

Left Behind

By: Joe Murkijanian

Joe Murkijanian  
Phone: 323-253-6402

FADE IN:

EXT. ARIZONA SKY - DAY

AERIAL SHOT - ENDLESS BLUE. A lone CONTRAIL streaks across the cloudless sky. Below, the sun-baked Arizona desert stretches for miles - scorched earth, winding two-lane highways, rusted rooftops, and sun-faded American flags flap weakly on poles.

As we descend - the outline of a modest town, surrounded by industrial yards, mobile homes, and dry brush.

EXT. RAMIREZ AUTO REPAIR - DAY

From above: A small, dusty garage tucked behind a gas station. Faded letters on the roof:

RAMIREZ AUTO - HONEST. FAST. LOCAL.

Pulling in close now - MIGUEL RAMIREZ (40s), under the hood of a Chevy truck. Sweat on his brow, grease on his hands, his body lean from hard labor. The quiet type. His movements are precise, methodical - this is a man who fixes things.

A car radio plays faintly nearby:

NPR ANCHOR (V.O.)  
(through static)  
...debate continues over the  
administration's enforcement  
protocols, as immigrant detention  
centers come under renewed  
scrutiny...

Miguel shuts the hood with a soft clunk.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

A cramped, sunlit kitchen with peeling cabinets and mismatched mugs. A pot of black coffee bubbles on the stove. Spanish-language radio hums softly in the background.

Miguel flips a tortilla in a pan.

Sofia shuffles in, hoodie over her head, still half-asleep.

MIGUEL  
¡Buenos días, dormilona!  
(singing softly)  
The princess emerges from her royal  
cave...

SOFIA (14) - Quietly strong, watchful, and brave. A child shaped by love and loss, clinging to hope. Sofia grunts and slumps into a chair.

SOFIA  
I'm not a princess. I'm a prisoner  
of the state.

MIGUEL  
Then I better feed you well before  
your trial.

He places a small plate of eggs and warm tortilla in front of her.

Sofia pokes at the food.

SOFIA  
Jenny said her cousin got picked up  
last week. She didn't even get a  
phone call.

MIGUEL  
(quietly)  
That won't happen to us.

SOFIA  
How do you know?

Miguel sits beside her. Takes her hand. His tone shifts.

MIGUEL  
Because I'm careful. And because  
I've been doing this dance since  
before you were born.

SOFIA  
That's what scares me.

Beat.

Miguel reaches into his pocket, pulls out a small, folded photo – a snapshot of Sofia at 6 years old, missing a tooth, holding a balloon.

He places it in front of her.

MIGUEL

When things got bad before – back  
when we crossed – I kept this in my  
boot.

No matter where they sent me, I remembered who I was.

Your father. Always.

Sofia stares at the photo.

SOFIA

I remember that balloon. You yelled  
when I let it go.

MIGUEL

I didn't yell. I begged gravity to  
show mercy.

She smiles, faintly.

He ruffles her hair.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

You get straight A's, beat the  
system, and buy me a house one day,  
sí?

SOFIA

Only if it has a rooftop taco  
stand.

MIGUEL

Deal.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT DOORWAY – MOMENTS LATER

Miguel picks up his thermos and lunch sack. Sofia stands  
behind him, chewing her last bite.

MIGUEL  
I'll be home by six. Stay out of  
trouble.

SOFIA  
Only if you do.

They exchange a quick hug.

Miguel opens the door. A ray of sun spills in.

He takes one step out. Then pauses.

Turns back. Kisses her forehead.

MIGUEL (SOFTLY)  
Te amo, mija.

He closes the door behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTO GARAGE OFFICE — DAY

Miguel enters, washes up in a stained sink. On the wall: a framed photo of his late wife, holding their daughter as a baby. Next to it, a hand-drawn map of the U.S. with colored pins scattered across it. Sofia's work.

He checks his watch.

Dries his hands.

Grabs a set of keys.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY — MORNING

A tide of students moves through a graffiti-tagged corridor. Bell ringing. Backpack zippers. Slammed lockers.

Sofia navigates it all like a pro – hoodie half-zipped, one earbud in, notebook clutched to her chest.

She stops at her locker. Opens it. Stuffs in a slightly squashed breakfast burrito wrapped in foil.

JENNY (15, chola-lite, hilarious) sidles up next to her.

JENNY

Girl. You know that thing's been in your backpack since Tuesday.

SOFIA

(innocent)

So? Fermented eggs are the new thing.

Jenny mock-gags. They share a quiet laugh.

CUT TO:

INT. AP GOV CLASSROOM – MOMENTS LATER

A worn whiteboard reads: CURRENT EVENTS – Immigrant Detentions in the News.

MR. DONNELLY (40s), overworked and tenured, paces with a stack of handouts.

MR. DONNELLY

Pick a headline. I want a short analysis on the impact of policy vs. politics. Due Monday.

Groans ripple through the room.

Sofia opens her notebook. At the top corner: a doodle of a bird breaking out of a cage.

She scribbles her headline in sharp pencil: FAMILY SEPARATION HEARINGS DELAYED AGAIN.

Jenny leans over.

JENNY

You're seriously doing immigration? That's depressing.

SOFIA  
It's reality.

JENNY  
Why can't you just do TikTok bans  
like a normal girl?

Sofia gives her a look – dry but warm.

SOFIA  
Because I'm not a normal girl.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA - LUNCH

Plastic trays clatter. Sofia sits across from Jenny. Their usual table. A third chair is empty.

JENNY  
You hear about Sara?

SOFIA  
What?

JENNY  
Gone. ICE showed up at her cousin's house. Poof.

Sofia's stomach turns.

SOFIA  
She was on track to graduate early.

Jenny shrugs – used to this by now.

Sofia pokes at her food. Suddenly small and quiet.

CUT TO:

INT. GIRLS' BATHROOM - LATER

Sofia stares at herself in the mirror.

For a second – just a flicker – she looks scared.

Then she squares her shoulders.

SOFIA (TO MIRROR)  
You're not going anywhere.

She pulls her hoodie back on. Tucks in her braid.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL GATES – END OF DAY

Sofia exits the building as the bell rings.

She starts walking.

Half a block away, Miguel's battered truck turns the corner.  
She smiles – reflexive, honest.

She runs toward it.

She doesn't know this will be the last time she sees that  
truck pull up for her.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – DAY           CONTINUOUS

Miguel pulls up to the curb just as Sofia runs out of the  
building, backpack bouncing. Her glasses are too big for her  
face, and she clutches a small notebook labeled:

"Sofia's Mega Map Quest."

She jumps in the truck.

SOFIA  
Did you know South Dakota has more  
cows than people?

MIGUEL  
Then maybe the cows should run for  
mayor.

She laughs. A private language of bad jokes.



SOFIA

Did you remember the scavenger hunt  
this weekend?

MIGUEL

I remember. We're going all the way  
to the river bend this time.

As they pull away, a pair of unmarked black SUVs turn onto  
the same road.

CONTINUOUS

EXT. INTERSECTION — MOMENTS LATER

The light turns red. Miguel stops. The SUVs stop beside and  
behind them. Miguel eyes his rearview mirror. The driver in  
the first SUV gives a slight nod.

SOFIA

Dad?

MIGUEL

Just stay calm.

Suddenly — FLASHING LIGHTS. ICE AGENTS exit the vehicles.

ICE AGENT (O.S.)

Miguel Ramirez! Step out of the  
vehicle now!

Miguel hesitates. Looks at Sofia — confused, scared.

MIGUEL

Stay in the truck.

He opens the door. Agents immediately grab him, slam him to  
the ground. Sofia screams.

SOFIA

DAD!

MIGUEL

I didn't do anything!

ICE AGENT  
You're being detained under federal  
jurisdiction.

Sofia opens the door – tries to run to him. Another agent  
blocks her.

ICE AGENT 2  
She's a minor. We'll notify child  
services.

Miguel thrashes.

MIGUEL  
She's my daughter! She's a citizen!  
I have papers!

They drag him to the SUV. Sofia watches, frozen. Her world  
falls apart in a single moment – and the camera holds on her  
wide, tear-filled eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERSECTION – DAY

SIRENS FADE.

The SUVs disappear around the corner with Miguel inside.

MOVE TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERSECTION – LATE AFTERNOON

The sun hangs low. Heat ripples off the pavement.

Sofia stands at the corner, shell-shocked, clutching her backpack and the coffee her dad never got to drink. Cars whoosh by. A CROSSING GUARD in a neon vest eyes her with concern.

CROSSING GUARD

You okay, sweetie? You waiting for someone?

Sofia doesn't respond. Her eyes stay locked on the street where the unmarked ICE SUV disappeared.

A white county CHILD SERVICES VAN pulls up. It idles by the curb. A woman in khakis and a floral blouse steps out – MS. LIN (40s), calm and rehearsed.

She approaches slowly.

MS. LIN

Sofia Rivera?

Sofia turns her head slightly, instinctively stepping back.

MS. LIN (CONT'D)

I'm from Child Protective Services.  
You're not in trouble.

We're just here to help, okay?

Sofia doesn't move. Her eyes well up, but she blinks hard, holding them back.

SOFIA

Where's my dad?

MS. LIN

They... they've taken him into custody. We're trying to–

SOFIA

No! You took him! You stole him from me!

Ms. Lin gently extends a hand, but Sofia slaps it away.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

Get away from me!

CROSSING GUARD

(softly, to Ms. Lin)  
Maybe she needs a minute.

But Ms. Lin has done this before. She nods to the driver, who steps out to open the van's sliding door.

MS. LIN

We have a foster placement already arranged. You can bring your things. We'll call you every step of the way.

SOFIA

I don't have "things." Everything I had was him.

She starts backing into the crosswalk.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

Don't touch me!  
(Screaming)

DON'T TOUCH ME!

Cars are stopping. People look.

The crossing guard raises her hand to hold traffic.

Ms. Lin follows, hands low and non-threatening.

MS. LIN

Sofia, please. You're not alone.  
This isn't forever.

Sofia's voice cracks.

SOFIA

That's what they always say right before they disappear.

The CPS driver steps forward to assist.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

I SAID DON'T TOUCH ME!

She swings her backpack at him, furious, eyes wild with grief. The driver recoils. The coffee cup hits the ground – shattering like glass.

Sofia stands over the puddle of coffee. It seeps into the white lines of the crosswalk like spilled blood.

Tears stream down her cheeks. She shakes with rage.

SOFIA (CONT'D)  
He was just going to work...

A long, agonizing beat.

The traffic light changes.

Sofia collapses to her knees – not from force, but exhaustion. She gives in to the weight of it all.

Ms. Lin kneels beside her, gently places a hand on her shoulder. This time, Sofia doesn't pull away.

CUT TO:

INT. CHILD SERVICES VAN - MOMENTS LATER

The van pulls away from the intersection.

Through the window, Sofia watches the crosswalk disappear behind her, the same one she and Miguel walked together every morning.

A single tear slides down her cheek.

She hugs her knees to her chest.

The coffee stain still clings to her backpack strap.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE TRANSPORT BUS - DUSK

MIGUEL (40s) sits shackled to a bench seat. Rows of detainees flank him. The bus bumps down a remote desert highway – cold, impersonal.

A GUARD tapes a new manifest to a clipboard.

Miguel stares out the window – passing nothing but fence posts and emptiness.

In his hand: a crumpled school permission slip he never signed. It's Sofia's. He grips it tight.

INT. COUNTY HOUSING CENTER - DUSK

SOFIA steps hesitantly into a small bedroom.

Neutral walls. No pictures. A generic teddy bear on the pillow.

She still clutches her backpack - dirt-smudged and soaked at the bottom from the spilled coffee.

MS. LIN

You can shower if you want. There's clothes in the drawer. I'll be just down the hall, okay?

Sofia nods - barely.

Ms. Lin leaves, gently closing the door.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE TRANSPORT BUS - NIGHT

The bus turns down a gravel road. Ahead, floodlights and a barbed-wire fence loom - a black site compound with no signage.

Miguel lifts his head. Alarm rising in his eyes.

MIGUEL

(to seatmate, whispering)  
Where is this?

No answer. Just the sound of the brakes hissing.

CUT TO:

INT. FOSTER ROOM - NIGHT

Sofia opens a drawer. Sees folded clothes – jeans, t-shirts, underwear.

She doesn't touch them.

Instead, she curls up on top of the blanket, fully dressed, clutching the teddy bear like a life preserver.

Her phone sits dead beside her. No charger. No contact.

CUT TO:

EXT. SITE THETA - NIGHT

Miguel is led off the bus by two ARMED GUARDS. His hands are zip-tied now.

Ahead: the detention complex, bleak and faceless.

One detainee asks in Spanish:

DETAINEE  
¿Dónde estamos?

No one answers.

Miguel scans the horizon. Blackness all around. No cities. No roads back.

CUT TO:

INT. FOSTER ROOM - SAME TIME

Tears begin to leak from Sofia's closed eyes as the camera slowly pushes in.

She whispers, barely audible:

SOFIA  
Please... don't forget me.

CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING CELL - SAME TIME

Miguel sits alone on a metal cot. No window. No clock.

He stares at his hands.

And then, quietly - almost instinctively - he hums a lullaby.

Their lullaby.

The same one he used to sing when Sofia couldn't sleep as a child.

His voice cracks. But he keeps going.

Darkness surrounds them both.

CUT TO:

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE - LATER

A cold, fluorescent-lit room. Sofia sits on a vinyl chair. Her notebook is clutched tightly in her hands.

A SOCIAL WORKER (50s, tired but kind) types on a keyboard.

SOCIAL WORKER  
We're trying to find a relative,  
honey. But we may need to place you  
in temporary care tonight.

Sofia stares forward. Her gaze flickers to a government poster behind the woman:

A smiling cartoon kid under big letters that read: "EVERY CHILD MATTERS."



She looks away.

CUT TO:

INT. FOSTER HOUSE - NIGHT

A modest home with a large family. Kids shout from other rooms. The foster mother smiles tightly as she hands Sofia a towel.

FOSTER MOTHER  
Bathroom's down the hall. Dinner's  
in the fridge.

You're safe here, okay?

Sofia nods, then closes the guest room door behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

The walls are bare. Sofia sits on the edge of the bed, staring at her notebook. Her fingers flip it open:

"SOFIA'S MEGA MAP QUEST"

Inside: maps, clues, lists of "places I want to visit with Dad."

One page reads:

"Secret mission: Find Mom's old letter."

She tears it out. Flips to a hidden pocket in her backpack – a small, wrinkled photo of her parents at the border wall, holding baby Sofia.

She wipes her tears. Then something clicks.

SOFIA (V.O.)  
Dad said: if anything ever  
happened... look under the truck  
seat.

CUT TO:

INT. FOSTER HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Sofia sneaks out in the pre-dawn hours. Backpack on.  
Determined.

CUT TO:

EXT. IMPOUND LOT - MORNING

She crouches outside the fence, staring at their impounded  
truck.

A security guard walks past. Sofia quietly slips through a  
gap in the chain-link.

She makes it to the truck. Slides under.

Her fingers reach under the seat - and pull out a folded  
envelope wrapped in a plastic bag. Inside:

- \* A photocopy of Miguel's green card
- \* A list of emergency contacts
- \* A small, faded business card that reads:

CASSIDY REED - JOURNALIST / PODCASTER

Truth is what you fight for.

(917) 555-0420

Sofia clutches the card. Her eyes flick toward the sun rising  
over the city skyline.

She doesn't cry.

She maps her next move.

CUT TO:

INT. PRIVATE DETENTION CENTER - HOLDING INTAKE - NIGHT

Harsh fluorescent lights. Bleak, echoing walls.

Miguel stands in a line of detainees, hands zip-tied, his face bruised from the arrest. An ICE GUARD barks orders as they're shuffled through processing like cattle.

ICE GUARD  
Step forward! State your name  
clearly!

MIGUEL  
Miguel Ramirez.

ICE GUARD  
Country of origin?

MIGUEL  
Mexico.

ICE GUARD  
Legal documentation?

MIGUEL  
It's in my wallet. I'm a green card  
holder. My daughter—

ICE GUARD  
You'll have your chance to speak.

Miguel's eyes burn with rage. But he swallows it.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION DORM - LATER

Metal bunk beds. A hum of fluorescent lights that never turn off.

Miguel lies on a top bunk. Around him, dozens of other men and teenagers sleep restlessly. Some cough. Some whisper in Spanish, Tagalog, Dari.

Across from him, an older man - JORGE (60s) - smokes a contraband cigarette and watches Miguel.

JORGE

You look too clean to be here.

MIGUEL

I wasn't supposed to be here.

JORGE

None of us were.

Miguel stares at the peeling ceiling. He whispers-

MIGUEL

They took my daughter.

JORGE

Then you better survive this place, amigo. Because if you don't, nobody will care what they took.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER - DAY (MONTAGE)

Miguel stands in a long line for food - watery beans, dry bread.

He fills out endless forms in English he barely understands.

A young detainee, LEO (18), asks if he's heard about a girl outside looking for someone named "Migs."

Miguel's ears perk up.

A female ICE supervisor calls roll from a clipboard, ignoring personal pleas.

A cell door slams behind Miguel – another day, another shift in his hope.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER – REC ROOM – NIGHT

Miguel sits at a communal table, sketching a rough map of the U.S. into the margins of a pamphlet. Tracing routes. Guessing where Sofia would go. He circles D.C.

MIGUEL (V.O.)  
(soft, to himself)  
Please be smarter than me, mija...

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STATION – NIGHT

Sofia boards a Greyhound alone. Her backpack clutched tightly.

She sits by the window and opens her scavenger map notebook. On the first page:

THE QUEST BEGINS HERE.

OBJECTIVE: Find Cassidy Reed. Bring Dad Home.

She draws a star on Washington, D.C.

The bus pulls out into the dark highway.

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. – BUS TERMINAL – DAY

The Greyhound pulls in under gray skies.

SOFIA steps off, small against the city's chaos. Horns blare. People rush past her. She clutches her backpack like armor.

She glances at her notebook, then the business card:

CASSIDY REED — JOURNALIST / PODCASTER

Scribbled below:

"Mount Pleasant, NW"

CUT TO:

INT. DINER — DAY

Sofia sits at a corner booth, sipping a \$2 soda to earn Wi-Fi.

She opens a busted Chromebook. Types into a search bar:

"Cassidy Reed Podcast"

"Cassidy Reed D.C."

"Where is Cassidy Reed now?"

Results come up:

Podcast host goes silent after immigration controversy

Ex-journalist sues ICE... and loses

Last known address: Adams Morgan P.O. Box

Sofia clicks through — no phone number. Just a fan email:

truthhacks@protonmail.com

She hesitates... then types:

Subject: Help my dad

Hi. My name is Sofia.

My dad Miguel Ramirez is in ICE jail and he says you can help.

He didn't do anything wrong.

Please write back.

From,

Sofia (his daughter)

She hits send.

Watches the screen. Nothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF D.C. - MONTAGE

Sofia walks the street asking strangers:

"Do you know Cassidy Reed?"

Blank stares. One man shrugs:

"She disappeared years ago."

She stops at a local library. Searches local voter records.

Finds an old P.O. Box in Mount Pleasant.

She goes to the post office - it's closed.

She slips a handwritten note into the box:

"Cassidy Reed,

My name is Sofia Ramirez.

You knew my dad. Please help us.

I can wait here every day until you come."

CUT TO:

INT. SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

A sea of fluorescent lights, plastic chairs, and numbered kiosks. Everyone looks half-defeated.

SOFIA waits at the back of the line, wearing a hoodie two sizes too big. Her backpack sits at her feet. A small paper number - B402 - is clutched in her hand.

She approaches a plexiglass window where a disinterested SOCIAL SECURITY CLERK (50s, badge: DORIS) pecks at a keyboard, chewing a cinnamon toothpick.

SOFIA

Hi... I'm looking for someone named Cassidy Lowe. She used to work at that nonprofit down on 3rd-The Path Group? I think she's in the system?

DORIS

Social Security isn't a directory, sweetheart.

SOFIA

I know. But... I'm trying to find her. I need help. She helps people like-

DORIS

We can't give out private information. That's a federal violation. You think I wanna get fired for someone I don't know?

SOFIA

I'm not asking for her number. Just... an address? A city even?

Doris sighs theatrically.

DORIS

Do you have a notarized request? A subpoena? A custody order?

Didn't think so.

SOFIA

There has to be something you can do.



Doris gestures toward a stack of forms.

DORIS

You can file a "Request for Inquiry Into Active Recipient Placement" – but it takes 12 to 16 weeks. That's if the system doesn't "eat it."

SOFIA

Twelve to sixteen weeks?

DORIS

Hey, you wanna talk to someone faster, try death benefits. We move real quick when someone's dead.

She chuckles. Sofia doesn't.

SOFIA

This is a joke.

DORIS

No, honey. This is America.

CUT TO:

INT. SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE – MOMENTS LATER

Sofia exits, defeated. She walks past a poster of smiling families under the slogan: "Working for YOU!"

She kicks the base of the sign – hard.

People glance. She doesn't care.

EXT. SIDEWALK – CONTINUOUS

Sofia stands outside the building, staring out at the cars zipping past. She pulls her phone – no signal. Dead battery.

She sinks onto a nearby bus bench. Alone.

Just then, a woman walks by pushing a stroller. A little girl inside drops her juice cup. Her father – laughing – picks it up and hands it back.

Sofia watches. Her lip trembles.

She curls into herself and whispers:

SOFIA  
This can't be it...

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. POST OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON -

A squat beige building with faded flags flapping above.

Sofia steps outside, her face pale and tight. Her fingers clutch a rejection slip – a coldly stamped "RETURN TO SENDER." It's the third envelope she's tried to mail to ICE.

She stumbles to the curbside bench just beyond the mailboxes. The sound of traffic hums in the background – distant, indifferent.

She sits down, slowly, like her body's giving out.

Her backpack drops at her feet.

The envelope flutters to the sidewalk.

Sofia stares at the building across the street. People come and go. Buying stamps. Carrying packages. Laughing on the phone. Life continues.

She doesn't move.

Her breathing grows shallow.

Then comes the first tear – soft and slow.

SOFIA  
(whispering)  
Why won't anyone help me?

She wipes her face, but more tears follow. Her breath quickens – a stifled sob caught in her throat.

And then it hits her – the collapse.

She breaks down completely. Shoulders shaking. Silent tears turning into guttural sobs.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

Daddy...

(whispers)

I don't know what to do...

No one stops. A few people glance. Most look away. One passerby offers a polite, awkward smile. Another crosses the street.

The sun begins to dip behind the buildings.

Sofia curls into herself, knees to chest, right there on the bench.

She hugs her backpack like it's the only thing left.

The streetlights flicker on as her sobs slow... and eventually fade into quiet exhaustion.

She slumps to her side on the bench.

Tears still on her cheeks, she drifts into sleep, surrounded by the sounds of delivery trucks, muffled radios, and the never-ending hum of a city that never noticed her pain.

CUT TO:

EXT. POST OFFICE - SUNSET

Sofia sits on the steps eating trail mix. The city hums around her. Her stomach growls.

Her eyes grow heavy. She lays back on her backpack. Fades into sleep.

A shadow moves across her.

She jolts awake.

A woman stands over her — tired eyes, hoodie, headphones half-around her neck. CASSIDY REED (30s).

Worn down, but watching. Not unkind.

CASSIDY

Sofia?

Sofia scrambles up.

SOFIA

Are you...?

CASSIDY

Yeah. You sent the email. And the note.

I've been avoiding people for a long time.

But you... you showed up.

SOFIA

Please. My dad's in trouble.

Cassidy looks at her – weighing things. Old wounds rising.

CASSIDY

Okay, kid. Let's talk.

They walk into the shadows of the city together.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER – COMMISSARY – DAY

Miguel eats alone. Fork scraping at beans and rice on a stained tray.

Across the room, LEO (18) – a wiry, quick-talking detainee – paces by the table, glancing around.

LEO

Psst. Ramirez. You got people on the outside?

MIGUEL

I have a daughter.

LEO

Then you better start listening.  
ICE ain't processing us – they're  
stalling. Holding us past the legal  
limit. You seen the files?

MIGUEL

What files?

LEO

The ones they keep "losing." You  
think it's an accident?

Miguel pushes his tray away.

LEO (CONT'D)

You look like a man with something  
to lose. Maybe it's time to stop  
waiting and start acting.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER – DORM – LATER

Miguel sits on his bunk, eyes scanning the room. The tension  
is mounting – detainees whisper more, guards shout louder.

He pulls out a pen cap he's been hiding and starts scratching  
notes into a Bible page margin.

MIGUEL (V.O.)

If I don't come home... at least let  
someone know the truth.

CUT TO:

INT. CASSIDY'S APARTMENT – NIGHT

Sofia sits on a beat-up couch, still wearing her backpack.  
Cassidy types furiously on a laptop, pulling up folders,  
waveforms, old interviews.

SOFIA

Are you going to help him?

CASSIDY

I tried once. They silenced me. Got me fired.

ICE buried my source and blacklisted my podcast.

SOFIA

So that's it?

CASSIDY

That's how it works, Sofia. Power wins.

Sofia pulls something from her backpack: a crumpled family photo. Miguel, Sofia, and her mom in front of their garage.

She hands it to Cassidy.

SOFIA

Please don't let them erase us.

Cassidy stares at the photo. Something shifts.

She exhales.

CASSIDY

Alright. Let's open some wounds.

She pulls open a hard drive and plugs it in.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

There's one file they missed. I never uploaded it.

It names a private contractor ICE used to detain people for profit.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER — UTILITY CLOSET — NIGHT

Miguel follows Leo and JORGE (60s) into a utility closet. One holds the door. Miguel pulls out a torn ventilation map of the center.

LEO

There's a USB. One of the guards  
logs incident reports from the  
camera room.

Get it, and we prove ICE has been faking release dates.

JORGE

They're moving us out in 48 hours.  
Quietly. Black site transfer.

MIGUEL

Then we move tonight.

CUT TO:

INTERCUT - MONTAGE

MIGUEL - sneaking through vents, peering down into offices.

SOFIA & CASSIDY - recording a podcast episode in the dark:

Cassidy's voice raw, vulnerable.

CASSIDY (V.O.)

They called it "administrative  
hold." What they meant was  
"disappearance."

MIGUEL - finding the computer, plugging in a flash drive.

SOFIA - uploading images to social media.

Cassidy hits POST.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - LATER

AGENT HAWTHORNE watches as his screen floods with  
notifications. Viral tweets. Podcasts. News alerts.

He scrolls down and sees a post:

"ICE took my dad. He's innocent. Please help."

- Sofia Ramirez, age 11. Washington D.C.

Hawthorne exhales - haunted.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HEADQUARTERS - HAWTHORNE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Dimly lit. Cluttered. File folders stacked like sandbags. A fluorescent light flickers overhead, unresolved.

AGENT HAWTHORNE (50s), sharp-featured but weathered, sits alone.

His badge sits next to an untouched cup of cold coffee.

A framed photo of him in uniform - younger, decorated, proud - rests beneath a family photo: an estranged daughter, maybe mid-20s, who hasn't called in months.

On his screen: the viral post.

SOFIA RAMIREZ, AGE 14.

ICE took my dad. Please help. #FreeMiguelRamirez

A cursor blinks at the end of her name like a heartbeat.

He minimizes it. Opens a detainee database.

Types: RAMIREZ, MIGUEL

Status: Processing Hold - Location: Transferred

His brow furrows.

He clicks again. The record glitches.

"TRANSFERRED" but no destination listed.



HAWTHORNE (SOFT)  
No chain of custody? That's not  
protocol.

He picks up his phone. Calls Internal Records.

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)  
This is Agent Hawthorne. I need  
verification on a detainee  
transfer. Miguel Ramirez.  
(beat)  
No--don't redirect me. I've got a  
minor posting online, and the  
optics are about to explode.

The line clicks. He's put on hold.

Elevator music plays, cheerful and ironic.

CUT TO:

NT. CASSIDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dimly lit. Boxes stacked in corners. Papers strewn across a  
table - maps, case files, post-it notes scribbled with ICE  
codes and bus routes.

Sofia sits on the couch, still damp from the rain. Cassidy  
moves through the small kitchen, making tea.

SOFIA  
How do you know all this stuff?

CASSIDY  
I read a lot. Obsessively.

SOFIA  
That's not what I mean.

Cassidy pauses, hands tightening around the mug.

SOFIA (CONT'D)  
You're not just doing this because  
it's right. You hate them. ICE.  
DHS. All of it.

Cassidy sets the mug down. Sits across from her.

A long beat.

CASSIDY  
I was a field officer.

Voluntary repatriation unit. That's the polite term for  
"deportation specialist."

Sofia's eyes widen slightly.

SOFIA  
You worked for them?

CASSIDY  
Eight years. I carried out raids.  
Did the paperwork. Signed people  
away like it was routine.  
(scoffs)  
I used to believe I was protecting  
the country.

SOFIA  
What changed?

Cassidy stares off for a moment.

CASSIDY  
My brother married a woman from El  
Salvador. No papers. But she was  
good. Kind. She volunteered at  
shelters. Taught Sunday school.

One day, she and my niece were pulled over – busted tail  
light. They sent her to Louisiana. I didn't even know until  
it was too late.

SOFIA  
They took your family?

Cassidy nods slowly. Her voice tightens.

CASSIDY  
They separated them in the  
processing center. My niece was  
four.

They lost her for five days.

SOFIA  
What happened to her?

CASSIDY  
(swallows hard)  
She came back... different. Quiet.

She used to love drawing. Now she doesn't touch crayons.

Silence. Heavy. Sofia looks down, suddenly understanding the weight behind Cassidy's fire.

SOFIA  
I thought you were just angry.

CASSIDY  
I am. But I'm also guilty.

And you can't undo guilt – you can only outwork it.

Sofia nods.

SOFIA  
So now you help people like her.  
Like me.

CASSIDY  
No. I help people like you because  
I couldn't help her.

Beat.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)  
And I won't fail again.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HALLWAY - LATER

Hawthorne walks briskly past other agents. Eyes follow him.  
Whispers behind badge clips.

He enters the Evidence & Surveillance Room.

Inside, a tech guy – MALIK (30s) – looks up.

HAWTHORNE  
Pull up camera footage from last  
night – Detention Center 27.  
(MORE)

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)  
Dorm access, commissary, and  
incident reports.

MALIK  
Supervisor said we're not sharing  
those anymore. Legal hold.

HAWTHORNE  
I am legal hold. Now move.

Malik hesitates, then clicks through.

Footage loads: Miguel slipping through a side vent.

MALIK  
That's your guy?

HAWTHORNE  
He wasn't a flight risk. He had a  
green card. A job. A daughter.

He leans closer.

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)  
And we made him disappear.

CUT TO:

INT. HAWTHORNE'S OFFICE - NIGHT (LATER)

He opens a drawer. Pulls out an old letter.

Unopened. From his daughter. Postmarked last year.

He stares at it.

Then dials a number.

HAWTHORNE  
This is Agent Hawthorne. Internal  
Request Code 289-B.

I want eyes on Cassidy Reed. She's resurfaced.

(pause)

And find me that girl. Sofia Ramirez.

But don't bring her in – not yet.

CUT TO:

INT. SAFEHOUSE – NIGHT (INTERCUT)

Cassidy and Sofia huddle over the laptop.

The podcast is gaining traction. They watch a live map of listeners light up like fireflies across the country.

Sofia looks tired. But hopeful.

Cassidy turns to her.

CASSIDY

You did it. People are listening.

SOFIA

Now we just have to find him.

Cassidy looks out the window, uneasy. Something in the wind has shifted.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER – DORM – NIGHT

Dark. Silent. Most detainees are asleep or faking it.

Miguel lies awake, staring at the ceiling, his thumb rubbing the edge of the Bible where he's hidden his notes.

Suddenly – click. Thud.

The door bursts open. Armed private security contractors – not ICE agents – enter, faces obscured by masks and visors.

They're Paramount Holdings – the private contractor ICE offloaded detainees to in past scandals.

CONTRACTOR #1

Ramirez. Let's go.

MIGUEL

Where?

CONTRACTOR #2

You're being moved. Now.

LEO (O.S.)

(to Miguel)

This is it. The black site.

Miguel looks to Jorge. Jorge gives a faint nod – not in approval, in warning.

JORGE

You go quiet, you disappear. You  
fight, you disappear faster.

Miguel steps down from his bunk slowly, clutching his Bible.

CUT TO:

INT. SAFEHOUSE – NIGHT

Low light. A map of California ICE detention centers is spread across the table. Cassidy marks a route with a red marker. Sofia watches quietly.

SOFIA

Why are you even helping me?

Cassidy doesn't respond right away. She stares at the map – then closes her eyes.

BEGIN FLASHBACK – INT. ICE DETENTION INTAKE CENTER – YEARS  
EARLIER – NIGHT

Cassidy (mid-20s, in uniform) stands stiffly at a processing desk. Her badge is shiny. Her face is unreadable, professional – but her eyes betray uncertainty.

A HISPANIC MAN in his early 30s, wearing a dirty white T-shirt, is being fingerprinted. He pleads – softly, in Spanish.

HISPANIC MAN (SUBTITLED)  
Please... my daughter is waiting  
outside. Please don't separate us...

Cassidy flinches slightly.

She turns away – locking eyes with her supervisor, Agent Mathers.

MATHERS  
Don't get involved, Lowe. Run his  
prints and move him.

Cassidy nods. Robotically. She logs into the terminal. Her fingers hesitate.

INT. DETENTION HOLDING ROOM – LATER

Cassidy stands outside a window, staring into a holding cell.

Inside: the man from earlier sits on a bench, face in his hands.

In the far corner – a young girl (8, maybe 9) is curled in a ball on a cot, clutching a pink backpack.

Cassidy watches.

She walks away... but stops. Looks back.

Her reflection overlaps the girl's in the window.

INT. ICE INTAKE CENTER – WAITING ROOM – SAME NIGHT

A younger Cassidy, this time not in uniform, sits next to her teenage brother in an old sweatshirt. ICE agents lead him away in handcuffs.

He glances back at her – and smiles sadly.

She can't speak. Can't move. Just watches.

Back then, she was powerless.

END FLASHBACK – INT. SAFEHOUSE – NIGHT (PRESENT)

Cassidy's eyes are red. She blinks away the memory. The silence hangs heavy.

Sofia watches her.

SOFIA

Who was it?

Cassidy doesn't answer. She just circles the next location.

CASSIDY

If they moved him like I think they  
did, there's only one place left  
that fits the profile.

She folds the map.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Let's go.

CUT TO:

INT. DETENTION CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Miguel is marched down a fluorescent-lit corridor. The center  
is oddly quiet - no staff, no buzz, just echoing footsteps.

At the end of the hall: a freight elevator.

He turns to the guard.

MIGUEL

I want to speak to a lawyer. You  
can't move me without paperwork.

CONTRACTOR #1

You don't exist in the system  
anymore.

They shove him forward.

CUT TO:



INT. TRANSPORT VAN - NIGHT

Metal box. No windows. Miguel sits in shackles, chained to a bolt on the floor. Opposite him, two other detainees – both silent, both terrified.

Above them, a dim red light glows. Cameras in every corner.

Miguel notices something scratched into the wall in Spanish:

"They bury us where no one will find us."

He stares at it.

Then grips the Bible tighter.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HEADQUARTERS - HAWTHORNE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Hawthorne sits at his desk. A cup of black coffee steams next to a blinking notification on his screen.

DATABASE ALERT:

"Miguel Ramirez - TRANSFER COMPLETE."

New Location: CLASSIFIED / CONTRACT FACILITY

Admin: O. Burchell / Paramount Holdings

Hawthorne leans back, eyes narrowing.

HAWTHORNE (SOFTLY)  
Classified, my ass.

He picks up the phone.

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)  
Get me the Reed file. And find the  
driver manifest for last night's  
transfer.

I want to know who moved Miguel Ramirez, and where the hell they took him.

CUT TO:

INT. SAFEHOUSE - DAWN

Cassidy is on her second cup of coffee. Sofia's asleep, curled up with her backpack.

Cassidy's screen lights up. Encrypted message. Anonymous sender.

She opens it.

"They moved him."

"You have less than 48 hours before he disappears for good."

No signature.

Just a link:

/paramountblack

Cassidy blinks.

CASSIDY (V.O.)  
He's in the wind.

She wakes Sofia gently.

CASSIDY  
Get up, kiddo. We have to move.  
Now.

CUT TO:

INT. SAFEHOUSE - MORNING

Sofia watches as Cassidy flips open a burner laptop and boots into a secure OS.

SOFIA  
Are we hacking them?

CASSIDY

No. We're asking rude questions in the right rooms until someone tries to shut us up.

She types quickly. Pulls up Paramount Holdings' internal contractor site, hidden behind layers of dummy companies.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

They don't run detention centers. Officially. They do "logistical intake and civilian relocation."

SOFIA

That's the creepiest way to say "kidnapping" I've ever heard.

Cassidy finds an employee access badge template online.

CASSIDY

We'll need disguises, access tags, and fake roles. And one hell of a story.

CUT TO:

INT. THRIFT STORE - MONTAGE

Cassidy holds up a Paramount-blue blazer.

Sofia finds a pair of ID clip lanyards and cheap sunglasses.

Cassidy sharpens her look in the mirror - cuts her hair shorter, changes her posture. She becomes someone else.

CUT TO:

INT. PARAMOUNT CONTRACTOR LOBBY - DAY

Sterile, corporate. No logos. Just numbers on glass doors.

Cassidy, in disguise as a "regional operations auditor", flashes a badge at the desk clerk.

Sofia follows, dressed in business-casual kid clothes, holding a tablet and clipboard – like an intern.

CASSIDY  
Angela Corday. Field compliance audit. We're supposed to observe a rotation out of Site B before the contractor briefing.

The clerk blinks, half-convinced.

CLERK  
I wasn't told–

Cassidy cuts him off.

CASSIDY  
Want me to call Legal?

He shrinks.

CLERK  
Conference room's down the hall.  
Sit tight.

CUT TO:

INT. PARAMOUNT HALLWAY – MOMENTS LATER

Cassidy and Sofia walk quickly.

SOFIA  
Do you think he's here?

CASSIDY  
No. But this system will tell us where he's going.

They enter an unmarked side room – a server hub.

Cassidy plugs in a small USB stick. A script auto-launches. Data begins downloading. Sofia keeps watch at the door.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)  
Come on, come on...

A document opens:

TRANSFER LOG: Ramirez, Miguel — ROUTE: Site Theta, WV.

SOFIA  
Site Theta?

CASSIDY  
Undisclosed location. That means  
it's off-books.

She unplugs the drive.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)  
We got what we came for. Now we  
vanish.

CUT TO:

INT. PARKING GARAGE - MINUTES LATER

Cassidy and Sofia rush to the car, toss their badges,  
jackets.

CASSIDY  
They'll know in five minutes that  
someone accessed the Theta  
manifest.

SOFIA  
So what do we do?

Cassidy stares at the windshield — then turns to Sofia.

CASSIDY  
We go find Site Theta. And this  
time, we don't go around.

We go straight through the front gate.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY (MONTAGE)

Cassidy and Sofia drive fast through winding forest roads.

Cassidy flips through maps and blueprints found on the USB.  
Sofia studies them like a battlefield commander.

SOFIA

There's a maintenance road here. If  
it's still open, we can get within  
a mile of the perimeter.

Cassidy nods.

CASSIDY

You'd make a hell of a journalist.

CUT TO:

Aerial drone shot.

A fortress of concrete and chain-link fencing deep in the  
West Virginia woods, camouflaged from satellites and hidden  
from the outside world.

No signage. No records. No laws.

CUT TO:

INT. SITE THETA - PROCESSING BAY - NIGHT

Floodlights buzz overhead. MIGUEL is unloaded from the back  
of the transport van. Shackled. Shivering.

Guards in black tactical gear greet him with silence.

One of them snaps a photo of Miguel with a handheld camera –  
no explanation.

Another removes Miguel's shoelaces and belt.

GUARD #1

Welcome to the end of your story.

CUT TO:

INT. SITE THETA - CELLBLOCK 3 - NIGHT

Miguel is escorted down a corridor of bare concrete and isolation units. Inside each cell: a detainee curled up on a cot, silent.

Miguel is shoved into a narrow solo cell with no toilet, no light switch. Just a drain and four walls.

The door slams. Silence.

He touches the wall. It's ice-cold.

He breathes in - and slowly exhales.

MIGUEL (V.O.)  
If I disappear, Sofia must not.

CUT TO:

INT. CELLBLOCK - LATER THAT NIGHT

A faint tapping.

Miguel hears it again - rhythmic. Morse code?

He taps back. Pauses. Listens.

A muffled voice from the next cell whispers through the vents.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Are you the mechanic?

MIGUEL  
Who's asking?

VOICE  
Someone who's not planning to stay  
here forever.

CUT TO:

INT. SITE THETA - CAFETERIA - NEXT DAY

Miguel eats silently under surveillance.

Across the room: a woman in her 50s, CARMEN, thin, sharp-eyed. A former immigration lawyer turned detainee after a raid on her pro bono clinic.

She approaches Miguel carefully.

CARMEN

They say you escaped before. From 27.

MIGUEL

I didn't escape. I survived.

CARMEN

You survived long enough for your daughter to make noise.

Miguel looks up.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

A podcast. Social media. A map.

You've become dangerous.

MIGUEL

I'm a father. That's all.

CARMEN

Exactly. That's why they'll bury you here.

Unless... we move first.

CUT TO:

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

Miguel, Carmen, and a quiet young man named OMAR, formerly a data clerk for DHS, meet under the guise of folding laundry.



CARMEN

There's a way into the internal  
network – Omar's old clearance  
might give us access.

We broadcast. Evidence. Names. Faces. GPS.

OMAR

But the moment we upload, they'll  
cut the power.

We need help on the outside to receive the signal.

MIGUEL

Sofia.

He looks at the ductwork above them.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Give me 24 hours.

INT. ICE HOLDING CELL – NIGHT

Dim. Silent.

A single fluorescent light buzzes above. Flickers.

MIGUEL lies on a narrow cot, arms folded across his chest.  
His eyes are wide open, unblinking.

The cell is concrete and airless. There's no window. Just a  
dull metal toilet in the corner and the smell of bleach.

He turns to face the wall, clutching his fingers like a  
rosary.

The hum of the overhead light starts to change – like a low  
vibration building in his skull.

CLOSE ON Miguel's eye – it dilates, and we begin to dissolve  
into—

FLASHBACK – INT. SMALL FAMILY KITCHEN – NIGHT (WARM LIGHT)

A tiny home, humble but full of life. A steaming pot on the  
stove. Music plays softly – romantic, old-fashioned.

MIGUEL'S WIFE, early 30s, glowing and playful, is dancing in  
her socks, making tamales.

She looks up as Miguel (younger, relaxed) enters the kitchen.

WIFE  
You're late.

MIGUEL  
(pulls her into a hug)  
I missed my girls.

She laughs as they spin in place. The music swells.

WIFE  
You're not allowed to be tired on  
Friday. It's family night.

MIGUEL  
Then I'm not tired. Just... full.

He kisses her.

From down the hall, we hear SOFIA'S CHILDHOOD VOICE:

SOFIA (O.S.)  
Daddy! Daddy, look what I drew!

Miguel turns – the light begins to flicker, the music warps –  
and suddenly–

DREAM SEQUENCE – INT. COURTROOM – UNREAL

Miguel now stands in a surreal courtroom.

He's in shackles. A massive judge's bench looms overhead.

His wife and young Sofia are beside him, crying – but no  
sound comes from their mouths.

The judge slams a gavel, but instead of a voice, we hear a  
burst of static.

Suddenly, ICE agents flood the room. They grab Miguel.

MIGUEL  
No! Wait! Please!

He reaches for Sofia as the floor stretches – she grows  
smaller, farther – like falling through a tunnel in reverse.

Her voice breaks through the static:

SOFIA (V.O.)  
Papi... don't give up...

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HOLDING CELL - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

Miguel jolts awake, breath ragged. Sweat on his brow.

He sits up, blinks, trying to orient himself. He puts his hand to his chest - it trembles.

He slowly leans forward and kisses his fingers, pressing them to the concrete wall.

MIGUEL (SOFTLY, IN SPANISH)  
Te prometo... no rendirme.  
(I promise... not to give  
up.)

He lies back down. Eyes to the ceiling. The flickering fluorescent buzzes on.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. CASSIDY'S SUV - MOVING - NIGHT

Intercut:

Cassidy and Sofia drive toward the mountains.

Sofia pulls out a walkie-talkie radio and turns to Cassidy.

SOFIA  
You said Site Theta was a cold spot, right?  
  
No signal in or out?

CASSIDY  
Yeah. It's air-gapped.

SOFIA  
What if we brought the signal to  
them?

Cassidy glances at her. Smiles.

CASSIDY  
You thinking what I'm thinking?

SOFIA  
Pirate antenna, baby.

CUT TO:

BACK AT SITE THETA — INT. CELLBLOCK VENTS — NIGHT

Miguel climbs silently through ductwork, using tools smuggled  
from laundry detail. His hands bleed. His breathing is tight.

Every move is risky.

He reaches a panel marked SERVER VAULT.

Takes a deep breath.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE FIELD OPERATIONS CENTER — DC SUBSTATION — NIGHT

Humming with energy. Satellite feeds. Rows of agents at  
terminals.

AGENT HAWTHORNE stands at a private station, eyes locked on a  
geofence alert:

UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS ATTEMPT - PARAMOUNT DATA NODE: RAMIREZ  
FILE

He taps the desk. A young analyst approaches.

HAWTHORNE  
Run a sweep on Site Theta's  
vicinity.

Look for any mobile relays, signal jumps, or bursts near the  
perimeter.

ANALYST  
You think someone's trying to  
extract from a black site?

HAWTHORNE  
No. I think someone's trying to  
broadcast out.  
(beat)  
And if we don't get there first,  
this whole damn operation goes  
public.

CUT TO:

INT. HAWTHORNE'S SUV - MOVING - NIGHT

Hawthorne drives through a stretch of mountain highway,  
headlights cutting through mist.

He has a manila folder open on the passenger seat.

Inside:

A photo of Cassidy Reed

A printed transcript from her old podcast titled "Ghost  
Papers"

A still image of Sofia, pulling a hood over her head at the  
bus station.

Hawthorne dials.

HAWTHORNE  
This is Agent Hawthorne.

I want drones in the air over the Theta zone, and I want access to everything Paramount's been hiding from us.

(pause)

And if anyone leaks this... I'll burn them myself.

He hangs up, jaw clenched.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. COURTROOM - FIVE YEARS AGO

Quick insert. A younger Hawthorne stands in uniform as his daughter testifies against the agency.

DAUGHTER (O.S.)  
He told me to keep quiet.

To stop asking questions.

To obey the chain of command.

Bang of the gavel.

Back to:

INT. HAWTHORNE'S SUV - NIGHT

He tosses the photo of his daughter onto the dash.

Breathes deep.

Then floors the gas.

HAWTHORNE (V.O.)  
I was loyal long enough.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKROAD OFF-RAMP - NIGHT

Hawthorne pulls into a rural truck stop, parks, and walks toward a satellite relay terminal in the woods.

He opens a locked case. Pulls out an old radio scanner and tunes to a band marked "THETA-PRIVATE."

Static.

Then—

A PING. A low-band pulse.

A signal spike.

HAWTHORNE

Got you.

He dials again.

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)

They're going live within 24 hours.

Send backup. But I'm going in first.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATIONAL FOREST - MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

Cassidy's SUV winds along a narrow, tree-lined fire road. Headlights off. Only the moon lights their way.

They pull into a clearing surrounded by pine trees and moss-covered rocks.

The car stops. Engine off.

SOFIA

This is it?

CASSIDY

Site Theta is about a mile through those trees.

Cassidy opens the back of the SUV, revealing:

A folding radio tower kit

A solar battery pack

Modified laptop wired to a signal scrambler

And a plastic tub filled with energy bars and caffeine pills

SOFIA

You always carry all this?

CASSIDY

Only when I'm about to piss off the government.

FADE OUT:

INT. MAKESHIFT CAMPSITE - LATER THAT NIGHT

They've set up a low-tent tarp, a fireless camp. Cassidy configures the laptop while Sofia assembles the mini antenna using scavenged parts: a satellite dish, old CB radio, copper wire strung between tree branches.

Sofia crawls into the cabling like it's a jungle gym, expertly connecting the leads.

SOFIA

This should give us about a kilometer radius. If he pings the signal, we'll catch it.

CASSIDY

We'll have maybe 20 minutes of bandwidth before they detect it.

Sofia nods. Nervous. She clutches her map notebook.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

You okay?

SOFIA

Just thinking.



CASSIDY  
About what?

SOFIA  
What if we fail?

Cassidy looks at her. Then pulls out a flash drive.

CASSIDY  
This auto-uploads the moment the  
file hits the drive.

To three different journalists, two watchdogs, and one very  
pissed-off senator I used to date.

SOFIA (GRINNING)  
That's the most hardcore ex I've  
ever heard of.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIDGELINE OVERLOOK - NIGHT

Cassidy scans the distance with binoculars. A faint glow in  
the valley: Site Theta, partially obscured by trees, fencing,  
and motion lights.

CASSIDY  
Perimeter's lit like a prison yard.  
No way we're getting inside. But if  
Miguel's near the main server  
vault...

She traces her finger across a blueprint printout.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)  
...the vault faces this direction.

If he pings the antenna, we'll have a direct line.

SOFIA  
Then we wait.

CUT TO:

INT. TENT - LATE NIGHT

Sofia lies in a sleeping bag, wide awake. She looks over at Cassidy, who's typing softly.

SOFIA  
Do you think he's scared?

CASSIDY  
Probably. But I think he's proud,  
too.

Sofia hugs her knees.

SOFIA  
He used to call me "his compass."  
Said I always pointed him home.

Cassidy looks over.

CASSIDY  
Then let's make sure he finds his  
way back.

CUT TO:

INT. SITE THETA - UTILITY TUNNEL - NIGHT

TIGHT ON: Miguel's face. Sweating. Focused.

He crawls through a narrow concrete shaft barely wide enough for his shoulders. The light on his makeshift headlamp flickers.

Each movement echoes. A clank. A breath. A heartbeat.

Behind him, a coil of wire snakes from a laundry-room breaker box. His only lifeline to the outside.

CUT TO:

INT. SERVER VAULT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Miguel emerges into a tight corridor – sterile, humming with static electricity. One red-lit camera rotates slowly overhead.

He pulls out a spray bottle from his jumpsuit. Mist.

STATIC POP. The lens fizzles – blind.

Miguel slips forward. Approaches a metal door marked:

DATA ARCHIVE - RESTRICTED

He pulls a stolen clearance card from his waistband.

Swipe.

ACCESS DENIED.

Shit.

He tries again – slower this time.

ACCESS GRANTED.

The door clicks. Opens just enough to slip in.

CUT TO:

INT. SERVER VAULT - NIGHT

Rows of humming servers. Blue LED lights glow like stars.

Miguel shuts the door. Seals it with a screwdriver across the lock. He has minutes. Maybe seconds.

He kneels. Unzips a laundry bag. Pulls out a modified radio modem, wired to a salvaged USB transmitter.

He plugs it into the console.

A small screen flashes:

RECEIVING SIGNAL...

CUT TO:

EXT. RIDGELINE - NIGHT (INTERCUT)

Cassidy and Sofia hunch over the laptop, watching lines of data begin to crawl across the screen.

CASSIDY  
He's in. He's actually doing it.

INT. SERVER VAULT - NIGHT

Miguel watches as the upload begins.

5%... 12%...

Suddenly-

BANG!!

A vent behind him explodes open.

A GUARD DROPS THROUGH - armored, fast, gun drawn.

Miguel stumbles back, slamming into the server stack. Sparks fly.

GUARD

ON THE GROUND! NOW!

Miguel raises his hands - then lunges for the spray bottle, launches it like a grenade.

SSSSHHHTTT!!

Misty fog erupts - the guard stumbles, blinded.

Miguel dives under the desk.

The laptop's at 48%...

He fumbles. Grabs a server blade from the open rack – and hurls it like a boomerang.

CRACK!

Hits the guard in the faceplate.

The guard fires – BLAM BLAM!!

One shot hits the wall near Miguel's head.

Suddenly–

THE LIGHTS CUT OUT.

Darkness. Silence.

Emergency red strobes click on.

Then–

A SECOND FIGURE enters the room. Slowly. Calmly.

We hear his voice before we see him:

HAWTHORNE (O.S.)  
That's enough, Ramirez.

Miguel freezes.

From the shadows: Agent Hawthorne, gun lowered, eyes locked on Miguel.

But...

He doesn't shoot.

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)  
Give me the drive. And I'll let  
your daughter walk free.

Miguel hesitates. Breathing hard. Hand inches toward the upload console.

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)  
It's your choice, but time's  
running out.

Miguel stares at him... then slowly reaches...

FOR THE SHUTDOWN BUTTON.

SOFIA (V.O.) – RADIO STATIC  
Don't stop. I see you, Papi. You're  
almost home.

Miguel's hand hovers. Trembles.

Then—

JUMP SCARE: THE FIRST GUARD – BLOODIED – LUNGES BACK INTO  
FRAME!!

He grabs Hawthorne from behind – misidentifying him as  
Miguel.

BLAM!

A gunshot. Chaos.

Hawthorne spins, disarms him brutally.

Miguel uses the moment to slam the ENTER key.

**UPLOAD COMPLETE. AUTO-SEND INITIATED.**

Red lights spin faster.

Hawthorne looks up.

HAWTHORNE  
You did it.

Miguel holds up the Bible.

MIGUEL  
My daughter did.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIDGELINE - NIGHT

The laptop chimes.

Cassidy and Sofia stare as their screen flashes:

UPLOADED.

SENT.

STREAMING.

CASSIDY (BREATHLESS)  
We got it.

SOFIA  
Now let's tell the world.

CUT TO:

INT. PARAMOUNT BLACK SITE - SERVER VAULT - NIGHT

Miguel and Hawthorne stand in silence as sirens wail.

The screen glows with a message:

BROADCASTING LIVE - 1.2 MILLION VIEWERS

A still frame of Miguel's face appears...

...and then the screen cuts to body cam footage, security cams,  
and hidden angles Miguel, Carmen, and Omar compiled:

MONTAGE - THE TRUTH GOES PUBLIC

INT. NEWSROOM - LIVE BROADCAST

An anchor stares at her monitor in disbelief.

## ANCHOR

We are interrupting regular programming with breaking, disturbing footage from a live data dump allegedly leaked from a federal detention contractor known as Paramount Holdings...

SCREEN WITHIN  
SCREEN - RAW  
FOOTAGE:

Children sleeping on concrete floors under aluminum blankets, crying softly.

A guard dragging a teenage boy by the arm, yelling in Spanish:

"You're not even supposed to be here!"

Carmen, behind bars, speaking into a smuggled phone:

"I was a lawyer. I helped immigrants get their green cards. They came for me anyway."

A clipboard zoomed in: "TARGET: Clean Sweep - All Hold Over 6 Mo. - No Paper Trail."

INT. TWITTER / TIKTOK / INSTAGRAM FEEDS - SIMULTANEOUS

The story goes viral instantly:

A teenager records their mother reacting to seeing Miguel's photo. She sobs.

A Mexican-American teacher tweets:

"My father was detained like this in 2019. No lawyer. No call. Just gone. #FreeThemAll"

Side-by-side photos:

"MIGUEL RAMIREZ: Father. Mechanic. Not a criminal."

"HOLDING CELL 3B - NO TOILET. NO WINDOW. NO NAME."

CUT TO:



INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

A teacher quietly wipes tears from her eyes as the class watches the footage.

On the screen: Sofia's video, intercut with her voice.

SOFIA (V.O.)  
My dad fixes things. He didn't  
break any laws.

But they tried to break him. And me.

Please... help him come home.

Students begin filming their reactions. Posting.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - PRE-DAWN

A long, desolate two-lane road. A light dust fog rolls across the scrub. Headlights in the distance - a black ICE convoy: three SUVs, a military-style van in the middle.

Inside that van:

INT. ICE PRISONER TRANSPORT - MOVING - SAME

MIGUEL is shackled, wedged between two silent detainees. The guard across from him grips his taser, eyes forward, unreadable.

Miguel's eyes flicker - alert, but trying not to show it. He's been moved again. Another ghost transfer.

INT. CASSIDY'S SUV - MOVING - SAME

Cassidy drives like she's threading a needle. SOFIA rides shotgun, her leg bouncing.

Cassidy speaks into a police scanner app, phone propped on the dash.

CASSIDY

Convoy crossed 14 North twenty minutes ago. They're making a detour. Theta's not on this route.

SOFIA

They're hiding him again.

CASSIDY

We stick to the intercept. Trust the source.

INT. ICE HEADQUARTERS - LOS ANGELES - SAME

HAWTHORNE stands before a bank of monitors. Mathers looms beside him.

MATHERS

Press is tracking the Theta story. If this gets out, we lose control of the narrative.

Hawthorne doesn't answer. He sees Miguel's face on the screen. His gut twists.

MATHERS (CONT'D)

I don't care what you do. Just make sure no one knows what's in that van.

INT. CABLE NEWSROOM - DOWNTOWN LA - SAME

Live coverage feeds flash: "ICE EXPOSURE SPARKS INVESTIGATION"

JOURNALIST 1

We have unconfirmed reports of a detainee transport moving without standard routing...

JOURNALIST 2

Could this be connected to Site Theta?

The newsroom pulses with heat. Phones ring. Reporters argue.

EXT. DESERT RIDGE OVERLOOK - SAME

Cassidy's SUV pulls off-road, climbing onto a bluff. Sofia stares down the highway with binoculars.

Nothing.

Suddenly – headlights emerge in the distance.

SOFIA  
There. That's them!

INT. ICE PRISONER TRANSPORT - SAME

Miguel notices something outside: a drone shadow passes overhead.

Then – something changes in the guard's face. A flicker of doubt.

Miguel knows that look.

MIGUEL (SOFTLY, IN SPANISH)  
What are you afraid of?

The guard doesn't respond

CUT TO:

INT. CASSIDY'S SUV - SAME

Cassidy slams it into gear.

CASSIDY  
They changed the route. It's a shell game.

SOFIA  
What do we do?

CASSIDY  
We get in front of it.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HQ - SAME

Alarms on a monitor: UNAUTHORIZED DRONE DETECTED.

TECH

We've got eyes in the sky.  
Someone's watching the convoy.

Hawthorne's jaw tightens. Mathers starts barking orders.

MATHERS

Shut it down. Scramble jammers.  
Pull all non-clearance comms.

HAWTHORNE

(quietly, to himself)  
You're making it worse...

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE - MINUTES LATER

Cassidy races parallel to the convoy now visible on a lower tier road.

SIRENS FLASH IN THE DISTANCE. Police? Or ICE counter-surveillance?

Cassidy grips the wheel.

CASSIDY

They're throwing up shadows. Trying  
to block us in.

SOFIA

Then we go faster.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HEADQUARTERS - WAR ROOM - NIGHT

Panic. Phones ringing. Screens glowing red. Multiple federal departments on the line.

OFFICIAL #1

The video's everywhere.  
The State Department's getting  
calls from Mexico City and  
Brussels.

OFFICIAL #2

Shut it down.

AGENT

It's too late. It's mirrored across  
200 servers.  
This isn't just damage control.

OFFICIAL #1

This is a reckoning.

CUT TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES - MEXICAN CONSULATE - NIGHT

Hundreds of people gather, holding photos of family members  
lost in the system.

Candles. Posters.

One boy holds a sign:

"MY DAD IS A GOOD MAN. BRING HIM BACK."

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - CAPITOL HILL - DAY

Reporters swarm.

Senators demand hearings.

Whistleblowers come forward.

The logo of Paramount Holdings is taken down from a corporate building and loaded into a truck.

CUT TO:

INT. SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

Cassidy watches the coverage, exhausted but emotional.  
Sofia stares at the screen - her dad's face everywhere.  
She turns to Cassidy.

SOFIA  
They're listening now.

Cassidy nods, eyes glassy.

CASSIDY  
Yeah. But we're not done.

INT. SITE THETA - HOLDING BAY - DAWN

Doors open. A chain of detainees is uncuffed, one by one.  
ICE agents retreat, faces blank.  
Miguel steps forward, disoriented, unsure if this is real.  
Carmen smiles faintly at him.

CARMEN  
You lit the match.

MIGUEL  
My daughter lit the fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. SITE THETA - MOMENTS LATER

A group of released detainees walks out into daylight.

Helicopter cameras circle above.

Reporters begin to arrive. Families cheer. Cry. Embrace.

Sofia pushes through the crowd – her eyes scanning – then locking on...

MIGUEL.

They run.

And crash into each other. Father and daughter. Finally home.

CLOSE-UP: MIGUEL  
He kisses Sofia's forehead,  
whispering in Spanish:

MIGUEL  
Mi brújula... siempre me llevaste a  
casa.  
(My compass... you always  
brought me home.)

INT. ICE FIELD OFFICE – HAWTHORNE'S OFFICE – NIGHT

AGENT HAWTHORNE (50s) sits alone in his fluorescent-lit office, watching bodycam footage on a government laptop.

The footage plays: a child in a detention cage, sobbing uncontrollably as a guard throws away her drawing.

GUARD (ON VIDEO)  
We're not running a daycare.

The child screams for her mother in Spanish.

Hawthorne freezes the frame.

Close on his face – emotion stirring beneath the surface. He clenches his jaw.

INT. DETENTION CENTER – OBSERVATION AREA – NEXT DAY

Hawthorne tours the facility with a junior agent. They pass rows of children in thermal blankets. A toddler rocks back and forth.

JUNIOR AGENT  
New arrivals from the Arizona  
corridor. They'll process out to  
Alabama in 48 hours.

Hawthorne stops in front of one cell. Inside: a boy with a  
black eye. Eight years old.

HAWTHORNE  
Why the hell is he alone?

JUNIOR AGENT  
He bit someone. Protocol says  
isolate.

Hawthorne looks through the plexiglass. The boy looks back.  
No fear – just hollow.

Something breaks.

INT. HAWTHORNE'S CAR - NIGHT

Parked outside a suburban home. Hawthorne drinks from a small  
flask, phone in his lap.

RING.

The screen lights up: CALL FROM: MADDY (DAUGHTER)

He answers.

HAWTHORNE  
Hey, kiddo.

MADDY (V.O.)  
Dad, I saw your name in the  
article. The one about the convoy.

Hawthorne exhales.

MADDY (V.O.)  
Are you the bad guy in this story?

Beat.

HAWTHORNE  
No. But I think... I might be  
working for them.



She stays silent.

MADDY (V.O.)

Then stop.

INT. ICE FIELD OFFICE - RECORDS ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Hawthorne sneaks in. Darkness. He inserts a USB drive into the master terminal.

He searches: "Miguel Rivera - Detainee ID 447ZX."

Files pop up - site transfers, medical logs, surveillance summaries.

He copies everything.

Then types a note:

"FOR THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE"

He hits send.

INT. ICE DETENTION CENTER - DAWN

Hawthorne stands outside the entrance.

He lights a cigarette. Looks out at the sunrise over the razor wire.

Behind him, chaos stirs - news crews outside the fence.

INT. SAFEHOUSE - DAY

SOFIA watches footage on a cracked TV.

A newscaster announces:

"...leak confirmed by DHS whistleblower. Allegations include child mistreatment, unlisted sites, and unlawful detainment..."

Miguel reads Hawthorne's name on the chyron.

MIGUEL

He did it.

CUT TO:

INT. CABLE NEWS STUDIO - NIGHT

A blistering live debate.

ANCHOR:

Breaking tonight - confirmation that Agent Jonathan Hawthorne, a veteran ICE field leader, was the source behind this week's explosive leak...

Split screen: a former ICE spokesperson vs. a civil rights attorney.

SPOKESPERSON

This leak endangers national security and undermines the integrity of our immigration system.

ATTORNEY

This isn't about borders - it's about morality. Children were caged. Families destroyed. Someone had to say no.

CUT TO:

INT. HAWTHORNE'S HOUSE - SAME NIGHT

Hawthorne sits in the dark. He's taken off his badge. His gun sits on the table.

His daughter, MADDY, stands in the kitchen doorway, still wearing her college sweatshirt.

MADDY

You're trending on Twitter.

Hawthorne chuckles without joy.

HAWTHORNE

Finally famous. Just had to betray my country.

MADDY  
Or save it.

Beat.

She crosses the room and hugs him. For the first time, he breaks – the weight of years slamming down.

CUT TO:

INT. DOJ HEARING ROOM – DAY

Cameras flash. The world is watching.

AGENT HAWTHORNE, now in a suit, sits at a panel table before a bipartisan committee. A silver whistleblower plaque stands before him.

He looks tired. Resigned. But firm.

HAWTHORNE  
This system wasn't broken. It was  
built this way.

And I upheld it – until I saw a six-year-old in chains.

A ripple of murmurs.

HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)  
I'm not asking you to pardon me.  
I'm asking you to stop it.

CUT TO:

Sofia and Miguel, watching live from a crowded café. Other patrons nod. Some wipe away tears.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Chaos.

Boxes packed. Offices cleared.

A giant "Site Theta Closed by Federal Order" seal slapped across a metal door.

CUT TO:

INT. FIELD OFFICE - NIGHT

Hawthorne stands outside the ICE building one last time. Same cigarette. Same sunrise.

He drops his badge in a padded envelope and leaves it on the reception desk.

CLOSE ON  
ENVELOPE:

"To the next good man who finds himself on the wrong side of justice."

He turns. Walks away. Doesn't look back.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - SUNSET

Miguel, Sofia, and Maddy ride together in a beat-up car - windows down, wind in their hair.

On the radio: a reporter announces a Senate bill to regulate all private detention centers.

MADDY  
You think it'll pass?

SOFIA  
Maybe not today. But one day.

Miguel looks out the window. For the first time – he smiles.

MIGUEL  
That's the long way home.

CUT TO:

INT. SAFEHOUSE – EARLY MORNING

A rare moment of stillness.

Sofia quietly brews coffee. Miguel, bruised but stronger, sits across the table – sketching on a napkin.

SOFIA  
Couldn't sleep?

MIGUEL  
Too quiet. I got used to alarms and shouting.

Sofia sets down a steaming mug. She notices the napkin sketch: a little girl and a garden.

SOFIA  
Is that me?

MIGUEL  
The day you planted your first tomato. You cried when it died.

She laughs softly.

SOFIA  
You told me, "Life's a garden, not a fence."

MIGUEL  
And look at you now. Tearing down walls.

CUT TO:

INT. GRASSROOTS LEGAL CLINIC - DAY

A dusty storefront in East LA now buzzes with energy.

Cassidy flips through documents. Niko sets up a livestream. Sofia welcomes a crowd of newly released families – weary, hopeful.

VOLUNTEER

What's this place called again?

SOFIA

"Puentes." Bridges.

We help people cross – to freedom, to reunification, to healing.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVE COMMUNITY BROADCAST - NIGHT

A bare-bones podcast setup. Sofia, Miguel, Cassidy, and Niko sit together under string lights.

SOFIA

We're not experts. We're not politicians.

We're just survivors who refused to shut up.

MIGUEL

I spent months thinking I'd die without anyone knowing my name.

He holds up a letter from a child.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Now kids send me drawings of butterflies. That's enough for me.

NIKO

But it's not enough for us.

Niko turns to the camera.

NIKO (CONT'D)

If you or someone you know was held  
in an unregistered facility – reach  
out. We're building a case. A  
public one. With names. Photos.  
Truth.

INT. PRESS ROOM – DAY

Sofia steps to a podium. Miguel stands behind her – proud but  
quiet.

Behind her: a giant image of a shuttered Site Theta and a  
banner: People Before Profit.

SOFIA

We are not threats. We are not  
cases.

We are families. And we are home.

Flashes erupt. A standing ovation. She locks eyes with  
Miguel.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. ROOFTOP – NIGHT

Later, just the two of them.

Miguel lights a candle and places it by a row of paper  
butterflies – one for every detainee still missing.

SOFIA

You think they'll ever find them?

MIGUEL

Not all. But maybe... they'll stop  
losing more.

They hold hands.

Above them, fireworks from a nearby protest-turned-  
celebration light the sky.

CUT TO:

INT. CAPITOL HILL - CLOSED HEARING ROOM - DAY

Wood-paneled and shadowy. No cameras.

A handful of powerful SENATORS and INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS huddle in whispered urgency.

On the screen behind them:

"Miguel Rivera. Sofia Rivera. Cassidy Lowe. 'Puentes' Activity - Monitored."

SENATOR #1

They've weaponized compassion. The public thinks they're heroes.

DHS OFFICIAL

They're leaking internal systems. Names, funding trails, routing intel.

SENATOR #2

We shut them down - we risk riots.

SENATOR #1

Then we don't shut them down.

Beat.

SENATOR #1 (CONT'D)

We absorb them. Control the narrative.

Offer grants. Licensing. Visibility... with strings attached.

CUT TO:

INT. PUENTES CENTER - NIGHT

Cassidy opens a government letter marked:



"FEDERAL RECOGNITION APPLICATION APPROVED - WASHINGTON GRANT PROGRAM."

She reads it once, then again. Frowns.

NIKO  
What's wrong?

CASSIDY  
This is... too easy. They're buying us.

Sofia enters, Miguel behind her.

SOFIA  
We don't have to take it.

MIGUEL  
But what happens if we don't?

A beat. They all look at the bulletin board - filled with missing-person reports, court dates, photos of still-detained family members.

CUT TO:

INT. FEDERAL BUILDING - OFFICE OF NEW PROGRAM OVERSIGHT - DAY

A sleek, modern office with a new sign:

"COMMUNITY STABILIZATION INITIATIVE"

At a desk: Julia, now reassigned.

She picks up a confidential dossier:

OPERATION VEIL  
Inside: blueprints of the Puentes Center, emails, private donations, and GPS tracking on Miguel and Sofia.

She looks up, expression unreadable.

CUT TO:

INT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cassidy steps out of her car. She notices a black SUV idling across the street.

Engine running. Lights off.

She locks eyes with the silhouette inside.

The SUV drives off - slow, deliberate.

She doesn't smile.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMUNITY RADIO BOOTH - LATER

Sofia records a final message.

SOFIA (INTO MIC)  
We aren't afraid.

If they come for us, they come for all of us.

MIGUEL (O.S.)  
You ready?

She nods. But we catch the flicker of fear in her eyes.

FADE IN:

EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - DAY

A wall of cameras. Reporters swarm outside. The U.S. flag flaps in the wind.

A hand-lettered sign reads:

"Families Belong Together."

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

MIGUEL, gaunt but dignified, sits beside SOFIA, now in clean clothes. She clutches his hand tightly.

Across from them, Cassidy watches, sitting behind the press rail.

HAWTHORNE stands alone at the witness stand - stripped of uniform, eyes red-rimmed.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Mr. Rivera, after review of the evidence and testimony, this court finds that your detention was unlawful...

Miguel closes his eyes. A single tear falls. Sofia stares up at him, smiling through hers.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT (LATER)

Desks are empty. Hawthorne walks the halls, alone, turning in his badge. He drops it on a desk, quietly. No one speaks.

He walks to the exit. Before stepping out, he glances at a TV mounted on the wall-

ON TV:

Cassidy testifies before Congress.

CASSIDY (ON TV)

I was part of it. And I stayed too long. But there are still thousands more Miguel Riveras - and they deserve better.

EXT. SMALL APARTMENT COMPLEX - SUNSET

A moving truck is parked outside.

Miguel and Sofia unpack boxes. They carry them inside. Miguel sets one down, and turns.

He watches Sofia help a younger neighbor with homework on the stoop. Her laughter echoes, strong and whole.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The walls are bare, but it's warm.

Miguel sets down two paper plates of tamales. He joins Sofia at a small table.

MIGUEL  
Do you miss her?

SOFIA  
Every day.

Beat.

MIGUEL  
So do I. But you... you are  
everything good that she gave us.

She leans over and hugs him. Tight. He doesn't let go.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Later. Miguel stands on the rooftop alone, looking out at the LA skyline. Lights blink. The city pulses.

Cassidy appears beside him.

CASSIDY  
You're free. You could disappear.  
Why stay?

MIGUEL  
Because people are still inside.  
And I remember what it felt like -  
being forgotten.

He hands her an envelope. Legal papers.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)  
We start something new. Something  
real. Not just for us.

Cassidy nods. She looks down at the stamp on the papers:

"FAMILY RIGHTS COALITION - Founding Committee."

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY (ONE YEAR LATER)

Sofia stands under a tree, waiting.

A younger immigrant girl walks toward her nervously.

Sofia kneels, offers her a cookie.

SOFIA  
You'll be okay. Promise.

Behind them, Miguel watches. He looks proud. Peaceful.

FADE OUT.

TITLE CARD:

"Based on thousands of true stories that continue to unfold  
across the United States today."