

MAKING SOME NOISE

By Claudia I. Haas

RUNNING TIME: 75-85 minutes (approximate)

CAST: 3 (3f)

JULES (f) (30's) eldest of the three sisters, carefully preserving 9/11, lawyer
EMMA (f) (28-30), middle child; still trapped in 9/11; follows disasters carefully,
music teacher

NELL (f) (early 20's) distanced from 9/11 but has never dealt with it
recent college graduate

TIME

September 9-10, today

PLACE

Jules's sun room on Long Island

SYNOPSIS: Juliana, Emma and Nell see Nazis and terrorists around every corner. This is noted as the three sisters gather yet again for the anniversary of their mother's tragic death on 9/11. What is the make-up of a life? Is it reduced to belongings and haphazard memories? They have basically been sitting Shiva every September 11th terror attacks. Juliana's grieving tradition has taken a toll on her marriage. Emma who is always quick to please anyone is ready for a change. Things are turned upside down when Nell returns home and no longer wishes to continue the grieving tradition.

NOTES:

Pauses can be brief. They are not long, "pregnant" pauses. Sisters can be careless with each other and their words. A sister may momentarily be taken aback. The "pause" can be just brief enough for one of the sisters to shake off the line. The length of the pauses are up to the discretion of the director and actors.

The slashes indicate overlapping dialogue.

Music:

For the piano piece on the CD by both the mother and NELL can be original. If you have a license, "Rhapsody in Blue" or a tape of a piano concerto (preferably by a Jewish composer) can be used. (You would need to tape it.) You will need two tapes: one old tape of their mom playing and a new CD that features Nell. The music interludes are important. Take your time with it. Music is the lifeblood of the sisters.

MAKING SOME NOISE**Scene 1, September 9, 4 p.m.**

AT RISE we are in the sunroom of JULES'S Long Island home. Great care has been taken with everything. It is morning. JULES is in the midst of four pairs of shoes. She holds them and strokes them as she listens to a worn tape recording of a piano concerto.

EMMA has come to the back door to be let in. EMMA has two cups of coffee.

EMMA

Jules! JULIANA!

(JULES turns off the music and lets EMMA in.)

JULES

Coming! Thank-you for being early! I desperately need help. Come in! Come in!

EMMA

Did I hear - music?

JULES

It relaxes me.

EMMA

Especially this week.

JULES

It's a necessity.

EMMA

Whoa! Look at your gaggle of shoes!

JULES

They're not mine.

(Pause.)

EMMA

No. they're not. Wow, Jules. All these years.

JULES

Yes.

EMMA

No idea.

JULES

When Dad was giving away Mom's stuff, I – hid them. I couldn't let go. Still can't – just see Mom and her lust for shoes!

EMMA

Most children are happy with their mother's earrings.

JULES

Each pair is a memory.

EMMA

But – they're her memories.

JULES

I'm keeping the memory torch burning. I took them to college, to my first apartment and finally here.

EMMA

There's a chink in your perfect armor – I never would have expected this.

JULES

They're – important to me.

EMMA

I don't want to interfere with whatever it is you have going on here – but maybe it's time -

JULES

- No!

(Pause.)

EMMA

Mom's not in the shoes -

JULES

-you don't know –

EMMA

You know that I *know* when she's around.

JULES

I know you announce crazy, paranormal stuff - like two weeks ago when you decided Mom was in a pastrami sandwich -

EMMA

- Not in the sandwich! Jeez, Jules - way to listen. I said she was at the table with us/

JULES

/Because we were eating pastrami sandwiches!

EMMA

No ... because she loved pastrami sandwiches and was happy to see us together.

JULES

She loved these shoes and we're here together - so she must be here!

EMMA

But - she's not - sorry -

JULES

What do you know?

EMMA

I kind of sort of - do. Haul her shoes around the world - I'm not judging - just saying - these shoes are not calling to Mom. Sorry.

JULES

She adored these shoes!

EMMA

They're not important to her anymore.

JULES

But pastrami is?

EMMA

Us. You and me. Nell. That's what's important to her.

JULES

We're together now -

EMMA

Arguing. Here! Peace! For you - a skinny-mocha-latte-slice-of-heaven-for-you and boring-but-necessary black coffee for me.

JULES

... thank-you ...

EMMA

I can't stay. Sorry.

JULES

O-kay.

(Pause.)

You haven't seen Nell since Hanukkah. What'll she think?

EMMA

She'll be so jetlagged she won't notice I'm missing.

JULES

It would be more welcoming if both her sisters were here.

EMMA

The principal called a meeting to go over the music for the holiday concerts. When the principal asks - it's a command.

JULES

But - school just started. How can you be planning a holiday concert already? Do you even know your students names?

EMMA

I don't know their names but I've gauged their music ability! When you're a music specialist at four elementary schools and each school has two concerts - you start planning the holiday concert in July.

I'm due back at school at five o'clock. I ran over - to tell you in person. Isn't that nice of me? I think it was nice of me. And now, I have to go. Sorry!

JULES

Isn't there another time? If I can make room in my schedule -

EMMA

I'm not a lofty A.D.A.

JULES

There's no such thing as a lofty A.D.A.!

EMMA

I'm sorry that I don't have control over my time. You and David will have to be the welcoming committee - just this once.

JULES

David left for Alaska yesterday.

EMMA

I thought you said he'd come this time.

JULES

He's continuing his fishing tradition while we continue our grieving one.

(Pause.)

JULES

I'm not an A.D.A. anymore.

(Pause.)

EMMA

That's new.

JULES

Brand spanking new.

EMMA

And you were going to tell me - when?

JULES

Now. I'm telling you now.

EMMA

Thanks. What's David think about this??

JULES

He doesn't exactly know. I did tell him I was considering the change. I want - more time at home - with him - maybe - start a family/

EMMA

//Jules!

JULES

Maybe! I make the switch to admin next week. I'm done with the eighty to one hundred caseloads at one time.

EMMA

That's a huge change for workaholic-you. You don't do change well. What's David think?

JULES

When I told him I was thinking about a change, all I got was "Do whatever you want." I took that as a green light. He doesn't really care what I do.

EMMA

Meaning ...

JULES

Nothing. I'm just on edge this week. I always am before the gathering.

EMMA

If you say so. Do you want to say more?

JULES

No.

EMMA

Are you sure?

JULES

I am. Stop over-thinking.

EMMA

Not –

JULES

Are!

EMMA

Sorry!

JULES

You're really not. That's just something you say –

EMMA

Do not!

JULES
All the time!

EMMA
 Sorry!

JULES
 Gotcha!

EMMA
 This one time. I should be going – sorry -

JULES
 Stay? Please. If you're really sorry – you could stay for just one minute. A few sips of coffee ...

EMMA
 One minute! The expressway is a parking lot this time of day.

JULES
 Deal. Just – wait here.

EMMA
 One minute!

(JULES quickly vanishes and returns with a plate of baked goods.)

JULES
 They're for the gathering – they seem a bit soggy – baking is just chemistry, right? I did well in chemistry. But I don't know - try one – do I reheat them? Start again? I don't have time to start again!

EMMA
 I can't –

JULES
Please! I'll give you a happy face sticker!

EMMA
 I'm sorry – but I'm trying to stay away from that stuff – I'm reinventing myself – looking for the healthier, skinnier “glow.” It's something I do every September. Maybe this time it will stick.

JULES

Sheesh, Emma! One little bite won't hurt you!

(JULES shoves a strudel bite into EMMA'S mouth.)

JULES

Soggy, right? I'll just dump them. I know they're soggy.

EMMA

Fine. They're fine.

JULES

"Fine" doesn't work. "Fine" means Aunt Rachel saying, "They're not her mother's. Poor thing. What does she know? All these years without a mother!"

EMMA

Jules!

JULES

FINE! It's FINE! I'll dump them! Don't give it another thought.

EMMA

Stop! Just – stop. You don't have to make yourself crazy every time September 11th rolls around. No more caffeine for you. Have a drink.

JULES

I don't drink.

EMMA

Make an exception. You must have some leftover Passover wine somewhere.

JULES

Give me back my coffee!

EMMA

Get a hold of yourself!

JULES

Everyone's here the day after tomorrow. And then there's Rosh Hashanah – and I can't even make strudel!

EMMA

You can stop. Everything. Just – stop doing everything.

JULES
Can't –

EMMA
Can! *Juliana* - Stop trying to be Mom!

JULES
I'm not!

EMMA
All the time!

JULES
Are you going to do the holy days? In that tiny, walk-up apartment? Will Nell? Who lives half a world away? Who's going to do it? Me, that's who.

EMMA
Someone else can do the gathering – Dad, Uncle Hilly -

JULES
Mom always did them –

EMMA
If you want to be more like Mom – cater. That's what she did.

JULES
I want – homemade. Warming. Nourishing – I want a welcoming home for everyone.

EMMA
And you're willing to make everyone crazy and stressed to be welcoming?

JULES
I don't do that.

EMMA
Yeah. You do. Get the strudel from Mom's Bakery in Roslyn. It's homemade – just made in someone else's home.

JULES
It's the cream cheese in the crust – that's why it doesn't work–

EMMA
I have to go –

JULES
Should I do it over without the cream cheese?

EMMA

Stop!

JULES

Emma!

EMMA

Jules – I really have to go. I'd really like to keep my job. My landlord also wants me to keep my job.

JULES

Move out of the city.

EMMA

What?

JULES

Move to Queens. It's – closer to your job. You won't have a commute.

EMMA

I don't want to live in Queens.

JULES

Things – happen in the city.

EMMA

The murder rate is down seven percent from this time last year. As someone who has had eighty to one hundred caseloads at any one given time, I think you realize that both Queens and Long island are not as safe as they're cracked up to be.

JULES

The buildings are shorter.

EMMA

I'm in a five flight, walk-up in a tenement building – surrounded by higher buildings. A plane couldn't hit my building even if it wanted to. Don't you think I checked that all out before I signed my lease?

JULES

I didn't mean –

EMMA

- yeah – you did. We both see terrorists and Nazis around every corner. Bye, Jules. See you tomorrow. We can drive each other crazy then.

(EMMA grabs another strudel bite.)

EMMA (cont'd)

One for the road..... they're not too shabby. Really. Keep them. Love you.

JULES

Love you, too.

(EMMA exits. JULES turns her tape of the piano music and eats some strudel.

She picks up a pair of shoes and wears them as gloves. She tries to do a few dance steps to the music and stops suddenly. She wants to dance but cannot. She drops the shoes. The light fades to black.)

SCENE 2 – September 9th, 8 p.m.

AT RISE NELL and JULES burst through the sunroom. NELL has a small suitcase. The shoes are still there.

JULES

You were supposed to text when you landed! I've been sitting by my phone obsessively checking!

NELL

I know! It was just an impulse – the plane was late and I thought - grab a cab and get to Jules! Thought I'd semi-surprise you and save you the trip.

JULES

You do travel light.

NELL

For now.

JULES

Little Nell! La Bella Nella!

NELL

Jule-la-la!

JULES

Rebel Nell! Let me look /at you!

NELL

/Don't look too closely! I've been up for thirty-six hours!

JULES

Beautiful. My baby sister is so beautiful -

NELL

Twelve hours on the plane and then another full hour waiting for a gate – Omigod! Not those fucking shoes again!

JULES

You remember them?

NELL

I helped you pack them when you went to Cornell! I thought it was a little strange then – but what did I know? I was what? Seven? Can't believe you /still have them!

(Overlapping)

JULES

I thought/

NELL

/Who carries around their dead mother's shoes?/

JULES

/You might like them...

NELL

What?

JULES

I saved them for you – -they're a size five – you're the only one who could wear them.

(JULES holds up a glittery dancing shoe.)

NELL

If the shoe fits?

JULES

- yes -

NELL

No, thank-you. Don't wish to be Fucking Cinderella.

JULES

I see.

(Pause.)

You must be hungry? Thirsty? Coffee? Water? Tea?

NELL

Alcohol?

JULES

Chicken soup?

NELL
Chicken soup with vodka works.

JULES
Sorry. I have strudel but no vodka.

(NELL takes out little airline bottles of vodka from her purse.)

NELL
I'm prepared.

JULES
Ever the boy scout.

NELL
You can't bring liquids on the plane but you can carry them off! Have any juice to go with it? I like to hydrate and dehydrate myself at the same time.

JULES
Grapefruit?

NELL
Works for me.

JULES
It's – really good to see you.

NELL
Same here.

(There is a brief smile of appreciation for each other. JULES exits as NELL looks at the shoes. She takes a long swig of vodka. JULES returns with the juice.)

JULES
Vitamin C to wash down the vodka.

(NELL downs her airplane size bottle of vodka.)

You haven't touched the juice.

NELL
Give me a sec.

(And NELL pulls out another small bottle of vodka and adds it to the grapefruit juice.)

JULES

Emma thinks I should get rid of them.

NELL

Build a bonfire.

JULES

Nell!

NELL

Wrong thing to say. Got it. But – it is - creepy! Very creepy.

JULES

I look at it as – a memory enhancement.

NELL

Hoarding – what? Four pairs of our mother’s shoes for how many years? Definitely on the creep-a-zoid barometer.

JULES

But - in a loving way.

NELL

Affectionately disturbing, all right?

JULES

Maybe ... just a little heartfelt-tender -creepy-weird ...

NELL

You don’t have the hang of this “creepy” thing at all.

JULES

It’s really good to see you. I missed you, Little Nell.

NELL

Ditto, Jule-la-la! David around?

JULES

No.

NELL

Fishing?

JULES

Yes.

NELL

It's comforting to know some things don't change. Is Emma coming?

JULES

She apparently had an "all important-must-not-miss-meeting-or-I'll-lose-my-job-with-the-schools."

NELL

I'll catch up with her tomorrow. And Dad. And Uncle Hilly.

JULES

Can I - interest you in soggy strudel?

NELL

Mmmmm Sounds so appetizing. But I'll restrain myself.

JULES

I'm looking for guinea pigs before I bring it out for the gathering.

NELL

White flour, white sugar stuff?

JULES

Yes.

NELL

No, thanks.

JULES

But alcohol is okay?

NELL

As long as it isn't mixed with processed sugar.

(NELL takes a nice, long drink.)

Much better. Mom's blue robe - do you still have it?

JULES

Why would you think that?

NELL

Look around.

JULES

Shoes are different than robes.

NELL

I remember we would come home from school and you'd change into your jammies right away and put her robe on.

JULES

Dad got rid of it.

NELL

Well yeah! It was weird that you did that.

JULES

It was – comforting.

NELL

I'd glance into the kitchen – see you in the robe and think – Mom? *Mom?* It was totally spooky, Jules. I still get goose bumps thinking about it.

JULES

I'll concede -it was sort of other-worldly.

NELL

Ghostly.

JULES

Jews don't believe in ghosts.

NELL

Emma does.

JULES

Emma says she can feel Mom's presence. The rabbi says no.

NELL

Depends on the rabbi. We have our dybbuks –

JULES

They're malicious – possessive – possessing - Mom would not have become a dybbuk!

NELL

Maybe she's an ibbur. Maybe she shows up to help us.

JULES

Then why don't I feel her? Do you?

NELL

No.

JULES

Could she be here? When we gather every September 11th? Could she be in the room? Helping us?

NELL

Maybe – she's here now. Looking at the shoes ... watching us discuss her ... prowling ...lurking...concealing herself in the shoes!

JULES

Nell!

(NELL takes a drink. She shuts off lights.)

NELL

Maybe ... we should be careful about what we say. Maybe she is listening, Jules. Stay very still. See if you can feel her ...

(And the sisters stay very quiet.)

JULES

(In a whisper.)

Nell?

NELL

Shhh I'm trying to "feel" ...

JULES

Do you –

NELL

Quiet... listen ...

(And all is quiet for a moment. And suddenly there is the blare of the doorbell. Both sisters jump.)

Mom? JULES

Expecting anyone? NELL

JULES! Are you home! EMMA (Offstage)

(JULES exits to let EMMA in. We hear greetings. NELL listens. EMMA bursts through. She has an overnight bag.)

Nell-la-la! EMMA

Auntie-Emma! NELL

Emma! We thought you were Mom! JULES

Don't be silly. Mom's not here. EMMA

Ever the "Mom-Whisperer." I thought you had a meeting. JULES

I did – and it went really well – all my music was approved quickly - so I thought – it's still early – go to Jules! See Little Nell! Visit – shoes! EMMA

Missed you. NELL

Ditto. EMMA

Which shoes do you care to visit? NELL

None. Not my size. EMMA

Not my style. NELL

(And they sing-song, maybe even twirl or can-can.)

EMMA

Not my circus –

NELL and EMMA

Not my monkeys!

JULES

Cue to the end of the musical interlude.

NELL

Vodka?

EMMA

Yes, please.

NELL

Straight up? Or grapefruit juice?

EMMA

A little vermouth and an olive would be nice –

JULES

I'll get the juice. Overnight bag?

EMMA

If it's okay – I thought you might need help getting ready for the gathering. I took off tomorrow and of course on the eleventh so I'm free to run errands, brown the brisket and take orders like a soldier. I'm your tool, Jules! Be kind.

JULES

Appreciated. One more juice coming up!

(JULES exits.)

EMMA

So – how's Tel Aviv treating you?

NELL

Good – it's all good. Lots of nightlife – you know – just a grand Israeli college party town.

EMMA

I worry – with all the stuff going on.

NELL

You'd hardly know it in the cafes. They're packed all the time. It's funny – but people there are as appalled by our homegrown violence as people here are by all the crap going down in the Middle East.

EMMA

Still – it seems scarier over there.

NELL

Point of view. Don't worry about it.

EMMA

Can't help it. There was that riot in the northern part of the city not too long ago.

NELL

You do keep track. It's a moot point. I graduated this summer. Home for good. Ta-da!

EMMA

Oh! That's wonderful! Congratulations!

(JULES enters interrupting EMMA and NELL'S hug.)

JULES

Grapefruit juice chaser for Emma. Plain grapefruit juice for me.

(NELLS pours the vodka in the glass and gives it to EMMA who takes a swig.)

What's – wonderful?

EMMA

Nell graduated! And is staying stateside for a while.

JULES

Oh! How – celebratory!

NELL

Way to steal my thunder, Auntie Em! You're the first ones I've told.

JULES

Will you be staying with Dad?

Here. I thought I'd stay – here.

NELL

(Pause.)

Since you asked so prettily.

JULES

It won't be for long. I've always had the knack of getting work that under utilizes my ability. Will David mind?

NELL

No worries. It won't affect David at all.

JULES

Jules?

EMMA

(JULES shakes her head “no” at EMMA.)

JULES

(Raising her glass.)

To Nell and her homecoming.

To Nell!

EMMA

(And amid hugs and sweet congratulations, they clink their glasses as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3, September 10, Noon

AT RISE EMMA is cleaning and starts to put the shoes in boxes. JULES arrives with groceries and some Chinese take-out cartons.

JULES

I have everything for the Brisket and the Halousky – I got the savoy cabbage this time – makes the Halousky much tastier plus – what are you doing?

EMMA

Oh – sorry. I thought – shouldn't they get put away? Were you planning on displaying them tomorrow?

JULES

Of course not. I'll do it. Later.

EMMA

I don't mind – really.

JULES

I'll – do it.

(Pause.)

EMMA

All is vacuumed, dusted! Bathrooms are clean! I washed the blue china.

JULES

The blue china?

EMMA

You always do the blue – sorry – if you want to do other dishes/

JULES

/No, the blue china's fine. I didn't realize – how predictable I was.

EMMA

Just a little.

JULES

Since you did so much – why don't I reward you? We can go into town for manicures.

EMMA

No, thank you. Manicurists yell at me.

JULES

They do not!

EMMA

I bite my nails. It makes them nervous. Nail-biters can put them out of business.

JULES

I'll try to think of something else. You did do a lot! I do appreciate it. Even if I feel a bit like the evil stepsister making Cinderella do all the work! Let me put the food away. Oh! Here's lunch.

(JULES puts down the little cartons of Chinese food and takes the groceries to the kitchen.
EMMA sneaks a peak at the food.)

EMMA

Beef and broccoli! Thank-you! Chicken fried rice! My favorite! Egg rolls. So hungry. Shrimp toast? **Juliana! Shrimp toast!**

(JULES comes running in.)

JULES

Is something wrong?

EMMA

Shrimp toast?

JULES

I thought you liked it.

EMMA

Love it! But you – you keep a kosher home – the dairy and the meat utensils are separate! How could I not know you were a cheater?

JULES

Mom ate it. Outside in the garden.

EMMA

I know. But you have this life where you – one-upped Mom on everything.

JULES

What?

Nothing. EMMA

No. Tell me. JULES

(We hear NELL entering.)

Hi, Honey! I'm home! NELL (offstage)

(NELL enters.)

Best. Morning. Ever NELL

Wonderful! EMMA

NELL

Dad and Uncle Hilly didn't ask if I changed my major! They didn't go over a life's plan for me! They – just – greeted me. Like I was a real person and not some woebegone character from Anderson's fairy tales. Chinese take out for lunch? That works!

(NELL goes through the Chinese take-out.)

JULES

What did they say when you told them you finally graduated?

NELL

Oh! I didn't tell them *that* - didn't want them to think I'd gone all-respectable. Whoa! Shrimp toast! Mom's forbidden fruit from King Yum! There is a God!

EMMA

So, you eat shrimp, too.

NELL

Love the illegal, bottom feeders. There aren't a lot of Chinese take-out places in Tel Aviv that offer shrimp toast. Thank-you for bringing banned substances into my first day back. You surprise me, Jules – didn't think you would bring home illegal food!

JULES

I eat bacon, too. Once in a while. Not at home – but out.

EMMA

Mom did, too. She told me that if bacon and shrimp toast were in the Garden of Eden – Adam and Eve would have succumbed to its charms on the first day. There never would have been all that fuss about an apple.

JULES

I'll get plates.

(JULES exits to the kitchen as EMMA checks her phone.)

NELL

Expecting something?

EMMA

There was an accident by my apartment yesterday – I saw a stretcher. I was just checking to see if anybody died.

NELL

And your phone will tell you that?

EMMA

I - follow the accident reports from a few police stations.

(JULES returns.)

JULES

Lunch!

NELL

Anything?

EMMA

No. That's good. It means nobody died.

JULES

Who died?

EMMA

No one.

NELL

Emma follows dead people on her phone.

EMMA
Don't judge.

JULES
... shall we eat?

(NELL throws a coverlet over the shoes.)

NELL
Don't want Mom's shoes watching me eat shrimp.

(There is a pause as everyone eats.)

So, what's the plan? Are we going to sit Shiva every September eleventh for the rest of our lives?

EMMA
That's what I love about you, Nell. Don't lead up to anything – just blurt.

JULES
It was important to Grandma and Grandpa -

NELL
- who are gone. It's morbid that we gather together to celebrate Mom's death.

JULES
It's not a celebration. It's – a gathering. Like Shoah – a commemoration.

NELL
Grandma and Grandpa didn't have a gathering for Shoah. They didn't "commemorate" the Holocaust.

EMMA
Because they were there. They didn't want to remember.

JULES
But Mom did – she went to shul for every Shoah. We're doing for her what she did for her parents.

NELL
Maybe what we're doing is another way of being dead. We're practicing.

JULES
Now that's morbid!

EMMA

There are lots of ways to be dead, aren't there? Remember when we saw *Fiddler on the Roof* and Mom said that if she didn't marry a Jewish man, Grandma and Grandpa would consider her dead to them? They'd sit Shiva and everything.

JULES

But Mom wouldn't really be dead.

EMMA

But to Grandma and Grandpa – she would be.

JULES

Can we find a topic of conversation that doesn't have Mom dead?

NELL

It's hard to do when we're gathered here to celebrate – *commemorate* Mom – you know – being dead. We talk about the Holocaust. Then we talk about 9/11. We eat the same brisket off of the same china year after year. You know what's missing from our gloomy, obsessive celebration? The tape of Mom's playing the piano!

(JULES and EMMA eye one another. Share – a laugh? A smile? EMMA gets up and turns on the CD. We hear piano music.)

NELL

Better! Now I can get into the gloom and doom of tomorrow.

(Pause as the sisters listen for a moment.)

The tape's getting worn.

JULES

I know. I keep thinking I should have it made into a CD.

NELL

Or we can – let it go.

JULES

No.

EMMA

This was what Mom played to calm herself down after a fight with Dad.

NELL

It's – her fight song! Let's do it up right! Maybe Mom went down fighting.

JULES

Jesus, Nell.

NELL

Wrong to thing to say. Got it.

EMMA

But – I wish ... that was a possibility – that she had a moment to fight. Who knows/
maybe

JULES

/We know! We have the answering machine placing her in the tower just before the
plane hit.

(Pause.)

NELL

Dance, Jules.

JULES

What? Don't be silly.

NELL

You used to dance to this. All the time. Mom would play and you – would dance.

JULES

A lifetime ago.

EMMA

You were so good. We thought you were going to go all the way – New York City
Ballet Company – here you come!

JULES

More like Martha Graham! But it wasn't practical.

NELL

So you became a poli sci major. Just like Mom.

EMMA

Mom was a music major. At Cornell. Before she quit to marry Dad.

NELL

That's right. She got more practical the second time around.

EMMA

Didn't you switch from journalism to political science?

NELL

Sophomore year.

JULES

I thought you majored in psychology!

NELL

Junior year.

(Pause.)

Mom was pretty good, wasn't she?

JULES

I remember - as a toddler - you would sit with Mom and play chords. The music stuck with you. You were the only one who continued lessons all the way through high school.

NELL

Mom was my first piano teacher. And my most patient one! Come on, Jules - a few steps?

(NELL does a few steps and holds out her hand. JULES doesn't take it but EMMA does. They do a few steps. It's sweet and close. EMMA and NELL both hold out a hand for JULES who finally takes it. They do a few steps from a long-ago dance they once did together - possibly at a recital. They are not bad. And it's sweet. JULES abruptly breaks away.)

JULES

This is backwards - we're going back in time. I can't do that.

NELL

We go back in time every time we come together on September eleventh!

JULES

We're remembering.

NELL

So - remember. Dance the way you used to. It's happy, Jules - remember happy?

(NELL tries to coax JULES who is conflicted. NELL and EMMA dance and JULES abruptly turns off the CD. JULES exits as NELL hums some of the music. She turns into EMMA's arms and they hold the dance pose as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 4, September 10 – 9 p.m.

AT RISE EMMA and NELL are sharing a bottle of wine and playing Scrabble. JULES enters and looks at the board.

Weep, Emma!

NELL

Fuck?

JULES

Didn't know you knew the word.

NELL

Really, Nell.

JULES

NELL

It's a word! And a mighty good one. Look - triple word – 39 points! How good am I? I'm waiting, Emma.

EMMA

I've got bupkis. All vowels.

(JULES looks over EMMA'S shoulder. She then puts some tiles on the board.)

Euoi?

NELL

No ganging up on me!

JULES

It was a cry of rapture during the ancient Bacchic revels. Look it up. It's legit.

(JULES cell phone rings. She looks at for a moment.)

Crap. I should – take this.

EMMA

So, will you let it fly?

NELL

As long as I win.

(NELL puts some tiles on the board.)

EMMA

Don't you know any words that aren't profane?

NELL

Just going for the points. You're up.

EMMA

Don't rush.

NELL

That must be David. On the phone. That's why she left the room. I'm thinking there's trouble in paradise.

EMMA

It could be work. She can't discuss a case in front of us.

NELL

No. It's David. I'll bet you twenty points – it's David.

EMMA

I never knew you could bet points in a Scrabble game.

NELL

Are you kidding? You could bet on a Go-Fish game – if you play your cards right. Want to take the bet?

EMMA

No. I think I'd lose.

(Pause.)

Do you follow conspiracy theories?

NELL

Let's not get too heavy here – we're just playing Scrabble.

EMMA

I was just remembering – these people on 9/11 forums/

NELL

/No! Don't tell me you read comments! Comments are only for deranged people!

EMMA

But there's a whole host of people who believe – that no Jews perished in 9/11. That they were told to stay home and that Israel and the good old U.S.A. bombed the Trade Centers.

NELL

Seriously?

EMMA

I always wanted to comment and set them straight but –

NELL

But?

EMMA

I was afraid to engage in the craziness!

NELL

Smart move.

(A beat.)

Do you date?

EMMA

Way to change the subject.

NELL

I'm thinking of Jules and David. Do you?

EMMA

Kind of – well ... actually no. Not much. Music teachers in elementary schools don't meet a lot of men. Do you?

NELL

Not a lot. I don't meet – whom I want to meet. But Jules and David – they're really good together, you know? It works. Usually.

EMMA

They say high school sweethearts can have a rough time – they – haven't fully grown up yet.

NELL

But they really, *really* know each other – from “back in the day.” There isn't as much – pretense.

It's a gamble -

EMMA

EMMA abruptly stops speaking as JULES enters with a glass. She pours some wine. She calmly goes to EMMA and puts a word on the board.)

Faqir?

EMMA (cont'd)

JULES

The only word I know of that has a "q" without a "u." It's a Muslim ethnic group in India. Look it up. It's legit.

NELL

Did you memorize the Scrabble dictionary?

JULES

Yes.

(JULES takes a long drink of wine.)

NELL

Thirsty?

JULES

David's not coming back.

(JULES takes another drink.)

EMMA

He's staying in Alaska?

JULES

Here. He's not coming back – here.

NELL

I'm so sorry.

EMMA

But David's a mensch. He wouldn't up and leave his wife.

JULES

"Call me if you decide you want to be happy," was the last thing he said.

EMMA

Of course you want to be happy! Who doesn't want to be happy?

NELL

What did you say to him?

JULES

There's nothing to say. Happiness is not in our veins. Grandma and Grandpa at Auschwitz. Mom in the World Trade Center. I hung up on him.

NELL

So – you want him to move out?

JULES

Of course not!

NELL

And you thought hanging up on him would be the way to make him stay?

JULES

We've had this conversation. For many years. He knew when we got married that Septembers are hard for me. He said he understood. I thought being happy together for eleven months of the year was enough!

NELL

Are you – even happy anymore? Lately whenever I come home, you have this stiff-upper-lip-going-to-smile-if-it-kills-me thing going on.

JULES

What constitutes "happy?" Damned if I know.

NELL

Grandma and Grandpa were happy!

JULES

Until Mom died.

NELL

Mom was happy.

JULES

Until she died.

NELL

Jeez, Jules! If you're lucky – you are happy until you die. That's where our family got it right.

(Pause.)

JULES

He wants a baby.

NELL

And you?

JULES

Yes. That's why I cut back my hours at work. But – it's complicated.

(Pause.)

EMMA

What if something bad happens to the baby?

JULES

Yes.

NELL

What if the baby grows up and cures cancer? Does something – so utterly, completely, absolutely splendid that brings joy to others for hundreds of years? *What if she's a tap dancer?* Are you going to deprive the world of that child? And more importantly, are you going to deprive me of being an aunt? I'd so rock that job!

JULES

You'll be teaching my child profanity before she's knee high.

NELL

Better she learns it from me than from some foul-mouthed toddler!

EMMA

And – you could name her Dorothy and I'd be Auntie Em -

NELL

And we'd all live happily ever after in Oz –

EMMA

With flying monkeys!

NELL

- traveling in bubbles –

EMMA

To the Emerald City! Jules – you need to have a child. Do it for your sisters!

JULES

If you want a baby so much, make your own babies!

NELL

All right.

JULES

After you're married of course.

NELL

There's always a glitch.

JULES

Do you bring children into the world such as it is? Or is it something we do for us but not for them?

NELL

They keep the "hope" thing going.

(Pause.)

EMMA

Wow, Nell. When did you become all unicorns and rainbows?

NELL

I keep my inner-Pollyanna hidden. It comes at a cost. Do you love David?

JULES

Of course.

NELL

And do you think he loves you?

JULES

It's a possibility – actually - yes. Yes, he does.

NELL

Then I'd so fight. Never give up the ship and seize the day and all that crap!

(JULES downs the wine.)

JULES

Yeah. All that crap.

(JULES exits. NELL and EMMA just look at one another.)

Game?
EMMA

Set. Match.
NELL

(They put away the game. EMMA goes to the shoes.)

Shoes?
EMMA

NELL
They stay. I'm not messing with Jules and those shoes.

(Pause. EMMA checks her phone.)

Are you – looking up dead people?

EMMA
Oh! Sorry. I obsessively check the news – looking for disasters, the latest terror attacks – the usual. I get like this every September. I finally calm down during the summer and then September rears it's ugly head again.

I used to memorize them. After 9/11, there was a typhoon in Taiwan that caused seventy-nine deaths. Twenty-nine dead on September 21st in Toulouse, thirteen coal workers dead in Brookwood, Alabama, and the beat goes on. I finally had to stop memorizing every disaster – because there were too many. I decided to just focus on the terror attacks. I don't memorize them anymore either. They just keep coming. But I diligently write them down in a journal and incessantly read every article about them.

And about the Holocaust. Six million Jews, two to three million Soviet prisoners-of-war, two hundred and twenty thousand Romani, fifteen thousand gay people –

NELL
EMMA!

EMMA
World War Two total: seventeen million dead.

NELL

Stop wrapping yourself around dead people!

EMMA

I need to constantly remind myself of this stuff.

NELL

No – you don't.

EMMA

It's self-preservation. These things happen – daily. War. Soldiers. Innocents killed – what do they call that – collateral damage? And people go on. They get up the next morning and try again. Why can't we?

NELL

We do go on – we're the grandchildren of survivors/

EMMA

/which is why I thought we were safe! Our family suffered enough. I thought the gods of hate would pass over us in this generation. *It was someone else's turn. How stupid was I?*

NELL

Emma?

EMMA

I worry that I'm growing bitter – that I may even evolve into a hater. And then I hate myself – for not being forgiving – but I hold onto the anger – the obsessive quest to check in on the terror worldwide - because I'm afraid that if I let it go – I'll let Mom go.

(Pause.)

Do they hate in Tel Aviv?

NELL

I don't know. It's mostly – people going about the business of doing their stuff. Going on. Going to work ... having babies ...

EMMA

And when a bomb goes off?

NELL

You hit pause for awhile. Say the Kaddish. "May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life for us and all Israel."

EMMA and NELL

“May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace to us and to all Israel. To which we say Amen.”

(Pause.)

NELL

Emma, does Mom really visit?

EMMA

Yes.

NELL

And you know that – absolutely, from your bones, from your blood, no-holds-barred, cross-your-heart-and-hope-not-to-die - know that?

EMMA

Yes.

NELL

Is she – a ghost?

EMMA

No!

NELL

Then, what?

EMMA

I don't know if I can explain it – I just feel her – you know? Feel the warmth. Sometimes there's the scent of lilacs –

NELL

Mom and her lilac bushes ...

EMMA

Yes. And I get a whiff and just know she's still a - presence in our lives.

NELL

Why does she stay? Does she feel guilty/

EMMA

/No! Worried. I think she still worries. About us.

NELL

But – we're fine. Usually.

Are we? EMMA

Is she here – now? NELL

No. Sorry. EMMA

So, she skips town around 9/11. NELL

Yes. EMMA

I want to skip town on that day, too. I so fucking want to do that. NELL

(NELL exits. EMMA checks her phone.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE 5, September 11, Midnight

AT RISE EMMA is surfing the web with her phone. The doorbell rings. EMMA jumps up.

EMMA

Crap!

(EMMA exits and we hear some murmuring, “you were supposed to call, thank-you.” And JULES has stirred and is calling to EMMA. EMMA returns with some pizza. JULES could be in a robe – or yoga clothes.)

EMMA
(Calling)

Sorry! Go back to bed, Jules! It’s nothing. The delivery guy was supposed to call me on my cell.

(JULES enters.)

JULES

Pizza? In the middle of the night?

EMMA

Pffft. Just after Midnight.

JULES

What happened to your September healthy regimen?

EMMA

I start again on September twelfth. Tonight I am looking for a carb-induced coma.

(NELL enters – dressed comfortably in sweats or yoga clothes.)

NELL

Do I smell – *pizza!* Pepperoni?

EMMA

Nell

NELL

Right. Don’t mix dairy with meat. I thought since we already had shrimp toast ...

JULES

Let's not upset the kosher cart too much.

NELL

So a BLT is out, right?

EMMA

Sorry about waking everyone. They were supposed to call me on my cell when they arrived.

JULES

I was awake.

NELL

Ditto. Soooo good. Thanks, Auntie Em!

EMMA

Your welcome, Little Nell!

NELL

So, Jule-la-la – when are you losing the shoes?

EMMA

And there ends the golden minute of the three sisters not sniping at one another.

NELL

Seriously, carting around Mom's shoes has got to be unhealthy! I think I learned that during my six months as a psych major. We definitely had a session on letting your mother's shoes go.

JULES

She wore these on her twenty-fifth anniversary. Remember?

(She holds up a pair of the black, strappy, high heels. EMMA takes them.)

EMMA

That time she wore that black, strapless dress that shocked Nell!

NELL

She was showing cleavage! All I saw were boobies! I was way too young for boobies!

EMMA

I don't think I could walk in heels this high.

JULES

Mom had a Napoleonic complex! She hated being short! Remember this!

(JULES holds up a running shoe as EMMA discreetly puts the shoes in a box. NELL observes.)

JULES (cont'd)

The only flats she ever owned!

EMMA

(EMMA takes the shoes.)

She ran the Daisy 10K – just before –

JULES

Yes. And she came in twentieth! “Twentieth!” she said. “The number twenty is only good for your age. I can do better next year!”

EMMA

But.

(EMMA puts the pair of shoes away.)

JULES

But. And these?

EMMA

Mom’s slut shoes!

(Imitating “Mom”)

“You may think they’re slutty, but at least I look like I cost something!”

JULES

And Dad said, “Don’t talk that way in front of the girls!” See? They’re all remembrances. They’re tangible. Physical.

NELL

(NELL takes the slut shoes.)

But not alive, Jules. Not alive. They’re empty. And they should stay that way.

JULES

You could wear them! *They fit you!*

NELL

I have my own legs and I will wear my own fucking shoes and not turn myself into Mom like you!

JULES

I don't!

NELL

Every time I come home – there's less of Jules. You're shriveling into some sort of adoration statue of what you think is Mom. But it's not Mom – it's Mom made of wax /

JULES

/Mom would never be wax! I would never be wax! Carrera marble maybe – but never wax!

(EMMA bursts out laughing.)

There's nothing funny going on here!

EMMA

Arguing about whether you've built a statue of Mom made out of wax or marble – oh dear lord!

JULES

There's no statue being erected!

NELL

Every day, ever minute – you've been chipping away at Jules and replacing the chips would these "Mom chips" – only the Mom chips never existed!

JULES

I don't do that!

EMMA

You do, Jules. You totally do. Sorry. I don't know where my big sister is anymore. All I get from you is Mom's shadow.

(NELL gives the shoes to EMMA who puts them aside.)

JULES

I stayed and kept the home fires burning while you – moved halfway across the world.

NELL

Our home became this - shrine. It was like living in a memorial vault! You two had more of her. She was a real Mom with you. After I was born – she finally finished college. And then law school. Why wasn't I enough? If she didn't go to law school – she wouldn't have been there --

JULES

STOP! *It's done. It's over. I didn't bring out the shoes for you to remember that day – they were to remember Mom!*

NELL

*But I do remember that day! It's written into our DNA just like the Holocaust is written into our grandparents! When I close my eyes, I still see Dad picking me up at school. Going down to Union Square. Posting notices. Searching the crowd. Hoping. And then I spent years – imagining she got out. She had amnesia. And one day she would come to Dad's office because she was sick and needed medicine – it would be just like Greer Garson in *Random Harvest* but in reverse!*

JULES

Please! This isn't what I intended! I thought if we just talked about the sweet memories – before – I want to remember – before.

NELL

They're intertwined. You can't have "before" without "after."

EMMA

Nell's right. Mom's not in the shoes. Sorry. Her essence – her spirit – is what's still important. Remember Mom's Memorial Service?

JULES

By heart.

EMMA

Do you remember Sandy talking about the night she drove Dad up to Cornell and Mom sneaked out with them – I mean she totally sneaked out of the dorm past curfew in her jammies! And Sandy drove them around Ithaca for an hour so Mom and Dad could make-out in the back seat?

NELL

Why don't I know this stuff?

EMMA

Don't you remember?

NELL

I do – but not the “making out” stuff. I probably didn't know what “making out” was!

EMMA

Mom was part renegade.

NELL

I totally got the renegade gene! Think: How did they arrange that? There were no cell phones, no Facebook messaging. That must have taken a lot of planning!

EMMA

To do something illicit!

NELL

Mom was freaking amazing!

EMMA

Exactly.

NELL

So, what the hell are we doing gathering ever September eleventh – quietly eating brisket? We should be drinking ourselves silly and telling stories of Mom's escapades!

JULES

Dad would hate that!

NELL

Dad should be the one telling the stories! Damn, we should have been Irish. They know how to celebrate at funerals.

JULES

We don't treat September 11th as a funeral!

NELL

That's exactly what we do! We revisit that day every year as if we wish to return to it!

JULES

No! It's to honor –

NELL

It's to go back in time to the worst day of our lives – over and over – it's pathological!

(Pause.)

EMMA

I'm going to open another bottle of wine.

JULES

What do you think, Emma? About our gathering? Do *you* think it's psychotic?

NELL

Pathological.

EMMA

I – don't know. Sorry, I really don't. I see both sides –

JULES

And?

EMMA

Does there have to be a winner?

JULES

You're the one who "feels" Mom? What is Mom feeling?

EMMA

I've no idea.

JULES

Come on – you're the one who's all touchy-feely about Mom.

EMMA

Yes. When she's here. But when we do our gathering - Mom never comes.

JULES

Maybe the day's too painful for her.

EMMA

Maybe.

NELL

Or maybe she's wondering how she created a family that collectively gets together and gets high on grief!/
/Opening the wine –

EMMA

JULES

/We don't do that! Jesus Nell, did you even love Mom?

NELL

Fuck you, Jules.

JULES

You come home and belittle every memory – every –

NELL

I don't have the eight extra years that you had with her! Yeah – it's fuzzy. The Mom I remember is all music and dancing and of course Mom always late when she had to pick me up –

JULES

She was late for all of us -

EMMA

- handing out the wine -

NELL

I don't reduce Mom to shoes and Brisket!

EMMA

Drinking the wine. In your corners. Drink.

(And they do.)

JULES

Do you seriously think I have reduced Mom to a pair of shoes?

NELL

You know what I'm thinking? Go fishing, Jules! *Go fishing!*

EMMA

She's right.

JULES

What?

EMMA

The fishing's really good in Alaska.

JULES

That's the silliest suggestion ever. Not practical, not useful –

On pointe.

EMMA

NELL

(Checking her phone.)

There's a flight at 6 a.m. – if you pack now/

EMMA

/Too early. We've been drinking.

NELL

– we'll call a cab -

JULES

This is crazy. I'm not flying to Alaska in the morning! There's our gathering –

NELL

Hang out a "Gone Fishing" sign.

JULES

And connecting flights. He's in some tiny town – not readily accessible – and I don't really think he wants to see me just now -

EMMA

Call him.

JULES

It's the middle of the night!

EMMA

Not in Alaska. Call him.

JULES

I can't/

EMMA

/He said "call me when you want to be happy." He didn't say he didn't love you. He didn't say he found someone else, he didn't say he needed space -

NELL

Or my favorite: "It's not you, it's me." Call him.

JULES

This is – crazy. No!

Drink some more. NELL

(JULES does.)

Now call him. NELL (cont'd)

This is drunken-silly-high-school-madness! JULES

Ain't it grand? NELL

Do you think - JULES

END OF EXCERPT