

ETHEL. Miss *Appley*, Norman, who lives with Miss Tate.

NORMAN. Ohhh. How do you like this one?

ETHEL. Stunning. They're both in their nineties, I should think. They were up here together when I was a teenager. Wearing their neckties and singing in the gazebo, holding hands. What a marvelous love affair. Can you imagine being together for so long?

NORMAN. No.

ETHEL. (*She throws the pile of dust clothes into the kitchen.*) Thanks a lot. Charlie says Miss *Appley* is just too frail, and Miss Tate won't come without her. One of them has a nephew, I believe, who'll get the house. It's sad, isn't it? (*She bends over and retrieves a wooden doll that has fallen onto the hearth.*) Oh, poor Elmer has had a terrible fall.

NORMAN. Who's poor Elmer?

ETHEL. *Elmer.* (*She holds up the doll.*) My doll. He fell in the fireplace.

NORMAN. Oh.

ETHEL. Poor little Elmer. The life you've had. (*To Norman.*) Did you know he turned sixty-five this spring?

NORMAN. No, I must say I wasn't aware of that.

ETHEL. I got him on my fourth birthday. I remember it quite clearly. I wanted a red scooter, but my father said red scooters were excessive and contrary to the ways of the Lord. He told me I'd understand when I was older. I'm a *lot* older now, and I'm afraid I still don't understand. But, he gave me Elmer. And Elmer and I became the best of friends. The times we had. He was my first true love, you know.

NORMAN. There's no real need for you to review the vagaries of your youth. I've realized all along that I wasn't the first in line.

ETHEL. No, you were a rather cheap substitute for my darling Elmer. Sixty-five years old. It's hard to think of a doll as being old. He doesn't look much different than he did. A bit faded perhaps. He'd still be a delight to a small child. Chelsea used to love him. And now he's had a fall, poor dear.

NORMAN. Maybe he was trying to kill himself. Maybe he wants to be cremated. Probably got cancer or termites or something.

ETHEL. Would you please shut up? I swear you get more morbid every year.

NORMAN. Well, it wouldn't be a bad way to go, huh? A quick front flip off the mantel, a bit of a kick at the last minute, and land right in the fire. Nothing to it.

ETHEL. Are you hungry, Norman?

NORMAN. Nope. When my number's up, do that for me, would you? Prop me up on the mantel and point out which way is down. I may even shoot for a full gainer with a half twist.

ETHEL. Norman ...

NORMAN. It's that little kick at the end I might have trouble with. You could get Charlie and hoist me back up again if I make a mess of it.

ETHEL. Norman ...

NORMAN. Give me three tries and we'll go with the highest score. I'd be pretty well dead anyway after three full gainers with half twists, so if I haven't managed to hit the fire by the third go, you could just give me a bit of a nudge.

ETHEL. Norman, you really are becoming a nitwit, aren't you?

NORMAN. I think I'll have that written into the final instructions of my will. Let's call up that Jewish person in Wilmington and see how much he'd charge for a rewrite. You won't even need an urn. You can just shovel me out when I'm done and put me on your flowers. (*The phone rings.*) That's probably Mr. Shylock now. Wanting to know if one of us has pooped out yet.

ETHEL. Your fascination with dying is beginning to frazzle my good humor. (*The phone rings.*) Don't you have anything else to think about?

NORMAN. Nothing quite as interesting. (*The phone rings.*)

ETHEL. Well, what's stopping you? Why don't you just take your dive and get it over with? See what it's like.

NORMAN. And leave you alone with Elmer? You must be mad. I know all those widow stories. Do you suppose you're going to answer that phone?

ETHEL. Yes. (*She glowers at him and then crosses and lifts the receiver.*) Hello? ... Hello? (*To Norman.*) There's no one there.

NORMAN. Ah Ha! See!

ETHEL. Hello?

OPERATOR. I'm here, I really am.

ETHEL. Oh, hello.

OPERATOR. Is this the Norman Thayer, Jr. residence?

ETHEL. Yes.

OPERATOR. Is Norman Thayer, Jr. there?

ETHEL. Just a moment, please. (*She holds the phone out.*) It's for you.

NORMAN. (*Stepping down to her.*) Who is it?

ETHEL. I don't know.

NORMAN. Not Saint Peter, is it? (*She shakes her head and point-*

*Norman, Ethel*