

THE WAR OF LIONS

Written by

Thomas W. Gatus and George A. Perantoni

Based on a True Story - *Arrivederci Leopolis*

©Thomas W. Gatus and George A. Perantoni
All Rights Reserved

Thomas W. Gatus
17, rue Ernest Cresson
75014 Paris, France
Email: thomas.gatus(at)hotmail.com
Tele:+33144755739

George A. Perantoni
5800 Shasta Drive
Orlando, Florida 32810
Perantoni(at)leopolis.com
407-644-3056

BLACK SCREEN

FADE IN:

SUPER: WRITTEN IN SCRIPT, "... MAN HAS DOMINATED MAN TO HIS INJURY." (KING SOLOMON: ECCLESIASTES 8:9)

FADE TO:

SUPER: "SEPTEMBER 11, 2001"

NARRATOR

My name is Vittorio. Victor, if you prefer. I was born in 1912 in Lwów Poland where my Italian family owned a tavern and inn. Our lives and those of our friends were good... until the war came. Like New York this morning. Long before 1939, my father, Carlo, believed that unfolding events in Europe, and the wider world, were repercussions felt from The Great War of 1914. If you've read the history of the 20th century, you will probably concur.

FADE TO:

SUPER: "LWÓW, POLAND 1939"

EXT. STREET - DAY

It is a sunny August day. The streets are modestly busy, no need to rush. Children play on sidewalks while adults shop at numerous store fronts.

Stately four storey homes and tenements of red brick and stone house merchants, tradesmen, blacksmiths, locksmiths, kosher grocers -- even tavern owners. Occasional cars and trucks toot their horns at friends on the street. One pedestrian, ANDRÉ FRODEL (late forties, thinning hair, with small moustache), carries a small manila envelope, waves in response before...

EXT./INT. WINIARNIA - DAY

... he turns and passes through two large doors to Carlo Perantoni's Winiarnia Italia tavern where...

... the walls are filled with photographs of the A/C Milan soccer team, race car drivers and other celebrities.

Several tables are filled with lunch patrons. Furthest away sit men near a back wall playing cards, gambling with postal stamps. It is a swap-meet of the Lwów Stamp Club. FRANKI MORAWIECKI, (mid-twenties), a regular patron, raises his hand, calls out...

FRANKI

Hey! Luigi.

LUIGI PERANTONI, the bartender and Victor's older brother, cocks his head, looks and nods.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

A round of espresso.

André smiles mischievously, approaches the table.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

About time.

ANDRÉ

Takes time for the ink to dry.

André pulls up a chair, lays the manila envelope on the table. All eyes focus on it. ANDRÉ wears a noticeable grin as he takes a seat. Enjoys the moment.

PLAYER

You gonna open it?

André yawns.

ANDRÉ

I was up late. Haven't even had a cup of espresso yet.

VICTOR PERANTONI (late twenties, lean, clean shaven) delivers a tray of espressos.

VICTOR

In that case...

Victor serves ANDRÉ first.

ANDRÉ

Ah. A fellow artist and a gentleman.

Victor pulls up a chair, squeezes in. André puts a hand on the envelope. His other hand reaches for the sugar.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Last week I received a post card
from a friend. It showed the
Liechtenstein Palace in south west
Germany.

André opens the flap.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

It's not beautiful, per se... but
it gave me a sense of permanence,
something solid... meant to last.

André drops sugar into his espresso, takes a small spoon and
stirs.

FRANKI

Okay. Enough. Let's see it.

PLAYER

You know André, this is like
waiting for the bell to ring at the
end of a school day.

André nods agreement. In seconds, plate blocks, tucked into
glassine envelopes, are born. Everyone leans in for a closer
look. Tweezers and loupes pop into hands from nowhere as the
collectors fall silent.

CARLO PERANTONI, (late fifties, balding) ambles towards the
silent table.

VICTOR

Papa. Look at André's latest art
work. Beautiful. Very detailed, no?

André hands a glassine to Carlo. The old man tweezes the
stamp, holds it closer to the light.

CARLO

I don't recognize the palace. Where
is it?

ANDRÉ

On a post card.

Snickers and chuckles. Carlo look up, mumbles something
heavenward.

A Catholic priest, MICHELE KOLBUCH (tall, wire-rim glasses,
whom they call PADRE), happens past. His eyes follow Carlo's.

PADRE

It's always good to see you
praying, Carlo. Now if I could just
get you in church.

Laughter erupts. Patrons observe the disturbance.

FRANKI

Padre. You in or out?

Padre reaches into a coat pocket. Takes out a fat glassine
envelope.

PADRE

In.

He surveys the table.

FRANKI

Victor. What time is it?

Victor checks his pocket watch.

VICTOR

Almost 2.

PADRE

(to Victor)

Ah. Too late for coffee. Bring us a
bottle of Valpolicella.

(to players)

Whose deal?

FRANKI

Yours.

INT. ANDRÉ'S PRINT SHOP - DAY

The following day, Victor visits André's print shop. In the
front room is André's desk and layout table. Behind it is an
open doorway through which various machines can be seen.

André sits at the desk. Victor seated on a stool, holds a
stamp album on his lap. He flips a page.

VICTOR

Your fantasy stamps amaze me. Every
one looks real and tells a story. I
mean, if you think about it.

ANDRÉ

One does something well when he
loves it. I love designing stamps.

VICTOR

Did you ever apply to the postal service?

ANDRÉ

I thought about it. But I'd have to do what someone else wants... Can't complain. Printing's a decent business.

VICTOR

Yeah. I understand... when you love something... that's why I take photographs. They're our memories. They teach us things... André....

ANDRÉ

What?

VICTOR

Will you teach me how to draw?

André is surprised.

ANDRÉ

It would be my pleasure, Victor.

SUPER: "AUGUST 24, 1939"

EXT. SWIMMING HOLE - DAY

Victor, LARISA (LARI) DOROSHENKA and DANIELA (DANI) RABINOWITZ (both early twenties) carry their picnic to a spot in the shade under a large tree. Victor holds a tripod over one shoulder and shares one handle of the picnic basket with Lari. They set the food down. The girls spread a large nap beneath the tree.

LARI

(to Victor)

This was a great idea. I haven't been swimming since summer began.

DANI

At least you get to work outside. I'm stuck in the shop or the house.

(to Victor)

Lari's right, Victor. Thanks

VICTOR
Can't think of a better way to
spend an afternoon than with you
two.

DANI
You're such a sweetie.

Victor snickers. The group finds seats on the ground.

VICTOR
You do know I have ulterior
motives.

Lari eyes his camera, a Zeiss Ikon Ikonta, in the basket.

LARI
So. You plan to turn us into
calendar girls and sell the photos.

VICTOR
HAH. You think your swimsuit shots
are worth money?

DANI
Certainly. And Stasia will be
jealous. You invited her, didn't
you?

VICTOR
Yeah. But I probably should have
invited her father too.

The girls laugh.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Did she tell you her father won't
allow her to visit me in the
winiarnia?

LARI
Ah. He doesn't trust you.

VICTOR
With his daughter... in a tavern?
Probably not.

LARI
Really? Ever think that your
hanging around with three girls
might make some fathers wary?

VICTOR
Your dad doesn't mind.

LARI
But he's Carlo's hunting partner.

DANI
My father would disown me if I
married a gentile.

VICTOR
Maybe that wouldn't be a problem if
my photographs make me rich.

They laugh. Lari stands up, back to the others, and starts to take off her clothes. Dani and Victor follow. All of them wear black swim suits.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Let me take our picture before we
look like a bunch of wet leaves.

Setting up the tripod and camera takes a few moments.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(directs the girls from
behind the camera)
Stand in front of the tree. That's
it. Lean on it. Look casual.

Once satisfied, he sets the timer and gets into frame. Lari takes him by the arm. CLICK.

EXT. SWIMMING HOLE - MOMENTS LATER

Back on the nap, they begin to divvy up food.

LARI
(to Victor)
You have Italian citizenship, yes?

Victor chews.

VICTOR
Uh-hum. I have both.

LARI
Seriously, what happens if there's
a war?

VICTOR
Didn't you hear the radio last
night?

LARI
(to Dani)
No. Did you?

DANI
No.

VICTOR
Germany signed a non-aggression
pact with Russia late yesterday.

DANI
That's great!

VICTOR
My dad said he doesn't believe
them. I hope he's wrong... pass the
bottle opener.

LARI
Carlo was in The Great War. He
probably has good reasons not to
trust them.

VICTOR
Not just that. From what I've read
Germany and Russia have been arming
to the teeth.

DANI
But there's no reason to start a
war.

VICTOR
Doesn't seem like it to us. But no
one knows what's on Hitler's mind.

LARI
Italy's allied with Germany. If
there's a war you'll be
conscripted.

VICTOR
I'm a Polish citizen too. Maybe
there's a loophole.

LARI
Let's hope it doesn't come to that.

DANI
Open my beer please.

INT. WINIARNIA - NIGHT

At the bar, Carlo serves an old client, KRZYSZTOF GORSKI, who always wears the same blue vest, a glass of wine. The man has already had a few. His cap hangs low over his eyes. He drags deep on a cigarette, stares at the wine. A little smoke exits through his nose. The rest escapes in coughs.

KRZYSZTOF GORSKI

Those damned Fascists ... Figli di puttane !! Cholerni Faszyści. And them Bloody Nazi kurwa too! Maledetti communisti, they're all crazy dupeks ... porche puttane! They want to ruin Europe... and the world too... Cholera jasna!

Nearby customers avert their eyes.

Carlo stares at him. They lock eyes.

KRZYSZTOF GORSKI (CONT'D)

You're part of it Carlo.

Carlo winces.

KRZYSZTOF GORSKI (CONT'D)

I don't forget. Ten years ago you fawned all over Mussolini when that group came to your Winiarnia Italia *Fascista*.

Carlo looks away to SIBILIA, Krzysztof's old wife as she approaches.

KRZYSZTOF GORSKI (CONT'D)

You closed the winiarnia to feed 'em. And found expensive cars for 'em to ride around the city.

CARLO

You're right. I did.

KRZYSZTOF GORSKI

Now what?

CARLO

Krzysztof, I swear. My loyalty has always been to Victor Emmanuel. To me, Mussolini is his prime minister.

KRZYSZTOF GORSKI

Bull. You never talked about the king. But you never lost an opportunity to talk about Il Duce, as you call him.

CARLO
Mussolini's changed... So have I.

Sibilia approaches. She touches Krzysztof's arm

SIBILIA
There's no use arguing. You know
Carlo for a long time. He's a good
man... Let's go home.

Krzysztof stands up, takes the glass of wine and pours it
into a spittoon.

INT. WINIARNIA - DAY

Early in the morning Luigi prepares the kitchen for a day's
work. In the hallway a WALL TELEPHONE RINGS. He moseys out
into the...

HALLWAY

LUIGI
Winiarnia Italia. Luigi.

ITALIAN CONSUL
Good morning Luigi. I'd like to
speak with Carlo.

LUIGI
Si signore. Just a moment.

Puts his hand over the mouthpiece. Shouts.

LUIGI (CONT'D)
Papa! S'for you.

Carlo descends the stairs. Luigi hands off to him.

CARLO
Si. This is Carlo.

ITALIAN CONSUL
Buon giorno Carlo. I have some
important news...

Carlo knows the voice, brightens.

CARLO
Ah. What can I do for you today
signore?

ITALIAN CONSUL
 Unfortunately, I'm calling
 regarding an urgent order from
 Rome. It deeply saddens me to say
 this, but you must immediately
 spread the word that all Italians
 in Lwów and Galicia province must
 evacuate Poland immediately.

Carlo is speechless, his eyes fixed.

ITALIAN CONSUL (CONT'D)
 Carlo, are you there?

CARLO
 Yes.

ITALIAN CONSUL
 Carlo. I'm sorry. There's no time
 to waste.

Carlo hangs up. Leans against the wall, dazed.

Luigi approaches.

LUIGI
 Papa?

CARLO
 We're closed. Hang the sign on the
 door.

LUIGI
 But... but why?

CARLO
 Clean up the kitchen. Lock all the
 bottles in the cellar. We have to
 leave Lwów.

LUIGI
 Papa. Why?

CARLO
 Because Rome is ordering all
 Italians to evacuate Poland.

LUIGI
 What! Did he say what happened?

CARLO
 No. He asked me to help spread the
 word. Go. Do as I told you.

(MORE)

CARLO (CONT'D)
Your mother and I have a lot of
work to do. I'll send Victor down
to help.

INT. WINIARNIA - MOMENTS LATER

Victor races down stairs.

Into the kitchen.

VICTOR
Can you believe this? It doesn't
make sense.

LUIGI
What?

VICTOR
Why would we leave? Russia and
Germany signed a non-aggression
pact a couple days ago. Poland
isn't going to start a war.

LUIGI
Little brother. We don't live in
Berlin. We don't live in Moscow.
The Fascio tells papa to leave now -
we leave now.

Victor looks at the surroundings.

VICTOR
What if they're wrong?

LUIGI
I guess we take a short vacation,
then come back to work.

Victor forces a thin smile.

VICTOR
Okay. If we're just going on a
vacation, we have to throw a party,
right?

Luigi shakes his head.

LUIGI
Ask papa.

INT. WINIARNIA - NIGHT

A party is in full swing. Serve-yourself food sits on the bar along with a cask of wine. At the far end, music POURS from a phonograph: a stack of records nearby.

Carlo's wife, ROMANA, (early 50s) brings a pot of pastasciutta from the kitchen.

Friends and family eat, drink. A space has been cleared to dance.

Victor laughs with friends, looks up to see a familiar young woman. STASIA ALEXINISKA (early 20s) enters wearing a light colored sun hat. She scrutinizes the situation.

VICTOR

Stasia!

Dani and Lari wave. Stasia's face brightens. Victor rushes over, takes her hand, raises it to his lips, kisses it.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You look lovely.

STASIA

So this is my father's forbidden Italian wine bar.

VICTOR

I'm so surprised. I didn't think I'd see you before we left. Your father...

STASIA

Well, he couldn't stop me when I said your family was leaving. But I can't stay long.

Victor smiles.

VICTOR

Come join us.

At the table, Stasia leans over to kiss Dani and Lari. They scoot chairs to make room while Victor fetches a glass of wine.

LARI

(to Stasia)

You look very nice tonight.

STASIA

Thanks. I want to leave a lasting impression.

DANI

You're serious -- I don't think they'll be gone long.

LARI

Maybe it's just a precaution.

DANI

Yeah. Couple weeks, a month... they'll be back.

Victor returns. Gives the glass to Stasia. Squeezes in. The music turns jazzy.

VICTOR

Is anyone else in the Lwów or Galicia worried besides us Italians?

LARI

Not much'll change on the farm. My father worries more about transportation to the market.

DANI

Papa says if there is a war, people won't have money to buy film and cameras. We might go out of business.

VICTOR

(to Stasia)

What about you?

STASIA

Don't know if I can afford ballet lessons. Or whether my teacher will stay.

VICTOR

Maybe you'd have a better chance in Krakow.

Franki approaches.

FRANKI

What a fine selection you have Victor. Would one of you ladies like to dance?

Dani eagerly waves her hand.

DANI
Me. The conversation is getting
heavy.

MUSIC: Something like, "In The Mood" by Glen Miller.

She takes a gulp of wine, stands. Seconds later, she is in
the swing.

INT. WINIARNIA - LATER

Music continues loudly as do the revelers. Victor steps out
on the men's room to find Stasia waiting. She looks without
speaking. Their eyes lock. Victor approaches, reads her face.

STASIA
Now I know why my father never
wanted me to come here.

VICTOR
Why did you? You knew I wouldn't
expect you.

STASIA
Because... I had to. I can't let
you leave without knowing how
much...

Victor leans down. Stasia closes her eyes. He kisses each
lightly. Then down to her lips. They kiss deeply. Embrace
deeply.

CARLO (O.C.)
(loud)
Victor. Another cask of wine.

The kiss continues.

INT. WINIARNIA - SAME TIME

André, Padre and several others chat while people dance
nearby. They raise their voices to be heard.

ANDRÉ
Padre. You decided yet?

PADRE
Of course. I'm staying. I have a
Vatican passport.
(MORE)

PADRE (CONT'D)

Without me and the other fathers,
who'll take care of the orphans?

NEIGHBOR

You're a good man.

Padre's lips tighten.

PADRE

That's for God to decide -- I'm
gonna miss Carlo as much as I'll
miss his wine. Well, let me restate
that.

People at the table laugh.

PADRE (CONT'D)

We should be happy the Perantonis
are heading to Italy. They'll be
safe if war does break out.

NEIGHBOR

A toast to the Perantonis. To their
health and swift return to Lwów.

The small group assents.

AT ANOTHER TABLE

Romana takes a break, removes an apron. Sits with some women
friends.

BABUSHKA WOMAN

The neighborhood won't be the same.
I'll think of you every day.

ROMANA

The same goes for me and Carlo.

BABUSHKA WOMAN

So what's your plan?

ROMANA

We're going back to Volargne for
awhile. Carlo hasn't said much but
I'm sure he'll be arranging next
year's wine imports to Lwów...
Luigi's coming too but Victor's
going to stay with relatives in
Switzerland. In Italy, he'd be
drafted into Mussolini's army.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

Your Carlo's always been a worker.

Romana nods.

ROMANA

He loves the public. Loves his friends.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

He'd have been a good politician, no?

ROMANA

Carlo? No, no. He's been a loyal fascist since Mussolini marched on Rome in 1922... but no more.

BABUSHKA WOMAN

I remember ten years ago... when Mussolini and that group came here with that toady, Hitler. Nobody could have imagined him leading Germany one day.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

Didn't Victor take a picture of them together?

Romana points to one of the framed pictures on the wall.

CLOSE ON

(Note: Characters can be posed as in the original photo.)

A photograph of European fascists, Carlo next to Mussolini and young-looking Adolph Hitler in the center.

ROMANA

If you look close, that's me in the window behind Victor.

Woman With Party Hat gets up, examines the photo.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

Hah. All the times I've been here, I never noticed that.

They laugh.

Carlo wanders among the tables. Stops at...

PADRE'S TABLE

CARLO
Excuse me, Padre. Would you come to
my office for a moment?

The priest gets up.

PADRE
Excuse me. I'll be right back.

CARLO'S OFFICE

Carlo points to the sofa, sits down beside Padre.

CARLO
No one knows how long we'll be
gone. So there's something I want
to do before we leave.

Carlo reaches for a fat envelope on the coffee table, hands
it to Padre.

Padre peeks in and is dumbfounded.

PADRE
Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

CARLO
That should help you feed the
orphans.

Padre becomes emotional.

PADRE
I... we can never thank you enough.

CARLO
You don't have to.
(grins)
They'll all grow up to be patrons
one day.

Carlo stands. Padre stands and hugs him.

CARLO (CONT'D)
Let's get a glass of Valpolicella.
I hear it's on the house.

THE DINING AREA

MUSIC: "Stormy Weather" or "The Way you Look Tonight."

A bit tipsy, Dani slow dances with Victor near the
phonograph. Her head rests against his shoulder. The music
ends. She steals a kiss...

... as Padre and Carlo walk past.

CARLO (CONT'D)
Kids today.

PADRE
Forget when you were young? It
could be a long cold winter.

THE DINING ROOM - LATER

Only a few people remain. Carlo checks his pocket watch.
André and Padre finish their drinks.

CARLO
I want you to do me a favor.

PADRE
Anything.

ANDRÉ
(somewhat slurred)
We owe you so much. All you want is
one favor?

Carlo pulls out two sets of keys. Pushes a set to each one.

CARLO
Keep an eye on the winiarnia while
I'm gone.

ANDRÉ
I've always wanted a bigger
bedroom.

PADRE
And I'll protect the wine from
André.

Carlo gives a snarky chuckle.

ANDRÉ
Grazie. Go easy on the communion
wine.

Carlo nods to Victor who is still in the company of Lari and
Dani; the latter is quite woozy.

VICTOR
(to the girls)
It's time to get some sleep. I have
a lot of work to do tomorrow.

Victor helps Lari rouse Dani to a standing position. They walk to the door. Dani stumbles. They prop her against a wall.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

I want...

LARI

No. Please don't say anything.

They wrap arms around each other. Lari's eyes well up.

LARI (CONT'D)

I'm going to miss you terribly.

VICTOR

I'll think of you every day.

LARI

Write me.

They kiss, tenderly. Lingerling.

FADE TO:

SUPER: "AUGUST 29, 1939"

EXT. LWÓW, MAIN TRAIN STATION - DAY

Many people crowd the platform. Passengers are solemn. A few argue. Children cry. Baggage is loaded. A conductor checks his watch.

NARRATOR

On the radio, we heard that travelers carrying more than 100 zlotys in cash or valuables would have their property confiscated at the border. So papa put the family's savings in a joint bank account: about 40,000 zlotys backed in gold. It was papa's last bit of business in Lwów.

On the platform, Victor, dressed in knickerbockers, watches the family climb aboard. Carlo and Luigi wave. Romana cries and waves also. Victor tries to smile, waves back.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

An hour later, I was on a train to Vienna. It would take fifty-four hours.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

I had packed everything I could think of to help get me into Switzerland, including Fascist Youth memorabilia.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - DAY

The car is crowded. The train moves at a good clip. Victor stares out the window.

NARRATOR

Hours later we approached the Czechoslovakian border, controlled since March by Germans.

The train comes to a stop. German soldiers mill around on the platform. They escort Gestapo officers boarding the train.

GESTAPO OFFICER

All passengers are to debark. Take only your passports or identification papers. Leave all your luggage on the train for the inspectors.

EXT. ON THE PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

As the last passenger debarks, the officer announces through a bullhorn...

GESTAPO OFFICER

Diplomats, raise your hands.

Several do.

The officer points.

GESTAPO OFFICER (CONT'D)

Form a line starting here. After my aide checks your papers you may return to your seats -- German nationals, raise your hands.

The number is larger.

GESTAPO OFFICER (CONT'D)

Line up behind these diplomats. The rest of you, I give you an opportunity to voluntarily declare any contraband on your person or in your luggage...

This group accounts for the largest.

GESTAPO OFFICER (CONT'D)

(he points again)

... and those with nothing to declare, form two lines here: men on the right, women on the left. You will now proceed to the restrooms to be strip searched.

NARRATOR

As I was carrying fifteen thousand zlotys in large bank notes strapped to my right leg and had a valuable collection of about nine hundred stamps strapped to my left leg, my anxiety began to rise. I felt like a frightened rabbit.

IN THE LINE

Victor is situated halfway down the line. In front is another SS officer seated at a field table set up in front of the men's bathroom entrance.

On the right, men emerge from the restroom. As Victor draws closer to the head of the line he hears...

SS OFFICER

Next. Do you have any contraband to declare?

Trying to appear casual, Victor puts his hands in his pockets. Then, the thinnest trace of a smile appears. Victor steps out of line, walks directly to the Gestapo officer who is bent over a document magnifying machine. Over the top of his eyebrows he notices Victor.

Immediately, Victor flashes a PNF (Partito Nazionale Fascista) badge in the officer's face.

VICTOR

(irritated)

I am Lwów's representative of the Blackshirt Youths for Southeastern Poland and Galicia. I'm expected at an emergency meeting with the Blackshirts in Rome.

Victor pounds a fist on the table. The SS officer is taken aback.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Your delay is causing me to miss my
Vienna connection. Mussolini will
hear about this.

The SS officer rises. Pushes the table out of the way and steps out, towers over Victor. He curses in German. Then, arm outstretched, points for Victor to get back in line - but he points to the wrong line, the one waiting to re-board the train. The German shouts again.

SS OFFICER

(shrieks)
Geh zurück.

Appearing to sulk, Victor follows the man's outstretched arm.

NARRATOR

That night, I slept in my clothes.

EXT./INT. RAILROAD YARD, VIENNA - DAY

Victor's train rolls slowly among the many tracks, finally coming to rest inside the main station.

Victor, tired, struggles with the luggage. Scans the hall for directions. Above many heads is a large arrivals/departures board.

NEAR THE BIG BOARD

Victor drops the luggage, scans his ticket and finds the departure time for his connection to Zurich.

INT. TRAIN STATION - CONTINUOUS

Victor looks about, finds an empty seat, plops down beside the luggage. Nearby, is a group of six young Italian fascists drinking at a beer stand sporting PNF party badges on their jacket lapels, smoking cigarettes and joking around.

YOUNG FASCIST

... Duce's talk on Mare Nostrum
was something, wasn't it?

The others loudly agree.

YOUNG FASCIST (CONT'D)

My old man thinks I'm crazy
following Il Duce. He doesn't
understand how exciting these
times are for us fascists.

Laughter and LOUD agreement follow.

Approaching from the b.g. are two Austrian's of about the same age in Nazi Brownshirt uniforms. They have already perfected a superior swagger. With just two yards between them - the latter salute.

YOUNG NAZIS
Heil Hitler!

The Italians eye each other and lazily respond with the traditional...

YOUNG FASCISTS
Duce a noi!

... followed by snickering.

The Brownshirts appraise them, turn away. The Italian's laughter swells behind their backs.

Victor keeps his eyes on the Brownshirts who meet up with four comrades and retrace their steps to...

CONFRONT THE ITALIANS...

YOUNG NAZI
In the interest of the Third Reich -
Are you carrying any concealed
weapons?

The biggest Italian...

YOUNG FASCIST
No. As if it's any of your
business.

Immediately, two Brownshirts begin to frisk and pat him down.

YOUNG NAZI
Loosen your knickerbockers, raise
them above your knees.

YOUNG FASCIST
(to the Nazi frisking him)
I have weapons up here.

The Nazi youth looks up.

YOUNG FASCIST (CONT'D)
(shows two fists)
Do these count?

He kicks the Nazi over. In the blink of an eye, the twelve of them are in full-brawl mode.

Victor jumps up, grabs the baggage and back-steps through a group of onlookers to the...

MEN'S RESTROOM

Victor locks a stall door, checks his pocket watch.

MEN'S RESTROOM - LATER

Victor, seated on a toilet, checks the pocket watch.

SUPER: "GDANSK, POLAND SEPTEMBER 1, 1939 10:00"

EXT. HEVELIUS PLATZ - DAY

Franki Morawicki enters the city's square, Hevelius Platz, to find it filled with jackbooted Nazi soldiers surrounded by onlookers. Everyone faces the Gdansk post office.

FRANKI

(to onlookers)

What the hell is going on? I'm supposed to start work in the post office this morning.

ONLOOKER 1

Doesn't look you'll start today.

FRANKI

I don't...

ONLOOKER 1

The radio said a German named Brauchitsch led these troops from the Westerplatte this morning. Nobody stopped them.

FRANKI

So, we're at war?

ONLOOKER 2

Who knows? Maybe there's a mistake.

FRANKI

Invasions don't happen by mistake... What about the postal workers?

ONLOOKER 1

Somebody said they've been here since 4 A.M. There's around sixty inside and they're armed.

FRANKI

Armed? Are they out of their minds?

Franki looks across the masses.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

There's a couple hundred Germans, and they brought canons.

ONLOOKER 3

I heard the post master, his wife and ten year old daughter refuse to leave.

FRANKI

It's futile. Don't they know it?

No one responds.

Franki shakes his head, turns away. Sees a coffee shop.

INT. COFFEE SHOP ON THE HEVELIUS PLATZ - CONTINUOUS

Franki enters, finds a table by a window. Seen through the window, Franki takes a sip of coffee as a large clock behind him shows 11:00 A.M.

Suddenly, a barrage of small arms fire explodes. Bullets are followed by several artillery shells against the post office facade. Windows shatter and bits of masonry fly.

Amid the reverberations, more gunfire and screams - a short lull ensues. Franki jumps up, bolts the coffee shop.

NARRATOR

Around 5:00 P.M. An enormous explosive device was set off. The walls of the post office collapsed, disintegrating into a noisy welter of smoke and dust. Later, Germans flooded the basement with gasoline and set the structure afire. Thirty eight survived only to be summarily executed.

EXT. ROAD TO GDANSK - DAY

German soldiers take down the city sign and replace it with another sign: DANZIG.

SUPER: "LWÓW, SEPTEMBER 12, 1939"

INT. WINIARNIA - DAY

Franki is back among friends. He and André, Dani, Stasia and Lari eat a breakfast of sausage, cheese, bread and coffee.

ANDRÉ

... all we can do is wait and see
how things turn out.

LARI

Well, everyone has to eat so I hope
they'll leave the farmers alone...
not that I want them in the city
either.

Franki rips off a piece of bread to sop up egg yolk.

FRANKI

I don't want to go to the Soviet
Union. But that might be our only
choice.

ANDRÉ

Poland's in no position to resist
Hitler. Maybe when the initial
fighting is over things will settle
down.

FRANKI

Won't happen. The underground
resistance won't settle for
occupation.

Out of nowhere there's suddenly a LOUD WHISTLING SOUND.
Everyone freezes. Another sound of WINDING ENGINES follows
seconds before bombs begin exploding - and not too far away.

ANDRÉ

Stukas!

They scramble for cover. Bombs fall closer and closer. They
cover their ears with their hands. They hide under a table,
crouch down near walls. The floor shudders. Swirling dust
fills the air. They pull clothing up to cover their mouths.
The next explosion isn't as near but again dust swirls.

Momentarily, Padre Michele, wire-frame glasses askew and black frock dusted brown, appears through the haze.

PADRE

(in tears)

O Lord. They're gone. They're gone!

ANDRÉ

Padre. Who's gone?

The others crowd around the priest.

PADRE

The priests. My friends. All four.
A bomb hit St. Elizabeth's parish
house. I...

Another explosion sets their ears ringing.

PADRE (CONT'D)

(over the din)

The orphanage... hit too. The
children escaped.

Another bomb sets the winiarnia shivering. Shortly, the explosions become more distant.

PADRE (CONT'D)

How am I going to care for two
hundred and three children?

LARI

We can help, Padre.

PADRE

Perhaps. But there's more to it.
Father Lantini just arrived from
Warsaw... thank God he was
shopping... told me last night that
the orphans, especially the Jewish
ones, are in extreme danger due to
all that Nazi hyperbole.

ANDRÉ

Probably so. We really have to give
this some thought.

FRANKI

Bring 'em here. We got empty
apartments, food and water to take
care of them for awhile.

LARI

If the roads stay open I can bring
food from the farm.

PADRE

You're both right. Good ideas.
Carlo would have done the same.

FRANKI

Let's go. No time to waste.

EXT. STREETS OF LWÓW - DAY

With Stukas overhead, but targeting another section of Lwów, the group breaks into ones and twos, runs, hides, dodges from buildings and piles of smouldering rubble until they make their way to the bombed-out, still smoking Neo-Gothic church of St. Elizabeth.

A large part of the roof collapsed into the sanctuary and nave. There, among the rubble, they find FATHER LANTINI (grey hair, tall, glasses) and the children who eerily reappear from hiding places.

FATHER LANTINI

I haven't stopped praying since you
left. Who are these people?

PADRE

Good friends. They have a place
where the children can be fed and
housed.

FATHER LANTINI

Thank God.

PADRE

And thank Carlo who gave me money
for just such an emergency.

FATHER LANTINI

Who's Carlo?

PADRE

They'll tell you. Right now I have
to try to salvage their
identification papers.

INT. WINIARNIA - LATER

The orphans vary from very young children to teenagers. They talk and move about as Lari, Dani and Stasia coordinate finding them room in the various apartments. Meanwhile in...

CARLO'S OFFICE

André, Franki and the two priests, seated around a big desk, make plans. A stack of official documents rest nearby.

FATHER LANTINI

We should thank God the papers weren't burned.

PADRE

Children can't stay here, now there's a war. Without these it'll be impossible to travel...

FATHER LANTINI

Worse. With Austria and Czechoslovakia's borders controlled by Nazis, Jewish children won't get through.

PADRE

Think about that. The only way I see to get them to safety is to go south to Budapest, then Yugoslavia to Venice.

FRANKI

Yes. Yes! There is a way out. Now you'll need new papers for the Jewish kids.

Franki's mischievous look lands on André.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

Can you do anything about that, André?

He looks more hopeful.

ANDRÉ

There's not much time.

NARRATOR

An artist and printer, André rounded up two other members of the Lwów Stamp Club.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

During the next few days they modified, falsified and generated the necessary new documents. By the morning of the fifteenth all traces of Jewish ancestry had not only been removed, the children were now Roman Catholics.

INT. CARLO'S OFFICE - DAY

The men are seated around the big desk. Padre and Father Lantini admire some documents.

PADRE

Incredible. A bit of singeing, some folds, wrinkles... you've given them character; tells a story of authenticity.

André smiles.

ANDRÉ

If you think they look good, you're going to love this.

He hands a paper to Father Lantini. The priest's eyes open wide.

FATHER LANTINI

My God. You forged a Vatican Travel Order?

Padre takes it from his hands, scrutinizes the document.

PADRE

I don't think the pope himself could have done better.

Laughter breaks out.

André points to the document.

ANDRÉ

It permits two priests accompanying two hundred and three children to pass through any European border on their way to the Vatican.

PADRE

This ensures your ticket to Heaven.

ANDRÉ

If not... I'll forge one.

Padre leans in to hug him.

FRANKI

Something else. Despite what happened in Gdansk, I'm still a postal official. So I went to the main post office this morning and I sent a telegram to Carlo in Volargne...

FATHER LANTINI

You didn't tell him what we've done.

FRANKI

Of course not... I told him that we were going to need some assistance with the children's travel from the Brenner Pass. I wrote...

FATHER LANTINI

...But we're not going through the Brenner...

FRANKI

Yes. I know. So does Carlo... but the Germans won't.

FATHER LANTINI

Then how...

ANDRÉ

The secret language of stamps.

FRANKI

I told Carlo Padre wanted to buy a complete mint set of commemorative stamps for the Ceferiada's seventieth anniversary and that he should have them...

FATHER LANTINI

The what?

FRANKI

Ceferiada. Celebrating Romania's first railroad station in eighteen sixty-nine... the point is, Padre wants them post marked by the issuing post office.

FATHER LANTINI

I still don't understand.

FRANKI

Carlo KNOWS the issuing post office is Bucharest, which is NOT en route to the Brenner Pass.

FATHER LANTINI

Are you sure this Carlo understands?

Franki pulls a telegram from his pocket.

FRANKI

I have it right here. Carlo suggested Padre pick up a mint corner block commemorating Hitler's fiftieth birthday and have it also postmarked by the issuing post office. Carlo knows very well the stamp was issued in Braunau, Austria.

PADRE

Pretty damn slick these stamp collectors, eh? Carlo knows the trains too. He'll figure we have to make the Innsbruck connection.

SUPER: "SEPTEMBER 17, 1939"

INT. WINIARNIA - DAY

Franki walks down a hallway, past a window. A steady rain pools in the courtyard below. He comes to André's room. The door is open.

André and Padre look very serious.

PADRE

...that's what I heard.

FRANKI

What was that?

ANDRÉ

Padre says the radio announced that Soviet Union invaded Poland early this morning.

FRANKI

But... no one's declared war on Russia.

PADRE

Correct. And nobody knows what goes on between Hitler and Stalin.

FRANKI

We're supposed to fight the Germans and the Red Army?

PADRE

I'm taking the children. We're leaving. Tell the girls I said good-bye. I hope to see you down the road somewhere.

NARRATOR

Padre negotiated for two teams of horses and covered, double-trailer hay wagons. He distributed the last of the five thousand six hundred zlotys among the children to prevent it all being confiscated. Later that day, they began a two week walk to Bucharest. Fortunately, the Vatican travel papers were never challenged. At Innsbruck they caught the final connection to Rome.

SUPER: "LAST DAYS OF SEPTEMBER 1939"

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

What the world didn't know is that Hitler "gifted" eastern Poland to Stalin who failed to conquer the area in the early 1920s. Stalin would now have his revenge.

EXT. SOVIET COMMUNAL FARM - DAY

Lari and Stasia sit on the farmhouse porch steps. Stasia, head down, cries.

Lari puts an arm around Stasia.

LARI

I understand. I was born on a farm. So it's not much different for me.

Stasia shakes her head despondently.

STASIA

I don't know if I can handle this. I'm... I'm no farmer's daughter.

(MORE)

STASIA (CONT'D)

My life is in the city where
there's music and theater. I'm a
ballerina.

LARI

If there was a way to bring you to
our farm, I would. You know that.

Stasia is overwhelmed.

STASIA

This is an army farm. I'm going to
go crazy here.

She bows her head, continues sobbing.

LARI

My grandmother once said happiness
doesn't depend on where you live or
where you are... Look at the
Perantonis. They were wealthy. Now
it's all gone. Lwów's been bombed.
Padre's gone. Victor's in
Switzerland. I imagine they'd all
like to be back home.

Stasia wipes her eyes on her sleeves.

LARI (CONT'D)

Happiness is a state of mind. It's
an attitude we need to cultivate.
We have no choice.

SUPER: "JUNE 22, 1941"

NARRATOR

Breaking the Molotov-Ribbentrop
Nonaggression Pact, Nazi Germany
re-invaded Poland. Needing more
troops, the Soviets conscripted
Polish men into the Red Army. Among
them were André Frodel and Franki
Morawiecki who, in late July, found
themselves in the Soviet village of
Totskoye.

EXT. TOTSKOYE, SOVIET TRAINING CAMP - DAY

A Soviet officer addresses an assembly of Polish conscripts.

TRAINING OFFICER

Germany has taken your land... your homes, families, farms, crops and cattle. They are raping your women! But we are giving you a chance to fight back! Beginning today, you will be forged into a special unit of the Red Army.

Low level cheers go up from the motley group. In the back Franki grasps André's arm.

FRANKI

You hear that? We're gonna fight the Germans.

ANDRÉ

We'll see. Perhaps it's better than nothing.

INT. TOTSKOYE SOVIET MESS TENT - EVENING

Franki has already begun eating diner when André arrives. The look on André's face says it all.

FRANKI

What's wrong?

André sits beside him.

ANDRÉ

They told me I'm too old to fight. They're sending me to a work camp... in Siberia.

Franki gapes.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Yes. It sounds bad but it won't be forever. I promise. I'll join you as soon as I can.

FRANKI

But... how?

ANDRÉ

I still have my pens, inks and some paper. Nothing's going to stop me. Nothing.

SUPER: "SUMMER 1941"

INT. LWÓW - RABINOWITZ CAMERA SHOP - DAY

MR. JACOB RABINOWITZ (fifties, bearded) sits at a desk behind a counter reading a broad sheet as he smokes a pipe. His look is inscrutable.

A small bell rings as the front door opens. A customer, MR. WOJCIK (thirties, modest mustache) glances over his shoulder and closes the door behind him.

MR. WOJCIK
Morning Mr. Rabinowitz.

MR. RABINOWITZ
And to you, Mr. Wojcik.

Wojcik looks around casually. Rabinowitz ambles to the showcase counter.

MR. WOJCIK
Glad to see you're still in business.

MR. RABINOWITZ
Who knows for how long? But I'm an optimist, Mr. Wojcik. I'm sure business will pick up the day the Germans leave Lwów.

Wojcik puts hands to mouth to stifle a laugh.

MR. RABINOWITZ (CONT'D)
As not much is going on at the moment, would you like a cup of coffee?

MR. WOJCIK
You have coffee?

MR. RABINOWITZ
I call it that only during a war.

MR. WOJCIK
And if there were no war?

MR. RABINOWITZ
I wouldn't serve it to a good customer such as yourself.
(loud)
Dani.

DANI (O.S.)
Yes, Papa.

MR. RABINOWITZ
 (loud)
 Bring Mr. Wojcik a cup of our
 finest coffee.

Dani laughs (O.S.)

MR. WOJCIK
 What were you reading?

MR. RABINOWITZ
 Poorly disguised propaganda. You
 can't believe anything you read or
 hear on the radio.

MR. WOJCIK
 I heard America's secretly helping
 the British. Do you think they'll
 help us?

Dani enters with a tray.

DANI
 Sorry I can't offer any sugar. But
 here's a little honey to help.

Dani goes to her father's chair. Looks over the broad sheet.

MR. RABINOWITZ
 I'm not optimistic. No matter if
 you go east or west, they're about
 fifteen thousand kilometers away.

Wojcik drinks a sip, makes a face.

MR. WOJCIK
 I did come here with a purpose Mr.
 Rabinowitz. Do you have a long
 cable release?

MR. RABINOWITZ
 (shouts)
 Mama. We need a long cable release.

MAMA (O.S.)
 Yah. Yah. I see a box...two boxes.

Momentarily, MAMA (fifties, hair in a bun) appears with the
 boxes.

MAMA (CONT'D)
 Two meters? Three meters?

MR. WOJCIK
Three is probably bet...

The door bell rings. They turn to find an SS officer (notable facial scar) accompanied by several soldiers who rush in behind him.

SS OFFICER
(to Wojcik)
Who are you?

MR. WOJCIK
A... a customer. I came in for...

SS OFFICER
(to a soldier)
Take him out. I'll interrogate him later.

Soldiers close in.

MR. RABINOWITZ
This is my shop. What do you want?

The SS Officer holds up an identity card with a man's face on it.

SS OFFICER
Do you know this man?

Rabinowitz looks at it passively.

MR. RABINOWITZ
He looks like a lot of men. Some are customers. I can't say I know this man for sure.

SS OFFICER
(smirks)
But he knows you.

MR. RABINOWITZ
I walk a lot for exercise.

SS OFFICER
Do you now? I'm not surprised as you might have to walk quite a way to contact these so-called Home Army resistance trash.

Rabinowitz lowers his eyes.

SS OFFICER (CONT'D)
These women your family?

Rabinowitz freezes, looks at them.

MR. RABINOWITZ
My family... yes.

SS OFFICER
Is this all of them?

Rabinowitz nods.

SS OFFICER (CONT'D)
Outside. Onto the truck.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Soldiers pull the Rabinowitzs up onto the large troop truck. The SS officer joins them as soldiers tie the hands and feet of Dani's parents.

DANI
(frantic)
Where are you taking us?

SS Officer has a satisfactory smile.

SS OFFICER
Not far.

The truck starts up and slowly rolls in reverse until it's under a large tree.

Dani's parents regard each other silently.

DANI
(beseeching)
What's going on?

SS OFFICER
Two old Jews aren't worth anything.
Not even a trip to a labor camp.

DANI
What are you saying?

SS OFFICER
Saying? Say goodbye.

Nooses are placed around their necks and thrown over a large limb. Soldiers tie the ropes off.

Dani tries to reach her mother - the officer jerks her back. The truck grinds forward.

DANI (O.S.)
 (screams)
 God! Nooo...

SUPER: "SWITZERLAND SUMMER 1941"

INT. BERNE CAFE, SWITZERLAND - DAY

Victor sits with a well-dressed female companion, FREIDA (mid-twenties). They're having pastries and coffee.

VICTOR
 Yeah. I got another refusal from
 the Soviet Embassy for a visa.

FREIDA
 Why bother depressing yourself over
 and over?

Victor says nothing. Starts to read a newspaper.

FREIDA (CONT'D)
 Forget Poland. There's nothing you
 can do.

He looks up over his eyebrows.

VICTOR
 Have you forgotten France?

FREIDA
 Of course not. But being Jewish,
 I'm not safe anywhere the Nazis are
 in control.

VICTOR
 I don't have that problem.

FREIDA
 Anywhere there's a war, you have a
 problem.

Victor folds the newspaper, lays it on the table.

VICTOR
 Don't take this personal, but I've
 already made up my mind to go back
 to Lwów.

FREIDA
 Victor, you can't. And I do take it
 personal.

VICTOR

I have a plan. You want to hear it?

FREIDA

No. -- Yes.

Victor, looks around to see if anyone's listening, leans in.

VICTOR

The Germans have retaken Lwów. It's my window of opportunity. Hitler and Mussolini are still allies. So, first... I was a member of Mussolini's fascist youth groups. I've kept their regalia with me. Second, I personally met il Duce in my father's Winiarnia in 1929. Because of our shared love of stamps, he jokingly said he'd see to it that I'd be in charge of designing new fascist stamps.

FREIDA

Benito Mussolini is not going to remember you.

VICTOR

Doesn't matter.

FREIDA

Victor. I know you're not a fool...

VICTOR

... We agree. But I showed him my friend André's fake Mussolini stamps and he was so thrilled that he signed a corner block with his distinctive "M", monogram. So, for the Germans, I'll be on a mission initiating the coming one thousand year rule of the Third Reich.

Freida stares at him.

FREIDA

You've got a lot of chutzpah. I think it's what got you into my bedroom in the first place.

SUPER: "AUGUST 10, 1941"

EXT. LWÓW, MAIN TRAIN STATION - DAY

Carrying bags and a photographic tripod, Victor leaves the station to find a city of horrors: squalor, death and decay. The landscape has become totally foreign. The smell makes him sick.

A German patrol passes but pays no heed. Shortly, Victor sees men and women hung by the neck - dangling from lamp posts and trees. Among them he recognizes the blue vest of Krzysztof Gorki and Sibilia; their putrefying corpses rotting in the August heat.

Corpses of animals, many former house pets, lie fly covered, larvae-infested -- composting on the sidewalks.

Victor drops the bags, vomits.

EXT./INT. WINIARNIA - DAY

Victor stands in the subdued light of the colorless dining room. Everything, except the bar, is gone.

Upstairs, he strolls from room to room in a daze. Everywhere he goes - nothing but empty rooms.

He comes to Luigi's bedroom. Wipes tearing eyes on a sleeve. Looks about, turns to leave, but spots something he can't believe. A secret floorboard remains untouched. He kneels, struggles with the board and therein finds a string wrapped package.

Victor checks over his shoulder to make sure he's alone. Extracts the package. Finds a letter and the entire contents of André and Franki's stamp collections.

INSERT - TYPED LETTER, WHICH READS:

"Dear Victor,
 Events in Lwów have been
 horrifying. The Germans and the
 Russians have gone berserk, killing
 innocent people on nothing but
 trumped up charges - some of it by
 collaborators. There is no court,
 no justice. Just summary
 executions. There's little doubt
 Franki and I will be taken prisoner
 as the Russians have beat them
 back, at least for the moment. God
 willing, we'll see you down the
 road."

Victor looks up, to sunshine through a broken window.

VICTOR
And what about the girls?

SUPER: "AUGUST 12, 1941"

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - DAY

Victor walks along the road. A German truck speeds past. He stops to watch it fade into the b.g..

From behind comes the sound of CLICKING HORSESHOES. He turns to see an old woman driving a cart. He steps out, waves his arms. The old woman drives past, then pulls up. He runs to the cart.

DRIVER
What are you doin' out here?

VICTOR
Trying to find Larisa Doroshenka
and some friends.

DRIVER
I can take you part way to the
Doroshenko farm. Hop on.

Victor climbs in back, pulls out some photos of the girls, shows them to the old woman.

VICTOR
This one is Dani, Daniela
Rabinowitz. Do you know her?

DRIVER
I've seen her in the past but not
for a long time... I guess you
don't know -- the Nazis killed her
parents.

Victor reels from the news.

VICTOR
Oh God.

EXT. HORSE CART - MOMENTS LATER

They arrive at a cross road.

DRIVER
I turn here mister.

Victor proffers some pocket change.

She hesitates, takes it.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
That's very kind. May God help you
find your friends.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Following a curve in the road, beside a woods, Victor walks into a foot patrol -- of Italian soldiers. He gawks.

Several ready their rifles. Victor raises his hands, looks to the leader.

VICTOR
Buon pomeriggio, signore.

A sergeant is taken aback.

SERGEANT
Tu sei italiano?

VICTOR
Yes. I have dual citizenship.

SERGEANT
Show me your papers.

Victor pulls a passport from an inner jacket pocket.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Perantoni, Vittorio.

VICTOR
Yes.

The sergeant flips through the pages.

SERGEANT
Seems you travel a lot.

VICTOR
I'm in the wine business,
import/export.

SERGEANT
You live in Switzerland. What are
you doing here -- walking a country
road?

VICTOR

I used to live in Lwów. My family had a winiarnia...

SERGEANT

... Excuse me. This is more than a bit strange. We're heading back to Lwów. Why don't you lead the way.

VICTOR

But I'm looking for old friends.

SERGEANT

I'm sure division headquarters can help.

The sergeant points Victor back in the direction from which he came.

NARRATOR

I soon learned that the Third Reich's four million man military was over-extended, from Scandinavia to North Africa. Hence, many of their non-strategic interest were assigned to Italian allies. After an interview with Lwów's Italian Military Police, I was sent to Division Headquarters.

INT. ITALIAN DIVISION HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Victor is escorted into the office of the Division Comandante Colonello Alberto Campana who sits behind an ornate desk.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

(to soldier)

That will be all.

(to Victor)

Take a seat Signore Perantoni.

Victor sits rigidly.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

Frankly, why are you in Lwów?

VICTOR

My family owns the Winiarnia Italia, not far from here, at 29 Ulica Sykstuska. A tavern of light cuisine and Italian wines.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Ah. I thought I heard your family name before. An old diplomat from Krakow perhaps. And recently, one of the locals mentioned it. Said he missed it.

VICTOR

My father was an army officer in The Great War. When it ended, he took over the business from an uncle.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Two generations here, eh?

Victor can't conceal his relief.

VICTOR

Yes. Yes. But the place has been looted. Nothing's left.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

So, you have dual nationality?

VICTOR

Yes. Born here. And I hope to find old friends. That was the...

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

... You realize that as an Italian citizen you're subject to military duty?

VICTOR

But... I've never lived in Italy.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

That's a minor technicality.

Victor's concern is discernible.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

I'm obliged to send you to Italy for military training. You're Polish citizenship no longer exists. In fact, and I'm sure this will hurt you deeply, neither is there any longer a Poland.

VICTOR

That can't be.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 Perantoni. We're in German occupied
 territory. There is no Polish
 government.

Tears well up in Victor's eyes.

The comandante remains silent for a moment. Then opens a desk
 drawer, takes out a leather folder, flips through some
 pages, turns it towards Victor.

Victor blinks away the nascent tears. He can't believe what
 he sees: a glassine encased 1929 Winiarnia invitation
 postcard with André's fake Mussolini stamp.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 I bought this at a Naples trade
 fair. Cost me a lot of lira.

VICTOR
 Beautiful, no?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 When I learned I was being posted
 to Leopoldis, I mean Lwów, I hoped
 to find the artist, André Frodel.

VICTOR
 He's one of the friends I'm looking
 for.

For the first time, the comandante smiles.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 Are you ready to trade?

Excitement shows on Victor's face.

VICTOR
 What could I have that you want?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 A full sheet of Frodel's Mussolini
 stamp.

VICTOR
 And in return?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 I have to set up an Italian
 military post office. Would you
 like the job?

Victor's eyes are clear and intensely focused.

VICTOR

I don't have access to a full sheet.

They regard each other pensively.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

I have something better.

Victor stands, reaches into the inner pocket of his jacket, pulls out a wallet, retrieves the small glassine corner block of initialed fake Mussolini stamps, lays it on the desk.

The comandante's eyes light up. He's smitten.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

We have a deal.

He rises, offers a hand shake. As they do...

VICTOR

Where's your post office located?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

At the moment, there's just a postal van parked outside. Mail will begin to arrive tomorrow... Now that I have a proper post master, do you have any idea where we can set up the official post office?

VICTOR

Indeed, I do.

EXT. WINIARNIA - DAY

Two Italian soldiers on ladders install signs over the storefront: POSTA MILITARE - REGIO ESERCITO D'ITALIA - ARMATA DI LEOPOLI, decorated with Fascist symbols, a likeness of Mussolini and the words "Saluto al Duce"

NARRATOR

What had been the bar and dining room was now a proper post office. Before long, I also processed German military mail, including inbound and outbound mail for the Russian Front.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In Lwów there was a small German contingent at the War Operations Staging and Development Center, located at the rail substation near the Janowska Labor Camp, a holding area for Jews and political prisoners before being shipped to death camps.

SUPER: "NOVEMBER 1941"

INT. WINIARNIA - DAY

Hands on his hips, the Comandante evaluates the space. Victor watches. Comandante spreads his arms upward.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Victor. This place is too large for a post office. Don't you agree?

Victor is leery.

VICTOR

Yes. It's... spacious.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Glad you agree. I'd like to offer a suggestion.

VICTOR

Of course.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

With the holidays coming up, why could we not relocate the post office to the adjacent apartment's front room and redecorate this like it once was? Make it a club for soldiers.

Victor is flabbergasted.

VICTOR

Si, Signore COMANDANTE. That's a fine idea.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

And there's that empty ground floor apartment across the courtyard. We could modify it into an officers club. What do you think.

VICTOR

Oh. Si, si. You really know how to take care of your men.

The comandante holds a look on Victor.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Do you suppose... if the army provided transportation from Verona to Leopoli... that your father would give us a good deal on wine?

VICTOR

I will guarantee it.

NARRATOR

I wouldn't know until later that at about the same time Franki was receiving additional training in Totskoye as a member of General Wladislaw Ander's new Polish Army. The Soviets planned to deploy these troops to Iran, via the Persian Corridor, to form the Polish 2nd Corps in the Middle East which would then join British allies in Egypt.

(NOTE: Archival film and newsreels may be available to use as background for this and other narrations.)

EXT./INT. TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILROAD TRAIN - DAY

Panorama of snowy Siberian boreal forest in November. The only sign of life - a single railroad train eating up track.

INSIDE A TRAIN CAR

André Frodel, bundled against the cold, clutching a wooden box to his chest, snores. Only a few seats around him are occupied.

He startles, one eye cracks open. He awakens from his torpor. With finger-less gloves he opens the box. Amid pens and pencils, fixed in their proper places, is a half finished document. He looks around at the others. Then peeks with a small magnifying glass. Satisfied, he closes the box and returns to his dreams.

EXT. SIBERIAN TRANSIT CAMP - NIGHT

Snow falls across the taiga under a moon-lit sky. André debarks. Before him, a barbed wire enclosure inside of which are several log cabins, each with a smoking chimney. He looks back at the train, notes very few other men getting off. He's confused.

GUARD

(announces)

Prisoners. You are at a transit camp. Transportation to Kolyma will arrive in several days. Have your papers and bags in hand. Form a line.

Near André is a SICK MAN, holding part of a scarf over his mouth.

ANDRÉ

Where are the others?

SICK MAN

What others?

ANDRÉ

The men on the train.

Sick Man regards the motley group.

SICK MAN

Have you slept through the past two weeks?

(coughs)

They're dead. We're all that's left.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

A fire burns slowly in a barrel stove. Men are crammed into sleeping areas on pallets. André looks to a big BEARDED MAN nearby who scratches his face.

ANDRÉ

What do we do here?

BEARDED MAN

(expressionless)

We wait.

ANDRÉ

Wait?

BEARDED MAN

The only transport to Kolyma is by river. The ice has to thaw before ships can take us upriver to the mines.

ANDRÉ

It's not even December. We have to wait till spring?

BEARDED MAN

Why are you here?

ANDRÉ

They say I'm too old to fight.

BEARDED MAN

Old, eh? Well there's a serious crime for yah.

ANDRÉ

How long have you been here?

BEARDED MAN

How long? Pfft. Time doesn't exist anymore... more than two full moons.

ANDRÉ

(lowers voice)

Is there a way to get out?

BEARDED MAN

Two. Die on the Western Front or die here.

LATER

While others sleep, André continues work on the forged document.

As if by magic...

Fifty-one becomes thirty-nine years old. Occupation changes from printer to master tent maker. For additional skills he adds multilingual translator.

Before he finishes, he runs out of red ink. He stares at the paper. In dim light he pulls a splinter from a pallet, pierces a finger, squeezes out several drops of blood and adds some white. Once satisfies the colors match, he holds the document near the fire to dry.

Nearby, Bearded Man watches through eye slits.

EXT. OUTSIDE CABIN - DAY

Prisoners line up four rows deep. Two guards face them. One steps to the middle of the first line.

FIRST GUARD
Those on my left fall out. Go
collect your wood cutting tools.

Among them is André.

EXT./INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The wood cutting group returns, file inside the cabin. The barrel stove's warmth draws men like summer moths.

André goes to his pallet, surreptitiously searches under the blanket. He's stunned. Throws back the blanket. The box and document are gone. André says nothing, scrutinizes those around him.

No one pays him any attention, except Bearded Man. They regard each other. Bearded Man approaches.

BEARDED MAN
Are you anxious?

ANDRÉ
Why do you ask?

BEARDED MAN
I know who did it.

ANDRÉ
Will you tell me?

Bearded Man inches closer. Lowers his voice.

BEARDED MAN
Only the air is free here.

ANDRÉ
Lucky for us.

BEARDED MAN
Everything has a price.

André looks about.

ANDRÉ
Like the rest, I have nothing.

BEARDED MAN
But you do... one third ration of
your bread.

ANDRÉ
I can't live on...

BEARDED MAN
... I'll tell him what you said.

ANDRÉ
Wait.

INT. ADMINISTRATION CABIN - DAY

André sits across a smooth pine table from a man with a cup
of hot tea.

ANDRÉ
... I'm telling you. No one listens
to me.

MAN WITH TEA
I'm bored. Amuse me.

ANDRÉ
Please read the document, not just
my name.

André slides it slowly across the table.

Man With Tea yawns. Hovers over it. Blinks several times.
Picks it up.

MAN WITH TEA
What the hell!

He puts a magnifying glass over it. Then holds it to the
light.

MAN WITH TEA (CONT'D)
Somebody's gonna lose their head.
Master tent maker? What idiot
wouldn't know how necessary you are
for the war effort?

ANDRÉ
Some of your comrades aren't as
sober as you. You're absolutely
right. Who could be that stupid?

MAN WITH TEA

What a god damn mess. Listen,
there's a train returning west in
two days. You should be rerouted to
Ander's Polish Army. I'm gonna make
sure you're on it.

ANDRÉ

And if I get a chance, I'll make
sure someone in authority hears
about you.

Man With Tea shows teeth, smiles cruelly.

SUPER: "EARLY DECEMBER, LWÓW 1941"

INT. WINIARNIA - NIGHT

Work on the two clubs is complete. The comandante pays a
visit. Signage has changed to inform - "Bar dell'Armata -
Club Soldati Del Fascio." He crosses the courtyard to the
officers club, looks about admiringly, takes a table.

A table server greets him.

SERVER

Good evening, sir. What would you
like?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

A nice glass of vermouth. And tell
Victor I wish to speak to him.

The server disappears and Victor approaches with a bottle of
vermouth and two glasses.

VICTOR

What do you think?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Sit down. Sit down.

Victor obliges.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

You've managed this well, as I
suspected you would.

VICTOR

You're a good judge of men.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
Despite your cleverness, your
flattery does not go unnoticed.

Victor pours their drinks. The comandante raises his glass.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
(in Italian)
Cin cin.

Victor clinks glasses.

VICTOR
(in Italian)
Cent'anni.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
A hundred years? Really? You are an
optimist Signore Perantoni.

They sip drinks.

VICTOR
I'm glad to see you're happy with
the outcome... There is something
that would make me happy too.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
Yes. I'm sure. And that would be?

VICTOR
A two day furlough to search for my
friends.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
Ah, Victor. I can't. Furloughs are
never granted in enemy territory.

VICTOR
You told me this was German
territory. Italy's ally.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
That's true. I did. But we're
holding it against potential Soviet
forces. It's contested territory.

The comandante regards him sympathetically.

Victor reaches for the bottle.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 Victor. There' not enough vermouth
 in Italy to induce me to sign a
 furlough.

Victor is dejected. But the comandante has a crafty smile.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 There's something I've wondered
 about.

VICTOR
 I'm sure.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 How are the post office supplies
 holding up?

VICTOR
 Fine. We haven't been in business
 long enough to make an inventory.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 In times of war, supply lines can
 be cut. Then where would we be?
 Maybe you should go look for a
 custom-made postal stamping kit
 with interchangeable letters... No
 telling when we might have an
 emergency.

Victor's face lights up.

VICTOR
 Planning for the unexpected. The
 mark of a great officer.

The comandante laughs. Raises his glass for another
 toast (CLINK).

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 Let's see. You'll need a car from
 motor pool and a driver.

EXT. DOROSHENKO FARM - DAY

Early in the morning an Italian military car pulls into the
 driveway. Victor emerges. Walks to the front door. KNOCKS. No
 answer. Goes around back to the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Victor enters. Sees Lari mucking a stall. She doesn't notice.

VICTOR

Larisa.

She freezes. Turns. Explodes with joy.

LARI

Oh my god! Victor!

They race to one another, embrace, cry with joy.

LARI (CONT'D)

Victor, Victor, Victor. I thought about you every day. I've been worried sick.

VICTOR

No more than me.

They kiss desperately. Hold each other tight.

A MOMENT LATER

They leave the barn, walk towards the car.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

What's happened to Stasia and Dani?

Lari stops.

LARI

Stasia's OK. She moved here with me after the Russians left. At the moment she's collecting kindling. She's had a rough time adapting.

VICTOR

And Dani?

Lari hesitates. Victor is immediately concerned.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

She's not...

LARI

No. Not yet.

VICTOR

What's that mean?

LARI

Nazis killed her parents and took her to Janowska Camp. She was moved to the Lwów Ghetto. The last stop is probably a labor camp.

She buries her head on Victor's shoulder.

NARRATOR

At that moment I knew I had to try to save Dani but had no idea how. In the days ahead, I got to thinking about the German's mail, particularly that of the guards. One night I steamed open several letters... finally, one steamed right back at me.

INT. VICTOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Victor sits at a small desk. Under a bright desk lamp he reads a letter taken from a plain envelope but written on expensive stationery.

INSERT - THE LETTER, WHICH READS:

"My Dearest Rolf,
You have barely gone, yet I miss you immensely. Except for the Führer, I've never met any man I love as much. I need your touch. I can't get you out of my thoughts. No matter the war, I will always love you. Do you love me? I'm yours forever. Do not forget me. Many kisses and sweet dreams my love.
Karl"

Victor smiles broadly.

VICTOR

Thank you Karl.

NARRATOR

Within days I collected a lot of information about Karl and his men.

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE, JANOWSKA CAMP - DAY

An S.S. Officer sorts mail at his desk. He sets aside four invitations to the Italian Officers Club Christmas Eve party.

EXT./INT. WINIARNIA - NIGHT

An SS officer (notable facial scar as in earlier scene) and three men with women companions appear at the front door. Victor opens the door, regards the officer. In the b.g. the party is already in motion.

VICTOR
(in German)
Gutten Abend. Willkomen auf unserer
Weihnachtsfeier.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
Ihr Deutsch ist gut. Vielen Dank
für die Einladung.

VICTOR
Come in. Come in. You have your
invitations, yes?

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
Of course.

The others hastily tender theirs.

VICTOR
The entry tickets must be validated
with your ID... I see you have the
free drink coupons. Good.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
My men have brought their
companions.

VICTOR
Yes. I see. Everything's fine.
Please go to the check-in.

AT THE TABLE

Victor stands close to the officer. Once his card is validated, Victor touches his arm.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I have a special gift for you.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
Really?

Victor goes to the bar and returns with a bottle of Lacryma Christi.

VICTOR
I've heard Germans love this as
much as Italians.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
Ah! We do. Thank you.

VICTOR
I think your men will do OK by
themselves. Why don't we go to the
officers club where we can have a
game or two of cards?

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
Lead the way.

VICTOR
Oh. I forgot. No guns allowed in
the officers club. Please leave
your sidearm with the attendant in
the cloakroom.

The officer obliges. Victor walks him across the courtyard to
the officers club.

INT. OFFICERS CLUB - CONTINUOUS

They enter in the midst of a card hand: American twenty-one.
The Italians are drinking, laughing, swearing, playing for
stamps.

Victor gives the S.S. Officer a small glassine with stamps.

VICTOR
You'll need a stake to get in this
game.

Victor catches the eyes of two Italian officers. Winks.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
We have a new unofficial member.
(to S.S. Officer)
Your name is Karl, yes?

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
Precisely.

VICTOR
I have to get back to work. Good
luck.

SUPER: "HOURS LATER"

Victor returns to the card game.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 (to S.S. Officer/Karl)
 That's an impressive pile of stamps
 you've won.

S.S. Officer/Karl is tipsy.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
 I'm good at twenty-one. You're
 right... that's a lot of stamps.
 Too bad we weren't playing for
 money.

VICTOR
 With money you might not have been
 so bold. When we have money we're
 usually more cautious.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
 Noo. I always play to win.

VICTOR
 So do I. And I have one stamp worth
 a hundred times what you have on
 the table.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
 Oh yeah. Show me.

Victor takes a stamp from his jacket pocket. Lays it on the
 table. Everyone watches the German, who looks to Victor.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL (CONT'D)
 You must be joking. You think I
 don't know stamps? It's a used
 worthless nineteen forty-one German
 racehorse stamp.

VICTOR
 You're right. Couldn't even mail a
 letter with it. It's not the
 catalogue price that makes it
 valuable. It's the letter the stamp
 was attached to.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
 What the hell are you talking
 about?

Italian officers move to each side of him.

ITALIAN OFFICER 1
We know certain things...

ITALIAN OFFICER 2
...about certain people.

S.S. Officer/Karl kicks back the chair and stands. The two Italian officers slam him back into the seat.

Victor pulls out the letter: begins to quote.

VICTOR
My dearest Rolf,
You've barely gone, yet I miss you
immensely. Except for the Führer
I've never met any man I love as
much. I need your touch...

S.S. Officer/Karl springs from the chair. Before anyone can grab him, he begins to bawl brazenly.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
I'm not worried.

Victor becomes angry.

VICTOR
You should be, because if any harm
comes to Daniela Rabinowitz, who's
detained in your stinking lousy
ghetto, I will personally see that
the man you love is shot before a
firing squad. His blood will be on
your hands.

S.S. Officer/Karl collapses onto the chair.

S.S. OFFICER/KARL
There's nothing I can do!

VICTOR
That's all I want. You do nothing.
Understand?

Victor puts the letter back in his pocket and from another flashes three additional letters.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
These are to the wives of your
guards cavorting with prostitutes
across the courtyard. I'll have a
few candid photos to go with them.

S.S. Officer/Karl stares vacantly at the stamps.

Victor points across the courtyard.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Now. Get up. There's a back door to the room they're in. Go catch them in the act, threaten them regarding their... adulterous behavior and tell them about the letters.

S.S. Officer /Karl hangs his head.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

And, why not a lecture on superior German morality. When you finish, come back and I'll tell you how this'll work.

SUPER: "NEW YEAR'S EVE"

EXT. LWÓW CITY SQUARE - NIGHT

A man and two women sing loudly as they stroll the street. The man appears to be a pimp. The two women, his girls. They are having a good time as they approach a group of street prostitutes across the street from Hotel George.

As they move into brighter light, it is apparent the man is Victor. The two women, Lari and Stasia, are all floozied up.

VICTOR

Good evening ladies.

The prostitutes are suspicious. A few feign smiles.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

My friends and I have a small problem.

A young, fairly pretty woman, is first to respond.

PROSTITUTE 1

Maybe I have the solution.

VICTOR

Well, my little coquette, perhaps you do. But we have a special need.

As Victor talks, Stasia and Lari look around for exactly what they need.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

We're going to a party with German guards in the ghetto. We're one shy. Would any one be interested?

The prostitutes are eager and vie for attention.

Lari whispers to Stasia. Stasia nods.

PROSTITUTE 2

(slurs)

I've never met a special need I couldn't fulfill.

PROSTITUTE 3

So low class. What she means is that she doesn't have a hole that can't be filled.

Other prostitutes titter.

Stasia whispers to Victor. He glances to the side, sees a woman that's pretty well blotto, wearing a broad hat. He concurs.

VICTOR

You. With the big hat. You want to make some money tonight?

HOOKER WITH BIG HAT is surprised.

HOOKER WITH BIG HAT

Me? Pff. Why not.

PROSTITUTE 1

Whoa. Must be one ugly guard up there.

As they walk away, Lari offers their guest a hit from a flask. A few steps later, Stasia offers hers.

EXT. GHETTO GATE - NIGHT

By this time, the hooker is very well soused. Stasia and Lari hold her arms to keep her vertical. Victor recognizes two gate guards from the party who wave them in.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The third guard escorts them to the lieutenant's quarters. He opens the door.

LIEUTENANT'S QUARTERS

There is no lieutenant. Ragged Dani doesn't even look up. They shuffle in. The door closes behind them.

VICTOR

Daniela.

Dani startles, eyes widen in disbelief.

DANI

Oh dear god, VICTOR! VICTOR, LARI,
STASIA. How in the name of god...

Friends rush each other. They hug and cry. Dani blubbers.

DANI (CONT'D)

I never... thought... never thought
I'd see any of you again. EVER. How
did you find me?

STASIA

Ask the smartest Italian pimp in
Poland.

Tears mix with laughter.

From behind, they hear a THUD. The hooker passed out on the floor.

VICTOR

I didn't plan that. How convenient.

MOMENTS LATER

Dani now wears the hooker's clothes. The hooker lies on the lieutenant's bed with some zlotys stuffed in her knickers. Dani pulls the hat over her eyes.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(to Dani)

No talking. You're too drunk. Lean
on Lari and Stasia.

(to Lari and Stasia)

Ready?

They nod.

Victor opens the door. They saunter down the hallway.

EXT. GHETTO GATE - NIGHT

The troupe sings and laughs, as Dani is dragged along. At the gate, Victor gives each guards a flask. After the girls pass through...

VICTOR
(in German)
Einen gutten rutsch Ins Neue Jhar.

INT. WINIARNIA - NIGHT

Smoke is thick and music loud as Victor and the girls pass through the crowd and into Carlo's old office.

CARLO'S OFFICE

Amid their excitement, Victor picks up a sign, opens the door and attaches it: PRIVATE PARTY.

(NOTE: The narration should be V.O. with archival footage.)

NARRATOR
Shortly after Dani's escape, she was hidden on a farm. Soon, the Soviets counter attacked, leaving the Polish Underground to face two enemies. In a vice, the Italian Division bartered weapons and ammunition with partisans for food. When Italy surrendered and declared war on the Axis, the Lwów Italian Division became Germany's enemy. Fortunately, before then, I was ordered to Italy for military induction. At twenty-nine, the most I would serve was eighteen months.

SUPER: "EGYPT, JUNE 1943"

INT. BRITISH MILITARY PRISON, ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT - DAY

Two men in a room face each other across a desk. One is an Italian colonel, the other, with pad and pencil, is the interrogator, André Frodel. André is overworked, he's aggressive and sweating. The colonel appears relaxed.

ANDRÉ
... you're denying the shifting tide. Why help the Germans?

ITALIAN COLONEL

They are our allies.

ANDRÉ

Really? What have your allies done for Italy?

ITALIAN COLONEL

We share a similar world view.

ANDRÉ

You mean that you share their world view. But how does that help Italy?

ITALIAN COLONEL

Are we going to go on like this again?

ANDRÉ

Sure. I get paid and you go back to a cell.

Behind them, the door opens.

PRISON GUARD

I was told to bring this prisoner...

André looks up.

ANDRÉ

Can't you see I'm...

Franki passes through the doorway.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Franki? Franki?

(to Allied MP)

Take the colonel back to his cell. I'll deal with him later.

The MP escorts the Colonel out.

André jumps up, grapples in a bear-hug with Franki

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Good god, man. Where the hell have you been?

FRANKI

Ander's Army 2nd Corp, since it was formed. I just got posted here as a guard.

ANDRÉ

Unbelievable! You and me ending up together like this.

FRANKI

Damn. So many days I never thought I'd see you or our friends again.

André turns misty eyed.

ANDRÉ

Me neither... I don't want to raise your hopes, or even mine too high - but I've heard rumors there's a plan to invade Italy.

FRANKI

Looks like I'll have a job for a while... Sweet mother of Jesus. I don't believe in destiny but I think the Perantonis are in our future.

NARRATOR

As my military service was coming to an end, I was determined to return to Lwów. Repeated requests for a transfer were summarily denied. I was angry but the logic was clear. With Polish birth papers, I was an enemy of the Axis. To stay, I'd have to join the Home Army and fight against the army of which I was a member. It would be two years until I heard that the entire Italian Division inexplicably disappeared.

SUPER: "JUNE 1944, ROME"

EXT. JEEP - DAY

Franki drives through streets with André as passenger.

ANDRÉ

The contrast breaks my heart. Look how beautiful Rome is. Almost nothing damaged. Even the bridges are intact.

FRANKI

Yeah. Sad to think of Monte Cassino.

(MORE)

FRANKI (CONT'D)
 Hanging's too good for Hitler...
 How we gonna find Padre Michele in
 this city?

ANDRÉ
 Let's start at the Vatican.

André points.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
 Pull over by that street vendor.

The jeep stops.

CONTINUOUS

André gets out, goes to the vendor. A small group crowds
 around the jeep.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
 How much for these two apples.

VENDOR
 For you, half price. Four lira.

ANDRÉ
 I bought two yesterday for three.

VENDOR
 Si. But you were not here
 yesterday.

ANDRÉ
 OK. Can you point me towards the
 Vatican?

VENDOR
 Directions are one lira.

ANDRÉ
 Two apples and the directions for
 four lira.

VENDOR
 OK. OK.

The vendor points. ANDRÉ pays.

ANDRÉ
 Grazie.

André gets back in the Jeep. Gives an apple to Franki. An OLD
 WOMAN leans in, points with two fingers.

OLD WOMAN
 Signore. He not tell the truth. The
 Vatican is in THAT direction.

EXT. VATICAN SQUARE - DAY

The jeep pulls over. André and Franki sit and take in the view.

ANDRÉ
 From Siberia to the Vatican. I
 never thought I'd live this long.

They park the jeep, walk among the crowd.

FRANKI
 What do you want to do?

ANDRÉ takes a moment.

ANDRÉ
 Find a priest.

They walk along momentarily. André spots one, maneuvers towards him.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
 Scusa Padre. My friend and I are
 looking for a priest, Padre Michele
 Kolbuch.

The priest eyes them suspiciously.

PRIEST
 (in Italian)
 Perché?

ANDRÉ
 Because he's a friend from Lwów but
 we haven't seen him since...

The priest's face lights up.

PRIEST
 Ah ha! So you're the ones.

FRANKI
 Th... the ones?

PRIEST
 Si, si. He's spoken of you often.
 Who's André?

ANDRÉ

That's me.

The priest offers his hand to shake. André takes it and the priest covers the shake with his other.

PRIEST

So... these are the hands that created the remarkable Vatican Travel Pass.

André grins broadly.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

I've seen it. It's incredible.

André revels in the praise.

ANDRÉ

Grazie. Grazie molto. I'm sorry to rush. We don't have much time. Do you know where we can find him?

PRIEST

Indeed. Come with me.

EXT./INT. COFFEE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

The priest puts a finger of silence to his lips, points through a quaint latticed window where Padre sits by himself, reading a newspaper.

PRIEST

I leave you with your friend.
Enjoy.

In battle fatigues, André and Franki draw eyes, including Padre's.

PADRE

(in Italian)
Ei. Paesani!!

He stands and waves.

PADRE (CONT'D)

Waiter! Bring some wine and three glasses.

Padre's enthusiastic voice causes attention as two Polish soldiers hug a priest with fervent affection.

MOMENTS LATER

The three are seated.

PADRE (CONT'D)

I don't know everything, but Carlo, Luigi and their families and Victor too... since he got married last year... are in Volargne.

FRANKI

Victor married? Hard to imagine him with only one woman.

André and Padre chuckle.

PADRE

A while back they sent me an invitation to visit.

FRANKI

Are they in for a surprise.

ANDRÉ

Great. But we have to wait till the Allies push the Nazi's north.

SUPER: "AUGUST 1944"

EXT. RURAL ROAD SIGN - DAY

Two Soviet soldiers take down a German sign: "Lemberg" and replace it with another, "LVOV".

NARRATOR

With the Soviets retaking eastern Poland, and the Allies moving up the Italian peninsula, the Nazi's days were numbered. Their inevitable retreat would transit the Brenner Pass, in an area of North Italy renown for great lakes and Valpolicella wine.

EXT. VOLARGNE DI DOLCE, ITALY - DAY

Carlo and COUNT VALENTINI (late fifties, shoulder length grey-brown hair, shirt opened) stand on the porch of the latter's spacious villa.

COUNT VALENTINI

(sarcastic)

They're called engineers.

(MORE)

COUNT VALENTINI (CONT'D)

The German officers set up headquarters on my property. The workers are all local... nothing but slaves.

CARLO

I know signore. I share your anger. I hear they're doing this everywhere; France, even in Germany as they've run out of manpower.

COUNT VALENTINI

Our people destroy their own countryside - building defense positions and military obstacles.

CARLO

Si. It's futile. Nazis think differently than we do. Then again, maybe it's what they're drinking.

Count Valentini smirks.

COUNT VALENTINI

And what would that be?

CARLO

Unfortunately, I'm under orders to supply wine to the Wehrmacht quartermaster. Between you and me, they're not getting the best wine.

COUNT VALENTINI

Times of war and all that. Such a shame.

CARLO

I do my best. We process every bit of vineyard remnants. Have Gypsies and barefoot children stomp the grapes. The bottles are so badly abused, hardly any unchipped ones remain.

Count Valentini snickers, pats his shoulder.

COUNT VALENTINI

Keep up the good work.

INT. CARLO'S WINE SHOP, MANTUA - DAY

Carlo reviews invoices. Victor enters, appears worried.

VICTOR
Papa. We have a problem.

CARLO
Tell me.

VICTOR
The quartermaster, Bergmann,
threatened me.

Carlo raises an eyebrow.

CARLO
Why?

VICTOR
He said the wine was poor quality.

CARLO
OK. He's right. But I'd never hire
him as a taster.

VICTOR
Papa. Seriously. He said that
unless we begin delivering good
wine in good bottles there would be
...punitive measures.

Carlo's eyes return to the invoices.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Papa?

CARLO
I'm thinking. You know, they're a
lot less brutal when they're drunk
on wine instead of Nazi ideology.

VICTOR
And? Ahh. Yess.

CARLO
There's some things I haven't
taught you about the business. For
example, if you take under-
fermented wine, add some uncooked
mosto, then some one-hundred twenty
proof grappa to cover the taste -
the result will be a very... very
effective laxative.

VICTOR
You mean...

Carlo smiles, continues reviewing invoices.

NARRATOR

By November, German troops were concentrated in the vicinity of Volargne, La Chiusa di Ceraino and Dolcé. With all their problems they still prioritized sending Italian Jews and political dissidents to concentration camps further north, creating a railway bottleneck.

SUPER: "MID-NOVEMBER 1944"

EXT. RAILROAD SIDING, VOLARGNE - NIGHT

A train of fifteen covered railcars rolls to a stop at a siding a few miles south of the La Chiusa bend in the Adige River, about one hundred yards from the town. Its markings indicate a German Army ordnance affiliation.

INT. GERMAN ENGINEER'S HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A young Swiss interpreter in civilian clothes, wears a Swiss flag lapel pin while he studies documents at his desk. A uniformed German soldier drops an envelope on top of an in-box labeled TRANSLATIONS. Annoyed but controlled, the young man looks up.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Give this top priority.

INTERPRETER

Ya vol.

The label is bold: TOP SECRET.

The interpreter hesitates. Knows he's being watched. Removes the contents. His face freezes, eyes widen. Breathes deep and exhales nasally. Takes a form from a desk basket and begins to write.

INT. RESTAURANT, VOLARGNE - NIGHT

The interpreter finishes dinner and drains the last of a wine glass. He glances at a waiter who arrives with a bill. The interpreter reaches into his jacket, takes out a wallet and quickly hands over a couple lira bank notes with a message sandwiched between them. The waiter gives him a few coins.

WAITER

Grazie signore.

INTERPRETER

Prego.

SUPER: "NOVEMBER 21, 1944

EXT. PERANTONI DELIVERY TRUCK - DAY

It is a beautiful cloudless day. The truck is packed outside the German engineers headquarters's gate. Victor exits the truck, opens the back, lays out two boards for a ramp, climbs up and rides a pedal cart, loaded with wine, carefully down.

He's on the road, where a SIGN indicates the direction as going to Dolcé.

Moments later he makes his way past the marble foothills of Ceraino where he hears the faint SOUND OF WARPLANE ENGINES. Suddenly, as if rising from the earth itself from behind the massive foothills, three planes fly very low and directly overhead, then suddenly disappear.

In the distance Victor HEARS a brief rat-tat-tat. In less than a heartbeat, it is followed by a red sky over Volargne that turns white and then black which precede an UNIMAGINABLE DEEP THUDDING SOUND FOLLOWED BY REVERBERATIONS FROM A THUNDEROUS EXPLOSION.

EXT. ALLIED PLANE, SKY - DAY

One warplane pilot looks aghast as the EXPLOSIVE VORTEX SUCKS and SLAMS the lead plane to the ground. Part of a train wheel BLASTS past him and jams into the fuselage of another plane, while his is RAKED WITH SHRAPNEL.

EXT. PEDAL CART, ROAD - DAY

As Victor is thrown to the ground, his hands fly up to cover his ears. Lying on the ground, his hair and clothes are pulled by a terrific wind. In pain, unable to breathe, he watches broken glass and wine flying horizontally towards Volargne.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Down along the river he pedals. At a point, he stops to look towards Volargne.

The town has been replaced by an enormous cloud of slow-settling dust pierced by surrealistic remnants of walls and huge piles of rubble. Fires burn, sending columns of smoke high aloft.

Where road meets rubble, Victor abandons the cart. Finds himself standing amidst a scene of apocalyptic proportions.

Haunting voices cry out from the rubble. Wounded and bleeding, survivors begin to emerge.

Victor finally finds his voice, aims it at the sky.

VICTOR

(screams)

You murderous maniac bastards! Look what you've done. God damn you all. Il Duce, you... you ignorant puppet, may you and your whore burn in hell for eternity. God damn National Socialism. God damn the Nazis.

Victor staggers, wonders aimlessly, rants...

VICTOR (CONT'D)

And you, you crazy, deranged Adolf Hitler... you fanatical, homicidal, insane bastard... causing nothing but death... Death in Lwów. Death from Finland to Africa. Death to a peaceful little town... I'd kill you myself if I could find you... you god-damned monster from hell, you Nazi demon!

A few people look on, including a couple German soldiers.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You, you think yourself above the laws but you pervert all laws. You twist them, torture them until they only mean what you say.... And who the hell are you. You're nothing. NOTHING!

Victor falls to his knees. Rips off the PNF party badge, beats it with a brick.

A German soldier moves towards Victor but another stops him.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Leave him. The wounded need help. Let's go.

From Victor's eyes tears track down over white dusty cheeks. Several fall onto a small piece of metal: a Swiss flag lapel pin.

SUPER: "APRIL 8, 1945"

INT. VATICAN APARTMENT - DAY

Padre Michele sits in a chair reading a letter by sun light. He HEARS A NOTE SLIPPED UNDER THE DOOR. It is folded in half.

INSERT - NOTE

André and Franki await you in San
Lazzaro di Savena.

BACK TO SCENE

Padre opens a closet, pulls out a large suitcase. There is a map. He scans it.

PADRE

(to self)

Da, da, da. Ah! Near Bologna. Then we go to... Mantua. Hmm. That could be difficult. Let's see. Take a few forms and Vatican stationary in case we need André's skills... some extra vestments - just in case. Food. Couple gifts...

EXT. VATICAN MOTOR POOL - DAY

In a merry mood, Padre slides into the driver's seat of a white convertible 1938 Lancia Astura Cabriolet, top down, with skirted rear wheels and rakishly inclined grill. As he departs, the VATICAN LICENSE PLATE comes into view.

EXT. SAN LAZZARO DI SAVENA - DAY

Padre arrives early in the evening. Virtually leaps from the car upon arrival where he finds André and Franki waiting with a third man. Padre hugs his friends.

PADRE

Despite everything, you two look wonderful. Thank God. Magnifici!

He turns to the third man.

FRANKI

Padre. Meet Guido. He's a fellow postal worker. Made it possible to get in touch with you.

PADRE

Ahh. Guido. For you I have brought something.

Padre reaches into the back seat and takes two packages.

PADRE (CONT'D)

These *mio amico* are for you.

Guido is speechless. He hesitates.

PADRE (CONT'D)

Please. Open them.

The timid man is delighted with what he finds: a signed photograph of Pope Pius XII and a large Italian salami.

GUIDO

Grazie molto, Padre.

Padre turns to the boys.

PADRE

Now then. When are the Allies pushing for Bologna?

ANDRÉ

Tomorrow.

PADRE

Tomorrow? We have to hurry.

INT. GUIDO'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The men sit around a table after a meal.

ANDRÉ

(to Franki)

...we can think about that later. First, we have to have a story.

PADRE

If it helps, I brought extra vestments. We can be three priests, if not three kings.

FRANKI

(to André)

Think he's had enough wine for tonight?

They chuckle.

PADRE

Three priests but what are we doing in no-man's land? Especially you two. You could be shot as spies.

FRANKI

Not without a cigarette and a glass of grappa, I hope.

PADRE

Grappa. Hey! How about wine?

ANDRÉ

There's wine everywhere.

PADRE

Wait! I got it. Not just any wine. A special wine - Vatican wine... because...

ANDRÉ

...because the Vatican purification machinery in Tuscany was damaged by bombs.

PADRE

And Carlo has special wine waiting for us.

Padre regards Franki.

PADRE (CONT'D)

We have a problem.

ANDRÉ

What?

PADRE

Franki. He doesn't speak German and his poor Italian has a Polish accent.

ANDRÉ

No problem. As the ranking NCO here, I order Franki to be a mute priest.

PADRE

Considering this is now a clerical mission and I'm the senior cleric, I *recommend* that Franki becomes the Vatican's official wine taster.

FRANKI

There's no sacramental grappa?

GUIDO

Mi scuzi. You guys are crazy.

ANDRÉ

We agree?

They nod.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

So, travel papers for three priests and a purchase order for Perantoni's special wine.

GUIDO

You guys know the pope and Carlo Perantoni too?

SUPER: "April 9"

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

White Lancia Astura with convertible top down and three priests ENTERS SCENE, passes a road sign, follows the directional arrow to MANTUA.

INT. CARLO'S WINE SHOP, MANTUA - DAY

Victor, Carlo and Luigi are busy in the shop with customers. Carlo, at the counter, glances up at the SOUND OF A POWERFUL CAR ENGINE coming to a halt. Luigi looks out the window and sees the big white car.

LUIGI

Madre di Dio. Victor, Papa - look.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The big touring car comes to a halt. The passengers debark. Their doors aren't even closed before Victor and Luigi are on top of them. Carlo, with a broad smile, brings up the rear.

For a moment, they look like a playful family of river otters: hugging, backslapping, kissing and hand shaking.

INT. PERANTONI'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Around the table are the three "priests", Carlo, Romana, Luigi, Victor and his wife, GINA (a pretty dark-haired woman, late twenties) tending baby Roberto. Dinner has finished.

PADRE

Romana, your cooking was just like
in Lwów. Ahh. What a memory.

The Perantoni's look at each other.

CARLO

Uhum. Padre. Gina cooked the
dinner.

Gina raises a napkin to her mouth to cover a laugh.

PADRE

Scusi. Gina. Let me restate that --
Romana, you're the best teacher of
Italian cooking in the world. And
your student Gina proves it.

VICTOR

Nice recovery.

Lots of agreement around the table.

PADRE

I want to make a toast. As Franki,
André and I were unable to attend
Victor and Gina's wedding due to...
to prior engagements, over which we
had no control... I now raise my
glass to them, their happiness and
may they be blessed with many
children.

Everyone raises their glass.

PADRE (CONT'D)

To Victor and Gina.

ENSEMBLE

To Victor and Gina.

Carlo stands up.

CARLO

Before we finish, I also want to make a toast. To our friends André and Franki who endured cruel hardships, survived and continue to fight for us. And Padre Michele who saved the lives of over two hundred children - whom God alone knows what would have become of them otherwise.

The Perantonis stand. The others stand.

CARLO (CONT'D)

To our precious friends.

ENSEMBLE

To our precious friends.

They retake their seats.

VICTOR

Please excuse me. I'll be right back.

FRANKI

Please pass the grappa.

Victor disappears into another room. HEARS table talk continue.

LUIGI (O.C.)

... the Germans were standing in line at the latrine.

CARLO (O.C.)

Oh... how I wished we had the concession on toilet paper.

Much laughter. (O.C.)

Victor returns. Holds something behind his back.

VICTOR

Per favore. Silenzio, cari amici.
I have something to say.

Victor turns serious.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

André. Franki. Remember your last days in Lwów? You left something behind in the winiarnia.

The two men look to each other. The dining rooms falls as quiet as an empty church.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Something you prayed would be
 safeguarded?

Victor's voice quavers.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Well. I found it and want to return
 it to you.

He hands them the bag containing their stamp collections.

Instantly tears well up in the men's eyes as they gawk.

ANDRÉ
O, mio fratello.

FRANKI
 I couldn't... couldn't ask for
 anything better.

ANDRÉ
 But... who knows what will happen?
 The war's not over.

FRANKI
 Victor. We're moving constantly.

Franki looks to ANDRÉ for approval.

FRANKI (CONT'D)
 Why don't you keep them until it's
 over.

VICTOR
 Of course. *Non c'è problema.*

SUPER: "April 12"

INT. CARLO'S WINE SHOP - DAY

Another large car has pulled up in front of the store. Luigi sees it, nods to Carlo.

LUIGI
 Papa.

Carlo casts a glance. Out on the street a Wehrmacht officer wearing a polished battle helmet, steps out and swaggers arrogantly through the front door.

WEHRMACHT OFFICER
The Third Reich needs a field
hospital. This looks like a good
place.

Carlo approaches.

CARLO
I'm Signore Perantoni. This is my
shop.

WEHRMACHT OFFICER
As I drove up I noticed Vatican
license plates. You have a priest
here?

CARLO
Yes. But he's only visiting.

WEHRMACHT OFFICER
Perhaps God sent him to care for
the dying. No matter. Move your
wine. Make whatever adjustments
necessary. The medical staff and
wounded will be here within the
hour.

The officer stalks out.

In the back of the shop "Fathers" ANDRÉ and Franki scramble
down to the wine cellar.

INT. CARLO'S WINE SHOP - LATER

Padre, wears a stole, stands out in a crowd of German
soldiers and their wounded: some on cots, more on the floor.
A German chaplain accompanies the soldiers. He raises his
hand for Padre's attention.

GERMAN CHAPLAIN
Here. This man is Catholic.

Padre approaches, holds a small tin of sacramental oil.

PADRE
My name is...

GERMAN CHAPLAIN
I don't care what your name is.
Give him the last rites.

PADRE

My dear man. I'm not in your army.
Don't give me orders.

The German looks him up and down. Gives a dour look. Walks away.

Padre opens the tin of ointment, bends over to anoint the soldier.

IN THE CELLAR

A German soldier descends the stairs where he finds Franki and André.

Franki turns his head. Taps André

GERMAN SOLDIER

Was machen Sie hir?

ANDRÉ

Why, we're sampling wine for the Vatican.

The soldier is doubtful.

GERMAN SOLDIER

For what purpose?

ANDRÉ

Suitability for sanctification by the Holy Father.

André reaches into his cassock, retrieves the purchase authorization.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Here. See for yourself.

The soldier takes the paper, inspects it briefly. Leaves.

UPSTAIRS TEMPORARY INFIRMARY

The same soldier shows it to the Wehrmacht Officer and is overheard by the German Chaplain.

GERMAN CHAPLAIN

Herr Oberstleutnant. That priest. Something about him. I don't believe he's here by accident.

WEHRMACHT OFFICER

The priest is the least of my worries at the moment.

Nearby, Padre notes the purchase order and reads their faces. He threads his way through the wounded and heads for the stairs where the soldier follows him to the...

CELLAR

PADRE

Have you sampled the barrels yet?

ANDRÉ

No. We were waiting for you

Padre picks up a tasting cup, fills, smells, tastes it. He ponders the flavor. Then turns to the German soldier and offers him a taste.

The soldier is surprised. Looks over his shoulder, drinks the sample.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Oh, ya. Das is gut! Das ist gross gut! Danke Schön.

ANDRÉ and Franki smile.

PADRE

Bitte schön.

(to André)

These two barrels will do nicely.

ANDRÉ makes a show of attaching an official looking Vatican label to each. Then, using red chalk, he marks each barrel with a date and his initials.

MOMENTS LATER

Padre approaches the German chaplain.

PADRE (CONT'D)

We've found Signore Perantoni's wine acceptable. As I carry no money these days, he'll have to accompany me to the church to transfer funds. We won't be long.

EXT./INT. STREET - DAY

Padre and Carlo head for the white car. Luigi and Victor follow them closely out the door.

INT. CARLO'S WINE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

The eagle-eyed German chaplain watches them through a window.

STREET

The Vatican car pulls away. Luigi turns to Victor...

LUIGI

We better get those barrels into
the van quick.

EXT./INT. PERANTONI VAN ON ROAD - DAY

The van whizzes down the road. Victor drives. ANDRÉ and Franki hide behind the barrels.

EXT./INT. LUIGI'S GARAGE - DAY

The Perantoni van arrives. Victor, Luigi, ANDRÉ and Franki exit, head for the building where they find Carlo and Padre who's in the process of removing the Vatican license plates. Padre looks to the four men.

PADRE

We'll need these when we head back
to Bologna... Right now we need to
leave the car and get out of here.

FRANKI

You know if the Allies have taken
the city yet?

PADRE

No. Nevertheless, you two need to
get back to your unit.

ANDRÉ

Shouldn't you leave it on the
street somewhere? That way there's
no connection to Luigi.

VICTOR

Not a good idea. If it's hidden no
one can ask questions. On the
street, it's like a Mona Lisa at a
rummage sale.

CARLO

I have an idea.

QUICK FLASH - LWÓW WINIARNIA - 1939

POV Camera: Photo of champion race car driver Tazio Nuvolari.

RETURN TO SCENE

VICTOR

OK. And I can hide the three of you
in the attic at my house.

EXT. SPACIOUS HOME - NIGHT

Carlo and Victor park in a dark alley, climb out of the Lancia Astura, go to a house where the lights are out. Carlo KNOCKS. A porch light illuminates them. The man who answers, TAZIO NUVOLARI, is lean, has an angular face.

CARLO

We're sorry to disturb you this
time of night Tazio, but I need
your help.

Tazio spots the Lancia Astura.

TAZIO

I can't believe it. Carlo! You
stole a car?

Tazio gives a crooked-toothed smile.

Carlo puts a finger to his lips.

CARLO

Shhh. It's not stolen.

VICTOR

The Nazis may be looking for it
right now.

TAZIO

Nazis, eh? Better step inside.

IN THE FOYER

VICTOR

It belongs to the Vatican.

TAZIO

The pope must be very angry to send
Nazis after you.

Victor burst out laughing. Then Carlo.

CARLO

Taz... Tazio. I... I'm serious. I need a place to hide it.

Tazio grins mischievously.

TAZIO

I have an automobile collection. I don't rent garage space.

CARLO

You're the only one who can help us. Please.

TAZIO

Oh, Carlo. Your beautiful Lancia is like a beautiful woman. How can I turn her down?

CARLO

I knew I could count on you.

Tazio's smile broadens. He gestures them further into the house.

TAZIO

Come in. Come in. Let's have some wine and talk.

NARRATOR

By this time, the Germans had begun an extensive search. However, Papa and Luigi worked throughout the night. First thing they did was drain the two wine barrels.

INT. LUIGI'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Luigi and Carlo stand near two large wine barrels. Carlo smooths his hand around the top of one barrel.

CARLO

I think we can install a little lip around the inside edge with notches on opposite sides.

He points.

CARLO (CONT'D)

Here... and here. Then we alter the top, give it two little wedged locking ears, that'll fit into the openings and under the lip.

(MORE)

CARLO (CONT'D)

The top can be put in place and turned from the inside to lock and unlock it.

LUIGI

Hmm. Only opens and closes from the inside. Should work. And there's no hint of alteration.

CARLO

And with the bung modified so it can be opened and closed from within, there's no lack of air.

LATER

Carlo attaches the Vatican License plates to Victor's delivery van.

SUPER: "APRIL 15, 1945"

INT. LUIGI'S GARAGE - DAY

Early in the morning, André and Franki, in uniform with weapons, hop into the back of Victor's van, squat down into the barrels, tighten the lids. The barrels are turned on their side so the men can travel lying down.

Victor and Luigi don priestly garments. Gina, holding little Roberto, laughs at the sight.

Victor drives. Luigi rides as passenger and Padre is in back.

NARRATOR

Everyone's adrenaline was running high. The trip was uneventful until about thirty miles south of Mantua where we ran into a Wehrmacht checkpoint. By that time, the Germans had alerted troops throughout Lombardy to be on the lookout for three Vatican emissaries, one of whom was a mute monk, in a white Lancia Astura convertible.

EXT. GERMAN CHECKPOINT - DAY

The van slows to a stop. The soldiers are noticeably young. Mortar thumps are heard in the b.g..

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER

Halt!
 (in Italian)
Dove state andando?

VICTOR

(surprised)
 We're going to the Vatican.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER

Where's the mute monk?

Victor looks to Luigi. They shrug.

LUIGI

What's he talking about?

VICTOR

A mute monk. I don't know any mute monks. Do you?

LUIGI

No. I know some monks but they're not mute.

VICTOR

(to Young German Soldier)
 No. We don't know any mute monks.

LUIGI

Hey! Maybe there was a mute monk in the other group that had their wine stolen by the Allied barbarians.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER

What's in the van?

VICTOR

Two barrels of sacramental wine and a priest.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER

Show me.
 (he calls out)
 Klaus, Arnaud, Jurgen.

With a nod of the head, he indicates the back of the van. Victor accompanies them, opens the door.

Padre seems groggy. Rubs his eyes. Yawns.

PADRE

Are we there yet?

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER
Open the barrels.

PADRE
I can't do that. They've been
sealed. If I break the wax seals
then the wine is contaminated.

The young German soldier is unsure of what to do.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER
Why the wax seals?

PADRE
The pope himself will use this wine
at mass. It will become the blood
of Christ.

The young Germans look to one another.

PADRE (CONT'D)
We've already tried two times to
get shipments through the lines. If
you open the wine, you might as
well steal it because it can not be
used.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER
(to another soldier)
Is the radio working yet?

OTHER SOLDIER
No. He's working on it.

PADRE
As we stand here and chat there's a
Lufwaffe plane, with Swiss Guard
markings, standing by in Rome
waiting to deliver Easter's holy
sacrament to your Führer... it's
already two weeks late.

Allied mortar THUMPS in the b.g. One soldier takes off his
helmet, lays down his rifle, kisses a barrel, goes to his
knees and asks Padre for a blessing.

A moment later, the entire patrol is on its knees. Padre,
Victor and Luigi bless each man.

EXT. BRITISH CHECKPOINT - DAY

The van comes to a halt. From a distance, much of the previous scene looks repeated until Victor opens the back of the van. Padre sees Allied troops and smiles. Then KNOCKS on both barrels.

PADRE

Time to get back to work.

Franki and ANDRÉ crawl out, jump out the van in wine stained uniforms. The Brits start to laugh, and laugh louder until everyone is laughing.

NARRATOR

Again, we changed license plates.
With Padre, Luigi and I in civilian
clothes, we drove back to Mantua...
by a different route.

SUPER: "APRIL 29, 1945"

EXT. MILAN - DAY

On a sun-drenched Sunday morning, Victor, Padre and a local FRIEND (older man), enjoy a downtown stroll. They stop at a stamp collector's shop window.

VICTOR

(to Friend)

Looks like we're a little early.
He's not open yet.

FRIEND

I know him. He said he had a few
fascist RSI stamps left. He'll hold
them. No rush.

PADRE

Let's get some coffee.

Before long, they HEAR a RIOTOUS COMMOTION from a large crowd in the old Piazzale Loreto, recently renamed Piazza Quindici Martiri and find themselves swept along to a horrendous sight.

From the overhead framework of a gas station, hanging by their feet, are the dead and bloodied bodies of Benito Mussolini and his mistress, Claretta Petacci.

On the ground below, ropes are attached to the feet of sixteen high-ranking dead fascist leaders awaiting similar treatment.

The crowd sways and surges, voices curse. Shots RING OUT from a gun held by a woman who empties her pistol into Il Duce's lifeless body.

WOMAN WITH PISTOL

(screams)

Five shots for my five murdered sons.

People spit on the corpses. Throw whatever they can at them. And afterwards, begin beating Mussolini's head with sticks and clubs until his face is unrecognizable.

As Padre Michele looks on, an enraged partisan brandishing a pistol looks directly at him.

PARTISAN

Don't even think of giving Il Duce the last rites. Not even a blessing.

Off to the side, Victor vomits. Padre looks at his friends who are mesmerized by the brutality.

PADRE

It's time for us to go. We've already been here too long.

SUPER: "SEPTEMBER 11,2001"

NARRATOR

As I had seen Mussolini and Hitler rise to power, how they wielded that power ruthlessly, lost it and suffered the fate of such men - it seems my father's vision of the ever entwined past and present is quite clear. Today we are still haunted by the first global war, the Great War of 1914. It seems we've learned little except... there will be more.

SCROLL

EPILOGUE

(Note: Photographs of original characters are available for use in this section.)

Victor and his family later lived in Australia, Milwaukee and eventually Orlando, Florida where he died in May 2002, followed by Gina in 2013.

Carlo died in Mantua Italy in February 1962, just a month after Romana.

Luigi was an anchor for the family business. In addition to being bartender and occasional cook, he handled shipping, receiving and bookkeeping. He died in Italy in November 1988.

André, whose wife disappeared in the mist of war, took a British wife named Mary. He received a land grant from Canada. But André wasn't a farmer. They sold the land and moved to Vancouver where he became a world famous philatelic artist. Having been a commissioned officer in World War I, and an NCO in World War II, André earned nine decorations for valor. He died in Vancouver in 1963.

Franki, once a student at Lwów's Polytechnic University, returned to Poland but was consigned to manual labor by the communist government. He couldn't go back to Lwów, now a Ukrainian city, and so spent the rest of his life in his native Gdansk.

Stasia resumed ballet and married a Polish dancer named Rozankowski. The two of them defected while on tour in Vienna. In 1964, Victor helped sponsor them in the United States where they were granted asylum. Upon retiring, Stasia opened a ballet tailoring shop in New York City.

Padre Michele moved to the United States as well. Later, upon being appointed General Consultant for the Holy See's Second Vatican Council, he relocated back to Rome.

Dani lived on Larisa's uncle's farm in southeast Galicia, on the Ukrainian side of the border. The exact location was not made public due to concerns for Dani's safety due to her Jewish heritage. With the Cold War, Stasia lost contact with Dani and Lari which meant that Victor never heard from them again.

FADE OUT.