

The Caruso Sisters  
By Claudia I. Haas

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**RUNNING TIME:** 75-80 minutes

**SYNOPSIS:** Giancarlo has died. Anna and Emilia run to Tess's side to help her through this difficult time. But Tess is amazingly calm. Maybe Anna and Emilia are the ones who need help.

The play was written to address the waste of "fine wine" actresses (over 40) that are too often absent on the stage these days.

**CAST:** 5f (Italian-American)

TESS (f): 60's – who knows – maybe even 70; the matriarch and the oldest

ANNA (f) 50 (probably, maybe) the youngest sister, harbors a grudge against Emilia - adores TESS, 8-12 years younger than her sisters

EMILIA (f) (60's – a little younger than TESS); lets go of nothing

ANGELA (f) (early- mid 30's\*) Emilia's daughter; sure-footed even in deep emotion; may be just a wee bit like her mother - which she will deny; very fit.

CHIARA (f) (Late 20's to early 30's\*) Anna's daughter; insecure about all – her intake of carbs, her role in the family, her need to not be her mother.

\*Ages can be played with as long as the order makes sense. The daughters should be 20-25 years younger than their mothers. So depending on the age of the sisters – the daughters could easily be in their 40's. Even if the Sisters appear to be in their 70's – the lines about their age should remain the same. They have lied so long about their age – they have no idea how old they really are.

**TIME:** Early spring; late morning following Giancarlo's cremation

**SETTING:** TESS'S kitchen. They kitchen is well appointed and used. It is the center of the home. One exit leads to the dining room and living room. Another exit takes us to the front hallway and the bedrooms. And an upstage exit leads to a covered porch and the stairs to the basement.

**SCENE 1:** Tuesday after Palm Sunday about 1 p.m.

**SCENE 2:** Same day, 3:30 p.m.

Optional Intermission

**SCENE 3:** Same day, 7 p.m.

**SCENE 4:** A few minutes after Scene 3 ends

## THE CARUSO SISTERS

AT RISE we are in TESS'S home. Verdi's "Pace, Pace" aria is heard. It's a lovely, well-used kitchen with all appliances and a small kitchen table and chairs. The fridge and the stove are used during the play.

On the kitchen table is a CD player. A newspaper is scattered. There are dishes needing to be put away. TESS enters on a mission. She carries a coat rack to the back porch. She quickly returns and digs out a man's robe from a cabinet or the dishwasher and carries it to the back porch. She rushes back in and digs out some men's slippers from the freezer and a man's golf hat from the oven and brings them to the back porch. She returns, retrieves a man's scarf from "somewhere" as the aria fades away. TESS turns on the CD player and a CD promising to teach Spanish in one week (or ten easy lessons) blares throughout the house.

TESS exits back onto the porch and closes the door as ANNA knocks on the door.

ANNA

Tess! TESS!

(ANNA rushes in. She carries a small suitcase which she puts aside. She is well-dressed and carries a large handbag. TESS enters from the porch. They speak loudly – above the sound of the CD.)

ANNA (cont'd)

Where are Gene's suits going? I saw a truck outside filled with his suits!

TESS

Fa Nabla! That's what I told them! But the daughter-in-laws swooped in and cleaned out the clothes. "It's better for you," they said. "It will make the move easier." I'm hiring movers! Why should I make it easy for them? Fa Nabla! They should all go to Naples! The lot of them!

ANNA

When are you moving?

TESS

What?

ANNA

WHEN ARE YOU MOVING?

TESS

Speak up, Anna! You always mumbled.

(ANNA turns off the CD Player.)

ANNA

What are you doing? Teaching the neighborhood to speak Spanish?

TESS

What?

ANNA

TESS! Turn on your hearing aid!

TESS

What are you doing here? The dinner's not till later!

ANNA

What's with the CD?

TESS

WHAT?

ANNA

THE HEARING AID, TESS!

(TESS adjusts her hearing aid.)

What's with the language CD?

TESS

The boys found a girl to help me. She doesn't speak English. They gave me the CD so I could speak to her.

ANNA

So, you turned the CD on and your hearing aid off?

TESS

It gave me a headache. You're early. The dinner's not till six.

ANNA

I just wanted to be with you. Here. Before the move. When is the move?

TESS

Not till early summer. I have time. To adjust.

ANNA

Isn't there a way you can stay? This is your home.

TESS

This is my home with Gene. He's gone. So I go. Apparently the house needs work. Who knew? The roof, the furnace, the windows – so I go to – new. Close to the boys on Long Island. It makes sense.

ANNA

How are you?

TESS

I'm fine. Why wouldn't I be fine?

ANNA

Because your husband was cremated this morning,

TESS

If you've come to baby me, walk back up the block.

ANNA

I want to help. The boys phoned about the car. Thank God everyone is all right! How did the brakes catch fire?

TESS

Why knows? My husband was cremated and he decided to take the car with him!

(The aria "Pace, Pace" from Verdi's "La Forza del Destino" is again heard in the background. It distracts TESS.)

ANNA

You okay?

TESS

I'm next.

ANNA

What?

TESS

Gene's coming for me.

ANNA

What are you talking about?

TESS

The grave. I'll be joining Gene soon. That's why I'm letting the kids clear the house. But they shouldn't take all of Gene's clothes.

ANNA  
No. It's too early for that.

TESS  
I need them.

ANNA  
Of course.

TESS  
(Listening intently to the music.)

Even if I am going soon.

ANNA  
Don't talk like that!

TESS  
Anna, it's time to let your sister go. You're old enough to be on your own.

ANNA  
I still need you.

TESS  
For what? You have your family. You're eating well.

ANNA  
Eating well? What do you mean – eating well?

TESS  
Nothing. It looks good on you.

ANNA  
Are you saying I'm fat?

TESS  
We're all fat.

(A knock on the door is heard. The music fades.)

EMILIA  
Tess? TESS! Are you in there?

TESS  
M'Mona Mia! Can't a person be alone? COME IN, EMILIA!

ANNA

I can't believe you told me I was fat.

(EMILIA enters.)

EMILIA

You shouldn't leave the door unlocked. You know how the neighborhood is.

TESS

So lock it.

(EMILIA does.)

EMILIA

(Looking at ANNA)

You couldn't wait for me? I had to walk down the block alone.

ANNA

So did I.

EMILIA

If you waited, we could've walked together.

ANNA

I took a walk. To see my old house. It's apparently good for me. It seems I need to lose a few pounds.

EMILIA

I wasn't going to say anything –

ANNA

What? That I've gotten fat?

EMILIA

You look good. You needed the weight.

ANNA

Why are we discussing my weight? How about yours? How much do you weigh?

EMILIA

Less than you. I didn't come down the block to talk to you. I want to see Tess. Who I'm only talking to 'cause Gene died. I know he would want me to talk to you. *Mi dispiace, Gene! So sorry! So sorry!*

(And she may wipe a tear.)

TESS

Emilia! Pull yourself together!

EMILIA

Such a good man! Gene! Poor Gene!

TESS

It's all right, Emilia! Get a hold of yourself!

(EMILIA breaks down and sobs.)

TESS (cont'd)

Emilia STOP! What's wrong with this? My husband died and I'm comforting my sister!

ANNA

Emilia! Calm down! Tess doesn't need this today!

EMILIA

I'm showing respect! Gene always talked to me. Even when Tess wouldn't.

TESS

Tell her she doesn't need to show so much respect. Peace and quiet – that's what I need. I probably won't get any until I'm dead – which could be any minute now ...

ANNA

Don't say that!

TESS

I'm grieving. Nobody listens to a grieving widow! It's like being dead!

ANNA

Shut up about being dead!

TESS

What's wrong with wanting some peace? What do you want to talk about? Getting rid of possessions? They tried to take his robe. But I got it back.

EMILIA

She's not the only one having a hard day.

TESS

Is Emilia speaking to me?

EMILIA

She should know that other people have hard days also.

TESS

Santo's been gone for ten years. Enough with your hard life!

EMILIA

It's not Santo. It's Kiki.

TESS

Mother Mary, who is Kiki?

ANNA

It's her cat.

TESS

My Gene was cremated today and she's moaning about a cat?

EMILIA

It was Kiki who got me through Santo's passing. And now Kiki – is waiting to die.

TESS

We're all waiting to die.

ANNA

Stop the death march talk!

TESS

Wait ... I thought Kiki died years ago.

EMILIA

That was Kiki One. Now I have Kiki Two. I got her right after Kiki One died. And now poor Kiki Two is sick and is going to be put to sleep today. Angela picked him up yesterday.

TESS

I can't deal with dead cats. Can we not talk about dead cats?

EMILIA

Ask her how the car is.

ANNA

Ask her yourself.

EMILIA

She's not talking to me.

TESS

I'm talking. So be quiet.



(Pause.)

EMILIA

So ... how's the car?

TESS

The front is burnt to a crisp. The rest is fine.

EMILIA

You're lucky.

TESS

Gene and his car burned up today! How is that lucky?

EMILIA

You could have burned along with the brakes in the car!

TESS

Then I'd be with Gene. Dead. Happy.

EMILIA

And we'd be having a double funeral. If you had died today, it would have been very hard on all of us. So shut up about your dying. I don't want to hear it! And Tess, you should have buried Gene properly. Next to Mama. If you had burned with the car, I would have buried you.

TESS

If I had burned along with the car, I'd be nothing but ashes. How could you bury me?

ANNA

*Would you all stop going on about being burnt?*

TESS

Gene didn't want to be buried.

EMILIA

Mama would never approve.

(EMILIA starts to straighten up – newspaper, dishes, drying silverware – she is a force of nature about cleaning and can no longer keep still.)

TESS

So, she can take it up with him now. If they're in the same place. If atheists are allowed in heaven.

EMILIA

Don't say that! Maybe God wasn't listening.

TESS

God knows. Gene didn't keep it a secret that he thought "man made up God."

EMILIA

He was Italian! Somewhere inside he believed in God!

TESS

Enough, Emilia! Sit! Leave my kitchen alone! Straighten up your own home! Let's just get through today. Tomorrow, we can stop talking to each other and everything will be normal.

EMILIA

I can leave. I need to scrub my floors. Do you want me to go? I don't need to be babysitting my sister.

ANNA

She just lost her husband! Leave her alone!

EMILIA

You think I don't know what that's like? I've been missing my Santo for ten years! She's lucky. She had Gene longer. And I'm next, you know.

ANNA

What?

EMILIA

I'm the next one to go in the ground. I lost Santo early. It's a sign that I'll go early.

TESS

No, I'm next. Gene wants me. He tried to get me by burning up the car. He'll find another way.

ANNA

Who knows? I could get hit by a bus tomorrow and beat all of you to the grave!

EMILIA

What do you know? Nothing!

ANNA

Don't blow past me. As if my thoughts don't count.

TESS

I'm turning my hearing aid off.

ANNA

I'm sorry. We won't fight.

EMILIA

Who's fighting? Any more coffee?

TESS

It's there.

EMILIA

Where?

TESS

Where it always is. You think that now that I'm a widow – I suddenly rearranged my kitchen?

EMILIA

I did. As soon as Santo passed, I thought – now I will make everything easier for me instead of for him. Biscotti?

TESS

Same place. If there is any.

EMILIA

How can you have coffee without biscuits?

TESS

I didn't have a checklist. I didn't decide that today I will have my husband cremated and then buy biscuits.

EMILIA

It's for other people – for later. I always have my kitchen stocked.

TESS

That's it! Turning off the hearing aid! I don't need to listen to my kitchen being criticized! Not today!

ANNA

*Emilia!*

EMILIA

What? She had time to get her hair done but not buy biscuits?

(EMILIA finds the biscotti.)

TESS

Gene understands. It's a sign of respect – to have my hair done when I say good-bye.

EMILIA

These are stale.

TESS

All biscotti are stale. They're baked twice to be stale. That's why you dunk them. Let me have one.

EMILIA

Where are the boys?

TESS

Where else? Golfing – in memory of their father.

EMILIA

When Santo died, my girls wouldn't leave my side. You shouldn't be alone.

TESS

Look around. I'm hardly alone.

EMILIA

The boys should be here with you.

TESS

They're boys. They don't smother you like girls do.

EMILIA

My girls don't smother me. Do your girls smother you, Anna?

ANNA

They don't come near me.

TESS

They were here all morning. That's enough. They're not much good in the kitchen. They don't cook.

ANNA

That's not true. Vince does his frittatas every holiday.

TESS

So, should we have a feast day in his honor because my eldest cracks a few eggs on Easter Sunday? That's not cooking. Cooking is every day. It's sauce, simmering ... stirring.

EMILIA

American boys don't cook. Not like their uncles – Dominic, God rest his soul –

(all bless themselves.)

could make gravy. And he grew his own tomatoes – just like my Santo.

ANNA

And Franco made the best roasts.

EMILIA

God rest his soul -

(All bless themselves.)

Franco didn't cook.

ANNA

He always made a roast when I visited him.

EMILIA

You're wrong.

ANNA

Stop dismissing me!

EMILIA

Tess, do you remember Franco cooking anything?

TESS

Who knows? That was years ago. Let our brother rest in peace.

ANNA

All our brothers are resting peace. All four of them – gone – too early.

EMILIA

That's because we do all the work. It keeps you alive.

TESS

So, who's the smart one? The one who constantly works? Or the ones resting peace after never lifting a finger?

EMILIA

Mama did everything. I helped. Giorgio, Roberto, Paul and Franco – they did nothing. Like you, Anna – you were the baby. Never had to do a thing. Everything handed to you on a plate.

ANNA

Emilia –

EMILIA

It's the truth! Santo cooked. That's what you must be remembering. Not that worthless Franco – may he rest in peace and be canonized after Santo.

ANNA

Franco cooked roasts. On Sundays.

EMILIA

Sunday was macaroni and gravy day in all our homes. I think you were brought up in another house.

ANNA

I was in a way. With you and Tess being much older – we are almost a generation apart.

EMILIA

Fa Nabra! A few years! Two maybe!

ANNA

At least ten years! How old are you now?

EMILIA

Fifty? Maybe fifty-one. Who remembers? Tess is older.

ANNA

I'm fifty and I'm the baby!

EMILIA

So maybe I'm fifty-one. Who can keep track?

TESS

If Emilia's fifty-one, then I'm fifty two.

ANNA

You celebrated your 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary a few years ago. What were you – a child bride?

TESS

Who cares?

ANNA

It's important for the kids – to know the ages of their parents and how they died so they can monitor their healthcare.

TESS

First she doesn't want to talk about our dying and now she wants to know how old we are – for when we die!

ANNA

It helps the doctors care for you.

TESS

Doctors! I was married to a doctor! He didn't need to know my age!

ANNA

Gene didn't know how old you were?

TESS

He didn't need to know. The marriage worked. That was the important thing.

EMILIA

(Spying ANNA's suitcase.)

What's that?

ANNA

My suitcase.

EMILIA

What's it doing down here?

ANNA

The boys leave tonight. So I'll stay with Tess. In case she needs anything.

EMILIA

We're right up the block if she needs anything.

ANNA

I came here to be with Tess.

EMILIA

You've already gotten the sheets dirty at my house. Why stay in another bed and get more sheets dirty? How many sheets are you going to sleep on while you're here?

TESS

It's fine. The girl will wash the sheets.

EMILIA

Not until you learn to say, “Wash the sheets, please” in Spanish.

TESS

I can get through to her. We just can't have a conversation.

EMILIA

It's a waste of energy.

ANNA

Since when are you concerned about wasting energy?

EMILIA

I've always been concerned. Two separate people one block away from each other will be washing your dirty sheets after you leave! You should be considerate enough to sleep on one set!

ANNA

I'LL BRING THE SHEET'S DOWN HERE AND SLEEP ON THEM AND WASH THEM BEFORE I LEAVE!

TESS

The hearing aid is going off.

EMILIA

Don't be such a stuhnada, eh?

ANNA

You're the one who's thick-in-the-head! Always obsessing over cleaning.

EMILIA

I got that trait from Mama! You two didn't get it!

ANNA

Mama was not in love with Mister Clean!

EMILIA

How do you know? You didn't live with her!

ANNA

*She was my mother! Of course I lived with her!*

EMILIA

But I was the one who stayed. When she was older – I was there.



ANNA

That's a little loco – never leaving your childhood home. Of course we all set up house within four blocks of one another. That's crazy, too. At least the boys had the sense to go to Long Island.

EMILIA

Someone had to stay and take care of things.

ANNA

We were nearby. We all took care of things. You just didn't want to grow up, Emilia. That's where you went wrong.

EMILIA

I grew up! I took care of Mama, Santo, my girls. And I didn't run away to that new state of yours – Michigan –

ANNA

Minnesota –

EMILIA

Same thing. That state that's so cold you wear lots of big sweaters and let yourself get fat!

ANNA

*I'm not fat! Not as fat as you!*

EMILIA

I'm thinner now than when I was forty! Can you say the same? Mama liked people staying put!

ANNA

Mama moved from Italy to America! How's that staying put?

EMILIA

Mama would not like that move you made. If Steven was Italian – he would have stayed!

ANNA

We're not going to that old fight about not marrying an Italian, are we? He's a good man!

EMILIA

Yes – he's a good man who doesn't understand why you should stay next to blood. It's not his fault he doesn't understand. And your Tina – she didn't marry an Italian either!

ANNA

*What does that have to do with anything? Both your girls married Italians and now Angela's divorced!*

EMILIA

*But she's divorced from an Italian man!*

(EMILIA starts to clean.)

TESS

Emilia! Stop with the cleaning! It's still my home!

(TESS starts to exit.)

ANNA

Where are you going?

TESS

I'm going to take a nap. You two have given me a headache. Go back up the block and leave me in peace. And do not – DO NOT – go on the porch. It's my private space and if you go there I will put a hex on you!

(TESS exits.)

ANNA

You should go.

EMILIA

You heard her – she told you to go up the block.

ANNA

*She was talking to you!*

(EMILIA makes a move to the back porch. ANNA blocks her.)

*What are you doing?*

EMILIA

Don't you want to know what she has out there? Our sister is not in her right mind. How can we help her if we don't know what's going on?

ANNA

*If you take one step onto that porch – I'll – take you down!*

EMILIA

*What?*

ANNA

*You heard me – I'll take you down! I don't bother with hexes! That can take days! I'll go with immediate results! You think I'm fat? Well – there will be a lot of fat coming at you, Emilia!*

Madonna in Heaven! Why are we like this? Every time we visit – we fight.

EMILIA

So – that's how we are! But at least we're together!

ANNA

It's twisted!

EMILIA

It's how things are! Angela and her little-weasel-of-a-husband always fought. So what does she do? She divorces him!

ANNA

Which should make you happy since you never liked him!

EMILIA

She was married! You stay married! I did!

ANNA

But you loved Santo!

EMILIA

Sometimes I loved Santo. And sometimes I like it better now. My house is always clean – and quiet.

ANNA

You were hysterical for weeks after Santo died! You tried to throw yourself in his grave!

EMILIA

And you should have let me!

ANNA

You'd be dead.

EMILIA

But happy! Although I never loved Santo more than after he passed. Basta! I'm going to check on the gravy. Who knows what it's like? Tess isn't in her right mind. She added a lot of salt yesterday. Might need some vermouth to cut it.

ANNA

I wouldn't touch her sauce. Tess is very particular about it.

EMILIA

I make the best you know. Everyone says my gravy is the best.

ANNA

Who? Who is “everyone?”

EMILIA

The kids. They tell me when no one is around.

ANNA

They’re just trying to be nice.

EMILIA

It’s all right, Anna. I’m sure your gravy is fine.

ANNA

They don’t call it gravy anymore. It’s sauce. You ever see cans of “tomato gravy” in the supermarket? It’s sauce!

EMILIA

You can call it whatever you like. Mine’s still the best. And Tess is not concentrating. I’m going to check on it –

ANNA

(Blocking her.)  
NO! You are not to touch her sauce!

EMILIA

What’s the matter with you?

ANNA

*I am protecting her sauce!*

EMILIA

*I’m helping!*

ANNA

**Do not touch her sauce!**

EMILIA

(EMILIA grabs a knife from the counter.)

*Out of my way –*

ANNA

*Are you threatening me with a knife?*

EMILIA

*I'll cut your heart out and feed it to the dogs!*

ANNA

*We're talking about sauce ~ you're going to commit murder over sauce?*

(ANNA also grabs a knife and brandishes it. TESS appears.)

TESS

*What are you doing?*

EMILIA

She insulted my gravy!

ANNA

I was protecting your sauce from her!

TESS

If you kill each other, I'm not going to the funerals.

EMILIA

What?

TESS

If one of you dies today, there will be no funeral. I won't make sauce for either of you.

(The doorbell rings.)

I have to answer the door. Don't kill each other because I won't visit either one of you in jail~

(TESS goes to answer the door. We hear greetings as ANGELA and CHIARA enter. CHIARA (ANNA'S daughter) has two bakery boxes. ANGELA (EMILIA'S daughter) carries a leg of lamb in roasting pan. They enter and stare at their mothers who are still wielding knives.)

TESS (cont'd)

Your mothers! Insano! I don't need this. Not today!

ANGELA

Ma! What're you? Nuts? Put the knife down.

EMILIA

I wasn't doing anything.

ANNA

She threatened to cut my heart out!

CHIARA

It looks like you're defending yourself just fine. No wonder I'm in therapy.

EMILIA

Anna? What kind of mother are you that your daughter needs therapy?

ANGELA

We're all in therapy, Ma. Except the boys. They're just in denial.

(EMILIA and ANNA put their knives down to check out the food their daughters brought.)

EMILIA

What's all this? Tess has food. I came down and cooked with her all day yesterday. Anna brought nothing. But that's to be expected.

ANNA

You wouldn't let me cook anything! You made me do the dishes all day! And I did bring some pizza du grane from home.

ANGELA

Look at this! A leg of lamb. Isn't it gorgeous? It's the Sophia Loren of leg lambs! It just needs ten minutes in the oven to finish it off.

EMILIA

(Peeking into the roaster.)

Look at the size of that thing!

TESS

(Also peeking in.)

Mutton!

ANGELA

It's not mutton. I went to the butcher and told him what I needed and he said this was the perfect size!

TESS and EMILIA

Mutton.

ANGELA

Aunt Tess!

TESS

It's fine. You'll learn. The guests won't know it's mutton. They're mourning.

ANGELA

*It's not mutton!*

CHIARA

Cannoli and cookies.

TESS

That's nice, dear. My Gene liked his tiramisu. But you didn't know. Since you moved to Michigan.

CHIARA

Minnesota. And Uncle Gene's not here – and – well – it's hard to get real cannoli in Minnesota – they make them with whipped cream – so I thought –

EMILIA

You could eat them!

CHIARA

Just one! The boys will like them.

TESS

If you say so. You look good, Chiara. Put on a little weight.

CHIARA

Not since last night! You saw me last night!

TESS

It's the clothes then – you looked better last night. It's fine. You're young. You'll take it off.

CHIARA

(Grabbing a cookie.)

Let's not discuss my weight.

ANGELA

To change the subject – Ma! I have good news! It's Kiki!

EMILIA

Oh my poor Kiki! She's resting comfortably now, right?

ANGELA

Yes. At your house. The technician read her x-ray wrong. She's right as rain. A little antibiotic and her infection will be cleared. There was no spot. I dropped her off on the way here. She's at home waiting for you.

EMILIA

But – I said good-bye. I took her around the house and let her look out of every window for the last time. We said good-bye to her favorite chair and her favorite pillow. I can't go through all of that again!

ANGELA

I thought you'd be happy! I thought you loved her.

EMILIA

I did love her! And then you took her away and I cried and I cleaned up all the damn fur-

ANGELA

Don't curse, Ma.

EMILIA

I never curse. Now if I saw that little weasel technician, I'd throw some curses at him!

ANGELA

Do you want me to take Kiki home with me?

EMILIA

No! She can't live with you! She'd pine away for me. I just think you should keep your promises. Where're the cookies?

TESS

Here. Have some.

EMILIA

No pignoli?

CHIARA

I got an assortment.



EMILIA

You have to watch the bakers. They sneak in a lot of the cheap ones and forget to give you the pignoli. Check! Always check.

ANNA

I think it's nice you two brought food. Even if your aunts don't think so.

EMILIA

It's nice. Did I say it wasn't nice? I'm just trying to teach her how to order in a bakery. Obviously you didn't show her.

TESS

The cookies are good. They're from Uncle Gene's favorite bakery. Could've used some biscotti. Emilia says mine are stale.

EMILIA

We should have some biscotti di cosuolo. For the guests from the old country.

CHIARA

We can run to the store and get some!

TESS

No need. I made enough food. You don't have to buy anything.

ANGELA

Don't say thanks or anything. I'll just make room in the fridge.

TESS

*No!* I'll – do all the arranging.

ANGELA

No big deal.

TESS

I like my fridge arranged a certain way. I don't want anyone in there.

ANGELA

Have at it!

CHIARA

Oh Mama in Heaven! I think I need a cannoli. Laced with scotch.

TESS

Go ahead, dear. No one else will.

ANGELA

So you're sure you have everything – antipasto, pasta, my lamb, Chiara's dessert, coffee – milk! You never have milk for the coffee!

TESS

Everybody drinks black coffee. Nobody likes American.

ANGELA

But we should have some just in case –

TESS

No one uses milk!

CHIARA

I do! I think I'll just run to the store and get some!

ANGELA

Good idea! I'll help.

CHIARA

I can carry a quart of milk by myself.

EMILIA

You two go together. The neighborhood is not so good now. You've been gone. You don't know.

ANGELA

Be right back.

(ANGELA and CHIARA exit. TESS, EMILIA and ANNA just stare at one another.)

EMILIA

She always does that. Blows in and out and then she can say she visited her mother.

TESS

Did you see the size of that leg?

EMILIA

Mutton.

ANNA

It's nice – that they brought things.

TESS

We don't need it.

ANNA

That's not the point.

TESS

(Peering into the fridge trying to find room for the lamb and cannoli.)

If they're trying to be helpful – let them polish silver – set the table. They didn't need to bring food. How long have they been coming to this house? When have they left hungry? Look at all this stuff! I can't find my stuff with all their stuff!

ANNA

Let me help.

TESS

Hold on. I'm looking for something. It got pushed in the back.

(TESS brings out a large covered bowl.)

TESS (cont'd)

Look! This is for us. I was going to have it tonight when I was alone – but you're my sisters. You won't tell.

ANNA

Tell? What do you have? Illegal substances?

TESS

You'll see. I'll get them in the oven – take the chill off. Peek!

EMILIA

Ohhhh! They're beautiful!

TESS

They're not the cheap ones you flaunted at me in the A&P!

EMILIA

Those were on sale!

TESS

I bought them to flavor the sauce – but after – I couldn't bear to throw them away. And I thought – I can do this now. I'm widowed. Who's going to stop me?

EMILIA

It's the best part!

ANNA  
Shall we?

TESS  
Aspetta!

(They hear ANGELA and CHIARA returning.)

TESS (cont'd)  
Mama in Heaven! What are they doing back?

EMILIA  
Hide them! Put it back!

TESS  
I am!

ANNA  
Make sure it's behind the sauce. They won't see it behind the sauce.

(CHIARA and ANGELA enter. The three sisters shove the bowl in the fridge, slam the door and guard the fridge.)

ANGELA  
Don't you three look like the proverbial canary-eating cats! What's going on?

CHIARA  
Do you need help?

ANNA, TESS and EMILIA  
No!

TESS  
We're – just – rearranging. What are you doing back so soon?

ANGELA  
We sat in the car and we thought –

CHIARA  
We did leave rather abruptly –

ANGELA  
And we came to help -

CHIARA  
So what can we do?

EMILIA

Polish the silver!

TESS

And then set the table!

ANGELA

Come on, Chiara. We came here to be indentured servants. We should have gotten that drink.

(CHIARA and ANGELA exit into the dining room.)

ANNA

That was close.

EMILIA

So how do we get rid of the girls?

TESS

We just have to wait. Anna, take the bowl down to the basement fridge. Then we won't get caught. Hurry!

ANNA

I'm going, I'm going.

(ANNA retrieves the bowl and exits into the basement.)

EMILIA

What's next?

TESS

Time to slowly warm the sauce. Help me with the pot. It's heavy.

EMILIA

Should've had the girls do it.

TESS

Too risky.

(And as they lift a huge pot of sauce from the fridge and place it on the counter, the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE, sauce is simmering on the stove, the lasagna is in the oven and there may be some other food items around - a salad, bread. ANGELA and CHIARA are sipping wine and folding napkins.)

ANGELA

Wasn't that nice of them to go to sleep? This is so peaceful.

CHIARA

The wine helps.

ANGELA

So kind of Uncle Gene to keep a wine cellar.

CHIARA

With any luck we can polish off the bottle before anyone arrives and no one will be the wiser.

ANGELA

That won't be a problem. When do you think I should put the lamb in?

CHIARA

The lasagna has another twenty minutes. Wait till then.

ANGELA

But if everyone has the lasagna first, they won't have room for the lamb. And it's expensive.

CHIARA

Then take out the lasagna and put in the lamb.

ANGELA

But if it cooks too long, it will be well-done and then no one will eat it!

CHIARA

Why are you asking me questions when you don't want my answers? You're getting just like them!

ANGELA

What do you mean "like them?" Like *my mother? I am NOT like my mother!*

CHIARA

Then stop acting like her!

ANGELA

You're doing to me what your mother does to my mother! You're finding all these imperfections and then wrapping it under the "stop acting like your mother" umbrella! You're trying to push my buttons!

CHIARA

Stop! Drink!

(They take a large gulp of wine.)

CHIARA (cont'd)

It is inevitable that we have some genetic traits from our mothers. The goal is to fight them! Do you hear? Fight to the last!

(They take another large gulp of wine.)

CHIARA (cont'd)

More?

ANGELA

Oh yes!

(CHIARA pours and they drink.)

ANGELA (cont'd)

Finished?

CHIARA

Almost.

ANGELA

Throw the rest in the sauce and dispose of the bottle.

(CHIARA goes to throw the rest in the sauce, thinks better of it and takes a last gulp from the bottle.)

CHIARA

I can't just stick it in the garbage. They'll see. They see everything.

ANGELA

Recycle. It goes in a brown bag and into the garage.

CHIARA

Do you really think Aunt Tess recycles?

ANGELA

She should. It's good for the earth.

CHIARA

But if she doesn't – the bag could be there for a long time –

ANGELA

- and she'll never know where it came from. Just do it.

(CHIARA cover it with a paper bag and throws it in the garbage. ANGELA gets her leg of lamb from the fridge.)

ANGELA (cont'd)

What do you think? It's a thing of beauty, isn't it?

CHIARA

I – really wouldn't know. I don't eat lamb.

ANGELA

How can you not eat lamb. You're Italian. It's required.

CHIARA

I don't eat cute Disney animals. Bambi ... Thumper ... baa ...

ANGELA

There's no Disney lamb!

CHIARA

Lambchop.

ANGELA

Not Disney!

CHIARA

But – she's cute!

ANGELA

It seems prejudicial to only eat ugly animals.

CHIARA

What can I say? Animation has affected my choice of food.

ANGELA

Do you eat cows?



CHIARA  
I guess – meatballs.

(Pause.)

ANGELA  
I like cows.

CHIARA  
I am so pleased.

ANGELA  
I mean – I like cows and I eat them.

CHIARA  
Life's all about choices, Angela.

ANGELA  
Are you saying I shouldn't eat cows because I like them?

CHIARA  
I'm not saying anything! *I* wouldn't eat an animal that I liked. But that's just me.

ANGELA  
So you are saying I shouldn't eat cows!

CHIARA  
Did you hear me say that?

ANGELA  
You're ... implying that.

CHIARA  
Don't read something into every word I say!

ANGELA  
Don't criticize my choice of meat! Especially now that you live in a state where everyone goes deer hunting. Like cave people – they hunt your Bambi.

CHIARA  
They hunt Bambi everywhere. Even in New York!

ANGELA  
I don't live in New York.

CHIARA

Oh I forgot – you live in *New Jersey*. There are no hunters in *New Jersey*.

ANGELA

But there are more hunters in Minnesota!

CHIARA

Did you seriously research this or something?

ANGELA

I just know.

CHIARA

Get off the Internet and get a life, Angela!

ANGELA

You pay taxes in a state to keep a large deer herd so you can slaughter them!

CHIARA

Why are you attacking my adopted state?

ANGELA

*Because you don't approve of my meat choices!*

CHIARA

*Where do you think your beloved meatballs come from? And that leg of lamb? Animals died to give you a freezer filled with meat!*

ANGELA

BUT I DIDN'T KILL THEM!

CHIARA

BUT IF YOU DIDN'T BUY THEM THERE WOULD BE NO MARKET FOR THEM  
AND THEY WOULDN'T BE KILLED!

ANGELA

Shhhh! You'll wake the dead.

CHIARA

And the dinner would be pointless because Uncle Gene would be back telling us to stop shouting.

ANGELA

I don't know if you can wake someone who's been cremated. Food for thought.

CHIARA

Everything's food. Every Saint has a Feast Day. We feast. All the time. Then we gain weight and get criticized –

ANGELA

I don't gain weight.

CHIARA

No. You don't. It's unnatural. You clearly are adopted.

ANGELA

Organic fruits and vegetables. Protein. No carbs.

CHIARA

How can you be Italian and not eat carbs? We grew up feasting on every carb devised. Stuffed carbs! Sauced carbs! Sauteed carbs! And that's just the pasta! Don't get me started on the risotto! We celebrate with carbs, we mourn with carbs, we are genetically programmed to be carbed to death! No wonder I resemble a stuffed manicotti!

ANGELA

Don't forget the polenta!

CHIARA

Oh M' mona mia! How could I forget the polenta – topped with creamy gorgonzola....

ANGELA

You clearly did not rebel enough. I long ago switched to meat and vegetables. Carbs only on Sundays. Try it. The weight will come off fast enough.

CHIARA

Are you saying I am fat? Please don't tell me I'm fat. Only I can say that. Don't sound like "them."

ANGELA

Don't push that button ...