

CHELSEA. Have Billy and Norman gotten along all right?

ETHEL. Billy is the happiest thing that's happened to Norman since Kennedy. 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 an ideal daughter. We couldn't have asked for more.

*Chelsea absorbs that, not satisfied. She ranges on.*

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 the 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. Thank you for taking care of Billy.

ETHEL. Thank you. I'm thrilled that it gives us another chance to see you. Plus, it's been a tremendous education. Norman's vocabulary will never be the same.

CHELSEA. (*Picking up a picture.*) Look at this: Chelsea on the swim team. That was a legendary 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 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. 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 singularly 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 her.*

ETHEL. That old son of a bitch happens to be my husband.

*Chelsea turns away, wiping her eyes. Ethel shakes her head.*

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