



Lenin's Breakdown



By Fred Newman and Dan Friedman

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

PSYCHIATRIST

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

DETROIT, an auto worker

ELIZABETH K., Lenin's mistress

"RED" EMMA GOLDMAN, an American anarchist

LEON TROTSKY

EDIE, a prostitute

Scene 1

The emergency ward at Bellevue Hospital. Dimly lit. It's between 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. It is winter, some time in the 1990s. A very, very old man, obviously a street person, is sitting on a bed while a somewhat kindly (though reserved) psychiatrist behind a desk interviews him, at first in a totally pro-forma fashion.

PSYCHIATRIST: *(Reading an administrative form)* Your name is Lenin? Is that right? Is that how you pronounce it, Mr. Lenin? And you spell it L-E-N-I-N?

LENIN: *(Stares at him pathetically; his words stumble out slowly)* Yes ... yes. That is my name.

PSYCHIATRIST: Have you been here at Bellevue before?

LENIN: No. No. I never ... *(his voice fades.)*

PSYCHIATRIST: Well, why did you come here, Mr. Lenin?

LENIN: I don't know. I needed a place to sit for just a minute.

PSYCHIATRIST: You live on the streets, Mr. Lenin?

LENIN: I suppose so. Yes. I live on the streets.

PSYCHIATRIST: Are you sick?

LENIN: Yes, I am sick.

PSYCHIATRIST: Well, what do you think is wrong with you?

LENIN: I have grown completely tired of life. I no longer care about anyone or anything. I see no reason to do anything. I see no reason to answer your questions, to talk at all, to go anywhere. To move my hand *(he gestures with his hand)* one way or another.

PSYCHIATRIST: Then why do you answer my questions, Mr. Lenin?

LENIN: I am polite ... even if I can no longer think of any reason to be so.

PSYCHIATRIST: Are you ... uh, on any drugs, Mr. Lenin?

LENIN: I do not use drugs. I never have. Maybe I should. What do you think, Doctor?

PSYCHIATRIST: How old are you?

LENIN: I am very old. It seems I cannot die. I have lived this whole century.

PSYCHIATRIST: You are in your nineties?

LENIN: Even older than that.

PSYCHIATRIST: What is your first name, Mr. Lenin?

LENIN: Vladimir. My first name is Vladimir.

PSYCHIATRIST: *(Pause)* Your name is Vladimir Lenin? *(Laughs slightly.)* Are you a relative of the famous Russian revolutionary?

LENIN: *(Pause; stares at PSYCHIATRIST)* No. I am no relative of his.

PSYCHIATRIST: Have you always been so uninterested in life, Mr. Lenin? What did you do when you were younger?

LENIN: I cannot remember what I did. I think I did my duty. I did whatever had to be done. Everyone wanted me to be someone for them. So I tried to do whatever they wanted me to do.

PSYCHIATRIST: So you were never motivated to do what you really wanted to do?

LENIN: *(Just a little agitated)* Oh, no. They all wanted me to be very motivated. So I was. I was more motivated than most anybody. I think that's why they liked me so.

PSYCHIATRIST: But you're saying you weren't really motivated ... is that right? You were motivated because they — the others in your life — wanted you, needed you, to be motivated?

LENIN: I don't know. I never could tell. Maybe I was motivated to be who they all wanted me to be. Can someone be motivated to be motivated, Doctor? What does Sigmund Freud have to say about that?

PSYCHIATRIST: I don't know, Mr. Lenin. I don't know. *(Pause.)* But I think I understand what you are talking about. *(He walks pensively across the room, then back to his desk and picks up a family picture.)* Do you want to lie down for a little while, Mr. Lenin? It's almost four a.m.

LENIN: Are you going to psychoanalyze me?

PSYCHIATRIST: *(Laughing)* No, Mr. Lenin. Though you are an interesting man. No. I'll just finish up this report. You can sleep the night here. We'll discharge you in the morning.

(LENIN lies down; PSYCHIATRIST works on his report, looks again at the family picture.)

LENIN: *(Free-associating)* The Black worker from Detroit. That Black worker with the strange drawing of me ...

PSYCHIATRIST: What about him, Mr. Lenin? What about him?

Scene 2

A brightly lit early 20th-century study. A more youthful LENIN enters and sits at his desk writing. A worker — DETROIT — enters and approaches him.

DETROIT: Excuse me, Lenine, I don't want to bother you.

LENIN: No, not at all. I was just reworking a talk I have to give tomorrow. Please, please come in.

DETROIT: I could come back another time.

LENIN: No. It's fine. I could use a break anyway. Have a seat.

(They sit quietly staring at each other for a long moment.)

LENIN: What have you come for, comrade?

DETROIT: I have come to see for myself that you are white. That your face is white. V.I. Lenine, the greatest revolutionary of all, is really white.

LENIN: I was born a European. Yes, I am white.

DETROIT: Yes.

LENIN: Yes.

DETROIT: Yeah.

LENIN: My skin color is a problem for you?

DETROIT: Of course, it's no fault of yours. But for me, yeah, it's a problem.

LENIN: Why?

DETROIT: *(Reaching into his pocket, DETROIT takes out a folded leaflet, which he unfolds carefully)* Look at this. *(DETROIT flattens the leaflet on LENIN's desk.)* I'm a pretty good artist. I don't mean to brag or nothin' ... I'm not a professional, but among us communists in Detroit, I'm considered one of the best.

LENIN: Yes. It's good. It's very good.

DETROIT: When we decided to form a study group last winter I was asked to draw a picture of you for the leaflet. But whenever I sat down to draw you, you kept comin' out Black.

LENIN: *(Examining the leaflet)* I do, don't I?

DETROIT: I drew you over and over again, but I couldn't make you look white. It got to the point where I thought maybe you were really Black. So I came to see ya. But, uh, you're not. You're white.

LENIN: So what is the problem, comrade?

DETROIT: Many problems, Lenine. One is that when I read your writings, when I hear about what you did in Russia in 1917, I feel you're very much like me. But you're really not.

LENIN: We're both communists.

DETROIT: I'm a Black communist. You're a white communist.

LENIN: Granted. That is a difference.

DETROIT: I want to follow you. I want the other workers in my shop to follow you. But with all due respect, Lenine, I don't want to follow a white man.

(A pause; LENIN is nodding.)

LENIN: Do the bosses see me as a white man?

DETROIT: When they look at a photograph of you, they do.

LENIN: You think the bosses see a difference between the Black Lenin you drew and the white Lenin of the photographs?

DETROIT: Sure. I do.

LENIN: I think, perhaps, you are right. When they see with their white racist eyes. But when they stare with their greedy bank accounts in mind and look with their private property-possessed egos, they see only rebellious communists who want to take everything away from them.

DETROIT: But the workers see a difference. To those in my shop, you're the same color as the boss.

LENIN: When they are on strike together or, better yet, fighting at the barricades, is that distinction of color so clear?

(DETROIT becomes a little more agitated.)

DETROIT: Yeah. Look, I know that the issue of color is trivial; that class is the real deal. But here's the important point, Comrade Lenine. The white worker is no longer at the barricade. The white revolution is over, Comrade Lenine. Millions of your white workers in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have abandoned the barricades for capitalism and Christian democracy. We are Black communists. Communists of color. We are Black revolutionaries. And we will not be fooled by your white workers. We have been abandoned. The white guys have been bribed. You are a symbol of white workers; of a white revolution. And it's dead. So, Comrade Lenine, what of you?

(A pause; LENIN is thoughtful.)

LENIN: I have been abandoned, too. The vision of our revolution has been bleached by a corruption whiter even than white skin. You are right, my Black comrade. The white revolution is indeed over. But I am no symbol of white workers; any more than you are a symbol of Black workers; any more than your drawing here is a representation of you or me or anyone else. I am no symbol. I am no monument. You are no symbol; no monument. We are revolutionary workers. Our duty is to make revolution. And it is our flesh and blood duty, which defines us, dear comrade. Let Stalin, the bastard, be the monument to our failures.

(DETROIT peers at LENIN and breaks into a little grin.)

DETROIT: You do seem a little less white, Comrade Lenine. *(Laughing.)* Do you think it's the lighting? Say, what is this strange lighting anyway? Where in the hell are we, Comrade Lenine?

LENIN: We're deep in history, comrade. *(A thoughtful pause.)* Or maybe we are in a memory or a dream or a fantasy. Now in history we're both the same color.

DETROIT: What do you mean, we're in history?

LENIN: This is where revolutionaries permanently reside. In history. We have no zip code. We are of no society. In the light of history we are the same red color. A young Indochinese fellow came to visit me a while ago. He was a cook on a French freighter and he wanted to know how he could take these "European" ideas back to Asia. I told him the kitchen of a freighter seemed as good a way as any to travel through history. His name was Ho Chi Minh. And a young Cuban, Fidel Castro, came by to see if "Leninism" — isn't that what you call it! — would work in Latin America. A small boat made history there.

DETROIT: Very interesting, Lenine. But what if this is a memory or a dream or a fantasy?

LENIN: Then ... then we are finished. Then we are truly dead. Then you and me and the others mean nothing. Or we are all madmen. Very possible, my friend. *(Pause.)* But it is a sunny day and those are dreary thoughts. Please, have a drink. *(Pours DETROIT a glass of wine.)*

DETROIT: *(Sips; looks at his drawing)* Then you think this is an alright picture?

LENIN: I think it is fine. It's just a picture. Only a picture. A very nice picture, Comrade Detroit ... but only a picture.

Scene 3

Bellevue Hospital. LENIN sits up suddenly.

LENIN: Why did I have to say those words? They seem so foolish and empty now. Why did I have to speak that way? So full of myself and self-assured.

PSYCHIATRIST: They seemed appropriate words, Mr. Lenin. Caring and kindly words.

LENIN: Did I say them because Detroit, my old comrade, needed to hear them? Is that it, Doctor?

PSYCHIATRIST: Is there something wrong with that, Mr. Lenin?

LENIN: There is, but I still can't tell what it is. *(Pause.)*

PSYCHIATRIST: This fantasy you have of being V.I. Lenin, the long dead Russian revolutionary talking to a Black worker you call Detroit ... it is recurring ... I mean do you have it frequently?

LENIN: I don't believe I ever had that fantasy at all.

PSYCHIATRIST: You mean this was the very first time?

LENIN: You think it is impossible that we were in history, Doctor? That Detroit and I were really in history? That it was not a fantasy?

PSYCHIATRIST: To me it seems impossible, Mr. Lenin.

LENIN: So then I am mad ... a lunatic. I have wound up a fantasizing lunatic. If you live too long, Doctor, I think you become a madman.

PSYCHIATRIST: There is something to that, Mr. Lenin. I believe there is.

(PSYCHIATRIST looks again at his family picture.)

LENIN: That is your family, Doctor? That is a picture of your family?

PSYCHIATRIST: Yes. It is.

LENIN: Has it also grown too old, Doctor? Forgive me, I do not mean to pry. I mean no disrespect.

PSYCHIATRIST: No, Mr. Lenin. I hear none. Perhaps we have all grown too old. Perhaps the world has grown too old.

LENIN: I have been too old all my life, Doctor. Too stuffy. Too formal. Elizabeth always told me so.

PSYCHIATRIST: Elizabeth? Your wife?

LENIN: No. My mistress ... a long time ago. *(LENIN lies down on couch.)*

Scene 4

Lenin's study.

ELIZABETH: (*Offstage*) Vladimir, darling!

(*ELIZABETH K enters.*)

LENIN: Elizabeth?

(*ELIZABETH crosses to LENIN and embraces him at his desk; she is oblivious to DETROIT.*)

ELIZABETH: Of course, darling, who else?

LENIN: (*Disengaging himself from her embrace*) Elizabeth, this is a comrade from, uh, Detroit.

ELIZABETH: (*Shaking DETROIT's hand*) Detroit? How interesting.

LENIN: Elizabeth is a, uh, friend. We met many years ago in Petersburg.

ELIZABETH: And what times we had, didn't we, Vladimir Ilyich?

LENIN: (*Pulling himself together*) Yes. We've had some wonderful times. And what have you come for today, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: I've come to take you to a play, Vladimir Ilyich.

LENIN: A play? What a nice idea, but I can't really. I have work to do.

ELIZABETH: You always have work to do. You act like such an old man. (*Grabbing his hand.*) Let's go.

LENIN: No, really, Elizabeth. I can't leave tonight. I have an article to finish.

ELIZABETH: Can't it wait until tomorrow?

LENIN: No, actually, it can't. It goes to the printer in the morning. The local mill workers are waiting for it.

ELIZABETH: Oh, let them wait another day.

DETROIT: But if Comrade Lenine says he has to work ...

ELIZABETH: Nonsense, I came all this way, and I won't take no for an answer.

LENIN: You must.

ELIZABETH: Oh, Vladimir Ilyich, really. This is such a play! It's Chekhov's latest. Stanislavsky is starring and it's very political. It really is. It's about a financially ruined aristocratic family who won't face up to their situation and they have their estate bought by a vulgar bourgeois friend. That's who Stanislavsky plays. He has plans to cut down their beautiful cherry orchard and sell lots for bungalows. (*Slight pause. She looks at LENIN for a reaction. He has none.*) Don't you see? It's all about the transition of Russia from semi-feudalism to capitalism! It's onstage just like you write about it in your pamphlets. But, oh! Chekhov is such a poet.

LENIN: It sounds very interesting.

ELIZABETH: It is! And I do so want to see it with you. I saw it last night with such philistines. The whole thing went over their heads. They wept for the family's estate as if the play were a cheap melodrama. It's actually a comedy. Very clever, you'll see that. Please, Vladimir Ilyich, I long to have an intelligent discussion of this play! There are so few intelligent people in this world.

LENIN: Elizabeth, I can't, not tonight.

ELIZABETH: When then?

LENIN: I don't know.

ELIZABETH: This is just like the time in Stockholm when your Bolsheviks were having some kind of congress and I came to spend some time with you. Out of a month, you could only see me twice.

LENIN: Elizabeth, I'm sorry. I know how unpleasant that was for you. But I do have my work.

ELIZABETH: Yes, you certainly do. You old fuddy-duddy. Is this communism business really going to work anyhow?

DETROIT: Hey, c'mon now. It's extremely important work, the revolution depends on him.

ELIZABETH: (*To DETROIT, impatiently*) Yes, yes. I know all that. (*To LENIN.*) Vladimir Ilyich, you're such a brilliant man. There's so much you could do. So much you have to offer the world, and there's so much the world could offer you. But you're so single-minded, so obsessed with this revolution of yours.

LENIN: It's true.

ELIZABETH: Well, it makes you boring.

DETROIT: Am I boring?

ELIZABETH: I don't know you, friend.

DETROIT: Lenin is boring like a worker. Doing the same thing over and over. That's what I do all day, you know, in Detroit. A chassis comes along; I lean over and add three bolts. It moves down the line. Eight hours a day. It makes me sweaty and pretty boring.

ELIZABETH: Yes, but you have no choice; he does.

DETROIT: Maybe that's part of what makes him so great.

ELIZABETH: That he chooses to be boring?

DETROIT: No. That he chooses to work like a worker.

ELIZABETH: (*Laughing*) Yes, yes. I suppose you're right. But it's infuriating. He's so obsessed. I remember once I was playing Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata for him. It's a very beautiful piece. And he had me play a particular part over and over. And when I asked him why, he said it reminded him of the revolutionary hymn of the Jewish Socialist Bund.

LENIN: It is very similar. I've been meaning to ask this guy at the Bund if they got their melody from that passage. It would be nice for the Bolsheviks to have our own song, don't you think, comrade?

DETROIT: Yes. Music can be very organizing.

LENIN: We've never been able to organize a composer into the Party ...

ELIZABETH: I should think not. When would he have time for music?

LENIN: Elizabeth, please ...

ELIZABETH: (*Trying again*) How about tomorrow afternoon? There's an exhibit of new French paintings. They call it cubism. It's fascinating; they've broken with single-point perspective. It's the most radical transformation in painting in 300 years. A revolutionary like yourself must see it.

LENIN: You're such an interesting woman, Elizabeth. It's a pity you're not a communist.

ELIZABETH: You're an interesting man yourself. It's a pity you are only a communist.

(*They both laugh very loudly, holding hands.*)

Scene 5

Bellevue. LENIN sits up startled; sort of hysterical; a mixture of laughter and torment.

LENIN: I am only a communist. Wow! And that is boring. Wow! Or is it only a dream, a fantasy, a memory? Can a boring man have interesting fantasies, Doctor? Isn't that what Professor Freud proved? My maternal grandfather, like Freud, was a Jewish doctor. Not a psychiatrist. Just a general practitioner. I think Elizabeth was right, Doctor. I was only a communist. Isn't it unhealthy to be only something ... whatever it might be? Now I am only a bum, an old man, a street person. Maybe when I die I can stop being only one thing. What's my problem, Doctor? What is your diagnosis?

PSYCHIATRIST: You are too old to be psychoanalyzed, Mr. Lenin. Far too old.

LENIN: But perhaps I will never die.

PSYCHIATRIST: If you think that then you are too mad for psychoanalysis.

LENIN: (*Slightly agitated*) Is it true then that Dr. Freud's psychoanalysis works only for middle-aged, middle-class women of modest madness?

PSYCHIATRIST: I do not wish to fight with you, Mr. Lenin. Whoever you are, your dreams, your fantasies, your memories, or, perhaps, even your history are more fascinating than my life. (*Takes a whiskey bottle from his desk drawer; pours himself a drink.*) Would you like a drink, Mr. Lenin?

LENIN: (*Pause*) Yes. I would. I am sad to hear about your life, Doctor. You seem to me a good man.

PSYCHIATRIST: Yeah. I'm only a run of the mill postmodern neurotic. (*Pause.*) You sure you're not related to V.I. Lenin?

LENIN: Why?

PSYCHIATRIST: Oh, I dunno. The stuff you're telling me seems so intimate — not like something you'd read in a book — and, at the same time, it sounds like real memory. I dunno. (*Pause.*) Do you have any memories — or whatever — with famous people?

LENIN: Like who, for example?

PSYCHIATRIST: Let's see. Uh ... what about Emma Goldman? Yeah. What about Red Emma.

LENIN: You know crazy Red Emma?

PSYCHIATRIST: No. But I've heard about her. My father was an anarchist, an old Wobbly.

LENIN: Red Emma was crazy. If you listen carefully, I'll bet you can still hear her screaming. *(They pause and we do hear RED EMMA screaming.)*

EMMA: *(Offstage)* Comrade Lenin!

Scene 6

Study. EMMA rushes up to LENIN.

LENIN: Comrade Emma?

EMMA: Look at you!

ELIZABETH: Who is this woman?

EMMA: You call yourself a revolutionary, but you look like a damned Philadelphia lawyer.

LENIN: Well, I was a lawyer.

EMMA: Oh, for Chrissakes, Lenin, you never practiced law in your life. One of the smartest things you ever did was to not practice law. How can you talk to the workers about liberation when you go around in a three-piece suit?

ELIZABETH: I beg your pardon, how should he dress, like you?

EMMA: Who are you? I'm talking to Lenin here.

LENIN: Excuse me. This is the famous Red Emma, an anarchist comrade from the United States. *(To EMMA, laughing.)* Ah, I take it you're still an anarchist, Emma?

EMMA: What a question! I wouldn't take up with those stuffy bourgeois intellectuals, Marx and Engels, if ...

LENIN: *(Cutting her off)* Yes, well. This is a comrade from Detroit.

EMMA: What's happenin'?

LENIN: And this is Elizabeth.

EMMA: Are you one of his Bolsheviks, too?

ELIZABETH: Certainly not!

LENIN: Elizabeth and I are, uh, friends.

EMMA: "Friends"?

LENIN: Yes, Emma, we are friends.

EMMA: Oh! You two are lovers. (*She finds this very amusing.*) That's wonderful, V.I. I didn't know you had it in ya.

LENIN: Please, Emma, this isn't something we need to talk about.

EMMA: It's exactly what I came to talk about, Comrade Lenin. I want to know where sex is in your revolution.

ELIZABETH: (*Laughing*) Well, I was sort of asking a similar question.

LENIN: I don't see what sex has to do with the revolution.

EMMA: I didn't think you did, Lenin. That's why we have to talk.

LENIN: The oppression of women is explained by Engels in his book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Of course, we'll abolish bourgeois marriage right after the revolution.

DETROIT: We will?

EMMA: Lenin, we know all that.

DETROIT: We do?

EMMA: I guess what I'm really saying is — you're not sexy. (*To ELIZABETH.*) No offense, sister.

ELIZABETH: Not at all. I like your style.

DETROIT: Wait a minute. Wait just one goddamn minute. You come in here and tell Lenine, *LENINE*, the leader of international communism, that he's not sexy? What in the hell are you two talkin' about?

EMMA: It's exactly because he is the leader of international communism that it matters. I mean, you're not so sexy either, brother, but who cares?

DETROIT: Comrade Lenine, would you like me to, uh, get rid of her?

EMMA: You and what army?

LENIN: No, of course not. Sex, like color, is important not in-itself, but for our class, in history.

EMMA: The workers (*giving DETROIT a dirty look*), at least the ones I know, demand to know where sex is in your revolution. They want to know what Lenin means by pleasure. If there's no dancing in your goddamned revolution, I don't want any part of it.

ELIZABETH: And I want Chekhov in the revolution.

EMMA: Who's he? A Menshevik?

ELIZABETH: No, a playwright.

(LENIN gets up, goes to a corner of the playing area, and begins to do acting warm-up exercises: rolling his head, his shoulders, shaking his arms and legs out, stretching his face muscles, blowing air through his lips like a horse, etc. The others watch him, baffled.)

DETROIT: Are you alright, comrade?

LENIN: I will be, yes. I'm just doing some exercises that an actor friend taught me. They help me relax before a speech.

EMMA: Am I making you tense, Comrade Lenin?

LENIN: Oh, yes. There are some very hard questions being asked about the revolution these days.

DETROIT: Would you like us to leave?

LENIN: No. Please. We must talk about this. I have been living in my pamphlets for too long. I am boring. Revolutionaries are concerned with life. Sex is part of life. We need to talk about it.

ELIZABETH: You make it sound like an obligation.

LENIN: I don't mean to.

EMMA: Well, you do give that impression.

LENIN: Do I? *(LENIN finishes his exercises, walks back to his writing table, sits down, blows air through his lips like a horse again.)* Okay, Emma. It's true, I don't know much about sex. But I sense a certain lack of seriousness on your part.

EMMA: I'm deadly serious. Sex and joy and life and emotions are things you communists don't take seriously.

LENIN: Emma, what I'm questioning is your seriousness about revolution.

EMMA: *(Icy)* I've dedicated my whole life to the revolution, comrade.

LENIN: To a revolution where you can dance. But what if you can't? What if your legs are shot off by the bourgeoisie?

EMMA: There's nothing I can do about that. What I'm concerned about is — what if my legs are shot off by the proletariat?

LENIN: And what if they are? What if all our legs are shot off by the proletariat? Would we still be for the revolution? (*EMMA and LENIN look at each other steadily.*) It's a hard question, Emma. A revolution is not cappuccino and talk in a Greenwich Village cafe; it's not writing an essay or choreographing a dance; it's not a lecture series, and it's not even a strike or a demonstration. (*To DETROIT.*) It's one class using every means at its disposal, including the most unpleasant, to overthrow another. If it succeeds it changes everything, including how we dance and how we make love. When revolutionaries make love we don't do it simply for the fun of it, or to procreate the species, or even primarily to express our love for another individual. We make love for the revolution. We don't make the revolution in order to make love.

Scene 7

Bellevue.

LENIN: (*More agitated than before*) Why did I talk that way? We had some good minds at the beginning. I assure you. I had a very good mind. But I became so motivated and so obsessed. I became a truth-teller and a pragmatist. A truly deadly combination. The philosophical profile of a mass murderer, if you want to know. Emma was too crazy; Elizabeth too trivial. But they knew better than me. I could have been almost anything. I did not wish to be a statue. But I was obsessed with being obsessed. They loved my intensity and I became a mass murderer — not like Stalin; worse than Stalin. He was a narrow-minded fool. I was a genius. (*Pause.*) That was Red Emma. What do you think?

PSYCHIATRIST: Yeah. I liked her. She was a little like my Aunt Ellen. (*Pause.*) These fantasies you have are nightmares, aren't they? But if they are history — your history — then you have lived one helluva life. Maybe no one could have done any better.

LENIN: Then maybe it shouldn't have been done at all. "What is to be done?" I asked. Perhaps the answer was "nothing." Too motivated; too committed; too boring. Trying too hard to make my will determine history. That's the fantasy of it. I do so want to die.

PSYCHIATRIST: (*He stands up*) Stop forcing things so much and perhaps you will!

LENIN: Oh, Dr. Psychiatrist. You do have some wisdom after all. That was a good comment. You are psychoanalyzing me, Doctor. I see you are a dialectician. Good. Very good. I must pay you a proper fee. Let me see. Who else would you like to know about? Stalin? H.G. Wells? Gorki? Who?

PSYCHIATRIST: (*He sits again*) Tell me about Trotsky. Leon Trotsky.

LENIN: Mainly he and I fought with each other. You know Leon was terribly, terribly aggressive. No one ever screamed out my name as he did.

Scene 8

Study. TROTSKY begins offstage, then enters during his first speech. He is reading an article by LENIN intensely. He has a pamphlet stuck in his back pocket. He is agitated and totally absorbed in the article and has busted in unaware that anyone other than LENIN is in the room or that he might be interrupting anything.

TROTSKY: Lenin, Lenin, Lenin! This is imprecise. Certainly we can speak of our Soviets as “Soviets of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers,” but it’s sloppy, and inaccurate to write of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” A peasant dictatorship would have to be reactionary. The proletariat rules. There can be no such thing as a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.”

LENIN: Trotsky, I have guests.

TROTSKY: (*Looking around for the first time*) Ah, excuse me, comrades. I was absorbed in this article that Comrade Lenin wrote.

EMMA: (*Extending her hand*) Good evening, comrade.

TROTSKY: And whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?

EMMA: They call me Red Emma.

TROTSKY: (*Shaking her hand warmly*) This is indeed an honor. I was an avid reader of your journal *Mother Earth* for the brief time I lived in New York City.

EMMA: You read an anarchist journal, Comrade Trotsky?

TROTSKY: And why not?

LENIN: This is a comrade from Detroit, Michigan ... in the United States.

TROTSKY: (*Very interested*) Detroit? I hear that your city is a center of the automobile industry.

DETROIT: Well, it was ... once upon a time.

TROTSKY: We must talk later. I’m very interested in how the automobile industry is organized.

LENIN: And this is Elizabeth K.

ELIZABETH: You’ve held meetings in my apartment.

TROTSKY: Yes, and a beautiful apartment it is — such high ceilings, and the parquet floors. And your samovar makes such tea! It's a wonderful machine.

ELIZABETH: Why, thank you.

TROTSKY: (*Speaking with even more aristocratic gentility than usual*) No, no, no, no, no, no, thank you. Thank you for the service you have rendered the revolution.

ELIZABETH: Comrade Trotsky, are you patronizing me?

TROTSKY: I'm not.

DETROIT: I think y'are. I mean does this sister mean anything more to you than her parquet floors and high ceilings and — what did you call it — a samovart?

TROTSKY: Yes, of course, she's Comrade Lenin's friend.

ELIZABETH: And if I wasn't Lenin's "friend"?

TROTSKY: Well, I don't think we would have met if you weren't Lenin's friend, now would we? (*To LENIN.*) Comrade Lenin, can we talk now?

LENIN: I suppose, comrade, if you don't mind company.

TROTSKY: No, not at all. Our struggles should be open to the whole working class — and others friendly to the revolution. I welcome the participation of the rank and file in every aspect of our work.

EMMA: (*Sarcastic*) How democratic of you, Comrade Trotsky!

TROTSKY: But, of course.

ELIZABETH: And what of me?

TROTSKY: And you too; you are a friend of the revolution.

ELIZABETH: From a friend of Lenin to a friend of the revolution, I suppose that's what you folks call progress.

LENIN: Elizabeth, please ...

ELIZABETH: No, really VI. I'm quite sick of it. Red Emma is right. Your sexist patronizing is quite boring. I know what you all think of me. You think I'm nothing but a wealthy whore. And do you know why they think that, "Comrade Lenin"? Because that's who you've told them I am.

LENIN: Elizabeth, I would never say something like that ...

ELIZABETH: Do you think the only way you say things is with your words or in your pamphlets? You treat me like a charming and superfluous embarrassment. I'm so witty and cultured, aren't I, Vladimir Ilyich? But when it comes down to it, my *raison d'être* is to lure you away from your "important work." It's gotten so that even I believe that's who I am. But I really don't want to do that anymore.

(ELIZABETH pauses, looks around. Everyone, including LENIN, is staring at the floor.)

EMMA: *(Looks up)* Elizabeth, there's no need to overstate the case.

DETROIT: She's not overstating anything. You know how we've all been lookin' at her, including you, Emma. We've been looking right through her. Wishing she wasn't there. She was just something that had gotten in the way, between us and Lenin.

ELIZABETH: *(Speaks quietly; she is surprised and moved)* Thank you, Detroit, thank you.

DETROIT: Well, shit, I know real well what it feels like to be invisible, to have people make believe I'm not there, to make them uncomfortable simply by existing.

LENIN: I'm sorry, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: You were sorry about Stockholm, too, if I'm not mistaken. Your apologies are also patronizing.

DETROIT: *(To LENIN)* Hey listen, V.I. It might not be a bad idea to see those paintings, either, the ones without single-point perspective that she was talking about. I don't know that much about them, but I do know how important culture is.

ELIZABETH: Oh, you should know about cubism, Detroit. It's dialectics brought to the graphic arts. It shows a thing from opposite sides at the same time. You communist workers would love it.

DETROIT: I'd like to. In Africa they've never used single-point perspective.

ELIZABETH: I didn't know that.

DETROIT: No, I guess you wouldn't. There's a lot of culture out there you know nothing about. I'd really like you to hear Motown sometime, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Motown?

DETROIT: It's the kind of music that I grew up with. Great for dancing.

ELIZABETH: I love dancing.

DETROIT: Oh yeah? Well, maybe we can go out dancing sometime.

ELIZABETH: Detroit!! Well ... that sounds like fun. It's a strange word, this "motown." Is it African?

DETROIT: (*Amused*) No, no. It's called Motown because most of it was recorded in my hometown, Detroit, the "Motor City," Motown, get it?

ELIZABETH: I love the way you Americans shorten everything.

TROTSKY: Comrade Lenin, can we have our discussion now or not? I could come back, but it is rather pressing.

LENIN: If you feel it's important, Leon.

TROTSKY: Theoretical struggle is always a priority.

LENIN: Yes, of course, even, I suppose over dancing to "Motown" music. Well, what are we "struggling" about today, Leon?

TROTSKY: Imprecision, Lenin, your imprecision. This reference to a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry."

LENIN: The peasantry makes up the vast majority of our population. Should we ignore them?

TROTSKY: Lenin, setting me up as a strawman is beneath you. I'm obviously not saying we should ignore the peasantry upon whose broad shoulders Mother Russia has been built. But I am saying — let us not elevate the peasantry, petty-producers that they are, to equal partnership in the Soviet state. Socialism is the rule of the proletariat; Marxism, the ideology of the working class.

LENIN: Without the support of the peasantry, the proletariat, in a backward country such as Russia, cannot retain power.

TROTSKY: Yes, yes, of course, we all know that, Lenin. But the precise, the accurate, the scientific formulation is the "dictatorship of the proletariat relying on the peasantry."

LENIN: It's really not worth arguing about.

TROTSKY: Not worth arguing about the precise nature of our revolutionary government?

LENIN: We agree on the nature of our revolutionary government. That's not the question. What you don't seem to understand is the difference between a tactical formulation and a scientific statement. Our government is the rule of the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry. That's the fact. To call it a "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants" in an article for a journal directed mainly to peasants, makes good sense.

TROTSKY: Maybe in a purely situational or pragmatic sense.

LENIN: Exactly. That's how I write, pragmatically.

TROTSKY: And if it's incorrect?

LENIN: (*Slight shrug*) Then it's incorrect.

TROTSKY: This is a problem of yours, Lenin. Everyone looks upon you as the great theoretician of the communist movement, yet you are incorrect on some very important points. And what's most frustrating, is that you don't seem to care. Moreover, you seem to care less and less. What's gotten into you? You have, on a number of occasions, written one thing and then done just the opposite! You have a responsibility to be more precise.

LENIN: I have only a responsibility to make the revolution.

DETROIT: (*To TROTSKY*) What the hell are you talking about?

TROTSKY: Well, for one thing, comrade, take the notion of permanent revolution. On paper, Lenin still rejects it, while in practice, he leads it. (*Pulling his pamphlet from his back pocket.*) As early as 1904, I wrote (*he reads his pamphlet aloud*), "it is possible for the workers to come to power in an economically backward country sooner than in an advanced country. To imagine that the dictatorship of the proletariat is in some way automatically dependent on the technical development and resources of a country is a prejudice of 'economic' materialism simplified to absurdity. This point of view has nothing in common with Marxism." (*Putting pamphlet back in his pocket.*) 1904, 1904, comrade! Up until February of 1917 you, Lenin, were still writing that Russia first had to have a bourgeois revolution and an epoch of development before it could have a socialist revolution. You have never publicly printed a retraction.

LENIN: I should think that my practice would suffice.

TROTSKY: Ah, but it does not! You have a responsibility toward posterity.

LENIN: Posterity will know far better than either of us the nature of our state.

TROTSKY: Perhaps, but the workers need correct theoretical leadership.

LENIN: You want to be correct? Be correct. You want to be right? You're right. Leon, Leon ... I can't take you anymore.

TROTSKY: Thank you. But as the leader of the revolution it is imperative that you correct your theoretical errors once you realize them.

LENIN: As the leader of the revolution, I have absolutely no interest in "correcting my theoretical errors." Revolutions were never led by people with the correct line. "Correctness" is determined by the future. You can't be right and make a revolution. Stalin was not right when he exiled you from the Soviet Union. Nor was he right when his agent drove an ice pick into you. The Stalinists were never right. More importantly, your petty bourgeois preoccupation with being right was no match for them. Your rightness is your insanity!

TROTSKY: We made a revolution in Russia with my rightness.

LENIN: For all your correctness, Comrade Trotsky, it is you who came to me in 1917, not the other way around.

TROTSKY: I came to you because you had finally come around to the idea of permanent revolution.

LENIN: That surprises me. I thought it was because I was leading the revolution.

TROTSKY: It was. But you were able to lead the revolution precisely because you had come around to the idea of permanent revolution.

LENIN: I had not come around to the "idea" of permanent revolution, or any "idea" for that matter. I was working in history, and history had come around to revolution in Russia. Yes, Leon, I am a pragmatist, not a purist.

TROTSKY: What happened in October was a clear case of combined and uneven development. We skipped the bourgeois stage of the revolution.

LENIN: How do you distinguish between "skipping a stage" and something you just didn't know would happen? What if the bourgeois stage is still in the future? What if there is no Soviet Union in 80 years?

TROTSKY: But I did know, I've just quoted from my 1904 pamphlet, "Results and Prospects." What you say is preposterous!

LENIN: The bourgeoisie, since their rule is based on lies and illusions, always try to cover their stupidity. Communists don't have to rationalize. We shouldn't have to hide our stupidity. What's wrong with our stupidity?

TROTSKY: Are you calling me stupid, Comrade Lenin?

LENIN: I'm calling all of us stupid, comrade. What I'm calling you is administrative. You try to administer history. The "correct theories" you care so much about are nothing but the rules you set up for the administration of history. The "theoretical" battles you waged so doggedly with Stalin and the others were over which set of rules history will be made to follow. It was clear that you would lose out to Stalin's authoritarianism. History doesn't follow our rules; it's the other way round.

TROTSKY: Your characterization of history seems to me rather Hegelian ...

EMMA: Oh, for crying out loud, would you two stop all the Bolshevik talk, already? It puts me to sleep.

TROTSKY: It's the language of science.

EMMA: Yeah, maybe, but I got news for you, comrade. Analysis doesn't make revolution. Passion does. People don't go to the barricades because they've understood the correct line. They go out of hate; deep, centuries old, smoldering hate of the bosses. And they go out of love; love of the working class, love of all humanity.

ELIZABETH: I hardly think Trotsky would deny the role of passion, Emma. I have heard him give speeches to the workers, and there is no more passionate orator in all of Russia. But in providing leadership, I would imagine, there is a certain need for analysis.

TROTSKY: Thank you, Comrade Elizabeth. But Red Emma and the others have a basic misconception about who I am just as they do with you. They think I'm a repressed petty bourgeois intellectual who's spent his whole life in the library, whose only passion is for abstraction and whose only love is dialectics. They think I have the personality of a pen, a mouthful of dust, and a crotch of polished marble.

EMMA: Very poetic, Trotsky. Very poetic.

TROTSKY: You talk about passion, Emma, you talk about sex, you talk about intimacy. But your sex is only the romantic kind between a man and a woman, your intimacy goes only so far. Do you know who Lenin and me are? Are you open to this? (*TROTSKY walks over to LENIN, kisses him passionately on the mouth.*) Does that passion count? This man and I have made a revolution. We have lain together in the cold hallways of the Winter Palace as the masses of the Russian people mounted the stage of history. I have comforted him in his moments of greatest fear. And our love is as filled with sexuality as any can be. I am Leon Trotsky: a gay Jew from Yanovka in the Ukraine, and I have truly loved in my

lifetime only the revolutionary motion of working people and this man, V.I. Lenin. Can you understand that, Emma Goldman?

EMMA: I don't know that I can.

TROTSKY: You thought you were the most radical person in this room a few minutes ago, didn't you? (*EMMA nods.*) You see, I too have a deep passion. Will you hold me tightly, Vladimir Lenine?

(*TROTSKY begins to cry, softly; LENIN comforts him.*)

Scene 9

Bellevue.

LENIN: That was Trotsky. He lied to Emma, of course. He mainly loved himself.

PSYCHIATRIST: Did you have sex with him?

LENIN: Why do you ask such predictable questions? (*Pause.*) I don't remember. It was the night of the October revolution. I awoke that morning in hiding. Russia's most wanted criminal. By midnight I lay with Trotsky in the hallway of the Winter Palace, leader of the largest country in the world. It was too much for me. I grew dizzy. Trotsky, you know, suffered his whole life from something the doctors then called "chronic catarrh of the digestive tract." He was always dizzy ... and nauseated. But I could never be allowed to be faint for even a moment. On that night we slept together. He comforted me. A memory? A fantasy? History? Homosexuality? I don't know.

PSYCHIATRIST: Trotsky wanted only to be right.

LENIN: I was no better. I wanted only to do right. We both murdered millions in the name of our obsession.

PSYCHIATRIST: Stalin did worse.

LENIN: That is of no comfort to me.

PSYCHIATRIST: You are Lenine, aren't you?

LENIN: I don't know. You are my psychiatrist. You must tell me who I am.

PSYCHIATRIST: No. So stupid I am not. I must go home to my family, my mid-life crisis and my postmodern despair.

LENIN: And where will I go?

PSYCHIATRIST: Sleep here until morning. Then you'll be discharged, Mr. Lenin. The day doctor will sign you out. There will be no second session. (*PSYCHIATRIST laughs slightly and extends his hand in a handshake.*) It was good to meet you, Mr. Lenin. Have a good death.

(They shake hands. PSYCHIATRIST exits. The stage is dark. LENIN lies down. He begins to snore. A figure is seen in the dark. A street woman. A prostitute. EDIE.)

EDIE: (*In a whisper*) Is that you, Lenin? Are you in here? Lenin, is that you over there?

LENIN: (*Sits up startled*) Who's that? Who's that?

EDIE: (*She comes closer to the bed*) Goddamn, it is you, Lenin. What in the hell are you doin' here? (*She admonishes him.*) This is Bellevue Psychiatric, goddammit. Why'd you come down here, Lenin? Are you crazy or somethin'?

LENIN: What are you doing here, Edie? How'd you find me?

EDIE: When you weren't there on the corner, ya know, up at 104th, ya know, I thought you was dead or something. So I started lookin' around. Bernie, my old pimp, said he heard you'd come down here. What the fuck you comin' here for? Are you some kind of nut case? Jesus, man.

LENIN: Why'd you come after me, Edie?

EDIE: I like workin' the street corner with you, Lenin. Yeah, man, I like those wild stories you tell about them revolutionary types. I like those stories. Yeah. I like you, Lenin. You're okay. So why'd you split like that and come down here to this shit house? I mean what's your fuckin' problem? You don't like the 104th Street crowd no more? We ain't good enough for ya? You don't like me no more? Whaddya come here to get psychoanalyzed, Lenin? Shit, man, I like those stories better than any shrink could. You been talkin' to a shrink, Lenin?

LENIN: Yeah, Edie. I have been. I'm sorry.

EDIE: Hey, man. That's okay. You can talk to whoever ya want. You don't belong to me. But I like ya. Ya tell great stories man, great stories. They keep me warm at night. Did ya talk about Emma Goldman, Lenin? Did ya tell the shrink about Red Emma. I dig Red Emma. She's my favorite.

LENIN: Yeah, Edie. I talked a little bit about Red Emma.

EDIE: I'm sorry I missed that. Did the shrink say anything interesting about Emma?

LENIN: No, Edie. He didn't have much to say about Emma.

EDIE: Was ya feelin' bad, Lenin? Is that why ya came here?

LENIN: Yeah, Edie, I was feelin' sick. Kinda tired. Wanting to die.

EDIE: Now why'd ya wanna go ahead and get into that old bullshit? I told ya I like you. I told ya I like your stories. Ain't that enough for ya? Whaddya want, a fuckin Valentine's card? Lenin, man, you're an old fuckin' guy, but I like ya. Like I said, those long nights on the street, ya need stories, man. And you got the best. Emma and Trotsky and Elizabeth and Detroit. Those are great stories, y'old son of a bitch. Vladimir Ilyich. Yeah. That's a helluva name. Vladimir Ilyich Lenine.

LENIN: I'm tired, Edie. I'm very tired.

EDIE: You wanna touch my tits? C'mon, touch my tits, Lenin.

LENIN: I don't know, Edie, I'm ...

EDIE: C'mon, Lenin. I don't give away free tit action to everybody. Gimme your hand. (*Grabs LENIN's hand and puts it on her breast.*)

LENIN: That feels nice, Edie. It feels very nice.

EDIE: Now tell me somethin' about Red Emma. Ya know, somethin' juicy.

LENIN: You're better than Red Emma, Edie. Way, way better.

EDIE: Stop that bullshit, Lenin! Don't fuck with me. How could I be better than Red Emma? She's in one of your revolutionary stories. Goddammit, Lenin, sometimes you can be an awful sap. But at least y'ain't boring. (*Pause.*) Ya wanna touch my pussy? (*EDIE puts his hand on her crotch.*) We should get goin' before it gets light, Lenin. (*They stand and EDIE leads LENIN quietly toward the door.*) I can't believe it, a man of your age, comin' to get his head shrunk. Shit. Didn't the doctor tell ya you was too old to be (*in a funny voice*) psy-cho-analyzed?