

## Scene 7

*Emma and Vera, in the apartment in New York, having just finished eating.*

VERA. So this new fella.

EMMA. Miguel.

VERA. Miguel. It's serious.

EMMA. We've been together since September.

VERA. Right. But is it serious?

EMMA. I ... guess I don't know what people mean when they say that. I wouldn't still be with him if I didn't take him seriously. *(Vera chews, watching her.)* What?

VERA. Didn't say anything.

EMMA. What, Grandma?

VERA. I think you should be honest with him, that's all. Because I don't think you're serious, and it sounds to me like he is. That's all. *(Pause. They eat.)* Have I told you about the lesbian who tried to seduce / me?

EMMA. Yes.

VERA. She showed up at the house, saying she had such a big, whaddayacallit.

EMMA. Clitoris.

VERA. Clitoris, right, and she said it would be terrific, and all that. And I said no thank you, and she went away. Nice woman. Very pretty, actually. But she had been, um. Whaddayacallit.

EMMA. *(Reluctantly, but she knows every word of this story.)* Sexually / abused.

VERA. Sexually abused, right. *(Brief pause.)* Which most of them / have been.

EMMA. Oh, Grandma, that's not true.

VERA. Well. I'm not saying all of them. But almost all of them.

EMMA. I could show you studies, it's not true.

VERA. All right, all right. I'm only saying, from my experience.

EMMA. This is all to say ...?

VERA. What?

EMMA. What's your point? You went from asking about Miguel to telling / your old lesbian classic.

VERA. Oh, because. You know your father hoped you would be a lesbian. You or your sister. Which I always thought was pretty strange.

EMMA. It's not that he / hoped one —

VERA. You have to talk louder if you want me to hear.

EMMA. It's not that he hoped we would be gay, it's that he wanted to create the space in — I still don't understand the connection.

VERA. I'm saying, just because your father wanted you to be gay, and you're not. Doesn't mean you have to go out with the kind of guys you always go out with. *(Pause.)* It's all right if you want to. It doesn't bother me. I just don't think you need to have a rule about it, to please your father.

EMMA. I don't have a rule about it. The last two *happened* to be Latino.

VERA. I think the fact that you're so sensitive about it, that's something you should look into. *(Pause.)* And I've never understood your prejudice against Jewish men.

EMMA. I do not have a prejudice / against Jewish men!

VERA. I mean, you'll do what you want, you always have, but you should just think about what you could be missing in terms of a, whaddayacallit, a common, a love of, of, books, and thinking about the important things, and an easy way of talking to each other. That's all.

EMMA. Well, Miguel loves books, and he thinks about important things, and we have an easy way of talking to each other. And I hoped we could talk about Grandpa Joe. *(Brief pause.)*

VERA. Sure. We can talk about Joe.

EMMA. I'm not sure how much my dad told you / about —

VERA. He told me about that filthy book, I know all about it. It's the first time in a year and a half I've been glad Joe is gone, so he never had to see that. Disgusting, Emma. It's just disgusting.

EMMA. I want to ask you about Joe's activities. In the forties.

VERA. We weren't married in the Forties.

EMMA. I know that.

VERA. We were married in nineteen fifty-eight.

EMMA. I know, Grandma, but he must have told you about that time, when he was working for the Office of Strategic Services.

VERA. That was during the war.

EMMA. Right. He was an economist in the Japanese division

31

VERA. Well, he was a brilliant man. Did you know he had just been appointed special assistant to Trygve Lie when they took his passport away in '49? That was when the U.N. was just really getting started, and he was a big part of it. He was supposed to have a brilliant political career, that's what was supposed to happen. Do you want dessert? I have some delicious plums.

EMMA. Thanks, I'm full.

VERA. (*Exiting.*) They're very small. (*Vera retrieves two plums.*) What?

EMMA. What?

VERA. What did you say?

EMMA. I didn't say anything.

VERA. (*Embarrassed and frustrated.*) You know, my hearing really isn't very good. I can't find words anymore, either. I say "whaddayacallit" all the time, I sound like a dummy.

EMMA. No you don't.

VERA. Don't get old, Emma. Now isn't that delicious?

EMMA. It is. Grandma, I didn't know until a few days ago that Grandpa was a spy. (*Vera stiffens.*) I'm hoping you can help me understand better what he did, and why he did it. (*Pause.*)

VERA. Well, I'm not a rah-rah American. So. (*Brief pause.*)

EMMA. What does that mean?

VERA. Just that I'm not a rah-rah American. If I were a rah-rah American I would see it one way, but I'm not, so I don't.

EMMA. I don't think you have to be a rah-rah American to question the ethics of spying.

VERA. That word again.

EMMA. He passed government secrets to Soviet agents, / what else should I call it?

VERA. Listen, Joe was a member of the Communist Party, you know that. Anybody with a beating heart and a half a brain was back then, that's hard for people to understand nowadays, because people have become so ... whaddayacallit. Apathetic. But it's true. And the Russians were really the ones fighting the war, not us, and some people were very happy to sit back and let them die, even some people in the Party, and some people like your grandfather were not. You're talking about ethics, well, those were his ethics, not to turn his back on his comrades who were fighting fascism.

EMMA. So you're saying his allegiance wasn't to the self-interested U.S. government.

VERA. Right!

EMMA. It was to Stalin. (*Brief pause.*)

VERA. (*Flummoxed.*) Listen, you — he — a lot of what you hear about Stalin in this country is propaganda, it's / not —

EMMA. Oh, Grandma!

VERA. There were a lot of wonderful things about the Soviet Union! The papers would never report that because they didn't want the American people to know the / truth.

EMMA. Vera, / you can't do that, you can't pick and choose —

VERA. And whatever else you want to say, the fact remains that it was really Stalin and the Russians who were stopping Hitler from killing all the Jews!

EMMA. Stalin was slaughtering Jews in his own country, and homosexuals, and / dissidents.

VERA. Well, we didn't know that then! And I still don't know how much of all that is true. (*Pause.*)

EMMA. I should tell you that I'm thinking of making a public statement about this before the book comes out.

VERA. What?

EMMA. (*Loudly.*) I may / make a —

VERA. I heard you. What kind of public statement? The kind where you defend your grandfather against those bullies? That's what I hope you mean, Emma Joseph.

EMMA. It may not be as simple as that.

VERA. Well, the question is which side are you on, that's the question. (*Brief pause.*)

EMMA. Thank you for your time. (*She stands with some dishes.*)

VERA. Leave those.

EMMA. I'll just put them / in the dishwasher.

VERA. I said *leave them!* (*Emma reacts.*)