

THE MANIFEST

A play in Two Acts

By Stephen Graff

© 2015 by Stephen Graff
213 S. Maple Avenue
Woodbury, NJ 08096
(609) 969-3102
sgraffwriter@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2015 This stage play may not be used or reproduced without the express written permission of the author.

CHARACTERS
5 Males/2 Females

Male 1, 30—40	Plays MARK RENKO, YOUNG CHARLIE
Male 2 40—60	Plays CHARLIE, FATHER
Male 3 30—40	Plays GROVE, UNCLE STANI, LORENZO PALMERO, YOUNG MAN
Male 4 30—50	Plays PALM, PALMERO, STOREKEEPER
Male 5 20s	Plays SAM, YOUNG MAN
Female 1 40—60	Plays JOSEPHINE, MOTHER
Female 2 30—40	Plays MARY, WIFE, YOUNG JOSEPHINE

SETTINGS

A variety of settings including Nursing Home, Mark Renko's House, Work Place, the immigrant ship Blue Star. All settings are conveyed through lighting and spare use of furniture and basic set pieces that can be easily moved on and off the stage.

CHARACTERS

A cast of 6 or 7 plays a larger group of characters. Actors/Actresses convey these characters by changing outward appearance through use of hats, coats, or costumes that can be easily put on and taken off.

TIME

This play switches between past and present as it tells the story of a tragedy aboard an immigrant ship in 1927 and that incident's present day reverberations.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(We are in a room in a nursing home represented by a simple bed and night stand and a wooden chair.)

(At rise, MARK RENKO is seated in chair working intently on his laptop. MARY ANN RENKO stirs in the bed and slowly lifting her head up and against her pillows. She reaches for him.)

MARY

Water.

MARK

Nowhere to be found.

(She reaches for the table, curls her fingers around an empty glass.)

MARY

Could you get me some water.

MARK

C'mon Mr. Palm.

MARY

I'm thirsty.

(He looks up, suddenly aware of her.)

MARK

What is it?

MARY

I'm thirsty.

(He looks around, then stands, puts laptop on chair, grabs glass and exits. She talks to someone.)

MARY (cntd.)

Are you here, Charlie?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

I was in the shed finishing up the toys.

MARY

You're always making something.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

One for you and one for him.

(MARK returns, glass in hand.)

MARK

Who are you talking to?

MARY

Charlie.

MARK

Grandpa? There's no one here, Ma.

MARY

He's in the shed. Out near the garden.

MARK

C'mon Ma. You said you're thirsty.

(He hands her the glass.)

MARY

No. I'm not. Not really.

(He shakes his head and puts the glass down.)

MARK

I have to go.

MARY

You just got here.

MARK

Ma. I have a lot of work to do.

MARY

Always on that computer.

MARK

It's my job.

MARY

What?

MARK

(sitting, putting laptop on his lap)

Huh?

MARY

What's your job?

MARK

I'm given names of people and I have to clear them of... wrongdoing.

MARY

I don't understand.

MARK

It's okay, Ma. You don't have to...

MARY

Why have you come?

MARK

I came to visit you.

(CHARLIE appears, accordion strapped around his shoulders. He is an older man. He walks over to MARY.)

CHARLIE

You should get up. Come with me.

MARY

Not time yet.

MARK

Look, ma. I have to get back.

CHARLIE

What kind of work does he do? It's not regular work.

(MARY turns away. MARK stands over MARY.
CHARLIE watches, then begins to play PLANINCA
POLKA)

You remember this song?

(MARY turns back, sits up.)

MARY

You played it after Sunday lunch. Every Sunday.

MARK

Who are you talking to?

(CHARLIE continues to play.)

MARY

Mama would cut the rhubarb pie in the kitchen and we would all listen. Sitting around the dining table.

MARK

Ma. There's no one else here.

MARY

Do you remember?

MARK

Vaguely.

CHARLIE

Whose memory goes. Yours or his?

(Lights go down.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(At rise we see a simple desk with two chairs facing each other. MARK sits in one chair. MR. GROVE sits in the other.)

GROVE

What kind of trail did he leave?

MARK

I just started this project, Mr. Grove.

GROVE

Mr. Palm is important to us, Mr. Renko. Clearing him won't be easy.

MARK

What's the difficulty? I know what to do.

GROVE

He wants to be able to do a clean search within a week.

MARK

That's doable, yeah.

GROVE

I put my complete trust in you, Renko.

MARK

Do you? Your complete trust?

GROVE

You're like a son to me. But I don't want you getting any ideas. It doesn't mean you can confide in me or think of me as a father.

MARK

I understand, sir. I don't think that's going to be a...

GROVE

Palm has one major request.

MARK

I know. It was in the email you sent to me.

GROVE

Don't contact him. And one other. No family searches.

MARK

You mean no family history.

GROVE

Unless there's something that could come back to haunt him.

MARK

Like a father or mother in the Klan.

GROVE

And he doesn't want to know who you are.

MARK

Sure. I got it.

GROVE

Partly because he has no respect for the researchers or writers we have on staff.

MARK

He's nothing to me, sir. Just a name. Just a job.

(Awkward pause)

GROVE

How's your mother doing?

MARK

She's in her own little world. She keeps seeing my grandfather. Thinks he's...

GROVE

I don't really care, Renko. I was just asking to be polite. You can go now.

(MARK stands as GROVE does.)

Do you have a wife and kids, Mr. Renko?

MARK

I do. A wife and two daughters.

GROVE

What's interesting about you, Renko? Anything?

MARK

Sir? I don't understand?

GROVE

Do you have a philosophy? A religion? A theory of life?

MARK

I believe in the common good. I believe that we should do the right thing.

GROVE

Sin...Mr. Renko. Do you believe in...

MARK

Sure. I guess so. You mean, do we pay for our...

GROVE

Your beliefs are of little concern. As long as they don't intrude. You've probably never had a file quite like that of Mr. Palm's. Stay above the file. Don't think when you study it.

(BEAT)

MARK

I try not to think too much. Is that all, sir?

GROVE

That's all. Please get back to your station and close the door behind you. Also: can you tell anyone who's outside my office that they should go away.

MARK

Yes sir.

(MARK nods, shakes his head slightly, then exits.)

(Lights go down.)

ACT I

SCENE 3

(At rise we are in a room of a threadbare cottage in foothills of the Slovenian Alps. MOTHER RENKO is getting an old backpack ready for her son, CHARLIE, as he looks on. Fear builds on his face. She lifts the pieces of a broken accordion and takes a rope to tie the pieces together.)

MOTHER

America doesn't want beggars and tramps, Charlie. You have to look the part.

YOUNG CHARLIE

What part?

MOTHER

A man with a purpose. Like you know where you want to go. He'll ask you why you've come. You have to tell him that you have family.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Who is it that I'm to see?

MOTHER

Uncle Stani. He's waiting for you in New York and he'll take you on.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Who is he?

MOTHER

Charlie? Do you listen?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Not very well.

MOTHER

You're seventeen, Charlie. You should have this information up here.

(Pointing to her forehead.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

I don't remember every detail, Mama. You've told me many times.

MOTHER

They'll ask you more questions than you can count. And if you get any of them wrong.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Mama. I'm scared.

FATHER (O.S.)

I told you. Quite scaring the boy. He'll throw up his dinner on his way to the dock.

MOTHER

I want him to be ready.

FATHER (O.S.)

By scaring the shit out of him? Charlie. Uncle Stani is my brother. He plays that instrument you're carrying better than me. He's the only one who can fix it so it works. Get it fixed.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Yes sir.

(FATHER appears, pulling up his pants and buttoning his shirt.)

FATHER

That toilet seat's as cold as ice. My ass is frostbitten.

MOTHER

Do we have to hear this same story?

FATHER

Every day. Right? The same story. So it's good because it doesn't change. The seasons always come. The earth gets frozen then melts. And we plant our crops. He has to remember how things are set; what we've said and done.

MOTHER

He remembers fine.

FATHER

(Approaching YOUNG CHARLIE.)

No. He has to keep it in his memory until there is no memory left. Will you?

YOUNG CHARLIE

If you say so.

(MOTHER is putting on her coat and gathering CHARLIE'S things.)

MOTHER

There's no time for a sermon Papa. This ship has his name on the manifest.

FATHER

Sure it does.

MOTHER

If we miss, then they'll still want their money.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Why am I going?

FATHER

To work. The only reason we move or travel.

YOUNG CHARLIE

We have a field. I can work here.

FATHER

Are you crazy? Pulling cabbage and potatoes for nothing?

MOTHER

Let him be. Let him think.

FATHER

Naah. Get him down to the dock. Thinking spoils the mind, weakens the body.

YOUNG CHARLIE

That doesn't make any sense. I don't understand. I thought you wanted me...

(MOTHER puts the pack over CHARLIE'S shoulder as FATHER puts his arms around his son.)

FATHER

No. I don't want you to go. It's the last thing for me to see you leave. Others have gone, never to return. America is such a place that there's no memory for the Old Country.

(MOTHER takes his hand.)

MOTHER

He will always have a memory for this. How can he not?

(She hands the tied up music box to her son.)

You're to give this to your uncle. He's waiting for it.

YOUNG CHARLIE

It's for him?

FATHER

No son. It's for you. Only he can mend it.

MOTHER

Mend it? It's in pieces.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Where was it found? Who found it?

FATHER

Uncle Stani found it, smashed against the rocks at the shores of a river. He was returning from service, lucky to be alive. He bent down to fill his canteen and the pieces were scattered around him.

VOICE (O.S.)

The Blue Star's coming into the harbor!

MOTHER

Okay then. Time to go.

FATHER

Does he have bread.

MOTHER

Yes. Of course.

(She turns away, drying her eyes.)

Never thought I'd see this day.

(Lights down.)

ACT I

SCENE 4

(At rise, we see a solitary SOLDIER taking steps to the right of center stage. He steps into a shaft of light, bends down to fill his canteen with water. MARY ANN RENKO'S voice is heard.)

MARY (off)

Who was he?

CHARLIE (off)

My uncle. Coming back from the war.

(SOLDIER rises with pieces of the music box in his hands. Lights down on him.)

He came here before I did. Left for America within weeks and left the music box with my Ma.

JOSEPHINE (off)

How many times are you going to tell that story?

(Lights come up slowly. CHARLIE is seen, accordion in his hands. Others are not on stage yet. He plays a slow waltz on the accordion, and as he does so, JOSEPHINE enters, pushing down on her apron.)

MARY (off)

Will the story ever change?

JOSEPHINE

It changes.

MARY (off)

Is it really magic?

JOSEPHINE

It's not magic. It's just a music box. Go to Cleveland. They're everywhere.

(CHARLIE closes his eyes. JOSEPHINE stops and starts to dance to the waltz. As she does so, MARY and SAM appear on stage.)

MARY

You see? I told you?

SAM

What? You didn't tell me anything.

MARY

It is magic. Only he can play it.

JOSEPHINE

That's nonsense. Anyone with skill...

MARY

Mama, look at you. You can't help yourself. You're dancing.

(JOSEPHINE finishing a subtle twirl.)

JOSEPHINE

(Smiling)

I'm not dancing.

(SAM and MARY put on hats, gloves.)

If you're going outside, dress warm.

(CHARLIE stops playing. JOSEPHINE walks up to him; he reaches for her, pulling her towards him.)

CHARLIE

Be careful out there. Snow and ice are everywhere.

MARY

Papa....

(MARY and SAM step gingerly downstage, stepping over snow drifts, walking the very edge of the stage.)

MARY

We can't cross.

SAM

It's frozen, Mary. The ice is thick.

MARY

No. You can't. Remember what Papa said.

SAM

It's ice.

(SAM lifts a foot to take a step. Lights down except a single spot on MARY, her face reacting in horror)

MARY

Nothing I could do. I told him no. I screamed it. No Sam. Don't go. It's the creek, still flowing under. Ice too thin. You'll fall through. And it was like a dream. Him smiling, turning to look at me then dropping. I reached out but there was nothing to grab. I tried to stop him, Papa. I really did.

(Lights down. Darkness.)

(JOSEPHINE'S voice is heard.)

JOSEPHINE

There was no music in this house after that. Sam was his life and blood. Nothing could change that.

(Lights up on CHARLIE sitting in a chair, accordion on the floor, a bottle of cheap wine in his hand which he brings to his lips. His hands are shaking.)

CHARLIE

Sell it. We need the money to bury Sam.

JOSEPHINE

Charlie, you can't.

CHARLIE

Nothing left. There's nothing left.

JOSEPHINE

Charlie. Sam would want you...

(CHARLIE looks up, his face etched in pain and anger.)

CHARLIE

I'll never play it. There's no music if there's no Sam.

JOSEPHINE

We still have Mary.

CHARLIE

She should've looked out for him. She should've stopped him.

(Set for nursing home is moved on dimly lit stage right as lights dim on JOSEPHINE and CHARLIE. MARK sits in chair. MARY is in the bed.)

MARK

I'm sure he forgave you, Ma. He couldn't speak the words.

MARY

Never did. Said nothing. He was never the same after that.

MARK

He was a hard man. Worked hard and drank hard. He couldn't speak the words he felt.

MARY

He only drank after Sam.

MARK

How do you remember?

MARY

Everything before you, before your father. But it's all going away.

MARK

Going?

MARY

I have to work harder to remember. There are no more days.

MARK

It's okay Ma. You don't have to try...

MARY

I have to keep the lights from all going out.

MARK

What happened to his accordion?

MARY

He sold it..

(Lights go up on CHARLIE and JOSEPHINE.)

JOSEPHINE

Charlie. It's been five years. You have to tell her.

CHARLIE

I forgive her.

JOSEPHINE

It has to come from you.

CHARLIE

You can tell her. I can't.

MARY

I would work for his forgiveness. I asked mama to help me.

MARK

Ma. I've heard this story a thousand times. You searched far and...

MARY

We searched far and wide. All over Punxsy and Pittsburgh. Even took the drive with Mama to Cleveland where all accordians die...or are born.

(Lights down.)

ACT I

SCENE 5

(At rise, MARK is sitting at his desk, the computer in front of him. On a big screen, we can see images of a man of varying age, with headlines, as he scrolls down. His WIFE is offstage, but her voice can be heard.)

(Big screen headlines: TONY PALM INVESTIGATED)

MARK

Number one. This one's easy.

WIFE (off)

Who is it this time?

MARK

His name is Anthony Palm.

WIFE (off)

Never heard of him.

(Headline with photo of Palm in handcuffs. Headline reads: PALM TAKES THE FIFTH.)

MARK

Nothing big so far. Cleared of charges.

WIFE (off)

What charges?

MARK

I can't go into detail.

(WIFE appears, crosses to center stage. She pantomimes picking tidying up living room. She stops and folds her arms. She's looking out over audience.)

WIFE

Sworn to secrecy. What happens if you tell me?

MARK

I'll be out of a job.

WIFE

You can find another one. I don't like what he's asking you to do. Each assignment worse than the one before. He wants to see how far you'll go.

(Headline: MURDER WEAPON TRACED TO MR. PALM with photo of Palm in a smart suit. Then: PALM CLEARED IN KILLING OF BUSINESS RIVAL.)

(WIFE walks over to him and looks over his shoulder.)

He's not a good man, Mark. You're going to erase all of that?

MARK

It's what I do.

WIFE

What does he want?

MARK

He's running for office. He wants all trails...

WIFE

How can you get rid of all that? People remember. Don't you think?

MARK

Not if I do this the right way. You shouldn't be looking...

WIFE

Look at that. He beat his wife.

MARK

Alleged...

WIFE

He stole millions in a Ponzi scheme.

MARK

It's okay. There are no convictions. Every one of these, he was cleared.

WIFE

I want you to give this file back. Ask for something easier....something...

MARK

It's too late. You know that. Once I start on a file, I have to finish it.

(Headline: PALMERO FAMILY'S FASCIST TIES.)

WIFE

They changed their name.

MARK

Not news. Lots of immigrants did that.

WIFE

Is that him?

MARK

I don't know. His grandfather...great grandfather.

(Headline: BLACKSHIRTS IN SQUARE. PALMERO
VOWS TO CLEANSE SLOVENE CITY.)

WIFE

Turn it off. I want you to turn it off and listen to me. Lately, your only frame of reference. I worry about you. You don't talk to me or the girls.

MARK

That's not true. We have dinner together. I'm home most evenings. They can come to me anytime with their problems. Most days, I work from home. Anyone can knock on this door.

WIFE

Something happened to you along the way.

MARK

I was given more to do at work. Everything I do involves going online. That's what I'm good at. That's why he gives me the files he does.

WIFE

Someone took away the husband I once knew

MARK

Is that supposed to be funny?

WIFE

It's no joke. I'm serious. Is Grove watching you right now? Watching me to see how I react?

MARK

What? Watching you?

(Headline: WRITER LORENZO PALMERO RENOUNCES
"THUGS AND GANGSTERS IN FAMILY TREE.")

(WIFE walks up to MARK and looks in his eyes, then reaches over and closes the lid of the laptop. The big screen headline dissolves.)

WIFE

Think about what you're doing. You're clearing a criminal of his crimes. Erasing his history, his family's. Do his victims know what you're doing? Does Grove tell them?

MARK

Of course he doesn't.

WIFE

Doesn't that bother you?

MARK

You're right. It should. It should bother me. But it doesn't.

(He closes his eyes. As he does so, lights come up on CHARLIE RENKO, sitting in a chair as WIFE moves back into darkness.)

CHARLIE

I remember when we were far out at sea. Middle of nowhere. There were Jews on board.

(MARK stands, approaches CHARLIE.)

MARK

So what?

CHARLIE

They had the money to travel, both ways.

MARK

Grandpa. C'mon. They had as much right to be on that boat as you did.

CHARLIE

Sure. You're right. There was one Jewish kid I remember. A little older than me. We were standing on the deck, leaning over the railing. Talking.

MARK

I don't remember this story...

CHARLIE

And there was an Italian. His father had put him on board. Stuffed money in his pockets.

MARK

What happened? Did something happen?

CHARLIE

Heard noises, muffled screams...

MARK

The Jewish kid... what...

CHARLIE

Was gone. The Italian was smiling at me, wiping his hands. He says "you didn't see it, right? No law out here." He was a Blackshirt. That's what they did. And we knew. (BEAT) You don't see, you don't say.

(CHARLIE bows his head.)

I know what happened.

(WIFE walks into shaft of light at center stage.)

WIFE

Come to bed. It's late.

MARK

Grove didn't choose me for this job.

WIFE

What are you talking about? Of course he did.

MARK

Palm picked me because he knew who I was. (BEAT) Our paths cross.

WIFE

I just don't understand the job you do. How do you cross paths with someone like him?

(MARK looks up, shakes his head.)

MARK

My grandfather saw something when he sailed to America. There's a story he told, but I don't remember the details. It's there...in that one story...the reason why Palm asked Grove to give me his file.

(Lights go down.)

ACT I

SCENE 6

(At rise, YOUNG CHARLIE, his FATHER and MOTHER walk across stage to down center. YOUNG CHARLIE carries a pack and the broken accordion. PALMERO, a young passenger, stands at the edge apart from the Renkos.)

FATHER

This is where we say goodbye?

MOTHER

We give him a good farewell. We have all day.

FATHER

Sure. We have all day.

MOTHER

Are you okay? Do you have enough bread?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Mama. I have enough.

MOTHER

It's a long passage.

YOUNG CHARLIE

How do you know?

MOTHER

My people and your father's...have gone over.

FATHER

What does he have? Isn't there food on the ship?

MOTHER

Of course.

(The sound of a boat horn is heard.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

When will I see you...

FATHER

This is why it's best to say goodbye. We may never see him.

MOTHER

Are you crazy? Don't say that.

FATHER

(pointing towards PALMERO)

Look at him. His people are gone. They left him.

PALMERO

No big deal. I left on my own. Hiked thirty miles.

FATHER

That's how it's done.

MOTHER

I can't leave him like that. Not our son.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'm ready.

PALMERO

It's nothing. Nothing.

MOTHER

You stay strong. I pray for you every day.

FATHER

Don't think about us. Your uncle will be there. He'll take care of you until you get on your own two feet.

MOTHER

Don't forget us.

FATHER

Please forget us. You're in America...the place where the old country gets forgotten.

(FATHER pats YOUNG CHARLIE on his back but CHARLIE grabs his father and pulls him tightly towards him. MOTHER puts her arm around both of them. PALMERO is watching, shaking his head.)

FATHER

Okay Mama. Let's go. Time to go.

MOTHER

Why such a hurry? What happens if we stay?

FATHER

The longer we stay, the harder it is to say goodbye.

(FATHER starts to exit. MOTHER watches her son as he walks to the edge. He turns, waves goodbye.)

OLDER CHARLIE (V.O.)

Last time I ever saw them. I never had the money to go back. And they never had the money to come to America.

PALMERO

You'll get over them. You get old and wise pretty fast.

(YOUNG CHARLIE nods.)

I know your village. My father's taken me through there. Poor farmers, mostly.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Like my father.

PALMERO

I didn't mean anything.

YOUNG CHARLIE

It's okay. I know your village too.

(Lights down. Voices of MR. GROVE and MARK can be heard.)

GROVE

This is highly unusual. I expected more from you.

MARK

I'm uncomfortable, sir. That's all there is.

GROVE

Do you think I'm comfortable? All that life, all those indiscretions, gone forever? But it's what we do here, Mr. Renko.

(Lights up on MARK and GROVE seated in GROVE'S office. GROVE has a brightly lit laptop in front of him.)

MARK

I'm having problems with his file. I just can't keep going down where this road leads.

GROVE

It's not that complicated. All you're doing is clearing him, cleaning him up. The press may find some data fragments here and there, but they won't be able to dig. That gives him a chance.

MARK

A chance for what?

GROVE

Who knows? Who cares? He may run for senate. The guy has money; enough to pay for everything. They want him to run. They want him in office.

MARK

Who wants him to run?

GROVE

The powers that be, Mr. Renko. The ones that run the whole show in this country. Our client starts with a clean slate, thanks to us, and we get paid. At this firm, Mr. Renko, every researcher goes through the same obstacle course. The cases get more challenging, on purpose.

MARK

This isn't just a challenging case. I think I was supposed to get...

GROVE

Of course you were. He asked for you, by name.

MARK

He was researching me...

GROVE

Not likely. I mean, how interesting is your family? What kind of trail would you have left? There's nothing there for him.

MARK

Something happened...

(GROVE stands, walks around the desk, sits at the edge.)

GROVE

If it's in the past, we let it lie. If something happened, it can be...

MARK

I know...erased.

GROVE

Mr. Palm wants to meet you.

MARK

Wants to meet me? Is that allowed?

GROVE

It's allowed if the client requests it.

MARK

What does he want?

GROVE

I'm sure I don't know.

MARK

Find me something else, sir. You can send me back to the editing room.

GROVE

You'll meet with Mr. Palm. I think he'll put your mind at ease. He's actually quite a nice guy. Personable. Family man. Monogamous. Churchgoer.

MARK

Criminal. Possibly a murderer.

GROVE

You cleared him of all that. It's gone, Mr. Renko. You've given Mr. Palm a new lease. He probably wants to thank you.

(GROVE pats MARK on the shoulder.)

GROVE (cntd.)

Go home, Renko. Take a rest. Have dinner with your wife. Tomorrow's another day.

(MARK nods as GROVE turns, exits. On the big screen, data is quickly scrolling down too fast to read. MARK stands, walks over to stage right where MARY ANN RENKO sits in a chair.)

MARY

Too many things to remember. Like boxes of light. A train going too fast.

MARK

You don't have to remember anything.

MARY

But I do. Because....

MARK

It's okay.

MARY

It's fading, Mark.

MARK

I know. I don't know what to...

MARY

What I don't remember gets lost. Mark. It gets lost. Charlie. He's barely there. Josephine and Sammy. I have to keep remembering before everything is gone.

(SHE closes her eyes. MARK takes her hand and holds on. The computer screen glows with an eerie light as lights go down.)

ACT I

SCENE 7

(At rise, a STOREKEEPER of an accordion shop looks up as JOSEPHINE and MARY enter. The store is filled with a large variety of accordians, concertinas and music boxes. These can be real instruments or images. JOSEPHINE stands back, but MARY looks closely at the instruments.)

STOREKEEPER

You play?

MARY

No. My papa does.

STOREKEEPER

Ah. Is this a gift?

JOSEPHINE

Tell him where we've been.

MARY

Yes mama. (to storekeeper) We've been in every music store in Cleveland. Last week we were in Pittsburgh.

STOREKEEPER

Looking for a certain one?

MARY

Yes. A certain one.

STOREKEEPER

A music box that has only one owner.

MARY

That's right.

(STOREKEEPER leads MARY to a wall of scattered accordians.)

STOREKEEPER

They all end up here, dear. The ones that can't be sold because they have only one player.

MARY

(pointing)

Mama. Is that the one?

JOSEPHINE

You found it?

STOREKEEPER

Ah. Yes. That one was rebuilt by hand. A Slovenian model. Is that the one?

JOSEPHINE

But he won't play it, Mary. You know he won't. We give to him, he might throw it to the floor.

STOREKEEPER

Who would do that?

JOSEPHINE

He would. The son of a bitch. Charlie Renko.

STOREKEEPER

Charlie Renko. I know him. A fine player. He had a band for a while, right? Played in the union halls in Pittsburgh, Slovenian festivals, churches...

JOSEPHINE

Yes. That was before we lost...

MARY

Mama. That's personal business.

JOSEPHINE

I wasn't going to tell the story. Bargain with him, see what his price is.

STOREKEEPER

It's okay. It has to go back to your father. There's a price, but I think we can come to agreement.

JOSEPHINE

I have ten dollars.

STOREKEEPER

Ten dollars? I can let it go. It does me no good hanging on that wall.

(JOSEPHINE gives the money to MARY. The
STOREKEEPER takes it down.)

And no one could play it. It made no sound.

(HE hands the instrument to MARY.)

Good luck.

JOSEPHINE

He'll probably try to sell it again.

MARY

Mama, have some faith.

JOSEPHINE

I've known him longer than I can remember. Stubborn man. No turning
around for him.

STOREKEEPER

You have to find the right time.

MARY

I'll give it to him. He blames me for everything. Maybe he'll see that I meant
no harm.

JOSEPHINE

(wiping her eyes)

Mary.

(She puts her arm around MARY.)

None of what happened is your fault. How could a kind, sweet girl like you
mean any harm?

(Lights down.)

ACT I

SCENE 8

(Lights rise to full and backdrop reveals a shimmering sea. A YOUNG MAN stands at rail of ocean liner. He is looking down, wears a yarmulke. YOUNG CHARLIE walks up to him.)

YOUNG MAN

Nice view.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Sure. It's nice. Water and sky.

YOUNG MAN

First good day.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Yes. Lots of bad weather. Hard to stay in for so long.

YOUNG MAN

I needed to stretch.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Sure. Have I seen you before?

YOUNG MAN

I'm from Ljubljana. Only a few hundred of us.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I don't understand...

YOUNG MAN

Jews. Not many in our country. I'm joining my parents in New York.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Ah. I see the hat.

(YOUNG MAN smiles, breathes in the air.)

YOUNG MAN

We wear the "hat" in the city, but probably not wise out here.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Why is it unwise?

YOUNG MAN

It's okay friend. Better that you don't know. We should talk like two young men on a journey. We don't have to know what's going on.

(PALMERO walks across the stage toward the two, but stops just short. He nods toward CHARLIE.)

PALMERO

Beautiful out here, isn't it.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Yes. Nice to see the sun after all this time.

PALMERO

If only THEY knew where to go.

YOUNG CHARLIE

What? Who are you talking about?

PALMERO

They cause all the trouble in the world. Start all the wars.

YOUNG CHARLIE

(pointing towards YOUNG MAN)

You're talking about him?

YOUNG MAN

Ignore him, friend. He wants to get you involved.

PALMERO

They should know not to come up on deck. We've taught lessons all over the ship.

YOUNG CHARLIE

What lessons?

PALMERO

You'll see, soon enough. Or turn away and walk down along the rail.

YOUNG MAN

You have to stay, friend. There are others waiting for his...

PALMERO

You've heard of us, Renko. See? I remember your name. My father knows more than I do, but I've learned from him. The Jews want all the power. Stop at nothing to get it. The Black Shirts are putting them in their place. Even out here.

(Lights fade on the men. Big screen lights up with scroll down of websites about the Palmeros. MARK'S WIFE steps out into spotlight.)

WIFE

What are you doing? Still working that stupid file?

MARK'S VOICE

Not really. I'm searching for something.

WIFE

I'm afraid your world is inside that laptop.

MARK'S VOICE

Inside the laptop.

WIFE

And it's replaced your brain...your senses.

MARK'S VOICE

I'm not following. How can the laptop replace my brain waves? I don't think that's possible.

WIFE

You don't even see what's going on around you Mark.

(Lights up on MARK sitting in chair, laptop in his lap.)

You see that screen in your sleep. It doesn't even look like a google search.

MARK

I don't use conventional search engines. We have our own. We have to go deep to erase things.

WIFE

What's going to happen?

MARK

You're going to leave me. I'm going to get fired. Or I'll just fade away until my battery dies. Or Palm will ask me a question, and he won't like my answer. That ends my association with him and Mr. Grove. But I have to find a way to protect myself and to keep the ball rolling.

WIFE

Do we still love each other?

MARK

I don't know. I would like us to, if it's possible.

WIFE

That's good enough for tonight. A work in progress.

MARK

I'm trying to wrest myself free. You have to give me time.

(SHE bends down, kissing MARK on forehead.)

WIFE

Don't be down here all night.

(MARK closes the laptop, grasps her hand, kisses it, lets go, watching as she walks into darkness. He waits. His cellphone rings. MARK answers.)

MARK

Hello Mr. Palm.

PALM'S VOICE

We need to meet, Mr. Renko.

MARK

Why? I thought you wanted anonymity.

PALM'S VOICE

Not with you, sir. You're different. Somehow, we were destined to meet to resolve a little problem. Of course, we are not guilty of the sins of our fathers or grandfathers.

MARK

I know the story.

PALM'S VOICE

You know the story you were told. I know the one I was told. I am a very different man, but I would like this story to be forgotten. All records. You plumb the depths of the so-called web. Dark records can be removed as well. Of course, I have little idea how that is done. You know. Grove assured me there was no one with your skill.

MARK

I can meet with you.

PALM'S VOICE

We can. In the meantime. Do what you can. And any record that you have. Your family records, I mean. Your mother is...

MARK

How do you know about her?

PALM'S VOICE

A strange intersection, Mr. Renko, with your past and mine. I have done my research as well.

(PAUSE)

Goodbye, sir. I'll talk to Grove. We'll meet for a drink and to finalize.

(Spotlight up on PALMERO leaning on railing of the ship.)

PALMERO

You can go back, Renko. You don't see, you don't tell.

(Voice of YOUNG MAN is heard.)

YOUNG MAN

You're a witness.

PALMERO

A witness? To what?

(Sound of scuffling feet. As lights come up, PALMERO is now behind YOUNG MAN who takes a few steps toward

upstage but is stopped by figures whose faces are obscured by tilted hats. They wear black shirts. YOUNG CHARLIE watches as PALMERO quickly grabs at YOUNG MAN'S arms. Another races forward, snatching MAN'S yarmulke. CHARLIE is shoved to the ground as PALMERO and another figure lift the screaming man up, PALMERO covering the man's mouth with his hand, and dropping him. PALMERO turns his back on CHARLIE.)

PALMERO

You see that, Renko? How easy it is. And in broad daylight no less. You can tell anyone you want. They already know. No one will care.

(PALMERO walks along edge of stage, whistling, then exits. CHARLIE RENKO stands, looking down at the water.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

Too late. Too late.

(Lights down.)

ACT II

SCENE 1

(At rise, GROVE stands at the edge of the stage, his arm around MARK RENKO, who appears nervous, his eyes darting around. Behind them is the big screen with the title BLACK TRACK with web matter scrolling quickly behind it in eerie lines of white light.)

GROVE

Ladies...gentlemen. I would like to personally congratulate our employee of the year, Mark Renko. He has done things that we can't speak of, so I won't speak of them.

(GROVE smiles as the crowd erupts in laughter and applause. MARK'S nervous face is partially obscured.)

We won't talk about his innovations here at Black Track, but you've all used them.

VOICES

He's a legend!!

GROVE

Search engines to dark nether regions of the net. We've cleared more candidates for office than all the intelligence agencies combined. This firm is small, still growing, but I see a bright future in black tracking.

VOICES

To the future!!

GROVE

But it must never be spoken of. Or I'll have to start killing you.

(Laughter)

No. I mean it. We have a firm that works for us. Bitcoin deposits have already been made, and they know what to do.

(Nervous laughter, applause)

No one knows half of you anyways, so nobody will miss you.

MARK

Sir. Are we almost done?

GROVE

They need to see your face.

MARK

But then they know who I am.

GROVE

They'll forget all about you, Mr. Renko, before they walk out that door. And you'll forget about me if you ever decide to leave us.

(Lights down as RENKO and GROVE step towards PALM, who stands downstage right. He extends a hand. They sit down in three chairs. The big screen lights up with an image of the Blue Star.)

PALM

Mark Renko. I finally get to meet you. Love your work.

GROVE

He wrote the book, Mr. Palm.

PALM

I've seen things go away. No other firm could touch that. And right away, I'm getting phone calls from donors. Amazing.

MARK

But this isn't about touting my successes.

PALM

No sir, it isn't.

GROVE

He wanted to make a proposal.

PALM

Let me speak, Mr. Grove. I wanna see if he's up to the challenge.

MARK

I'm done. I think I'm...

PALM

Do you have a family?

MARK

What does that have to do with...

PALM

A wife and two daughters.

MARK

Go ahead. Tell me about my house, my politics, where I go to church.

PALM

It's not like that. There's one man I'm interested in.

(Image of YOUNG CHARLIE RENKO standing on a dock. His UNCLE STANI has his arm around him.)

A man who saw and heard something on board the Blue Star in 1927. Your grandfather told you the story, told your mother a more detailed version. It was about my grandfather. There are records involved that a black track can't touch, Mr. Renko. This erasure has to be more creative. We have to start with the manifest.

GROVE

He can do it, Mr. Palm.

PALM

I'm asking him, not you.

MARK

The manifest? Of the ship?

PALM

Names have to be removed.

MARK

It's a written record. Government archives. And people know the story. My mother knows...

PALM

Your mother? Not for much longer.

MARK

I can't do what you're asking.

PALM

You can't or you won't?

GROVE

Renko. This ensures you an office next to mine. We can talk about partnership.

MARK

It can't be done.

GROVE

We've already shown that memories can be harvested.

MARK

We have? When?

PALM

Grove, perhaps you flatter yourself too much.

(PALM leans in closer to MARK.)

You know what happened on that ship.

MARK

I wasn't there. So...only bits and pieces.

GROVE

Who cares what happened? It's forgotten.

PALM

THEY remember, Grove. Whoever they may be. Always remember every damn thing. It makes them feel that they can change, live, rise above. But some things just happen out of the blue.

MARK

Like murder?

PALM

You think that's what we're talking about?

MARK

Isn't it? Wasn't it?

PALM

1927, sir, was a dark time in the old world. While America was dancing and pretending, my grandfather's world was falling apart. A new war was coming on. Young men out of work, angry, looking around for people to blame.

(MARK stands, walks to very edge.)

The Jews had money, jobs, owned businesses, flaunted their faith.

MARK

They made themselves targets, right?

PALM

What the hell do you know?

GROVE

Okay Mark. Think about what you're doing.

PALM

What's he doing? Where's he going with this?

MARK

I'll think about it.

PALM

Erase his name and those he...

MARK

(turning)

...tossed overboard.

PALM

From the manifest of the Blue Star. And anyone whose ancestors may have seen something. I'll pay you a bonus that equals your salary.

MARK

I'll consider the proposal, sir. It's a new wrinkle. It means contacting people.

PALM

You can do it. I know you can. Somewhere in your mother's room, there's a written record. A confession perhaps. Maybe your grandfather wasn't as innocent as you think.

(MARK closes his eyes, as if remembering.)

MARK

He wasn't involved.

PALM

Were you there, Mr. Renko?

MARK

I know what your grandfather did.

(PALM stands, nods at GROVE, then walks past MARK before stopping and turning.)

PALM

Everyone saw, Mr. Renko. Everyone knows more than they say and they do less or do nothing. That was Charlie Renko, wasn't it?

(PALM exits as lights go down.)

ACT II

SCENE 2

(At rise, CHARLIE is sitting in his chair without his accordion. JOSEPHINE stands behind him, head bowed, hands folded.)

CHARLIE

What can you pray about? There's nothing to be done.

JOSEPHINE

Maybe He'll listen and give us peace.

CHARLIE

I don't pray. God won't listen.

JOSEPHINE

I had a dream a month before he died.

CHARLIE

I told you. We don't talk about him.

JOSEPHINE

(looking up)

This is the first time. I have to say what happened.

CHARLIE

We don't talk about him.

JOSEPHINE

In the dream, I was awakened. Or maybe it really happened.

(A FIGURE appears carrying a child wrapped in winter clothes. Water drips from the clothing.)

An angel came to my bed carrying Sammy.

CHARLIE

I can't hear this.

JOSEPHINE

I knew what happened, but I asked the angel anyways.

CHARLIE

What good is it to tell me the story?

JOSEPHINE

Is it him?

(The FIGURE nods, gently lowering the child to the floor.
CHARLIE stands from his chair.)

CHARLIE

There won't be anything good in this house. Mary should've stopped him. She's the older sister. She let go. He slipped. There won't be anything left. Don't you understand that woman?

(JOSEPHINE nods as the FIGURE slips back into
darkness.)

JOSEPHINE

I don't blame Mary.

CHARLIE

Fine. You can be the one to comfort her. I can't. I can't comfort anyone.

JOSEPHINE

And that's great, isn't it Charlie? The accordion is gone. And all you have for a friend is that jug of wine.

(CHARLIE walks up to her, pulling back an arm as if he is
about to hit her. SHE doesn't flinch.)

That makes you feel better, to hit me? I won't back down. Not the Charlie I once knew. The one I fell in love with.

(CHARLIE collapses to the floor. MARK enters, walking
up to him, putting a hand on his shoulder, helping him up.
JOSEPHINE picks up a basket of vegetables. She walks to
the edge of the stage.)

JOSEPHINE

Look who's here Charlie. It's Mark. We have oxtail soup on the stove and bread. You have to eat.

MARK

I was on my way home.

JOSEPHINE

We don't see you much. How's Sarah?

MARK

She's good.

CHARLIE

Any grandchildren?

MARK

What?

JOSEPHINE

Charlie, that's their business.

CHARLIE

We're getting old and he's the first one married. How long have you...

MARK

Since last summer. Grandpa, you and grandma were both there. You played at my wedding.

CHARLIE

How's work?

MARK

I'm still looking for a...

CHARLIE

Good, honest work is hard to find.

JOSEPHINE

Not that hard. He can work anywhere.

MARK

I have a question for the two of you.

JOSEPHINE

Come in the kitchen. Come inside.

(SHE crosses to right of center stage where three chairs are set up. SHE puts down the basket and pantomimes pouring soup in a bowl and pulling off a piece of bread. SHE puts it down in front of MARK then puts her hands on her hips. CHARLIE struggles to walk over to table. HE sits, groaning as he does so.)

JOSEPHINE

(to MARK)

Don't stare at it. Eat. You're skin and bones.

CHARLIE

You have a question?

(MARK takes a bite. JOSEPHINE turns back to the stove.)

MARK

Yeah. How did you meet?

CHARLIE

Me and Josephine?

MARK

Yes. Mom tells me you two grew up in two villages separated by a mountain.

CHARLIE

Yes. I would see her walking down the path to the sea. Our eyes met a few times, but we never talked.

JOSEPHINE

I don't remember that.

CHARLIE

You don't remember me, but I remember....

JOSEPHINE

We met in Punsxy. You came over. Five years later, I came. We met at a dance where his band was playing.

CHARLIE

It wasn't a dance. It was a wedding.

JOSEPHINE

There was no wedding.

CHARLIE

Sure it was. Your aunt was getting married again. You were a bridesmaid. And I remembered you. Our eyes met again.

JOSEPHINE

No. It wasn't like that at all.

MARK

I'm sorry I asked.

(Lights dim. Two chairs are moved to the edge of the stage. CHARLIE and JOSEPHINE are seated. Their heads are down. MARY stands behind them. MARK is with them.)

JOSEPHINE

Why are we here?

MARY

I had no choice, mama. Papa had fallen. He couldn't take care of you anymore and couldn't take care of himself.

CHARLIE

You put us here? What happened to the house?

MARY

It's still there.

MARK

Grandpa.

CHARLIE

Who is it? Mark?

JOSEPHINE

Who is he?

MARY

It's Mark.

JOSEPHINE

Who is Mark?

MARY

Papa. How did you meet mama?

CHARLIE

I don't remember.

MARK

I've asked him that. He said...

MARY

I want to know what he remembers. Mama doesn't remember anything. Charlie...

CHARLIE

I was in a village and she came up to me.

JOSEPHINE

Who's talking now? What's he saying?

CHARLIE

She was carrying a basket of vegetables. She gave me some radishes.

MARY

What was her name?

(CHARLIE closes his eyes.)

CHARLIE

Her name?

MARY

Mama. What's Mama's name?

CHARLIE

She was a good cook. I remember. We had a garden and we worked it together in the backyard. She would chase away the rabbits and I would dig the rows for beans, endive, tomatoes, onions. She was...she was...

MARK

Details...he remembers. But names....

CHARLIE

Someone I used to know. Used to remember.

(HE puts out his hand, takes JOSEPHINE'S hand.)

I took care of her for a while in that house until I fell.

(Lights go down.)

ACT II

SCENE 3

(Stage is dark. VOICES of YOUNG CHARLIE and ELLIS ISLAND OFFICIAL are heard along with sounds of a ship creaking and moving back and forth in the water.)

OFFICIAL

Give me your name son.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Name? Charlie Renko.

OFFICIAL

Why are you here?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Pardon?

OFFICIAL

Why are you....

YOUNG CHARLIE

Work. To find...

OFFICIAL

Do you have family here? Family in America? Are you an orphan?

(Lights come up on YOUNG CHARLIE, carrying his pack and accordion, standing in front of OFFICIAL who sits at a desk. Another man, UNCLE STANI, stands off to the side, looking around as if trying to find someone. TWO WOMEN have come off the boat and are standing in line behind YOUNG CHARLIE. PALMERO waits down stage, smoking a cigarette.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

I want to report a crime.

OFFICIAL

What? Speak English.

(STANI sees YOUNG CHARLIE.)

UNCLE STANI

Charlie? Is that you?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Someone was thrown off the boat. A man. A Jew.

OFFICIAL

I can't understand a damn thing. Go to the next line where the doctor is. He'll check you for diseases.

(PALMERO glances toward the OFFICIAL, nods and smiles. The OFFICIAL nods, smiles back.)

UNCLE STANI

Charlie Renko! Over here.

OFFICIAL

He gets out of line, we have to put him in detention and send him back.

(PALMERO walks toward YOUNG CHARLIE.)

PALMERO

It okay. You just get in the next line so they can check you for lice. They think we're animals, you see. So we have lice and fleas and rabies.

(CHARLIE is guided across the stage by PALMERO, stands. The two WOMEN move from the first OFFICIAL to the line where CHARLIE is. STANI walks over toward CHARLIE, speaks to unseen official.)

UNCLE STANI

He's with me. I'm taking him from here. (BEAT) Yes. I'm family. (BEAT) His uncle. So I vouch for him.

(STANI grasps at CHARLIE'S shoulder.)

OFFICIAL

Hey. Hey. We're still not done with him.

UNCLE STANI

It's okay.

OFFICIAL

You don't tell me when it's okay. I tell him, then I tell you. When you lose the accent, you can talk like you own the place.

(Lights go down. A spotlight comes up downstage. A desk and chair are set up there. UNCLE STANI steps into the light, holding the broken accordion. He sets the pieces down on the desk.)

UNCLE STANI

It must've belonged to someone a long time ago. It's an old instrument. And it was stolen. Whoever stole it tried to play it but couldn't. So they smashed it on the rocks in frustration. That's where I found it.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Is that true?

UNCLE STANI

How the hell do I know.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Can you fix it.

UNCLE STANI

I don't know. But I'll try.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Will I be able to play it?

UNCLE STANI

If you ask permission, in the right way. It might be granted. The instrument has to approve of your hands. Let me see your hands.

(YOUNG CHARLIE lifts his hands.)

Maybe. They look like good, strong hands. But can they play an instrument like this?

YOUNG CHARLIE

It's not an instrument.

UNCLE STANI

It is, son. Just broken. I found it on the banks of a stream. I was on my way back from the Great War. Your father ever talk about it?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Sure. He said you were a soldier.

UNCLE STANI

(smiles, looks down at pieces)

I wasn't a soldier. Not the kind they wanted. I'm lucky to be alive.

(STANI picks up the pieces.)

God didn't want me to die, son. Not yet.

(He pushes them together, and holds them together with his hands.)

We'll get you set up. Fix the music box. Find you a job. You'll go out to where our people are. A town called Punxsutawney in Pennsylvania. You can stay with your mama's brother.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I won't be staying with you?

(STANI carefully sets the accordion down.)

UNCLE STANI

Nobody stays too long with me, son. I don't stay long in any place. I'll teach you how to keep yourself strong here. They want to make you give up and go home. Old country rules don't work over here.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I thought I would live here...with you.

UNCLE STANI

It's okay, Charlie. You'll be fine. You keep moving. Don't let the guard down. You don't need me. You can stay here for a few days. Then I put you on the train. They're waiting for you.

(STANI puts out his hands. CHARLIE walks toward him and STANI puts his hands on CHARLIE'S shoulders.)

UNCLE STANI (cntd.)

When the music box is done, it will get sent.

(STANI steps to the edge of stage left, pantomimes writing a letter. YOUNG CHARLIE steps to the edge of stage right. YOUNG JOSEPHINE walks into spotlight behind him.)

Dear brother, after a few lessons on how to survive in America, I put Charlie on a train and sent him on his way. Scared, yes. But he was like all of us when we first came. And we learned.

YOUNG CHARLIE

It wasn't a short journey. It was months off and on that train. Stopping in towns and looking for work. When I arrived in Punxsutawney six months later, they were waiting. And the music box was waiting too...

(Lights up over stage to reveal the accordion on a chair. There is the soft sound of a slow polka as OTHERS stand, heads down, in old country clothes. YOUNG JOSEPHINE steps toward YOUNG CHARLIE.)

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

Your family is here?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Some are.

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

You are?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Charlie Renko. Just arrived.

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

(pointing towards accordion)

The music box is yours?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Not yet. But soon.

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

They told me about you. Said, "be careful of him."

YOUNG CHARLIE

No one here knows me. But I know who you are.

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

You don't. How could you?

YOUNG CHARLIE

You don't remember? The paths we walked from our villages.

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

What paths? There weren't paths. What are you about to do?

YOUNG CHARLIE

You know me so well, you tell me.

(She smiles)

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

Dance?

(He bows his head. The music gets louder.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

And you are?

(They get closer, start to dance.)

YOUNG JOSEPHINE

Josephine.

(Lights go down. GROVE'S voice is heard.)

GROVE

Mr. Renko. We are at an impasse. This can only go in one direction. You refuse to finish this job you started.

(MARK'S voice.)

MARK

That's where you're wrong sir. I am finishing it.

GROVE

In your own way. We don't want to find out what happened on that ship. We want to forget.

(Lights come to reveal GROVE standing, his hands in his pockets. MARK is in the background.)

(MARK walks to the edge of the stage.)

MARK

Forget? How is that a solution?

GROVE

(angry, for the first time)

Are you trying to play a game with me, Renko?

MARK

I'm trying to get out of the game.

GROVE

You should know by now. There are no solutions to any of the problems in the world. Poverty, war, genocide, murder, rape. You name it. The worst impulses of human nature can't be changed. You think too much, Mr. Renko.

MARK

Is that what's wrong with me?

GROVE

Because of that, you fall short. Someone has gotten to you.

MARK

My grandfather.

GROVE

Your grandfather's still alive?

(Lights down on GROVE.)

MARK

He's with me, Mr. Grove, almost every day. I can still hear his voice. And you're right about how I fall short. (BEAT) I'm making up for that now, sir.

(Lights down on MARK.)

ACT II

SCENE 4

(OLDER CHARLIE walks into a shaft of light on a dimly lit stage, accordion strapped to his chest. He closes his eyes and begins to play a slow, mournful waltz. MARY is in nursing home bed. She sits up, looks around, then reaches below the bed for a wooden box. She lifts it, opens it.)

CHARLIE

One last time, Mary. Next time, there'll be others.

(He stops playing.)

MARY

No. Don't stop. It helps me remember.

(He plays a few more bars.)

Who will come?

CHARLIE

Mama and Sammy. They'll come. They want to see you through.

(He stops.)

What's in the box?

MARY

You know. Don't you know?

CHARLIE

What you wrote?

MARY

What you told me to write.

CHARLIE

Did I save him?

MARY

What do you remember?

CHARLIE

Too many versions...same story. I don't even know what he looked like.

MARY

But you were so young. What could you do?

CHARLIE

I put my life before his.

MARY

How old were you Papa?

CHARLIE

Seventeen.

MARY

A boy. Too young to know any better.

CHARLIE

No. I knew better.

(Lights down. Sound of a struggle between two men and the gentle rocking of a ship in fairly calm waters. Lights come up to reveal PALMERO and YOUNG MAN at the edge of the stage with CHARLIE backing away.)

PALMERO

Go your own way, Charlie. You don't need to be here.

YOUNG CHARLIE

He's done nothing wrong. Let him go.

PALMERO

Not your business.

(PALMERO suddenly grabs the man from behind. Another man in black shirt rushes up and helps him lift the YOUNG MAN, dangling him at the edge of the stage.)

BLACK SHIRT

You heard him. Get out of here.

YOUNG MAN

Sir! Help me!

(YOUNG CHARLIE turns his head away. PALMERO smiles.)

PALMERO

If you keep your mouth shut, I'll put in a good word for you.

(Shaft of light comes up on OLDER CHARLIE.)

CHARLIE

I did nothing.

(MARK'S VOICE is heard.)

MARK (off)

You told him to stop, didn't you?

CHARLIE

I remember it different each time. Maybe I didn't say a thing.

MARK (off)

Grandpa, it's okay. It was a long time ago.

CHARLIE

When he told me to look away, I did.

MARK (off)

You were fearful, right? And you were a kid.

CHARLIE

A coward. He wasn't much older. I could've taken him. I was strong enough to stop him.

(MARK appears.)

MARK

Grandpa. You were out in the middle of nowhere.

CHARLIE

If I could just go back there, I'd pull them apart...

MARK

But you can't.

CHARLIE

A second chance...

MARK

None of us get second chances. That's why our lives are full of mistakes.

CHARLIE

Mistakes. I've made so many that I wish I could change.

(MARK steps forward as CHARLIE'S head goes down.)

MARK

Charlie Renko. You were haunted and torn by the past. You wanted nothing more than to be a good man. But in your own eyes, you always fell short.

(Stage goes dark except for shaft of light up on MARY and JOSEPHINE near center stage.)

MARY

I keep trying Mama.

JOSEPHINE

He has to, at some point. Even a man as hard as he is.

MARY

Does he?

JOSEPHINE

Let me talk to him first.

MARY

He knows I'm getting married. He knows I'm leaving. He may never see me again if he won't talk to me. Is that what he wants?

JOSEPHINE

Let me talk to him.

(Light down. VOICE of MARK is heard.)

MARK

I left some pieces in. Some markers for the press to follow. They'll find out that there's a family history, Palm's own remarks about Jews and women. And then the Palms and Palmeros that came before him. All the way back to the Blue Star.

(Lights up on MARK and WIFE.)

WIFE

It sounds complicated. Why don't you just walk away from the whole thing? Let the pieces fall where they fall?

MARK

I want him to pay.

WIFE

For what his grandfather did? I understand that you want to right wrongs. But maybe you're going too far. Every family has secrets....dark secrets. Don't they?

MARK

Do you know how much damage I've already done?

WIFE

No. I don't. But there's nothing you can do about it except walk away and try to get your dignity back.

(GROVE stands at the edge of the stage. MARK approaches him.)

GROVE

I'm not concerned any longer, Mr. Renko. Of course, you did violate protocols. But it doesn't matter to me. The client no longer cares because he thinks the story will die. Who's going to follow it now 100 years later? What your grandfather saw on that ship; it can't be proven anyways. Things happen when you're out in the middle of the ocean.

MARK

There were witnesses and three missing Jews. All passengers whose names were on the manifest.

VOICE 1

Italians like me were on board and saw what happened. We reported it. We're not afraid of the fascists.

GROVE

The goddamn manifest! Who cares? A record of no consequence. ALL those passengers are now dead, Mr. Renko.

VOICE 2

A girl was thrown overboard. I saw it and I want to report it.

GROVE

There's no story here. The client is satisfied.

VOICE 3

My grandmother was there. She told me what happened, and I wrote down every word.

GROVE

You did some good work, but you chose to interfere. Because of that, you're no longer needed...or wanted...here at Black Track.

MARK

I'll be....

GROVE

You'll be going. And please, don't put me down as a reference. I won't exist, Renko. My name, my appearance, my line of work will all change.

VOICE

I know what happened on the Blue Star of the Adriatic. The story...

MARK

(whispered)

...is preserved.

(Lights down.)

ACT II

SCENE 5

(At rise, UNCLE STANI is standing at the edge of the stage. YOUNG CHARLIE is seated in a chair, his head down.)

UNCLE STANI

Once upon a time...there was a magical accordion.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I told you. This story never happened.

UNCLE STANI

It was carried by many owners over a course of a hundred years.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Is this one the truth?

UNCLE STANI

As far as I can remember. (BEAT) One day a villager found the accordion just sitting on a river bank. He picked it up and tried to play, but he was foolish. He expected the song to come. The accordion was patient and decided to stay with the villager. The young man carried the instrument to war where other soldiers asked him to play. He tried a Slovenian song, a mournful song of lost love. For one minute, the guns stopped and there was silence across all the fields. The accordion played like it had never played before. The man lifted his hands for one second before he was struck in the back and fell, his blood trickling across the keys.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Who was the soldier?

UNCLE STANI

A friend of mine. When he fell, I picked up the pieces and tied them together.

YOUNG CHARLIE

Is this the real story? It keeps changing, Uncle Stani.

(UNCLE STANI smiles sadly.)

UNCLE STANI

This is the one I remember. The one I'll stick with for now.

YOUNG CHARLIE

I'm not like you and Papa. Not a storyteller.

UNCLE STANI

How can you not be? It's in the blood. Your grandfather also had tales. Family stories going back centuries. Are you not one of us?

YOUNG CHARLIE

Who knows? I just started.

(UNCLE STANI puts his arm around YOUNG CHARLIE'S shoulder.)

UNCLE STANI

That's true. And I should know that. You have to set your own course, Charlie.

(Lights down. Stage is dark. VOICE of JOSEPHINE is heard.)

JOSEPHINE

Charlie? Are you asleep?

CHARLIE

No. I was thinking.

JOSEPHINE

You've been thinking a lot, but no change. When does that happen?

CHARLIE

Change? What do you want?

(Lights up on CHARLIE in his chair; JOSEPHINE standing behind him.)

JOSEPHINE

You've been sitting here, every day, for how many years now, since the day he was taken.

(CHARLIE looks up at her.)

JOSEPHINE (cntd.)

Still can't say his name. A long time, Charlie, pretending it never happened. Come home from work. Say nothing to her. Take your jug of wine.

CHARLIE

Saying nothing to her...

JOSEPHINE

Mary Anne. She knows what you think of her, Charlie. Barely a word comes across the table. You're a stubborn man, getting old before your time. It's not yet time to die. And you blame her. You make her feel like she did something wrong.

CHARLIE

You're right.

JOSEPHINE

(surprised)

What? I am?

CHARLIE

It's been too long. Wasted years. I should've told her it's not her fault. Where is she?

JOSEPHINE

Where she always is. In the house. Waiting for you. And she has something to give you.

(MARY comes toward CHARLIE, carrying the accordion.)

CHARLIE

No, it can't be.

MARY

Papa, we found it.

JOSEPHINE

She found it. It was her mission. I was just the driver.

(CHARLIE takes the accordion, puts it down on the floor.)

MARY

Do you forgive me?

CHARLIE

I should ask you that question. You did nothing wrong.

MARY

All these years, I thought you blamed me for what happened to Sam.

CHARLIE

How could I blame you? How could I have wasted all that time?

(MARY rushes into CHARLIE'S arms.)

I'm sorry, Mary. I was wrong.

JOSEPHINE

Does this finally end, Charlie? Your daughter's about to get married.

CHARLIE

It ends.

(Lights go down. MARY'S voice is heard.)

(MARK appears, in spotlight.)

MARY'S VOICE

The day he put his arms around me.

MARK

Ma? Are you awake? Can you hear me.

MARY'S VOICE

The day he spoke to me again.

MARK

What day? What are you...

MARY'S VOICE

The day his music came back to our house.

MARK

I've heard this one before. Every time I come here.

MARY'S VOICE

I remember nothing else but that. Nothing else.

MARK

Nothing?

(Lights up on MARY in nursing home bed.)

MARY

Who's there?

MARK

It's Mark. Your son.

MARY

You know who else is here?

MARK

No. The nurse is out in the hall. But it's just you and me.

MARY

No. They're here.

MARK

Who is that?

MARY

Charlie. Josephine. Sam. They're at the bed. And Charlie is playing.

MARK

Wasn't he always...playing?

(CHARLIE stands with JOSEPHINE, walking around the bed. JOSEPHINE looks down at MARK.)

JOSEPHINE

He's skin and bones. Is he eating? I have roast and cabbage on the stove.

CHARLIE

What stove? We don't have a kitchen.

JOSEPHINE

The kitchen in the old house.

CHARLIE

The house is gone. And we have to go.

JOSEPHINE

Mary. Can you hear us?

CHARLIE

Tell him good night. You don't have to fight with it.

MARY

Fight with what?

CHARLIE

Memory...that won't come. Now it all comes back. But only the ones you want.

JOSEPHINE

He's right Mary. Only the good memories come.

MARK

Ma? Are you still with me?

CHARLIE

You can tell him he did good. He was a good son. His name is Mark.

MARY

Mark. You did good. You're a good son.

(MARK grasps her hand, squeezes it. CHARLIE smiles.)

MARK

(struck by her words)

Thank you Ma.

MARY

Good night, Mark.

CHARLIE

When he leaves...

JOSEPHINE

Give him time.

CHARLIE

...we'll take her with us. The village is waiting. And the sea.

JOSEPHINE

And the garden. The one we had. You can't forget...

CHARLIE

How can I forget the garden?

(CHARLIE softly plays a waltz. MARK stands, kisses MARY on the forehead. JOSEPHINE reaches for MARY'S hand. MARK looks around as if he can feel their presence.)

MARK

Goodnight Ma. They'll take good care of you.

(CHARLIE continues to play as the lights go down.)

ACT II

SCENE 6

(At rise, LORENZO PALMERO is sitting at a small table, facing unseen reporters.)

LORENZO

My name is Lorenzo Palmero. Unlike my more famous cousin, I kept the family name. My grandfather rejected the extremist views of his brother. And many in my family fought against the blackshirts and fascists. But that didn't become the story of the Palmeros. The thugs and murderers were the ones that had staying power, the ones you kept writing about.

(Stage is dark. REPORTERS' and PALM'S VOICES are heard.)

REPORTER 1

Mr. Palm!

REPORTER 2

Mr. Palm. How do you respond to the story in The Exponent.

PALM

What story? I don't read that paper.

(Lights up to reveal PALM and a small group of REPORTERS. PALM is smiling, confident.)

REPORTER 2

They have a story that your family was connected to the murders of Jewish passengers aboard an immigrant ship in 1927.

PALM'S VOICE

Are you kidding me? You reporters have nothing better to do but ask me about something that happened almost a hundred years ago?

REPORTER 1

What about your family's ties to fascist and right-wing nationalist groups in Italy? And charges of anti-semitism? And your personal connection to the disappearance of a Wall Street rival?

PALM

Go to hell. This is the Jewish press, right? They're behind all these stories. The Jews like to use their money against people like me. Why don't you go investigate that?

(PALM realizes what he just said. His smile vanishes.)

REPORTER 2

Mr. Palm, what do you mean by that?

REPORTER 1

Mr. Palm, how do you expect to continue your campaign in a state with so many Jewish voters?

(PALM quickly exits, REPORTERS following after.)

REPORTER 2

Mr. Palm...do you have any comments?

REPORTER 1

Mr. Palm.

(Lights down. NEWS REPORT is heard.)

REPORTER'S VOICE

With polls showing him now in third place among republican candidates, many are wondering if ANTHONY PALM'S run for the vacated New York seat is in jeopardy.

(As lights go up, MARK is standing at the edge of the stage. WIFE is upstage of him taking off her jacket and hanging it up.)

WIFE

I'm sorry I wasn't there. I didn't think she'd go that fast.

MARK

It's okay. It was going to happen.

(She turns toward him.)

WIFE

She didn't suffer...right?

MARK

I don't think so. She said they were with her.

WIFE

Your grandparents?

MARK

It almost seemed like they were telling her what to say.

WIFE

Knowing Charlie and Josephine...I'm not surprised.

MARK

She even called me by name. The most aware I've seen her in months and it was the night she passed away. And she seemed happy. Could she have been?

WIFE

Happy? If her parents were there, then yes.

(WIFE walks up behind him, putting her hands on his shoulders.)

Are you okay?

MARK

I think so.

(BEAT)

WIFE

Do you remember us?

WIFE

Remember us?

MARK

When we first met? When we first started?

MARK

Most things...I guess.

WIFE

When we were young. When life wasn't as complicated.

MARK

Not as complicated, yes.

WIFE

When we said we loved each other more often. (BEAT) When you were a romantic.

MARK

Never. That was never me.

WIFE

Do you believe in magic? Some kind of...

MARK

You mean magic tricks or something else?

WIFE

I'm trying to ask a question and I don't know how to phrase it.

MARK

Are you asking if I believe in you?

WIFE

I think so.

MARK

Like I used to?

WIFE

Like you used to...yes.

MARK

I can. I can if I'm given a chance.

WIFE

Because there was a time when we did believe in each other. Wasn't there?

MARK

Yes, there was a time.

WIFE

And it wasn't so long ago. When you used to write songs for me. And you were strong in your beliefs. Do you remember? Because it's the memory that allows us to bring it back. And to keep going.

MARK

It is. You're right. I've never understood. That's what carried them through.

WIFE

Who?

MARK

My parents. My grandparents.

WIFE

Do we have that? Did we ever...

MARK

It's okay. I know what you're trying to say. Because you've always tried harder than me. I took you for granted. I'm sorry for that.

(MARK stands and faces her.)

You know I'm unemployed.

WIFE

I don't care. You can always start again, Mark. We can always start.

(He kisses her. He puts his hand around her waist, and pulls her close. They kiss again. CHARLIE and JOSEPHINE'S VOICES are heard.)

CHARLIE

We grow everything in this garden. Beets over there. Green beans down that row. Potatoes over there. And you see that?

(CHARLIE and JOSEPHINE appear in a shaft of light. SHE is bent down, pulling weeds. SHE rises, points.)

JOSEPHINE

It's endive. Just like we had in Slovenia. Bitter to taste until you put it in salad with vinegar, sugar and oil. Some bacon and beans.

CHARLIE

Tomatoes. Onions. Parsley in that corner.

JOSEPHINE

Turn the dirt. Throw in the peels. Keep out the rabbits. That's how it goes.

CHARLIE

Seasons always come, Papa said. Dirt gets frozen then melts. And we plant our crops. Have to remember how things are set; what we've said and done.

Anything worth doing....

JOSEPHINE

That's right.

CHARLIE

Takes work.

(Lights down on JOSEPHINE and CHARLIE.)

(MARK and WIFE are in a shaft of light, holding each other close and getting closer as stage gets darker.)

THE END

