

①
SOPHIE. Suit yourself. *(A beat.)* People were asking about Baker at the land office.

MISS LEAH. What people?

SOPHIE. White people. Asked me if I had heard anything from him.

MISS LEAH. Ain't no white folks looking to settle in no Nicodemus, Kansas.

SOPHIE. It's some of the best land around here. You said it yourself.

MISS LEAH. Ain't nothin' good to no white folks once a bunch of colored folks get set up on it!

SOPHIE. There's already a new family over by the Gaddy's and a widower with four sons between here and the Jordan place. They've probably been looking at your place, too.

MISS LEAH. Who said so?

SOPHIE. Nobody said anything. I just mean since you've been staying with us for a while.

MISS LEAH. Well, I ain't no wet behind the ears homesteader. I own my land. Free and clear. My name the only name on the deed to it. Anybody lookin' at my land is countin' they chickens. I made twenty winters on that land and I intend to make twenty more. *(While Miss Leah fusses, Sophie quietly goes and gets her shawl and gently drops it around her shoulders.)*

SOPHIE. And then what?

MISS LEAH. Then maybe I'll let you have it.

SOPHIE. You gonna make me wait until I'm old as you are to get my hands on your orchard?

MISS LEAH. That'll be time enough. If I tell you you can have it any sooner, my life won't be worth two cents!

SOPHIE. You don't really think I'd murder you for your land, do you? *(Miss Leah looks at Sophie for a beat before drawing deeply on her pipe.)*

MISS LEAH. I like Baker. And Miz Baker sweet as she can be. They just tryin' to stay in the city long enough for her to get her strength back and build that baby up a little.

SOPHIE. She'll never make it out here and you know it.

MISS LEAH. Losing three babies in three years take it out

Sophie / Miss Leah

of you, girl!

SOPHIE. They wouldn't have made it through the first winter if Wil Parrish hadn't been here to help them.

MISS LEAH. You had a lot of help your first coupla winters, if I remember it right.

SOPHIE. And I'm grateful for it.

MISS LEAH. Some of us were here when you got here. Don't forget it!

SOPHIE. All I'm trying to say is the Bakers have been gone almost two years and he hasn't even filed an extension. It's against the rules.

MISS LEAH. Against whose rules? Don't nobody but colored folks know they been gone that long no way. Them white folks never come out here to even check and see if we're dead or alive. You know that good as the next person. *(A beat.)* Sometimes I suspect you think you the only one love this land, Sister, but you not.

SOPHIE. What are you getting at?

MISS LEAH. Just the way you were speechifyin' and carryin' on in town meetin' last week like you the only one got a opinion that matter.

SOPHIE. Why didn't the others speak up if they had so much to say?

MISS LEAH. Can't get a word in edgewise with you goin' on and on about who ain't doin' this and that like they 'spose to.

SOPHIE. But you know I'm right!

MISS LEAH. Bein' right ain't always the only thing you got to think about. The thing you gotta remember about colored folks is all the stuff they don't say when they want to, they just gonna say it double time later. That's why you gonna lose that vote if you ain't careful.

SOPHIE. It doesn't make sense. A lot of the colored settlements have already passed rules saying nobody can sell to outsiders unless everybody agrees.

MISS LEAH. Ain't nobody gonna give you the right to tell them when and how to sell their land. No point in ownin' it if you can't do what you want to with it.

SOPHIE. But half of them will sell to the speculators! You know they will!

MISS LEAH. Then that's what they gonna have to do.

SOPHIE. We could have so much here if these colored folks would just step lively. We could own this whole prairie. Nothing but colored folks farms and colored folks wheat fields and colored folks cattle everywhere you look. Nothing but colored folks! But they can't see it. They look at Nicodemus and all they can see is a bunch of scuffling people trying to get ready for the winter instead of something free and fine and all our own. Most of them don't even know what we're doing here!

MISS LEAH. That's 'cause some of them come 'cause they ain't never had nothin' that belonged to 'em. Some of them come 'cause they can't stand the smell of the city. Some of them just tired of evil white folks. Some of 'em killed somebody or wanted to. All everybody got in common is they plunked down twelve dollars for a piece of good land and now they tryin' to live on it long enough to claim it.

SOPHIE. Everybody isn't even doing that.

MISS LEAH. Everybody doin' the best they can, Sister Sophie.

SOPHIE. And what happens when that isn't good enough?

MISS LEAH. Then they have to drink your coffee! *(Sophie laughs as Wil and Fannie enter outside. We can still see the activity in the house, but we no longer hear it. Miss Leah is smoking her pipe and Sophie is working on her ledgers at the messy desk. She pushes Fannie's papers aside carelessly, completely focused. Wil is dressed in work clothes. Fannie is dressed in boots, long skirt, shawl. They are strolling companionably and chatting with the ease of old and trusted friends.)*

WIL. I guess I'd have to say the weather more than anything. I miss that Mexican sunshine. Makes everything warm. You know how cold these creeks are when you want to take a swim? Well, I like to swim bein' from Florida and all, so I close my eyes and jump in real quick! But that water would neigh 'bout kill a Mexican. They don't know nothin' 'bout no cold. They even eat their food hot! *(Fannie, laughing, stops to pick a flower to add to her already overflowing basket.)*

FANNIE. Look! *(Holding it up for Wil's inspection.)* That'll be the last of these until spring.

WIL. I imagine it will be. I ate a Mexican hot pepper one time. It looked just like a Louisiana hot pepper, but when I bit into it, it neigh 'bout lifted the top of my head off. Them Mexicans were laughing so hard they couldn't even bring me no water. I like to died!

FANNIE. You really miss it, don't you?

WIL. Miss Fannie, sometimes I surely do. But I know Baker needs somebody to keep an eye on things for him until he gets back. And now I got Miss Leah's place to look in on too.

FANNIE. Do you think they'll be back this spring?

WIL. He swears they will.

FANNIE. Sophie doesn't think they're strong enough for this life.

WIL. Sometimes people are a lot stronger then you can tell by just lookin' at 'em.

FANNIE. Did he say anything about the baby?

WIL. Said he's fat and healthy and looks just like him, poor little thing!

FANNIE. *(Laughing.)* Shame on you! *(A beat.)* Has Miss Leah said anything to you about going home?

WIL. No. Not lately.

FANNIE. Good! We're trying to convince her to stay the winter with us.

WIL. She's not tryin' to go back to her place alone, is she?

FANNIE. She really wants to, but she's just gotten so frail. Sophie says it was just a matter of time before she fell and broke something.

WIL. *(A beat.)* You know what else I like? I mean about Mexico?

FANNIE. What?

WIL. I like Mexicans.

FANNIE. Well, that works out nice, I guess.

WIL. Everybody livin' in Mexico don't like Mexicans, Miss Fannie. They separate out the people from the stuff they do like and go on about their business like they ain't even there.

FANNIE. I never met any Mexicans.