



PLAYING LENI

by David Robson & John Stanton

EXCERPT

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Playing Leni

By

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Characters:

LENI RIEFENSTAHL: Early 40's.

SOLDIER: Early 30's

Time and Place:

1946, Kitzbuhel, Austria

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

SCENE ONE

(Lights rise on SOLDIER
outside LENI's mountain
lodge.)

SOLDIER

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

(LENI RIEFENSTAHL enters carrying a
suitcase and a large film can, which
drops to the ground.)

SOLDIER (cont'd)

What the hell are you doing? Jesus!

LENI

You gave me no time.

(LENI picks up film can.)

SOLDIER

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

LENI

This is an outrage!

SOLDIER

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

LENI

Have you no decorum?

SOLDIER

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

(LENI tries but again can't manage the can of
film.)

LENI

I can't carry all of this.

SOLDIER

Then leave it.

What? LENI

You heard me. SOLDIER

You're joking. LENI

Screw it! SOLDIER

(SOLDIER kicks the can.)

No, no, no! LENI

(LENI goes after the can and clutches it.)

What's in there anyway? SOLDIER

None of your Goddamn business! LENI

Some kind of movie, right...? SOLDIER

(SOLDIER goes to can.)

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

I kinda like your spunk, you know? SOLDIER

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

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

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

SOLDIER

You'd be surprised the things I can appreciate.

LENI

I don't think so.

(SOLDIER cocks the pistol. LENI hands him
the can.)

SOLDIER

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

LENI

Like what?

SOLDIER

It's an expression.

LENI

I want it back.

SOLDIER

I don't think so.

LENI

Why not?

SOLDIER

I wanna take a look.

LENI

It's not something you want--

SOLDIER

Gimme a little credit.

LENI

Why should I? What could you want with it?

SOLDIER

Evidence.

LENI

For what?

SOLDIER

For your trial, of course.

LENI

What trial—what are you—?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

How do you know my name?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

The nerve!

SOLDIER

I've seen your movies.

LENI

What are you talking about?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

What could the army want with me?

SOLDIER

You're famous.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

You'd be surprised, get moving!

LENI

Are you arresting me?

SOLDIER

Got the handcuffs to prove it.

LENI

You came alone.

SOLDIER

I told my boss I could find you myself.

LENI

You fashion yourself a cowboy.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

So you're my escort.

SOLDIER

In a manner of speaking.

LENI

Good, then you should carry this too.

(LENI drops her suitcase.)

SOLDIER

But I ain't your bellboy. Pick it up. I said pick it up!

(She does.)

LENI

Where are we going?

SOLDIER

My car is a little further.

LENI

That's not what I mean.

SOLDIER

I'm not answering any questions.

LENI

Whatever you think I've done—

SOLDIER

Start walking.

LENI

I'm not what you think.

Right, right...

SOLDIER

No, really. Listen to me.

LENI

All I know is that you made movies for Hitler.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

Do what again?

SOLDIER

What are you doing?

LENI

I'm acting.

SOLDIER

Wrong! That's not the line.

LENI

What do you mean?

SOLDIER

You must say the line, as written.

LENI

I was pretty close.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

That's what I said.

SOLDIER

That's NOT what you said.

LENI

What did I say?

SOLDIER

LENI

It's not worth repeating.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

Just say the line.

SOLDIER

What is it again?

LENI

Read it!

(SOLDIER reads the line to himself.)

SOLDIER

Got it.

LENI

You have it?

SOLDIER

I said I got it.

LENI

(Turning; to off)

Can we take this back? (To SOLDIER) Are you not the American soldier sent to arrest me?

SOLDIER

Yes.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Right, right..

LENI

No, really. Listen to me.

SOLDIER

All I know is you're a true artist.

LENI

You make me blush.

SOLDIER

Maybe you could teach me a thing or two.

LENI

Only if you'll let me—

SOLDIER

Wait, wait—hold it!

LENI

What?

SOLDIER

I can't say this.

LENI

Why not?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

You think you can do better?

SOLDIER

Sure I can. You got a pen?

(LENI finds a pen, hands it to him. SOLDIER puts down can, takes up script, and begins writing.)

LENI

I wasn't the only one.

SOLDIER

What's that?

LENI

Who made films for...

SOLDIER

Yeah, but you were the best one.

LENI
You've seen my films.

SOLDIER
More than once—

LENI
How many times?

SOLDIER
Does it really matter?

LENI
--But why?

SOLDIER
Let's say I took a special interest.

LENI
They're in German.

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

LENI
Well, if you've seen them, then you know I did the work I was paid to do. That is all.

SOLDIER
I think you liked it.

LENI
I don't have to listen to such bold-faced lies!

(LENI turns around and walks away. SOLDIER points the gun at her.)

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

LENI
Not bad.

SOLDIER
"Not bad"? That's good!

LENI

It's not so good.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

(reading)

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

SOLDIER

What do you think?

LENI

It's pretty good.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

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

(SOLDIER points gun at her.)

SOLDIER

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

LENI

(reading)

I have no weapon, I can assure you.

SOLDIER

I can't just take your word for it.

LENI

Oh cut! (to off) Can we take this back?

SOLDIER

Cut what? We're just reading.

LENI

You and your lines!

SOLDIER

Good dialogue is important!

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Well...O.K.

(LENI turns and exits.)

LENI

(under her breath; going off)

Amateur.

SOLDIER

Who yells action—

LENI

(off)

I ALWAYS YELL ACTION! ACTION!

(LENI enters with bag and film can.)

SOLDIER

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

LENI

You gave me no time to pack my things.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

This is an outrage!

SOLDIER

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

LENI

What did you call me?

SOLDIER

Doll face, sweetheart!

LENI

Cut! What the fuck are you doing?

SOLDIER

I thought it was alright.

LENI

But those aren't the lines.

SOLDIER

You said I could improvise.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

I thought I sounded like Bogie.

LENI

Listen, don't adlib. You're not good at it.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

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

SOLDIER

But you get to say whatever you like.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

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

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Oh my God! Really?

LENI

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

SOLDIER

This whole thing is starting to give me the willies!

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Is that necessary? You're already here.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

This isn't writing!

LENI

I'm an actor; I write in space.

SOLDIER

What does that mean?

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Alright. But this is the last time.

LENI

I think we worked out the kinks. Now keep your dialogue to a minimum. I carry the water in this scene anyway.

(LENI exits. He waits. She enters.)

SOLDIER

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

LENI

You gave me no time.

SOLDIER

(jumping on her line)

We ain't going on holiday!

LENI

Pacing! (she turns) This is an outrage!

SOLDIER

This here is my time you're wasting.

(She tries but again can't manage the can of film.)

LENI

I can't carry all of this.

SOLDIER

Then leave it.

(SOLDIER kicks the can.)

LENI

No, no, no! FOR THE LOVE OF GOD!

(LENI goes after it, picks it up and clutches it.)

SOLDIER

What's in there anyway?

LENI

None of your Goddamn business!

SOLDIER

Some kind of movie, right...?

LENI

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

SOLDIER

I kinda like your spunk, you know?

LENI

Well, I don't care much for yours.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

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

SOLDIER

You'd be surprised the things I can appreciate.

LENI

I don't think so.

(SOLDIER cocks the pistol. She hands him the can.)

SOLDIER

Wow. That was quite good!

LENI

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

SOLDIER

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

LENI

This is an outrage!

SOLDIER

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

LENI

Have you no decorum?

SOLDIER

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

(LENI gestures to film can.)

LENI

I can't carry all of this.

Then leave it.

SOLDIER

What?

LENI

You heard me.

SOLDIER

You're joking.

LENI

Screw it.

SOLDIER

(SOLDIER kicks a can.)

LENI

No, no, no!

(LENI goes after it, clutches the can to her.)

SOLDIER

What are you getting so bent out of shape about?

LENI

Would you kick defenseless child?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

However factually incorrect, still, quite a nice line.

SOLDIER

I thought so.

LENI

Still rolling!

SOLDIER

What's in there anyway?

LENI

None of your Goddamn business!

SOLDIER

Some kind of movie, right...?

(LENI rises and turns to go.)

LENI

I've had just about enough of this.

SOLDIER

You like livin'?

(SOLDIER aims his gun)

LENI

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

SOLDIER

No one would ever accuse you of being defenseless.

(LENI looks, showing disapproval of his line reading.)

SOLDIER

Sorry, I shanked that one!

LENI

(to off)

Keep rolling! What—this? You couldn't appreciate something like this.

SOLDIER

You'd be surprised the things I can appreciate.

LENI

I don't think so.

(SOLDIER cocks the pistol. She hands him the can.)

SOLDIER

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

LENI

Like what?

SOLDIER

It's an expression.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

I don't think so.

LENI

Why not?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

It's not something you would want to--

SOLDIER

Gimme a little credit. I graduated Dartmouth!

LENI

What could you want with it?

SOLDIER

Evidence.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Oh! Evidence!

(She turns for close up.)

LENI

For what, might I ask?

SOLDIER

For your trial, of course.

LENI

What trial—what are you—?

SOLDIER

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

passed.

LENI

I don't understand.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

How do you know my name?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

(to off)

Mark this. I will rise and go to the tree.

SOLDIER

There's no tree.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

You're famous.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

You'd be surprised, now move along.

LENI

You came alone.

SOLDIER

I told my boss I could find you myself.

LENI

You fashion yourself a cowboy.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

So you're my escort.

SOLDIER

--In a manner of speaking.

(SOLDIER takes out handcuffs.)

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Is that so?

LENI

(to off)

Follow me! (LENI turns and walks to him. To SOLDIER) If you don't believe me, frisk me.

(Slowly, starting from top down, SOLDIER frisks her. LENI shows signs of enjoying the process.)

SOLDIER

Can we do this in a movie?

LENI

(to off)

I hope you're in tight on this! Follow his hands. Still rolling!

(SOLDIER finishes frisking, steps back.)

LENI (cont'd)

Do you believe me now?

SOLDIER

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

LENI

(re: his line)

Putrid. (stepping to him) Anything else you know?

SOLDIER

Such as?

LENI

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

SOLDIER

What do you mean?

(LENI runs her hand slowly across his cheek.)

LENI

You farm boys are no naïve.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Stop.

(SOLDIER grabs her hand.)

LENI

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

SOLDIER

That's not...what? No!

LENI

Work with it!

SOLDIER

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

LENI

You Americans are such honorable men.

SOLDIER

We try.

LENI

Whatever it is you think I've done!

SOLDIER

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

LENI

I was never Hitler's mistress.

SOLDIER

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

LENI

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

SOLDIER

Can we please just go?!

LENI

I won't betray my country!

SOLDIER

What country?! There isn't one left!

LENI

LIAR!

SOLDIER

Let's go!

LENI

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

SOLDIER

I'm not sure--

LENI

You and the Goddamn lines!

SOLDIER

Not that. We really have to be going.

LENI

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

SOLDIER

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

LENI

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

SOLDIER

I knew it!

LENI

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

SOLDIER

We have a drive to make!

(SOLDIER reaches out to take her arm.)

LENI

Exteriors! Yes! The scene was stagnating. Needs a change. Let's take it on the road. I do my best thinking in the arms of Nature!

(LENI turns and walks off.
SOLDIER follows.)

