

# The Most Dangerous Woman In America

Michael Bettencourt  
347-564-9998 • michaelbettencourt@outlook.com  
<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>  
<http://blockandtackleproductions.com>

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## DESCRIPTION

Using the format of a lecture, this play presents a one-woman rendition of the life of a character named Emma Goldman. Where applicable, Goldman's direct words were used, but the bulk of the text is written in the spirit of Goldman's words and ideas in order to make the piece less formal and more theatrical.

Please Note: This version is designed for a single person onstage handling all props with a technician running lights and sound. There is a version which also uses the technician and two stagehands to handle all of Goldman's props.

## CHARACTERS

- EMMA GOLDMAN

The actor will play different ages and physical conditions, so she must be versatile enough to do this. Physically, when the play opens, Goldman is approximately in her late fifties, about the time of her exile from the U.S.: stout, near-sighted, plain. She will speak with a **slight** Slavic-Jewish accent, since Goldman was born in what is now Lithuania and spoke Russian, German, Yiddish, and English. She is wearing a shapeless but comfortable dress, with pockets from which she will pull items. She is wearing a pair of glasses, round lenses in a metal frame.

**NOTE:** To get a sense Goldman's style, here is an excerpt from Alice Wexler's Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life:

With her imperturbable self-assurance and blunt, earnest, "sledge-hammer" platform style, Goldman created a sensation. A short, sturdy figure with a determined chin and firm mouth, she conveyed an impression of strength and energy...."She makes great use of sarcasm" noted another, "lashing most severely what she regards as the evils of modern life." Others applauded her "fire and force," her "humorsome [sic] satire," her "vigorous and determined manner."

**Settings** and **time periods** will vary.

**Note:** This production of Most Dangerous is written for a space where the actor can interact directly and physically with the audience.

There must be a way for the actor to move among the audience and make direct contact with them.

### **Props, Sound, Lighting, and Stage Requirements**

Where the props will be placed onstage will be determined by the director and performer depending upon the performer's movements. Props can be placed on table, racks, etc. as long as these devices do not hinder the sight lines of the audience or the free movement of the performer.

### **PROPS/SOUND**

#### **Pre-Show**

- An easel with a lecture announcement on it. Or, if desired, the announcement may be hung.
- A program handed out which will list the topics of EG's lecture, using scene titles as topics.
- A lectern
- Tape of revolutionary songs, including the Internationale.

#### **Scene 2**

- Underscoring: any instrumental music which is soothing and unobtrusive

#### **Scene 3**

- Black bandana (pulled from pocket)
- Wooden chair
- Martial music -- suggested: J.P. Sousa, Mystic Chords

#### **Scene 4**

- Kerchief

#### **Scene 5**

- Sign with "8" on it and phrase
- Black shawl
- Chime -- one used for Zen meditation or anything with a clear, bell-like tone -- no gong

#### **Scene 6**

- Large book
- Street sounds, New York in 1889: horse carriages, whistles, trains, bells, etc.

#### **Scene 7**

- Letter from Sasha

#### **Scene 8**

- Same underscoring as in Scene 2

#### **Scene 9**

- Single red rose
- Dance music -- preferably a Lithuanian folk dance tune

## LIGHTING

Lighting suggestions are made throughout the script, but the director and lighting designer are free to change them. Two things should be noted:

- In those scenes that use a strobe effect, the effect should be similar to the blinding light given off by a photo strobe rather than the flashing light of a strobe light.
- In Scene 3, where EG undergoes the "third degree," the light should be very bright and hot.

## Scene 1: Introduction

Once the audience is seated, the play will start **without** beginning with a blackout and then lights up. Placed prominently somewhere on the stage is an easel with a notice announcing a lecture given by Emma Goldman this evening, done in an old-fashioned style. Or the notice may be hung. Emma Goldman enters. The pre-show music fades.

GOLDMAN

Good morning/afternoon/evening.

She waits to get a response from the audience she likes, that acknowledges her presence on the stage.

Well, I'm back. It seems you put out the call, and so I have arrived -- again. And given the state of the deep mierda you people find yourself in these days, I have not arrived a moment too soon.

So, good.

Let's work out some definitions before we do anything else.

First, the main course: Emma Goldman. If you think you know me, it's a good chance you really don't -- because sometimes I'm not even sure I know myself. You've probably heard that slogan that I don't want to be part of a revolution that won't let me dance. I never actually said those words, but that image has stuck: a little flippant, which I don't mind, but definitely safe, which I don't like one bit, because, after all, how dangerous can a woman be if everyone envisions her dancing the tarantella like that spastic, confused, little Nora Helmer in A Dollhouse, may my otherwise blessed Ibsen rest in peace? Nora Helmer dangerous? Just because she slams a door? Stomps out? Goes "wah-wah-wah"? If all it takes is a slamming door to make people afraid, then it's those people we should be afraid of, not some spoiled pet from the domestic zoo, because they are profoundly and frighteningly and willfully ignorant.

(I'm not talking about you, of course -- if you're here, then you are certainly not one of them.)

The times call for a dangerous woman, an un-safe woman. I think I fit that bill -- I was once given the moniker of the most dangerous woman in America.

So explosive that J. Edgar Hoover stole my citizenship -- stole my life -- and, lock stock barrel and book, packed me off to the Bolsheviks in the revolutionized Russia.

But -- really -- can you imagine him mistaking this -- this pudgy tub 'o guts -- for a slim cylinder of Alfred Nobel's dynamite?

I mean, do I really look like the greatest menace to the American way of life that has ever stalked the face of the earth -- even more dangerous -- maybe -- than whoever soils the bedsheets in the current White House?

She pauses, letting them observe what they want to observe.

But. He. Was. Right. Dead on target. Not because I had grenades in each hand, a dagger in my mouth, and the Stock Exchange blueprints in my back pocket. Because I held an idea, and I held it fierce, I held it bright above me -- "I lift my idea beside the golden door" -- no hiding it under a bushel, no quivering about etiquette. I was a woman with a mind graced by the beautiful and keen and cleansing and lifted ideals of Anarchism -- in comparison to those, dynamite is a fart. So erase the dancing diva from what you think you know. I didn't just slam the door -- I smithereened it!

Hoover was right to delete me. I wanted to cut him down to size and stuff him, and all his kind, into the dustbin of history -- and he deleted me because he knew that I would delete him and his noxious thugs in the FBI and the Justice Department if given the chance -- half a chance, a quarter of a chance, an eighth, a -- !

Not that I would have -- hurt -- him -- maybe, say, put him in a dress and have him play Nora to Mr. Woodrow Wilson's Torvald -- J. Edgar in a dress -- now that is an avant-garde thought to make one cringe and cry for mercy!

Enough. Enough discussion about those swine. Instead, I want to lay out a premise for you. This premise will underline everything I say during our time together, and the premise is this: The heart of Emma Goldman is the heart of Emma Goldman -- everything, everything, flows from that. I packed my brain with ideas -- I read, I discussed, I debated, I doubted -- but I did all that to ready my heart to speak truth to power -- not that I always did that well -- in the millions of words I spat out in my life, a lot fell short, some were not always honest, many were just blather and bullshit -- but a few exploded on impact right where I wanted them, and when they did, I could say, taking some pride, that I had done something other people hadn't dared to do, that my life was not useless.

So, enough on Emma Goldman -- for the moment.

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## **Scene 2: The Beauty of Anarchism**

And for what smelly, obnoxious beliefs did I suffer these slings and arrows? For what palabra sucia, as my Spanish comrades would say?

For Anarchism, the sweetest wine ever pressed  
from the human brain.

Sees that the audience does not respond. Repeats the line.

For Anarchism, the sweetest wine ever pressed  
from the human brain.

Time was when there would have been thunderous  
applause for my graceful imagery. Repeat the  
phrase after me, and then give me some applause -  
- just to humor this secular Lithuanian  
overweight Jewess. "For Anarchism, the sweetest  
wine ever pressed from the human brain."

They applaud. When they stop, the lights become softer. A soothing  
music underneath.

Let me explain what the word means -- let me take  
it back from the salaried fart-makers employed to  
foul the air by the rapist class of business  
leaders -- otherwise known as the media and the  
schools -- but I will need your help.

I need you to focus for a moment, center  
yourselves, because I'm going to hand you an  
idea, and I need your minds open and ready to  
handle it. Relax for a moment. Close your eyes,  
if you want, but I want you to listen closely to  
my voice. Breathe slowly. Relax. Listen.

Begin by bringing up a picture in your mind of  
the most satisfying work you have ever done in  
your life. Building something, changing  
something, helping someone -- you fill it in.  
Something you did, not because someone told you  
that you had to do it, but something you did  
simply because you loved doing it: a "labor of  
love" that called out the angels of your better  
nature.

Now swallow the wine and see the vision: doing  
something out of the goodness of your heart, and  
doing it with people you love and who love you,  
without fear or slavery. Come back to me now.

Anarchism. This is what touched my heart. This  
is what the most dangerous woman in America  
believed: that people like you should be free and  
not slaves, that your individual face is more  
precious and fundamental than all the  
institutions and governments and churches put  
together.

This is what I dedicated my life to teaching people: freedom through coöperation, power through sharing. And J. Edgar Hoover, and all of them, kept throwing me and a lot of other people in jail for teaching this, and killing a few now and then to make sure the living got the point.

Music stops.

So what could they have been so afraid of?

Lights change.

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### **Scene 3: Some History Perhaps Not Well Known**

I'll tell you what the pigs were afraid of: rebellion. The horrifying image of all of you -- the unwashed, the disinherited, the "proles" -- actually taking the control of your own lives away from them! How dare you!

To prove my pig-thesis, I am going to pass on to you some American history they probably didn't get around to teaching you in your well-funded system of free public education -- history as fleshed out by this flesh.

Thus, presented for your entertainment and uplift, a small divertissement entitled, "Eine Kleine Geschichte Musik, or How History Came Around To Bite Us In The Ass." Starring America 1917, co-starring the end of the Great War (Great War -- these names -- like putting perfume on horseshit), and directed by America hardening, like rancid fat, into a badly managed, Christianized, eat-your-seed-corn empire.

Pulls a black bandanna out her pocket and ties it around her head.

Rebellion! It amazes me how a country that began with a rebellion rebels against rebellion. Rebellion is in your blood -- Shays, the Confederacy, labor resistance, Indian wars, Whitman, Thoreau -- and yet you will twist your knickers into a pretzel denying it. I know this -- the denial has twisted my knickers many times. Let me show you.

Scene-setting: Prologue. There's a war on, the First World War, in Europe -- you know, that place where all those "others" live, and the U.S. of A. is thinking about taking a cut of the action. See you and raise you.

But our Mr. Woodrow Wilson is not so sure.

Goldman pulls a small sheet of paper out of her pocket and reads.

Woodrow Wilson, in 1912, when he is trying to grab the White House for the first time: "The history of liberty is the history of resistance." Not bad, huh? I like him in this mood.

Pulls out another sheet.

Mr. Wilson again, a little later: "[T]he government of the United States [should be] more concerned about human rights than property rights." I could just polish his pince nez when he talks like this. And when the Great War began --

She pulls out another sheet.

"The example of America must be an example...[of] peace because peace is the healing and elevating influence of the world." That got my juices going!

But not for long.

Because the United States has its entrepreneurs, and war is always good for profit if nothing else, President Woodrow Wilson -- a liar, a cheat, and a Christian -- triple-threat -- gets up in front of Congress on his hind dog-legs on April 2, 1917, and says, "The world must be made safe for democracy. The day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and might."

My God -- those butchering words: To spend her blood -- as if young men were just dollar bills, ready to be hemorrhaged from the Treasury to make the world safe for corporations and oil companies and lobbyists. They soon began drafting these dollar bills into the army -- telling them that if they didn't put on a uniform and kill the enemy, they'd go to jail.

Some of us Anarchists -- and lots of people just like yourselves, people of good heart and mind -- don't think this is such a good idea. We figure that if the politicians, the old men, want to make war, then they should go and fight it and leave all the young men at home to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Well, but the old men disagree, so off go the young men to fight the old men's war.

So we say, "Never!" **We say "Never!"** We held meetings in New York City where thousands of people came to hear us say, again and again, "The government has no right to draft young men, to steal them off the street and kill them!"

Well, stupid us, who thought we had a First Amendment to cover our backsides and frontsides! The government amended us as it amended who really had the right to speak.

Gets a chair.

The police came and got me. This is the kind of thing they did when they questioned us and gave us "the third degree."

The lights undergo a harsh change: a tight focused light center stage, very very bright; everything else dark. Goldman sits in the chair as if she has been roughly placed there by a guard. She takes off the bandana and puts it away. Goldman should consider the audience as the interrogator.

I never said that! And I never said that, either! Well, you shouldn't hire stupid spies, or at least you should clean the wax out of their goddamn ears. I would never say, "We support violence, and we will use violence." I would never say that. The point is to stop the violence, not feed its belly.

Goldman is knocked out of the chair onto her knees.

They also didn't mind practicing a little violence themselves.

I hope that made you feel better. It certainly cleared my head.

Goldman stands.

Next time, smack the other cheek so we can get really Biblical. Are all policemen as stupid as you? I never said that. We just told people how the government -- your boss -- was going to send young men to the slaughterhouse. I thought that a man going off to be turned into ground beef should examine the meat grinder. I told them they had to follow their own consciences.

I can say whatever I want. Do these words ring a bell: First Amendment? It doesn't apply to Jews and foreigners. Can you show me where that's written down?

Goldman reacts as if a truncheon is placed across her throat and she is pulled back against the chair: a chokehold.

Repeat after you? I don't think so. Let me go.

She physically reacts as if released from the chokehold.

There is never too much free speech.

She stands and composes herself, then gets up on the chair.

We are now in a courtroom.

(to the audience)

Oyez, oyez, oyez -- all rise for the honorable judge. Emma "The Mouthy Yid" Goldman is about to get her bloomers blown open.

She stamps three times to mimic the judge's gavel. Speaks in an exaggeratedly gruff voice, imitating/ mocking the judge.)

Hmm, hmm. Yes. I'm Judge Thumb Up My Butt --

(if laughter, add "Silence in the court!"

and stamp on the chair)

-- and I sentence you to two years in the federal penitentiary for conspiracy.

(her own voice.)

Conspiracy? I've been doing my work out in the open for the last 30 years! Where have you been?

(gruff voice)

And a \$10,000 fine.

(GOLDMAN slaps her pockets)

I got some nickels and some pocket lint.

(gruff voice)

And we're kicking you out of the country after that.

(her own voice)

When you clean house, your honor, you clean house. Thank you for applying the even hand of justice, your honor -- across my face.

She stamps three more times; she gets off the chair.

Act 2. For speaking my mind I spent two years in the women's prison at Jefferson City, Missouri, and then in 1920 a month-long voyage (certainly not bon) to Finland in a leaking troop transport with 248 other non-persons, and then a ride in a sealed train to Russia, where I lived for two years after the Revolution. Exiled. In the meantime -- the final act.

Martial music begins playing, gradually getting louder so that Goldman has to shout, but never so loud that she can't be heard.

Two fearless pit bulls of liberty: Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and his sidekick J. Edgar Hoover. They planned to drop-kick "60,000 Reds" into the ocean (well, one less, now that I was booted). They turned Ellis Island in New York into a meathouse where they crushed families, stole property, and ruined reputations -- like sloppy butchers they were cutting out the terrorists who lived among us. And all this pain was supposed to make democracy safe? For whom? It is hard to know, hard to feel, the terror we felt for the simple act of putting our thoughts into words -- but we felt it. It was there. We were not the terrorists but the terrorized.

She claps her hands, and music out.

Thus endeth the history lesson -- for the moment. Not too painful, I hope.

She bows, and, if she can do it, encourages applause.

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#### **Scene 4: Who Is Emma Goldman? Part 2**

Lights change. Goldman moves the chair off.

So -- how did such a nice Jewish girl learn to get so dangerous?

Goldman puts on a kerchief to indicate a change of age.

Family, of course, taught me something. I was born in Russia, to middle-class Jewish parents. My sisters Helena and Lena and I came to America because we got tired of being blistered by a Jewish father who hated women and a Russia that loved butchering Jews as a sport. I learned early on to hate men with lots of power they didn't know how to use.

Part of the lesson comes from place. Before I came to America, I lived in St. Petersburg -- and if you know anything about Peter's "gateway to the West," then you know how its mix of nightmare and power ignited many lunacies. Just think "Dostoevsky" in his mad phase (and when wasn't he mad?), and you'll have a pretty good sense of what I mean.

In St. Petersburg I learned about people like Vera Zasulich, Sophia Perovskaya, Gesia Helfman, Catherine Breshkovskaya -- you probably don't know these names, but to me they traced fire through the dark sky. Sophia and Gesia especially, crushed for assassinating czar Alexander, the despot, eater of his young, my father writ large -- their idealism galvanized me. I learned that a person didn't have to sit still when bad things were being done.

But the biggest lesson of all came from this wonderful, terrible country called America. And I can date the time and place of that lesson, my turning point: Haymarket, Chicago, Illinois, 1886, when I was seventeen years old. A lot of very strange things can happen to you when you're seventeen.

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### **Scene 5: Haymarket**

Goldman imitates the Statue of Liberty.

December 29, 1885. Helena and I slide into New York, past Bartholdi's "Liberté éclairant le monde" towering over Bedloe's Island. Tired, poor, homeless, yearning -- we hit every item on the checklist.

Goldman sets a vase of roses, puts on a white apron with a kerchief and a spool of thread in the pocket.

We went to Rochester, New York, where my sister Lena and her family lived -- talk about the huddled masses! A big shoe horn to make ourselves fit in a very small place!

To earn my keep I worked in Garson's clothing factory. For the grand sum of two dollars and fifty cents a week. Not a spare cent for a book or a theatre ticket. I decided to ask Mr. Garson for a raise -- my first lesson in the tender mercies of American economics.

I entered an office full of blue smoke rising from a large, fascinating cigar. And on a table, a vase of American Beauties. I knew how much they cost - one dollar and fifty cents each. Two of them cost more than what I earned weekly sewing up profits for Mr. Garson. He bid me speak.

She speaks to GARSON directly.

You see, Mr. Garson, after my expenses -- Yes, expenses: carfare, rent -- nothing is left over for a book or theatre ticket. Yes, I like the roses. Extrav -- extrav -- extravagant tastes? I don't know that word. Oh. Liking books is something working girls can't do? I read. Yes. And write. Well. It's not everyone's wages I'm asking you to raise, only mine. So, no is no?

The roses: two of them cost more than my entire salary. So beautiful -- and my enemy.

Goldman takes off the kerchief and put its and the thread into the apron pocket. She then takes off the apron and puts it to one side.

My parents were now in Rochester -- and we worked that shoe horn even harder! And suddenly all these men in my life wanted to direct me: my father, my factory bosses -- and a husband, Jacob Kersner, who I married on the "bounce," hoping for escape. But he was impotent on our wedding night -- no "bounce," if you know what I mean -- and he just became another chain masquerading as a man: jealous and dull and full of stupid opinions, with ear-hair and garlic breath.

Like most adolescents, I was in a constant spasm of confusion and anger. And it seemed that America felt confused and angry, too: workers and bosses at each other's throats, the rich and the poor at war with each other. And nowhere did it heat up more quickly than in Chicago, and in Chicago, no place was hotter than the hot seat of Haymarket Square.

Goldman holds up a sign with a big "8" on it and the phrase "Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for what we want to do."

I told you that what happened at Haymarket Square changed my life, and here's why. It's 1886 -- okay, so it's a little more history, you didn't know you were going to be in school today, but bear with me. Workers around the country were on strike to get their bosses to agree to an 8-hour working day -- usually, a day went for 10 or 12 hours or more. Chicago was the nerve-center for this fight.

She chants.

"Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for what we want to do." That was the simple argument, and isn't it amazing that many people died for something we now take as for granted as breathing?

Goldman puts the sign away.

Here we go: In February, at the McCormick Harvester Company, a labor disagreement leads to a strike. The bosses bring in scabs to break the strike, but things stay calm -- for the moment.

Goldman takes up the black shawl, draping it over her head as if in mourning. Goldman will use the shawl in a variety of ways.

But on the evening of May 4, in a light drizzle, 180 police in Haymarket Square break up a peaceful protest meeting. Someone -- a "someone," no one knows who -- heaves a bomb into the police ranks. Seven officers die, with almost 70 wounded. In a panic, the police --  
(miming shooting four people  
in the audience)  
-- kill four people in the crowd -- blood for blood for blood for blood. No doubt who did it -- the Anarchists, the Anarchists! And pay they must the ultimate price! Evidence? "Later!" The police charge eight Anarchists with a conspiracy to murder.

Lights change, dim.

Final. Act.

She takes the shawl off her head but still wears it as a shawl.

My sister Helena and I, like the whole country, follow the trial, eat it up. I read about the eight men, and I find their beliefs -- brotherhood, justice, peace -- very beautiful -- I am seventeen, remember -- confused, excited, moist, admiring, bombarded by self-centered men -- and very, very scared for these my new brothers. My young heart pounds all through my body.

Faster than an eye-blink, seven of the eight get a sentence to hang -- no matter that no one can tie the bomb to their hands. But not about proof, is it? The prosecutor, between his teeth, hisses to the jury:

(in the voice of the prosecutor)  
"Convict these men, make examples of them, hang them, and you save our institutions." To kill their ideas. Kill ideas -- think about that for a moment; think about how it's done, and why. It's just as bloody as butchery, isn't it?

She takes off the shawl and holds it in two hands in front of her.

The Illinois governor changes two sentences to life. One of the five left commits suicide. The other four -- Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, August Spies, George Engel -- have their necks snapped --

(jerks the shawl)  
-- on November 11, 1887. Black Friday. On that day, my heart breaks.

At my father's house. That evening. Big news, people arguing about it. Suddenly, this woman's fingernails-on-chalkboard voice drowns the room.

(as WOMAN)  
"Why all these sad faces? The men were murderers. They should be hanged!"

(mimes this)  
People had to pull me off her. I did not care. I got away and threw a water pitcher at her as hard as hard could go. "Get out of here or I will kill you!" I collapsed, and they had to carry me to bed; Helena soothed me, as always, and I lunged into a deep sleep, almost like a death.

She gets the chime.

I have slept in many strange ways, but never a sleep like this.

She strikes the chime.

Dreams -- dreams -- about the small men in my life who made me feel small.

(chime)

The women whose bodies they used, and then used up.

(chime)

Other women, with ideas heated, smoking.

(chime)

Jewish prophets and Russian czars bleeding into a single cruelty.

(chime)

About freedom drowned in blood.

(chime)

All this and more.

When I wake up, I don't just wake up -- I am re-born, and not in some cheap synthetic Christian fashion. For almost eighteen years I had swilled down the insults and shame fed to young girls with a strong mind and an open heart. Haymarket pierced me with this: find something worth living and dying for -- and not give a devil's fart what anybody else thinks.

I soon divorce Jacob Kersner -- pfft! out goes that candle. I chop off all the deadweight of the dead past and haul myself, like new freight, to New York. I have achieved the age of twenty. My real life --

(chime)

-- breaks through --

(chime)

-- and begins.

(chime)

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### Scene 6: Sasha

Lights change. Sounds of city life in 1889: horse carriages, whistles, trains, bells. Played very loud -- Goldman will speak over it. Goldman puts down the chime and shawl. Goldman is 20. She picks up a large book.

New York, 1889: streets full of horseshit and the air smeared with freedom. So much freedom and so much horseshit, mixed in their aromatic American dialectic! It didn't take me long to hook up with people on the Lower East Side, where the Jews crammed themselves in. No men sucking away my life, a little money jangling in my pocket, and my mind breathing free -- goddamn alive, at last!

Ideas pour in on me. Books. Lectures. I suck down strong coffee at Sach's Café and argue and argue until I am blind and tongue-numb. A famous man gives me a chance to lecture, and people begin to know my name. My mind pumps large as I turn twenty-three. Things add up.

Lights change.

And unexpectedly, but most welcome: sex, and sex that leads to love. In the name of Alexander Berkman. My Sasha. My first day in New York I meet him: twenty-one years old, strong, handsome, brutally honest, soaked in radicalism -- and pigheaded and cock-sure and always hungry for life. I had two reactions to him, my dialectic: I thought him obnoxious, and I couldn't keep my hands off him.

He believed completely in The Cause -- justice and freedom and freedom for all. And, if it came to it, you died for The Cause, pure and simple. I couldn't deny that -- for all my sadness, I felt proud when my Haymarket Anarchists died for their beliefs. So we connected like two comets colliding -- we fought, parted, fucked -- oh, the exquisite hard pleasure of fucking! -- repaired, danced, fought again, revised, soared.

And, for the sake of the Cause -- for him -- I plotted to kill a man.

Goldman opens and snaps closed the large book, making a big sound.

We schemed to murder Henry Clay Frick -- manager of a steel factory in Pennsylvania, who used troops and thugs like knives to put down a strike of steel workers. Sasha planned to get into his office and shoot him, and if that didn't work, stab him. I argued that I should go with him, attack with him, die with him, but he said "no," only himself, the explosive sacrifice for the good of The Cause.

Puts the book away.

We argued all night -- my beliefs bare knuckles with my heart: yes, strike back, but Sasha didn't have to deal the blow; yes, the workers revenged, but my Sasha didn't have to tear himself to shreds. I realized I wanted to live with Sasha, even though I said I wanted to die with him. He wouldn't give way, though -- he believed his act would spark the revolution. I knew, as any lover knows, that if I did not walk away right then, I would have no choice but to plunge in completely.

I did not walk away.

So very young, so drunk on our poorly distilled certainties. So romantically stupid.

And there were a few -- practical problems.

For instance -- a gun. One thing to plan to shoot a man, another thing to actually get a gun for the shooting. Especially when you barely have enough money to brush the scum off your teeth after eating your one meal a day.

And to get to Pittsburgh -- a train ticket. Which cannot be abracadabra'd out of the thick air of Suffolk Street, no matter how hot for the Cause you burn.

To borrow it -- how, when all your friends are also your fellow beggars, with nothing but hollow pockets?

I took it upon myself to find my love the money he needed. As women have ever found it -- on their backs.

Goldman sets the chair upstage center, angled downstage right. She takes out a tube of lipstick. During the next speech she dabs some on her lips and does a small spot on each cheek, which she blends in. Goldman does not need to do anything else to indicate what she is doing: no unbuttoning buttons, etc.

At night the men hunted Fourteenth Street for prostitutes -- so why not me? Made me sick, really, but Sasha -- The Cause -- what was the beast with two backs for an anonymous hour to all of that? I settled on my target.

Lighting changes. She approaches her target. She is the 23-year old Goldman.

Hello, are you looking for -- You know -- do you want -- I'm willing. \$10. Too high? \$5? I do, too, know what I'm doing. I do, too. Go with you -- well, isn't that -- Hey, where are you taking me? I don't want to go into this saloon. All right, then, I'll have a beer -- I'm thirsty. And stop calling me "little girl" -- I turned twenty-three last month.

As Goldman speaks, she wipes the color off her lips and face with tissues from her pocket.

He never bought my bluff. He knew I was new to the life. When I asked him how, he said, "I watched you -- the trick is to get the trick, ain't it? You do everything to scare people away. You'll keep your virtue, but you'll starve." He said he didn't care what my reasons were -- I wasn't cut out to hook. He gave me \$10 "to cover expenses," declared me silly, and told me to go home. When I told him, again, I was 23, he laughed: "All right, so you're an old lady, but even old folks can be babes in the woods. Look at me: I'm sixty-one and I often do foolish things." "Like believing in my innocence," I shot back, trying to keep a little dignity in the transaction. "Tell me your name and address so I can pay you back." "I love mysteries," he said, held my hand for a moment, and then left.

So I got Sasha his money -- \$10 from Helena, though I never told her what for, \$10 from my open stranger. The stage was set.

Goldman gets the chair and sits. She holds up her hands.

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

July 23. Sasha, in a new suit -- his uniform! -- gun in one pocket, knife in the other, and a dynamite cap in his lapel -- in case of emergency. He pushes his way into Frick's office, posing as the head of an employment agency that would provide scabs. Three shots. Frick does not die. Men in Frick's office jump on him -- workers, the ones who were supposed to admire what Sasha was doing! -- but carrying them on his back Sasha still manages to stab Frick. Three times, in the leg. Frick does not die. Frick, bleeding but very much alive, demands to see Sasha's face. They stare at each other for the first time and the last time. Frick says, "Leave him to the law." The law takes him. Sasha has failed. We have failed.

The blood -- in a moment --

My Sasha was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison -- 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. They buried Sasha in a jail cell in western Pennsylvania.

Such despair -- I couldn't sleep: I would haunt cafés or trolley to the Bronx and back -- just to kill time -- while they were killing him. I defended his name when I could -- 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 -- they were looking for me. 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 made another choice. 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.

Goldman takes up the chime.

Do you understand what I'm telling you? 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, an appetite for sex, a smug pride in this loud and unpluggable mouth -- and this made me a coward.

Chime.

I was too weak to let guilt purify me.

Chime.

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

Chime.

In 1906, after fourteen years, they released Sasha; they cut eight years cut off his sentence after cutting fourteen years off his life. For a long time he had horrible nightmares and veered toward suicide.

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 drunkard.

Betrayal. Betrayal made that Emma Goldman -- this Emma Goldman -- possible.

We have reached complicated terrain all of a sudden, haven't we? Not too much dancing at the moment. At the beginning I talked to you about my heart's equation: "The heart of Emma Goldman is the heart of Emma Goldman." What does this "heart" look like to you now? What color, what smell, what value does it have?

These are not easy questions to face.

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### **Scene 7: Who Is Emma Goldman? Part 3**

But if Sasha ever had any doubts about what I did, he never let me know them, and we continued our fight together for the next thirty years until he died in 1936. By his own hand, I have to tell you. Sick, without any money, feeling useless, this man, who had shot Frick three times up close and still couldn't kill him, decided to shoot himself, and he didn't have any better luck: the bullet split his lungs and stomach and lodged in his spine. It took him sixteen hours to die. His "estate" was only worth eighty dollars. The revolutionary klutz.

Takes a letter from her pocket, does not open it.

A letter to me, meant to be read only when he died: "I consider our life of work and comradeship and friendship...one of the most beautiful and rarest things in the world....I have lived my life and I am really of the opinion that when one has neither health nor means and cannot work for his ideas, it is time to clear out." Sasha, my sweet prince.

But his death didn't shut my mouth -- my mouth had been jabbering on for so long it had taken on a life of its own! I kept right on saying what I'd always been saying, and, man, I had something to say about everything -- you couldn't shut me up or shut me down!

And that was a problem -- because it seemed that while my words went out, not enough words came back in return to return my soul to my self. I was in exile, a long exile. Sasha and I couldn't stay in Russia after the Revolution -- they had no love of anarchists there, and we had no love of communists -- and I spoke against what I saw as the Revolution's injustices and betrayals, even though this put me on the same side as people like J. Edgar Hoover -- imagine that, both of us anti-communists and dress-wearers from opposite ends! Imagine how that made me sick at heart, to find myself in the company of such filth.

That's the funny thing about principles, about sticking to principles. You can be right in your heart, pure and fierce and consistent, and thus feel honorable and even a little bit superior -- and end up either irrelevant or in the company of demons.

The demons I could live with. Being irrelevant - - that ate away at my bones. Sixties, fat, living in France, working on a 1000-page autobiography I was sure no one would read -- I had nothing left but a lot of nothing.

From somewhere, Spanish being sung: perhaps the Internationale or the Hymn of Riego. It catches Goldman's ear.

Then history, which had nipped at my ass all these years -- and fingered me between the legs, I have to admit -- gave me one last vital kiss: Spain.

Spain. Spain. The anarchists had arisen in Spain, against the fascist Franco -- against Mussolini, against Hitler, against the priests and landlords and the mousy bourgeois politicians with their half-assed reforms. My anarchists. My principles. My world, my kingdom come.

And so I went, everything hanging out, everything in me going for broke, and so willing to make it work this time that I put myself under the discipline of an organization -- me, the tree-shaker, now becoming a jelly-maker, the primary English-speaking advocate -- fund-raiser -- cheerleader -- of the CNT-FAI --

(in bad but passionate Spanish)

La Confederación Nacional del Trabajo - La Federación Anarquista Ibérica. And so I came to Spain, thrilled to finally see, touch, embrace what my comrades were doing to make real what had only been words in my books, my essays, my brain.

Farms, schools, cooperatives, factories -- all being run by councils of the people, decisions made by vote and discussion and with full respect for each person's beautiful singularity.

On one trip, I ascended a hill -- almost seventy years old, and I am climbing like a mountain goat! -- to visit a school. And what I saw there, in the upper altitudes -- the sharing, the openness, no leaders but that all were leaders -- well, if I was biblical person, I would have swooned in ecstasies about redemption and a visit to paradise. But I didn't need that. The rude furniture, the simple food, the voices of children learning learning learning in the soft vowels of Spanish and Catalan -- if only Sasha could have seen -- heard -- if only --

Goldman sits.

I died not long after everything in Spain died. Everything there went to smash -- the revolution betrayed again, my anarchists rubbed out -- I never could get a revolution to work out the way I wanted it to! And so my heart decided not to take it anymore. Of a stroke. In Canada. Among friend, yes, but never delivered from exile.

Until the United States, in one of its rare cases of infinite wisdom, allowed my body burial in Waldheim Cemetery, in Chicago, a few meters away from my beloved Haymarket anarchists. Who knew that the Immigration and Naturalization Service could be possessed of such grace and fine discrimination!

And the final irony, of course: only when dead would they let me back in, when my mouth was wired shut and the tub o' guts could give no breath to the things they hated to hear about themselves.

But if Sasha's death didn't shut my mouth, my own demise wasn't going to have any better luck! My mouth has been jawing on for so long it's taken on a life of its own! It keeps right on saying what it's always been saying, and, man, I have something to say about everything -- as I said before, you can't shut me up or shut me down!

Gets up on the chair.

Here are a few of my ideas.

Marriage: don't do it! When they call it the bonds of matrimony, when they call it wedlock or the ties that bind, they aren't kidding! Marriage is just another kind of slavery for women -- and for men, too, if you think about it.

I never had children, but I made that choice. A woman must control her body, and no man has the right to say anything about it.

Why do we have a society that builds more jail cells than houses and schools? That spends more on pet food than child care? Where you can't get enough money to keep people healthy but there's enough money for fancy weapons to destroy people? Who gets to decide all this stuff? Did anyone ask you? And what are you going to do about it?

Which reminds me: I hate the military. What good is a democracy defended by people you hire to beat up and kill other people?

And religion -- and I apologize if I offend you, but this is the truth about me. I was an atheist all my life because I felt that there was about as much proof for God and Jesus as for leprechauns and Tinkerbell. Life is hard enough without having to carry gods and goddesses on your backs, especially ones that seem to get a lot of pleasure out of human suffering. You are all divine enough -- you don't need to believe in anything but the power of your own, sweet selves.

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### **Scene 8: Peroration**

Gets down.

See, a big mouth. But enough, because I'm sure at this point you're asking, "Doesn't the wench believe in anything positive?"

Oh I do, I do believe in something positive, as I told you at the beginning. I call it Anarchism, but I also call it by another name: love. Anarchism is love: sound odd to you? It shouldn't.

Lights change. Musical underscoring.

What they all couldn't understand is that everything we Anarchists believe comes out of love; Anarchism is love made into politics. Follow me in this thinking; I know you can. In real love, two people honor each other's freedom -- yes? They may fight and spit and complain, but in the end, if they really love each other, neither of them gets to have power over the other. Once one person gets to call the shots and say this is this and that is that, you have slavery. In real love, there is no slavery, only equals.

The next step -- the next thousand or million steps -- is what Anarchism is all about: how to take that real love, that equality, and build a society where everyone gets a fair deal. That's where the politics comes in: who gets to decide the answers to basic questions like who can eat, who has a place to live, who gets an education, who can see the doctor, and so on. Anarchism has some ideas about how to make those decisions, but the ideas are all based on one basic idea: equality among people, fairness to one another, comes out of love and respect. Anything else leads to unfairness.

In the end, the only test result that matters is this: how well we have loved ourselves, our friends and family, and even strangers. If you don't love life and people with this real kind of love, then, as far as I'm concerned, your life hasn't been very meaningful. And, really, in the end, do you want to lie on your deathbed and think about all the good things you should have done and didn't when there's no time left to make things right? Life is too short to waste it on regret or selfishness.

Anarchism, the sweetest wine that ever came from the human brain. I said this before. In the end, it is the only thing that did not betray me. And I did not betray it.

Lights change. Underscoring out.

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**Scene 9: Envoi**

Goldman picks up a single rose.

You know what this is. Look at it. See how it unfolds organically; this is Anarchism. This flower already has all the knowledge it needs to grow. You are no less than this flower; you have all the knowledge you need, if you can just free yourself. Anarchism: teaching us to rise to the sun and hook our roots into the earth.

I don't have a program or a formula for you. My Anarchism is about spirit, about rebellion: never forget how the individual can do great things when freed from society's weights and measures. System builders: Go elsewhere for blueprints.

But I know all of you have had some of these ideas flit through your brain. That is your natural anarchism speaking out. Take a risk and live up to it. I spent 50 years doing it. It was not easy. It was always "go for broke" with me -- and nearly always I got the "broke" I went for. I would not recommend this Via Dolorosa for anyone. But Anarchism is a journey, not a destination. May you live longer than I did so that this delirious wine can age well in the vessel of your heart.

Lights change.

And while I did not say it, I do believe it: Find yourself a revolution that sparks you to dance -- and then dance it. Some of you may think that's just frivolous and childish -- fine. Some of you may really love the idea and dedicate a lifetime to it -- fine. Just do something rather than nothing, go up rather than down. As for me --

Music comes up and Goldman dances by herself as the lights come down.

BLACKOUT