

FREEDOM EXPRESS

Tired of living with the daily threat of gang violence, an orphaned teen from Central America travels atop 'The Beast' - the Mexican cargo trains that carry migrants to the American border - as means of reaching his uncle in Oakland, California.

FADE IN:

A PANORAMIC VIEW of the city of SAN ANDRES, population 4 million, situated on the Atlantic coast in Central America near Panama. Hot tropical sun burns down from above.

Upbeat *cumbia* music plays in the background.

CLOSE IN on gleaming office towers downtown, a colonial quarter with a Spanish fort. A vast urban landscape covers a coastal valley, *favelas* push up towards a mountain range.

CLOSE IN, a busy street in a middle-class residential neighborhood. Crowded streets with bus and car traffic, sidewalks busy with pedestrians. Homes with storefronts line a boulevard, coffee shops, convenience stores, restaurants.

MANUEL, 15, thin, medium height, short black hair, brown eyes, rushes home from school. He carries a backpack and wears a school uniform, navy blue polo shirt, khaki pants, and sneakers. He arrives at a restaurant on the main boulevard.

The restaurant occupies the garage and living room on the first floor of a two-story home. Busy lunch crowd, a waitress buzzes around the room.

INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Manuel enters through the garage, the doors are open wide with patrons on small tables and chairs. GABRIEL, 40, tall with glasses and a goatee, works behind a cash register that sits atop a counter in the back of the room.

MANUEL

Sorry, I'm late, Uncle Gabriel. I got detention for being late this morning.

GABRIEL

Hello, Manuelito. Didn't you leave at the same time as always? What happened?

MANUEL

They closed the door on me right as I was about to walk in.

GABRIEL

Hum. That six a.m school bell can be tough sometimes. Hey, Listen. We're really busy today. Can you help out with deliveries?

MANUEL

Sure, Uncle Gabriel. I'll go
change, be right back.

Manuel walks to the back of the house, past a small kitchen,
and says hello to BEATRIZ, 42, long brown hair braided down
her back. She is the chef, co-owner, and wife of Gabriel.
She works with an assistant by her side.

SOLEDAD, 35, enters, she is a friend of the family. She
wears office attire, shoulder-length black hair, walks to
the counter to pick up her lunch order. She greets Gabriel
warmly, Beatriz comes out to say hello.

GABRIEL

Not staying for lunch today?

SOLEDAD

Sorry, guys. Really busy at the
office today. How is Manuelito?

BEATRIZ

He is in much better spirits, Sole.
Thanks for asking. It's hard to
tell with him sometimes, he is so
quiet.

SOLEDAD

I'm so glad to hear it, Beatriz. I
can't believe he is trying to run
away already?

Manuel walks out from the back in cut-off shorts and a tee
shirt. He says hello to Soledad and picks up the orders to
be delivered.

SOLEDAD(CONT'D)

Hola Manuelito, so good to see you.
How are you?

MANUEL

Pretty good, *Senora* Soledad.
Thanks.

SOLEDAD

Oh, you're so polite, Manuelito.
You can call me Sole, or 'Auntie'
if you want. I knew you since you
were a baby.

MANUEL

(shy, hesitating)
Okay, *Senora*. I mean Auntie? Sorry,
I have to go.

Manuel goes out to make the deliveries. Beatriz goes back to the kitchen to check on her assistant.

SOLEDAD

So, where did he go? Does anyone know?

GABRIEL

He slept in the school for the night and spend the morning at the park.

SOLEDAD

Well, thank God, he wasn't out there roaming the streets at night. But that doesn't sound like running away. What happened?

GABRIEL

He said the kids from the street gang were waiting outside for him the whole time. That's why he didn't leave school.

Gabriel steps away from the counter to help the waitress. Beatriz returns to the counter.

SOLEDAD

So, what is it with the kids in our neighborhood, these days? They all have parents, no one is poor around here. Why are they joining up with the lowest of the low?

BEATRIZ

Mija, it's all about fashion these days. It's not like the old days when the *gangeros* were really bad and everybody was afraid of them. Most of these kids just want to look like they're in a gangster music video or something.

Gabriel comes back to add up a bill.

GABRIEL

I really hope he can keep it together. The kid has been through a lot.

SOLEDAD

Dear Lord, poor Miranda.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

A MAN IN A SUIT parks a small car in front of a government building that takes up half a city block. He steps out with a briefcase, locks the doors and walks away.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MIRANDA GOMEZ, 42, Manuel's foster mother, sits at a desk before a desktop computer in a government office. A small framed photo of Miranda and Manuelito rests on her desk.

A car bomb explodes outside and her office disintegrates in a ball of fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Friends and family gather for the burial ceremony for Miranda Gomez. Beatriz holds Manuel's hand. Gabriel and his two adult daughters are present.

Also present, are Soledad and her family, her husband, JAVIER, 45, thin, medium height, and 10-year-old daughter, LETICIA, who wears thick, black rim glasses and long black hair in a ponytail.

A priest reads a passage from the Book of Psalms.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

The phone rings and Gabriel takes an order.

BEATRIZ

Sole, remember when Manuelito's mother died?

SOLEDAD

Lord have mercy, I remember Lolita like it was yesterday. Those were tough times.

BEATRIZ

You were there when Miranda and I promised God that we would take care of that baby. Now I'm doing it. But it just seems the world has turned against us trying to protect this child.

SOLEDAD

Oh, hang in there Betti. You are the best person to take care of this kid besides Miranda. You were the last one to see his mother alive.

Beatriz excuses herself again and returns to the kitchen.

GABRIEL

(lowering his voice)

Don't tell anyone, Sole, but we have been looking to relocate out of this neighborhood. We've looked at a couple of places already.

SOLEDAD

Yes, Beatriz told me the other day. You guys had been talking about it before Manuelito arrived. That is great news, Gabriel. Maybe that is what he needs. A new neighborhood. Too many bad kids around here.

(glances at her watch)

Oh, dear. I have to run. I'm gonna say my prayers for Manuelito. Let's get together after church on Sunday?

Gabriel says goodbye, Soledad grabs her lunch and exits.

EXT. STREET - SAME TIME

Manuel rides his delivery bicycle across a busy street and down a sidewalk. He is a block away from the restaurant.

2 TEENAGE BOYS step in front of Manuel, one grabs the handlebars, the other punches him in the face. He falls off his bicycle and hits the ground hard.

Pedestrians move out of the way. One teenage boy kicks Manuel in the ribs several times while the other rains down blows on him. One teenager takes the money and receipts from his pockets.

A GOOD SAMARITAN steps in to help, a mature man, a convenience store owner wielding a crowbar. He yells at the teenagers and they scam. He helps Manuel up.

Manuel is shaken up, he thanks the older man, picks up his bicycle and dusts himself off. Pedestrians go back to minding their own business.

INT. RESTAURANT/ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Manuel throws the bicycle against a wall outside and storms in without saying a word. Gabriel sees him bleeding from his nose, covering his face.

GABRIEL

My goodness, Manuelito. Are you alright?

Gabriel goes after him, Manuel walks past the kitchen to the back, and closes the door to his room next to the pantry. Beatriz comes out of the kitchen and stands next to Gabriel.

BEATRIZ

Manuelito, what happened?

Manuel's room is small, fashioned out of a broom closet. He sits on a small bed, there is a small t.v and cut-out magazine pictures of soccer players.

MANUEL

(from inside the room)

I'm okay, Auntie B. I fell off my bike.

Gabriel and Beatriz exchange a knowing look.

GABRIEL

Listen, Manuelito. I'll go make the rest of the deliveries, you take a break. Don't worry about the money.

Gabriel exits.

INSIDE THE ROOM

Manuel reaches under his pillow for a silver necklace with a pendant of Saint Jerome, patron saint of the orphans. He holds it in his right hand.

OUTSIDE THE ROOM

Beatriz grabs a clean cloth from the kitchen and returns to Manuel's room. She waits a moment and gently taps on the door.

Manuel opens slowly, Beatriz comes in and sits next to him and wipes blood from his mouth and nose.

BEATRIZ

Hey, it's okay, *mijito*. Was it the same boys from school that hurt you?

Manuel shakes his head gently from side to side.

BEATRIZ(CONT'D)

You mean they're some other kids from the neighborhood?

MANUEL

Yes.

Beatriz puts an arm around him and hugs him tight.

BEATRIZ

Oh, Manuelito, I'm so sorry about this. Remember what I told you the other day? That Uncle Gabriel and I are looking to move to a new place? A new neighborhood? It will happen, *mijo*. I promise. We've been wanting to do it for a couple of years. And when we do, all of this trouble will go away. Hang in there, sweetie.

MANUEL

Auntie B, I saw the boys from school again today. I think they're back from their suspension.

BEATRIZ

Manuelito, *mijo*. Why don't you let Uncle Gabriel pick you up? Or we can come by in our car?

MANUEL

I don't know, Auntie B. It seems they will find another way to beat me up. It was the same in my old neighborhood. I never knew when they were going to show up. I was afraid to leave the house.

BEATRIZ

Honey, let's talk to Gabriel when he comes back and we'll figure something out.

Manuel wipes his tears and calms down.

MANUEL

Thank you, Auntie B.

Beatriz sees the necklace Manuel holds in his hand.

BEATRIZ

You're not wearing your mother's necklace anymore?

MANUEL

I'm afraid those kids will take it.

(he sighs)

I miss my mom.

BEATRIZ

(hugging him tight)

I know, *mijo*.

(beat)

Do you mean, Miranda?

MANUEL

Both of them. I always think of my mother when I pray, but Miranda was like my mom and a big sister I never had. I wish she was still with us.

BEATRIZ

I know, Manuelito. I miss both of them, too. So much.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD/STREETS - AFTERNOON

The end of the day school bell rings. A four-story building filled with students spills out onto the neighborhood streets. Manuel and a friend, ANDRES, 16, tall and thin, meet at the schoolyard steps before the basketball courts.

MANUEL

Hey, did you get the video game?

ANDRES

I did. Even trade?

MANUEL

Let's see if it works.

ANDRES

Okay, let's go to my place.

MANUEL

Are you sure? I saw Tano and his friends at recess. You know they're back, right?

ANDRES

I know. And I'm not afraid. And you shouldn't be either. Come on, let's go.

Manuel and Andres walk out of school towards a busy street, two blocks away. They notice they are being followed by THREE BULLIES, one behind them on the sidewalk and two from the other side of the street.

Manuel and Andres take off running and the three bullies chase after them. The two on the other sidewalk cross over and the one behind them closes in.

Andres takes a left turn into a narrow street, Manuel follows, they cut across a playground and climb over a wall. One bully almost catches Manuel as he goes over.

Manuel and Andres run into a backstreet but are cut off by the two other bullies at a corner. TANO, 16, tall and thin steps forward.

TANO

Where are you going, *maricones*? You two on a date or something?

MANUEL

Go to hell, Tano. Leave us alone.

TANO

Let me guess, you are the bottom and he's the top.

ANDRES

Fuck off, Tano. You loser wannabe. You're not even a real *gangero*.

Tano grabs Andres by the scruff of his neck and throws him over a trash can in a corner.

BULLY #2 pins Manuel against a wall.

BULLY #2

Pay your dues, motherfucker. Or you know what's coming.

MANUEL

Fuck off, *cabron*! I work for my money! You don't deserve any of it!

BULLY #2 throws a punch at Manuel, he ducks and runs away. BULLY #2 and BULLY #3 quickly catch up to him, beat him with kicks and fists, and drag him back to Tano.

Tano is kicking Andres as he tries to get up. He picks up Andres and pins him against a wall. He holds him by the neck and pulls out a switchblade.

TANO

Join the gang and all this shit
will be over, *cabron*.

ANDRES

Fuck you, Tano. You're one of their
bitches, you get fucked every
night.

BULLY #2

(to Manuel)

Join or pay up, *cabron*!

MANUEL

Get your hands off me!

Andres shoves Tano back hard, he falls back and the blade comes loose, it is lost in the trash. Manuel ducks under again, gets away from the other two bullies, and runs down the alley.

Andres lands a couple of punches but is overpowered and is getting pummeled. The other two bullies catch up to Manuel, they beat him and kick him until he lays curled up on the ground in a corner.

The bullies collect the backpacks and wallets, take whatever valuables inside and throw them away. When they are gone, Manuel looks for Andres and they walk out together.

ANDRES

Those *cabrones* are gonna pay
someday, that's what I keep telling
myself.

MANUEL

You mean someone *else* is going to
kick their butts someday? That is
small consolation, Andres.

Manuel wipes a streak of blood on his lips and winces in pain. They walk down the street towards the busy boulevard.

ANDRES

I didn't see what happened. Did you
fight back?

MANUEL

Not really. I mostly ran.

ANDRES

Well, you better learn to fight quickly, or you're going to end up dead. Or in their gang.

EXT. PARK - MOMENTS LATER

Manuel and Andres arrive at a large neighborhood park and climb up a tree. They hide behind a tall acacia tree with deep foliage.

MANUEL

I'm sorry I ran away, Andres. I saw the blade come out and I thought you were dead.

ANDRES

And I told you, no matter what happens, you have to fight back, Manuel. It's not a choice. Besides, they can't kill anyone without asking permission first. That's how those losers operate.

MANUEL

Dam, your eye is getting worse. Your mom is gonna freak out.

ANDRES

Pff! Who cares? All she does is pray and go to church. She's no help.

From their perch on the tree, they see the three bullies from afar. They meet up with three other teenage boys from a gang. They sport their red gang colors and smoke weed in the open. They are referred to comonly as *gangeros*.

MANUEL

Man, I hate those *gangeros*.

ANDRES

Wanna get away from them? Come with me to the states. I'm heading out soon.

MANUEL

I don't know, Andres. You keep asking me, but that's a hell of a long way. And besides, I don't even know if I have the right number for my uncle in California.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A night at the restaurant with customers at the tables, a waitress buzzes around the room. Manuel helps clear the tables. He walks to the counter and sees Gabriel's wallet next to the cash register.

A paper with a phone number sticks out. It reads:
Mario/Oakland: 011-510-369-0149. Manuel copies the number on a napkin and puts it in his pocket. He returns the wallet to Gabriel, who is picking up orders from the service window.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

ANDRES

Okay, then. Make the call and find out. Where in California is he? Los Angeles?

Manuel's wheels are spinning.

MANUEL

A place called 'Owklan'.

ANDRES

You mean, Oakland?

MANUEL

Is that near where your father lives?

ANDRES

No, he is in New York. That's like thousands of miles away. But it doesn't matter. Do you want to get away from those assholes, or not? Maybe live in a place where street gangs will never bother you?

MANUEL

Of course, I do.

ANDRES

Well, you have to go real far. I'm going to the states to find my father because I rather live there with him, than here with my mom where I'm getting my ass kicked on a daily basis.

MANUEL

And I told you, I'm still thinking about it.

ANDRES

Well, make up your mind soon, because I'm real close to leaving. And I need a partner.

Manuel takes a moment.

MANUEL

Okay then, why did you pick me? Out of all the kids in school or in the neighborhood?

ANDRES

What do think, I'm gonna put out flyers for this? I've asked others and nobody wants to come. They're all a bunch of pussies. Including you.

Manuel shrinks a bit.

MANUEL

Look, I want to go but it just sounds crazy. Going all the way to the border to the United States? On top of the trains? You've told me the stories, you tried it once and you had to turn back.

ANDRES

I made a stupid mistake, I told you, and I'll never do it again. But it doesn't matter. You either do it or stay back here. And if you do, those gangs are gonna make you their bitch. Plain and simple.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Manuel sits in his bed, a small t.v is on. He holds a cell phone in one hand and the napkin with his uncle's phone number in the other.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

SEVERAL YEARS AGO - Manuel is 7 years old, he attends a family reunion with his stepmother, Miranda. Beatriz is there also, Gabriel welcomes his brother, MARIO, who is coming back to visit after a long absence in the United States.

Mario is 25, tall and strong, dark skin, short curly hair, he walks up to Manuel and Miranda and gives them a warm hug.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INTERCUT - INT. ROOM - NIGHT / INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Manuel dials the number nervously and waits. The receiver picks up.

MANUEL

Alo? -- Alo? *Senor Mario?*

MARIO, 38, sits with his wife CLARITA in their living room in Oakland, California. They are watching television.

MARIO

Mario's Landscaping... *Si, con el habla.*

Manuel is startled when he hears Mario's voice and quickly hangs up. / Mario hears a click on the line and looks at the phone.

MARIO

Huh. Sounded like a kid.

CLARITA

Friend of our kids, maybe?

MARIO

I couldn't tell. It sounded far away.

Mario puts away the phone. / Manuel writes Mario's phone number on a small piece of paper and puts it in his wallet.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Manuel stands near Gabriel at the steps of a house church after Sunday service, he looks bored and restless. Beatriz speaks with Soledad, her husband, Javier, and 10-year-old daughter Leticia stands nearby.

SOLEDAD

I am so glad to hear you found a new place.

GABRIEL

Yes, thank goodness, we're moving next week.

BEATRIZ

Praise the Lord. It's a nice little house in Maldivas, just outside of the city. A little quieter, not so crowded.

GABRIEL

And we have a nice room for Manuel.

SOLEDAD

Well, that sounds great. Manuel, what do you think?

MANUEL

(aloof)

Yeah, pretty nice.

SOLEDAD

And what about the restaurant? You're not gonna set up shop in the same house, are you?

BEATRIZ

Oh, no, we're going to find a bigger place for it. And we're gonna take our time on that. Did you know we've been at that location for thirteen years already?

SOLEDAD

Dear Lord, has it been that long?

GABRIEL

Everyday, including weekends.

BEATRIZ

I remember waiting tables for you guys when you first opened.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING - THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Manuel checks his backpack for a flashlight, a pocket knife, a sweatshirt, a note book, a pen, and some food. He looks under his forearm to check for Uncle Mario's phone number, it is written with a black marker.

Manuel reaches for his front pocket and holds his foster mother's necklace in his hand. He kisses it. He puts it on around his neck and hides it under his shirt.

Manuel is startled by a knock on the door, it's Beatriz.

BEATRIZ

Ready to go, Manuelito? Breakfast
is on the table.

MANUEL

Thanks Auntie B. Coming out in a
second.

EXT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Manuel steps out of the room wearing his school uniform. He takes a seat at a table in the restaurant with the rest of the family. He finishes breakfast and heads off to school with Gabriel and Beatriz' twin daughters.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - LATER

Manuel meets Andres on the steps before the basketball court, other students sit near.

ANDRES

(quietly)

Ready to go?

Manuel acknowledges silently. A bell rings and students make their way towards the building.

INT. SCHOOL BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Manuel goes to the back of the hallway and down a set of stairs to a basement bathroom. He throws off his school shirt and puts on a dark green shirt.

MONTAGUE - GETTING TO THE TRAIN TRACKS

-Manuel walks out of the school's service door and takes backstreets to the main boulevard.

-Manuel blends with other pedestrians, meets Andres at a convenience store.

-Manuel and Andres leave the store and get on a bus.

-Manuel and Andres get off a bus in downtown and take another bus.

-Manuel and Andres talk while they travel on the bus that takes them out of the city heading west.

-Manuel and Andres arrive at a small industrial town and get off the bus at a truck stop.

-Manuel and Andres take a small bus that goes down a country road.

END OF MONTGAUE.

EXT. ROADS/RAILWAYS - NOON

Manuel and Andres are dropped off the bus on the side of the road.

Manuel follows Andres to a trail that connects to the railways. They walk along the side of the railroad and stop under the shade of a tree. It's very hot under a clear sky.

ANDRES

We're a couple hours early. Let's wait here.

MANUEL

So, you were saying we will have to find work along the way to make money for the trip. What kind of jobs can you do?

ANDRES

Whatever you can find. You can ask a bus driver if they need an assistant. That means helping load bags on the roof, or giving them directions when they park. You can be a porter at a bus station. Clean car windows on a stop light in a city street. That kind of stuff.

EXT. RAILWAYS - LATER

Two other travelers gather at the same spot with Manuel and Andres.

A deep horn announces the train is coming and they get ready to board. The train's engine car comes into view, rolling slowly over the tracks.

The first few cars after the engine have about forty travelers riding on the roof. A row of tanker cars passes by followed by a row of boxcars.

The two travelers beside them run after the row of boxcars. Andres gives the signal.

ANDRES

Ready? Go!

Andres yanks Manuel by the shirt and they run after the train.

Andres reaches the end of a boxcar, grabs onto the fixed ladder on the side, and jumps on. Manuel reaches the ladder and Andres lends him a hand. He is on the train.

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Manuel and Andres take a short break in between cars.

ANDRES

We have to get to the front of the train. It's the safest place to travel.

They climb up the fixed ladder to the roof, it is hot to the touch from the sun. Manuel burns his hands.

Manuel stands on top of the boxcar and has difficulty keeping his balance, he follows Andres towards the front of the train.

Manuel jumps over the first gap between cars and nearly falls down. They approach the edge of the last boxcar before the row of tanker cars and 2 GANGEROS come up to the roof from the front.

GANGERO #1 and GANGERO #2 both carry knives and show them.

Manuel and Andres stop, look at each other, turn back and run towards the back. They run two cars behind them, but the 2 GANGEROS are right behind. They come before a row of hopper cars.

ANDRES(CONT'D)

Let's go down and around!

Andres leads Manuel down to the side of a hopper car and crawls in between to the other side. They lose GANGERO #1, climb back on top and jump to the boxcar in front.

GANGERO #2 waits behind and climbs up to the roof in front of them to cut them off.

ANDRES

Use your backpack!

Andres takes off his backpack and puts it forward as a shield, then runs up to GANGERO #2, blocks the first strike with the knife and kicks him in the crotch.

GANGERO #2 falls back. Andres runs up to him and kicks him in the face before he comes up again.

Manuel rushes to help and kicks GANGERO #2 several times, he falls down between cars and to the side of the tracks. Manuel is shocked by what just happened.

MAUNEL

Oh, my God! Is he dead? Did we kill that guy?

Andres sees GANGERO #1 coming at them with a knife.

ANDRES

Run!

Andres runs first and Manuel follows close. They jump over the next set of boxcars. GANGERO #1 is closing in.

Manuel jumps to the next boxcar, loses his balance, and falls flat on the roof. GANGERO #1 closes in with the knife raised, ready to strike.

Manuel turns on his back, he uses his backpack to shield the first blow of the knife, and kicks away at his attacker.

Andres throws a punch and Manuel grabs the hand with the blade. They fall on the roof as they wrestle.

Manuel bangs the assailant's hand against the hot roof of the box car and the knife comes loose. GANGERO #1 kicks Andres away, grabs Manuel by the neck and rips off his necklace with his left hand.

Manuel is startled and stops for a moment. GANGERO #1 kicks Manuel aside and he falls to the side of the boxcar.

MAUNEL

Ahhh!

Manuel hangs on to a railing and dangles off to the side of the car while the train is moving. Andres tries to lend him a hand.

GANGERO #1 stomps on Andres hand and burns it against the hot roof. Manuel falls off the side of the train.

MANUEL(CONT'D)

Noooooo!

GANGERO #1 pulls out a small handgun from his belt. He is ready to shoot Andres but a switch signal slams into his chest. BAM!

GANGERO #1 tumbles on top of the boxcar before falling off to the side of the train.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Manuel lies face down on a patch of tall grass. He gets up and sees the train cars roll by, he runs to the train to get back on.

He stumbles upon GANGERO #1 on the side of the tracks. He is bleeding from several places and is badly hurt.

Manuel sees the silver rope of his mother's necklace sticking out of the gangero's front pocket.

GANGERO # 1
Ayudeme! Por favor!
Help me! Please!

Manuel grabs the necklace and hold it tight in his hand. The last boxcar rolls by, Manuel turns and runs after it.

Manuel catches up and jumps on, he climbs up the ladder and Andres is there to lend him a hand.

ANDRES
Good. I thought I lost you for a moment. Let's get to the front. Hurry.

Manuel and Andres run over to the next row of boxcars, climb down the tanker cars and quickly make their way to the front of the train.

Manuel is shocked by the close call and breathing heavily, his eyes are glazed over.

INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Gabriel is taking a lunch order from a customer at the counter and the phone rings. It's Manuel's school.

GABRIEL
What? He was absent all day?

Gabriel hangs up and walks over to Beatriz.

BEATRIZ
Oh, dear Lord. He is missing again?

Gabriel and Beatriz leave everything behind and rush off to school to talk with the principal.

EXT. RAILYARDS - AFTERNOON

Late afternoon, the sun is going down. Manuel and Andres are riding in the second car behind the engine with about fifty stowaways sitting on top of a row of boxcars.

Word gets around that they are approaching the end of the line and they must step down.

ANDRES

This is where I told you we have to take a bus to the coast.

MANUEL

And then get on a boat, right?

ANDRES

Or walk. How much you got?

MANUEL

Five hundred pesos.

ANDRES

Not even close. I don't even have a full fare. If we had the money for the boat ride it would save us a week or ten days. There are no railways through this section, it's deep jungle.

MANUEL

So where do we go from here?

ANDRES

We take a bus to a town called Playa Negra on the other coast.

MANUEL

Really? Playa Negra? That's where my Uncle Gabriel is from. He left a long time ago. How far away is that? Can we walk there?

ANDRES

No way. It's a four-to six hour ride. Oh, and one more thing. From here on, don't use your real name. Always an alias.

MANUEL

Just make up a name?

ANDRES
Or a nick name, whatever, it's for
your own safety.

MANUEL
What name did you pick?

ANDRES
Same as last time, Nico.

There is a rush of passengers towards the front, somebody
shouts the word 'gangeros'.

MANUEL
What, again?

The train lurches forward as it approaches the railyards and
applies the brakes. Some travelers fall off the train,
others fall flat on the roof of the boxcar.

SECURITY GUARDS from the railyards approach from below.
There are shouts from below.

SECURITY GUARD
Everyone! Off the train! Now!

MANUEL
Down on the right!

A group of about ten gangeros approaches from behind,
running over boxcars. Another group approaches from the
ground to the left.

Manuel climbs down between boxcars, Andres is behind him. A
security guard shines a flashlight at Manuel, grabs him by
the arm and pulls him off the train.

MANUEL(CONT'D)
No! Get your hands off me!

Andres jumps off the train to help Manuel but he runs into
another security guard.

Shots are fired, the *gangeros* assault a security guard. The
security guards disperse.

The stowaways scatter and run for safety of the greenery
nearby while the train rolls slowly into the yards.

MANUEL
Andres! Andres!

Andres is nowhere to be found. Manuel sees two *gangeros*
running towards him and takes off running towards the city.

He runs towards the industrial part of town, he follows other panicked stowaways.

EXT. BUS STOP - NIGHT

Manuel walks to a town square, he looks around unsure and finds a corner where three small buses are parked. He picks the one that says 'Playa Negra'. He pays his fare and takes a seat in the back.

Manuel looks out the window for his friend Andres, but he does not see him. The bus leaves the town square half full, Manuel settles in for the long ride.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE/STREETS - LATER

Manuel arrives at the town of Playa Negra, a seaside tourist town. He steps off the bus at a town square, it's past midnight, the passengers scatter silently to their destinations.

Playa Negra is a fishing village that dates back to the times of the Spanish colonies, the buildings reflect the old and new architecture of three centuries.

Manuel is drawn by a sea breeze to a beach two blocks away. A promenade with hotels and restaurants line the street before a beach about five blocks long.

A Spanish wall with fishing boats docked on both sides juts out one hundred feet on the far side into a wide bay.

Manuel steps on a black sand beach and takes off his sneakers. He rolls up his pants and steps up to the waves washing up.

A waxing moon hangs above the deep and black Pacific ocean. The black sand sparkles under the moonlight.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Manuel walks from the beach to the town square and sits at a bench. He sees a group of ten to fifteen porters congregating at a corner and sits near them.

A PORTER is asking anyone willing to work a special assignment, most others turn him down. The porter is medium height, skinny, he comes up to Manuel.

PORTER

Hey kid, wanna work for five days?
A thousand pesos?

MANUEL

What do I have to do?

PORTER

Carry a back pack and some luggage around for five days.

MANUEL

Okay, I can do that. Do I start now?

PORTER

No, meet me tomorrow, here. 7 a.m.

MANUEL

Thanks. What's your name?

PORTER

I'm Flaco. Don't leave me hanging.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Boxes, mattresses, appliances, and personal belongings pile up in front of Gabriel and Beatriz Lopez's home in San Andres. Both of their daughters are there to help.

LILIANA, 21, tall and thin, her twin sister, BETI, both with long brown hair like their mother, wear teeshirts, jeans and sneakers.

Soledad is there to help along with her husband, Javier. Their daughter, Leticia is also present.

SOLEDAD

Beatriz, I'm so sorry to hear about Manuelito. Again?

BEATRIZ

Oh, Dear Lord, I have been praying for him day and night, Sole. And the worse part is that we're moving. What if he decides to come back from wherever he is and we're not here anymore?

SOLEDAD

Ay, Dios mio.

Gabriel arrives with a small truck, says hello to Javier, and has a few words with him. They talk as they move small pieces of furniture to the truck.

JAVIER

So what do you think pushed him
over the edge?

GABRIEL

I don't know, so many things,
Javier. He'd only been with us for
about a month, but I think it was
the kids in school. There was a lot
of bullying, and some kids were
involved with the street gangs.

Javier helps Gabriel lift a couch onto the truck.

JAVIER

Oh, poor kid, he probably felt
trapped.

GABRIEL

And scared, alone, homeless... And
a few other difficult things for a
boy his age.

JAVIER

I'll definitely say my prayers for
him, Gabriel.

Gabriel jumps down from the truck. They walk towards the
garage door where a few mattresses have been propped up.

GABRIEL

Thanks, Javier. So, with all the
craziness going around these days,
aren't you concerned about working
in the courts? The gangs and the
cartels are now working together.
There was a shooting in a courtroom
the other day.

Gabriel gets hold of one mattress and lifts, Javier lifts
from the bottom and they walk towards the truck.

JAVIER

Bah, we've known that for years.
The gangs are the seeding grounds
for the cartels. Luckily I'm in the
civil courts and I don't deal too
much with them, but every once in a
while...

EXT. TOWN SQUARE/STREETS - MORNING

The next day at 7 a.m. Manuel meets Flaco at the corner of
the town square.

FLACO
So what do they call you, kid?

MANUEL
I'm Nico.

Manuel follows Flaco to the town's beachfront promenade with hotels and restaurants. Flaco meets the driver of a rusty truck parked at a corner.

FLACO
(to Manuel)
Wait for me here. I am going to bring the folks we will be traveling with. My friend here is going to give us a ride to the trailhead.

Moments later, Flaco brings out two guests, a couple from the city, a man and a woman who look like they are married. They wear expensive camping clothing and hiking shoes. They hand their small backpacks to Manuel and he puts them in the truck.

FLACO
(to the clients)
This is Nico, my assistant. He'll be coming with us.

Two more travelers arrive, they are two gay men with Brazilian accents, they also look like they live in the city and are dressed for a nature outing.

MANUEL
So, how far are these people going?

FLACO
They're going to Costa Rica, and further up. If you want to make some extra cash, you can come with us past that point.

Flaco goes back inside while Manuel's wheels are spinning. Flaco comes out moments later with an older Muslim gentleman with a mustache, he wears black pants, sandals, and a white shirt stained at the armpits.

MR. TIKANEN (58) and his wife, Zahara, (50) or MRS. TIKANEN. walk out with two children, a boy 7, and a girl 4. Mrs. Tikanen wears an *abayat* and a *hijab*, she's covered in black from head to toes and attracts everyone's attention as she walks to the truck.

EXT. ROADS AND TRAILS - CONTINUOUS

Flaco ushers the travelers in the back of the truck, Manuel gets in last. The truck pulls away and drives north a few blocks across the small town to a small park on a black sand beach. The truck stops under a palm grove, everyone gets out.

FLACO

So, everyone, this is where we begin. We're gonna be walking on a coastal trail - it's not deep jungle - for a few days. After that, we'll be going by bus. Everyone, get your backpacks on.

Manuel helps the travelers don their backpacks, Flaco helps Manuel with a heavy backpack weighing over 50 lbs. Flaco leads the way up a black sand beach to a coastal trail. Manuel pulls up the rear.

BEGIN MONTAGE - THE JUNGLE TREK

-Manuel and his group hike along a trail that follows the rugged Pacific coast, past an ancient city swallowed by the jungle.

-Manuel and his group hike through old-growth rainforest. Three-toed sloths hang from trees, hummingbirds dart across their path.

-Manuel chops wood for a fire to cook a meal by the beach.

-Manuel and his group cross a series of broken bridges over a wide, braided river.

-Manuel and his group walk on the edge a mangrove swamp.

-Manuel and Flaco rescue Mrs. Tikanen from a mud pit.

-Manuel builds a fire to roast a big fish at night. Before going to sleep, he goes over Mario's phone number on his forearm with a marker.

-In the morning, Manuel and Flaco shoo away a 16-foot long salty-croc from their beach camp.

-Manuel and his group cross a fence post into Costa Rica. A small hand-painted sign reads 'BIENVENIDOS A COSTA RICA'. No one guards the border.

END OF MONTAGUE.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Manuel stands with the group of travelers in front of a farmhouse, everyone is ready to go. Flaco hands Manuel the small ax with a leather sheave they used to cut firewood.

FLACO

Here, I can't get caught with this.
Put it in the bottom of your pack.

Manuel takes the ax and shoves it into his backpack. Flaco gives the signal and they walk out of the farmhouse as a group.

FLACO

And remember, if any army or police
board the bus, do not say a word. I
do all the talking, okay?

MANUEL

What if we're not sitting together?

FLACO

Don't worry, I will always take the
seat nearest to the front.

INT/EXT. HOUSE/NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING - SOLEDAD'S NIGHTMARE

Soledad gets her daughter, Leticia, ready for school. Javier, her husband, kisses his wife and daughter goodbye, heads out the door. He gets inside his small car parked in a driveway outside.

Javier drives up to the corner before a busy street. Two men in a motorcycle come up next to him. A GUNMAN in the back opens fire with a machine gun, killing Javier. From her living room window, Soledad sees what happened.

SOLEDAD

Javier!

The DRIVER turns the motorcycle around and speeds towards the house.

Soledad grabs her daughter Leticia by the hand, runs to the back yard and goes out of a gate to an alley.

The GUNMAN jumps off and the DRIVER waits, looking around. The GUNMAN shoots the locks off the front door and kicks it open.

Soledad runs down a back alley with her daughter and turns into a busy street.

The GUNMAN runs through the house searching for Soledad and her daughter and comes out to the small backyard.

He sees the open gate and runs into the alley. The DRIVER circles around the block.

Soledad sees the DRIVER speeding down the busy street looking for them and walks into a supermarket.

The GUNMAN runs down the alley to the main street, sees no one and turns around.

Soledad and her daughter run into a bathroom inside the store and hide. She hugs her daughter tightly and keeps quiet, stifling her tears.

INT. HOUSE - EVENING

Soledad knocks desperately on the door of Gabriel and Beatriz's new home. Her daughter Leticia clings to her side. A small yellow cab pulls away. Gabriel opens the door and lets them in, Beatriz is ready for them.

BEATRIZ

Dear Lord, Soledad. Come in, dear.

Gabriel comes down from the second floor.

SOLEDAD

(Crying desperately)

Why would they do this, Beatriz?
Javier had nothing to do with
anything. Why?

BEATRIZ

Soledad, *mija*. It's happening all
over the city. Those drug cartel
people are taking over everything.

Betti and Liliana come down from their rooms.

SOLEDAD

Gabriel, we have to get out of
here. They were coming after me and
Leti. Please, help me. I need to
leave the city, leave the country!

GABRIEL

I don't know, Soledad. I can't
think of anywhere right now.

SOLEDAD

What about, Mario? Can I go there
and hide with him? I'll do anything
to get out of here, please?

GABRIEL

Okay, okay. Let me think. I'll give
Mario a call. What time is it over
there?

Gabriel rushes to the bedroom while Beatriz and her
daughters stay with Soledad and her daughter.

EXT. ROADWAYS - LATER

Gabriel drives Soledad and Leticia in their small car out of
the city.

A road side green signs reads 'OLAYA NEGRA, 120 Km'.

EXT. DOCKS - NIGHT

Gabriel walks with Soledad and Leticia down a long stone
wall towards the end to meet the COYOTE. A man in the
shadows stands near a boat with people already on board.

GABRIEL

She's all set and her daughter. I
was told you can help with
transportation on the other side,
is that right?

COYOTE

That's not what we do. We drop off
on the Mexican side and that's it.

GABRIEL

Are you sure?

COYOTE

Look, I don't know who you were
talking to. We don't do that.

SOLEDAD

Is everything okay, Gabriel?

GABRIEL

It's fine, Soledad. Don't worry.
Mario knows you're coming, we'll
figure out a way to pick you up
when you get there. You still have
his number, right?

SOLEDAD

I do. Thank you, so much, Gabriel.
I don't know how I will ever repay
you.

GABRIEL

It's alright, Sole. May God help
you and protect both of you.

Gabriel gives them a big hug before they step down on the boat. Soledad and Leticia waive sadly at Gabriel as the boat pulls away filled with 30 other refugees.

EXT. OPEN WATER - CONTINUOUS

A 25-foot wooden boat with an outboard engine slowly pulls away from the docks. The captain steps up to the aft board and makes an announcement.

CAPTAIN

Everybody, we will be traveling for
six to eight hours every night for
three nights. You can sit down, if
you get sick, do it over the board,
please. We get off in Mexico, then
travel by bus to the border. All
together it will be five or six
days to get there. After that,
you're on your own.

BEGIN MONTAGUE

-Soledad and her daughter Leticia take a seat on the deck of the boat as they hold on to their back packs.

-Soledad and Leticia travel over rough waves many miles from shore. Soledad writes down Mario's phone number on her forearm.

-Soledad throws up over the gunwales.

-Soledad and Leticia try to sleep as the boat slams against the waves.

-The boat approaches a remote beach in Costa Rica and comes down to shallow waters to let the travelers off.

-Leticia slips off the boat and falls in the water, but a young and tall black man is there to pull her out quickly.

-Soledad thanks the man and everyone proceeds to their sleeping quarters in a small farmhouse near the beach.

-Soledad and her daughter sleep with other travelers in shared bunkbeds in a small room.

END MONTAGUE.

INT. BARANDA - MORNING

Soledad and her group sit for a late breakfast at a table on a *baranda* overlooking a beach and the Pacific Ocean. Soledad approaches the man who helped her daughter earlier.

BIBI, 31, is a tall, muscular black man from Africa, travelling alone. He speaks with a slight British accent.

SOLEDAD

Permiso, senor? Thank you so much,
for helping us off the boat last
night. I am Soledad. This is my
daughter, Leticia.

BIBI

(shaking hands)
And I am Bibi. Very nice to meet
you, madam. I am glad I could help.
(to Leticia)
And nice to meet you, as well,
young lady.

SOLEDAD

Where are you from, Bibi?

BIBI

I'm from Uganda. What about you
folks?

SOLEDAD

We're from Cordova, we just
started. You have come a long way.

BIBI

Too long of a way, madam.

SOLEDAD

Heading to the United States?

BIBI

Yes. Looking for a long lost aunt
in Detroit. What about you?

SOLEDAD

Family friend in California.

BIBI

Well, good luck to you and all of us. We still have a lot of miles to go before the American border. I'll be glad to help in any way I can.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Flaco and Manuel lead the group down a gravel road away from a farm in Nicaragua. In the short hike to a small town nearby, Manuel talks with Flaco.

MANUEL

So, Flaco, how much do I get paid for coming this far?

FLACO

It depends, are you splitting soon? Do you have plans to come back?

MANUEL

Definitely not coming back.

FLACO

Well? Do you want to go all the way to the border?

MANUEL

Yes.

FLACO

Well, then that's a couple of hundred dollars. Multiply times 400 in pesos, and you got yourself a good payday.

MANUEL

Okay, shake on it?

Manuel puts out his right hand.

FLACO

You know, you never shake hands with a coyote, right?

MANUEL

I... didn't.

FLACO

It's okay, kid. I'm good for it.

The group arrives at a small town, they walk to the town square and gather at one of the corners where two small buses wait for passengers to arrive.

Manuel and his group travel in a bus through the Nicaraguan countryside, past a very large volcano, and arrive at a small town at night.

The bus is crowded, packed with sacks of produce and chicken cages in the back.

Manuel and his group ride in the back of a pick up truck to a small farm where they will spend the night.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

Soledad and Leticia sit near the prow of the boat as it travels fast in open waters. Bibi sits next to Leticia, other passengers sit crammed in around them.

SOLEDAD

It's been more than six hours,
shouldn't we be stopping by now?

BIBI

He must be running low on fuel. Do
you want me to say something?

SOLEDAD

I don't know. Will he even listen
to us?

BIBI

Let's give him a couple of minutes.
Smugglers are famous for taking
stupid risks.

SOLEDAD

Sounds like you've been through
something like this before.

BIBI

I have, and it's alright. As long
as you can see the seashore.

SOLDIER

So, I told you why I'm fleeing.
What about you? Who or what are you
running away from?

The engine coughs and roars, they both notice.

BIBI

I am a criminal and pursued by the
government of my country, for
falling in love with a man.

SOLDIER

Oh, God. I'm so sorry.

BIBI

It's alright, madam. I am who I am.

SOLEDAD

Bibi. You can call me, Sole.

The engine coughs and roars again.

SOLEDAD(CONT'D)

What do you think of this guy, the captain? Do you trust him?

BIBI

You can never trust a coyote, Sole.
That's what you call smugglers
around these parts, no?

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - EVENING

Manuel and his group arrive at a small port in Nicaragua in the afternoon, the only boat ride planned for the group.

Mr. Tikanen is talking to his wife trying to soothe her nerves before stepping inside a fast boat with two outboard engines. The two children are also afraid of stepping inside a boat. The boat's captain helps them inside.

MANUEL

What's the matter? Why are they so afraid?

FLACO

They lost a son at sea. They took a boat out when they left their country and it sunk. The old man told me before we left, no boat rides. But I told him this was a short one and could not be avoided. We have to do it.

MANUEL

Why?

FLACO

This is 'Salvatruchas' territory. You don't mess around with those people. We're going around them.

MANUEL

Do you mean, El Salvador?

The Tikannen family puts on safety vests inside the boat, Manuel climbs in, Flaco gets in last. The captain orders all to sit, opens the throttle slightly on the engine and guides the boat out of the docks.

INT. HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The suburb of Soyopango in the capital city of San Salvador.

MAZO, 18, is a tall and muscle-bound *mulatto* with no markings on his skin. SANTI, 17, his younger brother, is thin and carries a messy mop of hair covering his eyes, with no markings on his body either.

The two brothers sit on a luxurious living room couch in the home of a gang leader in the capital, his name is CHACO. He is a tall and muscle-bound *mayan* in his 40s, dressed in a sports suit and sneakers.

A BODYGUARD stands at the entrance to the living room.

CHACO

Mazo, Santi! Good to see you, *eses*!
I have a special job for you.

The two brothers lean in and listen.

CHACO

I need you boys to take a trip to
the United States to see your
mother.

MAZO

Our mother? You found her?

CHACO

Yes, your uncle Marcos passed the
info to us. She's living with some
guy named Mario in Oakland,
California. You know she's alive,
right?

MAZO

Yes, we knew she left soon after
Santi was born.

INT. SHACK - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A MAN comes drunk to a small shack in the woods, kicks the door open and rouses a WOMAN out of bed. Two children lie with her, MAZO is 2 years old, SANTI is still a baby.

The man pulls the woman out of bed by her hair and starts beating her. The children cry. He pulls out a gun and aims at her. Terrified, the woman runs out of the shack.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MAZO(CONT'D)

Then she turned up in the states
eight years later. But we never
knew where she lived.

Chaco throws a USB stick to Santi.

CHACO

Well, she has been found, boys. We
have her new name and I.D. Her
phone number and address are in
there. She's married or something
to some guy named Mario, we're not
sure. I want you guys to pay her a
visit, see if she'll take you in.
Maybe you can get your legal papers
through her.

MAZO

Sure, Chaco. You said legal papers?

A BODYGUARD comes around with tumblers of scotch whiskey on
the rocks. Chaco takes his first, Mazo and Santo follow.

CHACO

That's right boys. That's the main
reason you're going. First, you
track her down and follow her for a
few days. You will get all the help
you need from our eses in Phoneix
and Oakland. Then try to make
contact and be careful not to spook
her. The idea is that you will work
your way into her life, maybe
she'll take you in, and then you'll
ask her to get you legal in the
states through her.

MAZO

You mean, getting our green card?

CHACO

Yes. But also, very important: Try
your best to blend in, as if you
have nothing to do with the gang.
Got it?

MAZO

Sure, Chaco. Is the plan for us to stay there a while?

CHACO

Yes, hopefully for a long time. Once you guys get legal, we're gonna need you to set up front businesses to clean our money. Small stores and whatnot that we can also use for operations.

MAZO

Okay, I get it. Are we reporting to you the whole time?

CHACO

Only from time to time. I'll set you up with a couple of contacts along the way. Our guy in Chiapas, Mexico, and Leon in Phoenix. You know, Leon, right?

MAZO

Yes, we do. When do we leave?

CHACO

How about tomorrow? You'll be going on 'the beast'. You guys ready?

MAZO

Heck, yeah. We've been waiting for a chance to ride the trains.

CHACO

There is also another errand I need to run for me.

MAZO

Sure, what is it?

CHACO

I need you to check out the railways for me. We have other gangs taking over in Guatemala, and our guys are getting their asses kicked. But they are also falling asleep at the wheel on the good parts. There are all kinds of people using the trains nowadays and no one is looking for big fish anymore. Find out what the hell is going on. They're leaving money on the table.

(MORE)

CHACO (CONT'D)

I want you to keep tabs on what they do and report to me before you get to Mexico. Also, I need you to show them how to do a good shake-down. Especially in *Mejico*.

MAZO

You got it, boss. Anything else?

CHACO

Yes. Don't get killed out there.

Mazo and Santi part ways with the gang boss and walk out of the house. They step inside a black SUV waiting for them out front and it drives away.

EXT. RAILYARDS - NIGHT

Mazo talks to a group of eighteen GANGEROS about what's expected of them.

MAZO

You guys are part of this gang to make money. Not just for yourselves, but also to those who give you permission to do it. Right now, the bosses are not happy with you. The other gangs are coming into our territory and you guys are wasting chances to collect. We're gonna be checking out everyone that gets on this train, just like you do in your *barrios* when you go house to house.

GANGERO # 1

Mazo, just to give you a heads up. The last couple of times we came up against the 18th Street Gang, we had to back out because they had so many of them. I'm not shitting you, man. They had more than a hundred *pitos* with them.

MAZO

Then we'll get back up if we need to. These railways have been ours from the beginning and we're not giving it up.

GANGERO # 2

Also, the army is getting pretty serious near the border with *Mejico*. We've been having to bail out more often because they're shooting at us.

MAZO

Do you guys shoot back?

GANGERO # 2

Fuck yeah, man'. We're not pussies.

MAZO

Stop doing that. Everyone, the more you shoot back, the more soldiers they'll bring. Leave them alone. Just get off the train and let me know. We have people in Guatemala that can call them off.

A cargo train blows its horn and rumbles slowly down a track. There are more than one hundred travelers atop a long train. Mazo takes two *gangeros* with him and his brother.

The *gangeros* spread out to different points along the railway, they board the train at different spots and wait in between cars before coming up on the roof.

EXT. TOWN - DAY - SICHUATE RIVER, GUATEMALA

Manuel and his group step off a bus in a small town square in Guatemala near the border with Mexico. Flaco finds a man who is waiting for them and they lead the group out of town towards a poor neighborhood.

The Sichuate River comes into view. Shantytowns populate both shores of the river, a slow, muddy flow about 100 yards wide at this junction. There is trash in the dirt paths, homes are built out of cardboard, plastic and scrap metal.

Rafts go back and forth, ferrying passengers to both countries. The clients from the city cover their noses from the smell of putrid water in the air.

The group comes to the edge of the river where a flat wooden raft awaits.

FLACO

Listen up, everybody. We're going to get across the river on this raft, it will only take a minute. Once we get on the other side, we will be in Mexico.

(MORE)

FLACO (CONT'D)

A driver will be waiting for us to
take us to the next town where we
will board a bus. Everyone, get in.

The man that led them to the raft hands them off to a young
man with a long stick of wood in his hand. Manuel gets in
last.

The raft is pushed across the river, one minute later
everyone disembarks when they reach the shore.

Flaco meets a DRIVER on the shore and they lead the group to
an old truck that is waiting nearby.

Manuel gets in the back with the travelers and their bags,
Flaco goes in the front with the driver.

The truck drives away slowly through a shantytown. Poor
children play in the streets, there is garbage strewn in
places and stray dogs look for scraps of food.

A minute into their drive, the DRIVER pulls a gun on Flaco
and points it at his head.

DRIVER

This is it, *cabron*. End of the road
for you.

FLACO

Cabron, are you fucking crazy? Do
you know who you're messing with?

DRIVER

I know who I'm messing with. And I
know they'll never find me. Get
out.

FLACO

(smiling)

Really, mother fucker? You are in
way above your head.

The DRIVER slows down and pulls to the side of the road. He
comes around and pulls Flaco out of the car. All the
travelers are surprised to see the man with the gun.

FLACO (CONT'D)

Everyone, calm down. This *cabron*
doesn't know what he's doing.

DRIVER

Shut the fuck up! All of you, get
down!

A GANGERO, working with the driver, comes up from the side of the road to meet him. The driver orders him to go to the car and bring down the backpacks. They match each traveler with their belongings and take all valuables.

Manuel's backpack is emptied in front of him, they take a flashlight a pocket knife and a small wallet with all the money he was carrying. The gangero misses the ax with the sheath that is mixed with his clothes.

FLACO

You know I have people waiting for me in Santa Clara, *cabron*. In fact, they're probably wondering where I am right now.

DRIVER

Shut the fuck up. Give me your phone!

FLACO

Fuck you, I am not giving you shit.

The GANGERO is harassing the couple from the city, he is forcing the woman away from her husband. There is a tussle and some shouting. Suddenly, the husband goes after the GANGERO and the DRIVER turns the gun towards them.

DRIVER

Hey, what the fuck ---

Flaco lunges for the Driver and grabs hold of the gun. A scuffle ensues.

Manuel reaches for the ax on the ground and hits the DRIVER on the side of his head. A shot is fired, the DRIVER falls to the ground.

The two Brazilians subdue the GANGERO and chase him away. Manuel is shocked at his own actions.

MANUEL

Oh, my God, I killed him, Oh, my God!

FLACO

Anyone hurt? What happened?

Flaco inspects the wound on the DRIVER's head.

FLACO(CONT'D)

What did you hit him with, the ax?

MANUEL

(shaken)

It still had the sheath over it,
but I think I killed him.

Flaco inspects the body again and sees that he is still breathing.

FLACO

Well, you could have chopped off
his head and you didn't. He's fine,
Nico. Lets get out of here.

Flaco finds the keys for the truck and takes the gun from the DRIVER's hand. He hands Manuel the bag with the valuables.

FLACO (CONT'D)

Everyone, packs on, quickly. Let's
go.

Manuel and the travelers scramble to shove their belonging back into their packs and get in the truck. Flaco drives away with Manuel in the front.

FLACO (CONT'D)

It's alright, Nico. The guy will be
fine, you didn't kill him.

MANUEL

What if he doesn't get up? What if
he's hurt real bad?

FLACO

Listen, kid. You did the right
thing. Sometimes you have to fight
with everything you got.

Flaco drives into the next town and finds the town square. He drops off Manuel and the group at a corner, parks the truck discreetly on a side street.

Flaco shoves the gun under the driver's seat and joins the group at the town square. They board a bus and it takes off

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - NIGHT

A cargo train carries three to four hundred stowaways.

Mazo, Santi, and two GANGEROS step on the roof of a boxcar carrying about 30 people. Everyone rushes to the ladders to climb down. An older woman falls off the train.

They pin down a group of travelers at gunpoint and shake them down. Mazo shouts orders, Santi collects credit cards and cell phones.

Later, Mazo makes his way to the front of the train and stops near the engine car to check in with a GANERO keeping watch.

MAZO
Anything yet?

GANGERO
Any moment now.

Mazo returns to his brother's side a couple of cars behind. Moments later, the first shots are heard. Santi pulls out a rifle with a night vision scope.

MAZO
Make every bullet count, Santi.

BEGIN MONTAGUE - BATTLE ON THE TRAIN

-From the shadows in the forest, armed *gangeros* spring towards the train and climb on.

-Some are shot off the train, others are able to climb on top of the cars.

-Terrified travelers hide in between cars, under hopper cars and tanker cars, some inside boxcars. Some fall off the train.

-Mazo engages in hand-to-hand combat with a GANERO from a rival gang on top of a box car. He loses his footing and nearly falls off the train. He gets back on his feet and pushes his rival off.

-Santi shoots rival *gangeros* with the rifle and they fall off the train. One comes up in between cars, Santi pulls out a gun with his left hand and shoots him.

-More men come onto the train, there are several skirmishes on different train cars.

-Some rival gang members are chased from one car to the next, some are thrown off, others are shot.

END OF MONTAGUE.

EXT. RAILYARDS - MORNING

The train arrives at a yard at dawn. A black SUV is waiting to pick up the two brothers, they get inside and drive away. Mazo pulls out a phone to call Chaco.

MAZO

(on phone)

Yes, we are about to cross into *Mejico* -- Yeah, a good amount -- We collected one hundred and nineteen cards, thirty-eight cell phones. -- Yeah, Santi has all the info, he'll send it in a couple of days -- Sure boss, thanks.-- They had about a hundred, but we held our ground -- The military? they have a stretch of about fifty miles from the border with *Mejico*. We were told there's nothing that can be done about that -- For now -- Hey, thanks Chaco for sending the guys - - we're coming up into Ayunta -- Got it, boss. Over and out.

Mazo hangs up and turns to Santi.

MAZO (CONT'D)

We're gonna stay in Chiapas for a few days.

EXT. BOAT - NIGHT

Soledad and her daughter Leticia cling to their backpacks and each other as the boat travels at night over choppy seas.

The keel bangs hard against the waves and splashes water to the passengers. Bibi sits next to Soledad.

The boat turns to starboard to approach the shore. A rouge wave pushes the boat board side, it lands leeway onto an oncoming wave and it floods the hold. Several TRAVELERS fall overboard.

There are screams of anguish, a man jumps off to try to rescue a boy that fell off.

CAPTAIN

Everybody, stay on the boat!

TRAVELER

My son! My son!

Another wave floods the boat and it begins to sink. There are cries of anguish, prayers to God. The captain reaches under the aft board and starts handing out flotation devices.

CAPTAIN
Everyone, the boat is going down!
Save yourselves!

SOLEDAD
Bibi!

BIBI
It's okay Sole. I'm right here!
Leticia! Stay with me.

The boat is half-submerged, waves are washing in. Bibi puts a flotation device on Leticia, holds her in one arm, holds Soledad by the hand. Passengers are jumping off.

BIBI(CONT'D)
Can you swim okay? Stay calm. Just
wade in. Nice and easy.

Bibi and Soledad push away from the boat and are now swimming in open water. The black outline of the coast and a few scattered points of light can be seen in the distance.

SOLEDAD
Bibi, where are you?

BIBI
I'm right here, Soledad. I'm right
here. Leticia is here. It's okay.

Screams of anguish and desperation fade away in the distance as they get away from the boat. The waves rise and fall a few feet, a steady cold breeze pushes scattered grey clouds above.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Two hours later, Bibi, Soledad and Leticia come ashore on a deserted beach. Soledad holds Leticia tight, they sit in the wet sand and tremble from the cold.

Leticia has lost her glasses, all are barefoot. Bibi sits next to them, puts his long arms around Soledad and Leticia and tries to warm them up.

SOLEDAD
(weeping)
Bibi, you saved our lives! Thank
you! Thank you!

BIBI

It's okay, Soledad. Let's try to
get warm. We're going to be
alright.

INT/EXT. BUS - NIGHT

Manuel sits in the back of a crowded bus with the Tikkanen family and Flaco travels near the front. The bus stops at an army checkpoint and the clients get nervous.

An OFFICER and a SOLDIER with a machine gun step inside the bus.

OFFICER

Everyone, this is a routine
inspection. Get out your id's have
them ready to show.

The officer questions the couple from the city and they show their passports.

OFFICER(CONT'D)

I don't see any visa stamps here.
Get out and wait for me.

Flaco stands up and tries to intervene.

FLACO

Officer, if I may, these folks
traveling with me ---

OFFICER

Hey, shut it! Who the hell are you?
Get off the bus and line up!

Flaco puts up his hands in a gesture of peace and follows instructions.

Mr. and Mrs. Tikanen, their children, Manuel and the rest of the group are escorted off the bus to the side of the road.

Flaco is questioned in the back of the bus, within earshot of Manuel.

OFFICER

You little shit! Who is your
handler and where are you coming
from?

FLACO

Officer, these people are on a
special trip from the University of
Cordova ---

Manuel and the rest of the group stand nervously against the side of the bus.

BAM! A shot rings out from behind the bus and everyone's heart stops. A deep silence follows.

Manuel panics and begins to cry, a soldier picks him out of the group.

SOLDIER

You! The Captain wants to see you!

Manuel is brought before the officer by the scruff of his neck. Flaco's body lays dead half inside a ditch, bleeding out.

Manuel clutches his mother's necklace with both hands.

MANUEL

Please, officer, I had nothing to do with this. The guy asked me if I could carry bags for these people and I said, yes. But all I want is to find my uncle in the states. My foster mother died, I'm an orphan, and I don't have any money. please don't kill me, please. I just want a second chance. Please!

OFFICER

An orphan? I don't believe you.

Manuel doesn't reply but cries like an innocent child. The officer sees the silver necklace dangling from his hand. He takes it from him and sees the image of Saint Jerome.

The officer has pity on Manuel and throws the necklace back at him. He turns to a soldier.

OFFICER(CONT'D)

Take him to the orphanage.

The soldier removes Manuel and takes him to a patrol car nearby.

The officer calls the couple from the city. The two Brazilians and the Tikanen family wait with dread for their turn to speak with the officer.

EXT. BEACH - MORNING

Soledad, Leticia, and Bibi's clothes are dry, they walk on a beach towards a group of houses built on the shore.

Bibi sees a body of a dead passenger on their boat washed up on the beach and turns Soledad and Leticia away.

BIBI

Don't look. Keep going that way.

SOLEDAD

Dear Lord, help us.

Further down the beach they see a church steeple and a cluster of red roof tiles.

BIBI

There, Soledad. There has to be a bank machine over there.

SOLEDAD

God, I hope these work or else we're stranded here.

Soledad pulls out a small wallet out of her bra with three credit cards and a debit card.

They walk on a dirt road and arrive at a small town.

Soledad walks up to an ATM machine and goes inside. She comes out disappointed.

SOLEDAD(CONT'D)

Just one of them works. And there's a limit for withdrawal.

INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

A modest hotel restaurant in a colonial-style home in the small town where they landed. They all wear new clothes and look well rested. Bibi joins them on the outdoor seating.

SOLEDAD

You clean up well, Bibi.

BIBI

And you, as well. Leticia, you look enchanting.

LETICIA

Thank you, Mr. Bibi.

A waiter approaches and takes their lunch order.

BIBI

Thank you, Sole, for everything.
You are very kind.

SOLEDAD

Please, Bibi. Don't mention it.
After all you've done for us
already.

BIBI

So, do you have any idea how to get
to the border?

SOLEDAD

I haven't got a clue. I'm just
starting to figure out where we
are. We're almost at the border
with Guatemala. That means we have
to cross all of Mexico from the
bottom to the top.

BIBI

Hum, still a long way to go.

SOLEDAD

Have you heard about the beast?

BIBI

No, what is it?

Soledad takes a moment to butter Leticia's bread.

SOLEDAD

It's the southern railways. Lots of
people use it to travel for free.
It goes all the way to the border.

BIBI

Free sounds like a good deal.

SOLEDAD

Yeah, they are also crowded and
very dangerous.

BIBI

Do you have enough money to get you
to the border by bus?

SOLEDAD

Not for the three of us, I don't
think.

BIBI

Why don't you go by yourself with
your daughter? Get there faster.

SOLEDAD

Bibi, I'm really afraid to travel alone. Can you come with us?

BIBI

You mean on the trains? Is that the only option for the three of us?

SOLEDAD

It is. But I much rather do that than travel alone in Mexico. I heard terrible things about this country.

Later, as they exit the hotel's restaurant, a CONCIERGE approaches Soledad.

CONCIERGE

So sorry to bother you, senora, but the card you used to check into the hotel has been declined. Would you happen to have another one?

SOLEDAD

Oh, that's quite alright. I'll settle the bill with cash.

(to Bibi)

Oh well, nice try.

INT. ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

A police cruiser arrives at an orphanage on the outskirts of a small town in Mexico. The building looks like an old monastery, mountain mist hovers over the hills.

Manuel is brought out of a police cruiser and handed off to a priest at the gates of a seminary building. He follows the priest inside to an office to talk for a few minutes.

PRIEST

So, Manuel, the officer's report says that you were smuggled into the country. Is that right?

MANUEL

I'm not sure what that means.

PRIEST

Where you forced to travel with the man that was arrested?

MANUEL

He wasn't arrested. They killed him.

PRIEST

Who is 'they', the officers?

Manuel doesn't answer.

PRIEST(CONT'D)

It's alright, Manuel. You don't have to answer. So where are you from?

MANUEL

Guatemala.

PRIEST

Hum, your accent sounds like you're from Costa Rica or Cordova. Are you really from Guatemala or are you afraid to go back home?

Manuel doesn't answer.

PRIEST(CONT'D)

It's alright, Manuel. We're here to lend a hand and help you find a home. You can stay here as long as you need.

The priest walks Manuel from the main office down a long hallway running down the side of a chapel, to a set of stairs that lead to the cloisters. They walk up to the third floor to a large dorm room.

The priest meets a FRIAR standing by the door and introduces Manuel to him. The friar takes Manuel down a hallway and up a set of stairs.

About twenty-five teens ranging in age from 14 to 16 get ready for lights out. Some are in their pajamas, other are coming back from the washrooms.

The friar walks Manuel past a long row of bunk beds and shows him to the one at the end, next to a wall with an inset altar of Saint Jerome, patron saint of the orphans.

Manuel takes out his broken necklace from his front pocket and looks at the effigy.

FRIAR

Is that yours, Manuel?

MANUEL

Yes. I carry it for good luck.

FRIAR
It's not luck, Manuel. It's God's
Grace.

The friar introduces Manuel to a boy taking the bunk next to him. His name is FRANCISCO. He is 15, short, spiky black hair. The friar exits.

Manuel sits on the bunk and inspects the night table next to it. A Bible lies on top. He opens a drawer and finds a toothbrush, tooth paste, a bar of soap and a towel.

FRANCISCO
Hey, how did you end up here? Did
the Migra get you?

MANUEL
No.

The light flicks on and off once and the friar announces one minute until lights out. Most boys get under the covers and get ready to sleep.

FRANCISCO
Hey, want to get out of here?

MANUEL
What? No, I just got here.

FRANCISCO
Well, I'm busting out of here
before I get deported. They tell
kids they can stay here as long as
they want, but it's not true.

MANUEL
What you're talking about?

FRANCISCO
It means you can't stay here
forever. Will you think about it? I
need a partner to travel with.

MANUEL
I don't want to talk about it,
okay?

Manuel gets under the covers and the room lights are turned off. A small hallway light remains and Manuel is left alone to his thoughts.

Manuel's mind swirls with memories of the last couple of days. He cries quietly under the covers.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Soledad, Leticia and Bibi travel on a bus at night in the state of Chiapas.

SOLEDAD

I heard a woman talking back there saying that you can get information about the trains on social media, like on Facebook. Like when the trains come by and whether they are safe or not. I wonder if I should buy a cheap phone?

BIBI

Can you afford one? That's the important question.

SOLEDAD

I think we better save our money. Hopefully, we can ask people with phones.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Manuel moves slowly down a food line holding a metal tray. Two friars dispense porridge from two large pots. Manuel picks up a cup of water from a tray, he picks a spot at a long table, Francisco sits next to him.

MANUEL

You again?

FRANCISCO

Look, I know I'm being a pain in the ass. But I've seen some kids run out of here after the first night. Some of us just want to keep going. I'm trying to get to the states. What about you?

MANUEL

I'm going there, too. But I need some time. I've been through hell.

FRANCISCO

So have I. And as soon as you step out, you're gonna be right back in it.

MANUEL

So, what's the hurry?

FRANCISCO

Because they won't keep you here forever. As soon as they figure out where you're from, they'll ship you out.

MANUEL

How long have you been here?

FRANCISCO

About a week.

MANUEL

How come you haven't left?

FRANCISCO

I'm looking for a partner. I don't want to travel alone.

MANUEL

Look, I need a couple of days, at least.

FRANCISCO

Okay, but I'm leaving soon. I've been on the trains before. I know how to get around.

MANUEL

Then, what do you need me for?

FRANCISCO

To keep safe. There are a lot of *gangeros* on the train.

EXT. RAILYARDS - AFTERNOON

Mazo and Santi stand before twenty *gangeros* who have been assigned to look after the railway lines in the state of Chiapas.

MAZO

You guys are supposed to be turning a profit from this operation and every month you bring less and less. Now, I don't want to hear about the 18th Street gang or the army shooting at you. The bosses are not pleased with you and you're gonna have to step up. There are people from all over the world using this railway to try to get to the American border.

(MORE)

MAZO (CONT'D)

Some of them are carrying a lot of money on credit cards and debit cards. Enough money to pay for a coyote on the border, enough money to get to wherever they're going in the United States. So it is up to you to find them. We are going to be keeping tabs on all of you. If you don't produce, you're out. You get to do shit work shaking down old ladies in your neighborhood.

A train horn blows in the distance and a long cargo train rumbles slowly down one of the tracks. More than 500 men, women and children travel on top of the cars and in between.

MAZO

And another thing. Some of you guys have been taking women and girls from the trains to build up your stables, that's gonna end tonight. We don't have time for that shit. It will take you away from what you should be doing, which is shaking down passengers on this train! If I hear any of you doing that shit, I'm gonna personally deal with you and beat the shit out of you! You should be doing your job, not fucking around with girls!

One of the leaders talks to Mazo aside.

GANGERO

Say, Mazo. Most people get on the front of the train at this crossing.

MAZO

Everyone listen! Same four people out front. The rest of us, we're boarding from the last car. Raton and Chucho, you're coming with us. The rest of you, go!

EXT. TOWN - SAME TIME

Soledad, Leticia, and Bibi wait for the train at a road crossing. Hundreds of more people are waiting. A train blows its horn and there is a crush of the crowd near the tracks.

There are many people traveling on top of the train as it slowly passes by. Soledad runs after the train and jumps on. Bibi runs behind her holding Leticia, hands her to Soledad and jumps on.

Soledad is afraid to walk on the roof, prefers to stay between cars.

Mazo, Santi, and their men jump on the train at the last few cars.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Manuel sits with a group of seven BOYS in a circle of chairs. A FRIAR leads a session on how to deescalate conflict. Francisco sits a few chairs to the right.

FRIAR

Some of you have been here before.
Can someone share what are some of
the ways in which we can tell a
person that is threatening you to
slow down by using hand gestures?

A few hands go up.

BOY #1

You can show the person the palms
of your hands, signaling you have
no weapons and that you are not a
threat.

FRIAR

Very good. What about a word or two
you can say to help the person
react in a positive way.

BOY #2

You can say positive things like:
'It's okay', or 'Amigo'.

Later, after the session ends, Francisco talks to Manuel in the hallway.

FRANCISCO

I heard you killed a *ganguero*.

MANUEL

What? No, I didn't. How did you ---
Never mind. I'm never saying
anything around here again.

FRANCISCO

Hey, that's the kind of stuff you have to do out there, or else they eat you alive.

MANUEL

Can we not talk about this here?

FRANCISCO

Look, if you want to make it to the United States, you're gonna have to deal with those *gangeros* and you better be ready.

MANUEL

I am not ready, don't ask again.

INT. CHAPEL - EVENING

Manuel has just received communion and goes back to his pew. He kneels and says a prayer, Francisco kneels next to him. Manuel sits back, and moments later, Francisco sits up.

MANUEL

You know, you're a real pain in the *cojones*?

FRANCISCO

Father Alonso told me I have a meeting tomorrow. They're gonna ship me out. I'm leaving tonight.

MANUEL

Tonight? That's too soon. Wait another day.

FRANCISCO

I can't.

Manuel waits until evening mass is over and talks to Francisco as they walk back to the cloister.

MANUEL

So, what's your plan?

FRANCISCO

Wait until midnight and go.

MANUEL

That's it? Isn't there like 'anyone' keeping guard? Do we just walk out of here?

FRANCISCO

Pretty much. There are a few friars walking around, but they can't hold anyone physically back from leaving. That's not their job.

Manuel and Francisco enter the dorm room.

FRANCISCO(CONT'D)

So, are you coming?

MANUEL

Yes.

INT. ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

Manuel is awake under the covers writing over Mario's phone number with a pen under his forearm.

Francisco taps Manuel on the shoulder and signals him it's time to go.

They sneak down a hallway to the back staircase, enter the chapel's chambers and leave out of a back door.

Manuel and Francisco climb over a stone wall, run down the edge and jump on the road that leads to the orphanage.

They walk on the road heading west in the middle of the night.

FRANCISCO

Hey, Manuel. Do you have a name you were using when you were coming up.

MANUEL

I was using, Nico. What about you?

FRANCISCO

Call me Tuco.

MANUEL

How far do we go on this road?

FRANCISCO

See those lights over there. That's Santa Maria, we'll be there in half an hour. We can sneak into a truck at the depot. Most of them are heading to Aquinas.

EXT. TRUCK DEPOT - MORNING

Manuel and TUCO climb out of the back of a truck carrying produce until it comes to a stop in traffic. Aquinas is a small city in the mountains.

Manuel and Tuco walk towards the rail yards past a poor neighborhood, they reach the railyards and wait for the train to come by.

A long cargo train approaches, about fifty new passengers come up close to the rails. There are hundreds of travelers sitting on the first few cars. Tuco chases after a boxcar in the middle, Manuel follows and both jump on.

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Manuel and Tuco climb on the roof and walk towards the back. They walk past men, women, and children of all ages, mostly poor migrants heading to the U.S border.

TUCO

When the *gangeros* come up, everyone goes below between cars. Sometimes box cars are open, you can hide from them inside.

MANUEL

So how long will we be on this train?

TUCO

A week, maybe more, depending on how many times we have to get off.

Soledad has finally gotten the courage to travel on the roof of a boxcar and sits on top with Leticia and Bibi.

Manuel and Tuco walk on the same car going around groups of people and accidentally bumps Soledad's shoulder.

Soledad turns around and thinks she recognizes Manuel. She calls his name but he doesn't hear her.

Soledad turns around puzzled.

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - DAY

Soledad rides on the roof of a boxcar with Leticia and Bibi. Two women TRAVELERS sitting next to her look at a cell phone and share information between them.

SOLEDAD

Excuse, me. Did I hear you say
people give food to travelers along
the way?

TRAVELER

Yes, coming up on the town of
Ocozuata. We should be there in
about six hours.

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - EVENING

Manuel and Tuco ride the train on the third car from the
front. They have a plan to get food.

TUCO

Remember, you have about four and a
half minutes. If you don't come out
that you will miss the train.

MANUEL

I have to do it, Tuco. I haven't
eaten since we left.

TUCO

Good luck. I'll meet you in the
last car, just in case.

MANUEL

Okay, I'm ready.

EXT. ROADWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Manuel and other travelers step down from the train as it
rumbles slowly past a rail depot. Other travelers jump down
and run to a hut near the intersection.

About 30 others have arrived ahead of Manuel, a woman hands
out plastic bags with food. Bibi is in line a few places
ahead of Manuel.

Mazo and Santi wait in between cars to come out.

Manuel's turn arrives, he takes his bag of food and races
back to catch the train. The last car passes by the
intersection, Manuel runs to it and jumps on.

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

Tuco is waiting for Manuel in the last car and helps him up
from the ladder. Other travelers arrive with food bags and
make their way to the front.

TUCO

Good job, Nico. Let's see what you got.

Manuel opens the bag and they eat corn tamales, cheese *pupusas*, fried plantains, rice, and beans. They devour the food in minutes.

Soon after they finish their meal, there is a commotion on the cars ahead. Two men get up and hurry to get off the roof.

TRAVELER

Gangeros on the train, get down!

The word spreads quickly and soon there is a line of travelers before the ladder to get down. Manuel looks back and he sees a group of four gangeros harassing a small group of passengers.

MANUEL

The car below us is open! Let's go in from the side!

Manuel leads the way, Tuco follows. They crawl on the side of the boxcar and get in. A few other travelers are inside already. They come close to the group and wait in silence.

Bibi takes Leticia in one arm and crawls on the side of the boxcar to the open door while the train is moving. Soledad, afraid to fall off, hangs on for dear life to railings and doors and makes it inside.

INT. BOXCAR - MOMENTS LATER

Manuel and Tuco hear steps above them on the roof. Suddenly, a shadow appears at the door and three more GANGEROS pour in with flashlights and weapons drawn.

Mazo wields a sawed-off shotgun, Santi points a gun and shines a bright flashlight at the travelers. One GANGERO covers the door and another one points a gun at the travelers.

MAZO

Ahora si, cabrones! No one travels for free on this train! Show what you got!

Santi picks a man traveling with two young children and demands to see his wallet and cell phone.

A GANGERO finds an unaccompanied minor and throws him off the train. A woman screams, the body hits a post outside.

Soledad, Leticia, and Bibi huddle in a corner of the boxcar waiting for their turn to be harassed. Manuel inches closer and bumps into her. Soledad is shocked when she recognizes him.

SOLEDAD

Manuelito! What are you doing here?

MANUEL

Senora Soledad?

MAZO

Hey, you two! Shut the fuck up!

Soledad pulls Manuel close to her.

SOLEDAD

He's with me!

A *gangero* picks Tuco out of the group and demands to show what he has. When he replies he has nothing, he grabs Tuco by the scruff of his neck and throws him off the train. Manuel yells after his friend but Soledad holds him back.

MAZO

(to Soledad)

You! Show what you have!

Soledad pulls out one of her credit cards rolled up in a few bills and hands it over.

SOLEDAD

It's all we have. Please don't hurt us.

Mazo points the gun at Bibi.

SOLEDAD(CONT'D)

He is with us, too! Please!

MAZO

No fucking way. The guy looks like he comes from Africa.

SOLEDAD

Please. We've been traveling together. We had a coyote. Our boat sank off the coast.

MAZO

I don't have timee for fucking tall tales.

Mazo hands Santi the card.

MAZO(CONT'D)

You're going to wait here until we
find out how much money you have on
your card.

INT. BOX CAR - LATER

Seated on the floor of a half-empty wagon, huddled with ten
other travelers being held hostage, Soledad tries to talk to
Manuel. One *gangero* stands guard before all the travelers
with a short-barrell shotgun at the ready.

SOLEDAD

(whispering)

Manuelito, when did you leave?

MANUEL

About a month ago.

SOLEDAD

How did you end up on this train?

GANGERO

Hey, shut the fuck up!

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - DAY

Manuel sits on the roof of the boxcar with Soledad, Leticia
and Bibi nearby. They travel in the middle of the car, Mazo
and Santi sit behind them on one end of the car talking. Two
GANGEROS sit on the other end.

Soledad has a secret stash of cash in her backpack and has
rolled a few bills for Manuel. She whispers to him.

SOLEDAD

Let me see your hand.

Discreetly, Soledad places the bills in Manuel's hand and
rolls his fingers close.

SOLEDAD(CONT'D)

Just in case we get separated.

MANUEL

Gracias, Senora Soledad.

SOLEDAD

Manuelito, where are you going?

MANUEL

I'm looking for Uncle Mario in
California.

SOLEDAD
(concealing her shock)
Dear Lord. Does he know you're
coming?

MANUEL
Sort of.

SOLEDAD
What do you mean, sort of? Do you
have his phone number?

MANUEL
Yes.

A scuffle on the front of the train gets Mazo and Santi's
attention. A GANGERO comes running from the front.

GANGERO
18th Street gang! They are boarding
from the front!

Mazo springs into action and pulls out his shotgun and loads
up. Santi gets his rifle ready and loads up as he walks to
the front.

There is a rush of travelers going down in between cars.
Upfront several skirmishes are taking place. Shots are
fired.

BIBI
Get back inside the car!

Bibi grabs Leticia with one arm and crawls onto the side of
the boxcar. Tree branches close to the railway hit him on
the arms and legs.

Bibi and Leticia make it to the side door. Soledad gets in,
Manuel is right behind. A tree branch hits Manuel in the
face and knocks him off the train.

SOLEDAD
Manuelito!

Soledad rushes to the edge of the gate. Bibi goes after her.

BIBI
Soledad, please! They're shooting
outside!

EXT. RAILWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Manuel falls to the side of the tracks with his face inches
from the train wheels rolling on the tracks.

The last train car passes by and Manuel tries to get his bearings. He feels the sting on his face from the branch that hit him.

Manuel gets up and tries to catch the last car on the train. He hears shots nearby, jumps in the brush and hides.

EXT. ROADSIDE - ATERNOON

Manuel walks alone on a country road that runs within sight of the railroad. He arrives at a small town a few hours later.

He reaches the town square and sees Tuco, sitting on a bench eating a sandwich.

MANUEL

Tuco? Oh, my God, you're alive?

TUCO

Nico? Hey, man.

MANUEL

How did you --- ?

TUCO

I got lucky. I landed on some tall grass.

Manuel points to the sandwich he is eating.

MANUEL

Hum. Where did you get that?

TUCO

Some guy is running a shelter for travelers down the block. You should see if you can get some.

MANUEL

(rushing off)

Don't move from there. I'll be right back.

EXT. ROADSIDE - AFTERNOON

Soledad, Leticia and Bibi regroup with 40 other travelers at a town square. They start on a long walk towards the next town up the road.

A sign on the road reads: 'Alcala 15 km'

After walking for most of the day they get an unfriendly reception from the TOWNSFOLK.

WOMAN TOWNSFOLK
Afuera basura! Largense ratas!

BIBI
 What are they saying, Sole?

SOLEDAD
 They're telling us we're rats and
 to get out of town.

MAN TOWNSFOLK
 Get out of here, plague! Nobody
 wants you!

A woman townsfolk throws a pail of garbage at the passing
 migrants.

WOMAN TOWNSFOLK
 Here is your food! You vermin!

SOLEDAD
 I can't believe this. What's wrong
 with this people?

BIBI
 It's a sad reality, Sole.
 Immigrants are disliked in every
 country.

The group of travelers approach the town square, a man steps
 into the street and heckles them.

MAN TOWNSFOLK
 Get out of here! You're nothing but
 trouble!

The travelers enter the town square. They settle on the
 empty park benches crowding the center of the park, around
 an empty water fountain.

SOLEDAD
 I think we'll be okay, as long as
 we stay with the group.

BIBI
 You two rest for now. I'll keep a
 watch for you and these folks.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

MANUEL
 Are you sure this is the right way?

TUCO

Yes, I have been here before.
There! That's it over there.

The yellow lights of a small town in the middle of the mountains sparkle in the darkness.

TUCO(CONT'D)

But we need to be careful. We can't come into town.

MANUEL

Why, what's the matter?

TUCO

They don't like migrants in this town. Especially young ones like us. Sometimes they shoot at people.

Tuco leads Manuel to a cemetery outside of town. He sits under a tree.

MANUEL

Wait. We are not spending the night here, are we?

PEPE

Safest place to sleep. No one will bother us here.

MANUEL

I'm not sleepy yet. I'll keep a watch.

EXT. RAILYARD - MORNING

Soledad, Leticia, and Bibi walk with a large group of travelers, about fifty of them in a caravan.

They arrive at the dusty railyard in the outskirts of Mexico City. A group of 4 GANGEROS stops them at gunpoint. Bibi stands in front of Soledad and Leticia.

GANGERO # 1

Ahora si, cabrones! Everyone stop!

The 4 GANGEROS spread out, pointing their weapons in the TRAVELERS direction.

GANGERO # 1

No one travels for free any more!
You pay or you walk!

GANGERO # 2 picks out a man traveling with two children and demands to show what he has.

TRAVELER #1

Hey! We have nothing but the
clothes on our backs! We have
nothing to give!

Other travelers complain and tell the gangeros to leave them alone.

GANGERO # 1

Hey, nothing is free in this world,
not even for you scum bags! If you
got nothing, we'll keep you here
until you do!

GANGERO # 3 points a gun at Bibi and demands to show some valuables.

BIBI

(in broken Spanish)

Lo siento amigo. No tengo nada.
I'm sorry my friend I have nothing.

SOLEDAD

(intervening)

Esta bien, he is traveling with me.
Please take this. It's all we have.

GANGERO # 3 takes a card wrapped in a couple of bills and checks it out on his cell phone while other travelers get harassed. The card shows it's been closed by the bank and the gangero comes back to Soledad.

GANGERO # 3

This card isn't worth shit! Are you
trying to trick me? We're taking
the kid until you come up with
something.

SOLEDAD

No please! Not my daughter! No!

Bibi intervenes and picks Leticia up, GANGERO # 3 points the gun at him and cocks the trigger.

GANGERO # 3

Stay out of this, *cabron*!

GANGERO # 1

Hey, what the fuck is going on
here?

GANGERO # 3

This woman is bullshitting us with a fake card.

Mazo and Santi travel in an SUV on the way to the yards, they drive past the group of migrants and notice the altercation.

GANGERO # 2 pulls Leticia away from Bibi and Soledad is screaming. Some TRAVELERS are arguing with the gangeros.

MALE TRAVELER #2

Hey, leave the kid alone! *Que putas?* What's your problem?

FEMALE TRAVELER #1

You kids are despicable! Shame on you!

Mazo orders the driver to stop the car and gets out with Santi. The *gangeros* stop at the sight of Mazo walking towards them.

MAZO

Que putas pasa aqui?
What the fuck is going here?

GANGERO # 1

Nothing, Mazo. We're just having an argument with the woman.

MAZO

Give the kid back. Now!

GANGERO # 2 throws Leticia back to Soledad, she clings to her mother tightly as she cries. Bibi talks quietly to her to calm her down. Mazo scolds GANGERO # 2.

MAZO

What did I say about taking girls?
Huh? Are you fucking deaf? Am I speaking another fucking language, you fucking moron? I said no girls taken for any reason!

GANGERO # 3

But Mazo, we were gonna take her for ransom ---.

MAZO

I said for no reason! Not for fucking, or selling, or getting nothing!

(MORE)

MAZO (CONT'D)

Your job is to get money out of the people on this train and that's it! What are you gonna do? Pass her off to one of your eses and then what? Are they actually going to call her parents and set up a payment? No. Because that is too complicated for you fucking morons! So what's the point? Leave it alone and do your fucking job!

(to the rest of the gangeros)

Listen up, fuck heads! The orders were very clear! If you can't do the job we'll get someone to replace you!

A train horn blows in the distance and a rumble is heard on the tracks.

MAZO(CONT'D)

Now get the fuck back on that train and look for people that have something, instead of bleeding fucking stones! Get out of here!

The four GANGEROS walk away arguing with each other about who was at fault. Mazo and Santi come back to their vehicle.

MAZO

I swear, where do they find these idiots?

Soledad holds Leticia close as they walk, Bibi walks beside them. They rush to catch up to the train. The top cars are crowded with hundreds of migrants.

EXT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Bibi helps Soledad and Leticia jump on a crowded section between two hopper cars. Once they settle in Soledad is still shaken by the incident.

BIBI

Man, that was close.

SOLEDAD

(crying quietly)

Oh, Bibi. I don't know how much more of this I can take.

BIBI

It's alright, Soledad. We're okay now.

Soledad sits on the edge of the car with the train wheels rolling below, holding her daughter tight. She rocks slowly back and forth and closes her eyes, tears roll down her face.

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - DAY

Manuel and Tuco ride on the roof of a train along with hundreds of migrants and refugees.

MANUEL

Tuco, where did you get arrested?

TUCO

On the other side of the border. I made a stupid mistake and got caught by the Border Patrol.

MANUEL

So how come they didn't send you back to Honduras?

TUCO

I lied. I said I was from Mexico. Everyone says that so you don't get sent all the way back where you're from. But when they handed me over to the Mexican Migra they were ready to put me in an adult jail. So I pleaded with them and told them I was an orphan.

MANUEL

Should I say I'm from Mexico if I get caught?

TUCO

Heck yeah, you don't want to go all the way back to Cordova. But you should also have some sort of story together before they ask. Like the name of a town or an address. Or tell them you lived in the streets.

MANUEL

So, how did your parents die?

TUCO

My mother died when I was little. My father was killed by the gangs.

MANUEL

Where did you live after that?

TUCO

I lived with relatives, but they had their own problems. What about you? Did you ever see your parents?

MANUEL

No. My mother died when I was born. I never met my father. I had a foster mother. She was really nice but she died also.

A sudden lurch forward is followed by screeching metal and knocks a few travelers off the train. Shots ring out, other travelers jump off the train and a panic takes over.

TUCO

It's the *migra*! Let's get out of here!

Manuel and Tuco jump off the train and see a group of 15 to 20 Immigration Police officers in blue uniforms boarding the train in between wagons. They swing batons and detain men, women and children.

The train jolts forward to a stop and more passengers fall off the train, some are caught beneath the wheels. Women scream, men shout, total chaos.

EXT. ROADS AND TRAILS - CONTINUOUS

Manuel and Tuco step out into a gravel road and a truckload of Migra officers unloads. Men women and children are chased down and arrested.

Soledad turns her ankle as she gets off the train. Bibi helps her up, but she walks with a painful limp.

Manuel and Tuco run to a produce field and get lost in the greenery.

Soledad, Leticia and Bibi run down the gravel road in the opposite direction and run into a paved road. Other travelers join them.

Another truck with more officers in blue uniforms unloads.

Bibi takes Soledad by the hand and jumps off the road onto a small creek. He leads her into a large drainage pipe that runs under the road and hide.

Men women and children are wrestled into personnel trucks, some are beaten with sticks. Some travelers complain loudly and shout back at the officers.

Mazo and Santi walk on a nearby road and are picked up by a black SUV.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Soledad, Leticia and Bibi sit at a coffee shop at the Transportation Terminal in Monterrey. Soledad tries her last credit card at an ATM but is denied.

BIBI

It's alright, Sole. We can still keep going on the trains.

SOLEDAD

I really don't want to go back on that train, Bibi.

BIBI

And you don't want to go on the bus? It's only a six-hour ride to the border.

SOLEDAD

And what if we get stopped by the Migra or the Mexican Army on the way? There's a good chance of that happening. I can't imagine falling into the hands of those criminals, right before we get to the end.

BIBI

I can understand your concern, Sole. Let's ask around, maybe there's another way. How is your ankle?

SOLEDAD

It still hurts.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Manuel and Tuco walk towards a train yard several miles outside of Monterrey. when they arrive near the train depot they come up before hundreds of men women and children gathering, waiting for the train to come by.

TUCO

Man, I hate those *pinche* Migra cops.

(MORE)

TUCO (CONT'D)

If I had a gun I'd shoot every single one of those *cabrones*. I'd be glad to die for it.

MANUEL

Hard to tell who is worse, them or the *gangeros*.

TUCO

Tough competition. Beware, this shit gets worse the closer we get to the border.

A train horn blows. The train arrives with nearly a thousand travelers crowded on top of the cars.

Manuel and Tuco find a spot under a hopper car with other refugees, pushing right up to the edge over the train wheels.

MANUEL

This is crazy. Is everybody going to the border?

TUCO

Most of them, anyway. A few are just trying to get a free ride to the *maquiladores* near the border.

MANUEL

What are those? Maquila-what?

TUCO

Maquiladoras are factories that employ a lot of people. Some make the trip all the way from down here jus to go to work.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Soledad, Leticia, and Bibi travel at night inside a cattle truck with forty other migrants. They are let out in an industrial park near a large *maquiladora*, a factory in Nuevo Laredo, near the U.S. border.

The travelers walk together towards the center of the city past a desolate, decrepit neighborhood of cinder block homes with trash on the streets. Several blocks are darkened by lack of electricity.

Soledad, Leticia and Bibi arrive at a town square where a tent city has sprung up with a few hundred refugees.

SOLEDAD

Oh, my God. Are all these people waiting to cross?

BIBI

It sure looks that way.

SOLEDAD

Oh, my God, Bibi. This is hopeless.

BIBI

Listen, we just have to get to the other side. Even if we get detained over there, at least we'll be in an American jail.

SOLEDAD

But I don't want to go to jail anywhere, Bibi. I just want to find my friend.

BIBI

I'm sorry, Sole. I shouldn't have said that. Let's get through this part. Let's settle down here until morning, we'll get what we need tomorrow and cross in the afternoon, okay? I'll keep a watch for you and Leti.

Soledad and Bibi find a place to sleep next to a small patch of grass under a tree. There is hardly enough room for the three of them amongst the tents and people sleeping on the ground.

EXT. RAILYARDS - NIGHT

Manuel and Tuco jump off the train one mile before reaching the town of Piedras Negras near the U.S border. Many migrants step off as well.

Manuel and Tuco walk with a large group of migrants, about one hundred of them, down the main street towards the center of town.

TUCO

We need to spend as little time as possible in this hell hole.

As they get near the center of town they can see migrants and refugees sleeping on the sidewalks, some have pitched tents. Others lie on cardboard sheets with children sleeping next to them.

TUCO(CONT'D)

This fucking town sucks. Fucking gangeros are all over the place, and the Migra comes and goes as they please. I saw a kid get killed by one of them the last time I came through.

MANUEL

What about other border towns? Are they all as bad?

TUCO

They're worse from what I hear. Nuevo Laredo is ten times as big as this place with hundreds of thousands more people waiting to cross.

MANUEL

So where do we spend the night? Stay with the group I guess?

TUCO

Yes, but also keep a watch. Don't trust anyone around here. We should get ready to get across tomorrow in the afternoon, right before dark. Get some information first, figure out the best place to cross, and go for it.

MANUEL

I'm hungry. Where we can find some food?

Manuel and Tuco arrive at a large town square with a church in the corner. Most of the square is taken up by refugees living in tents.

They find a small spot of green grass behind a park bench that is occupied and rest for the night.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Soledad, Leticia, and Bibi try to get some food at the Red Cross Mission. There is a large crowd spilling into the street in front for a couple of blocks.

While they wait, Soledad takes out a pen and writes over Mario's phone number on her forearm. Bibi notices.

SOLEDAD

Do you want to copy this number in the States? Just in case you need it?

BIBI

Sure, Soledad, thanks.

SOLEDAD

(looking at the crowd)

I don't know Bibi. I don't think we're ever gonna get in here.

BIBI

Let's go the Jesuit Mission. They're a couple of blocks up the street.

LETICIA

Mommy, I'm hungry. And my tummy hurts.

SOLEDAD

Just a little bit longer, honey. I promise.

(to Bibi)

I think we're gonna have to dip into our reserve.

BIBI

And we definitely have to cross today. Look, I can go without food for days. I've done it before. Right now your daughter is more important. Let's buy her some food get her some water and make sure she has good energy for the crossing.

SOLEDAD

Dear God, help us. I hope we have enough for the bus fare out of town.

There is a commotion in the crowd in front of the Red Cross Mission. There are people running toward them, some are screaming and shouting.

MAN IN THE CROWD

La Migra! La Migra! Putos Cabrones!

BIBI

Let's get out of here, Sole.

They hurry their steps, Soledad limps and Bibi carries Leticia in his arm. The crowd is pushed by a squad of Migra police officers swinging batons and arresting men only.

EXT. ROADWAYS AND TRAILS - LATE AFTERNOON

Manuel and Tuco walk on a road with produce fields on both sides. They step off into a trail that leads to a tree grove, walk up an embankment and the Rio Grande comes into view. A winding muddy riverway about 90 yards across.

MANUEL

Finally, I can't believe we're here.

TUCO

That's the United States on the other side.

MANUEL

Look, there are some people crossing.

Manuel points to three people, two men and a woman wading across the river about waist high, each is carrying a plastic bag in their hands. The sun is going down.

MANUEL

What are they carrying?

TUCO

Plastic bags to put their shoes and clothes, so they don't get wet.

Manuel sees the three migrants come out on the other shore, the men wear their underwear, the woman is wearing shorts and a teeshirt. After changing into dry clothes onshore, the three of them take off running up the trail heading west.

TUCO

I never asked, but can you swim?

MANUEL

Hum, a little.

TUCO

A little? Jesus Christ. Just stay close, okay?

MANUEL

We're crossing right here?

TUCO

This place is as good as any.

MANUEL

What about our clothes? Do we take them off, too?

TUCO

I don't care, I'm going in like this. But first, take a good look around. Do you see any Border Patrol on the other side? They wear green.

MANUEL

No. I don't see anything.

TUCO

Me neither. Let's go.

Tuco walks down the embankment first and Manuel follows. He walks in slowly and wades in, Manuel follows close behind.

Halfway down the river, the current lifts Manuel off his feet and he dog paddles to the shore.

Manuel clings to branches overhanging and scrambles onto shore. He makes his way to where Tuco is standing.

MANUEL

Yes, we did it! We're in the United States!

TUCO

Don't celebrate so soon. We still have to get out of here without getting caught.

The sky darkens, the shadows deepen. Manuel and Tuco climb up the embankment and find a trail. He starts walking east rather than back towards the town.

MANUEL

Hey, don't we need to go that way?

TUCO

The town is that way and more Migra cops. When I got caught last time, I went that way and walked right into them.

Manuel and Tuco walk about 100 yards when suddenly, 2 GANGEROS cut off their path. One of them points a gun at them, they look much older and stronger than them.

GANGERO # 1
Stop right there, *putos cabrones!*
Show what you got!

MANUEL
Please, don't shoot. I have
something, please. Wait.

Manuel puts both of his hands up at first, reaches slowly for his front pants pocket, and pulls out some of the money that Soledad gave him. He hands it to GANGERO #2.

MANUEL
Look, we're giving you all we have.

GANGERO #2 inspects the loot and is not pleased.

GANGERO # 2
What is this a fucking joke? You
better come up with something
because this ain't shit!

MANUEL
Hey, we gave you everything we
have. At least is something!

Tuco lunges after Gangero #1 and grabs hold of the gun, Manuel goes after the one holding the money and they both fall down the embankment. A shot is fired.

GANGERO #2 tumbles down with Manuel, hits his head against a tree, and is knocked unconscious. GANGERO #2 falls into the river and drags Manuel in with him.

EXT. ROAD - EVENING

Soledad, Leticia, and Bibi ride on a small bus along a road heading west.

They get off a quarter mile past a small town and walk on a dirt road heading north.

Leticia is walking but Soledad's limp is more pronounced. The sun is going down.

SOLEDAD
So, we're heading back east when we
cross, right?

BIBI
Yes, and we need to get off the
trail as soon as possible.

SOLEDAD
(crossing herself)
Please, God. Watch over us.

BIBI
How's your foot?

SOLEDAD
Not great.

They arrive at a small patch of forest and come up before an embankment. They climb over and they see the orange sky reflected on the Rio Grande, about 100 yards wide.

SOLEDAD
Yes! Finally!

BIBI
So, this is it. Okay, shoes inside the backpack. Do you still want to change?

SOLEDAD
I think I do. Can I?

They look for a place where Soledad can discretely change into a pair of shorts.

She takes off her shoes and socks, same with Leticia. Bibi takes off his shoes and tee shirt and shoves them in the backpack.

BIBI
Are you ready, Leti? Soledad?

Bibi holds Leticia with one arm and wades in carefully. Soledad holds the backpack aloft as she follows Bibi into the river.

Bibi wades across until the current lifts him off his feet and wades through until he gets to the other shore. Soledad touches the shore soon after.

SOLEDAD
Oh, God. We made it! I can't believe we made it!

Bibi places Leticia on shore and pulls himself out without difficulty.

BIBI
God going, Sole! Let's change, quickly!

Soledad embraces her daughter for a quick moment.

EXT. TRAILS AND ROADWAYS - DUSK

Manuel is disoriented, comes up for breath, and swallows water. He splashes around, comes back up for breath. He floats down the river a few hundred yards as he flails about in panic.

A hundred yards downriver, a rope bridge is being used by 4 MIGRANT WORKERS who are crossing the river in a group.

The rope has lowered a few inches above the water and catches Manuel's arm. He grabs onto the rope and pulls himself up to breathe.

MIGRANT WORKER #1

Oye, pito! Aqui! Mira!

The man grabs Manuel by the arm and pulls him to shore.

MIGRANT WORKER #2

Hey kid, are you alright?

Manuel coughs and throws up water, he is gasping for breath.

MANUEL

Tuco! Oh, my God! They shot him!
They killed him!

Manuel looks desperately about for Tuco.

MIGRANT WORKER #2

Hey, calm down kid. There's no one else with you.

MANUEL

They were shooting! They're shooting!

MIGRANT WORKER #3

Orale, the kid looks pretty freaked out, man. Something happened.

MIGRANT WORKER #1 picks Manuel up and brings him to the trail.

MANUEL

Where am I?

MIGRANT WORKER #1

You're in the United Stated, kid.
Are you alright?

MANUEL

No! My friend! The *gangeros* shot him!

The COYOTE comes up with four more workers on the rope bridge.

COYOTE

Who is this kid? What's he doing here?

MIGRANT WORKER #1

The kid was drowning. I just saved him. Can we help him out?

COYOTE

I don't know. He's not with a gang, is he?

MIGRANT WORKER #1

No, he looks clean. No markings on his skin.

COYOTE

Sure. He looks more scared than anything.

EXT. TRAILS AND ROADWAYS - DUSK

While Soledad and Leticia change, a group of 8 migrants run on the trail above. It is getting dark. Soledad and Leticia come out and join Bibi.

Bibi holds a flashlight as he leads them down the trail. He looks out from the top of a hill on the riverside trail and spots a road following the river.

BIBI

There's a road. That way.

Bibi finds a trail heading north and they take it. Moments later, they find the road.

SOLEDAD

Thank goodness we're out of there, Bibi. How long do you think we'll be on this road?

BIBI

I don't know, from the maps at the bus terminal, I'm guessing an hour, maybe more.

A beam of headlights appears down the road coming over a hill. Bibi pulls Soledad to the side of the road and picks up Leti in his arms.

BIBI
Dam it! It's the Border Patrol. Run
to those trees.

Soledad and Bibi run towards a tree grove. A Border Patrol cruiser slides to a stop on the road, shines a spotlight on them from afar and two officers get out in pursuit.

BIBI
It's them, Sole! Let's get back on
the trail.

Soledad and Bibi run through a patch of forest and get disoriented.

Soledad falls and screams in pain. Bibi turns around and helps her to her feet.

SOLEDAD
Oh God, no! My foot, Bibi. I can't.

BIBI
Come on, Soledad. You can make it!
just a bit more! I'll carry you!

SOLEDAD
Bibi. don't! Remember the phone
number. Call me no matter what
happens! Please!

BIBI
Soledad, not now. You can make it!

SOLEDAD
No, Bibi. Go! You can't let them
get you. I'll be fine with Leti.

Beams of flashlights approach in the darkness.

OFFICER
Stop! This is the U.S. Border
Patrol!

Bibi stops for a moment.

BIBI
Soledad, Leti. Good bye. May God
keep you safe!

Bibi gives both of them a strong hug and takes off running. The Border Patrol officers are but a few feet away.

OFFICER

Hey! Stop right there!

One officer finds Soledad and Leticia crouching against a tree, while the other officer chases after Bibi.

INT. BLACK SUV - NIGHT

Mazo and Santi ride in the back of an SUV along a highway that runs past the city of Nuevo Laredo. Santi uses a tablet to run a check on a few credit cards they have collected, while Mazo speaks with Chaco on the phone.

MAZO

(on the phone)

Yes, I would say they need a lot of practice in how to do it. They're all over the place.

Mazo also holds a tablet, he is studying maps of cities in the state of California.

MAZO(CONT'D)

Yeah, big pain in the ass, that Migra police. They did two raids between the Federal District and Monterrey.

Mazo's map shows Oakland, California.

MAZO (CONT'D)

Yeah, and they're looking for payouts.

He zooms in on Mario's address and taps Santi on the shoulder.

MAZO (CONT'D)

Well, as long as we get them first, starting in Chiapas. Plus, there are always new people getting on at different points...
Yes, we're good, *Jefe*. Thanks. Over and out.

MAZO

(to Santi)

Easy ride from here on.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The black SUV rolls onto a gravel road and pulls up to a farm house. A MAN comes out to greet them as they step off.

Mazo and Santi follow the man behind the farmhouse and down a trail that runs to the edge of the Rio Grande. A small metal boat with an electric outboard engine is tied to a tree.

The man gets inside, Mazo and Santi follow. He takes the two passengers across in less than 30 seconds. A GANGERO waves a flashlight on the other shore to guide the boat.

GANGERO

Bienvenidos, cabrones.

EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Mazo and Santi step off the boat and follow the gangero on a trail that leads to a dirt road. His truck is parked under a tree grove by the side of the road.

Right as he's about to open the door, 2 MEN IN THE SHADOWS with weapons drawn click the triggers.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE

Step away from the truck,
motherfuckers.

Mazo, Santi and the GANGERO put their hands up. A DRIVER steps down from a truck parked on the side of the road behind them and turns on the headlights. He gets out with a semi-automatic AR-57 and comes towards them.

DRIVER

What have we here?

MAN IN THE SHADOWS # 1

Three fucking wetbacks crossing
illegally.

MAN IN THE SHADOWS # 2

They look like they run with a
gang, look at them. We ought to
waste these motherfuckers right
here. Not even bother reporting
them.

DRIVER

Cool it. B.P. knows we're here. We
have a job to do. I'm calling them
in.

One man points a weapon at their heads while another zip ties the three *gangeros* with their hands on their back. The driver opens the line on his satellite radio and calls for back up.

MAN IN THE SHADOWS # 1
Yes Delta team, do you copy? We
have three trespassers apprehended.
--- Yes, this is a citizen's
arrest. --- Yes, over and out.

Mazo and Santi talk amongst themselves and device a plan.

MAN IN THE SHADOWS # 2
Hey, shut the fuck up, wetbacks! No
one said you could talk!

MAZO
You're not Border Patrol. Who are
you?

MAN IN THE SHADOWS # 1
We are the Patriot Militias,
motherfucker. We are here to defend
the motherland from rats like you,
pieces of shit! You are going to
jail before you get sent back to
your shit hole countries!

The walkie-talkie crackles with a call and the driver answers.

DRIVER
What? One hour? What the fuck?
Fine. Over and out.

MAN IN THE SHADOWS # 1
An hour is a long fucking time.

MAN IN THE SHADOWS # 2
We should waste this garbage and
leave them here.

DRIVER
We can't. We just called them in.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

Soledad and Leticia have been brought to the side of the road. The second officer returns empty handed.

OFFICER # 1

Senora, you are under arrest for trespassing into the United States without proper inspection. We are going to take you and your daughter into custody. Please cooperate with us and things will be a lot easier.

Soledad and Leticia step into the back of the Border Patrol cruiser. Soledad is crying softly holding Leticia close to her. The cruiser takes off and minutes later it pulls up into a U.S. Border Patrol field station.

EXT. MILITARY CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The U.S. Border Patrol Regional Booking Station is a cluster of white tents surrounded by a chain-link fence topped with razor wire. Busy traffic of police cruisers and personnel carriers come in and out.

Soledad and Leticia are let inside through locked gates and chain-link hallways into a large air-conditioned tent with floodlights and chain link partitions.

Soledad is brought into an enclosure where she is questioned by an officer. After a few questions, a woman officer approaches and announces to Soledad her intention to separate mother and daughter.

WOMAN OFFICER

Mam' you have been charged with illegal trespass, a criminal offense under American law and as such, you are not allowed to remain with your daughter until your case has been decided or you have posted a bond.

SOLEDAD

What? No! Please don't take my daughter!

WOMAN OFFICER

Mam' please don't resist, it only makes things more difficult for both of you.

LETICIA

No, please, Mommy! Don't let them take me away!

SOLEDAD

No! Don't, please! Don't take my daughter! No!

The woman officer moves to restrain Soledad and an officer pries Leticia from her arms. Leticia cries desperately. Soledad kicks and screams and attempts to strike the male officer.

SOLEDAD

Why are you doing this? Why? You
heartless people! Why?

LETICIA

Mommy! Please!

SOLEDAD

No! God! Why?

Soledad collapses on the ground and weeps desperately in shock. An officer tries to help her up but she is despondent and refuses to cooperate. Soledad screams and curses at the officers.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

Manuel waits with eighteen other migrant workers on the side of a dirt road for their pick up. He eats potato chips from a bag that a man in the crew offered him, it helps him calm down.

A beat-up landscaping truck shows up with the headlights off. The coyote is at the wheel. Manuel and the workers get in and the truck takes off.

The truck stops before a junction with a paved road, A Border Patrol cruiser stands by on the other side. The coyote drives by slowly and gives the officer on the driver's side a wink and a nod.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

Mazo, Santi, and their handler have been cuffed with zip ties and are being held at gunpoint while the paramilitaries wait for a Border Patrol cruiser.

MAN IN THE SHADOWS #1 smokes a cigarette, MAN IN THE SHADOWS #2 points his AR-15 in their direction.

Santi pulls out a hidden knife from his belt and cuts off his zip ties without any of the three men noticing. He passes the knife to Mazo and he cuts his ties.

Mazo pretends he's having a coughing fit, MAN IN THE SHADOWS #2 steps closer. When he is within striking distance, Santi jumps to his feet, wrestles the weapon away from him, turns it towards the other two and shoots twice.

Mazo jumps to his feet and stabs the third man in the neck. The three Patriot Militias men lie dead on the side of the road in less than two seconds flat.

MAZO
Good job, Santi. Fucking crazy
gringos.

GANGERO
(kicking a body)
Who is the garbage now,
motherfuckers?

The two brothers and their handler get in their truck and drive away with the headlights off.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Manuel leans against an older man sitting on the passenger seat, he is in and out of dream state, exhausted from the long journey. The coyote, behind the wheel, talks to him when he wakes up.

COYOTE
Hey, kid. You know where you're
going?

MANUEL
Oakland, California.

COYOTE
We're gonna hit San Antonio in
about an hour. Do you know how to
get to Oakland?

MANUEL
No. Not really.

COYOTE
Don't worry about it. The only
thing you need to know is to head
west. Try to hit Los Angeles, you
can ask for directions once you get
there.

MANUEL
I heard you can ride the rails here
in the states.

COYOTE
Yes, but you have to be careful.
They're not like the old clunkers
in *Mejico*.

(MORE)

COYOTE (CONT'D)

Some are higher and harder to get on because they run faster. And don't get caught in a private yard because those security guards will shoot at you.

MANUEL

Muchas gracias, senor.

Manuel clutches the necklace in his hand. He open his palm ad looks at it. Says a prayer while he looks out the window. The driver looks in his direction.

The truck stops at a remote farm to drop the workers off. The coyote takes a few minutes to talk to the foreman and gets back on the van.

The coyote drives on a highway past the city of San Antonio and drops Manuel on the property line of a railyard. He hands Manuel a 20 dollar bill.

COYOTE

Hey, good luck, kid.

Manuel thanks him, closes the door, and turns towards a train in the yard moving west.

The landscaping truck pulls away leaving a cloud of dust behind.

Manuel chases after the train and jumps on. He sees no other stowaways in between cars or on top.

INTERCUT- INT. DETENTION CENTER/EXT. JOB SITE - AFTERNOON

Soledad dons an orange jumpsuit as she waits at a phone booth./Mario is working at a landscaping job, directing a crew of five on the grounds of a wealthy home in the suburbs.

A green light blinks and Soledad picks up the receiver. Her eyes are swollen from crying all day and night.

Mario feels his phone buzzing and takes the call. He steps aside under the shade.

SOLEDAD

(holding back tears)

Hello, Mario? Is that you? It's Soledad.

MARIO

Soledad, my goodness! Where are you? Are you okay?

SOLEDAD

I'm okay, Mario. Thanks. But I'm in detention in immigration.

Soledad breaks down crying.

MARIO

Oh, my goodness, Sole. Listen, don't worry. I can get you a lawyer, we can get you out of there. How is your daughter?

SOLEDAD

They took her from me, Mario. They took Leticia. What am I going to do?

Soledad breaks down again.

MARIO

Good God. Look, everything is going to be alright. This lawyer I know is an expert on this kind of thing. He is with our church and can put a bond for bail.

SOLEDAD

Thank the Lord, Mario. But why do they do this? Why are they treating us like this? They're saying I can be here for a year before I get deported, and no one tells me when I can see my daughter again!

MARIO

Soledad, listen. Everything changes when you have a lawyer, and I know I can get you a good one. Hang in there.

Mario stays on the phone for as long as Soledad is allowed and tries to bring her spirits up.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Mazo and Santi step into a luxurious living room in a house in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona.

LEON, the local drug dealer sits on a large white couch. He is in his 40's, a Hispanic-African American with bleached brown dreadlocks, he wears a sport suit and sneakers.

A BODYGUARD comes over with a small tray and offers the boss and the two guests a tumbler of Scotch whiskey on the rocks.

LEON
Congratulations, *cabrones!* You made
it in one piece.

Leon, Mazo and Santi raise their glasses.

LEON(CONT'D)
So how are the railways doing?

MAZO
The boys need a lot of work, Leon.
We almost got killed out there.

LEON
No shit. 18th Street motherfuckers
are everywhere now.

MAZO
We held our ground, but we're gonna
need to get those guys in shape.

LEON
Same thing happening here in
Phoenix, my bro. These new fucking
kids are fucking lazy as shit. They
just want to fuck around and have
their *putas*, but when it comes to
collecting, they're fucking
pussies.

A SCANTLY CLAD WOMAN walks up to Leon with a small silver tray in hand and offers him a blunt cigar roll of marihuana. He puts it in his lips and she lights it up for him.

LEON(CONT'D)
Now listen, guys. The reason the
bosses want to bring you to Phoenix
is in part to whip these little
shits into shape. All of these kids
were raised here, they don't know
shit, maybe they killed their
cousin to get in the gang and
that's it. And they brag like you
wouldn't believe. So you guys being
here, is important. We need to
start kicking some ass around here.

MAZO

Thanks, boss.

LEON

That's one part. The other is getting legal here in the states.

MAZO

You tell us what to do, Leon, we'll jump to it.

LEON

I spoke to Chaco this morning and he filled me in. Let's say you guys take a couple of months and see if you can work this out to get your legal papers through your mother. The idea is that you guys open a few small businesses that the bosses want to use to clean their money. A *bodega* here and there, a laundromat. You guys won't have to run it or manage it or anything like that, but you have to collect every month and keep very accurate records. That's when you come in, Santi. You both are going to be working here in the Oakland-San Francisco area.

MAZO

Absolutely, boss. We'll be glad to do it. Santi and I have no idea what it will be like with our mother, especially since we hardly remember what she looks like.

LEON

I know. Your uncle Marcos told me the whole story. Look, if this doesn't work out, we'll get you my lawyer and he'll work some of his magic shit and somehow get your papers. But he tells me that the best way to do it is to try to get your papers legit first. I know this shit may not make any sense to you right now, but that's what the lawyer says and he's kept us out of jail for years, so I'm gonna listen to him. But we want you to try, at least.

(MORE)

LEON (CONT'D)

And we need you to be very low-key about it, blend in. Don't go terrorizing the shit out of these people.

Mazo and Santi nod their heads in agreement.

LEON(CONT'D)

You guys need to pretend you are happy to see your mother, whatnot. But also, find out as much as you can about that guy, Mario. Is he legit? Is he with a gang? How has he managed to evade us all these years? Find out if the guy is legal, is he a citizen or a legal resident. And if he is, is your mother legal? Once you find out those two things report back to me and I'll tell you what the next steps are.

MAZO

Sounds good, boss. Anything else?

LEON

That's all for now, eses. Let's talk in a couple of weeks. And now that business is over, let's have a few drinks.

Leon calls his bodyguard over, he clicks on some house music with remote control and the room fills with scantily clad strippers from a nearby dance club. Other gang members join and the brood of vipers grows.

EXT. CARGO TRAIN - DAY

BEGIN MONTAGE - ACROSS THE DESERT TO CALIFORNIA

-Manuel rides atop a cargo train past the dry bush of Amarillo Texas, gets off in Navajo County, New Mexico.

-Manuel rides atop another cargo train across the Painted Desert in Arizona, steps off the train before reaching Phoenix, sees other migrants jumping off.

-On a private rail yard, Manuel runs for his life away from the train tracks being chased by dogs. Shotgun blasts are heard in the distance.

-Manuel sits drenching wet on the other side of a river under a highway looking at two guard dogs snarling at him from the other shore.

-Manuel rides under a hopper a car in the blazing heat of midday, drains the last bit of water from a plastic bottle.

-Manuel rides atop a train as evening falls over the Joshua Tree national Park.

-Manuel gets off the train as the skyline of Los Angeles looms before the dawn sky.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. SUV - NIGHT

Mazo and Santi sit in the back of an SUV, in a neighborhood in Oakland, California. Both are looking at computer tablets with maps of the neighborhood and comparing notes.

MAZO

That's it, the third house on the left. Did you confirm the phone number?

SANTI

I did, it matches up.

MAZO

Okay, let's wait a couple of days.

Mazo signals the driver and the vehicle drives away.

EXT. STREETS OF LOS ANGELES - DAY

Manuel walks near the main bus terminal in downtown L.A. He walks past the fashion district and through Skid Row.

He walks past tents of homeless people on the streets, the mentally ill, the destitute, the old and the poor.

Manuel walks up to a payphone near a gas station, reads the instructions on how to use it, and looks at his forearm for Mario's phone number. It is barely visible.

INTERCUT - EXT. GAS STATION/EXT. WORK SITE - DAY

Manuel hears a dial tone./ Mario is sitting on his truck eating a burrito when the call comes in.

MANUEL

Alo? Senor Mario Lopez?

MARIO
Si, con el habla.

MANUEL
 (timidly)
 Hum, Mario it's me, Manuel. Do you remember me? I was staying with Uncle Gabriel in San Andres?

MARIO
 (drops his food)
 Oh, my God, Manuelito! Are you alright, where are you?

MANUEL
 I'm okay. I'm in Los Angeles. Is that near where you live?

MARIO
 Oh, my God, you're in Los Angeles? How did --- ? Never mind, Manuel. You're still a long way off, but don't worry. I'm going to help you get here. Oh, my God, you made it across. Thank God, you're safe. Listen, Soledad told me she ran into you on the train. She could not believe it. Then you got separated?

MANUEL
 Oh, you spoke with *Senora Soledad*? Is she okay?

MARIO
 She's okay, Manuel. For now. But let's get you up here, kid. Do you have something to write with? I'm gonna send you some money so you can buy a bus ticket here. Ready?

Manuel uses a piece of glass from the ground to write down detailed instructions from Mario on a piece of cardboard.

INTERCUT - INT. BUS TERMINAL/EXT. WORKSITE - AFTERNOON

Manuel calls Mario from a bus station phone in Oakland, California.

Mario is at a worksite with the landscaping crew. His phone rings and he picks up the call.

MARIO
(on phone)
Hello, Mario's landscape ---
Manuelito? You're here? ---
Listen, stay where you are, I'm
coming to get you. I'll be there in
half an hour.

Mario alerts his crew that he will be away, he rushes to the truck and drives away.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - AFTERNOON

At the bus station, Mario searches a few faces of people in a waiting room, but no one seems young enough. He looks at the phone banks and there is no one calling. Manuel approaches from the side and taps Mario in the shoulder.

MANUEL
Senor, Mario. Is that you?

MARIO
Oh, Manuelito, thank God you're
here!

Mario gives Manuel a big, strong hug and pulls away from him.

MARIO (CONT'D)
You look exactly like the last time
I saw you.

MANUEL
And you, too. Senor Mario.

MARIO
Hey, you can call me 'uncle',
Manuelito. It's okay.

Manuel and Mario walk out of the station.

MARIO(CONT'D)
It's gonna be a couple of hours
before we get home, I have to go
back to work for a bit. You're okay
with that?

MANUEL
Sure, Uncle Mario. I'm okay with
that.

Manuel smiles as he looks out the window and Mario drives off.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

Manuel and Mario pull up on the driveway to a two-story home in the suburbs of Oakland. A feast has been laid before them in the dining room and a banner has been hung up that reads: 'BIENVENIDO MANUEL'

Manuel shrinks a bit from the attention, but a childlike thankful smile shows in his face.

MARIO

Bienvenido, Manuelito. Let me introduce you. This is my wife Clarita, my son, Felipe Antonio, he goes by Pipe, and my daughter Carmen Alicia.

Everyone greets Manuelito with a smile, and Mario invites him to take a seat between him and Felipe Antonio at a crowded table.

MARIO(CONT'D)

Everyone, thank you for welcoming Manuel into our home. He is a very special friend of the family, we have known him since he was born. Manuel's mother passed away when he was born unfortunately, and our family and friends have looked after him ever since. Manuel is there anything you'd like to say?

MANUEL

(in a very quiet voice)
I just wanted to say, thanks. I feel safe here. It was really hard back home.

MARIO

We're very happy to have you with us, Manuelito. Now, are you okay if we call you Manuelito, or do you prefer, Manuel?

MANUEL

It's okay, Uncle Mario. I'm fine either way.

MARIO

Well, I like Manuelito because it reminds when you were a little boy. But let's eat everyone. Let's say Grace.

Everyone holds hands and Mario says a short prayer of thanks, mentioning Manuel's arrival. The children ask questions from Manuel and he asks questions about school.

While Clarita and her daughter serve desert, a call comes in for Mario and he gets Manuel's attention.

MARIO

Hey Manuelito, come here. Guess who wants to say hello? It's Uncle Gabriel in San Andres.

Manuel takes the phone and speaks to Gabriel with a big smile on his face.

INT. DETENTION CENTER - MORNING

Mario arrives at a detention center in Texas with a lawyer by his side, ROBERT REID. They are processed into the facility and wait in a visiting room.

MARIO

Thanks so much for doing this, Bob. This poor woman has been through the wringer.

ROBERT REID

Of course, Mario. I'm glad I was available.

MARIO

So, did you hear from the Child Services Department?

ROBERT REID

Yes, they said they could visit within a couple of days of your friend getting out.

MARIO

And that whole thing about bail. That's all taken care of?

ROBERT REID

It's all taken care of, Mario. No need to worry about that.

A guard announces the door is opening and Soledad enters wearing an orange jumpsuit. She runs up to Mario crying and embraces him.

SOLEDAD

Mario! I'm so glad to see you!

Mario gives his old friend a warm hug.

MARIO

Hey, Sole. I'm here, I told you I would come to get you. How are you doing? Come have a seat.

While she is still crying, Mario introduces Soledad to Robert Reid, the lawyer. Mario tries to calm her down.

SOLEDAD

Mario, do you know how long they're gonna keep me here? I don't know what else to do. I can't sleep, I can't eat. All I do is worry and cry about Leticia. They don't tell me anything.

MARIO

Sole, everything will be fine. Robert, here is a good friend of mine, I have known him for years and I trust him.

ROBERT REID

Senora, we're here to post bail for you, so you can leave this detention center in a few days and reunite with your daughter. But first, we have to go through some documents.

SOLEDAD

Muchas gracias, senor abogado.

Soledad wipes her tears and listens to Robert Reid explain the process of posting bail with the help of a charitable organization.

INT. HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Mario is sitting with Manuel in the dining room talking, they drink lemonade with ice.

MARIO

So, Manuel, how did you do in school back home?

MANUEL

I got good grades. I wasn't top of the class but I did good in Algebra and Science.

MARIO

That's good Manuelito, I'm glad to hear that. What about the other kids? Did you get along with most of them, did you have any trouble?

MANUEL

I had some good friends but there were some kids that ran with the gangs, they were terrible. I used to get beat up all the time.

MARIO

Now, was this when you lived with your mom, Miranda, or when you lived with Uncle Gabriel?

MANUEL

Both, but it was worse when I lived with Uncle Gabriel because they were bigger. And they were trying to force me to join their gang. That's one of the reasons I left.

MARIO

Well, Manuelito. I can assure you that won't happen here. I won't tell you that there are no gangs around here. But as long as you keep away from certain people, apply yourself and get good grades, you can learn to stay away from them. We also have our church, Manuel, which some kids look down on, but this one is different and I hope you see how we do things. We really take care of each other, especially our kids. We are very serious about keeping the gangs and the drug dealers out of the neighborhood. Sometimes we work with the police. Do you believe in God?

MANUEL

I sure do, Uncle Mario.

MARIO

What about Jesus?

MANUEL

Him, too.

MARIO

Well, then we're off to a good start. Now, I'm gonna be around if you need any help with homework. Pipe is downstairs playing video games since he finished his homework at school, but as soon as you're done you can join him, okay? More lemonade?

MANUEL

Sure, Uncle Mario. Thanks. Say Uncle Mario, Can I ask you a favor?

MARIO

Sure Manuelito, what is it?

Manuel reaches in his front pocket and pulls out the necklace.

MANUEL

My mom gave me this a few years ago and it broke. Can you help me fix it?

Mario takes the necklace and looks at the pendant with the image of Saint Jerome.

MARIO

Oh, my Goodness, did your mom, Miranda, give you this?

MANUEL

She did. Around the time you came to visit. I was still little. I've kept it ever since.

MARIO

Of course Manuelito. I can take it to the jeweler's and have them fix the chain.

MANUEL

That would be nice, Uncle Mario. It's my good luck charm.

MARIO

I'll take good care of it, I promise.

Manuel turns to his homework and the doorbell rings.

Mario opens the door and sees two older teenagers, Mazo and Santi standing at the door.

MARIO
Yes, can I help you?

MAZO
Buenas, señor. We're looking for
Clara Lopez, she's our mother. We
came from El Salvador.

Mario is shocked but he hides his surprise.

MARIO
Excuse me, young men. But would you
mind waiting for just a moment? I
will be right with you.

Mario closes the door and goes back to Manuel in the dining
room.

MARIO
Say, Manuelito. Some people are at
the door and we need to discuss
some important business. Would you
mind going down to the basement for
a few minutes until we're done?

MANUEL
Sure, Uncle Mario. I don't mind.

Mario makes sure Manuel is well situated in the basement and
returns to the front door.

MARIO
So, you are looking for Dona Clara
Lopez? I am her husband, Mario,
nice to meet you.

Mario shakes hands with the brothers but keeps them outside.

MARIO
So, you boys came a long way.

MAZO
Yes, I can't believe we're here,
Senor Mario. We had kind of a rough
trip across the border.

MARIO
Sorry to hear that. My wife is not
here now, she will be in later. Do
you boys have a place to stay?

MAZO
Not at the moment. We just arrived
last night.

MARIO

Why don't you boys come in? Let's talk inside.

Mazo and Santi look at each other and cautiously walk in. Mario invites them to have a seat in the living room couch.

MARIO(CONT'D)

I hear the border is a much tougher place than when I came through a few years ago.

Santi scans the room quietly for every piece of information he can get. He takes mental pictures of photos on shelves, decorations, furniture. Mario is aware of this.

MARIO(CONT'D)

So, tell me, *muchachos*, how did you find out where your mother lives?

MAZO

We talked to Aunt Lydia in Denver, she told us where to find our mother.

MARIO

So, you spoke with Lydia, that explains it. How long did you stay there?

MAZO

Just a day or two, she was really nice.

MARIO

So *muchachos*, You know that your mother gave up looking for you many years ago? She tried for years and she couldn't find you. You could understand why this is probably going to come as a big surprise to her. She may not be ready for it.

MAZO

And we both understand that, *Senor Mario*. We just want a chance to meet her.

MARIO

Now, I know how your mother separated from your father and left you with him.

(MORE)

MARIO (CONT'D)

What happened in between? Where is your father?

MAZO

Well, Senor Mario, my brother Santi and I were sent to an orphanage after our father passed away.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

PEDRO RENDON, the father of 10-year-old Mazo and 9-year-old Santi, is heavily drunk. He beats a woman who has been living with him. He throws her over a small table in a small kitchen. She hits her head and falls to the ground.

Santi goes to help her, but his father kicks him away and starts beating him. Mazo grabs a large kitchen knife and stabs his father in the back, sinking the blade to the hilt.

Pedro Rendon falls to the ground dead and the two brothers run away.

END OF FLASHBACK.

MARIO

Sorry to hear about your father. So, you spend a few years at an orphanage, where did you go after they let you out?

MAZO

We worked a little bit here and there, bounced around from place to place. No one was willing to take us.

MARIO

Have you guys finished high school? What's the last grade you finished?

MAZO

I got as far as sixth grade.

SANTI

Fifth grade for me.

MARIO

Hum, it's gonna be hard to get you guys back in school. Can you guys do construction work? Do you have any skills?

MAZO

I've done construction before.

SANTI

I'm good at computers.

MARIO

Well, that's good. Listen boys, we are members of a wonderful church and we help immigrants of all kinds. Including young men like yourselves looking for an opportunity to make some money, help your family, and whatnot. But there's one thing you need to know, there are two adults in this house - your mother and I - that are illegal in this country and subject to deportation.

MAZO

What does that mean?

MARIO

It means the immigration police can come into our house at any time and haul everyone out to a detention center. So for that reason, we cannot guarantee your safety.

MAZO

Oh, that's too bad. I thought maybe we could stay here for the night.

MARIO

Well, lucky for you boys, we have a special apartment in our church to help people like you. You will be safe from the police, safe from the gangs, or from anyone that can place you in danger. What do you guys say?

MAZO

That is very generous of you, *senor. Mario*. But when do you think we can meet our mother?

MARIO

Well, let me check in with her at work. I can even write her a text now. But as far as a place to stay, you guys are in luck.

Mario stands, pulls out his phone and sends a text message to his wife, Clarita.

MARIO(V.0)

(text shown on phone)

"Don't come home with Carmen. Big Alarm. Wait for my call. Let Pastor Ortiz know. I need a room for two teenage boys. I will explain later."

MARIO(CONT'D)

(to the boys)

Let's see what she says. Sometimes she comes late for work. So, you guys came on the trains, huh? Isn't that kind of dangerous?

MAZO

Some parts were scary, but things moved pretty good in other parts.

Mario listens to Mazo talk and pretends to get interrupted by a message from Clarita.

MARIO(CONT'D)

Ah, sorry guys. That was her. Hum. She's gonna be late coming from work. Listen, boys, you're probably hungry after that long trip from Denver. Let's go get something to eat. You boys ever been to Burger King?

Mario moves towards the door and the boys follow along.

MARIO(CONT'D)

We could also pay a visit to Reverend Ortiz, the man that can put you up for a few nights.

Mazo and Santo look at each other agree to play along.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mario locks the front door behind him and leads the two brothers to the driveway. They get inside the front cab of the landscaping truck.

MARIO(CONT'D)

Just a minute guys, there is one more thing I need to take care of.

Mario walks to the basement door and checks in with Manuel and Pipe.

MARIO

Hey, boys. I'll be gone until
supper. Pipe, mom will be back in
about an hour.

PIPE

Okay, Papi.

Mario returns to the truck and drives away while he talks to Mazo and Santi.

The truck turns the corner, Mario looks in his rearview mirror and sees a black SUV parked nearby. It takes off and follows him from a distance.

INT. CHURCH OFFICE - EVENING

A white house in a neighborhood with a sign above an expanded double garage reads 'Lakeview Neighborhood Church of God'.

Mario is leaving Mazo and Santi in the care of REVEREND ORTIZ. He is an Afro-Hispanic man in his sixties, round belly, scraggly white beard and a kind face.

MARIO

We really appreciate you offering a
place for the boys to stay,
Reverend Ortiz.

REVEREND ORTIZ

Anytime, Mario. That's what we're
here for.

MARIO

(to the brothers)

You are in the best hands possible,
muchachos. We'll talk soon, okay?

MAZO

Thank you, Senor Mario.

Mario exits. Reverend Ortiz leads Mazo and Santi to a basement apartment that has been reserved for people in need.

A simple room with two single beds on either side, a night table with a bible on top, a dresser near the door.

REVEREND ORTIZ

Here you are, young men. You're welcome to use the pantry down the hall, bathroom is to the right.

Mazo and Santi thank the reverend and he exits. They begin to unpack their belongings.

SANTI

So, we play along for now. What's next?

MAZO

Well pay them a visit again tomorrow.

SANTI

I wonder if they have wi-fi around here.

INT. HOUSE - LATER

Mario arrives at his house in time for dinner. He takes a seat at the table with the family and Manuel.

MARIO

Manuelito, I am sorry I had to leave so quickly, but we have a special situation, which we'll talk about after dinner.

Now let's say grace, everyone. I'm hungry.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

After dinner is over and most have eaten desert, Mario calls for attention to discuss an important matter.

MARIO

Boys, *Carmensita*, I have something important to tell you, we have sort of an emergency. Your mom and I have been talking and we need to do something we have done before in some emergencies, like when we moved here to Oakland two years ago.

CARMEN

Is the Migra after us again, Papi?

MARIO

No, *mija*. But we still have to move.

PIPE

Aw. But we like it here.

MARIO

Pipe, I'm sorry, but this is serious. Manuel, I was hoping we didn't have to do this so soon after your arrival. You've only been here a few days, but we are having a major problem with the street gangs.

MANUEL

You do? What is it?

MARIO

I'll fill you in real quick. A few years ago, a relative who has been involved with the street gangs came to visit, and right from the start, we knew he was trouble. We waited a few days trying to figure out what to do, he came back to visit a couple of times, the kids were still very young but they remember what happened. Long story short, we were about to move out of that apartment because of him, when the police came looking for him and he wasn't in the house. But they rounded everyone and put me and their mother in jail. It was one of the worse things that happened to us. Thank God, we all got out eventually and got back together, but the lesson we learned was that when it comes to the gangs you don't mess around. You cannot reason with them, you cannot try to accommodate, the only thing to do is to get out of their way and go somewhere where they cannot find you. That's the situation we have today.

PIPE

So where are we going this time, Papi?

MARIO

Were going to a safe house on the other side of the city. And we will probably have to move again depending on what happens. We're gonna drive you to school as much as we can, but you may have to stay home with your mother as you did before. Please understand, this is for the safety of all of us. We are working with the church and the same network of community groups that we have in the past and they found a temporary home for us. But the most important thing is that we will be together and we will be safe.

CARMEN

How soon are we moving, Papi? Did you mean today?

MARIO

Yes, Nena. We are moving out tonight. You are all old enough to understand why these people are so dangerous and why we cannot take any chances.

MANUEL

Uncle Mario. Does this have something to do with the people that came to visit this afternoon?

MARIO

Yes, Manuelito.

Okay then. We're going to pack just what we need for a couple of days and we leave in a couple of hours. I'm waiting to hear from Reverend Ortiz about the keys, then we move out. Manuelito, I know you've been bouncing from one place to another since your mother passed away, but I promise you this: You are part of our family, we will stick together always. We will never leave you behind. Do you trust me when I say this?

MANUEL

I do, Uncle Mario.

MARIO

Very well, everyone. Let's get to it.

EXT. JOB SITE - AFTERNOON

Manuel helps out with Mario's landscaping crew. He carries bags of cut grass back to the truck. They work on the grounds of an expensive home in the suburbs of Oakland.

Mario pulls up on the truck, steps out and calls Manuel.

Manuel runs over, heaves the large plastic bag onto the flatbed and gets inside the truck with Mario.

MARIO

Hey, Manuelito. Come with me and get some lunch for the crew. But first, I got something for you.

Mario pulls out the necklace he took to be repaired and shows it to Manuel.

MANUEL

Oh, my God, Uncle Mario. Thanks so much.

Manuel takes the necklace and immediately puts it around his neck.

MARIO

You're welcome, Manuelito. Miranda was like family to us. And you are part of our family, too. Now, let's go get some food.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Mario and Manuel talk while they drive to a taco stand a few blocks away. Large homes and empty sidewalks pass by Manuel's passenger side window.

MARIO

Good job out there, Manuelito.

MANUEL

Oh, no problem, Uncle Mario. I like this job. Those guys are pretty nice.

MARIO

Yeah, they are all a good crew. You know, most of them are like you, they came here with no papers.

(MORE)

MARIO (CONT'D)

They all came across the border
just like you.

MANUEL

When you say papers, uncle Mario.
You mean like work permits and
ID's?

MARIO

Si, Manuelito. And one of the
things you need to know is that
those working papers are very hard
to get. People wait years sometimes
to get them.

Mario drives to a busy boulevard and pulls into a parking
lot where a taco truck is parked.

MANUEL

Am I going to have to wait a long
time also?

MANUEL

You might. But you don't absolutely
need them to find work. It's
alright.

Mario is about to step out of the truck, but is blocked at
the door by Mazo, who flashes a gun on his belt.

He gets in and pushes Mario in. He pulls out the gun and
pushes the barrel to Mario's side.

MAZO

Que putas, cabron? You thought you
could get rid of us so easy?

MARIO

Hey, put away that gun. There's no
need for that.

At the same time. Manuel, who is also about to get out of
the truck, is pinned inside by Santi. He pushes himself
inside and shuts the door.

Santi pulls out a gun and pushes the barrel on Manuel's
side.

SANTI

Orale, cabron!

MAZO

Well, it looks like we're going to need to get rough with you. You're acting as if you're hiding something.

MARIO

Oh yeah? You know the mere mention of your Uncle Marcos is enough to send us running for the hills.

MAZO

We barely know him. We're here on a different business.

MARIO

Okay, then. State your business and leave us alone.

MAZO

It's not that simple. We're here to stay and we're going to use you and our mother to get our papers.

MARIO

Well, somebody send you boys on a fool's errand, because your mother and I are as illegal as the both of you. I told you that when you showed up unannounced the other day. We have nothing to offer you.

MAZO

We will have the final say on that. In the meantime, we will find other ways to use you.

MARIO

Look, you're wasting your time. I have no drugs, I make my money honestly, and I don't run any scams. All the money I have is the week's take, this here truck, and whatever is in my pockets. Do you want it? Take it.

SANTI

Ok then, we'll take one of your kids.

Santi grabs Manuel by the scruff of the neck and points gun to his head.

SANTI(CONT'D)
How about this one?

Manuel swats Santi's gun away.

MANUEL
Hey, get the hell off me, you
idiot!

Santi slaps him back a few times.

SANTI
Oh, yeah, you little shit? You
think you're tough?

Mario holds his arm out.

MARIO
Hey, leave him alone! He's not one
of mine! And put away that gun!

Manuel pushes back.

MANUEL
(to Santi)
I'm not afraid you, I don't care
who you are!

Santi slaps Manuel again and Mazo steps in again.

MAZO
That's enough, Santi!

MARIO
Hey, stop it! He is an orphan, just
like you were at one point. Leave
him alone!

MAZO
Good, then we'll take one of yours.

MARIO
Don't go there, Mazo. I'll go to
the ends of the earth to find my
children. And I'll put you in jail,
just like I did with your uncle
Marcos.

MAZO
What? You had nothing to do with
that.

MARIO

That is because you people only tell one side of the story. It took us some time, but the information he left behind eventually earned him five years in the state pen and two more in immigration detention.

MAZO

You're talking shit old man. You just said you're as illegal as the both of us.

MARIO

I am. And one thing you don't have is a group of people that record everything you do and feed it to the police. You see, they are more interested in getting rid of people like you, than getting rid of people like us. They already have your names and you are on security video when you stayed at the church basement the other day. And don't try to follow us because wherever you go, we will report you and you will leave a trace.

MAZO

You're full of shit. The cops would be all over you.

MARIO

We know how to work it, Mazo. Unlike you, who only knows how to beat people up. So, go ahead. Try and do any of the things you threaten to do and see where it leads. I guarantee you will lose.

MAZO

Look here, I don't take threats from people like you, either.

MARIO

I don't make threats. I make things happen.

Mazo signals to Santi to step back.

MAZO

We'll be back, Mario. And tell our mother we're coming for her.

Mazo gives a signal to Santi, they step out of the truck and close the door. Mazo stands on the other side of Mario's door.

MARIO
Stop following me and your mother.
We have nothing for you.

MAZO
I make that decision. And I will
see you later.

Mazo and Santi disappear as quickly as they arrived. Mario turns to Manuel.

MARIO
Are you alright, Manuelito?

Manuel is still shaken, breathing heavily, looking around scared. Mario puts a hand on his shoulder to calm him down.

MARIO
It's okay, Manuelito. They're gone.
You handled yourself pretty well
there.

MANUEL
Uncle Mario, I ran into thugs like
that the entire way to get here. At
one point I decided that I rather
die than do what they want. Or else
they'll never leave you alone.

MARIO
Well. I respect your determination,
Manuel. But staying alive is
important, too.

Mario looks over at Manuel and they smile.

MARIO(CONT'D)
Now let's go get those guys some
lunch. They're probably wondering
what happened.

Manuel calm his breathing down and lets out a long sigh of relief.

EXT. CHILD SERVICES BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Mario and Soledad wait on a park bench in a courtyard inside a children's home. She wears regular clothes, Robert Reid stands near them, briefcase in hand.

A STAFF MEMBER, a woman, brings Leticia out of a classroom door, she sees her mother and runs to her.

Mother and daughter embrace tightly and cry tears of joy. Mario gives them a chance to talk to each other.

SOLEDAD
(still crying)
Leti, honey. This is Uncle Mario.
He is here to take us to our new
home.

MARIO
Hello Leticia. I'm so glad to see
you. Our family can't wait to meet
you.

Soledad turns to Bob Reid crying and thanks him once again.

MARIO
Come on, Soledad. Leticia. Let's
get you home.

Soledad walks hand in hand with Leticia as they follow Mario and the lawyer out of the building.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

Manuel and his cousins are doing homework in the living room, Clarita is helping them and Carmen is helping with dinner. Mario arrives with paper for banners and decorations.

MARIO
Hey, everybody, who wants to paint
a banner for our special guests?

MANUEL
I'll do it!

Mario brings Manuel to the dining room table and set up to make a welcome sign for Soledad. Carmen joins him.

Mario turns to Clarita discreetly.

MARIO
How did it go today?

CLARITA
Good, no sign of them anywhere.

MARIO
Did you talk to your sister Lydia?

CLARITA

I did. She never spoke to them, she
hasn't even met them.

INT. DINNING ROOM - LATER

Soledad and Leticia step through the door of Mario's
apartment and are greeted warmly by the family. It is
crowded, Manuel remains in the back.

SOLEDAD

And Manuelito? Where is he?

Manuel comes out from the back of the room.

SOLEDAD(CONT'D)

(with tears of joy)

Manuelito, thank God, I can't
believe you're here!

MANUEL

I'm really glad to see you, *Senora*
Soledad.

Manuel and Soledad embrace like old friends.

SOLEDAD

Oh, Manuelito, honey. You can call
me 'Auntie'.

They embrace and smile. Manuel gives Leticia a hug and
everyone takes a seat at the table. Mario says grace and
gives thanks for Soledad and Leticia joining their family.

While the family talks and shares food, Mario's phone rings
and he discreetly checks the call. He steps aside for a
moment to find out who it is and tells Soledad she has a
phone call.

SOLEDAD

What? For me?

Soledad steps aside for a moment and is shocked to hear the
voice on the other end.

SOLEDAD(CONT'D)

Bibi! Oh my God! Are you alright? -
-- Where are you? --- Canada?

Tears of joy flow again from her eyes, and she takes a
moment to explain to everyone who Bibi is.

SOLEIDAD(CONT'D)

This is the man who helped us on
our trip. And he held Leticia when
we crossed the Rio Grande.

THE END

"Blessed are they who in the name of charity and goodwill
shepherd the weak through the valley of darkness, for they
are truly their brothers' keeper and the finders of lost
children."

Ezekiel 25: 17