

PLIGHT

By

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FADE IN:

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - THE BOYS' ROOM - DAWN

Shafts of light fall across the room through a single window.

A small bed, shared by two brothers in a cramped bedroom adorned with posters of luchadores and soccer players.

A little curved body cuddled beneath a dark blanket stirs as DANIEL, 15, groans and pulls himself up from the bed.

He runs a hand through a crop of hair and rubs his eyes.

His little brother beside him moans and pulls against the blanket pinched beneath Daniel's butt.

A mop of curly hair juts out from the cover top. His little brother squirms and a small brown hand tugs the blanket up over the tangle of hair.

DANIEL

Shhh. Go back to sleep.

Daniel rises from the bed. He tugs at a wedgy creeping up his whitey tighties and pulls open the bedroom door.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - THE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Daniel slips down the dark hallway toward a backlit door. He reaches the door and opens it.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - THE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

MANNY, 34, spits a mouthful of toothpaste froth into the sink and smiles into the mirror at Daniel. He's shirtless, showing a few faded tattoos draped across his back and shoulders. He's brown faced with a thick mustache and goatee. Classic skinny Mexican.

MANNY

Early bird, my boy. Early bird.

Daniel, bleary eyed, shuffles to the toilet. He flips up the lid and slips down his underwear to pee.

DANIEL

Screw the worms.

Manny giggles and pops the toothbrush back in his mouth.

MANNY

Better hurry up if you want a ride.

Daniel flushes the toilet and turns to leave.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Hey, hey, your Mom deserves a clean seat and closed lid, boy.

Daniel turns back and snaps a square of toilet paper from the roll and wipes it across the seat. He casually tosses the square into the bowl and slaps down the lid.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Hey, man, this isn't the city. Throw that shit in the can next time.

Daniel rolls his eyes and walks out.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Next time you can clear the line then, you little turd.

Manny spits into the sink again and looks at himself in the mirror. He frowns and quickly looks away.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ANITA, 33, homemaker with a slender body and pretty features, fusses with her long dark hair at a small corner desk.

Manny slips from the hallway and into the room behind her. She looks at him through the mirror. He fishes through a dresser drawer.

Anita watches quietly as he pulls a pistol from the drawer and slips it into his pants.

ANITA

Why the gun?

Manny turns quickly, unaware he was being watched.

MANNY

You're already up?

ANITA

It's busy around here, I have a lot to do. Why the gun?

Manny waves his hands gently.

MANNY

Baby, it's nothing... just for protection. I want it in the truck. The gangs, you know.

ANITA

What happened at work? You're still on the job, right?

He moves in behind her, his hands clutching her shoulders.

MANNY

Nothing happened. I just want to make sure we're gonna make it. It's nothing. I'm just being safe.

ANITA

Are you? Are you sure you are?

MANNY

Yes.

ANITA

You quit dealing a long time ago right? No more, Manny, right?

MANNY

No more baby, I gotta go. I love you.

He leans down and kisses her head. Anita watches him closely through the mirror.

ANITA

I love you too. Will you be late?

MANNY

Yes baby.

Manny can't match her gaze. He pats her shoulders and turns away.

INT. HECTOR'S CARNICERIA - DAY

WHACK! Daniel, in a soiled butcher's apron, chops a large knife through a chunk of beef. The meat splits and blood squirts onto an oiled wood block. He works the meat into a pile of cuts and repositions the remaining chunk to be sliced.

HECTOR (O.S.)

Hurry up with the cuts you little asshole! Senora is waiting!

A spread of butcher's paper snaps across the block. Daniel stacks the cuts atop the waxy paper.

He balls up two of the three remaining cuts and delicately places them atop the others. He folds the final cut into a cylinder and conspicuously places it with the balled up slices.

He fine tunes his meat-dick sculpture and quickly folds the wax paper over it and into a bundle.

THE SENORA, early thirties, a beautiful Latina in a clinging summer dress, smiles as he turns to her with the package.

THE SENORA

Thank you young man.

DANIEL

You're welcome, Senora.

THE SENORA

Only the best cut right?

DANIEL

It's a lot of meat, Senora.

He grins and watches her turn to leave, his eyes drifting down to her ass as she goes.

A hand towel snaps across Daniel's head, popping into his right ear.

HECTOR, mid-fifties, fat, greasy, and frowning in disappointment.

HECTOR

You make another cock, you little asshole?

DANIEL

What are you talking about?

Across the counter and out the window is a busy street market. Vegetable stands skirt the street. A small pack of mutt dogs scurry through the trash piled along the sidewalk.

The outskirts of Mexico City.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND THE CARNICERIA - DAY

EMIL, 17, tall and skinny, with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, leans against the wall. He's wearing a soiled butcher's apron as well.

A door beside him reads "No entrada". It swings open and Daniel steps out.

EMIL

We gotta get out of here, man.

Daniel nods and looks out toward the street.

DANIEL

A few more days. I have to make sure my little brother doesn't follow.

EMIL

Just kick his ass, man. Or lock him in the shit-house or something.

DANIEL

He's not that easy to deal with.

Emil puffs his smoke, coughing a little.

EMIL

You make a new excuse every day, man.

Emil offers the smoke to Daniel. Daniel pops it in his mouth.

DANIEL

I just need to wait till the time is right. Then we'll go.

EMIL

What do you need? A fucking monster chasing you before the time is right?

DANIEL

No.

EMIL

I'll get Juanita's sister on you, man. She's a scary beast!

Daniel laughs a little and passes the smoke back to Emil.

DANIEL

Whatever doesn't kill you, makes you stronger right?

EMIL

Yeah, unless it gimps you up real bad with a crooked, broke dick or something.

Daniel laughs again. He shakes his head.

DANIEL
She's that bad, huh?

EMIL
Probably be good practice for a
little hoto like you.

Emil jabs Daniel in the shoulder with a friendly knuckle. He pulls his apron off and tosses it in a bin beside the door.

DANIEL
Does Texas have plenty of hot
penoche walking around you think?

EMIL
The white girls, they shave the
penoche. It's fucking amazing.

DANIEL
Shut up! Like bald?

EMIL
Like your little brother's pee pee.
Come on, maybe Juanita show us a
hairy Mexican muff one last time
before we go!

DANIEL
Shut up, you never seen it.

EMIL
Well come on, lets go see if she'll
show it to us!

EXT. GONZALES HOUSE - DAY

GILLO, 10, pushes a small plastic truck through the dirt. He picks up a broken dinosaur toy and attacks the truck with it.

A dog barks loudly from the street.

Gillo looks up, annoyed. He watches as the dog dances around a tree beside the road. It growls and snaps at a cat perched atop a low hanging limb.

The cat hisses and the dog barks in a fury.

Gillo stands and walks toward the tree. As he draws near, he scoops up a small stone.

GILLO
 Leave her alone, you stupid mutt!

He flings the stone at the dog, sending it yelping away. The cat cautiously drops from the tree and trots toward Gillo. It purrs and circles his feet.

The little boy crouches and begins to pet the cat. He smiles and scratches under its chin.

GILLO (CONT'D)
 It's OK Mittens. That stupid bully dog wont ever get you, not as long as I'm around.

He scoops the cat up and flips it on its back in his arms. The cat purrs loudly.

Gillo eyes the dog as it watches them from across the street.

GILLO (CONT'D)
 If I had a gun I'd shoot you with it, stupid mutt.

He nuzzles the kitten with his nose and strokes its belly. Mittens meows loudly and looks across the street toward the whining dog.

GILLO (CONT'D)
 I know, I hate bullies too.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A colorful drawing of a train pushing over a white moon lit desert in waxy crayon.

Gillo lay stretched out over shag carpet, contentedly coloring a new masterpiece. He makes the chugging sound of a make-believe train as he colors away on the paper. An old tube style TV set blinks out of focus behind him.

TALK SHOW GUEST (ON TV)
 The American Government continues to ignore the issue.

TALK SHOW HOST (ON TV)
 But what is Mexico's response? Why are we not addressing the issue ourselves?

TALK SHOW GUEST (ON TV)
 It's not just a Mexican problem, Juan. It's a Latin America problem.

TALK SHOW HOST (ON TV)
It's a cartel problem.

ANITA'S LEGS cross behind Gillo. A step over him and out of view then back again and over him the other way.

She walks past him toward a small kitchen area. Soup's on the stove.

She stops at the soup and dips a wooden ladle into the steaming pot, stirs it for a moment. She chops a sprig of cilantro and drops it in.

ANITA
Soup's almost ready. You hungry
littlebug?

The make-believe train stops chugging and Gillo walks toward her.

GILLO
What about Daniel? And Dad?

ANITA
They're working, sweets. But we can
eat if you're hungry.

EXT. GONZALES HOUSE - THE BOYS ROOM - EVENING

Gillo flops into his bed with a squeal. Anita comes in behind him with tickle fingers. He rolls into a ball on his belly and she begins attacking the sweet spot behind his knees.

A knock at the door from the other room.

Anita rises and straightens her blouse. She pinches her boy's little side handles and rolls off the bed.

ANITA
Ewh, you're a stinky boy.

She walks out of the room.

ANITA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Certainly a bath tonight.

Gillo sits on the side of the bed. He picks up a toy soldier and begins articulating the arms.

He cranes his head to see who's at the door at the sound of Anita throwing back the latch.

SERGIO (O.S.)
Senora Gonzales?

 ANITA (O.S.)
Si?

 SERGIO (O.S.)
Where's Manny?

 ANITA (O.S.)
What do you want?

 SERGIO (O.S.)
Are you alone? Is Manny here?

Gillo rises from his bed and walks toward the doorway. He leans against the frame and peers around for a better view of the front door.

Anita stands with the door slightly open. A MAN'S HAND curls around the edge of the door. A brown boot slides strategically against the bottom jam.

 ANITA
He should be home any time now.
I'll tell him you came.

Anita is noticeable shaken, nervous. She starts to close the door. The hand resist her and she is suddenly being pushed back from the door. She grunts and pushes hard but the door catches on the boot.

 SERGIO (O.S.)
Watch my toes you fucking bitch!

The door smashes into Anita's face and she spills backward onto the floor. SERGIO, mid-thirties, rushes in. He's well dressed, in a gray suit and leather boots.

Gillo doesn't hesitate despite Sergio's menacing presence. He rushes him, and we follow right behind him as he attacks.

Sergio catches Gillo hard against the head with a backhand just as he closes in. Gillo stumbles back and past the frame. Anita is on her feet. She claws into the man's face with both hands.

 ANITA
No! Get Out!

Gillo is back, attacking again. He shoves into Sergio from the side, Anita attacking from the front.

SERGIO
You fucking cunt!

Sergio fights back against Anita's scratching hands and slaps her hard. He spins her into Gillo and sends them both crashing to the floor again.

Anita covers her boy with her arms, tries to shuffle away from the man. He kicks her across the head with a meat slapping thud. Her nose explodes in a spray of blood. She slumps backward and unconscious.

Gillo whimpers as Sergio reaches down and snatches him by the collar.

EXT. DESERTED FACTORY - PUMP STATIONS - EVENING

Daniel watches as Emil and JUANITA, 15, make out atop a scrap heap. The boy's hand is buried in the girl's jeans. She bucks her hips and grinds against it.

Daniel bites his lip and turns away. He shoves a palm down across his crotch and adjust the boner sticking up against his pants.

He walks away, aimlessly kicking debris and trash.

EMIL (O.S.)
Hey Daniel, you going over behind
the corner to beat off?

Daniel turns back to them and flips up his middle finger.

DANIEL
I'm going home, this is boring.

He spins around and starts walking.

EMIL
Come on, man, She was about to show
you what a muff looks like.

JUANITA
Poor Daniel! You should let me hook
you up with my sister.

EMIL
Oh, no, man! She's so fat!

Juanita frowns and pulls away from Emil.

EMIL (CONT'D)

Oh, come on baby, I'm kidding.
Daniel was telling me earlier how
bad he wanted her.

DANIEL

Shut up, you asshole, no I wasn't.
I'm going home.

EMIL

Come on, man! Come see Juanita's
penoche. Show him your penoche
baby.

JUANITA

No way, let him go.

EMIL

Whatever, man. Go beat off and get
some sleep. Tomorrow you have a
long day of working at Hector's for
the rest of your life!

Daniel scoops up some gravel, he tosses it aimlessly as he
heads across the junk yard toward the fences. He reaches a
broken section and slips through into a dark field.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sergio's bare ass humps up and down in the foreground. Gillo
is huddled in the kitchen corner. He closes his eyes and
buries his head into his knees.

ANITA (O.S.)

Please...please...stop...

SERGIO (O.S.)

Quit crying bitch, your pussy's
saving your little boy's life.

Gillo cries softly into his arms.

On the kitchen counter sits a large BUTCHER KNIFE.

Gillo's eyes glance up to the knife then back to the horrid
scene in the living room.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sergio's grunts grow louder, more labored.

The knife slips into the man's furry belly, just above his tumid penis.

Gillo starts to stab wildly as Sergio tries to back away.

Anita covers herself, pushes up off the couch.

Sergio stumbles over a foot rest and crashes to the floor at the front door, his pants and boxers still piled at his ankles. He hacks blood, trying desperately to stop the flow of dark red squirting out from the three or four stab wounds to his gut.

Gillo, in a rage, begins slashing madly.

Sergio tries to ward off the attack but is only sliced more and more around the hands and arms. He drops his defenses for a moment to re-apply pressure to his seeping gut.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

Wait, stop...please...stop...

The knife swings at a low angle, plunges into the side of Sergio's neck with a moist plunk. It sinks all the way to the back of the blade.

Anita is pulling Gillo away now.

He cries and stabs an empty fist up and down.

Sergio writhes at the door with the knife jutting from his neck. Blood is pooling everywhere.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

I ca...help me...guh..guh...

His mouth pops open and closed in an inaudible fish pucker.

He gurgles and a fresh spurt of blood streams from his neck.

Sergio shutters and gasps and dies.

Silence.

They watch him slump slowly down the door and onto his side. Urine and shit-water flush out from between his legs as his bowels release.

Anita pulls Gillo back and onto the kitchen floor. She hugs him tight against her and begins wailing hysterically.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD ROAD - NIGHT

Yellow street lights in haphazard illumination of the street.

A passing pickup sputters and creaks as it chugs past Daniel. He looks up nonchalantly and then back to his feet.

A man coughs down a dark alley. A dog yaps as Daniel passes a small fenced yard.

It's a desolate little neighborhood, groaning under the strain of poverty and apathetic maintenance.

MANNY'S TRUCK rumbles past Daniel. Brake lights flash red then white as the gears shift into reverse.

INT. MANNY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Manny rolls back to an unaware Daniel. He smiles through the open passenger window.

MANNY

Hey boy.

Daniel looks up from his daydream and smiles back.

DANIEL

Hey Dad.

He swings open the truck door and jumps in.

INT. MANNY'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Daniel rummages through the truck's front console.

Manny smiles, keeps his eyes straight ahead to the road.

MANNY

How's that fat greaseball, Hector?

DANIEL

You have any peanuts?

MANNY

Hungry? Check the box. How's work?

Daniel flips the glove box down. A small pistol slides out and thumps to the floor board. Daniel picks it up and spins it in his hand.

Manny's eyes flash aware and he snatches the pistol from Daniel's hands.

DANIEL
Why do you have it?

MANNY
Quit digging in my shit.

He tosses the pistol back in the box and snaps the lid closed.

MANNY (CONT'D)
There's nothing in there for you.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Manny's truck makes a bumpy right turn and pulls into a short dirt driveway. The headlights sweep past a parked sedan along the road and then over a humble brick home.

INT. MANNY'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Daniel starts to open his door, only to be halted by Manny.

MANNY
You still going?

Daniel looks out the window.

DANIEL
I don't know. Emil says we can catch the train anytime now.

MANNY
But you don't want to?

Daniel looks back to his lap, avoiding eye contact with his dad.

DANIEL
I just, I want to wait until everything is right, the timing I mean.

MANNY
These kind of things, Daniel. The timing is never right, and always right at the same time. If you wanna go, you should go. If you don't wanna go, then you should stay.

Daniel rolls his eyes.

DANIEL

What is that supposed to mean?

MANNY

It means you can either choose to react to life or you can choose to act in life. It's a scary choice, but a choice you cannot make out of fear.

DANIEL

Why don't we just all go? Why can't you and Mom just pack it all up and go too?

Daniel looks to him, imploring.

MANNY

We can't Daniel, I can't.

Now Manny looks out the window toward the house. He too averts his eyes from any contact.

MANNY (CONT'D)

It's complicated.

DANIEL

No it's not. Doesn't have to be.

MANNY

It is, boy, don't argue. You wanna go, that's good. But me, I...I can't yet.

DANIEL

Cause you used to be a gangster? Cause you used to sell dope and beat up guys from the westside, and now the gringos wont take you?

MANNY

Shut up, boy, you don't know what your talking about. I was never in a Gang...come on, lets see what Mom's got on the stove.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Gillo sits cross legged on the floor. He stares ahead with a blank expression. The shower runs in the bathroom down the hall.

The front door cracks and tries to open. Sergio's body, still naked from the waist down, blocks the door's path.

MANNY (O.S.)
What the hell?

Manny's hand clutches the door and pushes hard against the unseen obstruction. He manages to clear a few inches and pops his head in.

MANNY (CONT'D)
Hey something's blocking the door!

His eyes find Gillo sitting on the floor against the back wall. He knows instantly that everything is wrong.

He follows the mess of blood to the door and finally to Sergio's bloody corpse.

MANNY (CONT'D)
Oh shit!

He shoves hard against the door and manages enough space to squeeze through.

EXT. GONZALES HOUSE - FRONT ENTRY - CONTINUOUS

Daniel approaches the front door. Manny stands at the door, struggling to get inside.

Sergio's bare legs and the bloody floor flash into view as Manny clears the opening.

MANNY (O.S.)
Baby? Anita!?

Daniel quickens his pace.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Daniel presses through the gap, horrified as he turns and surveys the scene at the door.

GILLO (O.S.)
He was hurting Mom.

Daniel goes to his little brother. The older brother stands over the other's huddled form.

GILLO (CONT'D)
I killed him with the knife.

MANNY (O.S.)
Anita!? Anita!

The sound of the running shower grows louder as the bathroom door opens down the hall.

INT. GONZALES HOUE - THE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Manny stands in the bathroom doorway. Steam billows out from over his head. He enters the small room.

Anita crouches in the shower, knees to her chest. Pink streams of water wash from her desecrated body.

She looks up to her husband, her face a wreckage of terror and pain.

MANNY
What did they do!? Oh no, no, please
baby, what did they do!?

She shutters and sobs.

INT. E.R. WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Pale yellowed walls. Stained ceiling tiles bowing from moldy aluminum grid.

Gillo stares up to the ceiling from his spot on the floor beside a seated Manny and Daniel.

Weary faces and twitching limbs blur out of focus around him. His lip quivers slightly. He blinks and looks intensely into a flickering fluorescent light bank humming over head.

The DOCTOR, early forties, approaches as Gillo drops his head down, looks into his hands.

DOCTOR
She's in shock. Her nose is broken.
She has some internal bruising and
a concussion. We're going to watch
those for a few days.

MANNY
She's gonna be OK?

DOCTOR (O.S.)
What happened? There's evidence of
possible sexual assault as well...

MANNY

She was hurt at work. I don't know what happened.

DOCTOR

Was she raped?

Manny doesn't answer. The Doctor looks to Daniel. Daniel averts his eyes.

The Doctor holds up a clip board.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Mr. Almejo...Alonso Almejo?

MANNY

Uh, Yes...she's uh... my sister...

DOCTOR

Was she raped?

MANNY

I don't think so, she only mentioned a fight with a co-worker.

The doctor tucks the clipboard under his arm. He stoops down to Gillo.

DOCTOR

What's your name, little boy?

GILLO

Gillo.

The Doctors pushes back a tuft of hair from the boy's forehead. He notices a large bruise.

DOCTOR

Are you hurt?

MANNY (O.S.)

He fell...off his bike.

The Doctor rises and looks at Manny.

DOCTOR

You sure you don't want the police to check into this? Talk to her?

MANNY

No, no need. She was quitting her job anyway. No cops. No.

DOCTOR

She is heavily sedated and needs to rest.

Manny nods and begins to gather the boys up to leave.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

If you need help...if they need a safe place...

MANNY

We're fine Doctor, just do your job...please...and no visitors...please.

DOCTOR

She's wearing a wedding band. Where's the husband?

MANNY

He's dead. Long time ago.

INT. MANNY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Manny races down the street. Flashing lights cut across his face with the steady drum of passing traffic.

MANNY

He's gonna come for us. We have to get just a few things. You have to go tonight.

Daniel hangs an elbow out the window, his hair whirls in the wind. Gillo is squeezed between them in the middle seat.

DANIEL

Where are we going? What are you talking about?

MANNY

You have to go... on the train. You have to go to the U.S., like, like you said.

DANIEL

What? I can't go now, I can't leave mom like this, what about Gillo?

MANNY

He's going with you.

DANIEL

Gillo can't come, he's too young.

MANNY

Shut up and listen Daniel! Quit fucking arguing and listen! You won't be safe anymore, not anywhere in Mexico! Vega will be hunting us now.

DANIEL

Who's Vega? That guy's boss?

MANNY

He's an East Barrio gangboss. That guy's his son. Sergio Vega.

INT. GONZALES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sergio's body, now rolled away from the door. A blanket mostly covers the bloody corpse.

A ringing and a glow from the pants bunched around his ankles. His cellphone rings a few times before falling silent.

The front door lock jiggles and the door swings in. Manny and the boys come inside. The boys pause at the body.

Manny shuffles past and over it. He disappears down the hall.

Daniel crouches aside the blanket-covered head. His shaky hand pulls back the cover.

The dead man's eyes are open but rolled back half into his head. The blood around his neck and splattered across his collar has thickened with time and begun to crust into dry, waxy strings.

The cellphone rings again, startling the boys. Daniel recoils and jumps to his feet. Gillo steps close to his brother, they stare at Sergio's ankles in anticipation.

The phone rings again.

Manny nervously steps into the room. He stares at the ringing glow from Sergio's pants. The cellphone rings a final time then goes silent.

Manny spins around, disappears down the hall again.

MANNY (O.S.)

Don't touch him. And don't go outside!

EXT. DESERTED FACTORY - DAWN

Manny's truck barrels down a deserted road. In the bed the body, wrapped hastily in sheets, slides to the side as Manny whips into the deserted parking lot.

He drives to the back of the lot and stops the truck. It's the same place Daniel left Emil and Juanita at earlier

INT. MANNY'S TRUCK - DAWN

The radio plays Tejano music softly, far away like early morning a.m. radio.

MANNY

How much money you got?

DANIEL

\$500 U.S.

MANNY

What? I thought you been working?
Hectors?

DANIEL

I have. He doesn't pay shit. Sorry
I'm not selling for the gangs,
making big cash.

Manny falls silent and Daniel instantly regrets his words.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I just...I didn't save as much as I
should have. I didn't actually
think we would go... I don't want
to go.

GILLO

I don't want to go either. What
about mama?

DANIEL

Why don't we just tell the police?
Why do we lie?

MANNY

The police work for the gang. We
lied to protect your mama. Vega
will be looking for us. All of us.
What was the plan before, you and
Emil's?

DANIEL

Emil says we can jump the train
anytime, go all the way to
Monterrey. We can get a bus or
maybe even walk from there.

MANNY

That's a hundred and fifty miles at
least.

DANIEL

Emil says it's five days walking.
And the busses are dangerous.

Manny nods several times, his eyes dart back and forth
between his boys and the rearview mirror. He pulls a small
wad of cash from his pocket. He takes half and hands the rest
to Daniel.

MANNY

OK, OK...You get to Laredo, you'll
turn yourself in..

DANIEL

No way...

MANNY

Yes...they will take you, they have
to.

DANIEL

No, they'll send us back.

MANNY

Quit fucking arguing, Daniel.
You'll turn yourself into the
Gringos. Tell them you're seeking
asylum, tell them you're refugees,
what ever...they'll...

He starts breaking up, choking back tears.

MANNY (CONT'D)

They'll keep you...I...I'm sorry
boys, I'm so, so sorry...I just...I
didn't...

He snuffles and cuts loose a deep belly cry, the kind with no
sound.

MANNY (CONT'D)

I fuckin love you two. I love you
so much.

He squeezes Gillo to his armpit and reaches a palm out over Daniel's head. He's starting to sob.

MANNY (CONT'D)

I wanted so much...so much more, I thought...If I...I just...

DANIEL

Dad...

MANNY

I'm sorry, I'm so sorry...

Daniel tears up. He stifles it, trying to be a man.

DANIEL

Dad, you're gonna stay for mom,
just long enough for her.
Everything will be OK.

Gillo starts to cry too. They are all in tears now.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

What are you going to do?

Manny wipes his eyes. He slams a hand into the top of the steering wheel and begins rubbing his chin obsessively.

MANNY

I have to dump Sergio somewhere.
Then I'm gotta lay low, just for a
few days...Maybe they don't know he
was coming over...I...I...

He pounds the steering wheel again, completely lost.

GILLO

I'm sorry...I'm sorry I killed him
with the knife.

Manny shakes his head. He grasp his young son's face into his palms.

MANNY

No boy, no Guillermo. You saved
her. That was not your fault. You
saved her. You're a brave man, a
brave, little man.

GILLO

He was hurting her.

Manny recoils and sucks a deep breath. He shutters and flips open the glove box. The pistol flops out, exposed in the moonlight.

MANNY

Take it. For safety.

DANIEL

No, I...I don't know how.

MANNY

Fucking take it, Daniel...I'm sorry, please, take it. You're the big brother, you have to be the man now. Take it.

Daniel picks up the pistol. He stares at it awkwardly.

MANNY (CONT'D)

You wait till sunrise. You wait for Emil to come by. Then tell him it's time to go. Don't tell him about Sergio or Mama, or anything, OK?

DANIEL

He's going to ask. He didn't think I would go either...he'll know.

MANNY

Fucking tell him then, it won't matter. Just...Just get on the train, no matter what...Here..here...

He hastily flips through his phone. He finds a contact and then shuffles through the console for a scrap of paper. He finds it but now realizes he has no pen. Frustrated, Manny slams a hand into the dash.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Fuck! Here take it.

He tosses the phone into Daniel's lap.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Your cousin, Arthur, lives in San Antonio with your Auntie. You never met them, well maybe, doesn't matter. They will watch over you. I'll get Mom and we will meet you there later...

Daniel picks up the phone. He now holds a cellphone and a gun, he is awkward and uncomfortable with both.

Manny reaches across them and pops open the passenger door. He nods toward the opened door.

MANNY (CONT'D)

It will be light soon. Go, wait over there under the building. If your friend doesn't show, go anyway. Get on the train and just go.

DANIEL

It was Emil's idea, I have to wait for him.

MANNY

You don't! You have to just go. Please, Daniel, please do what I say.

Daniel slides out of the truck, grabs their backpacks and drops them to the ground.

Gillo looks, wide eyed, at his father.

GILLO

I'm not gonna go! I'm not going!

He starts crying, a fit overtaking him.

MANNY

No, no, Guillermo, Please! Please, go with your brother. He will watch over you.

GILLO

No, please! I don't want to! I want to stay with you and Mama! Please!

Manny struggles unlatching the seatbelt across Gillo. Gillo kicks and screams. Daniel, uncertain what to do, stuffs the pistol and phone into his coat.

MANNY

Daniel, take him! Please, just go!

Daniel reaches into the cab and pulls Gillo toward the door. Gillo wails and reaches for his father. Manny touches his little hand one last time and turns his head, overcome with grief.

Daniel pulls Gillo free from the truck. The little boy screams and crumples to the ground, pulling Daniel down with him.

Manny kicks the ignition.

MANNY (CONT'D)

I love you both, I'm sorry. I'm
sorry!

Manny yanks the passenger door closed, puts the truck into gear and pulls off.

EXT. DESERTED FACTORY - CONTINUOUS

The sun crests over the horizon. Light pushes against shadow and toward the two boys alone and huddled under the skeleton of the old factory.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - NORTHBOUND - MORNING

A long cargo train chugs towards Mexico City from the south.

A few kids of all ages are atop a red train car. Several more are scattered along the other cars down the line.

ALFY, 15, a short, darkly toned Honduran, rides with his arm around his twin sister, ALMA, 15. She is pretty and petite with the same smaller frame of her brother.

They see Mexico City rising up in the distance and turn to each other smiling.

ALFY

That's Mexico City.

ALMA

We are getting closer then?

ALFY

I think so. The man said the City is one of the last places we will see before we reach the meeting spot.

ALMA

I'm hungry. Will we stop?

ALFY

Yes...I hope. I'm hungry too.

EXT. DESERTED FACTORY - PUMP STATIONS - MORNING

Daniel and Gillo sit, staring into the dirt, under the rusted portico of the deserted building.

DANIEL

Are you OK?

Gillo bites his lip, stares into the dirt in silence.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Gillo? Guillermo? Look, We have to stick together. It's just you and me and Emil, now. OK? At least until we get to Texas, and Mom and Dad find...

GILLO

They won't find us. Dad won't be able to protect her. They will kill him.

DANIEL

Everything will be OK, Gillo. You have to listen to me. You can't be stubborn.

GILLO

You're the boss now? You have a plan?

Daniel doesn't respond.

GILLO (CONT'D)

Well I do. We should stay and wait for them to come looking for us. Then we kill them all.

Daniel sighs.

DANIEL

You can't be so quick to fight all the time. It won't always work the way you think. I wish you...I wish you...

GILLO

You wish I hadn't killed the man? When he was hurting Mom like that? You wouldn't have done anything.

DANIEL

No, it's...I just, I would have done it differently, without killing him maybe.

GILLO

You would have laid there and let him do that to her, because you're a coward. Or maybe you would have run and hid, like Dad.

DANIEL

Gillo, it's not that simple...

GILLO

Neither is going to Texas. We don't even know the way. We have to go but we don't even know where we are going?

Emil appears around the corner, Daniel sees him and stands.

DANIEL

Emil! Over here!

Emil looks up, surprised to see them. He heads toward the boys.

Gillo rises now as well. He slides up next to his brother.

EMIL

What are you doing? Hector's going to be pissed!

DANIEL

We have to go today. This morning.

EMIL

Go where? To work? You should have been there an hour ago.

DANIEL

No, to the train. We have to get on the train today.

EMIL

To Texas? What are you talking about?

DANIEL

Emil, the train, you said we could get on it anytime. Let's do it right now.

EMIL

No way, man. Not today.

Emil points to Gillo with a sneer. Gillo raises his chin in defiance.

EMIL (CONT'D)
You said he wasn't coming, anyway.
I can't just leave. What about
Juanita?

Daniel reaches into his pocket, holds up his dad's phone.

DANIEL
Call her. Tell her to meet us at
the train.

EMIL
Man, you got a phone?

DANIEL
It's my dad's. They're meeting us
in Texas.

EMIL
Man, I can't...Me and Juanita...

DANIEL
You said...You said we could go
anytime. We have to go now.

EMIL
Man, I can't...Not today, for sure,
not today.

GILLO
WE HAVE TO GO TODAY! You're the
only one who knows how. You have to
take us!

The older boy stares at Gillo, surprised at his outbreak.

EMIL
Screw you, you little pinoche. Go
play with your toys!

Gillo charges Emil, face red with rage. Daniel tries to stop
him but Gillo shoves him off and attacks.

Emil, much bigger, snickers and easily fights him off, twist
him around and shoves him to the ground.

Daniel reacts, shoves Emil hard in the chest.

DANIEL
Don't touch him!

Emil, caught off guard, stumbles to his ass in the dirt.

EMIL
What the fuck, man?

DANIEL
Stay here with your heifer then!
You're all talk! Always have been!

Emil gets up, dusts off his pants.

EMIL
You're not going! You're too scared
to go without me. Now you're gonna
be fired from Hector's too, idiot.

Daniel is shaking, fists clenched at his waist. Gillo is by his side, ready to attack again.

DANIEL
We have to go. We're in trouble.
We're going. You told me you would
go, you know the way.

EMIL
It's not fucking hard, you idiot.
Go north! I'm staying.

Daniel stares at his friend for a moment. He shakes his head and snatches his little brother's hand. They turn around and walk back to their backpacks.

EMIL (CONT'D)
You look like a couple hots
holding hands like that.

Daniel picks up his pack, slings it over his shoulder.

DANIEL
Please don't tell anyone we've
left.

EMIL
Just stay a few more days, man.
Juanita's gonna let me do her, man!
I can't go yet!

DANIEL
We're going. Today.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - MORNING

Mexican rap thumps and a haze of cigarette smoke clings to the air.

MORLITTO, 30, a Mexican gangster with tatoos across his neck and shoulders, adorned in gaudy jewelry and a cheap leather vest, sits in the passenger seat looking at his cellphone. He's handsome but vicious looking with a freshly shaved head.

His driver, BEANO, 20's, a fat Mexican thug, nods his head to the beat of the music.

A third Thug sits in the back. Flaco, 20's, skinny and ugly.

Morlitto flips through the contacts on his phone and finds one labelled "Papa"

Types text message: No one at the house. Lots of blood. Car is there.

Morlitto plops the phone in his lap and scratches his chin.

He looks out the window as some girls walking along the sidewalk pass by. He grins , flashing a silver and gold capped grill.

MORLITTO

We're coming back for you honeys,
after we find this fucking asshole.

Beano grins and nods in agreement.

Flaco laughs and waves at the girls passing by.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Yeah, you're gonna pay for me
missing out on that shit, Manny.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - NORTHBOUND - MORNING

The train is slowing as it approaches a depot station. The kids atop it begin to gather their gear and ready for departure.

ALFY

We can get off for a few hours, I
think.

ALMA

Will it stay that long?

ALFY

Long enough for us to get some
food. We'll come straight back.

The train slows to a roll. Kids begin carefully descending to the sides of the boxcars. A handful of brave ones jump while the train is still moving.

Alma and Alfy shuffle down a cable rack in the front of their car. They swing down and out the side.

EXT. TRAINYARD - BESIDE THE TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Alfy adjust his pack and motions for Alma to follow. They head across a small grassy hill and into the line of kids gathered at a chain link fence.

A thick muscled GUATEMALAN, holds back a section of fence so that the other kids can pass through.

Alma smiles at him as she darts through. Alfy slides past behind her and nods appreciatively. The Guatemalan smiles barely, turns back to the remaining kids waiting to pass.

EXT. STREET MARKET - LATER

Alma walks close behind her brother as they weave between bodies gathered around the tables and booths offering various food and sundries.

Alfy pulls her along by the wrist toward an alley.

EXT. STREET MARKET - ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

They crouch together against a low wall. She moves to use her body as a shield from any onlookers from the street.

Alfy digs into the back of his pants. He grimaces a little and then the sound of tape peeling. He pulls a wad of American bills, covered by a thick strap of gray ducktape, from his pants.

ALFY

We get fruit and bread only. The meat's too expensive.

ALMA

Can we get some cola?

ALFY

We'll split one.

Alfy thumbs out a few bills and hands the rest to his sister.

ALFY (CONT'D)
You have to put it back.

Alma frowns but nods. Alfy flips around and drops his pants.

EXT. STREET MARKET - CONTINUOUS

Across the crowd, a tough looking teen, THUG 1, spots the two in the alley. He drops a smoke and tilts his head for a better view.

From between the bodies, he catches a glimpse of the cash being strapped to the boy's ass.

He crushes the smoke under a boot and nods to two other thug companions. They follow his gaze across the crowd.

EXT. STREET MARKET - MOMENTS LATER

Alma and Alfy move along from table to table. They spot some dried fruit rolls and purchase a few. Alma grabs a tall bottled coke and giggles a little when Alfy picks up a fish and pretends to kiss it. They laugh and make their way back across the crowd.

The Thugs follow, watching like wolves from between the blur of crisscrossing bodies.

EXT. UNDER THE BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Alma and Alfy proceed over a small hill and down to a dried out drainage ditch. They cross under a pedestrian bridge and crouch down to eat.

The Thugs slide around the corner.

Alfy stands, immediately moving in front of his sister.

THUG 1
Stuffing your little filthy faces,
huh?

THUG 2
Fucking migrants! Southern filth!

Alfy raises his hands.

ALFY
We're just stopping to eat.

The biggest one, THUG 3, steps past the others. He stands a good foot and a half over Alfy.

THUG 3
You sound Guatemalan? You a fucking
guato spic?

Alma pulls Alfy back against the wall away from the looming Thug.

ALMA
Please, you can have the food.

THUG 3
We don't want your shitty food. We
want your money.

THUG 1
And maybe something else, you
little Guatemalan whore.

ALFY
We're Honduran, from San Pedro.

THUG 1
Even worse.

The three draw closer. Alma tightens the grip on her brother's shoulders. She pulls him back closer, inadvertently knocking over the coke bottle.

Thug 3 flashes a knife. He grins and pushes the tip down to Alfy's face.

THUG 3
Give me your money, you little
piece of Honduran trash.

Alfy fishes a few bills from his pocket. He holds them up in a shaky fist.

ALFY
I only have a few bills left, we
just bought food.

The thug sticks the knife to Alfy's belly.

THUG 3
You're a lying little piece of
trash, huh? What about the wad
taped to your stinky ass?

ALFY

Please, we have to pay the Man in Monterrey, please.

THUG 3

You come to our city, bring your nasty little diseases and fucking filth? You have to pay the toll, bitch.

A snapping branch draws everyone's attention around behind them.

Daniel and Gillo freeze, a failed attempt to sneak by.

THUG 1

What do you want?

Daniel just shakes his head, he pulls his little brother close.

DANIEL

Nothing, we're just passing by.

THUG 1

Well get the fuck on by then.

Gillo sees the knife prodding Alfy's belly, his sister cowering behind him. He steps to the thugs.

GILLO

Let them go, they aren't hurting anyone.

THUG 1

What?

Thug 3 turns around, aims the knife in Gillo's direction.

THUG 3

What did you say you little bitch?

Daniel raises his hands, cuts his eyes at his brother with a "what the hell" look.

DANIEL

He didn't mean it, we're going.

GILLO

No, you let them go. You're just bullies. Let them go.

THUG 3

You little bitch, I'm gonna gut you
and rape your little bitch mouth!

The thugs move to grab them. Daniel steps in front of Gillo.

Thug 1 punches Daniel in the face, sending him stumbling backwards. Thug 2 grabs Gillo who begins kicking and punching wildly.

Daniel pulls at Gillo, trying to free him from the bigger boy's grasp, but Thug 1 pulls Daniel away and slugs him again. This time Daniel falls to the ground spitting blood.

Gillo is screaming and thrashing. He manages to kick Thug 2 in the shin before being tossed to the ground.

They pin him to the ground. Thug 3 approaches with a wolfish grin, the small blade pointing towards Gillo's belly.

Alma and Alfie are frozen, backed against the wall.

THUG 3 (CONT'D)

You stupid little spic. I'm gonna
cut your little baby cock off and
feed to your pussy friends.

BOOM! Gunfire explodes into the air and the three thugs jump, turn to see Daniel standing with the pistol raised over his head.

Hands shaking, he lowers the pistol and points it in their direction.

DANIEL

Get up Gillo.

The thugs release him and step cautiously back from the smoking pistol barrel. Daniel shakes, his lip drips blood down his chin.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Get up Gillo, we have to go.

Gillo stands up, defiantly stares at the larger thug with the knife.

GILLO

Who's the bitch now?

EXT. TRAINYARD - AT THE FENCE - MOMENTS LATER

The train is coughing and sputtering to life. Children gather along the edge of the fence waiting. A few yard workers walk along the rail cars. They chase off a few early attempts to board from some of the more eager kids, but remain mostly concerned with the train.

Alfy and Daniel slap against the fence, fingers locking into the chain hexagons. Alma and Gillo are running across the yard to join them.

ALFY

Holy shit! That was brave!

Daniel grins and looks over his shoulder. He coughs a bit trying to catch his breath.

ALFY (CONT'D)

Thank you, friend. You saved us. My names Alfy, that's my sister Alma.

DANIEL

Daniel, that's Gillo. Why don't we go ahead and get on, before it goes.

ALFY

No we have to wait. The men will kick you off. They don't really care once the train starts rolling.

DANIEL

We get on while it's moving?

ALFY

Yes. You just have to be quick and time it right.

DANIEL

And if the timing's not right?

ALFY

It's not good.

DANIEL

How many times have you done this?

ALFY

Five. Arriaga to Oaxaca, Tehuacan, and Puebla, and now here.

Alma and Gillo slide to the fence.

ALMA

Thank you, those guys were mean.

Daniel smiles shyly at her. She smiles back with big brown eyes.

GILLO

Why don't we just get on, before it goes?

He hunches over to catch a breath, looks back across the yard for any pursuers.

DANIEL

I don't know about this.

ALMA

What's the matter? It's not that hard. I'll help you.

GILLO

He's scared. He's scared of everything.

Alma shrugs, smiles again at Daniel.

ALMA

You seemed pretty brave when you saved us.

Daniel blushes and looks away.

EXT. TRAIN YARD - AT THE TRAIN - MOMENT'S LATER

A whistle howls from the far end over the cough of coal engines chugging to life.

The children pour through the fence and down the hill in a small brown and tan tidal wave. They swarm the boxcars as the train slowly begins to roll forward. Some dive immediately for a few half open cargo doors, others time it more carefully and wait to grab hold of end rails and swing atop the running boards between the cars.

EXT. THE TRAINYARD - CONTINUOUS

Alfy grabs the rail and swings himself into the small space between cars. He throws an arm out to Daniel running close behind.

Daniel hesitates. He shakes his head and slows his pace.

Gillo rushes past and grab's Alfy's hand. He squeals and swings aboard. Alfy turns back and motions for Daniel.

ALFY

Come on! Before it speeds up!

Alma matches Daniel's stride.

ALMA

Come on Daniel, You can do it!

She smiles at him before passing by.

She takes Alfi's hand is quickly pulled aboard.

Daniel huffs and picks up his pace. He reaches out for Alfy's hand.

ALFY

Come on, friend. I'll help you!

ALMA

Hurry Daniel! You can do it!

Daniel grimaces and grabs the other boy's hand. He jumps and Alfi swings him aboard.

The twins smile and pat his back. Gillo shakes his head.

GILLO

Good thing you're in charge, huh?

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - NORTHBOUND - CONTINUOUS

They climb along the cable rails and atop the train car. A few other kids are atop their car with them. Others are claiming their spots atop the cars down the remaining length of the train.

ALFY

Look.

He points back across the yard toward the fence.

It's the Guatemalan, holding back the makeshift gate as a few stragglers pass. He slides through last and lopes down the hill after the departing train.

The children watch as the few remaining kids jump aboard. The Guatemalan reaches the bottom of the hill and runs along side the train. Its speed increases and he struggles to find a clear spot to jump onto.

ALFY (CONT'D)
Come on, friend...you can make it.

Alma slides up next to her brother, peering over his shoulder.

ALMA
Run, run! Please make it...

The Guatemalan leaps, a last desperate attempt before the train slips completely from reach.

He misses and crashes into the side, bounces and disappears under the last car.

Gasp and chatter from the children watching.

Daniel turns his head and blinks several times. Gillo stares blankly at the mangled shapes rolling out behind the train in dust and haze.

Alfy shakes his head and looks down in disappointment.

ALFY
Dammit!

Alma leans her head on his shoulder and twist her lips.

ALMA
I wish he'd made it. He was one of the nice ones.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Anita lies in the bed, her head turned to the window. Tears stream down her swollen face. Manny sits, in a chair beside her, his face down in his hands. He raises his head. Tears streak down his cheek.

MANNY
I didn't think...I thought they would just ignore my little deals. I'm not a drug dealer, Anita, I promise. I was only selling to a few guys, just a little.

Anita turns her head toward him. She looks over him with sad, disappointed eyes.

MANNY (CONT'D)
I just...I wanted...I thought it would help up us, we're so poor and..

Anita slaps him hard across the face.

ANITA

At least we were a family, and we were together. Where are they going?

MANNY

North to San Antonio. To Arthur's.

ANITA

The alcoholic?

She turns away in disgust.

MANNY

It's better than Vega finding them. Better than staying here.

ANITA

They're so young. So alone now.

She hugs a pillow tight, cries softly into it.

MANNY

I'm gonna fix this, baby. I'm gonna fix it and we're gonna go. We'll get them back and make a new life, away from all this.

Anita just rolls onto her side away from him. She stares out the window in silence. Manny wipes his face and stands. He places a hand on her shoulder and bends over and kisses her cheek.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Everything...everything I've done, I did for you and the boys. I fucked this up tho. I know it. I'm sorry...and...I love you, so much.

He straightens up and walks out of the room. Anita closes her eyes tight and sobs into her pillow.

EXT. HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER

Morlitto's van sits across the main entry. He watches across the street through the open passenger side window, a cigarette perched between his fingers.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

BEANO

How much longer we staying,
Morlitto? I'm getting hungry, man.

MORLITTO

You need to diet anyway you fat
bitch.

BEANO

You think he's dumb enough to check
himself into a hospital, Man?

MORLITTO

Sergio's got a mean streak a mile
fucking long, but he wouldn't have
left all that mess. Shit, he'd been
calling us to come clean it up.

Morlitto flicks his smoke and turns back to the others.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

No, Sergio probably hurt one of his
kids or wife or something and that
stupid shit Manny killed him
probably. He's probably in there
right now with his whole family,
cryin and shit.

BEANO

Why you think that?

MORLITTO

Cause he's stupid.

BEANO

Why you think he killed Sergio?

MORLITTO

Cause Sergio hasn't answered his
phone in 12 hours. And his car is
in front of Manny's house. And the
house is covered in ten fucking
gallons of blood. And suddenly no
one knows where Manny is. What the
fuck do you think happened?

BEANO

Vega's gonna be pissed.

Morlitto frowns, nervously rubs his head.

MORLITTO
(to himself)
I know.

EXT. HOSPITAL - FRONT ENTRY - CONTINUOUS

Manny walks out the rotating entry door. He flips a baseball cap on and heads down the steps to the street. He hits the sidewalk and casually glances both ways.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Beano spots Manny across the street.

BEANO
Oh shit! Look!

The others see him now too.

FLACO
You're a fucking genius, Morlitto.

MORLITTO
Follow him. We'll grab him at his truck. Fucking got you, Manny, you stupid piece of shit.

Beano flips the gear shift down and rolls into the street.

They yield to a small car passing and merge into the traffic a few yards behind Manny. He is walking along the sidewalk, headed toward a small fenced lot.

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Manny keeps his head down, avoiding eye contact with passer-by's. He casually looks over his shoulder then back and to the ground. His head pops up suddenly and he looks back again.

Morlitto's van is rolling slowly behind him.

He looks back to the sidewalk, panic overtaking his face.

MANNY
Shit!

Manny picks up his pace, half walking and half jogging. He looks to his pick-up, parked in a fenced lot a half block down.

His eyes dance across the street, panicked and searching.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - DRIVING - CONTINUOUS

Manny looks back at them. Morlitto smiles and waves.

MORLITTO
Haha Manny, we fucking got you now,
bitch.

Manny breaks into a sprint.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Go, go! Don't let him cross the
street.

Manny stumbles past a pedestrian, an old lady with a sack of groceries. He knocks her to the ground and stumbles, catches himself and veers into the street to cut across.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Get beside him! Cut him off! Get
ready Flaco!

Manny dashes to the left. Beano floors it and tries to cut into the other lane in time to block him.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Go!Go!

Flaco slides open the side door.

THWACK!

Beano's veered too close. Manny hits the front fender in a full sprint, bouncing off and to the pavement.

A heaving bump and they roll over him.

Beano slams on the breaks. Another bump as the back tires roll over Manny as well.

Beano looks at Morlitto wide eyed. Morlitto eyes him back,

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
What the fuck was that?

BEANO
He run in front of me!

They look back. Manny lies in the street behind them.

MORLITTO
Fuck! Go get him!

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Flaco jumps out of the van and runs to Manny. A small crowd gathers at the sidewalk. He sneers at them and flashes a gang sign, heads over to Manny.

He reaches Manny and grabs his arms, begins dragging him.

FLACO
He's fucking heavy, I need some help!

Morlitto runs up. He pushes Flaco out of the way and stoops down, heaves Manny up in a "Fireman's Lift" He rises with a grunt and looks back at Flaco in disgust.

MORLITTO
Fucking clowns, man.

He heads back to the van carrying Manny over his shoulders. He gets to the van and flops Manny half in.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Get his legs! Get his legs!

Flaco tosses Manny's legs into the van and shoves in over him. Morlitto spins around to the watching bystanders. He waves his pistol.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
FUCK OFF!

He jumps in front. The van speeds away in a bluster of squealing tires and smoke.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - NORTHBOUND - DAY

Alfy fumbles open a paper-wrapped package of dried fruit. He breaks a piece in half and hands it to Daniel.

ALFY
We left San Pedro a few weeks ago.

DANIEL
You've been on the train the whole time?

ALFY

No. We took a bus to the border.
Then we walked to Arriaga. That's
where we found "La Bestia"

DANIEL

La Bestia?

ALFY

It's what we call her. The train.
We've seen three others die since
we got on.

DANIEL

Really? Like the one back there?

ALFY

One of them yes. Then one fell off
at night. Asleep and just rolled
off. Another was thrown off.

DANIEL

Thrown?

ALFY

You have to watch yourself, friend.
There are mean people everywhere.

Gillo slides up next to them. He eyes the fruit.

ALFY (CONT'D)

Did you pack any food?

DANIEL

No, we left so quickly. I didn't
even think about it...stupid.

GILLO

I'm hungry, Daniel.

Alfy breaks another chunk of fruit and hands it to Gillo.

ALFY

Here. We're friends now. You watch
our backs, we watch yours.

He smiles and bites a chunk of fruit.

Daniel nods and looks back to his brother. Gillo smiles and
hungrily bites into his share. Alma peaks over their
shoulders.

ALMA

I'm happy we found each other.

INT. VEGA'S WAREHOUSE - EVENING

A low hanging incandescent bulb.

Yellow, pasty light barely painting a dim and shadowy room.

Morlitto smiles, his capped teeth gleaming half in shadow.

He steps into the light and pulls on a cigarette. Hazy smoke swirls around his face.

MORLITTO

Where's Sergio?

Manny is hanging from his wrists, bare chested. His head hangs low against his shoulder. He grimaces in pain. A large purple contusion surfaces on his side. He heaves a raspy, wet breath.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

I think you have some broken ribs, probably bleeding internally. Probably a ruptured spleen or some shit too. In other words, you're fucking dying, Manny.

He laughs a little and steps closer. He hold the cigarette up to Manny's chest. The hairs around his nipple singe as the red hot tip draws close.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Where's Sergio?

Manny coughs, raises his head. Blood strings from his lips and down his chin.

MANNY

He raped my wife.

Morlitto stabs the cigarette butt into Manny's nipple. The skin seers and puckers against the burning cherry.

Manny screams and bucks against the pain. Morlitto keeps pressing until the butt is completely out.

MORLITTO

You think Mr. Vega cares if he raped your fucking wife, or your fucking mom, or even your fucking dog? WHERE'S SERGIO?

He slaps Manny with an open palm, slaps him again.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Your family at the hospital, huh?
That why you were there? Maybe I go
get your kids and hang them up too.
You think they gonna last long
hanging in here like this?

MANNY

They're gone. You'll never find
them.

MORLITTO

You do me a favor, Manny, I'll do
one for you. Just tell me where
Sergio is. If he's dead, tell me
where. When Mr. Vega gets here, and
he's on his way, He's gonna be mad,
mad at you, mad at me, mad at this
shitty barrio. A lot of people are
gonna get hurt, Manny.

Morlitto wipes the spittle from his lips with the back of his
hand. He rubs his bald head.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Tell me where Sergio is and I'll do
what I can for Anita. I'll take
real good care of her, I promise.

Manny convulses and spits more blood. He drops his head in
silence.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

You know, you're not gonna to
listen to reason? OK.

He pulls a shining knife from his belt.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

I'm gonna cut your ears off tho,
since you're not listening anyway.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - NORTHBOUND - EVENING

The four kids are gathered together at the head of their car.
Alfy pulls a rope from his pack. He smiles at Daniel.

ALFY

I got it in Oaxaca. I traded a pack
of smokes and a cola for it.

He slings the rope across the others. Alma, at the end beside
Gillo, takes it and flips it around the cable rail.

She deftly spins it into a knot around the thick beam and flings the loose end back to Alfy. Alfy pulls it tight into a loop around the beam at his end.

ALFY (CONT'D)

Just stay under the rope when you sleep. That way you won't roll off.

Daniel leans back against his pack.

DANIEL

How far till the next stop?

ALFY

I don't know. I think it will be awhile though. I think we have to pass over those.

He points to the mountain range climbing in the distance. The darkening sky shimmers blue and black behind it.

The train chugs along.

INT. VEGA'S WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Manny hangs, spinning slowly, over a pool of blood and piss. His chest is wracked with burns, his face swollen and bruised. Both of his ears are sliced to the bottom, hanging in twisted flops down the sides of his bloody head.

GANG DOCTOR, 50's, checks over him with latex gloved hands. He slides his hands along the swollen, bruised side and up over his ribs. He pinches at his Manny's right eye and pulls the lids open. A small pen light flickers across a blood-shot eyeball.

GANG DOCTOR

He's got some hemorrhaging in the abdomen. I'd say it's pretty serious but without an ultra...

MORLITTO

Is he gonna live til morning?

GANG DOCTOR

With no more torture, maybe. He's lost a lot of blood, and his gut is filling with whatever's left.

They walk away, into the shadows beyond the low hanging light.

Manny spins. He opens his eyes and looks around as best he can manage.

A door opens and bright light pour across the room. A flash of silhouettes exiting and then the door slams shut. He is alone in the yellowed chaff of the single bulb hanging overhead.

He begins to cry.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - NORTHBOUND - DAWN

Daniel wakes with a shutter. The train is climbing into a steep curve along a looming mountain. He fights to pull himself upright. Others ahead, unfortunate without a rope, struggle and slide, fighting to hang on to their packs and stay on the train.

Daniel nudges Alfy.

DANIEL
We're climbing.

Alfy blinks the sleep from his eyes and sits up. He reaches across Daniel and nudges Gillo. Alma has woken up now and pulls herself up as well. She draws her pack straps close and hooks an arm around the rope.

ALMA
It won't be too bad, just make sure
your pack is safe.

Daniel nods and pulls his pack tight around his shoulder. Ahead someone cries out and an errant backpack slaps Daniel across the chest and rolls over his shoulder. It slides down the car and off the side.

ALFY
Wake up your brother, he's sleeping
like a baby.

Daniel nudges Gillo in the ribs. Gillo stirs and tries to turn over.

GILLO
Leave me alone.

DANIEL
Wake up, a mountain! You have to
get up.

Gillo's pack slides down, barely catching on his limp arm. Daniel grabs it and pulls it back up to his brother's head. He slaps him gently across the face.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Get up!

Gillo snaps awake and sits up with a start. His thick hair sticks out in a wild morning mop. His eyes pop wide at the sight of the cars climbing slowly ahead.

GILLO

Whoa!

EXT. MOUNTAIN SIDE - DAWN

The train climbs into a steep turn and proceeds up the side of the mountain. The rising sun is blocked by the mountain, leaving the train cloaked in a cold shadow. Lights flicker from the engine, smoke chugging up and disappearing over the subsequent cars.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - NORTHBOUND - MOMENTS LATER

The car mostly levels off.

The kids straighten their packs and laugh, watching the others ahead of them gather their scattered belongings.

Daniel smiles at Alfy then tugs at the rope.

DANIEL

A good trade.

Alfy smiles back. He flips his pack around in front of him and begins rummaging through it.

ALFY

Breakfast?

He breaks out the remaining fruit and passes it out to the others. He pulls a canteen from his pack and offers it to Daniel.

ALFY (CONT'D)

Bet you didn't pack this either,
huh?

Daniel shakes his head and thankfully takes the canteen. He swigs some water and hands it to his brother.

DANIEL

We had to leave in a hurry. I didn't even think about water, or food, or even something simple like rope.

ALFY

Why the rush?

DANIEL

My father, he...he was in trouble and a man came.

ALFY

Gang?

DANIEL

Yeah.

ALFY

That's why we left San Pedro. They killed our parents.

Alfy squirms. He bites his fruit roll and chews in silence. Daniel watches him. He frowns and looks ahead.

DANIEL

I think the gang will kill my parents too.

He looks back at Alfy,

DANIEL (CONT'D)

A man came and raped my mother. Gillo killed him with a knife.

ALFY

Wow, he's pretty crazy, huh?

DANIEL

He's just tired of mean people, I guess.

Alfy shrugs and looks ahead toward the front of the train.

ALFY

I think this whole world's full of mean people. On this train, even with all of us fighting to get to the same place, still there are mean people here too.

DANIEL

What about the United States? What about the gringos?

ALFY

I think there will be mean people there too. Only there they have laws and police that are real police, not just gangsters in uniforms. And they have hope.

DANIEL

What do you mean?

ALFY

They have hope. They don't just exist in misery like back home. They hope for better things. That hope keeps them going, making their lives better. Hope keeps the bad away.

Alfy raises his face. The sun crests off the mountain and beams down in broken sheets. He looks to the left and smiles.

ALFY (CONT'D)

Look at that.

Daniel peers around him. A grand view of the valley breaks out as the train clears the woods and moves along the mountain's open face. The sunrise cast a glowing hue over the hilly woodlands and desert scrub below.

DANIEL

Wow. It's beautiful.

ALFY

Yeah, crazy, huh?

INT. VEGA'S WAREHOUSE - FRONT OFFICE - DAY

MR. VEGA, early 60's, a Mexican gentleman in an expensive suit and designer shoes. Unlike his lieutenants he is not adorned in gaudy jewelry or gangster apparel. He is a refined, cultured man.

Morlitto leans against a desk, his eyes lowered as Vega approaches him.

VEGA

Why was Sergio handling this pissant menial task?
(MORE)

VEGA (CONT'D)

These are the kind of jobs we have
you and your stupid sidekicks for.

Morlitto shrugs. Vega stands directly in front of him now.

VEGA (CONT'D)

You off getting fucked up on the
cocina again? Huh?

Morlitto cowers, shrugs a little.

Vega slaps him across the face.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Look at me, you little fuck!

Morlitto winces and looks into Vega's eyes.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Well, huh? Answer me.

MORLITTO

No Papa.

VEGA

What? What did you say?

He slaps him again.

MORLITTO

I said no. No sir.

Morlitto trembles under Vega's presence.

VEGA

Don't call me "papa" you little
shit. Just because I put you in
that whore's womb, doesn't make me
your "papa". I'm Sergio's papa. And
now, because your too busy getting
high and thuging around, and
fucking off! Now, my Sergio's
missing.

MORLITTO

I'm sorry Mr. Vega. I wasn't doing
nothing with no drugs, I promise.
Sergio likes to handle this kinda
shit himself. He wants to manage
everything.

Vega sneers in disgust and steps away from Morlitto.

VEGA
Show me this fucking surf.

INT. VEGA'S WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Vega steps into the room, careful to avoid the piss and blood covering the floor. Morlitto trails in behind him followed by a third man, Vega's ATTENDANT.

VEGA
Wake him up.

Morlitto circles around behind Manny's limp body. He nudges him and Manny stirs, weakly attempts to raise his head.

VEGA (CONT'D)
Manny, right?

Vega removes his coat, passes it off to the shadowy attendant.

Vega un-snaps the buttons on his sleeves and slowly rolls them to his elbows.

VEGA (CONT'D)
You're nothing to me, you know that? You're stinking, filthy, barrio trash. But apparently you think you're something.

He pulls a handkerchief from his shirt pocket, methodically begins to wrap it around his right fist.

VEGA (CONT'D)
Apparently you think you're man enough to steal from me, defy the order of how things go around here. Move beyond your simple, pathetic existence and encroach upon my world. My money, my turf, my honor? Where's my son?

Manny manages to raise his head enough to look into Vega's cold steely eyes.

MANNY
Your son raped my wife. He invaded my home and raped my wife. Where's the honor in that?

Vega slams his fist into Manny's gut. Manny grunts and spits blood. He groans and begins choking on the blood pouring from his gasping mouth.

Vega steps back, disgusted.

VEGA

You killed my son? Did you? Where
is he?

Manny is gagging, beginning to convulse in desperation to breathe.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Get his head or something, don't
let him choke.

Morlitto grabs Manny by the shoulders, spins him around and thrust two fingers down his throat. A gulp of blood splatters to the ground and Manny heaves, sucking air and groaning in pain.

Morlitto shakes the blood and bile from his hand, wipes his fingers across Manny's chest. He spins the captive back around to face Vega.

MANNY

I stabbed your piece of shit son. I
let him beg before I cut his head
off and threw it in the trash.

Manny spits at Vega, landing a thick red spatter across his expensive shoes.

Vega fairly snarls and cuts his eyes low toward Manny.

VEGA

You cut off his head? You that
kinda man, huh? You think you've
earned the right to put your
filthy, menial fucking hands upon
royalty?

He slugs Manny again, harder and deeper into his gut.

Manny convulses and begins to gag anew.

Vega moves past him, pulls the large hunting knife from Morlitto's belt. Manny chokes and gags behind them.

Vega swings back and snatches Manny's arm, spinning him around.

VEGA (CONT'D)

I'm killing you now, you puke, you
fucking serf!

He jabs the knife into Manny's throat. Stabs and saws viscously.

VEGA (CONT'D)
Then I'm going to bury your whole family you fucking gutter puke!

Morlitto moves in to grab hold of Manny's contorting body. Blood splashes across Vega.

Mr. Vega hacks and saws in a rage of vengeance.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The train levels out atop a long cutaway. It curves gently and enters a narrow mountain pass. Ahead, through the track and around another slight curve, the mountain opens to a deep chasm. The train rolls from the mountain pass.

EXT. THE BRIDGE - ACROSS THE CHASM - DAY

A shining suspension bridge hangs crossing far to the otherside. The train breaks into the long running ribs of the shining bridge and out beneath the sun.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - ON THE BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The kids sit atop the train car, racing over a sparkling river far below.

Alfy raises his arms in jubilee and howls at the wind. Gillo is quick to join him, yelling eagerly in a rush of release.

Daniel smiles and watches the boys. His eyes dash to Alma. She sits at the end of their short span of bodies, staring in bewilderment at the depths below. He watches her watch the space racing beneath them.

Daniel leans behind his brother for a better view. Alma, sensing his gaze, turns to him. He smiles sheepishly. She smiles back at him, unabashed. The open air blows her brown hair around her face.

ALMA
It's something isn't it?

DANIEL
What?

ALMA
It's something...

She rolls her eyes, dislodges herself from the rope and slides in behind Gillo. She leans close to Daniel.

ALMA (CONT'D)

I said, it's something. Down there.
The river sparkling so pretty.

DANIEL

Yeah. It's pretty cool.

ALMA

My brother tell you why we left?

DANIEL

Yes. I'm sorry.

ALMA

Gillo told me why you had to leave.
It's sad. We both have sad stories.

DANIEL

Yeah.

ALMA

But I don't know, maybe everything
happens for a reason.

DANIEL

Maybe...

ALMA

If we hadn't left San Pedro. We
wouldn't have been caught by those
thugs in the city... And you
wouldn't have saved us.

She smiles at him, leans forward and kisses him on the cheek. Daniel, surprised and embarrassed, looks away then turns back bravely.

DANIEL

And I wouldn't be here, looking at
such beauty.

Alma giggles and fiddles with her hair. She slides back beside Gillo and joins in the hooting and shouting.

Daniel looks over at them. He smiles and finally joins in as well.

The train zips across the long bridge.

EXT. VEGA'S WAREHOUSE - DAY

Mr. Vega and his Attendant step out into the sunlight. Vega's fine white shirt is stained in red and pink. He motions to his attendant. He's out of breath. It's hard work cutting off a man's head.

VEGA

Get me a clean shirt. And some water.

The attendant nods and heads toward a black cadillac parked behind Morlitto's van.

Morlitto steps out, wiping his knife clean with a small rag.

Vega begins unbuttoning his shirt. He coughs and spits, quickly reaches into his pocket for a small canister of glycerin tabs.

He coughs into his arm, hands the bottle to Morlitto. Morlitto stares at it confused.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Open it, put one in my mouth.

Morlitto pops it open grabs a tiny pill and holds it up. He hesitates.

VEGA (CONT'D)

I'm covered in blood, put it in my mouth!

Vega sticks out his tongue. Morlitto drops the little pill on top. Vega looks instantly relieved. He clutches his chest and heaves for a moment.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Jesus, what's happening to this country, two-bit fucking dope dealers running amok.

The attendant returns with a clean shirt folded across his arm and a bottle of water in his hand.

Vega pulls the bloody shirt from his body, tosses it to the ground. His back and chest are wrapped in faded gang tattoos. He holds his messy hands out and the attendant begins pouring water over them. Vega washes.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Order is in place for a reason. Everyone's roles are defined the moment they pop out of their mama's womb. You know what your fucking role is now, Morlitto?

MORLITTO

Yes Mr. Vega.

VEGA

This Manny didn't know what his role was. He was a serf. He thought he could be a boss.

Vega flips the water from his hands and motions to Morlitto to turn around. He begins drying his hands on Morlitto's back.

VEGA (CONT'D)

One serf starts to get ideas, then another, soon all of them will. You have to squash these, these insurrections before they take root, ruin the order of things.

The attendant helps him into his new, clean shirt. Vega buttons it slowly, methodically. He's sweating profusely, coughing a little more.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Send out a notice on his boys. I want their dirty little heads. Ten grand each. Put it out to everyone, everywhere. Get me those fucking heads.

He walks to his car, the attendant darting ahead to open the back door. Vega pauses at his car.

VEGA (CONT'D)

The wife's in the hospital?

Morlitto nods.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Send her the husband's.

Vega stares at Morlitto for a moment.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Don't fuck this up, Morlitto. No more second chances.

MORLITTO

I know. I wont.

VEGA

Bring me those heads, then maybe
you can start calling me Papa.
Otherwise...

MORLITTO

Yes Mr. Vega.

Vega nods and gets into the car.

INT. HECTOR'S CARNICERIA - DAY

The bell clings above the door. Hector looks up with a smile;
it quickly fades.

Morlitto and his gang enter.

Morlitto eyes two women at the counter. He smiles and winks
at them. His eyes cut to Emil, his back to the counter,
chopping meat.

HECTOR

C'mon, Morlitto, I got customers.

MORLITTO

It's OK, Hector. You're a good
little shopkeeper, you pay your
bills.

Morlitto steps up to the counter.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Where's Manny's boy?

Emil stops chopping. He cranes his head to listen.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Off for the day or something?

HECTOR

No call, no show. Little Asshole's
fired. I don't give a shit where he
is.

Morlitto nods at Emil.

MORLITTO

Hey butcher boy. You and Manny's
boy friends?

Emil turns around.

EMIL
We...uh, yeah, yes. Yeah.

MORLITTO
You seen him?

Emil fidgets and looks away as he answers.

EMIL
No. He told me he was sick.

MORLITTO
You haven't seen him?

EMIL
No.

MORLITTO
Then when he tell you he was sick?

Emil freezes, realizes his blunder. Morlitto shrugs.

EMIL
He has his dad's phone. He called
me... This morning.

MORLITTO
Why you lie, boy?

EMIL
You asked if I'd seen him. I only
talked to him, though. I didn't see
him.

Morlitto stares him down, contemplating.

He nods and turns to leave, turns back just as he reaches the
door.

MORLITTO
Hey kid, you better learn your role
around here. Don't start getting so
smart, huh?

He bares his grill and makes a pistol shape with his hand.
Brings it up slowly, aims it at Emil.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Poof.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - MOMENTS LATER

FLACO
 (on the phone)
 Yeah, brother. Yeah brother. Cool.
 Na, this is good. Later.

He snaps the phone down and passes a scrap of paper to Morlitto in the front seat.

Morlitto looks over the phone number and dials. He holds the phone up to his ear.

MORLITTO
 Shit, what's the oldest one's name?

Beano shrugs looks in the rearview at Flaco.

FLACO
 Shit...Daniel, yeah Daniel.

MORLITTO
 (convincingly concerned)
 Hey, Daniel. Listen, your dad, he wanted me to call. You probably don't remember me, Morlitto, we used to kick the ball and shit at your dad's parties. Anyway, uh...keep the phone close. I'll try again in a little while. Uh...O.K. Hey, I'm one of the good guys, answer the phone next time. O.K?

He hangs up.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
 Fucking voicemail.

FLACO
 Shit, one of the good guys? You're the fucking devil, Man.

BEANO
 Now what?

Morlitto lights a smoke.

MORLITTO
 Let's go to the hospital; see if Anita's still as fine as she used to be.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Anita sets up in the bed. She holds her stomach gingerly. She stands and shuffles to her private bathroom.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Morlitto and his gang. He is carrying a cardboard box.

He stops at the center nursing station and leans over the counter. A young nurse glances up as he approaches the station. Morlitto smiles at her.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Anita leaves the bathroom and looks around the room briefly. She goes to the doorway leading to the hall. An older NURSE walks by.

ANITA

Ma'am?

The Nurse smiles at her, stops in front of her door.

ANITA (CONT'D)

May I have some water, please?

The Nurse nods compassionately and walks off toward the Nurse Station. Anita watches her pass. She looks toward the station just as Morlitto is looking down the hall.

Morlitto recognizes her immediately and smiles. He waves off the young nurse thumbing through a registry.

MORLITTO

Nevermind, I see her. Thanks anyway.

He grins a silver toothed smile at Anita and heads toward her.

Anita gasps and freezes for a heartbeat.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She steps back into her room as Morlitto draws near. The three men follow her inside. She backs to the bed and sits, folds up her knees and wraps her arms around them. The men fill the room. Beano closes the door.

MORLITTO

Anita, I forgot how pretty you are.

ANITA

What do you want?

MORLITTO

I heard you were here. I want to come check on you. We used to be close, remember?

ANITA

We were never close, you just wanted us to be.

Morlitto puts the box on the floor beside the bed. He sits next to her and frowns, places a hand on her knee. She flinches and begins to shiver. Fear flashes in her eyes.

MORLITTO

What happened? Somebody, beat you up?

ANITA

Your friend... he was looking for Manny.

MORLITTO

Yeah, Manny really fucked up. What's the matter? You're shaking.

ANITA

I'm scared.

MORLITTO

Sergio really beat you up, huh?

His hand slips between her knees, his fingers at the edge of her gown.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

What part of you he beat up the most?

Morlitto licks his lips and grins devilishly. Anita is frozen in terror. His hand pushes deeper between her thighs.

A knock at the door...

The Nurse opens the door with a cup of water in hand. She is startled to see the men, especially Beano standing right by the door.

Morlitto withdraws his hand swiftly and looks to The Nurse with menacing eyes.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Some privacy?

NURSE
No visitors, she's not seeing anyone.

Beano steps close to The Nurse. He glares down at her but she doesn't back down.

NURSE (CONT'D)
Get out or I call the police. The Westside Police, motherfuckers!

Morlitto rises.

MORLITTO
We were leaving anyway, you old hag.

He looks over to Anita then points to the box.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Mr. Vega sent a gift. He says get well and he hopes to see you soon.

They leave and The Nurse moves to console her.

NURSE
Monsters.

Anita's eyes slowly pan to the box. She stares at it with heartbreak and begins to cry.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - DAY

Gillo watches a small mountain village pass by around the train. He sees dogs digging through trash piles, old women cleaning dishes in a communal sink. A small group of men sitting on a porch, talking and drinking.

Absolute poverty. And very few children.

Alma cranes her head into his view.

ALMA
Hello? Gillo, are you home?

Gillo blinks and shifts his eyes to her, a blank stare.

ALMA (CONT'D)
What are you thinking about?

Gillo stares at her for a long moment.

GILLO
The man who was hurting my mama. I was wondering if he had any kids at home wondering where he is.

ALMA
Oh..

GILLO
When I killed him, with the knife, I was so mad and...and scared. But now...I feel...He's dead and gone. He's never going to see anything like this mountain, or these people, or ever feel the wind on his face. Or see his kids again,

ALMA
And you feel sorry for him?

GILLO
No.

ALMA
Then what do you feel?

GILLO
Happy.

INT. VEGA'S CADILLAC - IN TRAFFIC - DAY

Vega sits in the back watching out the window. His eyes shift from the pedestrians along the sidewalk to the crush of cheap, battered vehicles around him. He is disgusted with all he sees.

He looks up to The Attendant driving.

VEGA
Fucking Eastside, barrio trash. I almost grew up here, you know that?

The driver nods at him through the rearview mirror.

VEGA (CONT'D)

My father was a smart man. He got out of here, built a kingdom on the back of these people's insatiable misery.

Vega thumbs at his collar. He rubs his chest and begins digging in his coat for his heart tabs. He pops one in, waits for it to burst through his veins with relief.

VEGA (CONT'D)

This place. Disgusting. Everything brown and gray like a disease. I can't even stand to breathe the air.

He coughs and wipes his sweaty brow.

VEGA (CONT'D)

Jesus, this fucking heat.

He begins to cough more violently. The Attendant looks over his shoulder in concern.

ATTENDANT

Sir?

Vega slumps to the seat clutching his chest.

The driver spins back to the wheel and begins honking, navigating the traffic.

Vega gasp and spits.

VEGA

No. Not here. No hospitals here!

ATTENDANT

It's the only one close, there's no time!

He fights to clear the traffic.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT.

The land levels out from the massive gray mountain range into low desert scrub and steppe.

The night sky sparkles overhead, a crystal clear southern moon.

The train descends into the plain, chugging along parallel to the mountains. Headed North and West.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - THRU THE DESERT - NIGHT

They lay back together, heads resting on packs. Gillo and Alma are fast asleep. Alfy, hands bent under his head, rolls his eyes toward Daniel.

ALFY

Have you also killed a man? Like your brother?

DANIEL

No.

ALFY

Me either. I don't think I ever will. I heard in America, they don't kill anyone, except in Texas. Only if they've done something real mean though.

Daniel stares toward the sky in silence.

ALFY (CONT'D)

In America, they take care of you at the hospital, give you food if you're hungry, and ...

DANIEL

They have MTV, and libraries with computers and internet.

ALFY

I can't read. I can write my name though.

DANIEL

You can't read?

ALFY

No, I never really went to school. Alma did but I had to work.

DANIEL

Well...I can't drive.

ALFY

Really? I drove for the taxi for a little while.

He laughs and rubs his hands over his face.

ALFY (CONT'D)

My dad, he gave me like five big books to learn how to read with.

(MORE)

ALFY (CONT'D)

I just used them to sit on so I
could see over the wheel though.

He chuckles then suddenly goes quiet and frowns.

DANIEL

I hope I can work a lot in Texas;
buy a real cool car, and a house
with like two bathrooms.

Alfy rolls up to one hand, perches on his elbow. He beams
down on Daniel.

ALFY

There it is...

DANIEL

What?

ALFY

I see it in you now, friend. That's
good. I was getting worried.

DANIEL

What?

Daniel awkwardly slides back from Alfy's gaze.

ALFY

Hope. You said hope.

Alfy rolls back over to look up to the sky. A deep sigh,

ALFY (CONT'D)

My dad said, just a few days before
he died, " We can never change what
we've seen behind us, but we can
always change what we see before
us."

Daniel looks over his shoulder to Alfy.

DANIEL

I like that.

ALFY

He was a smart man, I miss him.

The phone in Daniel's pocket beeps to life. They both jump at
the sudden noise. They sit up straight and look at Daniel's
coat pocket

Daniel pulls the phone out and looks at in anticipation.

ALFY (CONT'D)
They give teenagers phones in
Mexico?

Daniel flips the phone open.

DANIEL
It must have just found service.
There's a voicemail.

ALFY
Well see what it says!

Daniel taps a few keys and pulls the phone to his head. His eyes shift from curiosity to excitement as Morlitto's message plays into his ear.

He flips the phone down and grins at Alfie then spins around and shakes Gillo.

DANIEL
Gillo! Gillo! Wake up! It's dad! He
called!

Gillo stirs, pops up suddenly.

GILLO
What?

DANIEL
Dad, he called!

GILLO
Where is he?

DANIEL
Well, he didn't call, his friend
did. But he's with Dad and he's
gonna call back!

Gillo grins and starts shaking Alma.

GILLO
Alma! Alma! Dad's found us!

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - THRU THE DESERT - MIDNIGHT.

The train hums along, north thru the night. An endless desert peels out to the right; a long, knifing mountain range to the left.

Daniel sits atop his pack. Staring into his hands behind heavy lids. He holds the phone tight. He hasn't slept, he's waiting.

The phone chirps two quick beats. Daniel takes a moment to register the sound, lost in the nether between consciousness and exhaustion.

Gillo nudges him. He's suddenly standing over Daniel, his little head a glowing shadow breaking against the full moon.

GILLO

It beeped.

Daniel blinks and nods at him. His eyes drop back to the phone. He flips it open and sees a blinking yellow battery symbol. He sighs and flips the screen back down.

DANIEL

It's dying.

Gillo stands over him silence for a moment. He huffs and walks away, lays back down beside the sleeping twins.

Daniel frowns and shakes his head. He cast a weary, hopeless gaze out across the moon lit vista. Whatever joy and hope they felt a few hours ago is being sucked away by the rapidly depleting battery.

Then the phone rings.

Gillo sits up straight, his head craned toward Daniel.

Daniel snaps the phone open and up to his ear.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Hello?

We hear Morlitto,

MORLITTO (O.S.)

Daniel?

DANIEL

Yes!

MORLITTO (O.S.)

Good. I finally reached you.

DANIEL

My Dad?

MORLITTO (O.S.)
 No, he's at the hospital with your
 Mom. He's good though, they're both
 good.

Gillo is beside Daniel now, ears straining to hear.

GILLO
 Mama?

Daniel cups the phone,

DANIEL
 She's good. Hospital still.

He smiles and uncovers the phone.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
 What do we do?

INT. MORLITTO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Morlitto sits at a small metal desk, shirtless. A few lines of cocaine are cut over a hand mirror. He slides a pinky across the tip of one and rubs it across his gums.

MORLITTO
 Where are you?

DANIEL (O.S.)
 I don't know. On the train still.
 We're going to Monterrey.

MORLITTO
 O.K. Good. I'll call tomorrow. We
 can meet up tomorrow night maybe.

DANIEL (O.S.)
 Mom and Dad?

Morlitto draws down to the lines with a rolled bill. He snorts a long line. It's louder than he intends or even realizes.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - THRU THE DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Daniel squints, cranes his head with uncertainty.

DANIEL
 Who are you?

MORLITTO (O.S.)

Morlitto. Me and Manny went to school together. Remember, I used to come over when you were a little guy? We played soccer in your back yard. Maybe you were to young.

DANIEL

Are they coming with you?

INT. MORLITTO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MORLITTO

Yeah. You'll see them soon. Everything will be good soon. Wait for us in Monterrey. We will be there tomorrow night. I have to go. I'll call you when we get to Monterrey.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Wait! The phone is dying, I have no battery or charger.

MORLITTO

Well just stay close to the station then. Where the commuter trains run. Wait for us there.

He flips off the phone.

Morlitto stands and stretches. He twist his back and pops his neck, turns to the bed behind him.

A naked girl, a young teen, whimpers as he walks toward her. He pops the buckle on his belt and begins to drop his pants.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Kids these days... you're so fucking stupid.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - ANITA'S ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Anita packs a small tote with some medication samples. The Nurse knocks on her door. Another younger nurse is behind her. They are both smiling.

ANITA

Thank you, for everything.

The nurses enter, the older one takes Anita's hand.

NURSE

This world can be so hard, dear. We have a gift for you.

The younger nurse hands her an envelope.

NURSE (CONT'D)

We pooled our extra funds. It will get you most of the way, but you must hurry. Go find your boys.

Anita slips a train ticket from the envelope. She's fights back tears and hugs them both.

ANITA

Thank you! God bless you! Thank you!

Anita walks to the bed, stops over the box sitting on the floor. She crouches and puts her hand over the top. Tears flow anew.

NURSE

We'll keep him in the morgue. I'll file him myself. Maybe, his body comes in soon.

Anita nods and straightens up. The Nurse takes her by the shoulders.

NURSE (CONT'D)

These struggles...pain, sadness...to feel these things is to be human. To know them at all is to know what it takes to fight them, the monsters that inhabit this life.

EXT. THE GONZALES HOUSE - LATER

A taxi pulls into the driveway. Anita gets out and crosses in front. She turns back to the driver.

ANITA

I'm just going to grab some things. I'll be just a moment.

The taxi driver nods.

INT. THE GONZALES HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Anita enters with slow uncertainty. Dried blood everywhere. She carefully steps over the mess by the door and walks into the room.

She looks across the room. Pictures of the boys smile back at her from the walls. A picture of Manny and Daniel, before Gillo was born, hangs crooked at the end of the row of portraits.

Tears swell in her eyes. She looks away from it, unable to bare the memories.

Her eyes find the bloody knife on the floor and she stares at it for a long moment. She takes a deep breath and heads down the hall.

EXT. THE GONZALES HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Morlitto's van pulls up along the curb in front of the home. Morlitto gets out and heads to the taxi.

MORLITTO

Get lost.

The driver nods quickly and throws the car in reverse.

Anita exits the house just as the taxes pulls away.

She is startled to see Morlitto and tries to run past him. Morlitto side-steps and corrals her into his arms. He's high, amped on hours of cocaine.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Whoa, whoa, whoa... Where are you going, baby?

ANITA

How did you know?

MORLITTO

Where else can you go?

ANITA

What do you want? You've taken everything from me, I have nothing left to give.

MORLITTO

Your boys. I don't know what they look like, but I do know where they're going.

ANITA

No...how?

MORLITTO

Cause Manny was fucking stupid. He gave them his phone.

ANITA

Please, please Morlitto.

MORLITTO

You're coming with us.

Anita tries to shove him off. Morlitto draws the knife from his belt and holds it against her cheek.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

You're coming with us, Anita. Maybe I let you live. Maybe, I take you home with me, give you new kids to replace the ones your stupid husband killed.

Anita slaps him across the face and tries again to flee. Beano is there, grabbing her in his massive arms and dragging her toward the van. Flaco slides the back door open and Beano tosses her in. Morlitto smiles and looks into the back seat at her.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

You wanna fight? You wanna slap and kick and all that shit? That's good, I like it rough, baby. Come on, we got a long drive to Monterrey.

He jumps in the back with her and slides the door closed behind him.

EXT. ATOP THE TRAIN - DAWN

The train slows suddenly.

Alfy pops up first, then Daniel.

ALFY

We're stopping?

DANIEL

We're in the middle of nowhere.

Alma sets up. She points toward the front of the train.

ALMA
Lights. Beside the tracks.

Gunshots ring out from the darkness around them. Gillo jumps from his slumber. He peers wide-eyed at Daniel.

GILLO
Who's shooting!?

Flashlights and dogs barking. Figures emerging from the darkness below them.

ALFY
Traffickers!

They shuffle to gather their things.

ALFY (CONT'D)
We have to get off and hide. They are coming to take us!

DANIEL
We can't, they're all around us.

A spotlight falls across them. Men are yelling from both sides of the train, waving and pointing rifles at them. A pitbull, white and snarling, pulls against the leash holding it at bay.

Pick up trucks pull up from the dunes and flash their headlights across the train cars.

The COWBOY, bearded in his mid 40's, wearing a STETSON hat. An AK-47 slung across his shoulder.

He steps forward from the group.

He pulls a bullhorn to his mouth.

COWBOY
(thru bullhorn)
We are all around you children. If you run we let the dogs chase you. When the dogs catch you, we let them eat you.

The dogs growl and bark.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
(thru bullhorn)
Believe me, children. The dogs always catch the runners.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

The kids are gathered into groups. Dogs bark and snarl around them. Their packs have been piled along the side of the tracks. Men rummage through them and shout back and forth amongst themselves.

The kids push against each other, huddled into a tight circle with some of the other children from the nearby cars.

The Cowboy approaches them.

COWBOY
Listen up children,

He speaks calmly, with gently authority.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
We are Nortos. We are the coyote.
We are your best chance of
surviving the desert and getting
across alive. We can be friends.

He lights a smoke. Stares at the kids for a long moment.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
I know the places you are coming
from. I know the hell you have
lived and the hardships of your
plight. The United States is a
wonderful place. Lots of free
stuff. Lots of fun things. Lots of
money.

He walks into the group, gently pulls a small boy and a teenage girl out and takes them by the hand. He walks to the front, the girl on one side and the boy on the other.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
You're gonna help me get some of
that money. And in return, I will
help you get across the border. But
we have to work together.

He holds the girl's hand out to one of his soldiers.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
All the little girls go over there.

He pulls the boy over the other way.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
All the little boys come over here.

The men begin sorting through the group, separating the boys from the girls. Alma pulls Alfy closer.

Daniel and Gillo watch as a man begins to separate them. Alfy struggles against him. The man slaps Alfy to the ground and tugs his sister away. Alma whimpers and reaches for her brother but is quickly shuffled out of the group and in with the other girls.

GILLO
What about Alma?

ALFY
They will take the girls to
Monterrey. To sell them.

DANIEL
What?

ALFY
The man who arranged our trip
warned us. He said the Nortos sell
the girls as slaves to old men.
Then they'll march us across the
desert hauling their drugs.

GILLO
We have to get her back then.

DANIEL
How? We are surrounded and they
have guns.

GILLO
So do we!

Gillo digs his hand into Daniel's coat. He pulls the pistol and is moving before Daniel can react. He peels from the crowd and rushes the Cowboy, pistol raised.

Gillo moves within feet from The Cowboy, the gun aimed at his face.

GILLO (CONT'D)
Let her go! Let her go!

Daniel rushes through the crowd after him.

The men swing their rifles on Gillo. The Cowboy turns just as Gillo reaches him.

The Cowboy slowly raises his hands.

COWBOY
Whoa! Little man! Whoa, where'd you
get that?

Gillo stands with the pistol aimed directly at him. The
Cowboy cuts his eyes to his men.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
Easy, boys, easy!

He looks back to Gillo, smiles slightly.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
Hey little man. Lets keep it calm,
huh? Slow down.

Gillo holds a steady bead him.

GILLO
Let her go! She's not going to be a
slave! Let her go!

The men cuss and move in around him. Daniel clears the crowd
and rushes in behind Gillo. The Cowboy tilts his head.

COWBOY
You're some kinda little tough ass,
huh? Hold it boys, hold...

GILLO
She's not going with them! Let her
go!

COWBOY
Look, boy.

GILLO
LET HER GO!

COWBOY
Quit screaming at me, boy! I'm
right here in front of you...lets
talk this over, huh? You put down
the gun and we'll talk. Which one
is yours?

Gillo stares dead eye at him. His eyes leveled along with the
pistol at the man's chest.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
She your sister? Maybe your
girlfriend? Huh?

He nods to the girl group.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
Which one, boy?

The dogs are barking. The Cowboy's men have circled around Gillo and Daniel with their guns at the ready.

Daniel slowly puts a hand on his brother's shoulder.

DANIEL
Please, Gillo... They will kill us.

COWBOY
Listen to your friend, Gillo. Put down the gun and we'll talk.

GILLO
Alma? Alma come out.

The Cowboy nods to his men.

COWBOY
Easy boys, let her out.

Alma clears from the crowd of girls. She steps cautiously towards the boy's group. The Cowboy halts her with a raised palm. His men move around her.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
She your big sister, huh? Both of you? Look, she's OK...put down that pistol, you little tough ass. I'll talk to you man to man.

DANIEL
Put it down, Gillo.

GILLO
We just wanna go to Texas! We can take your drugs and she can go with us. She can carry your drugs too!

The Cowboy smiles and nods.

COWBOY
You don't got much bargaining power here, boy. I just say the word...

One of the men grab Alma. A pistol presses against her head and she whimpers in fear.

Gillo thumbs back the hammer on his pistol, un-fazed, as if he expected they'd grab her. The Cowboy laughs a little and drops his hands.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

Hold on, now...I like you Gillo. I like your spirit. You're a tough ass. You remind me of my boy.

Gillo remains ice cold, steady as a rock.

DANIEL

Don't Gillo, Don't...

GILLO

We can talk? We can make a deal?

COWBOY

You have any chips to put in the game?

Alfy breaks from the crowd behind them.

ALFY

We do! We have four thousand dollars! It's all yours, friend!

The Cowboy slowly reaches out for the pistol in Gillo's hands.

COWBOY

Well then, let's make a deal, huh?

He gently pushes the pistol down. Gillo doesn't resist but keeps his eyes locked with deadly intent.

EXT. THE COWBOY'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

The Cowboy drops his tailgate and lays his rifle across it. He flips Daniel's pistol around in his hand and offers it back to Gillo. Daniel takes it quickly and stuffs it in his coat.

The Cowboy shrugs at Gillo and looks to Alfy.

COWBOY

Lets see the money.

The kids stand behind him, surrounded by men with rifles.

ALFY

We have your assurances, then. We can trust you?

COWBOY

No, boy. You can't trust anyone.
But I will assure you, I am a
business man. For four thousand
dollars, I will sell you the girl,
and your freedom.

Alfy nods and looks around for a moment. He drops his pants.
Alma helps him unstrap the cash and he puts it on the bed
beside the rifle.

The Cowboy laughs.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

Taped to the ass, huh?

He looks over his men with disgust, points at the kids.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

This one's got a gun, this one's
got 4 grand stuck to his ass, you
guys didn't search nobody or what?

The men cut eyes at one another. The Cowboy thumbs the stacks
with a quick count.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

You think it's really any different
over there?

ALFY

I know it is.

DANIEL

Will you take us to Monterrey for
more?

The Cowboy considers it.

COWBOY

You're not worried I'll just kill
you and take what I want?

ALFY

Of course we are, but you're a
business man, this is business.

Daniel digs into the crotch of his jeans, pulls out a wad of
cash. The Cowboy shrugs at his men in disapproval. He looks
to Alma

COWBOY

What are you hiding?

Alma smiles and shakes her head.

DANIEL
Seven hundred for a ride to
Monterrey.

The Cowboy smiles at the kids, he takes the wad from Daniel and laughs a little.

COWBOY
You're going to do just fine over
there. Guns and Money,
children...Guns and Money.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - DAY

Morlittos cradles Anita's head in his arm. She is tied up.

MORLITTO
You know why we're going to
Monterrey, baby? We're fetching
trophies.

FLACO
Monterrey's not our turf, Morlitto.
You sure about this?

MORLITTO
Fuck the Nortos. Sergio's fucking
dead, now. That means somebody's
gotta step up, fill that role.

FLACO
What about The Cowboy?

MORLITTO
Fuck The Cowboy too. He's nothing
but a hoto in a fancy hat. I'm
getting these trophies for Mr.
Vega. He's gonna make me a fucking
prince.

He looks back at Anita with a devilish smile.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)
Maybe you'll be my princess, huh?

EXT THE BACK OF COWBOY'S TRUCK - DAY

Gillo and Alma brace their backs against the cab of the truck. Alfie and Daniel ride on the wheel wells. The truck bounces down a desert trail.

DANIEL

Where'd you get that much money?

ALFY

Driving the cab, working the fish market cleaning stalls, I even sold dope on the street for awhile.

DANIEL

You were a drug dealer?

ALFY

I didn't have a choice. The gangs in San Pedro, you either join them or get eaten by them.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF MONTERREY - NORTOS CAMP - DAY

The line of trucks pulls through a tall wood paneled fence and into the compound. Men wander about completing various tasks.

The trucks pull up to a large warehouse. The Cowboy's truck stops just past the warehouse bay door and the men in the front jump out. Children from the other trucks begin unloading in groups. The Cowboy calls out orders over the commotion of unloading trucks.

COWBOY

Alright, boys to the warehouse to feed. Girls to the bath house to bathe.

He leans into the back of the truck.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

You four get out and meet me over there.

He points to a brick bunkhouse across the yard.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

We will eat and then I will drive you to Monterrey.

INT. THE BUNK HOUSE - DINING TABLE - AFTERNOON

The Cowboy sits at the head of the table. The kids are seated around his left, starting with Daniel, and a few lieutenants to his right. COWBOY'S MAMA, late 70's, enters with a steaming pot of beans. The Cowboy smiles at the kids.

COWBOY

This one is the gunhand, this one
is the business man, she's the
moonflower,

He points a spoon at Daniel.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

But you? What is your role in this
little gang?

Daniel looks around the table uncomfortably. He doesn't know
what to say.

ALFY

He's the Cowboy, like you.

The old lady makes her way to the children first. She fills
Gillo's bowl with a steaming heap of pintos. He smiles
thankfully at her and digs in.

COWBOY

No, no, there's only one Cowboy.
No... you are the compass, I think.

DANIEL

Me? I'm never sure which way to go.

COWBOY

Yes, well neither is the compass.
It can only point to true north,
but it cannot tell you which is the
way you should go.

His mom fills his bowl.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

Thank you, dear Mama. She is the
compass for our gang, my Mama. She
is always pointing to the truth,
though we may not always choose to
go in that direction. Do you
understand?

Daniel shakes his head, his eyes locked in the Cowboy's
gentle stare.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

True North is just a direction, it
cannot be attained as a
destination. Often times, our
destination will take us in a much
different direction than we
intended.

(MORE)

COWBOY (CONT'D)

But the compass keeps the men orientated. Like a sun dial, its heart will always point to the truth, no matter which way we choose to go.

EXT. THE BUNK HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Daniel and Gillo stand out in the yard, peeing into the grass.

DANIEL

Don't ever do that again.

GILLO

What?

DANIEL

The pistol, that shit with The Cowboy. You could have got us killed. All of us.

Gillo pulls up his pants. He huffs and walks back toward the house.

GILLO

I saved us. I'm the gun hand.

Daniel catches him, turns him around.

DANIEL

You can't go off and start killing someone every time there's trouble.

Gillo pulls away from Daniel.

GILLO

He was hurting mom. You didn't see what he what he did to her!

Daniel grabs him again.

DANIEL

I meant...I'm sorry, I just...I don't want to see you hurt, Gillo.

He hugs his little brother. Gillo resist for a second then responds with an embrace. He hugs Daniel tight, his arms squeezed against his coat.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I don't know about this guy. We
have to be careful, everyone's up
to something.

His little brother looks at him and nods suspiciously.

INT. THE COWBOY'S TRUCK - DAY

Daniel rides in the front passenger seat, the other three are
packed into the crew cab. The Cowboy smokes and drives.

COWBOY
What is your plan?

DANIEL
We are meeting my parents in
Monterrey, then I don't know.
Texas, I guess.

COWBOY
Texas is a beautiful place. Lots of
different people. Lots of good
things there.

DANIEL
Why are you so nice to us?

COWBOY
It doesn't always have to be pain
and suffering. I don't like seeing
all the little children sad and
crying all the time. But I have a
job, with bosses that expect
things...Sometimes it's nice to do
things a little differently,
though. Besides, forty seven
hundred dollars is more than my cut
for moving ten of you across.

Alma leans forward from her spot between the other two boys
in the back.

ALMA
Thank you.

The Cowboy glances in the rearview mirror at her and then
back to Daniel.

COWBOY
They are from the south. But you
sound like a Mexican. Did you meet
on the train?

ALMA

Daniel and Gillo saved us, from a group of punks trying to beat us up.

COWBOY

Saved them twice now, huh?

DANIEL

It's all Gillo, he's the brave one.

COWBOY

Why aren't your parents with you now?

DANIEL

There was trouble in the city, with the gang.

COWBOY

Which one?

DANIEL

East Side Barrio.

COWBOY

Yes, they are trouble. They're run by an old cartel thug.

DANIEL

Mr. Vega.

COWBOY

That's right. You know of him?

Gillo leans forward, looks at The Cowboy thru the rearview mirror.

GILLO

I killed his son. I killed him with a knife.

DANIEL

Shut up, Gillo. It wasn't Sergio.

The Cowboy stares back at Gillo.

COWBOY

You killed Sergio Vega?

Gillo nods at him through the mirror, eyes locked on with steely resolve.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
Well... I better watch out then.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NORTOS CAMP - DAY

The COWBOY's LIEUTENANT, herds a line of boys from a long dining table. His cellphone rings.

LIEUTENANT
(on the phone)
Yeah, boss? Uh huh? Uh huh...
really? No shit? The little one?
Cold little fucker. Yeah, I'll
check into it. Yeah. Yeah, but hey,
money's money is what the Bosses
always say. Alright. I'll text you
their response.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - DAY

The Cowboy hangs up the phone and walks back toward the gas pumps. The kids look out the window as he approaches.

INT. THE COWBOY'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The Cowboy swings open his door and hops in. He slides the cellphone into the middle console and starts the engine.

DANIEL
Everything OK?

COWBOY
Yeah, just checking on Mama. We're
almost to Monterrey, let's go find
your mom, huh?

They pull out from the gas station and back to the highway. Daniel stares at the phone with unease. His eyes shift to the Cowboy then to the gun at his hip. He reaches over his coat pocket to feel for his own gun.

Nothing. He stuffs his hand inside, pulls out only the dead phone.

Daniel's eyes flick to The Cowboy again. The man stares straight ahead.

Daniel swings over his shoulder and looks back toward the others.

Alma smiles from the middle. Alfie watches out the window from behind The Cowboy, unaware of the attention. Gillo stares back at Daniel, blank faced.

GILLO

What?

DANIEL

Nothing.

GILLO

What are you looking at me for?

Daniel's trying to be inconspicuous. He folds his hand like a pistol, tries to show it to Gillo.

DANIEL

Nothing, just checking on you?

He silently mouths the word "gun?"

GILLO

What? Quit looking at me. Turn around.

Daniel frowns at him with frustration.

DANIEL

You OK then?

GILLO

Turn around, I'm fine! Quit looking at me!

The Cowboy looks at them, irritated.

COWBOY

Stop it both of you! Jesus, you two certainly are brothers.

Daniel huffs and turns back around.

INT. THE COWBOY'S TRUCK - DRIVING - LATER

The phone beeps in the console. Daniel's eyes flick to the Cowboy as he reaches for it.

The Cowboy flips open the phone and his eyes dash from the road to the screen.

Daniel watches in anticipation.

The Cowboy reads the message then flips the phone off and slides it back in the console. He looks back to the road in silence.

Daniel bites his lip, waits for a moment then reaches for the phone.

The Cowboy snatches his wrist before he reaches it, turns to Daniel with menacing eyes.

DANIEL

Ca... Can I call my dad? I'll just call him real fast.

COWBOY

Change of plans!

The Cowboy slams on the brakes and the truck heaves forward. Daniel's head crashes into the dash. The kids in the back shriek. The truck slides to a gravelly halt and The Cowboy has his pistol out, leveled on Daniel's head.

ALFY

What's going on?! Wait!

COWBOY

These boys are a hot commodity my little business associate. Turns out, there's a pretty little payoff hanging round their necks right now.

Daniel is groaning, holding his bloodied nose.

ALFY

I thought we had a deal?

COWBOY

We have a deal, for your sister and for your freedom. You two get out. You're free to go.

ALFY

What about our friends?

COWBOY

Get out now or the deals off! I'll haul your pretty little sister to the bathhouse and put her up with the rest of them. Get out.

Alfy reluctantly opens the door.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
You other two are going back with
me.

The Cowboy grabs his phone, flips quickly to a contact and hits call. The phone begins to ring.

MAN ON PHONE (O.S.)
Yeah boss?

COWBOY
(on the phone)
Hold on, hold on...

The Cowboy points his pistol toward Daniel's coat pocket.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
You ease that little pistol out
real slow. Put it on the dash.

DANIEL
I don't have it.

COWBOY
What?

DANIEL
I don't have the pistol.

The sound of the hammer clicking snaps from the backseat. The Cowboy barely looks.

MAN ON PHONE (V.O.)
Felipe, you there?

BOOM! The gunshot pops the sound from the cab with an explosion of vacuous ringing.

Blue smoke and shredded seat cushioning expel into the air.

The Cowboy wrenches and slams to his left with a grunt. His own gun fires errantly.

Daniel's eyes clench closed as the gun explodes right across from him. The window behind his head shatters.

Alfy spills from the truck, dragging Alma by the arm behind him.

ALFY
RUN! GET OUT!

He pulls her out and they fall to the pavement together.

The cowboy sucks air and looks across the backseat in shock.

Gillo rises over the middle seat-back, Daniel's pistol sliding up and over in front of him. He aims it into The Cowboy's face.

The Cowboy swings his pistol up now, turns it to Gillo's head.

Daniel screams, reaches for The Cowboy's hand.

EXT. THE ROAD - BESIDE THE STOPPED TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

BA-BOOM!

Both pistols fire simultaneously. The back windshield explodes and blood splashes across the driver side window.

Silence save for a dense ringing.

Alma screams and clutches her ears. Alfy rises, runs toward the truck.

ALFY
Daniel!? Gillo!?

He slides through the gravel and reaches the open back door. He climbs up in the cab.

Gillo stares over the backseat at The Cowboy's bloody face. Daniel, wide eyed and shocked, leans over the body. He still holds the man's wrist up in his hands.

The Cowboy's gun is smoking across Gillo's face. The gun in Gillo's hand is smoking into The Cowboy's bloody head.

Then Gillo begins to scream.

A primal, lung clearing cry of rage and release. He completely empties his lungs, heaves and begins screaming again. His eyes swell with tears.

Daniel drops the dead man's hands and grabs Gillo's head. He turns the screaming boy's face to his.

Their eyes lock and Daniel breaks into tears.

He squeezes his little brother's head tight and cries. He wraps his arms around Gillo and pulls him into a hug. Gillo just sobs.

EXT. THE ROAD - BESIDE THE STOPPED TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Daniel and Gillo huddle in the dirt beside the truck. Alfy stands over them. The sun begins to set behind them.

ALFY

We should go soon, someone will be coming down the road.

No one moves.

ALFY (CONT'D)

Please, friends. We should go.

Daniel looks up to him.

DANIEL

We have no water, no food, no money. Where can we go?

Alma slides beside Gillo. She hugs him tight. The little boy just sits and stares into the darkened pickup.

ALFY

You have to get up, not give up! We can walk to Monterrey. You heard him, he said it wasn't far. We can take his truck, I can drive!

ALMA

No, Alfy. I don't want to get in there.

DANIEL

No more trucks, no more trains. I'm finished, Alfy. I have no hope. We are lost. Every path leads to violence and trouble.

ALFY

Your dad is meeting you there. GET UP!

He bends down and grabs Daniel by the shoulders.

ALFY (CONT'D)

Get up! You can't give up! You get up!

Alma pops up suddenly, she's pointing down the road behind them.

ALMA

A car... or a van or something!
Someone's coming!

ALFY

We have to go! It may be his men
looking for him!

Daniel pulls Gillo to his feet.

DANIEL

The packs?

ALMA

There's no time! They're coming!

The kids are up and heading into the desert.

EXT. MORLITTO'S VAN - MOMENTS LATER

From over the driver's side wheel. Zipping lines of brown and tan. A paintbrush sunset framing the blurred landscape of desert dust and stone.

The hum of fast spinning rubber on road.

Ahead, The Cowboy's truck.

Slowing now as the van approaches. Turning slightly to the right. The dust and rock spit of a tire quickly crossing from pavement to dirt.

The tire spins across gravel and grit, slides to a halt.

A ringing cellphone echoes out from the Cowboy's truck ahead.

BEANO (O.S.)

What the hell is this?

The whining clunk of the van door opening.

The tire bounces slightly as the vehicle's weight ratio recalibrates.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Morlitto shoves Anita down across the seat. He leans in close and whispers in her ear.

MORLITTO

Don't get any big ideas, baby.

EXT. THE DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Alfy looks over his shoulder as they run. He turns back and grabs his sister's shoulders.

ALFY
Get down! Get down! They're
stopping!

He pulls Alma to the ground behind some scrub bush. Daniel and Gillo drop down beside them. The kids watch through the scrub as the men exit the van.

EXT. THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Beano approaches the truck cautiously. The back driver side door is ajar. Red streaks and dark chunks obscure the view through the driver's window.

Flaco moves around from the back of The Cowboy's truck. He reaches the cab and looks in through the open passenger door.

FLACO
Holy shit!

Beano pokes his head in through the other side.

BEANO
Fucking gross!

Morlitto approaches last. He goes straight to the driver's door and opens it. The dead Cowboy slumps halfway out behind the opening door.

Morlitto steps back to avoid the brains pouring onto the pavement from the back of the man's head. The Cowboy hat slides down and plops over the pile.

MORLITTO
Shit... It's the fucking Cowboy.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - BESIDE THE STOPPED TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

MORLITTO
Drag this asshole out, let's check
his pockets.

Beano looks at him incredulously.

BEANO
You drag him out. I'm not touching
that shit.

Flaco comes around the front. He's shaking his head.

FLACO

Man, Morlitto we should roll on.
This is some fucked up Nortos'
shit. This place could get real
hot, man.

MORLITTO

Shut the fuck up and check him out.

The other two just stare at each other.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

Fuck it, you fucking clowns!

He reaches across the body and unsnaps the safety belt. The Cowboy falls most the way out of the truck and to the ground. Morlitto grabs him by the elbows and tugs him out into the street.

MORLITTO (CONT'D)

This dude's gotta have some dope
or some crank, proolly. Check out
the truck, you fucking pussies.

Beano shakes his head and looks at Flaco. Flaco frowns back at him.

FLACO

This place is fucking hot, man.

MORLITTO

Fucking CHECK IT OUT!

Beano curses and turns to the truck. Flaco jogs back around to the other side, looks in the backseat.

FLACO

Hey, look! Look at this shit!

He holds up two of the kids back packs. Morlitto stands up and walks toward him. He sees the packs and stops at the bed of the truck. He calculates.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Anita raises her head slightly, just enough to see over the front seat and through the front windshield.

She sees Flaco and the backpacks, recognizes them immediately. Concern overtakes her.

EXT. THE DESERT - BEHIND THE SCRUB - CONTINUOUS

The kids see the men clearing the body, watch as the skinny one holds up their packs. Alfy crouches lower and looks to Daniel.

ALFY

Oh shit...

ALMA

Are they going to find us?

Daniel lays low to the scrub, looking back at Alfy.

Over Alfy's shoulder he sees trucks. Trucks coming up the road toward the men. He raises his head back up.

DANIEL

More trucks!

The kids turn and watch as three Nortos trucks roll into view.

EXT. THE ROAD - BESIDE THE STOPPED TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Morlitto cranes his head to the road. He spots the truck.

MORLITTO

Heads up you clowns, fucking company.

Beano bangs his head on the door backing out in a hurry. Flaco rolls around toward Morlitto for a better view.

FLACO

Oh shit! Fucking Nortos!

EXT. THE DESERT - BEHIND THE SCRUB - CONTINUOUS

The trucks slide to halt a few yards from the van. Men are screaming at each other.

Three men jump from the back of the first truck and head to the van. They set up, ready to flank at the rear of the van.

Dogs bark and yelp from the back of the third truck.

A man with an AK stands up behind the cab of the second, steadying himself over the top.

Morlitto backs toward the otherside of The Cowboy's truck. Beano pulls a pistol and climbs back into the cab as best he can manage.

A NORTOS MAN walks toward them. Flaco moves in to explain.

NORTOS MAN
What the fuck is this?

FLACO
No, no, we just found him here. He was already dead.

NORTOS MAN
What the fuck?

FLACO
No, no, no it wasn't us, man!

NORTOS MAN
Hey! They killed him! FELIPE'S DEAD!

The man points at the body in the street. He pulls a sawed off shotgun up at Flaco.

Morlitto fires first, killing the man yelling at Flaco.

An eruption of gunfire.

Flaco is shredded by the man in the second truck.

The three at the van begin to slide towards the front, using the vehicle as cover. One of them looks out too soon and Morlitto drops him with a headshot.

INT. MORLITTO'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Bullets and glass explode over Anita's head. She screams and presses as low as she can.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Another man rushes from the last truck, a booming shotgun unloading in a cloud of gunsmoke.

The kids watch, ducking behind the scrub as the shooting heightens into a frenzy of pops and cracking gunfire.

Beano bursts out from the passenger side door and starts running left to right away from the gunfight.

Beano runs, stumbles,

POP! His head explodes in a pink burst and his fat body slaps to the pavement.

Smoke hangs over the road like a heavy fog descending.

Morlitto pulls The Cowboy's AK from the cab. He snarls over the hood of the pickup and fires on the Nortos.

The one with the shotgun goes down. The two at the van swing out and open fire on Morlitto's spot behind the truck.

Morlitto staggers back with a yelp and drops behind the truck in a crouch.

NORTOS MAN 2
Halt! Cease Fire, Cease Fire!

Morlitto pops up, fires his last few rounds. He curses as the rifle clicks empty.

NORTOS MAN 2 (CONT'D)
We got you, pendejo! Give up now,
while you're still breathing!

Morlitto drops the rifle and begins to run. He's wounded, cursing over his shoulder and running away.

NORTOS MAN 2 (CONT'D)
DOGS!

They release the two pitbulls.

The dogs bound out of the truck and dart across the road past the van.

Morlitto runs, limping.

The men laugh as the dogs pass the bullet riddled truck and hit full stride behind Morlitto.

Beano's body is sprawled face down ahead, pink and red bubbling from his skull.

Morlitto stumbles and grunts as he passes the fat corpse. The dogs are snarling right behind him. He draws his knife and turns.

The first one bounces through the air, lunging with vicious white teeth.

The second bites his calf, pulls him back in a meat tearing frenzy.

He screams and tries to slash but the first dog catches his arm and pulls him completely down to the pavement.

He wails and cries. The dogs bite and rip in a wild fury.

Morlitto disappears into a frenzied cloud of snapping jaws and fur.

EXT. THE DESERT - BEHIND THE SCRUB - CONTINUOUS

The kids watch as the Nortos' survey the scene. The dogs are down the road, grappling over Morlitto. The men are helping their wounded.

NORTOS MAN 2
Santo, Demonio, come!

He walk out past The Cowboy's truck, hailing the dogs.

NORTOS MAN 2 (CONT'D)
Hey enough! Come here!

The dogs separate from Morlitto's mangled body. They snarl and snap at each other and head back to their master.

One stops and juts its nose to the air. It turns its head toward the scrub, sniffing.

ALFY
Oh no... oh no, no, no.

DANIEL
Shhh... don't move. Freeze..

The man collars one dog and calls for the other.

NORTOS MAN 2
Hey! Demonio! Come! What the fuck dog?

He starts walking toward the pitbull.

Morlitto moans and tries to move.

The Nortos man looks back at him, surprised.

NORTOS MAN 2 (CONT'D)
Holy shit, this one's still alive.

The free dog growls and breaks toward the scrub.

The Nortos man is stands over Morlitto now, calling back to the others.

NORTOS MAN 2 (CONT'D)
 I never seen anyone survive both
 the dogs! Hey man, how you feeling?
 Haha! You look like shit, dude.

The dog races closer, its mouth dripping red.

Alfy moves to stand and run, panicked. Daniel grabs his
 shoulder, throws his other arm across Alma.

DANIEL
 Don't! Don't run! Easy.

The pit stops just short of their scrub, it growls and snaps
 in their direction.

Gillo steadies the pistol at the snarling dog.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
 No, Gillo... Don't...

The dog twist and barks, bites the air. It is eager for a
 chase.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
 Please... Gillo... just wait,
 please don't...They will find us.

Gillo lowers the pistol, trembling.

A gunshot pops at the road and the dog jumps at the sound. It
 turns back and runs away. The Nortos man holsters his smoking
 pistol and walks away from Morlitto's corpse.

NORTOS MAN 2
 Get over here you stupid dog! We're
 not chasing rabbits today!

The kids crumple in an exhausted heap together.

Gillo tosses the pistol in the dirt.

EXT. THE DESERT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The remaining Nortos men gather their wounded and begin
 loading back up.

NORTOS MAN 3 begins toward the van.

NORTOS MAN 3
 What about the van? Looks like it's
 in good shape.

NORTOS MAN 2
 We don't have anyone left to drive
 it. Maybe I'll come back for it.

The man stops just as he reaches the back door. He glances in
 and shrugs.

NORTOS MAN 3
 OK, your call.

NORTOS MAN 2
 We need to get Felipe back, his
 mama is going to be a mess.

A man jumps in each of the Nortos's vehicles and they spin
 them around, quickly disappear down the road.

EXT. THE DESERT - BEHIND THE SCRUB - CONTINUOUS

Alfy watches them go and then cautiously stands. Daniel rises
 next to him.

Only the corpses of the three clowns and their van remain.

The sun is setting just beyond the mountain range, now far
 off to the west.

ALFY
 What do you want to do?

DANIEL
 We go north, to Monterrey.

Alfy stares at the bodies in the street.

ALFY
 Who do you think they were?

DANIEL
 I don't care.

Daniel scoops Gillo to his feet. The younger boy is pale,
 exhausted beyond relief. Alma takes Gillo's arm, tosses it
 over her shoulder.

ALMA
 I'll help him. You lead the way.

Daniel nods and looks back to the sunset. He cover his eyes
 with the blade of his palm, stares into the sun for a second
 then turns to his right.

DANIEL

We follow the road. It will be dark soon so we must stay clear of any passing headlights.

Alfy steps up next to him. He nods approvingly.

ALFY

That's a good idea.

ALMA

You're a good compass. I think I will follow you forever.

They begin walking north, away from the carnage at the road.

EXT. THE DESERT ROAD - MORLITTO'S VAN - CONTINUOUS

Anita slides the side door open and spills into the dirt. Her hair is covered in glass.

She stumbles to her feet, fighting to free herself from her duck tape binds.

She wrenches free, first one hand and then the other. Desperately, she runs to the kids backpacks lying in the road.

She reaches them and falls to her knees. She picks one up and hold it close, inspecting it thoroughly.

She begins to wail.

EXT. THE DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Gillo stops walking, turns his head to the side. Daniel stops beside him.

DANIEL

Come on, Gillo, we have to keep going.

Gillo ignores him, continues turning around, certain he hears a familiar cry.

GILLO

Mom.

DANIEL

What?

He follows his brother's gaze, turns and sees her in middle of the road, kneeling over their backpacks.

GILLO
Mom! Mama!

Gillo runs to her.

EXT. THE DESERT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Anita hears her boy's call. She looks up and sees them, sees Gillo running toward her.

She gasp and jumps up, dashes toward him.

ANITA
Gillo! Daniel! Oh my God!

Anita breaks from the road, reaches her little boy and drops to her knees before Gillo. Gillo tackles her, eyes wide in confusion and excitement. She hugs him desperately.

Gillo begins to cry.

Daniel rushes toward them. He reaches them and collapses beside Gillo. Anita cries and hugs them tight.

Daniel wipes tears from his eyes and searches over her shoulder.

DANIEL
Dad?

Anita just looks at him and shakes her head. She runs a hand through his hair and squeezes him into her neck.

ANITA
Oh, my boys...I found you...Oh
thank you Jesus, for my boys.

DANIEL
We didn't want to leave you. We
wanted to stay with you at the
hospital.

ANITA
No, you had to go.

GILLO
What do we do now? Are we going
home?

ANITA

I don't know, littlebug.

Daniel looks back at the twins for a moment then turns back to his mom and brother.

DANIEL

We keep going to Texas. All of us...together.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - EVENING

The nurses walk down the hall, clipboards in tow. They approach a small group of men arguing. It's the Doctor and a male nurse, arguing with Vega's Attendant and the Gang Doctor.

DOCTOR

Mr. Vega should not be moved yet.
He remains in critical condition.

GANG DOCTOR

Normally I would agree but certain considerations..

ATTENDANT

He will not be happy if he wakes up here, in this dump.

DOCTOR

Dump? We do the best we can! It's just not safe to move him tonight!

The nurses pass the men and smile. The old nurse turns to the younger one.

NURSE

Go along, I'll just be a minute.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - VEGA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The beeping pulse of a heart monitor. Oxygen tanks seeping through plastic hoses and splints.

Mr. Vega lies under an assortment of tubes and hosing. His chest heaves slowly to the rhythm of a ventilator.

The old nurse checks his charts, adjust a few dials on the equipment beeping next to the bed. She straightens his pillow and sits on the bed beside him. She wipes a line of drool from his whiskered cheek.

NURSE

My son's name was Julio. He used to love to play in the street at the corner by the old church, there in the street with all the other children. They were good kids just playing like kids should do. It was a safe place and this was a good part of the city then.

The Nurse pulls a syringe from her lab coat. She takes a hold of the old man's arm and turns it over to expose the veiny underside.

A poison warning flashes across the label of the syringe as she spins it into position over his flesh.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Then you and your men came and ruined all of that. You started peddling your poison to the children. You started beating and killing and scaring everyone.

She pinches at his arm, drawing up a vein.

NURSE (CONT'D)

You have destroyed so many lives, broken so many families.

Vega's eyes blink open and he sees her. His face is panicked. He's struggling to speak through the tubes jammed down his throat. The heartbeat monitor begins to excite.

NURSE (CONT'D)

You got my Julio hooked on your drugs, on your poison. This is for him and that poor woman and her boys, and all the others.

She pokes the needle into his arm, slowly begins depressing the poison into his veins.

He struggles to pull away from her. The old nurse tightens her grip and holds him close, only releasing her iron grasp after all the poison is completely emptied from the little syringe. She leans in close and whispers in his ear.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Say hello to the Devil.

FADE OUT: