

"REPRISAL OF LIONS"

Mini-Series and Pilot for
"The War of Lions"

Written by

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Screenplay Adapted from
"*Arrivederci Leopolis - The Lion's War*"
by George Perantoni & Sam Ivey

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FADE IN:

SUPER: "You must trust us" - said the British Prime Minister - "We will not abandon you, and Poland will be happy" (by Winston Churchill to General Władysław Anders, Commander of the Allied Polish Second Corps, on 26 August 1944, in Italy).

FADE TO:

NARRATOR

My name is Vittorio Perantoni, just call me Victor. I was born in Lwów, Poland (*Leopoli*) where my Italian family had a tavern and sold wine and spirits from Italy.

Our lives and those of our friends were quite happy until two hostile and utterly violent armies invaded Poland in September 1939.

The world formed an alliance and went to war to defend Poland, but in the end, world leaders gave her back to her original enemy.

It had been a terrible time for most nations in Europe, as they shared the same common enemy. But, Poland got the brunt of it because she had two enemies, and the war had defeated only one.

Plenty had been written about the war's commanders, their battles, and the politics of "WWII behind closed doors." Now, let's look at how some of us endured as civilians during... WWII out in the streets.

FADE TO:

SUPER: "CITY OF LWÓW (*LEOPOLI*) POLAND - MAY 1929"

EXT. STREET (ULICA SYKSTUSKA) - DAY

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

Stately four story tenements of brick and stone are the homes of merchants, tradesmen, blacksmiths, locksmiths, kosher grocers - even an Italian wine & pasta tavern.

Occasional cars and trucks toot their horns at friends on the street. One pedestrian, ANDRÉ FRODEL (late thirties, thinning hair, with small mustache) waves back with a large glassine envelope which he is carrying - and then...

EXT/INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL - DAY

...he turns and passes through the entrance to the Perantoni family's "Winiarnia Italia" wine & pasta tavern, where the last few lunch customers are still eating and the owner, CARLO PERANTONI (late forties, balding), has already begun serving a few early wine-bar patrons. Carlo sees André enter and waves him over to an isolated end of the huge wine-bar.

CARLO

Buon giorno, Andrea. Vermouth Bianco?

ANDRÉ

Si, grazie Carlo. Where's Victor?

Carlo pours two *bicchierini* of Vermouth Bianco.

CARLO

He's in the back, reading up on his new Zeiss Ikonta camera's instructions.

ANDRÉ

You bought him a Zeiss camera for his eighteenth birthday?

CARLO

Actually, he bought it. I gave him the money. He could've had a better deal few doors down, at Bujak's... but no, he had to go buy it at Rabinowitz's shop because he likes their daughter.

They laugh and clink their glasses cheering "*alla giovinezza*" which means: "to youth." After a hefty swig of Vermouth André hums the tune of Italy's Fascist National Anthem "*Giovinezza*" (TR. "Youth").

Carlo points at André's large glassine envelope.

CARLO (CONT'D)

Are those your fake Mussolini stamps that Victor's talked about all week?

André rubs the palm of his hand over the bar-top's surface checking for moisture. Extracts sheets of stamps from the envelope, lays them on the bar. Then from his coat pockets, he pulls out two packs of printed invitational postcards. He stacks them on the bar.

CLOSE ON SHEETS AND POSTCARDS.

CARLO (CONT'D)

Amazing. Your sheets of stamps are just like real ones... post-office fresh.

André giggles with pride.

ANDRÉ

They should be. It's what I do for a living. The only difference is that there's never been a stamp of Italy's Duce Mussolini, before today... Ha ha.

CARLO

Remarkable fakes of Italian stamps. But, one Lira each? Why such high values?

ANDRÉ

High denominations attract collectors. One Lira values will draw their eyes.

CARLO

And the eyes of Italy's postal authorities? Even though we're in Poland, Andrea, you're still counterfeiting Italian stamps.

ANDRÉ

Ha. It's impossible to counterfeit a stamp that never existed, ha ha ha. Don't worry Carlo, it's my field of work. I know what I'm doing.

CARLO

You know that we admire and respect you, Andrea. Still, it's shocking.

ANDRÉ

Let me shock you some more. You son intends to paste and mail these fakes to philately and stamp clubs all over Europe. Most of them to Italy.

CARLO

What are you saying? No. I forbid it.

André picks up one of the invitation postcards and points...

ANDRÉ

Relax, my dear regional Vice-Consul. Poland's real postage goes on the front with the address. Now, look at the backside with the invitation.

André flips the postcard over to show the pre-printed invitation side and points to a square box in the center.
CLOSE ON POSTCARD INVITATION WITH ANDRÉ POINTING FINGER.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
 (pointing finger)
 The fake Mussolini stamp goes in this
 box. Read what I printed beneath it.

CLOSE ON SQUARE BOX WITH CAPTION "FANTASY ART BY ANDRÉ FRODEL"

CARLO
 Thank God. I thought that I would've
 had to ruin Victor's 18th birthday.
 You took a huge weight off me.

ANDRÉ
 It's what Victor wants as a birthday
 present. Let's call him.

CARLO
 Still, I'm not too happy that it's an
 invitation to stamp and game meetings
 at my "Winiarnia Italia" as...

ANDRÉ
 (interrupting)
 But you approved it to Victor yourself.
 You said it would be 'good for business.'

CARLO
 The stamp card-game invitations are fine.
 But not "invited by the Fascist Youth of
 Leopoli" - with my Winiarnia's address.

ANDRÉ
 Victor thinks that you're going to be so
 proud of him. What's the matter, Carlo?

CARLO
 (lower voice)
 Yeah, I know André. Youths in Italy are
 organized into Fascist groups, and many
 of the adults are as well... and most
 other nations admire Mussolini's Fascist
 Italy. Even England does. But not me.

ANDRÉ
 Why Carlo... Tell me why.

CARLO
 (whispering)
 He's arrogant. There's not a milligram
 of humility in him. And he's defiant.
 What is worse, it's all an act. His
 public womanizing gives him away.
 Without his black-shirted *squadristi*...
 he's nothing. A nobody.

CARLO (CONT'D)
 (normal voice)
 But I won't ruin Victor's birthday.

ANDRÉ
 Good, then let's call him.

CARLO
 Yeah, I'll call him...
 (lower voice)
 If Fascists were going to have a cozy relationship with the King, as they proclaim, there wouldn't have been the need to march on Rome by crossing the Tiber with armed men... acting as he's the resurrected Julius Caesar.

The two men nod their heads with secretive glances of approval.

CARLO (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 Let's keep it between you and me.
 Victor will learn in due time.

Carlo turns his head and hollers to the back room.

CARLO (CONT'D)
 Victor... Vittorioooo...

YOUNG VICTOR enters the main hall holding his new camera.

YOUNG VICTOR
 Hey André, look at my new Zeiss ca...

Victor suddenly freezes at the sight of André's Mussolini stamps.

YOUNG VICTOR
 Awesome... Awweessomme...

ANDRÉ
 Happy eighteenth birthday, young man.

YOUNG VICTOR
 Thank you, André... *Grazie Mille*. With these, I'm gonna put Leopoli's Fascist Youth on the map... for sure.

André sees Carlo behind Victor, looking down and shaking his head.

NARRATOR
 The postcards were a big success. Even postal clerks enjoyed adding their own touch by putting collector quality cancellation postmarks on the mock stamps of Benito Mussolini - Europe's rising superstar - Dictator of Italy.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Being in Poland, 'Leopoli's Fascist Youth' became nothing more than a mail center for correspondence with Italy's Youth Councils of *Gioventú Fascista*.

Instead, the stamp meetings and card games in our Winiarnia became popular local events that often included surprise door prizes of André's fantasy stamp-art.

FADE TO:

SUPER: "TEN YEARS LATER, AUGUST 1939"

SUPER: "CITY OF LWÓW (*LEOPOLI*) POLAND

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL - DAY

Ten years have passed. André is late forties and Carlo late fifties. The wine & pasta tavern's décor hasn't changed much, except now the walls are filled with glossy photographs of Polish and Italian soccer teams, the A/C Milan in particular, race car drivers, Italian bicyclists, singers, and other celebrities.

Centered on the wall behind the bar is a group-photo with Italy's *Duce*, Benito Mussolini, taken ten years earlier.

NARRATOR

The photographic décor was my idea. As Vice-Consul's regional office, our "Winiarnia Italia" became quite popular among Italian travelers, hunters, sports figures and other celebrities.

In promoting Polish-Italian relations, Carlo and the Consulate often sponsored celebrities and sports teams. All the wall photos had either been taken by me or given to me by celebrity visitors.

Several tables are filled with lunch patrons. Furthest away sit men near a back wall gambling at cards, not for money, but using collectible postage stamps like poker chips in various denominations. They're members of Lwów's Stamp Club.

FRANKI MROWICKI, (mid-twenties), a regular patron, sees André enter the hall. Raises his hand, calls out...

FRANKI

Hey! Luigi.

LUIGI PERANTONI (31-yr, lean, clean shaven), bartender and Victor's older brother, cocks his head, looks, and nods.

FRANKI (CONT'D)
A round of espresso.

Franki turns to André who is approaching the table smiling mischievously. He's created next week's door prize.

FRANKI (CONT'D)
About time.

ANDRÉ
Takes time for the ink to dry.

André pulls up a chair, lays a glassine 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 postcard
from a friend. It showed the
Liechtenstein Palace.

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 and opens the envelope. Everyone leans in for a closer look. Tweezers and loupes pop into hands from nowhere as the collectors fall silent.

Carlo Perantoni ambles towards the silent table.

VICTOR

Papá. Look at André's latest stamp. Beautiful. Very detailed, no?

André hands the stamp to Carlo using tweezers. Carlo holds it close to the light.

CARLO

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

ANDRÉ

On a postcard.

Snickers and chuckles. Carlo looks 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 to 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 full of stamps.

PADRE

In.

He surveys the table. In seconds, prized stamp sets and blocks of sheet stamps tucked into glassine envelopes are born.

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... *Rosso!*
(to players)
Whose deal?

FRANKI
Yours.

FADE TO:

INT. ANDRÉ FRODEL'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,
even more than designing banknotes.

VICTOR
André, the stamp club missed you this
month. You're missed at our card games
too - you're gone so much of the time.
Couldn't you apply to Poland's postal
service for a job in Lwów?

ANDRÉ
Why should I, Victor? I make more
money serving Poland as a consultant
whenever they call me. Also, Romania and
Hungary want me back again early next
year to create their new banknotes.

André leans-in over his desk, on both elbows, getting closer to Victor's face to make his point:

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

If I let them employ me, I'd have to do what someone else wants. But Victor, art is freedom of expression, and as an artist, I must remain free to express it.

Then André backs-off, raises his chin and speaks with pride.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Printing is a decent business. But, above all... it's free enterprise which keeps me free. Just like the wine business has kept your father free. And like Carlo, you and Luigi will also be free... all your lives.

VICTOR

Yeah. I understand. It's just that I get tired of having to account for your whereabouts to every patron who sits at the bar. It's their routine. They sit down and holler for a wine or a pasta dish, then as predictable they ask about you even if I gave the same answer the day before.

Oh well, you're back and I hope you'll stay for a while. By the way, thanks for the beautiful Romanian stamps you brought for me. I have something for you too.

Victor reaches in his bag and gets a tin container filled with glassine envelopes and stamps. He shuffles through the envelopes and selects two.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

André, these two sets are for you. Both contain four stamps each. This set with the Swastikas is from Germany, and in this envelope is a 1938 set of Russian stamps.

ANDRÉ

Thank you, Victor. These are very nice.

VICTOR

Can you do me a favor?

André nods. Victor reaches in his bag again, and he pulls out a fresh new stamp album

See Lwów's handsome cote-of-arms on the cover of my new album. I'm dedicating this album to stamps of Germany and Russia. Will you please draw a Swastika on the left of our cote-of-arms... and then... also an image of 'Hammer & Sickle' on the right?

ANDRÉ
Gladly, Victor. It's no
problem at all.

VICTOR
I cut these two samples from a magazine.

Victor lays the two clippings of swastika, hammer & sickle images on the cover of his new album, positioned on the right and on the left of Lwów's cote-of-arms, just as he described.

CAMERA FOCUSES DOWN ON VICTOR'S COLORFUL 'NAZI-SOVIET' DISPLAY WITH LWÓW IN BETWEEN. SOUNDTRACK REVERBERATES A GLOOMY TONE.

FADE TO:

EXT. LWÓW, *JELAZNA VODA* THERMAL BATHING PARK" - DAY

Victor, LARISA (LARI) DOROSHENKA and DANIELA (DANI) RABINOWITZ (both are early twenties) choose a picnic spot under a 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 full 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
Just so you know, I do
have ulterior motives.

Lari eyes his Zeiss fold-out camera in the basket.

LARI

So. You plan to turn us into calendar girls and sell the pin-ups?

VICTOR

HA! You think your swimsuit shots are worth money?

DANI

Certainly. And Stasia will be jealous. You invited her too, 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 inside my family's wine tavern?

LARI

Ah. He doesn't trust you.

VICTOR

With his daughter... in a bar? 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 guide.

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... and him too.

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 swimsuits, top of 1930s fashion.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Let me take our picture before we
look like a bunch of wet leaves.

Setting up the tripod and the camera takes a few moments.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(directing 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 the frame.
Lari takes him by the arm. CLICK.

EXT. "JELAZNA VODA THERMAL BATHING PARK" - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Back on the nap they dry off with towels and begin
to divvy up their picnic lunch.

LARI

(to Victor)

You have Italian citizenship, yes?

Victor chews.

VICTOR

Uh-hum. I have both.

DANI

Seriously, what happens if there's
a war? Do you get to choose sides?

They laugh.

VICTOR

Didn't you hear what the radio
has been talking about?

LARI

(to Dani)

No. Did you?

DANI

No.

VICTOR

Germany signed a non-aggression
pact with Russia.

DANI

That's great!

VICTOR

Perhaps... or maybe not. The pact does not include Poland. It's just for them two... and Poland is in the middle. My father said that he doesn't believe them. I hope he's wrong... pass me a beer, please.

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 has been arming to the teeth. And Russia... not Poland's friend.

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 the minds of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin.

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

My beer's flip-top is stuck hard. Victor, Please open it for me.

FADE TO:

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL, TAVERN SIDE - NIGHT

At the bar, Carlo serves an old client, KRZYSTOF GORSKI, who always wears the same blue vest, drinks the same wine and he 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.

KRZYSTOF GORSKI

(Loud, obnoxious)

Those damned fascists. *Cholerni Faszysci*. Them bloody Nazi *kurwa*. God-damned Nazis. ...Crazy *dupeks*. They want to ruin Europe and the entire world too... *Cholera jasna*.

Nearby customers avert their eyes.
Carlo stares at him. They lock eyes.

KRZYSTOF GORSKI (CONT'D)

You're part of it, Carlo.

Carlo winces.

KRZYSTOF GORSKI (CONT'D)

I don't forget. Ten years ago you had Mussolini right here - in this hall - when he came to Lwów.

Carlo looks away to SIBILIA, Krzystof's elderly wife as she gets up from her table.

KRZYSTOF GORSKI (CONT'D)

An entire group of'em came - you found expensive cars to pick'em up as they landed - and you closed the *Winiarnia*... just to feed'em.

CARLO

You're right. I did.

KRZYSTOF GORSKI

Nothing has changed... has it?

CARLO

Krzystof, I swear. My loyalty has always been to King Victor Emmanuel. To me, Benito Mussolini is just his prime minister.

KRZYSTOF GORSKI

Not True! You never talked about the King. But you often talk about '*Il Duce*'... as you call him.

CARLO

Mussolini's changed... So have I.

Sibilia approaches. She touches Krzystof's arm

SIBILIA

Please don't be like this, Krzystof. You've known Carlo for a long time. He's a good man... Let's go home.

Krzystof stands up, takes the last glass of wine that Carlo had served to him... and pours it into a spittoon. As they walk out Carlo is left alone... THINKING DEEPLY:

FADE TO:

BEGIN FLASHBACK: "TEN YEARS EARLIER, JUNE 1929"

SUPER: "CITY OF LWÓW (*LEOPOLI*) POLAND"

NARRATOR

A month had passed since my birthday. My stamp-club postcards by the Fascist Youth of Lwów bearing a fake Mussolini stamp was becoming the talk of stamp collectors. Most philatelists in Italy welcomed the 'Stamp Fantasy by André Frodel'... but confusion buzzed among collectors in other countries.

Then, in mid-June, Carlo called me into his office... the typical place he would use to rebuke me. Mother was in the office with him.

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" CARLO'S OFFICE - DAY

CARLO

Sit down, Victor. This morning the Embassy called the Consulate... and then the Consul called me...

YOUNG VICTOR

(interrupting)

But papá. Did you tell him that the stamps are not counterfeits ... that they're just André's fantasy art?

CARLO

Feeling guilty, Vito? Cool it, son. It's not what he called about.

YOUNG VICTOR

What then? Why did you... what?

CARLO

I want you to know that Romana and I named your brother after my father, your grandfather Luigi... and you should know that we named you after the King of Italy, *Vittorio Emanuele*.

Victor is totally confused. He looks at both Carlo and Romana.

YOUNG VICTOR

The Consul called to tell... what?
Has something happened to Luigi?

CARLO

No... nothing like that. His military
service is almost over. He will be
honorably discharged in September, and
someday will be your turn to serve in
the King's army.

YOUNG VICTOR

You called me here to tell me that?

CARLO

We called you here to tell you that even
though we carry Fascist-Party ID cards,
our family's loyalty has always been to
the King, not to Benito Mussolini.

YOUNG VICTOR

That's it, papá? I won't tell anyone.

Carlo looks down... and shakes his head.
Romana covers her mouth from laughing.

ROMANA

Without our documentation as members of
Italy's Fascist-Party, dear Victor, it
would be impossible for us to operate
our import-export wine business...

Victor crosses his arms... showing mild resistance.

ROMANA (CONT'D)

Without it, we wouldn't even be able
to travel freely in or out of Italy.
Consider your Fascist-Party ID card to
be nothing more than a passport, son.

CARLO

Please understand, son, that in public
your mother and I neither dispute nor
dissent from the Fascist regime...
because it would be dangerous...

ROMANA

(short chuckle)

Safely, we knew you wouldn't either. Ha

CARLO

But, it's important that you know how
your mother and I truly feel about the
'black wave' of Fascist extremism and
intolerance that has gripped Italian
youth over the past seven years.

YOUNG VICTOR

Honestly, *mamma e papà*, you haven't shocked me. I kinda thought it was somewhat like this. Perhaps not as much as you explained... but, I'm grateful that you did clarify it.

Now, Victor gets up...

YOUNG VICTOR (CONT'D)

So, thank you, *carissimi genitori*.
And if there's nothing else...

CARLO

No. There's nothing else.

Victor turns and starts walking away.

CARLO

Oh, I forgot to mention about the Consul's phone call. He said that Mussolini will hold a political luncheon here on Saturday.

Victor freezes in his steps – staggered by what he heard. Then swings around incredulous.

YOUNG VICTOR

Did you say that the *Duce* will be here?
To hold a political luncheon... Here?

Carlo and Romana reply with blank stares. With difficulty, Victor tries to control his excitement... given all that they had just confided to him.

YOUNG VICTOR (CONT'D)

Here... in our Winiarnia... Saturday?

Carlo nods casually.

YOUNG VICTOR (CONT'D)

That's only four days from now. We have a lot of work to do. Where do I start?

CARLO

(with mild irony)

We knew we could count on you, son.

Again, but without delay, Victor turns and heads out towards the door, as he can no longer hold the bubbling excitement that's beaming inside him. He steps out of the office and into the main hall... wearing a big grin on his face.

YOUNG VICTOR

(to himself)

Wow, Luigi is gonna be sooo jealous.

NARRATOR

By Saturday the Winiarnia's main hall was '*spic & span*' clean. Also, I put a fresh coat of varnish to the wooden front of the huge wine-bar - I waxed and buffed the bar-top - and polished its upper and bottom brass rails.

I spread Romana's brand new red & white checkered tablecloths and I placed large brass ashtrays on each table, centered with tall cigar lighters made of spent brass shells from the Great War.

Carlo had organized a small fleet of deluxe automobiles with drivers who would provide transportation for an entourage of 14 guests... to and from the Winiarnia.

Reflecting on all the times Warsaw's Consul of Italy had called to speak with Carlo, always brought us good news. He usually would announce the arrivals of celebrities - sports figures - dignitaries... *Il Duce*.

But, the last time we heard from him wasn't about new arrivals from Italy. Quite the contrary... Not good news.

FADE TO:

SUPER: "TEN YEARS LATER, AUGUST 1939"

SUPER: "CITY OF LWÓW (*LEOPOLI*) POLAND"

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" KITCHEN - 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

Pronto, Winiarnia Italia. Luigi.

CONSUL OF ITALY

Buon Giorno, Luigi. I'd like to speak with Carlo.

LUIGI

Si signore, un minuto, please.

Luigi puts his hand over the mouthpiece. Shouts.

LUIGI (CONT'D)
Papá! S'for you.

Carlo descends the stairs. Luigi hands off to him.

CARLO
Pronto. This is Carlo.

CONSUL OF ITALY
Salve, Carlo. I have some very
important news...

Carlo knows the voice, brightens.

CARLO
Ah. What can I do for you today
signor Console?

CONSUL OF ITALY
Unfortunately, I'm calling you about
an urgent order from Rome. It deeply
saddens me to say this to you...
The Embassy has ordered all Italian
nationals to evacuate Poland...
Italy's Consulate relies on you, Carlo,
as our regional Vice-Consul, to advise
all Italians in Lwów and region, that they
must leave Poland... immediately.

Carlo is speechless, his eyes fixed.

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

CARLO
Si... si...

CONSUL OF ITALY
(serious voice)
Carlo. I am very sorry.
There's no time to waste.

Carlo hangs up. Leans on the wall, dazed. Luigi approaches.

LUIGI
Papá?

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
Papá. Why?

CARLO
Because Rome's ordering all Italians
to evacuate Poland.

LUIGI
What? Did he say why? What...
What happened?

CARLO
No. He asked me to notify all
Italians. Go. Do as I told you.
Your mother and I have a lot of
work to do... and many people
to contact. I'll send Victor
down to help.

Moments later Victor races downstairs, into the...

KITCHEN.

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

LUIGI
Yeah.

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* in Rome tells papá to
leave now - so, 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 papá.

FADE TO:

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL - NIGHT

A party is in full swing. Various foods and sweets sit on the bar along with a cask of wine. At the far end, music POURS from a phonograph. A stack of 78-rpm vinyl records nearby.

Carlo's wife, ROMANA, (early 50s) brings a pot of *pastasciutta 'alla carbonara con pancetta'* from the kitchen.

Friends and family eat, drink, laugh, and dance.

Victor jokes with friends, looks up to see a familiar young woman. STASIA ALEXINISKA (STASI, 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.

STASI

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...

STASI

Well, he doesn't know. He's with his Regiment. They're on alert. And mom couldn't stop me when I told her that your family was leaving. Mom sends best wishes to your family.

Victor smiles.

STASI (CONT'D)
...But, I can't stay long.

VICTOR
Come join us.

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

LARI
(to Stasia)
You look lovely tonight.

STASI
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... and they'll be back.

STASI
My father's cavalry unit, instead, they're taking it quite seriously.

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

VICTOR
Is anyone else in the city worried besides us Italians?

LARI
Not much will change on the farm. My father worries more about transportation to the market.

DANI
Daddy 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?

STASI
I Don't know if I'll afford ballet
lessons. Or if 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. This conversation is
getting heavy. Thanks!

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

Dani takes a gulp of wine, stands.
Seconds later, she's in the swing.

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL - NIGHT (LATER)

Music continues loudly as do the revelers. Victor steps out
from the kitchen to find Stasia waiting. She looks without
speaking. Their eyes lock. Victor approaches reads her face.

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

Victor leans over Stasia, she closes her eyes. He kisses each
lightly. Then down to her lips. They kiss embraced deeply.

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

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

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

CARLO (O.C.)
 (again, louder)
 Victor. Another cask of wine.

They embrace and kiss again... deeply.

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL, TAVERN SIDE - SAME TIME

André, Padre and several others chat as 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. 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 that Carlo is taking his family to Italy. They will be safe if war breaks out.

NEIGHBOR
 A toast to Carlo Perantoni and his family. To their health and a swift return to Lwów.

The small group assents.

AT ANOTHER TABLE
 Romana takes a break, removes an apron. Sits with her sister CORINNA MONDINI and friends.

BABUSHKA WOMAN
 The neighborhood won't be the same. I'll miss all of you... every day.

CORINNA MONDINI

The same goes for all of us. It'll be nice to see friends and relatives back in Volargne, but only a week or two.

ROMANA

Likewise, Carlo and me. Our entire family has plans for the holidays, here at home, in Lwów. No exceptions. December at the very latest.

BABUSHKA WOMAN

So. No later than December? But what if it comes to that?

ROMANA

Then we'll be in Volargne a bit longer. Carlo hasn't said much, but surely he'll be arranging next year's wine imports to Lwów. Luigi's coming too, but Victor will be staying with our relatives in Canton Ticino, Switzerland because in Italy he'd be drafted... Not what he wants.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

Your Carlo's always been a good 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 loyal to the House of Savoia ever since the King appointed him as Honorary Vice-Consul soon after the Great War... That was 20-years ago, in 1919. Carlo does his duty well... but he's no politician.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

Isn't he loyal to Mussolini too?

Romana's sister, Corinna, lets out a spontaneous laugh which she immediately controls not to attract attention by making it seem like a cough.

CORINNA MONDINI

Excuse me, ladies. Some wine went down the wrong tube.

Romana covers for her sister.

ROMANA

Ha! My Carlo is a loyal Fascist only because in 1922 King Victor Emmanuel made Mussolini his prime minister... Italy, however, is still a monarchy.

BABUSHKA WOMAN

I remember you telling us about when Mussolini came here years ago with that goofy creep... Adolf Hitler...
...as you called him.

ROMANA

We started to call him 'Hitler' years later when he reemerged on newspapers and magazines. But when Mussolini came here in 1929, all we knew about his odd follower was that his stupid behavior had annoyed the *Duce*... and all of us.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

In 1929 nobody could've ever imagined such a dumb idiot becoming leader of Germany one day. Where's that photo?

Romana points to the framed group photo centered on the wall behind the bar.

ROMANA

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

CORINNA MONDINI

Me too, li'l sister. I'm also in the window standing next to you.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

I gotta see this...

She gets up. Goes behind the bar. Examines the photo.

WOMAN WITH PARTY HAT

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

They laugh.

NARRATOR

I shot that photograph - *Il Duce* with 14 aspiring Fascists from around Europe - plus Carlo, seated next to Mussolini - and me, standing far behind the group. A photo of 16 men - and two women... my mother and her sister, aunt Corinna, looking out from the window.

CLOSE UP ON GROUP-PHOTO AND HOLD UNTIL FLASHBACK (NEXT)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

During the luncheon, dad asked me to position the chairs and the flag for a photo-shoot after lunch.

FADE TO:

BEGIN FLASHBACK: "TEN YEARS EARLIER, JUNE 1929"

EXT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" INNER COURTYARD - DAY

Eighteen-year-old Victor is in the Winiarnia's courtyard wearing a 3-piece suit. He's behind a row of six wooden chairs as he's adjusting a flagpole-stand holding Italy's Fascist flag. He hops up onto a wooden bottle-crate to reach the flag's top where he appends a banner. He laces the banner with a golden ribbon tied into a bow. The Banner is marked: '*Gioventú Fascista di Leopoli.*'

Carlo appears in Corinna's apartment window. He gets Victor's attention by TAPPING A COIN ON THE GLASS. Then he speaks to Victor directly through the glass.

CARLO

They forgot their "*Giovinezza*" record on the airplane. Do you mind letting them use your copy?

YOUNG VICTOR

It will be my pleasure.

CARLO

Thanks. Hurry up. Most of'em skipped breakfast, and they're hungry.

YOUNG VICTOR

Just another half-minute, dad - then I'll go get my "*Giovinezza*" record - Who said they're hungry?

CARLO

Nobody said it. Those whose *antipasto* dishes are empty and half of their table-bread is gone...

Victor starts laughing.

CARLO

Hurry. Romana and Corinna are ready to serve first-course *pastasciutta* but, the national anthem is holding it up.

Victor steps off the wooden bottle-crate, and he enters an adjacent door on the Winiarnia's apartments side. A minute later he's back walking across the courtyard - toward the tavern side - holding his 78-rpm vinyl copy of the Fascist national anthem "*Giovinezza*." Carlo is at the wine hall's back-door anxiously waiting for him.

CARLO

Com'on Vito. Can you walk any slower?
 (then he whispers)
 My hall's full of famished Fascists.

They both cover their mouths as they laugh undertone. Victor offers the record, but Carlo doesn't take it.

CARLO (CONT'D)

Take it to the *Duce* yourself. Tell him that I'm in the kitchen waiting to send out the servers as soon as I hear the last note of "*Giovinezza*."
 (then he whispers)
 I just don't want to be singing the Fascist national anthem with them.

FADE TO:

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL - DAY

Young Victor enters the hall from the kitchen's double-swing service doors. Mussolini is still speaking to the group as he catches Victor's presence from the corner of his eye.

MUSSOLINI

(to the group)
 So then, as I often remind Italians, you also must remind your nationals that if Fascism had not marched on Rome seven years ago, Moscow would be marching on Europe today! Remind them that from the very beginning it had been the Fascist movement of Europe's youth that began the anti-Bolshevik movement in 1919, and together we will be victorious in the end!
 (pause, glance at kitchen)
 I've been disrupted giving speeches in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, usually by protesters and other troublemakers. But, never by the loud rumblings of my audience's stomachs...

Surprisingly, the serious audience breaks into laughter.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

Together with my own stomach, the growling in this room is louder than any of my speeches in Piazza Venezia.

More laughter, louder.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

From the exquisite aromas of Italian cooking coming from the kitchen, it's evident to me that Carlo and Romana Perantoni have a solution to our unfortunate predicament.

Cheers from the audience.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

(turning to Victor)

Is that record you have in your hand our national anthem "*Giovinazza*"?

YOUNG VICTOR

Signor-Si, *Duce*. But, the side with lyrics skips tracks badly. We'll have to use the instrumental side only.

MUSSOLINI

Hmm. We usually sing-along to lyrics. Without lyrics might be tricky with this small international group.

(to the group)

Can any of you sing the lead for "*Giovinazza*"... besides me?

Only the Hitler doppelgänger raises his hand. Mussolini rolls his eyes in exasperation - as he's annoyed by him once again.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

(coldly, to Hitler)

Not with a German accent!

(to the others)

Is anyone else willing to sing lead?

No answer... Then Victor asserts persuasively:

YOUNG VICTOR

I can... *Duce*... I can sing it.

MUSSOLINI

(to all present)

What are we waiting for?

Start the phonograph.

Please stand for our anthem

Victor sings "Giovinezza" with remarkable excellence. After the first few lyrics, *Il Duce* and others look surprisingly impressed. Likewise, from the kitchen, Carlo, Romana, and Corinna squeeze their faces into the service-order window captivated by what they hear... They had never heard Victor sing anything before this day.

<p><i>Salve o popolo d'eroi Salve o patria immortale Son rinati i figli tuoi Con la fede e l'ideale</i></p> <p><i>Il valor dei tuoi guerrieri, La virtù dei tuoi pionieri La vision dell'Alighieri Oggi brilla in tutti i cuor</i></p> <p><i>Giovinezza, giovinezza, Primavera di bellezza Per la vita, nell'asprezza Il tuo canto squilla e va! E per Benito Mussolini, E per la nostra Patria bella,</i></p> <p><i>Dell'Italia nei confini Son rifatti gli italiani; Li ha rifatti Mussolini Per la guerra di domani</i></p> <p><i>Per la gloria del lavoro Per la pace e per l'alloro, Per la gogna di coloro Che la patria rinnegar.</i></p> <p><i>Giovinezza, giovinezza, Primavera di bellezza Per la vita, nell'asprezza Il tuo canto squilla e va! E per Benito Mussolini, E per la nostra Patria bella,</i></p> <p><i>I poeti e gli artigiani I signori e i contadini Con orgoglio d'italiani Giuran fede a Mussolini.</i></p> <p><i>Non v'è povero quartiere Che non mandi le sue schiere Che non spieghi le bandiere Del Fascismo redentor.</i></p> <p><i>Giovinezza, giovinezza... (closing by chorus)</i></p>	<p>Hail, people of heroes, Hail, immortal Fatherland, Your sons were born again With the faith and the Ideal.</p> <p>Your warriors' valor, Your pioneers' virtue, Alighieri's vision, Today shines in every heart</p> <p>Youth, Youth, Spring of beauty, In the hardship of life Your song rings and goes! And for Benito Mussolini, And our beautiful Fatherland,</p> <p>In the Italian borders, Italians have been remade Mussolini has remade them For tomorrow's war,</p> <p>For labor's glory, For peace and for the laurel, For the shame of those Who repudiated our Fatherland</p> <p>Youth, Youth, Spring of beauty, In the hardship of life Your song rings and goes! And for Benito Mussolini, And our beautiful Fatherland,</p> <p>The poets and the artisans, The lords and the countrymen, With an Italian's pride Swear fealty to Mussolini</p> <p>No poor neighborhood exists That doesn't send its hordes That doesn't unfurl the flags Of redeeming Fascism</p> <p>Youth, Youth... (closing by chorus)</p>
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NARRATOR

I never knew that I could sing, and neither did anyone else. I knew that Mussolini would call for a volunteer to sing the lead - and seeing that "Giovinezza" means "Youth" - usually a member of the local 'Fascist Youth' would be the 'chosen' volunteer. But, Leopoli's Fascist Youth had only two members - Luigi and me - But, Luigi was gone, and I had only four days to prepare, which I did in André's print shop every spare minute I had.

André was my teacher and my only audition. Neither of us had any musical skill nor any experience with singing. But, his printing machines served two key purposes. Using his gramophone, he'd test various machines, also he'd combine machines, to get the useable beat. Then, he'd adjust their speed to find the tempo. The machines were loud, and he required I sing louder.

After four days, however, I still felt not suitably confident. I relied on a helpful chorus - and a miracle - I got both. Proudly, *Duce* joined with me in the second half of the lead. That was the encouraging miracle needed. And the chorus did the rest.

Victor earns surprising applause from Mussolini and the entire group. Carlo, Romana, and Corinna step out of the kitchen and join in the applause with the guests who are still standing by their tables. *Duce* removes his PNF Party badge from his suit coat and pins it on Victor's left-lapel. The group applauds again - Victor catches Carlo's eyes for an instant - it's a fleeting look of fatherly pride, until Victor turns away, then Carlo's gaze turns serious as he realizes that he's lost his son to the other side... and that it's going to take time and patience to gain him back.

MUSSOLINI

(to Carlo)

Mangiamo? (TR: shall we eat?)

CARLO

Signor-Si. (TR: Yes-sir)

Romana and Corinna enter from kitchen pushing food-carts.

MUSSOLINI

(to group)

Buon appetito fratelli del Fascio.

Carlo sits at the speaker's table next to the *Duce* while Victor helps Romana and Corinna in providing food service. Mussolini invites Vittorio to sit with him and Carlo, but Victor politely explains that he's needed in the kitchen. Then, Victor reaches in his coat pocket, carefully extracts a glassine envelope containing a 4-stamp block of André's fantasy Mussolini stamps, and offers it to *Duce* as a gift.

Mussolini looks pleased as he examines the stamps. Then, he extracts the block, gets his fountain pen, unscrews the top, tickles the inker, and he inscribes his uniquely distinct "M" monogram across the block... and returns it to Victor.

MUSSOLINI

I heard about these 'fantasy stamps'
as you call them. They're excellent.
But I don't want to offend the King.
Please keep them for me, Victor, until
such time the King might let pass his
exclusive control of stamps. And then,
(humorous)
and then you can design the Party's
history of Fascism for us... on stamps.

They laugh. Victor graciously takes *Duce's* "M" monogrammed stamp block. Politely, he leaves to help Romana and Corinna serve a three course meal for lunch: the Winiarnia's famed *Pastasciutta alla carbonara con pancetta* - and - *Fette di Cervo con Insalata Verde Fresca* - venison steaks with fresh green salad dressed in olive oil and wine vinegar, crushed garlic and a slice of onion with an olive on top.

Classic straw-flasks of Valpolicella wines, white and red, are placed on each table - Also, liter bottles of locally brewed *Piwo Lwówskie* beer in room temp, dark and light - and bottles of typical *Acqua Minerale San Pellegrino*.

A short time later, CLINKING OF DISHES AND SILVERWARE is heard as Romana and Corinna begin removing empty dishes, bottles, and silverware, while Victor serves typical Italian *dopo-pranzo* treats: *Parmigiano* cheese with *olive nere*, *noci assortite con frutta secca* - assorted nuts with dried fruit. Carlo waves Victor over to the head table.

CARLO

Have you prepared the courtyard for our group-photo, like I asked?

YOUNG VICTOR

Si, papá... I swept it clean, and I placed the six chairs, flag'n'all.

CARLO

Good. Call Jacek and tell him it's time for desserts but his chocolate delivery has not arrived yet.

Mussolini overhears and says...

MUSSOLINI

Chocolates for dessert? Oom mah mah.
Dopo-pranzo I usually offer my guests an opportunity to speak... Won't take long. Afterward, we can move to the courtyard for the picture. From there we should head out - we have a long flight to Warsaw, and I want to arrive before dark.

YOUNG VICTOR

(points at front window)

Look. Jacek is here with the sweets.

CARLO

Good. Show him in. Then, get started with the coffees, and I'll follow behind for the '*corretto*.'

Carlo's friend, Jacek, serves each table various chocolate treats and other Polish pastry specialties that he obtained from the "Hazet Czekolady" factory.

Victor pushes a cart filled with cups serving *caffé espresso* while Carlo follows behind offering to 'correct' each coffee, *caffé corretto*, which entails adding a shot *grappa* to their cups, or a *bicchierino* of Vermouth Martinazzi, instead.

MUSSOLINI

(to the group)

The Perantoni family has not given us a quick lunch. Most of you are still eating. True '*hospitalità d'Italia*' and we are grateful - it will make flying to Warsaw easy to sleep.

Duce looks at his watch.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

But, as the result of our indulgence in Carlo's '*Perantoni Royal Banquet*' now we have time left for only two 10-minute talks. Who wants to speak?

Three hands go up - *Duce* takes three wooden toothpicks. Breaks the bottom off one - marks ink on the bottom of another. Hides the two unique toothpicks by holding all three between thumb and forefinger - walks to their tables - and says,

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

He who pulls the short toothpick gets a chance to speak some other time. He who pulls the full toothpick speaks first. The inked one speaks last.

One of the three volunteers is the doppelgänger Hitler. The *Duce's* hope is that he pulls the broken toothpick. But, he pulls the full clean toothpick, instead. The last speaker will be Mussolini's French guest. *Duce* returns to the head table where Carlo is seated.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

(whispers to Carlo)

Dammit. My daughter's fiancée Galeazzo showed me how to trick the toothpicks, but, dammit, I forgot how. That kraut has been a pain in my ass since we met yesterday in Vienna... Stick around, Carlo... you'll see.

(to the group)

Adolf will give the first talk...

Followed by Monsieur Pierre Laveller

(to doppelgänger Hitler)

Ten-minutes max. Observe that.

DOPPELGÄNGER HITLER

(serious, intense)

I am a German National Socialist born in Austria. And I want to tell you how the Great War was lost and why it was lost. Granted that the Central Powers had lost the war, it was neither fault of the German and Austrian people, nor the failure of their soldiers.

(loud obnoxious)

I blame the Hungarians and Bulgarians.

And I blame the Ottoman's Turks...

Pause. And it should not surprise you that the Jewish race triggered it.

(louder, boisterous)

Germany and Austria could've won the war all by themselves - if these other traitors hadn't been involved - and if the Jews hadn't owned the economies on both sides of enemy lines.

Duce pokes Carlo with his elbow, sharing his irritation.

DOPPELGÄNGER HITLER (CONT'D)

(loud boisterous)

The Germanic people are just and faultless, but not their leaders.

Kaiser Wilhelm, Paul Von Hindenburg, and Franz Joseph 1st of Austria shared indecisiveness -- whenever a decision was made, it was the wrong decision. They made our people succumb to...

'*Le Diktat de Versailles.*'

DOPPELGÄNGER HITLER (CONT'D)

(loud boisterous)

The Germanic people of Deutschland and Osterreich did not lose the war. Their leaders and their allies lost the war, but not the people, not the soldiers.

Before he can pause for another breath, *Duce* steps in.

MUSSOLINI

That'll do it. We've heard enough. Blowing your Germanic trumpet about how the Great War was unjustly lost - on your side - has undoubtedly offended some of the guests...

Doppelgänger Hitler sits - surprised - confounded.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

And you offended me too. Let me tell you that I fought opposite your side. Our valor had beaten your Germanic soldiers... Their defeat has nothing to do with your leaders.

NARRATOR

Mussolini's Fascist Italy had begun with international success - eleven years before Hitler's Nazi Germany came to exist. History reports that in those early years Mussolini had contempt for Adolf Hitler. However, the same historical accounts fail to explain any reason for such contempt. That day in our "Winiarnia Italia" may provide an insight.

History confirms that Mussolini had repeatedly rejected Adolf Hitler's friendship before accepting his rapport in 1934. During that period *Il Duce* was open to meeting with admirers and followers of Fascism. So, why not Hitler? - And why did Mussolini often denote Hitler as a "scimmietta", which is an Italian slur meaning "silly little monkey" ...as in "monkey see - monkey do."

History does not provide the reasons for *Duce's* initial scorn of Hitler. It may well have originated during their trip to Poland in 1929.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)
 (to Pierre Laveller)
 It's your turn. What's your subject?

PIERRE LAVELLER
 The mood in the hall has changed...
 So, the subject I had in mind should
 wait for another time.

MUSSOLINI
 Very well. So, let's show the Perantoni
 family our Fascist gratitude for their
 grand hospitality, and all they've done
 to make this day a special Italian event
 in far eastern Poland.
 (to Carlo)
 Please call Vittorio and the ladies.

Carlo takes a chance to change the mood back to happy.
 He stands up and shouts in typical colloquial Italian.

CARLO
 Vittorioooo - Romanaaaa - Corinnaaaa.

Duce and the group explode into laughter.

MUSSOLINI
 (enthusiastically)
 Italianissimo! Just like at home.

Victor, Romana, and Corinna step from the kitchen into
 surging cheers and applause. Mussolini takes his glass of
 vermouth and proposes a toast. The group follows their
 leader, and they raise their glasses.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)
 We toast to you, Carlo Perantoni,
 King's Honorary Vice Consul and
 merchant of Italian wines to this
 distant land. And we toast to your
 highly respected family. When in
 Rome, you'll be welcome at Villa
 Torlonia... *Alla Salute Fascista*.

THE GROUP
Alla Salute Fascista. (To Fascist Health)

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)
 I close this meeting with a final word
 for our souls. We must never forget that
 every precious day and every precious
 hour of Rome's glorious ancient history
 had been guided from Heaven and devoted
 to a single common mission. Culture.

MUSSOLINI (CONT'D)

We are the makers of civilization.
The nation of Italy continues to
achieve that same mission today,
more than ever before.

We must always remember that each one
of us - all of us - are lashed and tied
together by our Fascist brotherhood in
a united effort of faith and willpower.

And now, lets pick-up our things and
meet in the courtyard where Vittorio
is prepared to shoot our group photo.
From there we will head out to resume
our flight to Warsaw.

RETURN TO 'GROUP-PHOTO CLOSE-UP' WHERE FLASHBACK HAD BEGUN.

NARRATOR

So, I arranged the group by seating
Il Duce next to Carlo in the central
place of honor. And then, since that
ridiculous Hitler was the only one
dressed different from the others,
wearing a pastel plaid suit making
him look quite out of place, I chose
to put him in the middle of the back
row to balance the group's symmetry.
But this group-photograph is in honor
of *Duce* Benito Mussolini, not Adolf
Hitler... or his look-alike.

After setting the auto-shutter, I ran
behind the group and stood-up on a
wooden bottle-crate, centered with
Italy's Fascist flag, standing over
the group. Thus, the photo makes me
seem taller than I am.

Having this photo makes me very happy
today, more than ever because in 1944
and 1945 most Fascist documents had
been destroyed due to Italy's obscure
wartime politics. Similarly, in 1946
more Fascist era records disappeared
to prevent political gain by Italy's
new growing Communist party.

As a result, modern Italian history
does not report Mussolini's trip to
Poland. But, I have this photograph
that proves he was there.

FADE TO:

SUPER: "TEN YEARS LATER" (AUGUST 1939)

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL, SAME PARTY - NIGHT

Carlo wanders among the party tables.
He 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 coffee table. Opens a drawer.
Takes out a fat envelope, hands it to Padre.

Padre peeks in and is dumbfounded.

PADRE
Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

CARLO
It's to help you feed the orphans
if there's war... or, also peace.

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
our patrons one day.

Carlo stands. Padre stands and hugs him.

CARLO (CONT'D)
Let's get a glass of "Vino Rosso" di
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)
 The youth 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
 (to André and Padre)
 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 my own wine bar.

PADRE
 I'll protect the wine from André.

ANDRÉ
 (to Padre)
 And I'll watch your communion wine.
 (to Carlo)
 ...Grazie. No worries, Carlo.

Carlo gives a snarky chuckle. Then he 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.

They wrap arms around each other. Their eyes well up.

LARI (CONT'D)
 I'll miss you terribly.

VICTOR
 I'll think of you every day.

DANI
 I'll miss you too! Write to me.

They kiss, tenderly. Linger.

FADE TO:

SUPER: "AUGUST 29, 1939"

EXT. LWÓW, SADLOWSKI STATION, TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

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 heading west with more
 than 100 Złotys in cash or other
 valuables would have their property
 confiscated by German border guards.
 So papá put the family's savings in
 a joint bank account: about 40,000
 Złotys backed by gold reserve.

Unknown to us all, it would be papá's
 last item of business in Lwów. Also,
 the family's joint savings of 40,000
 Złotys would never be seen again.

On the platform, Victor in baggy knickerbockers watches the
 family climb aboard. Carlo and Luigi wave. Romana and
 Corinna cry and wave. Victor tries to smile, waves back.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

An hour later, I was on the train to Vienna. I had packed everything I could think of, including all my Fascist Youth regalia - and I took also what German border guards would consider to be contraband... but... ..but only if discovered.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - DAY

The car is crowded. The train moves at a good clip. Victor is standing in the aisle, staring out the window.

NARRATOR

Hours later we approached the Czechoslovakian border, controlled by Germans over the past eight months, since March.

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

GESTAPO OFFICER

(Loud)

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. And 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

Inside my baggy Knickerbockers, strapped to my left leg, there was a collection of stamps which were worth more than 9,000 Złotys. And I had strapped to my right leg 4,300 Złotys in fresh new Polish banknotes.

The radio had not mentioned "strip searches"... Needless to say, my anxiety began to rise. I felt like a frightened, trapped rabbit.

IN THE STRIP-SEARCH LINE

Victor is situated halfway down the line. In front of the men's bathroom entrance is an SS officer seated at a folding field table. At his left, men emerge from the restroom and form another line waiting to reboard the train. As Victor draws closer to the head of the line he hears...

SS OFFICER

Next... This is your last chance to declare any contraband!

Trying to seem casual, Victor removes his party badge from his coat's lapel. 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 his PNF (Partito Nazionale Fascista) badge in the officer's face.

VICTOR

(Loud, irritated)

I am Lwów's representative of Duce's Blackshirts for Eastern Poland. I'm expected to be at an emergency meeting of the Blackshirts in Rome.

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

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(Loud-authoritative)

Your delay is causing me to miss my Vienna connection. *Il Duce* d'Italia, Benito Mussolini, will hear about this!

The SS officer rises. Pushes the table out of the way and steps out, towering over Victor. He shouts down onto him a long string of nasty German words which need no translation. Then pointing with an outstretched arm, he barks '*Holen Sie!*' and '*Geh Zurück!*' - telling Victor to 'Get back in line, or else!'

But, the officer's outstretched arm points to the line waiting to re-board the train, having assumed that Victor had become irritated while waiting for re-boarding. Victor politely complies having sidestepped the strip-search altogether.

EXT/INT. RAILROAD YARD, VIENNA - DAY

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

Tired, Victor struggles with the luggage. Scans the hall for directions. Above many heads of a crowd of passengers is a LARGE ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES BOARD.

NEAR THE LARGE BOARD

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

INT. VIENNA TRAIN STATION - DAY

Victor looks about. Nearby, is a group of six Italian Fascist Youths at a beer stand sporting PNF Fascist party badges on their coat lapels. They're drinking, smoking, joking.

YOUNG FASCIST

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

The others loudly agree.

YOUNG FASCIST (CONT'D)

My old man thinks that I'm crazy
following '*Il Duce!*' - He doesn't
understand how exciting these
times are for us, Fascist Youth!

Laughter and LOUD agreement follow. Wearing the same PNF badge, Victor steps up to order a beer. The Fascist Youths cordially greet him and, they begin to chat with him.

Approaching from the b.g. are two Austrian Nazi Youths of about the same age, in dark tan uniforms with Swastika armbands. 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 Italy's traditional...

YOUNG FASCISTS
Duce a noi!

... followed by snickering.

The Austrian Nazi Youths appraise them, turn away. The Italian's laughter swells behind their backs.

Victor keeps his eyes on the Nazi Youths 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 concealed weapons?

The biggest Italian responds...

YOUNG FASCIST
As if it's any of your business?

Immediately, two Nazi Youths begin to frisk and pat him down.

YOUNG NAZI
(to Victor)
Loosen your knickerbockers,
raise them above your knees.

NARRATOR
Just when I thought the danger was over, my anxiety soared like it had been at the Czech border.

YOUNG FASCIST
(to Young 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 his baggage and back-steps through a group of onlookers to the...

MEN'S RESTROOM

Victor is tired. He locks the stall door. Checks his pocket watch and decides to stay hidden until his next connection.

FADE TO

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

EXT. HEVELIUS PLATZ - DAY

NARRATOR

Summer classes at Lwów's Polytechnic were over, and Franki had returned to his native Gdansk where he was to resume work at the main post office.

Franki enters the city's square, Hevelius Platz, to find it filled with jackbooted German 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

These German soldiers came from
the Westerplatte this morning.
They came in blasting away.
Our forces didn't stop them.

FRANKI

So... we're at war?

ONLOOKER 1

It seemed to be at the Westplatte.

ONLOOKER 2

Who knows? Maybe there's a mistake.

FRANKI

Invasions don't happen by mistake.
What's going on at the Post Office?

ONLOOKER 1

Somebody said the postal workers have armed themselves and they've been in there since 4 A.M. ...There's about fifty of them inside.

FRANKI

Armed? Are they out of their minds?

Franki looks across the masses.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

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

ONLOOKER 3

I heard the postmaster, 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 WALL CLOCK BEHIND HIM SHOWS 11:00 A.M.

Suddenly, a barrage of SMALL ARMS FIRE explodes. Bullets are followed by several HOWITZER BLASTS 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

Franki had just witnessed the opening salvo of World War Two. By firing from the post office windows, the brave postal workers had given the first firefight of resistance against Nazi defiance. Their action had been a message to the world that would be staunchly followed over the next six years!

(NEWSPRINT/NEWSREEL) Around 5:00 P.M. An enormous explosive device is set off. The post-office front wall collapses... disintegrating into a noisy welter of smoke and dust.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Later, German soldiers will flood the basement with gasoline and set the building afire. Thirty-eight Postal workers will survive, but only to be summarily executed.

FADE TO

SUPER: "LWÓW, SEPTEMBER 12, 1939"

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL, DINING AREA - DAY

Franki is back among friends. He and André, Dani, and Lari eat a breakfast of sausage, cheese, bread and coffee. In the absence of her father, Stasia is often at the Winiarnia.

ANDRÉ

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

LARI

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

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

FRANKI

Polish refugees have been arriving here from Warsaw and central Poland. Most of'em are joining the resistance.

ANDRÉ

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

FRANKI

Won't happen. The underground resistance will never accept a German occupation. They've come here to organize in the east, to fight Germany's invasion from the west.

Out of nowhere, there's suddenly a LOUD WHISTLING SOUND. Everyone freezes. Another sound of WINDING ENGINES follows seconds before BOMBS BEGIN EXPLODING - not too far away.

ANDRÉ

(loud shout)
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 still, again DUST SWIRLS from every open window.

Soon afterward, Padre Michele, wire-frame glasses askew and black frock covered in white dust, appears through the haze.

PADRE
(in tears)
Oh, Lord. They're gone. They're gone!

ANDRÉ
Padre. Who's gone?

The others crowd around the priest.

PADRE
My friends. All four priests. Fathers Zujchowski, Clemente Schleis, Ludovico Wotec, and Father Jaced. Bombs hit our parish home completely. - Four martyrs. Jesuit building destroyed as well.

ANOTHER EXPLOSION sets their ears ringing.

PADRE (CONT'D)
(over the din)
The orphanage was partly hit.
The Lord saved the children.

ANOTHER BOMB sets the Winiarnia shivering.
Shortly, the EXPLOSIONS BECOME MORE DISTANT.

PADRE (CONT'D)
How am I, alone, going to care
for two hundred and three children?

STASI and DANI
(spontaneously)
We can help, Padre. We can help.

PADRE
Perhaps. But there's more! Father Lantini just arrived from Warsaw. Thank God, he was there to find out. He told me last night that orphans, especially Jewish orphans, are in extreme danger due to all that Nazi Arian anti-semite hyperbole.

ANDRÉ
Hmmm... Maybe. And maybe not!
Let's give it some thought.

FRANKI
Bring 'em here to the Winiarnia. We have empty apartments, food, and water. We can take care of them for a while.

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

PADRE

Praise *Boga* for your kind hearts.
Carlo would have done the same.

FRANKI

Let's go get'em! No time to waste.

FADE TO

EXT. ULICA SYKSTUSKA AND BOMBED STREETS OF LWÓW - DAY

With Stuka dive-bombers over Lwów, the group breaks into ones and twos. They run, hide, dodge from buildings and piles of smoldering rubble until they arrive at the bombed-out Jesuit building and the adjacent smoldering *Saletinów* parish home.

Parts of the orphanage roof had collapsed. Among fallen trusses, plaster, and shingles, they find FATHER LANTINI (grey hair, tall, glasses) and the children. 203 orphans who eerily come out from hiding places, covered in dust.

FATHER LANTINI

(to Padre)

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

PADRE

Good friends. Your prayers were heard. They have a place where the children can be housed and fed. All of them.

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 because right now I must salvage the children's documents.

FADE TO

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL - LATER

Children's clothing and other salvaged belongings are piled in the center of the hall with some toddlers sleeping in it. The orphans differ from very young children to teenagers. The majority are between 5 and 10. They talk and move about as Lari, Dani and Stasi organize their rooms and beddings in the Perantoni family apartments.

Meanwhile in... CARLO'S OFFICE

André, Franki and the two priests, seated around Carlo's big desk. They make plans. There's stack of official documents resting on the desk.

FATHER LANTINI

We should thank God that the papers weren't burned.

PADRE

Children can't stay here forever. There's a war... and without these papers it'll be impossible to travel.

FATHER LANTINI

Worse. Czechoslovakia's borders are controlled by Germans. Austria too. Jewish children won't get through.

FRANKI

Lwów's train station has been bombed. The Germans have exclusive use of it.

PADRE

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

FRANKI

Yes. There is a way out. But, the Jewish orphans will need new identification papers.

Franki's willful look lands on André.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

Can you fix that, André?

André gives a confident glance raising their hopes.

ANDRÉ

There's lots of work to do. It's an urgent matter. I'll need some help. We should hurry.

NARRATOR

During the next few days, André and two other artists, members of Lwów's Stamp Club, falsified and generated the new documents. By mid September all traces of Jewish ancestry had been removed and all the children were now little Roman Catholics.

FADE TO

SUPER: "WINIARNIA ITALIA, 15 SEPT 1939"

INT. CARLO'S OFFICE - DAY

The men are seated around Carlo's desk. Padre and Father Lantini admire the new fake documents.

PADRE

Incredible. A bit of singeing, some folds, wrinkles... you've given them character and authenticity.

André smiles.

ANDRÉ

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

He hands a paper to Father Lantini. His eyes pop wide open.

FATHER LANTINI

You forged a Vatican travel order...
(then loudly)
...with the Pope's signature. My God.

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 fake Vatican travel pass.

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.

Another burst of laughter! Padre leans in to hug him.

FRANKI

Something else. This morning my postal privileges allowed me to communicate with Carlo in Volargne with telegrams.

FATHER LANTINI

You didn't tell him what we've done? Germans censure all wires.

FRANKI

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

FATHER LANTINI

But we're not going through Brenner...

FRANKI

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

FATHER LANTINI

Then how...?

ANDRÉ

The secret language of stamps.

FRANKI

I told Carlo that Padre wanted to buy a full sheet 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 postmarked 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's confirmation: "Tell Padre to cancel my order for the issuing postmarks of Hitler's fiftieth birthday." Ha. 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 arrive from Yugoslavia - then, Trieste - Venice - to Rome.

FADE TO

SUPER: "SEPTEMBER 17, 1939"

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" APARTMENTS SIDE - DAY

Franki walks down a balcony 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 the Soviet Union invaded Poland's eastern borderlands early this morning.

FRANKI

But, no one's declared war on Russia.

PADRE

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

ANDRÉ

No doubt that last month's so-called "non-aggression Pact" had really been their '*secret pact-of-aggression.*'

FRANKI

Poland is supposed to fight the Germans and also the Red Army?

ANDRÉ

And the underground resistance who are positioned facing west ... must also turn their guns facing east.

Suddenly, Father Lantini walks in appearing agitated, and he shouts out his distress in a frantic burst...

FATHER LANTINI

The Russians are coming - Everyone's talking about it on the street...
Two weeks ago Germany invaded...
...and now the Russians are coming.

PADRE

(to Lantini)

Yes, we know. The Soviet army will arrive in Lwów in just a few hours. The time has come for us to take the children and head for Rome.

FRANKI

I'll tell Stasi and Lari, and I'll help them get the children ready. By the way, have any of you seen Dani?

The other three reply with negative blank stares.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

Yesterday she had gone home to check on her parents, saying that she'd be back "in an hour or two" ... That's what she said ... But, that was yesterday.

Without a word, all of them come to the realization that Dani's parents, the Rabinowitz family, were Jewish.

NARRATOR

Padre purchased three teams of horses with covered hay-wagons and then he distributed the last of Carlo's 5,600 Żłotys among the older children to foil all of it from being confiscated.

As travel supplies and children necessities are being loaded into the wagons, André sees Dani busy helping with the others.

ANDRÉ

(to Dani)

How are your parents doing? ... in this insanity of bombings and double invasions?

DANI

They're confused and insecure. I worry for them. I told them about what you've done for the Jewish orphans ... and...

ANDRÉ

Should the Rabinowitz family become 'Polish Speaking Ethnic Germans' from Danzig with West Prussian family origins?

A burst of happy tears and a beaming teary smile covers Dani's face as she hangs on André's neck in a big hug.

ANDRÉ

Let's load the smallest children in the wagons. Then take me to the Rabinowitz's right after Padre's caravan departs.

NARRATOR

Later that day, as the Soviet army was marching into Lwów, the two priests began their 10-day walk to Budapest with the 203 orphans. The youngest children stayed in the wagons with older girls to care for them. Everyone else took turns walking, resting and sleeping.

André stayed the evening at Rabinowitz home as he collected their family details. He returned the following evening with new identification papers and new family documents. They had become the "Richter" family, sellers of German cameras and photo supplies. André had even provided a forged property deed showing their purchase of the 'shop and home' from the Rabinowitz family two years prior.

The following week Padre's caravan reached Budapest safely without incidents. Before boarding the train for Trieste, Padre traded the horses and wagons for 2 nights lodging, with hot meals and hot baths, in a large farm cottage. André's fake Vatican travel orders had never been challenged. At Venice, they caught their train connection to Rome.

The Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and Lwów proved to be among the war's worst persecution and malicious murders of Polish citizens at the hands of Russia. It came with wanton arrests, imprisonments, forced slave labor, and deportations.

FADE TO

SUPER: "MAY 1940"

EXT. SOVIET ARMY FARM, RURAL KRESY REGION - DAY

Lari and Stasi sit on the porch steps of a Soviet-occupied farmhouse seized from Polish farmers for military use and support.

Stasia, head down, cries. Lari puts an arm around her.

LARI

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

Stasia shakes her head despondently.

STASI

I don't know if I can handle this. I'm.
I'm no farmer's daughter. My life is in
the city where there's music and theater.
I'm a ballerina... (cries and sobs)

LARI

We're prisoners here now, but any
moment we might be free - as sudden
as we became prisoners. That day I
will bring you to my father's farm.

Stasia has fallen into fear, insecurity, and self pity.

STASI

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

She bows her head, continues sobbing.

STASI (CONT'D)

And where did they take my mother?
They told me that she was needed in
the milking station (sobbing) and I
haven't heard from her since. (sobs)
It's been almost a month. (loud cries)

LARI

My grandmother once told me 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. Victor went to
Switzerland. Padre is gone too. Andre
and Franki are in hiding. I imagine
they'd all like to be back home.

Stasia wipes her eyes on her sleeves.

LARI (CONT'D)

Happiness, grandma said, is a state
of mind. It's an attitude we need to
cultivate. There's no choice.

. NARRATOR

What the world didn't know is that in 1939 Hitler's alliance with Russia had been with an ulterior motive. Hitler had duped Joseph Stalin by offering Lwów and eastern Poland to him, knowing all along that Stalin had failed to conquer the area in 1920... thus he would take the deal 'licking his chops.'

Not known to Stalin, he was holding down eastern Poland for Hitler while having his bloody revenge in *Katyn* - during which Hitler takes Europe in a series of *blitzkriegs* - also with plans to return and take back eastern Poland... and also attack Russia.

FADE TO

SUPER: "OCTOBER 1940"

EXT/INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN HALL - DAY

Cautiously on ulica Sykstuska's sidewalk, trying not to attract attention, André and Franki approach the Winiarnia's front door. Franki carries a package. André holds the key... opens the door.

They step into the Winiarnia's large main hall, now looted and barren. Franki sets the package on the huge bar.

FRANKI

Where's your best hiding place?

ANDRÉ

It's where the Perantonis used to hide money for a rainy day.

FRANKI

If he left any, somebody's found it by now. Don't you think?

ANDRÉ

No. Looters are lazy. Grab what they see. They won't work for it. Besides, there's no money there. Carlo took it on the last day and gave it to Padre for the kids.

FRANKI

Must really be a well-hidden spot.

ANDRÉ

I'll show you.

They climb the stairs.

INT. MAIN HALL (MOMENTS LATER) - DAY

Heading back downstairs to the tavern's main hall.

FRANKI

I Guess I'm lazy. I'd have never found it. A perfect hiding place.

ANDRÉ

I feel better now. Our package is safe. Let's celebrate. There are bottles in the cellar.

Suddenly the front door opens on three curious Russian soldiers. The one in front is holding his sidearm.

SUPER: "JUNE 1941"

NARRATOR

Hitler drove his armies eastward again to reclaim eastern Poland and to attack Russia. As Soviets retreated, they took with them any useful resources, including Polish men and women for slave labor in factories and gulags.

Over the next two years, about one-hundred-twenty thousand Polish prisoners will follow Polish General Władysław Anders to freedom. They will join the Western Allies in Egypt... and from there they will take a major part in the Italian campaign.

SUPER: "3 AUGUST 1941"

NARRATOR

Twenty-one months of dreadful Soviet occupation in Lwów and eastern Poland resulted in wanton murders, deportations, and limitless other atrocities and persecutions of the Polish nation.

Nazi-Germany's arrival in June 1941 had triggered appalling pogroms on Jewish inhabitants of Lwów - and other massacres.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

These horrific events had changed the face of Lwów's society from what used to be a happy, loving and trusting community, to a suspicious, terribly fearful population.

Walking on ulica Sykstuska's desolate sidewalk, Dani "Richter" is pondering her sad memories with a painfully heavy heart. Wandering past the Perantoni family's former "Winiarnia Italia" she stops to observe the two wrecked entrances and its shattered window displays. Then, as she resumes walking Dani gets lost in thought - "It has been almost two years" - she reflects - "almost two years since the Perantonis went to Italy and Victor to Switzerland."

NARRATOR

It's been almost two years since the Nazi-Soviet invasions - Almost two years since Padre drove his caravan of orphan children away from the bombings and the insanity of war. Also, it's been almost two years since André had transformed the Rabinowitz family into the 'Polish-Speaking Ethnic German' family... The 'Richters'

Further down ulica Sykstuska, Dani walks past the stately Alexiniska residence. She wonders about Stasi's father, the Polish Cavalry officer who hadn't been seen since Germany's invasion on the first of September 1939, almost two years ago. She recalls the grief his disappearance had caused Stasi. Then Dani dredges up how intense Soviet persecution had caused André and Franki to go into hiding, while Stasi took Lari to her home, in refuge with her mother.

She observes the squalid conditions left by the Soviet army officers who occupied the Alexiniska residence immediately after the NKVD arrested Lari, Stasi, and her mother and took them away ...to who knows where?

To Dani, all of it seems a long time ago. But now the Soviets are gone, and Dani Richter is walking about making inquiries to find her friends.

FADE TO

SUPER: "6 AUGUST 1941"

INT. LWÓW - RICHTER (RABINOWITZ) CAMERA SHOP - DAY

MR. HANS RICHTER (JACOB RABINOWITZ) - (fifties, bearded) - sits at a desk behind a counter reading a broadsheet, with an empty tobacco pipe in his mouth. His look is inscrutable.

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

MR. WOJCIK
Good morning Mr. Rabinowi...
ehm... I mean... Mr. Richter.

MR. RABINOWITZ
It's OK... We're alone.
And how are you, Mr. Wojcik.

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

MR. WOJCIK
Glad to see you're still open.

MR. RABINOWITZ
I haven't seen you here for a long time. Actually, in April I began to reduce my store hours to four days per week and gradually to one day per week. Mondays only.

MR. WOJCIK
And why ...may I ask?.

MR. RABINOWITZ
Soviet soldiers had been refrained from looting an ethnic German's camera shop - but they were also becoming defiant 'customers.'

MR. WOJCIK
Defiant? ... how?

MR. RABINOWITZ
They began demanding film and cameras on loan, and sounding retaliatory if I didn't comply. But they never came on Mondays.

MR. WOJCIK
Definitely not good for business.

MR. RABINOWITZ
What business these days? I actually thought that the return of Germans would improve our business - and it did. German soldiers willingly paid their purchases. So then I re-opened the store all week long.

MR. WOJCIK

All is well now? At least better?

MR. RABINOWITZ

No. It's much worse! Even though Germans will pay for their products and services, I chose to eliminate sales of film, and I also ceased all film-development services.

MR. WOJCIK

I don't understand ...Why?

MR. RABINOWITZ

Because my wife and I had become absolutely sickened and appalled by what we saw while developing the photos of German soldiers.

MR. WOJCIK

Don't tell me - I know - shocking photographs of last months horrific pogroms on Lwów's Jewish residents. I saw Germans taking pictures.

MR. RABINOWITZ

Exactly. Thank God our daughter was not at home when my wife and I saw their atrocious photos. Usually, the dark room is Daniela's duty.

MR. WOJCIK

Now you keep her out of the dark room?

MR. RABINOWITZ

Not exactly. Do you read German?

Mr. Rabinowitz points to a sign posted on the wall behind the sales counter. Mr. Wojcik shakes his head. Rabinowitz reads.

MR. RABINOWITZ (CONT'D)

It says: "Our supply of film, photo paper, and developer acids have been returned to the manufacturer due to defective materials."

Mr. Wojcik nods his understanding and approval.

MR. RABINOWITZ (CONT'D)

So now, it's business as usual, but we neither sell film nor develop photos.

MR. WOJCIK

You're a good father, Mr. Rabinowitz. And I'm sorry about your business.

MR. RABINOWITZ
 Hopefully, it won't be for long.
 I'm an optimist, Mr. Wojcik. I'm
 sure business will pick up the
 day Germans leave Lwów.

Wojcik puts a hand over his 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
 (surprised)
 You have coffee?

MR. RABINOWITZ
 I call it that, only during wartime.

MR. WOJCIK
 And if there were no war?

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

Mr. Rabinowitz turns around and calls out...

MR. RABINOWITZ (CONT'D)
 (shout)
 Danielaaa.
 DANI (O.S.)
 Yes, daddy.

MR. RABINOWITZ
 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 anymore.

MR. WOJCIK
 I heard America's secretly helping
 the British. Do you think they'll
 declare war on Germany soon?

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 broadsheet.

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
 (a shout)
 Mamaaa. We need a long cable release.

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

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

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

MR. WOJCIK
 Three is probably bet...

DOORBELL rings. They turn to find an SS officer (notable facial SCAR) with 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 outside. I'll interrogate
 him later. Now I'll talk to *Richter*.

Soldiers close in, grab Mr. Wojcik and take him outside.

MR. RABINOWITZ (HANS RICHTER)
 This is my shop. What do you want?

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 my customers.
I can't say I know this man for sure.

SS OFFICER

(smirks)

But he knows you...

Rabinowitz stares at him briefly.

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 when
you contact these AK Home Army trash.

Rabinowitz lowers his eyes.

SS OFFICER (CONT'D)

And he's your relative! Your partisan
cousin has your picture in his family
album... and he has your surname too,
Mr. Rabinowitz...

Rabinowitz looks up again stunned. Dani and her mother
stand close to each other, and they hold hands.

SS OFFICER (CONT'D)

Yes, you heard me right... I said
"Mr. Rabinowitz" - Don't try to lie
Are 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. STREETSIDE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Soldiers lift and pull the Rabinowitzs up onto the large Opel Blitz troop carrier truck. The SS officer joins them as soldiers tie the hands and feet of Dani's parents. SS officer seats Dani next to him behind the cab.

DANI

(frantic)

What're you doing? Where you taking us?

SS Officer has a satisfactory smile on his notably SCARRED face.

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 the necks of Dani's mother and father. The leads are 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... Oh, God... Nooo!

FADE TO

SUPER: "SWITZERLAND 7 AUGUST 1941"

INT. BERNE CAFE, SWITZERLAND - DAY

Victor sits with a well-dressed female companion, FREIDA (mid-twenties). They're having pastries and coffee. Victor has a newspaper in hand. He's reading it ...

VICTOR

(to Freida)

Absurd. Even though Hitler pushed the Soviets out of Poland over a month ago, Soviet Embassy still refused me a visa just last week. This is preposterous. Lwów isn't even in Soviet territory anymore. And they think they can refuse me from returning to the town of my birth? And it's also their fourth refusal. This is outrageous.

FREIDA

Why sadden yourself over and over?

Victor says nothing. Returns at reading the newspaper.

FREIDA (CONT'D)

Forget Poland, Victor. There's nothing you can do.

He looks up over his eyebrows.

VICTOR

Have you forgotten what happened in France?

FREIDA

Of course not. But being Jewish, I'm not safe anywhere there are Nazis.

VICTOR

I don't have that problem.

FREIDA

Victor! Anywhere there's war, you have a problem.

Victor folds the newspaper, lays it on the table.

VICTOR

Don't take this personal, but I've made up my mind to go back to Lwów. Yes, I'm finally going back home.

FREIDA

Victor, you can't. And yes, I do take it personally.

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

Germany recaptured Lwów, again.
It's my window of opportunity.
Hitler and Mussolini are allies.
Also, I am a member of Mussolini's
Fascist Youth and I have all the
regalia with me. When Mussolini
held a luncheon and gave a talk in my
father's "Winiarnia Italia" in 1929,
he jokingly said he'd see to it
that I'd be in charge of designing
Italy's new stamps of Fascism.
Today, it gives me an idea!

FREIDA

Mussolini will not remember you.

VICTOR

Doesn't matter.

FREIDA

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

VICTOR

We agree! - When I showed André's
fake Mussolini stamps to the *Duce*,
he was so elated that he personally
signed a corner block with his
distinct "M"-monogram. So, using it
and all the persuasion I muster,
I will safely arrive in Lwów.

FREIDA

(incredulous)

You're going to fib your way across
five Nazi Reich borders by merely
showing your stamps over-marked with
an "M" written in ink?

VICTOR

Yes. That, and my other resources -
- for border guards and other German
authorities along the way -- also
those in Lwów - I'll be on a mission
to promote the Fascist brotherhood
with Germany, and the Third Reich's
thousand year rule.

Freida stares at him.

FREIDA

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

FADE TO

SUPER: "9 AUGUST 1941"

EXT. ULICA SYKSTUSKA AND LWÓW STREETS - DAY

Lari, Stasi, and other former prisoners from the Soviet army farm are given a hay-ride back to Lwów by the original owner of the farm. Still, no word on the whereabouts of neither Stasi's mother nor her father. Without delay, the girls go in search of their friends and loved ones, hoping that they might've also returned to Lwów after the Soviet retreat.

They find only squalid desolation at the "Winiarnia Italia." Likewise, the same misery fills their hearts when they reach the Alexiniska residence. Stasi bursts into tears and sobs. Holding Stasi close to her, Lari leads the way ...

LARI

Come'on Stasi. We'll at least find
Dani at the Rabinowitz photography
shop. Surely their identification as
the '*Richters*' has kept them safe.

FADE TO

EXT/INT. LWÓW. *RICHTER* (RABINOWITZ) CAMERA SHOP - DAY

On their arrival at the '*Richter*' photography shop the girls are shocked by finding the doors smashed open, the store obviously looted, and a homeless Polish family with a child and a new-born baby accommodated in the shop's residential quarters.

LARI

(to homeless family)
Who are you? This is the home of
our friends... why are you here?

A young KIND WOMAN with a suckling baby gets up. Holding her baby at her breast, she approaches Lari and Stasi.

KIND WOMAN

You must be friends of Daniela,
their daughter. Neighbors nearby
told us what happened.

STASI

What ... What happened?

KIND WOMAN

I'm sorry to inform you that
some days ago, late last week
German soldiers took her to
Lwów's prison ghetto for Jews.

Stasi resumes sobbing all over again.

LARI

Her parents too?

Lari's question is met with a blank negative gaze... and then, she lowers her eyes as she tries to find words. Stasi turns and runs out bursting into loud hysterical crying.

KIND WOMAN

(pointing to husband)

My husband -- I'm... I'm so sorry.
This morning my husband ...

The woman points to her YOUNG HUSBAND, but her words turn into sobs. She hands the baby to her husband and, weeping, she goes into the bedroom. Holding their baby, the husband gets up. Walks over to Lari and he speaks softly...

YOUNG HUSBAND

This morning... I gave both of them
a respectful burial, next to others,
in the Kosciuszki park, nearby here.

Now, even Lari gives in to the weeping emotions of the room. The baby starts crying. Lari reaches for him. The husband hands the baby to Lari who begins to cry along with the baby while the husband wipes Lari's tears with a handkerchief.

Then, Lari takes the husband's handkerchief and wipes the baby's tears with it. She hands the baby back to the young husband, and she forces a smile. The baby smiles back.

Stasi's crying has shrunk to sniffing as she returns in the room with the others. The kind young woman comes out of the bedroom and offers some food ...

KIND WOMAN

We don't have much to offer, but
you're welcome to share it with us.
And you can stay with us - Daniela's
bedroom is clean, and it's available.

LARI

Oh, thank you, dear lady. But, my
friend and I have a long way to go.

KIND WOMAN

Where are you going?

LARI

Rural Galicia... not too far from here. Just outside Lwów city limits.

KIND WOMAN

Then just share our food with us. You might need the strength just to reach the city limits. Why are you going to rural Galicia?

LARI

I live on my father's farm. I should be sharing food with you. And, I will. I promise to return to bring you some food from my father's farm.

KIND WOMAN

(surprised)

Farm? I know the nearby farm region. Where is your father's farm?

LARI

Nearby Galicia. The Doroshenko farm.

KIND WOMAN

I know the location of your father's farm. It's way too late for you to head out there. You wouldn't arrive until late at night. It's dangerous. Stay with us tonight.

YOUNG HUSBAND

My wife is right. German soldiers have not been friendly to our population. It will be too dangerous for two young ladies to be walking out there when it gets dark. Stay with us tonight... Then, in the morning...

The conversation is suddenly interrupted by (O.S.) SOUNDS of a nearby firefight and bullhorn commands shouted in German. The Young Husband promptly shoves the Rabinowitz store's broken front doors to a closed position.

KIND WOMAN

Stay in Daniela's bedroom tonight. In the morning, you'll easily find a ride with one of the grocery carts heading out to the farms.

SUPER: "AUGUST 11, 1941"

EXT. LWÓW, STREET OUTSIDE SADLOWSKI TRAIN STATION - DAY

Carrying bags and a photographer's tripod over his shoulder, Victor leaves the station and finds a city of dire horrors. Squalor, death, and decay. The landscape has become entirely foreign to him. The smell makes him sick.

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

Corpses of animals. Red Army mules and horses with Soviet marked bridles... shot by their owners in their hasty retreat and then left to be covered by flies, infested by larvae ... laid composting on the side of the road.

Victor drops the bags, he vomits.

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" HALL AND APARTMENTS - DAY

Victor stands in the subdued light of the colorless dining room. Everything except the big massive wine-bar - is gone.

Upstairs, he strolls from room to room in a daze. Nothing but dirty empty rooms - Damaged walls, broken doors, and shattered windows.

He comes to Luigi's bedroom. Wipes tearing eyes on a sleeve. Looks about. He observes that the secret floorboard seems untouched. He kneels, struggles with the board and therein finds a sizeable string-wrapped package. He is thrilled.

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, Carlo, or Luigi.
Events in our dear Lwów have
been horrifying. The Germans
and Soviets have gone berserk,
killing our innocent citizens
on nothing but fake trumped-up
charges, some of it provoked by
their collaborators. There is
no court, there is no justice.
Just summary executions

Russia is robbing Poland blind.
They're shipping everything in
sight to Russia: vehicles, carts,
furniture, even flush-toilets.

Above all, men, women, families,
and entire Polish communities are
being expatriated. The Bolsheviks
are eradicating Poland's citizens
away - out of Poland - rail-loaded
inside locked cattle cars. Shipped
to resettlement camps in desolate
regions - in far east territories,
or to Soviet weapons factories as
slave labor - or sent to Siberian
prison farms and gulags...
Mass deportations daily.

There's little doubt Franki
and I will be arrested sooner
or later and taken prisoner.
Please take care of our stamps.
God willing, we'll meet again.
Andrea"

Victor looks up, to sunshine through a broken window.
He ponders on André's letter - then exclaims loudly:

VICTOR
...What about the girls?

FADE TO

SUPER: "AUGUST 12, 1941"

EXT. RURAL GALICIA COUNTRY HIGHWAY - DAY

Victor walks along the country 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 grocer's cart. He steps out
and waves his arms. The old woman drives past, then pulls
up. Victor 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 on. Sits next to her

EXT. ON HORSE CART

Victor pulls out some photos of the girls.
He shows them to the old woman.

VICTOR

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

DRIVER

I know who she is. But I've not
seen her since when the Germans
killed her parents.

Victor reels from the bad news.

VICTOR

Oh, God...

EXT. HORSE CART - (MOMENTS LATER)

They arrive at a crossroad.

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)

Walking along a curved road sided by woods, Victor comes
upon a foot patrol - of Italian soldiers - he gawks.

Several unsling and ready their rifles. Victor raises his
hands. He looks to the leader.

VICTOR

Buon pomeriggio, signor sergente.

The sergeant is taken aback.

SERGEANT
Tu sei Italiano?

VICTOR
Yes. Italiano born in Polonia...
...I have dual citizenship.

SERGEANT
Show me your papers.

Victor pulls documents from a leather portfolio: His Warsaw chapter Fascist identification card and his Lwów chapter Fascist-Youth membership card which shows the "Winiarnia Italia" address as headquarters. He stuffs the two Fascist identification cards inside his passport and hands it over. The sergeant looks at the ID cards and is not impressed by Victor's Fascist showmanship.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Perantoni, Vittorio.

VICTOR
Si, signore.

The sergeant flips through Victor's passport pages.

SERGEANT
Seems you travel a lot.

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

SERGEANT
You came from Switzerland. Why are
you here - walking a country road?

VICTOR
I am a resident of Lwów. See the
address on my 'Fascist-Youth' card.
It's my home and my place of work.
It's also Lwow's visitor center
for 'Duce's Fascist-Youth.'

Again, the seargent is not impressed.

SERGEANT
I asked you: what are you doing here?
...Walking on this country road?

VICTOR
Sorry. I'm going to my girlfriend's
home... it's the Doroshenko farm.

SERGEANT

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

VICTOR

But I'm going to my girlfriend's
farm in the opposite direction.

SERGEANT

I'm sure that she will wait for you.

The sergeant points Victor back in the direction of Lwów.

NARRATOR

I soon learned that the Third Reich's four million man military was over-extended, from Scandinavia to North Africa. The majority of Germany's combat troops had been sent to the Russian front. Hence, rear support echelons were often assigned to their Italian allies. After an interview with Lwów's Italian Military Police, I was sent to Division Headquarters.

FADE TO

INT. ITALIAN DIVISION HEADQUARTERS IN LWÓW - DAY

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

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

(to MP guard)

That will be all, thank you.

(to Victor)

Take a seat *Signore* Perantoni.

Victor sits rigidly.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

Frankly, why are you here in Lwów?

VICTOR

My family owns the "Winiarnia Italia" not far from here at *ulica* Sykstuska 29. Our tavern serves a pasta cuisine, and we sell wine. It's been closed for two years as the rest of the family is in Italy waiting for the war to end.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Ah!-'Perantoni'-I thought I heard your family name before... From an Italian diplomat in Krakow perhaps. And only recently a local said to me that many *Lwówians* still miss your "Winiarnia Italia" pasta and wine.

VICTOR

Our family roots had been importing wine to Lwów, dating back to 1875.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Three generations in *Leopoli*, eh?

Victor can't conceal his relief.

VICTOR

Yes. But the Soviets have stumbled all businesses in Lwów - I'm hoping that the Third Reich will do better.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

So, you have dual nationality?

VICTOR

Yes. Born here - I'm back because the Soviets are gone, and I need to recover the "Winiarnia Italia" and my family property. Also, I really must go see Larisa, my girlfriend, who lives on the Doroshenko farm.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

You realize that you are Italian and you're on my list for military duty?

VICTOR

(acting surprised)
List? ... What list?

The commander gets a file from his drawer. Reads it out loud:

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

"Vittorio Perantoni. *Figlio di Carlo e Romana*, brother of Luigi Perantoni" etc. "Vittorio lives in *Leopoli, Polonia*"... etc. "Missing from Volargne" etc. "Must report to *Ufficio di Leva in Verona*" etc. Here, read it yourself.

Victor takes the file and reads. His concern is discernible.

VICTOR
 But... I was born in Lwów.
 I was born in *Polonia*.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 That's a minor technicality.

VICTOR
 (assertive)
Signore Colonello... I am *Polacco*.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 (assertive)
 Your Polish citizenship no longer exists. Just as your country Poland no longer exists. I'm sorry, but I am obligated to send you to Italy for your military training.

VICTOR
 (more assertive)
 That can't be... Poland exists.
 ...And I am Polish!

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 (more assertive)
 Perantoni. We're in occupied land of the Third Reich called "*General Gouvernement*" and Adolf Hitler has ordered that all Polish nationals must be treated as "*Untermensch*"! Sub-humans! But, you're Italian, Perantoni! *Capito? Eh, Italiano.*

Victor feels defeated, as tears well up in his eyes.

The commander remains silent for a moment. Then opens a desk drawer, takes out a leather folder, flips through it and pulls out a postcard. He turns it towards Victor.

Victor blinks away the nascent tears. He can't believe what he sees. A glassine encased 1929 Winiarnia invitational postcard with André's fantasy art Mussolini stamp.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 I bought this at a Naples trade fair. It cost me lots of *Lire*.

VICTOR
 Beautiful, no?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 When I learned that my unit was being sent to Leopoli, I mean Lwów, I hoped to find the artist, André Frodel.

VICTOR
Me too. I'm also looking for him.

For the first time, the commander smiles.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
Are you ready to trade?

Pleasing curiosity shows on Victor's face.

VICTOR
What could I have that you want?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
A full sheet of André Frodel's
fake Mussolini stamps.

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 a full sheet.

They regard each other pensively.
Then Victor sighs...

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Alright, I have something better.

Victor stands, reaches into the inner pocket of his jacket, pulls out his leather folder, retrieves a glassine envelope containing a corner block of André's fake Mussolini stamps. It's the one with the *Duce's* unique hand-signed "M" monogram. Victor proudly lays it on the desk.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
The four stamps are fake art, as
you already know. But the monogram
is *Duce's* true signature! He signed
it for me, in my presence, in 1929.

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

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
Yes! We have a deal.

The commander rises. He offers to seal the deal with a gentleman's handshake. As they do...

VICTOR

Where's your post office located?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

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

VICTOR

Indeed, I do.

FADE TO

INT/EXT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" - DAY

The Italian Division's engineer company is making complete restorations to the Winiarnia's interiors and street-front.

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

NARRATOR

What had been bar and dining room was now a military post office. In addition to postal services for Leopoli's Italian Division, the main purpose of our post office was to process the German military's mail as well - inbound and outbound - Mainly, mail service for Germany's Russian Front.

The Eastern Operations Staging and Support Center had a small SS command located next to the railroad's substation for the infamous Janowska concentration labor camp nearby Lwów.

The same SS command also operated the city's Jewish ghetto.

FADE TO

SUPER: "OCTOBER 1941"

EXT. TOTSKOYE, SOVIET PRISONER CAMP - DAY

André Frodel and Franki Mrowicki are among large groups of Polish prisoners encamped outside the Russian village of Totskoye. A Soviet officer addresses an assembly.

SOVIET OFFICER

Germany has taken your land... your homes, families, farms, crops, and cattle. They're raping your mothers and daughters. But, we will give you a chance to fight back. Soon you will begin training to fight and kill the kraut-eating barbarian Huns.

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 criminal Germans.

ANDRÉ (sighs)

We'll see. Better than nothing.

FADE TO

INT. TOTSKOYE SOVIET MESS TENT - NIGHT

Franki is waiting for André as he slowly chews on another tasteless prisoner's dinner. His mind drifts back to Lwów's happy pre-war days having exquisite lunches and dinners at the Winiarnia Italia.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. LWÓW "WINIARNIA ITALIA" TAVERN DINING AREA - NIGHT

Franki is eating "*Carlo's Favorite Pastasciutta con Insalata Verde*" -served on a warm plate, centered directly in front of a desirable stem-glass topped-off with "*Rosso di Valpolicella*." At left of the wine-glass is a small sampler-plate with three choice cuttings of northern Italy's best after-dinner sharp cheeses... "*Formaggi per farsi la bocca*" as Victor had always said. Tonight, instead, his mind orders a wedge of "*Lake Garda's famed Gorgonzola Blue Cheese*" served over a sliced hot buttered *panino di forno* - A tangy choice, because tonight's *pastasciutta* sauce is "*Romana's Favorite Pesto alla Genovese*." Victor, who taught him how to be a "*Buon Gustaio*" had always said that *Gorgonzola* favors the palate whenever the main course is served with "*Pesto alla Genovese*."

END FLASHBACK.

INT. TOTSKOYE SOVIET MESS TENT - NIGHT

Franki's pleasant nostalgia of Carlo and Romana's cuisine is suddenly ended when André enters the mess tent. Franki recovers himself resuming the grim reality which is as disgusting as the food he's chewing. But tonight is different. Usually, André's presence brightens Franki's outlook... But, not tonight.

The look on André's face says it all as he sluggishly walks over to Franki and sits idly facing him across the table.

FRANKI

What's wrong?

ANDRÉ

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

Franki gapes.

FRANKI

Oh no! ... They can't... must not!

ANDRÉ

Yeah. 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, my inks
and my papers. I promise.

FADE TO

SUPER: "NOVEMBER 1941"

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MILITARY POST OFFICE - DAY

Hands on his hips, the commander evaluates the postal lobby. Victor is watching as the commander spreads his arms upward.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

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

VICTOR

(leery, hesitant)
Well... It's... spacious.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

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

VICTOR

Well... eh... of course.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

With the holidays coming up our soldiers will need parties and festivities. Why not relocate the post office to the adjacent apartment's front room. And then we can redecorate the main hall like it once was. A saloon - yes, we can convert it into a club for soldiers. Just like your wine and pasta tavern used to be... How about it, Perantoni?

Victor is flabbergasted.

VICTOR

Si, Signor Colonello.
That is an excellent 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 commander 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 and spirits?

VICTOR

Signor-Sí! I will guarantee it.

NARRATOR

I didn't know until later that in about the same period, Franki was in Russia preparing to train as a member of the newly formed 'Polish Army of the east' to be led by the Polish General Wladyslaw Anders.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Four months later, Franki would be deployed with "Anders' Army" by way of the Persian Corridor to the Middle East to form the Polish 2nd Corps and join the western allies attached to the British 8th Army.

Also didn't know that in the same period André Frodel was heading to a gulag labor camp in Siberia.

FADE TO

SUPER: "NOVEMBER 1941" (CONT'D)

EXT/INT. TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILROAD TRAIN - DAY

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

INSIDE TRAIN'S CATTLE CAR

André Frodel, slouching in a corner, bundled against the cold. He snores clutching a leather portfolio to his chest. Only a few others are in the cattle-car with him.

He startles from his torpor, one eye cracks open. With fingerless gloves, he unfolds his leather art portfolio. Beneath pens and pencils fixed in their proper places is a compartment for papers, inside which André had hidden a half-finished document. He looks around at the others. Then he peeks with a small magnifying glass. Satisfied, he refolds the portfolio and returns to his dreams.

FADE TO

EXT. SIBERIAN TRANSIT CAMP - NIGHT

Light snow falls across the taiga under a moon-lit sky. André debarks. Before him, a barbed wire enclosure inside of which are several log buildings with smoking chimneys. He looks back at the train, notes very few other men are getting off. He wonders why?. A guard approaches...

GUARD

(announces)

Comrads. You're at a transit camp. Transportation to the Kolyma mines will arrive...
...whenever it gets here...
Have your papers and bags in hand... and form a line.

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

ANDRÉ
(to sick man)
Where are the others?

SICK MAN
What others?

ANDRÉ
The men on the train.

Sick Man regards the motley group.

SICK MAN
(coughing)
Have you slept all week?
They're dead. All of'em.
We're all that's left.

INT. PRISONER'S TRANSIT 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 scratching his face.

ANDRÉ
What do we do here?

BEARDED MAN
(expressionless)
We wait.

ANDRÉ
Wait for what?

BEARDED MAN
The only transport to Kolyma is by
river ferry. We wait for the river
ferry's return, to get ferried upriver.

ANDRÉ
If the ferries don't hurry back
the river might freeze.

Bearded man tugs on his beard.

BEARDED MAN
If we're lucky, the river will
freeze early - Why are you here?

ANDRÉ
They say I'm too old to fight.

BEARDED MAN
Too old, eh? Well, there's a serious
crime for yah.

ANDRÉ
You're not on transit, are you

BEARDED MAN
Ha. How'd'ja figure that? Ha ha.
I'm a man of means and excuses.
After some time one learns how
to manipulate this damn place.

ANDRÉ
How long have you been here?

Bearded man scratches his crotch.

BEARDED MAN
How long? Pfft. Time doesn't exist
anymore - many full moons. But I've
managed to stay out of them freezing
Kolyma mines every winter since then.

ANDRÉ
(lowers voice)
Is there a way to get out?

BEARDED MAN
Two. Die on the Western Front or die
in the mines. Or... three, die here.

André looks around.

ANDRÉ
Where's the latrine?

Bearded Man chuckles.

BEARDED MAN
Luckily it's outside.

ANDRÉ
Outside where?

BEARDED MAN
You will smell it.

INT. PRISONER'S TRANSIT CABIN - NIGHT (LATE HOURS)

While others sleep, André continues working on his
new master forgery.

As if by magic... fifty-one years-old becomes thirty-nine. Occupation changes from printer to master tent maker. For additional skills, he adds multilingual translator. Holds the document near the fire to dry. Nearby, Bearded Man observes him through eye slits.

EXT. OUTSIDE TRANSIT 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 to
the wood cutting tool-shed.

Among them is André.

EXT/INT. TRANSIT CABIN - NIGHT

The group returns at night and file inside the cabin. The barrel stove's warmth draws men like night moths buzzing on a light-bulb.

André goes to his pallet, surreptitiously searches under the blanket. He's stunned. Throws back the blanket. His leather art portfolio is gone and his special forgery gone with it. André says nothing, scrutinizes those around him.

No one pays any attention, except Bearded Man. They regard each other. Bearded Man, missing a few teeth 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
You do. Half of your bread ration.

ANDRÉ
I can't live on...

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

ANDRÉ
Wait.

INT. TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION CABIN - DAY

André sits at a smooth pine table across 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 back over to him across the table.

Man With Tea yawns. Hovers over it. Blinks several times. Picks it up. Puts a magnifying glass to it. Holds it to the light. Then he returns to acting relaxed.

MAN WITH TEA
Hmm. Born in Bucharest. Romanian with Polish citizenship. Why Polish?

ANDRÉ
I needed work.

MAN WITH TEA
What kind of work?

ANDRÉ

Tent-making During the Polish wars of 1920-1921, I was in charge of a tent making section. After the war, there wasn't much need. A friend in Poland said that I could work with him in construction.

MAN WITH TEA

What the hell. Somebody's gonna lose their head. Master tent maker...

He reaches in a drawer for a rubber stamp. Hits Andre's paper with it, front and back.

MAN WITH TEA (CONT'D)

What idiot wouldn't know how necessary you are to the Soviet war effort?

ANDRÉ

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

MAN WITH TEA

What a god damn mess. Look here, there's a train going back in a few days. You should be rerouted to the new Polish Army of the east. I'm gonna make sure you're on it.

ANDRÉ

Believe me, comrade, I'll make sure someone in authority hears about you.

Man With Tea shows teeth, smiles cruelly.

FADE TO

SUPER: "EARLY DECEMBER 1941"

INT. LWÓW "WINIARNIA ITALIA" - NIGHT

Work on the two clubs is complete. The commander pays a visit. Now the front sign reads: "*Bar dell'Armata - Club Soldati del Fascio.*" He crosses the courtyard to the officers club. He looks about admiringly, takes a table.

A server greets him.

SERVER

Good evening, sir.
What would you like?

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

The server disappears. 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 both drinks. The commander raises his glass.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
Cin, cin.

VICTOR
Cent' anni. (TR. hundred years)

They clink glasses.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
A hundred years? Really? You
are an optimist, 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 see my
girlfriend and to search for my
other friends - including André,
who is of interest to you too.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

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

VICTOR

But, you told me this was German territory. Italy's ally.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

I did, and it is. But we're holding it against potential Soviet forces. It's contested territory.

The commander regards him sympathetically. Victor reaches for the bottle.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

Victor. There's not enough vermouth in Italy to induce me to sign a furlough against regulations.

Victor is dejected. But the commander 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 made an inventory.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

In just a few weeks you'll be buried in Christmas season mail. In times of war supply lines can be cut-off. Then where would we be? You know this city very well. You should go look for a custom-made stamping kit. The kind with interchangeable letters. Also a lever-press stamper. No telling when we might have an emergency.

Victor's face lights up.

VICTOR

Planning for the unexpected. The mark of a great leader.

The commander laughs. Raises his glass. They clink glasses.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
Let's see. You'll need a car from
the motor pool, a driver, what else?

FADE TO

EXT. DOROSHENKO FARM HOUSE - DAY

Early in the morning, an Italian military sedan pulls into the driveway. Victor emerges. He walks to the front door. KNOCKS. No answer. Goes around back to the barn.

INT. DOROSHENKO 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.

EXT. DOROSHENKO FARM - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

They leave the barn, walk towards the army sedan.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Where are Stasi and Dani?

Lari stops, abruptly.

LARI
Stasi is well. After the Russians
left she moved here with me. At the
moment she's collecting kindling.

VICTOR
And Dani?

Lari hesitates. Victor is immediately concerned.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
She's not...

LARI
Oh... Noo... Victor.

Lari pauses. Then starts to cry.

LARI (CONT'D)
(sobbing)
No... not... not yet.

VICTOR
What's that mean?

LARI
(sobbing)
The Germans murdered her parents
and took her to the Lwów ghetto
for Jews. It's a holding area for
Jews. From there they're sent by
train to any of the various German
labor camps, to fill worker quotas.

She buries her head on Victor's shoulder and cries more.

LARI (CONT'D)
(cries and sobs)
Oh my god! Victor. The rumor is
that the quotas being filled are
the numbers of those who die in
the labor camps, Victor! And the
numbers are so high. The ghetto
prisoners who are put on trains
are replacing the dead ones.

Seeing Lari cry and knowing how tough she normally is...
Victor comes to realize the seriousness of the matter.

LARI (CONT'D)
(crying)
Oh my god! Victor... Dani will
be sent to one of those labor
camps, Victor! Some have called
them - 'death-camps' -

Stasi is seen in the distant b.g. dragging a bag of kindling.
Lari composes herself as Victor dries her face.

LARI (CONT'D)
Stasi knows that Dani is being
held in the ghetto. But Victor,
we must not talk about "death
camps" - she's had a very rough
time adapting.

Reuniting Stasi and Victor is a highly emotional scene of loving affections, quite similar to the earlier scene in the barn with Lari. This time, however, the ardent amorous scene is equally shared with Lari. A scene of three, affectionately devoted to their longtime friendships, bursting in absolute happiness. Three young adults revealing childhood ecstasy.

After hugs and kisses with Stasi, the three light a fire and Stasi heats the rabbit stew which Lari had taught her to make. Without mentioning Lari's fear of "death camps" - the three discuss an escape for Dani... But, they have no plan.

STASI

Perhaps rabbit stew will stimulate our brains. I'm taking this bowl to your driver. Then, we brainstorm a plan to get Dani out of the ghetto.

Stasi's delicious rabbit stew stimulates the discussion, but not ideas. They talk, and they talk, but to no avail.

VICTOR

It's getting late, and I must get the driver back. But, I swear that the next time we meet, I'll have a plan.

Both, Dani and Stasi, agreed to help in any possible way.

NARRATOR

At that moment I knew that I had to save Dani, but I had no idea how. Then... I wondered how the German's mail might help me... Particularly that of the ghetto guards. So, one night I steamed open several letters -- finally, one steamed right back at me.

FADE TO

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" 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. The letter is from an S.S. officer stationed at Lwów's Janowska labor camp. It is addressed to another S.S. officer on the Russian front.

INSERT - HANDWRITTEN LETTER (RECITED V.O. BY ACTOR PLAYING KARL)

"My Dearest Rolf,

You have barely gone, yet I already miss you immensely. Except for the Führer, I've never met any man I love as much. I need your touch, your hugs, and your sweet kisses. I think of you every day from when we first embraced in your room at the George Hotel.

Do you love me as much as I love you? I'm yours forever. Do not forget me. No matter the war's outcome, I will always love you with all my heart.

Many kisses and sweet dreams my love.
Tenderly yours,
Karl"

Victor smiles broadly.

VICTOR

Thank you, dear Karl.
Dani and I love you too.

NARRATOR

During Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime homosexuality had been deemed to be a crime against the state. As leader of Hitler's Nazi Waffen-SS, Heinrich Himmler had homosexuals labeled, arrested, and then given life sentences in concentration camps where they were required to wear pink triangles sewn on their jackets for identification.

Heinrich Himmler's ruling was far more severe on homosexuals found among ranks of Waffen-SS officers. If discovered their punishment would be death by firing squad without a trial.

From the German mail, I collected a lot more information about Karl and about the men who serve under him at the Lwów ghetto. Especially married guards who receive mail from their spouses back home, as well as from local prostitutes.

FADE TO

INT. S.S. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE, JANOWSKA CAMP - DAY

An S.S. officer reads mail at his desk. It's an invitation card to a Christmas party being held at the Italian Officer's club.

INSERT - A DECORATED CHRISTMAS CARD. TYPEWRITTEN. (MAY BE RECITED V.O. BY ACTOR PLAYING VICTOR, OR BY NARRATOR)

Congratulations Karl Becker. Your name was drawn for free admission and free drinks at our 1941 Christmas Party to be held in our OFFICER'S CLUB "Armata Fascista d'Italia" located at 29 Ulica Sykstuska, Lwów. Party begins at 20:30 and will last all night long.

This card will serve as your entrance ticket limited to one guest and must be validated with your identification.

(This promotion is in recognition of Italy & Germany's Fascist brotherhood)

NARRATOR

I had sent three more similar invitations to three selected German guards of Lwów's Jewish ghetto. Their invitations also offered free entrance to 1941's Christmas Party held at Italian "Soldier's Club" -- plus a bonus of free drinks all night long... if they brought a female escort.

FADE TO

SUPER: "CHRISTMAS PARTY 1941"

EXT/INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Three German soldiers with Polish women companions appear at the front door. Victor opens the door and greets them in German. In the b.g. the party is already in motion.

At the same time, a military Kübelwagen pulls up and lets off an SS officer (notable facial scar as in earlier scene.) He rudely steps in front of the others. Victor greets him.

VICTOR
 (to SS officer Karl)
*Gutten Abend. Willkommen auf
 unserer Weihnachtsfeier.*

SS OFFICER KARL
*Ihr Deutsch ist gut. Vielen
 Dank für die Einladung.*

VICTOR
 (to entire group)
 Welcome. Come in. You have
 your invitations, yes?

SS OFFICER KARL
 Of course. Here it is.

The three guards with women companions quickly tender theirs.

VICTOR
 Your invitations must be
 validated with your ID cards.
 Please follow me to check-in.
 Women first, please.

Victor flaunts his Italian charm by graciously guiding the three women thru the door (blocking officer Karl's passage) Then with more chivalry, he directs the three lower-ranking soldiers to politely escort their Polish female companions to the check-in desk... (once again, before the SS officer).

Victor gives a friendly reassuring wink to SS officer Karl who finds Victor's attentive gallantry to be captivating.

AT THE CHECK-IN DESK

Victor gives 'free drink' coupons to the three guards.

VICTOR
 Thank you for bringing your
 lady escorts. As we promised,
 these coupons provide you and
 your ladies free drinks...
 ...all night long.

Then Victor directs the three soldiers with their female escorts into the soldier's club.

SS officer Karl's check-in is personally validated by Victor. Then he charms Karl by beaming another reassuring look.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(to SS officer Karl)
I don't have coupons for you.

Then Victor chuckles with another comforting grin.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Because, Valpolicella wines and
vermouths are free tonight in the
officer's club... all night long.

SS Officer Karl
That is *wunderbar*.

VICTOR
Also, I have a special gift
for you, Karl.

SS OFFICER KARL
Really?

Victor grabs a bottle of Lacryma Christi under the
check-in desk and he gives it to Karl.

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

SS OFFICER KARL
Ah! We do. Thank you.

VICTOR
Let me show you the officers
club where there's been a hot
card game started earlier.

SS OFFICER KARL
Lead the way.

VICTOR
Yes, but I see that you have your
sidearm with you. Weapons are not
allowed in our clubs. Please have
your sidearm locked-up with the
attendant in the cloakroom.

The officer obliges. Then, Victor walks him
across the COURTYARD to the officers club.

(1941 CHRISTMAS PARTY - CONT'D)

FADE TO

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" OFFICERS CLUB - NIGHT

Victor and Karl enter in the midst of a hot Poker game. The officers are drinking, laughing, and playing for stamps. Victor gives Karl a glassine envelope filled with stamps.

VICTOR
 Gambling for money is not
 allowed, but these stamps
 will get you in the game.

Victor catches the eyes of two Italian officers of distinct 'hard' Sicilian breed. They share a secret understanding.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 (to the players)
 We have a new guest member.
 His name is Karl Becker.

SS OFFICER KARL
Guten abend... Buona sera, signori.

The Italian officers greet back and welcome him to the game.

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

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" OFFICERS CLUB - NIGHT (HOURS LATER)

Victor returns to the card game in the officer's club.

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

Karl is tipsy. His Lacryma Christi is three quarters down.

SS OFFICER KARL
 You're right. That's a lot of stamps.
 I'm good at gambling. Too bad that
 we're not playing for money.

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

SS OFFICER KARL
(Boastful)
Noo, no... I always play to win.

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

SS 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.

SS OFFICER KARL (CONT'D)
You must be joking. You think that I
don't know stamps? It's a worthless
nineteen forty-one German racehorse
stamp ...with a smeared postmark.

VICTOR
It's not the catalog value that
makes this stamp valuable.

SS OFFICER KARL
Who are you fooling? You couldn't
even mail a letter with it.

VICTOR
But, a letter had been mailed
with it. It's the letter the
stamp was attached to that
makes it valuable.

SS OFFICER KARL
What the hell are you saying?

The two Sicilian officers move to each side of him.

ITALIAN OFFICER 1
He's saying... that we know
certain things...

ITALIAN OFFICER 2
...that Heinrich Himmler does
not want to hear.

SS Officer Karl kicks back his chair and stands. The two Italian officers reach up and slam him back into his chair.

Victor pulls out the letter: begins to read out loud.

VICTOR

And I quote... "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 and your
hugs... and your sweet kisses. I
think of you every day."

Before anyone can grab him, SS Officer Karl springs from
his chair once again and he begins to bawl brazenly.

SS OFFICER KARL

I am not worried.

Victor becomes angry.

VICTOR

(fuming mad)

Not worried? You should be. Because
if any harm comes to my girlfriend,
Daniela Rabinowitz, who is detained
in your lousy stinking ghetto, I will
personally see that the man you love
is shot before a firing squad... And
his blood will be on your hands.

SS Officer Karl collapses onto his chair.

SS OFFICER KARL

There's nothing that I can do.

VICTOR

That's all I want. You to do nothing.
Understand? - *Capito?* - *Verstehen?*

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

VICTOR (CONT'D)

These are to the wives of your
guards cavorting with prostitutes
across the courtyard. I also have
a few candid photos to go with.

SS Officer Karl stares vacantly at the stamps on the table.
Victor gets his attention and 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... why not? -- Give them a lecture on superior German morality...

A burst of laughter explodes from the table.
SS Officer Karl hangs his head.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Then, tell them about the letters and the photos -- when you finish come back here -- and I'll clearly tell you how this will work.

FADE TO

SUPER: "NEW YEAR'S EVE 1941-42"

EXT. DOWNTOWN LWÓW MICKIEWICZ SQUARE - NIGHT

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

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

VICTOR

Happy New Year. Good evening ladies.

The prostitutes are suspicious. A few feign smiles.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

My friends and I have a 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, Stasi and Lari look around for exactly what they need.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

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

The prostitutes are eager and vie for attention. Lari whispers to Stasi... Stasi nods.

PROSTITUTE 2

(slurs)

I've never met a special need that 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.

The other prostitutes laugh.

Stasi whispers to Victor. He glances to the side, sees a woman that's pretty well sloshed, 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. Sure Why not?

PROSTITUTE 1

Whoa. He must be one ugly guard.

They walk away, the prostitute staggers. Lari offers their guest a hit of Lacryma Christi from a flask. A few wobbling steps later, Stasi offers Martinazzi Vermouth from hers.

FADE TO

EXT. LWÓW JEWISH GHETTO, FRONT GATE - NIGHT

Drinking, singing, and shouting "Happy New Year" they finally arrive at Lwów's ghetto. By this time, the hooker is very well soused. Stasi and Lari hold her arms to keep her vertical.

Victor recognizes the two gate guards from the party, and they recognize him. They pull the gate open and wave the threesome to enter. The hooker is dragged along.

FADE TO

INT. LWÓW GHETTO, HALLWAY TO OFFICER QUARTERS - NIGHT

The third guard directs them to the lieutenant's quarters where they would find Dani, as pre-arranged. Victor opens the door.

INT. LIEUTENANT'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

As agreed, the lieutenant is not present, but ragged Dani is there, seated on a chair staring at the floor. She doesn't even look up. The trio shuffle in and they close the door behind them.

VICTOR
Daniela!

Dani startles, eyes widen in disbelief.

DANI
Oooh dear God, Victor! - Lari!
Stasi! How in the name of God?...

The friends rush each other. They hug. They kiss and cry. Dani bursts into tears.

DANI (CONT'D)
I never... thought... never thought
I'd see any of you again! Ever!
How did you find me?

STASI
Ask the smartest Italian pimp
in Poland.

Tears mix with laughter.

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

VICTOR
I didn't plan that. How convenient.

INT. LIEUTENANT'S QUARTERS - NIGHT (MOMENTS LATER)

Dani now wears the hooker's clothes and big hat. The hooker lies on the lieutenant's bed with some Złoty's stuffed in her knickers. Lari puts a pillow under the hooker's head and whispers "thank you."

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(to Dani)

No talking. You're too drunk.

You can't walk straight.

Lean on Lari and Stasi.

(to Lari and Stasi)

Ready?

The three girls nod.

INT. LWÓW GHETTO, OFFICERS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Victor opens the door. They saunter down the hallway...

...toward the main gate.

FADE TO

EXT. LWÓW JEWISH GHETTO, FRONT GATE - NIGHT

The troupe sings and laughs, as Dani is dragged along with her head down, under the big hat. At the gate, Victor gives each guard a flask of Lacryma Christi, as the girls pass through.

VICTOR

(in German)

Einen guten rutsch Ins Neue Jahr.

(TR: A Happy Slip Into New Year)

(NEW YEAR'S EVE 1941-42 - CONT'D)

FADE TO

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" SOLDIER'S CLUB - NIGHT

Smoke is thick and music loud as Victor and the three girls walk past the party crowd and straight into Carlo's office.

CARLO'S OFFICE

The excitement level was high in the Soldier's Club, as it also was in Carlo's office. In their excitement Victor hangs a sign on his father's office door: "Private Party - Happy New Year 1942."

NARRATOR

Without a doubt, that was the happiest New Year's party of our lives! We had plenty seasonal goodies from Italy. Some which Carlo had sent to me with December's wine shipment before Christmas. Pandoro Melegatti and two bottles of Asti Spumante. Luigi had sent a Panettone Motta and Romana had sent lots of Torrone and several other Christmas sweets. We enjoyed all of it.

Victor, Dani, Lari, and Stasi, celebrate privately - sharing their wishes and hopes for 1942 to be a truly Happy New Year.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Afterward, I had provided comfortable accommodations for the three girls in Carlo and Romana's room directly above the post-office. On 3 January 1942 Larisa took Dani with her into hiding at her uncle's farm in southeast Galicia. The four of us had bright hopes to reunite in Lwów as soon as possible. But, we didn't know the critical twists and turns the war was going to take the next four years.

After Lari and Dani's departure, Stasia remained with me at the 'Winiarnia Italia' accommodated upstairs in Carlo and Romana's room. It was a very happy time for both of us.

It felt as a bright new life had opened up in front of us... A new future was at hand. Unfortunately, it lasted only about one week.

FADE TO

SUPER: "7 JANUARY 1942"

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" POST OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

Victor is sorting the afternoon mail. The routine body movements of his hands and arms suddenly freeze, as he slowly raises an envelope up, closer to the astonished look on his face. The letter brings an amazing surprise. The envelope is addressed to:

INSERT - WHITE LETTER-COVER, HANDWRITTEN ADDRESS:

"Stasia Alexiniska, 'Winiarnia Italia' ulica Sykstuska 29, Lwów."
The sender was Stasi's mother... Return address from Katowice.

NARRATOR

This was amazing good news because Stasia and her mother had lost all contact with each other in 1940 when assigned to work at Red Army farms during the cruel Soviet oppression.

Contact with her father had also been lost. As a Polish cavalry officer, he went to war the day Germany invaded Poland and had not been heard from since. Many years later Stasia will discover that her father had been one of the victims of the Soviet Union's 22,000 murders in the Katyn forest.

But now, I had in my hand a letter. Proof that Stasi's mother was still alive... Living in Katowice. And... Hopefully, I thought, it might have good news about her father too.

Victor's enthusiasm is noticeable. He becomes happily impatient, wanting to run upstairs and deliver the letter to Stasia. So he decides to shut down the postal lobby about one hour too early...

He locks the drawers and the postal safe. But, just as he goes to lock the entrance, he finds the commander standing in the doorway.

VICTOR

Buon Giorno, Signor Comandante.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Buon giorno Perantoni. You're leaving...

Embarrassed and unwilling to mention Stasi and her mother's letter, makes Victor tell a fib.

VICTOR

No, *signor* Comandante. I was just cleaning up early.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

With keys in your hand?

... You're leaving, Perantoni.

NARRATOR

I had never told the commander about Stasia being lodged in Carlo and Romana's room above the postal lobby... and I didn't think that this was a good time to announce it... So I stuck to my story.

VICTOR

No, I am not leaving, signor Comandante.
I just wanted some quiet time.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

You have not understood me, Victor.
YOU'RE LEAVING! You're going to Italy.

NARRATOR

Oh no! I had finally understood my predicament. The original deal made with the commander was over. It was the deal the commander had proposed to me six months earlier and which I had accepted by giving him with my precious monogram of Mussolini over André's esteemed corner block - and now the commander had also gained a post office, two clubs, the entire "Winiarnia Italia" with all our family's attached property.

Instantly, I felt terrible, like I wanted to die. Because now the devil had come to reap his soul. But, he was a 'nice devil' - while induction to Mussolini's Fascist army, instead, ...was going to be hell.

VICTOR

(Sad-lowly)

Is... is it... that time?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

It's not time to close the post office.
But it's time for your military service.

NARRATOR

My heart fell like a ripe tomato. Why now! Now that everything was perfect! Post office and clubs all finished... Stasi happily accommodated upstairs. Why did it have to be Now?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

I did not want to tell you until after the holidays. There was no point. You had given us a fine post-office, and you were doing a great job with the clubs. I did not want to ruin it for you... neither for me nor for the division.

NARRATOR

I began to blame myself for having finished all his tasks far too efficiently! A clash of emotions started consuming me. Only minutes earlier I was excited to burst good news to Stasia, and now I had sunk in a dark crater of gloom.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

We're going to miss you, Victor.
The entire division will miss you.
You are leaving with our respect,
and with our sincere admiration.

VICTOR

(Sad-lowly)

Grazie, signor Colonello Campana.
I will miss all of you... all of this.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

Go upstairs to your girlfriend, Victor.
Take some time, give it to her slowly.
Then come to my office to be sworn-in,
tonight. Bring her along, if she wants.
She can be your witness.

The commander turns and starts heading out ...

VICTOR

(surprised)

How do you know about Stasia?

Commander stops briefly, turns half-way and answers...

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

You took a beautiful Polish girl to a
division consisting of 2022 Italian
men - Figure it out yourself, Victor.
By the way, her mother found me in
Katowice last week.

Commander leaves Victor standing in the postal lobby, alone and broken-hearted. After some contemplation, he composes himself, locks up the post office and goes upstairs to Stasi's room.

FADE TO

INT. "WINIARNIA ITALIA" CARLO AND ROMANA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The room had been previously looted, but now it's clean and cozy. The furnitures are empty wine crates and other expedient furnishings. An army cot, two military mattresses with cushions are on the clean floor. The room is neat and inviting. There's a woman's touch.

As Victor gives Stasia the letter she is immediately elated at the first glance of her mother's handwriting on the envelope while it's still in Victor's hand. Once she sees that it has a current cancel postmarked date she bursts into ecstatic happiness, making her beauty burst as well. As she reads the letter she is filled of such splendid delight, the likes of which Victor hadn't seen before.

NARRATOR

The letter made no mention of her father. She remained hopeful. As the commander had suggested, I gave her some time sharing with her the enjoyment of the good news of her mother's letter.

Much later I told her my bad news. It brought her down to the same clash of emotions as experienced by me earlier. However, we made the best of it. Now was the time for a change... and we had accepted it.

STASI

I'm going to stay with my mother in Katowice. She's with her sister, my aunt and they're preparing to open a seamstress shop for ballerina costumes... But, of course, to be opened after the war.

VICTOR

Likely, I'll be in Italy, or, who really knows where? Come'on, I've put two tangy pasta salads and other goodies in the club's ice-box. *Andiamo*, let's eat!

NARRATOR

Stasi and I still had the same hopeful outlook of a looming end of the war... The outlook which we shared with Lari and Dani when the four of us had planned to reunite in Lwów "soon." But, unfortunately, however, in January 1942 nobody could foretell that the full sense of "Total War" hadn't even begun yet.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Stasi and I didn't know that the war's insanity would critically escalate over the next four years. We didn't know that Lari and Dani would become trapped behind the infamous Bolshevik iron curtain. And we didn't know that we would never see them again.

Victor arranges a delicious romantic candlelight dinner which they eat privately in Carlo's office at the Soldier's club. The timing was perfect because, unbeknown to them both, their lives would surprisingly change over the next 24 hours.

After their romantic dinner, he asks Stasia to accompany him to the commander's office, as she had been invited. They walk hand in hand to Division headquarters in Plac Maryacki.

FADE TO

EXT. AT DIVISION COMMANDER'S OFFICE DOOR - NIGHT
(7 JAN 1942 CONT'D)

STASIA

Why's he want you sworn-in here...
...now, tonight? Why am I invited?
When do you leave for Italy?

Victor KNOCKS on the commander's office door.

VICTOR

Excellent questions, Stasi. My answers are:
I don't know, don't know, and I don't know.

The door is opened wide by a field grade officer in dress uniform.

FADE TO

INT. INSIDE DIVISION COMMANDER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Inside can be seen the division commander, Alberto Campana, standing behind his ornate desk in dress uniform. Four other field grade officers in dress uniforms stand in pairs, to the right and left of the Commander's desk. Together, they are six officers.

On the wall behind the desk hangs a colorful, full image of King Vittorio Emanuele III -- The King is in vivid blue and gold regal outfit - with a golden saber. Victor and Stasi are impressed by the classy ambiance.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 Please enter, *soldato* Perantoni.
Buona sera signorina Alexiniska.
 Welcome to the military induction
 ceremony of Vittorio Perantoni.

VICTOR
 Grazie, *signor Comandante*.
 I'm without words...

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 I introduce to you our division's
 two regimental commanders - *Colonello*
 Marco Ferrucci and *Colonello* Gianni
 Calvetti. Their executive officers are
 here too - *Maggiore* Franco Balestieri
 and *Maggiore* Sergio Sereni. These four
 regimental leaders, along with our
 division executive officer, *Maggiore*
 Antonio Freddi and myself, we greet you.
Benvenuto, '*Soldato*' Perantoni.

The five others echo the commander's Italian welcoming '*Benvenuto*'
 Now, Alberto Campana, the division commander, takes his leather
 chair from behind his desk and rolls it over to Stasia.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 (to Stasia)
 Signorina Alexiniska, please take
 my chair for your comfort.
 (to the men)
 The rest of us, remain standing.
 (to Victor)
Maggiore Freddi will show you to the
 next room where you will find two fresh
 new uniforms in your size. Note, Perantoni,
 that one is a field & work uniform with
 boots. The other is a dress uniform with
 shoes. Put on your dress uniform...
 and then come back in here.

Victor and Stasia appear mesmerized! Victor goes to put on his dress
 uniform, and he comes back looking even more mesmerized than before.
 Stasia's eyes open wide and her jaw drops seeing Victor in uniform.

Without delay, Commander Campana waves Victor over to the front of
 his desk, facing the image of the King hanging on the back wall.
 Commander Campana stands on the left of Victor, facing the image.
 Then he turns around and invites Stasia to stand on the right of
 Victor. The other regimental officers also join-in on both sides.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

(to Victor)

Put your right hand over your heart
and repeat after me:

"Giuro di essere fedele a Sua Maestá il Re ed ai suoi Reali Successori, osservare lealmente lo Statuto e le altre leggi dello Stato e di adempiere tutti i doveri del mio Stato, con il sol scopo del bene inseparabile del Re e della Patria."

"I swear to be loyal to His Majesty the King and to his Royal Successors, to loyally obey the Statutes and other laws of the State and to fulfill all duties of my State, for the inseparable benefit of King and Country."

An applause follows. Stasi, completely caught in the moment, covers Victor's face with kisses, making the applause resume, even louder!

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)

(to Victor)

Benvenuto, soldato Vittorio Perantoni.
Welcome in the army of the Kingdom of Italy, in our loyal service to our King Vittorio Emanuele the Third... King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia.

Congratulations and handshakes with the officers follow, amid Stasia's amorous kisses. Although Victor had never known the five field grade officers, it appears that they know him very well. It's apparent from their words of praise and gratitude for having completed the post-office and the two clubs... in less than six months.

As commanders themselves, they express to Victor how valuable it is to the morale of troops, having an efficient mail system and social clubs. So, they thank him for having provided those benefits.

MAGGIORE FREDDI

(to Victor and Stasi)

Usually, induction ceremonies are done on parade fields with many inductees at the same time. But, this is the best we can do, here in challenged territory where mass formations of troops are forbidden.

Now it seems to be Victor's turn for reciprocating gratitude.

VICTOR

Gentlemen, never in my life have I been so gratefully appreciated! Why!... It's so encouraging! I cannot even imagine what I might've achieved to have caused the six of you to put on dress uniforms just to be with me on this special....

Victor's impromptu speech is abruptly interrupted by giggles and chuckles which erupt into laughter the moment Victor unexpectedly stops speaking. Two officers put their arms over Victor's shoulders to reassure him that they are not laughing at him, but only about a funny circumstance of what he was saying!

COLONELLO FERRUCCI

(to Victor in humor)

My dear soldier Perantoni! Ha, ha ha. Like you said, it's NOT easy to get men to put on dress uniforms and attend any kind of military ceremony, especially on their time off! Ha ha ha. In particular when they'd much rather be kicking back at your officer's club! Ha ha ha. Soon you'll see what the commander undertook to bribe us ... ha ha ha!

Victor and Stasia look at each other. The commander explains.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

(to Victor and Stasi)

I did not have to order these men to be here tonight. As commanders, they know the importance of an induction ceremony. However, I sweetened the task with some items of bribery. Or you might say that...
...I offered rewards.

It was your father, Victor, who sent the rewards with which, as they claim, I might've bribed them.

Victor and Stasia are amused, but they look at each other confused. Then, men applaud as the division executive officer, Maggiore Freddi, enters the room pushing a rolling dinner-cart on which are two large Panettone Motta, two large Pandoro Melegatti, and several other seasonal holiday sweets, like Torroni and other Croccanti. Plates, glasses, and utensils are on the dinner cart, along with five bottles of... Asti Spumante to wash it all down!

Colonello Ferrucci starts cutting slices of Panettone Motta. Maggiore Sereni helps by carving Pandoro Melegatti and laying large wedges on plates. Commander Campana pours bubbly glassfuls of Asti Spumante and hands the first two glasses to Victor and Stasia. Suddenly, everyone else in the room is holding a glass of bubbly Spumante as they wait for the commander's cheer... who looks to Victor and says:

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 Carlo Perantoni sent all these seasonal
 goodies with his December wine shipment.

Then, he raises his glass and offers a cheer:

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
Salute a Carlo Perantoni...
e al suo figlio, Vittorio.

The room fills with lauds of *salute* and *cin-cin*.
 Then Colonello Calvetti steps over to Victor and says:

COLONELLO CALVETTI
 You see, Vittorio, you Polish-born
 Italian *soldato*, these delicacies
 of Italy have greater sentimental
 meaning to soldiers far away
 from home than...

Maggiore Franco Balestieri interrupts, and he says to Victor:

MAGGIORE BALESTIERI
 Don't believe a word he's telling
 you, Victor. He's not here for the
 Panettone and bubbly wine. Neither
 are the rest of us. Take a look at
 what Comandante Campana had really
 used to bribe us.

Mysteriously, six large bottles of fine *grappa* turn up in the center
 of the commander's desk, surrounded by '*bicchierini*' for sipping
 liquor. Each of the six bottles is labeled with the names of the six
 alpine towns from which the *grappa* had been made: *Trento*, *Moggio*
Tarcento, *Palmanova*, *Spilimbergo*, and *Longarone*. Six towns renown
 for the most excellent bootlegged *grappa* known in Italy.

After several rounds of "*cin-cin*" and "*Salute*" the truth comes out.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 (to Major Balestieri)
 You're wrong, Balestieri. Actually, it
 was Carlo Perantoni who bribed us all.
 He did it with a bottle of *grappa* for
 each one of us six. Carlo had Victor's
 induction in mind. The real briber was
 Carlo. All I did was to hold back the
grappa so it would still be available
 for his son's induction ceremony.

A burst of cynical laughter meets the commander's insinuation.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 Next week Victor, when you're in
 training, don't bother telling anyone
 about drinking *grappa* with the division
 commander and his regimental leaders
 on your induction ceremony.

Chuckles and giggles are heard, as more *bicchierini* are poured.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 Oh, there's nothing wrong about it.
 But, your training peers and cadre
 will not believe you.

MAGGIORE FREDDI
 Vittorio, your induction to the King's
 army - here tonight - has the personal
 touch like that which members of the
 royal family might get... behind the
 closed doors of the House of Savoia.

Laughter erupts from the other five ... which calls for more grappa.

VICTOR
 (to Commandante)
 Did I hear you say that I'll be...
 "training next week"?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 Yes, next week. You're to appear at
 'Ufficio di Leva Militare' in Verona,
 between 0800-1630 hrs, Monday.

VICTOR
 That's kinda tight! There's only four
 days left. And I'm not sure about the
 train connections...

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
 Division courier leaves for Verona on
 Saturday morning. He will drive you all
 the way. Be sure to wear your field &
 work uniform as you will sleep in the
 Wehrmacht barracks near Vienna Saturday
 night... and again Sunday night in an
 Austrian Kaserne 8 miles past Innsbruck.
 ...Then, Monday will be all down-hill
 from the Brenner Pass... all the way
 down to Volargne.

Be in Volargne at noon to pick-up Carlo.
 Be on time, as he's told me to inform
 you that he'll be serving 'pasta alla
 carbonara' con 'insalata verde' for you
 and the courier. He doesn't want the
 pasta to require re-heating Depart for
 Verona afterward and take Carlo along
 with you. Volargne to Verona is less
 than an hour's drive, so the three of
 you can easily arrive before 1400-hrs.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
 Victor, understand this. You have been sworn-in by me this evening so that Monday you won't have to be sworn-in and assigned by Verona's 'office of induction.' Instead, your father wants to personally present you to his 'Amico' who runs the office of training and assignments. Carlo's *Amico! Capito?*

NARRATOR

I finally got it! Amid the bursts of laughter and many rounds of grappa, I finally felt my father's presence. His actions and his love for me.

But, all of it was not entirely him. In several ways, the six field grade officers were a reflection of Carlo. Above all, commander Alberto Campana who never ceased to amaze me!

VICTOR

(to the commander)

What about the 'Winiarnia Italia'?
 The post-office and the clubs?

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

When your assistant, Maurizio Vezzoli, shows up for work at the post office tomorrow morning, give him all your keys... lobby, both clubs, and spares.

Starting tomorrow morning let Sergeant Vezzoli open the post-office instead of you. You must take all day tomorrow to pack-up and prepare for departure.

VICTOR

Excuse me, Comandante, but I'm sure that Corporal Maurizio Vezzoli will need help... and supervision too.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA

His rank is 'Sergeant' Vezzoli. We promoted him this evening shortly before you, and signorina Alexiniska knocked on my door. We promoted him specifically for the same concerns you have. With you 'out of the way' Sergeant Vezzoli might flourish his 'hidden abilities' and, hopefully, provide your same quality of service.

VOICES IN B.G.

(voices with laughter)

Then you should've promoted Vezzoli to COLONEL... Better yet, to GENERAL.

MAGGIORE FREDDI

(to Victor)

Soldato Perantoni, what a miracle it was for you to show up the same week we had arrived in Lwów. You, and your "Winiarnia Italia" ... You, and your father's highest quality wines and spirits shipped to us at discounted prices - Meeting you made all the difference. Thank you.

COLONELLO FERRUCCI

(to Victor)

Please tell your father that we are incredibly grateful for entrusting us with his 'Winiarnia Italia'-Thanks to you, Victor, it's already much better today than how the god-damned Soviets had left it ... damaged and looted. Please tell Carlo that we'll protect his entire property... we'll maintain it and improve it any way we can.

MAGGIORE BALESTIERI

(to Victor)

Soldato Perantoni, here in Leopoli our division has no ambitions other than to write letters to our families back home, and to receive mail from home - Then, to spend as much time possible at your two Winiarnia clubs until we can all go home! Thank you for having helped us meet our two special needs.

The six officers give Victor final cheerful applause and one last round of grappa. Then, once again, it's Victor's turn to speak. Everyone's eyes are fixed on Victor waiting to see what he does.

VICTOR

Dear officers of our King's army...

Victor pauses. The group is detectably holding back a burst of laughter. Victor extends his pause, and then he repeats:

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Dear officers of our King's army,
I will Not discombobulate...
another speech today.

And he leads the group into a loud burst of laughter. When the laughter ceases, Victor immediately says:

VICTOR (CONT'D)

But, I must escort Signorina Alexiniska to her mother's home in Katowice. It's directly on the way, just a few miles past Krakow.

Commander folds his arms and looks serious.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
(to Victor/Serious)

Are you suggesting to transport a beautiful Polish female inside a military sedan belonging to the Army of the Kingdom of Italy?

VICTOR
Precisely.

COMANDANTE CAMPANA
(to Victor/Serious)
Soldato Vittorio Perantoni...
(suspenseful pause)

COMANDANTE CAMPANA (CONT'D)
(to Victor/Humorous)
Toss-out your Polish citizenship,
You are most definitely '*Italiano.*'

Final laughter, applause, and cheers.

NARRATOR

During my military service in Italy, I had made repeated requests to be transferred to the Italian division in Lwów. But, each request had been summarily denied. It made me angry, but the logic was clear... With my Polish birth, I would've been regarded as an enemy of the Third Reich.

For the same reason, I had not been sent to any of the Wehrmacht's attachments. Instead, I was kept safely in Italy. I often wonder if Carlo had anything to do with that? I was finally discharged two weeks before the Allied invasion. That same week, I married Luigina Zaninelli.

In 1942 The war had begun to escalate on the Russian and North Africa fronts. Hindsight clearly shows that the Axis' combined losses on these two fronts would mark the gradual beginning of the Third Reich's end. It was slow as it was steady. But, in 1942 neither Hitler nor his commanders had been able to foresee that realization... yet.

Italians, however, had begun to realize that Mussolini had taken our nation's involvement with Germany's war far deeper than most Italians cared to be.

SUPER: "GENERAL ANDERS' ARMY, EGYPT, JUNE 1943"

NARRATOR

Germany's invasion of Russia in June 1941 had caused the first surprising... twist of the war. Contrary to Stalin's desires, it caused the Soviets to recognize Poland's leaders and to acquiesce to some of their demands - among which, a group of Polish exiles and prisoners received "amnesty." The majority of them had been expatriated from eastern Poland and Lwów during 1939-1941 - by the Soviet Union - illegally.

By early 1942, this group had gradually grown to about 120,000, at which time they evacuated Russia being led to freedom by Polish General Wladyslaw Anders, as an Army. By summer of 1943, these Polish soldiers had been increasingly concentrating their numbers in Egypt to join with the Allied invasion of Europe and to defeat the criminal Third Reich.

Among them are André Frodel and Franki Mrowicki who had been separated in 1941, but are about to find each other again as their units have converged in Alexandria, Egypt.

FADE TO

INT. MILITARY PRISON INTERROGATIONS, ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT - DAY

Two men seated at a desk facing each other. One is an Italian colonel prisoner. The other looking relaxed with pad and pencil is André Frodel, multi-lingual interrogator on assignment to the British Eighth Army. The colonel is haughty. An MP stands by.

ANDRÉ

...you deny the shifting
tide. Why help the Germans?

ITALIAN COLONEL

They're our allies... They will
prevent any landings on Italian
soil from the air or sea.

ANDRÉ

Really? And just how are your Nazi
allies going to do that?

ITALIAN COLONEL

(proud, cynical)

As I said, they have fortified Italy.
Every beach, every rock, every hill.
And 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? ... over and over again?

ANDRÉ

Sure. Why shouldn't we? 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

Don't you knock? Can't you see I'm...

Franki with an Italian prisoner is standing in the doorway.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Franki? ... Franki?

(to the MP)

Take the colonel back to his cell
and take this new prisoner too.
I'll deal with them later.

The military policeman takes both prisoners and departs.
André jumps up, grapples in a bear-hug with Franki.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Good God, Franki! Where the hell
have you been?

FRANKI

Everywhere, André. You name it.
From Totskoye to Buzuluk - to Iran
and then Palestine - All over the
Middle East - Everywhere General
Anders led us. What about you?

ANDRÉ

Like I promised, Franki, I got
back to Totskoye and I looked for
you. But the next day they assigned
me to a Russian company of tent-
makers. We had to maintain those
enormous 'tent-cities' in Totskoye,
Buzuluk, and Tatischewo. They kept
me until the last of Anders' Army
had finally departed for Persia.
Only after the last tents got
folded and put in trucks was I
allowed to catch up with Anders'
Army. It was summer by then,
but I made it here.

FRANKI

It's been a long trek. We've been
marching over a year. God only
knows how many times we might've
crossed paths - but I kept faith.
I knew it would be possible. And I
knew that our best chance would be
at the 'end of the line' --
right here in Egypt.

ANDRÉ

Yes, Franki! You took those words
right out of my mouth... those were
my exact thoughts every day... from
Russia to Egypt. Finally. At last.
Finding each other again.

Franki turns misty-eyed.

FRANKI

Thank God You're here André.
 Healthy and in good shape too.
 You've lost weight, and you look
 younger. Seems that folding
 tents has done you well.
 Thank God! ...Damn!

André turns misty-eyed.

ANDRÉ

My tent-folding days are over
 now. I'm finally being utilized
 in a field that I can excel -

FRANKI

You collect stamps for the army?

ANDRÉ

Ha! No Franki. I'm assigned to -

FRANKI

Let me guess - to forge enemy documents?
 Or, you're forging Reichsmark banknotes
 to collapse Germany's economy?

ANDRÉ

Ha ha! No, but funny that you mention it
 because that had come up and Eighth Army
 headquarters took note of it. Right now,
 Franki, I'm assigned as a translator with
 the Polish Second Corps 'Joint-M-I-Ops'
 for the Brits and Allied Command.

FRANKI

Imagine, André, we got over 130,000
 prisoners. Most of 'em are Italians.
 I guard 'em, and you interrogate 'em.
 Ha! - But seriously, André, guarding
 Italian prisoners is just the interim
 until we invade Europe and overthrow
 Hitler. Thank God we found each other
 before crossing over to the Balkans.

ANDRÉ

I don't want to raise your hopes,
 or even mine too, but rumors are
 that the invasion will be through
 Italy... not the Balkans.

FRANKI

The Perantonis are in Italy.
Do you think that... maybe?

ANDRÉ

It's a possibility. Franki. Our section needs a couple of drivers. I'm gonna see if I can get you to fill one of those slots before we get separated again.

SUPER: "JUNE 1944, ROME"

NARRATOR

The Wehrmacht's defeat battling Polish Forces on Monte Cassino triggered a decisive 'beginning-of-the-end' for German Forces in Italy. Their northward retrograde involved several lines of defense on which the Wehrmacht suffered humiliating defeats on each one. Thus, their so-called 'tactical retrograde' was becoming a 'full retreat' increasing their despair with each backward step.

At the onset of Allied landings in 1943, Italy's capital city, Rome, had been declared by Axis Forces as "Open City" meaning that they would not defend - and, thereby expecting that Allies wouldn't destroy. Their declaration was really an attempt to preserve Fascist Rulership and to gain favor from Italians

But, it backfired on Germany. Although the Allied Forces did not destroy Rome, Germans still did not obtain the support of Italy. The Italian people had clearly turned their backs on Germany. So, as the Wehrmacht kept retreating, the Allies marched straight into Rome being hailed as 'Heroes of the Liberation.'

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The following week André was sent to interview the former curators of Fascist archives in Rome - and to examine papers and documents that missed being destroyed by their previous owners. Also, Franki was the appointed driver, and the two of them managed to set aside a few hours to find Padre Michele before heading back.

FADE TO

EXT. ROME AND ROME STREETS IN JEEP - DAY

Franki driving on streets in Rome with André as passenger.

ANDRÉ

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

FRANKI

Yeah. Sad contrast with the town Cassino and the Abbey on top of Monte Cassino. But war is hell. Poland paid enormous sacrifices there, but it had to be done. Now Hitler knows that we're here and we mean business.

ANDRÉ

Germany has nothing to look forward to except surrender in total defeat.

FRANKI

How we gonna find the Vatican in this huge confusing city?

ANDRÉ

Whenever possible keep taking any street going due west, while I'm studying this city's bewildering 'spaghetti-like' street plan.

Minutes later André points to a sidewalk fruit stand.

EXT. ROME SIDEWALK FRUIT STAND - DAY

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

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

ANDRÉ (in Italian)
How much for these two apples.

VENDOR
For you, half price. Four Liras.

ANDRÉ
I bought two yesterday for three.

VENDOR
But you were not here yesterday.

ANDRÉ
Ok. Which way towards the Vatican?

VENDOR
Directions are one lira.

ANDRÉ
Two apples and the directions
for four liras.

VENDOR
Va bene... va bene!

The vendor bags two apples. Points directions. 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 (in Italian)
*Signore. He not tell you right.
IL Vaticano is in that direction.*

ANDRÉ
(to Franki)
It figures. Rome's citizens are
as confusing as their street map.

FADE TO

EXT. ROME VATICAN, ST.PETER SQUARE - DAY

The jeep pulls over. André and Franki sit and are taking in the splendid view.

ANDRÉ

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

FRANKI

Ok. So, you lived a long time - But, we've been parked here almost fifteen minutes - how much longer are we gonna be staring at those marble columns? Aren't we going inside the Basilica?

ANDRÉ

We don't have enough time. We still need to find Padre Michele, so let's head back the way we came. Go east. I saw Padre's street a short way back. Just past the Tiber's bridge.

FRANKI

Which one? Sarsina or Cavour?

ANDRÉ

Via Cavour. His other address in *Piazza Principessa Sarsina* is in the '*Monte Verde Nuovo*' district which is south of here... but, let's try *via Cavour* first.

FADE TO

EXT. ROME, VIA CAVOUR NUMBER 213 - DAY

They park the jeep - Chain the steering - Walk in the crowd.

FRANKI

Finding house numbers is definitely easier than finding the street.

ANDRÉ

There it is... number 213...
via Cavour 213. The blue entrance.

Padre KNOCKS LOUD on the heavy double doors. A priest opens.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
 (to priest in Italian)
 Scusa Padre. My friend and I are
 looking for Padre Michele Kolbuch.

The priest hesitates to reply.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
 He's a Vatican emissary to Poland,
 but waiting for the war to end.

The priest eyes the two Polish soldiers with obvious interest.

PRIEST
 (in Italian)
Perché? - (TR. Why?)

ANDRÉ
 He's our good friend from Lwów,
cioè... Leopoli di Polonia, but
 we haven't seen him since...

PRIEST
 ...What are your names?

ANDRÉ
 I am Andrea Frodel... and my young
 friend here is Francesco Mrowicki.

The priest's face lights up.

PRIEST
 (in Italian)
 Ah ha! So you're the ones.

André repeats in Polish for Franki.

FRANKI
 (in Polish)
 He said ... "the ones"?

PRIEST
 Since when Padre Michele and Padre
 Lantini arrived with the orphans he
 often speaks of you and of all his
 friends in *Leopoli*. Michele would be
 embarrassed to hear me say it, but
 everyone here thinks he's a hero for
 protecting more than 200 orphans.
 Only the Lord knows what might've
 happened to the ones who were Jewish.

André continues translating for Franki
 who responds in Polish.

FRANKI

Tell him we also think he's a hero.

The priest waves them into the enclosed doorway to chat.

PRIEST

Several of us got involved at placing the children in various parishes in *Italia Centrale*. We put them in small inconspicuous groups of about 10-15 children per parish. Holy Father has nothing but praise for the two Fathers for taking to heart Christ's message.

ANDRÉ

Their journey financed by...

PRIEST

...Il Signore Carlo Perantoni. The tavern owner, right?

Franki and André look at each other, pleased.

PRIEST

I spoke with Carlo Perantoni as he often calls to speak with Michele Kolbuch.

André translates and relays for Franki.

ANDRÉ

(relays to priest)
God only knows what would have become of the orphans if not for Carlo Perantoni and Padre Michele.

PRIEST

Yes, Carlo...also the good artists from the stamp club.

Priest giggles mischievously.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Aha ha! Imagine. Aha ha! Forgeries made with the Lord's approval.

FRANKI

(to André in Polish)
I bet Padre has plenty of stories about his journey with the children.

André repeats to the priest, in Italian.

PRIEST

Oh, yes. That too. Even some of the more light-hearted moments like that magnificent travel order forgery made by you, Andrea. Aha ha! Extraordinary. Even His Holiness was impressed.

The priest takes André's hands admiringly.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

So, these are the hands that created the remarkable Vatican travel pass.

André grins broadly.

PRIEST CONT'D)

I never felt the hands of a master forger. Aha ha! - All jokes aside, I've seen it. It's incredible. Also the Pope's signature...
...How did you do that?.

The priest releases André's hands.
André revels in the praise.

ANDRÉ

Grazie. Mille grazie. I'm sorry to rush. We don't have much time. So, is Padre Michele in? or is he at *Piazza Principessa Sarsina*?

PRIEST

No, he has a room in the Vatican, but he stays here on weekends. So, you're at the right place. However, he went out a couple hours ago.

The priest looks at his watch.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

At this hour he's at his favorite café for lunch... like in *Leopoli*, he tells me. It's just around the next corner and down a bit. I will take you.

FADE TO

EXT/INT. ROME COFFEE SHOP - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

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

PRIEST

I leave you with your friend. Enjoy.

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

PADRE

Ei... Paesani... Ei... Amici!

He stands, extends his arms in embracing gesture.

PADRE (CONT'D)

Waiter. *Vino rosso con tre bicchieri.*

(TR. Red wine and three glasses)

Padre's enthusiasm with two Polish soldiers, hugging each other with intense affection, is drawing the attention of the entire lunch crowd seated in the café.

Moments later the threesome are seated at Padre's table with their wine glasses half-empty. They speak in Polish.

PADRE (CONT'D)

Carlo, Luigi, and their families are all in Volargne. Victor too since he got married last year.

FRANKI

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

André and Padre nod with chuckles.

PADRE

A while back they sent me an invitation to visit. Oh how I would love to see the look on their faces if the three of us were to show up together.

Franki looks to André who is already unfolding his map to plot the road to Volargne.

FRANKI

(to André)

We really must do it. Can you arrange it for us, André?

...André throws an approving glance back to Franki.

FRANKI (CONT'D)

Boy! Are they in for a surprise.

André spreads the map on the table and Padre easily points to Volargne.

ANDRÉ

Great. But the Germans are still retreating. Hopefully, they'll hop over the Alps and go home soon.

SUPER: "SOVIET POLAND, AUGUST 1944"

EXT. ROAD SIGN AT LWÓW CITY ENTRANCE - DAY

Two Soviet soldiers take down a German sign, "Lemberg." They replace it with another in Russian, "Lvov."

NARRATOR

The Soviets have retaken Lwów and eastern Poland. Hitler's eastern front is back-stepping in retreat.

On the west side of the continent the Allied landings in Italy and Normandy created a new western front - New battlefields causing Germany to retreat while being crushed between two enemy fronts ...and rising Hitler's anguish.

FADE TO

SUPER: "GERMAN FINAL DEFENSE, ALPINE LINE, SEPTEMBER 1944"

EXT. VOLARGNE DI DOLCÉ, NAZI OCCUPIED NORTHERN ITALY - DAY

Carlo and his friend, 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 Todt's Nazi Engineers. German officer headquarters on my property... and they're harvesting slave labor from fellow citizens of Volargne and nearby.

CARLO

I know *Signore*. I share your anger. I hear they're doing this everywhere throughout Europe, even in Germany. Wherever they need critical manpower to block the advancing Allies.

COUNT VALENTINI

Damn Nazi Party Todt Organization. They make our people destroy their own countryside - building defense positions and military obstacles.

CARLO

Si. And it's become futile also for the local Wehrmacht units. They don't understand. They think much differently than we do. Then again, maybe it's what they're drinking.

Count Valentini smirks.

COUNT VALENTINI

And what would that be?

CARLO

Regrettably, I'm under orders by the Wehrmacht's quartermaster to supply wine to their local mess tents and to soldier's canteens. Between you and me, they're getting not our finest of Valpolicella, but only the proper just value... for what they're paying... Ha!

COUNT VALENTINI

Times of war and all that. Such a shame... Ha!

CARLO

I do my best. We started soon after last year's harvest, processing every bit of vineyard remnants. Gypsies and children stomp the grapes with bare feet. The bottles are so badly abused, hardly any unchipped ones... ..worn out labels... weaved baskets separating under the flasks...

Count Valentini snickers, pats Carlo's shoulder.

COUNT VALENTINI

Keep up the -eh...good work, Carlo.

FADE TO

SUPER: "NAZI OCCUPIED MANTUA, NORTHERN ITALY, SEPTEMBER 1944"

INT. PERANTONI BOTTLING SHOP, MANTUA, NORTHERN ITALY - DAY

Carlo reviews invoices. Victor enters, appears worried.

VICTOR
Papá. We have a problem.

CARLO
Tell me.

VICTOR
It's quartermaster, Bergmann.
He threatened me.

Carlo raises an eyebrow.

CARLO
Why?

VICTOR
He said the wine was poor quality

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

VICTOR
Papá! 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)
Papá?

CARLO
I'm thinking. You know, Germans are
a lot less brutal when they're
drunk on our wine, than when they're
drunk on Nazi ideology.

VICTOR
Ahh. Yes... And so?

CARLO

There are some things I didn't show you about our business -- Such as, if you add uncooked grape '*mosto*' to under-fermented wine, will make a very effective laxative in just a few hours. The taste of the '*mosto*' blends well with wine, and it can also be improved to connoisseur's delight with '*grappa di vigna*.'

VICTOR

But papá, I remember you saying that uncooked '*mosto*' causes getting 'the runs.'

Carlo gives Victor a blank gaze.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

But papá, you said it gives you...
...Oooh. I get it. Ooh... Ha ha ha!
-- Just in time... Harvesting has just begun. Under-fermentations next. *Mosto* is a given, and we have plenty of grappa. Wow. It will taste great.

Carlo smiles. He continues reviewing invoices.

NARRATOR

By November, the German retreat was complete and Wehrmacht units had been concentrated on the R.S.I's final line of defense: "the Alpine line."

A majority of German units had assembled in vicinity of Volargne and Dolcé for rail-loading equipment and to defend the Adige river valley from Allied access to the Brenner Pass.

Despite the steady advance of Allied forces - Despite Germany's lasting defeats - Despite the common retreat of German armies - and despite being crushed between east and west enemy fronts... Hitler accelerates the deportation of Jews from Italy to German concentration camps.

Heinrich Himmler had scheduled the deportations like insane clockwork, even taking priority over military use of the Brenner railway.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

No opportunity was to be missed for the capture of all Hitler's precious victims before Germany is forced out from northern Italy altogether. Thus, the arrests and deportation trains had become numberless.

Consequently, the Nazi perverse insanity had caused an impossible snarl of bottlenecked wheel and rail traffic. Military rail-loads and SS prisoner trains all converging at Volargne's railhead. All are headed for the Brenner Pass, but resulting in numerous delays upon delays.

FADE TO

SUPER: "GERMAN FINAL LINE OF DEFENSE, ALPINE LINE. VOLARGNE DI DOLCÉ RAILYARD. MID-NOVEMBER 1944"

EXT. RAILHEAD SIDING, VOLARGNE RAIL-YARD- NIGHT

From the Brenner Pass, a train of fifteen covered railcars rolls into Volargne's railyard and stops at a railhead siding about one hundred yards from Volargne's school and convent. Nearby are Volargne's homes and town center. The railcars are marked as "WEHRMACHT ORDNANCE." Each of the fifteen covered railcars is suspiciously guarded, on both sides.

FADE TO

INT. TODT ENGINEERS, FASCIST R.S.I. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A young Swiss interpreter in civilian clothes studies documents at his desk. A uniformed German officer drops an envelope in his in-box labeled TRANSLATIONS. The young man looks up and sighs.

GERMAN OFFICER

Give this top priority.

INTERPRETER

Ya vol.

The label is in bold red: *STRENG GEHEIM* (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 writes.

FADE TO

INT. RESTAURANT, VOLARGNE DI DOLCÉ - NIGHT

The interpreter finishes dinner and drains the last of a wine glass. He glances at a waiter who arrives with a bill.

Interpreter reaches into his jacket, takes out a wallet and quickly hands over a couple banknotes with a HIDDEN MESSAGE sandwiched between them. The waiter gives him a few coins.

WAITER

Grazie signore.

INTERPRETER

Prego.

FADE TO

SUPER: "VOLARGNE DI DOLCÉ. NOVEMBER 21, 1944"

EXT. VICTOR'S WINE DELIVERY VAN. NEAR DOLCÉ - DAY

It's a beautiful cloudless day. A van parks outside the guarded entrance of the Wehrmacht's provisional compound near Dolcé. A SIGN hangs over the guard-shack: "Zivilist Fahrzeuge Verboten" (TR. Civilian Vehicles Forbidden).

Victor exits the van, opens the back, lays out two boards for a ramp, climbs in and guides a pedal-cart, loaded with wine, carefully down the ramp, then he locks the van.

Outside the compound entrance, a ROAD SIGN indicates the directions to Dolcé "Nord" and to Volargne "Sud". The b.g. scenery shows the ever-present limestone foothills of the Adige river's west banks.

As Victor mounts the pedal-cart to enter the Wehrmacht's compound, he hears the faint SOUND OF WARPLANE ENGINES. Suddenly, as if rising from the earth itself behind the massive foothills, three U.S. Air Corps warplanes fly very low and directly overhead, then suddenly disappear.

In the distance, Victor HEARS a brief rat-tat-tat. Then, in less than a heartbeat, it is followed by a red sky in the south that turns white and then black, preceding a harsh UNIMAGINABLE DEEP THUDDING SOUND FOLLOWED BY REVERBERATIONS FROM A THUNDEROUS GARGANTUAN EXPLOSION.

FADE TO

EXT. US ARMY AIR CORPS P47 WARPLANES, SKY - DAY

An Allied Air Corps pilot looks aghast as the unanticipated gargantuan EXPLOSIVE VORTEX draws and pulls the lead 'P47 Thunderbolt' and slams it to the ground.

He sees a TRAIN WHEEL blast past him jamming into the fuselage of the adjacent plane, while his plane is RAKED WITH SHRAPNEL.

FADE TO

EXT. VICTOR ON PEDAL CART. RIVER VALLEY 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 blown by a terrific northbound wind, and then immediately followed by a mysterious, powerful airless vacuum with an overwhelming suction from the south.

In pain, unable to breathe, choking and gagging on dust, Victor sees broken glass and streams of wine flying horizontally... towards the source of the airless suction... towards the town of Volargne. His delivery van is down on its side.

In a moment air and breath are restored. Victor gets up and lifts his fallen pedal cart. Down along the river, he pedals southward in a frantic sweat. The b.g. at Victor's right side are the distinctive massive marble and limestone foothills of the Adige river's west banks.

At a point, he stops to look towards Volargne in front of him, but he does not see it. The town has been replaced by an enormous cloud of slow-settling dust pierced by surrealistic remnants of walls and vast piles of rubble. Fires burn in places, sending columns of smoke high aloft. The Perantoni family's native town, Volargne, is no more.

FADE TO

SUPER: "VOLARGNE DESTROYED. 21 NOVEMBER 1944"

EXT. VOLARGNE DESTROYED, NAZI OCCUPIED NORTHERN ITALY - DAY

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

Wounded and bleeding, survivors begin to emerge covered in dust and blood. A haunting voice cries out from the rubble. Victor sees arms, legs, and gowns of two fallen women. He lifts rubble off a wounded nun school teacher and helps her to sit up in the rubble, while he uncovers rubble from the other woman laying next to her. He sees the dead face of his aunt Amabile Perantoni, Carlo's sister. Victor finds his voice, aims loud, emotional shouts at the sky.

VICTOR

Dannati voi. Dannati maniacs. Look what you've done. God damn you all. *Duce*, you... you ignorant puppet, may you and your whore burn in hell for eternity. *Maledizione* you and your *maledetto Fascismo*. God damn National Socialism. Damned, be your adulated Hitler and his damn Nazis.

Victor staggers, wonders aimlessly, ranting with tears tracking over the dust on his face. He bellows loudly.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Yes! You, you crazy, deranged Hitler, you fanatical, homicidal insane bastard ... You cause nothing but death... ..Death everywhere. Death from Finland to Africa... Death in my dear Lwów... Death to my peaceful little Volargne. I will kill you myself if I find you...

Few people look on, citizens return from surrounds, others from slave labor. Mothers scream as they find the bodies of their school children scattered in the rubble. Victor stays on his mad soliloquy as a squad of curious Germans arrives.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(facing German soldiers)

Maledetti Tedeschi Nazisti. Bastardi. Damned, be your *Germania* - You Nazi *dupeks*. Your Adolfo Hitler, *maledetto bastardo*. You - you think yourself above the law, but you pervert all laws... Yes. You twist them, and you torture them until they only mean what you say...

As Victor focuses his anger on Nazi-Fascism, he throws chunks of Volargne's rubble at the German squad, while he loudly curses Hitler and the Third Reich.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Damn you German villains... and your wicked Wehrmacht. Get out of Italy and stay out of Poland, You say that 'God is with you,' but I say the devil is with you... and his name is Hitler... Leader of criminal Nazi gangsters.

A German soldier takes aim on Victor, but another stops him.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Leave him. He's insane. This place has spilled enough blood. Let's find ours. Our dead and our wounded *Deutsche comrades*.

Victor goes on ranting and throwing rubble as they walk off.

VICTOR
(very loud)

Damn your Führer and your depraved Nazism. Who the hell are you? *Wer?* Who? *Wen?* You are nothing... Nothing.

Victor falls to his knees. Rips off his precious PNF party badge given to him by Mussolini. He beats it flat with a piece of rubble, grunting out curses with each strike.

Then, with a piercing howl blaspheming Fascism he throws his flattened defaced PNF party badge far into the deep center of the Adige river cursing Mussolini with all his wind.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Damn you coward *Duce* ...
...and damn your Fascism!

Italian army command vans and military ambulances begin to arrive, followed by trucks filled with Italian soldiers who start to erect tents for a hasty field hospital. Carlo and Luigi dismount from one of the vans. They look around in total disbelief and disorientation. They find Victor and console each other as they embrace in tears and bewilderment.

NARRATOR

Amid the crying screams of the school children's mothers and the howling of their fathers, we eventually got help from others in searching for wounded victims who were still alive in the rubble ... among the dead. Afterward, we cleared rubble from a portion of Volargne's former main street for a place to lay the dead.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Starting with Carlo's sister, Amabile, we gently positioned corpses of adults on one side of the street... and the school children on the other side... Bodies of fellow citizens lined up on the cleared roadway. Parishioners from a regional church brought sheets to cover the corpses.

FADE TO

EXT. ADIGE RIVER VALLEY, NAZI OCCUPIED NORTHERN ITALY - DAY

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

By 1945, Allied forces had already taken most of southern and central Italy. The bulk of Wehrmacht units had retreated to North Italy where they had bottlenecked large masses of armored vehicles, trucks, and equipment in a panic-driven escape back to Germany thru the Brenner Pass. But, their hasty flight was causing a critical traffic jam with delays upon delays, all converged at our peaceful town, Volargne di Dolcé, which Hitler's Nazi Party Engineers had utterly destroyed.

The bloodstains beneath the rubble of our annihilated town, mark the starting point of the Brenner Pass Roadway. It's a trek of about 200 Km to the alpine crossing from where barbarians had invaded Italy for well over 3,000 years. Now, in 1945 they had begun crossing back over to their barbarian lands of Germanic Aryan origins.

POV CAMERA: Focus on an official map image of Germany's lines of defense which converge into a bottleneck pointing to the Lake Garda region. During the NARRATOR's V.O. the camera zooms its focus down into the bottleneck, transforming the map-image into a melodramatic aerial view of Volargne in rubble. Then, the camera moves northward along the Adige River showing the adjacent Brenner Road and Rail up to "La Chiusa di Ceraino" where the river takes a spectacular detour around two Alpine rock foothills carving its way in between.

Lastly, a quick breathtaking bird's eye view of the awesome 200 Km alpine trek over the tremendous Adige River Valley, ending at the Brenner Pass where the camera view tilts horizontal revealing foggy images of ancient barbarian horsemen, armed with swords and spears.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The Wehrmacht's significant delays at the Brenner Pass Road and Rail intensified when Hitler augmented the arrests of Jews in North Italy giving priority to their railway deportations thru the Brenner Pass. This caused even more delays, and much longer delays, to the snarled Wehrmacht bottlenecked traffic jam. So, to compensate for the extensive delays, and to buy more time for their escape over the Alps, the Wehrmacht had to maintain their protection of Germany's Ghengis Khan defense line. Its command was headquartered in Bologna.

FADE TO

SUPER: "31 MARCH, 1945"

EXT. TOWNSHIP, "PONTE SAN GIOVANNI" (ROAD SIGN) - DAY

Franki Mrowicki drives his passenger, André Frodel, through the narrow main street in Ponte San Giovanni. The jeep is utterly covered in mud. Outside the town, they come to a rural 3-way intersection, and André points to the sign indicating the road to Perugia which also has a small sign hanging beneath it hastily written "DEPOT" in black paint.

NARRATOR

Allied preparations for the Battle of Bologna kept André Frodel busy on special duty as an interrogator since mid-February writing English translations of statements made by Italian and German prisoners during interrogations.

Franki Mrowicki was also kept very busy as André's driver to various Allied command posts over Central Italy for compiling translations of hundreds captured documents into English. André completed all his assignments by the end of March.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Driving all over Central Italy since mid-February had been tough on Franki's Jeep. Most excursions had been navigated over raw land, mostly very rough terrain and very steep inclines. As a result, now Franki was headed for 'Allied Depot Support' to requisition repairs to his assigned Jeep which he's driven the past two weeks without a functional first gear.

On the road to Perugia André points to another hastily painted DEPOT SIGN WITH ARROW. Franki follows the arrow and turns off the main road onto a muddy tank-trail. Then he follows other hasty painted directions written in English which lead to 'SUPPORT DEPOT ALLIED FORCES - CONSOLIDATED REAR ECHELON.' They halt at the entrance gate which is chained and locked. An AMERICAN MP looks out from his guard shack window. The MP steps out. He speaks southern slang with a heavy drawl.

AMERICAN MP

Y'ain't on mah'schedule.
Y'all got'n appointment?

FRANKI

My Jeep won't go into first gear
It needs a new transmission.

AMERICAN MP

Why ya'tellin me? I ain't puttin'
one in fer'ya - But yeah, yer'at the
right place - yo'ID's, please.

André and Franki hand over their ID cards. André extracts a paper from an envelope wrapped in plastic. Hands it over.

ANDRÉ

(to the MP)

We're with the Polish 2nd Corps on
special duty for British eighth...

AMERICAN MP

...I can read, I can read. You Polaks
are havin'all the fun... makin' the
rest of us lookin'bad... Y'all tryin'
win th'war all by y'selfs?

ANDRÉ

It's our war, you know? We appreciate
everybody's help, but it is our fight.

AMERICAN MP

Yeah yeah. Heard that before. Jus'do
me a favor n'save couple'a Nazis for
us before it's all over.

ANDRÉ

What are you gonna do with them?

AMERICAN MP

Gonna shove'em up Hitler's ass.

ANDRÉ

In that case, we'll save the biggest, fattest, largest krauts for you.

Laughter. André translates to Franki. He laughs. The MP hands back the ID's and André's special-duty orders.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

An Italian friend will soon arrive in his Fiat 'Topolino' to take us to the post office in Ponte San Giovanni. He's gonna wait for us here, outside the gate.

AMERICAN MP

Post Office? - Friend with Topolino?

ANDRÉ

Yep. He's a stamp collector, like us.

AMERICAN MP

(he points)

Yo' friend'll hav'ta park out there in the tall grass. Aussie tankers been takin' 'Matildas' in'n'out all week. They're known'to squash dem lil' Italian mosquito-cars.

Laughter. Then the MP kicks a huge chunk of clay-hardened mud from under the front wheel-well on the driver's side.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

(to Franki)

Soo, ya'got wheels b'neath that mud after all - At first yo'Jeep looked like a mud sled.

Laughter. André translates. The MP points directions to Franki.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

Support Depot processing station is that half-tent joined up'to the big tin-shed down yonder on the left.

André translates. The MP continues his directions to Franki.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

But, ain't nobody gonna take yo'muddy Jeep. Got sponge n'bucket, soldier?

André translates. The MP giggles. Franki is not amused. The MP continues his directions to Franki... and points.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

Jus'kiddin'- son. Past the processing station yo'll see the tanker's wash'n point. Be careful, son. The hose jets out water at 180 PSI. It'll blow your duffle-bags n'packs ta'smithereens.

André translates as the MP directs his attention to André.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

(to André)

Bes'ya put yo'bags in th'guard shack. You can wait in there too, if ya'want.

André translates. He gives Franki a copy of their special-duty orders. Franki helps carry their bags into the shack as the MP unchains the gate. Then Franki goes on as directed. André waits in the guard shack. MP offers him a chair across from his desk.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

(to André)

So, ya'waitin' on a stamp collector comin'to pick ya'up n'take ya'to the post office in Ponte San Giovanni?

ANDRÉ

Yep. If he gets here before Franki is back, I'll tell him to park in the tall grass area, as you said.

AMERICAN MP

Been goin' there for months n'months. The place is always closed.

ANDRÉ

Of course. Italy has no government. The King is being deposed soon. The Allied Military Government is in full control, and they're not paying wages to Italy's postal clerks and letter carriers. So why should they work?

AMERICAN MP

So, how are you'n yo'friend gonna get into Ponte's post office?

ANDRÉ

He's the '*Direttore-Postale*' in Ponte. He's got keys. But, there's no postal service. Why don't you use the US-APO?

AMERICAN MP

Ain't mailin' nothing. Jus' wanna buy any leftover Fascist stamps. I want full sheets of'em.

ANDRÉ

So, you think you're gonna make a killing back home after the war?

AMERICAN MP

I don't "think"... I know that I will. I got buyers lined up from Atlanta to Chattanooga. But I got no stamps.

ANDRÉ

You won't find any in Ponte either. All their stamps had been cleaned out by Germans soon after Monte Cassino.

AMERICAN MP

So why ya'all goin' there?

ANDRÉ

He's letting us use the telegraph.

AMERICAN MP

Why's he doin' that fer'ya?

ANDRÉ

You're a damn good interrogator. I sure could've used your help the past 6-weeks. But, all the questions you're asking are none of your damn business.

AMERICAN MP

Cut th'bullshit. I'm "pal" to Polaks. You've no idea how much I appreciate all that you damn Polaks do for us.

ANDRÉ

Yeah, I know. We're doing most of the combat, and you're welcome to stay out of our way. As you know, it's been our fight from the start. Our Allies, U.S. and Brits, should appreciate us too - in case they should forget our fearless warfare and all the heroic sacrifices that had cost Poland's brave warriors in defeating Nazi-Fascism.

AMERICAN MP
 (chuckling)
 Fine speech, Senator. Are ya'
 a politician back home?

ANDRÉ
 Now it's your turn to cut the
 bullshit - dear American "pal"...

AMERICAN MP
 (smiling)
 ...and don'cha forget it. What
 ya'all Polaks call 'friendship'
 we call it 'suthen hospitalitee.'
 Wanna beer, pad'ner?

André is surprised, and he's thirsty. MP opens a wall-locker.

ANDRÉ
 Sure, I can have one. But you...
 ...You're on duty.

AMERICAN MP
 (laughing)
 Jus'cause I appreciate Polaks, don't
 mean you can pull rank on me. Ha!

MP laughs and hands a bottle to André who wears a welcome smile.

ANDRÉ
 Mmm, it's German. I thought you were
 gonna give me a watery American beer.
 I guess that the Polish 2nd Corps has
 the Wehrmacht running so damn scared
 that they forgot to take their beer
 supplies with them.

AMERICAN MP
 Sumtin'like that. Actually, the
 Nazi crew hadn't even gone when
 I took their beers. I'd reckoned
 fer'sure they'd have beer on ice
 in their armored half-track.

ANDRÉ
 Germans don't like cold beer.

AMERICAN MP
 Right. They kept their beer warm.
 But the crew was cold. All six of 'em.

André looks at his bottle with some disgust. But then guzzles
 it down as his slang-talking 'pal' hands him another bottle.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)
 Why'ja made a face? Polaks killed'em.

ANDRÉ
 (sarcastic)
 Goody! Makes the beer taste better.

AMERICAN MP
 Ye' still hadn't told me why the
 '*Direttore Postale*' of Ponte lets
 y'all use the telegraph?

ANDRÉ
 I did tell you. He's a good friend
 and we share a common interest in
 stamp-collecting. Also, he shares
 a common fellowship with Franki who
 is a postal employee back in Poland.

Both soldiers drink and guzzle their beers.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
 I know you want to talk about stamps.
 Like I said, the post office has no
 stamps, but Franki and I traded some
 stamps with him. I had some that he
 wanted badly. So we sweetened him
 for the telegraph room.

AMERICAN MP
 Hadda'be sumtin' really good. So...
 Whad'ja give'um?... Have a beer.

ANDRÉ
 No thanks. Two's enough. I'll show you
 what I gave him. Take a look.

André reaches inside his field-jacket and pulls out a leather portfolio. He opens it and extracts a glassine envelope filled with stamps. MP stares. André prolongs the suspense.

Then he empties the stamps onto a clean sheet of white paper and pulls stamp-tweezers from his portfolio. The MP goes on staring as André sorts the stamps in order of sets and denominations.

AMERICAN MP
 What's these? I've sent my buyers
 'bout a hundred jus'like these. But,
 none of'em had overprints on'um.

ANDRÉ
 I knew that. I hadn't seen any either
 ...until three weeks ago.

AMERICAN MP
 Whad'ya mean? — Whatta'bout three
 weeks ago?

ANDRÉ

I took these stamps off an Italian soldier of R.S.I's Fascist forces.

AMERICAN MP

Since Monte Cassino I've scavenged plenty dead Fascists. Some of 'em had stamps, but not overprinted.

ANDRÉ

(sneering)

These stamps didn't come off a dead Fascist. He was perfectly alive.

AMERICAN MP

You roughed 'm' up for his stamps?

ANDRÉ

Nothing like that. He was one of the prisoners caught by the U.S. ninety-second infantry during combat with Mussolini's R.S.I Nazi-Fascist forces near the Gothic line. He was a former Italian G.N.R.

André ends sorting the stamps into sets and denominations.

AMERICAN MP

I heard 'bout them raids up north, but what's that about... G.N.what?

ANDRÉ

Republican National Guard - The first act of Mussolini's defiant rulership from his renegade Social Republic was to replace his former blackshirts and his police forces, and all his other paramilitaries... creating his new Fascist Republican National Guard.

André points at the overprints using his stamp tweezers.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

The next thing Mussolini did was to overprint Italy's former stamp issues with these markings. In this way, the Duce established Italy's new renegade Nazi-Fascist Social Republic.

POV: CAMERA FOCUSES ON EACH STAMP THAT ANDRÉ DESCRIBES.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

They're same stamps that you sent to your buyers, but overprinted "G.N.R." by Italy's new Fascist renegade state.

AMERICAN MP

Well, I'll be damned... My buyers will want these fer'sure.

ANDRÉ

Duce issued his next overprints soon after the King switched to the Allied side declaring war against the Axis. So, with great irony, the overprints plastered "fasces" directly over the image of the King's head, sending a sardonic message of Fascist defiance.

AMERICAN MP

Wow! I really gotta'git some of'em. Whatta'bout them without overprints?

ANDRÉ (pointing)

They're Mussolini's stamps also, but without overprints cause last summer the RSI ceased using stamps formerly issued by Italy's monarchy and begun printing its own stamps identified as "Mail of the Social Republic."

Now André eagerly shares thrilling stamp-facts with the MP.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Take a look at *Duce's* first two stamps printed by the RSI soon after the battle of Monte Cassino - A drummer boy calling his people "To Arms" - the other is an image of "Roman Italia" shouldering the ancient "Fascio War Ax" and wearing war fortifications on her head. Both stamps signify enduring defiance at its best.

AMERICAN MP

(astonished)

Howd'ja learn 'bout these 'enemy stamps' ...recently printed across enemy lines?

ANDRÉ

Interrogations. It was my job to find out everything and anything from the captured prisoners. But the prisoner to whom these stamps belonged denied all knowledge about them. But, other prisoners expounded all about these stamps to me. Most of them were also collectors and they gave me clear-cut explanations - even with enthusiasm.

AMERICAN MP

So the prisoner just gave'em to you?

ANDRÉ

He did not. He didn't claim them either. The stamps were found in a wallet on his possession, but during the interrogation he denied having ever seen it. Later, I discovered that he had two wallets. One had his ID papers and some cash, while the other wallet held only these stamps in glassines, and nothing else. But the initials in the leather didn't match his name. So, it was obvious that the reason for his denial had to be because he had robbed it from a fallen Fascist comrade. A violation for capital punishment.

AMERICAN MP

That damn vulture. I've been scavenging the wrong Fascists. I should've been on that battlefield.

André smirks at the thought.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

So, ya'kept his stamps. Ya' confiscated a scavenging vulture's loot?

ANDRÉ

Bingo!

AMERICAN MP

Dammit. I need t'git assigned to the ninety-second infantry.

André pulls a magnifying glass from his top pocket and he goes back to the stamps.

ANDRÉ

(pointing)

Here's the best part, 'pal' - Take my magnifying glass and read these words.

MP takes the magnifying glass and bends down over the stamps.

AMERICAN MP

"Hosti..." I can't read Italian.

ANDRÉ

It's latin... "Hostium Rabies Diruit."
It means "Destroyed by Enemy Violence."

AMERICAN MP

Enemy Violence? - Meaning who... us?

Precisely. It dumbfounds me. We bomb a church or a monument and in retaliation they print a stamp... It's unbelievable. Take a good look.

AMERICAN MP

Hey, this one says "Monte Cassino."
What does "a-b-b-a-z-i-a" mean?

ANDRÉ

It means "Abbey" - Bombed and shelled. It was such a big loss that they had to print two stamps for Monte Cassino. Amazing. They celebrate their defeats with commemorative postage stamps. Ha!

AMERICAN MP

Yeah. Ha ha! Sure is amazing. There's also a picture of the abbey. And looky here, it's that huge church in Ancona before we turned it into dust & rubble. And, why's this big wide stamp marked "Espresso"? Is it good'fer a coffee?

ANDRÉ

It has nothing to do with coffee. It's the first big church that we super-bombed. It's the Nazi-Fascist RSI's first "Hostium Rabies Diruit" stamp showing Sicily's main cathedral in Palermo before we bombed it into ruins of bricks and rocks. The word "Espresso" on Italian stamps always means "special delivery."

AMERICAN MP

Oh yeah. Our Air Corps really gave'em quite a special delivery on that day. Hey pal, you got plenty extras of all these. I wanna buy all your extras. What's your price? ... Buddy.

ANDRÉ

Sorry..."buddy"... not for sale.

With that said, André puts the stamps back into the glassine envelope, despite the MP's shouting high priced offers to purchase them, and protesting about André's indifference.

A call comes in thru the SCR-300 backpack radio-transceiver which is stood on a table next to the rear window. The MP picks up the handset, adjusts the squelch, and says...

AMERICAN MP

Depot... Main gate... Over.

The MP holds the handset to his ear. André can hear the squeaky sound of the caller's voice. Then he says...

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)
Stand by... Over...

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)
(to André)
Is yo' friend named "Guido"?

ANDRÉ
Yes. That's right.

AMERICAN MP
My five-PM gate-guard relief found'um
in his 'Topolino' — stuck deep in the
tank-trail's mud.

ANDRÉ
Oh nooo! Poor Guido. He loves his car.

Back on the SCR-300 handset, the MP says...

AMERICAN MP
(on handset)
Okay, let'um be. He's no problem.
Hurry up'n git here. I don't wanna eat
the mess-hall's cold leftovers. Hurry
up. I'm starvin'... Out.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)
(to André)
Best you help Guido get unstuck before
an Aussie's 'Matilda' runs over him.

The door opens and Franki enters the MP guard-shack.

FRANKI
(to André)
All done. Good to go. Guido not here yet?

ANDRÉ
(to the MP)
How are we gonna help him?
We just turned-in our Jeep.

FRANKI
(to André)
What's going on?

ANDRÉ
(to Franki)
Guido's stuck in the tank-trail's mud.

FRANKI

Oh nooo! Guido loves his car.
And we don't have our jeep.

AMERICAN MP

(giggling)

I didn't know that this guard-shack
had a Polish echo.

ANDRÉ

(to MP)

Can you help us... to help Guido?

AMERICAN MP

Oh, I dunno. Our mess hall is stingy
with their main course. On some days
they serve cold-cuts for leftovers.
Last week I got there late... It was
almost six PM... and all I got was a
box of 'sea-rats' for dinner.

ANDRÉ

Sea rats? What in hell are sea rats?

AMERICAN MP

"C" for "Combat" -- Combat Rations.
Whad'ya Polaks eat when yo'in combat?

ANDRÉ

Not rats... When we're in combat we
fight. We hurry to defeat the enemy
so we can sit down with some
hot pierogis.

AMERICAN MP

What are pierogis?

ANDRÉ

They're like giant raviolis. Please
help us get Guido out of the mud...
...for a Palermo 'Hostium' stamp?

AMERICAN MP

That, plus Monte Cassino and Ancona,
plus the three overprinted kings.

ANDRÉ

Palermo and Monte Cassino only. Not
Ancona. And forget the three kings.

The sound of a Jeep can be heard. It's the MP's evening-relief.

AMERICAN MP

Okay, keep th'kings. Jus'throw in
Ancona, and then throw yo'bags
in my Jeep and we'll go git Guido.

André reaches in his portfolio and tweezes out the bartered
Hostium-Rabies-Diruits: Palermo, Monte Cassino and Ancona.
André hands the stamps over to the MP who gives back a great
big USA southerner smile with perfect teeth.

AMERICAN MP

Thank God for Polaks in Italy. Ya'all
winnin'the war fer'us'n makin'me rich.
I luv y'all. Lets go'n save Guido.

The MP drives and André sits in the front. Franki is in the
back sitting high on top of their duffle bags and packs.
They arrive at Guido's rescue.

André, Franki, and the MP easily push Guido's 'Topolino'
out of the mud-rut without using a tow-chain. Luckily, they
clear the tank-trail only a minute before a roaring convoy of
Australian 'Matildas' storm past them.

AMERICAN MP

Whoa! That was mighty close.

ANDRÉ

(to MP)

Want the three overprinted kings?

AMERICAN MP

Do Italians eat spaghetti? Does
Hitler live in Germany? Hell yeah,
I want'um.

ANDRÉ

Guido's 'Topolino' won't fit me and
Franki, plus the bags. Will you keep
the bags in your Jeep and follow us
to Ponte San Giovanni?

AMERICAN MP

It's a done deal, buddy. I'll do it.

They shake hands on the 'three kings' deal.

AMERICAN MP (CONT'D)

I would've dun'it jus'cause you'n'the
Polaks got th'krauts runnin'scared.
And fer'that I am mighty obliged.

ANDRÉ

Good man, American 'pal'. Also, Guido just told me how you might obtain full sheets of RSI stamps.

The MP comes to attention and he's all ears.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

Guido found out thru his post office connections that the RSI had printed far too many stamps by assuming that Fascist forces would win... and that soon the rest of the Italian monarchy would become part of the Mussolini's Social Republic. But by now, however, it's become obvious that the greater part of those stamps will never be licked and pasted.

AMERICAN MP

So, whadda'I do?... how'da buy?...

ANDRÉ

You have to wait and be ready to go up north as soon as the RSI falls. There will be others who will rush for the stamps. Guido said the largest supply will be in the central post office of Milano. You might try Genova, Torino, Verona, or Brescia, if those cities are liberated before Milano.

AMERICAN MP

Words o'gold! I'm deeply grateful to you'n Guido. How can I thank y'all?

ANDRÉ

Just keep our bags in your Jeep and follow the 'Topolino.' I'll give you the three overprinted kings in Ponte.

AMERICAN MP

Ye'bags - me n'my Jeep - are ready. Lead the way, amigos... Let's go.

FADE TO

SUPER: "APRIL 1, 1945"

INT. VATICAN APARTMENT - DAY

Padre Michele sits by a window reading the Vatican newspaper. He HEARS A NOTE SLIPPED UNDER THE DOOR. It's a telegram.

INSERT - TELEGRAM

André and Franki await you in Ponte
San Giovanni, *presso* Guido de Amici.

BACK TO SCENE

Padre opens a closet, pulls out a large suitcase.
Spreads open a map. He looks it over.

PADRE

(to self)

Da, da, da. Ah! Near Perugia. Then
we go to... Mantua... Hmm. Mantova.
That could be difficult. Let's see.
Take a few Vatican forms and cards,
Vatican stationery in case we need
André's skills. Also, some food and
a couple of gifts. Oh, not to forget
sufficient extra vestments.

FADE TO

EXT. VATICAN MOTOR PARK - 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.

FADE TO

EXT. PONTE SAN GIOVANNI - 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 Polish friends affectionately.

PADRE

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

He turns to the third man.

FRANKI

Padre. Meet our friend Guido.
He's the '*Direttore di Posta*' in
Ponte San Giovanni. He's also
a master philatelist and stamp
collector Guido made it possible
for us to contact 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 humble man is delighted with what he finds. A signed photograph of Pope Pius XII and a full Roman salami.

GUIDO
Grazie moltissimo, Padre.

PADRE
 Prego, Guido, *mio piacere.*

Padre turns to his friends.

PADRE (CONT'D)
 So, when are the Allies
 pushing for Bologna?

ANDRÉ
 No sooner than next week.

PADRE
 We have to hurry.

INT. GUIDO'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The men sit at the kitchen table after dinner. They're speaking and translating Italian and Polish to each other.

ANDRÉ
 (to Franki)
 ... let's think about that later.
 But right now, we need a good story
 that will cover any suspicion of our
 presence in the RSI up north...

PADRE
 ...also, to justify using a river ferry.
 That's why I brought sufficient vestments
 for three priests, or perhaps monks.

FRANKI
 (to André)
 Think Padre's had enough
 wine for tonight?

They chuckle.

PADRE

Three priests - but what are we doing across enemy lines? Especially you two. You could be shot as enemy 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... Special pure wine for the Vatican... Wine for religious sanctification.

ANDRÉ

Yes... Special wine of consecration purity - needed because the Vatican's regular purification plant in Tuscany had been damaged by bombs...

PADRE

...without holy wine the Pope had to postpone the Easter sacraments...

FRANKI

...the alternate supplier for special pure wine is... Carlo?

ANDRÉ

Yes... we must obtain it in Mantua. And... "my" Vatican purchase orders will endorse using the river ferry.

Padre regards Franki.

PADRE (CONT'D)

We still have one problem.

ANDRÉ

What?

PADRE

Franki. He doesn't speak German. He doesn't even speak Italian. And God forbid should a Polish word drop out of his mouth.

ANDRÉ

No problem. As ranking NCO here,
I order Franki to be a mute monk.
A monk given to a vow of silence
for elevated spiritual purity.

PADRE

Considering this is now a clerical
mission and I'm the senior cleric,
I assign Franki, the mute monk, to
be Vatican's official wine taster.

FRANKI

There's no sacramental grappa?

They laugh. Guido who doesn't speak Polish also chuckles,
as he clearly understood their meaning and sense of humor.

GUIDO

Scusatemi. You guys are crazy.

ANDRÉ

Do we agree?

They all nod.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)

So, we need Vatican travel papers for
three priests and a Vatican purchase
order to Carlo Perantoni in Mantova for
special pure sacramental wine.

GUIDO

You guys know the Pope and
Carlo Perantoni too?

FADE TO

SUPER: "April 2, 1945"

EXT. PO RIVER FERRY LANDING TO HIGHWAY - DAY

White Lancia Astura. Convertible top down. Two priests
and one monk... ENTERS SCENE... slowly driving off
the ramp of a Po River ferry... Then passing a road
sign with the directional arrow to "MANTOVA" (MANTUA).

FADE TO

INT. PERANTONI WINE BOTTLING SHOP & CAFÉ BAR, MANTUA - DAY

Victor, Carlo, and Luigi are busy filling wine in bottles.
Carlo glances up at the SOUND OF A POWERFUL CAR ENGINE
coming to a halt. Luigi looks out the window and recognizes
the three disguised clerics in the big car with top down.

LUIGI
Madre di Dio. Victor, Papá - look!

FADE TO

EXT. STREET, OUTSIDE BOTTLING SHOP - DAY

The big touring car is parked, and 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 handshaking.

FADE TO

INT. PERANTONI BOTTLING SHOP, UPPER DINING ROOM - NIGHT

At table are the three "clerics," Carlo, Romana, Luigi and Victor with their newlywed Italian wives: MARIA and LUIGINA (both brunettes, late twenties). Maria helps Luigina tending her and Victor's newborn baby, Roberto. Dinner has finished, but not the wine. Rosso, Bianco, and Rosé. The men drink.

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

The Perantoni's look at each other.

CARLO
 Uhum. Padre. Luigina cooked dinner.

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

PADRE
Mi scusi. Luigina. Let me restate.
 Romana, you're the best teacher of
 Italian cooking in the world. And
 your student Luigina proves it.

VICTOR
 Nice recovery, Padre. Now that you
 three friendly 'priests' approve my
 lovely wife, mother of my first-born,
 and you've also savored her cooking,
 I formally designate her: bartender
 and chef for our imminent reunion at
 the "Winiarnia Italia"- soon.

Lots of agreement and cheer around the table.
 Luigina pours shot-glasses of fine home-made grappa.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Yes, back to Leopoli soon. It's been a long five and half years waiting for our return to Lwów. Now, at last. Poland's reprisal has opened the new western battlefields. The Krauts are being crushed on both sides like they did to Poland in 1939. And they will have to know that their goose is cooked! Cin Cin to Polonia!

They all raise their glass with cheer and delight. Then, Padre stands.

PADRE

I want to make a toast. As Franki, André and I were unable to attend Victor and Luigi's weddings due to Hitler and his god-damned Krauts...

Room fills with giggles over Padre's typical grappa-induced unpriestly vocabulary - Padre takes note, so he gulps down one more grappa, and then continues...

PADRE (CONT'D)

Well, the grappa made me say it.

A volley of laughter which had been waiting to burst out.

PADRE (CONT'D)

So, now raise my glass to them. No, not the god-damned Krauts. But, I raise my glass to the marriages of Luigi and Victor to their beautiful wives. May they be blessed with long lasting family happiness and with many children, all to be raised on ulica Sykstuska, in Lwów.

They all raise glasses.

PADRE (CONT'D)

To Luigi and Maria.

ENSEMBLE

To Luigi and Maria.

PADRE (CONT'D)

To Victor and Luigina.

ENSEMBLE

To Victor and Luigina.

Now Carlo stands up.

CARLO

Before we finish, I also want to make a toast. To our friends André and Franki who endured long, cruel hardships. And they survived, and they came with the "Valoroso Corpo Polacco" to fight the ...

Carlo pauses - looks at Padre, and then he goes on...

CARLO (CONT'D)

...came to fight the god-damned Germans... and to liberate Italy.

A great explosive burst of cheers and laughter. When the cheers and laughter subside, Carlo continues...

CARLO (CONT'D)

And to Padre Michele who saved the lives of over two hundred children, Polish and Jewish orphans, whom God alone knows what would have become of them otherwise.

The Perantonis stand. The others stand. They raise glasses.

ENSEMBLE

To Padre Michele and the orphans.

CARLO (CONT'D)

Amici, remain standing, please. I'm almost finished...

A pause of solemn silence.

CARLO (CONT'D)

To our precious friendships.

ENSEMBLE

To our precious friendships.

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.

LUIGI (O.C.)
Ha! They blamed the local water,
so they drank more wine, ha!

Much laughter. (O.C.)

Victor returns holding 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 room
falls as quiet as an empty church.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Something you hid in Luigi's room,
under his floorboard... something
you wanted to be safeguarded?

Victor's voice quavers.

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

He hands them the package containing their stamp collections.
In an instant, 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
Our stamp collections - But,
we cannot safeguard them as
you have done. Who knows what
will happen? The war's not over.

FRANKI
Victor. We're on the move
constantly... in rain and mud.

Franki looks to André for approval.

FRANKI (CONT'D)
Why don't you keep them until we
meet when it's over. Here or Lwów.

VICTOR
Of course. *Non c'è problema.*

FADE TO

SUPER: "April 3, 1945"

INT. PERANTONI WINE BOTTLING SHOP & CAFÉ BAR, MANTUA - DAY

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

LUIGI
Papá!...

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

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

Carlo approaches.

CARLO
I'm Signore Perantoni. This
is my wine-bottling shop.

WEHRMACHT OFFICER
I noticed Vatican license plates
outside. Do 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 bottles.
Make room and all other adjustments
to fill this hall with field cots.
We will need exclusive use of sinks and
water faucets and bathrooms throughout
your ground floor. The medical staff
with the wounded and dying will start
arriving within the hour.

The officer stalks out.

In the back of the shop "fathers" André and Franki scramble down to the wine cellar.

FADE TO

INT. BOTTLING SHOP, PROVISIONAL FIELD HOSPITAL - DAY (LATER)

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

GERMAN CHAPLAIN

Here. You. 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, and walks away.

Padre opens the tin of ointment.
Bends over to anoint the soldier.

FADE TO

INT. BOTTLING SHOP, IN THE CELLAR - DAY (LATER)

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

Franki turns his head. Taps André.

GERMAN SOLDIER

Was machen Sie hier?

ANDRÉ

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 his forged
Vatican purchase authorization.

ANDRÉ (CONT'D)
Here. See for yourself.

The soldier inspects it briefly. Takes the paper. Leaves.

FADE TO

INT. UPSTAIRS PROVISIONAL FIELD HOSPITAL - DAY

The same soldier shows André's Vatican purchase order to the
Wehrmacht Officer and is overheard by the German Chaplain.

GERMAN CHAPLAIN
Herr Oberstleutnant. That priest.
Something about him. I think
he's hiding something.

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 down to the cellar...

FADE TO

INT. BOTTLING SHOP, IN THE CELLAR - DAY

PADRE
(to André 'priest')
Have you sampled the barrels yet?

ANDRÉ
No. We were waiting for you.

Padre picks up a tasting cup, fills it, smells it, 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,
then guzzles down the whole sample.

GERMAN SOLDIER
*Oh, ya. Das is gut! Das ist
gross gut! Danke Schôn.*

The 'priest' André and the 'mute monk' Franki smile.

PADRE
 (to soldier)
Bitte schön.
 (to André)
 These two barrels will do nicely.

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

FADE TO

INT. PROVISIONAL FIELD HOSPITAL - DAY (LATER)

Padre approaches the German chaplain.

PADRE
 All the soldiers who needed to be anointed, have been anointed. I'm taking Signore Perantoni to the church to pay for his wine with a Vatican Funding Approval. We won't be long, and I'll be ready to anoint more casualties, if any.

FADE TO

EXT/INT. PERANTONI BOTTLING SHOP / STREET - DAY

Padre and Carlo are heading out. At the doorway, Carlo turns his head and hollers orders to Luigi and Victor. His orders are shouted-out with intent to mislead the suspicious German Chaplain. However, the style which he bellows loud makes obvious to Luigi and Victor.

CARLO
 Hey you two. Go and help the priest to load up the two approved barrels and haul'em to dock #2 at the train station. Tip cargo porter generously to expedite the shipment. Then, sign the wine over to the priest and get a receipt from him - not the monk - the purchasing agent priest. Only then the wine barrels will be his responsibility. Their elder will pick them up later this evening. Go now. Don't waste time.

GERMAN CHAPLAIN
 (to Carlo Perantoni)
 Quiet. Shut up. This is a hospital.

CARLO
 (whispering)
 Sorry. I forgot.

Carlo exits and joins Padre in his Lancia Astura, top down. The suspicious German chaplain watches them through a window. Padre's Lancia Astura pulls away. Luigi turns to Victor...

LUIGI
 Let's get those barrels into the van. I'll work with the purchasing priest. And you help the monk.

VICTOR
 Whatever you say, boss.

Without any delay Luigi, André, Victor, and Franki roll two barrels up the back ramp and into Victor's delivery van.

FADE TO

EXT/INT. VICTOR'S WINE DELIVERY VAN ON ROAD - DAY

Van whizzes down the road. Victor drives. Luigi sits in front. 'Clerics' André and Franki are seated in back with the barrels.

FADE TO

EXT/INT. GARAGE AT LUIGI'S HOME - DAY

Victor's delivery van arrives. Victor, Luigi, André and Franki exit. They enter the garage where they find Carlo and Padre in the process of removing the Vatican license plates from the Lancia Astura. Romana, Luigina and Maria are with them. Padre looks to the two Polish soldiers in clerical disguises.

PADRE
 You two need to get back to your unit.

ANDRÉ
 We've aroused suspicion and they will search for us when we fail to return. They will trace Luigi's home from the bottling shop's documents and records.

FRANKI
 Can't leave this car in Luigi's garage. No doubt this will be the first place they will search. Far too dangerous for Luigina, Maria - entire Perantoni family!

PADRE
 Priests in a Lancia Astura is what they will search for. So, we need to leave the car somewhere and get out of here.

ANDRÉ

Are you thinking to leave it on
a Mantua street somewhere else?
So that there will be no linking
to Luigi's home?

VICTOR

Not a good idea. If it's hidden, no
one can ask questions. But, on the
streets of Mantua, this car will be
like a Mona Lisa at a rummage sale.

FRANKI

But, where? Where can we hide it?

CARLO

I have an idea.

QUICK FLASH - LWÓW "WINIARNIA ITALIA" - 1939

POV CAMERA: WALL-PHOTOGRAPHS OF WORLD CHAMPION AND PIONEER
RACE-CAR DRIVER: TAZIO NUVOLARI, A NATIVE RESIDENT OF MANTUA.

RETURN TO SCENE

LUIGI

(to the 3 'clerics')

Just in case, I have a secret attic
room you might use until we figure a
safe way back to your Corpo Polacco.

FADE TO

EXT. STATELY AND SPACIOUS NUVOLARI HOME - NIGHT

Carlo and Victor park the Lancia in a shadow behind an elegant
house where the lights are out. Carlo KNOCKS. A porch light
illuminates them. The man who answers is the world-champion
racing pioneer, TAZIO NUVOLARI. He's lean with an angular face.

TAZIO (surprised)

Carlo! You and I are too old now, to
be going out carousing Mantua by night

CARLO

(chuckling)

Perhaps not tonight, Tazio.

The two old friends laugh and shake hands.
Carlo introduces Victor to Tazio.

CARLO
But seriously, Tazio, I'm sorry
to disturb you at this late hour,
but I need your help.

Tazio spots the Lancia Astura.

TAZIO
I can't believe it. Carlo.
You stole your first car.

Tazio gives a crooked-toothed smile. Carlo puts a finger
to his lips.

CARLO
Shhh. It's not stolen.

VICTOR
The Germans may be looking
for it right now.

TAZIO
Germans, 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
Tazio. I need a place to hide it.

Tazio grins mischievously.

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

CARLO
The Astura will fit well, unnoticed
in your automobile collection. You're
the only one who can help us. Please.

TAZIO
Oh, Carlo. Your Lancia Astura is like
a beautiful woman. How can I deny her?

CARLO
I knew I could count on you. Thank you.

Tazio's smile broadens. He tells Victor to drive the car around the back, and he invites them inside for a drink.

TAZIO

Come in, Carlo. Let's have a glass of Vermouth and talk. Join us, Victor, after you park the Lancia.

NARRATOR

By this time the Germans had already begun a wide-ranging search for two priests and a monk. However, Papá and Luigi worked throughout the night and devised an escape plan for them. The first thing they did was drain the two wine barrels.

FADE TO

INT. GARAGE AT LUIGI'S HOME - NIGHT

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

CARLO

We can install a wooden lip on the inside edge, all around, and cut notches on both opposite sides.

Carlo points and motions his design.

CARLO (CONT'D)

Cut here and here. Then, we alter the top lid, give it two wedged locking ears that will fit into the notched openings under the lip. Then with the top lid in place, it can turn to lock and unlock - from inside the barrel.

LUIGI

Hmm. Only opens and closes from the inside. Should work. And, from the outside, there are no signs that the barrels had been modified.

CARLO

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

INT. GARAGE AT LUIGI'S HOME - NIGHT (LATER)

Luigi attaches the Vatican License plates to Victor's wine delivery van. Then, he loads the two modified barrels and lays them on their side, propping them for stability.

FADE TO

SUPER: "APRIL 4, 1945"

INT. GARAGE AT LUIGI'S HOME - DAY

Early in the morning, André and Franki are in field uniform wearing their side-arms. They hop into the back of Victor's van and lay down inside the barrels. Then they tighten the lids from inside. This time Victor and Luigi put on the priestly garments. Luigina, holding little Roberto, laughs at the sight.

Disguised as priests, Victor drives, and Luigi rides in front. Padre sits next to the barrels in the back of the van.

NARRATOR

Everyone's adrenaline was running high. The trip was uneventful until about forty-five miles southeast of Mantua where we were stopped by a Wehrmacht tactical checkpoint at the Po river. By that time, the Germans had issued a broad alert throughout Lombardy... to be on the lookout for three Vatican emissaries, one of whom was a mute monk, riding in a white Lancia Astura Cabriolet. Suspected enemy spies.

FADE TO

EXT. GERMAN TACTICAL CHECKPOINT AT PO RIVER - DAY

The van slows to a stop. The German soldiers are noticeably young. MORTAR THUMPS are heard in the b.g.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER

Halt!

(in Italian)

Dove state andando?

VICTOR

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 none
of them are 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 barbarian Allies.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER
What's in the van?

VICTOR
Two barrels of holy sacramental wine
and Vatican's authenticating priest.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER
Open up and 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 rear double-doors.

Padre acts groggy. Rubs his eyes. Yawns. Two young German
soldiers enter the van. Two others stand by the open doors.

PADRE
Are we there yet?

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER
Open the barrels.

PADRE
(surprised irritated)
What? - What did you say? I can't
do that - These barrels belong to the
Vatican and been sealed to safeguard
the wine's purity. (MORE)

PADRE (CONT'D)
 (irritated assertive)
 If the wax seals are broken the wine
 will have been contaminated by human
 sinners, like you are - each one of
 you, and will be useless to the Pope.

The young German soldier is surprisingly taken aback and unsure of what to do next. The others are dazed.

YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER
 (stupefied)
 Why? ... What? ... Why seals?

PADRE
 (seriously assertive)
 The Pope will use this wine at mass.
 It will become the blood of Christ.

Padre remains assertive-authoritative-touched with anger. The young Germans look to one another, confused/embarrassed.

PADRE (CONT'D)
 This is the third time I've had to
 requisition wine of Christian purity.
 Paid for it twice and got nothing.
 Why? Because it had to go through the
 military lines of ungodly warriors
 like you. And it got stolen both times.

Padre's authoritatively powerful performance has gotten the attention of all young soldiers able to hear his shouts.

PADRE (CONT'D)
 So this time I've come to get the
 job done myself... So that I might
 see for myself the faces of those hell-
 bound Philistines willing to
 deny millions of devoted Christians
 their rite to the blood of Christ.
 And why? Just to get drunk on it.

More young soldiers slowly approach the van to hear Padre's long-winded raves. All of them are in fear, as they're under orders to hold their position, but as MORTAR THUMPS get closer they know that Allied forces will soon be upon them. Padre's words sound like a Christian sermon to them. At this moment the sermon of a preacher is what they crave.

PADRE (CONT'D)
 Was it YOU who stole the Pope's wine
 last week? - I don't think so. - But,
 if you open these barrels - you might as
 well steal the wine - because it won't
 be usable to the Pope or to any church.
 And you will be accountable to God...
 and held responsible to the Devil!

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

OTHER GERMAN SOLDIER
No. He's still working on it.

PADRE
As we stand here chit-chatting,
there's an undercover Luftwaffe
plane with Swiss Guard markings
standing by in Rome waiting to
deliver Easter's holy sacrament
to your Führer! And it's already
one week late. Do you want to
delay it more?

MORTAR THUMPS in the b.g. get much louder. A young soldier
takes off his helmet, lays down his rifle, he hugs and kisses
a barrel. Then goes to his knees asking Padre for a blessing.

NARRATOR
A moment later, the entire checkpoint
squad was on its knees with helmets
off. The three of us gave blessings
to all of them... but me and Luigi
had to observe Padre from corners
of our eyes to ably mimic him in
our acts of blessing the anxious
young German soldiers.

The mortar thumps kept coming closer,
and the squad was visibly frightened.
We felt quite sorry for these young
lads. They were under the typical Nazi
order to fight to the last bullet and
last man. They were facing death, and
they knew it.

In the next five days, Allied forces
would begin the spring offensives into
the Lombardy Plain and then the rest of
Mussolini's RSI. Thus kicking-off their
decisive defeat of Nazi-Fascism and
their historical victory in Italy.

The offensive's large-scale operations
were coordinated with the Battle of
Bologna and across the entire enemy
front at the Po River Valley.

But, smaller scale actions had already taken place in key locations, resulting from enemy attacks and/or in support of the planned, coordinated offensive.

Such was the situation we found upon arriving at the ferry station, as now it had become a British outpost and tactical checkpoint.

FADE TO

EXT. BRITISH CHECKPOINT NEAR BERGANTINO SUL PO - DAY

The van comes to a halt. Much of the previous scene, hours earlier at the German checkpoint, looks repeated until Victor opens the back of the van. Padre sees Allied troops and smiles. Then he KNOCKS LOUDLY on both barrels.

PADRE

Time to go back to work, chaps.

The Brits approach the van with caution and curiosity about the three priests in a delivery van. They become instantly alarmed and raise their weapons as they see the barrel lids come off freely and the bodies of two men crawl out.

Franki and André get up and jump out the van in wine stained uniforms and smelling like a distillery. The stunned Brits remain startled for a moment ... then gradually become amused as they slowly lower their weapons ...and they start to laugh, and laugh louder until everyone is laughing.

Luigi and Victor seize the opportunity to remove their stuffy clerical robes. Once again, the crowd of Brits are amused by the obvious disguises and call for Padre to perform a similar transformation to civilian clothes. So then, Padre removes his vestment and, to everyone's surprise, he is still dressed as a priest wearing black trousers, black shirt with church collar.

Then, Padre grabs the large silver cross hanging from his neck and, with a great big smile, he waves a witty, comical sign of 'blessing' toward the crowd ... who explodes in laughter.

NARRATOR

We exchanged goodbye-hugs with André and Franki, with plans to reconnect as soon as the RSI had fallen. Luigi and I removed Padre's Vatican license plates and replaced my regular Mantua plates. Then, with Padre and Luigi, we drove back to Mantua in civilian clothes... ..and by a different route.

SUPER: "APRIL 29, 1945"

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

It's been almost a week that the fall of Mussolini's Nazi-Fascist RSI was becoming an undeniable reality to all Italians and to the residual German forces who were still in Italy. Partisans and Allies had taken control of large Fascist sectors of the RSI, causing many local surrenders, followed by Germany's first unconditional surrender to the Allied command.

But, the whereabouts of Benito Mussolini and of several other high ranking Fascist leaders have been generally unknown for some days ... except to bold partisans who had remained on their tail.

EXT. DOWNTOWN MILANO, ITALY - DAY

On a sun-drenched morning, Victor and his long-time stamp dealer and collector friend, GOGLIARDO GRASSI, are with Padre Michele walking about in downtown Milano.

Gogliardo is a resident of Milano, and he is accompanying Victor and Padre on their mission to find special bargains on large lots of leftover Fascist RSI stamps which were about to become defunct. They arrive at the Post Office.

GOGLIARDO

Looks like we're a little early.
My friend isn't here yet. He told me that he might be late.

VICTOR

Did he give you a price-per-sheet?

GOGLIARDO

He said that full sheets would be sold at 25% of their face values and that he had hundreds of sheets in all the denominations.

PADRE

Let's get some coffee.

Walking about, they HEAR A RIOTOUS COMMOTION from a large crowd in Piazzale Loreto, and they find themselves swept along with one of the war's most horrendous sights.

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 being attached to the feet of sixteen high-ranking dead fascist leaders, murdered and waiting to be displayed in a similar manner.

The crowd pushes and shoves out of control. It sways and surges, voices curse. Shots RING OUT from a gun held by a woman who empties her pistol into the *Duce's* lifeless body.

WOMAN WITH PISTOL
(screaming angry)
Five shots for my five sons,
murdered by you... *Assassino*
Bugiardo... Delinquente!

People spit on the corpses. Throw whatever they can at them. Afterward, they 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 the *Duce*
the last rites. Not even a whispered
prayer or a blessing.

Off to the side, Victor vomits. Padre looks to Gogliardo who is mesmerized by the brutality.

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

EPILOGUE

In the post-war 1940s, the Perantoni family continued futile efforts of returning to their "Winiarnia Italia" in Lwów. In 1949 Luigina gave birth to George, their youngest son.

Afterward, in 1950, Victor took his young family as far as possible from what he considered as a 'war-torn ruinous Europe'. So they settled in Melbourne, Australia.

Carlo and Luigi's correspondence from Italy to Victor in Australia gradually made it clear that both Lwów and the "Winiarnia Italia" had been lost forever to the U.S.S.R.

In 1960 Victor took his family back to Italy to care for his elderly parents, Carlo and Romana, who, in 1962 passed away in Mantua, only weeks apart from each other.

The 1950s and 1960s saw the gradual reconstruction of Carlo Perantoni's native town, Volargne di Dolcé.

In 1963 Victor and Luigi built an above-ground family tomb in Volargne's cemetery, in which Carlo and Romana rest in peace.

By 1964 Italy's communist party had become very active. Thus once again, Victor took his family far away from Europe by migrating to the U.S.A. with special Cold-War priority status by the U.S. Embassy, as Polish refugees.

In March 1964 Victor settled his family in a Polish/Italian ethnic district of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His sons served in the U.S. Army and established their new lives as American citizens.

Stasia resumed ballet and married a Polish dancer by the name of Rozankowski. In 1965 Victor helped arrange their defection from the Soviet Union by arranging sponsorship to the United States with pre-arranged asylum. While on a ballet tour in Vienna Stasia and her husband took asylum in the U.S. Embassy.

The Vienna ballet had been their last dance. In 1966 Stasia and her husband opened a ballet costume shop in New York City.

Padre Michele moved to the United States as well, serving in several Salesian parishes of Polish congregations. Later, his final Vatican assignment had him relocate back to Rome.

Luigi remained the anchor for the family business in Mantova where he died in November 1988, soon after his beloved Maria.

In 1979 Victor and Luigina retired to Orlando, Florida where he died in 2002 at the age of 90, followed by Luigina in 2013.

Out of concern for Dani's safety due to her Jewish heritage, Dani lived as Lari's cousin on the farm of Lari's uncle in southeast Galicia, until 1946.

With the Cold War and Stalin's infamous Iron Curtain, Stasia and Victor lost all contact with Dani and Lari. They never heard from them again after 1946.

In 1947 Franki Mrowicki returned to Gdansk, Poland where he was committed to menial labor by the communist government. He was never allowed to resume his University studies.

André Frodel, whose Polish wife disappeared in the midst of war, remarried in England and then migrated to Canada in 1947 with Mary, his new wife. He became known as a world-famous stamp artist in Vancouver, where he died in 1963.

FADE OUT.

