

**Screenplay for the film "1924 – Vladimir Lenin. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze"**  
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**Screenplay Summary:**

*The text recounts Lenin's final years, depicting a man whose entire life revolves around power, even in physical decline. After his first stroke in 1922, he is moved to Gorki and treated not by party doctors but by famous foreign specialists, since he considers "doctor-comrades" to be incompetent. For a short time he occupies himself with growing mushrooms, tending rabbits, and even weaving a basket, but as soon as he can write again, he returns obsessively to political repression and control.*

*A central thread is Lenin's deep hostility toward the Russian intelligentsia. He pushes for the arrest and expulsion of hundreds of intellectuals, including the elderly historian Rozhkov, who becomes a personal obsession. He introduces an amendment to the Criminal Code imposing the death penalty on those who return from exile. Teachers, doctors and writers are portrayed as enemies of Soviet power who use their education to sabotage socialism. In a famous letter to Gorky, Lenin declares that intellectuals who consider themselves "the brain of the nation" are in fact "its shit." At the same time, he radicalizes his anti-religious stance, calling all notions of God an "unspeakable abomination" and supporting the execution of priests: "the more executions there are, the better."*

*The text also highlights the dark personal dimension of Lenin's last years. Already in 1921 he asks for poison, and in 1923 a request for potassium cyanide, conveyed via his wife to Stalin, is formally discussed in the Politburo. Stalin refuses to give him poison, not out of compassion, but because he sees no need: he is convinced that "Lenin is kaput" and argues that the Politburo must already govern as if Lenin were gone.*

*Against this background, the succession struggle takes shape. Lenin dictates what later becomes known as his "testament," warning that relations between Stalin and Trotsky represent more than half the danger of a split in the party. Stalin, as General Secretary, has concentrated enormous power and is "too rude"; Trotsky is highly capable but overly self-confident and enamored of administrative methods. For Lenin, the greatest threat is not cruelty but a "split" in the party—that is, any threat to unified power. After Lenin's death, Stalin will defeat Trotsky, adopt and twist some of Trotsky's economic ideas for his own five-year plans, and destroy all opposition, including those who remember the earlier Lenin.*

*The text shows that even before Lenin's death, Stalin is thinking about the political use of the leader's body: rejecting cremation, proposing preservation by embalming, and pushing for a special tomb on Red Square. Despite initial resistance from Trotsky and others, a decision is taken to keep Lenin's body in a vault by the Kremlin wall. The autopsy is widely publicized; the brain and heart are transported under heavy security; disputes arise over whether the body belongs to the family, the state, or the Communist Party. Lenin's corpse is turned into both a political relic and a mass spectacle.*

*Meanwhile, ordinary people mourn Lenin mainly because of the NEP, which has brought back some food and trade after years of hunger. Stalin quickly grasps the power mechanism at work: first confiscate everything, then return a little that means survival, and people will be grateful. Decades later, Khrushchev will revive Lenin's critical remarks about Stalin's "rudeness" and use*

*Krupskaya's complaints to contrast the two figures and rehabilitate Lenin after Stalin's death. Yet with the flood of information during perestroika, a different picture emerges: Stalin is not a tragic deviation from Leninism but its logical heir, continuing Lenin's line of one-party dictatorship, terror, and development "in the name of power and against freedom."*

## **Screenplay:**

1924. Vladimir Lenin

On January 21, 1924, Lenin died. A worker, Golyadkin, from the First Shoe Factory, spoke before his comrades and said:

"Many people say that Comrade Lenin is dead. No, he is not dead, he is alive. That over there is only the body, but he himself is with us."

Lenin's comrades began to prepare his funeral in advance, with mixed feelings. Practically from 1922 onward. The chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, Kalinin, said:

"If we are going to bury Vladimir Ilyich, the funeral must be such as the world has never yet seen."

All the while Lenin was dying, the main players around him were thinking about power.

Throughout all the months of his illness, Lenin himself was also thinking about power. It was hard for him to think about anything else. He was deeply indifferent to literature and divided it into useful and useless. According to his own words, he had thrown away his pectoral cross at the age of sixteen.

He had no patience for music. He would fall asleep even at Wagner, whom he was supposed to love. By that time, Inessa Armand was already dead. He had no children. The main meaning and the main success of his entire life was power. That is what he thought about.

He managed to create a powerful terrorist organization. It seized the country. Through the harshest terror this organization entrenched itself. It became legitimized. The world recognized it. But its essence did not change because of that. Nor did its creator, Lenin, change in the least, right up to the end.

The portrait of the terrorist Khalturin above Lenin's couch was no accident. Khalturin had tried to blow up Tsar Alexander II, the man who abolished serfdom in Russia. Khalturin's portrait hung next to Marx in Lenin's room.

On May 21, 1922, at Arkhangelskoye on the Moscow River, Trotsky, with his trousers rolled up, was fishing with a net. He slipped, fell, and tore a tendon. He had to lie in bed. On the third day, Bukharin came to see him.

"And you're in bed?" he exclaimed in horror.

"Who else, besides me?" Trotsky asked.

"Illich is in bad shape: a stroke — he can't walk, he can't talk."

The official bulletin about Lenin's poor health was published on June 4. It stated that Lenin had gastroenteritis and, on that basis, a minor circulatory disorder. The bulletin was drafted in such a way that even a doctor could not have suspected that Lenin was seriously ill.

A month after the stroke, on June 24, a consultation was held in Gorki to discuss what the patient could be allowed to do. One of the doctors suggested that he play checkers, but only with weak

players. The German doctor Klemperer testified that after the first stroke “Lenin at Gorki turned to growing mushrooms and caring for rabbits.” Then he began weaving baskets. He wove one under the direction of a female worker at the Gorki state farm. He gave the basket to his sister, Maria Ilyinichna.

A week after the basket had been woven, Lenin began to write by himself. On July 12, 1922, Lenin wrote to Kamenev:

“I invite you to visit me one of these days. I am bragging about my handwriting — something between calligraphic and paralytic. I am telling you this in secret.”

Four days later, Lenin wrote a letter to Stalin about the need to quickly expel from the country the leading representatives of the Russian intelligentsia:

“Throw them all out of Russia!”

Lenin was outraged:

“This operation was started before my vacation and still isn’t finished. Arrest a few hundred and expel them without explanation. Off you go, gentlemen.”

Directly before his “vacation,” as Lenin put it — that is, directly before the stroke — he introduced his own amendment into the Criminal Code of the RSFSR:

“For returning to the Motherland — the highest measure of punishment — execution by shooting.”

Demanding the expulsion of the intelligentsia, Lenin, gravely ill, barely able to speak or write, kept repeating to Stalin:

“We’ll cleanse Russia for a long time.”

In his letter of July 16, Lenin mentions among others an elderly historian, Professor Rozhkov. For some reason it was precisely this little-known Rozhkov who gave Lenin no peace. Lenin wrote:

“Incurable, we must expel him.”

At first Rozhkov was imprisoned, then released. As soon as Lenin officially returned to work after his stroke, he immediately asked Zinoviev:

“Is Rozhkov in Petrograd? We must expel him.”

On October 26, at a meeting of the Politburo, he again demanded that Rozhkov be expelled.

On December 8, back in Gorki, between new attacks, Lenin learned that the Politburo had decided not to expel Rozhkov. He was extremely indignant. Just before his second stroke, on the very day of the stroke, Lenin wrote to Stalin:

“I propose. First: to expel Rozhkov abroad.

Second: if the decision does not pass on account of Rozhkov’s old age, then expel him, for example, to Pskov. But keep him under strict surveillance.”

On December 14, the Politburo exiled Professor Rozhkov to Pskov. He soon died.

This *idée fixe* about Rozhkov was not accidental. The Russian intelligentsia in general was a painful subject for Lenin. The stroke only sharpened this.

Already on September 15, 1919, in response to a letter from Gorky, Lenin produced the now-famous hard-edged formula:

“The intellectual forces of the workers and peasants are growing and becoming stronger in the struggle against the bourgeoisie and its hangers-on, the intelligentsia, the lackeys of capital, who

consider themselves the brain of the nation. Actually they are not the brain of the nation, they are its shit.”

In fact, that whole passage is a hysterical outburst. A furious Leninist resentment, almost a childish hurt. How could this be? Back in September 1917, in his book *State and Revolution*, he wrote: “We’ll have no trouble with these gentlemen-intellectuals after we take power. These gentlemen who work today under the command of the capitalists will work even better under the command of armed workers.”

Fine, they did not want to submit at once to the armed workers. The Bolsheviks demonstrated their power to them. The overwhelming majority of those shot in 1918 were the intelligentsia. Only then, far behind, came the peasants shot, then the criminal elements, then the bourgeoisie, then the priests. They understood nothing in 1918, these gentlemen intellectuals. They were then given the lowest food ration. Per day: 110 grams of bread, 3 grams of sugar, 3 grams of salt, 17 grams of meat.

Even with the teachers it was impossible to find a common language.

“The teaching profession from the very beginning constituted an organization that was in its overwhelming majority, if not entirely, standing on a platform hostile to Soviet power.”

And the representatives of the medical profession! “They also dream of a return of the bourgeois order.”

All of them, all of them “have used their education to wreck the work of socialist construction.”

And the poet Alexander Blok! For four years he had maintained complete loyalty to Soviet power, and then he fell ill with a nervous disorder. Everyone began to ask that he be allowed to go to Finland for treatment. But he was a poetic nature, he might begin to write poems against Soviet power. Three times they voted against letting him out of the country. Then they let him go. And he went and died.

Let them all go to hell! Catch these spies and keep catching them constantly and systematically. And expel them abroad!

According to Lenin’s secretary Lidia Fotieva, already in 1921, before his illness, Lenin had asked that poison be brought to him.

As for the story that Lenin again asked Stalin for poison at the beginning of 1923, there was no secrecy about it at the time.

The rumor about Lenin and the poison was discussed in all newspaper editorial offices. And not only there. The economist, historian, and publicist Valentinov, who had known Lenin well from emigration, recalls that this rumor was told to him by his building manager. Valentinov then lived on Bogoslovsky Lane, now Moskvina Street, in house no. 8, opposite the Korsh Theater, later a branch of the Moscow Art Theatre. Above Valentinov’s apartment there was a night artistic club. The stomping, singing and women’s screams usually continued until five in the morning. The building manager and the janitor often watched how, from that club, they carried out, in their arms, and put into a cab, the drunken People’s Commissar of Education Lunacharsky, wrapped in a beaver-fur coat. At that time Kalinin was flirting with ballerinas of the Bolshoi Theater.

Trotsky writes that the question of whether to give Lenin poison or not was discussed in the Politburo. The Politburo then consisted of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin, Rykov, and Tomsky.

The leading trio was Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin. In the party leadership they were collectively called “Zikasi.”

Stalin then informed the Politburo that Lenin had unexpectedly summoned him and asked him to obtain poison for him. Trotsky said:

“Lenin may recover.”

Stalin replied:

“The old man is suffering. He doesn’t want to hear anything.”

On March 21, Stalin wrote a secret note to the Politburo:

“Strictly secret. On Saturday, March 17, Comrade Ulyanova informed me, in the strictest secrecy, of ‘Vladimir Ilyich’s request to Stalin’ that I, Stalin, take upon myself the duty of obtaining and delivering to Vladimir Ilyich a dose of potassium cyanide. In talking with me, N. K. said, among other things, that Ilyich is enduring unimaginable suffering and insisted persistently that we not refuse Ilyich’s request.”

Lenin’s sister, Maria Ilyinichna, writes:

“Why did V. I. address this request to Stalin? Because he knew him as a firm man, a man of steel, devoid of any sentimentality.”

Stalin did not bring poison to Lenin. He apparently did not see the necessity of it.

In 1924, the future deputy of Dzerzhinsky in the Supreme Council of the National Economy, Vladimirov, told the already mentioned Valentinov a sensational story. After the first stroke, Lenin recovered quickly. “How serious Lenin’s illness was, even that tiny group of people who knew about his illness did not suspect. Yet among them was a man who already in the summer of 1922 said: ‘Lenin is kaput.’”

The man who said “Lenin is kaput” was Stalin. He had met with Russian and foreign doctors, he had been following Lenin’s deteriorating health since 1921, and he concluded that one stroke would inevitably be followed by others. He said:

“The Politburo must work as if Lenin were no longer among us, and skillfully distribute all the leadership of the country among the members of the Politburo.”

On December 16, Lenin had his second stroke. But already a week later, Lenin dictated the text that is usually called Lenin’s testament:

“The relations between Stalin and Trotsky make up more than half of the danger of a split in the party.

Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated enormous power in his hands; and I am not sure that he will always be able to use this power with sufficient caution. On the other hand, Comrade Trotsky is perhaps the most capable man in the present Central Committee, but he is too self-confident and too carried away by the purely administrative side of affairs.

These two qualities of two outstanding leaders of the present Central Committee can quite inadvertently lead to a split.”

In this document, for Lenin the key word is neither “Stalin” nor “Trotsky.” The key word is “split.” In any physical condition, nothing was more terrible to Lenin than a split in the party. A split is a threat to power. There would be no split. Stalin would devour Trotsky, take up the economic ideas of Trotskyism, use them to launch his first Five-Year Plan, digest the right opposition, and have shot and imprisoned those who remembered Lenin before and after the seizure of power in Russia.

If Trotsky had devoured Stalin, the firing-squad lists would probably have been somewhat different. Instead of Tukhachevsky, Voroshilov would have been shot, the first poet would have been not Mayakovsky, but Trotsky's favorite, Yesenin. Meyerhold would probably have remained alive. Gorky would not have become the main Soviet classic. The situation in the NKVD would not have changed in any fundamental way. The countryside would inevitably have gone through a second edition of War Communism. The peasants had not forgiven Trotsky for the Civil War and hated him. And he would have returned that hatred to them on a new turn of the spiral. But he would hardly have surpassed Stalin in collectivization. Trotsky's passion for instant administrative decisions would have demanded slave labor in the economy as a whole — which, in fact, is also what happened under Stalin.

The authorship for spreading concentration camps in Russia is shared between Trotsky and Lenin. Stalin shares nothing with them. And he shares nothing of himself with them. Not even with Lenin. He consolidates his final victory during the war, when the official slogan of the offensive becomes the formula: "For the Motherland! For Stalin!"

What is certain is that under Trotsky, Lenin would not be lying in a Mausoleum.

At the first signs of illness in 1922, Lenin stated that he did not wish to be treated by doctors with party membership cards. Famous foreign specialists were called in to treat him: Professors Foerster, Berghard, Bumke, Klemperer, Strümpell. Among the older Russian doctors were Getyé, Kozhevnikov, Rozanov, Bekhterev.

The People's Commissar for Health, Semashko, and the head of the Moscow Health Department, Obukh, were removed from Lenin's treatment. Lenin said:

"It is possible that they know how to write a leaflet and make a speech at a meeting, but they certainly have no medical knowledge. How could they have any, when they have no practice and have been engaged in politics? I want to deal with real doctors, not ignoramuses."

At about the same time, among Moscow doctors a letter from Lenin to Gorky was circulating hand to hand:

"Dear Alexei Maximovich, the news that you are being treated by a Bolshevik, even if a former one, has honestly made me anxious. Really, in 99 cases out of 100, doctor-comrades are asses. You must be treated only by first-class celebrities. To try out a Bolshevik invention on yourself is horrible."

The content of this letter became known in Moscow at the end of 1922 and the beginning of 1923. But it had been written in November 1913 from Krakow, 51 Lubomirska Street. In other words, long before the revolution, Lenin had written:

"To try out a Bolshevik invention on yourself is horrible."

At the same time another letter from Lenin to Gorky about religion was circulating in Moscow, containing Lenin's basic thesis:

"Any little god is corpse-loving. Every idea of any god whatsoever is the most unspeakable vileness."

Lenin wrote this to Gorky also in 1913. In 1922, Lenin reinforced his old idea by smashing the Church, selling off its valuables, and by amending the Criminal Code to introduce the death penalty for clergymen. "The more executions there are, the better," Lenin said.

Immediately after his death, a proposal came from the workers of Plant No. 30, "The Red Supplier." The workers wrote:

“A brilliant idea has struck us. Not to lower him into the ground, but, after building a raised place on Red Square, to place him in a glass coffin, preserved in alcohol.”

The broad masses of the population were grateful to Lenin for a NEP that was not exactly generous, but still gave enough to eat. In essence, people were weeping for the dead Lenin mainly because of the NEP. The same Valentinov recalls:

“In the building where I lived, the janitor was an illiterate man with the barest degree of development, Stepan Antonovich. During the First World War he had been a prisoner in Austria. He used to say: ‘All Austrians are kulaks, because they all wear boots or leather shoes.’ Well, this Stepan Antonovich would say that it was very, very pity that ‘Lenin died.’ And he explained: ‘It was Lenin who ordered the shops opened. It was after his order that fancy bread appeared, and real rye bread, and potatoes, and sugar. If Lenin had not done that, we would still be standing hungry in the queues to this day.’”

Stalin could not fail to grasp this mechanism of power: first take everything, then give very little — but that little means life. Later you can give even less. Love and gratitude will only grow stronger.

Stalin understood Lenin very well. In 1922, Lenin wrote to Kamenev:

“It is a great mistake to think that the NEP will put an end to terror. We shall yet return to terror, and to economic terror.”

The writer Vladimir Soloukhin on Lenin and the NEP:

“Some believe that, before his death, Lenin came to his senses and carried to the grave recipes that could have saved the situation, the country. This is a profound delusion. They refer to the NEP introduced by Lenin. But, my God, the NEP is a pitiful parody of an ordinary, normal pre-revolutionary Russian reality with bustling trade, an abundance of goods, and 18,000 fairs.”

In 1922, an attempt was made to restore the famous pre-revolutionary Nizhny Novgorod fair. The head of the Soviet Nizhny Novgorod fair was appointed a former worker from Sormovo, Malyshev. Malyshev immediately grew a merchant’s beard, dressed in a caftan, and tucked his trousers into his boots. He addressed everyone with the familiar “thou,” swore constantly, and sprinkled his curses with “my dove,” “my soul,” “father dear.”

He sent his articles to various newspapers in Moscow for publication. Once he sent one to the *Trade and Industrial Gazette*, the organ of the Supreme Council of the National Economy. The chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy was Dzerzhinsky, also head of the OGPU. Malyshev’s article was not printed because it was so illiterate.

He called the editorial office by phone and told the editor:

“My dove, I sent you a little article, so you, my soul, kindly send me the proofs.”

He was refused. Half an hour later, a call came from the secretariat of the Central Committee. The matter reached Dzerzhinsky personally. Dzerzhinsky looked into it and gave this answer:

“I, chairman of the Supreme Council of the National Economy and of the OGPU, order that Malyshev’s article not be printed, no matter what threats are made.”

Malyshev, enraged, called again:

“Someone more important than Dzerzhinsky will be found.”

An hour later, Dzerzhinsky himself called the editorial office. He said hoarsely:

“Print Malyshev’s article.”

Stalin bestowed his favor on Malyshev, the head of the Nizhny Novgorod fair.

On December 23, 1922, Krupskaya complained to Kamenev about Stalin:

“I beg you to protect me from Stalin’s crude interference in my private life, from his vile insults and low threats. I am a human being, my nerves are stretched to the limit.”

The point was that the sick Lenin sent Krupskaya to members of the Politburo to get the information that interested him. Stalin was extremely reluctant to answer her questions.

Trotsky wrote in his memoirs that Stalin was extremely rude with Krupskaya. He gave her the information she needed twice, and then sent her to hell. After Krupskaya’s complaint to Kamenev and Zinoviev, she told Lenin what had happened. Lenin’s sister Maria Ilyinichna recalls:

“This conversation upset Nadezhda Konstantinovna so much that she was not herself. She sobbed, rolled on the floor.”

On January 4, 1923, Lenin dictated:

“Stalin is too rude. This defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in relations between us communists, becomes intolerable in the office of General Secretary. This circumstance may seem a mere trifle, but from the point of view of preventing a split, is not a trifle at all.”

Again, Lenin is talking about a split, not about his wife. Only two months later, on March 5, will he dictate a letter to Stalin about his rough treatment of Krupskaya:

“I do not intend to forget so easily what has been done against me, and needless to say that what has been done against my wife has been done against me.”

The next day, Stalin wrote in reply:

“If you consider that, in order to maintain relations, I must take back the words I said, I can take them back, though I refuse to understand what the matter is and what exactly is wanted of me.”

Khrushchev, in his memoirs, writes about Krupskaya:

“Stalin explained to us in a narrow circle that she had not been Lenin’s wife at all. After Krupskaya’s death, Stalin said that if things had gone on like that, we could have put in doubt that she was Lenin’s wife. He said we could have declared that another woman had been Lenin’s wife, and he named a respected person in the party. That woman is still alive even now, so I will not mention her name.”

Khrushchev dictated his memoirs in the late 1960s.

When Lenin’s words about Stalin’s rudeness were read to the delegations of the XIII Party Congress in May 1924, a remark came from the floor:

“It’s nothing, his rudeness won’t frighten us. Our entire party is rude, proletarian.”

In 1924, nobody attached any importance to this text of Lenin. It wasn’t even called a “testament” then.

This text, as well as the story with Krupskaya, would be heard again only thirty-two years later. For thirty-two years, those words of Lenin had been the first and main state secret. In 1956, at the Twentieth Party Congress, both Lenin’s words about Stalin and Krupskaya’s letter complaining about Stalin were made public in Khrushchev’s report. The report was still secret, however, and was distributed only to party organizations.

Lenin's statement that Stalin was rude acquired, in the new party interpretation, a sacred meaning. This new interpretation had a single aim: to contrast Lenin with Stalin, and thereby reanimate Lenin. The cult figure of Stalin had to be urgently replaced. There was no other possible candidate than Lenin. As an active political figure, Lenin lasted until the end of the Thaw and then returned once more into the confines of the Mausoleum.

The second attempt to reanimate him came in the perestroika years. The abyss of information that opened then revealed only one thing: that Stalin was Lenin's heir.

The writer Vasily Grossman had already written in his Thaw-era novel *Everything Flows*: "Lenin and Stalin formulated a principle: the nation and the state develop in the name of power and against freedom. This formula of Lenin and Stalin is a drug for failures, the weak, and the backward."

In the interval between the two letters about Stalin's rudeness, Lenin dictated a series of articles. Unlike the text about Trotsky and Stalin, which is still called Lenin's testament, these last articles were not perceived as confessional. Although Krupskaya called them "a testament in the true sense of the word." In essence, she was right, because Lenin there renounces Marxism.

Facing death, he uttered what he had in fact followed all his life: socialism does not need economic preconditions. First, seize power — above all, seize power, everything in the name of political power — and only then can one begin to build the economic prerequisites of socialism.

In the magazine *Projector* for 1924, the Soviet party and economic official Vladimir Milyutin wrote:

"Lenin never looked in the mirror. During the last ten years of his life he did not see his own face. Go through all the rooms in which Lenin lived in his last years. Not one of them has a mirror."

Lenin's own appearance did not interest him. His teeth were taken care of by the dentist Yudelevich. He recalls Lenin's teeth in the *Journal of Odontology and Stomatology* in that same year, 1924. He writes:

"Recalling the teeth of V. I. Lenin, I wondered whether one could judge a person's character from the configuration of his teeth. And, particularly, speaking of V. I.'s teeth, they are strong in structure, yellow in color — according to Ash's shade F5 — generally correct in shape, placement, and bite. The upper incisors are broad, with a strongly developed cutting edge bent inward, towards the palate. And his teeth undoubtedly harmonized perfectly with the overall impression of straightness, firmness, and strength of character."

Lenin was not interested in any connection between his teeth and his character. He knew perfectly well that the power he had seized in 1917 had to be a personal dictatorship. Stalin completely shared Lenin's point of view.

Five days before Lenin's death, Stalin said:

"The opposition, in its unrestrained agitation for democracy in the party, is setting loose a petty-bourgeois element. The oppositionists are acting as spokesmen for the new bourgeoisie. And the new bourgeoisie doesn't give a damn about democracy in the party. It would like to have democracy in the country."

In other words, it would begin with democracy in the party, and might end with democracy in the country. To give Joseph Vissarionovich his due — things happened just as he said they would. True, only by the end of the twentieth century.

In March 1923, Lenin never read Stalin's reply to his letter about Krupskaya. His condition worsened sharply. Voluntary speech was practically destroyed. His vocabulary was reduced to a few words: "here-go-take."

Sometimes foreign words would slip out, for instance "guten Morgen." He retained his facial expressions, a few gestures, and then there were only tears. It is the standard picture of the gravest illness.

Kamenev took the artist Yuri Annenkov to Gorki so that he might paint Lenin's portrait. Annenkov went, but refused to paint:

"Lenin could serve as a model only for an illustration of his terrible illness, not for a portrait."

Meanwhile, one of Lenin's doctors, Dr. Kramer, said that Lenin's vitality represented a phenomenal case in the history of this disease.

On October 19, 1923, Lenin, who by autumn could move about and was making progress in speech, suddenly went into the garage and demanded to be taken to Moscow. He arrived at the Kremlin, went into his office, then into the meeting hall, then went to the agricultural exhibition in the Park of Culture and Rest, and returned to Gorki.

This is the itinerary given in the memoirs of Lenin's secretary Fotieva.

However, certain circumstances make one doubt this. First, it is known that Lenin had long wanted to visit the agricultural exhibition. And the road from Gorki to Moscow practically went past the exhibition on Krymsky Val.

So it would have been natural to visit the exhibition first and only then go to the Kremlin.

Second, from some sources it is known that in the Kremlin, in his office, Lenin could not find the document he wanted. He became extremely agitated, began to wheeze, and convulsions started. He would hardly have been able to go on to the exhibition after that.

After his return to Gorki, his condition began to deteriorate sharply. Maria Ilyinichna, who was incapable of secrecy and blushed easily, told one of the doctors that her brother had fallen ill after he said that a document had been stolen from him.

In 1930, Valentinov, then an employee of the Soviet trade mission in Paris, spoke with a visiting Soviet official. He asked what Krupskaya was doing. He heard in reply:

"She keeps silent, humbles herself. Not a word of protest. But what can you expect from Krupskaya? You know that Stalin stole from Lenin's apartment a very unpleasant piece of writing that Lenin had made about him. And Krupskaya did everything to hush up this story. For that, Stalin made her a member of the Central Committee."

Strictly speaking, at the end of 1923, Krupskaya was not yet entirely sure that Stalin, and not Trotsky, would prevail after Lenin. At the end of that year Trotsky published a collection of articles titled *The New Course*.

The main ideas of Trotsky's *New Course* were:

"Bureaucratism in the party leadership is intolerable. The leadership has degenerated into command. The party apparatus must be renewed. Election is necessary. Criticism is necessary."

These ideas had not previously been characteristic of Trotsky. True, Trotsky had been the first to introduce the concept of "Leninism," and what he praised most in Leninism was its capacity for

abrupt changes in tactics, for sharp turns. He especially valued in Leninism “militancy combined with the use of cunning and tricks.”

Judging by everything, it was precisely this last quality of Leninism that Trotsky decided to use when he unexpectedly launched a course for inner-party democracy.

One should not harbor illusions about Trotsky. He simply wanted to strike those who wanted to remove Trotsky from power. Trotsky appealed to the youth, to the student body. The students responded. Tongues were loosened. And not only among students. Criticism spread everywhere: in party cells of military academies, the Moscow garrison, tank units, and further and further.

To fight Trotsky, all the well-known party members were mobilized, including Krupskaya.

A few days after Lenin’s death, Krupskaya sent a letter to Trotsky:

“Dear Lev Davidovich, I am writing to tell you that about a month before his death Vladimir Ilyich was looking through your book. I also want to say this: the attitude he formed toward you back when you came to see us in London from Siberia did not change in him until his death.”

And in issue no. 16 of the journal *Bolshevik* for 1925, Krupskaya wrote:

“After Vladimir Ilyich’s death, everybody felt somehow even more united. Under the influence of this mood, I wrote that letter to Trotsky. One cannot in any way draw from it the conclusion that Vladimir Ilyich considered him his deputy.”

Stalin would award Krupskaya the Order of Lenin and the Order of the Red Banner of Labor. It was a deserved award. Besides, Krupskaya knew better than anyone that in Lenin’s last years Stalin really had been close to him. She herself had conveyed Lenin’s request for poison to Stalin. You don’t ask an outsider for poison.

At the end of October 1923, shortly after Lenin’s last trip to the Kremlin, the members of the Politburo heard a report from Stalin in an informal setting: according to the information he had, Lenin’s health was worsening.

“We must think everything through in advance so that there is no confusion at the hour of great sorrow,” said Stalin, and he added: “Comrades from the provinces say that Lenin is a Russian man and should be buried accordingly. They are categorically opposed to cremating Lenin’s body. Some comrades believe that modern science has the ability, through embalming, to preserve the body of the deceased for a long time. During that time, we will be able to get used to the thought that Lenin is no longer among us.”

Trotsky responded:

“In Russia, sycophants were turned into relics. I’d very much like to know who these provincial comrades are who suggest using science to create relics from Lenin’s remains.”

Bukharin and Kamenev also did not support Stalin. Rykov expressed himself vaguely. In fact, Stalin had the support of only one man: Kalinin.

Five days after Lenin’s death, on January 25, the newspaper *Pravda* published an article by the secretary of the Central Control Commission, Emelian Yaroslavsky, containing the words:

“Dear Lenin! We shall hide your body in the earth, your cause will remain with us.”

This text differed little from the other memorial articles; it is interesting in that its author, a high-ranking party official, was not aware of the main party decision at that moment.

For in that same issue of *Pravda*, where on one page Yaroslavsky wrote: “Lenin, we shall hide your body in the earth,” another page, in the left-hand corner, quietly printed a resolution of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee:

“First. The coffin with the body of Vladimir Ilyich is to be preserved in a vault.  
Second. The vault is to be erected by the Kremlin wall.”

Signed: Chairman of the CEC Kalinin.

With Kalinin’s signature, Stalin’s personal decision was formalized: Lenin would not be buried, he would lie in a Mausoleum.

Apart from ideological considerations, Stalin thereby provided, for a century ahead, an incomparable spectacle for millions of people. Valentinov notes:

“It seems to me that our people have much more than other nations a special mystical curiosity, a sort of craving to look at a corpse, at the dead. Especially if the dead man stands out from the common run.”

Even Krupskaya, Lenin’s widow, wrote to Inessa Armand’s daughter:

“The photographs in the coffin came out well. I will send them to you.”

The People’s Commissar for Foreign Trade, Krasin, proposed to preserve Lenin’s body so that with the help of the newest technologies it could later be revived.

However, already from the first posthumous newspaper publications it followed that the resurrection of Lenin was not being contemplated.

On January 22, an autopsy was performed in Gorki. The report on the pathological-anatomical condition of the deceased was printed everywhere.

At the same time, side by side with expressions of feeling for the dead man, information was given about the state of his brain, the cranial vault, heart, lungs, abdominal cavity, spleen, kidneys and muscular system.

One employee of the *Trade and Industrial Gazette* said about this:

“We knew Lenin as the leader of the revolution, if you like, as the dictator who replaced the dynasty of tsars. We may sympathize with him or not. But Lenin is a human being, and they are gutting him before our eyes.”

According to the recollections of a foreign pathologist, open clashes arose over who was the lawful heir to the body — the relatives, the state, or the Communist Party.

That same foreign pathologist recalls:

“I happened by chance to witness how the secret police — in Moscow they were then called ‘the neighbors’ — escorted Lenin’s brain. In the evening of January 24, in an English limousine preceded by eight motorcyclists, it was transported to a special institute. I stepped away from the window, thinking it was once again some high guest. Later I learned who, or rather what, had been carried under my windows.”

Lenin’s brain and heart were received by the party and diplomatic official Arosev, who gave the following receipt:

“I, the undersigned Arosev, have received from Comrade Belenky, on the 24th of this month at 18 hours 25 minutes, for the V. I. Lenin Institute, a glass jar containing the brain, the heart of Ilyich,

and the bullet extracted from the body. I undertake to preserve what I have received and to be personally responsible for its complete integrity and preservation.”

Lenin’s body was brought to Moscow the day after the autopsy. Shortly before Lenin’s death, nonparty workers of the Moscow locomotive depot had, at an unusual time, repaired a locomotive of the U-series, No. 127. They unanimously elected Lenin honorary engineer of the locomotive and wrote in a letter:

“In handing this locomotive over to you, Vladimir Ilyich, the workers and employees do not doubt that you, as an experienced engineer, will lead us to a bright future.”

It was this very locomotive that brought the funeral train with the coffin to Moscow.

The making of the coffin was in charge of the former business manager of the Sovnarkom, Bonch-Bruyevich. He left memoirs about it:

“Just look for yourself, everything is in order, in the best condition,” the coffin-maker rattled off, bubbling with joy over the success of his work for such a rare deceased. “Here’s the little pillow, don’t you worry, he’ll lie comfortably, softly. The length is just right.”

On the day of Lenin’s death, Kamenev said to Bonch-Bruyevich:

“You prepare the grave.”

That is, on the evening of the 21st, Politburo member Kamenev still did not know that Stalin had already decided on the Mausoleum.

When the decision was announced, Bonch-Bruyevich was thrown into the construction of the first temporary vault. He left a description of this as well:

“Enormous bonfires were lit. The red flames, mixed with black smoke, licked at the Kremlin wall. Like shadows of hell people were wandering about. The ground was frozen hard. ‘The earth doesn’t want to receive Vladimir Ilyich,’ the workers said.”

On January 26, the Second Congress of Soviets opened in Moscow. It had been expected that the question of the method of Lenin’s burial would be decided there.

Given that Stalin’s decision had already been taken and published in *Pravda* the day before, the congress had no choice but to vote it through.

In February 1924, a discussion was held in the Soviet press on the architectural appearance of the Mausoleum. The People’s Commissar for Foreign Trade, Krasin, who had long ago been a top-notch engineer and manufacturer of explosive devices for Bolshevik terrorist acts, proposed “to give the tomb the form of a people’s tribune, from which speeches would be delivered on Red Square.”

This proposal by Krasin was far more politically astute than his earlier idea of freezing and later reviving Lenin. The function of a tribune would become the main function of the Mausoleum.

By 1924, it was already clear who would mount that tribune.