“On Golden Pond” Audition Pieces

#1. This is early in the play. We first see Ethel as a sweet, slightly scattered lady and Norman as a cranky but likable guy.

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. How nice.

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. (pause) 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: 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.

Norman: I don’t see any.

Ethel: You don’t see them till it’s too late. (Noticing the lake through 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 nice couple.

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. (referring to linens that Norman is folding) You needn’t be too careful with that. I’m going to hang them on the line, anyway.

Norman: Oh. (pause) What were these people doing in the woods?

Ethel: Walking. Their name was 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? Here – help me with this. They’re a very nice middle-aged couple. Just like us.

Norman: 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 150.

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.

#2. Now we meet Charlie, who has a big laugh. Ethel likes him and appreciates his easy-going manner.

Charlie: Morning, Ethel.

Ethel: Come in, Charlie, and have a seat? Like a biscuit?

Charlie: Sure. (the door falls) Uh oh. I think I broke your door.

Ethel: Oh, no. It’s been that way for a month now. I should have warned you. Norman is supposed to fix it. It’s not high on his list of priorities, I’m afraid.

Charlie: I could give it a try. It’s just missing its little thing-amabob-bers, that’s all.

Ethel: No, better let Norman get to it. Come in and let’s close the big door before every mosquito in the county finds its way in here.

Charlie: (laughing) Pretty bad this year, huh?

Ethel: Worse than ever. Sit down. How’s your brother? We haven’t seen him all this season.

Charlie: You mean Tom?

Ethel: That’s the only brother you have, isn’t it?

Charlie: Yes. He’s fine. He’s just come back up from Portland. Got stopped twice for speeding. Once down and once up. (laughs) By the same policeman! (laughs) You should have seen his face.

Ethel: I love your laugh, Charlie.

Charlie: Thank you. (laughs) Tom wasn’t too happy to hear it yesterday. I don’t know, it just struck me as awfully funny that he could be stupid enough to be stopped twice by the same cop. When he told me, I couldn’t stop laughing! (laughs – then suddenly serious) Tom’s not speaking to me anymore. Where’s Norman?

Ethel: Norman is off picking strawberries. I threw him out. (Charlie laughs) Don’t laugh. (Charlie stops) Norman is restless this year. I don’t know what’s got into him. How’s your mother?

Charlie: My mother?

Ethel: Yes.

Charlie: She’s holding her own. (more laughter) She fell down, you know, a couple of months ago.

Ethel: I didn’t know that.

Charlie: Yeah, a couple of months ago, right on her rump, when she was out helping clean up the town common with the Ladies’ Auxiliary. She was having a tug-of-war with a dead juniper bush, and she won, or lost, depending on how you look at it. (He is building up to a huge laugh!) She hasn’t been normal since. She walks all right, and sleeps and everything. She just can’t sit! It’s taken a little adjustment. If you’ll pardon the expression, she’s one old lady who really believes in busting her ass for the community. (big laughs from Charlie and Ethel)

#3. We see more of the personalities emerging of these characters. Norman is good-humored, in spite of his cranky demeanor. Charlie is somewhat socially awkward. Ethel is always looking for the positive.

Norman: Why didn’t you marry Chelsea?

Charlie: You wouldn’t let me.

Norman: Oh. (He thinks about it) You could have married someone else. I would have allowed that.

Charlie: I didn’t want anyone else. I mean, I’ve come close. There’s still time.

Norman: (losing interest) Oh, yes. You’ve got lot of time.

Charlie: How old will you be?

Norman: When?

Charlie: On your birthday?

Norman: One hundred and three.

Charlie: Really? (laughs) You’re kidding. Miss Apley was ninety-seven in May. Isn’t that amazing?

Norman: Yes.

Charlie: She died, you know.

Norman: No.

Charlie: Yep. Last Tuesday. We got a call … in case any mail came up.

Norman: They gave you a forwarding address for Miss Apley? (Charlie laughs)

Ethel: Now what’s going on in here?

Norman: One of the lesbians expired. (Charlie can’t contain himself.)

Ethel: Oh, Norman. (To Charlie) Which one?

Charlie: Miss Apley.

Ethel: Oh dear. Well, she had a good, full life.

Norman: Charlie says she was ninety-seven.

Ethel: Really?! How wonderful!

Norman: Puts us all to shame, doesn’t it? There’s something to be said for a deviant lifestyle.

Charlie: I always liked those old ladies. But I sure used to wonder what the heck was going on in there. (No response from anyone – Charlie is suddenly embarrassed) Well, thanks for the coffee and the biscuits.

Ethel: Any time, Charlie. You must come around when Chelsea’s here.

Charlie: Oh, yeah. I haven’t seen her for a long time. Must be … well, let’s see. It was the summer my father died, and I was thirty-six at the time. I’m forty-four now, so that’s … (Common Core Math is hard.)

Norman: Eight years.

Charlie: Eight years. Holy Mackinoly! Well, see you tomorrow.

Ethel: Okay, dear. (Norman is not interested) Norman, Charlie’s leaving.

Norman: (To Ethel) Good. (To Charlie) Bye.

#4. As Chelsea arrives, we realize she has a great deal of hostility towards her father. However, it is also evident that she shares his sense of humor. Ethel wants everyone to get along. Our first meeting of Billy Ray proves him to be quick and confident.

Ethel: Norman, the loons! They’re calling. Oh, why is it so dark?

Norman: Because the sun went down.

Ethel: I wish I could see them. Yoo hoo! Looo-ooons! Loony looo-ooons!

Norman: I don’t think you should do that in front of Chelsea’s companion.

Ethel: Oh, pooh. I’m just talking to my friends. Yoo hoo! (She hears something) Oh no! They’re here! And I’m not dressed!

Norman: You look dressed.

Ethel: Oh, no! I wanted to look nice. I look like and old character.

Norman: You are an old character. Run upstairs and change. I’ll stay here and entertain them. I’ll make them feel welcome.

Ethel: Will you be nice to them?

Norman: Sure. I’ll explain to them the risk involved in arriving late for an old man’s birthday party.

Chelsea: (happily) Mommy!! (less so) Norman.

Norman: Look at you.

Chelsea: Happy birthday.

Norman: (hiding emotion) Look at this little fat girl, Ethel.

Ethel: Oh, stop … she’s as thin as a rail. Isn’t she, Norman?

Norman: Yes.

Ethel: Dear Chelsea. I’m so glad you’re home.

Chelsea: Oh, God. I thought we’d never get here. We rented a car that explodes every forty miles.

Norman: You rented a car?

Chelsea: Yes, in Boston.

Norman: Hmmmm. What sort of car is it?

Chelsea: Oh, I don’t know … red, I think.

Ethel: (so happy!) Ooh! A red car!

Norman: No, I meant, what sort of make is it?

Chelsea: Ummm, I don’t know.

Ethel: She doesn’t know, dear. It doesn’t matter.

Norman: Of course it doesn’t matter. I was just curious.

Chelsea: (insulted) Well, I should have looked, I guess. It’s ummm, very ugly and it breaks down a lot.

Norman: Ugly and breaks down a lot. That sounds like a Nash. I bet they bought up all the old Nashes all over the country and are renting them to unsuspecting customers.

Chelsea: I’ll bet.

Norman: I’ll bet, too.

Chelsea. Well. Okay. Well. The old house looks exactly the same.

Norman: The old house is exactly the same. Just older … like its inhabitants.

Chelsea: Well …

Ethel: Where’s your friend? You did bring your friend, didn’t you?

Chelsea: I knew I was forgetting something.

Norman: That’s still on then, huh?

Chelsea: As far as I know … it was two minutes ago. I may have been deserted. It wouldn’t be the first time. Are you two ready?

Ethel: Of course! We can’t wait!

Chelsea: Great. (calling off) Hey! Come on in! Nobody’s going to bite you … I hope. Mommy and Norman, this is Billy Ray.

Billy: How ya doin’?

Norman: You seem awfully young to be a dentist.

Billy: I’m a midget.

Norman: Oh, really?

Chelsea: This is Billy Ray, Junior.

Norman. Oh. I’m Norman Thayer, Junior.

Chelsea: His dad is out trying to soothe the car.

Ethel: What a nice surprise! Hello, Billy. You can call me “Ethel” and you can call Norman “Norman.”

Chelsea: I like your logic, Mommy. I better go see if Bill’s gotten lost. He was trying to turn around. He probably drove into the lake.

Ethel: It’s so dark outside. It never used to be this dark.

Billy: I hear you turned eighty today.

Norman: Is that what you heard?

Billy: Yeah. That’s really old.

Norman: Oh? You should meet my father.

Billy: Your father’s alive?

Norman: No. But you should meet him.

5. Poor Bill – he has to make small-talk with Norman. Bill is polite and sincere, but not completely comfortable. Norman loves it.

Bill: So. You’re a baseball fan, huh?

Norman: No.

Bill: Oh. I like baseball. I like the Dodgers.

Norman: Oh really? They moved out west somewhere, didn’t they?

Bill: Uh, yes. To Los Angeles … some years ago.

Norman: They still in the big league?

Bill: Oh, yes. They’re a real powerhouse in the National League West.

Norman: Well, bless their little hearts.

Bill: Uh … how does it feel to turn eighty?

Norman: It feels twice as bad as it did turning forty.

Bill: Oh, well, I know what that’s like.

Norman: Do you?

Bill: Yes. I turned forty five years ago. I’m forty-five now. (This is painful) I … love your house.

Norman: It’s not for sale.

Bill: Oh no, I wasn’t thinking about buying it. I just like it.

Norman: Oh. Me, too.

Bill: It has a charming ambiance.

Norman: Does it?

Bill: Yes. Norman?

Norman: Yes?

Bill: May I call you “Norman?”

Norman: I believe you just did.

Bill: I don’t want to press.

Norman: No.

Bill: I’ll call you “Norman” then.

Norman: Fine.

Bill: What shall I call your wife?

Norman: How about “Ethel?” That’s her name. Ethel Thayer. Thoundeth ath ith I’m lithping, doethn’t it? Ethel Thayer. It almost kept her from marrying me. She wanted me to change my last name to hers.

Bill: What was that?

Norman: I don’t remember. Ethel’s all the need to know. That’s the name she goes by.

Bill: I never knew. Chelsea always calls her “Mommy.”

Norman: There’s a reason for that.

Bill: But she calls you “Norman.”

Norman: There’s a reason for that, too. I am her father, if you’re trying to figure it out. I’m her father but not her daddy. Ethel is her mommy and I’m Norman.

#6. Billy has acclimated to living on the lake. He enjoys his time with Norman and even has taken on some of his mannerisms. Norman has a new lease on life, as well.

Billy: Good morning, loonies.

Ethel: Oh yes, very funny.

Billy: Let’s get it in gear, Norman.

Norman: Watch it!

Ethel: You two will be sorry when it begins to pour.

Norman: It’s a chance we have to take. Billy still has to catch one more biggie. It’s starting to depress him that I’ve out-biggied him.

Billy: Today’s the day. I can feel it.

Ethel: What’s in the bag, Billy?

Billy: This bag? Food. Good food.

Ethel: Not my Toll House cookies by any chance?

Billy: Uh, some.

Ethel: Hand it over.

Norman: (to Ethel) Spoilsport. (to Billy) Oh, well. We can always eat raw fish the way the Orientals do.

Billy: Blechhh.

Norman: Of course, you may never get any taller. Got a book with you?

Billy: Yes. A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.

Norman: Ah.

Ethel: You’ll find a few cookies in there, and some biscuits, along with two tuna fish sandwiches each, a thermos of milk, and a nice jar of fresh raspberries, just picked.

Billy: Smooth move.

Norman: Right on, cool breeze. That’s jive talk, Ethel.

Ethel: That’s nice.

Norman: Goodbye, woman. Hold it! Where’s my chair? I can’t fish without my chair.

Billy: It’s in the back by the picnic table.

Norman: What’s it doing there?

Billy: You were sitting on it yesterday while you watched me clean the fish.

Norman: Ohhhh.

Ethel: Tsk. Has he been making you clean those stupid fish?

Billy: Yeah.

Norman: That’s right, Ethel. He cleans the stupid ones and I clean the smart ones. Fortunately, the smart ones are too smart to get caught. That’s why they’re in schools. Ha ha!

Ethel: Oh, Lord.

Billy: You’re really becoming a nitwit, aren’t you?

Norman: A nitwit? Hear that, Ethel? This poor child is starting to talk like an old lady. Get my chair boy.

Ethel: (with some sort of motion) Norman, his hands are full.

Billy: (perfectly copying Ethel’s motion) That’s right, my hands are full.

#7. Chelsea and Ethel are close, but Ethel has grown weary of Chelsea’s attitudes.

Chelsea: Look at you. You’ve had that robe for as long as I can remember.

Ethel: It looks that way, doesn’t it?

Chelsea: It looks great.

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.

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 make a very nice daughter.

Chelsea: Does Billy put the worm on the hook all 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! (new subject) Thank you for taking care of Billy.

Ethel: Thank you. I’m glad it gives us another chance to see you. Plus, it’s been a tremendous education. Norman’s vocabulary will never be the same.

Chelsea: Look at this – Chelsea on the swim team. That was a great exercise in 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 1800s.

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: (loudly) 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: That old son of a bitch happens to be my husband!