

The Great Catch

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INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Early morning sun shines through the kitchen window of an old country farmhouse. ETHEL, 66, housecoat and apron, sits at a table and wipes her plate clean with bread.

HERMAN, 68, overalls and plaid shirt, takes his breakfast plate to an old farm sink. Ethel hurries to the sink and snatches the plate from him before he can rinse it.

ETHEL

You don't wipe 'em. I got it. You go and get ready. I 'magine you'll be fishin' again today? Like you do every day.

HERMAN

I reckon fish would be good for supper tonight. I'll head down to the pond soon.

Ethel wipes the counters and rinses her washrag.

ETHEL

You think fishin's good all the time. I reckon it's 'bout all you do now.

HERMAN

Yes, Ethel, I retired. But I still work 'round this old house. It needs work every day. Your car, the mower.

Ethel prepares a lunch and packs an old ragged lunch box.

ETHEL

You'll be needin' lunch.

Herman gets a coffee cup and saunters to the coffee pot.

Ethel grabs the cup from his hands, pours the coffee, then adds a splash of creamer and half a cube of sugar.

Herman sneaks a bite of danish from a nearby plate.

HERMAN

You know I like a whole cube.

ETHEL

I also know you don't need it. And you got more than a cube in that danish.

Herman sits at the table with his cup of coffee and opens the Sunday paper. Ethel rinses and wipes both plates then places them in the dishwasher. She wipes down the table.

ETHEL

Fishin's not work. I work. Things got to be done in this house every day.

HERMAN

I keep up the yard and the house.

Ethel, irritated, wipes his elbow as she cleans the table. Then she drags her mop bucket out from a utility closet and rinses the mop in the sink.

ETHEL

For forty-five years, I've been married to you. All those years I've done the same job day in and day out.

HERMAN

I did too, Ethel. I worked at the factory all those years, and now I'm retired.

ETHEL

You are retired. You get to go fishin'. You relax. I still do the same job I've always done. I still clean house all day.

HERMAN

Ethel, maybe you need to let loose. How 'bout you catch the fish today? Let's swap. I'll do that mopping there.

ETHEL

More than mopping needs done.

She takes cleaning supplies from under the kitchen sink and the utility closet and lines them on the counter.

ETHEL

Let's do it. I'll catch the fish, and you can do my job in here. I'll bring dinner to the table while you get this mess cleaned up today. I'll make a list.

Herman looks at the pristine kitchen and shakes his head.

HERMAN

I don't need a list. I can see a well kept house needs little. I'll do my best work in here. You just get them fish.

ETHEL

I can't wait to get outside. It's time I relax. I'll sit in the sun and enjoy it.

Ethel takes off her apron and hangs it on a hook on the door. She grabs a tackle box from a utility closet.

HERMAN

You'll need to get some--

ETHEL

I got this, Herman. I know how to fish.
Do you know how to mop?

HERMAN

Bait.

Herman starts to mop careful, slow, and methodic. Ethel hums a tune while she rummages through the closet and fills the box with gear. Then, she leaves the room.

Herman wrings out the mop, then rinses, wipes, and places his cup in the dishwasher just as Ethel did earlier.

Ethel comes back into the kitchen in a casual dress, with her hair pinned up under a sun hat. She carries a beach bag with blankets and a paperback novel in her hand.

HERMAN

Do you need any help, Ethel?

She sets a list of chores on the table. She adjusts her hat and smooths her clothes, then sashays out the back door. The screen door BANGS twice at it bounces closed.

EXT. POND - DAY

Morning sun reflects off a small, still pond. Two Adirondack chairs sit near the shore line, one dull and ragged, the other sun faded. A bucket sits in between.

Ethel sets up an umbrella next to the nice chair. She lays a blanket across the chair and another on the ground, then empties her bag onto the blanket.

She sets the fishing pole in a holder on the chair and inspects the hook. She peers into the box and takes out each little bin and lines them up on the chair arm.

ETHEL

I guess I don't rightly know how this
thing works. Can't be hard though.

She inspects the rod and reel and ties a lure onto the hook. She stands near the shore and ducks as she tosses the line into the water from over her shoulder.

The lure PLOPS close to shore. Ethel reels it back in and tries again with a PLOP into the water further out.

She sits, puts the rod in the holder, and settles back.

The line moves. Ethel grabs the pole and reels in the line as fast as she can. The lure is gone and hook empty.

She ties on another lure, stands at the edge of shore, ducks, and tosses the line in again with a PLOP.

The lure flies off the line and lands in her sunhat. She turns to look for it and tries again with a new lure.

The line PLOPS back into the water. Ethel sits down, adjusts her hat, and wipes sweat from her face.

ETHEL

This is the life.

She pops some fruit into her mouth and opens her book.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Herman stands at the sink looking out the window.

HERMAN

She don't have no bait. I wonder what she thinks she's going to catch with no bait.

He fills a plastic pitcher with ice and water, gets two plastic cups from the cupboard, and carries them outside. The screen door BANGS twice after him.

EXT. POND - DAY

Ethel tugs on the fishing line but keeps her eyes on her book. She wipes sweat from her forehead. Herman spills water from the pitcher as he approaches.

HERMAN

Sorry. Didn't mean to scare 'em.

He looks in the empty bucket near his chair and places the pitcher down on Ethel's blanket. He hands her a cup.

HERMAN

Brought you some water.

ETHEL

Don't put that there! You think I want water all over my nice blanket?

Herman moves the pitcher to the sand next to his chair.

HERMAN

No bites yet? They are usually hungry by this time. What did you use for bait?

ETHEL

What did you use to beat the rugs?

Herman looks at the still pond, then nods and walks away.

HERMAN

(mumbling)

Beat the rugs--

Ethel, frantic, tugs on the line. She sits back and sighs with her book over her sweaty face. Antsy, she checks the line again then reels it in fast.

ETHEL

Bait? What did I use for bait? What was I supposed to use for bait?

She rummages through her bag and pulls out fruit, vegetables, chips, and a sandwich.

ETHEL

Do fish eat birds?

She opens her sandwich. She stomps her feet, holds one bread slice in each hand, then slams them together.

ETHEL

Oh! No turkey. I made peanut butter and honey for me and gave Herman turkey.

She pinches off a small chunk of bread and hooks it to the line. With a GRUNT, she ducks, covers her head, and sends the line into the water with a PLOP.

Ethel tugs the line and looks out at the water. The small piece of bread floats on top. Ethel sits with a sigh.

ETHEL

I don't know what I'm doing. This isn't very much fun at all. I want to relax!

Herman walks to the pond with his old lunch box in hand.

HERMAN

Had lunch yet?

Ethel startles and hides the sandwich she tore apart.

ETHEL

I only brought fruit. I'm eating healthy.

Herman bites into an apple as he sits in his old rickety chair which CREAKS with his weight.

HERMAN

No luck still?

Ethel, nervous, wipes her face leaving dirt on her cheek.

ETHEL

Oh, they're bitin' a bit.

HERMAN

I'd help you, but that house is a mess.

ETHEL

That house is not a mess! I clean it every day. Don't you tell me it's a mess.

HERMAN

I just come down here to tell you I beat the rugs and take up the fish you caught. You know, so they don't sit in the sun.

She rolls her eyes and picks up her book. Herman hides a smirk then sits back relaxed. He watches the water and eats his sandwich. Ethel swats at the air.

ETHEL

Did you see that?

Herman looks at the line which is still.

HERMAN

I see I don't have any dinner.

Ethel swats the air again. Irritated and overheated, she takes her sunhat off and reveals a mess of wet hair.

ETHEL

You'll get your dinner. I'm fishing.

HERMAN

I'd have fish by now if I was out here. I reckon I'll go get us some steaks for tonight. I 'magine Jerry has some strips at the shop.

ETHEL

I'm having fish, dear. I told you I could catch 'em just like you do. Now be quiet so they keep biting.

Herman chuckles, stands, and peers into the bucket.

HERMAN

I have beat the rugs. The same rugs you
beat every day.

Ethel, irritated, chunks of soaked hair in her face, puts
her on hat and looks at Herman then at the water.

HERMAN

I mopped the same floor you mop every
day. I rinsed and wiped the dishes.

He taunts her with the bucket and tugs her empty line.

HERMAN

You said you'd bring fish to the table.

Ethel, even more irritated but not backing down, turns
away and fiddles with the bins on her chair. She picks up
her paperback.

HERMAN

A man needs supper, Ethel. I need supper.

Herman gets up and towers over her chair. Ethel, worn out
pushes hair out of her eyes, but more hair falls out of
the sun hat onto her red and dirty face.

HERMAN

I'm going to see Jerry.

ETHEL

Tell 'im I said hello.

HERMAN

If you want fish, you stay out here and
keep trying, but I'm gonna get steaks.

ETHEL

I don't question you when you promise
dinner. Now I have promised fish and you
gonna go off and see Jerry about steaks.
It's rude, Herman. Down right rude.

HERMAN

I've cleaned your already clean house, so
I expect you'll grill my steak tonight.

Ethel slumps in her chair defeated. She wipes sweat from
her brow, tugs her line again, then watches Herman who
continues his walk to the house head held high.

She packs her bag and puts the bins away. Dust stirs from Herman's car as he drives along the driveway.

Ethel fumes as she picks up her belonging and reels in the line which comes out of the water with no hook and no lure. Frustrated, Ethel stomps again stirring up dirt.

She sits down and falls back into the chair.

ETHEL

He knows. I told him everything needing done in the house and thought I could do this simple thing here.

Defeated, hot, sunburned with dirty hair falling out of her hat, she sighs and tosses her book.

ETHEL

He knows I don't have any bait. He knows I'm not relaxed. He knows I don't know what I'm, doing. It's just fish!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ethel stands with a knife in hand at the kitchen counter in a dirty dress and crooked sunhat and cuts something.

The screen door BANGS twice. Herman walks into the kitchen with a paper sack tied in twine.

Sunburned and disheveled, Ethel looks at him then moves to hide what is in front of her.

HERMAN

You're back.

ETHEL

As are you.

HERMAN

How many did you get?

ETHEL

Oh you know.

HERMAN

I know you didn't have any when I left.

Ethel moves to conceal what's on the counter. Herman leans over more. Ethel, frustrated but laughing, steps back and reveals one fish wrapped in freezer paper.

ETHEL

You win.

HERMAN

I didn't know I was competing.

Ethel steps back to reveal another frozen fish in mid-cleaning on a cutting board in front of her.

ETHEL

I didn't get any fish. I don't know how to fish. I didn't know I needed bait.

HERMAN

You didn't have any bait?

ETHEL

I put worms on the hook. You know, those rubbery things. You make it look so easy.

Herman unwraps two steaks from the paper sack.

HERMAN

Do you want steak or fish?

ETHEL

I'll make your steak. Just the way you like it with butter and salt - all the things your doctor says to leave off your food. I'm having fish.

Herman wipes muddy hair out of her eyes. He steps back takes her in. She appears frazzled and unkempt.

HERMAN

You sure are a sight.

ETHEL

It was hot out there. I wore my hat. I got wet. I got sunburned. I'm dirty.

HERMAN

I'll grill your fish. You go get clean.

ETHEL

It's your fish. The one you caught last Sunday. I need to clean up.

Ethel walks out of the kitchen. A lure falls from her hat. Herman picks it up and laughs.

ETHEL

I'll be right back to cook your steak.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ethel and Herman sit across from one another at the table with two empty plates in front of them, Herman's with steak drippings and Ethel's with fish bones.

Ethel, sunburned with bags under her eyes, gets up with her plate and reaches for Herman's. He holds his back and takes her plate. She sits back down.

Herman rinses both plates and wipes them down.

ETHEL

How long have you had both those chairs out there?

HERMAN

For a while. I made one for you.

ETHEL

I thought I knew how to fish.

Herman places the dishes in the dishwasher as Ethel sits back and watches. She sets her napkin down and relaxes.

HERMAN

I'll show you tomorrow.

Ethel looks around at her clean kitchen.

ETHEL

Tomorrow is good. I could use a break.

They both laugh. Herman walks over to her, leans down, and kisses her. She falls into his arms exhausted.

HERMAN

I have no idea why you beat rugs.

ETHEL

I don't think we need to beat them every day. It's just you and me here now. Kids are gone. We should retire together.

HERMAN

Stop beating rugs?

ETHEL

And fish more. Together.

HERMAN

You're the greatest catch I've ever had.

Herman sits at the table. Ethel reaches for his hand.