

A GROWING PROBLEM

by JEANETTE D. FARR

CHARACTERS

FRANK: 68 years old. Recently retired. Former police officer.

HELEN: 66 years old. Spirited. Loving. Positive.

SETTING

Helen's modest home. There is a substantially overgrown cannabis plant that has a place of distinction.

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A GROWING PROBLEM

FRANK

(in mid-sentence) So it's actually the orchid that does all the work.

HELEN

Exactly.

FRANK

You have taught me so much, Helen.

HELEN

It's a part of life, Frank. The next time, I'll tell you the Queen Bee's role in the process of making honey.

FRANK

We're in your house - Honey.

HELEN

(cheeky) It's Helen, and yes, well, I did ask you in, after all.

FRANK

An important step for us, wouldn't you say?

HELEN

I think, maybe.

(FRANK moves in for a kiss.)

HELEN

Ah - but before we get too comfortable. How about...

FRANK

A little television?

HELEN

Some tea or something? With honey.

FRANK

Sounds nice.

(HELEN exits)

FRANK

(Calling after her) You know. I've enjoyed our time together. It's not often that I click with someone. Like two Legos that fit. *(he cringes at the metaphor)* I've been retired from the force for a while and the days get lonely, you know, with no one to share things with. I've tried to travel on my own. It's just not the same. Now it's not that I like you just because I'm lonely mind you. But the risks of being a police officer are just too much - you begin to realize what life really means, you know? I was lucky.

(HELEN returns with some cookies on a tray)

HELEN

Tea should be done in a minute. Just waiting for the water to boil. You were saying?

FRANK

Like I said, I know this is a big step.

HELEN

We can just have tea if you want.

FRANK

NO! I mean. What I mean is. You are such a lovely woman.

HELEN

You already got me, Frank.

FRANK

I'm glad to hear that. I mean, I've dated and...well, I don't want to be out there any more. I like that you make me laugh. I like that you read, and can do the crossword in no time at all, and that we like the same things, and your knowledge of the garden and exotic plants - you're your own woman, Helen.

HELEN

Oh Frank, that's sweet.

FRANK

What I am trying to say, is...*(noticing plant)* Oh my god!

HELEN

I don't think I've had a man be so passionate in expressing himself.

FRANK

Is that what I think it is?

HELEN

What? (*looking at plant*) Oh. It's hard not to notice, isn't it?

FRANK

I'll say. Do you know what that is, Helen?

HELEN

It always seems to be the topic of conversation.

FRANK

But, I don't think you know-

HELEN

I'm told that it's called cannabis.

FRANK

Nevermind - You know.

HELEN

I acquired it shortly after my husband died. I decided to name it after him, actually. Meet Henry Two.

FRANK

You can't have that growing in here.

HELEN

Henry Two grows just fine. I'm thinking this is the best room for him to flourish. In fact, I have to trim it back every once in a while. Last spring it actually had the most fragrant blooms. Here, smell.

FRANK

I'll pass.

HELEN

(*smelling the leaves*) Lovely. So you were saying.

FRANK

(distracted - then...) Helen. I have been on the force for many years. I've seen many things. *(looking at plant)* After a man has seen such things, he wants to settle down, enjoy life with one special woman. I never thought I would love again, until... what I mean to say is... *(looking at plant)* For gods sake will you please get rid of it!?

HELEN

Good grief, Frank. What on earth is the matter?

FRANK

I adore your - crossword - what do they call it - some fancy French word for ignorant.

HELEN

Naivite?

FRANK

Yes! But some things are just too... too... well, darn it - it's illegal!

(The TEA KETTLE whistles)

HELEN

Hold that thought.

FRANK

But-

HELEN

Let me get it and come right back. It's a bit distracting, don't you think?

(FRANK is left with the plant. It almost takes on a human quality, leaning toward him.)

FRANK

(Terrified) Helen!

HELEN

(with teapot in hand) I had to take the pot-

FRANK

Oh, god - it's worse than I thought! You're addicted! What else are you into that you haven't told me about? I never would have thought you were that kind of woman. I mean I knew you were modern and all - and hey, who am I to judge. I fought for the rights of all people. I cheered my ex wives when they burned their bras.

HELEN

I had to take the pot off the stove. What on earth is wrong with you?

FRANK

So, do you... smoke Henry Two?

HELEN

Henry One was cremated, but to get rid of a perfectly healthy living thing? That's absurd. I think that's a bit too much to ask, let alone see any benefit to it.

FRANK

Some might find it relaxing. So how do you do it, then?

HELEN

Do what?

FRANK

Do you smoke it? Eat it - bake it into brownies. (*gasps*) make tea?!

HELEN

It's chamomile, you idiot - and I hope that it comes out of my rug. You ought to have some, it might calm you down.

FRANK

I'm a retired police officer, I can't very well smoke something illegal.

HELEN

I think you are getting worked up over nothing. Mountains out of molehills, I'd say.

FRANK

It's the difference between a bonsai and a birch. That's not a little plant, Helen. It's huge.

HELEN

Let me let you in on something. A little secret.

FRANK

Yes - please. Let's be completely honest.

HELEN

Henry used to smoke a Cuban cigar on occasion. I didn't mind.

FRANK

I don't know how this is the same.

HELEN

So it's ok if you want to smoke. Cigars, cigarettes. Henry died of lung problems. So I can't say that it wouldn't bother me, but...

FRANK

It bothers me that you have that plant in your house. I mean - if we're going to take things to the next level.

HELEN

Henry Two is not going to bother you. Are you telling me you are afraid of a plant? In all actuality, he is cleaning the air. Filling it full of oxygen.

FRANK

Quit calling it "he"! Don't you know that much marijuana is enough to put us both away, not to mention if you distribute it?

HELEN

Marijuana? Do you mean like on Cheech and Chong?

FRANK

What do you think it is?

HELEN

I think it makes them act stupid and giggly. Why would anyone want to smoke that?

FRANK

Believe me, they do.

HELEN

This isn't used for that.

FRANK

But you have to get rid of it.

HELEN

I'm not ready to get rid of it.

FRANK

Helen. I don't think I'm making myself clear - this plant is-

HELEN

Special to me.

FRANK

That's fine - it's also illegal and I can't be in the house with it.

HELEN

That's fine - I don't think this is your house.

FRANK

What are you saying? I thought we were...

HELEN

We were. It just... that plant reminds me of Henry.

FRANK

I know - You named it after him.

HELEN

In the end, when Henry was hurting really bad, it was our gardener that suggested it, you know, to help with the chemotherapy.

FRANK

Oh.

HELEN

Henry didn't want to try it. Actually he had the same feelings about it as you.

FRANK

So you do know what it does.

HELEN

You said I was a smart woman. Of course I knew. I begged and pleaded with Henry to at least try it - no one wants to see their loved one hurting.

FRANK

I know what you mean.

HELEN

So, in some strange way if I look at it every day, I don't hurt so much.

FRANK

(Putting his arm around her) Another little secret, hm? Look, we'll plant a tree - something legal - and unassuming. Something that bears fruit, maybe. I know you like to bake.

HELEN

(pulling away) So every time I eat a slice of apple pie I can think of him? That's rich.

FRANK

Or something like it. Please Helen. Maybe, we can work on that hurt, together.

HELEN

I don't know. Henry Two has been with me for almost five years.

FRANK

I understand. But I can't be in the room with an illegal substance, let alone love a woman who is still stuck on her first love. Besides, I plan to be around for a long time. If you let me. Just think about it.

(FRANK sets a small box on the table next to HELEN.)

HELEN

Frank, please wait-

FRANK

Call me when you are ready.

(FRANK EXITS. HELEN looks at HENRY TWO. It appears to weep a bit. Then beckons her over with a branch.)

HELEN

Stop looking at me like that. We've had a great time together. You've listened to me when I've needed you the most.

(HENRY TWO shakes)

HELEN

And I've in turn nurtured you. Remember the last summer? Those were the prettiest blooms.

(HENRY TWO loses a couple of leaves.)

HELEN

I wish I could give you away, too. It wouldn't be right. I'm afraid he's right. I've never met anyone like Frank. I'll still remember Henry... and you. That won't go away. There just won't be enough room for the three of us.

(HENRY TWO extends a branch. Helen shakes it like a hand.)

HELEN

You've been a great help. That's what friends are for. And a real friend would be able to let go of the past.

(HENRY TWO returns looking like a plant in a container)

HELEN

You know. Lemons and honey don't make a bad pairing. Perhaps your memory would be better suited in a lemon tree, Henry. You always were a bit sour about the world.

(HELEN takes out a pair of shears and begins to snip the branches of the cannabis bush as lights fade.)

(END OF PLAY)