

Prisoner A-7

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086

201-770-0770 • 347-564-9998 • michaelbettencourt@outlook.com

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

(Copyright © by Michael Bettencourt)

Offered under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

Prisoner A-7

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The tale of Alexander Berkman, also known as Sasha and the life-long companion of Emma Goldman, and his fight for a better world through the principles of anarchism.

CHARACTERS

- ALEXANDER BERKMAN, 60s. Also Sach's Waiter/Frick/Prison Guard
- SASHA (Young Alexander Berkman), mid-20s. Also Young Man/J. Edgar Hoover
- EMMA (Young Emma Goldman), mid-20s. Also Prison Guard/Hannah

SOUND DESIGN

- Gunshots at various times
- Sach's Café - babble of voices
- Labored breathing
- Sounds of anvils, sounds of chains, sounds of metal doors slamming
- Boat horn
- Door opening
- Boat whistle
- Music

Prisoner A-7

Scene 1

ALEXANDER BERKMAN, 65, in great pain, breathing heavily, faces the audience, a pistol in his right hand.

SASHA appears, looking every inch the immigrant in a cheap suit.

BERKMAN

I don't need you to tell me anything.

SASHA

But Sasha, Sasha — who else will tell you a useful truth?

BERKMAN

I know the truth I need to know.

SASHA

So tell me the truth as you know it.

BERKMAN

When one has neither health nor means —

SASHA speaks as an announcer.

SASHA

Alexander —

BERKMAN

— and cannot work for his ideas —

SASHA

Berkman —

BERKMAN

— it is time to clear out.

SASHA

Readied for his deportation from the mortal coil.

BERKMAN turns the gun on himself, pressing it against his right side.

Gunshot sound — though BERKMAN doesn't fall as if shot.

SASHA

This is what all failed revolutionaries say.

BERKMAN

No they don't.

SASHA

Yes they do because they love feeling the dose of sadness that failure gives them.

BERKMAN

No they [don't] —

SASHA

"I did my best, sigh, but the world just didn't — " Berkman comma Alexander. Historical. Footnote.

Gunshot sound — but BERKMAN doesn't fall.

BERKMAN

"I believe that anarchism is the finest and biggest thing man has ever thought of — "

SASHA

Stop.

BERKMAN

" — the-only-thing-that-can-give-you-liberty-and-well-being-and-bring-peace-and-joy-to-the-world — "

SASHA

Stop! You've reached your quota of fine words no one ever paid attention to. Agreed?

BERKMAN

I have more.

SASHA

No you don't.

SASHA kisses him on each cheek.

SASHA

Alexander Berkman, I now pronounce you a failed and unnecessary revolutionary — a superb and superfluous man.

Gunshot sound. SASHA and BERKMAN stare at each as lights descend to darkness.

* * * * *

Scene 2

PROJECTION: Sach's Café, Suffolk Street, New York, August 15, 1889. A noisy place thick with language.

SASHA sits at a table, meditating on a coffee cup. WAITER, apron wrapped around his gut, stands to one side, arms folded, meditating on SASHA meditating on his coffee cup.

EMMA enters: hat askew, holding a small satchel and a sewing machine.

SASHA notices her, then really notices her. EMMA notices him, then really notices him. WAITER notices them both noticing each other.

Hello. SASHA

Hello — EMMA

Welcome to Sach's Café. SASHA

I was told — EMMA

Come sit. SASHA

No thank you. I was told — EMMA

Come sit. No commitments. SASHA

EMMA decides to sit.

Now, I would say that you look like you were told to look for someone. SASHA

Yes. EMMA

I know everyone here — except for you, at the moment — so you should take advantage — SASHA

Of? EMMA

My expertise. SASHA

I really need to find — EMMA

Test it — you have time. SASHA

In what? EMMA

SASHA
In knowing many things — knowing, for instance, that you are hungry and thirsty as well as looking for someone — am I right?

Yes. EMMA

SASHA
So two more things I know about you since you walked in here.

A detective — EMMA

Don't insult me — SASHA

A Pinkerton — EMMA

Please! An observer. SASHA

A snooper. EMMA

A philosopher. Of life. SASHA

Like my nosy neighbors. EMMA

I act from first principles. SASHA

EMMA
Do your first principles include a sandwich and a beer?

SASHA
And I bet I can get you that third thing you want.

EMMA
I'll go for your first two, thank you.

SASHA turns to WAITER.

SASHA
Sandwich and a beer.

Instead of getting them, WAITER comes to the table, takes a chair, sits.

WAITER

What did the Russian anarchist anti-Christer just say to me?

SASHA

What did the Austrian-Hungarian king-lover just hear me say?

WAITER

I don't know because anarchists never say anything I can understand.

SASHA

That's because monarchy is like ear wax. Can I get —

WAITER

She your anarchist?

SASHA

You my anarchist?

EMMA

I am my own hungry belly at the moment.

SASHA

A simple human being.

EMMA

I am the human condition.

SASHA

In want and privation, in hunger and thirst —

EMMA

Which means that I need the sandwich and the beer the anarchist wants to give to me.

WAITER

A king can give you more.

EMMA

But kings always want more in return.

WAITER

You follow anybody who feeds you?

EMMA

I thank anybody who feeds me.

WAITER

With the king, thanks will get you safety.

EMMA

But with this anarchist, I get freedom with my thanks —

SASHA

You're welcome —

EMMA

— which is going to make that beer and sandwich taste like heaven on earth —

SASHA

If she ever gets them — it's so hard for a monarchist to serve anyone.

EMMA

Eh, maybe — but I will bet — the noblesse oblige of the king — that he will be honored to bring food to a fellow human being like me.

EMMA and WAITER take a moment to assess each other.

WAITER

I will take your bet —

EMMA

And be better for it.

WAITER

You've got that kind of clearness in your eyes —

EMMA

But you should know that the only thing I'm going to take from you is the beer and sandwich.

SASHA

If she ever gets them. From you.

WAITER gets up.

WAITER

Consider it done. The compliment is part of the noblesse —

EMMA

The king has taught you well.

WAITER

The anarchist pays attention.

WAITER goes for the food.

EMMA

That's what goes on around here?

SASHA

Political discussion spreads through everything — like the dirt in the floorboards.

WAITER returns with a sandwich and a beer, places them with great gallantry, and retreats to his post.

EMMA makes short work of the food.

EMMA

I have only five dollars to my name.

SASHA

And what name would that be? Slow down —

EMMA

I'm saying that I can't pay for this sandwich.

SASHA

Slow — down — I know what you're saying — so, "to my name"?

EMMA

What happens when the bill comes?

SASHA

The bill comes into my hand, like a bird — sits right there, see? — then it flies out from my hand with money. Another?

EMMA

Can your bird afford it?

SASHA

He just got paid.

EMMA

For doing what?

SASHA

I set type for a newspaper — Die Freiheit?

EMMA

For Johann Most?

SASHA

You know him.

EMMA

Who doesn't know Johann Most?

SASHA

Mostly everybody in this country doesn't know Johann Most — but I observe that you know him.

EMMA toys with the empty plate.

EMMA

About him, I know about him.

SASHA

So you read Die Freiheit — “the propaganda of the deed” — you know that?

EMMA

About that.

SASHA

Yes or no to the idea of “the propaganda of the deed”? To the deed, to its propaganda value —

EMMA

I want to say “I agree! I agree!” but I find discussion so hard when I’m hungry —

SASHA

I have known that situation myself.

EMMA

So could I propagandize you for the deed of that second sandwich? And another beer?

SASHA signal WAITER for another sandwich and beer. WAITER bows, goes to fetch the food. They wait without saying anything to each other until WAITER returns and places the food, then resumes his post.

SASHA

The deed is done, with all its value to you.

EMMA makes short work of the sandwich and beer.

SASHA

She does. The deed. With great. Attack! Are you able to discuss better now?

EMMA

I can believe in first principles again.

SASHA

You’re not like most —

EMMA

Most what?

SASHA

Never mind.

SASHA reaches into his inner coat pocket and pulls out three business cards and hands them to her.

SASHA

In Yiddish. German. And Russian. You choose.

EMMA reads from one of the cards.

EMMA

"Alexander Berkman. Composer." With an address.

SASHA

In Vilnius I was Ovsei Osipovich, but when I moved to St. Petersburg I took on Alexander.

EMMA

Got rid of the Lithuania.

SASHA

What was in the Lithuania to keep?

EMMA

"Alexander" — did that mean you wanted to be a tsar?

SASHA

I didn't put this on those cards.

EMMA

What?

SASHA

That I would rather kill a tsar than be one. Just like they did with that other Alexander.

EMMA

Really?

SASHA

Propaganda. Of the. Deed. Of that kind of deed. Really.

EMMA pockets the cards.

EMMA

What do they call you when they don't call you Alexander Berkman Composer?

SASHA

"Sasha" would sound nice coming from you.

EMMA

I can do Sasha.

SASHA
And now, your friend.

EMMA
I should.

SASHA
His name?

EMMA
Solotaroff.

SASHA
A regular of Sach's Café. I'll find him for you — but when I've led him to you, all three wishes are filled, and then — what?

EMMA
Do you think I only have three wishes?

WAITER
Hey anarchist — she realize yet how little you have to offer?

SASHA
King-lover, as I've tried to teach you, my "little," no matter how little, will always be more than your "much" —

WAITER
He'll die a young and pure-bred revolutionary, leaving you open to making more sensible choices.

EMMA
"To each according to his needs" is the most sensible thing I have ever heard.

SASHA
Check please?

WAITER
"According to his needs" —

SASHA
Check please.

WAITER
Think you can meet his needs?

EMMA
He fed me — you didn't. Game over, game on.

SASHA
Check please.

WAITER

Check it is.

WAITER exits.

SASHA

Sorry.

EMMA

It's the best conversation I've had in a while.

SASHA

You must be starved beyond bread and water.

EMMA

I'm also putting you on notice that I'm from Lithuania as well.

SASHA

Excellent — more for us to talk about.

EMMA

Could include a fourth wish.

SASHA

But, you know, a name — a name, a name — I need a —

EMMA

Emma Goldman.

SASHA

I'll go find him, Emma Goldman — I'll pay up the bill — you should wait outside — too much August in here, you need to get some air —

EMMA

Deal.

SASHA

Ah, the American slang!

Lights shift. SASHA grabs a canteen. They move the chairs downstage.

* * * * *

Scene 3

PROJECTION: By the East River — August — New York City — Lower East Side — hot hot hot hot hot.

SASHA

You're very lucky.

EMMA

It's so hot —

SASHA offers her the canteen.

SASHA

Solotaroff is going to put you up.

EMMA

My five dollars stretches.

EMMA sips from it, hands it back.

SASHA

Mr. A. Solotaroff — why announce yourself like that, with that initial?

EMMA

I don't know —

SASHA

He seems generous — and you met him —

EMMA

He did a lecture where I lived before coming here —

SASHA points in several directions. EMMA points up.

EMMA

North — Rochester — I have family there — have family, had family — not sure at this moment — it's my own business.

SASHA

And so none of mine. He seems to like you enough, Mr. A. — for just going to his lecture.

EMMA

So?

SASHA

You arrive unannounced, and yet —

EMMA

You're a pig.

SASHA

Men are men. Women are women.

EMMA

And a lecture's a lecture — he told me if ever I was in —

SASHA

Uh-huh.

EMMA

I didn't go to him at first — I had family in this city, and notice I don't say "have" — aunt and uncle, on Canal Street — but I wasn't going to stay where I wasn't approved — still none of your business — I had one other name —

EMMA gestures for the canteen. SASHA hands it to her.

EMMA

Right name but wrong address — he'd moved to Montgomery Street —

EMMA sips, then pours some water onto a handkerchief she takes out of her pocket, dampens her face and the back of her neck. SASHA watches this with close attention.

EMMA

So I knocked on every door on Montgomery Street until I found someone who knew him, who told me he was at Sach's — and there I met you, the two-sandwich man.

EMMA hands back the canteen. SASHA sips.

EMMA

I don't give up unless I have to.

SASHA

But also good you had a short street.

EMMA

I would've done longer.

SASHA

I believe you.

EMMA

"Men are men" — include you? A lecture — a sandwich — a beer
—

SASHA holds up two fingers.

EMMA

— doesn't get anybody a bed with me.

SASHA

What does that take?

EMMA

Is it always hot like this?

SASHA

You didn't answer my question.

EMMA

If you're smart, you'll figure it out.

SASHA

I am, after all, a St. Petersburg boy — you have to expect the fire from me —

EMMA hands back the canteen.

EMMA

You're speaking to a St. Petersburg girl. Woman.

SASHA

Then "man."

EMMA

Kovno-born —

SASHA

Li-thu-a-ni-a —

EMMA

— but didn't stay in Kovno.

SASHA

Who would? Like Rochester!

EMMA

And Canal Street.

SASHA

So let me ask you this. Let me test you. Let me see if you have the fire. "What did you feel when they did it?"

EMMA gives him a half-glance.

EMMA

Did what?

SASHA

It — it — what other "it" was there when we were in St. Petersburg to feel the fire about?

They share a significant look.

EMMA

I admired the deed.

SASHA
To erase the tsar —

EMMA
To blow him up!

SASHA
Assassinate him to the ground!

EMMA
Rub him out!

SASHA
Completely! To see the propaganda of the deed in action!

EMMA
That's why working with Most must be —

SASHA
It is, it is!

EMMA
— amazing —

SASHA
He is! Johann Most is amazing! I'll introduce you to him.

EMMA
You'd better.

SASHA
He's lecturing tonight, as a matter of fact — I did the handbills and I'm putting them up — how's your German?

EMMA
As good as yours.

SASHA
Mine is excellent.

EMMA
Then as good as you.

SASHA
So, are you — free — I mean, free to come tonight?

EMMA
With you?

SASHA
I'd like that better than if you went with Mr. A. Or if Mr. A. came with me.

EMMA
Remember — I'm not in Rochester, I'm not on Canal Street —

SASHA
You are on your own.

EMMA
Make up my own mind. How much does it cost?

SASHA
You go as my guest.

EMMA
Guests are free.

SASHA
If you're free to go.

EMMA
I've never been freer to go.

SASHA
Fourth wish done.

They are both speechless for the moment

SASHA
Boy, it just got a lot hotter, didn't it?

EMMA laughs.

EMMA
Boy?!

SASHA
Slang.

EMMA
Man, it just got hotter!

Their laughter trails off into the discomfort of a new intimacy. SASHA hands her the canteen. She sips, hands it back. He sips.

EMMA
I'm going to have to get a job.

SASHA
I saw the sewing machine — always jobs doing that — it shouldn't be hard. I could spot you for a couple of sandwiches.

EMMA
If we have sandwiches again together — on my dime.

SASHA

I look forward to that.

EMMA

Better sandwiches, too.

SASHA

Come on, I'll walk you back to Mr. A's, we can arrange where to meet tonight —

But SASHA stops, seeing how dismayed EMMA looks.

SASHA

You all right?

EMMA

This — is — not — exactly what I want.

SASHA

But it's what you have — Rochester to New York in one day.

EMMA

And then, on the other hand, it's exactly what I want.

SASHA

Then you're where you need to be.

EMMA

I'm not sure about any of this. Five dollars to my name.

SASHA

We are in America doing what is to be done.

SASHA stands, offers her his arm. EMMA stands.

EMMA

I am taking your arm, and I am going to walk these streets with you.

EMMA takes his arm. They look very much like a pair in an old photograph.

Strobe effect, as if that photograph had just been taken.

* * * * *

Scene 4

PROJECTION: A brief slideshow of four pictures, two of young EMMA and two of young SASHA. Perhaps accompanied by music.

After the lecture — some change in clothing to suggest the passage of time. They are standing by the East River, under a gas lamp, the two chairs as a bench. SASHA holds a peeled orange.

EMMA paces. As she passes him, SASHA holds out a segment, but she doesn't take it — until, on one pass, she does.

SASHA

It's cooler, Miss Goldman, but it's still too hot to do what [you're doing]--

EMMA

Don't tell me —

SASHA

I'm just saying —

EMMA

This is what I do when everything is —

EMMA grabs another segment.

SASHA

He's a good speaker.

EMMA

Mmmmm — but you — you didn't seem all that excited.

SASHA

Heard it before. He never changes it.

EMMA

So what, you should — the ideas — just — just —

EMMA lets out a grunt or a hard exhalation — something that substitutes for the words she can't grab.

EMMA

I just can't —

SASHA watches her with more than just curiosity. EMMA sees him.

EMMA

What?

SASHA

Just waiting for you to come up for air. Do you want some more?

EMMA

No. Yes.

EMMA takes a segment. EMMA touches the left side of her face.

EMMA

What happened to his —

SASHA

As a kid, a doctor cut away some cancer there — doctor by name,
but really a butcher —

EMMA

When you introduced me to him, it made me feel —

SASHA

Usually either drives people away or draws them [in] —

EMMA

Gives him power — he's suffered —

SASHA

And I thought you just liked his ideas.

EMMA goes right up to him.

EMMA

Don't make fun of me!

SASHA

I'm not —

EMMA

I've had enough of men —

SASHA

And you won't get any of that from me. A little space — between
us — good — I don't want to be combusted. Most liked you, too —
I could tell — he gets this look when —

EMMA turns away from him in exasperation, paces some more, then sits.

EMMA goes to speak but can't. She gets up, sits back down, paces, sits again, hoping to jump-start the words, but the gestures don't work. She is near to tears but will not let them come.

SASHA sits.

SASHA

What is it, Sailor Girl?

EMMA gives him a half-laugh.

EMMA

Sailor Girl —

SASHA

Who sailed into New York today — today!

EMMA

— today.

SASHA

A sailor of deep seas, the Ocean of Philosophy, like one of those beautiful figureheads on the prow —

EMMA turns to him with a half-smile.

EMMA

Shut up.

SASHA

Don't like my compliments?

EMMA

Men should learn the art of shutting up —

SASHA

All men?

EMMA

All.

SASHA

Johann Most? Ah —

EMMA

All right —

SASHA

And Mr. A.?

EMMA

He gets a pass.

SASHA

And so we come to me.

EMMA turns away from him.

SASHA

I know a couple of languages, but not that one.

EMMA

I didn't just sail in — some tinhorn at Castle Garden. I — traveled here — no, no, I — I made my way —

SASHA

With a sewing machine and five dollars —

EMMA

Do you know the Nikolayevsky Bridge?

SASHA

Of [course] —

EMMA

You must know the Nikolayevsky Bridge.

SASHA

Of course! — don't I talk fast enough [for you] —

EMMA

I threatened to throw myself off that bridge. My father.

SASHA

For what?

EMMA

He stuck me in a corset factory and thought he could arrange a marriage for me.

SASHA

Barbarian.

EMMA

I have had enough of men.

SASHA

Me, too — no, not like that — I mean the way men think — I was in trouble a lot in school — what I read, what I wrote — a nihilist, an atheist — trying it all on — I had an uncle, shoveled off to Siberia for not thinking the right tsarist thoughts — my mother died in my arms — I came here because nothing for me there —

EMMA

And you made yourself —

SASHA

And I am making myself —

SASHA poses.

SASHA

A fine figurehead?

EMMA poses as well.

EMMA

Not as fine as mine.

SASHA

Agreed. I do not mind being your second.

SASHA takes a pastry wrapped in paper from his pocket, opens it: a poppyseed hamantasch. He holds it out on the palm of his hand.

SASHA

Interested?

EMMA breaks off a corner and eats — and smiles as she eats. SASHA eats, too. They sit.

EMMA

I haven't had —

SASHA

It's not Purim, but a little sweetness never hurts —

EMMA

And that's what Sasha brings, eh?

SASHA shrugs his shoulders, but he's pleased with her words. They continue to eat.

SASHA

The way men think, act, driven by ghosts and lies — I want to do something to wipe that away — I'm a slob —

EMMA

I'm not much better —

They brush crumbs off each other's clothes.

SASHA

Not the best hamantasch.

EMMA

It's been in a pocket — it'll do.

SASHA

Especially since we're finishing it.

SASHA folds the paper and puts it back in his pocket.

SASHA

Never know —

EMMA

I do the same —

SASHA

Savers, that's what we are.

A moment of suspended silence.

EMMA

Something else I need to tell you.

SASHA
Say “want to” —

EMMA
Want to.

SASHA
Better.

EMMA
I left Rochester behind for a specific reason.

SASHA
Shoot.

EMMA
You must know about Chicago, about Haymarket.

SASHA
You testing me?

EMMA
I’m asking because if you don’t —

SASHA
You’re testing if I know Haymarket.

EMMA
If you don’t —

SASHA
She’s testing me about Haymarket!

EMMA
If you don’t, then I have nothing more to say.

SASHA
You can say plenty more all you want because what person like me who loves justice wouldn’t — I am so insulted!

EMMA
No you’re not! You’re not, are you?

SASHA
You should kiss me I am so insulted!

SASHA laughs a big laugh. EMMA laughs with him.

SASHA
Let Sailor Girl test me all she wants about the Haymarket anarchists, about those poets for a better world! Come on, come on —

SASHA throws down the gauntlet.

Albert Parsons! SASHA

EMMA takes up the gauntlet.

August Spies [shpees]! Come on! EMMA

Adolph Fischer! SASHA

George Engel! EMMA

Louis Lingg! SASHA

Michael Schwab! Come on! EMMA

Samuel Fielden! SASHA

Oscar Neebe! EMMA

Eight for eight! SASHA

And what they said, so beautiful! EMMA

Everything that flew into our hands we read — SASHA

Couldn't get enough! EMMA

Big demonstrations. SASHA

Huge. Everywhere. The eight, speaking out — EMMA

Better world, more justice, no slavery, freedom — freedom — SASHA

So you know, you do know — EMMA

SASHA
Test me forever on this, Sailor Girl — in my bones, in our bones
— inside me still —

EMMA
I know — two years and still —

SASHA
And it still ignites, doesn't it? —

EMMA
Their eight faces still haunt me —

SASHA
Two years!

EMMA
Ignites — their thoughts, their words —

SASHA
The eight together — their anarchism — so —

EMMA
So right —

SASHA
So beautiful —

EMMA
So exactly right.

They catch each other's hands. They let them go. They have to catch their breaths.

SASHA
I — I still think it's the police who threw the bomb —

EMMA
I do too —

SASHA
Wouldn't put it past 'em.

EMMA
I heard Pinkertons —

SASHA
Them, too — whoever, they'd throw the bomb to kill their own just
to get at —

EMMA
To get at us —

Ah — SASHA

The look they give each other has a shared sorrow in it.

I know, I know — SASHA

Hanged — EMMA

So painful — SASHA

The five — EMMA

Their names on our bones — the slaughtered — SASHA

They recite the names without the enthusiasm of the challenge.

Parsons, Spies, Lingg — EMMA

Engel, Fischer — SASHA

Black Friday — EMMA

Ah — SASHA

I went numb — my family — all agreeing with the — EMMA

The crucifixion of anarchists — SASHA

Yes! Yes. EMMA

Barbarians. SASHA

I fainted that night, Black Friday. EMMA

Ah, Sailor Girl — Emma — I can understand that, completely — SASHA

EMMA

When I woke up — when I came to — came to my senses — well,
it took me those two years to make it work out —

SASHA

And you leave Rochester —

EMMA

No more family —

SASHA

You sail away —

EMMA

Weight [gone] —

SASHA

And wait — wait —

From his other pocket SASHA pulls out another hamantasch — apricot.

SASHA

You arrive to — apricot.

EMMA breaks off a piece and feeds it to SASHA. SASHA feeds a piece to EMMA.

EMMA

Can you help me find work?

SASHA

That won't be hard, not around here. Finding good work — that's
harder.

EMMA

I don't mind work.

SASHA

I mind stupid work — slave work —

*EMMA falters — the exhaustion has hit her. SASHA wraps up the hamantasch, puts it in his
pocket.*

SASHA

Come on — time for you to meet your bed.

*They stand. EMMA takes his arm. They look at each other. A small kiss. SASHA tastes his own
lips.*

SASHA

Apricot.

Transition to darkness.

* * * * *

Scene 5

Labored breathing in the darkness.

BERKMAN appears, gun in hand. He watches the next scene unfold.

* * * * *

Scene 6

PROJECTION: June 1892. What Is To Be Done?

A tiny apartment — barely room for a table and chairs.

Newspapers on the table.

EMMA and SASHA are seething, enraged.

SASHA

You can't just reject the idea like that —

SASHA points to the newspaper.

SASHA

Because we have to do something, Emma. We have to — I have to — they killed — slaughtered! — why aren't you saying something? Why aren't you —

EMMA

Sasha, please, just — I have to think —

SASHA

What an excellent luxury —

EMMA shoots SASHA a look. SASHA, abashed, but not really, shuts up — for a moment.

SASHA

Homestead Steel —

EMMA

I know the [name] —

SASHA

This could be —

EMMA

I know —

SASHA

— the moment —

I know! EMMA

What we've been looking for — SASHA

I know! EMMA

What Most has been calling [for] — BERKMAN

EMMA can't keep the sarcasm out of her voice.

"The deed, the deed" — a hundred times an hour — EMMA

But SASHA misses her sarcasm.

Killing the tsar, we have the chance to kill the [tsar!] — SASHA

Henry Clay Frick isn't the tsar — EMMA

Really? SASHA

— and keep your voice down — EMMA

Really?! BERKMAN

And your tone — EMMA

And yours — you're not [being] — SASHA

I'm being just as bloody-minded as you are! EMMA

Then act it! Do it! SASHA

We need to think it [out] — EMMA

SASHA

What's to think? Frick threw the Pinkertons in to break the strike just the way Caesar launched his praetorians — Frick is doing, he's not just thinking — doing like Caesar, he should die like Caesar — and I — what're you doing?

EMMA tries to clamp her hand over his mouth.

EMMA

Ssh. Ssh.

SASHA

Stop it!

EMMA

Remember where we live —

SASHA

Don't!

EMMA

Then remember how we live! Remember!

SASHA shuts up, but he can't stop himself from slamming the table.

SASHA

I wish we had been there! I wish we could've —

EMMA

I know — stop it, Sasha —

SASHA lets out a groan of exasperation.

EMMA

They'll hear —

SASHA paces to cool down, speaks in a harsh whisper.

SASHA

They drove off three hundred Pinkertons — three [hundred] — driven off — the Workers — the People — fighting back!

EMMA

And you forget —

BERKMAN

What?

EMMA

Always —

SASHA

What?

EMMA

How the tsar gets to be the tsar — how a tsar acts when you stick it in the eye!

SASHA

You always have to stick [it] —

EMMA

Bombs on the Catherine Canal — the tsar goes pfift! — remember our first conversation? —

SASHA

You liked that!

EMMA

Hurrah! huzzah! — but then what, huh?, what happened when the next tsar put on the harness?

SASHA

It doesn't matter what happened because the right thing was done —

EMMA

It has to [matter] —

SASHA

The deed was the right one to do —

EMMA

The Jews? You and I — the Jews — we're still —

SASHA

I've never been a Jew —

EMMA

Of course you're a Jew — you just mean you were never Jewish —

SASHA

Don't say —

EMMA

Doesn't matter — the Jews we knew — we got away, but not all could, and they got it stuck back to them — and a lot of others, too, who we knew, Jew or not — the police dogs tore their daily meat from our friends and teachers!

SASHA is quiet.

EMMA

The deed has a “before,” and it has an “after” — you know — we know — all this — it’s one thing for Johann Most to talk so much —

SASHA

So nothing —

EMMA

But think of Haymarket — think of the beauty we heard in their —

SASHA

So I should do nothing — nothing is so beautiful —

EMMA

I —

SASHA

We should just —

EMMA

Sasha —

SASHA

Thousands of workers fighting! — their deed! — Carnegie and Frick’s mercenaries — the Pinkertons — Praetorians!! — and the People — rise — take over the factories —

SASHA makes explosion sounds.

SASHA

And I can’t make myself part of [that], the thing that I [live for] — no, no — no no no no no — make myself the best part of that? What else am I to do with this life I am carrying around? Spend it in this — coffin — waiting waiting — I will suffocate! I am suf[focating] —

EMMA looks right at him.

EMMA

How would you —

EMMA lowers her voice.

EMMA

How would you do it?

SASHA

I would just do it.

EMMA

Keep your voice down. How? Just march right in there and shoot Frick?

SASHA

Why not?

EMMA

You don't have a gun, for one thing.

SASHA

I'll buy one.

EMMA

With what? Do you even know how much one costs? Oh, and bullets — don't [forget] —

SASHA

Of course I'd remember the bullets —

EMMA

Like how you remember not to pull the covers off me when you roll out of bed in the morning?

SASHA

That's not the [same] —

EMMA

Every morning, no matter how often I've asked —

SASHA

It's not [the same] —

EMMA

Paying attention, so I think I have to say the bullets, knowing you, gun and bullets.

SASHA

I'll get them!

EMMA

With. What.

SASHA

You always land on the minor stuff —

EMMA

Shoot — gun — it's not —

SASHA

What burns — the fuse is going, going — "What is to be done?"

SASHA pokes her, not quite playfully.

EMMA
Stop it.

SASHA
The rot oozes out of Carnegie —

EMMA
Stop —

SASHA
— but it's Frick that passes it along —

EMMA
Stop it!

SASHA
Frick's the one that's to go, and then —

EMMA
Then what? What's the "what" in your head?

SASHA
The fuse, the spark! The People will understand, the Workers will fight for the Justice they deserve. They hate their Slavery. I hate their Slavery.

EMMA
Your voice —

SASHA lowers it to a harsh whisper.

SASHA
We hate their Slavery! Everything we said we were ready to do, give our lives to do — there! In Pittsburgh! At Homestead Steel! With the Workers! Among the Suffering. Sailor Girl? Sailor Girl? Is she [there] —

EMMA
Yes, Alexander — she's here.

SASHA
Yes!

EMMA
The deed.

SASHA
The deed is ours to do. I will march in there. I will shoot Frick.

EMMA gestures. SASHA lowers his voice.

SASHA

I will suffer whatever I have to suffer — suffer in glory. How much better than that? Everything Johann Most just spouts off about, we will do, actually do, you and I — and History will love us!

BERKMAN watches EMMA and SASHA prepare for the assassination of Henry Clay Frick.

While SASHA dresses in a suit and hat, EMMA goes to BERKMAN and gestures for him to give her the gun. BERKMAN gives EMMA the gun, which she then puts in SASHA's pocket. SASHA also puts a knife in his pocket.

SASHA breaks free of EMMA, strides toward BERKMAN, pulls out the gun.

EMMA makes the gunshot sounds (e.g., a clap of the hands, a piece of wood slammed against the floor, etc.)

SASHA fires three times. With each shot, BERKMAN sticks a bloody red wound on himself — nothing vital is hit. SASHA drops the gun, pulls out the knife, thrusts three times. BERKMAN puts three “wounds” on his leg. Nothing vital is hit.

SASHA drops the knife. SASHA places his hands behind his back as if he has been handcuffed and speaks without emotion.

SASHA

Stop — stop — I did this for you — for the People — rise up — you can fight — stop — stop what you're doing to me —

BERKMAN shuffles to him; they meet face to face. EMMA stands in the background.

BERKMAN (AS FRICK)

Let me see his face.

A good long hard look between them — and for a moment shame and fear cross SASHA's face as BERKMAN takes off his “wounds” and puts them on SASHA. But not for long as SASHA hardens himself.

SASHA

No. No.

BERKMAN (AS FRICK)

Leave him to the law.

SASHA

The law means shit to me.

BERKMAN (AS HIMSELF)

Which is exactly what it will turn you into.

SASHA faces front in a burst of white-hot light and alarms. BERKMAN and EMMA don the jackets of policemen, grab their batons.

EMMA jams a cloth bag over SASHA's head. BERKMAN picks up the gun and knife.

EMMA speaks like a train conductor.

EMMA

All aboard! Welcome to Western State Penitentiary, Penn-syl-va-ni-a.

Sounds of anvils, sounds of chains, sounds of metal doors slamming while BERKMAN and EMMA strip SASHA naked. They pummel him to the ground. They can do anything they want to humiliate, torture, and punish him — nothing is out of bounds. All during this SASHA shouts.

SASHA

Human life is sacred, but killing an enemy of the People is not taking a human life. A true revolutionist sacrifices his life on the altar of the People. A true revolutionist has no personal desires above the Cause. The Cause! Above being merely human and excludes all doubt, all regret. Revolutionist first, human afterwards.

Sounds bump out. SASHA is curled into himself on his knees.

BERKMAN

You are a fucking loon, Prisoner A-7.

EMMA

What did you think would fucking happen?

They both sit beside him on milking stools. They can hit him as often as they want anywhere they want.

BERKMAN

Did you just hate Frick — God knows he's a prick — ha, a rhyme!
Frick the prick — was that it?

EMMA

Some kinda personal beef?

SASHA

No — no — I did it to —

BERKMAN

To do what?

EMMA

— to do what?

BERKMAN & EMMA

To do what?

SASHA

The Revolution —

BERKMAN
You are a fucking loon —

EMMA
Loon.

BERKMAN
Isn't he?

EMMA
Loon.

BERKMAN
Rise up, rise up, you thought —

SASHA
The fuse —

BERKMAN
He thought they'd rise up!

EMMA
The workers?

BERKMAN
The workers!

EMMA
The workers don't give two fucks for a revolution — they think you did it because Frick owed you some money —

BERKMAN
Or he screwed your wife —

EMMA
Or looked at you cross-eyed —

BERKMAN
Those steel workers, the ones you wanted to "fuse"? They asked the National Guard to come in to prove to Frick — and Carnegie — just how law-abiding and decent they were.

EMMA
A workman took you down in Frick's office! Only thing he raised was the hammer that cocked you out cold.

BERKMAN
Cause? Revolution?

EMMA
Just nothing but puke words.

BERKMAN & EMMA

Bllleeehhhh!!!

SASHA is curled in close, his back flat between them. BERKMAN pulls out cards, deals EMMA a hand. They play gin rummy using SASHA's back as a table-top. They can ad-lib comments about the card-play.

BERKMAN

Think Americans have a taste for that? Just jabber in their ears — just bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar — slap it away like a mosquito.

EMMA

Prisoner A-7 comes to America thinking we got some real freedom here! That the poor buttheads are just under the thumb of the rich — take away the thumb — workers united! — heaven on earth to follow. Little does he know.

BERKMAN

Little enough indeed.

SASHA

Please —

EMMA hits him.

EMMA

Shut up!

BERKMAN

And the little freedom the workers get let to have is magnificent compared to the fact that for the next twenty-two cock-in-ass years you are going to have just enough freedom to beat yourself off and do nothing more.

EMMA

And he's only lived 20 so far on God's green earth —

BERKMAN

He's just a babe —

EMMA

A veritable babe.

BERKMAN

Spark the rebellion! Kill the tyrant! You talked some crazy shit at your trial.

EMMA

And just to make sure no one, you know, gets infected by your bastard ideas — not that they've got any, you know, weight —

SASHA

Please —

EMMA

Shut up! But just for the good order and discipline of things here in Western Pennsylvania — it's in solitary for Prisoner A-7.

BERKMAN

Long time.

EMMA

Long long loooonnggg time.

BERKMAN & EMMA

Llllloooooonnnngggg time.

BERKMAN

Plenty of it to perfect your philosophy, shithead.

EMMA

To live on and off the stuff of dreams. Gin.

BERKMAN gathers up the cards.

BERKMAN

liiiiittttt'sssss time!

Together, they drag over a crate just big enough to cram the curled-up SASHA into. They cram him into it. EMMA hands BERKMAN her baton, exits.

BERKMAN uses the batons like drumsticks to play the crate, then abandons him.

Without great display, SASHA cries about his fate without taking off the hood.

EMMA, now dressed as EMMA, with the help of BERKMAN, steps up on to the crate, as if onto a stage.

As she speaks, SASHA crawls out of the crate and, with BERKMAN's help, dresses in simple clothes.

EMMA

You can't see it — but I have blood on these hands.

My Sasha was sentenced to twenty-two years — more years than he had been alive. If fate had given us \$15 more — a train ticket — I would have been there, and we would have burned together! But it didn't. And we didn't.

Such despair — I couldn't sleep: I would haunt cafés or trolleys to the Bronx and back — just to kill time — while they were killing him. I defended his name — I even horsewhipped the great Johann Most in public for defaming him! Broke the whip against his puny bones!

But it was all performance. I did everything to convince myself I was with Sasha except what I should have done: be with him. I could have turned myself in to the police. I could have stood with Sasha at trial, proud, and sacrificed myself to what I said I believed with all my heart.

I could have — but I didn't, because “all my heart” was not with Sasha. I chose to breathe free air — with no intention of giving it up. I betrayed him. Fully. By choice. Without ever intending to let my guilt argue me into doing the right thing and stand by him full-voiced, in joint resistance.

And even though for the fourteen years Sasha was in prison I visited, I agitated on his behalf, I even helped friends try to dig an escape tunnel under the prison walls — there was no denying the Judas kiss from the very start.

Sasha loved the ideal, the perfect, and so he believed he could give up ordinary life.

I loved the imperfect too much — food, coffee, praise, sex, a smug pride in this loud and unpluggable mouth — and this made me a coward.

I was too weak to let guilt purify me.

I was vain enough to want the world to want me.

SASHA is dressed. BERKMAN helps EMMA come down to the stage, then takes off the crate, sets a table and three chairs. She delivers her final lines to SASHA.

EMMA

In 1906, after fourteen years, they released Sasha; they cut eight years off his sentence after cutting fourteen years off his life.

For me, over those same fourteen years: lecture star, editor of Mother Earth, celebrated prisoner, free speech buckaroo, multiple lover, agitator nonpareil, “the most dangerous woman in America” — anti-militarism this week, abortion the next, an essay praising Ibsen knocked off in between. If reputation was a whiskey, I turned into a drunkard.

Betrayal. Betrayal made Emma Goldman possible.

We have reached complicated terrain.

EMMA sits at the table. SASHA does not sit right away but instead paces. He is, and is not, in the world with her.

EMMA

I thought you would like to see the old place — not much changed, is it?

SASHA continues to pace.

SASHA

Why should it?

EMMA

I guess — if it works, it works.

SASHA

If it can limp along, it limps.

EMMA

Everyone is so glad to see you back.

SASHA

You've said that.

EMMA

I am so glad to see you.

SASHA

You've said that, too.

EMMA

It doesn't get any less true if I keep [saying] —

SASHA

Don't worry, Emma, I believe you — so you can stop saying it.

EMMA lets that sink in.

EMMA

We were worried —

SASHA

I wasn't —

EMMA

— when you disappeared for those few days —

SASHA

I wasn't — I knew where I was —

EMMA

You can't blame [us] —

SASHA makes a gesture to indicate “craziness.”

SASHA

Who knew what the loony ex-con was going to do, eh?

EMMA

It’s been hard for you —

SASHA

In Buffalo — of all the places for him to go. Didn’t that give you a chuckle, at least?

EMMA

I can understand why you’d —

SASHA

No chuckle?

EMMA

I don’t laugh about what I worry about —

SASHA

Assassination of McKinley! Pan-American Exposition! Didn’t Buffalo put at least a half-smirk on your face? On anyone’s face? That I’d head for that city of death? — not an accident, not for me, you know that — intentional, loony but focused. Did I tell you about the woman on the boat? I told you about —

EMMA

Yes.

SASHA

"Frenchy."

EMMA

Probably not French.

SASHA

Who can tell these days — fine in her own way, gave me a comfort while she rifled my pockets, but her one bad point, she didn’t understand the word “superfluous” — su-per-flu-ous — so what good could she be to me? What good, eh?

EMMA

I understand the word.

SASHA

"Understand" is one thing, smell the constant stink of it off your own skin is [another] —

EMMA
I know it doesn't apply to you —

SASHA
Don't lie to me.

EMMA
Sasha, don't —

SASHA
A thing is as a thing does or doesn't do — existence drives
essence — or doesn't, as in my [case] —

BERKMAN, now as WAITER, comes on.

WAITER
Well — well — am I interrupting —

SASHA
Just bullshit and fog. Hello, lover of kings.

WAITER
I know your name, but I should address you as Lazarus.

SASHA
Call me anything you want — I'm just a toy.

EMMA
Two sandwiches. Two beers. I told you our next sandwiches
would be on my dime —

WAITER
It has to be Lazarus, your name, coming out of that prison.

EMMA
Could you bring —

SASHA
Let him talk to me, Emma.

SASHA sits.

SASHA
I'm not immediately hungry.

WAITER
You weren't forgotten — she made sure of that —

SASHA
She enjoys lost causes.

WAITER
— but fourteen years in an Allegheny hell-hole like the one you
were in — Lazarus had it easy — so —

SASHA
So.

WAITER
So I have to ask you, have to ask — you know I do — given all
that we —

SASHA
Ask. Go.

WAITER
You still the anarchist?

SASHA looks at them both, then away.

SASHA
You still the king-lover?

WAITER
May I sit?

WAITER sits.

WAITER
Twenty years — more, now — in this country, some of its
substance rubs off, you know. These days I find myself pulling for
Aurel Popovici's The United States of Greater Austria. And he's a
Romanian! Talking up a federation of states with the Archduke! It's
either that or the whole thing's going to go up in smoke.

SASHA
Do you care?

WAITER
Yes.

SASHA
Really?

WAITER
Yes, but to be honest —

SASHA
I expect you to be honest.

WAITER

You hear enough shit in this place day in and out about what people believe and how much they believe it — how fierce — fierce!! — they are in their beliefs! —

EMMA

Please —

SASHA gestures to her that everything is all right.

SASHA

Fierce!

WAITER

Fierce! But when you look over what their fierce believing does — to them, to their hearts — and then to people, to ordinary people who may or may not give a rat's ass about the Principle or the Cause —

SASHA

The Cause or the Principle —

WAITER

How people can get ground down to minced meat by someone's idea of "what is to be done" and what is — Right! — Truth!! — I sometimes get afraid about believing anything.

SASHA

Principles, beliefs, causes —

WAITER

Truth —

SASHA

— make us monsters, eh?

WAITER

They can.

SASHA

Monstrous.

WAITER

They can. I'm feeling the uncertain that I'm feeling because I'm not sure I will always be able to tell when the belief changes from words spit out with beer and crumbs —

SASHA

Did that myself —

WAITER

I remember the two of you — you, especially, with your dancing —

EMMA

I'm just doin' the ragtime dance these days —

WAITER

Seems like a good dance for you.

EMMA

More ragtime than dance, I'm afraid.

SASHA

You're posturing —

EMMA

Sorry.

SASHA

Point decided: it's good for her these days. Beer and crumbs —

WAITER

Yes yes — beer and words and crumbs —

SASHA makes a gesture of beer and crumbs.

SASHA

Yes —

WAITER

— which hurt nothing but maybe people's feelings —

SASHA

Or their clothes —

WAITER

— and then Principle, Belief, Cause, Truth! shifts like on a dime into a knife or a pistol or a bomb or an army — that scares me —

A moment of suspended silence.

SASHA

Lazarus scared a lot of people.

WAITER

I think Lazarus was the most scared of all probably — a second chance as a blessing? Maybe, maybe not —

SASHA

Especially if you've had three days of peace and harmlessness.

WAITER

Do I care, you asked, to come back around. I care. I have family there, I send my money home. I want what's best. But carefully want it, carefully, because it's not worth it to be right and be a butcher about it. After all, man, we each put our pants on in the same one-leg-at-a-time way, right?!

SASHA

A maxim ranking up there with the sermon on the mount. Yes?

WAITER

It's simple.

EMMA

If simple gives you comfort.

WAITER

Simple these days gives me comfort.

SASHA

In the prison no one understood why I did what I did. They didn't — I thought that put them beneath me. Pride — young, stupid — but it's now always "pants on in the same way" no matter how anarchist I think I am. The broken bits, the leftovers, the left-outs — prison is a sewer — brotherhood of man becomes the brotherhood of the spastic and mutilated and vicious and — and —

SASHA falls silent for several moments.

WAITER

I'll get you your sandwiches and beer, Lazarus.

SASHA

I'm still the anarchist — to come back around — you asked —

WAITER

I asked.

SASHA

Still in love with it — still angry — careful about the anger —

WAITER

I hear you —

SASHA

— raw around the edges of the heart — heart still strong.

WAITER

Good. That's good to hear.

SASHA

Yowser yowser may the blessings be upon us all.

WAITER

Okay. Okay. Beer and crumbs soon enough, eh?

WAITER gets up, exits. SASHA gets up.

SASHA

Sach's hasn't changed all that much. I lied to him. About the heart. I don't have one.

EMMA

Sasha —

SASHA

You don't happen to have that gun we bought, do you? I wonder what grave it's resting in? I wouldn't mind joining [it] —

EMMA

And where would that leave me?

SASHA

It wouldn't leave you anywhere you already aren't. You would go on as Emma Goldman always goes on.

EMMA

You must [hate] —

SASHA

I don't hate you for —

EMMA

You must, to say that.

SASHA

You lived your life as it needed living — don't deny that, don't do a ragtime guilt dance about it. Just as well be angry at a flower busting open as for me to — So did I, live my life as it needed to be lived — lived? — well, poor choice but —

EMMA

And now you don't want to live it.

SASHA

Right.

EMMA

Because.

SASHA

Emma, is that so hard?

EMMA

To see you like this? What do you think?

SASHA

I am out of date. I am soured and composted and rusted. "What is to be done" with such a broken machine, Emma? What can you do, friends do? Because it is unhinged into its parts, it is in junk heaps —

SASHA falls silent.

SASHA

I've said this to you, again and again, that when I don't have either health or means to make my ideas work — time to clear out. It's time.

WAITER returns carrying a tray with the sandwiches and beers and cloth napkins. He has a newspaper tucked under his arm. He serves.

WAITER

Sorry for the delay.

SASHA

Napkins?

WAITER

There be changes made all around.

SASHA unfolds his napkin.

WAITER

Something wrong with it?

SASHA

No.

WAITER

It isn't clean?

SASHA

It's clean — it's clean — and white —

SASHA puts the napkin over his lap, smooths it down — for some reason, doing this seems to please him. He smiles.

EMMA

Sasha?

SASHA
A courtesy. A — gesture. An etiquette.

WAITER
Better than sleeves.

SASHA
What do you think they handed Lazarus when he rose above ground?

WAITER
You mean first?

SASHA
Yes, first.

WAITER
Could be any number of things —

SASHA
I think it was a cloth, a towel —

WAITER
Maybe — wipe off the dirt, get the schmutz out of his eyes so he could see — he'd been there three days — makes sense.

SASHA
Makes sense. So let's believe it turned out that way, okay — somebody gave him something, didn't just let him stumble into the sunlight alone —

SASHA holds up his napkin.

SASHA
Could've been this one.

WAITER
If you want it to be so, then it is so.

SASHA laughs.

SASHA
It is so.

WAITER hands SASHA the newspaper, points to an article.

WAITER
Thought you might find this of interest to you. I'll be back — don't steal that napkin!

WAITER exits. EMMA begins to eat while SASHA reads. He shows EMMA what he's reading.

SASHA

Did you hear about this?

EMMA

I was there last night — remember? We didn't want you to go because — well — you can see why.

SASHA

Clubbed, bullied, arrested —

EMMA

We weren't surprised, Sasha — we were celebrating the anniversary of Czolgosz's [Choll-gosh's] execution, after all —

SASHA keeps reading, speaks as he reads.

SASHA

I never agreed with you about him, you know, about the assassination — it was a waste to kill McKinley — a waste to kill a president —

EMMA

I remember someone once saying that if a person acted like Caesar, he should die like Caesar.

SASHA puts the paper down.

SASHA

Comparing Leon Czolgosz to Brutus, the way you did in that speech — about as stupid as that someone you just mentioned comparing a Frick to a Caesar.

As soon as the words are out of his mouth, SASHA laughs — the laughter takes him by surprise.

SASHA

A Frick to a Caesar, a Caesar to a Frick — ha! Ha! Now, how inane is that, once a person can see it clearly.

SASHA rubs his eyes with the napkin.

SASHA

Un-schmutz'd! There is a level at which Czolgosz and I are the same — the deed had no propaganda in it because the framework for it wasn't there.

SASHA warms to what he's talking about.

SASHA

Americans, Emma, love their violence, but they don't know how to use it against their rulers — they're afraid of their government instead of it being the other way around, it being afraid of them.

SASHA grabs his napkin and waves.

SASHA

White flag in the air when the Caesar of the day says, "National security" —

EMMA

Sasha —

SASHA

Americans don't kill their rulers, they just kill each other, kill off strangers, Indians, black people, anarchists, prisoners —

EMMA

Sasha —

SASHA

That's why Leon and I, what we did, had no ignition — I need to think about this some more because maybe there is a way to calibrate —

EMMA

Sasha —

SASHA

— resistance from the pacifist to the assassinary depending upon the readiness of —

EMMA lays a hand on SASHA, which brings him up short.

EMMA

Can you smell it?

SASHA

What?

EMMA inhales.

EMMA

C'mon, smell with me.

SASHA inhales.

SASHA

What?

EMMA
Hot metal — gears grinding — working again. Rusted not at all.

SASHA
Not well-oiled.

EMMA
A matter of time. A lot to argue about.

SASHA
Including whether it's worth it to argue at all about anything.

WAITER enters.

WAITER
Need anything else?

SASHA
Later, yes. Now, no. Caesar calls.

WAITER
Whatever that means. My newspaper?

SASHA hands it to him.

WAITER
Welcome back, I guess.

SASHA
Back, yes. Welcome, maybe.

WAITER
To putting on pants one leg at a time!

WAITER exits.

SASHA
The time for his sit-down. The cleansing daily shit with something to read. Ah, humanity. I could do worse than think on that.

SASHA tears into his sandwich and beer. EMMA puts her napkin over her head like a babushka and laughs. SASHA laughs.

Lights tight downstage. SASHA moves into them.

Descending on a spider's thread is a notebook or journal. SASHA grabs it.

SASHA
Hey! Hey!!

On a second line, a pencil. SASHA grabs it.

SASHA opens the journal. SASHA writes. Writes. Writes.

INTERMISSION

Scene 7

A soundscape/visionscape — the run-up to the Great War: Wilson saying “the world must be made safe for democracy,” mobilization, trench warfare, posters, etcetera, etcetera. And at an ear-blasting volume, the Sousa march, “The Army Goes Rolling Along,” perhaps warped and distorted and over-sampled. Cacophony. Cacophony. Cacophony.

Into to this and out of this comes BERKMAN, no longer SASHA, dressed in sweatpants, sweatshirt, canvas shoes, on a stage that suggests a boxing ring or an arena of some sort.

A small stool, a water bottle, and a second pair of gloves are off to one side.

He shouts, he shouts, he shouts as if to shout the madness down. He puts on boxing gloves and moves, if stiffly, around the ring, shouting as he boxes.

BERKMAN

No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No.

BERKMAN shouts as much as he feels he needs to shout until the madness begins to abate. He’s got his sweat going.

The cacophony comes back momentarily, and he shouts it down again.

BERKMAN

No. No. No.

It goes away. SASHA enters, now just a YOUNG MAN. BERKMAN stops boxing.

BERKMAN

Stay where you are. Do I know you? Who are you?

SASHA

Nobody — just a stiff.

BERKMAN

Should I be afraid of a stiff like you?

SASHA

Miss Goldman sent me.

BERKMAN

How do I know that? I said stay where you are.

SASHA

I got —

BERKMAN

How do I know that you’re not one of Gregory’s men —

SASHA
Like I [told you] —

BERKMAN
One of his undercover goons —

SASHA
I don't know any Gregory — and I ain't a goon for anything.

BERKMAN
So you say.

SASHA
So I do say.

BERKMAN
Come closer. What is this thing you say you've got?

SASHA
A note. From Miss Goldman.

BERKMAN
Then you better show it to me.

SASHA takes it out of a pocket, unfolds it. BERKMAN reads.

SASHA
It's from her.

BERKMAN
I'll be the judge of that.

SASHA
I also got this. In the mail. She told me to show you.

SASHA unfolds a letter. BERKMAN scans it.

BERKMAN
The infamous draft notice — the passing-over your body by the
angel of death. Put them away — I've seen what I need.

SASHA puts both pieces of paper away. They look at each other.

BERKMAN
You like Tim or Timothy?

SASHA
What?

BERKMAN
Your name — Tim or —

SASHA

Tim — Tim —

BERKMAN

Tim. Gregory is Thomas Gregory, Attorney General, by the way, Tim.

SASHA

What am I supposed to do?

BERKMAN gets the other pair of gloves.

BERKMAN

You box?

SASHA

You?

BERKMAN

That's not what I asked you.

SASHA

Some — maybe not a lot —

BERKMAN

You got something against boxing with people like me?

SASHA

No. What'd'ya mean?

BERKMAN

Russian Jew anarchist — porky around the equator? Enemy of the state, according to Gregory and his goons. And President Wilson, the man who's got your best interests at heart.

BERKMAN takes off his own gloves, indicates for SASHA to offer his hands, which he does. BERKMAN puts the gloves on SASHA.

SASHA

Look —

BERKMAN

Gregory wants people like me, like Emma Goldman, out of the way.

SASHA

Look — I don't wanna fight with you —

BERKMAN

Maybe you're a goon at heart —

SASHA
One last time, I don't wanna fight with you —

BERKMAN
Not me — Gregory's the one you need to [fight]— undercover
goons are the ones you [need to] —

SASHA
She said you could help me.

BERKMAN steps back, puts on his own gloves.

BERKMAN
Yep I can.

They check each other out.

SASHA
Well?

BERKMAN
You know what that letter means, Tim?

SASHA
It means I gotta go fight.

BERKMAN
No, it means the government can steal you off the street
whenever it wants. Besides, fight whom?

SASHA
Germans.

BERKMAN
Who?

SASHA
Germans — you deaf [or] —

BERKMAN
Got anything against Germans, Tim?

SASHA
No.

BERKMAN
You know any Germans face to face, Tim?

SASHA
No.

BERKMAN
So why would you go off to kill them, Tim?

SASHA
I don't want to go — that's why I came [here] —

BERKMAN
So don't go.

SASHA
That's all your help?

Without warning, BERKMAN advances on SASHA and starts hitting him — gets in a couple of good punches before SASHA puts up his hands to protect himself.

BERKMAN stops.

BERKMAN
The draft says President Wilson can take your body and do whatever he wants with it — you want him feeling you up?

SASHA
Prefer not.

BERKMAN
Prefer?

BERKMAN advances again, but this time SASHA is ready and counters the punches. He doesn't punch BERKMAN back — he's humoring BERKMAN.

BERKMAN
"Prefer" is a shit word —

BERKMAN backs away from SASHA, all the time indicating for SASHA to advance on him — taunting him. SASHA follows on but doesn't really press his advantage in youth and strength — he throws a punch now and again but never seriously.

BERKMAN
Don't use shit words. They buried me in prison for fourteen of my favorite years because I terrorized a rich man — to shut me up you gotta kill me because terrorizing doesn't shut me down —

SASHA throws a punch, BERKMAN blocks it.

BERKMAN
Whoa!

As they box, BERKMAN speaks.

BERKMAN

Tim, this is what I'm going to say tonight at the meeting: "Mr. Wilson has taken us to war — which would be fine if the bankers and industrialists and arms merchants were the ones going off for slaughter. But the old men who declare the war force young men to fight it. No! No! And again, No! Tell Mr. Wilson and his capitalist trough-feeders that we will resist his call for universal conscription — universal slavery! universal death! — and support anyone who refuses to be conscripted. Let the old men fight — let the young men live!"

It's clear that BERKMAN is outmatched by SASHA — or would be if SASHA fought full out. BERKMAN holds up his hands to stop the action, and SASHA drops his guard. BERKMAN immediately sucker-punches SASHA, maybe even knocks him to the ground. It's not a hard shot, but it does what it needs to do.

BERKMAN

Sucker punched — I name that one "Gregory." That was Wilson, too. What'd'ya think of that, Tim? Is that what you'd prefer, Tim?

SASHA shakes it off.

BERKMAN

What are you going to do, Tim?

SASHA

You're telling me to fight.

BERKMAN

I'm telling you to think about your other choices.

SASHA

I can't box 'em all.

BERKMAN

I didn't say brute force — they've got more of that than you do —

SASHA

So how?

SASHA tries to sneak in a punch, but BERKMAN blocks him.

BERKMAN

Ah ah ah —

SASHA

Just checking.

BERKMAN pulls his own gloves off. SASHA holds out his hands. BERKMAN takes off SASHA's gloves.

BERKMAN

You — well, maybe not you, you being who you are —

SASHA

What're you [talking about] —

BERKMAN

— but a real stiff, let's say, for the theory of it — you — he — comes to our meeting tonight, he comes to every meeting he can come to — he looks to his right and to his left, front and back, to check out who's going to buck him up and who he can buck up, who swims in the same pool of shit — and then decides how much pain he can put up with to keep himself from being sent away to kill Germans he doesn't know.

SASHA

So you don't really have a real answer for me.

BERKMAN

An answer, definitive, would be "go to Canada" — an answer would be "kill all the Germans you want" — an answer would be "go kill Germans in Canada" —

BERKMAN offers SASHA water.

BERKMAN

Which would all be illegal to say, so we don't recite definitives. We just tell people that they have minds and that they have to make up those minds about this and that we trust them to do what's right —

SASHA

Which makes you a fool.

BERKMAN

That's the only way anything good gets done, Tim. Tim. For you, Tim, though, I do have an answer. Let's look at that draft letter again. Go on.

SASHA pulls out the letter, opens it, looks at it.

BERKMAN

Look at the name over the address.

SASHA laughs.

BERKMAN

Not Tim. Or Timothy.

SASHA

Mark. It's Mark.

BERKMAN

You need to prep yourself better, code name zero. Might as well show me yours now.

SASHA pulls a badge out of his back pocket, shows it.

BERKMAN

If even that is your actual name.

SASHA

What's worse than a fool?

BERKMAN

I should just point at you. Nice forgery on the Goldman. But that gave it away, too.

SASHA

Yeah?

BERKMAN

Note to your bosses: She has never called me "Aleck" or written that name. It's Sasha. So — arrested or not? All I told you was that you had to make up your own mind — if that's a conspiracy against the draft, then it's between me and you, and you'll have to cuff yourself too —

SASHA

You box all right for a fat-ass anarchist.

BERKMAN

Stout anarchist.

SASHA

Go hold your meeting tonight with Goldman — this was only a courtesy call. Just checking in.

BERKMAN

I meant what I said — you should rethink the choices that have made you "you."

SASHA

I like my choices.

BERKMAN

So, under-the-covers work for the Justice Department feels good?

SASHA

Better than being a rabbit chased by the wolves.

BERKMAN

Wolf — you really mean the bully. How red-blooded can you really be, Badge 1917, when all they let you play is the bully? Goldman and I can upgrade your manhood.

SASHA

My manhood is [fine] —

BERKMAN

So come to the meeting tonight and test it out — see if you can bump up to Badge Number One. I promise not to tell Gregory. Or Wilson.

SASHA

I'll pass on the meeting.

BERKMAN

And so pass on your manhood.

SASHA

You should get started on leaving.

BERKMAN

You're right — I can see it right there — the bully rising up in your face. Hope they don't send you to Germany between now and then — it's topsy-turvy out there —

SASHA

Prisons everywhere all the time for thin and stout alike.

BERKMAN backs away from SASHA, carrying the gloves and water. SASHA takes a notebook out of his jacket and writes.

SASHA

(laughing)

Mark. Mark. Mark Mark Mark Mark —

BERKMAN pauses, puts down his equipment, then moves back to SASHA.

BERKMAN

You know, I don't expect people who don't expect a lot of themselves to have much spine —

BERKMAN barrels into SASHA, continues shoving him until SASHA shoves back hard — BERKMAN is outmatched by the younger man.

BERKMAN

— but I just got sick and tired of this — people die while jerks like you — smug cock-sucking — we are just trying to save [people] — and you're playing games —

SASHA
I will arrest you — keep your hands [off] —

BERKMAN
“Arrest” is another shit word.

SASHA
Like I said, I’m doing my job.

BERKMAN
“My job” — shit words.

SASHA
Back off.

BERKMAN
“Checking up”? Shit words. And on what — bombs? The only bombs we’re making? Making sure no one gets slaughtered to make someone else richer. Why such a problem with that?

SASHA
Because we’re at war.

BERKMAN
Your bosses are at war. The people who buy off your bosses are at war. “We” are not at war. You even said you don’t know any goddamn Germans. Who can you really trust?

BERKMAN turns to go.

BERKMAN
Consider me checked up on — put in your timesheet. Work to do.

SASHA
You always sound like you’re going to win this thing.

BERKMAN
Or die trying.

SASHA
Really?

BERKMAN
If you can’t go that far, why go at all?

SASHA
Because you can’t win this thing.

BERKMAN
Just what a cowardly lion like me expects to hear from a wicked terrorist bully witch like you.

Cacophony begins to rise as BERKMAN leaves.

SASHA

I'm not wicked.

BERKMAN

Wicked is as wicked does, 1917. I have to go.

SASHA

I'm not the terrorist! You tried to kill a man for terror.

BERKMAN

Wrong man. Wrong time. Wrong kind of terror.

SASHA

And I'm smug?

BERKMAN

We're smug because we're in the right.

SASHA

And why am I not — we're not — right?

BERKMAN

You see the meat grinder working and don't do a thing to stop it. You're in love with the knives and the makers of knives. That's terrorist to us. I really have to go.

BERKMAN moves to the exit.

BERKMAN

You should fall in love with us instead, 1917 — you'd be safer and happier. Getting people to feed their own minds and not eat patriotic sewage — that is a great day's work!

SASHA

You are dangerous people.

BERKMAN

Right kind of terror.

SASHA

You're an enemy.

BERKMAN

Sticks and stones —

Louder and louder.

BERKMAN

Destroying the world by pushing it into a war is an ass-frontwards way to keep it safe, don't you think! It's really three-part simple Tim/Mark/Badge Number 1917: No fucking draft. No fucking conscription. No fucking war. Go!

Cacophony in full swing, now interspersed with the voice of BERKMAN speaking his speech at the meeting that night.

* * * * *

Scene 8

Continuation of the cacophony, now shifting into a court scene, banging gavels, martial music (e.g., Sousa's "Bullets and Bayonets"), a voice pronouncing "You are guilty of a conspiracy to encourage resistance to the draft" and "You are hereby sentenced to 2 years in federal penitentiary," pictures of GOLDMAN and BERKMAN prior to their deportation in 1919.

As cacophony subsides: a room, an overhead light, a table, a chair. BERKMAN, in overcoat, seated under the light, now handcuffed.

SASHA emerges from the shadows, dressed now as J. EDGAR HOOVER, clearly the young man who had boxed with BERKMAN but now 24, dressed in a cheap suit, cheap shoes, overcoat, maybe a fedora or straw boater.

[NOTE: HOOVER engineered the deportation of GOLDMAN and BERKMAN to the Soviet Union.]

The deep sound of a boat horn.

SASHA

Know what that is? That is the sweet sweet sound of your deportation.

BERKMAN

Why have you brought [me here] —

SASHA

My house —

BERKMAN

Why have I been separated [from] —

SASHA

My house — my deportation — my rules.

BERKMAN

Rules?

SASHA

Rules.

BERKMAN
For John Edgar Hoover? He flatters [himself] —

SASHA
John Edgar Hoover does.

BERKMAN
Does he still have “Tim” and Badge 1917?

SASHA
He is moving closer to Badge Number One.

BERKMAN
I want to be taken back to —

SASHA
My house.

BERKMAN
I want to be taken [back to] —

SASHA
Important event for today? By his late-morning cup of coffee
Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman will be gone — his
paycheck earned.

BERKMAN looks at SASHA as if looking at a baby.

BERKMAN
If it's over, John, then why —

SASHA
Because it's not, Sasha.

Both are a bit surprised by the emphasis on the name. SASHA sighs, regains his cool.

SASHA
The trial for conspiracy, your two years in prison — Goldman's two
years — this coming export — this “pest control” — vermin
anarchist, communist, socialist — all cleansed from the body
politic — by the thousands, Sasha, all these lice now gone — and
today, two hundred and forty-nine more disappeared — Emma
Goldman, check — Alexander Berkman, check —

BERKMAN
From God's ass right to your mouth —

SASHA
And from my mouth to “goodbye, goodbye” — you should just
listen now because, as you know, it's treason these days to get
people thinking for themselves, and I've got to be very careful.

BERKMAN gives SASHA a very quizzical look. SASHA moves in closer.

SASHA

You and Goldman — you got the jury to deliberate for thirty-nine minutes —

BERKMAN

Thirty-eight longer than —

SASHA

Ssssh. Ssssh. Sasha, here's the thing. Here's the thing. That thirty-nine minutes — surprised me. Which leads to another. In spite of all — you — the two of you — don't — give — up. The pests really believe.

BERKMAN turns to face SASHA.

BERKMAN

Why do you think we're calling each other by first names?

SASHA

I didn't ask you a question.

BERKMAN

But I have an answer for the question you didn't ask. You're twenty-four years old, John — badge one on the way — but you will be bored without us.

SASHA

Remember — vermin —

BERKMAN

Spout that party line for your paycheck — but you do love us dearly. Ever since the day we boxed it all out.

SASHA does not reply, but he does respond. BERKMAN holds out his hands. SASHA uncuffs him.

BERKMAN

And the "you" I mean is "you" personally. The time you spent — personally — the intensity of the sniffing-out you did — personally — to put this deportation order together — you say you hate us, but it certainly looks a lot like [love] —

The boat horn sounds again.

BERKMAN

In my anarchist utopia, John, we would put your love to much better uses.

A moment of silence.

SASHA

Such as.

The boat horn sounds again.

SASHA

Not a lot of time or much of an open window.

BERKMAN

Straight, no chaser.

SASHA

Window is closing.

BERKMAN

Then, John, this, which I know you've read because of your big fat loving dossiers on us —

SASHA

Closing —

BERKMAN

"Anarchism means that you should be free; that no one should enslave you, boss you, rob you, or impose upon you." From my book, John. The one you've read.

BERKMAN looks at SASHA, who does not tell him to stop.

BERKMAN

"It means that you should be free to do the things you want to do; and that you should not be compelled to do what you don't want to do.

"It means that you should have a chance to choose the kind of a life you want to live, and live it without anybody interfering.

"It means that the next fellow should have the same freedom as you, that everyone should have the same rights and liberties.

"It means that all men are brothers, and that they should live like brothers, in peace and harmony."

BERKMAN pauses. SASHA says nothing. BERKMAN continues.

BERKMAN

"That is to say, that there should be no war, no violence used by one set of men against another, no monopoly and no poverty, no oppression, no taking advantage of your fellow-man.

“In short, Anarchism means a condition or society where all men and women are free, and where all enjoy equally the benefits of an ordered and sensible life.

“‘Can that be?’ you ask; ‘and how? Not before we all become angels.’”

“Well, let us talk it over. Maybe I can show you that we can be decent and live as decent folks even without growing wings.”

BERKMAN lets the words echo a little longer.

BERKMAN

The kingdom of heaven upon the earth — but under our own powers.

SASHA paces, as if caged.

BERKMAN

I see I’ve stunned you, John, with my eloquence.

With an abrupt move, SASHA grabs BERKMAN by the back of the neck and would, if moved to do so, smash his face into the table.

SASHA

You can’t.

BERKMAN

Can’t what?

SASHA

Believe this.

BERKMAN

But I do, John —

SASHA

How?

BERKMAN

I just rise up in the morning —

SASHA pushes harder against BERKMAN’s neck; BERKMAN resists.

SASHA

How?

BERKMAN

Because I have had glimpses — because I have seen it —

SASHA

Seen it —

BERKMAN

Yes —

SASHA pushes harder.

BERKMAN

Not always, not often, not often enough — but enough —

SASHA lets BERKMAN go.

BERKMAN

I also hate being told what to do — you already knew that —

SASHA

Why haven't I seen it? Because it's what —

BERKMAN

You can't see it the way you are built now.

A moment of silence.

BERKMAN

If you want to, then you have to change how —

SASHA

If there weren't so many enemies —

BERKMAN laughs.

BERKMAN

Enemies? Really? Emma Goldman? Me?

BERKMAN rubs his bald head, displays his heavy-rimmed glasses.

BERKMAN

America's most fearsome enemy? They're running scared!
"Enemies" — another shit word, John — the beam stuck in your
eye — enemies — 249 poor bastards shivering in the cold — my,
my —

A moment of silence.

SASHA

You've seen it —

BERKMAN

Oh, John, yes I have —

SASHA

And it feels like —

BERKMAN

It feels like what you'd expect something beautiful and honest to feel like — whatever that would be like for you — this tough-guy stuff, this enemy stuff — Mr. A. Mitchell Palmer — the Red Scare — any of that feel anything like honest and beautiful to you?

A moment of silence.

BERKMAN

Are you — John, don't toy with me — are you thinking of coming over to the dark side? Remember, that jury took thirty-nine minutes —

SASHA goes face to face with BERKMAN. They stare hard at each other.

SASHA

"No opinion a crime, no opinion a law."

BERKMAN

I wrote that —

SASHA

The rest can be figured out by ourselves.

BERKMAN

Pretty much the best rule in my rulebook.

SASHA

Why doesn't what I feel about what I do feel the same as —

The boat horn sounds.

BERKMAN

If you want to, you will — if you don't, then you won't — that's all I can give you —

SASHA

The rules are exhausting.

BERKMAN

Then change them.

SASHA paces.

BERKMAN

The jury deliberates. Thirty-nine, thirty-eight —

BERKMAN waits. SASHA stops, decides, pulls BERKMAN roughly out of the chair.

BERKMAN

Change them.

SASHA
Window's closed.

BERKMAN
If you don't do it now, you'll never do it. Once the hook is in —

SASHA
Shut up.

BERKMAN
— it only digs in deeper.

SASHA
Shut up.

SASHA kisses BERKMAN, both rough and tender, as if this decides something for him.

BERKMAN
You read my prison memoir.

SASHA
That sets the hook.

BERKMAN
Then I hope you don't reach twenty-five.

SASHA re-cuffs BERKMAN.

SASHA
The interview is over.

BERKMAN
Because the misery will embalm you, John, the heart harden up
—

SASHA
Shut up. Shut up.

SASHA marches BERKMAN to the edge of the stage. Sound of a door opening. Light pours in as they stand there arm-in-arm.

SASHA
I will have the kind of long and productive career that you will not have.

BERKMAN
That will be your misfortune.

SASHA
Nothing compared to yours.

Boat horn sounds.

Lights out. Transition: slide show of images of BERKMAN, ending with the cartoon of the Buford leaving and this quote: "With Prohibition coming in and Emma Goldman going out, t'will be a dull country." Then a blur of images covering European history until 1936 — Lenin, Trotsky, Weimar German, Hitler, etc., pushed along by driving music/sound: a montage of exile and madness.

* * * * *

Scene 9

June 1936. A bench at the wharf from which the "Isle-de-beauté," an excursion boat, will take BERKMAN to Emma Goldman's house in St. Tropez for her birthday party. Some lights may be strung across the front of it, as if trying to be a little festive. A torn poster announces that it is 1936.

BERKMAN, dressed shabbily but well-enough, sits on the bench in pain, though he is trying hard not to show it. He is in pain throughout the scene.

The bench itself is rickety, not of the best quality.

EMMA, now HANNAH, stands at the other end of the bench. They exchange looks, smiles — they are both waiting. EMMA speaks with a false brightness.

EMMA

Excuse me — excuse me — may I?

BERKMAN

Of course. It would give this bench some much-needed balance.

EMMA sits.

EMMA

Do you know when the ferry leaves?

BERKMAN

I believe it's soon — you'll hear the whistle when it's coming —

EMMA

Good, good.

BERKMAN

— in to the dock.

A moment of silence.

EMMA

Good. Then that would give us time.

BERKMAN gives her a knowing half-amused look.

BERKMAN

Time.

EMMA
Time.

BERKMAN
Us.

EMMA
Time enough.

BERKMAN
You're joking. She's joking.

EMMA's façade begins to slip.

EMMA
Please, don't —

BERKMAN
I'm not making fun of you —

EMMA
I'm not joking —

BERKMAN
— and I don't mean to insult you, mademoiselle —

EMMA
So say [yes] —

BERKMAN
— your offer —

EMMA
Well?

BERKMAN
— is much appreciated —

EMMA
So say yes — time is —

BERKMAN
But alas, appreciation outruns money — which means I have no
money — you're barking up a losing tree — and besides —

EMMA
You have a ticket, you're taking the ferry down to St. Tropez —

BERKMAN
And St. Tropez pretty much takes up all my money.

Damn! Damn! EMMA

EMMA is now distraught.

BERKMAN
May I make an observation?

EMMA
It doesn't matter.

BERKMAN
It does to me. It might even to you.

EMMA gestures as if to say "Whatever."

BERKMAN
This is not a profession you're cut out for.

With some bravado.

EMMA
What makes you say that?

BERKMAN
I'm not saying that this is not your profession, mademoiselle, only that — you must be hungry often if you're depending on it for your income.

With even more bravado.

EMMA
And why is that, if you think you're so smart?

A spasm of pain kicks in, which EMMA notices. BERKMAN signals that everything is all right, even though it's clear it isn't.

EMMA
I'm sorry —

BERKMAN
Make me think of something else.

EMMA
I —

BERKMAN
A story — tell me — anything to [take] — ah —

But EMMA is at a loss at how to deal with the situation and stares at BERKMAN instead, silent. Perhaps she half-reaches out to him.

BERKMAN
I'm sorry you're wasting your —

EMMA
I don't know what to do —

BERKMAN
Life is difficult —

EMMA
No, not that — when a person is in such [pain] — like you are —

BERKMAN
To do?

EMMA
Yes — I don't know —

BERKMAN
I don't either, to be frank about it —

EMMA
I wanted to —

BERKMAN
It's all right — it's all right, it's all right — you are not obligated to —

EMMA
Pain — it just —

BERKMAN
Pain is a fart let loose at a funeral — the leveler —

The pain passes.

BERKMAN
Ah. Ah. Fine. Fine.

A momentary silence.

BERKMAN
Pain run in your family?

EMMA
Yes.

BERKMAN
Is that why you're [out here]--

EMMA shakes her head no.

BERKMAN

I've never been very good either at — taking care —

EMMA

I can take care, I can do that, I do take care — at home — my mother —

BERKMAN

III?

EMMA

Always — but at a point —

BERKMAN

To care can be too much, right?

EMMA

Caring can fill everything up — right up to the eyebrows —

BERKMAN

And the person cared for — your mother — it's not always — uplifting to be dependent on someone else's patience — tolerating your weaknesses — your bedpans! —

EMMA

I think about how she must feel feeling so weak — it's not a good feeling —

BERKMAN

For either of you.

EMMA

No. Undignified on both sides.

BERKMAN

My — companion — has stomach problems — but if I had money, she wouldn't, because then we would hire the only doctor in Nice who knows the procedure — and — and how dignity comes back to money — the frailty of humans —

EMMA

And don't forget time.

BERKMAN laughs.

BERKMAN

World enough and time. And money.

EMMA

"Time" and "money" means I have to go.

BERKMAN

A shame — good feeling flattered — but before you go —

EMMA

What?

BERKMAN

Tell me what I've been noticing in your face.

EMMA

You're the one whose been looking at it —

BERKMAN

You're troubled by your troubles.

EMMA

I'm used to those, to that —

BERKMAN

So?

EMMA points to her face.

EMMA

This?

BERKMAN

That.

EMMA

It's troubled by my thinking about how I'd like to think I'm a better person.

BERKMAN

I'm sure you're excellent person.

EMMA

You wouldn't know. How would you know?

BERKMAN

Purely on what I see before me — not just — the form — which is lovely — see, even in pain I can appreciate beauty, yours — not just the form but what this form does — just a sense, of course, my sensing — but the sense is positive.

EMMA

Even after I've asked you —

BERKMAN

You had your reasons — why don't you tell me them? We have some time left before —

EMMA
No.

BERKMAN
I vote for yes —

EMMA shrugs.

BERKMAN
Better than silence. Or pain. Or you leaving.

EMMA shrugs again, this time as if to agree.

BERKMAN
About your family, then?

EMMA
Definitely no.

BERKMAN
Then how about this “better person”? Humor me — it helps —

EMMA
Only if you tell me about — that —

BERKMAN
Your story is far better —

EMMA
“Fair” means a fair exchange.

BERKMAN
And where did you hear that?

EMMA
I’ll tell you if you tell me about —

BERKMAN
Done.

EMMA
Good. So go.

BERKMAN
An old man symptom — something called a prostate — lucky are you ungraced by such a thing — now you —

EMMA
Not enough.

BERKMAN
You like bargains.

EMMA

I like full value.

BERKMAN

I've had operations — two — to set the damn thing straight and — and it refuses to go straight. I'm trying to ignore it back to health.

EMMA

Money and doctors again.

BERKMAN

Can't trust either.

EMMA

And your trip to St. Tropez.

BERKMAN

To see a dear friend — her birthday today, sixty-seven years.

EMMA

The one with the stomach?

BERKMAN

Different friend. Different life. The birthday of Sailor Girl, who has a strong stomach for everything.

EMMA

That's what you call her?

BERKMAN

Sailor Girl.

EMMA

You are an odd man.

BERKMAN

And a subject easily exhausted. Fair is a fair exchange — so now you — the "why" of it I'm most interested in.

EMMA

I have a companion, too. Strong stomach, too.

BERKMAN

So why can't he get his own money?

EMMA

I don't work for him! Really. This isn't for him. He gets his own money — this money is for me.

BERKMAN

Why isn't he getting money for you if he's —

EMMA

Why should he?

BERKMAN

Why shouldn't he if he's —

EMMA

That's not how we've agreed on things.

BERKMAN

You've talked this out.

EMMA

We are very strong about our independence. Independences.

BERKMAN

And so he will let you put yourself in such danger.

EMMA

Of course not — if he knew, well —

EMMA makes a gesture of explosion.

EMMA

But he doesn't [know] —

BERKMAN

So you don't talk everything out.

EMMA

It's all about the timing of the talking — sometimes before is better, sometimes after —

BERKMAN

I cannot argue with that.

EMMA

But eventually, everything, yes, talked out — at least that's been the way it's been between us so far. Besides, there are not that many ways a woman can get money for herself —

BERKMAN

But not everyone will be as —

Pain strikes BERKMAN again. He suffers through it.

EMMA

Is there [anything] —

BERKMAN waves her off. The pain passes.

BERKMAN
As I was trying to say —

EMMA
"Not everyone will be" —

BERKMAN
Not everyone will be as gallant as I am —

EMMA
Or as nosy.

BERKMAN
You could do worse.

EMMA
That's my sensing as well — looking at the form as it is —

BERKMAN
So go on — please, go on — it's all right, I'm all right —

EMMA
You're not all right —

BERKMAN
Let's pretend I am —

EMMA
I can get you a lemonade —

BERKMAN
You spend money on me —

They chuckle together.

EMMA
I see the irony —

BERKMAN
The better twist is that you've got me curious — that's more
soothing balm than I get most days —

EMMA
You're sure?

BERKMAN
A young headstrong woman who seems fearless — and offers me
lemonade from her own pocket — what is not to like?

EMMA
I'd have to agree. So.

BERKMAN
Go on.

EMMA
Do you know about Spain?

BERKMAN
I've never been there, but Sailor Girl and I have many friends there.

EMMA
So you know.

BERKMAN
Give me more clues.

EMMA
I don't know if I should say the word to you, a stranger — you are a stranger —

BERKMAN
By this point do you really think I'm with some sort of police?

EMMA
These days, who knows — sorry —

BERKMAN
They must be desperate if they're hiring gutted-out old exiled anarchists as spies.

EMMA gasps, hard.

Sounding as if coming from a hall some distance away, someone begins playing "Claire de Lune" on a mostly tuned piano.

BERKMAN
What? What? Do you need some —

EMMA
You said the word.

BERKMAN
What word?

EMMA
A - N - A - [R] —

BERKMAN
That word.

EMMA
That word.

BERKMAN

What makes that word your word?

EMMA

His word, too.

BERKMAN

Then companion's word, too.

EMMA

My companion wants to go to Spain to join the —

EMMA hesitates.

BERKMAN

The word is understood between us. Let's call them the foxes.

EMMA laughs.

EMMA

To join the foxes because there may be a chance in Spain to make what companion believes up here —

EMMA touches her temple.

EMMA

— turn into something real. Things are changing so very fast in Spain.

BERKMAN

Let me guess — he's telling you it's too dangerous for you to go.

EMMA

And I tell him back that I am just as strong — and as brave — as [he is] —

BERKMAN

And that you can get your own money.

EMMA

Well, obviously not like [this] —

BERKMAN

No.

EMMA

But, yes, that, too —

BERKMAN

Plus the fact — the biggest fact — the biggest push — whoosh! — you love him. I didn't mean to make you blush.

EMMA laughs.

BERKMAN

To the eyebrows.

EMMA

Yes, plus the fact I love him. Whoosh!

BERKMAN

Do you love the foxes?

EMMA

I —

The music drifts through the air. A small spasm of pain, quickly gone.

BERKMAN

It's all right — you don't have to —

EMMA

Here's something that confuses me. I sometimes can't tell the difference between the two — the foxes, with their fox-ish thoughts, and him —

BERKMAN

With his fox-ish thoughts —

EMMA

And the world seems — brighter — for all the fox-ish thinking.

BERKMAN

But you would be willing to — collision — with a withered old man —

EMMA

Not withered!

BERKMAN

Beyond kind.

EMMA

Besides, you were my first try — I don't really know if —

BERKMAN

None of us really knows —

EMMA

I just don't want to be left behind. I don't want him to leave me behind.

They sit and listen. Music shifts: Gershwin, Prelude #2.

BERKMAN

And your family —

EMMA

Family —

BERKMAN

It would mean giving them up.

EMMA

They would probably do that to me first. No great loss —

BERKMAN

Don't minimize the exile — without a home is a cost, and not a light one.

EMMA

But the word — you know the word, you know about — brighter —

BERKMAN

Oh, the word, the foxes, got under our skin a long time ago, Sailor Girl and I — if we had world enough and time, I'd run down the whole story for you — you would recognize the echo —

EMMA

The mule part of me —

BERKMAN

I like that —

EMMA gives a little bray.

BERKMAN

Stubborn. Decided.

EMMA

It keeps saying I'll go, everything be damned —

EMMA holds up one hand.

EMMA

On the other —

BERKMAN waves a hand.

BERKMAN

Always an other —

EMMA

— the daughter part, with the mother in pain — father — around — says to stop the foolishness —

BERKMAN

The lover —

EMMA

Ooohh, the lover — that hand — that voice —

BERKMAN

And the blush returns.

EMMA touches her eyebrow.

EMMA

Right up to here. But then — there's this other voice — this little voice — it listens to all the other voices, but — it goes off on its own, and it says what the foxes say, and that voice makes me listen in a way nothing else can make me listen — it gives me hope.

BERKMAN

And beauty?

EMMA

Wherever it can be found.

BERKMAN

Who have you read?

EMMA

The books my lover hides.

BERKMAN

Kropotkin?

EMMA

Of course the prince.

BERKMAN

Goldman?

EMMA

I'm sorry, I don't [know] —

BERKMAN

Berkman?

EMMA

No, sorry —

BERKMAN

Ah, well, they're good, too — you should check them out.

EMMA

I will. Bakunin, Proudhon —

BERKMAN

You've set your pedigree high —

EMMA

The reading just thrills —

BERKMAN

And so the hope for hope and beauty in Spain.

EMMA

Because it's certainly not here in Nice —

BERKMAN

Sailor Girl keeps a small circle of it in St. Tropez —

EMMA

But it's not enough to make a dent in France, is it —

BERKMAN

No.

EMMA

To the density of France.

BERKMAN

And Europe. And the world.

They mock-toast.

BERKMAN

You'd go without the companion?

EMMA

The voice, the little — makes me think that — brave it out — but,
you know, I'd really prefer to go [with] —

BERKMAN

The right lover mixed in with the foxes — a heady brew —

They mock-toast again, but a sharp jabbing pain hits BERKMAN just as the boat whistle of the approaching ferry sounds and the piano music cuts off. This time the pain does not relent. EMMA rests a hand on him.

BERKMAN

I can't — make —

The boat whistle sounds again.

EMMA

Do you want me to give you a [hand] —

BERKMAN fights to fend off the pain, which will not let him go. He cannot sit on the bench. EMMA watches, helpless to help. BERKMAN walks and talks and laughs through the pain.

BERKMAN

Sailor Girl and I have had quite the life — we knew Lenin, Trotsky — I've written books — she's written books — we've both played the lottery with the grocery money — we hate any kind of tsar or king or president — I have no head for business — failures brilliant and pathetic —

Finally, the pain lets him go. BERKMAN is spent, sits. The boat whistle sounds three sets of two short blasts each. EMMA watches him, but BERKMAN can't stir to make the walk to the loading dock.

The ferry blows one long last blast, which fades as the ferry moves away.

EMMA

You've missed —

BERKMAN

The Isle-de-beauté —

EMMA

There won't be another today.

BERKMAN

The boat of Charon — will carry one — less passenger today —

Silence for a moment. Then, the Gershwin prelude again.

EMMA

She will miss you.

BERKMAN

I will let her know.

EMMA

You will miss her.

BERKMAN

Dirt and roots.

Silence again. BERKMAN reaches into his coat pocket, pulls out his ticket.

BERKMAN

It will not redeem for much, but it can be redeemed — it's an open ticket, going and returning —

EMMA

I can't —

BERKMAN

I think you can see that I won't be using it, at least not today —

EMMA

But you need [the] —

BERKMAN

Go on — go on —

EMMA takes the ticket.

BERKMAN

Now you can count your afternoon a success, plus virtue saved —
lover balanced — on to the foxes in Spain!

EMMA holds up the ticket.

EMMA

Thank you.

BERKMAN

You've told me an excellent story.

EMMA

It really is a beautiful way of believing —

BERKMAN

If only the mad world would hear it, eh? This Hitler buffoon, that
Mussolini fool, the Stalin psychotic — so much counter-noise in
people's ears — may you have better luck, Sailor Girl —

BERKMAN laughs.

BERKMAN

Maybe we'll next meet when the world has come to its senses and
taken the foxes to its heart!

They make their anarchist salutes.

EMMA

It won't be long now!

BERKMAN

Long live the resistance!

EMMA

Thank you. Again.

BERKMAN

It won't be long now. You're welcome. Again. Go — lover awaits.

But EMMA doesn't exit.

BERKMAN

You have a question.

EMMA goes to ask something but then holds herself back.

EMMA

No. It's better to see the new world coming.

EMMA holds up the ticket.

EMMA

I will think about you in Spain.

BERKMAN

Consider it a down-payment.

EMMA exits. The pain comes again. Scene shifts.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Labored breathing fills the air.

A table, a lamp, two chairs, a glass of water. The small bedside lamp comes on. BERKMAN moves toward a chair, stripping off his clothes as he does so, until almost naked — perhaps even down to naked. BERKMAN sits, in pain. BERKMAN drinks the water, but the pain does not stop.

SASHA appears, dressed in a cheap suit, looking every inch the immigrant. Their eyes meet.

BERKMAN

You. Again.

SASHA

Still here.

BERKMAN

Why now?

SASHA

Because it's the time. You've chosen.

BERKMAN

Aahhh —

SASHA watches the pain — not indifferent but not sympathetic.

BERKMAN

It is not the time.

SASHA shrugs.

SASHA

What have we accomplished?

BERKMAN

You would bring that up.

SASHA

The question is fair.

BERKMAN

The question is — painful.

SASHA

It is still fair. Do you have an answer?

BERKMAN

What would be your answer?

SASHA

You're just trying to buy time.

BERKMAN

With the millions I've stashed away!

SASHA

Do you have an answer?

BERKMAN

What would be your answer?

SASHA just looks at BERKMAN.

BERKMAN

All right!

SASHA

Because you always favored the analytical, the probing and the probative — so face it —

BERKMAN

You have me at a disadvantage, sir.

SASHA

That is very true. Your answer.

BERKMAN

I have nothing to say.

SASHA

I know.

SASHA pulls up the chair, takes up BERKMAN's right foot and starts to massage it.

BERKMAN

No — over a bit — that eases it a little — I sent her a note, about not being at her birthday celebration today — I really wanted to be there — just couldn't —

SASHA

There won't be a third operation.

BERKMAN

Emma's sixty-seventh —

SASHA

Is it really —

BERKMAN

And young men still want to screw her.

SASHA

Warm themselves at Sailor Girl's fire. The girl at the ferry port was nice.

BERKMAN

She got paid for her services.

SASHA

She gave you a reprieve.

BERKMAN

Sailor Girls have a way of doing that to me.

SASHA

Give me your other foot. Any answer coming to you yet?

No answer. SASHA massages the foot. There is nothing to talk about, so they don't talk. Until SASHA hits some point, and BERKMAN bursts out laughing.

BERKMAN

No, no, keep —

The laughter refreshes BERKMAN.

BERKMAN

You've hit the ancient pathway. I have an answer. In the form of a joke, because it's all a joke anyway, right?, so apropos that the revelation comes as a —

SASHA

A joke.

BERKMAN

What's left, anarchist? Left — hah! To the left! Everything Sailor Girl and I did, said, tried has changed none of the essential rules. I could take heart in the purity of my purpose, but when I die — I will be pure meat and nothing else — nothing more — “these last moments in the House of the Dead” — so why not a joke for the pennies on my eyes?

SASHA

You don't have any pennies.

BERKMAN

All the better.

SASHA

Do you want me to —

BERKMAN

No, you can stop.

SASHA

So, the joke.

BERKMAN

A little boy goes to his dad and asks, “What is politics?” Dad says, “Well, son, let me explain it this way: I'm the breadwinner of the family, so let's call me Capitalism. Your Mom, she's the administrator of the money, so we'll call her the Government. We're here to take care of your needs, so we'll call you the People. The nanny, we'll consider her the Working Class. And your baby brother, we'll call him the Future. Now, think about that and see if that makes sense.” So the little boy goes off to bed thinking about what Dad has said. Later that night, he hears his baby brother crying, so he gets up to check on him. He finds that the baby has soiled his diaper. So the little boy goes to his parents' room and finds his mother sound asleep. Not wanting to wake her, he goes to the nanny's room. Finding the door locked, he peeks in the keyhole and sees his father in bed with the nanny. He gives up and goes back to bed. The next morning, the little boy says to his father, “Dad, I think I understand the concept of politics now.” The father says, “Good, son, tell me in your own words what you think politics is all about” The little boy replies, “Well, while Capitalism is screwing the Working Class, the Government is sound asleep, the People are being ignored, and the Future is in deep shit.” The end.

SASHA

You know that things are never going to change.

BERKMAN

Oh, they'll change — they always do — and charlatans on the make will always flog us with “change change change” to baffle us — what won't happen, probably, is transformation — I mean on the big level — the renovation can happen in the single body, and the single bodies can gather themselves, but most people will be content with “change” — old wine in new bottles —

SASHA

You're rambling.

BERKMAN

Because I'm reluctant.

SASHA

But decided.

BERKMAN

One way or another, yes.

SASHA

Now?

BERKMAN

Yes.

SASHA takes out the gun and hands it to BERKMAN. The pain comes back to BERKMAN's body.

BERKMAN

Go.

SASHA

Gone.

SASHA exits.

BERKMAN faces the audience, the pistol in his right hand.

BERKMAN

When one has neither health nor means and cannot work for his ideas, it is time to clear out.

BERKMAN turns the gun on himself, pressing it against his side.

EMMA enters, now as EMMA, holding a hamantasch. She feeds it to BERKMAN as she speaks. BERKMAN eats, almost daintily.

EMMA

These moments in the House of the Dead will spur me to continue the work Sasha and I had begun on August 15, 1889. The many cables, wires and letters are proof of your devotion and your love. I know you will not deny our dead the respect for the method he employed to end his suffering. Our sorrow is all-embracing, our loss beyond words. Let us struggle for a new and beautiful world, for the triumph of Anarchism — the ideal Sasha loved so passionately.

BERKMAN

Yes. Yes.

EMMA touches his cheek, wipes away the crumbs.

BERKMAN smacks his lips.

Darkness.