

TRIBULATIONS

Kidnapped at the U.S-Mexican border and conscripted into forced labor, a young father must escape a tyrannical farm owner in order to get back to work and send money to his family back home.

EXT. STREETS AND ROADWAYS - AFTERNOON

Mario, 19, and Felipe, 20, stand in a crowded bus stop in the city of Matamoros, Mexico. Mario has dark brown, skin, curly hair and carries a backpack. He checks his watch.

Felipe has floppy black hair in a pony tail, he is thin and smaller than his cousin, Mario. A small red bus with a hand-painted sign on the window stops in front of them.

The bus is crowded, Mario squeezes in and pays the fare for two, Felipe gets in and pushes his way in.

The bus travels fast along a highway heading west. Mario and Felipe sit in the back of the bus. They see produce fields to the right, to their left a two-lane highway leading back to the city.

MARIO

This is near where I got out last time. We're going about ten miles further.

Moments later, Mario stands and calls for a stop.

EXT. ROADWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Mario and Felipe get off the bus and begin walking north on a dirt road. There are produce fields on both sides, a tree grove with a few houses half a mile ahead.

MARIO

We are two, maybe three miles from the river. Keep an eye out for cars on this road, you never know.

FELIPE

As long as I don't see any cops in blue uniforms around here.

MARIO

That's okay, Felipe. It's the *gangeros* on the trail that I'm worried about.

A beat up red pick up truck with rusted paint kicks up a cloud of dust behind them. It passes by without incident.

EXT. ROADS AND TRAILS - CONTINUOUS

Mario and Felipe arrive at a tree grove lining an embankment. They run to the embankment and climb up to the ridge, the Rio Grande comes into view. It is about 75 yards wide, flowing east, out to sea.

FELIPE
Yes! *El Rio Grande!* Finally!

MARIO
(pointing west)
Let's go that way.

Mario and Felipe walk on a foot trail on the ridge of the embankment heading west.

EXT. RIVERSHORE - DUSK

The sun is close to the horizon. A few migrants arrive ahead of them and some are wading across the river, they hold plastic bags and backpacks above the water.

FELIPE
Should we go now?

MARIO
Not yet. A little further up.

In the distance, Mario spots a rope hanging over the river.

MARIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
There! That rope looks like the one
I saw. Let's use it.

Mario and Felipe run towards the rope. It is attached to a tree with metal clamps.

When they arrive they see two other men using the rope bridge, they are reaching the other shore.

MARIO (CONT'D)
This looks good, Felipe. They could
be gathering on the other side,
maybe going to a farm for a job.

FELIPE
Are you sure we can tag along?

MARIO
We could at least ask for a ride.
Anything is better than going on
those trails by ourselves.

Mario and Felipe step down to the shore, they strip down to their underwear, put their clothes in Mario's backpack and get ready to Cross.

MARIO (CONT'D)
Ready Felipe? Let's go.

Mario goes first, he holds on to the rope with one hand, with the other he holds the back pack above the water. Felipe follows close.

Mario climbs up on the American shore first, he lends a hand to Felipe and helps him up.

FELIPE

Yes! I made it to *Los Estados Unidos*! Finally!

MARIO

No time to celebrate yet. Get changed quickly.

FELIPE

Uh, that rope was useless, I could have swam across faster.

Once they are ready, they climb up the embankment and step on a trail running along the river.

Suddenly, TWO GUNMEN dressed in black with hoods over their faces are waiting for them and point machine guns at them.

GUNMAN #1

Stop, *cabrones*! Who the fuck do you think you are, using our bridge?

Mario and Felipe put their hands up.

MARIO

Wow, what the ---.

FELIPE

Hey, Man. Sorry, we were just trying to get across.

GUNMAN #2

Shut the fuck up! Did you pay to use that bridge? No, you didn't! Over there, now!

Mario and Felipe are shoved to the side of the trail. The two men that crossed before them sit with their hands bound with plastic ties, GUNMAN #3 stands before them.

GUNMAN #3 walks over to Mario and takes the backpack, he inspects it for weapons. GUNMAN #2 places ties on Mario and Felipe's hands.

MARIO

Hey what are you doing? You're not Border Patrol! Who are you?

GUNMAN #2
 Shut the fuck up! You used our
 bridge without paying, you're
 coming with us!

Felipe looks bewildered, Mario keeps his cool.

GUNMAN #2 (CONT'D)
 Sit down! And don't say a word!

Mario and Felipe sit on the ground next to the other two
 migrants, GUNMAN #3 throws the backpacks at Mario's feet.

GUNMAN # 1
 Hey! There are three more coming!

GUNMAN # 3 stays behind while the other two round-up the
 next victims.

EXT. TRAIL - EVENING

It is getting dark. Mario and Felipe are marched at gunpoint
 down a side trail along with five other hostages, all of
 them bound with plastic ties on their hands.

The group comes upon a dirt road where GUNMAN #4 is waiting
 behind a white, windowless van. He opens the doors to let
 the hostages in.

GUNMAN #1 gets on the passenger seat, GUNMAN #2 jumps in the
 back first, GUNMAN #3 pushes the hostages inside the van,
 and gets in, GUNMAN #4 slams the doors shut.

GUNMAN #4 walks to the front and gets behind the wheel. The
 van tears out leaving a cloud of dust behind.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Mario looks around, tries to figure out what is happening.
 He whispers to Felipe.

MARIO
 These guys are not *gangeros*.

GUNMAN #3
 (threatening with gun)
 Hey! I said shut the fuck up!

The van rolls down a dirt road, moments later it gets on a
 paved road, then onto a highway. Not a word is spoken
 amongst the hostages.

EXT. TRUCK WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The van makes a stop at a truck depot. It comes to a stop at the last berth where a large container truck is parked with the engine on.

GUNMAN #3

Orale, cabrones! Everyone out!

Gunman #1 and Gunman #2 escort the seven hostages out of the van, up a set of stairs to a loading dock, and through a door that leads to the inside of the building.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

About fifty men stand in a line inside a nearly empty storage warehouse. They carry backpacks, some carry plastic bags in hand with their meager belongings.

A fat man with a straw cowboy hat and a greasy tee shirt sits behind a folding table checking names off a list. His name is CHANCHO.

The line of hostages is made to stand near the table. Mario can see every worker is getting a piece of paper after they are checked in, then they are ushered into a trailer truck container through an open berth.

GUNMAN # 1

Here are six plus one, Chancho.

CHANCHO

That's one more than we need.

GUNMAN # 1

Look *cabron*, they arrived that way. You decide what to do with the last one. I'm done here.

Gunman #1 walks away, Gunman #2 follows him.

CHANCHO

I said I needed six, not seven!
Fucking people can't do what they are told?

Chancho stands from the table and walks close to the hostages with a clipboard. His giant belly rolls over his thin legs covered by dirty blue jeans.

CHANCHO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Okay, you fuckheads. You use our bridge without asking, now we're gonna make you pay.

Chanco steps up to Mario and asks for his name. A guard takes a blade and snaps off Mario's plastic ties, then he is ushered inside the truck container.

Felipe arrives moments later. The truck is more than half full with about sixty workers.

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER - NIGHT - TRUCK RIDE FROM HELL

Felipe joins Mario inside the truck. An armed guard stands by the entrance.

FELIPE

Mario, what in the world is going on?

MARIO

I have no idea, Felipe. I'm sorry. I thought that rope bridge was safe to use.

Felipe asks WORKER #1 standing next to him.

FELIPE

Hey, what's on that piece of paper everyone is getting?

The worker pulls out a paper from his pocket.

WORKER #1

It's the work contract, everyone has one. Don't you have one?

FELIPE

For what type of work?

WORKER #1

Picking tomatoes at a farm.

The truck's engine revs up, loud cheers go up amongst some workers.

More workers push inside the truck until the last few step in. The man Felipe is talking to moves further down and disappears. Mario and Felipe stay together

MARIO

I don't like it that we don't have a contract.

FELIPE

The guys witht the guns kept talking about us not paying for using the rope bridge. What was that all about?

The metal door closes loudly, the latches bang hard inside the container. Bam! Slam! For a moment its pitch black. Chatter breaks out amongst the workers.

Some workers use their cell phones or lighters to see inside, Mario reaches for a flashlight in his backpack. It is crowded inside.

Outside, Chanco throws a lock on the container doors and signals the driver to go. The truck rolls out slowly out of the lot.

Inside the container some men stumble towards the back. Some complain loudly, others push and shove.

Once the truck gets on its way, some workers squat down on the floor of the container, every space against the walls is taken up. Its is pitch dark inside.

The truck makes a turn into a highway and everyone leans to the right, then straightens out into a smooth ride.

FELIPE (CONT'D)

Okay, so where is this farm? That's a good starting point.

Mario taps WORKER #2 next to him on the shoulder.

MARIO

Excuse me, where is this truck going?

WORKER #2

Supposedly, Florida. That's what they say.

MARIO

And who is they?

WORKER #2

Pues, los coyotes. Who else?

Mario thanks the worker and turns to Felipe.

MARIO

I don't know, Felipe. Looks like some people paid a coyote for this ride.

FELIPE

Did he say Florida? Isn't that like really far from here?

MARIO

This is crazy, Felipe. We have to get out of this truck.

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER - MORNING

As the hours pass in the dark container, some workers relieve themselves in the front end of the container causing rivulets of urine to roll down towards the back.

FELIPE

Jesus, it's starting to smell here.

MARIO

Argh. You can't sit down anymore.

FELIPE

You know, they should at least let us out to pee or something.

Two hours later a fight breaks out, there is shouting and cursing, shoving around. Mario grabs Felipe.

MARIO

Felipe, stay close!

There is a crush of bodies towards the rear of the truck, everyone is trying to get away from the scuffle.

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER-EVENING

A very strong smell spreads inside the container.

FELIPE

Jesus! Did someone take a shit in here? It smells horrible in here.

Mario, Felipe and other workers cover their mouths and nose. Some cover their faces with tee shirts and cloth.

Moments later another scuffle breaks out this time towards the front.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE

Hey! Leave the old man alone!

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE (CONT'D)
Mind your own fucking business!

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE (CONT'D)
Stop! You're killing him!

Mario and Felipe push towards the back of the container.

FELIPE
This is a total freak show, Mario!

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER - EVENING

Many hours later, with the temperature rising and the stench becoming oppressive, some workers jab the sides of the container with knives and twist the blade to open breathing holes.

FELIPE
If only we could get near one of those holes.

MARIO
Listen, I know this may not be the best time to eat something, but I'm starving. Do you want to eat some of the crackers we brought?

FELIPE
Hell, why not? I'll just cover my nose. Can you pass the water bottle?

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER - MORNING

Mario can see the the bright morning sky through the holes in the container. The truck slows down, exits the highway, and comes to a stop minutes later at a parking lot.

A roar of shouts and loud voices go up as workers demand to be let out and bang on the sides of the container.

FELIPE
Good, I hope we get a bathroom break!

The container is decoupled, the truck pulls away and the men inside grow restless. Many complain loudly about the prospects of being left behind.

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER - HOURS LATER

One desperate worker tries to open a hole through the side panel to escape but he can only open one about a foot wide.

Another worker tries it and soon there are many large holes on the truck. A worker sits on the floor weeping in despair.

Six hours later, a sound of banging metal. The container jolts backward and another truck is coupled. A cheer goes up amongst the workers.

MARIO

Thank God, we're moving again.

FELIPE

Mario, what if there's a dead person on this freaking container?

MARIO

Don't even go there, Felipe. Just put it out of your mind.

FELIPE

Now, I have to go to the bathroom real bad. Man, this sucks!

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER- LATER

Felipe walks inside the truck's container keeping his balance by holding on to the walls. He joins Mario who is sitting down.

MARIO

How did it go?

FELIPE

Terrible.

MARIO

I can't believe no one opened the door to let us out.

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER - NIGHT - ARRIVAL AT THE FARM

Mario and Felipe are both sleeping while squatting on the floor of the container. The truck pulls away from the highway and onto a secondary road. Chatter breaks out amongst the workers.

MARIO

We're off the highway.

FELIPE

We must be in Florida, we've been on the road thirty hours.

MARIO

Can't wait to get out of here.

The truck rolls from a paved road to a bumpy gravel road. All workers stand up. The truck slows down and lurches forward, some workers lose their balance and fall down.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE

Hey, what the hell, *puto cabron!*

There is pushing and shoving. A small scuffle breaks out and quickly subsides.

LATER. After more than an hour of traveling on the gravel road, the truck comes to a full stop.

Shouts of anger rise up inside, there is loud banging against the walls of the container.

EXT. WORKERS' COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Metal gates open outside. The truck lurches forward again, makes a hard left turn and comes to a stop.

INT. TRUCK CONTAINER-CONTINUOUS

All workers shout to be let out, many are banging loudly on the doors and the sides of the container.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE

Let us out of here, *cabrones!* We've been here two days!

The truck container's gates open and blinding floodlights shine on the workers. Many workers spill onto the gravel lot.

EXT. WORKERS COMPOUND-CONTINUOUS

A line of twelve ARMED GUARDS point weapons at the workers and order them to line up after they step down.

The lead guard, GERONIMO, shouts through a bull horn.

GERONIMO

Afuera todos! Out! Line up against the wall! *Afuera! Vamos!*

A large metal barn dominates the night landscape. There is a twenty foot chainlink fence topped with razor wire surrounding the gravel lot.

A sentry tower stands outside the perimeter. A water tower with guards in the rafters looms over a workers compound that takes up several acres of land.

A large sign with block letters on the water tower reads:
TUPELO FARMS. OPALAKI, FL. Mario stands in line next to
Felipe.

MARIO

What is this? Some sort of military
camp?

Some guards hold their hands to their nose and mouth as they
approach the truck, most workers have stained clothes with
urine and feces.

Geronimo steps closer to the truck. He sees the holes on the
side of the container.

GERONIMO

What the hell happened in here?
(To a guard)
You! Bring out the hose and clean
out this mess!

GERONIMO (CONT'D)

(to a worker)
You! Who put those holes in there?

WORKER #1

People couldn't breathe from the
stench, so they punched holes on
the sides to breathe.

GERONIMO

Son of a bitch! Where is the
driver?

A guard promptly produces the driver, carried by the scruff
of his neck. Geronimo glares at him.

GERONIMO (CONT'D)

You are ten hours late! And you
didn't give these men a break?!

DRIVER

I'm sorry, *senor!* I was told to
pick up the container in a hurry
and bring it here!

GERONIMO

And who told you to come here?

DRIVER

Some guy named, Chancho!

A guard comes to the edge of the trailer truck container and calls for Geronimo.

GUARD #1
Boss, we have dead body back here.

GERONIMO
What? Get him out of there! Now!

Geronimo turns to the driver enraged.

GERONIMO (CONT'D)
See what you've done, you, fucking moron? Why were you late?

Mario, standing in line next to Felipe comments.

MARIO
Oh no, they're bringing out the dead guy.

Two guards drag the body of a dead worker to the edge of the container, bloated, bloody, and stiff. Geronimo steps up and inspects the body.

GERONIMO
Jesus Christ! What the fuck?!

Geronimo paces like a wounded beast, dreading his next step. He calls for a guard.

GERONIMO (CONT'D)
God dammit! Get Zorrillo, tell him we have a dead worker here.

The guard turns pale anticipating the wrath of the boss. He turns and runs towards a large barrack building to the west side of the gravel lot.

FELIPE
(to Mario)
Well, if they had given us a bathroom break. Freaking idiots.

Enter, ZORRILLO, 73, the camp manager and farm owner, marching quickly on the gravel lot escorted by two guards.

Zorrillo is a short, thin and wiry man with a hook nose. He wears a straw cowboy hat rolled on the flaps, faded green tee-shirt, jeans, and snakeskin cowboy boots.

He shouts from a distance in a loud, raspy voice.

ZORRILLO

Geronimo! What the hell is this I
hear about a dead worker?

Zorrillo comes close to the back of the truck and is
overpowered by the smell inside.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What in the god dam? What is that
smell? And who put those holes all
over the fucking truck?

GERONIMO

Zorrillo, it looks like there was a
fight in ---

ZORRILLO

I don't give a shit! Get rid of the
dummy! Now!

Zorrillo grabs the bullhorn from Geronimo, walks up to the
long line of workers standing by the barn wall.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Ojos aqui, cabrones! All eyes here!
Now! And turn that god dam hose
off!

A guard scrambles to shut off the valve inside the barn.
Everyone stands still and listens.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Listen up, *cabrones!* Who put the
holes in the truck?

No one dares speak up.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Okay. If no one speaks , I'll
charge all of you for it! Who did
it?!

Finally, WORKER #1 breaks the silence.

WORKER #1

Hey! No one ever told us we'd be
locked in the container for days!
And no bathroom breaks! *Que puta
chingada!*

Zorrillo hands the horn to a guard and makes a beeline for
the worker. He grabs him by the scruff of his neck and
wrestles him to the ground. He puts a knee on his neck and
berates him in front of all present.

Two guards position themselves and point their weapons at the worker.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D)

Who the hell do you think you are to be making demands around here? Did you put those holes on the truck?! Huh, motherfucker?!

WORKER #1

(gurgling)
I can't breath!

ZORRILLO

What's your name, carbon! Say it!

Zorrillo lets go off his knee slightly.

WORKER #1

(gasping for air)
Abimael Perez!

ZORRILLO

Abimael Perez! I'll never forget your name as long as I live! You are gonna pay for every hole in that truck, and your rate will be cut in half! Go ahead, you piece of garbage! Say another word and you're dead!

Zorrillo stands up and the worker starts coughing.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Listen up, *cabrones!* You just arrived at this farm and I'm already pissed! So don't come to me or any of my guards with any of your shit! I don't give a dam! You're here to work and you start tomorrow at 6 a.m.!

Zorrillo pauses to look at the faces of the workers.

ZORRILLO (CONT'D)

The rules are very clear, they are in your contract! You break the rules, you will be punished and your earnings will be cut! Now, everyone, get cleaned up and line up to get your tent assignment! And those of you who did not sign a contract, you will be meeting with me shortly!

Mario and Felipe look at each other.

MARIO

Oh no, are we gonna have to talk to that guy?

FELIPE

Oh, man, we are screwed.

Zorrillo hands the bull horn to a guards and hollers instructions to other guards to take the dead body away.

EXT. WORKERS' COMPOUND-CONTINUOUS

A guard sits at a small folding table by the barn door with a clipboard checking names off a list.

The line of workers moves from the side of the barn into a gate at the far end where workers receive a blanket, a pillowcase, a sheet, and a towel.

Those whose names are on the list continue on through the barn and walk into the camp where several large army tents are visible.

Those whose names are not on the list are told to step beside the barn doors and form a line. Mario's tun come up and is told to line up on the side.

Felipe comes up next and he joins Mario on the line. The two men that crossed the border before them are also in line.

INT. MEETING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Mario, Felipe, and ten other workers are marched through a gate, and across a field surrounded by a chainlink fence. They come to a large wooden building that looks like a meeting hall.

The hall is empty inside, a single floodlight hangs from the ceiling on one end. The twelve workers are asked to keep the line while they stand under the light.

Zorrillo enters, his boots mark a steady cadence as he approaches the front center of the hall.

ZORRILLO

Ahora si, cabrones! We're gonna get a few things straight here. My men have been guarding the crossing at the border that we set up to bring workers who had paid for our coyotes.

(MORE)

ZORRILLO (CONT'D)

But now, you idiots, think you can use our ropes and our trails, and have to pay nothing?

Zorrillo paces to have a close look at each worker.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Had you come to work for us like real men and paid your fee, you would have signed an employment contract like every honest man here. But not you! Because you came across without asking permission or paying, your coyote fee will be tripled! And you have no contract! You're lucky we didn't shoot you when you were coming across!

Zorrillo stops in front of Mario and gives him an up and down look. His face wrinkles in disgust at his dark skin and continues to pace.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

We know when you crossed the border and with whom, we can turn you into the Border Patrol at any time! We can beat you, we can kill you if we want. No one will ever know what happened to you. If you try to leave without paying what you owe, we will find you, we will beat the shit out of you, we will make you work without pay and make you think you have arrived in hell! But you won't leave until you pay your debt and we agree to let you go! And if you try to escape, well, there are a number of things that can happen.

Zorrillo returns to the center.

ZORRILLO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

So wake up, motherfuckers! It's time to work like fucking slaves because you have a lot of money to pay back!

Zorrillo turns and leaves the room.

A guard comes around with a clipboard and writes down the workers' names. Mario and Felipe are marched out of the meeting hall and back to the barn.

INT. WORKERS' COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Mario and Felipe receive their sheets and towels and step into the workers compound covering about 3 acres of land.

Six large army tents marked with letters A to E at the entrance surround a large tent where latrines and showers are located.

A smaller barn is located adjacent to the large metal barn. Next to it, a larger tent operates as a mess hall.

There are guards stationed at the entrance of every tent and others make rounds along the perimeter.

Mario and Felipe step out of the barn with their blankets and sheets.

MARIO

Triple the fee? Is he nuts?

FELIPE

I am not paying shit!

MARIO

There is no way I'm going to work for these people for free. I have to send money home!

FELIPE

We have got to find a way out of here, Mario. What tent are you in?

MARIO

I'm in tent C. What about you?

FELIPE

I'm in tent E.

A guard walks by and sees Mario and Felipe talking.

GUARD #1

Hey! You two! Get in your tents!
Now!

MARIO

Let's find each other first thing
in the morning!

END OF ACT I