

② Wil / Fannie

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.

WIL. Nicest people you ever wanna see. Friendly, but know how to keep to they self, too. Didn't no Mexicans ever say nothin' out of the way to me as long as I was livin' down there. They a lot like them Seminoles I grew up around in Florida. When I run away, them Indians took me in and raised me up like I was one of their own. They most all gone now. Ain't got enough land left to spit on, if you'll forgive me sayin' it that way.

FANNIE. Do you think you'll go back? To Mexico, I mean.

WIL. I used to think so but I spent seven years down there. As long as I spent on anybody's plantation, so I guess I'm back even. *(A beat.)* I might even be a little bit ahead. *(He hands her a flower that has fallen out of her basket.)*

FANNIE. *(Embarrassed.)* My mother loved flowers. Roses were her favorites. My father used to say, "colored women ain't got no time to be foolin' with no roses" and my mother would say, as long as colored men had time to worry about how colored women spent their time, she guessed she had time enough to grow some roses.

WIL. I like sunflowers. They got sunflowers in Mexico big as a plate.

FANNIE. Sophie likes sunflowers, too, but they're too big to put inside the house. They belong outside. *(A beat.)* It's lonely out here without flowers. Sophie laughed the first time everything I planted around the house came into bloom. She said I had planted so many flowers there wasn't any room for the beans and tomatoes.

WIL. That's where your sister's wrong. There's room for everything to grow out here. If there ain't nothin' else out here, there's plenty of room. *(They stand together, looking at the beauty of the sunset. Wil turns after a moment and looks at her, quietly removing his hat and holding it nervously in his hands.)*

FANNIE. You think it's going to a long winter, Wil?

WIL. They're all long winters, Miss Fannie. This one will be about the same.

FANNIE. Sophie found her laugh out here. I don't remember ever hearing her laugh the whole time we were in Memphis. But everything in Kansas was funny to her. Sometimes

when we first got here, she'd laugh so hard she'd start crying, but she didn't care. One time, she was laughing so hard I was afraid she was going to have a stroke. She scared me to death. When she calmed down, I asked her well, why didn't you ever laugh like that in Memphis? And she said her laugh was too free to come out in a place where a colored woman's life wasn't worth two cents on the dollar. What kind of fool would find that funny, she asked me. She was right, too. Sophie's always right. *(While she speaks, Wil reaches out very slowly and almost puts his arm around her waist. She does not see him and he stops before touching her, suddenly terrified she would not appreciate the gesture. She picks up the flowers and hesitates.)* We're friends, aren't we?

WIL. Yes, Miss Fannie. I would say we are.

FANNIE. Then I wish you'd just call me Fannie. You don't have to called me Miss Fannie.

WIL. *(Embarrassed.)* I didn't mean to offend you, Miss ... I just sort of like to call you that because it reminds me that a colored woman is a precious jewel deserving of my respect, my love and my protection.

FANNIE. *(Taken aback and delighted.)* Why, Wil! What a sweet thing to say!

WIL. My mother taught it to me. She used to make me say it at night like other folks said prayers. There were some other things she said, too, but I can't remember them anymore. When I first run off after they sold her, I tried to close my eyes and remember her voice sayin' 'em, but all them new Indian words was lookin' for a place in my head, too. So I lost 'em all but that one I just told you. She used to say if a colored man could just remember that one thing, life would be a whole lot easier on the colored woman.

FANNIE. Can I put it in the book?

WIL. With Miss Leah's stories?

FANNIE. It's not just Miss Leah's stories anymore, Wil. It's sort of about all of us.

WIL. I would call it an honor to be included.

FANNIE. Well, good! *(Suddenly embarrassed, she adjusts her shawl and prepares to go inside.)*