

From my tent on the bank of the lake  
At Camp Koochakiyi

Koochakiyi

*(She stops and considers it.)* What a terrible song. *(But she sings on, tentatively adding a few long-forgotten dance steps.)*

We are the girls from Camp Koochakiyi

You can tell who we are by the gleam

In our eyes.

Our minds are clear and our hearts

Are strong.

We are dancing here, but we won't be long.

There will soon be deer where there now

Are fawns.

But we'll remember our years on Golden Pond.

On Golden Pond.

*(Near the end of the performance, Chelsea steps into the house. She listens, touched. She steps out to her mother, who stops dancing mortified. Chelsea raises a hand, in a Native American salute.)*

CHELSEA. How.

ETHEL. How'd you get here?

CHELSEA. I rented a car. A [Sebring]. It's made by Chrysler. *(She walks to Ethel. They embrace.)*

ETHEL. You're not supposed to come till the fifteenth.

CHELSEA. Today's the fifteenth.

ETHEL. No!

CHELSEA. 'Fraid so.

ETHEL. Well. No wonder you're here.

CHELSEA. Still have the kid or did you drown him?

ETHEL. Still have him.

CHELSEA. Are he and Norman asleep?

ETHEL. You must be joking. They're out on the lake already, antagonizing the fish. Still have Bill or did you drown him?

CHELSEA. Still got him. But he's not with me. He went back to

the coast. He had a mouth that needed looking into.

ETHEL. Oh. You must have left Boston at the crack of dawn.

CHELSEA. I left Boston in the middle of the night. I felt like diving. I didn't feel like getting lost, but it worked out that way.

ETHEL. If you'd come more often, you wouldn't get lost.

CHELSEA. You're right. If I promise to come more often will you

give me a cup of coffee?

ETHEL. All right. I could do that. Yes. You must have had a lovely

time in Europe. You look wonderful. *(She exits into the kitchen.)*

CHELSEA. I do? I did. I had a lovely time. *(Peers out at the lake.)*

ETHEL. *(Offstage.)* I always thought Norman and I should travel, but we never got to it somehow. *(Enters.)* See the boys?

CHELSEA. Yes. What are they doing out there? It's starting to rain.

ETHEL. Ah, well. I told Norman not to go. The loons have been calling for it.

CHELSEA. *(She nods and looks at Ethel.)* Look at you. You've had that robe for as long as I can remember.

ETHEL. *(She tries to arrange it.)* It looks that way, doesn't it?

CHELSEA. It looks great. *(She steps to her and hugs her emphatically, surprising Ethel, who steps back, embarrassed.)*

ETHEL. You're in a huggy mood today. What's the matter?

CHELSEA. You seem different.

ETHEL. You mean old.

CHELSEA. I don't know.

ETHEL. Well, that's what happens if you live long enough: You end up being old. It's one of the disadvantages of a long life. I still prefer it to the alternative. Come sit down. You must be exhausted.

*(Ethel sits. Chelsea wanders.)*

CHELSEA. Have Billy and Norman gotten along all right?

ETHEL. Billy is the happiest thing that's happened to Norman since [Roosevelt]. I should have rented him a thirteen-year-old boy years ago.

CHELSEA. You could have traded me in. Billy reminds me of myself out there, way back when. Except I think he makes a better son than I did.

ETHEL. Well, you made a very nice daughter.

CHELSEA. Does Billy put the worm on the hook by himself?

ETHEL. I'm not really sure.

CHELSEA. I hope so. You lose points if you throw up. I remember that. I always apologized to those nice worms before I impaled them. Well, they'll get even with me someday, won't they?

ETHEL. You're beginning to sound an awful lot like your father.

CHELSEA. Uh oh. *(Changing direction.)* Thank you for taking

care of Billy.

ETHEL. Thank you. I'm glad it gives us another chance, for you.

Plus, it's been a tremendous education. Norman's vocabulary will never be the same.

CHELSEA. *(Turning to the mantel and picking up a picture.)* Thank you at this: Chelsea on the swim team. That was a great experience.

humiliation.

ETHEL. Oh, stop it. You were a good diver.

CHELSEA. I wasn't a good diver. I was a good sport. I could never do a damn back flip.

ETHEL. Well, we were proud of you for trying.

CHELSEA. Right. Everyone got a big splash out of me trying. Why do you think I subjected myself to all that? I wasn't aiming for the Olympics, you know. I was just trying to please Norman. Because he'd been a diver, in the eighteen hundreds.

ETHEL. Can't you be home for five minutes without getting started on the past?

CHELSEA. This house seems to set me off.

ETHEL. Well, it shouldn't. It's a nice house.

CHELSEA. I act like a big person everywhere else. I do. I'm in charge of Los Angeles. There's just something about coming back here that makes me feel like a little fat girl.

ETHEL. Sit down and tell me about your trip.

CHELSEA. *(An outburst.)* I don't want to sit down. Where were you all that time? You never bailed me out.

ETHEL. I didn't know you needed bailing out.

CHELSEA. Well, I did.

ETHEL. Here we go again. You had a miserable childhood. Your father was overbearing, your mother ignored you. What else is new? Don't you think everyone looks back on her childhood with some bitterness or regret about something? You're a big girl now; aren't you tired of it all? You have this unpleasant chip on your shoulder which is very unattractive. You only come home when I beg you to, and when you get here all you can do is be disagreeable about the past. Life marches on, Chelsea.

CHELSEA. Yeah, your life. In your perfect house on your perfect lake. You don't know what it's like being reminded how worthless you are every time that old son of a bitch crosses your path. *(Ethel suddenly slaps the table [or Chelsea, depending on how brave the actors feel and how "right" it feels in the moment].)*

ETHEL. That old son of a bitch happens to be my husband. *(Chelsea turns away, wiping her eyes. Ethel could just die of remorse.)*

I'm sorry, Chelsea. That he's not always kind. It's not... always easy for me either. *(Pause. Trying to lighten the mood.)* You're such a nice person, can't you think of something nice to say?

CHELSEA. No. Oh, yeah. I married Bill in Brussels.

ETHEL. You did what in Brussels?

CHELSEA. I married Bill.

ETHEL. Does it count in this country?

CHELSEA. 'Fraid so.

ETHEL. Well, bless you. Congratulations.

CHELSEA. Thank you.

ETHEL. You have an odd way of building up to good news.

CHELSEA. I know.

ETHEL. Bill seems very nice.

CHELSEA. He's better than nice. He's an adult, too. I decided to go for an adult marriage this time.

ETHEL. Will Billy live with you?

CHELSEA. Yes. That's part of the reason Bill had to get back to L.A. He's murdering his ex-wife. She doesn't want the kid anyway.

ETHEL. Do you?

CHELSEA. Yes.

ETHEL. Well, I'm so pleased.

CHELSEA. Nothing to it. I'm twice as old as you were when you married Norman. Think that means anything?

ETHEL. I hope it means that Bill will be only half as much trouble. Norman will be so surprised.

CHELSEA. I'll bet.

ETHEL. All he wants is for you to be happy.

CHELSEA. Could have fooled me.

ETHEL. Dear God, how long do you plan to keep this up?

CHELSEA. I don't know. Maybe someday we can try to be friends. ETHEL. Chelsea, Norman is eighty years old. He has heart palpitations and a problem remembering things. When exactly do you expect this friendship to begin? *(Norman arrives on the porch, resending a wet rooster.)* Norman Thayer, you're soaking wet.

NORMAN. Yes, I know. It's raining. The damn loons are having a good laugh. *(He sees Chelsea.)* Well, well, well. Look at you.

CHELSEA. Hello.

NORMAN. I thought you weren't coming till the fifteenth.

CHELSEA. Today's the fifteenth.

NORMAN. Huh?

ETHEL. 'Fraid so. What have you done with Billy?

NORMAN. He's swimming home. *(Billy slogs onto the porch, lagging the load of gear. He, too, is drenched. Ethel opens the door and he steps in.)*

BILLY. Guess what? It's raining.

ETHEL. Oh, for Lord's sake. Norman, help him with this stuff.