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937

A drama in one act

By Don Zolidis

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One-act drama

14 actors+, gender flexible

May, 1939. Captain Gustav Schroeder pilots the SS St. Louis, a luxury ocean liner, away from its home port in Hamburg, Germany. His goal: to deliver 937 Jewish refugees out of the hands of Nazism and into the safe port of Havana, Cuba. But when Cuba is the first of several countries to deny the refugees safe harbor, a vicious Nazi plot is exposed. This historical drama chronicles the perseverance of the St. Louis' passengers and their struggle to find freedom, safety, and even love. A heartbreaking story of betrayal and hope in one of history's darkest times.

Cast of Characters

GUSTAV SCHROEDER, captain of the S.S. St. Louis, mid-40s
OTTO, mid 30s

MAX LOEWE, 22, recently released from Dachau

JACOB, 17
HANS, former professor
MARTHA, his wife

SELMA, 40s, Elise and Sofi's mother
ELISE, 16
SOFI, 14

MARLENE, 10
LENYA, 8

GUARDS/PASSENGERS/CUBAN OFFICIALS/PRESS RELEASE

Setting: The S.S. St. Louis, en route from Hamburg to Havana. May-June 1939.

(1947. The ruined hulk of the S.S. St Louis, rusting in the Hamburg harbor.)

(GUSTAV SCHROEDER, wearing a dark overcoat, is examining the ruin.)

SCHROEDER *(to the audience)*

When I return to the S.S. St. Louis it is eight years later. The English punched holes in it. Here is where the fires licked it after they dropped the bombs. After it left my care, it was used for the war effort. Soon it will be scrap. This was my ship for nineteen years. I find my room. Is there anything that remains from that last voyage?

(He stops on the bridge.)

Here is where I stood when I made the decision to sink her. To ram her into the British coast and set her on fire. It seemed like the only way out. Maybe I should've done it. Then everyone might have lived. Every day I see their faces.

(Lights change.)

(1939. The ship becomes a bustle of activity – Uniformed CREW MEMBERS rush past him in all directions, carrying supplies, setting the scene. Schroeder removes his overcoat to reveal his cleanly pressed Captain's uniform.)

(PASSENGERS board the ship. A Crew Member carries the luggage of an elderly woman.)

CREW MEMBER

Watch your step, Ma'am.

(He helps her aboard.)

ELDERLY WOMAN

Thank you sir.

CREW MEMBER

My pleasure.

(MARLENE, 10 and LENYA, 8 sprint across the stage and collide with SELMA, who is attempting to cross with her daughters, SOFI and ELISE.)

SELMA

Watch where you're going!

(MARLENE turns and sticks out her tongue at SELMA.)

MARLENE

Watch where you're standing!

(LENYA pinches her, and she gives chase in the opposite direction.)

(MAX LOEWE enters, with no bags, dressed very shabbily. He has recently been released from Dachau, and is haunted and gaunt. He takes in the majestic ship.)

(He is passed by HANS, carrying baggage, and in a hurry. His son JACOB is following, accompanied by his mother, MARTHA.)

HANS

Excuse me. Excuse me.

(A CREW MEMBER offers to assist.)

No thank you.

(HANS pushes past. MARTHA hands the porter her bags.)

MARTHA

Stop being rude, Hans. They wish to help.

(HANS huffs and is off.)

Room 217. And don't expect a tip.

(JACOB spots ELISE walking past him. He turns to look after her. MARTHA notices and grabs him by the chin.)

NO.

JACOB

But I –

MARTHA

NO. After your father.

(A CAMERA MAN enters with an old-style movie camera.)

CAMERA MAN

Smile for the camera! Let's have a wave!

(MARTHA turns JACOB to have him wave at the camera.)
(MARLENE and LENYA enter and wave happily.)
(MAX does not wave.)
(SCHROEDER enters with two of his crew, watching the proceedings.)

(A NEWSPAPER MAN enters and announces to the audience as the action takes on a slightly speeded-up newsreel feel.)

NEWSPAPER MAN

Pleasure Cruise to Freedom! The S.S. St. Louis, one of the most elegant steam liners of the Hamburg line, has been enlisted to help Jewish refugees leave the third Reich. But this is no ordinary ship. Staffed by the finest men and women on the line, a swimming pool, shuffleboard, even movies and dances have been scheduled for this once-in-a-lifetime journey. And where is the end of the line? Havana, Cuba. The jewel of the Caribbean! Sun, beaches, and warm tropical nights! Truly these nine hundred and thirty-seven Jews are the luckiest of all!

And now the St. Louis is ready to heave to! God Speed! The flag is being unfurled!

(SCHROEDER gives a signal and an enormous Nazi flag unfurls from the mast.)

(OTTO, leading several of the crew members, gives it a stiff-armed Nazi salute. SCHROEDER does not.)

(Lights change.)

(Music from the on-board band. Bach.)

(SCHROEDER enters with OTTO and two other CREW MEMBERS.)

SCHROEDER
I want them treated like any other passengers. There is to be no harassment, do you understand?

CREW MEMBER 1
Of course, Captain.

SCHROEDER
I want these people put at ease. None of your damn singing.

OTTO
Is there a problem with my singing?

SCHROEDER
None of your damn singing.

OTTO
Even in the crew barracks? We have no freedom there, either?

CREW MEMBER 2
We shall sing quietly.

SCHROEDER
I said none. I need you to prepare the evening dinner.

CREW MEMBER 1
Of course.
(CREW MEMBERS 1 and 2 exit.)

OTTO
Captain, may I have a word?

SCHROEDER
Quickly.

OTTO
I noticed you refused to stand at attention when the flag was raised.
(SCHROEDER looks at OTTO.)

SCHROEDER

Is there something you want?

OTTO

As party leader aboard this ship, I think it would set a good example for your crew if you showed more respect to the Fatherland. They might start to get the wrong idea about you.

SCHROEDER

I'm the leader aboard the ship –

OTTO

I understand that, but I represent –

SCHROEDER

I know damn well who you represent, and if you feel the need to speak to me of this again, I'll have you tossed in the ocean. Do you understand? I can make this trip with you chained up in the brig if you'd prefer.

OTTO

Sorry I mentioned it.

SCHROEDER

Captain.

OTTO

Sorry I mentioned it Captain.

SCHROEDER

Get tonight's movie ready.

OTTO

Yes, Captain.

(OTTO exits.)

(MARLENE and LENYA enter, giggling. They have a stick of butter in their hands which they are hiding. SCHROEDER stands back to observe them.)

\

MARLENE

Shhh!

LENYA

I didn't say anything!

MARLENE

You get that one!

(MARLENE breaks the butter in half and hands it to LENYA. LENYA runs to the opposite side of the stage, not noticing SCHROEDER. SCHROEDER hides, amused.)

(Both GIRLS rub their sticks of butter on the door handles. They giggle and wait.)

(CREW MEMBER 3 enters, carrying a large stack of tins, balanced on his arms. He spots MARLENE, who is still giggling and smiles at her. She smiles back.)

(CREW MEMBER 3 tries the door, his hand slips on the butter as he pulls, and he topples backward, dropping all of his tins.)

(LENYA and MARLENE explode with laughter and run off, right into SCHROEDER, who catches them.)

MARLENE

I didn't do it!

LENYA

It was her! I saw her!

SCHROEDER

Where are your parents?
(No answer.)
Your parents, where are they?

MARLENE

Our mother is still in Hamburg. We didn't have enough money for three tickets.

SCHROEDER

And your father? Is he aboard the ship?

LENYA

No.

SCHROEDER

Where is he?

MARLENE

He's waiting for us in Havana.

SCHROEDER

I see. I want you girls to be on your best behavior, is that understood?

LENYA

It's her fault! She's the one with the ideas!

MARLENE
You lie! You always lie! Don't listen to her!

SCHROEDER
You're not in trouble. Try not to injure any of my crew, all right?

LENYA
Yes sir!

MARLENE
You're supposed to say Captain, Lenya! You say Yes Captain!

LENYA
You don't know everything, Marlene!

SCHROEDER
Good night, girls.
(They run off.)

(Lights change.)

(Music from the band on-board.)

(JACOB is writing in his diary as the movie is set up upstage.)

JACOB
May 14th. The second night of our trip was the loveliest yet. The waters have grown calm. It was sunny and warm today. A perfect spring day. The movie was –
(The PASSENGERS take seats to watch the film as OTTO sets up the camera.)
I don't recall what the movie was tonight.
(He sees ELISE, apart from the rest of the crowd, looking out at the ocean.)
Because the movie did not matter.
(He sets his diary down and approaches ELISE cautiously.)
Not a fan of film?

ELISE
Hmm?

JACOB
You're not watching the movie.

ELISE
You're very observant.

JACOB
Where are you from?

Skipping Forward

(Two other CREW MEMBERS enter.)

(HANS sits.)

JACOB *(standing)*

Turn the damn thing off!

(one of the CREW MEMBERS grabs JACOB.)

(SCHROEDER enters.)

SCHROEDER

What is the meaning of this?! Let him go. Let him go I said.

(The CREW MEMBER lets JACOB go.)

Put the film on.

OTTO

I was only trying to inform them of –

SCHROEDER

Put the film on.

OTTO

Yes, Captain.

(SCHROEDER looks to the crowd.)

SCHROEDER

My deepest apologies. He will not work the camera again.

(Lights change. Stars.)

(MAX enters furtively. A CREW MEMBER passes by and MAX steps out of the way instinctively.)

(He takes some food out of his coat and hides in a corner to eat it.)

(JACOB enters, looking for ELISE. He spots MAX.)

JACOB

Are you all right?

(MAX doesn't answer.)

You all right?

MAX

Fine.

JACOB

That's um… you know they have dinner in the dining rooms. You can eat there.

(MAX doesn't answer.)
It's a nice night, isn't it? The sea air. It's very… relaxing.
(MAX doesn't respond to him.)

(JACOB takes off his jacket and gives it to MAX.)

JACOB
It will only be cold another night or two. And then we'll be in the tropics. But it's good to have a nice jacket.
(JACOB starts to walk away.)
Were you in prison long?

MAX
Two months.

JACOB
Where at?

MAX
Dachau.
(JACOB sits next to MAX.)

JACOB
You're alive now. You're free. You're free…
(Lights switch To ELISE's cabin. SELMA is folding laundry as ELISE and SOFI are getting ready for bed.,)

SELMA
Who was that boy you were talking to?

ELISE
I wasn't talking to any boy.

SELMA
At the movies I saw you talking to a boy.

ELISE
He was talking to me, I wasn't talking to him.

SOFI
I thought he was cute.

ELISE
Sofi, you don't need to watch such things.

SOFI

She wrote about it in her diary. She thinks she likes him.

ELISE

You read my diary?

SOFI

It's a small room and there's not much to read!

SELMA

Elise. I don't need to remind you that this is not the time.

ELISE

I didn't do anything! He came talking to me!

SELMA

You were standing on the railing, gazing at the ocean. You think a boy's not going to come talk to you? You might as well put a neon sign over your head that says "I'm moody and I'm looking for love!"

ELISE

I am not moody!

SOFI

Yes you are! You're full of them in your diary!

ELISE

Stop looking in there!

SELMA

Your mind needs to be on music.

ELISE

What music?

SELMA

Practicing your music.

ELISE

With what? You sold my violin.

SELMA

You think the only way you play music is with an instrument?

ELISE

Yes! That's how music works!

SOFI

There's a violinist in the band. You could ask him to borrow his.

SELMA

I don't want you speaking to any musicians.

SOFI

He's very handsome.

SELMA

Don't start Sofi!

SOFI

I'm fourteen I'm almost a woman!

SELMA

When we get to America, you need to have a way of making/ a living. You are so talented, my dear, you can play anything – but you need to keep up your practice.

ELISE

I've heard this. I've heard this. How am I going to make a living if you sold our only violin?

SELMA

How else do you think we could afford this trip?

ELISE

I don't need you telling me what to do. I'm perfectly capable of making up my own mind –

SELMA

You are not.

ELISE

And stay out of my diary!
(She exits.)

SELMA *(after a moment)*

What else is in there I should know about?
(Lights change.)

NEWSREEL

Cuban Parliament signs Decree 937!
(Lights up on PRESIDENT BRU, speaking to the media.)

PRESIDENT BRU

We will fight corruption at every opportunity. Too long the powers of Europe have used our nation for a dumping ground for their least desirable citizens. At this very moment a shipload of

criminals, murderers, and Jews is heading towards our nation. They have not a penny to their name. What are we to do with them? Let these penniless scoundrels infiltrate our country? No. No. They will become beggars on the street, all of them. I say, no more! No more!

(Lights change to SCHROEDER's office. SCHROEDER has a telegram.)

OTTO

What is it you wanted to see me about?

SCHROEDER

Do you know about this?

OTTO

About what?

(SCHROEDER hands the telegram to OTTO.)

This is insignificant.

SCHROEDER

I hope so.

OTTO

If they won't take them, we can always dump them over the side of the boat.

SCHROEDER

We are not in Germany and I don't want to hear that kind of talk.

OTTO

I'm not the only one who is saying it.

SCHROEDER

Keep your ideas to yourself.

(CREW MEMBERS 1 and 2 enter.)

I'm glad you're here. There may be some difficulty when we reach Havana. I want you to be prepared. Here's what I plan to do…

(Lights change. Violin music. Bach.)

(ELISE is playing the violin. (This may be pantomimed) JACOB is watching her.)

JACOB

Beautiful.

ELISE

You can find work as a spy, I'm sure. It was just a little piece.

JACOB

Oh yes the music was lovely too.

ELISE

Are you always like this?

JACOB

I'm sorry but a Caribbean Cruise has me in a romantic mood.

ELISE

I'm sure there's a few elderly widows that would love your attention.

JACOB

I have no doubt of that.

ELISE

What do you think Cuba will be like?

JACOB

Hot.

ELISE

Beyond that.

JACOB

Jews in the tropics, who would have thought? Next they'll find an island to stick us on.
(The mood darkens.)

ELISE

Is your family planning on going to America afterwards?

JACOB

That's my father's plan.

ELISE

And what's yours?

JACOB

That depends on where you're going.

ELISE

New Jersey. We have relatives there.

JACOB

That sounds amazing.

ELISE

I didn't invite you along.

JACOB

And yet still – I hear New Jersey is nice.

ELISE

You haven't heard anything about New Jersey.

JACOB

It sounds better than Old Jersey.

ELISE

Do you mind? I need to –

JACOB

Play?

ELISE

Practice. I've only got the violin for an hour.

JACOB

What was that piece before?

ELISE

Bach.

JACOB

It was beautiful.

ELISE

He's a German. Just think, if he were alive today, he'd be one of them. A Nazi. All that beauty in his mind like a second skin over the hatred underneath. You'd almost think they had souls that could feel, consciences that could be roused, hearts that could beat like anyone else's – I played for Goebbels once. My father thought it would be a good strategy. I was fourteen, things were already disintegrating, we thought – see we'll go play for them, we'll play their music, look at us, we're capable of beauty… we're human.

When I play sometimes I try to picture myself in a field. All alone. The sun on my skin, the breeze through the grass, the trees overhead – I just kept trying to keep that image alive when I was in that room with him, they ate dinner while I played – sucking on cigars and gobbling up meat. Their eyes like knives.

They own that field. They would uproot us, as if we're the contagion, we're the blight on their happiness, as if it is somehow our fault that we dare to exist and breathe and think and dream. My father was arrested two months later. I haven't heard from him since.

So I keep playing their music. Now I imagine that I'll go back to that room with that man and kill him with my bare hands. Wrap my fingers around his neck when he's old and weak and on his deathbed. I will never be done hating them. That's what they made me.

(short pause)

Thank you for standing up to them the other day.

Skipping Forward

SCHROEDER

We purchased them from your office!

BENITEZ

There is no need to get upset. I am stating facts.

SCHROEDER

What the hell do you want me to do?

BENITEZ

Our government requires assurance that they would not be thrown into poverty.

SCHROEDER

How is that my responsibility?

BENITEZ

A sum in the amount of five hundred U.S. dollars per passenger/ would

SCHROEDER

What?

BENITEZ

Would ensure that they had enough resources to land on their feet.

SCHROEDER

There are nearly a thousand Jews on board.

BENITEZ

I noticed.

SCHROEDER

You're asking for a bribe of half a million dollars?

BENITEZ

I am an official of the Cuban government. I don't take bribes.

SCHROEDER

I can't pay that kind of money.

BENITEZ

Then I suggest you find another island for your Jews.

(BENITEZ leaves.)

(Celebration on the deck. The band is playing. MARLENE and LENYA are running around the deck chasing each other.)

(A CREW MEMBER is dancing with SELMA.)

(JACOB sees ELISE. He's about to dance with her when SOFI shoots in and takes her place.)

SOFI

I've got something I need to talk to you about and it's extraordinarily important.

JACOB

Who are you?

(Lights change.)

ELISE

May 27th. An almost perfect day. Havana looks enchanted at night. We arrived just this morning before dawn. I woke to them ringing the breakfast bells! Everyone was out on the deck pointing and cheering. I can't wait to be rid of this ship! It was a lovely ride, but I think my stomach would love to feel solid ground again. There are so many papers to be filled out! You would think the entire country of Cuba had been drafting forms on our voyage here. We're certain to be on dry land tomorrow. Goodbye, St. Louis!

Although I do have something to report. And Sofi, if you are reading this, now is the time to stop.

(Night on the ship.)

(OTTO and another CREW MEMBER walk past.)

(JACOB is sneaking after them. He stops to crouch.)

(ELISE darts in and puts her hands over his eyes.)

ELISE

Got you!

JACOB

Shhhh! They'll hear us!

ELISE

They don't care. Come on!

(She pulls him to his feet.)

It's so wonderful here. The night. It's like being in a bath.

(JACOB laughs.)

What's so funny?

JACOB

I completely agree.

ELISE

You're making fun of me.

JACOB

I'm not agree. I agree it is exceptionally lovely. Very exceptionally lovely.
(He looks up)
There are so many stars above the ocean it's like a million miracles.

ELISE

Let me picture my Romeo in a million stars and cut him out and hang him in the heavens.

JACOB

Am I your Romeo?

ELISE

I hope not. We'll both end up dead. Are you feeling poetic?

JACOB

Always. With you. There aren't… words enough for this.
(He takes her hand.)

ELISE

Are you always so dopey?

JACOB

I am possessed of a rare and delicate nature.

ELISE

I doubt that very much.

JACOB

Kiss me.

ELISE

No. You kiss me first.

JACOB

Very well.
(He kisses her.)

ELISE

I have to tell you something. I used to be so afraid of the future. I was convinced that ruin was just around the corner. When my father was arrested, there were just the three of us. It seemed like only a matter of time before we got swept up in the nets. I saw the people who had been released and they looked – they looked a thousand years old. And I thought – we're going to die here. Or I'll see what they saw. And then we got on this ship and I didn't let myself believe things were going to be any better – I wanted to keep those stupid hopes down as far down in the

pit of me as possible – I didn't want to let that light in, because once you start hoping for things the pain comes back.

But I can't help it. You make me think of the future.

JACOB

You make me think of the present.

ELISE

And the future, right?

JACOB

Of course. Of course. I only wanted to let you know that the present is so fantastic it nearly blots out the future. But yes. I think of the future too.

ELISE

And where do you imagine yourself?

JACOB

Near the sea. Somewhere. And I rather like this warm thing. But not hot.

ELISE

I didn't ask for a weather report –

JACOB

I'm trying to tell you –

ELISE

Will I be there?

JACOB

Of course. Of course you are there.

ELISE

In this warm but not hot area near the sea?

JACOB

Precisely. And we will live in a cottage –

ELISE

I don't want to live in a cottage.

JACOB

Then we won't. We will live in a little house.

ELISE

That's the same as a cottage.

JACOB

No, a cottage is –

(OTTO has returned.)

OTTO

Look at this.

JACOB

We were just heading back.

OTTO

Why leave?

JACOB

Good night.

OTTO

I said why leave? I thought you were enjoying the view.

ELISE

It's very late.

OTTO

I know it is. Which is why I'm wondering why you children can't seem to find it to your rooms.

ELISE

Thank you for reminding of us that.

OTTO

I'll walk you there.

ELISE

No thank you Jacob will –

OTTO

I'll walk you there.

ELISE

I don't need to be walked.

OTTO

I think you do.

(OTTO takes her wrist.)

JACOB

That's enough, sir.

(JACOB puts his hand on OTTO.)

OTTO

Did you touch me? Did you touch me you filthy piece of shit? Do you think you are worthy of putting your disgusting hand on me? You know what I did to vermin like you back home?

JACOB

We're not in Germany anymore.

OTTO

Germany is this ship. And until you are off it, you are in my country.

(MAX enters.)

MAX

Let them go.

OTTO

Another one?

MAX

Let them go. I'll walk them home.

OTTO

Your hair is looking a little long. I think it's about time for it to be shaved again. Heil Hitler.

(OTTO exits.)

(Lights up in various spots as the CUBAN ambassadors speak.)

AMBASSADOR

I'm afraid there can be no solution to the problem of -

BENITEZ

Your ship cannot remain in Cuban waters indefinitely –

BRU

We are not Europe's dumping ground –

(Lights down them as SCHROEDER enters.)

SCHROEDER

May I have your attention please? May I have your attention?

(The PASSENGERS assemble on deck.)

We have been informed by the Cuban government that… you will not be permitted to disembark in Havana immediately –

(Hubbub. What? We paid for our tickets! You promised us that we would be able to leave! What is going on?!)

OTTO

SHUT YOUR MOUTHS!

SCHROEDER

I am doing everything possible to rectify the situation but it may take some time. In the meantime, please be patient. I will update you as soon as I have better information. For the moment, no one is allowed to leave the ship.

NEWSREEL

Nowhere to go! S.S. St. Louis in Havana Harbor unable to make port! Refugees growing anxious! When will they depart? Who will take the refugees?

(Lights up on SCHROEDER and PRESIDENT BRU.)

SCHROEDER

Thank you for agreeing to see me.

BRU

I don't have much time, Captain.

SCHROEDER

Of course. You know why I've come.

BRU

I do, and if you have some new argument to make, make it.

SCHROEDER

My company purchased visas for these/ people on the understanding –

BRU

You purchased fraudulent visas. Are you suggesting that Cuba is responsible for your poor judgment?

SCHROEDER

I am not, but –

BRU

We are a nation of laws.

SCHROEDER

Of course.

BRU

And there is a strict immigration law that has been passed. By the will of the people.

SCHROEDER

I understand/ that but

BRU

We do not want your Jews. Go back to Germany.

SCHROEDER

Do you understand what will happen to them if we go back?

BRU

Why is that my problem? It's your nation – perhaps –

SCHROEDER

They're human beings!

BRU

I find it ironic that a German is lecturing me on treating Jews like human beings.

SCHROEDER

You are sending these people to die.

BRU

They cannot land here. You have twenty-four hours to remove your ship before my military will escort you out.

(Lights change.)

(The deck of the ship. MAX is expecting JACOB.)

MAX

Your name is Jacob?

JACOB

Yes I –

MAX

I don't have much time to talk to you. I overheard the captain.

JACOB

What is it?

MAX

Cuba won't take us. We're not landing here.

JACOB

That's ridiculous that's –

MAX

Skipping Forward

OTTO

Captain, if I could speak with you?

SCHROEDER

What is it?

OTTO

We have wasted enough time here, we/ will run out of fuel -

SCHROEDER

I am not in the mood to listen to your nonsense when you and your party are responsible for this.

OTTO

You have entirely too much love for these Jews –

SCHROEDER

I wouldn't be in this position to –

OTTO

I shall have to mention it in my report.

SCHROEDER

Go ahead!

OTTO

It is time to return to Hamburg.

SCHROEDER

Don't tell me what it is time for, you understand? I will have you/ thrown –

(OTTO takes out an I.D. and shows it to SCHROEDER.)

OTTO

Perhaps you are confused as to your role here.

(SCHROEDER looks at it. Turns pale.)

SCHROEDER

You're Gestapo?

OTTO

It is time to return to Hamburg.

SCHROEDER

Why does Berlin care about this voyage?

OTTO

I think it ought to be clear to you now – I don't answer to you. We have what we want. No one wants the Jews. We can't be blamed for removing them ourselves when the entire world despises them as well.

SCHROEDER
Did you know all along we wouldn't be allowed to land?

OTTO
Our propaganda was instrumental in getting the Cubans to pass the law.

SCHROEDER
So why was…? Is that what this was about? A publicity stunt to justify genocide?

OTTO
Set course for Hamburg. You have been a most useful accomplice in this, but any further resistance will be noted. Unless you want to join your friends aboard this ship at Auschwitz, make course for Hamburg. Heil Hitler.
(OTTO exits.)

CREW MEMBER 1
Captain?

SCHROEDER
Set course East Northeast. We're going home.
(Lights change.)

(The deck of the ship.)

NEWSREEL
Back to Germany! The S.S. St Louis has departed Havana and is on a return voyage to the German Reich. Chaos on the deck!
(ELDERLY WOMAN, SELMA, and the other PASSENGERS rush to try to escape the deck and leap from the rails. CREW MEMBERS hold them back.)

(MARLENE and LENYA reach the rails.)

MARLENE
Father!
(LENYA screams and reaches out for him.)

(One of the CREW MEMBERS lifts her away from the rail.)

LENYA
Father! Father!
(Both girls continue to scream as lights fade on the struggle.)

(Lights up on ELISE.)

ELISE

June 8th. Near Florida now. An American plane flew overhead today. Some people thought they were here to save us. No. Every hour we get closer to Germany now. Mother has taken in the girls.

(SELMA enters with MARLENE and LENYA.)

SOFI

You want a doll? I have a doll.

(LENYA shakes her head and sits.)

I'll leave it here, all right?

SELMA

It's going to be okay. You stay with us. We will be together now.

MARLENE

I'm scared.

SELMA

It's all right. You're such a brave girl, already. You crossed the ocean by yourself, didn't you? And nothing bad happened to you on the way over, and nothing bad is going to happen to you on the way back. I'll see to it.

(SELMA hugs MARLENE and LENYA.)

You're going to be safe.

LENYA

If we go to the camp, will father be allowed to visit us?

(Light change to the captain's office.)

SCHROEDER

I understand that. If there's anything that you can do to –

(MAX, JACOB, and other MEN break in. MAX has the gun out.)

What is the meaning of this?

MAX

Sit down.

SCHROEDER

I can assure you that –

MAX

Sit Down!

(SCHROEDER sits.)

SCHROEDER

I am doing everything in my power to –

MAX

Shut your mouth!
(to JACOB)
Lock the door.
(JACOB locks the door.)

SCHROEDER

I understand your frustration but –

MAX

I didn't tell you to speak! You have done nothing but lie to us from the moment we got on board this ship - Shut up! You knew we wouldn't be allowed to leave! You have made promises and promises and promises and now you are taking us home to die! I AM NOT GOING BACK! I have been there, you understand me you son-of-a-bitch?! They pulled me from my home, they shaved my head, they took my wife, they took my children, they killed my boys, they killed my boys – I had one photo of them, one photo that I held against my heart –

They took my picture and pissed on it in front of me.

Before breakfast the hangings begin. They line us up to watch. I see our necks yanked by the ropes, arms and legs dangling like marionettes. Any way to kill they can find. Old men drowned in vats – a woman crucified. A man castrated with a bayonet. Like they're children pulling the wings off a fly. In the afternoon we dig the pits we're to be buried in. And then we tumble the bodies of our friends and our families into the graves. The children like broken playthings for them.

So much like my own boys. My own boys dead like that somewhere else. Eyes open. Mouths open. A fistful of lye to keep down the smell. My boys.

And they say we're animals. *We're the animals?!*

Tell your pilot. Turn the ship to Florida.

SCHROEDER

There is no port in/ Florida that –
(MAX fires a warning shot.)

MAX

Turn the ship to Florida.

End of Excerpt.
To purchase this play, visit www.concordtheatricals.com