

CATHERINE BANKS

BONE CAGE

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NOTE TO ACTORS—don't do rural accents—the sentence structure should work fine. Also if there is a word in () it means that you don't say that word. It is only there to help with the intent of the line.

Jamie is 23 and works as a wood processor—which means he sits in a machine that cuts, strips and stacks trees for 12 hours a day or night (if he is on the night shift). When he is done the area of the forest he has worked, it is clear cut—completely devoid of standing trees.

Chicky is 26 and works on a sod farm owned by her married lover Reg. The land that Reg farms is interval land—that is, the land bordering the river that is especially rich because the river has flooded it since land and the river came into being.



ACT I

SCENE I

Lights up to half. JAMIE sits on the rail of a steel bridge painted Industrial green.

JAMIE is stroking the body of a dead blue jay.

There is the sound of a huge pulp truck travelling on a village road. The sound of it approaching then the swamped noise of it passing too fast, and too close. The engine winds and fades as it goes up a hill leaving the village.

JAMIE

Oh yeah

Everything in its path it eats.
Yellow birch spruce—fir
White Maple
It picks its teeth with the alders
Bitter taste don't matter.

Eats squirrels, porkies
Mainly birds, lots still in the nests
Not so safe after all.

He holds up the jay looking at it carefully.

To the processor
I'm the first beer of the day
What's needed to get it started

At the end of every shift
It pisses me out on the ground.

I saw an eastern ghost once
A cougar, watching me in the woods.
Biologists say cougars don't exist around here.
That's funny because I saw one
And he saw me too.
I said
"You do exist same as me."
And he said back
"There you have it Jamie-boy"

When I got a kid someday
Just born and everything
I'm going to go raid that fox den
that I know where it's at
And go get a cub.
Foxes are always black when they're cubs.
And I'm going to raise the baby and that fox up together.
Fox curl up in the crib at night
Baby play out in the woods all day
Til their hair grows orange.
And their second teeth?
Razor sharp.

JAMIE drops the dead bird off the bridge into the river.

Scene II

Lights up.

CHICKY squats next to the river.

CHICKY

The summer I turned 15 I did something that people who knew me then would never have believed. It happened right here too at the river. He'd brought a bunch of us swimming cause we were haying all-day and hot. Us girls were swimming in our shorts and white t-shirts so our bras would show through. The boys swam through our legs grabbing our crotches saying it was an accident *they was stuck* or *drowning honest to fucking god*. He sat on the beach smoking, watching me like he had all summer. It was the first time I felt that feeling in my nipples.

He said he needed to see Clarence so he'd drop me off last but I said *yes OK* and he brought me back here. He brought me down to the water and he said he didn't have any right, he was married man with kids even and I was so beautiful and he wasn't trying to start anything up with me because that kind of man disgusted him but he needed me to know that he loved me. And just saying it helped him so much and if he could once in a while tell me that he'd be OK never happy now but OK. Then he stood up and he was walking up the bank saying he'd better get me home.

I knew how to stop him. I took off my T-shirt, my bra still damp from the river and I said *Reg!*

I did that, shy little me did that, I pulled *him* to me.

This scene happens after Jamie and Chicky learn that someone has partially dug up the grave of their brother who died 10 years before at the age of 9 from a brain tumour. Jamie's girlfriend's brother Kevin, who has been badly beaten and humiliated by Merv the village bully, has blamed the grave incident on Merv. Carol is Reg's wife.

CHICKY

I don't think even Merv would do that.

JAMIE

It don't matter to Kevin who did it.
He needs for it to be Merv.

CHICKY

Why?

JAMIE

Look Chicky. Merv did something to Kev, Kev got to take Merv on.

If he wants to live around here anyways.

CHICKY

What did he do to Kev to make him so crazy?

JAMIE

I don't ask what Merv the perv does. You saw him. They got him good and drunk that's for sure. Maybe they fed him some vigara made him look at someone's dick and told him if his pecker got hard it meant he's a queer. Anyways you know they got his underwear off him one way or another.

CHICKY

He's acting like he's going to kill Merv.

JAMIE

If Kevin got laid he'll be all right.

CHICKY

You know he might be my half brother same as you.

JAMIE

You're putting a lot of faith in shit Mom told you.

CHICKY

You tell Kev, Merv's got kids and that's enough.

JAMIE

We're done if he is.

CHICKY

When are you going to B.C?

JAMIE

Soon enough.

CHICKY

Not soon enough.
You've had that ad for heli-logging for months.
Have you called the number?

JAMIE

That ain't your business but yes I called.

CHICKY

So you are going?

JAMIE

Soon as I get the money together.

CHICKY

Jesus you've *quit* your job.

JAMIE

Danny's renting the trailer til Christmas. We'll have enough
by then.

CHICKY

You might have the wedding paid off by Christmas.
Why are you marrying her?
Jesus it's not like you're lovesick.

JAMIE

Now you sound like her. *Do you love me? Do you really really
love me?* Fucccccccccckkkkk.

CHICKY

She'll stop you from going.

JAMIE

She won't.
Krista's got to go with me or I'm not going.

CHICKY

You'll do better on your own.

JAMIE

I need one person with me who knows me.

CHICKY

You marry her you'll be stuck.
She'll get pregnant...

JAMIE

No we ain't having kids for a long time.

CHICKY

You're being a stupid married man and you're not even married.

JAMIE

Yeah, I heard Carol's preggers.

CHICKY

Yeah well so I know what I'm talking about.

JAMIE

You know sis, old Reggie's using you up same as he using up the interval land. What are *you* sticking around for?

CHICKY

Haven't you noticed I've been taking care of you?

JAMIE

So now you don't have too. And don't wait around here for some someday-family reunion. Mom probably doesn't know who your father is, for sure.

CHICKY

Jesus I can't stand living with you sometimes.

JAMIE

I'm not saying anything against you. It's her I'm talking about.

CHICKY

You use to have a heart. I remember when you use to have feelings.

JAMIE

Yeah?

CHICKY

You didn't use to be like this before.

JAMIE

Before when?

CHICKY

I don't know. Before Jason died. Before you quit school.
Before you started drinking everyday.

JAMIE

You know what I feel these days?

CHICKY

What?

JAMIE

Nothing.

CHICKY

No what...tell me.

JAMIE

Nothing is what I feel after a 12 hour night shift shaking
inside that machine. Hearing everything outside it get tore
up. The men say don't walk around a section you've just clear
cut. Earl and them say if it makes you feel bad don't do it. I
can't just walk away...leave things half dead and dying.

CHICKY

Is that why you're drinking, causing trouble with Merv?

JAMIE

Merv isn't anything. All that is just...something stupid to do.
What makes you feel better after a sunny afternoon of strip-
ping the interval land of another layer of its soil?

CHICKY

I certainly don't go beating up people.

JAMIE

Seen Carol lately? She looks like you've given her some good
jabs in her gut.

CHICKY

Jesus.

JAMIE

And you're worried about what I'm doing to Merv's kids?

CHICKY

Jesus you've got a lot of nerve.

Well, I'm not being the maid of honour at your funeral.

JAMIE

I told her you will.

She walks out the door.

He holds out his hands in front of him.

You are right Sis, I have a lot of nerve but it's shot.

Nothing another beer won't fix.

He takes a long drink.

Lights out.

