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NORMAN. Good. *(He looks up.)* Bye!

CHARLIE. Goodbye, Norman.

NORMAN. Watch out for that screen door.

ETHEL. *(To Charlie.)* He really is a poop, isn't he? *(Charlie laughs, and exits out the big door and across the porch. Ethel closes the door and then calls to him.)* Seen our loons out there today?

CHARLIE. *(Offstage.)* Yup. Out by Honey Island. They're teaching their baby to fly.

ETHEL. Oh. How exciting. I hope they bring him over to introduce us. Bye, Charlie.

CHARLIE. *(Offstage.)* Bye!

ETHEL. ~~Isn't that exciting? Teaching their baby to fly.~~

NORMAN. Listen to this: "Elderly gentleman wanted for companionship and conversation, for convalescing invalid. Three afternoons a week." Now, doesn't that sound perfect?

ETHEL. Perfect for you. I wouldn't have much hope for the invalid.

NORMAN. There's another one here: "Retired people sought for handbill delivery. Mornings or evenings. Some walking involved." I should call; I can walk.

ETHEL. Yes. I can just see you walking out there with those mosquitoes. You'd be eaten alive.

NORMAN. I could carry my screen door with me.

ETHEL. Is that why you came rushing back here? To read those silly ads?

NORMAN. Could be. Maybe I should have asked Charlie if he needs another man on the boat. I could balance out there on the deck, and do a belly flop at every dock we came to. Could be a source of amusement all around the lake. Be a great boon to the Postal Department. Get more people writing letters. What do you suppose Charlie would pay me?

ETHEL. Whatever is the matter with you? Why do you need a job? You've always loved being here on Golden Pond with nothing to do. Why is this summer any different?

NORMAN. I'm in the market for a last hurrah.

ETHEL. Lord. Why can't you just pick berries and catch fish and read books, and enjoy this sweet, sweet time?

NORMAN. *(After a pause.)* Do you want to know why I came back so fast with my little bucket? I got to the end of our lane, and I ... couldn't remember where the old town road was. I went a little way into the woods, and nothing looked familiar, not one tree.

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And it scared me half to death. So I came running back here, to you, to see your pretty face, and to feel that I was safe. That I was still me. *(He puts his face in his hands. Ethel is stunned by his speech, but she rallies quickly. She bends over him and rubs his back.)*

ETHEL. Well, you're safe, you old poop. And you're definitely still you. Still picking on poor Charlie. After lunch, after we gobble up all the strawberries, I'll take you down to the old town road. You'll remember it all, my darling; we've walked it a thousand thousand times. And we'll pick us another batch of those little tiny berries. And I'll do the bending. You just talk away the mosquitoes. *(She rubs his back and smiles down at him sadly.)*

Scene 3

The middle of July. Early evening.

It is just the edge of darkness, there is still a soft glow in the sky. The room looks quite cheery. A large poster hangs on the stage right wall. It reads: Happy Birthday Norman. There are several balloons flung about. As the scene progresses and it grows darker outside, little lights may be visible in the distance, other cottages.

After a moment, Ethel enters from the kitchen, carrying another poster. She wears jeans again, and a sweater now. She looks about for a place to put the sign. She crosses to the mantel and props it against the chimney. It says: Welcome Home, Chelsea. She looks at it, please. She looks about the room. Suddenly she rushes up to the porch door, which is open, the screen back in place. She speaks to the door.

ETHEL. Get away you nasty things. Tsk. *(She waves her hands.)* Get off the door! *(She slaps the screen door.)* Get off, go on! *(She slaps the door harder. It falls over and onto the porch.)* Oh, Norman, for God's sake! *(She screams quietly.)* Acch! Get away, get away! *(She quickly closes the big door, and leans against it.)* Worse this year than ever. *(She cranks closed one of the windows. Norman appears on the stairs. He is dressed quite nattily in slacks and a shirt, a bright "scenic"*