

PLAYING LENI

By

David Robson and John Stanton

PLAYING LENI

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PLAYING LENI

Playing Leni won the Hotel Obligado Audience Choice Award for New Work at the Spark Showcase held at Plays and Players Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on June 25, 2010. It was performed under the working title *Dysfictional Circumstances* and directed by Seth Reichgott.

The cast was as follows:

SOLDIER—Robert DaPonte

LENI—Colleen Corcoran

Playing Leni premiered in a production by Madhouse Theater Company at the Adrienne Theater in Philadelphia on May 27, 2011. The production was directed by Seth Reichgott, with set design by Lance Kniskern and lighting design by Josh Schulman.

The cast was as follows:

SOLDIER—Robert DaPonte

LENI—Amanda Grove

PLAYING LENI

CHARACTERS

SOLDIER—30s

LENI—40s

PLACE AND TIME

Kitzbuhel, Austria, 1946

NOTE

Playing Leni uses the conventions of film and film acting to tell its story. The repetition in the script is intentional and is to be used to explore the way in which the characters edit their lives, often keeping in the parts which are least threatening to their sense of self. Actors and directors should feel comfortable in exploring the extremes of behavior between the two characters as they seek to get at the truth of their situation.

PLAYING LENI

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SCENE ONE

Lights rise on SOLDIER outside LENI's mountain lodge.

SOLDIER. Cum an, cum an, you can move faster than that. (*LENI enters carrying a suitcase and a large film can, which drops to the ground.*) What the hell are you doing? Jesus!

LENI. You gave me no time. (*Leni picks up film can.*)

SOLDIER. What do you expect? We ain't going on a holiday.

LENI. This is an outrage!

SOLDIER. Damn right it is! This here is my time you're wasting.

LENI. Have you no decorum?

SOLDIER. Stop using those big words, lady. They ain't no good with me. Now, get your ass movin'. (*Leni tries but again can't manage the can of film.*)

LENI. I can't carry all of this.

SOLDIER. Then leave it.

LENI. What?

SOLDIER. You heard me.

LENI. You're joking.

SOLDIER. Screw it! (*Soldier kicks the can.*)

LENI. No, no, no! (*Leni goes after the can and clutches it.*)

SOLDIER. What's in there anyway?

LENI. None of your Goddamn business!

SOLDIER. Some kind of movie, right...? (*Soldier goes to can.*)

LENI. Don't touch it. Don't touch it, I said!

SOLDIER. I kinda like your spunk, you know?

LENI. Well, I don't care much for yours.

SOLDIER. I don't need spunk; I got this. (*Soldier pulls out a pistol and points it at her.*) Now, hand it over.

LENI. What—this? You couldn't appreciate something like this.

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SOLDIER. You'd be surprised the things I can appreciate.

LENI. I don't think so. (*Soldier cocks the pistol. Leni hands him the can.*)

SOLDIER. Spunky *and* smart—how do you like that?

LENI. Like what?

SOLDIER. It's an expression.

LENI. I want it back.

SOLDIER. I don't think so.

LENI. Why not?

SOLDIER. I wanna take a look.

LENI. It's not something you want—

SOLDIER. Gimme a little credit.

LENI. Why should I? What could you want with it?

SOLDIER. Evidence.

LENI. For what?

SOLDIER. For your trial, of course.

LENI. What trial—what are you—?

SOLDIER. You can stop playin' dumb. It doesn't suit you, Frau Riefenstahl.

LENI. How do you know my name?

SOLDIER. Everyone knows your name! Hitler's pin-up girl!

LENI. The nerve!

SOLDIER. I've seen your movies.

LENI. What are you talking about?

SOLDIER. You have to go a lot further than Bavaria to ditch the U.S. Army.

LENI. What could the army want with me?

SOLDIER. You're famous.

LENI. I didn't think the army was interested in the movie business.

SOLDIER. You'd be surprised, get moving!

LENI. Are you arresting me?

SOLDIER. Got the handcuffs to prove it.

LENI. You came alone.

SOLDIER. I told my boss I could find you myself.

LENI. You fashion yourself a cowboy.

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SOLDIER. Yeah, but shucks, ma'am, I forgot my white hat.

LENI. So, you're my escort.

SOLDIER. In a manner of speaking.

LENI. Good, then you should carry this too. (*Leni drops her suitcase.*)

SOLDIER. But I ain't your bellboy. Pick it up. I said pick it up! (*She does.*)

LENI. Where are we going?

SOLDIER. My car is a little further.

LENI. That's not what I mean.

SOLDIER. I'm not answering any questions.

LENI. Whatever you think I've done—

SOLDIER. Start walking.

LENI. I'm not what you think.

SOLDIER. Right, right...

LENI. No, really. Listen to me.

SOLDIER. All I know is that you made movies for Hitler.

LENI. Cut! Can we do this again? We'll do it again.

SOLDIER. Do what again?

LENI. What are you doing?

SOLDIER. I'm acting.

LENI. Wrong! That's not the line.

SOLDIER. What do you mean?

LENI. You must say the line, as written.

SOLDIER. I was pretty close.

LENI. I don't think so. (*Leni exits and returns with a script. She thumbs through it.*) Look: the line is... (*Leni points to line.*)

SOLDIER. That's what I said.

LENI. That's NOT what you said.

SOLDIER. What did I say?

LENI. It's not worth repeating.

SOLDIER. Yeah, it is, if you want me to get it.

LENI. Just say the line.

SOLDIER. What is it again?

LENI. Read it! (*Soldier reads the line to himself.*)

SOLDIER. Got it.

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LENI. You have it?

SOLDIER. I said I got it.

LENI. (*Turning, to offstage*) Can we take this back? (*To Soldier.*) Are you not the American soldier sent to arrest me?

SOLDIER. Yes.

LENI. Well then act like one! Now let's try it again from the top! We'll go on my line. (*Yells off:*) Alright, roll it! (*To Soldier.*) I'm not what you think.

SOLDIER. Right, right...

LENI. No, really. Listen to me.

SOLDIER. All I know is you're a true artist.

LENI. You make me blush.

SOLDIER. Maybe you could teach me a thing or two.

LENI. Only if you'll let me—

SOLDIER. Wait, wait—hold it!

LENI. What?

SOLDIER. I can't say this.

LENI. Why not?

SOLDIER. I'm supposed to take you in, and your dialogue is shit.

LENI. You think you can do better?

SOLDIER. Sure, I can. You got a pen? (*Leni finds a pen, hands it to him. Soldier puts down can, takes up script, and begins writing.*)

LENI. I wasn't the only one.

SOLDIER. What's that?

LENI. Who made films for...

SOLDIER. Yeah, but you were the best one.

LENI. You've seen my films.

SOLDIER. More than once—

LENI. How many times?

SOLDIER. Does it really matter?

LENI. —But why?

SOLDIER. Let's say I took a special interest.

LENI. They're in German.

SOLDIER. I can pick out a few phrases here and there.

LENI. Well, if you've seen them, then you know I did the work I was

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paid to do. That is all.

SOLDIER. I think you liked it.

LENI. I don't have to listen to such bold-faced lies! (*Leni turns around and walks away. Soldier points the gun at her.*)

SOLDIER. You like livin'?! Here, try this line. (*He shows her something he's written.*) What do you think?

LENI. Not bad.

SOLDIER. "Not bad"? That's good!

LENI. It's not so good.

SOLDIER. Say it. (*Hands her script.*) Here, I'll set you up. (*Clears throat.*) You like livin'?!

LENI. (*Reading.*) You won't shoot a defenseless woman in the back.

SOLDIER. What do you think?

LENI. It's pretty good.

SOLDIER. Say it again and see what I do. Trust me. You like livin'?

LENI. You won't shoot a defenseless woman in the back. (*Soldier points gun at her.*)

SOLDIER. Who said you were defenseless? (*Aside.*) Nice touch, huh? Keep reading.

LENI. (*Reading.*) I have no weapon, I can assure you.

SOLDIER. I can't just take your word for it.

LENI. Oh, cut! (*To off.*) Can we take this back?

SOLDIER. Cut what? We're just reading.

LENI. You and your lines!

SOLDIER. Good dialogue is important!

LENI. Not in film. It's the images that matter. Now, I want to take this back. Now, you say whatever you say. Feel free to improvise. This is film. Who gives a shit about the script? Now, I want you out here before I enter. Give me a long moment. Either I don't hear you the first time, or maybe I'm expecting you and just letting you stew a little—my attempt to control my last moment of freedom. Anyway, that's my motivation. You don't need to concern yourself with it.

SOLDIER. Well...O.K. (*Leni turns and exits.*)

LENI. (*Under her breath, going off.*) Amateur.

SOLDIER. Who yells action—?

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LENI. *(Off.)* I ALWAYS YELL ACTION! ACTION! *(Leni enters with bag and film can.)*

SOLDIER. Well, if it ain't Hitler's moll! Hey toots!

LENI. You gave me no time to pack my things.

SOLDIER. What do you expect? We ain't going on holiday.

LENI. This is an outrage!

SOLDIER. Sorry about that, doll face. Just doing my job here.

LENI. What did you call me?

SOLDIER. Doll face, sweetheart!

LENI. Cut! What the fuck are you doing?

SOLDIER. I thought it was alright.

LENI. But those aren't the lines.

SOLDIER. You said I could improvise.

LENI. You sound like you're in the latter stages of dementia.

SOLDIER. I thought I sounded like Bogie.

LENI. Listen, don't ad-lib. You're not good at it.

SOLDIER. You said the script is shit! And my rewrites were apparently no good.

LENI. Well, in any case, just say the basic thing. For plot. Don't try and create a character.

SOLDIER. But you get to say whatever you like.

LENI. Yes. But I'm celebrated. And I've acted before.

SOLDIER. Listen, I'm not unaware of this world. I'm a published author and the son of a Hollywood producer.

LENI. And I've had Hitler's cock in my mouth!

SOLDIER. Oh my God! Really?

LENI. No, but I made my point. This is my story and my arrest! So, stop screwing around with B movie shit!

SOLDIER. This whole thing is starting to give me the willies!

LENI. Just do as I say, and it will all go well. Take it from the top!
Everyone, places!

SOLDIER. Is that necessary? You're already here.

LENI. A writer like yourself doesn't appreciate working a scene...?

SOLDIER. This isn't writing!

LENI. I'm an actor; I write in space.

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SOLDIER. What does that mean?

LENI. I'm not talking words. Words are mere symbols by which I express my emotional struggle which I mold and remake constantly. It means, that in this last moment, after a tumultuous decade, a female's accomplishments that are unrivaled, you think you could possibly grant me a proper arrest scene?

SOLDIER. Alright. But this is the last time.

LENI. I think we worked out the kinks. Now keep your dialogue to a minimum. I carry the water in this scene anyway. *(Leni exits. He waits. She enters.)*

SOLDIER. Cum an, cum an, you can move faster than that.

LENI. You gave me no time.

SOLDIER. *(Jumping on her line.)* We ain't going on holiday!

LENI. Pacing! *(She turns.)* This is an outrage!

SOLDIER. This here is my time you're wasting. *(She tries but again can't manage the can of film.)*

LENI. I can't carry all of this.

SOLDIER. Then leave it. *(Soldier kicks the can.)*

LENI. No, no, no! FOR THE LOVE OF GOD! *(Leni goes after it, picks it up, and clutches it.)*

SOLDIER. What's in there anyway?

LENI. None of your Goddamn business!

SOLDIER. Some kind of movie, right...?

LENI. Don't touch it. Don't touch it, I said!

SOLDIER. I kinda like your spunk, you know?

LENI. Well, I don't care much for yours.

SOLDIER. I don't need spunk; I got this. *(He pulls out a pistol and points it at her.)* Now, hand it over.

LENI. What—this? You couldn't appreciate something like this.

SOLDIER. You'd be surprised the things I can appreciate.

LENI. I don't think so. *(Soldier cocks the pistol. She hands him the can.)*

SOLDIER. Wow. That was quite good!

LENI. You think? I really liked it. *(to off.)* Are we getting all this? Let's just keep rolling.

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SOLDIER. Yes! Let's go, Leni. Let's go!

LENI. This is an outrage!

SOLDIER. Damn right it is; this here is my time you're wasting.

LENI. Have you no decorum?

SOLDIER. Stop using those big words, lady. They ain't no good with me. Now, get your ass movin'.

LENI. (*Gesturing to film can.*) I can't carry all of this.

SOLDIER. Then leave it.

LENI. What?

SOLDIER. You heard me.

LENI. You're joking.

SOLDIER. Screw it. (*Soldier kicks a can.*)

LENI. No, no, no! (*Leni goes after it, clutches the can to her.*)

SOLDIER. What are you getting so bent out of shape about?

LENI. Would you kick defenseless child?

SOLDIER. If he helped to slaughter an entire population of Jews I would.

LENI. However factually incorrect, still, quite a nice line.

SOLDIER. I thought so.

LENI. Still rolling!

SOLDIER. What's in there anyway?

LENI. None of your Goddamn business!

SOLDIER. Some kind of movie, right...? (*Leni rises and turns to go.*)

LENI. I've had just about enough of this.

SOLDIER. You like livin'? (*Soldier aims his gun.*)

LENI. You won't shoot a defenseless woman in the back.

SOLDIER. No one would ever accuse you of being defenseless. (*Leni looks, showing disapproval of his line reading.*) Sorry, I shanked that one!

LENI. (*To off.*) Keep rolling! What—this? You couldn't appreciate something like this.

SOLDIER. You'd be surprised the things I can appreciate.

LENI. I don't think so. (*Soldier cocks the pistol. She hands him the can.*)

SOLDIER. Spunky *and* smart—how do you like that?

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LENI. Like what?

SOLDIER. It's an expression.

LENI. Fucking Americans and their shit peasant expressions! *(To off.)* We'll cut the fuck-word later, keep rolling. *(To Soldier.)* I want it back.

SOLDIER. I don't think so.

LENI. Why not?

SOLDIER. I wanna take a look. See what you're up to.

LENI. It's not something you would want to—

SOLDIER. Gimme a little credit. I graduated Dartmouth!

LENI. What could you want with it?

SOLDIER. Evidence.

LENI. Nice! *(To off.)* I will turn, pull in for a close up on "evidence". Ready? *(To Soldier.)* What could you want with it?

SOLDIER. Oh! Evidence! *(Leni turns for close-up.)*

LENI. For what, might I ask?

SOLDIER. For your trial, of course.

LENI. What trial—what are you—?

SOLDIER. When I, uh, kicked the can I was testing you. Guess what: you passed.

LENI. I don't understand.

SOLDIER. You can stop playin' dumb. It doesn't suit you, Frau Riefenstahl.

LENI. How do you know my name?

SOLDIER. I've seen your movies. You have to go a lot further than Bavaria if you want to ditch the U.S. Army.

LENI. *(To off.)* Mark this. I will rise and go to the tree.

SOLDIER. There's no tree.

LENI. We will build a tree! *(To off.)* Build a tree! *(To Soldier.)* Alright. Let's continue...What could the army want with me?

SOLDIER. You're famous.

LENI. I didn't think the army was interested in the movie business.

SOLDIER. You'd be surprised, now move along.

LENI. You came alone.

SOLDIER. I told my boss I could find you myself.

LENI. You fashion yourself a cowboy.

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SOLDIER. Yeah, but shucks, ma'am, I forgot my white hat.

LENI. So, you're my escort.

SOLDIER. In a manner of speaking. *(Soldier takes out handcuffs.)*

LENI. I doubt you'll need those. I'm an artist. My only weapon is inspiration.

SOLDIER. Is that so?

LENI. *(To off.)* Follow me! *(Leni turns and walks to him. To Soldier.)* If you don't believe me, frisk me. *(Slowly, starting from top down, Soldier frisks her. Leni shows signs of enjoying the process.)*

SOLDIER. Can we do this in a movie?

LENI. *(To off.)* I hope you're in tight on this! Follow his hands. Still rolling! *(Soldier finishes frisking, steps back.)* Do you believe me now?

SOLDIER. You may not have a weapon, but I know this journey will not be a safe one for me.

LENI. *(re: his line)* Putrid. *(Stepping to him.)* Anything else you know?

SOLDIER. Such as?

LENI. I felt the way you were touching me. Is that what you want?

SOLDIER. What do you mean? *(Leni runs her hand slowly across his cheek.)*

LENI. You farm boys are no naïve.

SOLDIER. I'm a Jew from the farms of a Hollywood soundstage.

LENI. You want me, don't you. I'm interested too. I just didn't think it would be at our first interaction—

SOLDIER. Stop. *(Soldier grabs her hand.)*

LENI. You're not going to rape me, are you? Let me make it easy for you.

SOLDIER. That's not...what? No!

LENI. Work with it!

SOLDIER. No, ma'am. I didn't plan on it.

LENI. You Americans are such honorable men.

SOLDIER. We try.

LENI. Whatever it is you think I've done!

SOLDIER. I don't care about that. Just following Uncle Sam's orders.

LENI. I was never Hitler's mistress.

SOLDIER. That's for others to figure out. I'm here to drive you to the

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camp.

LENI. You're lying! You have other plans for me. You want to ravage me!

SOLDIER. Can we please just go?!

LENI. I won't betray my country!

SOLDIER. What country?! There isn't one left!

LENI. LIAR!

SOLDIER. Let's go!

LENI. Well, that was quite good. I think we have a scene here. Now let's give it one more go.

SOLDIER. I'm not sure—

LENI. You and the Goddamn lines!

SOLDIER. Not that. We really have to be going.

LENI. Don't worry. I'll fix everything in the editing. Film is editing. And that's where I shine. In the cutting room.

SOLDIER. Edit the frisking. Are you serious?! There's no need for that.

LENI. Ha! You would kill for a taste. The woman who had Hitler.

SOLDIER. I knew it!

LENI. I will say it for the good of the scene. I will include it in my back story. But honestly, he was creepy—

SOLDIER. We have a drive to make! *(Soldier reaches out, takes her arm.)*

LENI. Exteriors! Yes! The scene was stagnating. Needs a change. Let's take it on the road. I do my best thinking in the arms of Nature! *(Leni turns and walks off. Soldier follows.)*

SCENE TWO

Leni and Soldier stand near his car. He's carrying her suitcase and film can.

LENI. *(re: the car.)* Well, this is unexpected.

SOLDIER. What do you mean? Oh! This helps us stay incognito.

LENI. Yes, of course. Ford convertibles are so common in Bavaria. We'll be virtually invisible.

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SOLDIER. We're O.S.S. We're not infantry. Should I have picked you up in a tank?

LENI. It's more proper in a jeep.

SOLDIER. Proper?

LENI. For the sake of the audience.

SOLDIER. The audience...right.

LENI. The *mise en scène* has to be perfect, don't you think? They see jeep, they think American Army. They see Ford, they could think any number of things.

SOLDIER. Yes, but how about a little something unexpected? We're not sure what this vehicle is for exactly. Keeps things interesting.

LENI. I like what I'm hearing.

SOLDIER. Let's just say the film might not be what we first believe.

LENI. But what of the crew, the lights, the cameras...?

SOLDIER. They'll be along.

LENI. Let me ask you something. May I ask you something?

SOLDIER. Okay.

LENI. Why are you working on this film?

SOLDIER. Well...

LENI. I want you to tell me the truth. You're sent to arrest me and instead we're now shooting a movie about my arrest. I know it was my idea to shoot this film, and that it will be a terrific one, with intrigue, suspense, high drama, but still, what's in it for you? I mean, it's unusual for a member of the enemy's army to be participating in such an endeavor.

SOLDIER. I guess...I think an artist of your accomplishments should have the chance to finish her film about her arrest as we...you know...arrest...you.

LENI. It's nice the Army hasn't lost its sense of honor.

SOLDIER. The United States Army is not in the revenge business. The way we see it, if finishing this movie makes for a happy, cooperative Leni, then so be it.

LENI. Leni is very happy and more than cooperative. Tell me, did you have to fight for this mission.

SOLDIER. Not really. They wanted someone who might be able to

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relate...have something in common.

LENI. Should I be flattered that you wanted to collaborate?

SOLDIER. I wouldn't call it a collaboration.

LENI. But that's what we're doing, isn't it? There's nothing to be embarrassed about.

SOLDIER. I'm not embarrassed.

LENI. But you admire my accomplishments. You can admit that, can't you?

SOLDIER. I agreed to make this film to help bring you back. My job *is* to bring you back. Let's be clear on that.

LENI. And you'll stop at nothing.

SOLDIER. Sounds a little melodramatic.

LENI. My forte.

SOLDIER. Just get in.

LENI. Such a serious young man... *(They get in the car. Soldier stashes suitcase and film can in the back seat. Leni speaks sarcastically.)*

Was the car ever used in features? Fine leather upholstery...nickel plated, I'm certain...I haven't been in a Ford since my last trip to America. *(Soldier starts the car.)* It's like riding in a covered wagon.

SOLDIER. Yeah, well we were not issued Mercedes in the Army. *(They drive.)*

LENI. If I were making a gangster picture, I might use such a vehicle.

SOLDIER. You? Gangster pictures?

LENI. You don't think I could make one?

SOLDIER. I should think not your cup of tea.

LENI. I can adapt to many situations. I'm a chameleon. What about you?

SOLDIER. What about me?

LENI. You handle yourself pretty good behind the wheel. You ever do any stunt driving?

SOLDIER. Too dangerous.

LENI. A brave soldier like yourself...? Do you know where you're going? Things can get quite treacherous. I know a safer route.

SOLDIER. I'm fine.

LENI. But if we stay on this road, you could easily go off into that

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gorge there.

SOLDIER. I won't.

LENI. I'm just being cooperative. It's not like I would make you lose your way—plant some co-conspirator in the tree-tops: a mercenary perched high above us, his rifle leveled at your head, your skull captured in his scope! All he must do is await my subtle but equally dramatic signal... (*Leni takes out white handkerchief, raises it to wipe her eyes. Soldier snatches it away from her.*)

SOLDIER. I don't think so. All your pals got smart and killed themselves.

LENI. I was joking! Can't you take a...what's the American word... "ribbing"?

SOLDIER. Oh, that's right. Third Reich humor. Heads getting blown off by snipers. Hilarious!

LENI. You're being vulgar. I didn't mean anything of the sort.

SOLDIER. Well, let's drop it then. (*They drive on.*)

LENI. You know, I'm so excited about making this film. I know it will be a huge success!

SOLDIER. Are you the villain or hero?

LENI. The hero, of course!

SOLDIER. Does that make me the bad guy?

LENI. You're merely a supporting character. But remember, there are no small parts...

SOLDIER. But I'm no actor.

LENI. Don't underestimate yourself.

SOLDIER. You know something I don't know?

LENI. I know nothing.

SOLDIER. Is that what you're planning to tell them? (*They drive on.*)

LENI. Did you bring a map?

SOLDIER. I don't need a map.

LENI. Did you bring one just in case?

SOLDIER. I brought a map. Pipe down!

LENI. Well, where is it—?

SOLDIER. I have it.

LENI. Are you sure?

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SOLDIER. Don't say it!

LENI. I will navigate.

SOLDIER. I can handle it.

LENI. Let me see. I'll navigate.

SOLDIER. I can handle it.

LENI. This isn't the most picturesque location. I would never shoot here unless it was a film about the end of the world. You must find a suitable location for our exteriors. Perhaps outside a mountain lodge.

SOLDIER. We just left your mountain lodge!

LENI. That old shack?

SOLDIER. Looking out here, I could write all day about its long, cold expanse, devoid of life, the very throbbing essence sucked or stolen or murdered out of it.

LENI. Yes. But I would *never* make a movie about that. My movies are about hope and possibility.

SOLDIER. Well, you must be some kind of magician if you make this story a hopeful one.

LENI. I have a few tricks up my sleeve...So, how would you tell my story?

SOLDIER. This one, you mean...?

LENI. If you were directing it, yes.

SOLDIER. I don't know...

LENI. My story is a goldmine, you know. How would you make this story?

SOLDIER. I haven't thought about it.

LENI. Well, think about it...Perhaps there's another topic on which we can "chew the fat?"

SOLDIER. You like pizza?

LENI. What?

SOLDIER. How about the Yankees?

LENI. Never heard of this.

SOLDIER. Let's talk about Hitler! (*Soldier smiles.*)

LENI. So, tell me about Hollywood.

SOLDIER. What do you want to know?

LENI. Will they welcome me once all this unpleasantness has ended?

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. I'm not sure the Jews on Rodeo Drive will ever welcome you.

LENI. Are you always so crude? When I first went to California they slammed the door in my face.

SOLDIER. Yes, and I carried a sign at a demonstration.

LENI. Oh, that was you? Your father is a producer.

SOLDIER. Yes.

LENI. Why aren't you?

SOLDIER. My talents lie in other areas.

LENI. Writing can be difficult. But good stories seem to write themselves.

SOLDIER. Sometimes.

LENI. Not my strong suit. Did it only when absolutely necessary. Things are looking up! We have finally come upon a few trees. I've always adored the outdoors: the fresh air, flowers, green pastures!

SOLDIER. An old country girl, huh?

LENI. No, but I adore it!

SOLDIER. You made quite a living from it, I must say.

LENI. My mountain pictures were immensely popular! Say, you *do* know my work.

SOLDIER. We're just really interested in that other period in your career. (*Leni slides closer to Soldier.*) What are you doing?

LENI. Around this turn is a terrific view of the valley. Might be something worth exploring for my film. (*She sits up high in the seat, leaning on him for balance.*) Right along here.

SOLDIER. Stay, stay on your side, alright?

LENI. Drive carefully! (*Leni stands on the seat, grabs hold of Soldier for support.*) We'll engage a pilot and get aerial footage of this entire region!

SOLDIER. Stop, okay—

LENI. Just help me get a little higher...

SOLDIER. I can't, I'm driving!

LENI. Hold her steady and we'll be— (*Leni pushes harder on Soldier so he is wedged against the door of the car. He's losing control of the vehicle.*)

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. Get off of me! I can't drive!

LENI. Can you see? It's glorious!

SOLDIER. Are you crazy?! *(Soldier slams on the breaks. The car veers off the road into a ditch. Soldier is thrown from the car. Leni climbs out of the car and goes to him.)*

LENI. Are you...are you hurt?

SOLDIER. What?

LENI. Are you injured?

SOLDIER. I'm not sure. Let me try and get up...Ahh! *(Soldier collapses.)*

LENI. You look alright.

SOLDIER. My ankle is twisted.

LENI. That was some pretty lousy driving there.

SOLDIER. You were practically sitting on my head!

LENI. I was thinking of the shot!

SOLDIER. We could've been killed!

LENI. Stop this at once! We're fine.

SOLDIER. Fine? Is that how you see it? Shit, it's already swelling.

LENI. A few bumps and bruises.

SOLDIER. That were entirely your fault.

LENI. All I perceived was a soldier with no ability to adapt under pressure. Is this too hard for you, sergeant?

SOLDIER. I'm not a sergeant.

LENI. I assume all soldiers are sergeants. It's a habit I have. Perhaps your habit is crying like a child...

SOLDIER. I'm not crying!

LENI. Are you really a soldier? Or are you only pretending. Oh, my word! You are really crying!

SOLDIER. No!

LENI. What kind of man are you?

SOLDIER. We could have died and now we're stuck!

LENI. You weren't going to die.

SOLDIER. How do you know? How do you know that?

LENI. Alright...Perhaps—

SOLDIER. Perhaps!

PLAYING LENI

LENI. There was the slight possibility—

SOLDIER. Yes!

LENI. But we didn't! The crew is behind us, correct?

SOLDIER. What?

LENI. This is what we'll do. You wait here for them. And I will keep looking for terrific places to shoot. We have a lot of work to do.

SOLDIER. I don't like that idea at all.

LENI. Why?

SOLDIER. Do you think I'm stupid?

LENI. I won't run off.

SOLDIER. Sure, you will.

LENI. What do you take me for?

SOLDIER. For one of them.

LENI. A woman?

SOLDIER. No.

LENI. A director?

SOLDIER. No! A Nazi!

LENI. All Germans are Nazis, is that it?

SOLDIER. Pretty much.

LENI. How easy...What if I turned around and said you all are the same.

SOLDIER. Soldiers?

LENI. Jews!

SOLDIER. It's a little different. Your people persecuted and killed my people.

LENI. It didn't happen to you! You weren't there. You didn't suffer!

SOLDIER. No. But I'm Jewish. I would have had I lived here!

LENI. You're no victim!

SOLDIER. You're no innocent!

LENI. Who are you to condemn me?! A soldier? You practically shit yourself. You're a pathetic little mouse! *(Soldier struggles to his feet. He takes out his gun while leaning heavily on his good ankle.)*

SOLDIER. I don't have to tell them I found you. For all they know, you already escaped. *(Soldier points the gun at her.)*

LENI. I don't like this change in the script at all.

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. This is what you call real life.

LENI. Don't do something you'll regret.

SOLDIER. And when you realized we were closing in on you, you did what any self-respecting Nazi would do: you shot yourself.

LENI. That's a terrible idea. I'm not killing myself. At least not yet. There's so much story to tell.

SOLDIER. Yes. You shot yourself...with a little help from me. *(Soldier holds the gun up ready to shoot. Leni steps to him so the gun is resting against her.)* Trying to be cute, huh? I will shoot you.

LENI. Oh, I'm sure of it. *(Leni pushes on the gun. Soldier loses his balance and stumbles. He howls in pain and falls. Leni easily takes the gun from him.)* You almost had me there. I almost believed you.

SOLDIER. This is *not* part of a movie. *(Leni stashes the gun in her belt. She takes the scarf from around her neck and ties it tightly around his ankle.)* What are you doing?

LENI. Stop talking. *(She touches his head comfortingly.)*

SOLDIER. I'd rather you didn't do that.

LENI. Just stay off the ankle when you can.

SOLDIER. Why don't you run? Here's your chance.

LENI. Why run? You will find me again. Or someone like you.

SOLDIER. We're leaving. Come on.

LENI. How?

SOLDIER. Walking! *(Soldier gets to his feet.)*

LENI. I don't think so.

SOLDIER. We can't stay here on the side of the road.

LENI. We'll wait for the crew. *(Soldier sits.)*

SOLDIER. You still want to make this movie?

LENI. I can't fire you after that incredible scene. After the crew gets here, we'll run through it again. And I want you to know something, for the scene and in general. The Nazis were thugs. I made those movies because I did not have a choice!

SOLDIER. But you know it's a lie.

LENI. That's my story and that's how going to be told. Now you can rest until the crew arrives. I'll keep watch.

SOLDIER. You rest first.

PLAYING LENI

LENI. You're going to protect me?

SOLDIER. I'll keep an eye. The pain is so throbbing I couldn't possibly sleep.

LENI. No one's going to mistake you for a real soldier.

SOLDIER. I *am* a real soldier.

LENI. I'm sure you are.

SOLDIER. Not a sergeant. But I am most definitely a soldier.

LENI. You and your silly illusions.

SCENE THREE

Leni enters what looks like woods. Soldier follows behind her carrying her film can and suitcase.

SOLDIER. Can you slow down?!

LENI. There are some good things here. We will have to shoot much of this!

SOLDIER. After a break. *(Soldier sits.)*

LENI. I feel terrific! Breathing the fresh mountain air. Breathe it in! I'm not uncertain that our story won't begin in the forest. I hope you're taking notes of all that I am saying. That's how I work. I talk, pose questions, and develop conflicts. And then when I'm all talked out I make a movie. Are you getting all this?

SOLDIER. Every word...

LENI. Nature! Yes, we must capture this. For after all, we come from it and in the end, return. That is what it comes down to after all: ashes to ashes...

SOLDIER. I'm sorry. I can't focus on the film right now. I'm a little preoccupied with my fucking ankle! *(Leni ignores him and smells a flower.)*

LENI. We flashback to a young Leni! As a small child. Playing in a field of vivid red tulips. There is so much blood to come, it will serve as a visual cue. Now, where is that crew? They are going to hear about this! You're certain they will come this way?

SOLDIER. They will be here. They know the way. But I need to rest.

PLAYING LENI

LENI. We can't!

SOLDIER. Just leave me here.

LENI. No!

SOLDIER. Why?

LENI. You're a character in my story. How would it play with you disappearing after the first reel? No, we'll find the right location and set up camp.

SOLDIER. What are you going to do, carry me?

LENI. If I must. I'm quite fit. Have been all my life. *(Tries to lift him.)*

LENI. Help me a little!

SOLDIER. I'll do it myself...It's all about leverage. Stop pulling!
(LENI gives up.)

LENI. You're too heavy!

SOLDIER. Just give me a second. *(Soldier gets up by himself.)* Alright. Let's go. *(Soldier takes a step, nearly loses his balance and sits back down. Leni sits next to him.)*

LENI. Let's have a look. *(Leni unwraps the scarf.)*

SOLDIER. How is it? *(Leni moves the foot gently.)*

LENI. I don't think it's broken. I think you will live after all.

SOLDIER. I didn't have you pegged as the sympathetic type. *(Leni rewraps the ankle.)*

LENI. That's because you don't really know me...How long do you think we can last out here?

SOLDIER. If we can find some water, a few peaches or something, we'll make it.

LENI. It's getting dark.

SOLDIER. Need to find a shelter. *(Soldier puts out his hand for her to take. Leni again tries to help him up. Soldier pushes to his feet and they begin walking.)*

LENI. Since we're spending all of this intimate time together, shouldn't I know your name at least?

SOLDIER. Call me Sergeant.

LENI. I'm sure your parents gave you a Jewish name of some kind: Irving, Melvin, or Seymour.

SOLDIER. You're hilarious.

PLAYING LENI

LENI. Am I?

SOLDIER. A real laugh riot.

LENI. I'm not getting you.

SOLDIER. If they're going to believe your story you have to keep a lid on it.

LENI. Maybe you could teach me a thing or two.

SOLDIER. First rule of the interrogation: Don't joke about the Jews.

LENI. I have nothing against anyone. As far as I'm concerned, people are all the same.

SOLDIER. Easily lead, you mean...?

LENI. Yes! Give them a good speech and they'll follow you anywhere. Your heart pounds when you watch my film.

SOLDIER. Made me want to puke.

LENI. Taste is subjective.

SOLDIER. I heard Speer did much of the lighting...

LENI. Albert tried to take credit. It's the editing! Movies are editing.

SOLDIER. (*Stopping.*) You know, I've seen this bush before.

LENI. There's a million like it—

SOLDIER. No. This particular one. See the broken branch there where the new bud is forming at the break.

LENI. I just can't get enough of this fresh air! (*Leni begins calisthenics: jumping jacks.*)

SOLDIER. Go easy there...

LENI. You should stretch and breathe. Exercise invigorates the body and spirit.

SOLDIER. I'm fine thank you.

LENI. You're not happy without smog in your nose and concrete under your toes. Do you dance?

SOLDIER. Do I look like I dance?

LENI. Looks have nothing to do with it. Here, let me show you.

SOLDIER. The ankle would rather not. (*Leni sways gently.*) There's no music

LENI. Let the rhythm of nature provide your music.

SOLDIER. Hold it together there, Ginger.

LENI. I'm beginning to feel it, the rhythm coursing through my body.

PLAYING LENI

We all move within it. Some of us ignore its music. Are you watching?

SOLDIER. I'm watching.

LENI. I've been known to seduce many a man with my dancing.

SOLDIER. What men have you seduced?

LENI. Wouldn't you like to know?

SOLDIER. Yeah, I would, actually.

LENI. What would you give for me to tell you?

SOLDIER. I don't know. Depends on who we're talking about.

LENI. I have my list.

SOLDIER. What about those who seduced you?

LENI. What?

SOLDIER. The glamour...the power...who can resist?

LENI. That won't be our story here. I thought we had an understanding. It's the story of a woman forced into a difficult situation. A woman trying to save her life!

SOLDIER. That's right. I keep forgetting that!

LENI. Well, I suggest you focus on the topic at hand and don't let your mind stray.

SOLDIER. Forgetting the movie for a moment, let me ask you a couple of questions. Just for my own understanding. You really expect us to believe you were forced—

LENI. I see the crew has finally arrived!

SOLDIER. Really?!

LENI. *(To crew, off.)* Set her up, boys! We'll start on me. We are going backwards men! A scene where it all began. Goebbels and I. It's important our soldier gets the full import of my dilemma. Not a seduction by any means. *(To Soldier.)* You'll find, in the course of events, that I was powerless and had no choice. That all the cards were stacked against me. We'll take it from the interior in the cabaret.

SOLDIER. Cabaret?

LENI. ACTION! We're at my birthday party, Frau Riefenstahl. Would you like a drink?

SOLDIER. I'm you?

LENI. I wanted to see you, Leni.

SOLDIER. Goebbels, is it?

PLAYING LENI

LENI. I want you to listen. Let's begin the scene. Have a seat.

SOLDIER. I'd rather stand.

LENI. Sit down, Leni, have a drink. *(Soldier sits.)* We will have brandy.

SOLDIER. If you insist.

LENI. I do!

SOLDIER. Is this how it happened?

LENI. It was not in a cabaret.

SOLDIER. So, why are we here?

LENI. It's more interesting than some drab office.

SOLDIER. We're replaying what scene...?

LENI. When Goebbels gives me an order in the shape of an offer. An offer that will change my life fore—

SOLDIER. The scene as you remember it? Or the scene the way it was?

LENI. You are much more attractive in real life than the pictures.

SOLDIER. Thank you.

LENI. Doctor...

SOLDIER. Doctor!

LENI. Goebbels...

SOLDIER. Of course, Goebbels! Sorry.

LENI. A terrific German specimen, Fraulein Riefenstahl.

SOLDIER. I can't do this!

LENI. Have I done something wrong? Say it!

SOLDIER. Have I done something wrong?

LENI. I'm not sure why you would want to see someone like me. Say that!

SOLDIER. I'm not sure...what's the point!

LENI. You want to see the truth?!

SOLDIER. I'm not sure...

LENI. Why you would...

SOLDIER. Why you would.

LENI. Want to see someone like me...Damn it! *(To crew, off)* ARE YOU GETTING ALL THIS?!

SOLDIER. Want to see someone like me! This is ridiculous! *(Soldier gets up and limps away from table.)*

LENI. Get back here and finish the scene. *(Leni waits for him. Soldier*

PLAYING LENI

doesn't move.) You want the truth? I'm giving it to you. (Soldier returns to the table.)

SOLDIER. I'm dying to see how this fantasy ends.

LENI. Where were we? Yes! You say, why would you want to see someone like me, Doctor Goebbels?

SOLDIER. Why would you want to see someone like me?

LENI. I have a proposition. Of a cinematic nature.

SOLDIER. Is the party in the movie business now?

LENI. No, but you are.

SOLDIER. Yes.

LENI. I've seen a few of your movies.

SOLDIER. I hope they were to your liking.

LENI. You're good. I mean, I think you're good. But the Führer? He thinks you are—How do the Yanks put it?—the cat's pajamas? The man's infatuated, and this is someone who is never infatuated.

SOLDIER. I'm flattered.

LENI. You should be honored.

SOLDIER. Is the Führer here tonight?

LENI. He doesn't like places like this, but he wanted me to meet with you.

SOLDIER. Is this the point where you stand up and walk out because you don't want to be partners with Nazis?

LENI. You think you're so smart. You don't get up and walk out. You wiggle.

SOLDIER. Wiggle?

LENI. You wiggle free. You say something like, "I'd love to stay, but I really must be going."

SOLDIER. That's "wiggle"? Sounds like Groucho.

LENI. You're trying to get away without upsetting him too much. Say it.

SOLDIER. I'd love to stay, but I really...

LENI. You'll go when I allow you to go! Not so easy when dealing with Goebbels. Are you with me so far?

SOLDIER. Yes. It's an interesting fiction.

LENI. This happened!

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. So, what does Goebbels say next?

LENI. Now, the Führer saw that movie of yours. What was it called... the *Blue*...?

SOLDIER. *The Blue Light.*

LENI. And this is where I make my stand. Go ahead. Tell me you're just an artist, Leni.

SOLDIER. If he saw the film, then he knows I'm but an artist.

LENI. Of course you are. You've got talent, and that's why he needs you. We need you.

SOLDIER. For what exactly?

LENI. Our Party Congress is approaching, and we'd like to take advantage of its possibilities.

SOLDIER. Possibilities?

LENI. As propaganda.

SOLDIER. I am not political. I'm sorry I can't help you.

LENI. Who said you couldn't help me? Actually, it's to our advantage you are not. You will approach this film dramatically. As if it were one of your films. You're exactly what we're looking for. Here's the address. (*Leni hands Soldier a slip of paper.*)

SOLDIER. Nuremberg?

LENI. You've been there?

SOLDIER. Of course.

LENI. Good, now you just tell me what you need.

SOLDIER. For what?

LENI. To make a film. To show us to the people. The Führer is keeping a low profile right now, but that's going to change.

SOLDIER. What if I say no? With all due respect...

LENI. Why would you do that? You have a blank check. All film production this side of the Rhine stops, and everything is put at your disposal.

SOLDIER. You didn't answer my question: what if I say no?

LENI. You would disappoint your Führer?

SOLDIER. Not my intention. But surely there are directors better suited.

LENI. But Hitler wants you. And he usually gets what he wants.

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. And, of course, I say something like, “You must explain to the Führer how much I appreciate his most generous offer. But I must decline, Dr. Goebbels.”

LENI. Oh well, that’s fine, another brandy perhaps...

SOLDIER. No, thank you.

LENI. But stay and enjoy the music.

SOLDIER. Thank you.

LENI. You know, the pistols they issue are not for sitting. I mean they issue you a gun—make you wear it at all times. But it isn’t properly designed so you can sit with it. You have to take the entire belt and gun off and put it on the table for the world to see just to sit comfortably. I know we live in difficult times. But this is a cabaret. For fun, drinking, to forget for the moment. And while people are forgetting here is a gun staring one in the face. Reminding one of the troubles that lie ahead. It’s very indelicate. But what can I do? So, what were we talking about? Ah, yes. The film.

SOLDIER. So, this is the point where you give up.

LENI. Yes.

SOLDIER. Bull shit.

LENI. Silence!

SOLDIER. Let’s take it back a bit. Hand me the slip of paper again.

(Leni hands him the paper.) Nuremberg?

LENI. You’ve been there?

SOLDIER. Of course.

LENI. Good, now you just tell me what you need.

SOLDIER. For what?

LENI. To make it into a movie.

SOLDIER. Make a film for the Nazis?

LENI. To make a film for us, yes. To show Hitler to the people. He is keeping a low profile right now, but that’s going to change. Your job is to make him look like the second coming.

SOLDIER. What if I say no?

LENI. You have a blank check. All film production this side of the Rhine stops, and everything is put at your disposal. You’ll be the most popular, the most powerful, artist in Germany and beyond.

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. (*Enthusiastic.*) I know I could really make that Party Congress fly. I have a lot of ideas already...I mean just sitting here; I can imagine columns of soldiers as Hitler descends from the clouds in an airplane...I've seen the Führer speak before. Very charismatic. Perfect for film...

LENI. Stop. I never said that! (*To crew, off.*) Take that back!

SOLDIER. Sorry. When I get going, I get...

LENI. I didn't want to do it! I did my utmost to refuse him.

SOLDIER. But as much as the idea of it excites me, I have plans of my own and I can't let anything get in the way of them. There's so many films I want to make. You have no idea! I can't get my thoughts down in notes fast enough. I need two or three lifetimes to shoot them all. And THEN THEY OFFER TO FUND ALL YOUR PROJECTS!

LENI. He made no such offer!

SOLDIER. Which you took!

LENI. I will kill you!

SOLDIER. You haven't the guts! Tell the Führer that's peachy! There is so much I could do with this film. All of Germany will bow at my feet. I will be so very famous!

LENI. I never said that. I never thought that! (*To crew.*) Stop filming!

SOLDIER. I will be top dog. The cat's whiskers!

LENI. When you fear for your life, you will say anything.

SOLDIER. I know what you said.

LENI. One day you will see. You will be up against it. You will find out how hard it is.

SOLDIER. I'm different than you!

LENI. Not so. You are very much like me. Everyone is very much like me. You *are* a killer, you *are* a hero depending on the circumstances. That's the only thing that distinguishes us. Circumstances!

SOLDIER. I could never be like you. I would never sell my soul. Some of us make the right decision.

LENI. Why are you here? You never quite answered that question to my satisfaction—

SOLDIER. Let's both be you. Leni meets Leni. Who is lying? Roll it!

LENI. You are lying! Why are you here?!

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. I, Leni Riefenstahl, want to be rich and famous!

LENI. I didn't want to die!

SOLDIER. In those photos I seem so happy.

LENI. I was acting!

SOLDIER. I could have left.

LENI. To go where?

SOLDIER. Hollywood!

LENI. Please. We can't both be Leni in this scene. *(To crew.)* Cut! Stop filming!

SOLDIER. We must. This is going very well.

LENI. You be Goebbels. And I will show you how it really happened.

SOLDIER. Around and around we go! Where she stops nobody—

LENI. You wanted to see me, Minister Goebbels.

SOLDIER. I'm not interested. That's a wrap!

LENI. No! Did I do something wrong?

SOLDIER. Please. Give it a rest.

LENI. I'm really not political!

SOLDIER. Tell the truth!

LENI. You're not listening. I talk and talk, and nobody listens.

SOLDIER. I'm listening. I don't believe you!

LENI. I will film your death scene! *(To crew.)* Roll it! *(Leni takes gun, tries to shoot. Soldier grabs the gun and points it at her.)*

SOLDIER. Truth. Tell the truth. Tell me what you knew and what you did! Tell me about all the death!

LENI. I'm not what you think. I say that sincerely. I was duped! What I'm trying to say...some of my dearest friends were Jews!

SOLDIER. You don't say.

LENI. Of course. A slew of Jews! Reinhardt, Von Sternberg, Balazcs...

SOLDIER. You think I won't kill you just because you conjure up your phony list of alibi Jews!

LENI. You've got me all wrong...

SOLDIER. The Führer descends from the heavens like Christ himself. Germany gets a collective erection. People die by the thousands, the millions, and you're not in some way responsible?

LENI. Einstein! Einstein!

PLAYING LENI

SOLDIER. Einstein too?

LENI. We dated a few times...

SOLDIER. What's the point of bringing you in, really? You'll just make things up.

LENI. Gershwin! Jonas Salk! Benny Goodman!

SOLDIER. Maybe you ran into some nefarious characters on the road...a mercenary perched high in the treetops.

LENI. Freud! Schweitzer! Roosevelt!

SOLDIER. Just die, you Nazi whore!

LENI. You see...? You're no better than they are.

SOLDIER. You're right! *(He punches her face. Blackout.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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