

Sketch

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Mom

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Abstract

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MOM

“GOOD MORNING, Mom. Boy, it sure smells good in here.”

“Good morning, Jim.” Mom was absorbed in her pile of papers.

Odors of coffee mingled with smells of bacon, Mom’s special oven roast, and fresh apple pie. It whetted his appetite. Mom must have got up early to do all this baking. She sure had energy. He flopped down in a chair at the table and stretched out his long lean legs. He reached for a quart of milk. He poured himself a glassful and swallowed it in two gulps. He filled it again. He heaped his plate with eggs and bacon. He buttered two slices of toast. He dished up a large bowl of oatmeal, then attacked his food. Mom always said a growing boy should eat a good breakfast. She usually saw that he did.

Mom looked up again, as if just realizing that Jim was there. “Jim, I have had the most wonderful idea. I got up at five this morning. I was so excited that I couldn’t sleep.” Her voice was bright and sparkling. She swallowed some coffee and prepared to tell her big news. “I’m going to rearrange the kitchen!”

Jim didn’t know whether to laugh or groan. As if re-decorating were foreign to this house. Furniture, rugs, walls, people — all were constantly on the move with Mom behind, pushing. He listened as she continued.

“I’ve thought of a better way to fix it. It will cut down my work area and make a brighter, more pleasant kitchen. Here, take a look at what I’ve done. You’ll see then.” She motioned to scaled plans she had drawn on graph paper.

Jim scooted his chair closer to hers and peered at the plans.

"Now see, Jim, we'll move the stove here and put a cupboard where the stove was. We'll remove this half-wall which juts out between the kitchen and breakfast nook. It doesn't support anything, I checked. We'll take out the breakfast bar and put in a table instead."

"But . . . gee, Mom . . . we just built the bar last fall." Jim remembered the struggle he had getting the braces attached to the wall and how proud he was of the finished product.

"I thought we would put it in the recreation room. It would be just perfect in there. It's such a good piece of work. Now that we are going to have more room in the kitchen a table will be good to have. It's friendlier sitting around a table than eating at a bar." Mom smiled at Jim and his frown erased. She was right. It would be nice in the recreation room when the kids came over.

Jim resumed his eating. Mom sat there, trying to say something, a little hesitant.

"Dear, do you suppose you could help me a little this morning? If you and I worked together we could tear out the wall this morning. Your Dad is the only one who will be home for lunch and I have that already fixed." She pleaded.

"Well . . . uh . . ." He hated to disappoint Mom but after all it was Saturday morning. "Well uh . . . I'd sure like to but, . ." Her face fell. "Well say, Mom, I'll help till Jerry Sikes comes. He's coming at ten to play basketball. How's that?"

She gave a happy little sigh, "Oh, wonderful. Let's get started right now. We'll just forget doing the dishes. Let's push them to the back of the bar."

Just like Mom. She never worried about the humdrum tasks of daily housekeeping. She said you could wash dirty dishes anytime.

She hopped up and began pushing back the dishes. She threw a cloth over them. Jim watched her for a moment and swallowed a grin. She was dressed in sneakers and bobby sox, a pair of his jeans and a blue flannel shirt, open at the neck. Her brown hair was curled in tight little curls all over

her head. She looked nearer seventeen than forty-five.

"Let's see. We'll need a crowbar to begin with. You get that, Jim."

Jim went out to the back porch and rumaged around in the closet for the crowbar while Mom lugged a tool box from the porch. She took out a hammer, sat down cross-legged on the floor and began prying the molding loose. Jim came back.

"Here you go Mom, just what the doctor ordered." He thrust out the crowbar.

"Thanks. I guess we'll have to take out the electric wires before we tear down the whole wall. You finish the molding. I'll go turn off the electricity."

Jim took the hammer and yanked at the molding with its claws. You had to give Mom credit. She really was something. Imagine a woman knowing how to saw, hammer and turn off electricity. He hummed to himself while he worked. The buzz of the electric clock stopped. The room was quiet except for the sound of his hammer scraping at the wood and his humming.

Mom pattered up the basement stairs and into the kitchen. "That's done. I'll take off the wall plates while you finish that. Then we can really get going on the wall." She took off the plates and began to knock away the plaster around the outlet. "We'll have to work from both sides, Jim. You go over to the other side and chop."

Jim obeyed. He chopped away. This really wasn't very hard work. "Well, Mom, looks like you can't change your mind now," Jim teased above the noise of their hammers. They had cleared away a three-foot area of plaster. "The laths will come off easily with the crowbar, Mom. Here, I'll show you," Jim pried at the boards. One soon pulled away from the supporting two-by-fours. They both began to work quickly with the crowbar and hammer, splitting away the framework of the wall.

"Your Dad will be surprised to see that we've already begun."

Jim doubted that. Dad knew Mom pretty well. Once she caught fire there was no putting her out.

They worked awhile in silence. It was hard to talk above the noises of their work.

Mom laid down her crowbar and wiped at her face with arm. She was covered with the chalky white dust. "I think we can get these wires out now, Jim. Let's try."

They unwound the wires and soon had them pulled out onto the floor.

"We'll just leave them for now. I'm going to splice them with some longer wire and put an electric outlet above the table for my coffee pot."

The doorbell shrieked out a tinny sound. It sounded like a Halloween noise-maker.

"Is that Jerry already?" Jim looked at his watch in surprise. "Come on in. The door's open." Jim yelled out his welcome.

The door slammed and after a minute Jerry Sikes sauntered into the kitchen. His faded levis hugged his legs like a girdle. His shirt tails hung out. His hair was cut in a Mohawk, leaving one bald strip down the center of his head. He grinned. "Hi, Jim. Ready to play ball? Boy, do you look a mess! Oh, hi, Mrs. J. Looks like you're redecorating again."

He sat down in a chair at the bar, looked under the cloth, and helped himself to some toast and a glass of milk. "Gosh, it's dusty in here. Enough to choke a person. You know, Mrs. J., my mom says she doesn't know how you do it. Six kids, always sewing, baking, changing your house around, and being an officer in every organization you belong to."

Mom laughed. "It's not much. I have such a wonderful family. They really deserve the credit."

Jerry winked at Jim. "Yes, they do deserve the credit. You don't do much at all." He spoke in his most serious tones. He tipped back his chair and watched them pounding at the wall. "Say, if you have another hammer I might just help a little. Looks like fun. Satisfies my destructive urge."

There's one in the left-hand cupboard on the porch, Jerry." It was Mom's turn to wink at Jim.

He found it and came back to work. The three of them hammered and pounded, sounding like a crew of carpen-

ters. The boys sang all twenty verses of their favorite song. Mom worked silently and happily. The piles of broken laths and plaster grew bigger. The boys forgot about playing ball as more of the wall came down.

The front door slammed. "Well, what's going on here?" Dad shouted above the noise. Mom and the boy's stopped.

"Oh, hello, Dear. Are you home early?" Mom glanced at the clock. "My gracious, it is noon." Mom hopped up and began scurrying around picking up her tools. "There's a roast in the oven and apple pie on the cupboard. We just decided to start the kitchen this morning while everyone was gone. We'll eat in the dining room."

Dad laughed at Mom's rapid pace.

"Go wash, Honey. I'll set the table." He began counting out the silverware.

As Mom went into the bedroom she called back. "Jerry, you be sure to stay for lunch. You boys worked so hard all morning."

Good for Mom. She always said the right thing. No wonder the fellows all came here. Jim and Jerry headed upstairs to wash. In a few minutes they all gathered around the table. Dad said the prayer and they sat down. Mom sat in silence, gazing at the windows. Then she brightened. Daddy and the boys exchanged expectant looks.

"I've been thinking as I worked this morning. When we finish the kitchen I think I'd like to rearrange this room. Those small east windows don't really give enough light. If we'd saw out the center pieces we could have a five-foot square window instead of three little ones.

Dad grinned at the two boys. Jim began planning his escape.

Mom insisted. "Look at them. I think it wouldn't take much work, but then you men know better than I do."

Dad and the boys looked at the windows. Dad got up to examine them more closely. "You may be right. I think you have something there. If they were cut this way, . . . uh . . . Jim, go get the yard stick."

—Dorothy Gillette, *Soc., Soph.*