

THE SIXTH SUN

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WASTELAND - NIGHT

Vast. Desolate. Ice stretches to the horizon. No sign of a coming day. In the distance, the ruins of snow-covered city.

A small ember of light glows in the distance: a volcano. The snow reflects a faint crimson light from the volcano's core. Humanity's last refuge in a frozen wasteland.

INT. FARM CAVES - CAVERN - ARTIFICIAL DAYLIGHT

Artificial sun lamps cast harsh light over rows of stunted crops growing in volcanic soil. A light fog born of humidity.

Her face etched with quiet determination, CITA, 33, drips sweat and hums as she works her dirty hands on the soil. She radiates quiet strength. Long years of working the farms have toned her muscles, made her strong in body and mind.

A hummingbird necklace restricted tight to her neck catches the light and sparkles emerald.

She harvests beans one by one, placing them into a small cloth pouch at her waist.

Nearby, a HARVESTER accidentally knocks over a small basket of harvested corn. Kernels scatter across the ground.

The Harvester moves on to his next patch, but notices Cita look around to see if anyone else notices the kernels.

HARVESTER

They're all yours if you think
they're worth the back pain.

Cita watches him move on. She walks over, picks them up one by one and places them in a second pouch hidden on her waist.

As she walks back to her original area, she spots something in the ground. A single bean stuck in between two rocks.

She drops to her knees and retrieves it with nimble fingers, humming all the while. Places it into the secret pouch.

INT. CITY PARK - DAY

Rectangular brownstone homes built into the walls. A humongous sun lamp illuminates the city from on high.

Bats fly around. Some hang from stalactites as they sleep.

A large Ceiba tree dominates a circular park carved into the center of the floor.

On the far wall of the cavern, a multi-story palace stands tall in the stone, its exterior bright reds, blues, yellows.

Cita walks amongst the VILLAGE PEOPLE, their faces weary, bodies tired, an overall feeling of listlessness pervasive.

CHILD'S VOICE (V.O.)

Cita! Cita!

Cita turns and sees two children, ATZI, 8, and CAYO, 12, run up and hug her.

Behind them, their mother NAHUATL, 33, dressed in a pristine, regal uniform, her long black hair in a ponytail.

NAHUATL

Now now, children, leave Cita be.
Can't you see she is tired from
work?

CITA

That's alright. I think I can
stop for a few minutes for my
favorite people.

Cita bends down and returns the hugs. She looks around. No one around pays any attention to them.

CITA

Want to see something?

The kids nod. Cita pulls out some kernels from the secret pouch and gives them each a few. She looks at Nahuatl.

CITA

Just promise not to tell your
mother where you got them from.

The kids turn and look at Nahuatl. She looks off into the distance, pretending not to witness.

CITA
Run along now. And don't forget
your prayers.

Cita rises and walks to Nahuatl.

CITA
Where is Xochi? I thought she was
with you.

NAHUATL
She is helping her father at
home.

CITA
Helping? With what?

Nahuatl gulps. She looks down, dodging Cita's eyes.

CITA
(concerned)
With what?

EXT. CITA'S HOME - DAY

A small dwelling carved into the rock. Cita rushes in.

INT. CITA'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Everything fastidiously organized. Each cooking utensil,
garment, humble possession with its precise place.

The type of organization that doesn't belong in such a place.

Cita's husband ACOPA, 38, face wrinkled from years of toil,
hair thinning, sits with his leg wrapped in a bloody bandage.

Beside him sits a thin teen, XOCHI, 16, face stretched with
worry. She wipes his face with a damp rag to cool him.

Cita stands in the doorway and looks, her face struck with
horror. She sets her things down and approaches.

CITA
My love. What has happened?

XOCHI
Father broke his leg, mother. He
was trapped under a boulder.
Ichtaca and Tenoch brought him.

Cita sits next to Acopa and cradles his head. He winces.

ACOPA
We hit a hidden fissure.

CITA
You must see a doctor.

XOCHI
They said he won't be able to
return to work until he is
healed.

CITA
Hush, never mind that now. You
need strength.

Cita rushes to her things and pulls out the secret pouch.

Moves back to Acopa and removes the extra rations.

ACOPA
I told you to stop doing that.
The guards-

CITA
The guards see nothing. Eat.

Cita feeds him. Xochi retrieves water. Cita helps him drink.

He takes the glass on his own and drinks.

Cita looks at Xochi and notices something. This won't do! She reaches out and begins to rearrange her messy hair.

XOCHI
Mother, it's fine.

CITA
Stay still.

Xochi remains still, resigned, as Cita makes it look neater.

CITA
Better.

Cita turns to Acopa.

CITA
I will call you a doctor while I
am at prayer. You must have
medicine to ease the pain.

ACOPA
I'm coming with you.

CITA
Your brain must have been
injured, too, if you expect me to
let you up.

ACOPA
Try and stop me.

Cita looks to Acopa, who glares back at her. He can be stubborn, too. Her expression softens, an appreciation of his resolve.

INT. SHRINE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI - DAY

Obsidian altars reflect the dim, reddish light from old braziers. Ancient carvings of Gods adorn the walls.

In somber rows before the central altar kneel WORSHIPPERS.

Among them, Cita and Xochi help Acopa stay upright.

At the front of the assembly, HUEHUETL, 68, a priest with ritual markings painted across his weathered face, stands.

He raises an obsidian blade to his palm and slices. His face remains still, not a flinch. Blood wells up in his hand...

...and drips onto the black altar below. Steam emerges from the altar upon contact, then evaporates.

HUEHUETL
The gods have molded us. It is by
their hands that we are guided.
Our path lays not in questions,
but in service and thanks for
what we have been given.

The Worshippers murmur in agreement. Some touch their own ritual scars.

Huehuetl cuts his other hand. Blood drips. Steam rises, vanishes.

HUEHUETL

They test us. We must prove our worth. May humility in the face of silence and darkness earn us favor. Until we meet again in the light of a new day.

The Worshippers bow their heads. Cita's eyes remain fixed on the spot where the blood vanished.

Her hand unconsciously touches rubs her hummingbird necklace. A constant presence in the face of uncertainty.

Xochi notices, and steals a glance at her mother's wide eyes.

EXT. SHRINE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI - AFTER THE CEREMONY

Cita turns to Acopa and Xochi, waives them on.

CITA

I'll be right behind you with medicine. Get your father in bed with enough water and a warm rag.

XOCHI

Yes, Mother.

She turns to Acopa, stern faced.

CITA

And you. Allow yourself to rest.

Xochi leans her father against her as they head off. Cita turns and approaches Huehuatl, who watches her.

HUEHUETL

I heard about Acopa. We must hope the Gods heal him quickly.

CITA

The gods...

Cita looks down for a moment, then back up. A quick flash of anger, then sadness.

CITA

Do you truly believe they still care? It has been so long...

HUEHUETL

You question too much, child. Do
you see how the blood vanished?
They consume our sacrifice.

CITA

Yet we remain in darkness.

HUEHUETL

You are burdened with much
weight, Cita. Your husband. Your
daughter. The memory of your
father. The ghost of your mother.

Cita's expression hardens at the mention of her mother.

CITA

I carry what I must. There is no
other choice.

Huehuetl places his bandaged hand on her shoulder.

HUEHUETL

There are burdens we are meant to
carry. And those we must learn to
release. Sometimes our greatest
strength is in what we choose to
let go.

Cita looks at the ceiling, where faded paintings depict the
gods creating and destroying various forms of suns. Stares
longingly at the blank space reserved for the Sixth Sun.

INT. DINING HALL - PALACE - NIGHT

A massive obsidian table spans the length of the chamber.

Faded murals of ancient gods line the dust-collected walls.

CHIEF TEMILO, 54, corpulent, ornate headdress, feasts on an
array of delicacies. A man who has never been told "no" and
would never dream of going without.

Around him, ADVISORS and OFFICIALS nibble on modest portions.
Eyes stealing glances at Temilo, hoping not to become the
object of his attention.

Nahuatl, one of the servants that stands against the walls,
moves silently to refill goblets and replace empty platters.

From a corner seat, MACUIL, 70, a gaunt official leads over to Temilo as the others engage in conversation:

MACUIL
The farm yields continue to decrease, my lord. The people are growing restless. Starvation is sure to follow.

Temilo tears into a chunk of meat. Juices run down his chin.

TEMILO
The people grow restless because they expect too much.

He gestures to him with a half-eaten drumstick.

TEMILO
Do they not have light? Warmth? The volcano sustains while the god's slumber.

MACUIL
But the rations-

TEMILO
Will be reduced again! The weak shall perish and make room for the strong. When the gods awake, they will be pleased with me.

Temilo lifts his goblet for a sip. Finds it empty. Glares at the servants on the wall.

Nahuatl rushes over and fills up his cup and others nearby.

As she does so, her eyes drift to a parchment near Temilo's plate - a list of names with columns and markings.

She glimpses Acopa's name featured with a red mark beside it.

Temilo leans to his other side, where YAOTL, 43, a severelooking woman with ritual scars, sits.

TEMILO
The exile list is finalized?

YAOTL
All those unable to contribute. As ordered. The new additions marked in red. Injured, sick. The weakest.

TEMILO

Good. In seven days, we cleanse
ourselves of another burden.

YAOTL

Yes, your honor. If I may be
excused?

Temilo nods, resumes gorging himself.

Yaotl leaves. As Temilo turns once more to engage Macuill,
Nahuatl sneaks the list into her garment.

Looks around. Nobody saw.

INT. CITA'S HOME - NIGHT

Cita dabs a wet cloth on Acopa's forehead as he sleeps on a
pallet. Xochi sits nearby, weaving a small basket, lost in
the repetitive motions.

CITA

The weave is uneven on the left.

XOCHI

(sighing)

I'm almost finished, Mother.

CITA

It won't matter if it's finished
if it's done wrong.

Cita reaches over and undoes part of the weaving. Xochi's
expression tightens, annoyed but unwilling to start an
argument.

ACOPA

(weakly)

Let her be, Cita.

CITA

She needs to learn properly.

Cita moves to Acopa and adjusts his bandage, even though it
doesn't appear to need adjusting.

ACOPA

It's fine. It's comfortable.

CITA
It's loose. You'll get an
infection.

She tightens it. Acopa winces.

CITA
(to Xochi)
More water.

Xochi rises. Cita adjusts Acopa's blanket, then his pillow, then wipes his brow again.

ACOPA
Cita. Please. Sit, rest.

CITA
Somebody should stay up with you.

A soft KNOCK from the front door.

CITA
Who could that be?

Cita opens it to find Nahuatl, her face drawn with worry.

Nahuatl looks over Cita's shoulder and sees Acopa laid up.

Cita recognizes the severity on Nahuatl's face.

CITA
Xochi, watch your father. If his
fever raises even slightly, call
for me.

XOCHI
Yes, Mother.

EXT. CITA'S HOME - NIGHT

Nahuatl and Cita stand in the shadows. Nahuatl glances around, nervous.

NAHUATL
There's something you need to
see.

She produces the folded parchment. Hands trembling, she passes it to Cita.

CITA
What's this?

Nahuatl remains silent. Cita unfolds it. Her eyes scan it anxiously.

INSERT PARCHMENT:

Cita's finger scans down the list. Lands on Acopa's name.

She looks at Nahuatl, stunned.

CITA
We must burn this.

NAHUATL
Chief Temilo has already approved it.

Cita's hand instinctively clutches her hummingbird necklace for comfort.

NAHUATL
The red mark is for his injury.
That he can no longer work.

CITA
But he will heal!

Cita looks around, realizing she yelled. She quiets down.

CITA
He only needs time.

Cita looks to Nahuatl for an answer, but Nahuatl offers her a look of sympathy.

INT. CITA'S HOME - NIGHT

Cita enters slowly, her face ashen.

XOCHI
What is it, Mother?

Cita forces a smile, fools no one.

CITA
Nothing, child.

She moves to Acopa, who watches her with knowing eyes.

ACOPA
Nahuatl never brings "nothing."

Cita busies herself adjusting his bandage.

ACOPA
Stop with the bandage and speak.

CITA
Your fever is rising. Xochi, more wet rags.

Xochi hesitates, looks between her parents, unsure.

ACOPA
Xochi, leave us for a moment.

Xochi nods and exits. Acopa grabs Cita's wrist, pulls her closer. Stares deeply into her eyes.

ACOPA
Tell me.

Cita hesitates. Pulls the list from her garment, hands trembling.

He takes the list. Scans quickly through the names. His expression hardens.

CITA
The next one is in seven days.

ACOPA
Hmm.

CITA
We can go deeper into the mountain. There are unexplored caverns where-

ACOPA
And eat what?

CITA
We would find a way. Start our own crops with these seeds...

ACOPA
It would be a slow starvation instead of a quick freeze. There is no escape that way.

Cita squeezes his hand desperately.

CITA
I will not let you go.

INT. PALACE ENTRANCE - DAY

Grand obsidian doors tower above Cita. Two GUARDS stand at attention, spears tipped with glinting obsidian blades.

GUARD ONE
The chief sees no one regarding the list.

CITA
Please. It must be a mistake. He only needs time to heal. He is a great worker.

The guards exchange glances. One lowers his spear, menacingly.

Light catches the edge, creating a blood-red gleam.

Cita backs away, looks angrily up at the palace walls.

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Cita stands beside Acopa, who leans on a makeshift crutch near a narrow opening in the cavern wall. Bitter wind HOWLS through the gap.

Through it, the frozen wasteland extends endlessly under the black sky.

CITA
The guards change shifts at night. We could try then.

ACOPA
Look out there. No one can survive more than a few minutes. And I am in no shape to run.

CITA
Then I'll carry you.

ACOPA
And Xochi? You'll carry us both?

Cita stares through the gap, resentment in her eyes. There must be a way. She will be the one to find it.

INT. MEDICINE WOMAN'S DWELLING

Drying plants, bones, and strange concoctions in clay pots litter the home of TZITZITLINI, 75, in a multi-colored apron.

Cita places a beautiful copper cooking pot on the table.

CITA

This was the only thing my mother left me. The most valuable thing I own.

TZITZITLINI

A beautiful piece. Yes. But what good to me?

CITA

You could use it for medicine. Something to mend bone...

Tizitzitlini's wrinkled hand touches Cita's consolingly.

TZITZITLINI

Child, there is no potion that can heal shattered bones in days.

Cita pulls back in desperation.

CITA

There must be something. Anything!

TZITZITLINI

Only if the gods intervened.

CITA

The gods...

Tizitzitlini notices the spark in Cita's eyes at the mention.

TZITZITLINI

Be careful where such thoughts lead you, dear. Desperation may point to the divine, but the answers we find are rarely as we hope.

INT. SHRINE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI - NIGHT

Huehuetl tends the flame on the altar as Cita stands by him.

HUEHUETL

Even if I were able, let alone
willing, to grant passage, six
days is not enough time.

CITA

He will be gone in six days. Six
days! I will not have Xochi
experience the same loss I have.

HUEHUETL

What would you have me do, Cita?
I am sorry-

CITA

Sorry will not save him!

Cita bangs on the altar.

CITA

You once told me stories of
heroes who traveled to speak with
the gods. There is something in
those tales, I know it.

Huehuetl's expression turns grave as he considers Cita.

HUEHUETL

There is always truth in tales,
my dear girl. But not always
salvation.

CITA

I know no one will come save me.
But I care for my husband. My
family. I have to try.

Huehuetl looks to the circular carvings on the wall. Gestures
to them: five massive stone circles, each depicting a sun - a
sixth circle ominously empty.

HUEHUETL

The Five Suns. Each age of the
world, created and then destroyed
by the gods. Many years have
passed since the Fifth Sun fell.

CITA
And the Sixth?

HUEHUETL
Who can say? A god must be
willing to sacrifice their life
to rise. We can only pray that
one makes the choice.

Cita steps closer to the carvings, her determined reflection
visible in the polished stone of the empty circle.

HUEHUETL
There are legends of those with
divided souls. Those who exist
between life and death. Who may
walk the path of the underworld
while still living.

CITA
And what makes a divided soul?

Huehuetl approaches her.

HUEHUETL
I think you know.

He caresses her hummingbird necklace.

HUEHUETL
They bear a mark of both
worlds...one that does not
guarantee return.

Cita looks down at the necklace. It momentarily glows with
emerald and sapphire light.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

A riot erupts near the ration distribution center. HUNGRY
CITIZENS push against GUARDS. Shouts and cries fill the air.

Cita watches warily from the edge of the crowd. Xochi scans
the scene nervously at her side.

An ELDERLY COUPLE sneaks toward one of the cavern exits
clinging desperately to each other. Cita spots them, follows.
Xochi latches onto her mother.

XOCHI

What are they doing, mother? They will die.

The Elderly Couple embrace at the threshold to the outside world. They kiss, and then step through.

Through the opening, Cita watches horrified as they walk hand-in-hand into the wasteland.

CITA

Cover your eyes, my love.

Cita covers Xochi's eyes.

The cold overtakes the couple. They sink to their knees in the snow, still embracing.

Their bodies stiffen. Frost covers them. Dead in moments.

Cita's eyes well with tears. She turns angry, then determined.

INT. CITA'S HOME - NIGHT

Acopa and Xochi sleep, her head on his chest. Cita enters, ready to exit. She stops and stares at them.

Cita lays a note on the table for them to read upon awaking.

She bends over and gives them each a kiss. Tiptoes to the door.

Turns, looks once more at them with longing. Tears form in her eyes.

She hears Acopa's labored breathing, sees his face twist in pain. She steels herself, stands taller, and exits.

EXT. SHRINE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI - NIGHT

Cita stares up at the structure as it towers over her. She walks up the steps.

INT. SHRINE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI - NIGHT

Cita kneels before Huehuatl, her face resolute despite the fear in her eyes.

CITA

I will do whatever it takes. My family is worth any price.

HUEHUETL

I was afraid you would say that.

Huehuetl takes a peak out of the curtains, then shuts them. He walks back over to Cita and produces a small clay bowl.

HUEHUETL

The path between worlds is not meant for the living.

He looks at her sadly, she stares back at him without flinching. He cuts his palm with an obsidian blade, lets it fill the bowl.

HUEHUETL

Even if you find your way, the gods have not spoken in generations.

CITA

Then I will make them listen. If not for my husband, then for all of us.

HUEHUETL

Stubborn. Just like your mother.

CITA

And my father?

HUEHUETL

Your father... was a sweet man.

CITA

Like my husband.

HUEHUETL

Yes. Much like Acopa.

CITA

Then I have no choice.

Huehuetl mixes ash from the brazier with his blood until it forms a thick, dark paste. He dips his fingers into the mix.

HUEHUETL

These will mark you as a divided soul. You will gain passage into the underworld and to the gods whom you seek.

He draws intricate patterns on Cita's forehead, cheeks, arms.

As he does, they begin to pulse and writhe on her skin.

HUEHUETL

The path begins deep in the mines, far, far beyond where even the bravest workers venture. Follow the sound of dripping water until you can no longer hear it. Then do what most men never dream of.

He looks deep into her eyes.

HUEHUETL

Go towards the silence.

Cita winces as the symbols burn into her flesh.

HUEHUETL

Remember, Cita. The gods demand balance. To gain something, you must surrender something of equal or greater value.

CITA

I have nothing.

HUEHUETL

Then I pray you do not find what you seek.

Cita looks at her arms and sees the symbols contort. Her resolve falters. She looks up, momentarily uncertain at the task she is undertaking.

Huehuetl's expression softens. He gives her a sad half-smile in comfort.

HUEHUETL

Now close your eyes so that I can
put this on your eyelids.

CUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

INT. DEEP MINES - NIGHT

A torch in Cita's hand as she descends into an abandoned section of the mines. Long, unnatural shadows cast.

The flame illuminates a large patch of dark blood on a stone.

The sound of DRIPPING WATER echoes as the tunnel narrows.

Cita continues and bends around the curve. She makes a turn, another turn, and another, as the dripping QUIETS.

Cita continues forward, hesitant. She stops. No sounds of water. Only the loud beating of her frightened heart.

She turns down a passage that seems to absorb the light of her torch rather than reflect it. She pauses, takes one last look behind, and steps into the void.

INT. ENTRANCE - UNDERWORLD

Cita emerges into a vast cavern. Stalactites hang. At the far end, a massive stone archway covered in ancient carvings. It pulses with blood-red light like the heart of a great stone giant.

As she approaches, the symbols on her skin glow in response, matching the rhythm of the archway.

She takes a deep breath - and steps through.

INT. PORT ENTRANCE - TWILIGHT

An infernal twilight reveals a surreal, dark obsidian flooring that reflects the blood-red sky above.

Before her, a large gate of twisted bone and volcanic glass.

A ferry awaits at a river of black water that flows with unnatural stillness.

Near the gate, A GROUP OF SPIRITS in tattered garments shuffle forward in a line, translucent versions of human forms with vacant expressions. No spark of life, no hint of hope in this group.

At the front, a spirit guard, TENAMITL, gaunt and severe, herds them with a staff made of human spine. No gentile shepherd here, just cold, hard, ruthless.

Tenamitl's form appears more substantial. A tall, imposing figure adorned in ceremonial garb, an obsidian headdress. Cracks in his skin reveal blue-black light that seeps through his skin and dark exterior.

Cita watches warily as he hands over the chain to another SPIRIT GUARD, who scoffs at Tenamitl and spits at his feet.

The Spirit Guard leads the prisoners harshly onto a boat.

Once they set off, the Spirit Guard and his companions look back at Tenamitl and release a hearty set of laughs.

As Tenamitl turns to go, he stops, feeling something. His eyes dart over to Cita. The feathers of his headdress rise.

He approaches her at an incredible speed, as if transporting.

He walks a circle around her as she remains tense. A wolf sniffing his next meal.

CITA

Hello?

TENAMITL

Quiet.

He does another rotation. Eyes peering into Cita like he can see her soul.

TENAMITL

The scent of life. It clings to you like perfume.

He inspects the markings on her skin. One of his fingers traces a symbol on her arm. The marking flares at his touch.

TENAMITL

A divided soul. How...curious.

CITA

I seek passage to speak with the gods.

Tenamitl laughs derisively.

TENAMITL

You humans and your ridiculous stories. The living do not speak with gods. The living are devoured by them.

Cita clutches her hummingbird necklace. Tenamitl notices. His expression shifts upon sight - some sort of recognition.

He looks from the necklace to Cita's eyes. His eyes widen.

His face tilts with curiosity, or something more.

CITA

My husband has been sentenced to exile. Into the frozen wastes.

Tenamitl's feathers settle. He studies her with renewed interest.

TENAMITL

And you believe the gods will care about one mortal's fate? You are not special. But you are stupid to travel here.

CITA

It is time they gave us more than eternal night.

Tenamitl stops in front of her.

TENAMITL

My shift is over, oh divided one. I could guide you...

Tenamitl leans his head in close to hers.

TENAMITL

(wicked smile)
...for a price.

She pulls her head back in fear and disgust.

CITA

What price?

TENAMITL

Blood. Live blood here is... different.

Cita hesitates, then nods. If this is what she has to do to achieve her goal, it is a small price to pay.

TENAMITL

Very well.

Tenamitl produces a small obsidian knife. He yanks her hand, forcing the palm up and cuts a line. Collects it in a vial.

As the vial fills, his fissures glow brighter, more vibrant. He leers at the blood, hungry for more. Looks at the cut, forces himself to hold back.

TENAMITL

The underworld does not welcome the living, divided soul or otherwise. Stay close. Touch nothing. Speak only when necessary. And do as I say.

Cita nods, follows him towards the dock, where a small boat floats on top of the still, black water.

CITA

Have you done this before?

TENAMITL

Did you not hear? Speak only when necessary.

INT. BOAT - BLACK RIVER - TWILIGHT

Tenamitl poles the small craft across the unnaturally still water. The boat makes no sound, seems to glide.

Cita sits, rigid, and watches the shore recede behind them.

CITA

How far is it to the gods?

Tenamitl keeps his gaze on their surroundings.

TENAMITL

If anyone should ask why you are with me, I am delivering you for judgment. Should we be separated, you will say that you have made this journey alone. Understood?

He gives her a look. It's his way or no way. She nods.

TENAMITL

The gods are everywhere and
nowhere. One cannot simply walk
up and knock on their door.

A boat passes by them. Tenamitl tenses.

TENAMITL

Lay flat.

CITA

What?

TENAMITL

(through his teeth)

Get down.

Cita lays flat. A boat with TWO SPIRIT GUARDS passes in the other direction.

CITA

You are not supposed to help me.
Why are you?

TENAMITL

We need to reach Quetzalcoatl's temple. He alone may listen to a mortal's plea.

CITA

Then take me to him.

Tenamitl laughs, cold.

TENAMITL

It's not so easy. The temple's sealed by a gate. A calendar that requires two stones to open. Bluegreen stones of sky and earth.

Cita's hand goes to her necklace.

CITA

Where do we find these stones?

TENAMITL

The first lays with Tlacatzinacantli, the god of maize.

CITA
And the second?

TENAMITL
One step at a time. You can't
rush things.

CITA
My husband has six days before
exile. Every second counts.

TENAMITL
Time moves differently here. What
feels like hours may be minutes
in your world. Or days.

The boat drifts into a thick mist.

TENAMITL
The gods don't care about human
suffering. What makes you
different? Or are you so self
important?

CITA
Maybe you have no one you love,
but I made a vow.

She watches his back as he poles - just a bit harder.

TENAMITL
(quietly)
Vows and promises. Such mortal
stupidity.

TENAMITL
Tlacatzinacantli's domain lies
ahead.

Cita leans forward, peers into the mist.

TENAMITL
He is vain and cruel. In his
crown is one of the stones we
seek. The last divided soul to
seek an audience wound up as feed
for his dog.

CITA
How will we get it?

TENAMITL

I have not thought that far
ahead. Perhaps you could ask
nicely?

His mocking smile reveals a set of dirty, jagged teeth.

TENAMITL

Hide your fear when we arrive or
the gods will smell it and find
it appetizing. If they haven't
already sensed your beating
heart.

In the distance, a shore of black sand peeks through.

EXT. BLACK SHORE - TWILIGHT

Tenamitl secures the boat with a spike made of bone. He
extends a hand to Cita, but she waves it off and exits alone.

He grins, enjoys it.

TENAMITL

Stay close. Touch nothing. Eat
nothing.

CITA

What are you getting out of this?
Or are you expecting something
from me after?

TENAMITL

When people help us, we're better
off to accept it without asking
questions. Touch nothing. Eat
nothing. Speak only when spoken
to.

He walks up the shore. She watches him go. Turns and sees the
water, then turns back and follows him.

Corn husks CRUNCH underfoot as she catches up with him.

CITA

If I get the stones and reach
Quetzalcoatl...he will help me?

TENAMITL

It is a wonder you have any faith
at all, living in darkness and
squalor above.

They crest a hill. Cita freezes in wonder at the sight before them.

EXT. MAIZE CITADEL - TWILIGHT

A massive structure rises from the landscape - a palace made of colossal, translucent kernels of maize that grow from within with an amber light.

The citadel towers hundreds of feet high, its walls curved like the side of an enormous cob.

TENAMITL

The citadel of eternal harvest.
While your world starves, the
bounty here is endless.

Discordant MUSIC drifts from the structure. FLUTES play sinister melodies.

CITA

How do we get in?

TENAMITL

Not through the front.

He points to a procession of spirits carrying baskets of corn through a side entrance. Cita looks where he points.

TENAMITL

Wipe that look from your face.
Gods expect deference. It makes
them predictable.

INT. CORRIDOR - MAIZE CITADEL - TWILIGHT

Cita follows Tenamitl through narrow passages between enormous kernels. The walls pulse with light.

They pass SPIRIT SERVANTS carrying platters. Some appear human-like, others more insect than person.

The MUSIC grows louder. They hear LAUGHING and SHOUTING. The CLINKING of glasses.

Tenamitl pulls Cita into an alcove as a pair of GUARD SPIRITS with locust heads march past. They come face-to-face.

Tenamitl looks down at her necklace.

TENAMITL
Where did you get this?

Cita gives him a strange look.

TENAMITL
Nevermind. Come.

They continue forward. Emerge onto a balcony.

INT. FEAST HALL - MAIZE CITADEL - DAY

A vast chamber where hundreds of FERTILITY GODS recline at tables overflowing with spectral food.

The gods vary in appearance - some beautiful, others grotesque, all inhuman. These are beings used to getting everything they could possibly desire with the curl of a finger.

At the head of the largest table sits TLACATZINACANTLI, a massive deity: the body of a man, the head of a fruit bat.

Tlacatzinacantli's enormous ears twitch at each sound. His wings, folded behind him, occasionally stretch to full span.

Around his neck hangs a necklace of human teeth. Atop his head sits a crown of woven maize leaves.

In the center of the crown, a BLUE-GREEN STONE pulses with inner light.

CITA
That's it?

Cita's eyes fix on it, then widen as Tlacatzinacantli suddenly tilts his head, his ears rotating slightly.

The god's nostrils flare. He SNIFFS the air.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
Quiet! I said quiet!

He bangs the table, continues to sniff.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
I smell...life.

The hall falls silent. All eyes turn toward the balcony.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
Come out, come out wherever you
are. I can hear your heart
beating.

Tenamitl curses under his breath.

TENAMITL
I told you to be quiet. Stay
back.

He turns to go. She puts out a hand and stops him. He looks down, insulted that she would think it okay to touch him.

CITA
The stone-

He yanks free, furious.

TENAMITL
If you wish for death, there are
easier ways.

Cita stands speechless.

TENAMITL
Your husband has six days, yes?

CITA
Unless time has shifted.

Tenamitl considers her as their eyes lock in a tense moment.

TENAMITL
Face him alone. With no knowledge
of me. Unless you want me to
suffer your punishment, as well.

She studies him. Then gives the small nod of a head.

TENAMITL
Then go.

Tenamitl gives her a nudge to the rail of the balcony, in full view of the gods.

Cita turns hesitantly, watches him fade into the shadows, then turns to face the balcony's edge. The hall falls into shocked silence.

Tlacatzinacantli stands from his seat, his head tilted at an unnatural angle. His wings unfurl, partially.

He snaps. Behind Cita two LOCUST-HEADED GUARDS materialize.

INT. FLOOR LEVEL - FEAST HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The Guards throw Cita to the floor before Tlacatzinacantli.

Her body hits the obsidian with a painful THUD.

She looks up and sees many gods of varying grotesque forms.

Tlacatzinacantli looms over her.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
So...a living soul dares walk the
paths of the dead.

Tlacatzinacantli sniffs the air around Cita. A predator in full control of his cowering prey.

The Gods watch in anticipation, some licking their lips.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
You stink of mortality and
desperation. Who guided you
through the black waters?

Cita rises to her knees, then her feet. As she goes to stand, he pushes her back down.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
You will rise when told.

CITA
I have come to seek the gods and
ask for their mercy.

The Gods LAUGH, a cacophony of howls and shrieks. Wine spills from goblets.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
And why would a mortal be so
foolish?

CITA

My husband is to be exiled in the province of Chief Temilo. Sent to die in the frozen wasteland. I have come to plead for his life.

The LAUGHTER grows louder, more mocking. A female FERTILITY GODDESS with multiple breasts, an insect head, points at her.

FERTILITY GODDESS

She believes her husband more worthy than the thousands who've perished before!

HORNED GOD

Perhaps she should meet them!

Another round of LAUGHTER. Tlacatzinacantli circles Cita.

Inspects the marks on her skin.

The blue-green stone in his crown pulses with each step.

TLACATZAINACANTLI

One man. One insignificant life. You risked eternal torment for this?

CITA

Not just for him. For all of us.

The hall hushes.

CITA

Children grow without seeing daylight. Our crops wither. We starve while you...

Cita gestures to the overflowing tables.

TLACATZAINACANTLI

You dare lecture us? We know all. We see all.

He leans in close, his face inches from hers. He reveals his teeth - rotted. Cita maintains a straight face, unflinching.

TLACATZAINACANTLI

Humanity is a failed experiment. The Fifth Sun has set just as the first four. Why should we care if the rest of you freeze?

Cita glances at the stone in his crown. Then to the feasting Gods that surround her.

CITA
You lack purpose; a reason to go
on.

MURMURS ripple through the crowd.

CITA
You have little left of what you
once were. All glory gone. No
praise, no devotion, no
offerings. Surely you must wish
for more.

Tlacatzinacantli's ears twitch, angrily.

CITA
I seek Quetzalcoatl's temple. If
even one god shows compassion,
the people will remember.
Sacrifices will flow. Songs will
be sung in your name. You will
experience worship again.

FROM THE BALCONY

Tenamitl watches in disbelief of Cita's audacious courage
from behind a pair of curtains.

BACK WITH CITA

as she looks directly at Tlacatzinacantli.

CITA
Unless these faded pleasures are
all you desire.

The Gods exchange glances. Tlacatzinacantli's wings extend
fully now, casting Cita in shadow.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
You speak boldly for someone
so...fragile. You are not even
the first divided soul to plead
with us.

CITA
I ask for your help and provide
reason. I would not presume on
your good graces.

Tlacatzinacantli touches the stone in his crown.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
This is what brings you here...
One of the eyes, yes?

Cita doesn't answer, but her eyes betray her.

Tlacatzinacantli looks at her hummingbird necklace.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
I could part with it for a time.
For something of...equal value.

His gaze fixes on her necklace once more. The emerald hummingbird glimmers at her throat. She notices.

She touches it protectively. Worry crosses her face.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
You will surely not survive your quest. I must have something for when you fall.

Cita continues to look at her necklace. Clutches it. Desperately tries to think of another way.

CITA
(to herself)
Father...

TLACATZAINACANTLI
Unless your husband's life is worth less than a trinket.

CITA
It's not a trinket.

He grins menacingly. Cita is out of options.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
No. It is not.

Cita's hand trembles as it moves to the clasp at the back of her neck. She hesitates.

FERTILITY GODDESS
(whispering to
another deity)
Quetzalcoatl has the same one...

Cita's fingers shake, take a moment to work the clasp. The necklace comes loose.

As she pulls it off, the pale scarring on her neck shows where the chain has worn into her skin over the years.

Cita's breath catches. She holds the necklace before her, suspended between her fingers. With visible effort, she extends her hand toward Tlacatzinacantli.

The bat God grins, then snatches it. He examines it with gleeful eyes.

FERTILITY GODDESS
(whispering again to
the deity)
He will be rewarded.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
A curious bargain. What makes you
certain I will follow through?
(beat)
Perhaps I will keep both and end
your suffering now.

FROM THE BALCONY

Tenamitl shakes his head, as if preparing for the worst.

BACK WITH CITA

CITA
You dream of being praised. As
when my ancestors walked the open
sky. My success will return this
to you.

Tlacatzinacantli's smile fades. His eyes narrow in anger.

TLACATZAINACANTLI
You should not speak so. You are
nothing and your quest will come
to nothing.

He removes the stone from his crown and tosses it with reckless abandon to her. She catches it with both hands.

The moment her fingers close around it, she gasps. Her hand moves to her bare neck, finding nothing there.

TLACATZAINACANTLI

Now go. Before we decide a taste
of your flesh is worth more than
your meager entertainment.

Cita backs away, clutching the stone.

TLACATZAINACANTLI

Oh, but wait!

Tlacatzinacantli motions to two GUARDS.

TLACATZAINACANTLI

Her blood. I will have my due.

Cita stops. She doesn't look back. Just holds her hand out.

INT. CORRIDOR - MAIZE CITADEL - MOMENTS LATER

Cita stumbles into the shadowed passage, breathing hard. She finds herself in front of a mirror. Steps in front of it.

In her reflection, she sees herself without the necklace. She feels the marks where it once was. Was this worth the price? Will she even make it to the end of this road?

A shape emerges from the darkness - Tenamitl.

TENAMITL

You have the courage of one
unafraid to die.

CITA

My life is meaningless without my
family. If you had one, you would
understand.

Cita walks off. Tenamitl looks at himself in the mirror. Quickly looks away, unable to take the image.

EXT. MAIZE CITADEL - TWILIGHT

As the exit through the side-door from which they came, her eyes drift back wistfully toward the feast hall.

TENAMITL

I would not count on seeing it
again unless we make it to
Quetzalcoatl.

CITA

Unless?

TENAMITL

He has one just like it.

CITA

What now?

Tenamitl shakes his head.

TENAMITL

Even with the good graces he is likely to receive, he would not normally let you go. Your flesh. It is a delicacy here.

CITA

Mine? The flesh of a woman?

TENAMITL

No. The flesh of a divided soul.

CITA

And you don't want it for yourself?

TENAMITL

I am not so far gone that human flesh is my desire. That may change, though.

CITA

I don't think you are quite so bad as you make yourself out to be.

TENAMITL

You couldn't possibly know how bad I am.

EXT. FOREST ENTRANCE - TWILIGHT

Tenamitl leads the way. Beyond, nothing but darkness and the intermittent sounds of growls, some hissing.

TENAMITL

The darkness grows deeper in the lands of death. Have you changed your mind?

Cita gives him a haughty look, then walks by him onto the path. She's come too far to listen to half hearted taunts.

CITA
I am no stranger to the dark.

Tenamitl watches her. He grins, as if starting to like her.

TENAMITL
Yet you seek the light.

CITA
Perhaps I'm a fool. But at least
I'm a hopeful fool.

TENAMITL
For now.

INT. FOREST - TWILIGHT

The land around them has thinned, giving way to a path bathed in deep crimson light. The sounds of the forest echo.

Cita stumbles along, legs trembling beneath her. Ahead of her, Tenamitl clears the way with a stick, not looking back.

She stops, places her hands on her knees and bends over. As if sensing it, he turns and faces her.

TENAMITL
The blood tax was generous today.

CITA
As was yours.

Tenamitl grins: touché. Cita steadies herself against a gnarled tree, its bark like petrified skin.

She looks at the stone in her hands.

TENAMITL
We have to keep moving. The
Guards scour these woods for
divided souls.

CITA
Go on. I'll catch up.

Tenamitl watches her, waits for her to rise.

CITA

Why are you helping me?

TENAMITL

Call it penance, a big heart, or
foolish charity. Whatever keeps
you moving.

He turns and continues the path, which narrows between
towering obsidian outcroppings. Bones litter the way.

Cita looks up and sees a hideous face-like carving on the
tree, as if it were once alive. She follows Tenamitl.

CITA

The Guards. From the beginning.
They were laughing at you. You're
not like them.

TENAMITL

You talk too much.

CITA

I take it Guards here don't
usually guide mortals.

TENAMITL

You don't want to know the answer
to that.

Tenamitl hacks at a tangle of spectral vines that bleed sap.

TENAMITL

Maybe your boldness has inspired
me. Maybe your suffering
entertains me.

CITA

But it doesn't. I can see that
you don't enjoy my suffering. You
must want to improve this place.

TENAMITL

I've spent centuries learning to
be cruel. Don't mistake your
usefulness for me being kind. Or
my helping you for anything more
than pity. I choose not to be
like the others and seek a better
existence. As do you.

CITA

Your eyes showed more when you
saw me. There must be more.

Tenamitl hitches mid-swing, eyes twitch, continues.

TENAMITL

My eyes have seen many things.
Most of them I've learned to
forget.

INT. FOREST - DEEPER

Obsidian trees grow denser, their jagged branches
intertwining overhead. The crimson light barely penetrates.

Tenamitl, in front of Cita, pauses. Raises his hand for her
to stop. She watches him, notices his suddenly tense posture.

TENAMITL

(whispers)
Stay behind me.

CITA

What is it?

TENAMITL

Shh.

In the distance: FOOTSTEPS. Regular. Disciplined. The
unmistakable clatter of armor.

Tenamitl looks for an escape route, but the path narrows
between two massive obsidian outcroppings. No way around.

TENAMITL

When they come, stay silent. I'll
handle this.

Cita nods nervously, clutches the blue-green stone tight in
her palm.

Around the bend appear two UNDERWORLD GUARDS with the bodies
of men, the heads of coyotes, wearing obsidian helmets.

Their obsidian armor clicks with each movement.

The Guards stop at the sight of Tenamitl and Cita. The taller
one, the CAPTAIN, steps forward.

CAPTAIN
Look who it is.

TENAMITL
Captain.

The Captain tilts his head.

CAPTAIN
You're out late. You should have
reported to the barracks.

Tenamitl straightens, adopts a formal posture.

TENAMITL
I was given a special assignment.

The regular Guard takes a look at Cita behind him. His nostrils flare as he sniffs.

GUARD
A divided soul? Unbound?

The Captain notices.

CAPTAIN
Where are her chains? And why are
you not heading to the judgment
halls?

TENAMITL
Direct orders. Quetzalcoatl
requested her presence.

The Captain and his Guard exchange glances. The Captain laughs in a harsh, abrupt manner. This peon couldn't hope for such an important assignment.

CAPTAIN
Quetzalcoatl hasn't requested a
mortal's presence in centuries.

TENAMITL
It's not my duty to question
orders.

The Guard sniffs Cita. Prowls around her. Notices the stone in her hand.

GUARD
She carries something.

He points his Captain's attention to the stone. Cita tightens her fist around it.

CAPTAIN
You have always been a terrible liar.

TENAMITL
I'm telling the truth.

CAPTAIN
Very well. If she is going where you say, then we'll take her from here.

He steps toward Cita. Tenamitl blocks his path.

TENAMITL
Are you prepared to answer to the higher powers?

CAPTAIN
Are you? Step aside.

TENAMITL
I am to deliver her personally.

The Captain and Guard draw their weapons.

GUARD
The ferryman has forgotten his place, Captain.

Cita backs away, eyes moving between Tenamitl and the Guards.

CAPTAIN
What are you plotting?

TENAMITL
She is important.

CAPTAIN
Ha!

TENAMITL
She needs an audience with Quetzalcoatl.

CAPTAIN
The same audience you stupidly asked for?

Cita looks at Tenamitl, cocks her head. Someone has not been forthcoming.

CAPTAIN
Move aside.

The Captain shoves Tenamitl out of the way.

CAPTAIN
What are you hiding...

He rips the stone from her grip. As he stares at it, Cita looks to Tenamitl for aid. He eyes her to keep her cool.

CAPTAIN
One of the eyes. Where did you get this?

Cita stays quiet.

CAPTAIN
Do you have ears? How do you have this?

Cita stays quiet. He slams her with a fist.

She yells in pain and collapses to the ground.

He steps forward and looms dangerously over her.

Tenamitl moves behind the Captain and spins him around.

CAPTAIN
You will rot in eternal darkness!

As he speaks with Tenamitl, Cita eyes the hilt of his sword. She can reach it.

The stone in his hand...

CAPTAIN
You will face judgment! I may meet it out here and now!

Cita rises, quiet. Tenamitl gives her a slight nod.

She yanks the sword free, falls back onto the ground from its weight.

The Captain turns and sees her. Lets out a ROARING LAUGH.

CAPTAIN
You both will. I hope you made
your final farewells.

The Captain reaches for Cita. As he does, the Guard steps in front of Tenamitl to block his way.

Tenamitl puts up his hands feigning innocence. But then, he swings a downward elbow. The Guard crumples.

The noise diverts the attention of the Captain, who looks back. He grabs Tenamitl by the throat and lifts him.

CAPTAIN
You...

The Captain squeezes Tenamitl's throat. This worm will never trouble him again.

As he does, Cita rises, heaves up the sword - and stabs the Captain.

He turns, the sword still in him. He stumbles forward, his eyes wide. He reaches out for Cita, who stands still, watches.

As he reaches her, he falls forward. She moves out of the way and allows him to fall on his face.

Cita and Tenamitl make eye contact. Tenamitl's eyes widen with disbelief. He looks around them. Cita trembles while she helps him up.

CITA
I've never harmed anyone...

TENAMITL
(catching his breath)
He's not alive. He doesn't count.

Cita looks horrified at the Captain sprawled out.

CITA
Is he gone...?

TENAMITL
He will be reborn.

CITA
Where?

TENAMITL
If he is lucky, here. Pick up the
stone.

CITA
What about the bodies?

Tenamitl looks around, skeptical.

EXT. FIELDS OF THE DEAD - TWILIGHT

Tenamitl in the armor of the Guard and Tenamitl in the armor of the Captain, they emerge from the forest path.

An endless agricultural landscape stretches before them.

Countless PAINED SPIRITS work in endless rows of crops.

TENAMITL
The fields of Cincalco. Endless
labor to those who have
transgressed the gods' decrees.

Dozens of paths fork out in different directions from where they stand, each disappearing into different regions.

CITA
Lead the way.

Tenamitl scans the horizon with uncertainty. Shakes his head.

CITA
You're a guide of the underworld
and you don't know where we're
going?

TENAMITL
I am a guard, not a guide. And
the paths - they change
frequently. The underworld is in
a constant state of change.

CITA
Then what's our plan?

TENAMITL
The same.

CITA
Maybe one of these spirits will
know.

Cita approaches a spirit - a YOUNG MAN whose arms have become trellises for flowering vines. His eyes hold a faint spark of awareness. He might be able to help.

CITA

Excuse me - can you tell me which
of these paths lead to
Quetzalcoatl's temple?

The Spirit's head turns, slow, soil crumbling from his neck.

PRINCE SPIRIT

We toil the soil. That is all.

CITA

Please, you must know.

PRINCE SPIRIT

We toil the soil. That is all.

The Spirit gets back to work, faint spark fading.

CITA

I am here on a mission to restore
the Gods.

The Spirit stops. A hint of anger flashes on his face.

PRINCE SPIRIT

The Gods. More like monsters.

CITA

Look at me. Am I not human? I
need your help.

PRINCE SPIRIT

A h-h...human.

The Spirit turns to her. This time, his full body. He looks her over.

PRINCE SPIRIT

A living human. It's been so
long.

CITA

You were, too, once.

PRINCE SPIRIT

Yes. Yes, you are right.

The Spirit takes in his surroundings, as if anew.

PRINCE SPIRIT

I was a Prince. Set to rule a kingdom. I fell in love with the daughter of my father's great enemy. When they forbade our union, I took my own life, believing we would be together in death.

Cita watches him, intent. Something registers within her. He looks down at his palms. Crops sprout from them.

He looks up at her, his eyes wide, fearless, unblinking.

PRINCE SPIRIT

Now grow crops for uncaring lords in far off temples. I pay an endless price for believing my sorrow was worth more than life.

The Spirit stares unseeing into the distance.

PRINCE SPIRIT

She is elsewhere. No doubt spending eternity with another love.

CITA

You took your own...
(hesitates)
Do all who...take their own lives...do they come here?

The Spirit studies her face.

PRINCE SPIRIT

Most do. It is our lot for spurning the gods' gift of life.

Cita's eyes scan the fields - searching for one particular spirit among the multitudes.

TENAMITL

You knew somebody who did the same.

Cita continues to scan the faces. Tenamitl watches her.

PRINCE SPIRIT

If it is truly Quetzalcoatl you seek, you must find a path to the mountain of smoke.

Cita runs all over the fields and checks the faces of the Spirits. Tenamitl and the Spirit watch her.

WITH CITA

CITA

Mother! Mother! Mother, it's me
Cita! Mother! Mother are you out
there!? It's your daughter! It's
me mother! It's Cita!

Cita runs all over the field in search of her mother. Spirits ignore her and continue to work.

Cita stops. Shouts desperately into the void.

CITA

Mother!!!

She turns to Tenamitl who stands stoic, watching.

He saunters over to her. He points at the sky.

TENAMITL

The red has shifted. Another day
has passed.

CITA

But she may be...

She bites her lips, looks all over the field, weighing her options.

TENAMITL

Do you wish to speak to your dead
family or preserve your living
one?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CITA'S HOME - NIGHT

Xochi dabs Acopa's forehead with a damp cloth. His skin has taken on a grayish pallor, his breathing labored.

The wound on his leg, darkened around the edges. Acopa struggles to sit up, wincing in pain.

XOCHI

Father, please. You must stay
still.

ACOPA

You sound like your mother. How long has she been gone?

XOCHI

Three days.

Acopa falls back with a grimace.

ACOPA

The fever. I can feel it getting worse.

Xochi looks at the dwindling supply of medicine on the table.

XOCHI

I will get more medicine from Tzitzitlini.

ACOPA

No. You must save our resources.

XOCHI

But father-

ACOPA

Four days left, Xochi. Four days until the exile.

Xochi's eyes fill with tears. She busies herself rearranging the blankets to distract from the truth.

ACOPA

Just like your mother. Fixing things that don't need fixing.

Xochi stops. A mix of frustration and sadness on her face.

ACOPA

I don't know where she's gone, but I know why. Promise you will forgive her when she returns.

XOCHI

You will heal and we will all be together again. I know it.

Acopa reveals a weak smile. He reaches for a small wooden carving beside his pallet - a crude hummingbird. Turns it around in his hands, remembering a happier time.

ACOPA

She made me this the day we met.
A copy of the one given to her by
her father.

Green spittle spatters his lips. Xochi gasps, rushes to wipe it away.

XOCHI

Father!

ACOPA

Listen. When I am sent out...if
your mother hasn't returned...

XOCHI

Please don't...

ACOPA

Survive. If necessary, hide. You
must do what it takes - whatever
you have to do - to live.

Xochi stares at him, terrified.

A knock at the door startles them both. Xochi opens it and reveals Nahuatl, her face grim.

NAHUATL

How is he?

XOCHI

Worse.

NAHUATL

Let me see.

Xochi lets her in. Nahuatl places a tiny bundle on the table.

NAHUATL

Extra rations. From my children's
portions.

ACOPA

Nahuatl, they need it more than-

NAHUATL

Hush. Build your strength.

Acopa watches through half-closed eyes as she approaches.

NAHUATL
Guards have begun preparations.

Acopa nods, resigned. No miracles will save him now.

ACOPA
Any news of Cita?

NAHUATL
(shaking her head)
Nothing.

Acopa closes his eyes, his breathing shallow.

ACOPA
She trusts too much in fables.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

EXT. RIVER OF OBSIDIAN SHARDS - UNDERWORLD - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl, in their stolen guard armor, approach the water. It glitters in the crimson light.

Sharp obsidian fragments click and scrape against each other as they flow.

They look at one another. Who wants to go first? Cita leads the way, crosses a trail of narrow stepping stones. She sways, almost falls.

Tenamitl reaches out and steadies her. She looks at him. They make eye contact. He nods. As she continues, he watches her.

EXT. FACE CLIFFS - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl scale a steep cliff face.

The rock formations resemble demon faces twisted in agony.

Some stone mouths open widely in moans as they climb past.

Tenamitl struggles to find a handhold. Cita offers her arm.

He takes it and continues.

EXT. SHADOW VALLEY

Tenamitl pulls Cita behind a large boulder as a PATROL UNIT passes by with SPECTRAL WOLVES that have skeleton features pass through the valley below.

The Lead Wolf stops, sniffs the air. Turns toward their hiding spot.

Tenamitl and Cita press themselves against the rock, barely breathing. The patrol moves on.

Tenamitl looks at Cita. She looks pale, the loss of blood, lack of food having made an impact. She slumps, exhausted.

EXT. AMPHITHEATER - INFERNAL FESTIVAL

Cita and Tenamitl hide behind crystalline formations and watch MINOR GODS engage with dance, song, food.

Cita presses a hand to her stomach, hungry. The Gods eat away. Cita and Tenamitl continue on. Cita peers back at the Gods as she goes.

END MONTAGE.

INT. SHELTERED CAVE

Cita and Tenamitl huddle by a small fire. Outside, the crimson sky almost pitch-black. Strange noises ECHO.

Cita studies him as he moves to the cave exit and looks out at the terrain.

CITA

You still haven't told me.

TENAMITL

Told you what?

CITA

Why you're helping me.

Tenamitl remains quiet.

CITA

Your face betrays you when I speak of my family. You were a father.

The slightest movement of Tenamitl's head. She is pressing at a deeply suppressed wound.

TENAMITL

Many generations ago. My village faced a drought. Resources dwindled. Food became scarce. People...we started... well, you can guess.

He traces patterns in the dirt on the floor.

TENAMITL

Like your people, we were forced to thin our population. My family was chosen.

(beat, stares into the distance)

I had a wife. Two daughters. And like your husband, I was...

Tenamitl furiously wipes away the pattern he drew.

CITA

You were...

Tenamitl remains silent. Avoiding his truth.

CITA

What?

TENAMITL

(angrily)

A coward. One day I found an ancient gate to the underworld, one long since sealed. I chose to serve the Gods rather than die with dignity.

Tenamitl walks to the other edge of the cave entrance and looks in the opposite direction.

TENAMITL

(whispering)

Rather than die with my family.

Tenamitl moves back toward the fire. He sits, stares into it. Sees visions of his lost wife and children in the flames.

TENAMITL

Get some rest. Tomorrow we will arrive at the Palace of Mictlantecuhtli and Mictēcacihuātl. Soon after, we will know your fate.

INT. SHELTERED CAVE - LATER

Tenamitl watches Cita sleep, a contemplative expression. He looks back outside at the dark night.

EXT. MISTY ROAD - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl emerge from a twisted path to find themselves at the foot of a road shrouded in thick mist.

Through the swirling vapor, the silhouette of a massive structure looms.

As they draw closer, the mist parts to reveal a GRAND PALACE of gray stone. They stop under an overhang.

Blood-red carvings cover every surface, depicting scenes of torture and feasting intertwined in macabre harmony. The living are not guests here, they are the entertainment and food.

Cita stops, transfixed in horror. Her body shows the toll of her journey - gaunt, weakened by blood loss.

TENAMITL

The palace of Mictlantecuhtli and Mictēcacihuātl. Lords of the underworld.

Cita runs her hands over the carvings.

CITA

They will show us the way forward?

TENAMITL

They know every corner of this realm.

Tenamitl hesitates, his posture suddenly tense. He looks toward the palace, then back at the path they came from.

TENAMITL

When we reach the door, they will
not allow me in.

Cita turns to him.

TENAMITL

It's a long story.

CITA

You have made many enemies.

TENAMITL

Yes, well...

Tenamitl shrugs. Cita faces the palace.

TENAMITL

I will wait for you by the brook
we just passed.

Cita studies him, nods. They move toward the entrance. As
they do, a DISTANT HOWL echoes.

TENAMITL

Underworld patrols. We may be
their target.

EXT. PALACE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI AND MICTECACIHUATL - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl reach the doors where the Guards stand.

GUARD #1

Look who we have here.

GUARD #2

If it isn't our delivery boy.

CITA

Delivery boy?

Cita turns to Tenamitl. The Guards walk behind them, blocking
their exit.

GUARD #1

The Lords have been waiting for
you.

Guard #1 looks at Cita and licks his lips. Perhaps she will
be part of his next reward.

GUARD #1

And you.

Tenamitl twists in shame at Cita's gaze.

GUARD #1

Ahead.

The Guards lift their spears for them to enter. Cita keeps her eyes on Tenamitl.

CITA

I saved your life.

TENAMITL

Impossible. I'm already dead.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - BLUE FLAME LIGHT

A corridor stretches before them, lined with human skulls embedded in the walls. Blue flames burn in iron sconces.

As they pass, the skulls follow their movements with empty eye sockets. Some emit quiet WHISPERS.

WHISPER

The thousandth soul...the final one...the last entry...

Cita stops and looks at the faces.

GUARD #2

Keep moving.

He pushes her forward.

CITA

What are they whispering about?

Tenamitl turns his face away, dodges her eyes.

At the end of the corridor stand massive metal doors adorned with bones arranged in intricate patterns.

The Guards knock. The sound ECHOES.

A moment passes. Then the doors CREAK open on their own, revealing a sliver of the chamber beyond.

GUARD #1
Welcome. It's a momentous
occasion.

The Guards push Cita through the door. Tenamitl walks in of his own accord.

CITA
(to Tenamitl)
What do they mean?

INT. THRONE ROOM - GREEN FLAME LIGHT

A vast chamber with ceilings that vanish into darkness.

Obsidian columns rise like petrified trees.

In the center, a SUNKEN FIRE PIT burns with ethereal green flames that rise to great lengths.

In front of the congregation, on twin thrones made of human bones, sit MICTLANTECUHTLI and MICTĒCACIHUĀTL - the god and goddess of death. They radiate power and terror over the assembled demons in the hall.

Mictlantecuhtli's skeletal body adorned with paper decorations and obsidian jewelry. His exposed ribcage reveals a swirling void where organs and a heart should be.

Mictēcacihuātl appears as half-flesh, half-bone, one side a beautiful woman, the other a gleaming skeleton. Her eyes burn with a cold, ruthless gaze.

Between them on a small table rests a GLOWING HEART, pulsing with bluish light. Mictēcacihuātl idly traces a finger along its surface.

The Gods look up from their macabre meal as Cita and Tenamitl are forced to approach.

CITA
(whispers)
Do the gods only ever eat?

TENAMITL
(whispers)
Yes.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
(voice like grinding
stones)
Tenamitl. Finally.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
And your final delivery. You have
taken more time than usual. I
trust you are not getting cold
feet.

Tenamitl still won't meet Cita's eyes.

CITA
Final...delivery?

Mictlantecuhtli rises from his throne, towering impossibly tall over the rest.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
One-thousand divided souls. At
last.

He gestures toward Tenamitl.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
Our faithful servant. You have
fulfilled your contract.

Cita backs away from Tenamitl, her eyes wide with betrayal.

CITA
All this time...

Tenamitl finally meets her gaze, his expression torn between shame and defiance.

TENAMITL
Do you see nothing? You should
never trust anything in this
place. Or anyone... Look around
you.

Cita looks around the room. The thousands of eyes of demons all stare back at her, their expressions savage, dark.

TENAMITL
Desperation has made you weak. A
tragically human failing.

CITA
You're human!

TENAMITL

Not anymore.

Mictlantecuhtli and Mictēcacihuātl exchange grins.

Mictlantecuhtli glides toward Cita. She leans in, inhaling her as if smelling a delicacy.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

The meat of divided souls is the sweetest.

She smiles, revealing teeth filed to points. Blood from the heart runs down her skeletal chin.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

You taste both of life and death.

Mictlantecuhtli gestures to the heart on the table.

MICTLANTECUHTLI

Your predecessor - a divided soul, not satisfied with his life, who tried to challenge the Gods.

The heart pulses, feebly, as if still conscious, suffering.

MICTLANTECUHTLI

(to Tenamitl)

Once we finish with her, your debt is paid. You may join our feasts as promised.

Cita turns to Tenamitl, stunned.

TENAMITL

I have been hungry. Far too hungry for far too long, with no end in sight. You could never understand. And you will never escape.

Cita turns her attention back to the Gods. Mictēcacihuātl's laugh sounds like breaking glass.

Mictēcacihuātl reaches out and touches Cita's face. Cita turns away, but dares not step away completely.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
No divided soul may leave the
underworld alive without
Quetzalcoatl's blessing.

Cita's face pales. There really is no escape.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
So fearful of death you forget
the natural order. Your kind
falls more reliably than ash from
a volcano.

Cita frantically pivots her head around the room again. Nowhere to run. Trapped. Alone.

Her eyes wind up on Tenamitl, who now stares back at her.

She turns back to Mictlantecuhtli.

CITA
I must find reach Quetzalcoatl's
temple. I am sure you will send
me on.

The Death Gods exchange surprised glances.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
(to Tenamitl)
This delivery has fire in her
heart. And pretends courage. It
will be delicious.

He steps closer to Cita, studying her.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
Tell me, mortal. Why risk eternal
torment for those who will forget
you in a heartbeat?

CITA
Love isn't about being
remembered. It's about giving all
you have to another.

Mictēcacihuātl considers. Then circles around her, appraising her with new interest.

MICTLANTECUHTLI

Love. A folly. A trick on foolish
beings to get them to procreate.
In the end, it dies like all
else.

He circles back in front of her.

MICTLANTECUHTLI

You smell familiar. Perhaps I
have consumed one of your
ancestors.

He runs a skeletal finger down her cheek. She shudders.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

I suppose you also do not know
the truth about who can become
the Sixth Sun.

Cita just stares at her, awaits an answer.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

They must suffer and sacrifice.

She gestures toward the ceiling, where thin streams red light
filter through tiny window slits.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

A God who sacrifices themselves
separates from all comforts. All
control.

(beat)

The perfect sun must have felt
loss, given everything...

MICTLANTECUHTLI

And shown that they hold the
lives of others before their own
desires.

Cita looks back and forth from one of them to the other.

MICTLANTECUHTLI

Your strength, your possessions,
your control, your family. All...
sacrificed.

(a moment)

You are becoming a worthy vessel.

TENAMITL

She seeks only to save her
husband.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

(amused)

Does she? Even if a divided soul
can assume the sun's place? I do
not think she will have the
courage, in the end.

The Goddess returns to her throne, leans back.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

How much time until the next
exile, husband?

Mictlantecuhtli gestures to the side of the chamber, where an ENORMOUS OBSIDIAN DISK slowly rotates. Symbols along its edge glow red as they align.

MICTLANTECUHTLI

Two days. Two days until more
souls fall to our table.

Anxious murmurs amongst the congregation.

Mictlantecuhtli turns to Tenamitl.

MICTLANTECUHTLI

Our bargain stands. Bring her
back to us after Quetzalcoatl
finishes with her. We will
consider your service complete.
You may partake of the next
feast.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

But first.

(to Cita)

An offering must be made.

He produces an obsidian knife, its edge gleaming. Cita looks at the knife, then to the Gods, then to Tenamitl.

Without removing her eyes from Tenamitl, she extends an open palm to Mictēcacihuātl.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL

No. Your arm.

INT. CITA'S HOME - NIGHT

Acopa lies on his pallet with blankets piled on him. He shivers with fever, the wound on his leg a sickening black.

Xochi presses a damp cloth to his forehead. Nahuatl wipes the paste from an herbal concoction in a bowl onto his leg.

NAHUATL

His fever has gotten worse. The wound is infected.

Xochi continues to wipe his head, staring at Acopa's face like she can heal him through force of will alone.

Acopa pushes himself up to sit, eyes fluttering open.

ACOPA

(weakly)

Cita?

XOCHI

No, father. It's still us.

Acopa looks at her, a flash of recognition in his eyes. Attempts to steady his voice.

XOCHI

My brave Xochi. So much like your mother.

A wracking, painful cough. He falls back to lie down.

He looks on the wall and sees a wooden hummingbird carving.

ACOPA

Whatever happens...always remember she loves you. That I love you.

Xochi takes his hand, tears in her eyes. Almost no hope left, but still praying for a miracle.

XOCHI

She will come back. She must.

Nahuatl looks down on Xochi with pity.

INT. THRONE ROOM - GREEN FLAME LIGHT

Cita slumps against a column, pale and weak. Her arm bears a fresh cut, deeper than the one on her hand.

A bowl of her blood rests in Mictlantecuhtli's hand.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
(examining the vial)
Enough. For now.

He drinks from it, the blood disappearing into the void where his throat should be.

Mictēcaciuhātl approaches Cita, her face almost compassionate.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
Quetzalcoatl's temple lies beyond
the fields of ash, through the
canyon of whispers. Look for the
pyramid whose peak touches the
red sky.

She leans closer, her voice drops to a whisper.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
But know this: even should you
reach him, your fate is sealed.

Cita meets her gaze, unwavering despite her weakness.

CITA
Do the Gods all enjoy the sound
of their own voice as much as
you?

Mictēcaciuhātl cocks her head back in surprise. She turns her eyes upon Tenamitl and nods.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
Take her to the fields of ash.
Return when it is done.

Tenamitl bows.

TENAMITL
As you wish.

He moves to help Cita stand, but she pulls away.

CITA
Don't touch me.

She pushes herself to her feet, swaying slightly but refusing to show any more weakness than she has to.

Mictlantecuhtli and Mictēcacihuātl watch them go.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
He has fulfilled his final task.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
Not yet.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
He has delivered nine hundred and ninety-nine souls. What is one more?

MICTLANTECUHTLI
Perhaps. But this one has changed him. I see it in his eyes.

The obsidian clock ticks toward alignment.

Tick...tick...tick...

INT. CORRIDOR - BLUE FLAME LIGHT

Cita walks ahead of Tenamitl, using the wall for support. The skulls lining the walls WHISPER as they pass.

CITA
Your family was well rid of you.
Under the sun or under the earth.

TENAMITL
I had no choice. This contract was made long ago.

CITA
There is always a choice.

TENAMITL
Maybe for you. But we are not all so strong.

Cita stops.

CITA
That may be true for most.

She looks over her shoulder, barely seeing him.

CITA

But you are.

She continues forward.

CITA

Freedom bought with the lives of
others is no freedom at all.

TENAMITL

Says the woman who abandoned her
daughter to save her sure-to-die
husband.

Cita turns. Tenamitl walks up to her. Face-to-face.

CITA SLAPS TENAMITL ACROSS THE FACE.

For a moment, they stand in silence. Both glaring in self-righteous anger.

Cita turns and continues for the exit. The grand doors at the end of the corridor swing open. Red light spills in.

CITA

We have less than two days until
my husband's exile. Until the
exile of so many others. We must
hurry.

She walks through the doors without looking back. Tenamitl watches her go, fuming, not moving.

The doors close.

EXT. PALACE OF MICTLANECUHTLI AND MICTECACIHUATL - TWILIGHT

Cita walks to the bottom of the steps. Looking around, she hears the GROWLS from within the surrounding woods.

She waits, looks back to the doors. They remain closed. After some moments, she walks back up the stairs.

INT. CORRIDOR - BLUE FLAME LIGHT

Cita enters. Looks around. Tenamitl nowhere to be seen.

CITA
Hello? Hello? Tenamitl?

Cita spins around as she looks.

Tenamitl nowhere in sight.

EXT. PALACE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI AND MICTECACIHUATL - TWILIGHT

Cita scans the premises. Nothing. Nobody. She looks down the path from which they came. Nothing.

INT. SHELTERED CAVE - TWILIGHT

Cita enters, checks the area. Nobody there.

EXT. PERCH - TWILIGHT

Cita scans the surrounding area from outside of the cave. She hears only the sounds of MARCHING BOOTS and CLANKING METAL.

In the distance, she sees the peak of a far-off red pyramid glowing through the fog.

She tracks its location and sees a great ravine in between two humongous mountains on both sides.

QUICK FLASH:

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
Quetzalcoatl's temple lies beyond
the fields of ash, through the
canyon of whispers. Look for the
pyramid whose peak touches the
red sky.

END QUICK FLASH.

EXT. PERCH - TWILIGHT

Cita stares at the pyramid. She looks down at her cut hands and arm. Then back to the pyramid.

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE OF THE CANYON OF WHISPERS - TWILIGHT

Cita approaches the mountainside. Looks down into the deep descent of a path toward its center. A river runs through it.

EXT. PATH - LATER

Cita stumbles forward along a narrow path between towering obsidian formations, beside the black river.

With pale skin and unsteady movements, Cita drags along. She unconsciously feels the fading imprint from her necklace. The end is in sight. She will find a way to get there. But how will she enter with only one temple eye?

In the distance, the red pyramid disappears behind the fog beyond the mountainside.

She pauses, leans against a jagged riverside rock to catch her breath. Looks at the slice where Mictēcacihuātl cut her.

Cita turns her gaze upon the water. In the black reflection she sees herself - a pale ghost. There is almost no life left in her. But she refuses to give up.

She gathers her strength and lifts with a grunt. She pushes forward down the path.

EXT. PATH - TWILIGHT

Cita continues toward the red pyramid as it disappears in and out of view behind the fog.

Her breathing more labored, her steps heavier.

EXT. FIELD OF ASH - TWILIGHT

Cita emerges onto a vast plain where ashen figures wander without aim.

Unlike the spirits in the fields she saw earlier, these souls appear lost, their forms somewhat translucent, their faces only skin.

As she walks, they part before her without looking up. Cita stops at one.

CITA

Please, can you point me toward the canyon?

The spirit walks through her as if she doesn't exist. She shivers at the contact, turns and watches it go.

As she does, a PROCESSION OF SPIRITS approaches from the distance - souls being led in chains by SPECTRAL HANDLERS.

Cita steps off of the path and hides behind a black stone column, her body pressed against it. Eyes lose focus, exhaustion pressing on her like an anvil.

She watches as they pass. Amongst them, she notices CHILDREN.

ONE OF THEM LOOKS LIKE XOCHI.

CITA
Xochi? Xochi!

Cita looks away, then back to the children. The one she saw - clearly not Xochi.

She waits for them to turn and head up a mountain ridge. She sets out to resume her path, when she hears a low growl.

From the opposite direction comes a PATROL UNIT - undead wolves, their exposed ribcages full of burning coals where the organs should be.

Leading them - the Captain she stabbed earlier.

He stops, sniffs the air. His hand goes to the wound in his side, not healed but no longer bleeding.

He holds up a hand. All stop. He turns in a circle and continues to sniff.

CAPTAIN
Something's here. Something...
alive.

The heads of the wolves turn in unison toward Cita's hiding place, their empty eye sockets glowing with ember light.

ON CITA

as she hears the growl.

She backs away, turns, and runs. The Captain hears the ground crunch under her feet.

His eyes squint with recognition. The wolves' mouths slather and snap. They pull at their chains. He leans over and unhooks their leashes.

EXT. FIELDS OF ASH - CHASE - TWILIGHT

Cita sprints as she wolves HOWL behind her. The sounds echo through the valley.

The wolves gain ground.

Cita veers toward a thick stand of crystalline formations.

She heads into a maze-like structure.

INT. CRYSTALLINE MAZE - TWILIGHT

Cita ducks and weaves through narrow passages between towering crystal columns.

Her reflection multiplies in the glossy surfaces.

The wolves, slow and confused by the reflecting images and scents, trail off of her.

The Captain stops at an intersection. He sniffs. Turns around and looks in the opposite direction of the wolves.

He calls after the wolves, leads them down the way he looks.

CAPTAIN

You have nowhere to hide. All paths lead to the knife.

Cita presses herself against a crystal wall. Tries to control her breathing. Blood trickles down the wound on her arm.

A drop of blood falls onto the ground.

The nearest wolf's head snaps toward the scent of blood. It growls. Leads the other wolves and the Captain toward her.

Cita sees it come in a reflection. She runs again, emerging from the crystal maze and onto:

EXT. CLIFFSIDE PATH - CONTINUOUS

A narrow trail along the edge of a precipice. Below, the black river flows.

She hurries along the path, looks back to see the wolves emerge from the maze.

Her path narrows. Rocks crumble beneath her feet.

Ahead, the path splits. One direction toward the canyon of whispers, another toward a dark pit.

The wolves close in. The Captain appears at the maze's mouth.

Cita takes the downward path - and finds herself cornered at the end of a sheer drop.

The wolves close in, their coal-hearts burning brighter with the excitement of a fresh catch.

Cita looks over the edge. Too far to jump. She turns to face her pursuers.

CAPTAIN

You believed you could cheat
death? Or judgment?

He draws close to her as the wolves encircle her.

CITA

I didn't mean to hurt you. I only
came for my family. My husband.

(a moment)

My daughter.

CAPTAIN

Take a good look.

He reveals a wicked smile.

CAPTAIN

Do you really think you could
hurt me?

He motions to the wolves, who lunge forward.

Cita steps back. She loses her footing on the cliffside.

CITA FALLS. Time seems to stop. Her hands grasp at empty air, mouth open in a silent scream.

EXT. MIDAIR - CONTINUOUS

Cita tumbles through the air. Her body lands, rolls down the side of the hill, and lay still alongside the riverbank.

Cita remains unconscious, her eyes closed as the black water drifts by near her head.

The Captain looks down at her.

EXT. RIVERBANK - TWILIGHT

The Captain approaches Cita and drags her off by her feet, her back and head scraping the ground.

ON CITA'S HEAD

as it drags across the ground...

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. CITA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

YOUNG CITA, 8, plays with a wooden toy on the floor. A small hummingbird figure. Woven tapestries line the walls.

In a rocking chair across the room sits CITA'S MOTHER, 33, as she mends a dress. Her baggy eyes carry a distant gaze.

YOUNG CITA
Look, mama! It can fly!

Young Cita makes the toy soar through the air. Her Mother smiles, faint, but doesn't look up.

Outside, a commotion of RAISED VOICES penetrates the walls.

Young Cita's Mother tenses, sets aside her work.

CITA'S MOTHER
Wait here.

She goes to the door and steps outside. Through the doorway, Cita sees her Mother talking with GRIM VILLAGERS.

Young Cita moves closer to the door and listens:

VILLAGE ELDER
Your husband tried to cheat
death, but it has found him.

CITA'S MOTHER
But he only sought healing!

VILLAGE ELDER
He divided his soul. Fractured
between worlds. The taint could
spread unless amends are made.

CITA'S MOTHER
What must I do?

VILLAGE ELDER
You know the laws.

Cita's Mother looks at the Villagers' faces, horrified.

CITA'S MOTHER
But you can't. Our daughter. She
is eight years old.

VILLAGE ELDER
Younger have been banished.

Young Cita clutches her hummingbird toy, confused and scared.

VILLAGE ELDER
You have until morning.

The Villagers walk away. Young Cita returns to her former spot. Her Mother enters, takes her seat.

YOUNG CITA
Is everything alright, Mama?

CITA'S MOTHER
We have to leave, Cita.

YOUNG CITA
Where are we going?

Her Mother looks out of the window and sees the Villagers.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - NIGHT

Young Cita and her Mother walk a dark path deeper into the mountain. Behind them, the village disappears.

YOUNG CITA
Mama, I'm scared.

Her Mother continues, not responding.

YOUNG CITA
Mama?

They reach a small cave. Her Mother stops, looks around.

Turns around and gets on her knees in front of Young Cita.

CITA'S MOTHER
I need you to wait here, my
little hummingbird. To wait here
and be brave. Can you do that?

Cita's Mother wipes a tear from her eyes.

CITA'S MOTHER
Can you do that?

YOUNG CITA
Mama? What's wrong? I want to
stay with you.

CITA'S MOTHER
Nahuatl's mother is coming to
take you, okay? I have to go do
something. Alone.

YOUNG CITA
Alone?

CITA'S MOTHER
Yes. Alone.

YOUNG CITA
But-

CITA'S MOTHER
But nothing!

Cita's Mother realizes her mistake in yelling. She brings in
Cita for a hug, and then pulls something from a pocket.

The hummingbird necklace.

CITA'S MOTHER
This was your father's. It will
protect you.

YOUNG CITA
Where is papa?

Cita's Mother can't help but cry.

CITA'S MOTHER
He's right here.

Cita's Mother puts a hand on Young Cita's chest.

CITA'S MOTHER
With you.

Cita's Mother puts Young Cita's hand on her own chest.

CITA'S MOTHER
With me. With us. Take it.

Cita's Mother places the necklace in Young Cita's hand.

CITA'S MOTHER
I must leave now, okay? You will
be with Nahuatl just as you have
always wanted.

YOUNG CITA
I want to be with you, mama.
Where are you going?

CITA'S MOTHER
Somewhere that you can't follow.

YOUNG CITA
Yes, but where?

From the path behind them emerges Young Nahuatl and Young Nahuatl's Mother.

YOUNG CITA
Listen to her, do you understand?
Do everything she asks.

Young Cita looks back and forth from Nahuatl and Nahuatl's Mother to her own Mother.

YOUNG CITA
Please...

END FLASHBACK

INT. OBSIDIAN PIT - TWILIGHT

Cita's strained, red eyes open. They stare up from the floor and see the red sky above through a perfect circle.

TWO GUARDS patrol the pit above, walking the perimeter.

Cita GROANS, lifts into sitting position. She looks around.

Finds herself in a cramped cell perched over a drop.

Dozens of cell-like alcoves carved into the rock walls around her. Most have nothing but piles of bones in them.

In two nearby cells, Cita sees the forms of TWO OTHERS that remain alive, but too enshrouded in darkness to see.

Cita moves to the edge of her cell. She looks down and sees nothing but darkness. An oblivion.

Cita looks back up. A perfect circle and the red sky beyond.

She turns her attention to the two others across the pit.

CITA

Hello! Hello!

No response.

ELDERLY MAN (O.S.)

They can not hear you.

Cita whips around and sees an ELDERLY MAN hunched over in the corner.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN (V.O.)

Nor do they want to.

Cita turns and sees a HUMP-BACKED WOMAN sit against the wall.

CITA

What is this place?

ELDERLY MAN

Hazard a guess.

Cita looks around.

ELDERLY MAN

It is where our souls are kept until our time runs out.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN

Or they get hungry enough to eat us. Even without our souls being as ripe as they like.

As Cita watches the Elderly Man, his form FLICKERS, becoming transparent in patches.

ELDERLY MAN

Seems I will be first.

The Elderly Man rises, his eyes more hollow as he approaches the edge of the cell and the red reflects upon them.

ELDERLY MAN
I will see you soon again, my
son.

His form flickers once more.

Cita looks to the Hump-Backed Woman.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN
If you are here, it means you
have, or at least had, something
of value to offer the world. Even
if it will end in nothing but
pain. The price we pay for our
good hearts.

Cita looks back to the Elderly Man, who leans against the
edge and looks up at the Guards.

His form flickers again. This time more parts of his body
become transparent.

The Elderly Man gets onto his knees and holds his arms up.

ELDERLY MAN
Do your worst.

The Elderly Man flickers at a rapid rate. Then, all at once,
he crumples into a heap.

Cita backs away, horrified.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN
Without Quetzalcoatl's permission
or your talisman we will not be
far behind him. You should not
have traded away something so
valuable.

She looks pointedly at Cita's neck where the necklace marks
have not completely faded away.

Cita's hands move to the markings, seeking non-existent
comfort.

CITA
How did you...?

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN
After long enough here you can
see another's true form. He is
known for having one just-

The DING of a clock interrupts her.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN
Another hour gone.

CITA
He is known for having one just
like what? Just like...mine?

The Humped-Backed Woman stays silent. She moves to the corpse of the Elderly man and sits.

Cita watches the woman rock back and forth, childlike.

EXT. PALACE OF MICTLANTECUHTLI AND MICTECACIHUATL - TWILIGHT
LAUGHTER and RIOTOUS ARGUING exits the windows.

INT. FEAST HALL - GREEN FIRE LIGHT

Tenamitl sits at the farthest table. Among MINOR DEITIES and SERVANT SPIRITS. Before him lies a plate of untouched food.

Mictēcacihuātl approaches, her skeletal hand trailing along the table's edge.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
You do not eat. Are the spoils of your service not to your liking?

Tenamitl looks up, his expression conflicted.

TENAMITL
No. The food. It is...
magnificent.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
Yet you have not taken a single bite.

She circles behind him, leaning close. Predatory eyes looking him up and down.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
Do you regret your duties?

Tenamitl picks at his food, nervously.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
How amusing. You disdain
humanity, yet embody their
greatest flaw.

TENAMITL
And that is?

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
Selfishness disguised as
sacrifice. If you are unhappy
with your reward, a place amongst
the divided souls could be found.

Tenamitl stabs a piece of food with his fork. Mictēcacihuātl grins, moving his drink closer to him.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
And the blood...

TENAMITL
Yes. Yes. Thank you.

She moves away, addressing the feast hall.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
It seems we have a melancholy
addition to our court.

She picks up her goblet and motions to Tenamitl.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
To that I say...

Mictēcacihuātl ROARS with laughter and chugs her goblet, provoking the rest of the crowd to do the same.

As Tenamitl looks around the room and sees all the ghoulish faces watching him, a piece of meat hits him in the head.

More LAUGHTER.

Tenamitl looks at the goblet of wine before him.

He sees his reflection.

Then he looks across the room at the Gods.

At the table with Mictēcacihuātl and Mictlantecuhtli sits Tepoztecatl, the God of Wine.

His head bobs up and down as he tries to stay awake.

From Tepoztecatl's neck dangles a necklace from which a BLUEGREEN stone dangles.

Tenamitl watches Tepoztecatl. Nobody pays attention to him.

Tenamitl stares back at himself in his wine glass.

INT. TENAMITL'S CHAMBER - TWILIGHT

In the palace, Tenamitl stares out of the window at the Underworld landscape around Mictēcacihuātl and Mictlantecuhtli's palace.

He hears a CHILD'S LAUGHTER.

His eyes lose focus.

A vision: A HAPPY FAMILY walk through a park. A child swings between the arms of a HUSBAND and WIFE.

A BANG comes from the next room beside his chamber. Loud VOICES ring out.

He looks back at his front door, which remains shut. Then looks back out of the window, but the happy family has left.

Tenamitl looks at the horizon. Sees the red temple of Quetzalcoatl in the distance.

The loud BELL of a clock rings out.

EXT. OBSIDIAN PIT - TWILIGHT

Cita lays on the floor and hears the BELL ring. She doesn't bother to lift and look. All hope is lost. There's not enough time.

The blue-green stone rests on the floor beside her face.

INT. WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

A cavernous chamber lined with obsidian casks and vessels of fermenting spirits. The air thick with dust and decay. Dim light from scattered torches.

Tepoztecatl lies sprawled on the floor. His bloated form rises and falls with drunken snores.

The blue-green stone glints from his necklace in the dim light. An empty goblet on its side in a puddle of wine.

Tenamitl creeps on tip-toes through the shadows between the towering wine casks.

He reaches Tepoztecatl. Spots the necklace. Crouches down and reaches for it.

Tepoztecatl snorts, shifts in his sleep. The stone swings away from Tenamitl's grasp.

Tenamitl pulls his hand back. Freezes. Waits.

Tepoztecatl's breathing returns to its steady rhythm.

Tenamitl reaches again, his fingers nearly touching the stone, when...

...footsteps echo from the corridor outside.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL (O.S.)
Surely he has not done it again.

Tenamitl ducks behind a massive wine cask as the chamber doors CREAK open.

Mictēcacihuātl and Mictlantecuhtli enter, their forms casting long shadows across the stone floor.

They turn the corner and glare down on Tepoztecatl.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
A pitiful excuse for a God.

MICTĒCACIHUĀTL
Even we enjoy an escape from time
to time.

MICTLANTECUHTLI
This is no escape. This is his
whole being.
(beat)
How do you judge our reluctant
Tenamitl's escape from his former
servitude?

Mictēcacihuātl moves closer to Tepoztecatl and studies his unconscious form.

MICTLANECUHTLI
He was nothing then and remains
so.

MICTECACIHUĀTL
Does he not seem...preoccupied to
you?

MICTLANECUHTLI
What of it? Surely he would not
presume to dine at our table.

MICTECACIHUĀTL
Guilt may have made him weak.

MICTLANECUHTLI
Good.

MICTECACIHUĀTL
But it may make him dangerous.

MICTLANECUHTLI
To whom?

She traces a finger along Tepoztecatl's forehead. The wine
God mumbles in his sleep.

MICTLANECUHTLI
You suspect something...

MICTECACIHUĀTL
Nothing. Yet.

The Gods each grab a crate of wine.

MICTECACIHUĀTL
Come. Let him dream his liquid
dreams.

They exit. The doors close behind them. Their footsteps fade.

Tenamitl emerges from hiding and moves to Tepoztecatl. With
precision, he lifts the necklace over the God's head.

The blue-green stone catches the torch light.

As he looks at it, the eyes of Tepoztecatl suddenly open,
conscious. He notices Tenamitl, and tilts his head.

Tenamitl looks around. Grabs a bottle from a crate and
smashes it over Tepoztecatl's head, knocking him back out.

Tenamitl's eyes whip to the door in case someone heard. He waits a moment to listen, then scurries out of the room.

EXT. CORRIDOR - OUTSIDE OF THE WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

Tenamitl exits, closes the door behind him, quietly. He looks both directions down the hall.

Directly across the hall: A statue of a fallen God - an obsidian blade in its grip. Across its shoulder - a long coil of rope.

Tenamitl stares into the empty eyes of the statue.

INT. OBSIDIAN PIT - TWILIGHT

The Humped-Backed Woman rocks in the corner and HUMS a children's lullaby.

Cita sits against the cell wall. Her form FLICKERS just as the Elderly Man's did.

CITA

What did you...what did you mean
about Quetzalcoatl having a
necklace like mine?

The Hump-Backed Woman continues to hum.

CITA

Hello?

The Hump-Backed Woman continues to hum. Cita walks over to her and shakes her.

CITA

What did you mean?

The Hump-Backed Woman stops humming.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN

Some say it was a token given to
him by his father before the fall
of the first sun.

She looks up at Cita.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN
It used to be said that it was a
sign. Of one who would fall,
sacrifice, and rise again.

CITA
Sacrifice? Sacrifice what?

The Woman's eyes reflect the red light from above.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN
No one knew. Enough time went by
that everyone realized just what
the legend was.

Cita waits for an answer.

HUMP-BACKED WOMAN
Just a foolish story.

Cita's shoulders drop. She stares at the Hump-Backed Woman, who begins to hum again.

Cita moves to the corner of the room, sits against the wall.

She drops her head into her arms, when SHOUTS ring out.

She waits, listen.

After several more moments of silence, she hears the sound of METAL clashing against BONE.

Cita moves by the Hump-Backed Woman, who follows her to the edge of their room and looks up.

A GUARD'S body tumbles over the opening, passes right by them with a whoosh and disappears into the darkness below.

After she watches it disappear, she looks up at the circle.

Nothing happens.

Then...

...Tenamitl's head peeks over the edge.

TENAMITL
If you can climb, climb now!

Tenamitl lifts out of view.

TENAMITL (O.S.)

Hold on!

The sound of METAL against BONE once more. Another GUARD body falls down into the pit's darkness.

EXT. OBSIDIAN PIT - TWILIGHT

Tenamitl drops the obsidian blade as the remains of the pit's protectors lay sprawled around him.

He peers over the edge and sees Cita look up at him. They stare at one another for a few moments.

TENAMITL

(to himself)

This was a bad idea...

He looks around to see if anyone watches. With the coast clear, he drops the rope down into the pit.

INT. OBSIDIAN PIT - TWILIGHT

Cita watches the rope lower. She looks back up and sees Tenamitl. He YELLS something undefinable to her.

She peers back to the Hump-Backed Woman, who FLICKERS as the Elderly Man did.

Cita rushes over to her. The Hump-Backed Woman extends an arm to keep Cita away.

Cita backs off, watches the Hump-Backed Woman FLICKER again.

EXT. OBSIDIAN PIT - TWILIGHT

Tenamitl strains as he pulls on the rope. Cita reaches the top and falls onto the ground beside him.

He rushes over to check on her. She angrily pushes him away.

CITA

Get away from me.

Tenamitl backs off. Cita craws back to the edge, looks down.

CITA

Why are you here? To deliver me personally? I have nothing left to live for.

Tenamitl watches her. He looks down at the blue-green stone in his hand. Moves to her, slowly and warily.

Sets the blue-green stone down beside her. She sees it, then looks at him with exhaustion, but a small fire of hope in her eyes.

TENAMITL

We can enter Quetzalcoatl's temple.

CITA

We?

TENAMITL

I have my own debt to pay.

CITA

To whom?

TENAMITL

It's personal.

In the distance, HORNS sound. An alarm.

Tenamitl looks back.

TENAMITL

They're coming for me. We need to get to the gates.

Tenamitl pushes the stone toward her.

TENAMITL

Now's your chance.

He takes her hand in his and places it on the stone. Tries to pull her up.

TENAMITL

When I abandoned my family, I convinced myself there was no other way. Nothing I could do to save them. Saving myself would at least keep their memories alive... But that wasn't the truth.

CITA
What is the truth?

TENAMITL
I sold my soul for nothing but
misery and isolation. I died that
day, but it has taken centuries
for me to realize it. Maybe now I
can make it right.

The HORNS sound again, closer now.

CITA
You risk too much. Everything.
Immortality. Feasts with the
Gods...

TENAMITL
You have seen them. The Gods are
less alive than I.

Tenamitl extends his hand. Cita doesn't look at it. She
stares into Tenamitl's eyes.

EXT. UNDERWORLD PATH - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl come to a crossroads. One path leads back
toward the original docks, the other toward the red pyramid.

Cita looks down both paths.

She feels the marking from her necklace, now faded.

Down the path toward the pyramid, she sees an ornate gate
carved with Aztec calendar symbols.

EXT. ENTRANCE GATE - QUETZALCOATL'S TEMPLE - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl approach as the HORNS blare, now heard
further away in the distance.

She looks at the stones in each of her hands.

Steps to the gate.

Looks up.

Beyond the gate, a bridge stretches out over the seemingly
still river of black.

Beyond, the top of the pyramid disappears beyond the clouds.

Cita lifts the stones, inserts them into the empty sockets of the calendar.

A moment goes by where nothing happens...

Then they begin to glow with ethereal light.

The massive doors RUMBLE open, revealing a stairway that stretches upward into swirling mists.

She looks at Tenamitl. He nods. Takes the first step.

She follows.

Once on the stairs, the gate closes behind them.

They hear it thud shut. No return that way.

Tenamitl flinches.

EXT. BRIDGE - QUETZALCOATL'S TEMPLE - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl walk. Tenamitl, hesitant, grabs onto the side. Cita looks back at him, sees him eye the temple.

She sticks out a hand. Nods at him.

He stares at it, then at her, uncertain.

Then...Tenamitl takes her hand, her help.

They cross the bridge. Fates intertwined.

EXT. STAIRWAY - QUETZALCOATL'S TEMPLE - TWILIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl reach the other side.

The structure rises impossibly tall into swirling mists, each stone carved with symbols that shift and move as if alive.

CITA
It's...beautiful.

She turns and stares at the Underworld they have traversed.

CITA
All of it.

Tenamitl turns and looks as well.

TENAMITL

That is one of the great problems
in any realm.

CITA

What?

TENAMITL

The danger of beautiful things.

Tenamitl looks back to the temple.

TENAMITL

We must hurry. There is no time
to spare.

They walk up the steps, the fog becoming more concentrated.

EXT. ENTRANCE - QUETZALCOATL'S TEMPLE - TWILIGHT

They reach the very top, bent over for breath. As they keel
over, the doors, as if by magic, open.

They push themselves up with their little remaining strength.

Through the doors they see an entrance hall of polished jade.

From within, a VOICE echoes: ancient, melodious, weary.

QUETZALCOATL (V.O.)

The divided soul arrives at last.
And she brings with her the
shepherd turned wolf.

Cita freezes. Tenamitl looks back at her.

CITA

He knows.

TENAMITL

Of course he does.

Tenamitl continues.

TENAMITL

Don't be afraid. It's me who has
to worry.

Cita watches the back of Tenamitl as he walks.

INT. HALL - QUETZALCOATL'S TEMPLE - DAY

They exit the entrance and step into a long hall. Lit as if with bright daylight, despite the eternal twilight outside.

Murals depicting the creation and destruction of the Five Suns cover the walls.

In each image, a different God sacrifices themselves to become a sun.

The sixth mural remains blank. Pure, empty, white stone.

Footsteps echo from above, slow and deliberate.

At the top of the staircase, a long shadow turns the corner and stands above, looking down.

Tall and elegant, draped in feathered robes that shift between emerald and sapphire, QUETZALCOATL appears.

His face seems both young and ancient, beautiful and terrible. His eyes, a mix of empathy and coldness.

QUETZALCOATL

Welcome, child of two worlds. To my sanctuary. Impressive to have made it this far.

They stare in awe as he walks down the steps toward them.

He stops several steps above them, maintaining distance and elevation.

QUETZALCOATL

And welcome to you as well, faithful servant. Though I confess, your "faithfulness" has grown rather...questionable.

Tenamitl goes stiff.

TENAMITL

My lord, I-

QUETZALCOATL

Have helped her enter this temple in defiance of my orders. Yes, I am aware. Fortunately for you, I have become quite curious about this one.

Quetzalcoatl's gaze shifts to Cita.

QUETZALCOATL
You seek to see a Sixth Sun rise.

CITA
I seek the salvation of my
people. My family.

QUETZALCOATL
Ah. Family. The cause of so many
problems. One could even say a
disease of the mind to make you
journey so.

He descends a step.

QUETZALCOATL
And what makes your family worthy
of such divine intervention? What
makes them different from
countless others who have entered
this place at their appointed
times?

Cita takes a moment. She looks at Tenamitl. Then she looks
back at Quetzalcoatl - and takes a step forward.

CITA
Nothing. That's why I've come.

Quetzalcoatl tilts his head, intrigued.

QUETZALCOATL
Explain.

CITA
All people suffering above share
the same fate. We are all equal
and saving one will benefit all
of us.

QUETZALCOATL
Yet you have come only when your
own are sentenced to die.

Quetzalcoatl takes a step down.

QUETZALCOATL

The gods who became the previous suns risked everything. Immortality, power, their very existence. They spent eons staring at a world from which they were completely detached.

He takes another step down. Close enough for Cita to see that, around his neck, rests a hummingbird necklace.

He notices, grins, feels it in his fingers.

QUETZALCOATL

A rather strange coincidence, I must say.

He pulls out something and tosses it to her. She catches it.

Looks down and sees her own hummingbird necklace.

QUETZALCOATL

If you believe in such things.
(beat)

My father gave me this when I was young. Before I ascended to godhood. I was told there was only one of them in all creation. A blatant lie, the coward.

Tenamitl looks back and forth between the two, tense, waiting for a strike he knows must be coming soon.

QUETZALCOATL

Perhaps it means nothing. Perhaps everything. If you live as long as I have, coincidence stops being something one believes in.

Quetzalcoatl points to the empty Sixth Sun mural behind her.

QUETZALCOATL

You wish to convince one of the Gods to sacrifice themselves for the sake of humanity. But why should they? What has humanity given us? Given themselves? Ingratitude. Disease. War. Despair.

TENAMITL
(blurting out)
Hope.

Cita and Quetzalcoatl turn to him.

TENAMITL
She gave me hope. I was
completely lost. My long years of
deception turned almost every
piece of my soul dark. But Cita-
(takes a breath)
Cita was able to wake up the part
of me that remembered the light.
To make me care about another
again.

QUETZALCOATL
And what can a monster like you
do with hope?

TENAMITL
I don't know. Maybe it will be
enough to learn...
(beat)
...to trust it.

Quetzalcoatl takes a moment. He looks back and forth from
Cita and Tenamitl.

QUETZALCOATL
Strange that you should have
formed such a bond under these
circumstances.

Quetzalcoatl nods, slowly, as if confirming something.

QUETZALCOATL
Very well. I will hear your
petition before the assembly. But
understand - it is a fruitless
endeavor. They will not
volunteer. Gods no longer value
humanity. Nor do they desire to
give up their comforts.

CITA
I ask only for a chance.

QUETZALCOATL
Such misguided "hope."

Quetzalcoatl turns to lead the way.

QUETZALCOATL
(to himself)
A rather strange coincidence,
that hummingbird necklace...

Cita and Tenamitl share a final look of the condemned. Follow him at a safe distance.

Touches the hummingbird necklace as they descend a staircase.

INT. CITA'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Cita sits on her FATHER's lap. He wears the hummingbird necklace.

She touches it and looks into his eyes.

YOUNG CITA
Where did you get this?

CITA'S FATHER
This has always been in our family, Cita. One day I'll give it to you.

YOUNG CITA
But why do you wear it all the time?

CITA'S FATHER
My mother told me that it holds
some of the light of the first
sun. That if I wear it, I will
feel its warmth inside me.

YOUNG CITA

He laughs, hugs her.

CITA'S FATHER
One of our ancestors made these
for a very powerful man. He was
supposed to make only one, but
secretly made this for his son,
too.

She holds the hummingbird necklace up and looks deep into the stone.

YOUNG CITA
 But a bird shape and not a sun
 shape?

He looks at her knowingly and winks.

CITA'S FATHER
 The hummingbird is very special.
 It is an animal that can pass
 freely between the worlds. This
 shows our deep connection with
 our ancestors.

Cita lays her head on his neck and smiles.

END FLASHBACK

INT. ASSEMBLY HALL - BRIGHT BONFIRE LIGHT

Cita and Tenamitl enter behind Quetzalcoatl. Cita caresses the necklace. A jade circle expands into a vast amphitheater.

Hundreds of GODS materialized on ascending stone benches - beings of impossible beauty and terrible power.

At the center burns a massive fire pit, its flames reaching toward the vaulted ceiling.

Quetzalcoatl strides down the alley toward the pit.

QUETZALCOATL
 Behold! The mortal that seeks to address the divine assembly!

MURMURS from the Gods.

Cita looks to Tenamitl, who gives a slight nod of encouragement.

CITA
 This is no longer your concern.

TENAMITL
 I will face punishment regardless. So yes - it is.

Tenamitl follows Quetzalcoatl. Cita walks behind him.

QUETZALCOATL

She comes, asking for the
ultimate sacrifice. That one
amongst us surrender immortality
to become the Sixth Sun.

More MURMURS. Some Gods LAUGH outright.

HORNED GOD

Mortals were meant to freeze!
They breed like insects and die
just as easily!

FERTILITY GODDESS

Perhaps we should put her out of
her misery!

CITA

You speak so easily for one
without a soul.

The hall falls silent. Cita stops in the middle of the alley,
swiveling in all directions, looking at the Gods.

CITA

You gods drink and revel while
the world withers and dies above.

(a moment)

But why celebrate? Nothing
remains of your creation or your
victories. Soon no one will
remain to remember your names.

The expression of the Gods darken. Several rise from their
seats and turn their eyes to Quetzalcoatl.

CITA

You have become gods of nothing.
Singing and laughing into the
void. When the last human dies,
you will fade, and even this
place will fall under shadow.

TLACATZAINACANTLI

(entering from the
shadows)

This creature has offended us
enough. Silence her.

CITA

Because of the truth? That not
one of you is willing to
sacrifice your comforts for the
world you claim to rule?

Cita faces Quetzalcoatl.

CITA

Or maybe you are too attached to
the darkness to step into the
light.

Quetzalcoatl eyes her down. He steps onto the stage beside
the pit.

Tenamitl reaches out and touches Cita, nervous and tense.

TENAMITL

(whispering)

They are getting angry.

She shrugs him off and walks forward.

CITA

You fear sacrifice because you
have forgotten what it's like to
love something more than
yourselves. What it feels like to
create instead of destroy. To
give instead of take.

She stands at the foot of the stage.

CITA

"The gods have molded us and by
their hands we are guided."
(beat)
If that's true, then our failures
are your failures. And yours
ours.

The MURMUR of the Gods grows angry, restless.

Quetzalcoatl holds up a hand, which silences them.

QUETZALCOATL

You talk like one who has spent a
life giving. Yet you are here.
Begging us to sacrifice so that
you may keep all you posses.

CITA
I am not a God.

QUETZALCOATL
No you are not. But I am.

He takes a bowl from an attendant behind, filled with dark water.

QUETZALCOATL
And I can offer you what you could never obtain on your own.

An image of Cita's mother in the water. Suffering on her face. Toiling in the fields of the underworld.

QUETZALCOATL
I can return her to you. You have only to serve.

Cita looks at the raging fire. Stares up and sees the flames disappear as they reach the ceiling.

She looks sadly back to Quetzalcoatl, steps onto the stage.

CITA
I lost my mother a long time ago.
And now I may finally understand
why she left.

Tenamitl watches her as she steps to the edge of the fire and gazes into it.

Tears well in Cita's eyes.

She clutches the hummingbird necklace, tight. Turns and looks back at Tenamitl.

CITA
Any divided soul with enough suffering can become the Sixth Sun.

Tenamitl watches her, not understanding. Then his eyes narrow as he realizes. She may actually do it!

CITA
I do see the light in you.

TENAMITL
You can't.

CITA

Maybe not.
(beat)
But I have to try.

Cita turns and speaks to the Gods.

CITA

I see now that I was foolish. The Gods have abandoned us. Any redemption must come from our own hands.

Quetzalcoatl watches her with growing recognition as the Gods continues to murmur.

QUETZALCOATL

Silence.

They continue to speak amongst each other.

QUETZALCOATL

Silence!

The hall falls quiet.

QUETZALCOATL

The mortal speaks of sacrifice. Redemption. Let those who would see her punished make their own sacrifice. Step forward and volunteer to become the Sixth Sun.

No one moves. This is an unthinkable sacrifice for the beings that demand offerings to themselves.

QUETZALCOATL

Come now. Surely one amongst us possesses the courage she claims.

Still no movement. He turns and faces Cita.

QUETZALCOATL

It seems we are beyond saving.

CITA

And you?

QUETZALCOATL

You are fortunate you have not already been consumed.

CITA

All your immortal years have not
made you worthy.

Cita walks to the edge of the fire and stares in, the flames reflecting in her eyes, her skin shining. Waves of heat blur her edges.

TENAMITL

Cita...don't...

She faces Tenamitl.

CITA

I will not allow my loved ones to
perish needlessly.

Tenamitl steps forward.

TENAMITL

You can't change fate.

CITA

Maybe not, but fate is not set in
stone. And only a great light can
illuminate the path ahead.

She turns looks at Quetzalcoatl. Then back to the fire...

In the flames, visions of Acopa, Xochi.

CITA

Forgive me my loves.

TEARS STREAM DOWN CITA'S FACE.

She kisses the necklace and straps it around her neck.

CITA

Perhaps the greatest act of
love... is letting go.

Without hesitation, she leaps.

Tenamitl moves forward, stopping abruptly.

Cita falls into the fire.

The hall hushes.

Quetzalcoatl watches in shock.

The flames engulf Cita, whose flesh becomes light, bones become fire, as she transforms into spirit without screams.

CRACKS heard from above.

All look up and see the ceiling of the hall cracking and SPLINTERING, as a hole forms in the ceiling.

The flames condense into a blinding white sphere. The assembly shields their eyes.

Stunned, Tenamitl steps to the edge of the light. He looks up through the hole in the ceiling.

A tear rolls down his check.

He wipes it.

Looks at the wetness on his finger, his jaw open in disbelief at his own tears.

A giant eagle swoops in, long talons taking hold of the new sun. Wings fly into a brightening sky.

Rising, it grows and sheds warm golden light.

EXT. VOLCANIC CITY - DAY

A full sun on a day of clear skies. No ice, no snow. Makeshift shelters built on the mountainside. Short green plants push through the soil.

The people of the Volcanic City watch as Guards force Temilo out of the community and move toward whatever lays beyond.

A healthy Acopa and Xochi stand with Nahuatl, their faces turned upward, allowing the warmth to caress their skin.

XOCHI
I know she is watching.

Acopa puts a comforting arm around Xochi.

ACOPA
She will always be here with us.

A hummingbird flies to a small flower by their feet.

It drinks and flies away.

FADE TO BLACK