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NORMAN. But, you've already filled the buckets.

ETHEL. Don't move. *(He doesn't. She exits into the kitchen. The sound of a motorboat can be heard. Norman looks to the lake.)*

NORMAN. Here comes whatshisname. He'll be bringing the paper, you know. I wouldn't want to miss any career opportunities just because I'm out looking for strawberries.

ETHEL. *(Coming back with an empty bucket.)* I'll pay you, Norman. It could be the beginning of something big. You may become a major strawberry picker.

NORMAN. Not if I have to be bending over all the time. I think you're trying to kill me.

ETHEL. I've thought about it.

NORMAN. You needn't bother. I'm on borrowed time as it is.

ETHEL. Would you please take your cheery personality and get out of here?

NORMAN. Maybe I could lie down to pick the berries.

ETHEL. Would you go on?

NORMAN. Where did you say these strawberries were? Other than on the ground I mean?

ETHEL. On the old town road. Just up from the meadow. *(He exits. Ethel watches him go. There's a look in her eyes, partly concern, partly pleasure at making old Norman get moving. She closes the door and crosses the room, tidies the pile of newspapers. The motor is very loud now. Ethel steps up onto the platform and looks down at the lake. She opens the wooden door and calls through the screen.)* Yoo hoo! Charlie! Hey! *(The motor stops.)* Good morning. Got some coffee on, if you'd like. Come on up, you can take five minutes off. I'll write you a note and you can send it to the Postmaster General. *(She steps quickly to the kitchen where she can be heard banging about. After a moment Charlie Martin appears on the porch. He's a big, round, blond-haired man, weather beaten face, smiling eyes, strong Maine accent. He is indeed a laugher, but not exactly "deficient." In his rustic, simple, thoughtful way, he is actually quite charming. He carries a small package, a rolled newspaper, and several letters. He peers through the screen door.)*

CHARLIE. Morning, Ethel.

ETHEL. *(Opening the kitchen door and leaning out.)* Come in, Charlie, and have a seat. Like a biscuit?

CHARLIE. Sure. *(She goes back inside. Charlie pulls the screen door. It falls back over on him. He wrestles with it and it slams down onto the porch.)* Uh oh. *(Ethel comes back out, having heard the noise.)* I

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think I broke your door.

ETHEL. Oh, no. It's been that way for a month now. I should have warned you. Norman is supposed to fix it. It's not high on his list of priorities. I'm afraid.

CHARLIE. *(He sets down the mail and leans the door up against the wall.)* I could give it a try. It's just missing its little thing-amabobbers, that's all.

ETHEL. No, better let Norman get to it. Come in and let's close the big door before every mosquito in the county finds its way in here. *(He steps in, laughing, leaving the mail outside.)*

CHARLIE. Pretty bad this year, huh?

ETHEL. Worse than ever. Sit down. How's your brother? We haven't seen him at all this season.

CHARLIE. You mean Tom?

ETHEL. That's the only brother you have, isn't it?

CHARLIE. Yes. He's fine. He's just come back up from Portland. Got stopped twice for speeding. Once down and once up. *(He laughs.)* By the same policeman. *(He laughs. Ethel comes in with a coffee carafe.)* You should have seen his face.

ETHEL. I love your laugh, Charlie.

CHARLIE. Thank you. *(He laughs.)* Tom wasn't too happy to hear it yesterday. I don't know, it just struck me as awfully funny that he could be stupid enough to be stopped twice by the same cop. When he told me, I couldn't stop laughing. *(He laughs. He stops.)* Tom's not speaking to me anymore now. *(He helps himself to his coffee and grabs a biscuit. Ethel smiles at him.)* Where's Norman?

ETHEL. Norman is off picking strawberries. I threw him out. *(Charlie laughs.)* Don't laugh. *(Charlie stops.)* Norman is restless this year. I don't know what's got into him. How's your mother?

CHARLIE. My mother?

ETHEL. Yes.

CHARLIE. She's holding her own. *(He laughs and laughs.)* She fell down, you know, a couple of months ago.

ETHEL. I didn't know that.

CHARLIE. Yuh, a couple of months ago, right on her rump, when she was out helping clean up the town common with the Ladies' Auxiliary. She was having a tug-a-war with a dead juniper bush, and she won, or lost, depending on how you look at it. *(He laughs.)* She hasn't been normal since. *(He laughs.)* She walks all right, and sleeps and everything. She just can't sit. *(He snickers.)* It's taken a little adjustment. *(He laughs and laughs. Ethel smiles.)* If

you'll pardon the expression, she's one old lady who really believes in busting her ass for the community. *(He howls. Ethel joins in, neither of them noticing at first as Norman steps in, carrying a bucket.)* Hi, Norman.

ETHEL. Hello, Norman. What are you doing back already? You've barely left.

NORMAN. So? I moved fast. I ran all the way, picked without stopping and ran all the way back.

ETHEL. *(Rising and starting to head him off.)* Well, I don't believe a word of it. Let me see what you've got.

NORMAN. I'll just dump them in with yours. Stay where you are.

ETHEL. *(Getting closer.)* Let me see.

NORMAN. No. I don't have many.

ETHEL. *(On him now. She reaches for the bucket.)* Just let me see. *(He tries to pull away. They wrestle with the bucket, it drops on the floor and bounces.)* There's nothing in it at all. You didn't get a single strawberry. What's the matter with you?

NORMAN. *(Looking at the empty bucket.)* I must have eaten them all.

ETHEL. Why didn't you stay and pick some?

NORMAN. Too many mosquitoes. You were right about them. I was afraid I'd contract malaria and die before my time.

ETHEL. Well, I don't know. Do you want some coffee?

NORMAN. No. *(He looks at Charlie.)* No mail today, Charlie?

CHARLIE. Holy Mackinoly! I left it on the porch!

NORMAN. Well, how about fetching it? Could you do that?

CHARLIE. You bet. *(He jumps up and goes out the door.)*

NORMAN. Look out for the mosquitoes.

ETHEL. You want a glass of milk, Norman?

NORMAN. No.

ETHEL. I'll get you one. *(She exits to the kitchen. Norman watches her go. He looks out at Charlie.)*

NORMAN. I see you broke the screen door, Charlie.

CHARLIE. *(Coming back in.)* Yuh, well, I think you need a couple of little thing-amabobbers for the hinges.

NORMAN. Oh, I don't know about that. It's been working all right. You must have yanked at it. Let's have the mail.

CHARLIE. Oh. Yuh. *(Holding it out.)* Got a package for you. *(Ethel comes back in with a glass of milk.)*

ETHEL. Here, Norman. Drink this. *(She hands it to him.)*

NORMAN. Thank you, nurse.

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ETHEL. Sit down, Charlie.

CHARLIE. I should get going, I guess. Or somebody's not going to get their mail.

NORMAN. He's right, Ethel. Neither rain nor sleet nor hot biscuits, and all that.

ETHEL. Sit down, Charlie, and finish your coffee. (*Charlie hesitates and then sits by Norman. Ethel returns to her chair. Norman is wrestling with the package.*) What have you got there, Norman?

NORMAN. I have no idea, I can't open it. (*He passes it to Charlie.*) Here, could you bite this, please? (*Charlie laughs, and rips off the cover. He hands the box back to Norman, who squints at it.*)

ETHEL. What is it?

NORMAN. I still don't know.

ETHEL. Oh. It's your medicine.

NORMAN. Oh, goody. What a swell surprise.

ETHEL. Just in time. You'd nearly run out. (*To Charlie.*) It's nothing serious. Just for his palpitations.

NORMAN. Yes, Charlie, I have occasional heart throbs. (*Charlie laughs. Norman goes through the three or four envelopes.*) Look at this. A bill from Gas and Power in Wilmington, and we're not even there.

ETHEL. It's only a little bit each month.

NORMAN. (*Thrusting the letter at Charlie.*) Here, give this back to them. (*Ethel holds out her hand and Charlie passes it onto her.*) Since you're playing mailman, why don't you just deliver all of this to that old lady down there? (*He hands the other mail to Charlie, who laughs and passes it to Ethel.*) I've got to see what's happening in the world. I need some touch with reality. (*He unfolds the paper, Ethel looks through the envelopes.*)

ETHEL. Ah! A letter from Chelsea. (*She opens it eagerly.*)

CHARLIE. I noticed that. How is she? (*No one answers. Norman is studying the paper, Ethel digs into the long letter.*) Norman?

NORMAN. What?

CHARLIE. Chelsea.

NORMAN. Who?

CHARLIE. Your daughter, Chelsea.

NORMAN. What about her?

CHARLIE. How is she?

NORMAN. Oh. Forty-two.

CHARLIE. What? How is she?

NORMAN. Oh. I don't know. You'd have to ask her mother.

CHARLIE. Ethel?

ETHEL. Mmmm.
CHARLIE. How is she?
ETHEL. Mmm-mm.
CHARLIE. (*Turning back to Norman, who has opened the sports section.*) Is she really forty-two? Norman?
NORMAN. Who?
CHARLIE. Is Chelsea really forty-two?
NORMAN. That's what her mother says.
CHARLIE. Holy Mackinoly. And she went all the way through and never had kids, huh?
NORMAN. What? What do you mean, all the way through?
CHARLIE. Her childbearing years.
NORMAN. Oh. Yes. I suppose so.
CHARLIE. Hmmm.
ETHEL. She sounds as if she's having the best time.
CHARLIE. That's great.
NORMAN. Look at the goddam Red Sox.
CHARLIE. Where's she writing from? I couldn't make out the postmark.
NORMAN. What?
CHARLIE. Where's Chelsea writing from?
NORMAN. Home.
CHARLIE. I figured that. Where's she live now?
NORMAN. At home. Goddam Yankees.
ETHEL. (*Not looking up.*) On the coast.
CHARLIE. Oh.
NORMAN. Better tell him which coast, or he'll think she's living in Bar Harbor. It's California, Charlie.
CHARLIE. I knew that.
ETHEL. He knew that.
NORMAN. Goddam those Orioles. Baltimore has always been a sneaky town.
ETHEL. Oh, Norman, she says she's coming for your birthday. And she's bringing her friend. (*To Charlie.*) She has the nicest boyfriend.
CHARLIE. (*Not sounding thrilled.*) Oh.
NORMAN. She decided on her own to come, just like that? No prompting from anyone?
ETHEL. What? What are you saying?
NORMAN. Likely story. Mrs. Machiavelli.
ETHEL. They're coming together as part of a vacation, that's all, and then they're going on to Europe.