

"REPATRIATION"

by

Steven A. Huston

Inspired by true events.

Based on the book

"Repatriation of Prisoners of War

from Siberia"

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REPATRIATION

FADE IN: BLIZZARD.

INSERT TITLE:

During World War One, Russian prisoner of war camps were among the worst. Many of these camps were in Siberia. Over two million soldiers - ninety percent of those captured - came from the Austro-Hungarian army.

EXT. SIBERIAN WASTELAND - NIGHT

INSERT TITLE: "Eastern Siberia, 1920"

Five rag-tag men, wrapped in old holey blankets, wander slowly through a frozen wasteland during a heavy, blowing snowstorm. Every so often, someone falls. The others assist him back up.

In the distance, one can barely see what appears to be a barn. The group makes its way toward it. Minutes pass. They arrive at the door and struggle to push it open. Moments later, it slides a bit to the right. They enter.

INT. INSIDE THE BUILDING - NIGHT

The group hurries in and quickly slides the door closed. Although the snowstorm continues to blow outside, suddenly it is much quieter inside. And very dark. A small fire, the only source of light, burns on the floor in the center.

As eyes grow accustomed to the low light, one can see they are inside a barn. The small fire is surrounded by a large group of many similarly clad men trying to sleep on the hay-covered dirt floor. A few heads pop up as the newcomers slowly and carefully make their way through the sleeping bodies to find five sleeping spots of their own. One at a time, they are successful.

JULIUS, six-feet-tall, thin, bearded, about age fifty, is a barn 'resident.' He begins a quiet conversation with a younger, age thirty, unremarkable looking 'newcomer,' ERIC.

JULIUS

Any food?

ERIC

No. You?

JULIUS

No. I'm Julius.

ERIC

Eric. How long have you been here?

JULIUS

Two days... Maybe three.

ERIC

Everyone a prisoner of war?

JULIUS

I think so. Now, we're all free... but have nowhere to go. You?

ERIC

Same. How many here?

JULIUS

Not sure. About one fifty. Now, maybe one hundred.

ERIC

All from Chita camp?

JULIUS

More or less. Headed east?

ERIC

Yeah. You?

JULIUS

Same.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BUILDING - DAWN

The sun is rising and the blizzard decreasing.

INT. INSIDE THE BUILDING - DAY

Moving and rustling begins among those who had been sleeping. Someone puts more twigs on the fire. Two men stand, feet apart, facing different walls. Steam rises from the dirt floor between their feet. The men on the floor slowly begin to move apart and form a pathway to the rear door. In pairs, six men carry three lifeless bodies through the pathway and set them down near the rear door.

ERIC

What's happening?

JULIUS

Time to remove the dead.  
Volunteers needed.

Julius and Eric make their way through the pathway and stand at the rear door. They are joined by four others.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BUILDING/BACK - DAY

The rear door is slid open. It is now lightly snowing. The six men carefully step outside and survey the scene. Before them is a practically unblemished snow-covered field stretching back some one hundred yards. One hundred yards away is a snow-covered tall tree line.

Moments later, they turn and re-enter the barn. Then, two men each carry a body out by its arms and legs. Eric and Julius are first. The six men carrying three bodies slowly make their way into the snowy field. About fifty yards away, they carefully lay the bodies down, one on top of another, making a pile of three.

Eric ventures a bit further into the field to look around. The others start to return to the barn. Julius turns around and calls to Eric.

JULIUS

Coming back in?

Eric starts to lumber through the snow back to the barn. Suddenly, we hear a very loud crack and crash as a snow-covered tree limb breaks and falls to the ground.

Jolted by the noise, Eric falls forward into the snow, his arms extended to break his fall. Eric realizes he is touching something unusual. He rises to his knees, reaches into the snow, and pulls out a frozen human hand.

He digs in the snow and finds the connected frozen arm. He slowly stands up. Heavier snowfall begins. Eric looks around the field. He can barely make out now small humps in the snow. All around him. All over the field. As far as the eye can see.

He looks toward his companions as they trudge back to the barn. Again, he turns and looks out at the field. His eyes widen as he realizes what all the humps represent. He slowly makes the sign of the cross.

EXT. STREET CORNER NEWSTAND - DAY

INSERT TITLE: "New Jersey, 1920"

NEWSPAPER HEADLINE: 'Approximately 500,000 prisoners of the Great War in Europe are awaiting repatriation.'

Father ALBERT is about six feet tall, age thirty, thin, good-looking, with a slightly receding hairline. The intelligent and charismatic priest steps closer to the news stand, picks up the paper and reads it quietly.

ALBERT

'Many are Austro-Hungarians, detained under miserable conditions, primarily in Siberia. The League of Nations has entrusted the task of organizing the prisoners' repatriation to the Catholic Church, in cooperation with the Red Cross.'

He buys the paper, crosses the street, and enters the church.

INT. CHURCH INTERIOR - DAY

Mass underway, Father Albert delivers his homily.

ALBERT

Many of us have lost our way from time to time. Most of us believe that during our daily lives, we are walking along a path of righteousness. Only to discover that we have strayed. Some of us recognize when a course correction is needed. And then, there are those of us who never do. We have all heard it said that 'ignorance is bliss.' Is it really? Just because a person is unaware that their pocket has been picked, does not mean that it wasn't. Eventually, it is discovered. And it is then, one chooses to act.

EXT. CHURCH FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Mass is over. The church bells ring. Albert greets parishioners at the front door steps. As they exit, he notices a beautiful young woman parishioner. LIZ is twenty, about five-feet-six inches tall, thin, with short red hair. Albert tries not to stare. He's certain she is smiling at him. Liz approaches with hand extended.

LIZ

Good morning, Father Albert. I must tell you, your homily was very thoughtful... and thought provoking. Something about it really touched me.

ALBERT

Thank you, so much.

LIZ

The premise that we all lose our way... is so personal. And, so universal. Honestly, many may not admit to it, but everyone should have identified with that.

ALBERT

Kind of you to say.

LIZ

And it sounded a little...  
autobiographical, as well.

Father Albert lowers his voice.

ALBERT

I pray it wasn't that obvious.

LIZ

Oh, no. And not in a bad way.  
You just seemed a little close  
to it.

ALBERT

I have been told that every  
good homily has a basis in  
fact.

LIZ

Sounded that way to me.  
You know, from someone  
also familiar with the  
subject. By the way, I'm  
Elizabeth. Friends call  
me Liz. See you later.

EXT. ALBERT'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Establish building.

INT. ALBERT'S SMALL APARTMENT - DAY

In his poorly lit, sparsely furnished one room apartment,  
Father Albert awakens to find himself alone. He sits in  
one of two ordinary wooden chairs, completely dressed.

An empty whiskey bottle, empty glass, and a lit lamp sit on  
a small table between the chairs. To his right and behind  
him is an unmade bed and a messy open closet. Albert rubs  
his bloodshot eyes, retrieves and affixes his collar, and  
leaves the apartment.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Albert crosses the street and walks to the church. He approaches a group of children playing 'keep away' on the sidewalk. They pause during their arguing just long enough to greet him with a 'good morning Father.' Then resume arguing over the rules of their game.

ALBERT

Children. Must we argue so?

YOUNG GIRL

These boys are not playing by the rules.

YOUNG BOY

Father? Is it fair to change the rules in the middle of a game?

ALBERT

If you've all agreed upon them, no, they probably shouldn't change. Unless, of course, you all agree to change them. So, have we all agreed upon the rules... or to change them?

Quiet.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Tell you what. Let's talk a bit about what we think the rules are. Ladies.

YOUNG GIRL

Well, I thought it was basically a game of 'keep away.' You know, pass the ball to your teammate without losing it to the other team.

ALBERT

Sounds reasonable.

YOUNG BOY

What's wrong with forcing the  
ball loose?

The girls frown.

ALBERT

If it's unexpected, that would  
certainly give the boys an  
advantage.

YOUNG GIRL

Not fair. The boys already  
have an advantage. They're a  
lot stronger than we are.

ALBERT

Perhaps the boys can agree not  
to force the ball loose, and  
the girls can agree... to  
accept other changes of  
possession.

Quiet.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

OK. Give it some thought.  
The first step of any journey  
can often be the most  
difficult.

Not a further word is spoken. Albert continues his walk. He passes five neighbors sitting on their stoop. He tips his hat to greet them. He approaches the corner newspaper stand and skims the headlines. Albert acknowledges the stand's owner, crosses the street and enters his church.

INT. ALBERT'S SMALL APARTMENT - NIGHT

Albert again sits alone on one of his two chairs. He opens a whiskey bottle and pours himself two fingers of whiskey. Albert loosens and removes his priestly collar. He looks at the glass, then downs it all in one swallow.

He pours another, and again downs it in one swallow. He pours a third glass of two fingers. There is a knock at his door. Albert gets up, walks to the door, and opens it.

It is Doctor Frederick PALMER, a portly, five-foot-six well-dressed man in his fifties. They are delighted to see one another. Palmer enters, they hug. Albert takes the doctor's coat, tosses it on the bed and they sit in the chairs. Both have slight Hungarian accents.

ALBERT

Doctor Palmer. Good to see you my old friend. Care for a drink?

PALMER

No thanks. None for me.

ALBERT

Don't mind if I do.

Albert salutes the Doctor with his glass and drinks.

PALMER

So, tell me, all is well? What's going on these days?

ALBERT

Nothing really. Much the same. Very routine.

PALMER

Still... a good relationship with your Bishop?

ALBERT

After all these years, yes, we remain good friends.

Albert pours himself another two fingers.

PALMER

And all is well at your Hungarian parish?

ALBERT

Yes. Much the same.

PALMER

Much the same. Hmm. Have you determined what's causing this... 'melancholy' of yours?

ALBERT

Melancholy?

PALMER

You seem sad to me. What troubles you?

ALBERT

You know me too well.

PALMER

Enough for me to be concerned. Tell me about it.

ALBERT

Please don't dwell on this. I'll be fine.

PALMER

Is there anything I can do?

ALBERT

I'm afraid not.

PALMER

Sounds serious. What is it?

ALBERT

I've never told anyone this. I attended the seminary... for the wrong reason.

PALMER

What?

ALBERT

I think about it all the time. I feel I'm wasting my life and not making a difference in the lives of others.

PALMER

Albert. What could be wrong about attending the seminary?

ALBERT

Not just attending... attending for the wrong reason.

PALMER

I don't understand.

ALBERT

I wanted... a college education. An affordable college degree.

PALMER

And you got that. Right?

ALBERT

Yes. But, as I've learned, everything has its cost. For me, it's been no marriage... and no children.

PALMER

You are a priest. Correct?

ALBERT

I met a young woman the other day. And talking with her reminded me of all I've given up.

PALMER

My friend, have you thought about all you've gained? Monetarily what do you think your education was worth?

ALBERT

Thousands of dollars... I presume. Oh, I don't know. But it was all wrong.

PALMER

I don't believe that. You  
don't believe that either.

ALBERT

Yet, it haunts me all the  
time. I'm constantly afraid  
someone will find out. The  
stress of keeping it hidden is  
a constant reminder.

PALMER

And you believe this to be a  
weakness?

ALBERT

What I believe is... I feel  
lost and empty. Without  
purpose.

PALMER

And I feel I can only offer  
you words of encouragement.  
To find your purpose, you will  
have to speak with someone  
else.

They sit quietly. Albert drinks more whiskey. Soon, he  
has fallen asleep. While Albert snores, Dr. Palmer  
retrieves his coat and quietly departs.

INT. ALBERT'S SMALL APARTMENT - DAY

It's morning. Albert wakes to find himself alone, sitting in  
the chair, dressed. An empty whiskey bottle, empty glass,  
and lit lamp sit on a small table between the two chairs.  
Albert checks his watch, affixes his collar and leaves.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Albert walks to his church. The street is moderately busy.  
Otherwise, very much the same. He passes a group of children  
agreeably playing their game of 'keep away.' He greets five  
neighbors sitting on their stoop.

He approaches the newspaper stand and skims the headlines. He acknowledges the stand's owner, crosses the street, and enters his church.

EXT. CHURCH FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Mass is over. The church bells ring. Albert greets parishioners on the church front steps. Again, he sees Liz.

ALBERT

Good morning, Miss Elizabeth.

LIZ

Good morning, Father. Have time to talk today?

ALBERT

No. Sorry. Not today. My schedule... is filled with administrative matters.

LIZ

Oh, alright. Another time, then.

Albert greets other parishioners. Then enters the church.

INT. ALBERT'S SMALL APARTMENT - NIGHT

He sits alone, removes his collar and drinks himself to sleep.

INT. ALBERT'S SMALL APARTMENT - DAY

In the morning, Albert awakens to find himself still sitting in the chair, dressed.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

It is overcast and lightly snowing. Albert wears a fedora and overcoat while walking to his church. The children are not playing. The neighbors are not on their stoop. He stops briefly at the newspaper stand to check the headlines.

EXT. CHURCH FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Mass is over. The church bells ring. Albert greets parishioners on the church front steps. Everyone wears coats and gloves. Again, he sees Liz.

Today, she is among the last to exit the church. She smiles warmly as she shakes his hand. It all seems to happen in slow motion. There is clearly a connection. Their eyes meet. Then, their hands separate. Albert watches as she walks away. After about twenty yards, she turns her head his way and smiles. He enters the church.

INT. FATHER ALBERT'S OFFICE - DAY

Albert sits at his desk and drafts the next homily. He checks a few reference books open on his desk. He jots down a few thoughts, then he reads quietly.

ALBERT

So, this week, we should all think about our neighbors and what we could do to improve their lives.

He stops. He frantically searches through everything in his office. He finds the earlier day's newspaper and retrieves it.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Here it is.

He quickly reads the front-page portion of the article again.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

I should have thought of this before.

He carries the paper to the Bishop's office.

INT. BISHOP WALSH'S OFFICE DOOR - DAY

With the newspaper under his arm, Albert knocks on the Bishop's office door. From inside, we hear WALSH.

WALSH

Come in.

INT. BISHOP WALSH'S OFFICE - DAY

WALSH is a relatively short man in his forties, almost bald, wearing glasses that sit on the end of his nose. He is at his desk reading the Bible. Albert stands quietly in front of him until the bishop looks up. Albert puts the newspaper on Walsh's desk in front of him.

WALSH

Why, good morning, Albert.

ALBERT

Good day, Right Reverend.

Walsh reads the headline and the start of the article.

WALSH

I have heard talk of this.

ALBERT

You have? It was literally news to me.

WALSH

This has been brewing for some time. Apparently, action is, at last, being taken.

ALBERT

It seems to have the support of the Church. It's hard to imagine those prisoners being forgotten for so long.

WALSH

But... not completely forgotten. I understand this task is of such magnitude that much time has been spent selecting members of the committee. I believe the selection process may still be underway.

WALSH (CONT'D)

They may have an opening. Are you expressing interest?

ALBERT

It does seem like a noble cause... one that could impact thousands of lives.

WALSH

Just so happens that I have a friend, who has a friend, who knows someone, who's involved with the planning for this.

ALBERT

That is well-connected.

WALSH

And what shall I say would be your contribution?

ALBERT

Well, years before entering the priesthood, I was a member of the state National Guard.

WALSH

Really?

ALBERT

We drilled at the guard base not far from here. The facility had a large drilling ground, a firing range, and... railroad sidings.

WALSH

Railroad sidings?

ALBERT

Sections of track, just off the mainline, where an entire train can stop without blocking other traffic.

WALSH

Interesting.

ALBERT

I assume the repatriation effort will make at least some use of rail transportation.

WALSH

A reasonable assumption.

ALBERT

And that may likely benefit from someone with a knowledge of railroad sidings.

WALSH

One would think.

ALBERT

So, in addition to my keen organizational skills, I also have that.

WALSH

A valuable familiarity in this case. During my next communication with my friend, I will mention your name.

ALBERT

Most generous of you.

WALSH

Believe me. I think this is most generous of you.

EXT. CHURCH FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Mass is over. The church bells chime. Father Albert greets parishioners today and is pleased to see Liz again.

ALBERT

Good morning, Miss Elizabeth.  
Still wish to talk?

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Father Albert walks Liz home.

LIZ

I, myself, have had a similar life experience as that which you mentioned in your homily the other day.

ALBERT

Really?

LIZ

I may have also momentarily lost my way... stepped off the path, so to speak, and found myself... floundering. For lack of a better word.

ALBERT

When was this?

LIZ

Within the last two years or so. Since I graduated from high school. I noticed it almost right away.

ALBERT

What was it you noticed?

LIZ

Well, I was feeling lost... and conflicted. I prayed for guidance, but nothing seemed to come my way. I began questioning my faith. I stopped going to confession, stopped receiving communion, and then stopped coming to mass altogether. My mother was appalled. We didn't speak for months.

ALBERT

And then?

LIZ

Then I attended a few church social events with friends. Soon, I showed up for mass. It wasn't long after that, I went to confession, and soon received communion again.

ALBERT

Is it fair to say... your faith was reaffirmed?

LIZ

I think so. Well, maybe ninety-eight percent of it. You see, there was still something missing.

ALBERT

There always seems to be.

LIZ

Yes. Exactly.

ALBERT

And you've since overcome that as well?

LIZ

Not really. You see, I found I had fallen in love. But... in love with someone who couldn't return my affection.

ALBERT

Couldn't? Or wouldn't?

LIZ

Both.

ALBERT

That must have been very challenging. I will pray that you find your missing two percent.

They approach her house and stop at the front gate.

LIZ  
Thank you, Father.

Liz hugs Father Albert, a noticeably stronger and longer hug than those with which he is familiar.

LIZ (CONT'D)  
See you later.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET AND ALLEY - DAY

Albert chooses to cross the street on his walk home. As he approaches the entrance to an alley, he hears a male voice.

VOICE  
Now Norah... don't get all huffy with me. Norah!

The voice is coming from the alley. Albert peers in and looks for the source. About halfway up the alley, he sees an old man sitting alone on the pavement, between the garbage cans. An almost empty whiskey bottle is at the man's side. Albert ventures forth to talk with him.

VOICE  
Norah. If you're out all day, out all night, and I don't see you, what d'you expect?

Albert quietly approaches.

VOICE  
Norah! Come back here!

ALBERT  
Excuse me...

VOICE  
AHHHHHHHHHHHHH! Who's that?

ALBERT  
I am so sorry. Didn't mean to frighten you.

VOICE  
Who may I say is calling?

ALBERT

I'm Father Albert. Of Saint Ignatius church.

VOICE

Won't you please come in, Father. Sorry the place is so cluttered. (takes a swig of whiskey)

ALBERT

I heard you yelling. (squats)  
Is everything alright?

VOICE

Oh... the wife is never home.  
No housework is ever done.

ALBERT

Are you alright?

VOICE

Oh... nothing a stiff drink won't cure. (takes another swig) If you see my wife, Norah... Norah's her name... please tell her I miss her. Tell her to come home.

ALBERT

I certainly will. (stands) And maybe we'll see about finding you a better place to live.

VOICE

Make sure you tell Norah.

ALBERT

I'll do that.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Albert is about to exit the liquor store across the street from the church. He carries his purchase; a bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag. Liz walks in.

Albert quickly walks over to browse in the wine section. Liz joins him. Albert awkwardly and unsuccessfully tries to hide his purchase under his arm.

LIZ

Hi. I thought it might be you. But then I thought, how strange to see him here at the liquor store.

ALBERT

Always a pleasure to see you, Miss Elizabeth.

LIZ

Could you possibly help me? I must make a critical decision.

ALBERT

I'll do my best.

LIZ

Mother is hosting a dinner for some dear friends and has asked me to purchase a bottle of wine.

Liz pulls a piece of paper from her purse.

LIZ (CONT'D)

She even wrote this note to the store manager. Would you also have a suggestion?

ALBERT

It depends.

LIZ

Depends?

ALBERT

On the menu. Most importantly, the main dish.

LIZ

Of course. That would be my mother's wonderful chicken paprikash.

They walk along the wine racks.

ALBERT

Hmmm. I would suggest a white wine. Not too dry. Perhaps a zinfandel. Or perhaps a rustic Hungarian red wine.

LIZ

My goodness. So many choices. This is more complicated than I anticipated.

ALBERT

Listen... just purchase a nice bottle of white zin. I assure you it will be perfect.

INT. ALBERT'S SMALL APARTMENT - NIGHT

MONTAGE BEGINS:

Father Albert continues to drink himself to sleep every night.

MONTAGE ENDS.

One evening, he checks his wall calendar and notices that an entire month has passed. He pulls off the monthly page.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTRY - DAY

Albert enters the sacristy before mass. He encounters Reverend Walsh in the hallway, who pulls an envelope out of his pocket and hands it to Albert.

WALSH

This came for you late yesterday.

ALBERT

Thank you. Good morning, Right Reverend.

Albert looks at the return address.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

It's from New York. The American Red Cross and the National Catholic Counsel.

Albert opens the envelope, unfolds the letter, and reads it aloud. Bishop Walsh has a look of satisfaction on his face.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

"We are pleased to inform you that the Prisoners of War Repatriation Committee has selected you, Father Albert, to be a member of the Planning Committee. The Committee will meet in Budapest, Hungary this summer. Travel information is forthcoming. Congratulations."

Bishop Walsh shakes Albert's hand.

EXT. FRONT OF THE CHURCH - DAY

Standing on the sidewalk in front of the church, Albert waits for a taxi. His small suitcase sits on the sidewalk by his side. He checks his watch and looks for a cab. Liz crosses the street and walks toward him.

LIZ

Father, that wine was perfect. It was enjoyed by everyone. Thanks so much for the recommendation.

ALBERT

You're most welcome. Liz... right?

LIZ

That's me.

Liz looks down at his suitcase.

LIZ (CONT'D)  
Going somewhere, Father  
Albert?

ALBERT  
Yes. I'm travelling to Europe  
to assist the prisoners of war  
repatriation effort.

LIZ  
Europe? Prisoners of war?  
What war would that be?

ALBERT  
The Great War.

LIZ  
I thought that was over years  
ago. Wasn't it?

ALBERT  
Yes. But there are still  
prisoners today. Some have  
been imprisoned for as long as  
six years.

LIZ  
Oh my. I had no idea.

ALBERT  
Very few know that. That's  
why this is so important.

LIZ  
I take it you must travel a  
long way to help?

ALBERT  
Yes, ma'am. These camps  
are in eastern Siberia.

LIZ  
Siberia?!?!? Good Lord.

Liz starts searching through her purse.

ALBERT

And frankly, I'm concerned I might get a little homesick. May I ask you... to possibly write me? You know, and tell me all the local neighborhood news?

She finds her silver Saint Christopher medallion and is poised to put it in Albert's hand.

LIZ

Of course. And here; please promise me you'll take this with you. It will keep you safe... and bring you back home safely.

Albert quizzically looks at the medallion in his hand.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Please. It's a gift. A gift of friendship from me to you.

ALBERT

You are too kind. Alright. I will watch over it... as it watches over me.

A taxi pulls up to the curb. The DRIVER calls out.

DRIVER

Railroad station?

ALBERT

Yes, sir.

DRIVER

Need help with that?

ALBERT

No. But thanks.

Albert opens the cab door, puts his suitcase on the seat, and gets in. He closes the door and opens his window.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Thank you, Liz. I promise...  
I will not forget you.

LIZ

Safe travels, Father Albert.

The taxi pulls into traffic. Liz wipes tears from her eyes.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY RAILROAD STATION - DAY

A train arrives with passenger Albert.

EXT. PORT OF NEW YORK CITY - DAY

A steamship with passenger Albert departs for eastern Europe.

EXT. TRAIN TO BUDAPEST - DAY

A train from Hamburg, Germany with passenger Albert, arrives at Budapest's Keleti Railway Terminal.

EXT. BUDAPEST SIDEWALK - DAY

Albert carries his suitcase and walks from the terminal to his assigned rooming house quarters.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE LOBBY - DAY

Albert enters the lobby. Two gentlemen sit comfortably in easy chairs reading. A third is on the phone at the front counter. Albert notices a tray there marked 'outgoing mail.' Albert is approached by MRS. DOBOSH, the proprietor. She is only five-feet tall, plump, with a friendly face.

MRS. DOBOSH

Can I help you, sir?

ALBERT

I believe I have a room here.

He presents his appointment letter.

MRS. DOBOSH

My goodness. You certainly  
are well-prepared.

She reads it and hands it back.

MRS. DOBOSH (CONT'D)

Everything looks in order. I'm  
Mrs. Dobosh. Please follow me.

Mrs. Dobosh leads Albert upstairs.

INT. ALBERT'S QUARTERS - DAY

Mrs. Dobosh unlocks the door and they enter the room. She walks to the window, opens the curtains and the shade. The room is small, but nicely appointed with a single bed, dresser, two comfortable chairs, and a desk. Mrs. Dobosh hands Albert his room key.

MRS. DOBOSH

The bathroom is just down the  
hall. Towels should be in the  
dresser. If you need anything  
else, please just let me know.  
Have a nice stay.

ALBERT

Thank you, Mrs. Dobosh.

Mrs. Dobosh closes the door. Albert looks out the window. He pulls the St. Christopher medallion out of his pocket and stares at it wistfully.

INT. PLANNING COMMITTEE WAR ROOM - DAY

The next morning, wearing his priestly collar, Albert opens the planning office door and quietly enters. The office is full of noise and activity. Cable machines are typing. Messages are ripped off and hand-delivered to various desks. Telephones ring. Planners stand and discuss issues.

A conference table waits at the far end of the office, surrounded by chairs. Upon it a table cloth, coffee urn, cups, and a partially eaten breakfast cake.

Above the table is a large map of Russia, China, and Siberia. Across the map are red stick-pins to identify the locations of the POW camps.

From west to east (left to right) over about one-thousand miles, the six camps are near: Chita, Nikolsk, Pervaja Rjetchka, Blagoveshchenk, Harbin, and Vladivostok. Albert is approached by FELIX, a neatly dressed, relatively short committee member, about age thirty.

FELIX

Good morning. Welcome. Here to join us?

ALBERT

Good morning. Yes. I am.

FELIX

You must be Father Albert. We've been expecting you. I'm Felix. Felix Warburg. Oh, yes. This post card arrived for you a few days ago.

Felix pulls a postcard from his pocket, hands it to Albert. Albert looks at it briefly, it's from Liz. He pockets it. Felix steers him toward the other committee members near the conference table. Everyone is seemingly on their best behavior, though several members whisper mischievously.

WILLOUGHBY

Why is he here?

LEWIS

Is he truly necessary?

CHESTER

Suppose we could always use some divine assistance.

FELIX

Everyone. This is Father Albert. A new member of our committee. I understand he has railway knowledge and will offer spiritual guidance when requested.

Father Albert is introduced to WILLOUGHBY, BURLE, and CHESTER. They are in their fifties, hair neatly trimmed, wearing business suits.

WILLOUGHBY

Pleasure to meet you. I'm Willoughby Walling. Representing the House of Commons.

BURLE

Hi. Burle Bramhmanall. Bundesrat. Munich.

CHESTER

Chester Graham. Parlement français.

FELIX

And continuing, Misters Strauss, Sloane, Adee and Nansen.

All four are about fifty, with receding hairlines, similarly dressed in suits. Two of them also wear vests.

LEWIS

How do you do. Lewis Strauss. War Ministry. Berlin.

WILLIAM

Nice to meet you. William Sloane. House of Lords.

ALVEY

Alvey Adee, Paris. Ministre des Armées.

NANSEN

Fridtjof Nansen. Zurich. War Minister's Office.

FELIX

And we don't want to forget committee members Farrand and Brylawski.

Mr. Farrand is wearing a striped suit and matching tie. He is a well-groomed gentleman about age thirty. Fulton wears a bow tie, vest, but no jacket. In his mid-twenties, his hair is uncombed and his sideburns lengthy.

LIVINGSTON

Hi. Livingston Farrand. Prime  
Minister's Office, London.

FULTON

Fulton Brylawski. Warsaw.

Felix pulls Albert aside and whispers to him.

FELIX

Livingston is London born and raised. Fulton, here; is a son of the Polish war minister. Though a political appointee, he's a helpful and enthusiastic member of our committee.

Felix continues the introductions.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Last, but certainly not least,  
members Keppel and Kovacs.

Keppel, age forty-five, wears a business suit and matching dark blue tie. Kovacs, age thirty, wears a business casual outfit.

FREDERICK

Pleased to meet you. Frederick  
Keppel. Zurich.

KOVACS

Stephen Kovacs. Budapest.

FELIX

And this is our committee  
chairman, Major Lively, from  
New York City.

Major LIVELY, a handsome, charismatic, uniformed army officer, six feet tall, about age forty, shakes Albert's hand.

LIVELY

Welcome aboard, Father Albert.  
An honor having a 'man of the  
cloth' on the team with us.

Felix shows Father Albert to the conference table and morning refreshments. Albert gets himself some coffee. Soon all committee members are seated around the table, with name cards, notebooks and printed cables in front of them. Felix sits next to Albert. Major LIVELY sits at the head of the table.

LIVELY

I believe our first order of business should be to continue identifying the issues we face. I think we can all agree, that the number one issue, and our primary goal continues to be: all prisoners shall depart Vladivostok before winter sets in and the harbor freezes.

General agreement expressed

WILLOUGHBY

Sir? The ships captains are seeking modifications to the interior layouts of their ships.

LIVELY

It's still not clear to me what exactly they want. Let's lock this down.

BURLE

I've noted that Bachelor quarters availability has recently become an issue.

LIVELY

How so?

BURLE

No one seems certain of their own capacity.

LIVELY

Someone must know. Mr. Burle, please contact all the BQs and confirm their current bed counts.

FULTON

Speaking of that, we still need actual prisoner counts versus the estimates we now have.

CHESTER

One explanation of these estimates could be that, since the end of hostilities, prisoners are being treated as free citizens. Many are just roaming around.

LIVINGSTON

My understanding was that these roaming prisoners were told they might be needed to do some work for the Russians.

LIVELY

We need to confirm this.

ALBERT

The most current estimates, even those based upon the best information available, are themselves, just estimates.

BURLE

I think we'll get a better sense of prisoner numbers when the trains are boarded.

LIVELY

Meanwhile, we will plan with the numbers we have.

INT. BUDAPEST TAVERN - NIGHT

The committee sits together at several tables enjoying comradery, cocktails and beer. Except Fulton, who drinks sitting at the bar. Father Albert soon excuses himself. He stands up but has difficulty keeping his balance. Felix stands and assists Albert out of the tavern.

Fulton slurs his words somewhat as he vents to a patron sitting next to him at the bar.

FULTON

Yah know, I volunteered to join this effort.

PATRON

What effort is that?

FULTON

The repatriation... of Great War prisoners.

PATRON

The Great War. Many close friends of mine never came home from that.

FULTON

I lost my older brother.

PATRON

Sorry to hear that.

FULTON

I really looked up to him. He was my hero, yah know? I loved him very much.

PATRON

Great War. Hah. Nothing great about it.

FULTON

Amen to that. He was killed during fighting between the Austro-Hungarians and the Poles.

FULTON (CONT'D)

When I learned of this so-called repatriation, I knew that its success would be just another nail in my brother's coffin.

PATRON

How's that?

FULTON

I just couldn't live with myself knowing that all these men who murdered my brother were to be freed.

PATRON

So... they're all complicit?

FULTON

As far as I'm concerned. These killers should all simply stay put in Siberia... be frozen... and forgotten.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE LOBBY - NIGHT

Albert carries a bottle-shaped paper bag, walks into the lobby and is somewhat surprised to encounter Mrs. Dobosh.

ALBERT

Oh. Good day, Mrs. Dobosh. Excuse me. Can all your guests use that telephone?

MRS. DOBOSH

Why yes. When it's available. Would you need to use it now?

ALBERT

No. Not right now. Thanks.

MRS. DOBOSH

Oh, by the way, this letter arrived for you today.

She hands him one piece of mail.

ALBERT

Thank you.

Albert walks upstairs.

INT. ALBERT'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Albert enters his room, places the paper bag on the bed, hangs up his hat and coat. He opens the shade, takes a glass from the top of the dresser, and grabs the bag. Albert sits at the desk, removes his collar, winds-up and sets his alarm clock.

He opens the bag to reveal a bottle of whiskey. Albert pours two fingers and drinks it down. Pours two more fingers and drinks it as well. Then he opens his piece of mail from Liz and reads it.

LIZ (V.O.)

Dearest Father Albert,

I pray your travel thus far has been pleasant. It's been quiet here in Trenton. Please pardon the following, but I must tell you how I feel.

After much soul searching and prayer, I've concluded that I have feelings for you. I understand the difficulties of this type of relationship. But I also believe in the power of love.

If we are meant to be, nothing will keep us apart. Do you feel the same? Your friend, Elizabeth.

Albert drinks himself to sleep.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET AND ALLEY - DAY

Albert dreams of the old man sitting alone between the garbage cans in the Trenton alley. A whiskey bottle is by his side. Albert ventures forth up the alley to talk with him.

He approaches but sees a priest sitting between the garbage cans. Albert looks more closely and sees... himself.

INT. ALBERT'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

With a jolt, suddenly Albert wakes up. After a moment, he moves to the bed, lies down and falls asleep again.

INT. PLANNING COMMITTEE WAR ROOM - DAY

Albert is running late, and in a sour mood. He arrives, heads directly to the conference table coffee urn and pours himself a cup. The table is soon cleared of morning refreshments. Members sit down behind their name cards with their coffees, notebooks and latest printed cables.

BURLE

Good morning, Major. May we talk rail transportation today?

LIVELY

You have the floor, sir.

BURLE

From all I've read, I believe we should be extremely cautious and wary of the Chinese Eastern railroad.

FELIX

Though it's the only game in town, no other railroad has had such a remarkable history.

CHESTER

And I understand no other railroad has been built under such insurmountable difficulties either.

LIVINGSTON

How does it happen that a railway with only about a thousand miles of single track can stir up so much trouble?

KOVACS

You know, probably no other railroad in the world has caused so many international complications.

ALVEE

I, too, have studied this issue and learned that the Russians sent in troops, organized police, established laws, even set up a court system.

FULTON

After all, Manchuria is in a direct line between Moscow and Vladivostok.

CHESTER

When time came to connect these two centers of Russian influence by rail, a line was first surveyed through all-Russian territory.

WILLOUGHBY

The Chinese Eastern Railway provides a shortcut for the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Burle stands up and points at the map for emphasis.

BURLE

Starting here, near Chita, the route goes across inner Manchuria, via Harbin, to Vladivostok.

The discussion pauses for a moment as Burle sits down.

FELIX

A slight change of subject, if I may. It appears we may not be departing before the cold sets in. So, an originally unforeseen issue now seems to be locating available ice-breakers.

LIVELY

This is likely to be our biggest challenge. We must be prepared for this.

FULTON

If there are no objections, I volunteer to identify and engage contractors to provide the ice-breakers we need.

LIVELY

Thank you, Fulton. And if I may, the fate of this entire operation could very well rest upon your success.

EXT. KELETI RAILWAY TERMINAL BUDAPEST - DAY

INSERT TITLE: Weeks later.

The committee train is about to leave the terminal. Major Lively, now in civilian clothes, is waiting impatiently at the entrance to the coach. Fulton is late, running through the crowded platform, with his suitcase.

LIVELY

Come on, Fulton. You don't want to be left behind, now.

Fulton is out of breath as he reaches the train.

LIVELY (CONT'D)

Don't know what we'd do  
without you.

FULTON

I'm sure... you'd figure out  
something.

Fulton gets aboard, followed by Lively. The train departs.

EXT. HUNGARIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

After departing Budapest, the train travels quickly through  
the Hungarian countryside.

INT. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' COACH - DAY

The members of the Committee are the coach's only  
passengers. They are scattered throughout the cabin.  
Fulton continues watching Albert. Lively sits next to  
Willoughby. He studies and points at a map.

LIVELY

I figure our total non-stop  
travel time to Vladivostok is  
about seven and a half days.

WILLOUGHBY

Gee, I knew it was far, but I  
thought... less than a week,  
for sure. Oh, well.

LIVELY

We'll be going from Budapest,  
to Warsaw, through Kiev, then  
Moscow... to Vladivostok.

WILLOUGHBY

My passport is ready. I'm not  
quite certain I am.

Felix sits next to Albert, who stares out the window.

FELIX

So, our trip begins.

Albert is quiet.

FELIX (CONT'D)

And the last part of it will be on the Trans-Siberian Railroad... the longest single-track railway in the world. You know, it was built just four years ago, under supervision of the Russians.

ALBERT

You don't say.

FELIX

And I suppose one could say...  
'we're off.'

ALBERT

I suppose.

FELIX

I understand we'll be travelling many hundreds of miles. Myself, I've never been more than one hundred miles outside of Budapest.

ALBERT

Well. Looks like you'll be expanding your horizons.

Albert continues to stare out the window.

FELIX

How about you?

Albert turns, faces Felix, and forcibly replies.

ALBERT

How about me, what?

FELIX

Have you ever been that far  
from Budapest?

ALBERT

My parish... is in Trenton,  
New Jersey.

FELIX

In America? Huh.  
Considerably more than one  
hundred miles outside of  
Budapest.

ALBERT

Yes. My family emigrated from  
Hungary to America in oh-four.

FELIX

I suppose that makes you... a  
world traveler.

ALBERT

I suppose.

Albert turns his head and looks out the window again.

EXT. NORTHBOUND TRAIN - DAY

The train travels through northern Hungary, then Belarus.  
Signs are posted to identify the border crossings. The sun  
sets and night falls.

INT. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' COACH - NIGHT

Albert is sleeping. Felix is reading "Lives of the  
Saints." Other committee members are sleeping or reading.

EXT. TRAIN IN RUSSIA - DAY

INSERT TITLE: Thirty-two hours later.

The train reaches the outskirts of Moscow. It stops and is  
replenished with coal and water.

A sign marks the beginning of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Burle and Willoughby procure more sandwiches and coffee at the station.

INT. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' COACH - DAY

Albert writes a letter to Liz. Lively looks at a map and speaks to Chester, his seatmate.

LIVELY

Still ahead, another eighty hours or so to the first camp. I figure that's a little more than... three days.

CHESTER

Sounds right.

LIVELY

That's good, because we probably can't survive on coffee and sandwiches much longer than that.

EXT. TRAIN TO CHITA - DAY

The train passes through a landscape covered by farms.

EXT. CHITA CAMP RAILROAD SIDING - DAY

INSERT TITLE: Three days later.

A trackman pulls the lever for the train to access the Chita siding. The train slows and makes the track shift.

INT. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' COACH - DAY

Lively stands next to Albert's seat. He gets Albert's attention as the train enters the first camp's railroad siding.

LIVELY

Father Albert... would you care to join me as we visit our first POW camp?

ALBERT

Yes sir. Of course.

LIVELY

Come talk with me as we arrive.

Albert grabs his coat and follows the Major to the platform between coaches.

INT. BETWEEN THE COACHES - DAY

Albert joins Lively. They stand and look out the window as the train passes the sign designating Chita.

EXT. CHITA CAMP RAILROAD SIDING - DAY

The train slowly passes the camp, providing an opportunity to observe conditions. All prisoners are wearing rags, sleeping in poorly made lean-tos or in the open.

A few small fires burn, surrounded by shivering men. Open trenches serve as latrines. Melted snow and rain water are collected for drinking.

LIVELY

I had no idea conditions were so bleak. God... please forgive us our delay.

ALBERT

This proves that imagining the camps, then actually witnessing them, are two very different things.

LIVELY

From what I'm told, this is typical of all the camps. Let's have a talk with the Commanding Officer.

The train stops. Fulton watches carefully from his window seat. Albert and Lively step off. They are met by two Russian soldiers and escorted to the Admin building; a converted farm house on a hill overlooking the camp.

INT. CHITA CAMP ADMIN OFFICE - DAY

Albert and Lively enter the outer office. The secretary speaks to them in slightly 'broken' English.

SECRETARY

Hah-lo. How can help?

LIVELY

Good day. We're with the Red Cross and Catholic Church to see the Commanding Officer.

SECRETARY

Moment please.

She stands, knocks on the C.O.'s door, and opens it slightly.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

Sir? Visitors for you.

INT. CHITA CAMP C.O. OFFICE - DAY

Albert and Lively sit across from Captain IVANOV, a stern but handsome, uniformed Russian officer in his mid-forties.

LIVELY

May we discuss camp and prisoner conditions?

IVANOV

Of course. There is little money for more than basic repairs here. The camp plumbing is badly broken. Beyond repair, I've been told.

ALBERT

And the prisoners' health... may we ask them directly?

IVANOV

Of course.

LIVELY

The prisoners are fed daily?

IVANOV

Of course. Local bakers and grocers contribute food as often as possible. Are you certain you don't want cookie?

ALBERT

Thank you, no. Regarding the prisoners' health, would it be possible to examine some of them?

IVANOV

Of course.

LIVELY

We also have some blankets and coats to distribute.

IVANOV

All donations are welcome.

LIVELY

And we'd like to get a prisoner count, in preparation for the coming trains.

IVANOV

That should help us all. Ah, coming trains? You know something of coming trains?

ALBERT

Just that they should be... coming. Captain, we'd also like to drop off two of our staff members to help prepare the prisoners for evacuation.

LIVELY

We also plan to leave a pair of staff members at each of the other camps, as well.

IVANOV

Excellent. Anything else?

ALBERT

I believe we've covered everything.

IVANOV

Very good.

They stand, shake hands and the visitors begin to leave.

IVANOV (CONT'D)

Would you please... close door? Thank you.

They do. The C.O. picks up his phone to make a call.

INT. CHITA CAMP ADMIN OFFICE - DAY

Lively and Albert talk with the fast-typing secretary.

LIVELY

Hello again.

SECRETARY

Hah-lo.

LIVELY

My goodness, you're quick.

SECRETARY

Thank you. Finished talking, yes?

LIVELY

Yes. Yes, we are. Is there a cable station nearby?

SECRETARY

At railway station.

ALBERT

Would you also have personnel records... here... in these files?

SECRETARY

Pers-sun-ell... records?

ALBERT

Yes. Pers-sun-ell records? In this office?

SECRETARY

No. No. Sorry. Not here. In Vladivostok. My friend, Anna. Her office is administration.

INT. CHITA CAMP C.O. OFFICE - DAY

Ivanov is on the phone.

IVANOV

This is Captain Ivanov... yes, Ivanov. In Chita... on railroad board. Can I speak with Lebedev? Yes, Lebedev. Can I leave message? Tell him I know how to increase railroad revenue. Yes. Make more money. Have him call me.

EXT. CHITA CAMP - DAY

Albert and Lively walk through the camp with a Russian soldier shadowing them. They wave to Willoughby and Burle on the train who grab blankets and coats and begin distributing them.

They witness first-hand and close-up the stark camp conditions. Albert quietly explains his desire to see personnel records.

ALBERT

Based on our discussion here,  
I'm convinced there is some  
connection between this C.O.  
and the railroad.

LIVELY

Perhaps the C.O.'s at the  
other camps as well.

ALBERT

The personnel files should  
enlighten us.

EXT. TRAIN TO NIKOLSK - DAY

The train speeds east to the Nikolsk Camp.

EXT. NIKOLSK CAMP RAILROAD SIDING - DAY

A trackman pulls the lever, the train shifts tracks, slows  
and stops on the siding designated 'Nikolsk.' We hear the  
train engine release steam and quietly chug.

Lively steps off and is met by two Russian soldiers,  
presents a copy of the government agreement, and briefly  
explains the stop.

LIVELY

Good day, gentlemen. We  
represent the Hungarian  
government and the Catholic  
Church.

SOLDIER

Hah-lo. We represent  
commanding officer.

LIVELY

Very good. According to our  
agreement with the provisional  
government, we'll be dropping  
off two of our members to  
prepare the prisoners for  
later evacuation.

Behind him, Chester Graham and Lewis Strauss step off.

EXT. PERVAJA RJECHKA RAILROAD SIDING - DAY

Behind Lively, William Sloane and Alvey Adee step off.

EXT. BLAGOVESKCHENK RAILROAD SIDING - DAY

Livingston Farrand and Frederick Keppel are dropped off.

EXT. HARBIN RAILROAD SIDING - DAY

Fridtjof Nansen and Fulton Brylawski step off behind Lively, who speaks to them.

LIVELY

Gentlemen. See you in  
Vladivostok.

EXT. TRAIN TO VLADIVOSTOK - DAY

The train speeds on to the harbor station.

EXT. TRAIN AT VLADIVOSTOK STATION - DAY

The train stops at the end of the line. Albert, Lively, Felix and Kovacs step off each carrying a bag. A station conductor directs them to the base gate, less than half a mile away.

They pass several groups of soldiers standing about the platform waiting to board a westbound train.

KOVACS

Guess they're awaiting the  
next westbound train.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK BASE GATE - DAY

The base guard checks his list, provides temporary base-badges and directions to the BQ.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK BASE - DAY

The group walks down the hill, gets a glimpse of the docks, and detours to visit them. After a brief self-guided tour, they continue to the BQ.

INT. VLADIVOSTOK BACHELOR QUARTERS - DAY

Albert, Major Lively, Felix Warburg and Stephen Kovacs enter the BQ lobby and 'check-in.' Lively is handed a cable that he quickly reads to himself and pockets. The clerk places their bags on a small cart.

INT. BQ FACILITIES - DAY

The guests start with a brief self-guided tour of the facility. To include a quick look at their rooms, the mess hall and showers. They then depart to the pier office.

INT. PIER OFFICE AND CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The office and adjoining conference room have large windows conveniently facing the pier. The lights are turned on throughout the empty office and conference room. Albert, Major Lively, Felix and Kovacs choose their desks and explore the few amenities. A coffee mess in one corner and a restroom in the other.

LIVELY

I understand we're expecting  
five steamships: all former  
passenger liners or mail  
ships. The *Scharnhorst*,  
*Meinham*, *Stiegerwald*,  
*Frankfurt*, and *Pierre Benoi*.

ALBERT

Most likely, all arriving at  
different times.

LIVELY

Yes. And remember, there should be no premature announcements of arrivals. Those tend to become rumors.

ALBERT

When discovered not to be based in fact, they've caused many prisoners to become extremely depressed.

LIVELY

These cases of depression have resulted in many suicides.

KOVACS

Five in one camp alone.

LIVELY

The faster we get the prisoners home, the more quickly we eliminate that problem.

Lively pulls out a folder of eight-by-ten black and white photos from his briefcase. The team gathers to look at them.

BEGIN MONTAGE - PRISONER SUICIDES

- Photo: POW body lays next to the railroad track.
- POW walks down the railroad track and shoots himself in the mouth.

LIVELY (V.O.)

After obtaining a pistol, a POW strolled out of camp, walked about twenty yards down the track, put the end of the gun barrel in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

- Photo: Mangled and bloody POW body lays on the tracks.
- POW is hit by fast freight train.

LIVELY (V.O.)

A prisoner walked west along the tracks when a full speed freight train comes along from the east. The POW quickly ran and laid down across the tracks. The train could not stop in time.

- Photo: A POW body is hanging from a tree.
- Prisoner hangs himself.

LIVELY (V.O.)

A Russian guard, making his morning rounds, arrived at the camp latrine area and looked up to find a prisoner had hanged himself from a tree.

- Photo: And many POWs simply 'give-up' one night.
- Bloodied bodies throughout a camp.

LIVELY (V.O.)

Here, when prisoners awakened, they discovered their bloody comrades throughout the camp with slit throats and wrists.

END OF MONTAGE.

LIVELY

Everywhere were dead and bloodied bodies with knives and other sharp objects nearby.

EXT. SNOWCOVERED TRAIL - DAY

The group of five poorly dressed, former Chita prisoners (from the opening) continue their trudge through the snow.

INT. PIER OFFICE - DAY

Albert stands in front of the base map posted on the wall. Felix walks up behind him.

FELIX

Becoming familiar with the neighborhood?

ALBERT

Just looking for the administration building.

Felix stands beside Albert, and squints at the map.

FELIX

Can't be too far from here. Aah! There it is. On the east end of the BQ.

ALBERT

Where? Oh, yes. Thanks. My eyes can't see the way they used to. Guess I must be getting old.

FELIX

Life happens to all of us, my friend.

ALBERT

You are so right.

FELIX

And it's important to savor every moment.

ALBERT

My goodness, Felix. You've become quite the philosopher.

FELIX

Life is a unique gift. It's amazing to me how some folks never quite realize that.

ALBERT

Maybe some folks are just too busy with their daily lives. Or perhaps it's just too difficult to get beyond something and make a change.

FELIX

That's truly unfortunate. I believe this life is whatever you want and make it to be. And change is quite natural.

ALBERT

But what if there's something holding you back?

FELIX

No, sir. I don't buy that. This is your life. You are responsible for adjustments.

Albert guides Felix to a quiet corner of the office to better facilitate their conversation.

ALBERT

My friend, lately I've been dealing with something very personal. I don't believe anyone can really help me except... maybe myself.

FELIX

Do you need money?

ALBERT

No. But thanks. It's more like... well... I was going to say, it's more like a faith issue.

FELIX

You haven't lost your faith? Have you?

ALBERT

No... well not entirely. But it's fair to say... my faith's been shaken somewhat.

FELIX

Being a priest, that must be quite challenging.

ALBERT

And it's always there. Sorta like an annoying relative who just won't go home at the end of an evening.

FELIX

I think I get the picture. You'll be in my prayers.

EXT. ADMIN BUILDING SECURITY - DAY

Pointing to his security badge, Albert is waved forward.

INT. ADMIN BUILDING SECRETARY POOL OFFICE - DAY

Albert fishes in his pocket and finds the note. At the first desk, he quietly inquires.

ALBERT

Pardon me. I am looking for Anna. Is Anna working today?

The woman at the first desk turns around in her chair and points to the back of the large office. The back row of desks is in front of a wall of file cabinets. In the middle of the row, Albert sees the nameplate on Anna's desk.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

I see her desk. Thank you.

Albert quietly walks to the back of the office and slowly down the last row of desks. He stops in front of Anna's desk and quietly introduces himself.

Albert quietly explains the reference he received at Chita camp regarding personnel records. Anna waves her arm at all the file cabinets behind her across the back wall.

INT. PIER OFFICE - DAY

Albert returns and sits down at his desk.

ALBERT

Got what I was hoping for.

LIVELY

Very good.

ALBERT

Apparently, only one camp  
C.O. is also on the railroad  
board of directors.

LIVELY

Ivanov?

ALBERT

The one and only.

LIVELY

And whatever he's up to, he's  
at the western most camp.

ALBERT

Yes. I believe his reach is  
very long. We should keep an  
eye on this fellow.

INT. PIER OFFICE/DESKS - DAY

The team members work at their desks.

LIVELY

Father Albert... I think we  
should finalize evacuation  
plans for each camp.

ALBERT

I agree. And we should also  
coordinate timetables for all  
the trains.

LIVELY

Timing will be critical. All  
the departures must be well-  
synchronized.

Kovacs volunteers to coordinate a prisoner transfer.

KOVACS

Excuse me. With some assistance from base security, I see no reason to delay the transfer of Vladivostok camp prisoners to the BQ.

LIVELY

Agreed. Thank you. Make it so, Mr. Kovacs.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK CAMP/BACHELOR QUARTERS - DAY

Local POWs requiring medical assistance are escorted first. Remaining POWs follow, from the local camp to the base BQ.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

Two of the five expected steamships have arrived at the pier. Their captains enter the pier office space.

INT. PIER OFFICE - DAY

The small office gathering is soon noticed through the windows by anxious boarding and gossiping POWs.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

Suspicious, and sensing with concern that they are the subject of the office gathering, the POWs soon stop their ship boarding and migrate toward the pier office. They form a crowd of gawkers just outside the office windows.

INT. PIER OFFICE - DAY

Lively begins with introductions.

LIVELY

I'm Major Lively. This is Father Albert, Felix, and Mr. Kovacs.

CAPTAIN X

Good day, gentlemen. As you can see, two of your expected ships have arrived. Many folks seem anxious to get aboard.

CAPTAIN Y

We thought it would be good to discuss our requirements with you, to avoid any confusion.

LIVELY

Certainly.

ALBERT

Perhaps we should include some prisoners in this discussion?

LIVELY

After all, they are your customers...

The captains look at each other and nod in agreement.

CAPTAIN X

Fine with us. If you think you can accommodate them all.

INT. PIER OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Albert turns on the lights in the conference room and the Major unlocks and opens the outside door. The POWs stream in. About one hundred of them fill the conference room.

LIVELY

We are fortunate to have two ships' captains with us to talk about their boarding requirements. Captain...

CAPTAIN X

Gentlemen... once at capacity, we-are-not leaving anyone behind. However, it is also important to note that we will not over-crowd our ships.

CAPTAIN X (CONT'D)

Again, we will not over-crowd the ships. Our route includes travel through the tropics, which makes it extremely uncomfortable below deck.

ALBERT

Excuse me, Captain. I believe most of these men have heard that logic before.

All the prisoners grumble among themselves.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

My understanding, though, is that everyone agrees travel through the tropics is much preferred... to another winter's stay in Siberia.

CAPTAIN Y

And we believe it's far better to discuss issues like these now, before we get underway. The basis for our over-crowding rule is a lesson learned over many years of travelling through the tropics. However, in this case... due to the circumstances of your request... it will be waived.

ALBERT

So, I take it we should consider this matter resolved?

Aye is the group response. Then quiet.

CAPTAIN X

Matter resolved.

The group cheers and begins to file out.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - SUNSET

Albert walks across the pier, gazing at the harbor. He inspects the hulls of the arrived ships. Ice is forming.

ALBERT

(to himself)

I pray Fulton was able to contract those ice-breakers.

EXT. STIEGERWALD AT THE PIER - NEXT DAY

POWs walk up the gangplank to board the *Stiegerwald*. Albert and Lively stand on the pier observing.

LIVELY

Because of the number of stowaways we've recently discovered, I've issued orders to prevent a recurrence.

Lively and Albert continue to witness the boarding.

ALBERT

Stowaways?!? Even after we've announced that no one will be left behind?

LIVELY

Yes. It would appear our credibility is suffering. These prisoners have lived with lies and rumors for so long, they don't know who or what to trust.

ALBERT

Each man still goes aboard with all the luggage he can carry. Correct?

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

While boarding a ship, one POW carries a large bundle.

LIVELY (V.O.)

Correct. But there was one man who came along the gangplank with an extra-large bundle on his back. He was momentarily stopped from boarding.

ALBERT (V.O.)

I think I may know that man. He's been looking after his younger brother for some time, now. So, you were saying the stow-away problem persists?

LIVELY (V.O.)

Afraid so. When this specific prisoner was told he had too big a bundle, he looked the guard straight in the eye and mournfully said...

POW

Mister, all I've got in the world is in this bundle.

LIVELY (V.O.)

He was so convincing and sorrowful that the guard said:

GUARD

Alright... go on board.

The POW boards with his 'luggage.'

INT. STIEGERWALD BELOW DECK - DAY

FLASHBACK: CONTINUED

A guard makes his rounds.

LIVELY (V.O.)

Later, while the passengers were getting settled, a guard made his rounds.

LIVELY (V.O.) CONT'D

He spotted something unusual  
in a passenger 'rack' area.

A large 'something' is on the deck between racks, about six feet long, wrapped in a blanket and tied with rope. The guard stares at it for a moment. Then notices it move slightly.

GUARD

Hey! This yours?

POW

What?

GUARD

Caw-mere. Look. This yours?

POW

Ah, yes sir.

GUARD

Well, move it.

POW

What?

GUARD

I said... move it.

The POW struggles as he tries to slide the bundle onto a nearby hammock rack. In the process, the ropes come undone, his brother falls out, and hits the deck. The brother's legs are tied, and he is trussed up in such a way that he could be carried aboard.

GUARD

Would you look at that. Could  
it be... a stowaway?

POW

Le'me splain. Le'me splain.

GUARD

Oh no. Not necessary. We'll  
just toss this overboard.

The guard reaches down to grab the body.

POW  
No! No! My brother! That my  
brother!

The guard stops and turns to the POW.

GUARD  
Your brother? I don't care if  
it's your mother. Rules is  
rules. No stowaways.

POW  
(tearing up)  
Please. Please. He 'fraid we  
get left behind. But we go  
home now. We go home.

The guard relents, shakes his head and mutters as he walks away.

GUARD  
We go home now. Geez.

END FLASHBACK.

Albert and Lively continue observing the ship boarding.

LIVELY  
I've concluded there remains a  
loop-hole in the boarding  
policy.

ALBERT  
Really? You know... it all  
depends on one's point of  
view. I like to think of it  
as our 'humanitarian  
exception.'

INT. LIZ'S FAMILY HOME - DAY

INSERT TITLE: Trenton, New Jersey

At a gathering in her family's modest home, surrounded by a small group of family and close friends, Liz blows out the twenty-one birthday candles on her cake. Then, Liz opens a card from her MOTHER.

The front of the card confirms this is her twenty-first birthday. In the card, she finds several tickets for trains and steamships.

LIZ

Oh my! Mother! This is a wonderful surprise! I... I can't thank you enough.

MOTHER

Elizabeth, dear. We felt it was time for you to visit Budapest. Your Aunt and Uncle will be awaiting your arrival.

Liz places the tickets on the table. We see the destination is Budapest. Liz begins to cry 'happy tears.

INT. BACHELOR QUARTERS CLUB - DAY

Albert sits alone drinking at the bar in the dimly lit BQ Club. He stares ahead, through the bottles, into the mirror behind the bar. He covers his eyes and thinks about the man in the Trenton alley.

FLASHBACK BEGINS:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET AND ALLEY - DAY

Old man sitting alone between the garbage cans about halfway up the alley. An almost empty whiskey bottle by his side.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

INT. BACHELOR QUARTERS CLUB - DAY

After more shots of whiskey, Albert gets up to leave. He has difficulty standing and keeping his balance.

INT. CHITA CAMP C.O. OFFICE - DAY

Establish Chita camp, the C.O. Office door, then his desk. Captain Ivanov's phone rings. He answers.

IVANOV

Captain Ivanov. Lebedev! How are you? Good. Yes. Listen, my friend. What? The Board is meeting soon? Hold phone. I have plan so railroad makes much money.

LEBEDEV

(on phone, filtered)  
Ivanov. Perhaps you come see me. So, we can discuss, how do you say, man-to-man.

EXT. EACH SWITCHING STATION - NIGHT

All stations receive a cable including instructions to be shared with staffs of switchmen. The switching stations distribute signal lights and tools to their men who prepare to proceed as directed.

EXT. ALL FIVE SIDINGS - NIGHT

Two switchmen position themselves at the western junction of each siding. They prepare to signal the next POW train. Faux repair crews are also positioned similarly on all the sidings to communicate an 'excuse' to the train engineer and then simulate track switching repair work.

INT. RAILWAY HEADQUARTERS/LEBEDEV OFFICE - DAY

ESTABLISH: Headquarters building.

Captain Ivanov meets with Lebedev, the board chairman. LEBEDEV is about forty-five, in uniform, a rather short senior officer. Ivanov appears less than enthusiastic.

LEBEDEV

I understand ransom plan. But we have bigger problem.

IVANOV

Bigger problem?

LEBEDEV

Yes. Much bigger problem.  
Efforts to repatriate  
thousands of prisoners...  
could become international  
public relations fiasco.

IVANOV

How is this possible?

LEBEDEV

You are aware of camp  
conditions? Yes?

IVANOV

Of course.

LEBEDEV

This is new day. Does not  
matter what may have been  
considered fair treatment or  
even fair conditions. If  
truth becomes public  
knowledge, it could be very  
damaging.

IVANOV

We did best we could.

LEBEDEV

Listen. Facts don't matter.  
What matters is perception.

IVANOV

We can't change facts.

LEBEDEV

Correct. But, we can  
influence public perception...  
and sell many newspapers.

IVANOV

OK. So, I get promotion?

LEBEDEV

No... not quite. But  
congratulations on your new  
assignment! You are now  
officially responsible for  
prisoner dis-information.

IVANOV

Sounds like de-motion.

LEBEDEV

No, no. New assignment.

IVANOV

Dis-information?

LEBEDEV

Propaganda.

IVANOV

May take some time... to make  
adjustment.

LEBEDEV

Take all the time you need.

EXT. RAILWAY HEADQUARTERS ROOF - DAY

Ivanov walks out the access door and across the roof of the  
building. He breaths deeply and looks up to the sky.

IVANOV

Twenty years. This is how you  
thank someone for twenty years  
of loyal service?

He shakes his head, walks back and re-enters the stairway.

INT. CHITA CAMP CABLE ROOM - NIGHT

The official Vladivostok Pier Office cable is received in  
the Chita camp rail station cable room. A portion is read  
out loud by the cable station operator.

CHITA OPERATOR

Train departure times will be based upon camp distance from Vladivostok.

INT. NIKOLSK CAMP CABLE ROOM - NIGHT

Another cable operator continues reading.

NIKOLSK OPERATOR

Trains at camps closest to Vladivostok will depart first.

INT. BLAGOVESHCHENK CAMP CABLE ROOM - NIGHT

Another cable operator continues reading.

BLAGOVESHCHENK OPERATOR

Trains incrementally further from the harbor will depart one at a time, west to east.

INT. PERVAJA RJETCHKA CAMP CABLE ROOM - NIGHT

Another cable operator continues reading.

RJETCHKA OPERATOR

Trains at camps furthest from the harbor will depart last.

INT. HARBIN CAMP CABLE ROOM - NIGHT

Another cable operator continues reading.

HARBIN OPERATOR

Trains must carefully follow the agreed-to time schedule.

EXT. ALL FIVE CAMP SIDINGS - NIGHT

Train loading of prisoners begins. Sick POWs are accommodated first, then remaining POWs board.

The two deposited committee members at each camp are the camp evacuation leaders. They check their watches and confirm passenger readiness.

INT. TRAIN ENGINEER CAB - DAY

Evacuation leader, Burle, converses with an engineer.

BURLE

You must be ready when the order is given. Remember, you are but one of five prisoner trains, all making this coordinated run east to Vladivostok... Simultaneously.

INT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER OFFICE - NIGHT

Boarding confirmations are received.

KOVACS

All POWs have been evacuated. They're on the trains and ready. Sending departure orders. All camps confirm trains have departed, sir.

Pop. Felix opens a bottle of champagne. Gets everyone a glass.

ALBERT

None for me, thank you.

FELIX

Are you certain?

ALBERT

I've lately had some balance issues. And a recent rather unpleasant drinking experience.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. BACHELOR QUARTERS FRONT DESK - DAY

ALBERT (V.O.)

I was recently attacked by a  
bottle of local liquor.

Albert visits the front desk.

ALBERT

Excuse me. I'm in Room One-  
eleven. I'm searching for a  
beverage. Alcoholic, in  
nature. Whiskey, perhaps?  
Whiskey?

CLERK

Whiskey? I don't know  
whiskey. Vodka? I know. And  
I know where to get vodka.

INT. BQ HALLWAY - DAY

INSERT TITLE: Later.

We go down hallway, past Albert's room number one-eleven.  
Then further down and across the hall, stopping in front of  
the men's room door. This door is labeled in Russian  
'Muzhskaya Komnata.'

From inside the men's room, we hear someone retching...  
throwing-up violently. Soon, all is quiet. Then, we hear  
the toilet flushing. Albert slowly staggers out of the  
door and into the hall. He wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOC PIER - DAY

Albert sits on a pier pylon, looking to the horizon.

ALBERT (V.O.)

It caused me to... to re-  
evaluate many things.

END FLASHBACK.

FELIX

Maybe later?

ALBERT

Doubtful. I think I'm gonna  
take a walk.

Albert dresses warmly and departs. Lively raises his glass.

LIVELY

To the safe return of all the  
prisoners.

ALL

Here, here.

EXT. ALL TRAINS ON MAIN TRACKS - NIGHT

Each of the five POW trains travel eastward to Vladivostok.

EXT. ALL FIVE SIDINGS - NIGHT

A mile or two east of each camp, an Eastern Chinese Railroad team of track switchmen is poised. At the junctions with each of the five sidings, these teams have lanterns and tools and watch for approaching trains.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK BASE - NIGHT

It is snowing. Albert walks the length of the pier, turns and walks up the hill past the BQ, toward the main gate.

INT. VALDIVOSTOK PIER OFFICE - NIGHT

It is snowing outside as Lively looks up at the wall clock.

LIVELY

The train from Harbin should  
be here first... in about  
twelve hours. The other  
trains should begin  
arriving... some nine hours  
after that.

Kovacs writes some notes to himself.

KOVACS

Roger that. Noon tomorrow,  
then about nine tomorrow  
evening.

FELIX

Of course, that's if world  
events don't interfere.

LIVELY

Now Felix, don't be a  
naysayer.

Kovacs points to a newspaper on Felix's desk.

KOVACS

May I see that?

FELIX

Be my guest.

Kovacs reads a newspaper article out loud.

KOVACS

'Conditions in Vladivostok, at  
present, are reported to be  
quiet. But no one has  
confidence in the continuation  
of that. Trouble is expected  
soon between the Russians and  
the Japanese.'

LIVELY

Don't let that speculation  
interfere with the mission.

FELIX

Besides, there must be a  
thousand other things that  
could go wrong.

KOVACS

I wonder how much of this is  
fact, and how much is  
propaganda.

FELIX

I, for one, refuse to dwell on  
any negative possibilities.

A Chinese Eastern cable is received. Kovacs rips the message  
off the teletype and gets everyone's attention.

KOVACS

All the trains have stopped.

LIVELY

Did I hear you correctly?

KOVACS

Just received a cable from  
Chinese Eastern.

LIVELY

What does it say?

KOVACS

From: The Board of  
Directors, Chinese Eastern  
Railroad. To: Prisoner of War  
Repatriation Committee. Sirs:  
It is with regret that we  
inform you about the  
unfortunate delay being  
experienced by all our trains.  
High priority, unscheduled  
track switching maintenance  
has been directed by the  
Board. It must be  
accomplished before further  
movement of trains. We  
apologize for any  
inconvenience. Further  
guidance forthcoming.

FELIX

Holy crap.

EXT. ALL TRAINS ON ALL SIDINGS - NIGHT

At the western junction of each siding, each prisoner train  
is signaled onto the siding.

All trains slow down, make the switch and stop. A switchman approaches each engineer's cab. Each engineer hops down from his cab.

EXT. CHITA TRAIN ON SIDING - NIGHT

The first engineer down from his cab.

ENGINEER #1  
Everything OK?

EXT. NIKOLSK TRAIN ON SIDING - NIGHT

The second engineer down from his cab.

SWITCHMAN B  
Just a little switch maintenance.

ENGINEER #2  
Switch maintenance? In the  
middle of the night?

EXT. RJETCHKA TRAIN ON SIDING - NIGHT

The third engineer down from his cab.

SWITCHMAN C  
Instructions from our  
headquarters.

ENGINEER #3  
What?!?

EXT. BLAGOVESHCHENK TRAIN ON SIDING - NIGHT

The fourth engineer down from his cab.

SWITCHMAN D  
Just following orders.

ENGINEER #4  
Good grief.

EXT. HARBIN TRAIN ON SIDING - NIGHT

The final engineer, down from his cab, starts walking to his train's caboose.

SWITCHMAN E  
Hey. Where are you going?

ENGINEER #5  
To tell my passengers.

INT. PIER OFFICE - NIGHT

Lively, Kovacs, and Felix man the office.

LIVELY  
Prepare an urgent cable to our representative in Budapest.

KOVACS  
Yes, sir.

LIVELY  
Reference and forward the railroad's cable and request immediate guidance.

KOVACS  
On its way.

Kovacs is interrupted by another arriving cable.

KOVACS (CONT'D)  
Stand by, Major. We're receiving another cable...

Kovacs rips it off and reads it out loud.

KOVACS (CONT'D)  
'Due to significant adjustments of railway fares throughout the industry, we are compelled to raise our passenger fares effective immediately.'

KOVACS (CONT'D)

'Unless prompt payment is received, there will be no further movement of trains.'

Kovacs walks over to Lively and hands him the typed cable. The Major finishes reading it aloud.

LIVELY

'We respectfully request that all customers remit immediately. We apologize for the inconvenience. Blah, blah, blah. Send this to Budapest as well.'

FELIX

Unless prompt payment of the increased fare is made, how do you say, our goose is cooked.

LIVELY

This is not yet over.

EXT. CHURCH FRONT ENTRANCE (TRENTON, NEW JERSEY)- DAY

Church bells ring. Bishop Walsh greets parishioners after mass.

WALSH

Why, good morning, Miss Elizabeth.

LIZ

Good morning. Have you heard anything from Father Albert?

WALSH

Why no, my dear. Sorry. I'll certainly let you know when I do. Something wrong?

LIZ

Well, I've sent several postcards and a letter, and gotten no response at all.

WALSH

I understand the mail system  
there is not always reliable.

LIZ

I suppose I can wait a little  
longer. Thank you.

INT. BASE CHAPEL - NIGHT

Wandering across the base through the snow, Albert finds himself in front of the small base chapel. He enters the doorway and shakes the snow off his shoulders. The door closes behind him. He is alone.

Many devotion candles are lit on both sides of the small altar. They are the only source of light. There are just five rows of pews. Albert lays his coat and hat in one pew, slowly walks up the short aisle.

He goes to the right side of the altar, drops coins in the box, and lights a candle. He walks to the center and kneels at the altar rail. It's very quiet, except for the sound of the cold wind blowing outside. He folds his hands, looks up at the crucifix above the altar and prays.

ALBERT

Lord, forgive me for all my  
transgressions. And please  
give me strength... please  
give everyone strength to see  
this repatriation through to a  
successful conclusion. Also,  
please share with me the  
wisdom I need to get beyond my  
seminary sin.

Albert stops and thinks a moment.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

I'm hopeful this travel will  
clear my mind and help me find  
an answer.

Suddenly, the chapel door opens. A gust of cold air blows in some snow.

Albert slowly turns around and sees what appears to be another priest. The chapel door closes. Albert faces the altar again. Makes the sign of the cross and stands. He walks slowly back up the aisle, chooses a spot and sits.

The newly arrived fellow priest sits down in the pew across the aisle from Albert. The fellow priest is tall and thin, in his eighties, almost bald, and has a well-trimmed beard. It is strangely quiet except for the wind. Several minutes go by. The FELLOW priest picks up a hymnal, flips through its pages, then puts it down.

FELLOW

It's always a challenge.

ALBERT

Pardon me?

FELLOW

It's always a challenge. For many years now, I've been searching.

ALBERT

Searching?

FELLOW

Yes. Searching.

ALBERT

Searching for what?

FELLOW

Thank you for asking. Most people ignore me. Or figure I'm just nuts.

ALBERT

That seems a bit impolite.

FELLOW

I usually smile and wish them a good day.

ALBERT

So, for what are you searching?

FELLOW

Excuse me?

ALBERT

What are you searching for?

FELLOW

An answer. An answer to my quest. How can I be a better priest? Ever since my seminary days, that's been my quest... to learn how I can be a better priest.

ALBERT

That's a bit subjective, don't you think?

FELLOW

I suppose. In some ways. But once I find a metric, I'll be set. Have you ever thought about it that way?

ALBERT

Not in so many words.

FELLOW

But you have thought about it?

ALBERT

I suppose. What were you saying about your seminary days?

FELLOW

Oh, yes. It was then, that I realized something... I was attending the seminary for the wrong reason.

ALBERT

Wait. You were attending the seminary for the wrong reason?

FELLOW

I know. Crazy, right? Think about it. Who would ever do such a thing?

ALBERT

Perhaps it's not as crazy as you believe.

FELLOW

What makes you say that?

ALBERT

I may know of someone who did the very same thing.

FELLOW

No! You must be joking. Why, this is amazing! How is it that the two of us, complete strangers, happen to be sitting here together, on a snowy night in Vladivostok... knowing of two people who did the same right thing for the wrong reason? Glorious. I'll tell you my story, if you tell me yours.

ALBERT

OK... Sure. It was me. I attended seminary... not to become a priest, but I believed it was my only opportunity... my only chance... to obtain an affordable college education. Very selfish of me. But, nevertheless, very true.

A brief pause in the conversation.

FELLOW

My turn. I was in love. And I went to the seminary... to follow my love. His name was William. It didn't work out.

FELLOW (CONT'D)

He drifted away. But, that was years ago. I've finally gotten over it. Been assigned here as a faithful servant of the Lord ever since.

ALBERT

My seminary sin suddenly seems... less significant. What kept you going?

FELLOW

Faith, my friend. Of all the things I could have lost, I still had my faith. And ever since, it seems to grow stronger with each passing year.

ALBERT

Faith. Of course. I don't know why I'm the least bit surprised. It is the key to everything.

FELLOW

It seems to have worked for me. Why not give it another chance?

ALBERT

I do remember embracing faith years ago. I recall how it helped me finish seminary.

FELLOW

See. You even have an example.

ALBERT

And... I wasn't unhappy. I had purpose.

FELLOW

Do you have purpose now?

ALBERT

Ah, I think so. I chose to travel thousands of miles... and participate in this repatriation effort.

FELLOW

Guess somebody had to do it.

ALBERT

I do have another question.

FELLOW

Hope I have another answer.

ALBERT

I recently met a lovely girl in my parish and we have become friends...

FELLOW

Just friends?

ALBERT

Yes. Just friends. But I think of her all the time. I fear it may turn into something more.

FELLOW

Truly good friends are rare.

ALBERT

Before I left, she gave me this.

Albert shows him the St. Christopher medallion.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

And every time I look at it, I think of her. Tell me, my new friend, what shall I do?

FELLOW

Well, I'm no expert in male/female relationships, but I can tell you this. Truly good friends are rare to find. Talk with each other... about options and consequences. And remember, true love usually conquers all. Have faith, my friend. Faith is always the answer. Hope that's helpful.

ALBERT

Thank you.

Fellow priest stands up, takes a step toward the alter, then turns around.

FELLOW

And may good fortune smile upon you.

The fellow priest turns again, slowly walks up to the altar rail and kneels to pray. Albert puts on his hat and coat, and quietly exits into the falling snow.

INT. PIER OFFICE - NIGHT

Major Lively, Kovacs and Felix discuss the train situation.

FELIX

Our greatest nightmare.  
That's what this is. Our  
greatest nightmare.

LIVELY

We really need to exhaust all  
our options.

KOVACS

If the communication lines  
stay open, we sort of have the  
proverbial snowflake's chance.

LIVELY

Gentlemen. As far as we know, requests have been made all the way to the State Department... to secure more favorable rates.

KOVACS

Sounds like the chain of command has been followed.

FELIX

What more can be done? This waiting for a response is maddening.

KOVACS

Major, have we contacted all the right individuals? Perhaps, we should review our cables again.

LIVELY

Guess it can't hurt.

KOVACS

Some provision must be made to meet this emergency.

LIVELY

I believe the State Department should be involved. They should cable the Chinese Eastern Railroad directly.

FELIX

That may take too long. State should directly secure some reasonable action on these exorbitant tolls. A considerable concession is what's needed.

KOVACS

The Red Cross needs to communicate with the government and make a payment guarantee of some kind.

LIVELY

Hopefully, the question of obtaining a reasonable rate is still an open one.

The office door opens and closes. Albert stomps his feet and shakes off the snow. He hangs up his hat and coat.

FELIX

Father Albert! You've returned.

ALBERT

Yes, my friends.

KOVACS

You won't believe it!

ALBERT

Excuse me?

LIVELY

All the trains have stopped.

ALBERT

Mechanical failure?

FELIX

Nope.

ALBERT

Military intervention of some sort?

KOVACS

Nope.

ALBERT

OK. I give up.

LIVELY

Chinese Eastern is holding them all hostage.

ALBERT

Why am I not surprised?

LIVELY

They're demanding a significant fare increase.

KOVACS

Here are all the cables.

Albert quickly looks through them.

ALBERT

What is their basis?

FELIX

Because they can.

LIVELY

They claim it's driven by rate increases across the industry.

ALBERT

But we don't buy that? Right?

LIVELY

No. Certainly not. It's twice as much as the originally contracted price.

FELIX

This is highway robbery.  
Highway robbery.

LIVELY

Certainly, railway robbery. We need to come up with some alternatives while we await word from the Red Cross and the Hungarian government.

KOVACS

Isn't it only the government  
that can guarantee payment?

ALBERT

Not exclusively. We're  
talking about a huge payment  
guarantee, here. Double the  
fares for about... eighteen  
hundred prisoners. That may  
be pocket change for some, but  
right now, the Hungarian  
economy is still recovering  
from the war.

KOVACS

So, if I'm correct, our  
exercise now is to stand-by  
for an agreement... to meet  
the railroad's newly proposed  
rate?

ALBERT

I don't think standing-by will  
be the answer.

LIVELY

OK. Then... who among us has  
negotiating experience?

Quiet.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

Trenton neighborhood street game of 'keep away.'

END FLASHBACK.

ALBERT

I have... some. A little.

LIVELY

Thank you, Father... for  
volunteering.

ALBERT

Okay... Hmm. Mr. Kovacs, is there a way for me to have private and direct cable communication with the railroad board?

KOVACS

Think so. Sure. Alright.

ALBERT

First, the railway must be convinced that I am the sole point of contact. That I represent the Red Cross, the Catholic church, the Hungarian government, the Repatriation Committee... basically all the key players.

KOVACS

Got it.

FELIX

What do you have in mind?

KOVACS

Father, I think I have your introduction to the railway board.

ALBERT

Excellent. Let me know when it's sent.

FELIX

This entire thing should have quite the pay-off. What role have I?

ALBERT

All of us will be counting on you for support once the cables start flying. We'll need a dedicated monitor for all incoming messages.

LIVELY

So, once you're established as the sole negotiator, shall I just... get out of the way?

ALBERT

Don't stray too far, my friend. I plan to rely on your military knowledge and experience.

The office is very quiet. Minutes go by. Suddenly, the teletype machine comes to life.

FELIX

So much for my little nap.

Felix reads the cable.

FELIX (CONT'D)

'Would the sole negotiator please identify himself?

LIVELY

It would appear you've established yourself.

ALBERT

It appears so. Please respond, Mr. Kovacs, with the following: Father Albert, spiritual leader of the repatriation committee.

KOVACS

Nice touch.

Kovacs sends the cable and a response is quickly received.

FELIX

Got someone's attention. 'The newly established railway rate per POW is non-negotiable.' How does one respond to that?

ALBERT

Certainly, not immediately.

KOVACS

What's the next move?

ALBERT

After a few more moments of silence: 'Perhaps we will seek an alternative. Thank you.'

Kovacs sends the response.

KOVACS

What do you think they'll do?

A cable response is received.

FELIX

'We are unaware of any alternative. Please enlighten us.'

ALBERT

A slight pause, please, Mr. Kovacs. Then send the following: 'Alternative transportation is our problem. Thank you.'

Another pause. Kovacs sends the response.

FELIX

'Rather than relying on an unproven alternative, perhaps we can offer a reasonable, one time only, preferred customer discount.'

LIVELY

Now we're talkin'.

KOVACS

Amazing.

ALBERT

'We appreciate your gesture of goodwill. May we inquire as to the size of the offered discount?'

Kovacs sends the response. The cable typewriter comes alive.

FELIX

'Being a valued customer, we believe a five percent discount for you is a reasonable gesture.'

ALBERT

'The offered discount is much appreciated. However, it unfortunately does not quite meet our standards for reasonableness.'

KOVACS

And frankly, nor does it make us feel very valued.

LIVELY

Hopefully, they're not too sensitive...

FELIX

'Please pardon our error. The discount that should have been offered is actually ten percent.'

ALBERT

'We are all only human, and mistakes can be made. Still, as customers, we are not feeling very valued. Perhaps a greater discount might alleviate our feeling of inadequacy.'

FELIX

'Again, we apologize. Please stand-by while our staff of accountants reviews your portfolio.'

LIVELY

Father, "our portfolio?" You really must share with me some of your insights.

KOVACS

This is beginning to feel a bit like a poker game.

ALBERT

'Pardon us for inquiring, but our account must be relatively inactive, and our portfolio equally small.'

FELIX

'Our accountants' have completed their review. Previous offers of discounted fares are now null and void. The currently offered discount is... fifteen percent.

KOVACS

Dang.

LIVELY

Do I hear twenty?

KOVACS

Father?

ALBERT

It's time to let them wonder for a little while. Trust me.

LIVELY

Father? Have you something in mind?

ALBERT

I think a discount of... what? Twenty-five percent is a good number. Wouldn't you agree, Felix?

FELIX

Yes. But I'm probably the most agreeable person I know.

KOVACS

Let me know when to engage them again.

ALBERT

Stand by.

Felix nervously rubs his neck.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

OK. Send the following:  
'Again, we find your offer less than adequate.' Silence.

KOVACS

Father... how long...

ALBERT

I think we're getting near the finish line.

FELIX

'Current offer is... twenty, repeat, twenty percent off.'

ALBERT

'We believe the currently offered discount is unacceptable.' Stand-by. This next cable should offer some closure.

The next cable is received and typing.

FELIX

I hope we're near the finish.

KOVACS

Could be.

Kovacs reads it to himself as it is typing. He rips off and takes the cable to Albert who reads it out loud:

ALBERT

'To: All Customers. Copy to:  
The Prisoner of War  
Repatriation Committee. From:  
The Board of Directors,  
Chinese Eastern Railroad.  
Sirs: We have reached  
agreement on an updated  
government guaranteed  
passenger rate. A discount of  
twenty-five percent is now in  
effect. All trains should be  
moving upon receipt of this  
cable. Thank you for your  
patience, and continued  
patronage.' Blah, blah, blah.  
Mr. Kovacs, please prepare a  
cable to the Red Cross, the  
Catholic church, and the  
Hungarian government... Let  
them all know the results of  
my... our negotiations.

LIVELY

Guess they are still  
responsible for making  
payment.

KOVACS

So, you're both a priest and a  
negotiator?

ALBERT

It would seem those two jobs  
are not mutually exclusive.

FELIX

What did he just say?

KOVACS

I believe Father Albert said there's little difference between a priest and a negotiator.

FELIX

Oh. And there truly is a God almighty.

ALBERT

Yes, Felix. Have faith. There truly is.

EXT. ALL RAILWAY SIDINGS - DAWN

One after another, each of the five prisoner trains start to move again. They get up to speed toward Vladivostok.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAWN

Three more ships arrive. The total ships at the pier is now five. Albert and Lively walk across the pier and inspect for ice. They find some already forming.

INT. BASE BQ - DAY

Word of the new ship arrivals makes its way through the BQ population. As do copies of the latest Harbin newspaper.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

Passenger lines begin to form again on the ship gangplanks.

INT. PIER OFFICE - DAY

Albert reads several cables.

ALBERT

These weather cables are beginning to concern me.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

The temperature is supposed to drop significantly over night. Additional ice may make tomorrow's departure a tad more difficult.

LIVELY

Fulton should arrive soon. I'm eager to learn the status of the ice-breakers he volunteered to contract.

EXT. HARBIN TRAIN ARRIVAL IN VLADIVOSTOK - DAY

The Harbin POWs arrive and are guided through the railroad station. Several soldiers are on the platform, most combat-ready and dressed in full gear. Some are sitting, most are standing. Practically all carry a recent newspaper, being read or under their arms.

Fulton is among them. Wearing prisoner garb, he blends-in with the prisoner population. POWs near Fulton bump into a soldier, practically knocking him down on the station platform. Others steady him and apologize.

Fulton notices immediately a grenade has fallen to the platform. He quickly acquires the 'loose' grenade and conceals it.

EXT. BASE MAIN GATE - DAY

Railroad personnel escort the Harbin POWs to the main gate.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK BASE - DAY

The POWs are guarded during their walk onto the base. They go down the hill toward the BQ and the pier. Fulton continues to remain inconspicuous.

INT. VLADIVOSTOK BQ SHOWERS - DAY

Fulton roams throughout the BQ, avoiding detection. He finds himself in one bunkroom with a loud group of recently arrived POWs. Fulton continues to remain inconspicuous. He walks among the naked POWs who are waiting to shower, and casually notices personal belongings amidst their ragged clothing piled on the floor. Fulton concludes most of it is of little or no value.

Then, he notices a gun barrel, partly hidden under some ragged clothes piled in a corner. He quickly surveys his surroundings for an opportune moment to appropriate the pistol. Suddenly, a POW slips and falls in the shower-room.

During the immediate aftermath of loud painful groans, shouts for help, and general confusion, Fulton decides to act. He reaches into the clothing pile, grabs the gun, slips it in his pants, and casually walks away. Fulton is now armed with both a grenade and a gun.

INT. VLADIVOSTOK BQ BUNKROOM - DAY

Albert, Lively, Felix and Kovacs roam through the crowded BQ looking for the two camp evacuation leaders. They locate Fridtjof Nansen and begin looking for Fulton.

KOVACS

(singing quietly)

Where, oh where can our Fulton  
be? Oh where, oh where can he  
be?

Fulton continues to maintain a low profile. He hides his face when the searchers are nearby. The searchers meet to compare notes and plan their approach.

FELIX

Why is this so hard? Are we  
certain he has arrived?

LIVELY

He was assigned to the Harbin  
camp, so unless he's become  
invisible, we should see him  
with this group.

KOVACS

What's our next move?

ALBERT

Man all the exits. I'd really like to talk with this guy before he has a chance to board any of the ships. And let's see where those ice-breakers may be.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK BASE - DAY

Fulton leaves the BQ. He walks up the hill toward the base gate. Fulton looks around to see if he is being followed. As he nears the base gate, he sees it is heavily guarded, and quickly makes a turn toward the admin building.

As he approaches that building entrance, he sees the security guards checking everyone's ID at the door. He again gets paranoid and makes another turn.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK OFFICER'S HOUSING - DAY

By this time, his original pursuers have spotted him. He attempts to lose them again, by weaving his way through the housing area known as officers' row. He finds an uninhabited house, hides behind the front bushes, then climbs up on the front porch.

The dog next door barks loudly. Fulton's position has been compromised. He returns to running through the base housing. Around the next corner, he comes face-to-face with Major Lively. Frozen for a moment, he shoves Lively to the ground and runs away.

Fulton hides around the corner of the next building, pulls out his pistol, and runs again. This time he's spotted by Kovacs. Fulton stops, turns and fires two shots. The bullets hit a tree behind Kovacs. Fulton continues to run toward the pier. He sees that he has also been spotted by Felix. Fulton stops and fires two shots in his direction. One shatters a window and one grazes Felix. Felix falls, holding his bleeding right arm.

Kovacs kneels beside him, putting pressure on the wound and wrapping the arm tightly with a bandage. Felix sits up and shakes-off Kovacs.

FELIX

Thanks. I'll be alright.

He gets up and runs toward the pier.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER APPROACH - DAY

Fulton again sees Lively closing in. Fulton stops and fires two more shots in his direction. One misses, but the other hits Lively in his thigh. The Major falls. Albert stops to compress and quickly bandage the bleeding leg.

Meanwhile, Fulton tries to blend in with the long line of ship-boarding prisoners that now almost reaches the BQ. He realizes he's been seen by Albert. Fulton immediately gets out of the line.

He slowly walks as invisibly as possible on the opposite side of the POW line, still moving toward the pier. Albert keeps watching the line, trying to spot Fulton. Then, he sees something move on the opposite side of the line. Albert quickly heads toward Fulton.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

Fulton finally reaches the pier but slips in the snow and falls. As Albert gets nearer, Fulton tosses his pistol into the icy harbor. The ship-boarding line parts and Fulton can be seen lying on the ground. Albert attempts to secure him.

Fulton breaks away, takes a few steps back, and pulls the pin from his grenade. Albert immediately falls to the ground. The POWs scatter. Fulton yells within the next five seconds.

FULTON

You may have me... but you  
have no-ice-breakers!

Fulton explodes.

INT. VLADIVOSTOK BQ - DAY

More POWs arrive at the BQ. They are loud and boisterous regarding their new temporary lodging. They marvel at the working showers, amazed to see water flowing.

They claim sleeping racks for themselves though they are only temporary. Copies of the Harbin newspaper are plentiful, read, waved around and discussed.

PRISONER 1

Can you believe this crap?

PRISONER 2

Sounds like we were at a resort of some kind.

PRISONER 3

No mention of the starvation... the suicides.

PRISONER 1

No mention of the filth... the cold. This almost makes me want to go back. Almost.

INT. IVANOV'S NEW HARBIN OFFICE - DAY

The captain sits alone at his new desk in his new office on an upper floor of the Chinese Eastern Railway building. The Harbin newspaper is spread out on his desk. He reads the articles, shaking his head in disbelief.

IVANOV

Nonsense. Pure nonsense.

He shakes his head as he reads further.

IVANOV (CONT'D)

This is incredible. My entire career has come down to this?

His telephone rings.

IVANOV

(into phone)

Ivanov, here. Oh, hah-lo  
Lebedev.

LEBEDEV

(on phone; filtered)

Ivanov. Something must be  
done about all the complaints.

IVANOV

Complaints?

LEBEDEV

The readers and advertisers  
are very upset about all your  
lies.

IVANOV

My lies?!?

LEBEDEV

In last few days, mailroom is  
flooded with complaints, and  
switchboard is jammed with  
unhappy readers.

IVANOV

I don't understand. What is  
wrong?

LEBEDEV

Your propaganda is not  
withstanding scrutiny. It is  
receiving heavy criticism.

IVANOV

What the hell? I thought you  
told me editorial staff was  
screening everything.

LEBEDEV

You cannot pass buck. You  
cannot escape this. You are  
responsible for all dis-  
information.

IVANOV

This is ridiculous.

LEBEDEV

I have already talked with  
Editor-In-Chief. He was  
hesitant to hire you in first  
place.

IVANOV

Fine.

LEBEDEV

Now, he expects you to clean  
up this mess.

Lebedev hangs up.

INT. VLADIVOSTOK BQ - DAY

Several prisoners emotionally discuss the articles.

PRISONER 1

It's just not true. I never  
said that!

PRISONER 2

Yes, you did!

PRISONER 1

Don't you dare to say that  
about me!

PRISONER 3

You have nerve to insult me to  
my face!

PRISONER 4

I have nerve?

Fist fights erupt among several of the prisoners, almost  
like a barroom brawl. A crowd of other POWs forms around  
them to cheer them on and make wagers. Guards rush in,  
pull POWs apart and quell the disturbance.

INT. BASE LIBRARY - DAY

Establish library. Father Albert sits alone at a table in the reading room. Several books with pages marked by scraps of paper are stacked around him on the table.

He is intently reading and taking copious notes. We see the title of the book is: "Mariners' Departures from Frozen Ports - Without the Aid of Ice-breaker Ships."

INT. IVANOV'S NEW HARBIN OFFICE - DAY

Ivanov is pacing, he holds his head. He rubs his eyes. He sits back down at his desk. He takes his pistol out of the holster, checks the ammo clip and finds it loaded. He stares at the handgun and slowly raises it to his temple. He closes his eyes, pulls it away and sets it down.

He stares at it again. He picks it up, slowly raises it again to his temple and closes his eyes. After a moment, he pulls it away again and sets it down on his desk. His phone rings.

IVANOV

(into phone)

Hah-lo. Yes. Ivanov here.

No news? Hmmm. OK.

He hangs up the phone and maintains the blank expression on his face. Ivanov picks up, then puts down his pistol once again. He puts his head in his hands again. Then, he gets up and walks out of his office.

INT. RAILROAD BUILDING ROOF - DAY

Ivanov walks onto the roof of the building to get some fresh air. From the stairway door, he walks the width of the building and takes several deep breathes. He walks to the front edge of the roof and returns to the stairway door.

IVANOV

Twenty years... wasted.

He turns around and again walks the width of the building. He walks to the front edge of the roof and looks down at the concrete entrance steps, some one hundred fifty feet below. He steps up on the roof's ledge and jumps off.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

Sunrise over the harbor is beautiful. The deck look-outs on all five ships cannot believe their eyes. They each look carefully at the harbor around them. A few men are even taking a morning stroll across the ice. The entire harbor is frozen solid.

INT. PIER OFFICE - SUNRISE

Lively turns on lights and starts to make a pot of coffee.

LIVELY

Rise and shine, gentlemen.  
Any cables overnight?

Felix and Kovacs open their eyes, yawn and stretch. Felix is the first to stand and walk to the window.

FELIX

Ho-ly crap.

KOVACS

Good morning, Felix.

LIVELY

What's going on, fellas?

FELIX

Ho-ly crap.

Kovacs and Lively both join Felix and look out the window.

KOVACS

Why is the water not moving?

LIVELY

It's frozen.

FELIX

Ho-ly crap.

Albert walks in the office.

ALBERT

Good morning, gentlemen.

Albert joins the group looking out the window.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Frozen?

LIVELY

Looks that way.

FELIX

Guess it was kind of chilly  
last night.

KOVACS

There was even some fella out  
there earlier taking his  
morning walk.

INT. PIER OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Lively, Albert, Felix, and Kovacs meet with all five ship  
captains. Kovacs comes to the table with the latest cable alert.

KOVACS

Remember when the news  
reported: 'all is quiet in  
Vladivostok'?

FELIX

I remember reading that.

KOVACS

Well, the latest news alert  
reports 'trouble is brewing  
between Russia and Japan.'

He hands the alert to Lively.

LIVELY

This latest alert reports that  
'Japan is expected to attack  
the port city of Vladivostok  
no later than noon today.'  
They intend to do as much  
damage as possible, then  
return to their home base.

FELIX

Damn. That only gives us about... five hours.

LIVELY

Looks like we need to move this along.

ALBERT

Somewhat unexpectedly, we will all apparently be departing without the assistance of ice-breakers. It seems our friend Fulton never contracted them.

CAPTAIN X

Or maybe we should just wait... until spring.

CAPTAIN Y

I ain't waitin' 'round 'til spring.

CAPTAIN X

Somebody better think of somethin'. 'Cause we just wastin' time jawin' about it.

CAPTAIN V

Looks like the Japanese just gave us a noon deadline.

ALBERT

Logistically, it can be done. Without ice-breakers, that is. I've researched this. The methodology is somewhat out of date... and timing will be critical.

LIVELY

Our primary goal is: we are gone by noon. Father Albert, please outline the departure process.

ALBERT

Certainly. Remember, it's not completely foolproof. It will be a little risky. The process can be a bit dangerous even if one is not pressed for time. So, listen carefully...

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK TRAIN STATION - DAY

The last POW trains arrive. The passengers exit the station and are directed to the base gate.

EXT. BASE MAIN GATE - DAY

The last trainloads of POWs enter the base and begin a guarded hike down the sloping hill to the BQ.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

When ready to travel again, groups exit the BQ and get in line to board the ships. Albert and Felix check their watches.

ALBERT

Is that the last of them?

FELIX

I think so.

EXT. APPROACH TO VLADIVOLSTOK STATION - DAY

The group of rag-tag prisoners (from the opening scene) trudge slowly eastward, at about one mile per hour, following a snow-covered trail high above the track bed. Climbing up the last hill before reaching the harbor, the slowest man among them falls. The group helps him up.

ERIC

There have been many times, since leaving that barn, I thought we'd never lay eyes on this harbor.

JULIUS

That barn was seventy-five days ago.

ERIC

What?

JULIUS

Almost there, my friend.  
Almost there.

He grabs his comrade by the arm to avert a fall. The five of them trudge down the hill toward the harbor.

ERIC

Look! I see ships!

JULIUS

Of course, you do. It's a harbor.

ERIC

But these ships... are for us.

JULIUS

How can you possibly know that?

ERIC

I just do.

JULIUS

Really? Could they be waiting for anyone else?

ERIC

Have faith, my friend.

JULIUS

Faith? I have. Something to eat? Forget about it.

ERIC

Hey, I can't feel my feet. Can you?

JULIUS

You want me to feel your feet?

ERIC

No. My feet are numb. Are your feet numb?

JULIUS

A little sore. A little cold.  
But no, not numb.

ERIC

Well, my feet are numb. There  
a cure for that?

JULIUS

I believe it's called warmth.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK STATION/BASE MAIN GATE - DAY

The small rag-tag group of roaming prisoners finally arrives at the Vladivostok railroad station and collapse in the snow. They are assisted to the base gate by railroad personnel, and by base guards to the BQ.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

Chita POWs migrate from the BQ to the pier. Directed to the gangplanks, they join the boarding process.

ALBERT

How are we doing with time?

LIVELY

According to my watch, it's about  
eleven. So, maybe... an hour.

FELIX

They should be all. Unless we  
have more unexpected guests.

KOVACS

I hope this is all. We're  
running out of space... as  
well as time.

Lively, Albert, Felix and Kovacs board. Gangplanks are retrieved.

EXT. SHIP MAIN DECKS - DAY

Main deck gatherings form on each ship. Departure protocol is reinforced. A typical gathering is on the *Scharnhorst*.

ALBERT

Just a few words before we shove off. Due to circumstances beyond our control, there are no ice-breakers rented today. Nevertheless, as you can all see, ice has formed. So... we intend to use a historically tried and true method of breaking out. I've researched this drill. It's generations old. It has proven itself effective in the worst of conditions. Not to say that these are the worst of conditions. Anyway, this method should prove itself once again...

All ships communicate they are ready for departure.

EXT. LEAD SHIP SCHARNHOST - DAY

The engines are fired up, and ready when full power is available. Readiness is confirmed to the bridge. Gears are engaged, and the props are gradually throttled forward. Steadily, the props are fully throttled. Still, little or no movement is detected.

Several attempts are made. The captain then applies full throttle aft. Still, no movement. Again, full throttle forward. Then, full throttle aft. The captain attempts to create a rocking motion, but still with no success.

EXT. OTHER FOUR SHIPS' MAIN DECKS - DAY

The crews and passengers of each ship find the best vantage point to watch the unfolding drama. When the attempt fails, silence.

EXT. SCHARNHOST MAIN DECK - DAY

A sailor is on look-out, using binoculars to scan the horizon. Suddenly, he sees something in the northeast sky. He frantically waves at and yells up to the bridge.

LOOK-OUT  
 Captain! Captain! Planes  
 approaching from the  
 northeast!

On the horizon is a squadron of six Japanese World War One vintage bi-planes.

EXT. SCHARNHOST - DAY

The engines rumble back to life. More attempts to break out are made. The ship is eventually rocked onto the ice ahead of it, and one can hear the ice begin to crack.

Several more rocking attempts are made, fore and aft, and the ice continues to crack. The ice finally breaks and the ship travels noticeably forward.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

The Japanese planes arrive overhead. Explosives are dropped on the base and airplane machine-gun fire punctuates the explosions. *Scharnhost* slowly moves away from the pier.

EXT. MANHEIM/STIEGERWALD/FRANKFURT - DAY

The Japanese bi-planes return for another pass. The *Meinham*, *Stiegerwald*, and *Frankfurt* all fire up their engines. The planes attack from the west this time. Explosives again drop, and airplane machine-gun fire fills the air.

The bullets make awful sounds as they hit the decks and ricochet off the hulls. The last three ships display what they have learned. Simultaneously, the ice-breaking procedure is followed. Despite the attacking bi-planes, the *Meinham* rocks itself fore and aft, and eventually onto the ice ahead of it.

The ice cracks under the ship's weight. Soon, the ship moves forward, breaks free and begins to follow the first ship out to sea. The bi-planes return for another pass.

The *Stiegerwald* struggles. It is not as fortunate as the *Scharnhorst* and must rock fore and aft many more times. The engines soon fail and black smoke billows from the stack. Japanese fighter planes buzz again from the east. Explosives drop and bullets fly.

The *Frankfurt* is fortunate. A few attempts at rocking fore and aft, the ice cracks, she moves forward and is soon free.

EXT. PIERRE BENOIT - DAY

The bi-planes continue to drop bombs and emit gunfire. In a hail of bullets, *Pierre Benoit* rocks and eventually her bow slides over the ice. But, the ice refuses to break. As the bi-planes are turning around again in the east, the chief engineer offers a suggestion.

BENOIT CHIEF

Cap'ain. We don't have enough weight to break the ice.

BENOIT CAPTAIN

Damn it.

BENOIT CHIEF

We need to try front-loading the ship.

BENOIT CAPTAIN

What?

BENOIT CHIEF

Move everyone and everything to the bow.

BENOIT CAPTAIN

Make it so.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER

The Japanese aircraft make another pass over the ships.

INT. PIERRE BENOIT - DAY

The Benoit Chief Engineer runs below deck. He facilitates the front-loading. Everyone and everything is crammed into the bow.

EXT. PIERRE BENOIT - DAY

The ice-breaking maneuver is again attempted. This time, successfully.

EXT. VLADIVOSTOK PIER - DAY

Soldiers on the base find some cover outside and begin shooting their rifles at the planes. A few bombs explode near the soldiers' positions. Several soldiers are hit by shrapnel. One of the attacking planes begins to billow smoke and soon falls into the icy harbor.

EXT. ONBOARD STIEGERWALD - DAY

The *Stiegerwald* crew works frantically to repair her engine. Explosions and rapid gunfire are heard. As the other ships almost disappear over the horizon, she prepares to give it another go. Seeming to gag, sputter and cough its way to a start, the ship engine eventually discovers some life is left.

The bi-planes make a final pass and disappear in the northeast sky.

The ship moves a little fore and aft and makes its way through the broken ice. The other ships have left behind a path to follow through to the sea.

INT. BUDAPEST FAMILY HOME - DAY

INSERT TITLE: Budapest

Liz reads a newspaper at her aunt and UNCLE's breakfast table.

LIZ

Oh, my goodness. They're coming home.

AUNT

Who's that, dear?

Liz pours herself another cup of coffee.

LIZ

The prisoners of war... from Siberia.

UNCLE

They're coming home?

LIZ

Yes! According to this.

AUNT

When? Where do they arrive?

Liz excitedly reads the article out loud.

LIZ

'The former German passenger boat, the *S.S. Scharnhorst*, is among five chartered to repatriate Hungarian war prisoners in Russian captivity. The steamer sailed from Vladivostok on October 1<sup>st</sup> with four other ships. In total, about eighteen hundred prisoners of war were aboard the ships. They will make stops in Shanghai, Djebuti and Port Said, and are scheduled to arrive in Trieste on November 18<sup>th</sup>.

LIZ (CONT'D)

The Hungarian prisoners of war will board three trains in Trieste and make the six-hour journey by rail northeast to Budapest.'

Liz speaks quietly, almost to herself.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Father Albert most likely will be there.

Then she speaks out loud with greater volume and confidence.

LIZ (CONT'D)

I want to be there, too!

EXT. SCHARNHOST AT SEA - DAY

The lead ship travels south through the Sea of Japan, soon followed by the other ships. She then makes her way down the Chinese east coast.

The ships travel into more tropical waters off the coast of Korea and then between Sumatra and Malaysia.

EXT. SUEZ CANAL AND THE MED - DAY

The ships travel through the Suez Canal. Decks are crowded with passengers viewing the locks for the first time. The desert scenery includes drifting Egyptian sand, camels, and stately palm trees. Once through the canal, the ships continue across the Mediterranean Sea.

EXT. MED AND ADRIATIC SEAS - DAY

The ships sail across the Mediterranean into the Adriatic Sea and up the east coast of Italy.

EXT. TRIESTE PORT

All five ships are docked at the Trieste pier.

EXT. TRIESTE PORT AND CENTRAL RAILROAD TERMINAL - DAY

The POWs disembark onto the pier and walk three quarters of a mile from the port to the railway terminal. Light traffic is stopped by the local police. The prisoners are escorted across the road.

EXT. TRIESTE CENTRAL RAILROAD TERMINAL - DAY

About eighteen-hundred prisoners in all parade into the terminal. They all wait together on one platform to board their trains. Travelers walking through the station, gawk, whisper, and point at the former prisoners.

EXT. TRIESTE TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

The prisoners board three designated trains. Once each train reaches capacity, about six hundred, it leaves the terminal, and departs northeast to Budapest.

EXT. BUDAPEST SIDEWALKS NEAR TRAIN TERMINAL - DAY

Liz walks to the Budapest train station. As she gets nearer the station, she notices the crowd on the sidewalk getting denser. When she's within a few blocks of the terminal, she notices the police presence increase.

Only a block away, she sees the long lines entering the station. She looks at her watch and then the outdoor terminal clock. It is almost noon.

Liz gets into the shortest line she sees. It moves at a glacier pace. She can't even see the station door by standing on her tiptoes. Gradually, she moves just inside the station door.

INT. BUDAPEST EASTERN KELETI RAILWAY TERMINAL - DAY

Once inside, the crowd noise increases dramatically. Again, standing on her tiptoes, she sees no trains. All the tracks are empty. Liz speaks to a policeman.

LIZ  
The train from Trieste?

## POLICEMAN

Not yet.

The large station holds a huge crowd, gathered to receive the returning prisoners. Functionaries, reporters, and high ranking military personnel are in the hall of the station. Mothers, wives, children, fathers and families stand behind a cordon, awaiting the arrival.

Liz moves slowly through the crowd. She can see the cordon and makes her way convinced she must at least reach it. She gets there as the first POW train enters the station. The train slows to a stop.

A band plays the Hungarian national tune, the Rakoczy march, as the men get out of the train cars and look around with questioning eyes. One can see their sunburned faces. Some are wrapped in sheepskin. There are both young men and older grey-bearded men.

No prisoner leaves his place as the second train enters the station. The band again begins the national tune. The returned soldiers exit this train, join the others on the platform, stand still and uncover their heads. They clasp their hands over their hearts and sing with the music.

It appears an endless number of prisoners arrives. Some relatives get so impatient it becomes hard to keep them behind the cordon. Some of them manage to break through and find their loved ones. Police shore up the crowd.

The third and final train arrives. The military band starts the national march again. Liz gambles and moves to a better vantage point closer to the podium.

The Governor and his wife enter. On a pedestal covered with carpet and decorated with flags, the Archduke and other notables appear. The Governor steps to the podium.

## GOVERNOR

With love and every feeling of  
my heart, I welcome you.  
Surely, you had another  
picture in mind during the  
days of captivity, when you  
dreamt of your return home.

## GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

Presently, conditions in our country are very sad. We have a long road before us. If we want Hungary to take its place among the nations of the world, we must cover this long road with honest and unfaltering work. I am certain that if everyone here feels himself a true Hungarian, and looks to the future with determination and hope, we shall attain that for which we now work. Thank you, my friends.

Applause and cheers. Liz smiles as she gets a glimpse of Father Albert. Major Lively, in full uniform, speaks next.

## LIVELY

I am Major Lively. I spent six years as a Russian prisoner. Then, I also had the honor of looking after these fine men, all the way home from their captivity. Thank you for this fine reception. We will never forget it. Now, I'd like to introduce our spiritual leader during the long journey home. Father Albert. Father...

Applause and cheers. Albert steps to the podium.

## ALBERT

I have worked sixteen years for Hungarians in America. Today, I stand before you with freed Hungarians who have now returned home. I don't have to remind any of them about the oath they took in Vladivostok.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

They will, as faithful  
citizens participate  
energetically in the  
rebuilding of our country.  
God bless you. And may God  
bless Hungary.

Applause and cheers. Everyone in the crowd runs toward the soldiers and finds their beloved. Many of the prisoners gather around Father Albert before departing. They shake his hand and personally thank him for his efforts in bringing them home.

As the crowd around Albert disperses, Liz finds herself facing the more self-confident priest. She jogs up to Albert and they hug.

ALBERT

I thought about you every day.  
Every day I was gone.

The crowd further disperses. Albert gives her the Saint Christopher medallion.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Before I left, I was lost. I  
thought I had no purpose.  
But, I was wrong. My  
purpose... is you.

They hug again. All around them on the platform, people move briskly; trying not to miss their train or trying to find loved ones who've been awaiting their arrival.

FADE OUT

THE END