

# EMMA

An opera in two acts by Elaine Fine based  
on the play by Howard Zinn

**Jenny** (soprano) a factory worker

**Rose** (soprano) a factory worker.

**Dora** (mezzo-soprano) a factory worker.

**Vogel** (bass-baritone) a corset factory foreman.

**Emma Goldman** (mezzo-soprano) She is eighteen to twenty-two in the first act, twenty-two to thirty-seven in the second act, and forty-eight at the end. She has strong and pleasant features.

**Sasha** (Alexander Berkman) (baritone): He is the same age as Emma and wears glasses.

**Anna** (soprano): She is the same age as Emma

**Fedya** (tenor): He is also the same age as Emma

**Vito** (bass-baritone): He is also the same age as Emma

**Johann Most** (tenor) He is in his forties. He should have a beard

**Henry Clay Frick** (bass-baritone)

**Ben Reitman** (baritone) He appears to be ten years younger than Emma, and is a very handsome and flamboyant man.

**J. Edgar Hoover** (bass-baritone)

**Thomas Gregory** (tenor)

**Reporter** (soprano)

**Woman** (soprano)

**Receptionist** (mezzo-soprano)

Instrumentation: Piano, clarinet, violin, cello, percussion, trumpet and a small chorus that plays the parts of workers, strikers, and police.

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This operatic adaptation of Howard Zinn's play *Emma* is a gift to the Emma Goldman Papers at the University of California, Berkeley. It is free from copyright and can be performed in whole or in part by anyone who wishes to perform it without paying royalties to the composer.

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## ACT ONE

### Scene One

*The stage is dark. When the lights come up Emma, Rose, Jenny, and Dora are sitting at imaginary sewing machines going through the imaginary motions of sewing.*

DORA:

Nit zukhn mikh vu di mirtn grinen!  
Gefinst mikh dort nit, mayn shats.  
Vu leben velkn bay mashinen;  
Dort is mayn rue plats,  
Dort is mayn rue plats.

(Don't look for me where the myrtles blossom,  
you won't find me there, my dear.  
Where people live by machines  
There is my resting place.)

DORA and JENNY:

Nit zukhn mikh vu di feygl singen.  
Gefinst mikh dort nit, mayn shats.  
A skav bin ikh, vu ketn kingen  
Dort is mayn rue plats,  
Dort is mayn rue plats.

(Don't look for me where the birds are singing,  
you won't find me there, my dear.  
I am a slave where chains are ringing  
There is my resting place.)

VOGEL: How many times do I have to tell you? No singing on the job. You want to sing?  
Get a job with the opera!

JENNY: You remember the fire at Kachinsky's shop last month? Eighteen girls died. Some burned to death. Some jumped from the windows. How could anyone for get such a thing? Well, it said in the paper this morning why those girls couldn't get down the back stairs.

DORA: So?

JENNY: The door was locked from the outside. Kachinsky locked it because girls were sneaking on the roof to get some air.

DORA: The dirty bastard and he calls himself a Jew!

ROSE: Is a Jewish boss any different?

DORA: A Jew is supposed to be different.

ROSE: They're all the same, believe me. I've worked for Jews and Gentiles. Even Italians. They're all the same.

JENNY: I don't feel good working here on the eighth floor. There's too many fires these

days. Did you read what the fire chief of New York said?

ROSE: Who reads that foolishness?

JENNY: You better read. He says his ladders only reach up to the sixth floor. If you're on the seventh or the eighth floor like us pray to God.

ROSE: You know the back door on this floor is locked from the outside too.

JENNY: What are you saying?

ROSE: It's been that way ever since I was working here.

DORA: That's not right.

ROSE: It's better not to think a-bout it.

JENNY: Someone should tell Vogel to open the door.

DORA: You talk you get in trouble. Who will tell Vogel? Not me.

EMMA: (spoken) Mr. Vogel! Please! Go outside and open the back door. In case of a fire...

VOGEL: Mind your own business. You work on the corsets. It's Mister Handlin's shop. I have nothing to do with the doors. Emma, take my advice. You're the youngest girl here. Learn to mind your own business.

EMMA: I'm not working if the door is locked.

VOGEL: Good! Good Leave! Go home right now. Who needs you? Dora you stay a little later and do Emma's work.

DORA: I can't stay later.

VOGEL: You, Jenny?

JENNY: I have to be home tonight.

VOGEL: Rose? (*she shakes her head*) What's the matter with all of you?

ALL WOMEN: The door. The door. You have to open the door. Mister Vogel I'm sorry but I'm scared of fires.

VOGEL: I'm not supposed to. It's not my business.

ROSE: Mister Vogel, if there's a fire, you won't be able to get down the back stairs either.

VOGEL: You're all meshuganah. I've got a family to support. Please, get back to the machines. The order has to get out tonight.

ALL WOMEN: Open the door, open the door

VOGEL: (*spoken*) All right! Enough. I'll lose my job and then you'll be satisfied. (*he opens the door*) All right. Get back to work.

DORA: A friend of mine saw the fire at Kachinsky's shop. The girls on the tenth floor came out on the window ledge, the flames all around them. They looked so small up there. And when their clothes began to burn they jumped. Two of them, three of them, at a time, holding hands...

## **Scene two: Sach's Café in New York City**

*Fedya, Vito, Anna, and Emma are in Sach's café.*

FEDYA: Welcome to New York, Emma, the city of sewers.

VITO: Fedya can't forget that I work in the sewers

ANNA: You work in the sewers Vito, but you're really a philosopher.

VITO: What's the difference? Anna works in a corset factory, and Fedya is unemployed, but he's really an artist.

FEDYA: I'm really unemployed. Unlike Vito.

VITO: Sewer work is only temporary. It only lasts until there is a general constipation in the city. If the rich get more constipated, and the poor have less and less to eat, the sewers will run dry.

*Sasha enters, order, and begins eating. He is too busy eating to sing along.*

ANNA: During the day in the shop we denounce the capitalists, and the evening in Sach's café we denounce each other.

VITO: Here we've got Marxists, Bakuninists, Kropotkinists, DeLeonists...

ANNA:

Marx! The Manifesto! So clear, so glorious.

Workers of the world, unite; then the people who share the work share the wealth.

VITO: Marx was right when he said the wealth of the capitalists comes from the misery of human beings.

FEDYA: But Bakunin said the dictatorship of the proletariat is as tyrannical as a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

VITO: Equality, says Kropotkin, is the most powerful weapon of the animal world in the struggle for existence. Equality is equity.

FEDYA: DeLeon said it is only possible to have equality between people who are economically free.

ANNA: Engels says the only way of creating true social equality is when both men and women have absolutely equal legal rights.

ALL: There can be no worker's state. The state is an evil in itself. We must have no governments, no masters, no gods. We declare war against inequality, against exploitation, against deceit. In the name of equality we are determined to have no more prostituted, exploited, and deceived, and governed men and women.

SASHA: *(to a silent waiter)* Another steak, and a large beer.

EMMA: who's that glutton?

FEDYA: Sasha! Who died and left you money?

SASHA: Today was payday.

VITO: *(to Emma)* He works in a cigar factory. Hey Sasha. Say hello to our new comrade from Rochester, Emma Goldman.

SASHA: *(looks up and nods)* Johann Most is speaking at the academy tomorrow night. I have leaflets to distribute.

EMMA: Johann most himself? I'd like to help.

SASHA: Fine. I'll meet you at Broom Street at Dawn. Where the street car stops.

### **Scene three: at the Brooklyn Academy**

MOST: Members of the police force, why are you here? Haven't you heard that this is a meeting of anarchists? Perhaps you've heard we believe in disorder. Wrong! We believe in order. Equality. Natural order. Harmony. We found we were living by rules we had not made, in ways that we did not want. We looked around the city. In winter we saw corpses of old people frozen for lack of fuel. In summer we saw babies in the tenements dying of cholera. We saw the rich give a party at the Waldorf Astoria in honor of a dog dressed in jewels; while mothers on Cherry Street couldn't buy milk for their children. We saw that the men who own America's industries pick the presidents, pick the congressmen, appoint the judges, anoint the priests, and own the newspapers.

Thousands of workers die in their mines each year. Thousands of workers die in their mills each year. Sons of those workers are slaughtered in their wars. And they accuse us of violence! Our position is clear. We oppose violence against the innocent. We promote violence against the oppressor.

*Applause, lights out. Lights up.*

EMMA: Now I know why Johann Most is always in and out of prison. Sasha, I wonder... Do you think that we have to give up everything to be revolutionaries? Must we give up music and the smell of lilacs? Must we give up art?

SASHA: It is an objective fact: the artist lives on the backs of the poor.

EMMA: There is something wrong with the way you think, Sasha.

SASHA: Let's not argue. After all we're comrades.

EMMA: Shouldn't comrades argue? Anyway, tell me something about yourself. They tell me you are organizing the cigar workers. How did you start?

SASHA: In the old country, at the age of thirteen I was expelled from school for writing an essay.

EMMA: For an essay?

SASHA: They didn't like the title "There is no God."

EMMA: At thirteen I was at a factory in St. Petersburg. I thought America would be different. I felt no difference in the factory in Rochester. I felt no difference in America. America had a constitution, but it meant nothing in the factory. Now we have a movement we can live for.

SASHA: So our grandchildren can live full lives...

EMMA: No. We must live for ourselves, now, and beautifully.

EMMA and SASHA: We must live today and show the world just how fully life can be lived.  
*(they embrace)*

#### **Scene four: Anna's Apartment**

*Emma and Sasha are drinking tea in Anna's apartment, Anna and Fedya enter.*

EMMA: Who's going to tell Anna, you or me?

SACHA: I'll tell her.

ANNA: Tell her what?

EMMA: That girl hears everything.

ANNA: Yes, everything (she laughs and kisses Emma)

EMMA: Toby Golden is moving from her place on Forsyth street. Sasha and I are going to take it. It's twelve dollars a month.

ANNA: So you'd rather live with Sasha than me. A true friend.

EMMA: You know this place is just big enough for you. With me here you have no privacy at all.

ANNA: You mean since Sasha started coming around. I know Toby Golden's place. It's twice as big as this, isn't it?

SASHA: Yes.

ANNA: Good! Then there's room for me.

SAHSA: Now look, Anna.

ANNA: Do you believe in collectivity or not?

SASHA: Of course, but...

ANNA: Bourgeois individualism Corrupts us all! Comrades! We must begin the new culture right now! Right here. Comrades! Share and share alike.

EMMA and SASHA: She's right. Of course she's right.

FEDYA: (*Who has been listening*) ...and it's big enough for me too.

ANNA: You too?

FEDYA: We must begin the new culture right now! Comrades! Love thy neighbor, says the bible. Live in free association, says Kropatkin. Workers of the world, unite, says Marx. Make room for Fedya, says Fedya.

ANNA: But we're not like Emma and Sasha. We're just friends.

FEDYA: And we will live together as friends.

ALL: Why can't we live together? Why can't we live collectively? It's the way of future. And the future is now.

ANNA: We're a perfect group. We'll never interfere with one another. Fedya will be sleeping, Sasha will be eating, Emma will be reading, and I'll be in the toilet. And every hour we can change places.

ALL:

Un libstu mikh mit varer libe,  
Akh kum tsu mir mayn guter shats,  
Un hatr oyf mayn harts dos tribe,

Un makhn mir sis mayn rue plats,  
Un makin mir sis mayn rue plats.

(And if you really love me,  
then come to me, my dear,  
and put an end to my tribulations,  
and make me a sweet resting place)

**Scene five: In the new apartment.**

*Fedya is painting at the table, and Emma enters.*

EMMA: It's so hot up here Fedya. How can you work? It's worse than the shop.

FEDYA: You're home early.

EMMA: Three of us were fired this morning. Kargman found out we were organizing the union. It was a big commotion. More girls wanted to walk out, but we told them to wait. Oh God, it's so hot.

*(Emma takes off her shirt. She is wearing a camisole)*

FEDYA: Emma, what are you doing?

EMMA: You've seen me like this before, Fedya, darling.

FEDYA: Yes, with everybody here. But like this...

EMMA: I'll put my blouse back on if it makes you nervous.

FEDYA: Why should I be nervous? I'm an artist, after all. I have always painted nudes. We painted them in art school. But now I can only afford to paint my nudes from memory, and my memory isn't very good.

EMMA: Just tell me when and I'll pose for you.

FEDYA: Emma, you're serious?

EMMA: Why not? We're friends and comrades.

FEDYA: There's a problem Emma. Sasha is my friend, and I have feelings for you.

EMMA: It's all right. It's all right. We both love Sasha. Why shouldn't we love one another? What is this all for? Why do we struggle? Sometimes in the turmoil I forget, and then I think of the first time I realized my life could be ecstatic.

Back in Popelan, I was eight or nine. A peasant boy named Petroushka who worked around the farm, took me to the meadow one day. The sun was strong. We sat in the tall grass, and he played his flute. Then he lifted me in his arms, and threw me in the air, and caught me. Everything smelled of grass. My soul melted. Many years later my aunt took me to the opera for the first time. Il Travatore. Such voices, such music, and I sat there, on the balcony, in a trance. When it was over I heard the crash of applause. Everyone was leaving. My aunt called me, but I just sat there with tears streaming down my face.

Then we sailed for America. On the boat I thought of the peasant boy and the opera house. I knew so little but I knew what I wanted my life to be.

*They embrace*

FEDYA: I feel like I'm betraying Sasha.

EMMA: You've taken nothing from him. He and I are still as we were.

FEDYA: Will he see it that way?

EMMA: You know Sasha. First he'll be angry.

FEDYA: Oh! He will be angry.

EMMA: He may smash a piece of furniture.

FEDYA: Or two or three.

EMMA: And then he'll say I was wrong!

FEDYA: I was wrong!?

EMMA: I admit it.

FEDYA: I admit it.

EMMA: We are free people. We must live like free people. We must live like the people of the future. Yes, that's exactly what he will say.

EMMA and FEDYA: We are free people. We must live like free people. We must live like the people of the future. Yes, that's exactly what he will say. I love Sasha.

**Scene six: Outside Kargman's corset factory.**

*The workers are striking.*

WORKERS: Strike! Strike! Stay out! Don't work for Kargman. Stay out! Scabs! They're bringing Scabs!

EMMA: *(to the scabs, and then to the audience)*

Keep walking comrades. Your families are hungry just like ours.  
Your houses are cold just like ours.

WORKERS: Strike! Stay out! Don't work for Kargman

EMMA: Kargman is your enemy! Kargman is a liar! He despises you. He despises us. He will pay you until the strike is over, but what then? What then? He will cut your wages like he cut our wages, and then you'll go on strike just like us. The police will smash you with their clubs, just like us. Listen!

WORKERS: Listen! We are not alone.

EMMA: People across the country. Working people. Are joining together. Right now three thousand steel workers say enough to Andrew Carnegie.

WORKERS: The richest man in America.

EMMA: Enough to twelve-hour work days in the steel furnaces. Enough to heat like hell at fourteen cents an hour.

Stand together! Kargman is your enemy! Kargman is a liar!



WORKERS: We stand together! Stay out! Stay out! Don't work for Kargman

**Scene seven: in the apartment**

*(Sasha is in the apartment, Emma enters)*

SASHA: I heard about the strike. Anna told me you gave a good speech. Where have you been all evening?

EMMA: With Johann. At the opera.

SASHA: Johann who?

EMMA: Johann Most.

SASHA: So now it's Johann. The opera. So that's how Most uses the movement's money. And after the opera?

EMMA: We went to a restaurant.

SASHA: And you probably drank expensive wine. That's our great revolutionary leader.

EMMA: Most is a wonderful man. You told me so yourself. He gave up his seat in the German Reichstag and became an anarchist. He spent years in prison. He risked his life.

SASHA: The movement gives no special benefits for war veterans. The most heroic figures can become corrupt.

EMMA: Am I corrupt too by going to the opera, by drinking wine?

SASHA: You're worst than Most. You with your pretensions, cuddling up to every leader in the movement...

EMMA: Shut your mouth!

SASHA: It's the truth and you know it. What are you holding in your hands?

EMMA: Violets. Yes, I know flowers are an unnecessary expense when people are starving, but they are beautiful and I love them. *She puts them in a vase.*

SASHA: The make me nauseous when strikers in Pittsburgh are starving.

EMMA: Don't you understand, Sasha? We can't all live at the level of the most oppressed. We have to have a little beauty in our lives, even in the midst of a struggle. Sasha. You're jealous of Most. I thought you were beyond that. I thought you believed in freedom.

SASHA: Freedom, yes. Decadence, no. With Fedya it is different. We both love him. But Most! He is not good for you, Emma.

EMMA: Who is to decide that, you or me?

**Scene eight: In the apartment**

SASHA: Have you heard the latest from Pittsburgh? Carnegie put Henry Clay Frick in charge.

FEDYA: Frick called two thousand Pinkertons to break the strike.

EMMA: A private army.

ANNA: Something must be done in Pittsburgh. The arrogance on the faces of the Carnegies, the Rockefellers, the Fricks.

FEDYA, ANNA, and EMMA

The contempt they have for those who haven't won at their game. Frick in the White House, Frick at a church. Frick drinking whisky at his club while his Pinkertons shoot at women and children, and innocent people die.

SASHA: Frick must die.

ANNA and EMMA: Are you crazy?

SASHA: Frick must die. Like your friend Most says "there are times in history when a bullet speaks louder than a thousand manifestos."

ANNA, FEDYA, and EMMA: We have all said when the right time comes we'll be ready. We'll all go to Pittsburgh. Frick has slaughtered working people. We will show everyone that Frick can die too.

ANNA: The four of us can do it together.

FEDYA: We'll have to plan carefully.

ANNA, FEDYA, and EMMA: It's the right time. We'll be ready. We'll all go to Pittsburgh together.

SASHA: The one who kills Frick will surrender his life.

ANNA, FEDYA, and EMMA: The four of us can do it. It's the right time. We'll be ready. We'll all go to Pittsburgh together.

SASHA: I will do it myself, alone.

EMMA: Sasha! You're crazy.

SASHA: We can't give them four lives for one.

EMMA: You're not going to do it by yourself.

FEDYA: What are we talking about anyway. We don't have money to go to Pittsburgh. And what will we use? A bomb? A gun? It all takes money.

SASHA: It's not the money.

EMMA: What is it then? You want to do it by yourself? You want to say to hell with our comradeship. To hell with our love? Is that it?

SASHA: When Frick is killed, someone must explain why. Otherwise they'll say it was a madman.

FEDYA: They will say it anyway.

SASHA: Emma could explain it.

FEDYA: And I could help you. We could do this together.

SASHA: No Fedya. We don't have to sacrifice you too.

EMMA: Keep your voices down.

SASHA: You know I am right. You know it's necessary. A moment comes when someone

must act, must point, must say “Enough.” I’ll need a train ticket, a device that can kill...

EMMA: You’ll need a new suit of clothes...

### **Scene nine: Frick’s office**

*Sasha is changing into his new suit on stage while Frick dictates to his secretary.*

FRICK: To riot in the street when things aren't going right, is that the American way? When things don't go right we go through the proper channels. That's the American way. We go to the Speaker of the House, to the Attorney General, and to the Secretary of the Treasury. They always respond to us with generosity. That is democracy

RECEPTIONIST: Do you have an appointment? Mr. Frick cannot see you now. Where are you going?

SASHA: Frick!

*Sasha shoots at Frick and misses. He takes out a knife and tries to stab him, but two men pounce on him. His glasses fall off.*

My glasses! Where are my glasses? I can't see. I can't see.

Postlude

MEN: Alexander Berkman. For the attempted murder of Henry Clay Frick you are sentenced to the Western Pennsylvania State Penitentiary for a period of twenty-two years

EMMA: Sasha!

## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene One: at a meeting**

*Emma begins the act either seated in the audience or standing in the back of the theatre. She is wearing a cape under which she is carrying a horsewhip.*

MOST: Comrades! I have refused to sign the petitions to free Alexander Berkman. Revolutionary violence is one thing. Comic opera is another. Comrades! I am not urging any person here to assassinate the nearest capitalist, at least not publicly. But if you do, please do it efficiently. Have a device that works. Comrades! If you fire a gun at a capitalist, don't close your eyes. When Berkman's shots missed he took out his knife. We must admire him for being well armed.

*(spoken over music)* I believe I see Emma Goldman, the organizer of the cloak and suit workers. I believe she has a question.

EMMA: *(sung)* I have no question. *(she walks towards the stage).*

MOST: No question?

EMMA: Shame on you Johann Most! Shame on you! Shame on you! *(She approaches Most)*

MOST: Do you have a question?

EMMA: *(She takes out her horsewhip and strikes Most)* Shame! Shame on you! *(to the audience)* Shame on all of you!

## Scene two: Chicago

*Train music. Emma is getting off a train at the Chicago train station. Fedya has come to meet her.*

EMMA: How good of you to meet me, Fedya dear. I know how busy you are these days.

FEDYA: It's lucky that I have an art exhibition in the same city where you have a lecture. It's been so long since we...

EMMA: *(grasps his hand)* Yes.

FEDYA: Who is arranging your lecture?

EMMA: A Dr. Reitman. He should be along soon. I don't know anything about him.

REITMAN: Miss Goldman?

EMMA: Yes...

REITMAN: Welcome to Chicago. An honor indeed, Miss Goldman. I am Dr. Ben Reitman.

EMMA: This is my friend Fedya.

REITMAN: A friend of Emma Goldman is a person to be cherished.

FEDYA: Well, Emma. I leave you in good hands.

EMMA: *(spoken over music)* Are we going to the Worker's Hall?

REITMAN: *(spoken over music)* The chief of police closed it in anticipation of your arrival, so we'll have to use my headquarters. I call it "Hobo Hall." Two hundred and fifty of my people will be there.

EMMA: *(spoken over music)* Your people? I was told you were a doctor.

REITMAN: *(spoken over music)* I am. But my work is with the city's outcasts: the tramps, hobos, petty criminals, pimps and prostitutes. People scorned by both the bourgeois and the revolutionists.

EMMA: *(spoken over music)* How did they become your people?

REITMAN:

I'm an outcast myself. At eleven I was on my own. I wandered the earth from Mexico to Europe.

In Chicago I worked in a lab for a famous doctor. One day when he didn't show up for a lecture I put on his lab coat and took his place. The school officials were outraged but they gave me a scholarship.

EMMA: And so you became a doctor.

REITMAN: But I won't sell my knowledge for money. I give it to people in need, and they give me what I need.

EMMA: You mean affection, devotion, and love?

REITMAN: We understand each other. I believe that I can make friends with any human being. I'm even on good terms with the police. They're no different from the prostitutes and thieves I work with. They are all deprived people acting out of desperation.

*Reitman offers Emma his arm, she withdraws it.*

EMMA: I can walk without support.

REITMAN: My object is not support. It is to hold the arm of a woman I have admired for years.

EMMA: But you don't know me.

REITMAN: I know your ideas about government. I know your ideas about prisons. I have heard about your speeches concerning men and women.

EMMA: So you know all about me?

REITMAN: Not everything. I'm curious about one thing though. I wonder if your breasts are as beautiful as I imagine them to be.

EMMA: Are you crazy?

REITMAN: Is it crazy to be honest?

EMMA: Do you know that tonight I'm speaking about arrogant men? And I'm speaking about the women who are stupid enough, slavish enough, to believe that it is acceptable.

REITMAN: Your speech is certainly not about me. Can we meet after the lecture?

EMMA: I don't think so. Women like me don't trust men like you.

REITMAN: There are no men like me, and there are no women like you.

EMMA: I don't trust YOU!

### **Scene three: Hobo Hall**

*While the "International" is playing people enter and set up the hall for Emma's speech. They are talking while the music is playing.*

REITMAN: *(speaking over music)* Ladies and gentlemen. Here is the woman we have all been waiting to hear, America's High Priestess of anarchism, Emma Goldman.

EMMA: *(speaking over music)* I am glad to see so many women in the audience. Tonight, my friends, I speak of the tragedy of women's emancipation. Why tragedy? Because what is not called emancipation is a delusion. There is this idea that women will be emancipated by the vote. But has the vote emancipated men? There is this idea that women will be emancipated by leaving the home and going to work. Has work emancipated men? This tragically emancipated woman is afraid to drink of the fountain of life. She is afraid of ecstasy, and so afraid of men. She will no longer be afraid of men when she learns that her freedom must come from and through herself. She must say: *(singing)* I refuse anyone's right over my body. I will have children or not have them as I wish. I will refuse to be a

servant to God, to the State, to a husband. I will make my life simpler, deeper, and richer. Such a woman will be afire with freedom, and she will light up the world. Such a woman will be afire with freedom, and she will light up the world.

*Applause. Cheers, the lights go down and up again on Emma and Reitman walk towards a table.*

REITMAN: If I were your manager I could get you huge audiences. We could sell anarchist literature and raise money for the movement.

EMMA: You certainly managed to get a large crowd.

REITMAN: The crowd came because I put posters all over town. Come and see Emma Goldman, the High Priestess of anarchism. Come and see Emma Goldman, the apostle of free love. They were not disappointed. I was not disappointed. What you said was so true. It's been a long day for you. Do you have a place to stay in Chicago?

EMMA: I have friends here.

REITMAN: Can I count myself as one of them?

EMMA: I don't know yet. We've only known one another for three hours.

REITMAN: You spoke tonight of passion. Passion has no thought of time. Stay with me tonight, Emma. You will not regret it.

EMMA: I spoke tonight of a woman being made into a sex commodity.

REITMAN: But a woman like you? Never. No man would dare. Do you know how much courage it takes for me to approach you? Do you know how I am trembling inside?

*Black out*

EMMA: Last night I dreamed about Ben Reitman. Last night I dreamed flames were shooting from his fingertips and slowly, slowly, slowly enveloping my body. I made no attempt to escape them. I strained toward them, craving, craving, craving to be consumed by their fire, to be consumed by their fire, to be consumed.

#### **Scene four: Vito's apartment**

ANNA: Where's Emma? She should have been here an hour ago. It was her idea to meet.

VITO: You know where she is. She is with Reitman. How can she stay with that faker?

FEDYA: Reitman is her manager, and Reitman is a charmer.

VITO: But Emma is his slave. She seems obsessed. What is it about him, Anna?

ANNA: Well, I have only heard women talk about him.

FEDYA: So it's not only Emma..

ANNA: Reitman is a true democrat. He believes that all women are created equal: short, tall, blond, dark, young and old. They say he makes love like a lion.

VITO: But he's a liar and a cheat.

*Emma enters, holding a letter*

EMMA: I have a letter from Sasha! He says he has been in and out of solitary. They punish him.

He says he has been kept in a straightjacket for eight days. He sees his friends die one by one.

Some die of sickness. Some hang themselves. He says he won't last five more years. He says there's a plan for escape. He wants to dig a tunnel, and he wants our help.

FEDYA: How can we help him?

VITO: First we need a piano, then we rent a house on Sterling Street.

FEDYA: Right across from the prison gate?

VITO: That's right. Then we get a pianist and we get a singer.

ANNA: A great soprano!

EMMA: And we have them play music all day long, music that the guards enjoy.

VITO: And then we start our tunnel. We'll start it from the cellar, and dig it underneath the gate.

FEDYA: How about we dig it 'till it hits the outhouse.

VITO, EMMA, and ANNA: Perfect!

VITO: When the work gets noisy, the music can get louder.

EMMA: And if there is danger, the pianist can give a musical signal to the people digging below.

ANNA: The singer can keep watch.

EMMA: We'll communicate in code.

VITO: And nobody will know, nobody will see, nobody will guess that when Sasha goes to take his last crap in prison, he'll simply slip down the hole.

ALL FOUR: And nobody will know, nobody will see, nobody will guess that when Sasha goes to take his last crap in prison, he'll simply slip down the hole.

### **Scene five: at a lecture**

REITMAN: Miss Goldman will take your questions now.

WOMAN: Is it true that you believe in free love?

EMMA: Free love? How can it be called love if it isn't free? It is outrageous that a healthy grown woman, full of life and passion, must deny nature's demand that she should subdue her most intensive cravings, break her spirit, stunt her vision, abstain from the depth and glory of sex until some so-called good man comes along to take her for himself in marriage. Love defies all laws, defies all conventions. Love, the root of all life, the harbinger of hope, of joy, of ecstasy. How can such an all-compelling force be synonymous with that painful product of church and state called marriage.

WOMAN: Miss Goldman, are you against marriage?

EMMA: I am against all institutions that demand subservience. What a world it will be if

men and women would cast off the church, cast off the state, come together in love, and refuse to sacrifice their children to the monster of war.

WOMAN: But don't you think that patriotism unites us?

EMMA: Yes. It unites us against others. It intoxicates us. It drives us to violence against anyone different from us.

#### **Scene six: Emma and Reitman at dinner**

EMMA: Why do you always embarrass me? Like when we were staying with that old couple in Detroit, and you came to breakfast stark naked. And when you started talking about God and Jesus with anarchist organizers in the Bronx...I'm embarrassed by the way you dress...the way you eat.

REITMAN: I eat as I do everything else. For enjoyment. I do not eat to obey the rules of etiquette. In short my darling, unlike you, I eat like an anarchist.

EMMA: You seem to think that anarchism has no respect for the ordinary niceties of behavior, like eating with some delicacy. Like bathing regularly.

REITMAN: *(spoken)* Bathing?

EMMA: Yes. Most people bathe.

REITMAN: Am I unbearable as I am? We have an hour before our train. Do you really want me to spend half of it bathing? You know an hour alone with you is never enough. *(he kisses her.)* You spoke wonderfully tonight, Emma.

EMMA: How can I be angry with you, Ben.

#### **Scene seven: Before a lecture**

REITMAN: ...I was just being pleasant to her.

EMMA: You were leading her on.

REITMAN: No seriously. I was just playing.

EMMA: Don't you understand that it is wrong to play with another human being? Have you no sense of fairness or justice? Not only to me, but to all these other women? I really don't know why I don't say goodbye to you once and for all. It is such hypocrisy, the way I speak all over the country about women imprisoned by men, and I am unable to tear myself away from you.

REITMAN: Don't berate yourself. It is my fault. My weakness. It was just one night.

EMMA: So you did spend the night! You liar! You told me, "I can't be in Chicago and not see my mother." You spent the night with that woman. You liar!

*Emma starts hitting him.*

REITMAN: Please, Emma.

Calm down. I have to introduce you in two minutes. We'll talk afterward, my darling.

EMMA: No. Not this time! Get out there and do your introduction. Don't wait for me at the hotel afterward. The committee will find me a place to stay.



### Scene eight: Union Square

*A Rally at Union Square. Emma appears center stage. She gets up on a box to address an enormous crowd of the unemployed. Her style is different than on the lecture platform.*

Look around, my friends! Look around! Thousands of workers have come here today To declare their anger at this system. There are no jobs for people willing to work. Everywhere in this city, The richest city in the world, The lines of unemployed workers stretch for miles. The richest city in the world and women have to sell their bodies just to stay alive. The richest city in the world, and children are crying for food. We ask for work, they tell us to wait. We ask for medicine, and they tell us to pray. We ask for food, and they tell us to vote. *Police appear suddenly*

We ask for time to pay the rent and they send the police. The police are here! As always. The police are here to protect the rich. If your children need milk Go to the stores and take it! If your families need bread, find the flour and take it. Take it! Take it! *The police who have been moving toward Emma pull her roughly off the platform. As the lights go down the hoof beats of the police horses get louder.*

### Scene nine: An office

*In a darkened office Attorney General Thomas Gregory and J. Edgar Hoover are looking at photos. A projection of the photos could be shown on a screen for the audience.*

HOOVER: *showing a photo* This was last September.

GREGORY: What was she charged with?

HOOVER: Trespassing. She entered the Smokers' Club in Minneapolis. It's a men's club.

GREGORY: A brazen one, isn't she? What does her sign say?

HOOVER: It says, "I'm a heavy smoker."

GREGORY: I understand she travels everywhere with a man younger than herself.

HOOVER: His name is Reitman. He manages lectures. Our informants tell us that they have engaged in numerous immoral sexual acts. Never overt enough to make an arrest.

GREGORY: What is this one? *(taking another photo)*

HOOVER: New York City. Lower East Side. It was a meeting of Jewish women. She told them how to use contraceptives. She was released for lack of evidence. It seems she spoke to the group entirely in the Jewish language. And our informant could not understand a word.

She has been arrested fourteen times. Right now she is serving a one-year sentence on Blackwell's Island. Inciting to riot. We are looking for a way to deport her back to Russia.

GREGORY: That would be ideal. I heard that when she was seventeen she married an American citizen. Jacob Kershner. When she married him she automatically became an American citizen too, under the law.

HOOVER: We are working on the problem. It is a challenge. We are dealing with the most dangerous woman in America.

## Scene ten

CROWD: Welcome home Emma!

EMMA: Do you know I tried two years ago to investigate prison conditions. And they wouldn't let me near a prison. Then, suddenly, a stroke of luck. I was inside. I learned so much on Blackwell's Island. When I thought of Sasha and all the others who fill the prisons I promised myself, day after day, inside that hell, listening to the other women. Marveling, as I took their pulses, that their hearts could beat so strongly in defiance of their condition. I promised myself, day after day, that I would not rest until the prisons of the country are taken apart, brick by brick, and the iron bars of prison are melted down to make monkey bars for children's playgrounds.

## Scene eleven

*"Hail to the Chief" and then voices are heard before the lights come up.*

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Fellow citizens, the President of the United States.

RECORDED VOICE OF MCKINLEY: My fellow Americans...I am indeed happy to be present at this splendid Exposition in the historic city of .... *(pauses to remember)* Buffalo. It is a pleasure to report to you that our great nation is in good health. Business is prospering. Overseas, our war with Spain has yielded the most happy results. War is always to be regretted. But Cuba is now free and under our protection. Puerto Rico is ours. Hawaii fell like a ripe fruit into our arms. I did puzzle for some time on what to do with the Philippines, and then I got down on my knees and prayed to God, and he said, "Take them, Mr. President. Civilize them, Christianize them...And so *(a shot is heard followed by silence)*.

REPORTER: Miss Goldman, after President McKinley was shot, why did they arrest you?

EMMA: You know the police don't need evidence to arrest someone.

REPORTER: They say that Czoglosz is responsible and that you defend him.

EMMA: I do not defend his act, but I do defend his anguish.

REPORTER: Do you believe Czoglosz is insane?

EMMA: He must be insane. He killed one man without the force of law behind him. He must be insane. If he were the President of the United States he could do what McKinley did. He could send an army into the Philippines to kill ten-year-old children, and that would be legal and considered sane.

REPORTER: Is it true that you offered to nurse the President?

EMMA: Yes. But my offer was somehow not accepted.

REPORTER: Do you think that things can change by way of the ballot box?

EMMA: The ballot box! Voting is a game to keep everyone busy while the rich take control of the nation's wealth.

REPORTER: What do you propose, then?

EMMA: If enough people organize wherever they work, wherever they live, then they will be strong enough to take this country back. To take everything back that has been stolen from them.

REPORTER: Can we quote you?

EMMA: You think your newspaper will print this?

**Scene twelve: in Sach's Café**

ANNA: They're here! *Emma and Sasha enter.*

SASHA: Anna, Vito, Fedya!

VITO: Look Sasha! In the afternoon paper! A picture of you Sasha,

FEDYA: An old one.

VITO and FEDYA: "Alexander Berkman, Frick assailant, released after fourteen years."

VITO: And there's something about you too, Emma.

EMMA: What is it? *(Vito hands her the paper)* The government has revoked the citizenship of Jacob Kreshner, my former husband. That means I am no longer a citizen. *(She puts down the paper and Fedya picks it up and starts reading)*

ANNA: Will they try to deport you?

EMMA: Perhaps.

FEDYA: President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany. First Europe goes mad, and now America.

ANNA: Congress will vote quickly. We'll have to move fast.

VITO: We expected this. We have a rally next week at the Harlem River Casino. Emma will be speaking.

FEDYA: Emma must not speak. With the news of Kershner and her citizenship they will pounce on her in a minute.

EMMA: How can I be silent now? How can I be silent now? If I cannot speak at time like this, everything I've done up to now is worthless. Everything I've done up to now is worthless.

SASHA: Emma, Fedya's right. You should not speak at the meeting. Let me speak in your place.

EMMA: No Sasha. Fourteen years in prison is enough.

SASHA: They have silenced me all these years. It is time for me to speak. I must.

EMMA: Let it be both of us, then.

EMMA and SASHA: Let it be both of us. Together we will speak against the war.

**Scene Thirteen: Setting up the Casino** (*music only*)

**Scene Fourteen: Outside the Harlem River Casino.**

EMMA: Why did you come here Ben? You were gone for six months, and here you are, just before I speak.

REITMAN: I'm frightened for you Emma. Wilson will sign the conscription law today and...Emma, you know what they want to do to you. Don't speak tonight.

EMMA: I don't need your advice.

REITMAN:

Why are you so cold? What is going on? Is it because I can not join you in this? It's not my way. I do not think that we should put our heads in their nooses.

EMMA: Someone has to. If we persist there will be too many of us for their nooses.

REITMAN: Emma, how I love your dreams. Emma, how I love your dreams, but I am also afraid for you and your dreams. I can't stand the thought of you going to prison again. What if they send you out of the country? What would I do without you?

EMMA: His one concern is what HE will do.

REITMAN: Haven't I stood with you. Haven't I faced down howling mobs from here to California.

EMMA: I never understood why. He was never one of us.

REITMAN: Emma. You are so cold. What is wrong? Why can't we be happy? You and your friends cannot be at peace. You and your friends cannot stand joy. Wilson declares war. You declare war. Why is this necessary? Let Wilson sign his act. Let those who don't want to fight not fight. Why must we always stand on platforms exhorting, pushing, and trumpeting our defiance. Be careful Emma. They are setting a trap. Think of Sasha

EMMA: He's not thinking of Sasha. He's thinking only of himself.

EMMA: I heard from a friend in Pennsylvania. Amanda Spray. She wrote me a letter.

REITMAN: Amanda Spray...Amanda Spray...that drunken socialist whore from New Kensington?

EMMA: That drunken socialist whore! She sold herself to men because she had nothing to eat. She built a socialist group by herself in that godforsaken town. She said never to send you there again. She said that you met her at the railroad station. She said (*reads the letter*) "Please ask him, for the sake of the cause, if he ever goes to meet another sinful woman who is beginning to see a glimmer of light, not to engage in fuck talk."

REITMAN: I'm not sure what she's talking about.

EMMA: You're such a liar.

REITMAN: I suppose I am. Have I ever denied it? I would be lying if I did. How can one live in this world without lying?

EMMA: Lying to those you love is unpardonable.

REITMAN: But you have always pardoned the unpardonable.

EMMA: You always made me forget everything when I was with you. I couldn't stop wanting you. Then I would speak all over America, telling women they should be independent, and afterwards I would rush to you. You always made me forget everything. What a fool I have been. *Spoken over music* I have to go and speak.

REITMAN: Will we meet afterwards?

EMMA: *(sung)* No. Not tonight. Not any night. Not anymore.

### **Scene Fifteen (Finale): Inside the Harlem River Casino**

EMMA and SASHA:

We are willing to die for this country. For the mountains and the rivers, the land and the people, we are willing to die. But not for the generals or the admirals, or the businessmen, or the bankers, or the President, all who want to go to war. They are not our country. They don't give a damn about all the young men who will die in this war. What is patriotism? Is it love of your government? No. It is the love of our fellow men and women. It is the love of our country. And that love, that patriotism, may require you to oppose your government.

EMMA: *(spoken over music)* Mark this day, my friends. The 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 1917. The President has signed the conscription law, and the young men of this nation will now be marched into the slaughterhouse of the war in Europe.

EMMA and SASHA: *(singing)*

Refuse to die! Refuse to kill! If you have a mind of your own If you have a will of your own  
If you don't want to be a slave of authority If you believe in democracy, and liberty, and  
peace for all mankind. Refuse! Refuse!

*Anna and Vito leap on stage*

ANNA: *(spoken)* Emma! Sasha! The hall is full of federal agents.

VITO: *(spoken)* They're coming down the aisle.

RECORDED VOICE THROUGH SPEAKERS: Clear the hall. By order of the United States Government. No one leave the stage. Stay where you are.

*Emma, Sasha, Anna, and Vito all join hands and face the audience as the lights go down.*

END

PAGE

Emma Libretto Page PAGE

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