathers. It's the way of things. Older boys...well, things sometimes change.

CLINTON: I guess.

CAROLINA: Give it some deeper thought. You have the time.

CLINTON: I will. Now you answer my question.

CAROLINA: Did I love Jimmy?

CLINTON: That's the one.

CAROLINA: I think so. I saw something in him that moved me, I think. Or maybe I just saw some good times in the backseat of a Chevy and—

CLINTON: Mom!

CAROLINA: Oh, please. You telling me you've never been in the backseat of a Chevy with a girl? Remember: I know more and have seen more than I'm telling you.

CLINTON: A Mazda. Once.

CAROLINA: Really?

CLINTON: With Janine. Up on the Rims. My legs dangling out of the back window. Small car, a Mazda.

CAROLINA: Sharp moves, son. Sharp moves. [*She points out the windshield.*] Snow gate's coming down. You're not making it past Buffalo tonight.

[*A frown screws up on CLINTON's face as he swings the truck hard for an exit. The spotlight narrows on him, casting CAROLINA into darkness.*]

CLINTON: Wait.

[*He reaches for the dog in the opposite seat.*]

Hold on to your ass, Sammy. Looks like we're gonna have to hunker down for the night.

[*The scene dims.*]