

ELEANOR: I can barely remember one week to the next anymore. I was all ready to make fig preserves today and forgot almost everything I needed except the figs.

ABEL: How long y've been retired?

ELEANOR: Again, Mr. Brown — not your concern.

ABEL: Five years.

ELEANOR: *(Reluctantly.)* Six.

ABEL: Long time t'not have a routine. And stimulation. Your brain sensors are hibernatin'. But they'll fire up again when you need 'em. If you want 'em. Like that song.

Abel snags on a container of potato salad. Eleanor watches.

Roof came out well, no?

ELEANOR: Well enough.

ABEL: The new shingles'll look better when they've aged a bit. *(Raising an eyebrow.)*
Most things do.

→
START

ELEANOR: *(Unnerved.)* I wouldn't touch that potato salad now that it's been sitting out.

ABEL: Yes, ma'am.

ELEANOR: *(Taking the potato salad.)* And stop calling me "ma'am." I'm not a hundred.

ABEL: Didn't think you were. Y'know, food doesn't spoil like it used to. They put things in it now, so it won't.

ELEANOR: So it won't what, Mr. Brown? You can't end a sentence with "won't."

ABEL: *(With an edge. This has been a struggle.)* So it won't spoil.

ELEANOR: We still get at least one case of ptomaine poisoning every summer.

ABEL: Well — I wouldn't want anyone t'think I brought'cha supper to poison you.
I'm a little suspect 'round these parts already.

ELEANOR: That's not what I meant. *(To herself.)* And you're not so little.

ABEL: What's that?

ELEANOR: *(Resenting getting caught.)* You said you were a little suspect, and I said that you're not so little.

ABEL: *(Smiling.)* A play on words! Was that humor, Miss El?

ELEANOR: You have the biggest feet I've ever seen.

ABEL: *(Raising one of his feet into the air.)* Brown family curse! My mother had feet like gunboats. *(Lowers his foot.)* Not like you. Couldn't help but notice yesterday morning that you have real lady-like feet.

ELEANOR: I already told you that I don't want to talk about yesterday morning.

Abel smiles, goes to the window overlooking the property.

ABEL: I know. Y'told me. Still a nice thought. *(Looking out.)* Fireflies should be coming out soon.

ELEANOR: *(Watching him. A man in her house.)* Fireflies are always out.

ABEL: Not so you'd know. *(Facing Eleanor.)* Shouldn't it be "largest" feet?

ELEANOR: What?

ABEL: Shouldn't it be the "largest" feet you've ever seen, not the "biggest" feet?

ELEANOR: (*Warily amused, sitting, pouring a glass of wine but taking only a sip.*)

What have you been doing for most of your life, Mr. Brown?

ABEL: (*Leaning on a tall kitchen stool, an attractive pose.*) Oh— nothin' extraordinary.

Drilled wells. Built houses. I'm good with cars and plumbing. That's always handy in a pinch. Renovations and repairs. Wrote a song once, but somebody stole it. Heard it on the radio one day. Not half bad. Mostly, though, I've traveled around — lookin'.

ELEANOR: For single women with empty houses.

ABEL: That's the second time you've said that. I like houses, it's true. Always have.

Most trav'lers do, I'd imagine.

ELEANOR: And single women?

ABEL: Well — that's a whole other can'a worms. No. Just lookin'. For what I

couldn't say. Probably just chasin' my own tail — but no law against that.

What about you, Miss El?

ELEANOR: What about me?

ABEL: What have you been doing for most of *your* life?

ELEANOR: I've been right here where I belong. Teaching school and picking figs.

ABEL: Only you don't teach school anymore.

ELEANOR: I have a full life. You needn't worry yourself.

ABEL: I never worry myself.

ELEANOR: I have that impression.

ABEL: (*Off-handed*) Ask me, worry's just an excuse. Nice way to avoid things. Not sayin' I run around jumpin' off cliffs, but I don't run around avoidin' 'em either. A cliff can have a pretty nice view if you stop worryin' about fallin' off.

Eleanor stares.

ELEANOR: I'll sleep better tonight knowing that. (*Remembering something, standing.*)
Damn it! I forgot David Wilcher!

ABEL: (*To no one, amused.*) One sip'a wine and she's cussin' like a sailor!

ELEANOR: (*Getting a pen and paper.*) He asked me to come back and see his fields at harvest time.

ABEL: Some old widower, I suppose.

ELEANOR: A former student. Or pupil, I should say. There's a difference.

ABEL: How's that?

ELEANOR: A student is interested in learning. A pupil is only interested in getting out.

ABEL: I pupiled my way through tens years of school, then. Almost eleven.

ELEANOR: (*Writing a reminder.*) He was worried about the humidity. I could never be a farmer. Too much uncertainty.

ABEL: And you like certainty.

ELEANOR: I prefer it, yes.

ABEL: I never found much of it around for some reason.

ELEANOR: Certainty isn't something you find. It's something you build.

ABEL: Like a house.

ELEANOR: Yes.

ABEL: Or a tomb.

This strikes something deep in Eleanor. Abel notices, sidesteps.

Don't forget there's ice cream, Miss El.

END

As Abel continues, Eleanor goes to the refrigerator freezer, removes two small individual ice cream cups — the kind with flat wooden spoons attached.

I could never be a farmer cuz it's damned hard work. Tried it once for half a season. Worst job I ever had. Grit in my mouth all day. Belly bloated from all the water I had to drink to keep cool. Not for me.

ELEANOR: So you quit.

ABEL: No. Didn't quit. Got fired. For lyin' down between the furrows, watchin' a hawk dive for field mice.

ELEANOR: How long ago was this?

ABEL: I was fifteen or sixteen. Lazy age. Still am lazy, when the spirit moves.

ELEANOR: *(Setting the ice cream cups on the table.)* Mr. Brown, I believe we are what they call "opposites."

ABEL: Could be, Miss El. Could be. But then y'know what they say about opposites.

ELEANOR: *(Unamused.)* There is one thing you *can* be certain of, Abel. I do not find you attractive.

ABEL: *(Taking his ice cream cup with a smile.)* Never said y'did, Eleanor. I never said any such thing. But y'can't blame a man for tryin'.

ELEANOR: I can blame anyone for anything, anytime I want.