

ON GOLDEN POND

BY ERNEST THOMPSON

SECOND REVISED EDITION

A DPS ACTING EDITION PUBLISHED BY

BROADWAY
LICENSING GLOBAL

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*For my parents, Esther and Theron Thompson,
who are not Ethel and Norman Thayer, but might be.
With love and great admiration.*

ON GOLDEN POND was first presented by the Hudson Guild Theatre (Craig Anderson, Producing Director; David Kerry Heefner, Associate Director; Harold Sogard, Managing Director) at the Hudson Guild Theatre in New York City, opening on September 13, 1978, for a limited run of thirty-six performances. It was directed by Craig Anderson, the set design and costume design were by Steven Rubin, the lighting design was by Craig Miller, and the production stage manager was Daniel Morris. The cast was as follows:

NORMAN THAYER, JR.	Tom Aldredge
ETHEL THAYER	Frances Sternhagen
CHARLIE MARTIN	Ronn Carroll
CHELSEA THAYER WAYNE	Zina Jasper
BILLY RAY	Mark Bendo
BILL RAY	Stan Lachow

ON GOLDEN POND was subsequently produced by the Hudson Guild Theatre (Craig Anderson, Producer) and presented by Arthur Cantor and Greer Garson at the New Apollo Theatre in New York City, opening on February 28, 1979. It was directed by Craig Anderson, the set design and costume design were by Steven Rubin, and the lighting design was by Craig Miller.

NORMAN THAYER, JR.	Tom Aldredge
ETHEL THAYER	Frances Sternhagen
CHARLIE MARTIN	Ronn Carroll
CHELSEA THAYER WAYNE	Barbara Andres
BILLY RAY	Mark Bendo
BILL RAY	Stan Lachow

AUTHOR'S NOTE

On Golden Pond has been produced in forty countries, in three Broadway houses, and in theatres all across America; it was made into a movie, for which I won an Academy Award; I wrote and directed a musical version and a live television production, starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer; and, after all that, I'm still trying to get it right. While the play, like any work of art, is about many things, what I thought I was writing as a young man was a study in dysfunction, one family's struggles with what we all struggle with—age, rage, regret, love withheld, love unspoken, disappointment and, ultimately, if we're lucky, forgiveness, acceptance, and renewal. Maybe it's because it's so funny, or because there's so much emotion in the piece, but there's a tendency sometimes to make the play softer and sweeter than intended. When we revived it on Broadway with James Earl Jones, the director, Leonard Foglia, and I made it our goal to make *On Golden Pond* as unsentimental and unflinching as I had originally conceived it. It wasn't the actors' skin color that made the production significant; it was the courage of their performances, not to yield to the tenderness, but to keep the tension real, and, in the process, the stakes high. As a consequence, it was far and away the funniest interpretation of OGP that I'd been associated with, until, in 2019, I directed myself in the role of Norman Thayer, Jr., and got to put my theories about the play to the ultimate test: could the humor coming from the same painful place it does in real life still ring true and still deliver the emotional wallop the play always has? Based on the handkerchiefs and the delicious silences, the play was just as moving as ever. This is that production's script, the same story I wrote as a twenty-eight-year-old, augmented by a line or two stolen from the film or the musical and fine-tuned by subsequent iterations directed by the author, and is now **the official script of *On Golden Pond* and the only one that can be presented to audiences in any theatre, of any size, anywhere in the English-speaking world.** Mr. Jones was the first actor I'd ever had ask what was being said on the other end of the telephone conversations, so I wrote that dialogue for him. You may choose to leave it to the performers'—and audience's—imagination, but I have included the lines regardless. Also, a number of words in the

script appear in brackets. You may find it helpful to update these words with more contemporary references. If so, please ensure that any updates conform to the spirit of the original dialogue. **Those are the only changes permitted** and under no circumstances are theatre companies allowed to import other lines from the film, regardless of how much an actress might wish to go full Hepburn and violate the play's simple economy by schmaltzing it up with knights in shining armor and other travesties; we have closed productions that chose to do so or have added or deleted other words or phrases, which is not only an illegal violation of intellectual property, but unprofessional and insultingly disrespectful.

It's been brought to our attention that some theatre companies have grown squeamish about certain words in this script, specifically Jew, Negro, and lesbian. To which I say, probably not the right play for you; there are plenty of others. Or, conversely, consider why those words exist. It's not that Norman Thayer, Jr., has become Archie Bunker; it's that he's becoming not himself. If you've ever been in the company of someone visited by dementia, you'll know that those unlucky souls are not always on their best behavior and sometimes resort to expressing themselves in invectives and outbursts that may seem out of character and deeply troubling to those around them. It falls upon Ethel to be our eyes and ears and to mark Norman's discomfiting descent. The clues are clearly indicated in the script, both in Norman's struggle to remember who essential people in his life are and in Ethel's growing concern that her beloved husband is slipping away, never more so than when he returns from picking strawberries and manifests behavior stranger than ever, culminating in his finally confessing what has disoriented him so. It must be borne in mind as well that for forty years or more, Norman was a professor of English at an Ivy League college, the University of Pennsylvania, meaning that he stood in front of classrooms and lecture halls and regaled his students with great stories of literature, challenging and inspiring them. And now he's lost his audience and, for all intents and purposes, a fundamental part of his reason for living; it's not surprising then that his mind is lacking the stimulation that could keep it engaged and refreshed. Cue Billy.

But, here's the bigger question for my esteemed fellow directors and actors: what are you afraid of? Offending your audience, appearing politically incorrect or unwoke? Isn't that our job to give the audience food for thought, to provide an unblinking, realistic view of life as it's lived in our complicated times, even if it makes theatregoers temporarily uncomfortable? Let's not insult them by sugarcoating. *On Golden Pond* is a very funny, serious deep dive into the human condition. Don't do the play if you can't embrace that notion. Or, trust your audience's ability to figure it out for themselves, even if it involves prompts in the program. Or, blame the playwright who has more than four decades of proof that, in no time, Norman will win them back with his rich humor and suggestions of the vulnerability that make him lovable. Audiences the world over don't need to have material dumbed down; more than ever, they need to be respected for their own courage and intelligence; they're also part of the human condition. That all said, enjoy your time on the lake.

CHARACTERS

NORMAN THAYER, JR.

ETHEL THAYER

CHARLIE MARTIN

CHELSEA THAYER WAYNE

BILLY RAY

BILL RAY

PLACE

The living room of a summer home on Golden Pond, in Maine.

ON GOLDEN POND

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The middle of May. Early afternoon.

The setting is the living room of a summer home on Golden Pond, in Maine. The room is large and old and high ceiled, all wood and glass, not sparkling like a picture in House Beautiful, but rich and wrinkled and comfortable-looking. The house was built in 1914, as a plaque on the chimney proclaims, and it has aged well. Its beams and plank walls are a deep brown, windowsills and doorways fading green, hooked rugs and plaid curtains still bright. There is a line of windows upstage, the sort that can be cranked open, with screens on the outside. Through them can be seen trees, and then a brightness because the sun is reflecting on the lake down below. If one looked far enough, one could see mountains in the distance. And that is all. Just a house on the lake in the woods.

There is a heavy paneled door up right, open now, showing a screen door beyond it, and an outside porch beyond that, a platform really with several outdoor chairs sitting on it. In the left corner upstage a stairway leads to a landing where there is a closed door, and then bends and rises higher still, disappearing into a hallway. The upstage area of the room is raised by two or three steps. In the right corner is a tall folding glass door, closed now, and beyond it a dining area, an old oak table with chairs piled on its top. The stage right wall is dominated by a huge fieldstone fireplace with a wide slab hearth. On either side there are wood boxes with plaid

cushions, and, above them, shelves and shelves of books and games and knickknacks and more books, rising all the way to the ceiling. Stage left there is another smaller table, chairs upside down on it, too, and there are two doors, both closed. The upstage one is the swinging variety, and the entrance to the kitchen, the downstage door leads outside. A little window beside it shows a bit of the shingled back porch and more trees.

The room is a trifle disorganized. Its furniture, a fat couch and two fat chairs, two rockers by the fireplace, are all covered with dust cloths. A chair by the entrance door has a footstool overturned in its lap, and, next to it, a small table holding a fifties-style telephone. There are other tables, curious handmade relics, clustered in the center of the room waiting to go outside. The rugs are all rolled up. There are floor lamps here and there, end tables, hassocks, a basket of wood, bric-a-brac galore, fishing poles in a rack, anchors, pine cones, boat cushions, and the like. A row of old hats and a pair of binoculars hang from hooks upstage. Everything looks as though it's been there forever, and while the room is cluttered, it still looks like a nice place to curl up and take a nap. Everywhere, on the wall and on the mantel, on the bookshelves and windowsills, on the tables and the doors, are pictures, photographs, most of them framed, most of them old and brown, some new. Pictures of people, groups, families, children, animals, places, the whole room a huge photo album, a huge book of memories.

When the curtain rises there is quiet for a moment, and then footsteps can be heard in the hall upstairs. Norman Thayer, Jr., appears on the steps. He is seventy-nine. He wears baggy pants and sneakers and a sweater. His hair is white. He wears glasses. He walks slowly but upright. On the one hand he is boyish and peppery, having hung onto his vigor and his humor, but at the same time, he is grand, he has a manner, a way of speaking and of carrying himself.

He stands on the landing, taking in the room. He smiles. He walks down to the raised platform and stops at the entrance

door. He stares out at the lake. He pushes the screen door, but instead of opening, it falls over. Norman watches it smack down onto the porch. He considers it a moment, then he turns and faces the room again. He steps to the phone and lifts the receiver. He listens. He calls offstage.

NORMAN. The phone works! (*Speaking to himself.*) At least I think it does.

He picks the phone up again and listens. He squints and dials "0." A moment passes.

Hello? ...Hello?

His attention is diverted by a photo. He squints at it.

Who the hell is that? (*Calling offstage.*) Who the hell is in this picture here? (*Hearing a voice in the phone.*) Hello? Who is this?

THE OPERATOR. This is the operator.

NORMAN. The operator! What do you want?

THE OPERATOR. I beg your pardon?

NORMAN. You called, you must want something.

THE OPERATOR. You called me, sir.

NORMAN. But that was a long time ago. You never answered.

THE OPERATOR. We get a little busy.

NORMAN. I see. Well, here you are. How are you?

THE OPERATOR. Just peachy.

NORMAN. How grand. Listen, this is Norman Thayer, Jr., Professor Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania, Department of English, over on Golden Pond.

THE OPERATOR. Where are you?

NORMAN. *Golden Pond.*

THE OPERATOR. And where is that?

NORMAN. It's in New England, dear, in the state of Maine.

THE OPERATOR. Where exactly?

NORMAN. Where are you?

THE OPERATOR. I'm in Waterville. Also in Maine.

NORMAN. I thought so. You have the accent, you know.

THE OPERATOR. Doesn't sound like it to me.

NORMAN. Well, it doesn't matter. Golden Pond is very near wherever you are.

THE OPERATOR. Okey dokey.

NORMAN. I have something I would like you to do, if you could: Call me up. Can you do that?

THE OPERATOR. Is there some *reason* I'm doing it?

NORMAN. I want to check my phone to make certain it rings. It hasn't been rung all winter, that we know of; it may have lost its whatsie.

THE OPERATOR. We'll give it a test, then?

NORMAN. Thank you, dear. Do you have my number?

THE OPERATOR. We would need that.

NORMAN. Well, I should think you would.

THE OPERATOR. You could just read it to me. It's written on the phone.

NORMAN. What do you mean, written on the phone? There's nothing written on the phone. (*Staring at the dial.*) Wait a minute; I see what you mean, but I can't make it out.

He bends closer.

Nope. Sorry. Too small. They should write the numbers bigger. You'll just have to look it up, dear.

THE OPERATOR. What's the exchange?

NORMAN. I haven't a clue. It has a nine in it, that's all I know.

THE OPERATOR. There's a lot of numbers with nines in them.

NORMAN. Yes, I suppose there *are* a lot of numbers with nines. Well, it's in the book. You must have a book. Norman Thayer, Jr. In the state of Maine.

THE OPERATOR. I'll call you back.

NORMAN. Fine. Thank you very much.

He hangs up, ready to answer. He squints at the photo.

Who the hell is that?

There's a pounding offstage.

Someone's at the door!

ETHEL. It's me, you poop!

Norman steps to the door and opens it. And in walks Ethel Thayer. Pretty at sixty-nine and energetic, she is Norman's opposite in many ways. And his match in many others. She lugs in a basket of branches.

NORMAN. Look at you.

ETHEL. Yes. Quite a sight, aren't I?

NORMAN. Where have you been?

ETHEL. In the woods.

NORMAN. In the woods.

ETHEL. Oh! It's *beautiful!* Everything's just waking up. Little tiny birds, little tiny leaves. I saw three chippies, and a whole patch of little tiny flowers out by the old cellar hole. And millions and millions of little tiny black flies. In my eyes and hair. Just terrible!

NORMAN. What were you doing out there in the woods?

ETHEL. Getting kindling.

She sets it on the hearth. She takes in the room fondly.

Just look at this place.

NORMAN. It's a mess, isn't it?

ETHEL. Not really. Just take a minute and it'll be all shipshape again. Come on. Help me with the dust covers. What's happened to the screen door?

NORMAN. It fell over.

ETHEL. How?

NORMAN. I pushed it.

ETHEL. What do you mean?

NORMAN. I pushed the door and the door fell over.

ETHEL. It's not supposed to do that when you push it.

NORMAN. I didn't think so. I'll fix it later.

ETHEL. You might have closed the big door.

NORMAN. Didn't want to touch it. I was afraid of what might happen.

ETHEL. Well, now we'll be swatting at black flies for the next two days. The room is probably full of them.

She closes the door. He looks about critically.

NORMAN. I don't see any.

ETHEL. You *don't* see them till it's too late.

She stares out the window.

Of course they're never quite as bad on the lake side. Not when the wind blows. Whitecaps today.

NORMAN. Ah.

ETHEL. I met a very sweet couple.

She pulls off a dust cover, as does he, folding it neatly.

NORMAN. What? Where?

ETHEL. In the woods.

NORMAN. You met a couple in the woods? A couple of people?

ETHEL. No, a couple of antelope. Of course a couple of people. You needn't be too careful with that. I'm going to hang them on the line anyway.

NORMAN. Oh.

He continues folding it.

What were these people doing in the woods?

ETHEL. Walking. Their name is Melciorri, I think, or something.

NORMAN. Melciorri? What sort of name is that?

ETHEL. I don't know, dear. Italian, probably. They're up from Boston.

NORMAN. Ohhh. They speak English?

ETHEL. Tsk. Of course they speak English. How do you suppose I talked to them? (*Lifting a dust cover.*) Here, help me with this. They're a sweet middle-aged couple. Just like us.

NORMAN. (*Dropping his own dust cover and taking an end of hers.*) If they're just like us, they're not middle-aged.

ETHEL. Of course they are.

NORMAN. Middle age means the middle, Ethel. The middle of life. People don't live to be one hundred and fifty.

ETHEL. We're at the far edge of middle age, that's all.

NORMAN. We're not, you know. We're not middle-aged. You're old, and I'm ancient.

ETHEL. Pooh. You're in your seventies and I'm in my sixties.

NORMAN. Just barely on both counts.

ETHEL. Are we going to spend the afternoon quibbling about this?

NORMAN. We can if you'd like.

ETHEL. (*Picking up another cover.*) The Melciorris, whatever their age group, are a sweet couple, that's all. They're staying up at the Putnams, while the Putnams are in Europe.

NORMAN. Do the Putnams know about this?

ETHEL. Yes. They're the best of friends. That's what Mrs. Melciorri said.

NORMAN. Ha!

ETHEL. Oh, Lord. They've invited us for dinner, if we like.

NORMAN. Oh. Well. I'm not sure my stomach is ready for rigatoni and that sort of thing. Tiramisu.

ETHEL. We didn't discuss the menu. Want to help me with the rugs? Guess whom else I ran into.

NORMAN. You ran into someone else? The woods are full of people.

ETHEL. It was only Charlie.

NORMAN. Who's Charlie?

ETHEL. *Charlie*. The mailman.

NORMAN. Oh. What was Charlie the mailman doing in the woods?

ETHEL. He was on the road.

NORMAN. Oh. You went on the road, too. You didn't say that. You said you were in the woods.

They unroll the rugs, Norman barely helping.

ETHEL. Well, the road goes through the woods, you know.

NORMAN. Of course it does.

ETHEL. Charlie wants to put in our dock.

NORMAN. What for?

ETHEL. To park the boat beside.

NORMAN. I'll put in the dock.

ETHEL. You *won't* put in the dock.

NORMAN. Why not?

ETHEL. Because you're too old.

NORMAN. I'm not old at all. I'm middle-aged.

ETHEL. Old Pearson's been putting in the dock for God knows how long anyway, but he died this past winter, so Charlie has offered to do it, now that Pearson has received his just reward.

NORMAN. How did that come about?

ETHEL. I don't know. I suppose he got ill.

NORMAN. No, how did the subject of our dock come about?

ETHEL. We started talking about the dock because Charlie said it would be two more weeks before he'd start delivering the mail by boat, and he wanted to be sure we were okay. He must be the busiest man in the state of Maine.

NORMAN. I should think so. Certainly the dimmest witted.

ETHEL. Norman.

She finds a cloth and begins to dust and Norman rants.

NORMAN. I remember Charlie when he was just a little fellow.

ETHEL. Yes.

NORMAN. Little blond-haired kid. Used to laugh at anything. I thought then that he was a bit deficient. Charlie must be thirty by now.

ETHEL. Charlie is forty-four. Two years older than Chelsea.

NORMAN. Chelsea is forty-two? Our Chelsea?

ETHEL. 'Fraid so.

NORMAN. Good God.

He takes down an old straw hat and poses in it. She strains to lug a handcrafted table.

What do you think?

ETHEL. Quite a sight.

NORMAN. I should say so. How's that table, a bit heavy?

ETHEL. Yes. My father built this table. It's practically as old as the house.

NORMAN. Your *father* made that?

ETHEL. Yes. The first summer I went to (*Rhymes with Pooch-a-bye-bye.*) Camp Koochakiyi.

Norman replaces the hat and dons a floppy fishing hat.

Charlie says he doesn't expect Miss Appley to make it up this year.

NORMAN. Who's Miss Appley?

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. 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 finds an ancient doll in a heap by the fireplace.

Oh, poor Elmer has had a terrible fall.

NORMAN. Who's poor Elmer?

ETHEL. *Elmer*. My doll. He fell in the fireplace. Poor little Elmer. The life you've had. 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 inseparable. 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. 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 gives him a last stern look and steps to the phone and lifts the receiver.

Hello? ...Hello? There's no one there.

NORMAN. Ah ha! See!

ETHEL. Hello?

THE OPERATOR. I'm here, I really am.

ETHEL. Oh, hello.

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

ETHEL. Yes.

THE OPERATOR. Is Norman Thayer, Jr. there?

ETHEL. Just a moment, please.

She holds the phone out.

It's for you.

NORMAN. Who is it?

ETHEL. I don't know.

NORMAN. Not Saint Peter, is it?

She pointedly sets the phone down, out of his reach. She begins dusting windows as he plods over to lift the phone.

Hello? Who is this?

THE OPERATOR. It's your operator.

NORMAN. (*To Ethel.*) It's the operator. (*Into the phone.*) What do you want?

THE OPERATOR. You asked me to call.

NORMAN. I don't think so. Oh, to check the ring, of course. I'd given up on you. Does it work?

THE OPERATOR. You tell me.

NORMAN. Yes, I guess it did ring here, come to think of it. That's why we picked up. So. Everything's all hunky-dory then.

THE OPERATOR. As far as I'm concerned.

NORMAN. Terrific. Thank you.

THE OPERATOR. Have a nice day.

NORMAN. I beg your pardon?

THE OPERATOR. Have a nice day.

NORMAN. Oh.

He hangs up.

She said, "Have a nice day." What a strange thing to say. What did she think I was going to do? Well, the phone works.

ETHEL. What about these fish poles? Been through them this year?

NORMAN. No. I doubt that I'll be doing any fishing this time round.

ETHEL. All right.

NORMAN. Seems a shame to spend the money for a license.

ETHEL. All right.

NORMAN. You'd think they'd give it free to an old case like me. It's not as though I'd go out there and deplete the entire trout population or anything.

ETHEL. You always catch your share. You always have.

NORMAN. Well, that's all behind me now.

ETHEL. All right, Norman.

There is tension in the air. He looks at the photo.

NORMAN. Who the *hell* is in this picture? Some fat woman with a little fat baby.

ETHEL. What? Oh. That's Mille's daughter Jane and her grandson. I can't remember his name.

NORMAN. Oh. Who's Millie?

ETHEL. *Millie*, Norman. Our next-door neighbor in Wilmington.

NORMAN. So that's what her name is. Well, there's a certain family resemblance through the generations, isn't there? Everyone's fat.

Ethel studies him, concerned. Norman deflects her look by picking up another photo.

Look. Chelsea on the swim team at school. She wasn't exactly thin.

ETHEL. She had a few fat years.

NORMAN. It's no wonder she couldn't do a back flip. No center of gravity.

ETHEL. Well, she tried, Norman.

NORMAN. Of course she did. I remember.

ETHEL. She only did it for you anyway. She only wanted to please you.

NORMAN. Yep.

ETHEL. Maybe this year we could persuade her to come and spend a few days. Wouldn't that be fun?

A moment passes. Norman breaks the mood.

NORMAN. Feel like a quick game of Parcheesi?

ETHEL. Not right this minute.

She goes on cleaning windows.

NORMAN. I guess you wouldn't be up for Monopoly either then, huh?

ETHEL. Tonight, Norman. We've got the whole summer. The whole summer for you to try and win back the fortunes you lost to me last year.

NORMAN. Heh heh.

ETHEL. I hope you've thought about your tactics over the winter.

He finds a book and settles into a chair.

NORMAN. Heh heh.

ETHEL. Pretty shoddy, some of those moves of yours.

NORMAN. Heh heh.

ETHEL. We've got the whole summer. It's wonderful to be home, isn't it?

NORMAN. (*Lost in his book.*) Mmmm.

ETHEL. Norman!

NORMAN. What?

ETHEL. The loons, Norman! I've spotted the loons!

NORMAN. Where?

ETHEL. Get the glasses. My word!

Norman fetches the binoculars and stands beside Ethel. He trains them on the lake.

They're so lovely. Do you see them?

NORMAN. No. Oh. There they are. Oh, my goodness.

ETHEL. Aren't they lovely?

NORMAN. They're huge! I've never seen such big loons in my life.

ETHEL. (*Looking at where he's aiming.*) Those are boats, you poop. Come in closer. By the float.

NORMAN. (*Lowering the glasses.*) Oh. Those little things. Look at them swimming about.

ETHEL. Black and sleek. Lovely animals. A husband and wife. I think they're looking at us.

NORMAN. Yes, they are.

ETHEL. Oh, Norman, they're nudging each other. They're talking.

NORMAN. Yes. But I can't make out what they're saying. Can you read beaks?

ETHEL. They're kissing is what they're doing.

NORMAN. How inappropriate.

ETHEL. Norman. Do you realize this is our forty-eighth summer together? Our forty-eighth summer on Golden Pond.

NORMAN. Huh.

After a moment.

Probably our last.

ETHEL. Oh. Shut up.

The play doesn't end here...

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