

④ Fannie / Frank

Scene 5

Miss Leah is in the back sitting with Minnie who is lying down. Sophie and Wil are hiding outside. Fannie is alone in the kitchen where she checks the time and then goes to the oven and takes out a perfect pie.

Frank enters the yard furtively. Fannie sees him and watches him from the window. She takes off her apron and goes to the door. She opens it before he knocks. He steps back, startled.

FANNIE. Come in, Frank. (Frank hesitates.) Sister's gone to town and Miss Leah's in the back with Min. Please. Come in.
FRANK. Parrish said you were going to come into the land office with me. Are you ready?

FANNIE. It's all right. Sister isn't angry anymore. She wants to make you an offer.

FRANK. What kind of offer?
FANNIE. Please. Come inside so we can talk.

FRANK. I don't want any trouble.
FANNIE. We're prepared to make you an offer for your land.

FRANK. You can't afford what they're paying in town.
FANNIE. We're prepared to pay exactly what they're paying in town.

FRANK. You don't have that kind of money. Minnie said so.
FANNIE. Sister and I didn't involve Min in all the details of our household finances. I'll go into town with you now and we can make all arrangements. Do you have the deed? (Frank shows it and puts it back in his pocket.) Good!

FRANK. That's fine by me. I don't care where the money comes from as long as it ends up in my pocket so I can get the hell out of this place! (Extends his hand.) Can we seal the deal, Fannie? Just the two of us?

FANNIE. Done.

FRANK. You know I'm sorry it had to go this far in the first place. I love Minnie ... how is she?

FANNIE. She's asleep right now. Miss Leah's with her.
FRANK. Good, good.

FANNIE. She wanted me to wake her up as soon as you got here, but I told her to get a few more minutes rest and I'd give you a piece of homemade apple pie to keep you busy in the meantime.

FRANK. You're not angry with me? About Min, I mean. You know how aggravating she can be sometimes. She's such a child.

FANNIE. I understand. She has to understand that a wife's first allegiance is to her husband.

FRANK. Well, you're a very understanding person and I appreciate that, but I would just as soon we get on our way. I don't think your sister would be too happy to come home and find me sitting at her table eating up all her ...

FANNIE. (Holding out a piece to him.) ... apple pie. My specialty. Sister won't be home for hours yet. Besides, now that we know we'll be able to keep the land in the family, Sister's not one to hold a grudge.

FRANK. I don't know about that. She didn't seem to mind swinging that shotgun my direction.

FANNIE. We've got to put all that behind us now. For Min's sake and for the sake of your baby. I know Sister's prepared to let bygones be bygones. In fact, when she saw me rolling out the crust for this pie, she told me to make sure you got a piece of it.

FRANK. She did? Well, it takes a better man than I am to refuse an invitation for a piece of your famous apple pie! (He sits and begins to eat heartily.) Delicious! Well, you tell Sophie she's not going to have to worry about Frank Charles hanging around getting in her hair. Not me! (Laughs, coughs a little.) Soon as I get everything signed and proper, good-bye Niggerdamus! Hello London! They treat me like a human being over there. You wouldn't believe it. Half the people we know don't even know I'm colored. I told Min if she was just a couple of shades lighter, we could travel first class all over the world. Nobody would suspect a thing. (Laughs, coughs a little, loosens his tie.) Don't get me wrong. I don't outright pass.

I just let people draw their own conclusions. (*Coughs harder as Fannie watches impassively.*) Can you get me a glass of water, please? I feel a little ... strange.

FANNIE. No, Frank. I can't do that.
FRANK. Please! I ... water ... my throat's on fire! (*He suddenly realizes.*) What have you done? My god, help me! Please help me! (*She watches him as he tries to stand, but can't. He looks at her in a panic, then slumps over. dead. Fannie shudders slightly; it's over. She composes herself, goes to the door and waves a signal to Sophie and Wil who come immediately. Wil checks the body to be sure Frank is dead. He nods to Sophie and they begin gathering Frank's things to remove the body. Minnie and Miss Leah, hearing the activity, enter from the back. Minnie moves slowly from her injury and from her reluctance to see the result of their collective action. They see that Frank is dead. Miss Leah watches Minnie who moves toward the body then stops, looking at Frank with a mixture of regret and relief. She approaches the body slowly, her anger and fear battling her bittersweet memories of the love she once felt for Frank. She reaches out and touches him tentatively, realizing the enormity of what they have done. She draws back, but reaches out again, almost involuntarily, to touch his arm, his hand, his shoulder. We see her move through a complex set of emotions, ending with her knowledge of the monster Frank had become. Her face now shows her resolve and even her body seems to gain strength. She steals herself and reaches into Frank's pocket to withdraw the deed. She clutches it in her hand then looks to Sophie, who stands watching her. Minnie takes a step toward Sophie and extends the deed to her in anticipation of Sophie demanding the return of the deed. Instead, Sophie re-closes Minnie's hand around the deed and gently pushes Minnie's hand with the deed back to her. Minnie, grateful and relieved and finally safe, clutches the deed to her chest with both hands.)*

BLACKOUT

Scene 6

Miss Leah is sleeping in her chair at the table. The cradle is on the table and one of her hands touches it protectively. Minnie enters from the back, dressed for the dance in town. She stops and looks at Miss Leah and her baby. She does not go to them, but looks for a minute and then around the room, slowly. She walks past the side board, touching it absently. She walks to the door and stands looking out at the full moon. She absently touches the broach at her throat. Her hair is braided with ribbons and she wears bright clothes. She looks calm and healthy. She feels Miss Leah's eyes on her and turns. They share a look. Both smile slowly.

MINNIE. It's as bright as noon out there.

MISS LEAH. That's a good luck moon. It's gonna be a good day tomorrow.

MINNIE. Do you think so?

MISS LEAH. It's gonna be a good day every day.

MINNIE. How do I look?

MISS LEAH. You look beautiful. Baby Sister.

MINNIE. Is she sleeping? Look! Her eyes are wide open!

Hello, darling!

MISS LEAH. She's thinkin'.

MINNIE. (*Grooming to the baby.*) What can my sweet baby be thinking, huh? What are you thinking about?

MISS LEAH. Leave the chile in peace now! Everybody's got a right to their own thoughts.

MINNIE. Do you think she's warm enough?

MISS LEAH. You're gonna smother the child if you're not careful. It's spring! Time to let some air get to her.

MINNIE. I know. I even took my shawl off while I was hanging clothes out today.

MISS LEAH. You better stop that foolishness! This is still pneumonia weather!

MINNIE. You just said winter was over, Miss Leah.