

BELLA VISTA

(Based on a true story)

FADE IN:

EXT. THE PANAMA CANAL ZONE - DAY

Dawn breaks as a soft breeze rustles the tropical fauna. It has the feel of a Mediterranean morning, but it is, instead, the Panama Canal Zone.

Resting along the canal is the majestic luxury Italian liner Conte Biancamano whose name is emblazoned along the bow.

INT. THE SLEEPING AREA FOR BIANCAMANO CREWMEN - DAY

FRANCESCO, a muscular and handsomely dark man in his early 20s, is asleep in his bunk. Above his head hangs a portrait of Mussolini with a small red ribbon affixed to the top.

In the bunk next to him sleeps GIANGUIDO, a stocky-built man in his late-40s, with rugged features. Above his head hangs a portrait of the Italian King Emmanuel.

Gianguido suddenly stirs awake and looks at his bedside clock. It is 5:45 a.m. He jumps up.

GIANGUIDO

Francesco! Wake up! We're late!

FRANCESCO

Huh?

GIANGUIDO

Breakfast is in 15 minutes!

FRANCESCO

So what? Go back to sleep.

GIANGUIDO

Ma donna! Alessandro will have our skin
if it's not ready! Avanti!

FRANCESCO

Alessandro. Eh, who's afraid of Alessandro
anymore? We have no passengers. This is
a ship of fools. Let'em all wait.

GIANGUIDO

Wait! Are you crazy?

FRANCESCO

Yes, wait. Like we wait. Month after
month in this hole. Breakfast, lunch.
It's all the same. Why hurry?

GIANGUIDO

Because it's still our job? Here, put on
your pants and move your lazy ass.

Both men get dressed. Gianguido hurriedly, Francesco at a
snail's pace.

FRANCESCO

Italy has joined the war and we sit
here like ducks in a pond.

GIANGUIDO

They will let us cross when it is safe.

FRANCESCO

Safe? I will be an old man by then.

GIANGUIDO

Stop complaining. You could be home,
looking down the barrel of a gun
this morning instead of making fritatas
and espresso. No? Let's go.

Gianguido rushes out the door and leaves Francesco slowly buttoning his shirt

INT. GALLEY OF THE BIANCAMANO- DAY

In silence, Gianguido works frantically and Francesco, again, at a snail's pace, stacking eggs, filling pots with coffee and water, as they prepare breakfast for the crew.

Suddenly the silence is broken BY THE SHOUTING OF U.S. COAST GUARD SEAMEN BOARDING THE SHIP AND TAKING THE BIANCAMANO'S MEN INTO CUSTODY.

Two Coast Guardsmen BARGE INTO THE GALLEY WITH GUNS DRAWN.

FIRST GUARDSMAN

Let's go. Up on deck.

GIANGUIDO

Why? What have we done?

SECOND GUARDSMAN

Just move. Come on.

GIANGUIDO

We're not soldiers. We're cooks.

FRANCESCO

So now your government treats us like criminals? For what? Where is your commander? I demand a hearing!

Francesco steals himself, arms defiantly folded, striking a pose like El Duce.

I am not moving until I see your commander!

The first guardsman moves aggressively close to Francesco and points his rifle inches from his face.

FIRST GUARDSMAN

Pack up your things and get on deck.

Gianguido, sensing the danger, quickly intercedes.

GIANGUIDO

We want no trouble. We will come.

FIRST GUARDSMAN

You have two minutes.

The guardsmen leave. Gianguido lashes out at Francesco.

GIANGUIDO

Jesus Christ! You hothead. I swear
you are going to get us killed!

FRANCESCO

Me ne frego! I don't give a damn.

He gives a fascist salute toward the closed door.

GIANGUIDO

You and Mussolini! What's he gonna
do for us here, huh? Come on!
Move out!

FRANCESCO

Ha! I didn't have to go back to Italy
to look down the barrel of a gun, huh?

INT. - THE CREWMEN'S SLEEPING QUARTERS - DAY

Gianguido and Francesco gather things into their duffle bags.

Francesco takes his portrait of Mussolini off the wall and puts
it in his bag.

GIANGUIDO

Ah, *that*, my friend, will get you into big
trouble.

FRANCESCO

So be it. "Better one day as a lion than a hundred years as a sheep."

Gianguido rolls his eyes.

INT. - STAIRWAY OF THE SHIP - DAY

Crewmen are struggling to climb stairs to the deck while carrying all their belongings in large duffle bags and crates. Musicians from the cruise liner's band are carrying large instrument cases. One band member, VINCENZO, is pushed into Francesco and his violin case jabs him in the back.

FRANCESCO

Oh! Vincenzo, watch it with that fiddle of yours.

VINCENZO

I was pushed. And it's a violin.

FRANCESCO

The way you play it, it's a fiddle.

EXT. - THE DECK OF THE BIANCAMANO - DAY

The Biancamano's men have been assembled on deck. Many holding their instrument cases. Francesco stands stoically, while Gianguido fidgets. A Coast Guard Captain steps forward to make an announcement.

COAST GUARD CAPT.

By order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, this ship is impounded. It is now the property of the United States of America.

Suddenly, CAPT. ALESSANDRO GIOTO steps forward, salutes and interrupts the captain.

ALESSANDRO

Sir, I am Alessandro Gioto, and as this ship's captain, I must protest this action. We are a cruise ship, not a war ship! We have no weapons here. Only musicians, actors, and sailors. We demand a hearing.

COAST GUARD CAPT.

This is a Presidential order. And it will be enforced. You all will remain in the custody of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service until it is safe for you to return home. Until that time, you will be sent to a safe, secure area where you will be housed, fed and treated with the utmost respect. Now, we will need you to move out in single file, please.

Alessandro, visibly resigned, turns to his men.

ALESSANDRO

We will leave the Conte Biancamanno with dignity.

Francesco yells out in anger:

FRANCESCO

They are taking our ship to give to the British! This is Italian property! They have no right!

A few guardsmen raise their guns and take a few steps toward the men. Alessandro raises his hand and yells back to Francesco and the other men.

ALESSANDRO

With dignity!

Gianguido elbows Francesco hard in the ribs, which quiets him. Alessandro begins escorting the men off the boat.

EXT. TRUCK CARAVAN ALONG THE CANAL - DAY

Gianguido and Francesco climb into the back of one of the trucks.

GIANGUIDO

Maybe they are taking us to Hollywood.
And we will become movie stars.

FRANCESCO

Wherever, it will just be farther
from home.

GIANGUIDO

Home. We've been away so long,
Francesco, tell me, what is home?

A long line of camouflage trucks leave the canal as Coast guardsmen lining the deck of the Biancamano look on.

EXT. DOWNTOWN MISSOULA - DAY

LOUISE, a natural beauty in her early 20s is excitedly strolling down Main Street as Harold Arlen's "Blues in the Night" plays. She is carrying a small paper bag.

We see a sign that says "Welcome to Missoula, Montana."

She enters GIORDANO'S
MARKET.

INT. GIORDANO'S - DAY

SAL GIORDANO, a stocky man with the look of someone who has agreeably settled into middle age, is wiping the deli case and is noticeably not in a good mood. As Louise walks in:

SAL

You're late!

LOUISE

She hurriedly grabs an apron

Yeah, yeah. I know, daddy.

SAL

I'm waitin' to open over here and
you're out, what? Shopping?

He turns the sign on the door from "closed" to "open," then
moves to the counter, picks up Louise's paper bag, takes out a
new 45 record and reads the title:

"Blues in the Night"...I got blues
in the day - with you.

LOUISE

Dad, it's the biggest hit on the
radio. And I'm here now, okay?

Sal would enjoy lecturing some more, but he relents.

SAL

Go get the bread and put it in
the cases. We're behind. Let's
move!

LOUISE

Gives her father a Fascist salute

LOUISE CONT.

Yes, Il Duce.

SAL

Hey, hey. Don't you speak that
name in here again.

Louise storms off and quickly returns with bags of rolls and
begins THROWING them into the bins one at a time.

Sal glares at her in silence. Louise stops for a moment and
glares back.

LOUISE

What?

SIRENS are wailing outside. Sal and Louise look puzzled and run out the door to see what's going on.

EXT. MAIN STREET, MISSOULA - DAY

Missoullans pour out of their shops to watch a police escort lead a motorcade of military trucks, filled with the men from the Conte Biancamanno.

As one of the trucks slowly passes GIORDANO'S MARKET, where Sal and Louise are positioned, Louise, who stands out as a dark brunette in a sea of white blondes, fixes her sights on one of the young men passing by in the truck. It is Francesco.

THEIR EYES MEET, AND THEY KEEP LOOKING AT EACH OTHER as the truck moves into the distance and out of sight.

Sal notices and grabs Louise by the arm.

SAL

Come on...We have work to do.

LOUISE

Daddy, who are they? What's going on?

SAL

It doesn't concern
us. Let's go. Inside.

He practically has to drag her back inside.

INT. GIORDANO'S MARKET - DAY

Sal immediately gets busy opening boxes, marking prices. Louise looks on in disbelief.

LOUISE

Aren't you even curious?

SAL

No. The rolls, please?

Louise is exasperated. She continues pouring rolls from brown bags into bins, staring intensely at her father.

Sal finally feels her eyes upon him.

SAL

What?