

Passing (Draft 05)

By

John Sowalsky

Copyright © 2017-2019 by John L. Sowalsky. All Rights Reserved.
john.sowalsky@aol.com
(240) 550-9184
169 Lamont Lane
Gaithersburg, MD 20878

Cast of Characters

<u>Ruth</u> :	A 28-year-old Jewish woman in a concentration camp in Nazi Germany.
<u>Hannah</u> :	The pregnant 21-year-old wife of a Nazi Officer.
<u>Gretchen</u> :	Hannah's daughter; age 43, later 75.
<u>Emma</u> :	Ruth's daughter; age 41, later 73.

Scene

Ruth and Emma's house in West Hartford, CT, and a Nazi concentration camp in Germany.

Time

Spring of 1988 (Hartford), the spring of 1945 (Germany), and the spring of circa 2020 (Hartford).

ACT I

Scene I

The entryway and living room of the home shared by RUTH and EMMA, a modest post-WWII, single-family rambler in West Hartford, CT, which has become slightly run down over the years. A hallway and doors lead offstage to a kitchen, a dining room, etc. It is late morning, the day before Passover, Friday, April 1st, 1988. It is a cold morning and a fire is burning in the fireplace. RUTH has died several days earlier, and EMMA is surrounded by boxes which she has been rummaging through. GRETCHEN, still in her coat, has evidently just arrived, and stands tentatively by the front door, as if hesitant to enter the room.

EMMA

Take your coat off. Stay a while.

GRETCHEN

I thought I'd run those errands soon.

EMMA

They can wait. Come in for a bit. I haven't seen you in two years.

GRETCHEN

It's always so cold in this house. You should've had it insulated by now.

EMMA

Money was tight.

GRETCHEN

What else is new?

GRETCHEN enters the room, slings her coat over a chair, and warms herself by the fire.

EMMA

So. How are my brother-in-law and niece?

GRETCHEN

Oh, David's fine. Rachel is just over a bout of strep. But the doctor said she was OK to travel.

EMMA

You're staying with the in-laws?

(CONTINUED)

GRETCHEN

Yeah. I dropped them off there.

(She gestures at the boxes and bundles strewn about.)

No sense in dragging Rachel over for all this.

EMMA

How are David's folks?

GRETCHEN

You know how they get. A new ache and pain every other day. But they're all right. Better than Mama.

EMMA

What about you, Gretch? How are you doing?

GRETCHEN

Feh. You know me. Solid as a rock. What about you, Emmy? You gonna be OK?

EMMA

Look at all this! I can't believe some of the crap Mama saved.

(She holds up a scrap of paper.)

A receipt for dry cleaning. From 1961.

(She holds up an envelope.)

An empty envelope postmarked July 17th, 1962.

(She throws these items into the fire.)

God forbid we should find a will in here.

GRETCHEN

Well don't look at me. You're the one who's been living with her.

EMMA

I didn't think... I mean I --

GRETCHEN

I know, Em. It caught everyone off guard. I don't mean to be a pill. You know how I am. I don't get sad, I get cranky.

EMMA

Well, there's still a mountain of boxes to go through. Maybe something will turn up.

GRETCHEN

And if it doesn't?

EMMA

I don't know. I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.

GRETCHEN

You always say you'll cross that bridge when you get to it. But you have to hit the road if you want to cross bridges.

EMMA

Someone had to take care of her after Daddy died. You certainly weren't going to.

GRETCHEN

I already had a life.

EMMA

So I don't count among the living?

GRETCHEN

You know what I mean. I was married. I had moved away. Bought a house. I was already a mother.

EMMA

You could have brought her to live with you.

GRETCHEN

I tried! You know I did.

A lugubrious pause in the dialogue in which EMMA continues to rummage through the box of paperwork in front of her, examining its contents a piece at a time, and consigning most of them to the fire. GRETCHEN finally pulls a stool in front of the fireplace, drags another box over, sits, opens the box, and begins doing likewise. She pulls out an old photo and holds it up for EMMA to see.

EMMA

Florida. Is there a date?

GRETCHEN examines the back of the photo.

GRETCHEN

November '57.

EMMA

30 years! How did we ever find the time to get so old?

GRETCHEN

Speak for yourself. I'm just getting started.
(Charged pause.)

Damn it, Em, it's not too late. We're not old. You're not old. You can still squeeze a life out of it. When was the last time you went out on a date?

EMMA

You think I don't try, maybe? I'm a tough match, Gretch, you know that.

GRETCHEN

Tough match my eye. When, Em? When was your last date?

Pause. EMMA sighs.

EMMA

Eight months ago? I don't know, maybe ten?

GRETCHEN

Ten months! You're making my point for me. You need to get out and circulate!

EMMA

I'm not a penny.

GRETCHEN

Oh, honey, you know what I mean. Mama is gone. You need to live a little now. Don't become just another old school marm.

(She approaches EMMA and pulls her hair back.)

You're the one who got her good looks. Lord knows I didn't. You should use them!

EMMA

I don't know, Gretch. I can't think straight about the future right now. Can't we just focus on the task at hand?

GRETCHEN

Which? Mama or Passover?

EMMA

Both. That reminds me: Aren't there some sort of special rules when it falls on Shabbos?

GRETCHEN

Does it really matter? You should see the Haggadah we use. It looks like a comic book. Even then we end up skipping half of it. Rachel won't sit still through the whole thing.

EMMA

I just thought, in honor of Mama.

GRETCHEN

Knock yourself out. But don't expect your niece to cooperate.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

I'm sure it's in the Haggadah we have -- I have -- here. That reminds me: You might want to pick up some grape juice for Rachel. All I have is Manischewitz.

GRETCHEN

I think she'll be OK drinking a few sips of wine. She's not so little anymore.

(Pause.)

Well, at least it'll be the last Passover in this dreary old house.

EMMA

We don't know that.

GRETCHEN

Even if you do stay -- and I'm not saying you will -- or even that you should -- but even if you do stay, surely it's easier for you to come to us than the other way around.

EMMA

And what about David's parents?

GRETCHEN

You can all drive down together. It's still easier than packing up Rachel and squeezing into that little bungalow.

EMMA

I suppose you're right, but...

GRETCHEN

But what?

EMMA

It just never occurred to me to hold it anywhere else. We grew up around that table.

GRETCHEN

What's the big deal? We only make it up here once every two or three years anyways. You don't have to come down every year if you don't feel like it. You can always have it here on the off years.

EMMA

Right. By myself.

GRETCHEN

What about the synagogue? You must know people there. Besides, what if we sell...

GRETCHEN has let this slip out unintentionally.

EMMA

Who said we're selling?

GRETCHEN

We need to face facts, Emma. If we can't find a will, we'll have to come to some sort of agreement about the house. Are you telling me you can pay me for half of it? Do you know how much the lot alone is worth in today's market?

EMMA

Why are you so determined to sell the house?

GRETCHEN

Look how run down it is! Someone will snatch it up for a fortune, tear it down, and put up something with... with insulation, for crying out loud! And we'll each walk away with a nice chunk of change in our pockets. That's why.

EMMA

So it holds no sentimental value for you?

GRETCHEN

Not much after I saw what properties are going for around here.

EMMA

What am I supposed to do, then?

GRETCHEN

Buy a condo. They're going up all over the place. Less upkeep, more convenient location, plus you'll have change to spare.

(Another long pause.)

You really want to stay here? In this dump?

EMMA

This dump is my home, Gretchen! Not everyone can live in a shiny steel and glass mansion like you.

GRETCHEN

Please! I do not live in a mansion!

EMMA

Five bedrooms? A three-car garage? Sitting on two and a half acres?

GRETCHEN

It's not a mansion.

EMMA

Then it might as well be.

GRETCHEN

Look, David and I worked hard for what we have.

EMMA

That's not what I meant. But you know how I am. I never wanted a castle, just a white picket fence. Well this is my white picket fence. I don't understand why you're so determined to take it away from me. My heart is in here, not some condo across town!

GRETCHEN

Listen to me, Emma. You've always been a bit naive, and as long as Mama was alive it wasn't my place to disillusion you. But unless you can turn up a will which states otherwise, this house belongs to the two of us, and I have as much say as you do in what happens to it. It's not my fault that you missed every boat in the harbor while I was sailing the seven seas. It's not my fault that you didn't get married, didn't have kids. It's not my fault that you chose to stay in this dreary backwater for the sake of a woman who could just as well have fended for herself.

EMMA

That's enough! You have no idea what it's been like.

GRETCHEN

Don't make yourself out to be the martyr, Emma. You had every chance and opportunity I had. And then some! You were the youngest.

EMMA

What's that supposed to mean?

GRETCHEN

It means that you were always the favorite.

EMMA

That's not true.

GRETCHEN

Oh ho! You know damn well that it is. Why do you think I left as soon as I could? Why do you think I never looked back? Do you really think the reason I only visited once every few years was because I couldn't? No, it's because Mama never could stand the sight of me so long as she had her precious angel by her side. Some angel! Look at yourself, Em! It's no wonder you haven't had a date in a year! I meant it when I said you got Mama's looks. But what do you do with them? Hide them

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GRETCHEN (cont'd)

under these frowzy schmattas! I don't think you've changed your hair style in 20 years. No makeup. Not so much as a necklace or a bracelet.

EMMA

Enough! That's enough, Gretchen! At least I'm not vain! Or greedy or desperate for status or whatever it is you've been chasing! At least I'm not... Damn it, can't you understand what I'm going through?

EMMA breaks down.

GRETCHEN

I'm... I'm sorry, Emmy. Really, I am. I miss her too. I do. I'm just being my usual thorny self. Let's set all this aside for now. I need to get the shopping done or it won't be much of a Seder. And you need to clear up this mess so you can be Aunt Emmy tomorrow. At least that much we can agree on. Right?

EMMA nods in agreement.

GRETCHEN (CONT.)

Don't cry, Emmy. We'll... we'll figure something out. The truth is that... Well, the sad truth is that we took some bad losses this year. I mean really bad losses. We may have to move ourselves. So please, Emmy. Don't judge me too harshly. I guess I'm just a fool who doesn't know what to say or when to say it.

EMMA

I had no idea, Gretch. Look, if things are that bad, then maybe --

GRETCHEN

No. Let's not talk about it now. Just, please, forgive me, Emmy. I don't want to fight. Let's just have as nice a Passover as we can and worry about the rest of it afterward. Agreed?

They hug.

EMMA

Agreed.

GRETCHEN pulls back and checks her watch.

GRETCHEN

I really should get a move on.

(She puts her coat back on and moves toward the door.)

Maybe I will pick up some grape juice while I'm at it.

EMMA

Drive safely. And hurry back.

GRETCHEN exits through the front door. EMMA continues to sort through the box of papers, examining items and tossing several of them into the fireplace. She finds a sealed envelope, opens it, and begins to read. The following voice-over occurs as EMMA reads and the scene shifts; Scene I segues directly into Scene II without a break.

RUTH (V.O.)

My dearest Gretchen. There's something I've needed to tell you for a long time, but I've been afraid to. I thought maybe if I wrote it all down that would make it easier. As you know, your father and I both survived the Holocaust. We never talked about it much, because, after all, what was there to say? We were always very grateful to have survived, but even between us, in private, your father and I rarely discussed it. Sometimes the past is best left behind. But sometimes it needs to be acknowledged. This is one of those times. I can still remember Passover, 1945 as if it was yesterday.

Scene II

The entryway, living room, and adjacent dining area of a small apartment just outside a Nazi concentration camp in Germany on the evening of Passover, Thursday, March 29th, 1945. A door leads offstage to the kitchen. It is evident from the decor that this is the residence of a proud and loyal Nazi. In fact, the apartment is shared by the Commandant of the concentration camp and his wife, HANNAH, age 21, who is 9 months pregnant. She is feeding wood into the fireplace. She calls to someone in the kitchen.

HANNAH

Do you need a hand?

RUTH (O.S.)

No. I'll be right in. And stop feeding the fire. You should sit and rest.

HANNAH

That's all I ever do anymore. I'm tired of sitting. I'm tired of resting.

RUTH (O.S.)

Soon enough you'll miss it.

(CONTINUED)

HANNAH

Not soon enough for me.

RUTH enters, carrying a tray with food. She is a 28-year-old Jewish prisoner who has been assigned to care for HANNAH during the final months of her pregnancy. Her clothes are clean and neat, but drab and somewhat threadbare. This characterizes her general appearance. She sets the tray on the table, where HANNAH sits, places various dishes in front of HANNAH, and serves her. She then crosses the room and tends the fire.

RUTH

This room is always so drafty. It's not good for you in your condition. Such a cold spring, too. Karl really should move you into better quarters.

HANNAH

This is the best he can do so close to the camp.

RUTH

He's the Commandant. Can't he have better quarters built? There's certainly enough labor to handle the job.

HANNAH

The war is... a drain on resources. We have to make due with what we have.

RUTH

He should have sent you back to Berlin.

HANNAH

He would never hear of it. Insists that I stay close. He wants to see the baby as soon as she... I mean as soon as he's born. What can I do? It's my job to obey. Even the Bible teaches that.

RUTH

Whose Bible?

HANNAH

Oh, Ruth, I'm sorry. I always forget.

RUTH

I wish I could afford to forget. Oh, it's alright, dear. Have some of the potatoes. They're good for you. And what if it's a girl? Will he love her just the same?

HANNAH

You think so badly of Karl. But if you knew him like I do, you'd see. He has such a tender side.

RUTH

(Gesturing outside the apartment.)

Tell that to them.

HANNAH

I'm sure it's all for the best. Think of the danger if they were out in the streets now. They'd be killed by mobs. Or bombs. Either way, I'm sure we're doing the right thing.

RUTH

Is that what the Commandant has told you?

HANNAH

Ruth, you must understand. We have to preserve the purity of our blood. Would you and your people do any less?

RUTH

Hannah, I don't want to argue with you tonight. I'm too tired and too cold.

HANNAH

I'm sorry. Here. Take some bread, won't you?

RUTH

No, I can't.

HANNAH

Of course you can.

RUTH

No. I really can't. It's Passover.

HANNAH

I don't understand.

RUTH

It's one of our traditions. On the Passover we commemorate the Exodus from Egypt by eating only unleavened bread.

HANNAH

But surely you can make an exception this once.

RUTH

No. Really. I'm not trying to martyr myself. How about this: Give me a piece of potato, yes?

(CONTINUED)

HANNAH passes the dish to RUTH who places a potato on a plate. She offers a bottle to RUTH.

HANNAH

Have some wine.

RUTH pours some wine into a cup. She holds the cup and bows her head.

RUTH

Baruch ata Adonai, Elohainu melekh ha'olam, bo're p'ri hagafen.

RUTH drinks.

HANNAH

That's beautiful. What does it mean?

RUTH

Blessed is the Lord our God, Creator of the universe, Who gives us the fruit of the vine.

HANNAH

Why, you're saying grace, Ruth! I had no idea the Jews said grace!

RUTH

People are more alike than they are different, my friend.

HANNAH

Perhaps. But don't let anyone else hear you saying that. You've been a blessing to me these past few months. I don't know how I would have managed without you.

RUTH

You would have managed. Someone else would have helped you instead.

HANNAH

But it wouldn't have been you. I do hope Karl will let you stay on after the baby comes.

RUTH

Well, I must admit, I much prefer this to the alternative. At least I get to taste a potato from time to time. Or some bread and butter. Or a cup of wine.

HANNAH

We're not all so bad, are we?

RUTH

You're very young, Hannah. Someday you'll understand.

HANNAH

I'm not a child.

RUTH

No. You're not. And that's why I never hide the truth from you. But my truth and yours seem to be two different things.

HANNAH

Oh! He's kicking again!

RUTH

Or she.

HANNAH

Or she. Either way -- he or she -- will have two loving parents, I can assure you of that.

RUTH

From your lips to God's ear, Hannah.

They eat in silence for a few moments.

HANNAH

What are you thinking?

RUTH

Oh, nothing. The usual rumors. You know. Everyone wants to see an end to the war so badly they'll believe anything.

HANNAH

And what do they say?

RUTH

Well, they say that things are not going very well for Germany.

HANNAH

Oh, but that's not true, I assure you!

RUTH

Why hasn't the wood pile been replenished for over two weeks, then?

HANNAH

Because spring is here.

RUTH

You could have fooled me.

HANNAH

Besides, we don't want to waste our resources, even if we do have plenty of them. I hear they do the same in England and America, too. Waste not, want not, isn't that what they say?

RUTH

I suppose you're right. But I'd think the Commandant could at least provide his pregnant bride with an adequate supply of firewood. Or enough oil to run the furnace.

HANNAH

It's like I said, Ruth. We're just trying to conserve.

RUTH

Or is it more than that?

HANNAH

If the war ends soon, I'm certain it will be with Germany's victory.

RUTH

And what do you suppose will happen to me then? Do you really think I'll be allowed to serve as a nursemaid?

HANNAH

Certainly. If I request it. I don't see why not.

RUTH

Because, if Germany wins the war, you'll have a fine, upstanding German nursemaid. Why wouldn't you? How many of my people have been put to death in the camp? Hundreds? Thousands? And how many more have died of disease, starvation, exhaustion, accidents? No, my dear, if Germany wins the war the victors won't spare the likes of me. Of that I'm sure.

HANNAH

Please, Ruth, no more. This started out such a happy evening.

RUTH

Life limits our happiness, Hannah. When you get a little older --

HANNAH

Yes, I know. When I get a little older I'll understand. Well, we'll see. But for now let's eat and drink and try to find what happiness we can here, today. I'm certain tomorrow will take care of itself.

RUTH

Well, then, another cup of wine, perhaps.

RUTH pours another cup. They raise their cups to toast.

HANNAH

To happiness.

RUTH

No, dear. To peace!

They drink. Lights dim to the sounds of airplanes, guns, bombs exploding, people shouting. This serves as a segue to the next scene.

Scene III

HANNAH's apartment, 12 days later, very early in the morning. HANNAH -- who has obviously given birth in the interim -- and RUTH are both dressed in night clothes, evidently having been awakened prematurely. RUTH is preparing tea and toast, while HANNAH stokes the fire.

HANNAH

What a fool I've been. Here they are, right at our doorstep. You know, up until just yesterday I truly thought we would win this war. I believed the Reich would stand for 1000 years, just like they told us.

RUTH

Come and eat, dear. You need to keep up your strength. Here, look, I've saved some marmalade.

HANNAH

What sort of future do you honestly think I have?

RUTH

You have a beautiful little girl. That's your future.

HANNAH

The words sound nice, but I can't see the road ahead.

RUTH

The fog will lift. Until then, one step at a time. Slowly. Carefully.

HANNAH

I've run out of road. There's no bridge. No way to pass over the abyss. Only a cliff. A sheer drop.

(CONTINUED)

RUTH

Nonsense. It only seems that way. If that were true, I wouldn't have survived these past three years.

HANNAH

You don't understand --

RUTH

How much have you understood, Hannah? What do you think life has been like for me? I'm not just talking about these past three years. More than a decade of my life has been stolen from me. From my people. My entire youth spent being persecuted. If I can survive that, you can survive this bump in the road.

HANNAH

Bump in the road? I'm telling you, Ruth, the road is out!

RUTH

Then turn around. Choose another direction. Cut a path. As soon as you gave birth, you gave up your right to give up.

HANNAH

That's not how Karl sees it.

RUTH

What do you mean?

HANNAH

They'll take him into custody and put him on trial. And they'll probably hang him. I tell you this, Ruth, he's not going to wait around for that.

RUTH

He's going to make a run for it?

HANNAH

Run? Run where? The Reich has fallen. Even if they haven't reached Berlin yet, it's over. Any fool -- even a fool such as I -- can see that. Where will he run? To the Russians? To the Americans? And where will that leave me? The wife of an infamous Nazi war criminal? My daughter marked for life? No. I see no road ahead. And neither does Karl.

RUTH

The story isn't over yet.

HANNAH

It is for us.

RUTH

And what is that supposed to mean?

HANNAH

We have... pills we can take. Cyanide. We've both agreed. It's the best solution. Ruth, Karl didn't just go along with the Reich. He helped to lead it. Can't you understand? We either take our own lives now or they'll be taken from us, one way or another, and after that much more pain.

RUTH

This is foolishness. I won't hear any more.

HANNAH

You must. Try... try to put yourself into my place. To see my husband imprisoned and likely put to death. To be reviled for the rest of my life. And to ask my daughter to carry that stain with her? No, I tell you, it's too much.

RUTH

And you would kill your daughter too? Not one week old? As innocent as a lamb? No, I refuse to believe that any mother -- least of all you -- would take the life of her own child.

HANNAH

No, you're right. I won't. I cannot.

RUTH

Then you're going to simply abandon her?

HANNAH

I was hoping... it wouldn't come to that.

A long silence in which the truth slowly dawns on RUTH.

RUTH

Me. You want me to take her. Is that it? You expect me to take her and, what... raise her as my own?

HANNAH

Why not? Who would question it? It's either that or she winds up in an orphanage. Karl tells me the camp will be liberated before the sun sets. No one will expect you to provide documentation. If you claim her as your own, who will know the difference? As the dust settles they'll give you new paperwork. You can return home --

(CONTINUED)

RUTH

Home... Ha! What home? Do you honestly believe I would stay here in Germany? And now I have to move... I don't know... to some foreign country with the extra burden of a baby in my arms? Hannah, no, no. Think this through, I beg you. She needs you. She needs her mother.

HANNAH

Her mother is already dead.

RUTH

Then Karl... he would force you to...

HANNAH hangs her head in affirmation.

RUTH (CONT.)

Truly, I tell you, these men are monsters.

HANNAH

Please, Ruth. You're all the hope I have left in the world.

RUTH

I can't believe there's no other way.

HANNAH

He'll kill me. And maybe the baby, too. I can't take that risk. Please. We haven't much time. He's half crazed as it is. And he'll be here before long. You can take her now and lose yourself in the camp for a couple hours until the Americans break through.

RUTH

And what will you tell Karl? You don't think he'll try to find her?

HANNAH

I'll tell him the truth. What will he do about it? Risk being captured? I hardly think so. Yell at me? Strike me? Kill me? What matter will that make? Please, Ruth. Take her.

RUTH

I... I don't know. This is all very sudden. I have to think.

HANNAH

About what? Don't you love her too?

RUTH

Of course I do, but this changes my whole life in a moment.

(CONTINUED)

HANNAH

Your whole life is changing anyways. And we're running out of time. Ruth. Please. Another hour and we lose the choice.

Another long, charged pause. Then, the sound of a baby crying from off stage.

HANNAH (CONT.)

Please!

RUTH

All right. All right. What choice is there? Bring her to me.

HANNAH

(As she moves offstage.)

I'm coming, my darling. Mama's here, Gretchen!

Lights down to the sounds of fighting: gunfire, gates being broken down, soldiers yelling, all of which slowly fades. This acts as a segue to the next scene.

Scene IV

RUTH and EMMA's living room. EMMA is standing by the fireplace, still reading the letter. GRETCHEN enters from running her errands, bags in hand, and closes the door. She looks across the room at EMMA and surmises that something has transpired.

GRETCHEN

What? Em, what is it?

EMMA is dumbfounded.

GRETCHEN (CONT.)

What is that? Did you find the will? Emma, what is that?

GRETCHEN puts her bags down, but before she can move across the room, EMMA throws the letter into the fireplace.

EMMA

Nothing. It was nothing.

GRETCHEN glares at her. A charged moment. Lights down to the sounds of hatred and unrest: screaming crowds with ugly quotes from white nationalists superimposed on top. This acts as a segue to the final scene.

Scene V

The same living room as in the previous scene, but 30-plus years later. Again we see EMMA surrounded by boxes, but this time she is packing them, as opposed to unpacking them. It is clear that she is preparing to move out. GRETCHEN lets herself in, carrying a bag full of groceries. She sets the bag down, removes her coat, and hangs it up.

GRETCHEN

How's it coming along?

EMMA

Um.

GRETCHEN

Um? That doesn't tell me much.

EMMA

Huh? Oh. I'm sorry. I guess I'm a little lost in my thoughts.

GRETCHEN

You OK?

EMMA

Yeah. I'm fine. I just... you know. It's surreal. The thought of leaving. This house has been my life.

GRETCHEN

The movers are all set for Friday morning, bright and early. I called them earlier to confirm.

GRETCHEN takes the bag into the kitchen, offstage, and returns as EMMA is finishing the following line.

EMMA

You didn't have to do that. They already sent me an e-mail, a text message, and a voice mail. I'm surprised they didn't send a carrier pigeon while they were at it.

GRETCHEN

I'm sorry, Em.

EMMA

For calling them?

GRETCHEN

No. I'm sorry that we're leaving. I know what this place has meant to you. To both of us.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Oh, it's all right. Honestly. Look at the two of us. We're hardly in any condition to maintain it. We should've moved out five years ago. Maybe ten. We can't keep hiring people to come in and fix every little thing.

GRETCHEN

Eric doesn't mind helping us out.

EMMA

Is this what it really means to be sisters? To have the same argument a thousand times over until a new one comes along to take its place?

GRETCHEN

I'm not arguing.

(She flops down into a chair.)

I'm too tired to argue. And too damn old.

EMMA

You have some miles left on you. Look, Rachel and Eric have their hands full. They don't need to battle three feet of snow to drive clear across town on our account. Besides, what grandmother wouldn't want to see her granddaughter on a daily basis?

GRETCHEN

She's at that age. Another year or two and she's won't care about her worn out old Nana anymore. Part of me wishes I had moved in with them the day she was born.

EMMA

You should have told them to move into a bigger house sooner.

GRETCHEN

Still, I'm luckier than most. At least they didn't move across the country. Not many families that stick together the way we have.

EMMA

Rachel has always been her mother's little girl.

GRETCHEN

After David died...

Unspoken thoughts hang in the air for a long moment as EMMA continues to pack. GRETCHEN soon grabs a box, some old newspapers, and starts to help packing up glassware and china. Throughout the scene they continue to pack.

EMMA

Wait, not those. I set them aside for tonight.

GRETCHEN sets a stack of dishes aside.

GRETCHEN

Anyways, Em. You know I'm no good with all the mushy stuff. But I never did thank you for... you know... letting me move in. After all the grief I put you through.

EMMA

What grief? We found the will, didn't we? And it all turned out for the best, too.

GRETCHEN

Still. I don't think I ever really thanked you. I was so angry when he died that I couldn't find gratitude anywhere.

EMMA

You thanked me well enough. Don't you understand that, Gretch? You owe me nothing. Nothing at all.

GRETCHEN

But after all the hell I put you through --

EMMA

So you tried to convince me to sell the place. Big deal.

GRETCHEN

The awful things I said about Mama.

EMMA

You felt like she had favored me. She probably did.

GRETCHEN

But it was only right. I mean, you were right.

EMMA

About what?

GRETCHEN

When you said that I had run from her.

EMMA

If I recall correctly, you were the one who said that.

GRETCHEN

Did I?

EMMA

Well, it's all water under the bridge now. Or do you want to rewind and open up a few more old arguments again?

GRETCHEN

Damn it, Emma, why are you always so... forgiving! It's exasperating! Why couldn't you ever shout at me? Say something nasty?

EMMA

I seem to recall getting hot under the collar once or twice.

GRETCHEN

Well, maybe once. You're so damn agreeable.

EMMA

I agree.

GRETCHEN throws a wad of paper at EMMA.

EMMA (CONT.)

At any rate, far be it from me to say I told you so.

GRETCHEN

You just did.

EMMA

Do you still think I'm so forgiving?

A pause. They stare at one another for a moment.

EMMA (CONT.)

What do you suppose would've happened. Suppose there hadn't been a will? Or suppose we hadn't found it? What if you had brow-beaten me into selling?

GRETCHEN

What if, what if, what if?

EMMA

But isn't that what you're really asking? Are you seeking absolution, or just condemnation? Do you really want to know what I think, or are you just playing at it?

GRETCHEN

I've never heard you like this, Emmy.

EMMA

Haven't you? Or maybe you never stopped to listen. Just because I don't raise my voice doesn't mean I don't

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

EMMA (cont'd)

have a voice. You want the whole world to shout and scream and pitch a fit. That's the only way you hear. But if I might be bold enough to speak for some small part of the world, not all of us are built that way.

GRETCHEN

Would you rather I had not moved in?

EMMA

No! No, that's not what I mean. I'm grateful you moved in. I think it saved us. Our family. I think it helped draw us together, closer than we could have been otherwise. When David died, you could have gone in any direction you chose. When you came here that sent a message. It was... healing. But I still don't understand why.

GRETCHEN

Why what?

EMMA

Why here? You were still plenty young enough. You could have moved on. Remarried. Picked up the pieces without crawling back here.

GRETCHEN

I did not crawl!

EMMA

I'm sorry. But you know what I mean.

GRETCHEN

I was... so angry at David.

EMMA

It wasn't his fault.

GRETCHEN

I know that. It was just one of those things. One day you're fine, the next they're rushing you to the emergency room. It's not that he died. It was the mess he left behind for me to clean up. Between the debt and the lapsed life insurance.

EMMA

I guess I expected you to respond with defiance, not defeat. You've always been so feisty.

GRETCHEN

I wasn't angry about the money, and it wasn't defeat. Not exactly. It was Rachel. If it had just been me it would've been so much easier. But he was always the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GRETCHEN (cont'd)

soft touch with her. I was always the hard-ass, the disciplinarian. When she fell down and scraped her knee, it was always David that she cried for. He was the one who would soothe her. He was the one who sang the lullabies, not me with this croaking reed organ of a voice. What could I do?

EMMA

So that's it. You came running here. To Aunt Emmy. I don't know why I never saw it before. Of course. It all makes sense now.

GRETCHEN

Are you angry?

EMMA

Angry? Are you kidding? You blessed me. All those maternal instincts I had, but no child of my own. And you knew. You knew that I would be the one she'd run to when --

GRETCHEN

When she scraped her knee.

EMMA

When she scraped her knee. No, I'm not angry, Gretchen. I'm grateful. You gave me a gift I might never have had otherwise. "Aunt" is such a nebulous word. An aunt can be someone you only see once every three years. Or it can be someone you see a dozen times a day.

GRETCHEN

Bringing her to you was as close to being a nurturer as I get. So, after all that, what did I care about men? I certainly didn't need one to take care of me. All I cared about was --

EMMA

Was Rachel. Yes, I see it now.

GRETCHEN

And the irony is that now I'm going to live with her, but you're going to live on your own.

EMMA

Gretch, it's still only across town from you.

GRETCHEN

Still --

EMMA

No. I really mean it. I don't want you to give it another thought. Everything has worked out just as well as it could have. Especially under the circumstances. I feel as if I've had a full, rich life. And there's still more life to live. I hope to see Miriam grown and married some day. It's funny. 30 years ago you couldn't force me into a condo. And now you couldn't force me to stay here. No, no. It's time. Staying here any longer? Now that would be the death of me.

GRETCHEN

Well you're going to have to tolerate us dragging you out of your Shangri-La.

EMMA

I'd expect nothing less.

GRETCHEN

You didn't pack away the Kiddush cup, did you? I set it on the counter in the kitchen.

EMMA

Give me a little credit. I may be old, but I'm not senile.

GRETCHEN

We should think about taking a break and setting the table soon. Might as well preheat the oven while we're at it.

GRETCHEN makes as if to exit into the kitchen, but EMMA puts her off.

EMMA

You sit. I can get it.

EMMA exits to the kitchen.

GRETCHEN

You know, Em, you never did tell me.

EMMA (O.S.)

Tell you what?

GRETCHEN

Oh, come on. You know.

EMMA (O.S.)

You're going to have to be a little more specific, I'm afraid.

(CONTINUED)

GRETCHEN

That day. You know. When I thought you had burned the will?

The shattering of glass is heard offstage.

EMMA (O.S.)

Damn it!

EMMA enters holding up the broken pieces of a Kiddush cup. GRETCHEN gasps.

GRETCHEN

Mama's Kiddush cup!

EMMA

(On the verge of tears.)

Oh, Gretchen, I'm so sorry.

GRETCHEN

Oh, Emmy. Don't cry. It's just a thing, after all. I don't know. Maybe we can glue it?

EMMA

We can't glue this! Are you crazy? Just look at it. It's ruined. It's gone! It was there on the counter, I turned, and I clipped it with my elbow. And now. Damn it!

EMMA throws the broken pieces into a nearby wastebasket. GRETCHEN retrieves the broken pieces -- which are large and few in number -- and sets them aside.

GRETCHEN

Emma! Calm down. What has gotten into you? Just a minute ago you were happy. What the hell is the matter? It's just a cheap old cup. Get a hold of yourself!

EMMA

Oh, I don't know. I guess I'm just on edge because of the move.

GRETCHEN

I thought you were happy about it!

EMMA

I am. I guess it's the fact that it's the end of an era. A new chapter. At our age, you wonder if each new chapter might be the last. I guess I'm a little stressed out.

(CONTINUED)

GRETCHEN

But --

EMMA

Yes, I am glad to be moving. But it is still a stress.
A positive stress, but a stress nonetheless.

GRETCHEN

Do you want me to go get things ready?

EMMA

No, there's not much left to do at this point. I
already set the table. The oven is heating.

(She checks the time.)

What time are they supposed to be here?

GRETCHEN

Rachel said a little after six.

EMMA

Well, we have a while yet. I'll put the bird in in
about 20 minutes and then we can start with the rest of
the prep around 5:30.

GRETCHEN

Maybe you should sit down and take a break. How about a
drink?

EMMA

Yes. Maybe a glass of wine.

GRETCHEN

I'll get it.

*GRETCHEN exits to the kitchen. EMMA pulls a photo
album out of one of the boxes and begins leafing
through it. She pauses and touches one of the
pages.*

EMMA

(Quietly, to herself.)

Oh, Mama, I miss you.

*GRETCHEN enters with two glasses of wine and hands
one to EMMA.*

GRETCHEN

(Eyeing the picture.)

My God, she was such a beauty. You're the spitting
image, you know.

EMMA

I'm the last.

GRETCHEN

What do you mean? There's Rachel. And Miriam.

EMMA

Of course, of course. I just mean that they don't really look much like Mama.

GRETCHEN

Do we have another one anywhere?

EMMA

Another what?

GRETCHEN

Another cup?

EMMA

No, that was it.

GRETCHEN

I'll call Rach. Maybe the shop at the synagogue is still open.

EMMA

Oh, don't bother her now.

GRETCHEN

(As she's dialing.)

What bother? She's probably bored stiff.

(As she's waiting for RACHEL to answer.)

I remember when I used to take her to those God-awful things. What a snooze!

(Pause.)

Hi, baby, it's Mama. Listen, if you get this message before you leave, see if you can pick up a Kiddush cup for us. Just a cheapie, if you can find one. Grandma's broke and I'd hate to use a paper cup. See you girls soon!

GRETCHEN hangs up.

EMMA

It's nice.

GRETCHEN

What's that?

EMMA

To finally see it all work out for one of us.

(CONTINUED)

GRETCHEN

You and I didn't do that badly, did we?

EMMA

Better than Mama, at any rate. Each generation seems to improve on the last.

GRETCHEN

She was always so sad after Daddy died. I don't think she left Hartford more than four or five times in all those years. She was such an odd old bird.

EMMA

(Chuckling.)

No denying that.

GRETCHEN

Hey, you remember that time we were watching the news and they were interviewing some woman named Gretchen, and she --

EMMA

And she said: "What kind of mother would name her daughter Gretchen?"

They laugh.

GRETCHEN

I was sitting right there next to her.

EMMA

You have to cut her some slack. She wasn't always so clear-headed towards the end.

GRETCHEN

You're telling me.

EMMA

Well, what about the time when she --

GRETCHEN's phone rings. She answers. Throughout the following, RACHEL's voice can be heard, at first very faintly, as if heard by someone sitting next to GRETCHEN -- in point of fact, as EMMA would be hearing it: tinny, muffled, indistinct, being able to make out the voice and its tone, but not the words. As the following progresses, however, the voice at the other end slowly becomes louder and clearer until, at the end, it sounds as if RACHEL is standing in the room with them.

(CONTINUED)

GRETCHEN

Hi Rachel. Did you get my --

(Slight pause during which RACHEL's panicked voice can be heard indistinctly.)

Oh my God, baby, what's wrong?

(Another similar, slightly longer pause. Extreme panic can be heard, but no distinct words yet.)

I don't understand. Slow down. You're at the synagogue and what? Why are you crying, baby?

(RACHEL's response is almost audible, but not quite. A tone of terror creeps into her voice.)

A what?

RACHEL

(Now just barely discernible.)

A gun. Oh, Mama, he's got a gun!

GRETCHEN

Are you sure?

RACHEL

(Just a bit louder, a slight bit less tinny.)

He shot Lauren and Dan. Oh my God! Their blood is all over me. Baby, stay down!

The sound of semi-automatic gunfire can be heard, still a bit tinny, but very distinct. Screams of terror from afar.

GRETCHEN

Can you run? Try to run! Is Miriam with you?

RACHEL

(Much more distinctly now. More gunfire and shouting in the background.)

I can't. There's no way. He's between us and the exit. Oh my God! Oh my God!

GRETCHEN

What about Miriam?

(To EMMA.)

Call the police! Someone's got a gun.

EMMA

At the temple?

GRETCHEN

Yes! Call now!

(CONTINUED)

EMMA grabs her phone and dials.

RACHEL

(Even more clearly.)

She's here with me. We're between two rows of chairs.

GRETCHEN

Is it anyone you know?

RACHEL

(More gunfire. More screaming.)

No! I mean, I don't. Oh, I don't know!

EMMA

Hello? Yes, I'd like to report a shooting.

GRETCHEN

Keep down, baby. Keep your heads down. Oh dear God!

EMMA

Yes, yes. That's right. Yes.

RACHEL

(As clear as a bell. As if she's in the room.)

Oh no. No, no, no, no, no! Please no! Oh no!

GRETCHEN

Baby, what's wrong?

The sounds of RACHEL and MIRIAM screaming. This is cut short by gunfire. Lights out to the sound of GRETCHEN screaming.