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CHELSEA. Great.

ETHEL. I'll get the yard light. *(She reaches by the door and flicks it. The trees light up.)* I generally keep it off to discourage the June bugs. *(She starts to open the door.)* Now, we're going to have to make a run for it all at once. Ready? *(She opens the door and pushes Billy through. Chelsea follows.)*

CHELSEA. The screen door has fallen down.

ETHEL. Oh, really? Norman will fix it. *(She steps through the door, closing it. Their voices can be heard as they cross the porch and disappear down the steps. Norman, in the meantime, has sat down in his chair. Bill stands for a moment, a shade uncomfortable.)*

BILL. So. You're a baseball fan, huh?

NORMAN. No.

BILL. Oh. I like baseball. I like the Dodgers.

NORMAN. Oh, really? They moved out west somewhere, didn't they?

BILL. Um. Yes. To Los Angeles. Some years ago.

NORMAN. They still in the big leagues?

BILL. Oh, yes. They're a real powerhouse in the National League West.

NORMAN. Well, bless their little hearts. *(There is a long pause.)*

BILL. Um. How does it feel to turn eighty?

NORMAN. It feels twice as bad as it did turning forty.

BILL. Oh, well, I know what that's like.

NORMAN. Do you?

BILL. Yes. I turned forty five years ago. I'm forty-five now. *(Realizing how stupid that sounded, he forges on.)* I ... love your house.

NORMAN. It's not for sale.

BILL. Oh, no. I wasn't thinking about buying it. I just like it.

NORMAN. Oh. Me, too.

BILL. It has a charming ambiance.

NORMAN. Does it?

BILL. Yes. Norman?

NORMAN. Yes?

BILL. May I call you Norman?

NORMAN. I believe you just did.

BILL. I don't want to press.

NORMAN. No.

BILL. I'll call you Norman then.

NORMAN. Fine.

BILL. What shall
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BILL. What was t

NORMAN. I don't

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BILL. *(Confused.)*

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(Norman looks up.

NORMAN. Wha

BILL. Huh?

NORMAN. You'

BILL. What shall I call your wife?

NORMAN. How about Ethel? That's her name. Ethel Thayer. Thoundth ath ith I'm lithping, doethn't it? Ethel Thayer. It almost kept her from marrying me. She wanted me to change my last name to hers.

BILL. What was that?

NORMAN. I don't remember. Ethel's all you need to know. That's the name she goes by.

BILL. I never knew. Chelsea always calls her Mommy.

NORMAN. There's a reason for that.

BILL. But she calls you Norman.

NORMAN. There's a reason for that, too. *(He pauses.)* I *am* her father, if you're trying to figure it out. I'm her father but not her daddy. Ethel is her mommy, and I'm Norman.

BILL. *(Confused.)* Oh. Is it all right if I sit down?

NORMAN. As far as I'm concerned it is. *(Bill sits. Norman stares at him. Bill tries to smile. Norman abruptly rises.)* I think I'll start a new book. See if I can finish it before I'm finished myself. Maybe a novelette. *(He steps to the shelves and studies the collection.)* Maybe something in Reader's Digest Condensed. *(He pulls down a book.)* Here's *Swiss Family Robinson*. Ever read it?

BILL. Oh, yes. It's great. I'd recommend it.

NORMAN. No need for that. I've read it, too. *(He sits again.)* But my mind's going so it'll all be new to me. *(He opens the book.)* Has that son of yours read this book?

BILL. I ... don't think so.

NORMAN. Your son hasn't read *Swiss Family Robinson*?

BILL. No. But I intend to have him read it. I'm afraid his mother's been the motivating force in his life the last few years, the poor kid, and now I'm making a move to eradicate some of the ... dishevelment. *(Norman stares at Bill without comment. He returns to his book. Bill feels compelled to communicate.)* Yeah, things are coming together for me pretty nicely now. The practice is real strong, and I'm feeling very good about myself. Meeting Chelsea has been a major...thing. And she's really flowering. She likes her job a lot, and she's been doing some beautiful paintings. We have a very kinetic relationship. Very positive. I'm sure you'd be pleased. *(Norman looks up. There is a pause.)*

NORMAN. What do you charge for a filling?

BILL. Huh?

NORMAN. You're a dentist, aren't you? What do you charge for

a filling?

BILL. Um. Start at about [ninety-five dollars].

NORMAN. [Ninety-five dollars]?! Good God! My brother charged [fifteen dollars] a filling right up until [1988] when he raised it to [twenty]. That's when I stopped going to him.

BILL. Your brother is a dentist?

NORMAN. He was. When he was living.

BILL. Isn't that amazing?

NORMAN. I don't know. I think every family has one. *(He returns to his book. Bill studies him, then chooses his words with care.)*

BILL. Norman. Um. I don't want to offend you, but there's a rather important little topic that I feel I have to broach.

NORMAN. *(Looking up.)* I beg your pardon?

BILL. I don't want to offend you, but ... if it's all right with you, we'd like to sleep together.

NORMAN. What do you mean?

BILL. We'd like to sleep ... together ... in the same room ... in the same bed. If you don't find that offensive.

NORMAN. All three of you?

BILL. What? Oh, no. Just two.

NORMAN. You and Billy?

BILL. No.

NORMAN. Not Chelsea and Billy?

BILL. No, sir.

NORMAN. That leaves only Chelsea and you then.

BILL. Yes.

NORMAN. Why would I find that offensive? You're not planning on doing something unusual, are you?

BILL. Oh, no. Just ... *(He can't go on.)*

NORMAN. That doesn't seem too offensive, as long as you're quiet.

BILL. Great.

NORMAN. Chelsea always used to sleep in the same bed with her husband.

BILL. Oh, I'm sure.

NORMAN. And Ethel and I do, you know. We sleep together. Been doing it for years.

BILL. Well, of course. But you're married and all.

NORMAN. So?

BILL. Well ...

NORMAN. I think I'm beginning to see this more clearly. It's a moral issue, isn't it?

BILL. Well, it's just mores ...

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BILL. No, indee

NORMAN. Wha

BILL. Well, it's just that we're of different generations, different mores ...

NORMAN. What is a more? I've never known.

BILL. Um ... a custom, I'd say. Or something.

NORMAN. Go on. Forgive me for interrupting.

BILL. Well, it's just a matter of points of view ...

NORMAN. (*Interrupting.*) I shouldn't have interrupted.

BILL. Oh. Of course. (*Starting again.*) It's just that I don't want our relationship to ...

NORMAN. It's a terrible social problem, I think.

BILL. Um...?

NORMAN. Interrupting. Not listening. The art of conversation went out with radio probably.

BILL. Yes.

NORMAN. Or maybe with mirrors.

BILL. Um ...

NORMAN. Ever notice how people start to check themselves out in a mirror or a window or your eyeglasses when they're supposed to be listening?

BILL. Yes, I have noticed that.

NORMAN. It's a shifty sort of quality, I think.

BILL. Yes.

NORMAN. Or perhaps it's just a form of egocentricity.

BILL. Yeah.

NORMAN. I do it.

BILL. You do?

NORMAN. Sure. Conversations bore me to tears. I always look for a little divertissement while I'm waiting for my turn to talk.

BILL. Huh.

NORMAN. Pretty shabby, huh?

BILL. Well ...

NORMAN. I don't do it with Ethel. She's so pretty, isn't she?

BILL. Yes.

NORMAN. After all these years I still can't get over how pretty she is. Or how handsome I am. That's the real reason I always look for a mirror. I like to keep checking. Make sure I haven't faded.

BILL. Oh.

NORMAN. They say you fade with old age. They say your looks just go. Haven't seen a sign of it.

BILL. No, indeed.

NORMAN. What were we talking about?

BILL. Um ...

NORMAN. Sex, I believe. You were concerned that my morals somehow wouldn't mesh with yours.

BILL. Yes.

NORMAN. Don't be silly. I'd be delighted to have you abusing my daughter under my own roof.

BILL. Um ...

NORMAN. Would you like the room where I first violated her mother, or would you be interested in the master bedroom?

BILL. Norman ...

NORMAN. Ethel and your son and I could all sleep out back and you could do it right here on the hearth. Like that idea?

BILL. *(He's embarrassed, but he's also heard enough. He smiles at Norman and shakes his head.)* You're having a good time, aren't you?

NORMAN. Hmmmm?

BILL. Chelsea told me all about you, about how you like to have a good time with people's heads. She does it, too, sometimes, and sometimes I can get into it. Sometimes not. I just want you to know that I'm very good at recognizing crap when I hear it. You know, it's not imperative that you and I be friends, but it might be nice. I'm sure you're a fascinating person, and I'm sure it would be fascinating to get to know you. That's obviously not an easy task. But it's all right, you go ahead and be as *poopy* as you want, to quote Chelsea, and I'll be as receptive and as pleasant as I can. I just want you to bear in mind while we're sitting here smiling at each other and you're jerking me around that I know precisely what you're up to and that I can take only so much of it. Okay? Good.

(He pauses. Waits for a reaction. Norman has been listening very intently.) Now. What's the bottom line on the illicit sex question?

NORMAN. *(He stares at Bill for a long moment, then smiles.)* Very nice. Good speech. I liked that a lot. So, bottom line, huh? You're a bottom-line man. All right. Here's the bottom line: oh-kay. Ethel and I haven't always been married. It just seems that way. We tipped over a canoe or two in our day, trying to accommodate another generation's *mores*. *(He pauses.)* You seem like a nice person, a bit verbose perhaps, a bit outspoken, but ... nice.

BILL. Thank you.

NORMAN. And you're right about me. I *am* fascinating.

BILL. I'm sure you are.

NORMAN. I didn't mean to weight down our conversation. We can go back to talking about sex if you like.

BILL. Oh, no. Th
NORMAN. I like
just ask me.

BILL. Okay. I ...
clear in my mind.

NORMAN. Yes! I
*the sound of footsteps
the door.)*

BILLY. Dad! I pa
had! *(Bill stands.)*

NORMAN. Actu
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BILL. Skinny-dip

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