

## THE COSMOLOGICAL CONSTANT (Excerpts)

(An old ranch house with a very wide front porch and a screened-in porch attached stage right. A caliche road runs stage left and up into the distance. There is also a tree stump and a low white picket fence downstage with a space for a gate in the middle. Narrator comes down road with gate and lays it against the fence. Turns to audience)

### NARRATOR

Gooooood morning!

(yawns and stretches)

Oh, lord it's early!

(looks at audience)

How come all of you look so bright-eyed and bushy-tailed? Oh, that's right, it's not morning for you.

(smiles slyly)

But over here, in this world, *my* world, the dawn is just breaking. The unpredictable birth of a new day is bursting across the horizon. And it's about to shed its wondrous light...on my family.

"Where are we," you may well ask. This...universe, a balance of memory and imagination, of truth and convenient lies, is a fanciful, factual rendition of my family's ranch—somewhere in the heart of yesterday...and tomorrow.

That's the original ranch house. Still home to the reunions of the Pyes and the Mays and the Cravens that come from all the nooks and byways of this earth.

You may also wonder why I've brought you here. I mean, what can this old, unremarkable place have to offer any of us?

(sits on tree stump, maybe)

I hope you can indulge me. See...I'm not quite sure why.

(up, pacing almost frantically)

I mean, there are so many important things to consider—things I want to understand about this life, this universe—its origin, the basic principles by which it functions.

But it's funny...inexplicable really: when I think about those things my mind keeps coming back here.

(picks up gate and talks as he attaches it)

Anyway, I'm Jordan, and I'll be your guide on this...odyssey; a kind of fifth-columnist behind the fourth wall, so to speak.

(gate hangs in a decided overlap)

Humph. Never was much of a help out here.

(another sly smile)

But, you see, it doesn't matter a stitch. Because *I deal in magic!*

(snaps finger; gate straightens. Narrator, very happy with himself, looks up to audience. He is just about to speak as the gate falls. Turns to it, surprised.)

That shouldn't be...

(collects himself)

Anyway, to matters at hand. There are some other things missing here. Let's see...

(waves his hand; cows begin to low in the background)

Ah, yes, there's that wonderful, familiar sound.

And what else? Oh, yes.

(flicks finger: sparrows chirp)

Uh, huh. And we have to have those annoying grackles that sound like a rusty gate creaking open.

(western grackles sound)

And we also need...

(nods; horse whinnies)

And let's see...what else, what else?

(rooster crows)

Of course! What am I thinking?

Oh, and it being Thanksgiving...

(turkey gobbles, animal sounds continue)

Yeah. That's more like it.

Now, just off to the right—uh, your left, used to be another family home where I spent every Thanksgiving and ever summer with my Aunt and Uncle and two cousins, Tommy and Paul. Taken down by a tornado, along with this tree, here. Boy, do I miss that place.

(looks mischievously at audience)

Ah, what the heck?

(flicks fingers open at stage right, house appears)

There it is, just as I remember it.

And there's one last thing.

(his tone becomes reverential as he walks toward it)

Off to my far left, just out of sight, is the Indian Mott: a clump of trees hidden back in the woods that served, in times forgotten, as an ancient Indian settlement and burial ground. When we were kids, oh, it had powers! Time seemed to stop out there. And nothing was more real...than our dreams.

II.

### NARRATOR

So...where does this leave us, this probabilistic nature of the universe? Oh, on the subatomic level all kinds of bizarre things happen. That electron, which is matter, or *probably* matter, can penetrate a concrete wall! And not because of its infinitesimal size but, if you can believe it, because it can borrow enough energy from the future to go right through that wa...

(before he can finish, he turns to see Harrison looking straight at him)

...ll.

(unnerved, he tries to continue)

S-So, if an electron can do it, then why can't one of us? Well, it turns out that if we try often enough, we could! We could just pass right through that suck...

(turns in the opposite direction to see Aunt Connie staring at him)

...er.

(sees others gathered around him; completely confused)

Yes-s-sir, on the subatomic level all kinds of absurd things happen...things that...don't made any sense...

(turns to look at Harrison)

...at all...

**UNCLE HARRISON**

Well, hey Jordie.

(narrator jumps)

Come back to be among the civilized, have you?

**NARRATOR**

You...you can see me?

**AUNT CONNIE**

We kin all see you, Jordan.

(narrator whips around to her, startled)

The question is, kin you see us?

**GEEGEE**

Three!

**NARRATOR**

But...But I'm not really here.

**UNCLE HARRISON**

Well, where are ya'...Uranus?

**MARY KATHRYN**

Daddy...

**NARRATOR**

No, I mean, it's... I'm just an observer from a different time.

**AUNT TEC**

Oh yeah? From the past 'er the future?

**AUNT CONNIE**

Aunt Tec, don't encourage him.

**NARRATOR**

Well...from the future, I guess.

**AUNT TEC**

You don't know? Me neither.

**NARRATOR**

Well, it's...hard to explain.

**AUNT TINY**

It's even harder to understand.

**NARRATOR**

This can't be happening.

**AUNT TEC**

(cheerfully)

Well, maybe it ain't.

**NARRATOR**

What?

**AUNT TEC**

Maybe we're just dreamin' this. I often wonder if when I think I'm dreamin' that that's really real & what I think is life is really somethin' I'm dreamin'. You know?

**MARY KATHRYN**

Of course, Aunt Tec. We know just what yer sayin'.

**AUNT CONNIE**

Could we get back to the matter at hand?

**AUNT TINY**

What's that exactly?

**NARRATOR**

No, no, no, that's really interesting. You think your dreams may be real?

**AUNT TEC**

Well, how d'ya know fer sure?

**NARRATOR**

Yeah! How *do* you know? How do we know the physical world exists at all?

**AUNT TEC**

How do we know we really exist?

**NARRATOR**

Well, *cogito ergo sum*.

**AUNT TINY**

Now, Jordie, you watch yore language.

**AUNT CONNIE**

It means "I think therefore I am," Mama.

**AUNT TINY**

Oh. Well, could we leave this philosophical discussion fer another time? Thanksgiving dinner's just about ready & we got tons 'a chores to attend to befor' this weddin' kin happen.

**NARRATOR**

Dinner's ready? I don't remember jumping time forward.

**AUNT TEC**

Forward? I thought you were from the future.

**GEEGEE**

Three!

**NARRATOR**

No, well...I am...I think. See, it all has to do with how you look at time. I mean, does it just travel—

**AUNT TINY**

(rings triangle; all stops)

Let focus, please.

**AUNT CONNIE**

Here's the deal, Jordie. Now, we understand you wanna' make the story interestin'. But you've made us so eccentric.

**AUNT TEC**

Well, we are eccentric, aren't we? Leastwise, I know I am.

**MARY KATHRYN**

Now, Aunt Tec, that's an exaggeration.

**AUNT TEC**

Oh, heck. I know I'm crazier than a junebug in a horse's tail. Seems like the only reasonable response in a crazy world. Like fightin' fire with fire.

**UNCLE HARRISON**

(lifting beer)

'Er with a good friend.

(takes a good swallow)

**AUNT CONNIE**

The point is, Jordan, we're just a bit concerned about the accuracy of the portrayals.

**NARRATOR**

*The accuracy of...!* Look, this isn't history. This is art!

**UNCLE HARRISON**

Well, it sure ain't history.

**NARRATOR**

Oh, now what's that supposed to mean?

**AUNT TINY**

Now, Jordan, don't get in a tizzy.

(to audience)

He was always so sensitive.

**NARRATOR**

I was not! I *am* not!

**AUNT CONNIE**

I don't think I ever drank as much as you've got me doin' here.

**UNCLE HARRISON**

I'll drink to that.

(takes a slug)

**NARRATOR**

Look, this is *my* story and it—

**AUNT TINY**

You've combined some people and left out others completely.

**AUNT CONNIE**

& turned us into stereotypes.

**NARRATOR**

(exploding)

*That's poetic license!*

(pause)

**AUNT TEC**

Gee, I didn't know you needed a license to write poetry.

**NARRATOR**

*No...!*

**AUNT TEC**

Do they arrest ya', 'er just fine ya'?

**NARRATOR**

My god in heaven.

**AUNT TINY**

*Jordie!*

**NARRATOR**

(hands up)

*Sorry...sorry!*

**UNCLE HARRISON**

I think I've been made sorta' bland. & I do believe I worked as hard as anybody out here.

(he looks around for approval; Connie clears her throat; others look away)

What...?

**NARRATOR**

Look, if you don't like the way I'm telling the story, then why doesn't one of you see if he or she can do it better?

**AUNT TINY**

Like who?

**NARRATOR**

Like any one of you! Just jump in, take over if you think it's so d...

(looks at Aunt Tiny)

...darn easy.

**MARY KATHRYN**

Now Jordan, we didn't mean to put you on the defensive.

**NARRATOR**

No, hey, don't worry about me. Go ahead, go on, tell the d...dang story!

**AUNT CONNIE**

Any of us?

**NARRATOR**

Any of you. All of you!

**AUNT TINY**

Well...

(they all turn to audience and start talking at once)

**NARRATOR**

Hold it! Hold it! Hold it! Go...lly, you can't tell a story this way!

Now, do you see the absolute chaos when no one's in charge?

**AUNT TEC**

I kinda' liked it. Sorta' like the voices in my head.

**NARRATOR**

This is completely insane.

**AUNT TEC**

Yeah. Fun, ain't it?

**NARRATOR**

Look, this is utter chaos. I can't tell a story this way, with things so completely out of control.

**AUNT TINY**

Well, Jordie, it's like I told you when you were a boy: if you wanta' be with people, you gotta' let people be. Maybe you should just sit back & let thangs happen as they will.

**UNCLE HARRISON**

(toasts)

Secret 'a mah success.

**NARRATOR**

I tell you what. If you all think you can do so much better, then I'll just leave it in your capable hands. *How about that?*

(he storms off)

**AUNT TINY**

Dear Lord, some things'll never change.

**AUNT CONNIE**

Well, whadda' we do now?

**AUNT TEC**

I know what I'm 'a gonna' do!

(heads to porch)

**MARY KATHRYN**

What's that, Aunt Tec?

**AUNT TEC**

I'm a-gonna' try out Jordie's theory about walkin' through walls.

(starts banging into wall)

**AUNT TINY**

Oh, Texie...

**AUNT CONNIE**

Well, anybody got any bright ideas?

**MARY KATHRYN**

I wonder how the story ends in Jordan's mind.

**UNCLE HARRISON**

Proibly with a mass murder.

(Aunt Tec continues bouncing off the wall)

**AUNT TINY**

Well, y'all kin jabber 'bout this all you want. I got chores to tend to.

**UNCLE HARRISON**

Yeah, me too. This beer's well nigh empty.

**AUNT TINY**

(calls off left upstage)

Boys! Come on & get cleaned up fer dinner. Tec, c'mon, let's—

(Aunt Tec walks through the wall)

**AUNT TINY**

Oh, my Lord!

(everyone is momentarily stunned)

Tec! Texie!

(Aunt Tiny and the rest follow through the door with various expressions of concern for Aunt Tec)

**GEEGEE**

(after a moment she stands & walks up to  
audience)

Y'all kin take a break now.

(lights down, end Act I)