

# ECHOLAND

Written by

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Story by

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v10.2

WGAW Registration #2201682

February 18, 2025

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A woman's soft voice, our Narrator.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)  
I had that dream again. We were  
swimming near a shore, the water  
was warm and you were smiling, as  
if completely at ease. Then the sky  
shifts. Storm clouds swallow rolled  
in.

FADE IN:

**EXT. KUNAR PROVINCE, EAST AFGHANISTAN - DAWN**

A vast expanse of mountains. Deep gorges.

The sun begins to break through the canyon.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)  
I try and swim to you, but the tide  
turns violent, pulls me under, and  
my body goes numb. I finally come  
up, but you are gone. I call out  
and I soon discover I am alone, in  
an endless ocean. The waves swell,  
crashing over me as the sea  
swallows me...and that's when I  
wake up.

SUPER: KUNAR PROVINCE, EAST AFGHANISTAN - 2013

Multiple off-terrain tires kick up sunlit dust trails.

A convoy of LIGHT-ARMORED VEHICLES rumble along a beaten dirt  
road.

The convoy consists of three heavily armed AFGHANI ARMY  
TRUCKS manned by Afghan soldiers, as well as two equally  
armed AMERICAN HUMVEES manned by US Army soldiers.

**INT. US ARMY HUMVEE (DRIVING) - MORNING**

Seated up front are:

US Army Staff Sergeant MILLER (30s), a steel-jawed soldier,  
spitting dip into an empty water bottle.

Driving is US Army driver Private MARTINEZ, a 20-something  
clean-cut Mexican American.

Seated in the back are:

AHMAD (36), a skinny US Army/Afghani interpreter wearing a helmet and flak jacket. He holds a photo, cautiously staring out the window.

US Army Specialist ALEX GALVEZ (19), bright-eyed with a scruffy beard, glances at Ahmad's hands holding the photo. Ahmad catches him looking and puts the photo in his jacket pocket. They share a smile.

A TURRET GUNNER in mirrored Oakleys scans the ridge. He stands between Alex and Ahmad.

Miller speaks into the HUMVEE COM system.

MILLER

Copy Saber One. We are Oscar Mike from Asmar village. The well is in place and operational, mission success. RTB at this time.

Martinez starts to smile cheek to cheek.

HUMVEE COM

Roger, RTB. Bravo Zulu. We'll see you soon.

Miller puts the mic down and hits the top of the Humvee.

MILLER

Shit!!

(eyeing Martinez)

Goddamn it, Martinez, swear to Christ, front and center.

Martinez eyes back to the road.

MILLER (cont'd)

Galvez, not sure how, but you just cost me a hundred bucks. Goddamn last engineer thrown at me couldn't tie his own fucking boots. But you - - shit, fuck it, this op has been on my ass for weeks. So...job well done, soldier.

Martinez cracks a slight smile. Miller grins.

ALEX

Thank you, staff sergeant.

Miller looks out the window, scanning the mountaintop.

MILLER

Fourth fucking tour in this shit hole.

ALEX

Sir?

Ahmad, the interpreter, glances at the staff sergeant.

MILLER

Washington bureaucrats and their bullshit, if you ask me. These boys know. We sacrifice our butts day in, day out, and for what? For these fucking elders? Half are Taliban. The other half don't want a goddamn handout. What do we gain? I mean, what's this world coming t--

BOOOOOOOOMMM!!!

A massive roadside IED BLOWS the lead truck. Shards of glass, twisted metal explode.

Then, an RPG hits the front of the Humvee. The windshield explodes.

Ricochets PING the outer hull.

LEAD TURRET GUNNER

Contact right!!!

The turret fires. Casings fall.

Rattled, Alex and Ahmad slowly come to. Ears rigging. Alex looks around, but before he knows it, Ahmad starts dragging him out of the Humvee.

They hit the deck, taking cover near the rear tires under the Humvee.

#### **EXT. US ARMY HUMVEE - CONTINUOUS**

An RPG SLAMS into the trailing truck, snapping Alex into coherence, Ahmad by his side.

Smoke engulfs them.

The Turret Gunner, wounded, keeps firing.

Alex crawls, seeing tracers and the glimmer of scopes about two hundred yards away. Snipers.

Alex repositions, adjusting his M4 and SCOPE. He controls his breathing, firing three round bursts.

HIT! HIT! HIT!

Another RPG hits the supply truck, exploding it and the Humvee behind them.

ALEX  
Goddamn kill box!!

He pulls the pin on a smoke grenade. Plumes of white smoke billow. Alex pulls Ahmad into some

BUSHES

They crawl, moving up to a small ridge, surrounded by huge boulders and thick brush.

On his back, Ahmad is trying to breathe. He holds his hands to his abdomen as blood pours.

Alex attends to his wound.

ALEX (cont'd)  
Put pressure on it.

He pulls his pack off, realizing his arm is bleeding.

Alex tourniquets his arm. He picks up his M4 and scope.

SCOPE POV

The remains of the convoy - smoldering hunks of metal, fire, and black smoke.

Around twenty Taliban fighters surround the wreckage, taking "souvenirs" - US Army soldiers - corpses dragged onto the dirt road. They fire their AKs in celebration.

BACK TO ALEX

ALEX (cont'd)  
(to himself)  
We can't stay here.

**EXT. MOUNTAINS OF EASTERN AFGHANISTAN - SUNSET**

Alex and Ahmad climb a steep mountain.

Ahmad falls, taking deep breaths.

AHMAD  
(whizzing)  
I can't. How much further?

Alex examines his map, checks his compass.

ALEX  
We're about...five clicks from  
base. Bad news is we can't take  
that route.

AHMAD  
Great. What's the good news?

ALEX  
We're still breathing.

AHMAD  
Lucky me.

ALEX  
Come on, we have to keep moving.

Alex puts his arm around him and helps him walk, but Ahmad  
cannot move.

AHMAD  
I...I can't feel my legs. You have  
to leave me.

Alex grabs Ahmad.

ALEX  
You have to try goddamnit.

Distant voices. Alex begins to pick Ahmad up.

Ahmad coughs blood.

AHMAD  
No. No. Leave me. Please.

ALEX  
I cannot do that.

AHMAD  
Please.

Ahmad removes his DOG TAGS and the photo of his family.  
Holding them out.

AHMAD (cont'd)  
Go.

Their eyes lock.

AHMAD (cont'd)  
(whispering)  
Go.

Alex takes them, hesitates, then moves out, heading further over the ridge.

**EXT. MOUNTAINS OF EASTERN AFGHANISTAN - MORNING**

Coming down a steep hill, Alex slips, landing on his arm. He drops in pain. He checks his wound and sees an infection spreading.

Voices - yelling - approaching - Taliban.

Alex drops. On his back, he sets his M4 to BURST MODE.

He swallows. Finger on his trigger.

Taliban soldiers yell then scatter as a rush of helicopter rotors slice through the air -- a pair of APACHE HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS quickly pass over him as the clouds and blue sky frame their background.

SUPER: TEXAS, 2025

**EXT. GAS STATION - SUNSET**

Off the clouds and blue sky, the dilapidated sign of a little gas station/convenience store comes into view.

A small rental sedan pulls into a parking spot.

**INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS**

Entering the station is Alex, now 31, is clean-shaven, wearing hiking pants with a North Face jacket. He is with an old friend SCOTT, (29) with jeans and a Polo shirt. They go down separate aisles searching.

ALEX  
What do you want?

SCOTT  
Any sort of IPA.

ALEX  
Got it.

Alex grabs two six packs of beer and meets Scott at the register manned by a GAS ATTENDANT (50).

GAS ATTENDANT  
Will that be all?

SCOTT  
Pack of Camels too, please.

The Gas Attendant places a pack of cigarettes on the counter. Scott pulls out his wallet.

ALEX  
No, no, no. I got this.

SCOTT  
Bro, stop, I got you.

ALEX  
Hey. It's cool. Let me pay. How much?

GAS ATTENDANT  
Fourty-four fifty-seven is your total. May I see some ID?

They take out their IDs and pass them over. Alex hands over his debit card as well. The Attendant looks over Scott's ID.

He takes his time with Alex's military ID.

GAS ATTENDANT (cont'd)  
Alex Galvez.  
(in Spanish)  
Speak Spanish?

ALEX  
Sorry. I do not.

GAS ATTENDANT  
You in the Army?

ALEX  
Was. Yes, sir.

The Gas Attendant looks Alex up and down. He nods, giving Alex back his ID. He looks him in the eyes.

GAS ATTENDANT  
My son, he was a marine in Afghanistan.

He points to a small makeshift shrine of his son in uniform.



GAS ATTENDANT (cont'd)  
Were you there?

ALEX  
Yes sir.

He smiles. He hands Alex back his ID.

GAS ATTENDANT (SPANISH)  
Thank you for your service, Señor  
Galvez, and happy birthday.

Alex nods graciously.

**INT. KEVIN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

A modest space with a well-worn poker table. Empty beer bottles and a couple of half-eaten pizza boxes litter the room.

The only sound is the shuffling of chips.

Alex sits around with some other old high school buddies: BRANDON (32), a heavy set car salesman, KEVIN (29), a fit and clean cut software engineer, SHALIN (31), a tall, skinny high school history teacher, and dealing cards is SEAN (27), a hedge fund analyst and Gen Z yuppie, who wears a leather-bound Patek Philippe watch and Polo shirt.

Scott is up, near the kitchen.

SHALIN  
(sighs)  
I'm out. Not my night.

Brandon folds.

BRANDON  
Me neither.  
(to Scott)  
Scott, since you're up, get me  
another beer.

Sean eyes the others, puffing on a vape pen.

KEVIN  
Somebody feeling lucky, or are we  
just donating to my vacation fund?

Sean checks.

ALEX  
Check.

Sean drops "the River" - the moment of truth in Texas Hold 'em.

SEAN

Alex, you still grinding eighty-hour weeks or you finally figured out how to make your money work for you?

ALEX

Yea, well my money works just fine. Like my conscience. Unlike Kevin, our resident "blockchain visionary."

KEVIN

(interrupting)

And I'm still waiting for the day you rewire this table to dispense chips when you win. Remind me again where you became a Master Electrician? Was it Devry or YouTube?

Laughter. Alex flips him off, kisses the finger for emphasis.

Scott returns, a beer and whiskey in hand.

SCOTT

What I miss?

ALEX

Yeah, you dick, Devry. I fix fuse boxes and fragile egos.

KEVIN

You're all spark, no light, birthday boy. You playing or what?

ALEX

Yea. All in.

Alex moves his leftover pile of chips into the pot.

The room goes silent.

KEVIN

You bluffing?

ALEX

Wouldn't you like to know?

SCOTT

Now, *that's* a power move.

SEAN

Or a midlife crisis. I fold.

BRANDON

You folding with a pair of kings?  
That's like a mechanic who doesn't  
own a wrench.

KEVIN

(to Alex)

You walking, or you fixing?

SHALIN

You guys play like my grandma plays  
Canasta.

ALEX

Just adjusting the voltage.

SHALIN

Enough already. Show'em.

KEVIN

Four of a kind.

ALEX

Nice hand. But...

Alex shows his cards: a straight flush.

KEVIN

You lucky son of a bitch. Fuck.

SCOTT

Don't underestimate him.

KEVIN

Well...anybody want a shot?  
Refills? Birthday boy?

ALEX

I'm straight.

KEVIN

Like that flush? Shit...who else?  
Oh come on! I need you bitches  
fucked up so I get my money back.

SEAN

I'm good, thanks.

SCOTT

Beer me.

Alex's iPhone rings. It's a FaceTime call from his Aunt. He contemplates picking up.

ALEX

Oh man, maybe a beer. Kev, can I take this in your bedroom?

KEVIN

Sure, just make sure you come back!

**INT. KEVIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Alex enters with his phone. He answers the FaceTime call. On the screen appears his Tia, TIA NORA ELENA GALVEZ, a frail, skinny woman in her 50s.

The rowdy guys can be heard in the background.

ALEX

Hi Tia.

TIA NORA (O.S.)(SPANISH)

What time will you be home, mijo?  
Will you be long?

ALEX

Tia, please, I told you, Scott's in town. I'd like to stay a little longer, ok? Please don't wait up again. I'll be home around midnight. Ok?

TIA NORA (SPANISH)

Ok. Ok. Someone wants to say goodnight.

Tia Nora turns the camera over to Alex's daughter, SOPHIA (5). Her large eyes and innocence calms Alex's tone.

ALEX

Hey, baby.

SOPHIA

Papa, can you tell me a story?

ALEX

Not right now baby, maybe tomorrow night. Someone should be in bed already. Did you brush your teeth?

Sophia nods.

ALEX (cont'd)  
That's my girl. Listen to Tia. I'll  
be home soon.

SOPHIA  
Ok, Papa.

ALEX  
Love you, kisses, sweet dreams.

Sophia kisses the phone's camera.

ALEX (cont'd)  
Bye, baby.

ALEX (cont'd)  
(to Tia)  
Don't stay up. Be home soon. Love  
you both.

TIA NORA  
Buenas noches. Un beso.

ALEX  
Love you too. 'Night.

He hangs up, sighs, and exits.

**INT. KEVIN'S HOUSE - LATER**

Alex checks his Apple watch: 2:03AM.

Scott pours him another whiskey.

SCOTT  
Come on, man. Haven't seen you in  
ages.

The River is laid down once again. Kevin is all in.

Kevin shows his cards. Two pairs and a queen of spades. Alex  
shows his: three of a kind.

KEVIN  
Fuck. Remind me again why I invited  
you?

BRANDON  
Busted. Guess that's the game.

Brandon kicks back his beer.

Alex gathers the pot.

SCOTT  
(stretching)  
That's it? Come on!?

SHALIN  
Been fun fellas.

SCOTT  
Shit. Well, I'm not driving.

KEVIN  
Whoever wants to stay, can. Guest  
room is made up.

ALEX  
I'll call an Uber.

KEVIN  
Uber? Sean's like five minutes from  
you.

SEAN  
I got you, c'mon.

ALEX  
You sure?

SEAN  
Yeah, of course.

ALEX  
Thanks. Scott, call me tomorrow. We  
still on for golf Sunday?

SCOTT  
(laughs)  
If I sober up. Call me midday.  
Drive safe.

**INT. SEAN'S CAR (DRIVING) - NIGHT**

It's dark on the streets of southern Texas.

ALEX  
You ok to drive?

SEAN  
Totally. I just had a couple Cokes  
and that one shot.

There is an awkward silence.

ALEX

You should come out with us on Sunday, we may need a fourth. You play golf?

SEAN

Me? No. Just tennis.

Sean and Alex drive down a dark road.

SEAN (cont'd)

Wish the city would do something. These streets are pitch black.

ALEX

Take this exit.

Sean turns off and goes underneath an overpass.

SEAN

New place?

ALEX

Yeah, just moved in three months ago with my aunt and Sophia.

SEAN

Right, your daughter, how --

Sean sees lights come up in the rearview mirror.

SEAN (cont'd)

Oh, fuck me. No, no, no.

ALEX

What?

(sees cop lights)

Shit.

It's a local sheriff's car pulling them over.

**EXT. SEAN'S CAR - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)**

The cruiser's high beams illuminate the car's interior.

POLICE CAR LOUDSPEAKER

Shut off the engine.

Sean shuts off the engine.

The deputies exit their vehicle. Flashlights in one hand, the other on their holsters.

DEPUTY #1  
License and registration, please.

Deputy #2 blinds Alex.

They take both IDs and head back to their squad car. Sean and Alex wait.

ALEX  
You ok?

Sean keeps an eye on his rear-view mirror.

SEAN  
Yeah.

Alex just looks at him.

The deputies return.

DEPUTY #1  
You know why I stopped you?

SEAN  
No, officer.

DEPUTY #1  
Your left tail-light is out.

SEAN  
I am sorry, officer.

DEPUTY #2  
Have either of you been drinking tonight?

SEAN  
No, officer.

ALEX  
No, sir.

Deputy #2 looks over to Deputy #1.

DEPUTY #1  
Mister Galvez, is this your only form of identification?

ALEX  
Yes, sir.

Deputy #2 nods over to Deputy #1



DEPUTY #1  
Step out of the vehicle please?

SEAN  
What for?

DEPUTY #2  
Just comply with what the deputy is asking you to do. Step out of the car.

Alex and Sean exit and are escorted to the trunk where Deputy #1 searches them. Deputy #2 searches the vehicle.

DEPUTY #1  
Are there any drugs, needles, weapons, or anything else in the vehicle?

SEAN  
No, officer.

Deputy #2 thoroughly searches the vehicle, flashing his light in the center console, in between seats, and in the glove box.

DEPUTY #1  
You sure? Don't be stupid now.

Deputy #2 reaches deep below the passenger seat. He feels something. He pulls out a pouch and opens it to reveal: some marijuana, a lighter, some paraphernalia, and a ziplock bag with 5 grams of white powder along with blue and white capsules.

Deputy #2 shines his flashlight toward Alex and Sean, holding the pouch.

DEPUTY #2  
Want to explain this?

**INT. COUNTY JAIL - OUTGOING COMMUNICATIONS ROOM - NIGHT**

Alex makes his one call. The dial tone rings. His Tia answers - half asleep.

ALEX  
Tia? It's me.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Alejo, it's four in the morning.  
Where are you?

ALEX  
I've been arrested.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
What?! What happened?

ALEX  
It's all a mistake. A  
misunderstanding.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Oh, Alejandro. What have you gotten  
into, mijo --

ALEX  
Please don't tell Sophia. I'll fix  
this, ok? I love you both. Talk  
soon.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Ay Dios mio. Ok. Bye.

He hangs up - slamming the phone on the hook.

**INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - LOCKER ROOM - MORNING**

Deputy #1 shuts his locker.

DEPUTY #1  
See you in twelve. 'Night.

DEPUTY #2  
Yep.

Deputy #1 exits. Deputy #2 sighs. Exhausted. He wears a towel  
and is about to throw his uniform in his locker when he feels  
something in the breast pocket - Alex's military ID.

Alex's picture stares at us. He closes his locker.

DEPUTY #2 (cont'd)  
Fuck it.

The deputy turns and walks toward the showers, dropping the  
ID in the trash.

FADE TO:

SUPER: TWO WEEKS LATER

**INT. COUNTY JAIL - VISITATION ROOM - DAY**

Alex sits in a visitation cell, handcuffed to a table.

HENRY WEXLER (43) enters. He's a skinny, anxious man dressed in an off-the-rack suit. He carries a briefcase and a vending machine coffee cup.

He sits down. The large metal door closes and locks.

HENRY WEXLER

Mister Galvez, good morning. My name is Henry Wexler. I am the county's public-appointed defender. Says here you got charged with possession of several controlled substances, cocaine, methamphetamines, and paraphernalia. How do you want to plead?

ALEX

Not guilty. I did nothing wrong. Those drugs are not mine.

Wexler just writes on his pad, hardly making eye contact.

HENRY WEXLER

The cocaine...it was found under the passenger seat, correct?

ALEX

Yes, but no, wait, he was just giving me a ride home. I didn't know he had drugs.

HENRY WEXLER

Mister Coleson has denied possession and says you put those in his vehicle.

ALEX

What? Bullshit! That is not true. That is a lie. I did no such thing. Those drugs are not mine.

Wexler keeps writing on his pad. He takes a moment, then looks over his paperwork.

HENRY WEXLER

I see. Look, Mister Galvez the good news is that this is your first offense.

(MORE)

HENRY WEXLER (cont'd)

I see here that you were honorably discharged from the Army in December two-thousand-thirteen, a Purple Heart recipient. That's good. Bail for these charges are around five to ten thousand US, bad news is I am unfortunately not experienced in immigration law. And that is something to consider given your citizenship status. They may deport you.

ALEX

Deport me? I am a citizen. A veteran.

HENRY WEXLER

Mister Galvez, when you got booked without an ID, your prints got ran through Live Scan. You popped up on ICE's radar immediately --

ALEX

The cop took my ID, he never returned it. I told that to the booking officer --

HENRY WEXLER

(interrupting)

Look, Mister Galvez, I hate to be the bearer of bad news but you are not a citizen. Unfortunately, it seems as if the Army will take just about anyone. Your service does not equate to citizenship.

ALEX

I can't believe what I am hearing. I sacrificed myself for this country!

He turns to Alex and, as if scripted, says...

HENRY WEXLER

Calm down, Mister Galvez. Let's just hope that with your service record, the judge will be lenient. Ok?

(stands up)

I'll be in touch soon.

(pounds the door)

We're done here.

The door opens and he exits.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. COUNTY JAIL - CELL - NIGHT**

Alex sits next to his bunk in his cell.

He stares at a letter addressed by his aunt, Tia Nora.

PRISON GUARD #1 (O.S.)

Lights out.

Alex is plunged into almost darkness except for an exterior flood-light, slipping through his cell window.

He opens the letter. A photo falls out. He picks it up and then reads the letter.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)

Dear Alex. I have been holding onto these words for too long, not knowing how to say them. To tell you over the phone is not a good idea, and you and I know that any visits right now are too dangerous. So that is why I am writing to you. You deserve the truth. Please first know that what your Mama and Papa had to do was out of love.

(beat)

You were born Alejandro Luis-Ordoñez Galvez. You were not born in the United States, but instead, you were born outside of Monterrey, Mexico, a small town where you and your parents and me and your uncle separated. The only thing they could do is put you in our hands. We crossed into the US illegally over twenty-five years ago.

He reads, scanning the words.

TIA NORA (SPANISH) (cont'd)

Your uncle, bless his soul, decided to get you false papers, give you a new name. An American name. I wish I could tell you your Mama and Papa were out there waiting to see you again. But they are gone now.

(MORE)

TIA NORA (SPANISH) (cont'd)

But listen to me, your name, your past, where you come from does not change who you are. You still are the same man you were yesterday. The same heart, the same soul. No matter what happens now, you are not alone. You will never be alone. We are still family, and so is Sophia. Take time with all of this. I love you, always.

(beat)

P.S. Enclosed is a photo of Sophia from her first day of kindergarten.

Alex picks up the small photo. We see Sophia wearing a light blue school uniform. She holds a Smurfs lunch box and book bag.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)

You'd be so proud of her. Consuelo and I found her that cute dress. She's been so helpful with you gone. God bless her. We all miss you so much and pray every day for you to return safe. Love Tia.

His eyes tear up. He folds away the letter and photo, tucking it up under the mattress.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)

I always wonder, do we share the same dreams? The same nightmares? Our thoughts so much about each other. I wonder.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. GALVEZ HOME - KITCHEN - DAY**

A phone rings. Sophia colors at the table. Tia Nora enters and picks up the phone.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (O.S.)

This is a pre-paid call from Alex Galvez, an inmate at Ector County Correctional Center. To accept the charges please press seven.

Tia Nora presses seven on her phone.

## INT. COUNTY JAIL - OUTGOING COMMUNICATIONS ROOM - DAY

Silence.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
Alejandro? Are you there?

INTERCUT - ALEX/TIA PHONE CONVERSATION

ALEX  
Why? Tell me why.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
I am so sorry. Your uncle he tried,  
we tried, even through the legal  
channels, things became more  
difficult, you remember? Then,  
after he passed...well, it never  
got finished.

ALEX  
It's as if my life is a lie.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
I'm sorry. I am...it's our fault.  
It's my fault. What are we going to  
do?

ALEX  
I don't know Tia. I honestly do not  
know.  
(sighs)  
But Tia, please, I need you to do  
me a favor.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
Of course. Anything.

ALEX  
I need some money from the house  
fund, the savings. I'll pay it  
back. I need that money for bail.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
Yes. Of course.  
(beat)  
Listen, someone wants to speak with  
you.

ALEX  
No. I can't. I really can't right  
now.

Silence.

TIA NORA  
Alejandro? Please forgive me.

ALEX  
Just...just tell her, I love her  
and that I'll be home soon.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
Ok, ok.

ALEX  
And Tia...please get me that bail  
money as soon as possible --

The call disconnects. He lowers his forehead. He hangs up.

**INT. COUNTY TEXAS COURTROOM - MORNING**

A gavel comes down.

Papers are laid out before JUDGE BEAUDRY (58). With a scowl  
and reading glasses, she looks over the court documents.

JUDGE BEAUDRY  
After reviewing your case, Mister  
Galvez, I am allowing bail, set at  
ten-thousand dollars...

Alex anxiously clasps his hands together.

JUDGE BEAUDRY (cont'd)  
However, you are an undocumented  
immigrant, and this court must  
follow suit with the current  
mandate, therefore, I have no  
choice but to remand you to the  
Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
Agency, and the federal government  
where you may appeal deportation  
and any other charges that  
thereof...case dismissed.

The judge bangs her gavel.

ALEX  
No. No! Your honor, please, I did  
nothing wrong! I served my country!

Two ICE agents approach Alex.

ALEX (cont'd)  
This is unjust goddamnit! Aren't I  
entitled to more than this?!



As Alex resists, Wexler puts his hand on his shoulder.

HENRY WEXLER

(whispers)

Word of advice. Anything you say or do will hurt your appeal. Better to fight another day, another way.

He pats Alex on the back. Alex silently stares at him and the judge as he is taken away.

FADE TO BLACK.

We hear a dial tone.

ELECTRONIC VOICE (O.S.)

This is a pre-paid call from Alex Galvez, an inmate at the South Texas ICE Processing Center. To accept the charges please press nine.

SUPER: FOUR MONTHS LATER

FADE IN:

**EXT. ICE DETENTION - CENTER - DAWN**

Barbed wire. Guard towers. Miles of fences.

A Federal detention center.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)

When's the hearing?

**INT. SOUTH TEXAS ICE PROCESSING CENTER - OUTGOING COMMUNICATIONS ROOM - NIGHT**

Alex, now in an ICE detention center, talks on the phone.

ALEX

Tomorrow. But I don't know how much longer I can take. In here. Waiting.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)

I can't imagine. But friends at church, people have taken a collection...at church. They've given donations. Consuelo even found a lawyer in Dallas who deals with these kinds of immigration cases. They are not charging us.

(MORE)

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
So please understand we are getting  
by, have faith, but...the checks.  
They stopped.

ALEX  
What do you mean?

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
A letter came the other day. It's  
your disability pay from the VA.

Silence. Alex tenses up.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
I'll figure something out. God will  
see this through.

ALEX  
I can't believe this. Fuck.

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Please Alejandro. We'll find a way.

ALEX  
Is she there? Sophia. Is she there?  
Can I speak with her.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
Sure. Just a minute.

He waits.

SOPHIA  
Papa?

ALEX  
I'm here baby.

SOPHIA  
Papa. When are you coming home?

ALEX  
Soon. Very soon.

SOPHIA  
You

The line goes dead. He slams the phone.

ALEX  
Fuck!!

**INT. ICE DETENTION - CELL - EARLY MORNING**

Dim orange floodlights bring some light into the 8'x8' cell.

Alex stares at the ceiling - wide awake, unable to sleep.

Alex drops to the floor and does push-ups.

He rinses a small Bic razor and shaves, trying to look as presentable as possible. His reflection distorted in a small plastic wall mirror.

SAME - LATER

BAILIFF (O.S.)

US Appeals Court, Dockett number  
nine-six-three-eight-four-zero-one,  
the United States versus Alejandro  
Galvez. All rise, the honorable  
Judge William S. Lord presiding.

Handcuffs lock onto Alex's wrists, courtesy of a prison  
GUARD. The Guard attaches the cuffs to a chain around Alex's  
waist and feet. The Guard escorts him down the hall.

**INT. FEDERAL TEXAS COURTROOM - DAY**

JUDGE WILLIAM S. LORD is a towering figure. Irish by descent.  
A conservative man in his 70s. He approaches his bench, sits,  
takes out a pair of small reading glasses, and organizes the  
brief in front of him.

Alex, in an orange prison uniform, sits at his appeal case.

The judge looks Alex over, and finally, the FEDERAL  
PROSECUTOR. Alex sees a team of four on the prosecution side.

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD

Counsel.

A PUBLIC DEFENDER (27) arrives late.

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD (cont'd)

Be seated. The prosecution may  
proceed.

**BEGIN MONTAGE**

- The public defender taps a chewed up pencil on his legal  
yellow notepad. Then twirls it.

- Alex stares at this tik, then clasps his hands together, carefully listening, then glances at
- The prosecution, as it takes detailed notes with laptops, legal leather briefs, and ink pens. They discuss in whispers between one another.
- The judge bangs his gavel.
- Alex adjusts his hand-cuffs, releasing tension around his wrist.
- The court reporter types on her keypad. Her eyes darting around the room.

END MONTAGE

The public defender stands.

Alex glances at his yellow pad, seeing notes along with scratched-out doodles.

Judge William Lord stares down at the Public Defender. He removes his glasses.

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD

Does the defense have form I-two-nine-B, yes or no?

He shuffles through his papers. Then, through his brief.

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD (cont'd)

Counsel?

PUBLIC DEFENDER

Uh, I am so sorry, your Honor. I seem to have misplaced that particular form. Nonetheless, the defense is requesting an immediate dismissal of the charges.

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD

Request denied. And I will take that as a 'no'.

Alex sinks into his chair. The judge takes off his glasses, having heard enough.

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD (cont'd)

The defendant will rise.

Alex stands, as does his public defender.

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD (cont'd)  
Mister Galvez, let me be frank. I do sympathize, and it is not your military record that is on trial here. I thank you for your service.

Alex stands tall. Until...

JUDGE WILLIAM LORD (cont'd)  
Nevertheless, under the current statutory framework, Mister Galvez has resided in this country without legal authorization and is, by definition, an undocumented immigrant. Therefore, under applicable federal immigration law, the Court hereby orders that the defendant, Alejandro Galvez, be remanded into the custody of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency for immediate deportation. This ruling is not made lightly. It merely reflects the policies enacted by Congress, and this Court is bound to uphold those statutes as they exist. However, Mister Galvez, if you wish to obtain legal citizenship, I strongly urge you to pursue the lawful processes in place - to follow the established path, as countless others have done before you. Case dismissed.

Down comes the gavel.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. DEPORTATION BUS - DAY**

Now in a bus filled with other migrants - MEN, WOMEN, and CHILDREN, Alex can only stare at their faces and one of his last sole possessions, the now tattered kindergarten photo of his daughter.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)  
The many faces you saw...

The migrants bear beaten features, sun-weathered skin, and carry the few possessions they still own, literally the clothes on their backs.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)

All of them - hopeless,  
overwhelmed by the single fact:  
they could not reach a better life.  
And that you felt as they did,  
despondent and further away from  
home.

The bus slows as a group of PROTESTORS with signs block the bus. An American flag waves in the wind, its ends are tattered, and its colors somewhat faded.

He carefully places her photo back in his wallet, suddenly feeling something else - one of Ahmad's dog tags. A personal keepsake of the person who saved him in Afghanistan. He feels the raised lettering.

**EXT. US/MEXICO BORDER - DAY**

He crosses into Mexico, seeing a territorial landmark (Bienvenidos a Mexico). The whole landscape changes.

**EXT. CIUDAD JUAREZ DEPORTATION SITE - DAY**

The sun is high as Alex exits the bus, squinting as if setting foot on another planet.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)

Lost was your sense of self.  
Questioning: am I Mexican? Or am I  
American?

Some of the other deportees meet with awaiting families. Others, like Alex, have no one. He looks around, unsure where to go next.

VLADY (19) a shady scrapper, sees Alex. He keeps an eye on him as he smokes his cigarette. He looks disheveled and has a small dark red birthmark on his cheek.

Alex comes upon a MAN on a cell phone. Alex makes a phone gesture with his hand.

ALEX

Where is...telefono?

The Man gives him a look of disdain as he turns his back.

Vlady keeps eyeing him. Another JUNKIE comes over to Vlady.

VLADY (SPANISH)

Go! I have nothing. Beat it!

Vlady drops his cigarette and limps as he approaches Alex. His lips curl into a smile.

VLADY (cont'd)  
Gavacho?

ALEX  
Excuse me?

VLADY  
You from United States, right? You  
ok, my friend?

ALEX  
Yes. You speak English?

VLADY  
Yes. I learn. You need help?

ALEX  
I need a phone, do you know where I  
can use a phone?

VLADY  
(laughs)  
Pinché gringo, of course. Come, I  
show you. Me llamo Vladimir. Call  
me Vlady.

ALEX  
Thanks, Vlady. My name is Alex.

VLADY  
Mucho gusto, Alex! Orale pues!  
Vamos, I show you.

**INT. CIUDAD JUAREZ CANTINA - AFTERNOON**

Vlady and Alex enter the bar where Vlady knows the owner.

VLADY (SPANISH)  
Hey Mauricio, can my friend here  
use your phone?

The owner looks at him and then gestures to a phone at the  
end of the bar. It's a rotary phone from the '80s.

**INT. GALVEZ HOME - AFTERNOON**

We pass through the house, now seemingly empty and dark. No  
one looks to be home. The kitchen phone rings and rings.

**INT. CIUDAD JUAREZ CANTINA - AFTERNOON**

Alex, bewildered, hangs up.

He dials another number. The dial tone rings.

CONSUELO (O.S.)

Halo?

ALEX

Conny. It's Alex. How are you?

CONSUELO (O.S.)

(surprised)

Alex, I'm ok. You --

ALEX

Is Tia there?

CONSUELO (O.S.)

Yes. Yes.

ALEX

Please can you put her on?

**INT. CONSUELO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON**

Sophia plays with her toys while Tia Nora drinks a cup of coffee. CONSUELO (50), a fair complexion beautiful Hispanic woman, enters.

CONSUELO (SPANISH)

Norita. It's Alejandro, on the telephone.

Tia Nora immediately gets up and heads to the --

KITCHEN

She grabs the phone. Consuelo looks on.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)

Alejandro?

INTERCUT - ALEX/TIA PHONE CONVERSATION

ALEX

Tia, I thought you'd be there. Are you ok?

TIA NORA (SPANISH)

Yes. Consuelo is being very gracious. Where are you?



ALEX  
Ciudad Juarez. I got deported  
today.

Consuelo is by the window, she sees men coming toward the  
door.

ALEX (cont'd)  
Tia?

CONSUELO (SPANISH)  
Norita, stay in the living room.  
You need to hang up.

TIA NORA (SPANISH)  
Mijo, I have to go --

She hangs up.

ALEX  
Tia?

The line goes dead.

**INT. CONSUELO'S HOME - AFTERNOON**

There is a knock at the door.

Consuelo opens the door. ICE SPECIAL AGENT #1 (35) stands  
there with a fake smile, wearing thin wireframe glasses. His  
partner, ICE SPECIAL AGENT #2, suspiciously looks Consuelo up  
and down.

ICE SPECIAL AGENT #1 (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Good evening, ma'am. Sorry to  
disturb you at this hour.

CONSUELO  
How may I help you?

ICE SPECIAL AGENT #1  
Excuse me. Would you know a Misses  
Nora Elena Galvez?

CONSUELO  
Yes. She lives a couple houses  
down. Why?

ICE SPECIAL AGENT #1  
When was the last time you saw her?

He notices the ring on her left finger.

CONSUELO

Haven't lately, I have been out of town. Maybe three weeks ago. What's this concerning?

ICE SPECIAL AGENT #1

Your husband, is he home?

CONSUELO

My husband passed two years ago.

ICE SPECIAL AGENT #1

(looks around)

Oh, I see. I am sorry, thank you for your help. Sorry to bother you. If you hear from her, here's my card.

He hands her a US Government business card:

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**  
**U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT**  
Johnathan E. Cooper  
Special Agent

ICE SPECIAL AGENT #1 (cont'd)

We just want to speak with her.  
Have a good night.

CONSUELO

Goodbye.

The door shuts.

Consuelo takes a deep breath.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)

Consuelo never did confide in you of her "illness". She didn't want anyone to know except for Alvaro, whom she loved until the day he passed.

(beat)

I wish I could have known her.

(beat)

She too passed, two years later succumbing to the cancer.

**EXT. CIUDAD JUAREZ CANTINA - AFTERNOON**

Alex walks out of the cantina. Vlady is there waiting for him.

VLADY (SPANISH)

Any luck?

Alex nods his head.

VLADY (cont'd)

I see your type all the time. The same as you. Good thing you met me. I help all the pochos that come here.

(long beat)

Amigo, you hungry?

ALEX

Starving.

VLADY

I take you...lo autentico Juarez!

**EXT. CIUDAD JUAREZ STREET - NIGHT**

The smell of meats sizzling, veggies sautéing, fills the night air.

Alex watches as an OLD MEXICAN WOMAN, makes tortillas. Patting them back and forth, molding them with care. Then warms them, filling them with sizzling meat and condiments. She hands the food over on a flimsy plate.

VLADY

Don't worry. I get you dinner. No problem.

He pays.

ALEX

Thanks, Vlady.

**EXT. CIUDAD JUAREZ STREET - NIGHT**

They sit on the curb, eating their tacos.

VLADY

Good, yes?

Alex nods.

VLADY (SPANISH) (cont'd)

Hey gavacho. I get you back.

Alex looks up.

VLADY (cont'd)  
I know a friend, a compadre. His  
name is Big Mac, like the  
hamburguesa (hamburger). He can  
help.

ALEX  
How?

VLADY  
He gets la gente - the people  
across.

ALEX  
Illegally?

VLADY  
Yes. He has ways. Good. Smart.  
Safe.

Alex contemplates this.

ALEX  
How much?

VLADY  
Two thousand dollars pocho.

VLADY (cont'd)  
It's usually three thousand but  
he's a friend. I help you. He owes  
me.

ALEX  
When? I mean when could I cross?

VLADY  
Tonight?

ALEX  
Really?

VLADY  
I got you man.

Alex looks out and sees a DAD (20s) with his little GIRL (6).  
They shop for a vendor. They hold hands. She tugs, and he  
turns, picks her up, and puts her on his shoulders.

He turns back to Vlady.

ALEX  
Tonight?

Vlady nods in confidence.

ALEX (cont'd)  
Ok, but I have to make another  
call.

**INT. CIUDAD JUAREZ CANTINA - NIGHT**

Alex again is on the phone. On the other side of the bar,  
Vlady talks to the owner. Some money is exchanged.

INTERCUT - ALEX/TIA PHONE CONVERSATION

TIA NORA (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Mijo, what? Two-thousand? Why?

Consuelo listens in.

Consuelo asks for the phone. She takes the receiver.

CONSUELO  
Alejandro? How much do you need?

ALEX  
Conny?

CONSUELO  
How much?

A long beat.

CONSUELO (cont'd)  
It's ok, I want to help.

Tia Nora looks on.

ALEX  
Two-thousand dollars.

CONSUELO  
Ok. How should I send it?

ALEX  
It has to be through MoneyGram.

CONSUELO  
Give me an hour but I will get it  
to you.

ALEX  
Conny, thank you so much, I'll pay  
you back.

CONSUELO

Don't worry about it. We just need  
you home.

**INT. MONEYGRAM SHOP - NIGHT**

Before Alex can even blink, a stack of two-thousand US dollars, all twenties is counted and recounted on the counter.

**INT. CIUDAD JUAREZ - LARGE WAREHOUSE - NIGHT**

Vlady and Alex enter an import/export warehouse where all sorts of products are being loaded onto trucks.

VLADY

Mac attack!

BIG MAC (59), is a large burly man with a rough beard, mustache, and tattoos on both arms and neck. He has an aggressive sense of discipline and sternness.

BIG MAC (SPANISH)

(under breath)

Ah fuck me.

VLADY

I want you to meet a friend.

Big Mac looks Alex up and down.

ALEX

Hello Mac. Alex.

VLADY

Alex is interested in a ride.

BIG MAC

Can't. Whatever he told you, sorry  
kid. He puts his foot in his mouth.

VLADY

Come on, Mac.

(in Spanish)

Make a little room, my friend.

BIG MAC

(staring at Vlady)

Jesus Christ. What did I just say?  
No.

Mac's cellphone rings.

BIG MAC (cont'd)

Excuse me.

Max walks to the side to take the call in private.

Vlady offers Alex a cigarette.

From a distance, Mac glances back.

Vlady lights it for him as he makes eye contact with Mac.  
Vlady nods.

BIG MAC (cont'd)

(on phone)

Yea. Yea. I got you, I'll hit you  
back.

VLADY

(to Alex)

Don't worry, you will be home soon,  
con la familia. Trust me.

Big Mac returns.

BIG MAC

Ok, kid. The cash? You got it? Four  
thousand.

ALEX

Four? Vlady mentioned possibly  
doing two.

BIG MAC

(he eyes Vlady)

Two thousand? Kid you're dreaming.  
Nope.

Alex looks at Big Mac's forearm, noticing a familiar tattoo.

ALEX

You Army? I know that tat.

BIG MAC

Was. Desert Storm. Tank Battalion.

ALEX

I was Army Specialist, 4th  
Infantry, Afghanistan.

Alex removes his Apple watch.

BIG MAC

No shit? Well...

ALEX

Two-thousand. All I have and this watch, take it. I need to get back.

Big Mac contemplates.

VLADY

Come on, Mac.

(in Spanish)

Plus, you owe me. Remember?

BIG MAC (SPANISH)

I don't owe you shit.

Mac's cellphone buzzes again. A text message:

**UNKNOWN NUMBER: NEED 1 MORE M - same \$\$\$**

Mac looks around, sighing.

BIG MAC (cont'd)

Fine. Ok. Guess it's your lucky day kid.

**INT. WAREHOUSE OFFICE - NIGHT (LATER)**

Mac eyes Alex as he counts the wad of cash. Then takes the watch.

ALEX

Mac, you mind if I use your phone?  
Collect call.

BIG MAC

Yea, sure. Make it quick though.

Mac and Vlady step out.

**INT. WAREHOUSE - CIUDAD JUAREZ - NIGHT**

Vlady and Mac walk. The warehouse office is in the background. Mac sets Vlady aside.

BIG MAC

Look, I don't give a flying fuck who your cousin is. You ever undercut me again, with your shit friends, you're dead.

(under breath)

Goddamn junkie.



Mac throws him the watch, exiting, while giving Vlady the finger.

VLADY

Relax. My cousin, he pay good.

He tries it on. He admires its shininess.

VLADY (cont'd)

(under his breath)

Pinche pendejo.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. SMUGGLING TRUCK (DRIVING) - DAWN**

A large 18-wheeler drives through an expansive desert.

**INT. SMUGGLING TRUCK (DRIVING) - DAY**

Now in a hidden compartment, Alex makes the journey accompanied by a dozen other migrants -- MEN and YOUNG WOMEN.

Alex stares at the one picture of Sophia.

ISABEL (19) leans over. A dark-haired woman with striking eyes. She has some day-old bruises on her arms and face.

ISABEL (SPANISH)

Your daughter?

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)

Yes. My Spanish is not so good.

ISABEL (BROKEN ENGLISH)

I speak little English.

(beat)

Pretty. My name Isabel.

They shake hands.

ALEX

Alex. Nice to meet you.

ISABEL (BROKEN ENGLISH)

Where she?

ALEX

She lives in Texas.

ISABEL (BROKEN ENGLISH)

She has your eyes. How old?

ALEX

Six. Next month. Where are you from?

ISABEL

El Salvador.

ALEX

Long way from home.

ISABEL (BROKEN ENGLISH)

Yes. I left two weeks ago. You? Where from?

ALEX

Texas. My aunt is still there with Sophia, my daughter.

ISABEL (BROKEN ENGLISH)

And her mother?

(in Spanish)

Sorry, I am so nosy.

ALEX

It's ok. She didn't want to be a mom. She left.

ISABEL (BROKEN ENGLISH)

Oh. I am sorry.

ALEX

Why did you leave?

ISABEL (SPANISH)

Spanish, please?

Alex nods.

ISABEL (SPANISH) (cont'd)

My boyfriend. He met some bad friends. I told him I did not like what he was getting into, and I tried to leave, but...I couldn't.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)

What happened?

ISABEL (SPANISH)

I found three kilos of cocaine hidden within our apartment. One night, two masked men came looking for it.

CUT TO:

**INT. EL SALVADOR - APARTMENT (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT**

Isabel is hysterical. Tears stream down her face, smudging her makeup.

Isabel's BOYFRIEND is zip-tied, a SILVER WATCH on his wrist. He is on his knees. A barrel on the back of his head. One MASKED MAN #1 holds him at gunpoint. Another MASKED MAN #2 tightens his grip around Isabel's neck.

ISABEL (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
They demanded to know where the  
drugs were. But he wouldn't say a  
word.

Fingers begin a countdown, one by one - four, three, two, one...

A finger on the trigger. Her Boyfriend closes his eyes. Then the hammer comes down -- click.

ISABEL (O.S.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Nothing. Then, laughter.

The reality settles in.

ISABEL (O.S.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
A test. To prove loyalty for the  
local gang. After that day, he was  
not only trusted but had more  
responsibility.

**INT. EL SALVADOR - KITCHEN (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT**

A pair of Nike sneakers are removed. The pockets of Designer jeans are being emptied.

ISABEL (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Then a month ago, he angered the  
wrong people, and they killed him.  
His best friend had done it as a  
test for a rival gang.

The SILVER WATCH is taken off the wrist as blood begins to pool on the linoleum floor from her Boyfriends's head.

BACK TO SCENE

ISABEL (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
I had to get out. Somehow get to  
Canada. I have a half-sister who  
lives in Vancouver.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Canada?

ISABEL (SPANISH)  
She says there is work there. A  
better life.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
I'm sorry.

ISABEL (SPANISH)  
Thanks. Are you cold?

Isabel lays out a blanket.

ISABEL (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Here, we can share.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Thank you.

They huddle for warmth coming closer together.

#### **INT. SMUGGLING TRUCK - MORNING**

Alex awakens, Isabel still leaning on him.

The sounds of air brakes disengaging. The engine stops.

Suddenly, power tools open the hidden smuggling manifold.

Light floods the hidden cargo hold. Hands reach in and help the migrants out one by one. Alex exits and sees that they are in --

#### **INT. WAREHOUSE - MORNING (CONTINUOUS)**

Alex and the others lay eyes to several Sinaloa Cartel Members (16-22) carrying shotguns, mac-10s, and semi-automatic rifles.

Leading the outfit is ALBERTO "KASTOR" CASTRO (34), one of the lesser-known capos of the Sinaloa cartel. Always looking to prove something, with hair slicked back, gold chains.

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
Separate them.

HUMBERTO "CAMARON" REYES (16), the youngest recruit, slings a semi-auto rifle and a 9mm Beretta pistol in one hand. He is tattooed and has multiple piercings.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
Attention! Men to the left! Women  
to the right!

Men go to one side and women to the other.

CAMARON (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Form a straight line. Do not speak.  
Unless spoken to.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 pushes them on with the barrel of his rifle. Several other Cartel Members go down the women's line, studying them over. CARTEL MEMBER #2 makes notes in a small notepad:

HAIR COLOR, HEIGHT, BODY TYPE

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
What's the count?

CARTEL MEMBER #6 (SPANISH)  
Eight women, five men.

Kastor nods to Camaron, his lieutenant.

He walks down the line of men, tapping each with the barrel of his Beretta.

This rather PORTLY MAN looks up, seeing Camaron's eyes. He glances for a second, then looks away.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
What are you staring at, fat-ass?

Portly Man looks away, nodding his head no.

CAMARON (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
What?

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
Privilege comes at a price.

Kastor nods his head.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
That belly grumbling? Eat lead.

Camaron fires one round. The Portly Man falls like a slaughtered pig. Blood pools on the cement floor, flowing rapidly out as the man twitches.

Camaron stands over him.

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
Do not forget who feeds you. Who  
keeps you alive. Who keeps you  
safe.

(beat)  
Go ahead. Rank and file them out.

Isabel is brought to the front of the line.

The Cartel Members zip-tie the women.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
Move. Move!

Isabel keeps staring at Alex as she's led away.

CAMARON (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
What a little princess you are.

Camaron sees her glancing at Alex.

CAMARON (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Who you peeping, with those eyes?

Camaron licks the smoking barrel of his Beretta. Then graces  
her crotch with it.

CAMARON (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Maybe you and me...

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
Camaron!

Camaron leaves her. He turns to Alex.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
And you? Her little prince.

Alex slowly makes eye contact.

KASTOR  
Camaron! Enough!

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
(whispers in Alex's ear)  
I saw her first.

Alex glances at Camaron, who suddenly pistol-whips Alex,  
square in the head.

All goes BLACK.

**EXT. US ARMY HUMVEE - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

An explosion.

The IED has just gone off as Alex comes to. He's back in the Humvee soon after the attack. He looks to Martinez, his body slumped over and bloodied. He turns to Miller.

Everything is muted as Ahmad is yelling at him. Ahmad pulls him as Alex grabs Miller, his body slumping back, revealing a large, gruesome gaping hole in Miller's eye socket.

SMASH CUT TO:

**INT. HOLDING AREA - EARLY MORNING**

Alex abruptly awakens from his nightmare. He grabs his head, feeling a wet, bloody towel.

A bank of fluorescents come on.

A skinny, weathered migrant leans in. This is RAMON (34). A man who'd help anyone in need.

RAMON (SPANISH)

Friend? Are you ok?

Ramon cups Alex's head and gives him a drink of water from a plastic bottle.

RAMON (SPANISH) (cont'd)

Drink this.

ALEX

Fuck, my head. Where am I?

RAMON (SPANISH)

Speak Spanish?

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)

Where am I?

RAMON (SPANISH)

Durango, I think. Not sure, really.  
Can you get up?

Looking around, Alex is in a small room with sixteen other MIGRANT MEN. They all gather their belongings. There is one door, which looks large and rusted out. There is one small window in the corner with bars in front of the glass.

The heavy door unlatches.

Camaron enters and addresses Ramon.

Alex eyes Camaron.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
Get his ass up.  
(to Ramon)  
You stay with the prince, keep him  
out of my sight.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Yes, boss.

**INT. TRANSP0 TRUCK (DRIVING) - MORNING**

Small rays of light filtrate the dusty tin box on wheels -- a box truck. Alex sits cramped with other Migrants, and Ramon.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
What's your name?

ALEX  
Alex.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
My name is Ramon. Listen, stay  
close. You don't want to anger El  
Camaron.

ALEX  
Is that his name? I'll remember  
that.

**EXT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - MORNING**

A couple of Cartel Members, EL SAPO (25) and GUERO (22), escort everyone out of the back of the truck. They're outfitted with walkie-talkies.

The sun shines harshly as Alex squints, seeing nothing but a desert wilderness with mountains in the distance.

Three Cartel Members give "The Tour". One is EL COCINERO (33) who seems to be more of the brains and lead "Chef" of the operation. The other is Camaron, making sure he keeps everyone in line. The third is the Sous Chef - EL GATO (30).

EL COCINERO (SPANISH)  
(into his walkie)  
New group coming through.



Alex follows the rest of the group out of the truck and into what looks like a dilapidated restaurant on the very outskirts of a ghost town.

Migrants, now slave LABORERS, work around the restaurant. There are concrete mixing machines, wheelbarrows, bricks, and tools scattered about.

**INT. EL COMPADRE RESTUARANTE - DAY**

As they enter, "tour guides" put on their white worn-in chemical suits, gas masks, and goggles -- equipment similar to something you'd buy at Home Depot for painting.

EL COCINERO (SPANISH)

Masks.

The dining room looks unkept and there is a foul odor coming from the kitchen, almost like ammonia.

Each Migrant is given a gas mask and goggles as well as a bandana. They walk into the --

KITCHEN

-- where Alex finally sees what's being "remodeled" --

A METHAMPHETAMINE kitchen.

EL COCINERO (SPANISH) (cont'd)

You are never to be in here alone.

Always in a pair. Absolutely no smoking. Understand?

Chemicals, plastic cylindrical drums, beakers, stoves, pots, anything and everything to build a small working meth lab.

El Gato in PPE gear slowly rolls in a PLASTIC DRUM. We see the label, a skull and crossbones, and writing (*in Chinese and English*):

DANGER - ACETONE - HIGHLY FLAMMABLE

They move quickly through the kitchen and into a --

MAKESHIFT STORAGE SPACE

Alex notices several more plastic drums near some paneling that looks like electrical and gas.

CAMARON (SPANISH)

Move.

They are moved along into the --

# PANTRY/PACKAGING ROOM

-- with one window and overhead fluorescent lighting. Three MIGRANTS/LABORERS pack BLUE/WHITE CAPSULES with Meth. There is one CARTEL GUARD in the room.

EL COCINERO (SPANISH)

You three. Join them at the table.  
You. Get them proper gear. Show  
them how and bring them up to  
speed, understand? You're in  
charge.

A Packing Migrant sitting at the table nods his head.

PACKING MIGRANT #1 (SPANISH)

Yes, boss.

EL CONCINERO (SPANISH)

Take these four out back. Camaron,  
you're with me.

EL GATO

You four. With me.  
(into walkie)  
Moving to you.

FOREMAN (O.S.) (SPANISH)

Copy.

Alex, Ramon, and two other Migrants are led out back to a --

# SMALL CONSTRUCTION SITE

An extension to the restaurant, where a large hole with walls has been dug up, with a ladder leading to its floor.

They meet the FOREMAN (37), wearing a cowboy hat and work boots, overseeing this construction project along with two WORKER MIGRANTS.

EL COCINERO (SPANISH)

They're all yours.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)

(to Cook)

I need another two for us to stay  
on schedule.

EL CONCINERO (SPANISH)

I'll bring it up the chain.

El Cocinero and Camaron exit. Foreman addresses the group.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
Who of you has construction  
experience?

Half raise their hands. Foreman looks at Alex.

FOREMAN (cont'd)  
Is this going to be a problem?

He points to Alex's injury. Ramon steps in.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
No, boss. He's good, strong.

He looks Alex over, then Ramon.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
I hope so.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Yes, boss.

Ramon grabs two shovels. He hands one to Alex.

RAMON (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
(whispering to Alex)  
Best to listen and do.

Alex takes the shovel.

#### BEGIN MONTAGE

#### **MIGRANTS WORK ON RESTAURANT EXTENSION**

- Another day, measurements, pouring, mixing, and more digging.
- They eat lunch: beans, rice, and tortillas wrapped in foil
- The Foreman oversees the work.
- The sun shines blazing heat.
- Inside, El Cocinero and other Cartel Members make meth.
- Plumes of white vapor escape from the restaurant's vent.
- Cement is laid down, and with a dowel, the brick is set.

#### END MONTAGE

Alex brings more cement in a wheelbarrow. Ramon shovels.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Hey, Ramon, how long you been here?

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Three weeks. Not exactly what any  
of us imagined, but we're still  
breathing.

Alex glances over to Ramon's tattooed wrist. It reads: PABLO  
along with Christ on the Cross.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)  
Since the age of seven, Pablo and  
Ramon were as blood brothers...

Scars run up his forearm. Sweat falls off his brow.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Since Ramon could ever remember,  
Pablo always lived next door. He  
always had the latest He-Man action  
figures, even Castle Grayskull.

Ramon's face is weathered. His hands, dirty and his  
fingernails, long.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
In middle school, Pablo's father  
was hand-picked to the president's  
cabinet, a promotion catapulting  
his political career. Soon after  
Pablo moved away, to another  
neighborhood situated, in a  
wealthier part of town...

Ramon takes a moment to wipe the sweat with his bandana.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Soon thereafter he was kidnapped by  
a leftist faction, emphatic on  
overthrowing the current party in  
power. His body was later  
recovered, in a river south of  
Cuilipa, near the capital of  
Guatemala. He was only fifteen.

Alex stops shoveling for a second. Ramon pauses, digging his  
shovel in.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Where were you headed?

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Texas.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
You look American. Ever been to  
Montana? So much land, I've always  
wanted to see those mountains, be a  
cowboy...like John Wayne.

They finish mixing and start to lay more brick.

ALEX  
(chuckles)  
John Wayne?

The Foreman looks at them with a stare.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
No talking.

Ramon nods, returning to work. He whispers.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Sometimes, I wonder. Who guides us?  
Luck or fate.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
God does. So have faith. For He,  
will one day fulfill all of us.

#### **INT. HOLDING AREA - MORNING**

The fluorescents spark on. It is morning as Alex and the  
others wake up - another day begins.

#### **EXT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - WORKSITE - DAY**

Alex picks at his food sitting next to Ramon.

He sees two Cartel Members. He eyes their weapons - semi-  
automatic long guns, hunting rifles with scopes, pistols.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
There must be twenty of us.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Twenty-seven.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
How many cartel, you suppose, run  
this little operation?

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Ten, maybe twelve. I think.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Right. And the same routine?

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Yes. For as long as I have been  
here. Organized. Of course, they  
have guns.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Of course.

SAME - LATER

Alex sweats heavily as he lays brick. He looks over at  
another Migrant, who keels over, passing out due to the heat.

Other Migrants attend to him. The Foreman steps in.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
Leave him. Get back to work.  
(over walkie)  
Got another.

A pair of Cartel Members grab the Migrant by the arms and  
drag him out of the sun.

Alex watches them take the Migrant, then overhears the  
Foreman and El Gato talking in the background.

He keeps quiet but keenly takes in every word.

They pull out a pack of cigarettes, lighting up.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Excuse me...bathroom?

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
(to El Gato)  
Take him.

**INT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY**

Alex is led through the kitchen, the packaging room, etc.  
They stop in the --

**MAKESHIFT STORAGE SPACE**

Alex sees Camaron furiously banging the main AC unit.

CAMARON  
I'm roasting in this motherfucker.

CARTEL MEMBER #8  
Leave it. It's busted.

Camaron sees Alex looking at him.

CAMARON  
The fuck you looking at prince,  
piece of shit-faggot?

Alex continues to the --

MEN'S BATHROOM

Alex enters the worst bathroom in all of Mexico.

CAMARON (O.S.) (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
(laughing)  
Make you clean that shit-hole too.

EL COCINERO (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Camaron, get over here and bring  
the new shipment.

Camaron grins at his joke.

**EXT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - WORKSITE - DAY**

The crew eats lunch. Sick of the same meals, Alex gives his tortillas to Ramon. Ramon nods his head graciously.

Alex keeps the aluminum foil wrapping, folding it over and over again, and places it in his pocket.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Ramon, you have an extra bandana on  
you? Need a napkin.

Ramon pulls out one of his bandanas and hands it to Alex.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Listen, after lunch, maybe talk to  
the Foreman. Could you tell him I  
have electrical experience? I can  
be of service.

Ramon finishes his meal. He licks his fingers.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Ok.

He gets up and approaches the Foreman, who's busy on his walkie.

Alex watches the interaction. Ramon points to him.

The Foreman walks over.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
You know electrical?

Alex nods. Alex puts down his food.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Yes, sir.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
(to Alex)  
Come with me.  
(to a Cartel Guard)  
Make sure they finish and start  
back up in ten, no more, got it?

Alex follows the Foreman into --

**INT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - KITCHEN - DAY**

The Foreman enters, followed by Alex. They see Camaron wearing PPE while cooking meth alongside the El Cocinero. Camaron sees Alex.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
Why's he here?

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
Focus on your task. I'll focus on  
mine.

Foreman grabs two gas masks. He hands one to Alex.

FOREMAN (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Put this on. Do you understand  
Spanish?

He nods. They both put on masks.

FOREMAN (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
The AC units in this place are  
shit. We lost one about a week ago.  
Then the other. See what you can  
do. Do good, and we can use you.  
Give you a better job. Pay you.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Thank you. Is there a fuse box? A  
power distribution panel?



FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
Yes. The main is in the storage room.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
I may need some tools also if that's possible.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
(on open walkie)  
Boss. Another Migrant's down from the heat.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
(on walkie)  
Fuck. I'll be right there. Put him in the shade and come in here and take over for me. Bring a toolbox.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Yes, boss.

Cartel Member #1 enters with a toolbox. He hands it to the Foreman. They exchange masks.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
Make sure he does the work. He's going to check out the electrical in the building. Got it? Keep me up to date.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 (SPANISH)  
Yes, boss.

Foreman hands the tools to Alex.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
Report when you find problems. Ok?

Alex nods. Foreman exits.

Alex inspects the fusebox panel discreetly checking to see how closely Cartel Member #1 watches him.

A Cartel Guard pops his head out of the packaging room.

CARTEL GUARD (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
You got a cigarette?

While the Cartel Members exchange a cigarette, Alex uses a SCREWDRIVER to puncture a barrel.

Camaron enters.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
(to Cartel Guard)  
Hey idiot, you trying to kill us?  
No smoking!

Liquid leaks from the barrel. Alex pulls out the bandanas. He plugs the hole with one and puts the other beneath the hole.

CARTEL GUARD (SPANISH)  
Chill.  
(to Cartel Member #1)  
What's up his ass?

Alex stands up and starts to open the fusebox panel with the screwdriver.

He looks over the fuses and sees that several are burnt out. One looks to be the circuit for the AC units.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Tell your boss - several fuses are  
dead. They need to be replaced.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 (SPANISH)  
(on walkie)  
Boss, the gringo says we need new  
fuses.

FOREMAN (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
(on walkie)  
Copy. I'll put the request through.  
Make sure he checks the AC units as  
well before the day is out.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 (SPANISH)  
(on walkie)  
Yes, Boss.  
(to Alex)  
You heard him. Let's go.

Alex gathers the tools and closes the box.

#### **INT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - PACKAGING - DAY**

Alex opens the AC panel and finds the electrical wiring. Using NEEDLE NOSE PLIERS, he separates the sheath from the main electrical wire. There are three wires: a white one (GROUND), a black one (NEGATIVE), and a red one (POSITIVE).

He pulls out the aluminum foil and wraps the end of the red wire with it. He closes the panel.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
This one is good. How many more?

**EXT. EL COMPADRE RESTUARANTE - DUSK**

Another day has come to a close. The workers line up and get back into the truck. Once loaded, the door closes.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Ramon, listen...tomorrow, in the morning, make sure no one comes into the kitchen for any reason. No one. Got it? Keep it quiet, but let the others know.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Why?

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Just trust me.

**INT. HOLDING AREA - EARLY MORNING**

The fluorescents flicker on. Alex wakes up the next day as always. Ramon helps him up.

RAMON (SPANISH)  
Another day is another life.

Alex stands up.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Did you inform everyone?

RAMON (SPANISH)  
I did as you said, but I do not understand.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Just keep your eyes open today, ok my friend?

He pats him on the back, Ramon nods. They exit.

**INT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - PANTRY - MORNING**

With his gas mask on, Alex reopens the fusebox panel. He puts the SCREWDRIVER back in the toolbox.

A different guard is with him, who hands him the new fuses.

Alex turns to hide what he's doing in the fuse box.

Foreman enters. He addresses the guard.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
How's the electrical coming along?

Cartel Member #1 turns to Alex, still rigging. He nudges him.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 (SPANISH)  
Hey, the boss is talking to you.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Good boss, but lots of old wiring.  
More work to do.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
How long?

ALEX (SPANISH)  
End of day.

FOREMAN (SPANISH)  
Notify me when it's done.

Alex returns to his work. He puts one new fuse in its place, then wraps the top of the new fuse in foil, placing it in its correct position, which should power the AC units.

Alex rummages through the toolbox for his SCREWDRIVER, which he "accidentally" drops near the drums. He glances at the guard, who doesn't notice.

Alex picks up the screwdriver and one of the damp acetone bandanas. He carefully stuffs the bandana inside the fusebox, then closes the panel.

Alex rummages the toolbox as if to return a tool but instead hides the screwdriver in his sock. Then, he closes the toolbox.

He stands, handing the toolbox to Cartel Member #1.

Camaron enters, pulling up his gas mask.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
Little prince, you fix it or what?

Alex nods.

Camaron gives him a dirty look.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Done. Need to check the AC unit in  
the other room, ok?

Cartel Member #1 nods ok.

PACKAGING ROOM

Alex enters with Cartel Member #1, who addresses another  
Cartel Guard.

CARTEL MEMBER #1 (SPANISH)  
He's going to check the unit and  
make sure it works. I am heading  
back out. Need the air. Keep an eye  
on him.

CARTEL GUARD (SPANISH)  
Ok. This room is hell.

Alex reaches the AC unit, plugging it back into the outlet.

He pushes the on button on the AC unit. It works...blowing  
cool air from its vent and into the cramped room.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Bathroom?

CARTEL GUARD  
Sure.

**INT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - KITCHEN - MORNING**

Stepping up to the other AC unit, Camaron lifts his mask.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
(to himself)  
Little shit. Better work.

BATHROOM

Alex enters and leaves the door ajar to scan the room and  
Cartel Guard.

KITCHEN

Camaron pushes the AC power button. Nothing.

EL COCINERO (SPANISH)  
Camaron, stop messing with that and  
get over here. We gotta cook!

The AC unit does not work.

Suddenly, he sees it's not plugged in.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
(to El Cocinero)  
Give me a goddamn minute!!

BATHROOM

Alex waits, scanning the room. The screwdriver is tucked in one hand. He notices the guard has a 9mm tucked in the back of his pants.

Alex holds his breath, keeping an eye on the guard.

KITCHEN

Camaron plugs in the unit and turns it on.

CAMARON (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Electrician my ass.

The AC starts to hum. He leans in closer to feel the first bit of cool air hit his face. He fully takes off his mask.

The foil attached to the positive RED hot wire begins to smoke. It smolders like a slow-burning fuse.

EL CONCINERO (SPANISH)  
Camaron! Get another barrel.

Grumbling, Camaron grabs a barrel. The punctured one.

He rolls it, unbeknownst to him, that acetone is leaking onto the floor. The pressure pops the acetone-soaked bandana.

The foil smokes, practically almost burned through.

Camaron inadvertently slips on the slippery acetone.

CAMARON (SPANISH)  
The fuck?

He looks perplexed by the wet floor, then sees the puncture.

The foil is completely burned away, and the wire is exposed as a large electric arc jumps it, creating a --

A chain reaction.

Melting the connector with an intense amount of heat, then

SPARKS

The trigger to an electrical FIRE -- igniting the acetone-dampened bandana engulfing the whole panel.

SPARKS/CINDERS fall on the floor, igniting the other soaked bandana and acetone-filled floor.

FIRE spreads in an instant! Then...

The ACETONE-RICH AIR IGNITES. A tsunami of fire engulfs the space - the kitchen sending --

Camaron, now immersed in flames SCREAMING, tries to stamp out the flames creeping up all his clothes. He is a FIREBALL, and anything near him IGNITES, including El Cocinero.

The Cartel Guard is appalled.

BATHROOM

Alex makes his move. Pushing through the bathroom door and into the --

PACKAGING ROOM

Jabbing the screwdriver into the back of the Cartel Guard's head and spinal cord, killing him instantly.

Two other Cartel Members enter the kitchen - see Camaron, then the Cartel Guard as Alex kills him. They lift their weapons. Alex grabs the 9mm from the dead Cartel Guard using his body as a human shield and unloads four 9mm rounds into them in point-blank fashion. All drop DEAD.

The entire kitchen, now in flames, spreads quickly to other parts of the restaurant.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Fire!! Fire!!! Get out!! Out!!

Another Cartel Member with a rifle enters the

KITCHEN

Alex drops, aims, and puts two quick rounds into his chest and one in the head - with pinpoint accuracy.

He checks his body, finds some ammo and a knife with a compass, and takes his Remington Model 700 bolt-action hunting RIFLE with a SCOPE.

The fire is quickly growing in intensity, and smoke is billowing.

He slides on the floor and stays low as he approaches the

**MAKESHIFT STORAGE ROOM**

Alex finds a Packing Migrant, half-conscious. He takes off his mask and puts it on him, then lifts him, rescuing him out of the building.

**EXT. EL COMPADRE RESTAURANTE - DAY**

Alex stumbles out of the restaurant, now engulfed in smoke as flames erupt through windows, shattering glass. Migrant Laborers flee. Some Migrant Workers use their shovels as weapons, killing other Cartel Members, including the Foreman.

ALEX

Ramon!!

A Migrant Worker passes by, helping him tend to the injured Packing Migrant.

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH) (cont'd)

He needs help. Have you seen Ramon?

The Worker shakes his head.

Alex scans the area and comes to find Ramon lying on the ground motionless. Two bullet holes in his back.

More explosions go off. Alex runs into the desert. He catches his breath. Then --

BOOOOOOOOMMM! A massive ball of fire and debris fills the sky. Alex escapes toward the open desert.

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - DUSK - LATER**

Alex scans the open desert ground, finally finding a tuft of dried grasses.

He unscrews the knife handle, revealing a FLINT.

With the flint and a rock, he creates sparks. An ember creates smoke. The bundle of dried grass becomes fire.

With the knife, he sticks a piece of prickly pear cactus and scalds the spines over the roaring fire. After burning them off, he cuts the red-colored fruit aside and cuts the rest of the cactus up. He eats the soft meat apart from the skin, squeezing the fruit and enjoying its puree.

The fire burns as Alex sits beneath the stars.

DISSOLVE TO:



**INT. EXTENDED STAY SUITES - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

A single candle burns brightly. We pull back to reveal that another is lit with a match, then another. Six candles on top of a small white birthday cake. They sparkle, illuminating the darkened room.

<p>TIA NORA (BROKEN ENGLISH) (singing) Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you...</p>	<p>CONSUELO (ENGLISH) (singing) Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you...</p>
--	---

Tia Nora and Consuelo sing to Sophia, who sits at a small kitchen table. The room is dim.

<p>TIA NORA (BROKEN ENGLISH) (cont'd) (singing) Happy birthday, dear Sophia. Happy birthday to you!</p>	<p>CONSUELO (ENGLISH) (cont'd) (singing) Happy birthday, dear Sophia. Happy birthday to you!</p>
---	--

Sophia is smiling at the sight of her birthday cake.

TIA NORA (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Happy birthday, princess. Make a  
wish and blow out all the candles.

Sophia excitedly nods, and with one blow, she extinguishes all the candles.

Sophia pulls on Tia Nora and leans in...

SOPHIA  
(whispering)  
I wished Papa to come home.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - MORNING**

A large wasteland of a desert lies ahead of Alex.

Dizziness, exhaustion, and dehydration set in as he falls to his knees. He breathes heavily, almost whizzing.

He passes out -- blacking out.

**EXT. EL COMPADRE RESTUARANTE - MORNING**

A large 4x4 truck skids to a stop as a pair of boots exit the passenger side and walk the dusty ground, revealing charred pieces of the destroyed restaurant.

It's Kastor. He covers his mouth with a handkerchief as he surveys the carnage of smoldering ashes and bodies and what's left of the cartel's drug lab.

CARTEL MEMBER #3 (O.S.) (SPANISH)  
Nobody seems to have survived,  
except for a couple of the workers.

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
Find out what they know...and round  
up a team. This just does not  
happen.

His eyes gleam with anger as he has seen enough.

**EXT. MEXICO - DEEPER INTO THE DESERT - DAY**

A burro (donkey) awakens Alex -- licking him.

An old man's hand cups his head, lifting it and bringing it closer to a jug of water. The man holding the jug is KIQUE (60), with a long scrubby beard and straw hat.

A spirited little girl looks down at him, silhouetted by the sun. This is MANUELA (10).

MANUELA (SPANISH)  
Is he going to be ok?

Alex's eyes open. Disoriented.

ALEX  
Sophia?

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
The heat has got to him.

Alex, mustering his strength, sits up.

His eyes begin to focus.

He sees the young girl, but it is not his daughter.

KIQUE (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Drink. Slowly.

He sips more water.

A migrant man, IGNACIO (34), and a migrant woman, MARIBEL (29), bearing a small baby, JUAN FELIPE (8 months), step in cautiously.

IGNACIO (SPANISH)  
Kique, we should move on or at  
least find shelter.

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
We can make camp for the night and  
attend to our new friend.

Kique helps him up.

KIQUE (cont'd)  
Can you walk?

ALEX (BROKEN SPANISH)  
Yes.

Alex stumbles, and Kique and Manuela grab his shoulders,  
helping him walk.

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
My name is Enrique, but you can  
call me Kique. This is Manuela,  
Ignacio, Maribel, and that's Juan  
Felipe their son. I am sure you  
have much to tell, and some shade  
and sustenance will do you good.

MANUELA (BROKEN ENGLISH)  
What's your name?

He hesitates the question, then speaks.

ALEX (SPANISH)  
Ale...Alejandro.

MANUELA  
I like your name.

ALEJANDRO  
You speak English?

Like pearls, her eyes bring a smile to his face.

MANUELA (BROKEN ENGLISH)  
Little. Call me Manu.

She drags him over to the burro (mule), patting his dusty  
mane.

MANUELA (BROKEN ENGLISH) (cont'd)  
This is Don Coque.

The mule nudges him.

Ignacio and Maribel, concerned, come over to Kique.

IGNACIO (SPANISH)  
(whispering)  
Kique, do you believe this is a  
good idea?

They both stare at the weapons Alejandro still carries.

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
(to Ignacio)  
Judge not, and you will not be  
judged. Condemn not, and you will  
not be condemned. Forgive, and you  
will be forgiven.

They head toward a rock outpost, which holds some shade.

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - CAMPSITE - NIGHT**

A fire burns as Kique puts another piece of dried wood on the flames.

Maribel hands him a bowl of beans and corn tortillas.

He looks up, with half a smile, having seen this type of food now for weeks.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)  
Uh. Thank you.

MARIBEL (SPANISH)  
(smiling)  
Welcome.

Ignacio takes care of the baby as Maribel hands Kique a bowl.

Kique takes a moment. Closes his eyes and prays.

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
(quietly)  
Father, you are good and generous  
in your gifts. Amen.

Alejandro looks over and sees Manuela is already fast asleep.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)  
Where is her father?

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
I don't know. He made me promise to  
look out for her and take her to  
Arizona. She has family there.  
(MORE)

KIQUE (SPANISH) (cont'd)

(beat)

He only handed me this.

A handwritten note:

OCTAVIO GIRALDO

3854 Las Cruces Rd., Tucson, AZ.

520-907-8978

BACK TO ALEJANDRO

He looks at Manuela.

KIQUE (cont'd)

I assume that's her only family besides him. I could not say no to the man. So I promised him without question. That was two weeks ago.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)

She knows English pretty well, I'm surprised.

Maribel looks over at them as she sits by the fire.

KIQUE (BROKEN ENGLISH)

It is good to practice.

Kique smiles, making Alejandro smile.

KIQUE (SPANISH) (cont'd)

She reminds me of my granddaughter. It's probably the reason I could not say no to her father.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)

I get it. I have a daughter. Close to her age. She's in Texas.

KIQUE (BROKEN ENGLISH)

I can tell you have a good heart...

ALEJANDRO

Good heart?

(scoffs)

(in Spanish)

Not sure of that. I'm not sure of anything anymore...except her. I cannot fail her. She is all I have that is true. So I need to get back to her.

KIQUE (SPANISH)

I understand. We all seek a better life. Protection, though, is important. The cartels do not want us to cross without a price. But I know of a secret passage near Nogales. We could use your help. With you as protection and as a guide, we'll have a better chance.

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH)

Have you ever fired a gun before?

Kique nods.

Alejandro puts his food down. He pulls out the 9mm pistol he took from the Cartel Member. He cocks the weapon, releasing the bullet in the chamber, and removing the mag clip. Ignacio and Maribel can only stare.

Alejandro stands over him as he hands him the weapon and mag.

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH) (cont'd)

I want to help. You saved my life.  
So take it. You may need it.

Kique reaches, grabbing the pistol and mag. He loads it and sets the safety.

Manuela wakes up.

MARIBEL (SPANISH)

Manu, you should eat.

MANUELA (SPANISH)

I'm thirsty.

Maribel passes her some water. Manuela drinks, staring at Alejandro. An innocence in her eyes strikes him deeply.

KIQUE (SPANISH)

We should all get some rest. We need to leave before the sun rises.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - ROCKY MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT - AFTERNOON**

Alejandro and Manuela are on top of a high ridge. Alejandro uses binoculars while Manuela holds the rifle and scope.

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH)

Keep scanning. What do you see?

MANUELA (SPANISH)  
Nothing. Just tumbleweeds.

Manuela keeps her eyes locked within the scope.

SCOPE POV

She pans the scope, landing on a group of Coues Whitetail deer.

MANUELA (cont'd)  
Deer!

ALEJANDRO  
Good. Ok, see those tumbleweeds?  
How fast are they moving?

MANUELA  
Ughh. Not too fast.

ALEJANDRO  
Are they moving left to right or  
right to left?

MANUELA  
Right to left.

ALEJANDRO  
The wind affects the bullet. Set  
your sights two clicks to the right  
of one of the deer. Make sure you  
aim for the heart. Got it?

MANUELA  
Got it.

ALEJANDRO  
Slow your breath. Ease it. Control  
it.  
(beat)  
Calm?

MANUELA  
Hm-mm.

ALEJANDRO  
Now, release the safety. Push this  
button with your finger.

She releases the safety.

ALEJANDRO (cont'd)  
Now, carefully, put your finger on  
the trigger.

She breathes slowly.

ALEJANDRO (cont'd)  
Just listen to my voice. Keep your  
aim, and when you're ready, take a  
deep breath, hold it, and send it.

The deer lifts its head. Crosshairs in dead aim.

She fires.

HIT! The deer stumbles, hitting the ground.

ALEJANDRO (cont'd)  
Good shot!

MANUELA (SPANISH)  
How did I do?

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)  
A natural.

She smiles.

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - SMALL CAMPSITE - DUSK**

The caravan has set up another small camp. It is a little more enclosed within the rocks. This one has two fires going. One seems to be for smoking meat.

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
How was the hunt?

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH)  
She did good. We'll have some meat  
tonight to grill and smoke the  
rest.

**SAME - LATER**

Kique pulls out an old, tattered topographical map.

Alejandro uses the compass to map out some waypoints.

IGNACIO (SPANISH)  
How long before we cross, you  
think?

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH)  
I calculate maybe one to two days  
if we keep our pace.



MARIBEL (SPANISH)  
So we are close?

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
The cartels have their lookouts around this area. So we'll have to maneuver, which could add a half day.

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH)  
If the weather at night improves, we could navigate the last part of the course with the moonlight, making us undetectable to the cartels.

KIQUE (SPANISH)  
A solid plan.

Kique goes to Don Coque and pulls out a small flask.

KIQUE (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Salud! To a safe crossing and prosperity for all of us.

Kique drinks, then passes it to Alejandro.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)  
Salud.

He drinks and then coughs. Kique laughs.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
(smiling)  
Strong.

Maribel looks away.

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - SMALL CAMPSITE - NIGHT**

Alejandro lays in a deep sleep, eyes darting - dreaming. He awakens suddenly in a fright. It's Manuela. She stands over him with her blanket.

ALEJANDRO  
Oh God. Manu.

MANUELA (SPANISH)  
I had a nightmare.

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH)  
It's ok. It's just a dream. Only dreams.

MANUELA (SPANISH)

But you left us. I saw you leave me.

ALEJANDRO (BROKEN SPANISH)

But I am not gone. I'm here. It's ok. Come here.

She curls up into a ball as he covers her.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH) (cont'd)

I am not going anywhere.

MANUELA

Promise?

ALEJANDRO

Yes, I promise.

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - SMALL CAMPSITE - DAWN**

Alejandro awakens, jarred by the sound of the baby crying. Maribel tends to the baby. The smoker's fire is just smoldering.

He fans its flames as it reignites. He checks the meat. It is all in long strips and seems almost dried out.

He adds more wood as the smoke billows out, tracking a long cloud of smoke up into the sky.

He thinks for a minute. Then looks up, noticing the smoke cloud trail go up and probably being seen for miles. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

Alex climbs up to the

HIGH RIDGE

Alex uses the SCOPE of the rifle to try and get his bearings.

SCOPE POV

He scans the horizon. Nothing.

Suddenly, he sees a cloud of dust starting to billow on the horizon. He realizes it's a pair of large 4x4 trucks.

He runs down the ridge.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)

Wake up. Wake up.

He goes to Kique.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
It's the cartel. We have to take  
cover. I am going to try and see  
what I can do. Whatever you do,  
keep quiet. Use the gun if you have  
to.

Kique grabs Manuela and the others and moves to cover.

Alejandro extinguishes the fires to stop the smoke, but it's  
useless. He gathers what extra ammunition he has and climbs  
to the --

#### **EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT**

He does an ammo check. Only seven bullets left for the rifle.

He loads the weapon, cocking the bolt and taking aim.

SCOPE POV

He tracks the vehicles as they approach. There are two 4x4  
large trucks with three Cartel Members in each. They stop shy  
of the camp, cautious.

#### **EXT. SMALL CAMPSITE**

The trucks stop. Six Cartel Members get out, guns drawn. One  
is Kastor. The other is TATTED CARTEL MEMBER (25), whose bare  
chest is tattooed from head to stomach. He carries a Mac 10.  
The other have semi-automatic rifles.

TATTED CARTEL MEMBER #3 (SPANISH)  
(checking the fire)  
They were just here.

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
You two stay with the trucks. You  
both come with me.

#### **EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT**

SCOPE POV

Suddenly, a truck horn starts to blare, echoing the valley. A  
roaring engine can be heard.

The Cartel Members lock and load their weapons. Even the drivers come out, taking cover behind their doors. Alejandro pans his scope.

ALEJANDRO

What the --

BACK TO KASTOR

KASTOR (SPANISH)

Hold your fire.

A large blue tricked-out truck with painted flames and massive mud terrain tires is tearing through the desert at them. The truck features a large 50cal heavy machine gun strapped to its bed, along with its GUNNER.

The truck stops about three hundred feet from the two other trucks. It is a rival cartel, THE JUAREZ CARTEL.

A loudspeaker goes off.

JUAREZ CARTEL MEMBER #1 (SPANISH)

You assholes forget where you are?  
You are trespassing on our  
territory.

KASTOR (SPANISH)

We have some property that is lost.  
It belongs to us.

JUAREZ CARTEL MEMBER #1 (SPANISH)

Fuck your shit. You know the pact,  
so you have two minutes to make the  
smartest decision you will today.

The Gunner locks and loads his 50cal.

All guns cock and aim. A true Mexican stand-off.

KASTOR (SPANISH)

Hold on! Stop! Stop! Look, we  
respect the pact.

Alejandro sees all this play out through his scope, knowing very well that this could all go bad in a matter of seconds.

#### **EXT. SMALL CAMPSITE**

Within their hiding spots, Kique looks over a rock to see what is happening. Manuela wants to see it. Kique holds her back.

Manuela notices the pistol tucked in Kique's back pocket.

**EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT**

Alejandro is waiting for the precise moment. He turns the dials on his scope, calculating for the wind and angle.

KASTOR (SPANISH)  
Look, let's be reasonable. Let us  
find who we are looking for, and  
we'll be on our way --

He fires one round from his rifle, echoing through the valley and hitting one of the Juarez Cartel Members square in the chest.

The Gunner sees this and stares at his enemies.

Kastor raises his arms...

KASTOR (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
No, no! No! No!!!

The Gunner unleashes a barrage of bullets tearing the air, ripping through the metal, rubber, glass, flesh, and bone.

A chain-reactive firefight ensues.

One by one, they are mowed down, except for one Sinaloa member, the Tatted Cartel Member, who escapes the firefight.

Alejandro aims and fires another round to take out the Gunner, missing and ricocheting.

ALEJANDRO  
Shit!

The Gunner quickly sees the glint off the scope high up the ridge, re-aims, and fires at Alex's position.

Alejandro takes cover. He reloads as the rocks around him are being obliterated by the 50cal.

**EXT. SMALL CAMPSITE**

The Tatted Cartel Member falls to the sand, escaping the carnage. He bleeds from his arm. He scurries, accidentally finding the group taking cover within the rocks.

They are huddled, helpless. Manuela hides behind Kique, and Ignacio protects Maribel as the baby cries.

He approaches, slowly raising his Mac-10 and fires, only a couple of rounds until...

The gun jams. He furiously checks the bolt.

Suddenly, he's hit by three bullets. A gun is smoking, but it's not from Kique instead it's Manuela.

#### **EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT**

The Gunner keeps unloading rounds exactly where Alejandro is taking cover. Alejandro hits the deck, engulfed in bullets. With haste, Alejandro crawls to a different shooting position.

He pulls up his weapon and scope, aiming carefully, slowing his breath.

MISS!!

The Gunner re-aims but suddenly runs out of ammo. He bends down to reload the heavy automatic weapon.

Alejandro breathes, popping up, and aims...

ALEJANDRO

Pop up, you son of a b --

The Gunner pops up from his ammo box.

SCOPE POV

ZIIIIIIIPPPPPP!!! HITTT!!!

A shot to the head.

Alejandro keeps scanning what's left of the carnage.

Alejandro is relieved...then he hears the sounds of cries.

#### **EXT. SMALL CAMPSITE**

Reaching the group, he sees Kique on the ground, bleeding from his neck. Ignacio is trying to help.

Alejandro puts pressure on the wound, but within seconds, Kique's eyes stare out as the life within leaves his body.

Alejandro takes his palm and closes Kique's eyes.

In Kique's front chest pocket, Alejandro finds the piece of paper, now bloodied, with Manuela's uncle's address.

He places it in his pocket.

**EXT. SMALL CAMPSITE - AFTERNOON**

Under a sunset sky of gold and purple, Kique and the others carefully lay rock after rock, burying their fellow traveler.

Ignacio steps forward. He gives the sign of the cross.

IGNACIO (SPANISH)

God, bless us as we pray for our friend, who lies before us, and grant whose body is to be buried here may live with Christ your only Son, in paradise, and may come to know and revere your heavenly kingdom through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

EVERYONE

Amen.

They make the sign of the cross. Manuela cannot help but stare at the grave and sob. Alejandro is at her side.

**SAME - LATER**

Ignacio loads some last things onto the saddlebags of Don Coque. Maribel holds the baby, staring at Ignacio.

Alejandro comes forward.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)

I think this is for the best. Take this.

He hands Ignacio the blade with the compass.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH) (cont'd)

It'll guide you along with the map. Take a direct heading due northwest. You will be in California before long. They will be more likely to take you in.

IGNACIO (SPANISH)

He was right about you. It's not easy to trust a stranger, but he was right.

They share a moment.

IGNACIO (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
Kique was Maribel's grandfather. I  
don't think you were aware.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)  
I am sorry for all of this. I'll  
take care of Manuela and make sure  
she gets to Arizona. Here, take it.

He hands him the 9mm pistol.

IGNACIO (SPANISH)  
No, thank you.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)  
Sorry. I never intended any of  
this.

Ignacio cannot say a word. He simply turns away. Alejandro  
turns to Maribel.

MARIBEL (SPANISH)  
May God watch over you...and her.

MANUELA (SPANISH)  
Take care of Don Coque.

IGNACIO (SPANISH)  
I will.

Both of them, now on their own, watch as the small family and  
burro ride out slowly.

ALEJANDRO  
Let's get you home.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. MEXICO DESERT - DAY (LATER)**

Manuela walks ahead as she sees something glittering on the  
desert floor. She runs and looks to see what it is. She  
kneels.

She pulls up a scarf, torn with some red and silver glitter.  
Its edges are marked in blood. She drops it, backing away.

MANUELA  
It's blood.

Alejandro approaches, finding hidden in the sand -

A SILVER CRUCIFIX.



He looks further, seeing the sole of a shoe in the bushes.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH)

Stay here.

He walks up to the shoe, and tucked in the bushes is a body, facedown, covered in sand and brush.

Alejandro inspects it closer, seeing the remains of a dead migrant, obviously semi-eaten by a wild animal. Manuela approaches slowly.

ALEJANDRO (SPANISH) (cont'd)

Stay. Don't come any closer.

He inspects the body, searching its pockets, finding grains of sand and a single granola bar wrapper.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - DAY**

The sun is high as each takes another step, leaving tracks in the loose sand. The wind howls.

Manuela is now more pale. A sheen over her face. She faints.

ALEJANDRO

Manu. Manu.

He feels her pulse.

His feverish eyes scan a --

ROCK OUTCROPPING with BUSHES

Manuela is slumped over his shoulder. He sets her down, still unconscious.

Within the bushes, he surveys what appears to be a MIGRANT WATER DROP - left by American Good Samaritans - several black jugs of water.

He looks back at her. Motionless.

He reaches down to grab a jug.

Hidden within the brush is a viper. It bites him in the upper forearm. Pulling off the serpent, he squashes it with his boot.

Blood pours from the two holes now in his arm. He tourniquets the wound and covers it.

He grabs a jug, bringing it to her side, pouring water into her little mouth and cooling her head.

Alejandro feels her forehead. She's hot to the touch.

ALEJANDRO (cont'd)  
Stay with me Manu. Please.

Suddenly, a rifle shot echoes. He covers, grabbing his pistol.

Silence. Then another.

He takes a peek, scanning, but sees nothing.

He hears the gravel shift. He turns and there, holding a long rifle with a scope, is EDUARDO (51), a hunter, wearing a cowboy hat and binoculars hanging from his shoulder. A large buck knife is in a leather holster.

He sees Manuela, unconscious and pale, then Alejandro's pistol.

EDUARDO  
Speak English?

Alex nods.

EDUARDO (SPANISH) (cont'd)  
I just want to help the girl. I am  
going to put down my rifle, ok?

Slowly, Eduardo puts his rifle on the ground. Alejandro lowers his pistol.

EDUARDO (cont'd)  
What's wrong with her?

ALEJANDRO  
Heat stroke, I think.

He checks her pulse.

EDUARDO (O.S.)  
We have to get her to a hospital.  
Come on, I have a truck.

**INT. PICKUP TRUCK - (MOVING) (LATER)**

Eduardo approaches a US BORDER CROSSING. He has his documents in hand.

**EXT. ARIZONA - US BORDER CROSSING - DAY**

He pulls up to one of the officers.

US BORDER AGENT #1  
Eddie, how you doing?

EDUARDO  
Good, good. You? How are the kids?

US BORDER AGENT #1  
A pain, as always, not as bad as  
the wife.

US BORDER AGENT #1 (cont'd)  
What you bag this time?

EDUARDO  
Whitetail. Gotta get home before  
she turns.

US BORDER AGENT #1  
I see. So, you know, I have to ask,  
where are you headed?

EDUARDO  
Sahuarita. Home. As always.

The other US Border Agent walks over to the bed of the truck.  
Eduardo watches him in his side-view mirror.

We see in the back of the truck a large blue tarp tied down  
and the blood and the carcass of an animal hanging out.

US Border Agent #2 takes a good look, covering his nose.

What they don't see are Alejandro and Manuela hiding in the  
back with the carcasses.

US BORDER AGENT #2  
(holding his nose)  
His paperwork check out?

US BORDER AGENT #1  
Yes.

US Border Agent #1 pulls out a clipboard.

Eduardo's hand is trembling as he signs the paperwork.

US BORDER AGENT #1 (cont'd)  
Hey, if you make that jerky again,  
save me some.

EDUARDO  
Sure. No problem.

Eduardo cracks a smile, waving as he exits the checkpoint.

**EXT. ARIZONA - US HIGHWAY - LATER**

Eduardo's truck flies by a sign that reads:

WELCOME TO ARIZONA: THE GRAND CANYON STATE

**INT. NORTHWEST MEDICAL CENTER - ER - NIGHT**

Alejandro runs with haste, sweating profusely.

ALEJANDRO  
I need a doctor!

An ER NURSE #1 (29) comes up with a gurney. Alejandro lays her down.

An ER NURSE #2 (32), along with now an ER DOCTOR (35), takes her vitals.

ALEJANDRO (cont'd)  
I think it's heat stroke. We were hiking and got lost. She's gotten fluids, but her pulse is very low.

ER NURSE #2  
We'll take care of her, sir.

Another ER Nurse with a clipboard steps in. He looks at his bandaged arm.

ER NURSE #3  
Sir? She'll be ok. Are you alright?

Alejandro nods but can't help but stare as Manuela is wheeled away. He cannot hear anything else until --

ER NURSE #3 (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Sir? Excuse me? Please fill this out, and you can wait over there.

**INT. NORTHWEST MEDICAL CENTER - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT**

Alejandro sits down with the clipboard.

The waiting room is almost empty.

He looks at the clock on the wall: 9:17 PM.

He scans the room, trying to make sense of the last twelve hours. He refocuses, back to the clipboard.

The first line reads:

GUARDIAN NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER

He takes a moment. He takes out the bloodied piece of paper out of his pocket and starts to copy the information.

**INT. NORTHWEST MEDICAL CENTER - NURSES STATION - MORNING**

A couple of NURSES begin their morning shift.

ER NURSE #4 (27) is on the phone. ER Nurse #3 is getting her things to go home. She overhears the phone conversation.

ER NURSE #4

Is this Mister Giraldo?

(beat)

Good morning, sir. My apologies for the early call. I am a nurse at Northwest Medical Center in Sahuarita. I'm calling to give you an update on Manuela Giraldo. She's out of the ICU and doing much better. We are finalizing her discharge paperwork, the doctor says she should be ready to go home by ten this morning.

Nurse #4 overhears the conversation.

NURSE #4 (O.S.)

Hello? Sir? Are you there?

She hangs up.

ER NURSE #3

What was that about?

ER NURSE #4

I don't know. Just following up on one of the patients being released. The little girl that was brought in last night for heat stroke.

ER NURSE #3

Well, her father is still here. I just saw him asleep in the waiting room.

ER NURSE #4  
(surprised)  
Oh.

**INT. NORTHWEST MEDICAL CENTER - WAITING ROOM - MORNING**

A clock ticks. It's hands at 6:31 AM.

An empty waiting room. Fluorescents lightly buzz.

PA SYSTEM (O.S.)  
Visiting hours are from 8 AM to 8  
PM. After-hours check-ins must be  
done at the main lobby.

Nurse #4 peaks into the waiting room, seeing Alejandro,  
alone, still sitting upright, head tilted, appearing asleep.

ER NURSE #4  
Sir?

She approaches.

She reaches out, a gentle hand on his shoulder.

ER NURSE #4 (cont'd)  
Excuse me, sir?

His body slumps, motionless.

The nurse freezes. A breath catches in her throat.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER ON BLACK: 20 YEARS LATER

**EXT. WASHINGTON DC - MORNING**

An aerial of Washington D.C., featuring Capitol Hill - the  
expanse of the nation's center of government.

**INT. US CAPITOL - HALLWAY - MORNING**

The solemn halls of the US Capitol.

CHAIRMAN ADAMS (O.S.)  
Thank you again for bringing this  
matter further to our attention.  
Your testimony reminds us that  
behind every statute are real lives  
and sacrifices.

**INT. US CAPITOL - HEARING ROOM - MORNING**

Seated in distinction is a group of senators. A committee hearing.

CHAIRMAN ADAMS (58) speaks into the microphone, clearing his throat.

CHAIRMAN ADAMS

I can speak for this committee earnestly, Staff Sergeant, that you have made your case clearer than any briefing we could have read. This committee strives to uphold the lives of United States Veterans and their families. Before we adjourn for today, is there anything else for the record you would want to offer to these proceedings?

Seated front and center in full Army uniform is STAFF SERGEANT MANUELA GIRALDO (29), strong, proud, silk black-hair in a tight bun, sitting behind a microphone.

MANUELA

Thank you, Senator and honorable members of this committee. At this time, I look forward to working alongside this body to give back the honor these veterans so highly deserve. And thank you again for your dedication to seeing the first of these soldiers finally be with the brothers and sisters he bravely fought alongside. As one who followed his footsteps, it gives me a sense of hope for the future of our military veterans and their families. They are heroes to be recognized. Thank you.

A gavel slams.

CHAIRMAN ADAMS

These proceedings are adjourned.

Silence.

She takes a moment for herself, then rises and gathers her things.

Our same narrator, a woman's voice breaks --

NARRATOR (V.O.) (SPANISH)  
 Every day, I wake up, and I know  
 you can hear me. I know you are  
 with me, Papa.

FADE IN:

**EXT. ARLINGTON MEMORIAL PLOT 1173421 - AFTERNOON**

The grand expanse of the Arlington Memorial Cemetery in Washington, D.C., is where thousands of white gravestones line the green pastures of this solemn site.

A WOMAN IN BLACK (27) and her SON (3) stand at one of the many white gravestones under a Cherry Blossom tree. They are formally dressed.

WOMAN IN BLACK (SPANISH)  
 Papa. I miss you so much.

We recognize the voice - our narrator. It is Sophia.

SOPHIA (SPANISH)  
 I want you to know that we will be  
 fine. I will be fine. Words can  
 never fully say what you mean to  
 me. I love you so much. You did  
 good, Papa. More than good.

A black Escalade approaches in the distance.

SOPHIA (cont'd)  
 I want to introduce you to your  
 grandson, Alejandro. I named him  
 after you, so he'll always remember  
 the man you were.

Alejandro looks up at his mom, Sophia. Then looks back to see Manuela approach.

SOPHIA (cont'd)  
 Manu, so good to see you again.

They both embrace.

SOPHIA (cont'd)  
 Oh my God, thank you. We cannot  
 thank you so much. What you've  
 done.  
 (to Son)  
 Alejandro, mijo...you remember  
 Manuela, don't you?



Alejandro, somewhat shy, hides behind Sophia's leg but cracks a smile.

Manuela's eyes swell with both contentment and nostalgia as she looks at Alejandro's grandson.

MANUELA  
(to Alejandro)  
Don't you remember me?

Alejandro nods his head.

MANUELA (cont'd)  
I remember you.

Their eyes lock, and they hold each other as they stand proudly looking onto the white gravestone:

**ALEJANDRO LUIS-ORDOÑEZ GALVEZ**  
**US ARMY**  
**1994 - 2039**  
**PURPLE HEART/MEDAL OF VALOR (POSTHUMOUS)**  
**FATHER - PATRIOT - HERO**

FADE OUT.

.THE END