

Goose-Stepping with Bound Feet

by

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The lights come up on the interior of a cavernous concrete holding cell. A large steel door occupies space upstage center.

Scrawled here and there on the wall is the phrase "I am not afraid of having my head chopped off!"

Two oversize chairs, suggestive of both royalty and capital punishment, sit down stage center. Between the chairs lies a large heap of naked dolls.

The dolls are bathed in a shaft of pale blue light, the effect being they resemble a pile of corpses.

Metal bunk-beds & a toilet comprised of a board set atop a filthy bucket occupy territory to the side of the cell.

MADAME MAO, in Communist worker garb, sits down stage left. She hand-stitches material to create a doll-sized uniform.

A basket of fabric remnants and various sewing supplies sits nearby.

Footsteps and the muffled voices of a **MAN & WOMAN** approaching from beyond the door give Madame Mao pause.

WOMAN (LENI) (O.S)

I asked you a question: do you know who I am?!

MAN (ATTENDANT) (O.S)

It doesn't matter.

WOMAN (LENI) (O.S)

It -- what?

MAN (ATTENDANT) (O.S)

Who you are doesn't matter here. Only what you've done.

Madame Mao sits up a little straighter so that she might hear a little better.

WOMAN (LENI) (O.S)

But -- I'll not be treated -- Guards! Someone, please!

MAN (ATTENDANT) (O.S)

I am the Attendant to this area.

The footsteps and voices are now
just beyond the door.

WOMAN (LENI) (O.S)

There must be someone I can --

MAN (ATTENDANT) (O.S)

-- There are no others. Our system is efficient in that way.

And with that, the steel door opens
and **LENI RIEFENSTAHL**, in safari attire
a la the 1930's, is forced inside by
THE ATTENDANT, a melancholy man who
wears a faded uniform suggestive of
both The Red Guard & the Hitler Youth.

NOTE: The Attendant's uniform will grow
more decorated as the play goes on, but
along with each new medal, we'll note
he also sports a new war wound.

ATTENDANT

(as he unties Leni's hands:)

Welcome to your chambers. Your chamber pot is over there.

LENI

What?

ATTENDANT

Your chambers. This is where you'll work on your defense and
so forth. And over there is your chamber pot, which is really
bucket and not my fault. I know you have bladder issues.

Leni protests & watches in horror as
the door SLAMS closed, its echoes an
offence to her ears. Wincing, Leni
turns downstage. She freezes at the
sight of the dolls.

Madame Mao observes, delighted
by the theatrics.

MADAME MAO

...Now that's an entrance -- !

LENI
 (startled)
 Oh! You frightened me --

MADAME MAO
 And I know from entrances, so do take that as a compliment.

LENI
 (beat; wary recognition)
 You're not...? No...

MADAME MAO
 I'm sorry?

LENI
 ...Are you apologizing or -- ?

MADAME MAO
 Apologizing? What ever for? Are you who I think you are?

LENI
 ...Leni. Riefenstahl.

MADAME MAO
 Right! The great goose-stepper's muse! Wonderful!
 (rising to present herself:)
 I am Jiang Qing, once called Yunhe, later called
 Lan Ping, but best known, of course, as Madame Mao...

Madame Mao bows dramatically.

LENI
 ...I can't believe I've been placed with you.

MADAME MAO
 (returning to her seat)
 No?

LENI
 No.

Leni begins to walk the perimeters
 of the chamber in search of some clue
 that might shed light on her situation.

NOTE: Whereas Madame Mao is aware
 of the audience, Leni is not.

MADAME MAO

(watching Leni; amused)

I was originally put with Tz'u Hsi.

(beat; off Leni's blank stare)

Tz'u Hsi was best known for using eunuchs to assassinate her enemies..?

(beat; for the new kid:)

Point being: the system here is clearly arbitrary.

LENI

With due respect, placing you alongside another woman known for wrecking excessive vengeance upon those who slighted her in the least is not such a great...leap.

MADAME MAO

Ah, but *I* had no such dealings with eunuchs.

LENI

Right. Well, "touche" then I suppose.

MADAME MAO

Did you expect to be placed with Eva Braun -- or Eva Peron, for that matter?

LENI

No. I...

MADAME MAO

Or perhaps Mati Hari? Or Marie Antoinette or Stalin's dear Nadezhda Alliluyev? But then you weren't deemed worthy of a firing squad, self-reflexive enough to offer pastries to the pathetic, nor did you have the good grace to kill yourself.

LENI

Yes, I had the audacity to go on living. Damn me.

MADAME MAO

Perhaps that's why we're here together!

LENI

I heard that you committed suicide.

MADAME MAO

Oh, yes. Yes, I heard that, too...

Leni scowls at the primitive "toilet."

MADAME MAO

(gesturing to the other chair)

You might as well make yourself comfortable. Things show no signs of changing anytime soon and wearing yourself out with incessant pacing isn't good for anyone's nerves.

Silence. Leni eyes the dolls again.

LENI

(reluctantly sitting; beat)

What's with the...dolls?

MADAME MAO

Hmmm? Oh, I make them. It's been my work duty for as long as I can remember. Started in Qin Cheng Prison back in 1981. Manual labor is, of course, compulsory.

LENI

...Must they be piled in a heap like that?

MADAME MAO

(giving it some thought)

...I suppose we could arrange them in a more pleasing manner. Be like giant morticians at a miniature genocide. That could be great fun! I'll make a note to keep that activity option in mind should we grow bored getting to know one another.

Madame Mao pulls out a little red journal and jots down the note as Leni gingerly picks up one of the dolls.

Leni takes a beat to study the doll's face. Shuddering, she places it gently back on the pile.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

(observing Leni)

You never had any children.

Leni shakes her head, focus still on the dolls.

LENI

There wasn't... I didn't... No.

Madame Mao holds up one of the dolls and cocks her head as if trying to see its point of view...

MADAME MAO

I had a little girl, but we never really... I also helped raise a few of the children Mao had with his other wives. Though actually "raise" might be over-stating things -- we abandoned them to the care of strangers during the Long March. Years later we did some digging to try to track down a few of the boys, only to find that two had been killed fighting the ole "good fight" and another committed to an asylum, having lost his mind. As to the "fe-Maos," we'll just never know... Perhaps *that's* why we've been placed together!

LENI

I'm afraid I don't see the connection.

MADAME MAO

Your niece and nephew, Eckhart and Uta Riefenstahl?

Another blank stare from Leni.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

Whom you were to raise after your brother was blown to bits in Russia? The toddlers whom you abandoned when they were but 3 & 4 years old?

LENI

I -- those children were *kidnapped*, not abandoned! My brother's ex-wife Ilse, she kidnapped them one day while I was at work.

MADAME MAO

(nodding)

And then you spent half a century attempting to disinherit them, your only living relatives, going so far as to use a fraudulent will so that you alone might lay claim to your brother's estate... That must have been very hard on you. Having seen Mao go through similar moral struggles, "kamps," as you say -- it's...well, you just don't know what to think.

LENI

(rising from the chair)

...Do you hear that? Something dripping...

MADAME MAO

(listening)

Drip... drip... yes! What of it?

LENI

I just wondered if you heard it.

MADAME MAO

I do. Do you wonder if it bothers me?

LENI

I -- does it?

MADAME MAO

(listening very intently)

When I focus on it, yes...But that's psychology for you: focus only on the negative and soon that's all you'll see -- or in this case, hear... drip...drip...drip...drip...

LENI

Please stop that.

Leni listens, trying to work out from which side of the room the dripping emanates.

MADAME MAO

Reminds me of a piano player I knew in Shanghai, back when I was a struggling actress and simply grateful for a roof over my head. I was living in a little room next to a man who was only just learning to play... His careful plucking of the keys was so comforting at first... reminded me that I wasn't the only lonesome soul hoping to be heard above the din of the world...

LENI

(beat; perfunctory)

And then what happened?

MADAME MAO

The voices of envy starting talking louder than the voices of gratitude; I developed standards and grew to hate the talentless twit and his damn out-of-tune piano.

Leni circles the room in a quest to determine the source of the sound.

LENI

...I hope something isn't leaking.

MADAME MAO

Oh. Yes. That would be too bad...

(beat; listening again)

Perhaps it's someone crying...

LENI

Crying? It sounds nothing like crying.

MADAME MAO

How do you know?

LENI

Are you -- ? You think tears could possibly make that sound?

MADAME MAO

If the person weeping is profoundly sad -- and well-hydrated obviously -- they would no doubt generate very large tears. If those tears were to subsequently fall onto a concrete surface in a cavernous chamber like this one... Not only do I believe tears *could* make that sound, I believe they *would*.

LENI

Well. You're obtuse.

MADAME MAO

Ah, ah - I'm experienced. I've been here longer. I know there is no limit to the ways in which pain will profess its presence in a place like this, when all is lost...

(a sudden horrific realization)

You don't suppose...?

(shuddering, for effect)

No...

LENI

What?

MADAME MAO

I don't want to alarm you, but it occurs to me we may be hearing someone weeping as a result of water torture!

(off Leni's look:)

It's the explanation the evidence best supports.

LENI

Chinese water torture? Where they..?

With the cold water on the forehead..?

MADAME MAO

Before you deplete your supply of racist ignorance, you should know that the Chinese did not invent water torture, nor are we particularly honored to be credited as its originators. No, the Victorians are to blame for this.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

They liked to bandy the term "Chinese" about whenever something confused or disgusted them, which, given their taste for bland food, crinolines and bric-a-brac, one must surmise was rather often...

LENI

You're suggesting that people are tortured in these chambers? That we might be --

MADAME MAO

-- tied down, face up, as pellets of ice water are dropped on us in a seemingly random sequence, for days on end, until at last frantic dementia devours any trace of sanity? Yes. I think it's safe to assume that could happen here.

Leni looks at Madame Mao with a combination of fear and skepticism.

LENI

...I must tell you, I'm beginning to understand why the Victorians' might have been inclined to associate things that were baffling with the word "Chinese."

MADAME MAO

Are you indeed? And in your experience, what sort of adjectives do people tend to associate with the word "German?" Or the name "Riefenstahl" for that matter?

LENI

(stung)

Why are you being so cruel?

MADAME MAO

I'm not!

LENI

You are! You're speaking in subtext and trying to bait me.
(to the heavens:)
I've done my time, spent decades of my life trying to...!

Leni gestures vaguely, but not dispassionately to the things she'd hoped to redeem...

Madame Mao looks to the heavens to confirm they've no intention of responding, then:

MADAME MAO

...Problem being, Len, this is eternity. Or something that very much resembles it. In any case, the currency of time isn't recognized here.

LENI

...God damn it. God damn it all!

Suddenly The Attendant storms in.
He scolds Leni:

ATTENDANT

You must not say that here! Do you understand?

LENI

What are you - ?

ATTENDANT

Are we not damned enough as it is? Look around and tell me: do you see anything here that's been insufficiently damned?

LENI

It's just an - (expression!)

ATTENDANT

(overlapping)

No! It is not just an expression here! Here it's a curse that's become a lifestyle and it's awful. It's just...awful!

The Attendant fights back angry tears before abruptly exiting, SLAMMING the door as he goes.

Awkward silence.

Leni reels in the wake of the Attendant's tirade.

MADAME MAO

(tentative, earnest)

I...You should know that while I'd like to comfort you in your very apparent despair, I'm not very good at...

Madame Mao now gestures vaguely.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

I've just never been on the receiving end so I don't know what to do. But if it's any consolation, I feel for you... "Deprivation, like fame, is a spur"...and so on, and stuff.

LENI

I'm not interested in being pitied.

MADAME MAO

Of course...

(beat)

Perhaps *that's* why we been placed together...!

LENI

...Perhaps. Or perhaps it's because we both simply wanted what we wanted and were too self-involved to realize we'd wind up scapegoats grazing on an Everest of miss-placed...

Leni gestures vaguely again...

MADAME MAO

Faith?

LENI

That, too.

Madame Mao jots a thought in her book.

LENI

What are you writing?

MADAME MAO

I'm taking notes.

LENI

On me?

MADAME MAO

On *us*.

LENI

Why? For what?

MADAME MAO

Ammunition. In case...

LENI

In case...?

MADAME MAO

In case someone later cares to find out who we really were, stripped of the men and circumstances that have come to define and doom us.

LENI

...You think there's a chance of that happening?

MADAME MAO

We must cling to hope. There is nothing else.

Leni notices the book is nearly filled with Madame Mao's various entries.

LENI

...You've been here a long time.

MADAME MAO

Mmm. Were it not for the occasional memory of a few beautiful events, I'd be inclined to believe I've been here forever...

LENI

And where exactly do you suppose we are?

MADAME MAO

Oh, I think we're in hell. Or purgatory. Or some place religion hasn't yet accounted for or bothered to create. Does it really matter?

LENI

I...I was just making small talk.

MADAME MAO

Ah.

LENI

I wish --

MADAME MAO

-- Oh, yes. Me, too.

LENI

You know what I was going to say?

MADAME MAO

Oh - no. Sorry. I tend to get caught up in all sentences that begin with "I wish..." It's a terrible habit because of course it fails to take consequences into consideration.

LENI

...I wish that this place came with instructions. That was what I was going to say. I don't like the lack of structure.

MADAME MAO

No, the lack of structure is hard. Probably even more so for a National Socialist... But you'll get used to it. I did anyway. As long as you have no expectations you'll be fine.

(beat)

Shall I call for some tea?

LENI

(perking up a bit)

...That's an option?

MADAME MAO

Oh, sure! We can *call* for whatever we want.

LENI

...It's funny. I don't feel hungry or thirsty...

MADAME MAO

How lucky for you. Desire is a real burden anywhere, but here it's particularly cumbersome. Like having a hippopotamus for a necklace.

Leni watches as Madame Mao rises to kick the steel door 3 times. Madame Mao listens to confirm her kicks were heard, then races back to her seat and her sewing

Seconds later, THE ATTENDANT arrives with a tray of tea on a rolling cart.

ATTENDANT

Who kicked at the door?

Madame Mao subtly points to Leni; Leni doesn't notice.

The Attendant glowers a warning at Madame Mao as he rolls the cart between the women and serves the tea.

LENI

I can't recall the last time I had tea...

MADAME MAO

We had it all the time. Green tea, mostly.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Mao used it in lieu of toothpaste. And a toothbrush. Swish, swish, spit, and then a chew of the leaves -- that was the extent of his oral hygiene...

LENI

(sugarcoating her disgust)

I understand tea does provide some fluoride...
It's reputed to have many antiseptic qualities, in fact.

MADAME MAO

True. And still Mao reeked and was a toothless, walrus-shaped fool in the end, wasn't he? Swimming in polluted rivers and calling that a bath, eating nothing but pork, sugar and soy, morning, noon and by the light of the moon, and hobbling about spreading his syphilis to enthralled virgins near and far... That was the Mao I ended up with. Messy Mao...

(beat)

But once upon a time...oh, he was beautiful. And all mine...

(a memory brings a smile;

then:)

Was Adolf very clean?

LENI

Immaculate, yes.

MADAME MAO

So no conclusions to be drawn there...

LENI

(inspecting the tea service)

...Is there no sugar?

ATTENDANT

No sugar, no spice. Nothing nice. You only get tea to prove we're not uncivilized, but if you ask for honey I will hit you because though we have bees, we do not have flowers.

The Attendant turns on his heels and exits, SLAMMING the door as he goes, causing the women to wince and their cups & saucers to rattle.

The ladies sip in silence. Gradually the sound of dripping steals focus.

LENI

(an outburst:)

You've resided in caves, do stalactites drip before they set?

MADAME MAO

(thinking it through)

It would stand to figure, yes... I admire stalagmites more, don't you? The way they forge upward! Stalactites cling and pull downward and that's no good...

(an inspired smile:)

What a perfect proverb for the people!

Madame Mao grabs her journal and jots down the "proverb." Leni watches her.

LENI

But do you understand what I'm saying? I think we might be in a cave and the sound we're hearing could be the result of water intrusion from a melting icecap or internal waterfall.

MADAME MAO

(still writing)

Yes, could be. I'll go with whatever you wish to believe.

LENI

(with growing exasperation)

Well, but - ! Don't you want to know where we are? What it is we're hearing? What might befall us?

MADAME MAO

Sure I do! ...Though I must confess I'd be more interested if I thought it would make a difference. At this point whether we're in a cave or a dungeon, whether we're listening to the tears of the tortured or the warbling of glorified mud, we're nevertheless stuck, so --

(a sudden realization:)

Oh! I've been insensitive -- you want to make sure you're not in a gas chamber don't you?

LENI

What?! No... I. No!

MADAME MAO

If it's any consolation, I don't think we are. I mean we'd smell the gas right?

LENI

(a little spooked now)

...Not necessarily...the gas smell is due to an additive, mercaptan, without which...

MADAME MAO

Well I'll be -- now was that a Nazi invention?

Leni surreptitiously scans the ceiling for any sign of suspicious duct work.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Oh, cheer up. We can't die twice, right?

LENI

Please, for a moment, stop talking.

MADAME MAO

I shall...But know this: without my voice, and it is a theatrically trained instrument thank you very much, you'll be left with only the 'drip, drip, drip --'

LENI

-- Just...shhh.

Madame Mao shrugs & resumes sewing. Leni looks from the "toilet" to the dolls to the scrawled declarations of "*I am not afraid to have my head chopped off!*" and she begins to weep. Her sobs soon build to melodramatic levels causing her cup & saucer to rattle again in her trembling hands.

Madame Mao rises to give Leni a slow-clap standing ovation.

MADAME MAO

Well played...! Convincing dramatic arc and you've managed real tears: I'm impressed. But sadly it won't work. Believe me when I say the best have tried -- oh how we've tried...

The Attendant enters to clear the tea service. He now sports a star shaped medal, a red ribbon, and a black eye.

Ignoring Leni's tears, he pries the cup and saucer from her shaking hands.

LENI

(wailing)

Someone get me out of here!

ATTENDANT

Shut. Up.

And with that the Attendant spits on Leni, shocking her into silence.

As Leni wipes saliva from her blouse:

MADAME MAO

(waxing nostalgic)

...You know, the first time I was in prison, this would have been back in '34, I spent a brutal eight months behind bars enduring all manner of indescribable abuse until, at long last, my innocence was proven beyond the slimmest sliver of doubt and my triumphant struggle against my crude and cruel captors became a thing of legend...!

The Attendant looks at Madame Mao with contempt.

ATTENDANT

You were imprisoned for *three* months, during which time you sang Pekinese arias like a pathetic prostitute in some kind of moronic attempt to seduce the guards until finally they played upon your insatiable vanity and flattered you into giving a gossipy confession that would fatally implicate several of your supposed "comrades" and allow you to waltz away into that bright red sunset that continues to scald an entire nation. Your lies are disgusting.

Madame Mao glares at the Attendant, before flashing a winning smile at Leni, who dabs tears with her sleeve.

MADAME MAO

Well. "Two sides to the story" and all that I suppose.

The Attendant collects the final elements to the tea service and exits, SLAMMING the steel door as he goes. Leni and Madame Mao wince in unison.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

I do hope you've sense enough to believe my version of events over his. Men have a tendency to contort things beyond all recognition whenever it serves them, have you noticed?

Madame Mao starts to hum the tune to "The East is Red." Losing herself in the tune and some fond memory, she begins to sing:

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

(sung simply & beautifully)

The East is red, the sun has risen,
And China has made a Mao Zedong,

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

He creates fortune for the people,
 Hu er hai yue, he is the savior of us all!
 For the Communist Party under Mao is like the sun:
 Brightening up everything it shines upon...
 With Mao as guide, the Communist Party grows unabated,
 Hu er hai yue, there is a China whose people are liberated...
 Da,dee,dee,da, la, la...

LENI

(affected by the song)

...I want to go home.

MADAME MAO

To Germany?

Leni nods.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

And to which year would you hope to return? Pre or post 1933?

LENI

....Please. Don't do that.

MADAME MAO

What? I'm just trying to find out more about you so that
 I can be more sympathetic the next time you have a fit.

LENI

No, you are plotting...

MADAME MAO

Ah -- like those Jewish money men who concocted the tale of
 the Kristallnacht pogrom just to ruin your trip to America?

LENI

(shouting to invisible spies)

Why am I here?! Why with her?!

Madame Mao covers her ears until she is
 sure Leni has finished shouting. Then:

MADAME MAO

How about you spare me the migraine and, like a good little
 actress, pretend you're somewhere else? That's what I do when
 the chocolate turns to shit: I pretend I'm back on-stage as
 Henrick's Nora or that I'm in love with a man who desperately
 loves me back... Or sometimes it's enough for me just to
 pretend I'm in a well-appointed room with a functioning
 thermostat...

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Perhaps you could pretend you're scaling a mountain or doggie-paddling in the Arctic or earning your sassy little nickname "the glacial crevasse" with one of your myriad boy-toys!

Leni begins to cry again.

Madame Mao rolls her eyes, reaches for her sewing, stops suddenly...
An epiphany:

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Ibsen! Len -- that's why we've been placed together!

LENI

(through tears)

I'm not here. Shut up. Be quiet.

MADAME MAO

But I've solved the mystery -- we were both *actresses!* Actresses whose lives were profoundly touched by Ibsen! Me, thanks to my awe-inspiring turn in *A Doll's House*, and you thanks to your Fuhrer's obsession with *Emperor and Galilean*, Ibsen's absurdly wordy 10 act opus which Hitler is said to have used as his playbook for that travesty known as the Third Reich!

LENI

You're insane, insufferable and ridiculous.

MADAME MAO

(with glee)

It's suddenly so apparent to me: God/Buddha/Allah/What-have-you is taking out on *us* the fact that *He* is profoundly mad at *Ibsen* for introducing the world to the drama of ideas, which first exposed the meek as easily manipulated sheep and continues now to tempt the not-so-meek into trading in their morality for power! The end and la-dee-dah!

LENI

...I've no idea what you're on about.

MADAME MAO

(as if talking to a slow child)

Did they not say at your de-Nazification hearings that you "lacked moral poise"?

LENI

As if those people knew from poise!

MADAME MAO

Len: we are the Hedda Gablers and Nora Helmers of history!
Oh this is progress..! Light has been shed on our unfortunate
rooming situation -- it's not that we were too ego-centric
and horrible to see that millions were dying at the hands of
the men we chose to idolize and aide, no! It's that we are of
a breed of most misunderstood heroine!

Beginning to appreciate the theory:

LENI

...You consider me a 'misunderstood heroine?'

MADAME MAO

Leave the corpses & propaganda out of it for a moment, and
you, like me, are merely guilty of playing well in a man's
world, no?

LENI

...Right. That's -- you're right..!

MADAME MAO

Oh, we must celebrate this revelation with more tea!

(beat; considering the door)

...Would you mind calling for it this time?

Leni, high on her newly realized
status as 'heroine,' approaches the
door. Madame Mao encourages her with
nods & smiles. Leni knocks 3 times.

MADAME MAO

See if he'll bring a deck of cards, too. I'm feeling lucky!

LENI

(at the door)

Sir...? Sir, we'd like some more tea if you would be so kind.

There is no response.

Madame Mao gestures that Leni must kick
at the door. Leni nods, kicks 3 times.
Suddenly The Attendant swings open the
door, backhands Leni in the face, and
SLAMS the door closed again.

Leni turns back to Madame Mao.

Madame Mao winces.

MADAME MAO

Oh...dear. I forgot to tell you to run after kicking...
The Attendant, he's...

(gesturing vaguely...)

Moody. All of his idealism was dashed at an impressionable
age and you know the 180 that can do to a fella's smile.

LENI

I hate it here! I don't belong here!

MADAME MAO

But you do belong here! As I just explained, Ibsen --

LENI

I'll not reconcile myself to this kind of abuse!

MADAME MAO

He merely slapped you, Len. He's an unhappy man.

LENI

His unhappiness doesn't give him the right to be cruel to me!

MADAME MAO

No... But he took that right nevertheless. As so many do...

LENI

(annoyed by Madame Mao's calm)

You know, when *I* was in prison for the first time I escaped!
Just as I did the second and third time, but you -- like a
good "Commie" you are content to let the system *beat* you up
rather than *raise* you up. Well, every piss-bucket may be a
bidet to you, but not to me!

With an air of determination, Leni
starts to look around the perimeters
of the cell, brainstorming potential
escape options.

MADAME MAO

I see. So if I'm hearing you right, you're saying that you're
very good at manipulating your way out of trouble, but not
terribly skilled at avoiding trouble's traps to begin with?
Yes? Or are you waxing nostalgic about the sanitation options
that were made available to you curtesy of Immaculate Adolph?

LENI

I'm saying we should be trying to get out of here instead
of sitting around ruminating about a past we can't change -
or childishly fantasizing that we're here under celebratory
circumstances!

MADAME MAO

Ah. You'd prefer to take exhaustive action against a future we can't change? Talk about a childish fantasy of celebratory circumstance! I like your moxie, but I must tell you --

LENI

Fine. I'll go it alone. As any true "heroine" would!

Madame Mao watches Leni weigh the pros and cons of various options.

MADAME MAO

You know Marcel Marceau had a very funny routine he called "Capitalism" -- he'd mime escaping from one cage only to find a bigger one lay just beyond the bars of the first. It went on and on...Oh he was funny! And so soft-spoken...

LENI

Because you won't help me I'm not taking you with me when I manage to get out of here.

Leni works out the height of the walls in her head. She pulls her chair out of sight, presumably to stand on it and scale the wall...

MADAME MAO

That particular threat would carry more weight if I believed there was an "out of here" to be gotten, let alone managed. You don't honestly believe that greener pastures exist for people like us, do you?

LENI (O.S)

I am not like you!

MADAME MAO

No, apparently not: among the million things you so willfully deny, you can't seem to accept that this is the way our ends have been written. Also we have different colored hair, your parents stayed married, your father didn't beat your mother -- and were your feet ever bound?

Leni reappears, her chair experiment an apparent failure.

LENI

Shhh!

Leni examines Madame Mao's chair, squatting to take a closer look at its mechanics as she tries to decide if it could be stacked atop her own chair...

MADAME MAO

My mother wanted to bind my feet, tried to, in fact.

LENI

(disappearing to get her chair)

I am not listening to you!

Leni reappears, her chair in tow. As she decides where to place the chair:

MADAME MAO

Did you know that foot binding came into fashion in the 11th century as a result of a Sung Dynasty empress being born with a foot deformity that caused her to walk with a particularly enticing spring in her step -- presumably due to the searing pain she felt whenever she put weight on the deformed limb?

Leni shoots Madame Mao a "won't you ever shut up?" look which Madame Mao reads as "I'm horrified, but do go on."

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Interestingly, despite a willingness to invest in silicone saturated breasts and botulism enhanced brows, modern women look down on this practice of breaking a girl's little piggy toes so that they can be twisted & cinched under the balls of her tiny feet with long wet bandages. They consider the practice barbaric and akin to female circumcision. Seems they forget that the resulting bent stubs were merely mangled to better show off a pair of beautifully embroidered silk lotus shoes -- now do you know any barbarians who embroider?

Leni shakes her head as she positions her chair to study the hole through which the shaft of light pours.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

(off Leni's head shake)

No, nor I -- unless we're to consider Manola Blahnik a barbarian...

Leni stands on her chair and squints into the light.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Mothers typically broke their daughters' toes around age 7, while the bones were still soft and the girls easier to chase down. Then as the girls grew, the bandages would be tightened until at last, after many years, a very high arch resulted, causing the shrunken foot to form a fleshy cleft between the ball and heel, and this cleft was very special: for it was regarded as a second vagina. And so you start to understand the appeal.

Leni's revolt is apparent.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Various sexual guidebooks describe countless techniques involving the bound foot. Racy stuff... Of course these days only a spattering of very old women sport the lotus, and while a gang of 'em did form a touring disco troupe some years back, most can no longer walk, let alone perform the "Yunnan Hustle." The issue is the arthritis, which tends to do quite a number on the curled up toes that didn't fall off during the binding process... Anyway, that's how the four inch golden lotus came to be a part of our culture. Fascinating, isn't it?

LENI

That's got to be the most horrendous thing I've ever --

MADAME MAO

Oh, I think we both know that's not true...

(locking eyes with Leni; then:)

You Europeans had your corsets and 16 inch waist ideals. Most cultures eroticize some form of female torture and most women are only too happy to participate if it means they might be rewarded in whatever manner passes for vogue in a given economy. Just look at the suffering you endured and endorsed so that you might be noticed.

LENI

I never crippled children to achieve an aesthetic ideal!

MADAME MAO

Right, perhaps you didn't cripple them...

May I read you something?

Not waiting for a reply, Madame Mao reaches deep in her sewing basket to produce a copy of Leni's autobiography.

LENI

(aghast)

Where did you get that?

MADAME MAO

It was just --

LENI

I demand to know!

MADAME MAO

It arrived with the last batch of materials for the dolls!

LENI

When?

MADAME MAO

I...

LENI

When?!

MADAME MAO

I don't know -- there's no real time here! Maybe a day ago, maybe last month! Stop shouting at me!

Livid, Leni charges for the book,
but Madame Mao darts away from her.

A game of chase ensues and escalates
during the following exchanges:

LENI

I've already suffered the injuries of people misconstruing my images, I won't have someone like you misconstruing my words!

MADAME MAO

Someone like *me*? What does that mean?

(wagging her finger at Leni)

If I didn't know better I'd think the closet goose-stepper in you just emerged! Say what you will about the brutalities of my people, at least racial purification was never on the menu.

LENI

(exasperated)

Are you -- to this day your people drown baby girls!

MADAME MAO

Yes but -

LENI

-- Gun down protestors, put people who hold opposing beliefs into camps where they're tortured and their organs are harvested for profit -- !

MADAME MAO

Wonder where we learned that one...

LENI

-- Then there's your tainted milk, and Plasma-gate-- !

MADAME MAO

Plasma-gate?

LENI

Greed in the blood bank world, coupled with poverty on the donor level, has led to blood pooling..!

Off of Madame Mao's confused look:

LENI (CON'T)

Your officials are *reinjecting donors with pooled blood* and then cashing in on the spread of AIDS by selling the diseased plasma to the desperate medical community!

MADAME MAO

Huh. Did not know that...

LENI

Did you know that China executes more people than the rest of the world combined?

MADAME MAO

Well, but we've such a large population, so statistically speaking... I mean *you* try managing a billion people --

LENI

-- And don't even get me started on Tibet, or China's role in the ethnic cleansing happening in Darfur -- or the fact that were it not for a few Superpowers wanting to suss out your army's capabilities using a sports metaphor, no one would have attended your Olympic games because *your air is as toxic as the toys you export!!*

MADAME MAO

(beat; a 'gotcha' smile)

...Whew. Len. I must say you seem to know a lot more about the workings of the world than this book of yours would ever suggest. But then sports metaphors and the exportation of toxicity were rather specialities of yours, weren't they?

LENI

Just hand it over, God-damn it!

MADAME MAO

God knows *Triumph of the Will* ended up introducing a less than benign political product to the marketplace -- while *Olympia* served as a brilliant military recruitment tool, with its emphasis on the glory of power and competition... For a humble artist who claimed perpetual ignorance when it came to the agenda of your most famous subject and sponsor, you sure seem to know a hell of a lot about everything else.

Having now cornered Madame Mao, an out-of-breath Leni lunges once more for the book & victory is hers.

Madame Mao concedes with a simple shrug before returning to her chair.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

Oh! Speaking of the known and unknown, did you realize that your name falls on page 666 of the index? Kinda eerie...

Leni glares at Madame Mao, then pages to the index of the book only to find Madame Mao is telling the truth.

LENI

...This is...! It's unfair. And mean.

MADAME MAO

Poor thing. Wanna talk about it?

LENI

As I've said: I'm not interested in your pity!

MADAME MAO

Then my advice would be to stop acting so pitiful! The very reason I presented you with that book was so that you might think back to some fond memories of your scuba diving days, or to your time with the African Nuba -- or perhaps to that athletic Tarzan fellow with whom you lay...

LENI

...Glenn Morris?

MADAME MAO

Was he the one with the handwriting that spooked you to your very core and that you say foretold of all manner of madness?

Leni skims through the book in search of photos from those days.

LENI

...I've not thought of Glenn in years...

Leni begins to reminisce despite herself.

MADAME MAO

-- What was *Hitler's* handwriting like?

LENI

(ignoring the question,
indulging the memory)

Glenn ripped off my blouse to kiss my breasts in front of tens of thousands of spectators when he won the gold in '36. The passion of that man... Such a shame, his demise...

MADAME MAO

Sounds like Tarzan was maybe more monkey than man. Did you know I used to train monkeys? I miss my monkeys...

LENI

(finger tracing a photo)

For all the men I've loved in my life, I'm remembered in conjunction with those I loved the least.

MADAME MAO

Still, better than not being remembered at all.

LENI

Is it?

MADAME MAO

I dare say yes. I've been expunged from most of the history books in China. If I'm remembered at all, it's as "the white-boned demon," "leader of the gang of four," "instigator of the ill-fated Cultural Revolution" -- somehow I'm credited as being the force behind all the bad decisions Mao ever made, yet none of the good...

LENI

(her focus still on her photos)

And you feel people should have more respect for the woman Mao chose as his companion?

MADAME MAO

If he's to be deemed infallible, it should stand to follow that his choice in a spouse be held beyond reproach.

LENI

Well that's an awful lot to expect when you entered the picture in a such a scandalous way. You were what, wife number four? And an actress-mistress to boot -- did you not know he was married or did it simply not matter?

MADAME MAO

He approached me!

LENI

I'll get the Attendant's side of the story on that one.

MADAME MAO

Oh, you'll never get the straight story from *him*!

(beat; throwing up her hands)

You know what, fine, have it your way: I seduced Mao Zedong! Everyone happy now? Despite my questionable background -- the daughter of a nomadic concubine and with a previous marriage or two myself -- and regardless of the fact that I was 21 years his junior -- I was able to trick the greatest leader China has ever known into calling me his wife for the 38 years that remained of his life. I'm that good and that bad; that beautiful and that ugly.

LENI

Even if he did approach you, it makes no difference. People will always blame the *mistress* over the *mister*. You only have to look at that poor Monica Lewinsky -- or Mary Magdalen, for that matter.

MADAME MAO

Everyone conveniently forgets that He Zizhen, Mao's nauseatingly popular third wife, was also his mistress first. Mao wasn't even divorced from Yang Kaihui when they married! And poor Yang, here she was about to be executed by the Kuomintang for refusing to betray Mao and all the while he's gallivanting about with ole "sure-shot!"

LENI

It's hard for me to imagine that a woman as dedicated to the cause of communism as you contend to be would be so surprised to find that hypocrisy is what keeps that machine running.

MADAME MAO

Mmmm. Yes, well it's hard for me to imagine that a woman who hand-picked Gypsies from a internment camp so they could be extras in a film she was directing would be so surprised to find that no one believed her when she later contended that she never even know such camps existed.

Leni opens her mouth to present a rebuttal, but thinks better of it.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

...It would seem we're both going to have to stretch our imaginations a bit if we're ever to understand one another.

LENI

(terse)

Yes. It would seem so.

MADAME MAO

But enough of the unpleasant! Let's speak of the good times. Who was the love of your life, Leni?

LENI

(wary)

I... I don't remember.

MADAME MAO

Well, that is its own shame. When a woman can't look back on her years, all 101 in your case, and lay claim to at least one encounter with love -- particularly given all the sex you're credited as having had with people like Arnold Fanke, who introduced you to film and whose style you would mimic time and again; Anatol Dobriansky, Luis Trenker, Luis' best friend Hans Schneeberger, that "sensitive" sound editor Hermann Storr, --

LENI

-- Horst.

MADAME MAO

I was getting to him --

LENI

No, Horst was the love of my life. I've answered your question so you can now shut up.

MADAME MAO

Horst over your husband Peter?

LENI

...*Ex*-husband, Peter.

MADAME MAO

Right, right...You separated as a result of *his* infidelities?

LENI

It's none your business why we separated.

MADAME MAO

True. I was only going to point out that given your own proclivities you perhaps shouldn't have been so hard on poor Peter, but that's all woulda-coulda-shoulda at this point, anyway. On to Horst --

LENI

I'll not speak to you of him.

MADAME MAO

You don't have to. I already know of his devotion and appeal. Horst Kettner was like the sexy son it's o.k. to sleep with.

LENI

He most certainly was not!

MADAME MAO

Don't constipate yourself -- I'm speaking to the 42 year age difference and Horst's handsome Aryan build. I'm not suggesting you'd dabble in incest. Even *your* moral compass knows north from south when it comes to that.

LENI

Horst was my assistant and caretaker, and yes I loved him. Because he was as loyal and dear to me as my Mother and he believed in me and let me shine when the rest of the world wanted to quench my flame. He was a beautiful man, but our relationship was not as your double-speak & sick innuendo suggest and I'll not let you sully something so precious!

MADAME MAO

(taken a bit aback)

I see. Well. It *is* refreshing to hear you defending someone beside yourself for a change.

Leni glowers, then returns to her book and some memories which make her smile.

Madame Mao's boredom grows with every page Leni turns. She fidgets. Finally:

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

You know there was a time when I, too, was loved enough to think anything was possible -- a time when a man capable of great things wanted *me* as his ally... It's true. In fact, once upon a time Mao was so desperate to get the Party's permission to marry me that he consulted *Stalin* for advice.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

He even threatened to give up his leadership position and become a farmer if that proved the only way for us to be together..

(beat; with a sigh)

But no one knows the end at the beginning - people forget that...The things I gave up so that I might sit at his side..

LENI

(gazing at photos of herself)

...Is that regret I'm sensing?

MADAME MAO

No!...Yes...Maybe a little.

LENI

(a casual jab)

And would you tie into that regret any remorse for the lives you destroyed during the Cultural Revolution? Or is your regret specific to personal yearnings that never came to fruition?

Madame Mao turns to Leni with a smirk.

MADAME MAO

You know, I could grow to like you, Len.
For all we have in common.

LENI

Anything we have in common is circumstantial,
not psychological.

MADAME MAO

Denial is psychological. We share a bit of that.

LENI

I disagree.

MADAME MAO

I knew you would.

Leni rolls her eyes then
delves deeper into her book.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

Did you have many female friends, Leni? Growing up?

Leni ignores the question.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

I didn't...It wasn't that I thought there was something inherently terrible about other women -- I never bought into the idea that girls were inferior to boys, despite the constant re-enforcement of that notion in China. No, I think I lacked female friends because I was always forced to compete with them for some prize some man always seemed to be holding hostage...affection...that feeling of being truly seen -- or more than that, cherished...

(a memory wounds her;
she recovers & muses on)

Must have been nice to be in your position: the only woman in a circle of powerful men, appreciated for both your beauty and your prowess - like a Condoleezza Rice or Sarah Palin in so many ways... I had glimpses of that, but it never lasted, especially once the uniform replaced the qípáo; I became a shorn peacock, my winsome femininity no longer a crutch upon which I could rely.

LENI

I earned every job I ever got and happily respect followed; there were no crutches involved.

MADAME MAO

Certainly you had Hitler's respect. And Horst's. And you continue to have the respect of all those apologists who, like you, prefer to focus on the technique and the medium instead of the message and its ramifications.

LENI

My so-called "apologists" --

MADAME MAO

-- Let me guess: you prefer the term "admirers" -- ?

LENI

(ignoring the "guess")

-- are smart enough to realize it's only fair to judge me on my contributions to a given project; in the case of my more... controversial films, they understand that I was solely responsible for the execution and not the content.

MADAME MAO

I do wish there were some snuff film cinematographers around here with whom you could commiserate. Gotta figure those poor bastards feel a mite misunderstood, too. "I didn't kill him, I merely shot him! In 3/4 frame. At golden hour..."

LENI

Why do I even attempt to communicate with you? You mock me for the very things you yourself believe in: the beauty of an ideal captured in dramatic gestures, a desire to be known, adored, respected -- you've some nerve, you know that? How were *your* operas or films any less culpable than *Triumph of the Will* in promoting a vision that would prove misguided?

MADAME MAO

Well I'll tell you how: because China's system is working.

LENI

Ha! For some, perhaps, but hardly for most!

MADAME MAO

Still, when compared to the number of people for whom National Socialism is currently working...

LENI

China's system merely *appears* to function -- and only when measured in terms of colorful opening ceremonies or the rampant Capitalistic consumption that's been so cleverly packaged and sold as "the next best thing to freedom" to those willing to compromise enough liberty to afford it! Your peasants, who comprise the vast majority of your population, certainly wouldn't say the system is working! And your true artists -- those condemned by censors to live in poverty and anonymity because they dared expose the bleaker aspects of authoritarian rule -- they would hardly say China's system is working!

MADAME MAO

Zhang Yimou would say it's working.

LENI

...Who?

MADAME MAO

The filmmaker Zhang Yimou? The genius responsible for the Olympic ceremonies you referenced. His conversion is quite a story! Did you know that for years he was considered an enemy of the people? That his films -- *Red Sorghum*, "*Ju Dou*," "*Raise the Red Lantern*" and so on -- were banned due to their unfortunate depictions of life under Communist rule? But then suddenly, like a prisoner finding God, he had an epiphany and realized, as you eventually will, that low-and-behold *China's system is working!*

As Leni is about to protest:

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

Of course some will say Zhang Yimou is nothing more than a Chinese Leni Riefenstahl -- a gifted sell-out who happens to excel at making fascist look festive while at the same time pretending to have no interest in politics. But I see Zhang as more of a Chinese Shakespeare -- a humble court artist who did the math and realized that the benefits of working *with* the powers-that-be were far greater than the benefits of working *against* them.

LENI

God -- the ludicrous ways in which you attempt to dress-up and justify the censorship and corruption that you and your narcissistic Revolution put in motion -- ! You've just gleefully told the tale of the neutering of an artist!

MADAME MAO

This, from Hitler's sniveling pawn? A woman notorious for allowing self-interest to trump morality time and again? Oh, do go on, Ms. Riefenstahl, tell me of the charitable work you've done on behalf of any "artist" beside yourself and Adolph Hitler -- for we already know to what lengths you'd go to prove that his balls were still intact!

LENI

(taking a deep breath)

You know what, rather than indulging in the heightening of your grotesque anatomical metaphor, let me ask you a simple question: did you set out to destroy lives when you fell in love with Mao Zedong?

MADAME MAO

Of course not, I --

LENI

-- Why, then, is it so hard for you to believe that I didn't intend to hurt anyone when I accepted the Reich's job offer?

MADAME MAO

I suppose the "For the People" Communist in me just has a difficult time believing that anyone who was similarly "for the people" would be lured by the bigoted bait that had you at "Heil Hitler."

LENI

(barbed)

I see.

LENI (CONT'D)

Follow-up question for the bleeding heart Bolshevik: how do you feel about the fact that your beloved "for the people" Communism always seems to devolve into a game of passive aggressive 'duck-duck-goose' while your revered "class struggles' time and again reveal themselves to be nothing more than petty plays for revenge at the leadership level? Your entire system is no more sophisticated than a cat fight waged behind Plexiglas! I mean I may be a lot of things, but at least I'm not vindictive!

MADAME MAO

No, you're not really discerning enough to be vindictive...

Just as Leni opens her mouth to reply, The Attendant enters pushing a dolly on which half-burned boxes bearing the label "Things Thought Buried /Burned" are stacked.

The Attendant demonstratively unloads the boxes, GRUNTING excessively to indicate their burdensome weight.

The women watch him.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

Don't like the look of that...

LENI

What does he have there?

MADAME MAO

Not sure...

THE ATTENDANT

What do you think I have here? It's evidence! Letters that would lead lovers to attempt suicide, photos of a certain femme fatale fraternizing with those she'd come to deny ever knowing, a noose comprised of gilded ping-pong balls on which skulls have been painted --

MADAME MAO

Oh, that...

THE ATTENDANT

Yes, that! The crude ornament you forced Wang Guangmei to wear the night your Red Guards took her into "revolutionary custody" for the crime of *wearing a necklace* she'd received as a gift from a Burmese diplomat.

MADAME MAO

That was the crime we nailed her on. She committed many more.

THE ATTENDANT

And do you recall the ruse you used to get Wang into custody?

Madame Mao glares at The Attendant.

THE ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

You coerced Wang's youngest daughter to call with fabricated news of a terrible accident involving her oldest daughter.

MADAME MAO

"Ruse. Coerced...Fabricated." Despite all we've been through, you're siding with Hitler's harlot here aren't you?

THE ATTENDANT

I don't take sides, I simply follow orders.

LENI

Whose?

THE ATTENDANT

What?

LENI

Whose orders are you following?

MADAME MAO

Yes, good question!

THE ATTENDANT

(gesturing toward the audience)

Society's. The People's.

Leni peers out at the audience.

LENI

You gesture toward a haunted hole.

THE ATTENDANT

The sky is not less blue because a blind man doesn't see it. Now if you'll excuse me, I've more boxes to retrieve.

The Attendant exits, SLAMMING the door.

MADAME MAO

Be afraid, Leni. Be very afraid.

LENI

Why should I be more afraid than you?

MADAME MAO

Because *your* ambitions wrought worldwide pain. Mine, not-so-much. Gilded ping-pong balls versus the Diary of Anne Frank.

LENI

Anne -- ?!

(beat; seething)

I will have you know, my heart, this beating vessel right here...

(Leni realizes her heart no longer beats as she's dead)

Well, it was beating... And I'll have you know that it beat *pink*, not black! And it -- not sinister ambition but my pink heart -- was the muscle that moved me to promote my passions and perceptions through art! My pink heart!

(pounding her chest:)

Which used to be right here..! Right here...right...here!

MADAME MAO

(beat)

So it seems that in your own way, you too are a Communist.

LENI

No -- I'm apolitical, an artist!

MADAME MAO

But you're a feminist.

Leni looks at Madame Mao, certain she won't like where this is headed.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

Feminists are Communism defined; we say we'd sacrifice anything so that we might be looked upon as equals, then we're surprised when we're raped and left with nothing but an ill-becoming workload & the stench of chivalry's rotting corpse.

LENI

That's not how it was for me.

MADAME MAO

No?

LENI

My talent offset any challenges my gender might have invited.

MADAME MAO

Ah, without question you possessed a very special talent. But many of your critics, and I'll include Goebbels here, felt it was your feminine wiles, coupled with your uncanny ability to time a good crying fit, that earned you access to the immense resources that all but guaranteed your films about that orgy of machismo would be ground-breaking and therefore lead to additional opportunities. How do you answer to those charges?

LENI

(dry)

You lost me at 'orgy of machismo.'

MADAME MAO

I'm referring, of course, to National Socialism, with its pretentious uniforms, banners and medals, the garish parades and that spoiled sense of entitlement that seemed to always be screaming "Worship me! For I have a third limb growing between my legs and it is ready-set to defend my asshole!" That asshole's name being, obviously, Adolph Hitler.

LENI

As if the Cultural Revolution didn't reek of pretension! You used opera for Christ's sake -- to polarize the masses and establish an ideological dictatorship for the sole purpose of getting back at those you felt had been mean to you!

MADAME MAO

Now, now, that wasn't the *sole* purpose of our ideological dictatorship. It was a nice by-product, I'll admit, but as we've just discussed, the underlying intentions were far nobler than the results, just as you swear your intentions were when you first wrote to Hitler to tell him you'd liked his book, seen his last speech, been quite taken by his oratory style and simply *had* to meet him, even if it meant skipping out on a Hollywood sponsored press campaign that might put your acting career on a path comparable to Marlene Dietrich's -- you do recall taking this action, don't you?

LENI

...The press campaign for *S.O.S. Iceberg*...Universal Pictures had invited me to travel to Greenland to promote the movie...

MADAME MAO

Yes! And in lieu of traveling with the cast and crew to support the role you fought tooth and cooter to land, you chose to take your first meeting with your new idol, Adolph Hitler.

LENI

No, I went to Greenland -- !

MADAME MAO

Right. But only *after* meeting with Hitler and only because he was able to arrange for you, and a suitcase sized bouquet of flowers, to fly to Hamburg on one of the Nazi Party's private planes. Do you really expect anyone to believe that those arrangements came about thanks to your talent and not as a result of hours of back & forth flattery and flirtation?

LENI

(piecing together the memory)

...It was all so long ago.

MADAME MAO

It was 1932.

LENI

I heard him speak at a rally on February 27th, of that year.

MADAME MAO

Just a day after he'd become a German citizen.

LENI

(guilty/wistful)

He was...it was like being struck by lightning. I had an almost apocalyptic vision that I was never able to forget.

MADAME MAO

Which is saying a lot, given all the other things it seems you were able to forget...

LENI

(indulging despite herself)

It felt as though the earth's surface were spreading out in front of me like a hemisphere that suddenly splits apart in the middle, spewing out an enormous jet of water, so powerful that it touched the sky and shook the earth...

MADAME MAO

You make it sound so -- dirty.

LENI

I felt...paralyzed. I was so deeply affected that afterward I was unable to even hail a cab...

We see Leni start to hail a cab, but end up *Heiling* an invisible Hitler.

MADAME MAO

...And what exactly did Hitler say that touched you so?

LENI

(gesturing, but at a loss)

He...it was how he spoke, not what he said.

MADAME MAO

Ah, style without substance -- classic aphrodisiac.

LENI

No, you must understand -- it was like the power of a beautiful aria sung in a language that isn't your own.

MADAME MAO

But he spoke to you in your native German, Leni. And you'd read *Mein Kampf* so you must have had an inkling as to what he was on about.

LENI

No, but I...I suppose I heard what I wanted to believe he was saying. I was idealistic and young...

MADAME MAO

You were also zealous and a mite bit anti-Semitic yourself.

Breaking from the beauty of the memory:

LENI

That's not true! I had Jewish friends and --

MADAME MAO

Even a Jewish mother if we're to believe the --

LENI

My mother most certainly was NOT Jewish!

MADAME MAO

She was if you trace her lineage back to the woman who actually gave birth to her and not to the Aryan nanny who subsequently became your step-grandmother and whose name you chose to use in the "proof of descent" paperwork you submitted to the Reich's film office.

LENI

Just -- the point is I'm not anti-Semitic.

MADAME MAO

Well you're not *consistently* anti-Semitic.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

But while one would need to grow additional fingers and toes in order to point to all the Jewish lovers and collaborators peppering your past, when it came to giving credit to those Jewish individuals - to people like Harry Sokal or Bela Balazs for example - one certainly wouldn't consider you *pro-Semitic*.

LENI

Look --

MADAME MAO

I mean you wrote to your good friend Julius Streicher, publisher of the hate-rag *Der Stürmer* and one of Germany's most outspoken anti-Semites, asking for his assistance in handling the -- your words here: "Jew Bela Balazs." And why? Because it wasn't enough for you to simply strip Balazs of his credit on *The Blue Light*, you also felt it necessary he be stripped of any chance of getting paid.

Leni is quiet for a moment as she works to process an excuse. Finally:

LENI

I simply had no money to pay Bela. I had mortgaged my own apartment to fund the project and we made nothing back --

MADAME MAO

But why involve Streicher in the matter? And why omit Balazs and Sokal from the credits? It would seem the least you could do for two men who did you such favors. Did not Balazs film every scene in which you, the star of the movie, appear?

Again Leni struggles to arrive at an explanation. After a beat:

LENI

It was very complicated. You weren't there, so you couldn't possibly know.

MADAME MAO

You think I don't know from complicated? I lived with donkeys and survived on only string beans during the North Shaanxi campaign of '47 & 48!

Leni can only blink at this.

LENI

That's...it's not the same.

MADAME MAO

But is it so very different? It would seem we both felt saddled in by asses while a larger struggle loomed that required all manner of hard-to-swallow sacrifice... That's what I'm hearing at any rate.

LENI

(quietly, almost to herself)

Great poverty followed by great power perverted everything...

MADAME MAO

Yes, those who have hungered most do have a tendency to gorge when at last they're invited to brunch. Ooh! Another proverb!

She jots the proverb in her book.

LENI

...My memories from that time are hazy, filtered...I just... One morning I awoke to find I had lost many friends and that one of these friends -- a man who had been so kind to me -- was the same man the rest of the world regard would come to view as being worse than all serial killers combined -- I mean worse than even Stalin. Everything ended up upside down.

(beat; as if just realizing)

Even the swastika, a symbol which represented life & luck for 3000 years, was suddenly blighted beyond recognition.

MADAME MAO

You and Hitler did make sauvastika of the swastika, there's no denying that. Just like R.J Reynolds with that poor "Old Joe" Camel... To think an ad agency would take a creature known for its ability to survive long periods without access to water and turn it into a caricature we'd come to associate with emphysema -- remarkable really: the power of branding.

LENI

You're rubbing things in. I don't like that.

MADAME MAO

Not true! I am in fact commending you on your ability to generate logo-recognition. You mustn't be so sensitive, Len. It won't earn you points in a place like this, where *everyone* has some sort of cross-shaped object to bare.

LENI

What nobody seems to appreciate is that the whole...

(a vague gesture; then:)

mess was all Goebbels' fault.

MADAME MAO

You don't say -- in what way?

LENI (CON'T)

Well it was Goebbels who initiated Kristallnacht. He lied to Adolph and frightened him into thinking that Hershel Gryzspan's shooting of Ernst vom Rath in Paris was part of a *chain* of violence that was hitting even German cities -- but there was no chain of violence! It was a tiny little singular incident.

MADAME MAO

The catalyst of which was the expulsion of 5000 Polish Jews, including young Hershel's parents, to an isolated area on the German/Polish border where they were left to die --

LENI

(with a dismissive gesture)

I don't know the details. Only that it was a one-time thing.

MADAME MAO

Ah, and no doubt had Hitler realized this, the world would have seen his inner Yid-o-phile emerge to start a fan club.

LENI

(ignoring Madame Mao)

Do you know whose idea it was to burn the first books? *Goebbels*. He was also the mastermind behind the yellow stars the Jews were forced to wear. *Goebbels*, not Hitler! That man even lied about his club foot, telling people it was a war-injury -- well, let's be clear: the bastard never even served in the military! He was lucky he wasn't exterminated alongside the other "gimps" at Mauthausen!

MADAME MAO

If only he'd made it as the romantic novelist and playwright he aspired to be, eh? Had his '*Gone With The Wind-ish*' novel '*Kolberg*' seen the light of day, you might have dodged this place. One can only hope the publishers & producers of the world have taken heed...

LENI

You joke, but Goebbels' stated mission was to exploit the base instincts of the German people, to play upon their fears and insecurities, to prod them to embrace racism, class envy, xenophobia. He didn't care if propaganda was intelligent, he only cared that it was successful.

MADAME MAO

While you hoped to make propaganda what? Enlightening?

LENI

I was not involved in generating propaganda!
 (beat; off Madame Mao's look)
 ...Or, if I was, I wasn't aware of it.

MADAME MAO

Not even in the editing room? When you cut your shots so as to suggest that Hitler was Germany's answer to Batman?

LENI

But that's what I'm saying: I merely filmed what Goebbels created! The banners, the "Heil, Hitlers!," the masses marching -- all of those elements were created by Goebbels! And I was as seduced as anyone into believing them to be a vision of truth!

MADAME MAO

I see.

LENI

...Do you?

MADAME MAO

Yes. And you're certainly not going to hear me defending Herr Goebbels -- by all accounts he would seem a royal ass. But honestly Leni, pointing fingers at all the other bad guys with whom you frequently dined -- particularly when the majority of them would be executed for crimes against humanity... Do you begin to see how it gums up the works? It's probably better you simply embrace the fact that when compared to Hitler, the Nazi everyone's heard of, you come out smelling like Mother Teresa after a bath. You've got that going for you! That, and the fact that the purest of aesthetes continue to consider you a genius despite your myopia. Make it about bright sides, Leni. Bright sides!

LENI

But if records are ever to be set straight -- !

MADAME MAO

(with a laugh)

Who would turn to *us* in hopes of setting things straight?

LENI

(indicating Mao's journal)

But, then why do you -- with your notes?

MADAME MAO

For posterity, not redemption.

LENI

But I've already paid! God, why can't people move past the mistakes -- the naive missteps? So I backed the wrong horse! I wanted someone to be what I mistakenly thought they were! And I wasn't the only one -- all of Germany erred in that direction.

MADAME MAO

Except for the Jews, of course. And the gypsies, communists, socialists, handicapped and otherwise "impure."

LENI

But that wasn't made clear to me then -- does no one see that? As you said: the end wasn't written at the beginning! I was presented with an opportunity, a menu of options if you will, and I had to eat something or starve.

MADAME MAO

So you chose the vegetarian course, failing to grasp that an absence of meat doesn't necessarily portend the absence of blood. Or bones. Or blankets comprised of human hair.

LENI

Oh, go on and judge! But if I was bad, you were no better. You denied your every Communist affiliation whenever it served you, selling out anyone who got in the way of your desperate quest for a compliment. Pouting your way from the cave floor to the hammock and doltishly expecting your "comrades" to celebrate the ascension -- yet somehow you've the nerve to call *me* a hypocrite. Unbelievable!

MADAME MAO

I'm not calling you a hypocrite, Len, I'm calling you a liar. Though I'll admit you've got me nearly convinced you were lying to yourself as much as to any one else and perhaps that defense will come in handy...

LENI

I truly did think I was doing the right thing at the time, based on the information I had and was compelled to believe. And people all over the world are doing the same thing this very second -- choosing sides in one way or another: Black or white, red or blue...

MADAME MAO

Left or right, revolution or coup...

LENI

Exactly.

MADAME MAO

Kiss and seethe, duck and weave --

LENI

Come again?

MADAME MAO

You know "neither & both," for those times when taking a side is just too much of a damn bother.

LENI

The bottom line is it isn't fair that I be held responsible for the acts of a person and party I merely captured on film.

MADAME MAO

Just as it isn't fair that I be held accountable for the crimes of a system I didn't invent, but merely sought to serve to the best of my abilities.

LENI

Exactly. So now can we please put our differences aside and look instead to what little we hold in common?

Madame Mao nods and opens her red book.

MADAME MAO

(reading:)

Misplaced children, Ibsen & pink hearts which no longer beat -- and I'll add:

(as she writes:)

'a delusional belief in the theory that life is fair...'

Beat.

LENI

...I was referring to the fact we each were merely a product of our times, not evil, but in fact too innocent.

MADAME MAO

Victims!

LENI

...What?

MADAME MAO

We were *victims* of our times. Victims who had the audacity to make soursap soup from the soursaps... the only fruit we ever knew...

LENI

Yes, fine. And just as a journalist can't be held responsible for the era into which they were born, we shouldn't be held accountable for --

MADAME MAO

-- but you weren't a journalist, were you?

LENI

I was a kind of a journalist, documenting speeches, events --

MADAME MAO

Ah, o.k. That means I was a kind of journalist as well, documenting in my work, my operas, lectures and so forth, an ideal I firmly believed would bring greatness to China. Thank you for that -- I better understand myself now.

Beat.

LENI

You're roping me in again, aren't you? Hoping to play me the fool by drawing a line between journalists and...what?

MADAME MAO

Artists. I thought you were an artist.

LENI

I was -- I am.

MADAME MAO

So then was The Fuhrur your subject or your muse?

LENI

I - I was commissioned to cover an event in my particular style, nothing more.

MADAME MAO

With only one directing credit to your name and after writing the equivalent of a love letter to a man whose favorite film was one in which you danced topless on a beach.

LENI

(exposed)

...You seem to know so much about me.

MADAME MAO

I've taken to studying the very funny and the very sad.

LENI

...I was commissioned by the man to cover an event. I was...

MADAME MAO

Young and idealistic?

LENI

Yes.

MADAME MAO

Me, too. And also like you I was an artist. But I fear there are those who would mark a distinction between being a journalist, who records and reflects back a true picture of a person & place in time, and doing what we did. Artists' eyes, ears and agendas are different...

LENI

Of course they are, but --

MADAME MAO

-- Monet couldn't see and we're left with impressionism; Beethoven couldn't hear and we're left with the Ninth Symphony; Goebbels couldn't write and Hitler couldn't draw and so we end up with the holocaust --

LENI

That's not entirely...

MADAME MAO

-- You couldn't separate the fairy tale from the fanaticism and the result there is *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*.

LENI

Now hold on --

MADAME MAO

You see we artists focus our lenses on that which inspires us, but sadly that doesn't mean our focus is always aimed in the direction that's most charitable or humane, and certainly it's no guarantee that we understand the whole picture -- quite the contrary, in fact...

(beat; noticing Leni's silence)

Oh - do feel free to disagree with me.

Leni offers a scowl and a glare.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

You're newer to this. I understand. Just a few years ago you were carousing with Sigfreid and Roy and all those attractive Nuba tribesmen...A study in contrasts, that, by the by... The former so black and manly, the latter so white and...

Madame Mao gestures vaguely...

LENI

This place must have a name...

MADAME MAO

If it does, I don't know it... Shall we name it?

Madame Mao waits for an
answer that never comes.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

We can call it something German if you like. Though I confess I know more Russian than German... How about... Belzec? That's a nice German name from your hey day.

Leni turns to Madame Mao.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

You prefer Grafeneck? Or Auschwitz?

LENI

Fuck. Off.

MADAME MAO

Oh. That's another thing to know about this place: you don't get to be offended. You have to reel in that sense of guilt that you should have maybe asked a few more questions before choosing to artistically extol the virtues of a man who was at work exterminating 7 million as you doodled on your story boards.

LENI

Are you - ! Under your watch 30 million died in a preventable famine! That's three times the number killed in the camps!

MADAME MAO

No. Under *my husband's* watch 30 million died in a preventable famine. You must remember: I wasn't allowed to participate in politics in any kind of meaningful way until 1966.

LENI

Still, you were closer to Chairman Mao than I ever was to Hitler -- you married and served the monster for decades!

MADAME MAO

Your argument presumes that marriage equates to two people always acting the role of soulmates and confidants -- another beautiful, but false fairy tale I fear, and one I'd think your own hapless hitching to Peter would have dispelled.

LENI

But -- ! During the Cultural Revolution you used to *insist* that spouses be punished alongside their significant others! How is it you're always the exception to your own rules?!

MADAME MAO

Well I'll tell you how: because I barely saw my husband toward the end of the 1950's, which is when that famine and the not-so-Great Leap Forward occurred. I was in and out of Russian hospitals, battling high blood pressure, depression, liver infections, something else, and cervical cancer. And all that while my beloved "hubby" was sleeping with another actress, Yu Shan -- who happened to also be my former sister-in-law. In conclusion, you may bandy your blame all you wish, but it's simply inaccurate to credit me with any part in the passing of those peasants; Yu Shan is the one I would target in that particular matter.

LENI

Well I, too, was elsewhere when all the Nazi atrocities occurred! I didn't even see photos of the camps until after the war and when I did, I was aghast, horrified -- I mean I had to hide my face in my hands!

MADAME MAO

Gee, it hit you that hard?

LENI

Yes! As I said to my interrogators: I could have cried when I heard the dreadful things that happened! I couldn't grasp how any of the people who shared Hitler's political ideas had the courage to go on living -- for I would have committed suicide had I felt I shared any responsibility for those crimes!

Madame Mao is silent, transfixed
by Leni's lack of self-awareness.

Beat.

LENI

What?

MADAME MAO

Nothing, Leni. Nothing...

LENI

No you're thinking something -- what are you thinking?

MADAME MAO

It's just... *Mein Kampf*, Len -- does not that little book, which we've established you not only read, but recommended to friends, begin with its author declaring his intention "to destroy the foul legends dished up by the Jewish Press"?

LENI

Well, yes -- but the fact is the Jewish Press were awful and did need to be taken down a notch or two -- !

Madame Mao smirks and jots
a note down in her journal.

LENI (CON'T)

(catching herself & clarifying)

-- Which is not to say that they deserved to be gassed or... Write that down, too! I'm not saying anyone deserved to die.

Madame Mao demonstratively
adds Leni's addendum.

MADAME MAO

(as she's writing)

And, correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't it go on to say: "If the Jew is victorious over the other peoples of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity"?

LENI

...I -- I can't recall.

MADAME MAO

Mmm. It is kind of a vague throw-away line, isn't it? Comes across as filler Hitler tossed in there so he could open the next chapter on a clean page... Oh! But I've got one you're sure to know -- remember the bit that goes: "Culturally, the Jew contaminates art, literature, the theater, makes a mockery of natural feeling, overthrows all concepts of beauty and sublimity, of the noble and the good..." Surely you recall that sentence -- in it your future patron speaks his mind on beauty and art!

LENI

(snapping)

Look, it's not like I had the damn thing memorized! I skimmed it once on a train is all.

MADAME MAO

I see.

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

But just so we can confirm that you're not suffering from Alzheimer's, did you happen to catch the Nazi-studded world premiere of a film called *Triumph of the Will* in Berlin?

LENI

It was *my* premiere!

MADAME MAO

Oh, that's right. So if you had to name the protagonist -- ?

LENI

Oh for Christ's -- ! In the name of your husband and his brand of Communism you empowered children to beat their teachers to death for suspected "bourgeoisie tendencies" -- whatever that means -- was that not far worse than anything I ever did in filming a political rally?

MADAME MAO

(shrugging)

...I don't know. Was it?

LENI

You are a weasel, you know that? You start us down a path of similarities over which we might commiserate and then you draw fictitious distinctions in an attempt to implicate me while spritzing yourself to smell like a rose!

MADAME MAO

(nodding in agreement)

Mmm. The best leaders alternate kindness with violence. Psychologically it's a very good thing to do. The kindness, you see, draws people in, the violence scares them into staying, and the inconsistency keeps people intrigued and guessing. Have you not read the 36 Chaos Stratagems?

Leni's seething silence
provides the answer.

MADAME MAO (CON'T)

"Hide a knife behind a smile", "point at the mulberry tree while cursing the locust tree", "borrow a corpse to resurrect the soul", "feign madness but retain your balance", "make a sound in the east, then strike in the west" -- the list goes on... I think you'd find it a far superior read to *Mein Kampf* -- in fact, the Allies used its tenets to get the better of your guys at Normandy, so if proof be found in pudding...

(beat; off Leni's angry look)

Len?

LENI

I have nothing more to say to you. To anyone.

MADAME MAO

Ah, very good then. Just nod if you'd like some more tea.

LENI

(fuming)

You're nothing more than a failed artist. At least I can look back to a distinguished career as a dancer, actress, and renowned director prior to my involvement with Hitler!

MADAME MAO

-- Ooop - another lie: you said you'd nothing more to say!

LENI

What can you point to? A couple suicidal boyfriends and a slew of colleagues who'd never work with you twice! When you couldn't maintain the level of attention and creative satisfaction you craved, when you couldn't make it happen on the stage, you turned to politics -- and the sick character you chose to play ended up destroying far more lives than I could ever be accused of!

MADAME MAO

(spooky)

Makes ya wonder where those ghosts all go, doesn't it?

LENI

Oh stop.

MADAME MAO

No, really -- do you suppose they all get to go to Heaven? Because it just doesn't seem right to me that all who lost their lives under Stalin, Pol Pot, your darling Führer, my Mr. Mao and so on, be cast inevitably as angels. I mean are we truly to believe there were no ass-holes killed in the myriad famines, holocausts, genocides & other blights that make up the history of the world? That there was not a single concentration camp victim about whom one might say "oh, but actually that guy was a real bastard -- it's just as well he's off to the decay buffet!"

LENI

...You are unbelievable.

MADAME MAO

It wasn't exactly fun swinging by my neck until my legs twitched their last twitch, yet I'm stuck here in "crap palace" with you, while they're probably traipsing about on puffy little clouds appraising the various monuments that continue to be erected in the name of their turmoil...It must really bunch your britches, Len -- to think the same "Jewish element" that conspired to shut you out of Hollywood, has also managed to slam the Pearly Gates in your face.

LENI

Enough! And stop calling me "Len," it's "Le-ni."

MADAME MAO

Oh, so you can flounce about feeling sorry for yourself and I'm allowed nothing, is that it? Not even familiarity?

LENI

I don't like your talk of ghosts and gore.

MADAME MAO

Why?

LENI

It's indulgent, stupid and serves no purpose.

Madame Mao studies Leni for a moment before turning to the pile of dolls.

Madame Mao gently takes a doll from the pile and starts to cradle it.

Leni looks away.

MADAME MAO

...The ghosts of all the girls who've been drowned in China scream to me when I close my eyes. Who calls to you, Len?

LENI

I'll not be tricked into another manipulative interrogation.

MADAME MAO

Interrogation -- ?

(eyeing the audience)

Now that would be a fun way to kill some time..!

(turning back to Leni)

What do you say? I'll be your lawyer and together we'll fight to see if we can't come up with a reasonable argument to help get you released from this place that so offends you!

LENI

No!

MADAME MAO

You'd find worse lawyers. I have experience defending myself, the only one of the 'gang' to do so, and did I not manage to avoid public execution?

LENI

I'm not so sure *you* were the reason you weren't executed.

MADAME MAO

I know how to divide, conquer, confuse and confound --

LENI

Clearly, but I'm not interested, so --

MADAME MAO

Fraidy-cat.

LENI

What?

MADAME MAO

Fraidy-cat -- it's friendly for 'pussy.'

LENI

This isn't about fear!

MADAME MAO

Then what is it about? Why won't you let me defend you?

LENI

Because I don't want to play a pointless make-believe game --

MADAME MAO

But you love make-believe!

LENI

-- and you've already proven yourself incapable of seeing things from my point of view --

MADAME MAO

Help me see things as you see them, Len!

LENI

-- and besides we've no jury, so --

MADAME MAO

No jury? -- What about them?

Madame Mao CLAPS TWICE and lights come up just high enough to cast a ghostly glow on the audience.

Mortified by the sight, Leni freezes, then scampers toward the door.

LENI

No -- ! Where did they come from?! When did they arrive?!

MADAME MAO

(to audience)

A show of hands, who here finds Leni Riefenstahl a megalomaniacal princess who lacks self-awareness?

Madame Mao squints to get a read on the audience and whatever hands may be raised.

LENI

(horrified)

Stop it!

MADAME MAO

(as she counts)

Now, now, this isn't the sentencing. I'm merely screening the jurors to make sure they aren't too terribly biased.

LENI

Stop!

Leni covers her eyes, refusing to see the final count.

MADAME MAO

(calling to Leni)

You can look now. I've concluded that they each possess the attitude, cultural qualifications and moral standards required for the job at hand.

Leni uncovers her eyes and charges through the pile of dolls in an effort to strangle Madame Mao.

LENI

God-damn you!

Madame Mao jumps to her feet and the two women circle one another, sumo-style, until they finally lunge to grab at each others' throats.

A struggle ensues. Though it starts as an almost comic cat-fight, it quickly progresses into something far more violent. At no point is there a clear winner or loser as tumble, claw gasp, and roll about on the ground.

In the course of the struggle the dolls are kicked, thrown, stepped on, and scattered about the stage.

At last an AIR-RAID SIREN sounds and The Attendant, his uniform bearing ever more stars and his body ever more evidence of the fights waged in exchange, storms in to pull the two women apart.

The Attendant stands between Leni and Madame Mao, who glare at one another, posed to pounce again just as soon as they catch their breath.

ATTENDANT

(thunderous)

I will strap you to your chairs! Or worse, I'll leave you to rip one another to pieces -- it'd be what you both deserve!

Madame Mao straightens, a pirate's smile on her bloodied face.

LENI

(Pointing to Madame Mao)

Don't let her near me! She's insane.

ATTENDANT

(backhanding Leni)

Quiet!

Leni falls to the floor,
hand to her face.

MADAME MAO

I warned you he was moody, Len.

The Attendant swiftly turns on Madame Mao next, knocking her to her knees.

ATTENDANT

Shut up!

Madame Mao attempts to get back to her feet, but The Attendant kicks her to the ground once more.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

(addressing Madame Mao)

That you, one of the damned, would attempt to serve as judge over these proceedings --

LENI

...Proceedings?

ATTENDANT

-- for that alone we should consign you to this cell forever!

Even silenced and on her knees,
Madame Mao exudes an air of defiance.

As the Attendant & Madame Mao engage in a silent stand-off, Leni warily regards the audience:

LENI

Who are...they?

ATTENDANT

We've been through this: they are society. The people. It is they who determine your rank among the *rank*.

LENI

I don't -- but they don't know me!

ATTENDANT

But they're learning. They're studying the way you behave around others and hearing about your past. They're analyzing your contributions in contrast to your offenses and working to determine whose version of events they wish to believe. Some have seen your films and have spoken highly of you -- or at least the idea they have of you -- at dinner parties. Others, not so much. Still a few more are considering your looks in the matter, for better or worse. Ultimately, all are forming an opinion of some sort. An opinion about you, or the process, depending on how they feel about the outcome. Think of them as... scientists, or historians. Or gamblers.

LENI

And...if their opinion of me is... If I'm seen as being -- ?

ATTENDANT

If you're judged to be less vile than (re: Madame Mao:) *that*, you get to leave this cell and go to another, wherein you'll be judged & ranked again. And on and on it goes.

LENI

But -- is there no chance of final ascension...out?

ATTENDANT

I shouldn't think so. Unless evidence capable of explaining and redeeming your every offense turns up. So, no. This isn't a film festival.

LENI

Then what is the point?

ATTENDANT

The point?

LENI

Why bother to rank and judge if this fate is inevitable?

ATTENDANT

...How are we to quantify & qualify, describe & stereotype, penalize & punish if we've no method by which things can be measured? Why did you Nazis bother with the triangles, stars and tattooed numbers? Why must I wear medals and ribbons? Such symbols have no impact on my fate -- I'm still forced to follow orders, endure punishment & ultimately die whether I've one brass star or 60 -- the only thing affected is public opinion.

LENI

But --

ATTENDANT

Nevertheless, to be efficient you've gotta be organized and patches, ribbons, medals, trophies and degrees give the impression of organization. And it's not as though the other cells are all the same. Some have broken toilets in lieu of buckets; some are drafty, but not drippy --

MADAME MAO

(ruing some past experience:)

-- Some house people who are very poor conversationalists; others, people who smell bad...

MADAME MAO (CONT'D)

(an aside to Leni:)

I'm speaking of Ilsa Koch & Elizabeth Báthory, respectively.
If you're lucky, you may yet get to meet them...

LENI

So Hell is no more evolved than reality television -- ?

MADAME MAO

I don't know that it's *that* bad...

LENI

-- where people are systematically pit against one another
in a kind of sadistic popularity contest that ultimately
depletes its players of all dignity while offering no
tangible reward in return?

MADAME MAO

Actually, when you put it that way...

ATTENDANT

Call it what you will. Roses by other names and all that.

MADAME MAO

He sure puts the "shakes" in Shakespeare, doesn't he?

LENI

I call it an idiotic system run by an illiterate idiot!

ATTENDANT

Are -- are you calling me an idiot?

MADAME MAO

I believe she called you an "*illiterate* idiot."

LENI

You are as you do!

The Attendant nods. His hurt apparent.

ATTENDANT

...You must keep it in mind that any intellectual or cultural
shortcomings I may demonstrate are a direct result of the
policies endorsed by pigs such as yourselves and the men
you followed -- pharisees who would teach creationism at
the expense of science, hate at the expense of happiness,
and fiction at the expense of truth.

MADAME MAO

(a roll of the eyes)

Where now did we place the world's smallest violin?

ATTENDANT

I hold you each responsible for what I learned, and failed to learn, back when my heart still beat and my mind was yet capable of change.

LENI

Our paths never even -- (crossed)

ATTENDANT

(for Leni:)

-- It's your fault that at age 10 my parents dressed me in a small uniform and led me into a big auditorium so that I could be shown film of a larger than life man speaking to a larger than life crowd about his plans to restore glory to a unhappy country... I'll never forget how thrilled I was that the man wore a uniform just like mine... that's the year I learned to march.

MADAME MAO

Marching, done right, is a -- (skill)

ATTENDANT

(for Madame Mao:)

-- At 11 I was taken on a field trip to see an opera that spoke to the blessed greatness of my nation and I learned that abandoning my individuality was the only way to express sufficient appreciation. I also learned that those most willing to conform would be rewarded with power over those less willing to conform, which is incentive enough for the disenfranchised and a real boon for the aspiring bully.

The Attendant now begins slowly circling the women in a menacing manner, daring them to interrupt him again. The women stiffen.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

By age 12 I had a clearer picture of who my enemies were then I would ever have of who I might be. And that picture was in pristine focus, supported catchy songs, and colorful banners, posters & parades...

By 13, I was...completely indoctrinated and deemed ready to graduate, having mastered loyalty & hate.

(beat)

But yes, there are huge gaps when it comes to my knowledge of Shakespeare.

And with that the Attendant walks forward to formally break the fourth wall and retrieve a podium from the back of the house. Leni watches in awe.

MADAME MAO

And so it begins...

LENI

"It?"

MADAME MAO

The trial. Word is the next room up is occupied by Irma Grese. Something to consider as you endeavor to eek your way out of here.

LENI

But -- is he to play both judge and attorney?

MADAME MAO

Also star witness and bailiff. It is a streamlined system in that way, Guantanamo-esque even, but it's certainly not without its critics.

LENI

This is a monstrosity!

MADAME MAO

We can't all have the bells & whistles of Nuremberg, Len.

The Attendant returns to position the podium between the two chairs, moving some dolls out of the way as necessary.

The Attendant takes a breath and addresses the audience:

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

Ladies and gentlemen of the People's Jury to Determine Greater and Lessor Evils Among the Historically Notorious, I humbly welcome you and look forward to your verdict.

(to Madame Mao:)

Madame Mao, aka Jiang Qing, Lan Ping and so on, we shall now evaluate whether or not your misdeeds as they relate to the orchestration of the Cultural Revolution pale in comparison to Leni Riefenstahl's misdeeds as they relate to the creation of documentaries designed to exult Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Before we hear the testimony of our witnesses, the jury will hear your statements. Jiang Qing, as you've done this so many times before, you are first.

MADAME MAO

I am not afraid to have my head chopped off!

ATTENDANT

(beat;)

Is that is your statement? You're setting a poor example --

MADAME MAO

I was merely Mao's mad dog; trained to bite those he asked me to bite and loyal to the end. Ergo I am as blameless as an adorable, abused pit bull puppy!

ATTENDANT

Christ -- how do you plead?

MADAME MAO

Innocent!

ATTENDANT

You know right well you're beyond a plea of innocence --

MADAME MAO

Fine! Less guilty.

ATTENDANT

Less *evil*. And now you, Ms. Riefenstahl, a statement & plea.

LENI

I... I am neither guilty nor evil.

ATTENDANT

...Right. Do you wish to make a statement, as well?

Leni opens her mouth to speak, but thinks better of it. She shakes her head 'no.'

ATTENDANT

Very well. I now call the first witness to the podium, a former Red Guard who served the Cultural Revolution...

The Attendant now goes through a rather sad routine wherein he, acting as Judge, must question himself about his experiences as a Red Guard.

NOTE: When playing the Red Guard The Attendant channels a nervous young man.

Leni watches in bewildered horror, while Madame Mao plays along.

ATTENDANT (as Judge)

Please state your name.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)

I go by Comrade and I am but one of the millions of young people who committed ghastly acts in an effort to resolutely demonstrate my devotion to my country.

ATTENDANT (as Judge)

Would you please describe these acts for the jury.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)

(with great difficulty)

I - I once used pliers to pull out a woman's teeth. She was targeted because she was a Muslim and had more faith in Allah than in Chairman Mao. I then used the pliers to twist off her nose and her ears and then hacked her to death with a hammer. I've driven nails into the skulls of university workers who were deemed too intellectual and I've cut out the tongues of people who dared think it possible that a parent's love for their child might prove any competition to Mao's love for the people... Finally, I was witness to the suicide of a woman I helped rape with a pole and I have firsthand knowledge of what gunpowder can do when set alight in a man's nostrils.

Leni winces at the acts described;
Madame Mao is not impressed.

ATTENDANT (as Judge)

You may now address either defendant as you wish.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)

I wish to address Madame Mao and to use the interrogation tactics I learned as a Red Guard: criticism and struggle.

The Attendant approaches Madame Mao.
His movements are tentative at first.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
 (singing quietly)
 We are Chairman Mao's Red Guards,
 Firm in our proletarian stand --

Madame Mao taps her feet in rhythm.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
 (building in volume)
 We unite with the masses and plunging into the battle
 We wipe out all the demons from the land...

MADAME MAO
 You really do have a lovely voice.
 Were you castrated or were you classically --

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
 (suddenly violently loud)
 -- Dance!

MADAME MAO
 ...What?

The Attendant produces a gun & thrusts
 its barrel in Madame Mao's face.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
 Dance! Dance as you did in those operas that made
 you think you were some kind of gift to the world.

MADAME MAO
 (re: the pistol)
 You know... I'm already dead.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
 (cocking the gun)
 Still I can shoot you full of holes -- dance!

Madame Mao rises & begins to dance
 a simple, graceful dance at gunpoint.

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
 (singing the way Hamlet might)
 Remember that year when she gave us crab apples?
 Aunt Jiang Qing really liked us then...
 How pitiful that today, those who were given fruit,
 Got handcuffed and put in a pen...

Madame Mao begins to tire.
Her dancing turns clumsy
and increasingly pathetic.

MADAME MAO
(gasping for breath)
I can't say I'm familiar with that song...

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
(gun still pointed)
It was one of many that were sung behind your back.

MADAME MAO
That would explain that... May I please stop now?

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
(giving her a death stare)
No. I'm making a metaphor of you.

MADAME MAO
I see.

The Attendant falls in line
with Madame Mao's dancing.

They dance side by side until his
dance starts to evolve into movement
reminiscent of a martial arts routine &
he swiftly kicks Madame Mao in the gut.

As the pain forces her to her knees:

ATTENDANT (as Red Guard)
It was your suggestion that kung fu kicks and death stares be
introduced into ballet routines. Don't you remember? You said
"The dancing looks all right, but where are the guns?
Where are the grenades?" Here are the guns, Madame Mao...

The Attendant cocks the gun & aims it
at Madame Mao's forehead. Their pose
is suggestive of Eddie Adam's photo of
the execution of a Viet Cong prisoner.

The Attendant's body shakes with rage.
Then, abruptly, he puts the gun to his
own temple & pulls the trigger...

ATTENDANT (as Judge)
BANG!

Madame Mao & Leni are both startled.

ATTENDANT (as Judge)

(as he tucks the gun away:)

Yet another suicide we must attribute to you, Madame Mao... Happily, he had the foresight to prepare a closing statement.

The Attendant produces a sad-looking hand-written note. He demonstratively unfolds the letter to better show off the childlike handwriting contained within...

The Attendant reads:

ATTENDANT

Confucius, the great Chinese thinker whose statue Madame Mao vandalized as a girl and whose ideals she would go on to ban during the Cultural Revolution, once said: "to see and listen to the wicked is already the beginning of wickedness" so I should not be surprised to find I've been condemned to spend my afterlife in this place. I do think it's terribly unfair, though, because my wickedness isn't my fault. It's -- please point to Madame Mao --

(The Attendant points as instructed by the note)

-- her fault! And I ask that the jury keep that in mind.

The Attendant studies the paper for a moment before tucking it into his pocket. He looks to Madame Mao:

ATTENDANT

Written by a 13 year old... Jiang Qing, your rebuttal?

Madame Mao glares at the Attendant. Then:

MADAME MAO

I did no harm to Confucius. Once upon a time I removed a kerchief from his cold concrete head -- nothing more.

ATTENDANT

No, much more. You defecated on everything he represented. Confucian philosophy operates on the tenet that what one does not wish for oneself, one ought not do to anyone else; what one finds desirable for oneself, one ought to be willing to grant to others. Honesty, empathetic morality and benevolence were at the core of his teachings. None of these adjectives can be applied to either of you.

LENI

-- I'm honest! I'm...

ATTENDANT

-- Instead of using your talent to illuminate and inspire, you used it to corrupt & deceive, making you each accomplice to the murder of millions of people and ideas.

LENI

That - that may be true of her, but not of me. She held genuine power, I was merely an artist --

ATTENDANT

(wincing with disdain)

Ms. Riefenstahl, for you, of all people, to play dumb to the power an artist wields...

(beat)

A little girl, burned and naked, calls for help as she runs along a dusty road in Vietnam having just survived a napalm attack. A photographer, Nick Ut, captures the event on film and the resulting photograph helps end a war. Is that not power?

That 35 years later, to the day, he would photograph a teary eyed Paris Hilton as she is being driven back to jail, yet another entitled socialite who thinks it's unfair that she should have to play by the rules of the commoners -- that's its own irony. The point, however, is that those who choose to capitalize on the power of art to move people must assume a degree of responsibility for the effect their art has on the world.

Did not your own Führer declare that "Art is a noble mission"?

Madame Mao stealthily jots
the quote in her journal.

LENI

Yes, but he went on to explain: "Artists will speak a language, regardless of whether others understand them. They will suffer hardship rather than become unfaithful to the star that guides them from within." That was my curse! Artists, we are destined, *doomed*, and ultimately rendered powerless by the stars & muses that demand our attention. We see, hear -- are capable of obeying nothing else!

ATTENDANT

That has been your perennial excuse --

LENI

I was -- I am an artist through and through!

ATTENDANT

And you've been granted such leniency as a result, as if we're to believe that talent inevitably must be accompanied by some contrary moral handicap that needs be excused lest the great gift wander away. Kevin Carter, Roman Polanski, Michael Jackson, Woody Allen... But tell me: Do you ever wonder how many other artists were denied such clemency as a result of the cause to which you hitched your vision? Artists like Janina Tolick, Victor Fernandez and Boris Taslitzky, who sketched on papers full of bullet-holes as they rotted in Terezin; Zoran Music, who tinted paintings with the rust he scraped from the jail bars at Parchav; Abbe Daligult, who stole plaster from the camp infirmary and culled wood from her guards' chairs so that she might continue to serve her muse...

Leni is silent.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

All the nameless others who were forced to illustrate manuals instructing guards in the ways of handling prisoners, thereby making it easier for their captors to torture them. And the list goes on: Leo Haas, Bedrich Fritta, Karel Fleishmann, Otto Ungar, Felix Bloch. Josef Nassy...

LENI

(quietly)

I don't know those names..

ATTENDANT

No. You wouldn't.

(beat)

And yet you did you knew the phone number to their murderer's bunker. And you knew the names of all those men who, while you and your muse were commiserating over wrecked rolls of negative, were swallowing cyanide pills or hanging in gallows -- for these were the men who made your reputation possible.

Leni turns away.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

But you lived on -- to complain that people were stealing footage of the death march you mistook for a parade, to lie about your age so that you might learn to scuba dive, to publish photos of a tribe of people who'd only lose everything when exposed in such a way...

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

(beat; quietly incredulous)

Then there are the savants who continue to adore you despite your making a career out of poisoning minds with propaganda you insist be called "art" -- that they can look beyond the lamp-shades and soap that men you called friends were making out of *human beings* to focus instead on some innovative camera shot you used to capture and celebrate Satan himself -- it is really... something.

Leni puts her hands over her ears.

She collapses & begins to slowly rock back & forth like a traumatized child.

Madame Mao is enthralled by the act.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Like one who can look upon a city of devastated buildings only to say 'yes but you know I never liked that architecture to begin with...' It's psychopathic. I will use this as the basis for your defense: clinically, you're a psychopath.

LENI

No...

ATTENDANT

(he produces a DSM-IV manual:)

If it's good enough for Charlies Manson...

(finding the page, he reads:)

The prototypical psychopath is an exploitative, egotistic, rapacious, opportunistic, reckless & sentimentally immature control freak. Violently impatient, emotionally labile, unstable, erratic, untrustworthy...

She lacks a sense of guilt or remorse for any harm she may have caused the world, choosing instead to rationalize her behavior, blame someone else, or deny it all together. Her lack of empathy results in tactlessness, contemptuousness and egregious insensitivity, all of which belie a tendency to make a good first impression. Yes, such monsters *do* have a superficial charm about them, empowered by a willingness to say anything without concern for accuracy or truth.

They are pathological liars, manipulators and con artists, people whose relationship to the world is characterized by shallow displays of surface emotion all generated for the sole purpose personal gain.

MADAME MAO

(nodding as she observes Leni:)

I dare say you've hit the nail on the head!

As the Attendant is about to admonish Madame Mao, Leni stands to stumble drunkenly and dramatically down-stage to confront the audience jury.

LENI

No! No, please! I would like -- I would like to explain. Please. I would like you to all understand what it was I saw in the man... The man who is responsible for...(she gestures vaguely), and all that is good and bad about me. He...We... We fade in on the man -- this nothing-man who, yes, we'll come to realize is non-Aryan and not even German born. He...wears a uniform that seems too fancy for someone of his stature. With his big nose and ridiculous moustache, we don't believe for a moment he's survived any real battles in any real wars; he is all that is negatively conjured up when we think of the word "average." And yet... One can't help but notice that he steps with such confidence when he rises to stand at an austere podium on a cold, bleak, grey day so that he might address a desperate crowd for whom tomorrow is not a gift, but rather a burden.

(beat; guilty reverence for the man growing ever apparent)

And then he *speaks*... And we get to see the world through this man's eyes, and all is changed. The dragon of despair is slain and the people gathered are moved and made glorious by his impassioned plans. Anyone -- anyone! -- would want to live in the country he said he sought to build that day. And yes, I in particular wanted to believe it was all true. And yes, I loved the hype, but more than that I wanted to live in the gorgeousness he described and said would one day be real. He spoke of a people ascending, creating an ideal for the world that would inspire both power & grace... He told us we were going to be o.k. And you must understand: He didn't speak of camps or barbed wire or stoves or piles of bones. He spoke of hope & healing -- a future that was intoxicating. And I, who had little-girl dreams of being loved for some bit of pretty I added to the world, wanted to believe him so much so that I got a job at the factory that promised to package the man and his seemingly beautiful plan. And I was far from alone! The darker reality of his agenda, which is all anyone now can see, was hidden under layers of charms -- you must understand that.

(beat; lost in the memory)

And he *saw* me...Took my hand, looked me in the eye and spoke with adoration of my *art* -- not of me, but of my ability to capture the spirit and nobility of potential realized. I was captivated, yes, infected and flattered.

LENI (CONT'D)

I wanted to be the brilliant filmmaker he told me I was. He didn't pinch my ass or try to seduce me like so many others before -- rather he sent me flowers when I was ill and asked after my Mother...He defined for me a place in the world -- told me what I was, called me an artist...

Leni is overcome by the memory.

She starts to sob.

LENI (CON'T)

(beat; through tears)

But I didn't mean for people to get hurt. I never meant to hurt people. I just didn't know, didn't understand --

ATTENDANT

-- Didn't care, couldn't be bothered...

Leni's arms flail in the frustration of being so misunderstood. She finally collapses again on the floor, a heap of tears and torment.

Madame Mao jumps to her feet & applauds enthusiastically. The Attendant glowers and her applause reluctantly stops.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

(to Leni; softening a bit)

You mined for beauty, managed to find it in the ugliest people by maneuvering a lens just so. There's something to be said for that ability to be sure. But you weren't sorry when you needed to be sorry, Ms. Riefenstahl. And you lied. You may have believed every lie you told, but lies and dreams don't go over well with those who are suffering truths and nightmares. In the end, your work will be remembered without question, but not because it was forward-thinking or masterfully edited. It will be remembered because it is testament to an abhorrent era that must not be repeated - a time in which innocence and art were hijacked by malignant narcissists.

(with a nod to Madame Mao:)

Perhaps being expunged from history *is* better.

MADAME MAO

...Only if you're blotted out completely.

Beat.

ATTENDANT

But I've lost myself. I call the court to order once more.

The Attendant returns to
his post behind the podium.

ATTENDANT

Ms. Riefenstahl, I must ask that you take up your seat. Our next witness, a member of the Hitler Youth who became a guard at a certain internment camp in Salzberg, would like to speak about the gypsy extras you deny hand-picking for your film "Tiefland" --

LENI

No - please...no more testimony. I -- just...please...

Leni looks from the Attendant to Madame Mao, desperate for any brand of mercy.

Madame Mao regards Leni.
The women's eyes meet.

They share a complicated moment.
Madame Mao turns to the Attendant:

MADAME MAO

(turning to the Attendant)

Don't you think we can all imagine what this Hitler Youth-turned casting associate would have to say about Leni? Doubtless she inspired him to become interested in Hitler in much the same way George Lucas inspired people to become interested in the stars and space and wearing costumes to multiplexes. I propose we skip his testimony and allow the good people of the jury to have their vote now.

ATTENDANT

You're putting yourself at a disadvantage --

MADAME MAO

Yes. That's right.

Leni flashes Madame Mao a look of humbled gratitude; Madame Mao offers a Mona Lisa smile in return.

As the Attendant adjusts his podium, Madame Mao winks & gives a thumbs-up sign to the audience. Leni looks upon the audience the way a non-swimmer looks at an ocean that must be crossed.

ATTENDANT

Very well. May I have some more lights?

Lights come up just high enough to
allow the Attendant to count hands...

++++
Please note: there are two possible conventions that may be
used to end this play:

The first convention asks that the jury/audience vote for
the woman they believe to be the more vile of the two and
then the endings have been written to accommodate all
possible outcomes.

The second convention, should a live vote been deemed
undesirable, is the alternate ending you'll see starting on
page 80, which would pick up from the bottom of page 74.

++++

ENDING BY AUDIENCE VOTE:

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I now ask that you please
submit a single vote in the direction of the woman you
believe to be the more evil of the two who sit before you.
Because poverty is the rule here, you shall vote by a show of
hands and on this note, I ask that you please keep your hands
in the air until I finish counting. I thank you in advance
for your cooperation.

Now: would those who find Fraeulein Leni Riefenstahl to be
the more evil party, please raise your hands...

The Attendant counts and writes down
the tally on a slip of paper.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

And would those who find Madame Jiang Qing Mao to be the more
evil one, please now raise your hands....

The Attendant again counts and writes
down the tally.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

Madame Mao, Ms. Riefenstahl and ladies and gentleman of the
jury, we have a verdict...

The Attendant then announces the name of the woman deemed most evil by the audience. As there are three possible outcomes to the voting, there are three possible endings:

1.) In the case of Madame Mao being deemed more evil:

ATTENDANT

If the subjects would please stand...

Madame Mao and Leni both stand.
Madame Mao runs a hand over her hair to assure she looks her best.
Leni nervously follows her lead.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

After carefully dissecting the spectacle presented today, the People's Jury has determined that you, Madame Mao, are once again the more evil party.

Leni's knees go weak as relief, shock and a bit of guilt converge. She finds herself unable to look at the audience.

Madame Mao fights the hurt with a forced smile. She scans the audience like a parent imparting a guilt trip on a child.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

Madame Mao, you will therefore remain in this cell until another arrives who might better challenge the degree of your atrocities. Ms. Riefenstahl, you will now follow me to an alternate chamber.

Leni numbly steps toward the Attendant, suddenly a little ashamed at her luck in the face of Madame Mao's misfortune.

Madame Mao catches Leni's look of pity as the Attendant leads her to the door.

MADAME MAO

(a whisper to Leni)

Once again you eek by... --

(turning to the audience)

-- making Nazi-sympathizers out of so many...

And with that, Madame Mao returns to her seat and her sewing. She starts to hum the tune to "The East is Red" as the Attendant leads Leni through the large steel door.

The steel door slams and Madame Mao ceases humming and sewing for a beat. She allows herself a second of sadness.

The second passes and Madame Mao starts to stitch and hum again, her humming grows defiantly louder as the lights start to fade.

FIN.

2.) In the case of Leni being deemed more evil:

ATTENDANT

If the subjects would please stand...

Madame Mao and Leni both stand.

Madame Mao runs a hand over her hair to assure she looks her best. Leni nervously follows her lead.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

After carefully dissecting the spectacle presented today, the People's Jury has determined that you, Leni Riefenstahl, are the more evil party.

Madame Mao lets out a SQUEAL of glee before racing to her chair to collect the belongings she's accumulated over the years. She beams at the audience as she tosses her things into the basket of fabric remnants.

Leni's knees wobble as the news hits. She looks around the room like a lost child.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

You will therefore remain in this cell until another arrives who might better challenge the degree of your atrocities. Madame Mao, you will follow me to an alternate chamber, where your crimes will be matched, at last, against those of your husband.

Madame Mao pauses at this news,
her enthusiasm dulled a bit.

Leni looks to Madame Mao for some clue
as to how to behave, but Madame Mao,
basket in hand, now stands at the steel
door, anxious to leave.

LENI

No... This can't be right. This isn't... I was an artist.
Only an artist -- I...

The Attendant gestures that it was the
jury's decision and strolls past Leni
to open the large steel door for Madame
Mao. Inside the doorway, Madame Mao
turns back:

MADAME MAO

Beware the ghosts, Len.

And with that the steel door slams
and the lights fade as the sound of
DRIPPING gradually swallows the sound
of Leni's PLEAS.

FIN.

3.) And in the unlikely case of a tie:

ATTENDANT

If the subjects would please stand...

Madame Mao and Leni both stand.

Madame Mao runs a hand over her
hair to assure she looks her best.
Leni nervously follows her lead.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

Leni Riefenstahl, Madame Mao, The People's Jury has voted and the result is...a tie. As there is no higher authority who may serve as tie-breaker, per the guidelines, neither of you will be leaving this cell.

Leni's knees wobble as the news hits. She looks around like a lost child.

Leni looks to Madame Mao for some clue as to how to behave. Madame Mao shakes her head and returns to her chair.

LENI

No... This can't be right. This isn't...

The Attendant gestures that it was the jury's decision & therefore fault. He collects his podium, strolls past the women and is soon swallowed by the large steel door which slams behind him. In unison, the women cover their ears and wince.

Leni numbly return to her chair. It is quiet for a beat -- until the sound of dripping begins again.

Beat.

LENI

I wish...

MADAME MAO

...Yes. Me, too.

The lights fade.

FIN...

++++
NON-VOTE ENDING:

In the event a theatre doesn't wish to or is unable to contend with the convention of voting, the play can conclude as follows from page 74:

ATTENDANT

But I've lost myself. I call the court to order once more.

The Attendant returns to his post behind the podium.

ATTENDANT

Ms. Riefenstahl, I must ask that you take up your seat. Our next witness, a member of the Hitler Youth who became a guard at a certain internment camp in Salzberg, would like to speak about the gypsy extras you deny hand-picking for your film "Tiefland" --

LENI

No - please...no more testimony. I -- just...please...

Leni looks from the Attendant to Madame Mao, desperate for any brand of mercy.

Madame Mao regards Leni.

The women's eyes meet.

They share a complicated moment.

Madame Mao turns to the Attendant:

MADAME MAO

(turning to the Attendant)

Don't you think we can all imagine what this Hitler Youth-turned casting associate would have to say about Leni? Doubtless she inspired him to become interested in Hitler in much the same way George Lucas inspired people to become interested in the stars and space and wearing costumes to multiplexes. I propose we skip his testimony and allow the good people of the jury to have their vote now.

ATTENDANT

You're putting yourself at a disadvantage --

MADAME MAO

Yes. That's right.

Leni flashes Madame Mao a look of humbled gratitude; Madame Mao offers a Mona Lisa smile in return.

As the Attendant adjusts his podium, Madame Mao winks & gives a thumbs-up sign to the audience. Leni looks upon the audience the way a non-swimmer looks at an ocean that must be crossed.

ATTENDANT

Very well. May I have some more lights?

Lights come up just high enough to make the audience feel exposed.

ATTENDANT (CON'T)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, and all you ghosts who were present for the once-upon-a-time events that implicated these women, you are being asked to decide how you feel about this evening's presentation, and also who you'd choose to redeem if but one could be redeemed. There is much to consider, of course: the role of preconceived notions regarding these women's talents, the obstacles they faced that are arguably responsible for making them who they became, the validity of the information you were exposed to and the manner in which it was presented, the tears, the beauty, the fandom... Yes, it's really rather a lot to consider and I recognize that such matters are apt to take some soul searching, I therefore shall not expect your verdict tonight. It would be wrong to rush such things. I'd only ask that you deliberate, perhaps over a cocktail or some coffee, and get back to me.

LENI

-- What does he mean he's not expecting the verdict tonight?

MADAME MAO

Shhh!

The Attendant now starts to tidy the space. Sweeping the dolls back into a heap, restoring books to their place and so forth, conversing as he cleans:

ATTENDANT

-- I advocate going with alcohol for the deliberation, but then you see what I must deal with every evening. If you're of an addictive nature, maybe an herbal tea would be best.

He surveys the space a final time
before collecting his podium & heading
to the door. The women watch in horror.

LENI

No..! This can't be right. This isn't...

Addressing the jury a last time:

ATTENDANT

Oh, and to those of you who feel the very act of judging is beneath you, who feel put upon when the jury duty notices arrive or you're asked to choose sides because you wish to believe that you're simply too skilled at 'seeing the pros and cons of each,' who say things like 'but what do I know of what they've been through?' or 'how can I be certain of the truth?' -- do recognize the luxury inherent in such moral ambiguity. Because if you were at Nuremberg or any of the show trials that defined justice in Asia or the Soviet Union in the 1930s, well... suffice it to say you would have been forced to take a stand. Unless, of course, you had the kind of notoriety that made you the (with a nod to Leni and Madame Mao) exception.

With that, the Attendant exits, the door SLAMMING in his wake. In unison, the women cover their ears and wince.

It is quiet for a beat -- until the sound of dripping begins again.

LENI

I wish...

MADAME MAO

...Yes. Me, too.

The women turn to look at each other.

A final beat.

The woman SCREAM and LUNGE at each other.

Black-out.

FIN...