

FADE IN:

EXT. TRAVELING TRAIN - NIGHT

Dark images of churning train wheels on railroad.

S.O. "Texas, 1963"

The lonely dry lands of Texas reflect pale blue light under a full moon.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

A tall figure wearing a Texas Border Patrol uniform and a no-nonsense demeanor strides the hallway with a clipboard and pen. He dominates the hall. His name is EDUARDO HIDERAS. Mexican children scamper past him, giggling. He pauses outside a compartment, looking at his papers. He enters

THE COMPARTMENT

Where a family of three Mexicans reclines.

HIDERAS
Name?

MAN
Rodriguez.

HIDERAS
Paco, Maria, and Felipe?

MAN
Si.

HIDERAS
May I see your papers please?

The passports and work visas are furnished. Hideras returns the papers and exits. In the hallway, he studies the list on his clipboard and then looks down the hall.

ANOTHER COMPARTMENT

The VALDEZ FAMILY: VICTOR, age 6, sister ANGELICA, age 4, their mother, ELENA and father ROMELL, and infant brother PEDRO. Elena sings a lullaby to children.

ELENA
Before you close your eyes at
night, kiss me, squeeze me, hold me
tight.

(MORE)

ELENA (CONT'D)

And if by chance you go away, then
angels guide you when I pray.

Victor attempts to sing it with mother second time through.
Romell smiles. Angelica starts to sleep. Elena rocks
infant.

HALLWAY

Hideras stands at the door to another compartment, peering in
with cold eyes.

HIDERAS

Pena?

VALDEZ COMPARTMENT

Victor, wearing his knapsack, takes Bible story book to his
father. They speak in Spanish.

VICTOR

Papa, put this in my pack please.

Romell does so, zips it up, pats Victor on the head.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Papa, can I go play?

ROMELL

Yes, Victor. Don't be gone long.

Victor runs out into the hallway. Hideras exits Pena's room
and slowly turns towards the Valdez's compartment.

VALDEZ'S DOORWAY

Hideras is a looming silhouette.

HIDERAS

Valdez family?

ROMELL

Yes, I am Romell Valdez.

HIDERAS

Four family members?

The couple exchange a quick look.

ELENA

Yes.

HIDERAS

Your papers, please.

Father hands documents over. Hideras examines them quickly, hands them back, exits.

IN THE HALLWAY

Hideras proceeds to the next room.

VALDEZ COMPARTMENT

Elena and Romell gaze nervously at each other, then out the window at barren countryside speeding by.

INT. FORTUNE TELLER'S COMPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Victor stands among three other Mexican children, one of whom is having her fortune told by an elderly Mexican female. Their dialogue is in Spanish.

FORTUNE TELLER
How old are you, nina?

GIRL
Five.

The fortune teller reaches into her burlap sack and counts out five long matchsticks. She hands them to the little girl.

FORTUNE TELLER
Here, now break this bundle once.

The girl snaps the matchsticks with some effort.

FORTUNE TELLER (CONT'D)
Now raise your hands here...

The woman guides the girl's clenched fists over a wooden diagram with the four atlas directions around the perimeter, and a series of etched symbols across the interior, including the sun, moon, and a number of other mystical figures.

FORTUNE TELLER (CONT'D)
Now let it go.

The girl drops her sticks. They fall haphazardly across the diagram. The woman studies the configuration as the children all study her face, breathless with anticipation. Finally the woman's face breaks into a wide smile. Laughing and clapping her hands together, she draws the girl close to her for an embrace, speaking comforting words.

FORTUNE TELLER (CONT'D)

Ah my dear, you will have many children. You will thrive in the new land ahead of us, and we shall all see you get married before your twentieth birthday!

The other three children OOH and AHH with excitement at this. The woman sweeps the sticks off her board and smiles contentedly.

FORTUNE TELLER (CONT'D)

Who is next, my darlings?

VICTOR

I am, Senora.

The woman looks up at the adorable little figure of Victor standing before her. Her smile disappears. A dark mask of worry takes its place.

FORTUNE TELLER

What is your name, nino?

VICTOR

Victor Valdez.

FORTUNE TELLER

How old are you?

VICTOR

Six.

Frowning, she reaches into her sack and counts out six matchsticks. Slowly she turns to Victor, handing him the small bundle. As his hand grabs them, her two hands clasp together over his in a firm hold. Her eyes search deeply into his face, studying him. Her look of dread begins to unnerve the young latino before her.

Her eyes close as she mumbles to herself.

FORTUNE TELLER

A darkness, so much darkness. No, no, very terrible this darkness!

Victor takes a step back.

FORTUNE TELLER (CONT'D)

Listen to me, my precious! We will do this another day. I want you to go to your mother and father and stay by their side, no matter what. Do as I say. Now go!

Victor releases the matchsticks and pulls his hands away from the woman. A bit shaken, he turns and runs out into

THE HALLWAY

Hideras emerges from a compartment, studying his clipboard. Victor comes running past him and enters Valdez's room.

VICTOR
Mama! Papa!

Hideras sees him; his face turns to flint. He quickly strides back into Valdez's room.

HIDERAS
You said four members!

ELENA
(Spanish)
Yes, four!

He points to Victor.

HIDERAS
Is this your son?

ROMELL
(Spanish)
Yes, but at the time we were hired,
we were four! Just last week we
became five!

HIDERAS
This is the United States of
America. You will speak in
English.

ROMELL
Senor Hideras, we never --

HIDERAS
The contract was simple. Southwest
Oil Company would provide papers,
transport, and lodging for FOUR
family members.

ELENA
(Spanish)
I beg of you sir, be reasonable!
We are aware of the terms! My
husband is a good man, a good --

HIDERAS

I am an officer of the law. I am
to escort families of no larger
than four to Southwest Oil fields.

Hideras grabs Victor and drags him into the hallway. Parents follow screaming, and fumble for their son. A crowd gathers in the hallway, responding to the noise. The fortune teller watches in horror as Hideras opens a door and kicks Victor off moving train into the darkness. Train moves on into the night.

OUTSIDE

Victor murmurs softly in pain for his parents. PARENTS' SCREAMING fades into the distance.

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - TRAVELING BUS - DAY

S.O. "7 years later. Alameda County, Texas"

The dry landscape of Southwestern Texas provides a lonely backdrop for this orange Alameda County vehicle.

INT. COUNTY BUS - DAY

A dozen boys, mostly Hispanic between the ages of 12 and 17. They all have packed bags. VICTOR, age 13, is still a small-framed boy with no hint of looming adulthood in his features. But his eyes betray a sadness and knowledge that is seldom seen on a youthful face.

Seated in front of him is lively white boy ARNIE, age 13, Victor's best friend. Across from them is SHAWN, age 12, a scrawny Mexican boy. They all look out the window at the approaching Alameda County Boys Home. High fences and barbed wire surround the expansive grounds. A dismal fortress.

ARNIE

There she is, Victor. Our new home.

VICTOR

Our retirement home.

SHAWN

I've heard stories about this place. Boys come here and then disappear, never to be seen again.

VICTOR

Who told you that?

SHAWN

(Spanish)

You've heard that, haven't you?
This is the end of the road for
teen orphans. Like a great big
junk yard. And you know what they
do at junk yards. They burn the
garbage!

Victor shakes his head with disapproval.

VICTOR

Shawn!

ARNIE

Can't be all that bad. Just a bit
bigger than what we had.

SHAWN

Yeah big with a graveyard in the
back, and torture chamber in the
basement.

Victor and Arnie give Shawn a look, then turn back to the window.

Victor sees a white horse galloping full speed off the road, as though racing with the bus. He stares at this peculiar yet beautiful sight, mesmerized.

The bus veers away from the horse as they arrive at the great gated driveway to the boys home. Pressed up against the fence are 30 older teenage boys, all gawking at the new arrivals.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Oh, to have a genie in a bottle.

ARNIE

Yeah, I think we'd all be wishing
for the same thing.

EXT. BOYS HOME DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The boys step off the bus. Arnie slings a bag on each shoulder. Victor emerges slowly with his knapsack and a crutch. As he strikes ground it becomes apparent he has a pronounced limp. The crutch is old and wooden, etched with designs.

A paternal figure, superintendent BRACKMAN, greets the boys and leads them in. The boys behind the fence watch them enter the building, and snicker as Victor limps by.

INT. BOYS HOME CAFETERIA - DAY

Three deputies stand before the group of new arrivals, one with a clipboard and dark shades.

BRACKMAN

Come over here boys, have a seat. My name is Mr. Brackman. I am superintendent of this facility and I want to welcome you to Alameda Boys Home. When you hear your name called, please step forward to receive your bed linen and bunk assignment. Also you will be given our house rules, class schedule, and map of the grounds.

Victor eyes the silent deputies.

BRACKMAN (CONT'D)

This facility is under the jurisdiction of the Alameda Sheriff's department. I rely on the Sheriff's best men to help me run an orderly house here. I hope you never have need of discipline. Let me introduce you to the disciplinarians.

Brackman glances at the deputies.

BRACKMAN (CONT'D)

We have Deputy George McKenna, Deputy Frank Benitez, and First Deputy Eduardo Hideras: my boss and your worst nightmare if it comes to that.

Beefy MCKENNA nods to the boys as a grinning BENITEZ tips his hat. Hideras steps forward from behind McKenna. Victor gasps as he recognizes him. Hideras removes his dark shades before he speaks.

HIDERAS

Hello boys, it's a real pleasure.

McKenna starts to call out names. Boys go forward as called.

MCKENNA

Abramson.

BRACKMAN

As today is Monday you will be expected to attend class like any other school day. Check your schedule and after you've settled in, please be prompt in showing up...

ARNIE

(to Victor)
You okay?

VICTOR

(shakily)
Yeah... fine.

INT. BOYS BUNK ROOM - DAY

Arnie and Victor enter the sleeping quarters with their belongings. They find their beds and look out the window.

ARNIE

Firm beds.

Victor tries the window. It's secured, opening only a few inches.

VICTOR

Yeah, deluxe.

Arnie unpacks his clothes into a small set of bedside drawers. More boys enter carrying their belongings. Shawn is among them, and approaches.

SHAWN

Find any secret passages yet?

VICTOR

Only the secret passage to your heart.

Shawn clutches his heart. He answers in Spanish.

SHAWN

My heart! I love you!

He tackles Victor to the bed, laughing. Victor's tattered children's Bible tumbles open from his bag. A small faded photo of baby Victor and his parents stares back at the three boys.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
(Spanish)
Sorry, buddy.

Arnie takes the image and gazes at it longingly.

ARNIE
I think family is the most
beautiful thing on earth. I wish I
could have mine back, but I know
they're gone.

VICTOR
Arnie, shut up. You sound like a
girl.

ARNIE
No, YOU shut up! You are lucky,
you still have one. I would do
anything to help you find yours,
Victor.

VICTOR
It's okay. I've had that picture
longer than I had them.

Victor places the pic between the ragged book pages and snaps
the book shut.

ARNIE
I'm just saying that I will never
have that joy of having a home, or
a mom or dad. You still can.

Victor looks softly at Arnie, who is lost in heavy thoughts,
looking out the window. Arnie looks over and sees that
Victor is touched.

ARNIE (CONT'D)
I'm thirteen. Who's gonna want me?

Victor reaches for a pillow and throws it at Arnie.

VICTOR
I think the gorillas at the zoo are
looking to adopt!

They laugh. Mr. Brackman enters the room.

BRACKMAN
Come with me, young men. It is
time to give you a fast tour before
school starts.

INT. BOYS HOME CLASSROOM - DAY

Victor, Shawn and Arnie sit at desks in a room full of teen boys. MISS ANTHONY, a stern-looking, middle-aged woman, addresses the class.

MISS ANTHONY

Okay class, today we have some new additions to the group. I would like them all to stand up, and when I point to you I would like you each to tell us your name, age, and favorite book. You may go first.

She points to Shawn. He nervously rises.

SHAWN

Hello, my name is Shawn and I'm twelve years old. My favorite book is "Tom Sawyer."

MISS ANTHONY

Thank you Shawn. That's a wonderful book. You may sit down.

She points to Arnie.

ARNIE

Hi, my name is Arnold, but my friends call me Arnie. I'm thirteen, and my favorite book is "Huckleberry Finn."

MISS ANTHONY

Oh, another Mark Twain classic. How about that? And what about you?

She points at Victor. He stands with quiet confidence.

VICTOR

My name is Victor Valdez and I am thirteen years old. My favorite story is in the Book of Genesis. Chapter thirty-two, where Jacob wrestles with the angel.

All eyes are on Victor as he leans against his desk. The old-timers have amused looks on their faces.

MISS ANTHONY

How interesting! A Bible story. Why don't you tell us the rest and why you like it so much?

VICTOR

Jacob was camping with his family when he met an angel of the Lord. Jacob wrestled with the mighty angel who was not able to get away because Jacob was strong, and wouldn't give up. Finally, the angel asked Jacob what he wanted, so that he would let him go. Jacob demanded that he bless him. The angel blessed him and gave him a new name, Israel, meaning that he had wrestled with God and won. And because he had wanted the Lord's favor so much, he would surely succeed at any earthly challenge he would face.

The class is speechless. Victor's stoic face permits a tiny enthusiastic spark in his eyes. Some of the boys start to SNICKER, yet Miss Anthony radiates an actual smile.

MISS ANTHONY

Haven't you left a part of the story out, Victor?

VICTOR

Yes. The angel touched Jacob on the hip during their fight, and he was left with a permanent limp.

MISS ANTHONY

Looks like you met with this angel yourself.

VICTOR

No Ma'am.

MISS ANTHONY

Do you believe this story is true?

VICTOR

It's just a story.

MISS ANTHONY

Well if I didn't know better, I would think I was looking right at young Jacob of Genesis thirty-two.

VICTOR

(sheepish)

No Ma'am.

MISS ANTHONY

Thank you Victor. You may be seated.

Many mocking faces sneer at Victor.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

A baseball game is underway. Victor and Arnie lean against a tree. THREE TEEN PUNKS approach, taunting Victor.

PUNK 1

Oh look guys, it's Jacob!

He grabs Victor's crutch from under him.

PUNK 1 (CONT'D)

Or is it Moses?

PUNK 2

Naw, his new name is Israel, remember?

Punk 2 grabs the crutch, swinging it like a bat.

PUNK 2 (CONT'D)

Hey cool, a new baseball bat! The bat of Israel!

PUNK 3

Yeah, let's give it a try!

VICTOR

Give it back.

PUNK 1

Oh no. You're the one with the blessed name. We need you on the team. You can be catcher.

They grab Victor and start to drag him over to the home plate. Arnie tries to stop them.

ARNIE

Leave him alone! He didn't do anything to you!

Punk 2 slugs Arnie, and he falls to the ground. The punks resume dragging Victor towards the game and are intercepted by CHAVEZ, Latino, 16, easily the most athletic boy on the field. A pretty intimidating fellow.

CHAVEZ
The game is over.

The punks glare at Chavez.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)
Or do you want your face to be
third base?

Arnie rises from the ground. Chavez grabs the crutch.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)
If you mess with him again, you
will need one of these for
yourselves. Now beat it!

The punks slowly walk away, giving Chavez dirty looks. He
walks over to Victor and Arnie, handing over the crutch.

VICTOR
Thanks.

CHAVEZ
(to Arnie)
You all right?

ARNIE
Yeah, thanks.

CHAVEZ
I'm Chavez. Really liked what you
said in class today.

The boys awkwardly shift dirt around with their feet.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)
Hey let's sit together at dinner
tonight. Look for me.

VICTOR
Cool.

ARNIE
Sounds good.

EXT. NAVARRO COUNTY OIL FIELDS - DAY

S.O. "Southwest Oil Fields, Corsicana, TX"

Workers toil under the hot sun on ramshackle oil rigs.

ON "HICKEY" DERRICK

A crew fumbles to keep up with the speed of the drill. A pipe rolls and falls, pinning a Mexican laborer to the deck. He groans in pain, and his comrades rush to his rescue. The Caucasian foreman TOOL PUSHER roars in protest.

TOOL PUSHER
Get back! Get back to your stations
you stupid beaners!

He stomps to the fallen man and carelessly rolls the pipe off the groaning man, who is clearly injured.

TOOL PUSHER (CONT'D)
You've got to the count of five, or
should I say, cinco, to get up on
your feet.

The man tries to get up; his lower body won't cooperate.

TOOL PUSHER (CONT'D)
Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, CINCO! Get
out of here.

The Tool Pusher stomps back to his rig controls. A laborer scuttles over to the fallen man, and helps him to his feet. They slowly trudge to the end of the deck at the top of the stairs.

The Tool Pusher sees this, and WHISTLES.

A small crowd of day laborers seated in the dust near the bottom of the stairs looks up at the sound. Each man instantly jumps to his feet.

The Tool Pusher raises his hand and shows two fingers.

TOOL PUSHER (CONT'D)
Dos! I need dos!

Two men nearest the stairs rush up the steps, and nudge past the descending pair. Once on the deck, they join the downcast and murmuring laborers 'round the drill, and fall in place to the work at hand.

The injured man and comrade reach the ground and are greeted by the day laborers who all look up meekly, with muffled shock and disbelief at the cruelty of the gruff foreman.

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Victor, Arnie, Shawn and Chavez sit together.

SHAWN

So how long have you been here,
Chavez?

CHAVEZ

A couple of years. (hushed) Which
is a long time for this place.

VICTOR

What do you mean?

CHAVEZ

Boys seem to pass through here
pretty quick. Mr. Brackman says
they get placed with families. But
that's a load of crap. NOBODY
comes looking in Alameda county to
take a teenage boy into their home.

SHAWN

(Spanish)

Especialy us Mexicans.

Chavez nods in agreement.

ARNIE

So what are you saying?

CHAVEZ

Something's going on here. I've
noticed about twenty guys vanished.

VICTOR

Vanished?

CHAVEZ

They're always gone in the morning.
Somehow these "adoptions" always
take place at night.

ARNIE

Have you seen one?

CHAVEZ

No, that's the funny part. I've
never heard or seen a thing. I
wake up in the morning and their
beds are made, and their stuff is
all gone.

Mr. Brackman walks by. Shawn, Arnie, and Victor look at each
other, eating tentatively.

INT. BOYS BUNK ROOM - NIGHT

Arnie, Shawn and Victor lay in bed. Chavez on floor between them, caressing the crutch. Arnie looks at Chavez.

ARNIE

How'd you wind up here?

CHAVEZ

My family works for a big oil company in Oklahoma. One day while I was walking to school, a car drove up and two deputies got out and told me to get in. I was only eight years old and I was taught to obey authorities. When I got in I asked them where they were taking me. They told me to shut up and not ask questions. They took me to a bus with other kids on it, all as scared as I was. I saw the bus driver give these deputies money. We all had our hands taped together.

The boys listen intently as the macho demeanor trickles away. Chavez pauses to check his surging emotions.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)

The bus took me away from my family, my town, everything. Later, they said my family died in an oil fire, and that's why they had to take me.

The boys look bewildered.

ARNIE

Don't you feel lucky you escaped the fire?

CHAVEZ

There was no fire that day.

VICTOR

How do you know what really happened? Maybe your parents sold you. Maybe they didn't want to raise a boy.

CHAVEZ

Oh shut the hell up!

VICTOR

Come on, get real Chavez! Why do you think we're all here? It's no accident. We're castoffs, the undesirables. I know exactly what happened to me. My parents had my little brother, then threw me away. It's the same with you. If we really have families who love us, then where the hell are they?

CHAVEZ

Shut up, Victor.

VICTOR

Oh wait, maybe they're outside. Let me look.

He goes to the window, looks outside.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Nope, I don't see 'em! Not here Chavez!

CHAVEZ

(Spanish)

Knock it off!

SHAWN

(Spanish)

Leave him alone, buddy.

VICTOR

Do you really think there's any other place for us than here? Face it Chavez, our parents didn't want us then, and they don't want us now. That's why they got rid of us.

Chavez, eyes tearful with rage, lunges at Victor. Arnie pushes him back.

ARNIE

Cool it, you guys! You're gonna get us all in trouble!

SHAWN

(to Victor)

Down boy, down.

Chavez's face trembles with rage. Brackman appears in the doorway.

BRACKMAN

Chavez, you better return to your bed. You know the house rules.

Brackman strides away, Chavez trudging behind him.

INT. CAFETERIA - MORNING

Arnie, Shawn, and Victor join Chavez who eats breakfast. His stoic face looks up for a moment, then back to his food.

VICTOR

Hey Chavez, about last night... I'm sorry. I can sometimes be a jerk.

Chavez shrugs.

CHAVEZ

Yeah, you touched a nerve. It's no big deal.

VICTOR

That story you told us last night, almost the exact same thing happened to me. I was separated from my family by an officer of the law. We were moving across the border to work for an oil company, and I got... pushed... from the train.

They all gawk at his words.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

By Senor Hideras.

Now their mouths drop open in disbelief.

CHAVEZ

First Deputy Hideras?

VICTOR

I'll never forget his face.

Victor's face twists into a grimace.

CHAVEZ

I believe you. He reeks of something. Is that how you got your limp?

Victor nods.

VICTOR
I broke my hip.

The boys stare at their plates in silence.

SHAWN
(Spanish)
Do you think he recognizes you?

Victor gives Shawn a fed up look. Shawn gives a sarcastic staccato reply in English.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
Oh sorry. Do-you-think-he-recognizes-you?

VICTOR
I don't know. But I have a bad feeling about him. Like he's not finished.

CHAVEZ
No kidding. Not only is he the superintendent's boss, but he's the Sheriff's right hand man. There are no Social Services in this county. He is Social Services.

ARNIE
What, are we too close to the border? No one cares? So there is no one to talk to, no one to go to for help. We are surrounded by a pack of wolves.

CHAVEZ
Sheriff Bebb is supposed to be a decent man. But we never really see him much.

They play with their food, in thought. Chavez sees Victor's Bible sticking out of his bag.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)
Is that your famous book?

Chavez's gaze draws Victor to the book. Victor shrugs an affirmation, keeps eating.

ARNIE
He takes it everywhere he goes.

VICTOR
It's the only old friend I have.

ARNIE

Hey!

SHAWN

Yeah, hey!

CHAVEZ

Your mom gave it to you?

VICTOR

It doesn't matter.

Chavez is nonplussed by Victor's indifference, and glances at Shawn and Arnie for help.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

It's just a book. A stupid book I look at once in a while. It makes me feel good. That's all it is.

ARNIE

Still, I wish I had something to remind me of my folks. Anything. A picture or a toy, you know?

Victor looks ready to cut apart the sweet sentiment in the air.

ARNIE (CONT'D)

Okay, okay! Never mind, forget I said it!

Their attentions are drawn to the window. They see a man bringing horses up the driveway. The boys rise and go to the window. One horse seems to look directly at Victor.

CHAVEZ

It's Farmer Paulson's monthly visit. I think the State wants us all to be ranch hands someday. They figure bringing the horses here will give us a head start.

VICTOR

What if we don't wanna be a ranch hand?

SHAWN

I hear there's lots of work up in oil country. Even for minors like us.

VICTOR

Oh yeah?

Victor reflects on that news. Arnie is mesmerized by the horses.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Hey, tonight let's make a plan to
get out of here. Soon.

Arnie looks nonplussed.

ARNIE
Yeah right. Hey, let's go outside!

Shawn and Arnie look excitedly at Victor for a response.

VICTOR
Naw, you go ahead. I hate horses.

The boys leave Victor at the window as he stares back at the curious horse.

INT. BOYS HOME CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

The boys stream out of the room with their books. Arnie, Victor, Shawn and Chavez gather near the door.

VICTOR
Hey I'm not hungry. Think I'll
skip dinner.

CHAVEZ
They have brownies tonight.

SHAWN
Oh man, come on Victor. (in
Spanish) Brownies for us brownies.

VICTOR
Next time. I'll see you guys
later.

CHAVEZ
Okay, I'll come by after "lights
out."

INT. BOYS BUNK ROOM - NIGHT

Victor is awake, restless. Arnie is sleeping.

VICTOR
Hey Arnie. Arnie! Wake up.

Arnie doesn't respond. Victor tries to rouse him, unsuccessfully.

He gets his crutch and goes over to Chavez's bed down the hall. Everyone sleeps soundly. He tries to wake Chavez.

CHAVEZ
(groggily)
I'm so sleepy.

VICTOR
Come on, Chavez. Wake up.

Chavez drifts back to sleep, despite Victor's urging. He shuffles over to Shawn's bed and nudges him with the same results.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
This isn't right.

He returns to his bed and straps on his backpack, then lays down and closes his eyes.

LATER

FOOTSTEPS wake him. He sees three men carrying off the unconscious Chavez, Shawn, and Arnie.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Hey, what are you doing? HEY!

The three men take Victor by force, taping his mouth shut and hands together. All boys are taken to

EXT. BOYS HOME DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The boys are placed in two 4-wheelers: deputy cars.

IN BACK SEAT OF DEPUTY CAR

Victor overhears Benitez talking to Hideras.

BENITEZ
What are we gonna do with the gimpy one? He's useless!

HIDERAS
Not at all. His blood will mix well with the others'.

Victor's eyes widen with fear at these words as he wrestles against his restraints.

The 4-wheelers drive off, down the dark road.

INT. TEMPLE BARRACKS - DAY

Victor wakes, backpack still strapped on, in a squalid bunk room: dingy floors and one small window allowing the morning light to illuminate to a spooky dimness. He can make out 14 other sleeping bodies. He sees he is shackled to his bed.

VICTOR

Arnie!

Across the room, Arnie opens his eyes. Other boys stir.

ARNIE

Where are we?

VICTOR

That's not the same bed you fell asleep in last night.

He gestures to the sleeping bodies.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

We're like them now, the missing boys of Alameda.

ARNIE

How did we get here?

A sad-looking ghost of a boy speaks up.

BOY 1

Did you eat brownies last night?

ARNIE

Yeah... we all did.

VICTOR

Except me.

BOY 1

Guaranteed a good night's sleep.

Chavez stirs.

CHAVEZ

Oooh, whoa wait a minute. Where am I?

ARNIE

That's what I want to know.

From his bed in the shadows, another ghostly teen, JERALD, 16, speaks up.

JERALD
Hey Chavez, remember me?

CHAVEZ
Yeah, Jerald! Hey... whoa Jerald, you look like shit.

Shawn stirs.

SHAWN
Who... where are we?

VICTOR
Looks to me like we're at a slave camp. And guess who the slaves are.

With those words, Victor lifts up his shackled hands.

JERALD
Your smarts won't help you in here. Nothing will.

Arnie turns to the nearest pale-face boy. We'll call him BOY 2.

ARNIE
What is this place?

BOY 2
It's an old, dried up gold mine; abandoned a long time ago. But somehow it ain't so dried up anymore. We harvest gold outta the digs day and night.

NOISE OF METAL DOORS being unlocked. TWO DEMONIC BARRACKS GUARDS, corporeal with skin the color of tar and eyes that seem inhuman, come in through an interior door and unshackle the boys.

Shawn mumbles in Spanish, petrified:

SHAWN
Good God in Heaven, it's the devil.

BARRACKS GUARD 1
Welcome new cadets. Fall in line. Time to meet your master.

ARNIE
 (to Victor)
 Seems like we just did this.

The boys are led to another dismal room with a big table and benches. Hideras is there, as well as 15 other boys. There is food. The boys start to eat.

HIDERAS
 We have some new faces at the table today. I'm sure some will look familiar. For the newcomers, you may feel disoriented. That will pass. You have been chosen as special soldiers of a new army. You should feel honored and proud. You no longer belong to the orphanage. You have been adopted. Meet your new father.

BALAAM enters, an evil, shadowy creature of a man in flowing robes. His breathing is an audible rasp. Dreadlocks hang from his head. He seems to glide, slightly translucent.

All the boys stop eating, the newcomers frozen in fear.

BALAAM
 Greetings my children. You are all now my sons; brothers in a new family, united by the same purpose. To build your father a home.

Shawn hides his face behind Chavez. Victor and Arnie drop their food, speechless and dumbstruck at the sight of this creepy man with the darkly resonant voice. Balaam waves his arms as golden double doors open to reveal

THE TEMPLE SANCTUARY

An orange-glowing sanctuary under construction, lit by torches reflecting off piles of gold.

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - LATER

Boys are pulling slabs of stone and grunting with the effort. They pause to rest.

JERALD
 We work in two shifts. The night crew does all the harvesting. They bring in all the stone and gold. They sleep during the day.
 (MORE)

JERALD (CONT'D)

We take what they've brought in and
put it where they tell us to.

VICTOR

This place is creepy.

JERALD

You ain't gonna like this either.

Jerald points across the sanctuary to a partially constructed altar. Nearby, two boys with a translucent demon guard stir molten gold.

VICTOR

Is that some kind of altar?

Jerald's eyes also register horror at the thought.

CHAVEZ

Holy shit. What the hell is this
place?

ARNIE

And how the hell are we gonna get
out of here?

Shawn continues to mumble in Spanish.

SHAWN

Holy Mother of God. Holy Mother of
God.

A translucent, ORANGE-GLOWING GUARD approaches with a fierce expression and a red-glowing spear.

SANCTUARY GUARD 1

Get moving!

A series of DISSOLVES showing the boys slaving away at the sanctuary construction.

INT. TEMPLE BARRACKS - NIGHT

Boys are shackled to their beds. Victor looks at barred window, moonlight streaming in.

VICTOR

Do we ever get to bathe?

BOY 2

About once a week.

The boys hear CHAINS and SQUEAKING OF WHEELBARROWS through the window.

JERALD
The night crew.

ARNIE
I hope they work slower. I don't think I wanna see this place finished.

CHAVEZ
Me neither. I'll take Brackman any day over this place.

Victor pulls his book from his bag, looks at pictures in moonlight.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)
Read us a story, Victor.

ARNIE
Yeah, something... to dream about.

VICTOR
There's this song my mama used to sing to us at night. I can still hear her voice.

The room falls quiet in anticipation.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Before you close your eyes at night, kiss me squeeze me hold me tight. And if by chance you go away, then angels guide you when I pray.

He sings the verses again in Spanish.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
That's the first thing I ever learned in English.

There is no response except the sound of deep breathing. All boys are peacefully asleep. Victor puts his book in his bag and closes his eyes.

LATER

Victor awakens with a start, looks at the window. No moonlight. He looks around silent room, then grabs his bag. He sits up. Suddenly his shackles come off by themselves.

Befuddled, he sits motionless. GREEN LIGHT GLOWS through the window. He puts his backpack on, grabs crutch, goes to the door: it pops open with a METALLIC CLANK. He steps back for a moment, then pushes door open and steps

OUTSIDE

Into darkness. Green light is gone, but he sees a white horse in the distance. He limps out onto dirt driveway where the two barracks guards spy him.

BARRACKS GUARD 2

Look, a boy!

Victor spins and sees two guards, Hideras, Benitez, McKenna, and boy laborers all looking at him. They are gathered around a large utility cart. Hideras and deputies start to quickly stride towards him.

Victor hears the horse WHINNY. He looks in the direction of the sound and sees the horse lower itself onto its knees. Victor hobbles frantically to the horse and throws himself onto its back, dropping his crutch. The horse rises and runs off. The deputies jump in three different cars and take off in pursuit.

The horse jumps the chained gate entry. The cars stop to release the chain, open gate, and resume pursuit. As they whiz out the gate, past the "Private Property", and "No Trespassing D.D.A. Mine Company" signs.

A ROMPING CHASE DOWN ROADS

Suddenly the horse kicks into high gear and with a GREEN STREAK OF LIGHT blasts ahead and out of reach, then out of sight.

ON THE HORSE

Victor clutches with fear and closes his eyes.

EXT. CLEARING IN WILDERNESS - NIGHT

The horse trots into clearing with Victor asleep on its bare back. Horse SNORTS, walks in a circle, and lowers to the ground.

LATER

Victor sleeps with a blanket near a campfire. He wakes up. Across from him is a handsome Hispanic man, perhaps mid 30s, with an athletic build and a captivating face. This is MIGUEL. Victor looks around, bewildered.

VICTOR
Who are you?

MIGUEL
My name is Miguel.

VICTOR
Where is the horse?

MIGUEL
The horse is no longer here.

VICTOR
How did you find me?

MIGUEL
You found ME.

Victor stares at Miguel warily.

VICTOR
I was being pursued by some men.

MIGUEL
It's okay. We're safe now.

Victor pulls the blanket tighter around himself. He looks around and sees his bag behind him, then glares back at Miguel.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Relax, I'm not going to hurt you.

VICTOR
Where are you headed?

MIGUEL
Oil country.

VICTOR
Where are we now?

MIGUEL
Far from oil country.

VICTOR
That's where I'm going.

MIGUEL
(Spanish)
Do you know how to get there?

VICTOR
I don't speak Spanish.

MIGUEL
(Spanish)
There's a snake behind you.

Victor jumps up, freaked. There's no snake, only a smiling Miguel, entertained.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
What you mean is you won't speak Spanish.

VICTOR
It serves me no purpose.

Miguel lets the crackling fire fill in as a response.

MIGUEL
(Spanish)
So, do you know how to get there?

VICTOR
I don't know. I'll find a way.

MIGUEL
Perhaps we can travel together.

Victor scrutinizes this stranger before him.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
You're pretty independent for a kid.

VICTOR
Yeah well, it's not like I've had a guardian angel watching out for me.

Miguel smiles at this.

MIGUEL
Maybe, but sometimes help comes when you least expect it. Come and eat.

Victor eats from the pot on the fire. Miguel watches him calmly, drawing the shape of Texas with a stick in the dirt.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
You were hungry.

Before Victor can reply, the SOUND OF BARKING DOGS AND MEN'S VOICES IN THE DISTANCE interrupts. Victor's eyes lock onto Miguel's.

VICTOR
They've found us! Oh no!

MIGUEL
Don't worry. Go hide behind those bushes over there and wait for me.

Victor hobbles off to distant shrubs with bag in tow.

EXT. WILDERNESS - CONTINUOUS

The posse of Hideras, deputies, and dogs follow horse tracks through the shrubs. With flashlights they follow tracks into camp where they stop, but don't lead out; hoof prints just come to an end.

BENITEZ
Look at that. The prints stop here, but where'd he go? They don't go anywhere. Like the horse just vanished.

HIDERAS
The boy was just here. Food is still on the fire.

He turns to the dogs.

HIDERAS (CONT'D)
Where are they, girls? Which way did they go?

IN NEARBY BUSHES

Miguel watches, then BLOWS A SUPERNATURAL BREATH which makes the campfire jump out and spread into a ring around the posse. Miguel rushes off, leading Victor back to the

DEPUTIES' CARS

Two vicious guard dogs are tied to one of the cars. When Miguel approaches, they fall down trembling. He unties them, then kicks one car: ALL TIRES GO FLAT.

He kicks a second car, then helps Victor climb into the third car. Miguel climbs in the driver seat. No keys, but Miguel STOMPS the floor and it starts up.

MIGUEL
That's called a kick start.

He hits the gas and they pull away.

MOMENTS LATER

The second car falls apart.

IN RING OF FIRE

Hideras and company panic, dogs BARKING.

INT. ESCAPE VEHICLE - CONTINUOUS

Miguel and Victor floor it.

VICTOR
Are we headed north?

MIGUEL
Yep, northeast. That's where oil
country is.

VICTOR
Do you work for an oil company?

MIGUEL
No.

VICTOR
What kind of business do you have
up there?

MIGUEL
I'm on assignment.

VICTOR
What kind of assignment?

MIGUEL
My boss sent me here to find
something.

VICTOR
What do you gotta find?

MIGUEL
Something of great value.
Priceless. But it's to be kept
secret. Don't want to cause a
commotion... until it's necessary.

VICTOR
So you're like a secret agent?

MIGUEL
Exactly.

VICTOR
You don't look like one.

MIGUEL
Exactly.

EXT. DEPUTIES' CARS - NIGHT

Hideras' posse arrives back at the remains of their cars, shocked at what they see. Hideras gets on the radio.

HIDERAS
Sheriff, this is Ed. We got a little problem here.

INT. ESCAPE VEHICLE - LATER

Miguel and Victor are still driving. It's almost dawn. Miguel pulls off road to drive into back country to reach hillside caves.

VICTOR
Wow, this car gets good mileage. We've been driving for an hour and it's still a full tank.

MIGUEL
It's all in the driver.

VICTOR
Senor driver, don't you think they're gonna be looking for this car? They probably got sheriffs in every county on the lookout for us.

MIGUEL
Those men back there, they kidnapped you, right?

Victor looks at Miguel curiously.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
To build the temple...

VICTOR
How did you know that?

MIGUEL
Secret agent, remember?

VICTOR
Well yeah, that was them.

MIGUEL

I highly doubt they will report your absence to any authority. In the eyes of the State, you don't exist anymore. Your records have been purged from all Texas agencies by now. If you suddenly reappear, your existence will have to be explained, and the last thing they want is for you to tell of their operation.

VICTOR

Then we need to go see the Sheriff. If we explain to him, he'll bring them all down. He'll fix everything.

MIGUEL

In order to see the Sheriff, we'd have to get by a whole department of corrupt deputies first. And believe me, your friend Hideras does not plan on letting you do that.

Victor contemplates Miguel's objection, and a sudden pallor drains the life from his features.

VICTOR

He wants me dead, then. He's going to kill me. And no one will even know I'm gone!

MIGUEL

Relax, my little friend. You and I are a team now.

Victor remains unsettled in silence.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

There is much corruption in this world. Especially in high places.

VICTOR

And you're not afraid?

Miguel shakes his head with an easy smile.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

I'm scared.

MIGUEL

Don't be scared, nino. We have a job to do. We're going to get you somewhere safe. This is my area of expertise.

They drive in silence and then:

VICTOR

I think we should ditch the car.

MIGUEL

It does reek of dirty men, doesn't it? We'll have to give it a good wash or something.

EXT. ESCAPE VEHICLE - CONTINUOUS

The car completely changes appearance. THE PAINT FADES FROM BLUE TO WHITE, AND THE LICENSE PLATE NUMBER MORPHS TO A SMILEY FACE. Vehicle zooms off towards the dusty hills.

INT. TEMPLE BARRACKS - MORNING

Boys' day and night crews eat at table. Balaam enters with barracks guards, very angry.

BALAAM

It has been brought to my attention that there has been an unauthorized leave of absence among your brothers. The one who could barely walk, in fact! Let me tell you, he has just sealed his doom. And it's such a shame to leave this earth at such an early age, isn't it? Don't any of you try this foolish thing again! I will have you dipped in molten gold and mounted in my sanctuary forever!

The frightened boys cower against each other in terror at this seething threat.

EXT. HILLSIDE CAVES - DAY

Victor gets out of car, looks at it strangely. As they hike to the caves, he grunts in pain. Miguel turns to look at him.

VICTOR
I lost my crutch.

Miguel kneels before Victor.

MIGUEL
Hop on. I shall make you a new
one. But someday, you won't need
it.

He piggybacks on to Miguel.

VICTOR
Why do you say that?

MIGUEL
You are a young man of uncommon
faith, Victor. Do you believe God
can heal you?

VICTOR
I don't know. I doubt it.

MIGUEL
Then be prepared. His help is
measured out in proportion to your
faith.

VICTOR
I don't have much faith, Miguel.
Everyone who meant something has
failed me. As a rule, I don't
think anyone can be trusted.
Everyone looks out for himself.

MIGUEL
In your short time on earth, how
can you be so sure? You have a
whole lifetime of friends to make.

VICTOR
Friends? Guess you've never been
to a boy's home. You have to fight
to keep your blanket at night.

MIGUEL
Makes it kind of hard to trust
anybody, huh?

The conversation silences Victor.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Do you think God is any different?

Victor reflects over the question first.

VICTOR

If he sees bad men doing things to others and does nothing about it, he's no different than they are.

Now Miguel reflects on the youngster's repartee.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

And if there is a God, He's the only one who's seen me cry.

The duo arrive at the top of a dusty hill where Miguel gently unloads his backside passenger.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Tears don't move him either, do they?

Miguel's masculine features belie the softness of his answer.

MIGUEL

I would think your tears do.

He turns and heads to a spacious cave. Victor trudges after him.

INT. BALAAM'S CHAMBER - DAY

Balaam reclines on his intimidating chair. His gilded door opens. Hideras enters, head bowed in deference.

HIDERAS

The boy has temporarily eluded us, Master Balaam.. But he will be found soon. A crippled boy can endure the wilderness for only so long.

Serpentine eyes seething with malice, he looks upon Hideras with contempt before replying.

BALAAM

If this missing boy is a threat to our plans, then he must be removed. Removed now or held for sacrifice, it's up to you. He is yours to deal with.

HIDERAS

Yes, of course.

BALAAM

Let me remind you Mr. Hideras that when the Temple is completed and the sacrifices have been made, you will have the power you seek. You will be as I am... immortal.

Hideras savors these words as he rolls his tobacco chew behind his teeth.

HIDERAS

Don't worry master. The boy is mine.

INT. HILLSIDE CAVES - NIGHT

Miguel fashions a crutch from a tree branch while Victor sleeps near a small campfire. Victor twitches and trembles from an apparent nightmare.

Miguel sees this and moves over to touch him. Putting aside the crutch, he cradles Victor's head and enters his

NIGHTMARE

Flashes of being thrown off the train by Hideras, and landing on an altar where Hideras stands poised to slaughter him. All the while, Victor's parents and Fortune Teller stand far off, laughing.

FORTUNE TELLER

You will die!

Suddenly, Miguel's face and VOICE, gently saying Victor's name, dispel the scary images. Victor calms down, breathing deeply. Miguel strokes Victor's head.

ANGLE ON MIGUEL

Whose great WINGS UNFOLD with a GREEN LUMINESCENCE, forming a protective shelter over them. In Victor's dream, he hears his mother SINGING THE LULLABY.

EXT. NAVARRO COUNTY OIL FIELDS - DAY

Mexican laborers struggle to control the piping assembly over the drill. A chain snaps free and whips with lethal force. The derrick hands and motor hands dodge the wild chain, experience driving their reflexes.

A roughneck doesn't, and is knocked out cold. The Tool Pusher roars from his seat.

TOOL PUSHER
Get him out of here!

He WHISTLES. A DERRICK HAND steps away from the crew and stands defiantly over the fallen roughneck, angry as hell. In broken English, he challenges the Tool Pusher.

DERRICK HAND
What about his pay?

The Tool Pusher is floored by the Mexican's audacity, and half-laughs.

TOOL PUSHER
What? His PAY? You gotta be kidding me, right?

DERRICK HAND
No! What about his pay?

TOOL PUSHER
He didn't complete his shift. He gets no pay!

DERRICK HAND
He been here since shift change. You must pay!

The burly Tool Pusher slowly stomps over to the pissed off challenger, each footstep thumping like he were a giant on the deck. He stops when he towers over the unafraid Mexican.

TOOL PUSHER
You can take your friend's beany ass, and YOURS, off this rig. Don't ever let me see your ugly face back here again. You GOT me, Pedro?

The two men glower with testosterone bravado. The Tool Pusher's hands CRACKLE and POP into two fists, ready for a fight. The smaller man steps back, no hint of cowardice at all. When he reaches the unconscious roughneck, he crouches down and lifts him like a rag doll over his shoulder, then trudges towards the stairs.

The Tool Pusher adjusts his glare to the dumbfounded crew, and they immediately resume their work. The Tool Pusher shouts below to the day laborers.

TOOL PUSHER (CONT'D)
Dos!

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - DAY

Boys laboring. Translucent sanctuary guards intimidate them with menacing looks.

CHAVEZ

Shawn, I'm scared. And I never get scared.

SHAWN

Me too, amigo.

ARNIE

Have you noticed the guards? These guys seem almost... like not real or something.

SHAWN

And the other ones, in the barracks, they're like, for real.

ARNIE

I kinda thought my eyes were playing tricks on me.

CHAVEZ

I don't know. I just don't get it. I keep thinking I'm gonna wake up--

SHAWN

From a bad dream.

Chavez nods in agreement. They pause from their work to reflect on these observations, when Sanctuary Guard 1 notices, and HISSES. The boys quickly resume work.

CHAVEZ

Has anyone seen Senor Hideras lately?

ARNIE

It's been a while. I wonder if they caught Victor.

They shovel several mounds of dirt into a wheelbarrow. Chavez pauses.

CHAVEZ

No, they haven't. He's still free. I know it.

EXT. HILLSIDE CAVES - DAY

Panoramic views of hill country reveal beautiful colors of a new day stretching across the Texas sky.

IN THE CAVE

Victor awakens. Miguel stirs breakfast over the fire. The youngster blinks groggily.

MIGUEL
Buenos dias, nino. Breakfast is ready.

VICTOR
Mmm, oatmeal.

MIGUEL
This is for you.

Miguel hands him the new crutch.

VICTOR
You made this for me?

MIGUEL
Last night, while you slept.

Victor examines the newly sculpted branch. Miguel brings him a bowl of hot oatmeal. Victor rises with the crutch, weighing it carefully on his open palm and then... spins and twirls the stick with almost ninja-like skill. Miguel smiles broadly at the short display, then claps.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Impressive!

Victor wields the cane, spinning it in a blur until it's suddenly pointed at Miguel's face.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Looks like I made you a weapon.

VICTOR
Once in a while, that's what it is.

Miguel's eyes gaze at him inquisitively. Victor sits, pensive.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Living in a boys home... it's no vacation. I'm small, with a limp, from south of the border.

Victor warily stares into Miguel's understanding eyes for several meaningful moments.

MIGUEL
And all those things place a target
on your back?

VICTOR
They make me easy to despise.

Miguel's face radiates compassion.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
It's like a game to some of them.
Like I'm already damaged goods.
What would a few more bruises
matter?

Victor looks down, takes a breath, then lifts up his shirt. Miguel is looking at a four inch gash below his rib cage.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Or even a puncture wound or two.

Miguel carefully touches the scar with his fingers.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I've literally been stabbed in the
back.

Victor pulls his shirt down, then shows Miguel his palms. Light scars criss-cross his skin.

A FLASHBACK:

EXT. A DARK ALLEY - NIGHT

A younger Victor cowers against a wall with several other Mexican boys. A gang of white boys close in on them with knives and baseball bats.

WHITE BOY 1
Stupid spics!

A blade is raised. Victor raises his hands against a slashing knife. His AGONIZING CRIES echo as we

RETURN TO SCENE

MIGUEL
I am sorry, nino. Sorry you had to
go through all that.

Victor is visibly vulnerable, drawn to Miguel's compassion. And then he sucks it up; his demeanor hardens as if by shame and instinct.

VICTOR

It doesn't matter. I can take care
of myself.

MIGUEL

I can see that.

Victor ambles to the edge of the clearing, looking out at the dry hills.

VICTOR

I was warned it would all happen.
She said there was a darkness.

Miguel studies the melancholy boy.

MIGUEL

You must not believe everything you
hear.

Victor turns around, riled.

VICTOR

I suppose you also see the future,
eh? Like everyone else, you have
power that I don't. Power over my
life. Power to hurt me, to kill
me, to cripple me!

MIGUEL

Not everyone is out to hurt you,
nino. You must learn to believe
that you have the power to turn
things around. You can make bad
news into good news--

Victor smacks a bush with his crutch in anger.

VICTOR

Believe? I don't know what to
believe anymore! I don't know who
to believe anymore! I know I don't
believe you, your crazy stupid
secret agent story!

His crutch is now pointed directly at Miguel, inches from his throat. Miguel serenely studies Victor's face, unperturbed by the wild display, and gently puts his hand on the crutch, lowering it.

MIGUEL

To believe IS power. It's called
faith. It can move mountains.

He calmly takes the crutch from Victor and walks to a large boulder at the edge of a gully. He places it as a lever on a basketball-size rock. With his hands on his end of the stick, he addresses Victor.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

This end is your part.

He slides the other end over the rock, wedging it under the boulder.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

The rest is God, moved by your
faith.

Miguel presses down on the crutch. The laws of physics operate on the boulder as it is dislodged by the lever, and dramatically rolls down the hill. Victor watches wide-eyed, reluctantly awed.

Miguel rises and tosses the crutch to Victor, who deftly catches it with one hand.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Where is your book?

Victor looks momentarily confused.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

The one you carry. I want you to
see something.

Victor retrieves the book and sees a leafed twig between two pages. He opens to the page and reads aloud.

VICTOR

"Then as Elijah lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Arise and eat.' Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time and touched him and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.'"

Victor looks up from his book. Miguel stands several paces away, gazing out over the rugged terrain. An epiphany slowly manifests on Victor's face.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Who are you, Miguel? Why are you here to help me?

Miguel turns to face the dumbfounded boy.

MIGUEL

Because the journey is too great for you.

Victor rises to his feet as Miguel's magnificent wings unfold.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE PARKING LOT - DAY

Hideras pulls up in an older jeep, parks, and enters building.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Hideras pours some coffee. SHERIFF CARL BEBB relaxes at his desk with coffee. He is a large-framed Caucasian man with stern features that easily turn into a warm smile.

SHERIFF

Found your vehicle yet, Ed?

HIDERAS

No, Sheriff. No such luck.

Hideras turns to a file cabinet next to his desk, his name printed on the top drawer. He unlocks it and starts shuffling through folders.

SHERIFF

Professionals no doubt. Roaming the countryside for easy loot. They can hot-wire a car in seconds, them city slickers.

HIDERAS

The boys are still looking. Neighbor counties know.

SHERIFF

George and Frank's are about finished at the shop.

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

I don't think our budget would cover new vehicles this year. I hope you don't mind driving that old jalopy.

HIDERAS

Not a problem, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

How they took them buggers apart so fast though... I bet you'd just love to get your hands on the fellas that did that.

HIDERAS

Yep. It would be a pleasure.

He slides the cabinet drawer shut with a firm CHINK.

INT. HILLSIDE CAVE - DAY

Victor gawks at Miguel as he transfigures.

VICTOR

I don't believe it. A real angel.

MIGUEL

God has heard your prayers, Victor.

VICTOR

The prayers stopped years ago.

MIGUEL

He remembers them, and He wishes to show Himself strong on your behalf. He wants to use you.

VICTOR

Why me? What good can I do? I am just a crippled kid. With nothing.

Miguel creates a holographic image as he speaks.

MIGUEL

See the snake with no legs, yet his bite can bring down the buffalo. The ant who carries what is ten times its size. The tiniest seed of the melon disappears into the ground, only to reappear as a giant and feed many.

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

You feel insignificant and the least among men, but God sees the possibilities that disbelieving minds cannot imagine. Be reassured little man, you have found favor with God, and He has plans for you!

INT. BOYS HOME CLASSROOM - DAY

Miss Anthony dismisses her class of indifferent boys. She organizes her books and papers, then stops. Her eyes fix on the desks formerly occupied by Chavez, Arnie, Victor and Shawn. She heaves a heavy SIGH and bites her lip in frustration.

With resolution, she strides out of the classroom and into

MR. BRACKMAN'S OFFICE

Where he sits at his desk, scratching his head with a pen in frustration at a pile of papers before him.

MISS ANTHONY

Mr. Brackman!

He looks up with surprise, her insistent voice breaking his focus.

BRACKMAN

Miss Anthony! What can I do for you?

MISS ANTHONY

Please tell me that there's just a flu going 'round here.

His face registers a familiar discussion is at hand.

MISS ANTHONY (CONT'D)

PLEASE tell me it's just the flu!

The elder statesman of the house rises, with a smile that hides the tiniest note of mischief behind it.

BRACKMAN

Now Ellie you know that our job is to place these boys with families.

MISS ANTHONY

Yes, John. With FAMILIES.

BRACKMAN

So what are you all in a pinch about then?

MISS ANTHONY

You can't try to convince me AGAIN, that a whole fistful of boys has been placed all at once.

The superintendent walks over to the anxious school teacher and places his large hands on her shoulders.

BRACKMAN

Relax, Ellie. You should be happy for these young men. You did a good job while you had them, and now they're advancing out into the world. I think you just have a hard time letting go.

She tries to restrain her huffing breath.

MISS ANTHONY

Please don't patronize me, John Brackman. I didn't become a school teacher by being dumb and naive. But what we're talking about here doesn't even involve real smarts. We're talking about common sense. And common sense tells me that what goes on around here every few months is not normal. And you know EXACTLY what I'm talking about.

With that, she clutches her paper load to her chest, turns on her heels, and briskly walks out.

INT. HILLSIDE CAVE - DAY

Even the crevices are bathed in light from Miguel's glorified state.

MIGUEL

I bring you good news, Victor. Together, we will find your family.

Victor's demeanor slowly changes from wonder to embedded bitterness.

VICTOR

Why didn't my parents come looking for me all these years?

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

If you know so much about me, why did they forget?

Angry tears form in the youngster's eyes.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Why did it take an angel to come and find me?

Miguel powers down to his human form, softening with emotion.

MIGUEL

Oh no, they did not forget. They have been praying for you. Your mother goes to the train station every day, waiting. But things have not been so easy for them. The same people who kidnapped you and your friends are connected to the oil company that employs your parents. They run their business like a prison camp. But there are changes coming. Changes for the good. And we will get you there.

Victor doesn't buy it.

VICTOR

I don't want to see my family, Miguel. I can't forgive them for what they did.

MIGUEL

It was an evil man who caused this sorrow, my friend. Your parents are blameless.

Victor looks away, tortured.

VICTOR

Why didn't they do something? If my mother and father loved me so much, they would have taken me home by now, spared us all a lot of heartache. But no such thing happened. I'm here because I'm lucky, not loved.

MIGUEL

Love can reach across the quiet abyss, little man. It was love that spoke the world into existence. And it is love that can move angels to action.

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Love spoken through heartfelt
prayers you never heard.

Victor closes his eyes to maintain his tough facade. He speaks quietly, and with determination.

VICTOR

It doesn't matter what you say. I
am not going home. My brother
Pedro came along and took my place.
They have what they wanted now. I
will make my own way out there. I
don't need anybody, not even you.

Miguel is a model of patience and sympathy.

MIGUEL

I think I'll come in handy for a
while. So we're a team for a bit
longer.

Miguel draws pictures in the dirt, watching Victor pace around with one eye. The teen slowly comes undone.

VICTOR

Senor Hideras, he's the one who
separated me from my family. He's
the one who threw me from the
train!

He sobs uncontrollably.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Threw me from... from... the train.
Why didn't they throw HIM from the
train? From the TRAAAIIN!

Miguel approaches and holds the sobbing Victor. The harsh walls of the cave ECHO THE SOUNDS of a crying boy.

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - DAY

Boys labor and sweat. Sanctuary guards hiss and growl at them. Arnie, Shawn, and Chavez talk while they work.

ARNIE

We've got to get out of here. Make
a break like Victor did. I don't
wanna know what happens once the
temple is finished.

CHAVEZ

Yeah me neither.

SHAWN

These guards never seem to eat or sleep. They don't even seem human.

Sanctuary Guard 1 appears before the boys in a STREAK OF ORANGE LIGHT.

SANCTUARY GUARD 1

Don't be so stupid to think you will get out of here like your friend did. When we find him, we'll show you what happens to runaways.

A CRACKLING FIREBALL comes to life from the guard's extended hand. The boys scurry down the path with their load of materials, eyes wide with fright.

INT. HILLSIDE CAVE - DAY

Miguel lovingly embraces Victor whose sobs slowly subside. Miguel's attention is drawn outside, skyward.

A series of TRANSPARENT RED-ORANGE FORMS ZOOM overhead, like fast-flying vultures.

Victor senses something and follows Miguel's steely gaze.

VICTOR

What was that?

Miguel pauses before he speaks.

MIGUEL

I have enemies.

Victor stares at Miguel, incredulous at the import of his words. Miguel waves his hand: the camp fire goes out. Still holding on to Victor, he retreats into the far recess of the cave.

Dozens more of the frightening creatures wing by, all demons on a mission.

VICTOR

What if they find us?

MIGUEL

They cannot harm you in their spirit form. Not physically. At the most, they can stun you, confuse you. As spirits, they have strong powers of suggestion.

Victor watches them fly by with fear in his eyes.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

They are reluctant to become corporeal, as I am, because in this form, even though they can hurt you, hurt me, you can hurt them too.

Victor's eyes light up with an epiphany.

VICTOR

You mean like Jacob did?

Miguel smiles.

MIGUEL

I let him win.

VICTOR

That was YOU?

Miguel's smile only widens in response.

MIGUEL

I don't think they'll take the chance, nino. We must stay flesh and blood for forty days if we transform. It's very risky. The demons will avoid human form at all costs.

VICTOR

What are we gonna do?

MIGUEL

We will wait til the scouts go home.

VICTOR

And then?

MIGUEL

And then we're going to get you home.

EXT. NAVARRO COUNTY OIL FIELDS - DAY

The Tool Pusher pushes his crew hard on the rig. Tempers are flaring. Machinery whines with high velocity.

The derrick hands drip with sweat. One of them visibly slows from dehydration. A roughneck, SWEATY SHIRT, is drenched with perspiration. He addresses the Tool Pusher.

SWEATY SHIRT

(Spanish)

Sir, I need water. Just a drink.

The Tool Pusher turns to the DRILLER.

TOOL PUSHER

What did he say?

DRILLER

He's thirsty! He needs water!

TOOL PUSHER

Get real! He just had a break--

DRILLER

That was two hours ago. We all need water.

TOOL PUSHER

I'LL be the one to say when you take a break, and when you drink your damn water!

The Driller steps away from the drill crew, and flips a switch. The machinery stops. His crew looks with trepidation at the standoff.

TOOL PUSHER (CONT'D)

What the hell!

The rest of the crew defiantly step forward around the Driller. The Tool Pusher leans on a length of pipe, slams it on the floor.

TOOL PUSHER (CONT'D)

You gotta be flippin' kidding me!
You beaners gonna try and form a
freakin' posse on MY watch?

The unmistakable sound of footsteps coming up the wooden stairs turns the Tool Pusher's wrath away from his crew. A latino with a confident strut reaches the platform, carrying a large wooden sign in his hands.

The sign says in both English and Spanish: "Oil Workers Unite! Slave Labor Stops NOW!" The crew exchanges satisfied looks with the man, who in turn exchanges defiant glares with the Tool Pusher. The man with the sign is Romell Valdez.

The crew cheer in unison, fists pumped in the air. A water canteen is passed around.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Bebb receives a message over the wire. It reads:

"Oil workers throughout Texas and Oklahoma unionize. Strong demands by laborers for better pay, benefits, and work conditions. This development coincides with a Federal investigation into the alleged mistreatment of immigrant workers."

SHERIFF

Hey Ed, look at this. Them oil companies been busted for running those hell holes the way they do. Good to see the Feds kick some ass 'round here. Bring them oil bigwigs off their high horses some.

Hideras reads news wire, tries to hide his smoldering anger.

HIDERAS

Very interesting.

EXT. BOYS HOME DRIVEWAY - DAY

Hideras parks car and enters orphanage.

INSIDE

He proceeds to Brackman's office.

BRACKMAN

Mister Hideras!

Hideras throws a small bag of gold nuggets on Brackman's desk. Brackman counts nuggets.

HIDERAS

For the last scouts brought to camp.

BRACKMAN

You took four. We agreed it would be three.

HIDERAS

You really should encourage the kids to eat all of their dinner.

(MORE)

HIDERAS (CONT'D)

Don't worry, you've been paid for four.

Brackman is visibly pleased.

BRACKMAN

Well it's always a pleasure doing business with you Mr. Hideras. Here are the boys' records. My files now show that they never existed.

HIDERAS

As will mine.

The shady deputy turns to leave.

HIDERAS (CONT'D)

Business will be slow. Our suppliers up north have their hands tied. It will be difficult to boost your occupancy for awhile.

Brackman shakes his bag of gold.

BRACKMAN

I'm sure this will tide me over.

HIDERAS

I'm sure it will too.

Hideras passes through the hall and out the front door. From a recessed corner of the entry way, Miss Anthony watches.

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - DAY

Miguel drives the transformed deputy car down a long stretch of highway. They notice a SIREN SOUNDING in the distance. A deputy car approaches them from behind. The white 4-wheeler with smiley-face plates pulls over to the side of the road.

IN MIGUEL'S CAR

Miguel has a twinkle of mischief in his eyes.

MIGUEL

Wanna have some fun?

Victor nods, feeling Miguel's playfulness.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Do you like dogs?

VICTOR

Yeah, why?

OUTSIDE

Deputy George McKenna gets out of his vehicle, looking curiously at the white car and license plate. He approaches the driver's side window, peering inside to see a SWEET OLD LADY and her DOG.

OLD LADY

What is it, officer?

MCKENNA

Ma'am, where did you get this vehicle?

OLD LADY

Oh this pretty thing? Why, this car is property of the Sunshine Ministry. Have you ever heard of the Sunshine Ministry?

McKenna looks at the dog. Dog growls at him.

MCKENNA

No Ma'am I haven't. And I'm afraid this car ain't legal. I'm going to have to run a check on this.

OLD LADY

Oh sure, sonny. Let me help you.

The old lady BREATHES A GREEN MIST over McKenna's face and he FREEZES, entranced. Old lady gets out of the car and goes over to McKenna's CB radio. With MCKENNA'S VOICE, she speaks into it.

OLD LADY (CONT'D)

Sheriff, I've got a report of a missing boy from the Alameda Boys Home being sighted 'round Dead Pine Road, near the old abandoned gold mine.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Bebb's attention is on the CB radio.

SHERIFF

Missing boy from the orphanage?
I've seen no report from Ed about any missing kids.

INTERCUT CONVERSATION

OLD LADY

Well Sheriff, please look into it. Ed musta forgot to tell you or something, but I believe there's more than one been sighted 'round the mine. I'll check it out myself and get back to the office soon enough.

SHERIFF

Right, son. I'll look into this on my end.

He hangs up.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Right after lunch.

Sheriff grabs hat to leave, and turns to big-haired DOLLY, the office secretary.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Be back in an hour, Dolly.

DOLLY

All right, Sheriff.

He steps out into the street.

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - DAY

The old lady hangs up CB piece in McKenna's car and turns back to the white car. As she walks, she TRANSFORMS INTO MIGUEL.

EXT. OUTSIDE SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Bebb strides calmly down the street towards JJ's Diner. He greets folks as he passes, politely smiling. Across the street he sees Mr. Brackman exit Clyde's Cash Converters. Sheriff stops, looking curiously at him.

SHERIFF

Good day to ya, Brackman!

Brackman very nervously waves to Sheriff Bebb and walks quickly down the street. Sheriff stands there, watching him intently. He crosses the street and enters.

INT. CLYDE'S CASH CONVERTERS - CONTINUOUS

Clyde, a pleasant middle-aged man with an apron tied around his stout frame, looks up.

CLYDE
Howdy Sheriff.

SHERIFF
How you doing today Clyde?

CLYDE
Oh just fine, fine. What can I do for ya? Got somethin' to sell?

SHERIFF
No, not today. I was just kinda curious what John Brackman was doin' in here.

CLYDE
Now Sheriff, you know I can't go on talkin' 'bout other people's business, especially my customers.

SHERIFF
Oh well ya know Clyde, I'm the sheriff in this town and I kinda need to know all kinds of people's business. Now go on, tell me just what he was doin' here.

CLYDE
Nothin' too unusual. He just came to convert some gold nuggets is all.

SHERIFF
Gold nuggets? Has he done that before?

CLYDE
Well yes, he's been a regular customer for awhile now.

SHERIFF
Gold nuggets, eh?

Clyde shows Sheriff Bebb the nuggets.

CLYDE
Yessir.

SHERIFF

You don't think that's sorta unusual?

CLYDE

Well you know Sheriff, in these parts, some families have gold stashed away from our grand daddies' time.

SHERIFF

Right. Well I thank you Clyde. Much obliged. You have a good day now.

Sheriff heads for the door, then stops.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Say Clyde, you don't think that old gold mine's still puttin' out, do ya?

CLYDE

Naw. That thing's been dead and done for years now.

SHERIFF

Right. Good day to ya.

He tips his hat and steps

OUTSIDE

Where he stands on the curb, pensive.

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - DAY

Miguel and Victor drive down the highway.

IN THE CAR

The two are having a good laugh.

VICTOR

Let's do that again!

MIGUEL

We'll see.

Victor basks in the camaraderie.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I believe you look like your father
when you laugh.

Victor looks out the window, unresponsive.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Is this not what you want, Victor?
After all these years?

VICTOR

That's exactly right, Miguel.
"After all these years." Seven
lonely years explaining to people
that I still do have a last name,
because my parents are alive and
coming to get me soon. Half my
life, waiting...

Miguel calmly drives. After a silence:

MIGUEL

I'll find a place where you can
wash up. You might feel better.

VICTOR

Yeah, fine.

They drive off road towards hills, stopping by a small grove
of rocks and trees. They exit car.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

What's here?

MIGUEL

A place for you to freshen up.

Victor looks around.

VICTOR

Where?

Miguel takes Victor's crutch, walks a few steps forward and,
with a swipe of GREEN LIGHT, slams the ground with it. A few
seconds later, a spring bubbles up like a fountain. Victor
marvels at this, takes off his clothes, and goes over to the
fountain and bathes.

As Miguel looks around he spies a hawk landing in a tree
above Victor. A prairie dog snoops around the other side of
the water. Suddenly, the animals begin to GLOW RED and MORPH
INTO CORPOREAL DEMONS, coiled and ready to attack.

Miguel's wings unfurl, and he deftly plucks two feathers from them. The feathers harden into GREEN-GLOWING DAGGERS. He expertly throws them at demons, nailing the hawk-demon which VAPORIZES in a cloud of RED SMOKE.

The other demon SCREAMS, hit by the dagger. It SIZZLES as it VAPORIZES.

A third demon, this one transparent, appears from behind a rock and SHRIEKS at the double defeat.

MIGUEL

Victor, hit the dirt!

TRANSPARENT DEMON 1 takes a clawed swipe at Victor, and it passes through him. Victor freezes, expressionless like a zombie. The demon SHRIEKS and then shoots off into the sky with a red streak.

Miguel runs to Victor and breathes a GREEN MIST over his face. Victor revives.

VICTOR

Was that what I think it was?

MIGUEL

Yes, and that can't be good. They will come back with greater numbers. Here, step into these.

Miguel hands Victor freshly folded, GREEN-GLOWING clothes.

VICTOR

Oh yeah!

INT. BALAAM'S CHAMBER - DAY

Transparent Demon 1 arrives before Balaam and Hideras, shaken.

TRANSPARENT DEMON 1

Master, I have seen the boy! He is not alone! He has the help of an angel!

BALAAM

Did he see you?

TRANSPARENT DEMON 1

Yes master. I am the only one to escape.

BALAAM

So we know how the boy has eluded us thus far. We now have two enemies, Mister Hideras. I will handle the angel, you must handle the boy!

EXT. HILLSIDE TREE GROVE - DAY

Miguel checks Victor in his new clothes, all fresh and clean.

VICTOR

How do I look?

MIGUEL

Good as new.

They are suddenly surrounded by five grimacing demons: two corporeal on the ground, and three spirit-forms hovering in the air.

VICTOR

Oh no.

With a clap of his hands, Miguel bowls the corporeal demons backwards with a BOOMING SHOCK WAVE.

MIGUEL

Victor, run! Now! To the highway!

Victor stands rooted, staring in fear at Miguel.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

NOW!

Victor grabs his crutch, makes a run for the highway. As the corporeal demons regather, the transparent demons SHRIEK in unison, making a harsh assault on Miguel's ears. The corporeal demons run in a blur around Miguel who is immobilized by the sonic attack.

TRANSPARENT DEMON 1

The holy one took human form! What a fool!

TRANSPARENT DEMON 2

This is too easy!

The demons cackle with delight at the following development: the sprinting corporeal demons create a whirlwind. Soon after, rock and soil rise up from the ground beneath Miguel and form a large, crusted formation, effectively entombing him in granite.

Within seconds, Miguel is no longer visible, only a small craggy plateau where he once stood.

AT THE HIGHWAY

Victor hobbles as quickly as he can, looking through the heat waves on the road for a passerby. He slowly starts to tire, moving painfully down the lonely stretch of road. Off in the distance, a vehicle appears, and as it approaches it is discernible as a weathered farm truck.

IN THE TRUCK

Sit LISA and REX GIBSON, both 61. He is in overalls and she is in a gingham dress, peering through the windshield at the solitary figure of a limping boy in the distance.

REX
What is that?

LISA
It's a boy.

REX
Alone?

LISA
Yes Rex, and he is hurt. Pull over honey, let's see what's wrong with him.

They pull ahead of Victor and bring the truck to the side of the road. As they emerge, Victor hobbles toward the Gibsons, stops, and exchanges stares with the elderly couple. Heat-driven dust swirls between them.

REX
Are you all right, son?

Lisa steps forward, holding her dress down in the blowing breeze, looking every bit the part of a concerned mother. Victor eyes them warily, then looks over his shoulder at the barren highway. No patrol cars. Yet.

LISA
Can we give you a ride somewhere?

Victor's voice sounds every bit as frantic as his demeanor.

VICTOR
I gotta catch a train.

The Gibsons look at each other briefly, then gesture emphatically to the young boy.

LISA

Of course, honey. We'll take you to a train station. Come on, hop in.

Victor hobbles up to the truck and slides in the front seat between the spouses. While they drive, the two Gibsons examine the silent, wild-eyed youth.

REX

Son, what are you doing out here all by your lonesome? You surely didn't get this far on foot.

Victor hesitates.

VICTOR

I... got left behind.

LISA

Good heavens! On the highway? You boys shouldn't play such crazy pranks on each other. Look at you, you're not in a walkin' way.

Victor's attention appears far off.

VICTOR

I know, ma'am.

Lisa eyes his crutch.

LISA

Do you need to see a doctor?

Victor's head jerks to face her.

VICTOR

No!

LISA

Well all right. Shouldn't you be in school?

VICTOR

Uh, yes ma'am. But I'm not from 'round here.

REX

'Cross the border?

VICTOR

No sir. Up North.

They drive; the Gibsons in perplexed silence, Victor under a catatonic glaze. After awhile, the interrogation starts up again.

REX
You got money to buy a train
ticket, son?

Victor snaps out of his reverie at this question.

VICTOR
(sheepishly)
No sir.

The Gibsons look at each other with concern.

LISA
What is your name, young man? I'm
Lisa Gibson and this here is Rex
Gibson, my husband.

VICTOR
Victor. Victor Valdez.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Bebb enters with a sandwich and soda in hand.

SHERIFF
I'm back.

DOLLY
Well that was fast.

SHERIFF
I got something I need to tend to.
You seen Ed?

DOLLY
He just came and left. Said he had
to file some papers, then went to
lunch.

Sheriff goes into his office, searches for and finds a key, looks inside Hideras' file cabinet. Inside a folder labeled "ALAMEDA BOYS HOME" is a list of 12 names titled "OCTOBER 1969 TRANSFER". Attached behind this paper is letterhead from John Brackman's office with the following names listed:

Victor Valdez
Chavez Sepulveda
Arnold Daniels
Shawn Torres

Sheriff sips on soda, looking concerned, goes to window and looks out at orphanage bus.

INT. GIBSON'S TRUCK - DAY

The new acquaintances continue to drive on highway. They take notice of a deputy vehicle approaching in the oncoming lane. Victor's eyes grow wide with dread, and then he suddenly bends forward to tie his shoelaces. The couple take no notice.

REX

Victor, I do believe we'll miss the last train of the day by the looks of things.

VICTOR

It's okay. You can drop me at the station. I'll be fine.

REX

How'd you like to stay the night with us, at our ranch? We'll get you on the morning train if you like, make some phone calls.

VICTOR

(quietly)

That's very kind of you sir.

EXT. GIBSON RANCH DRIVEWAY - DAY

The truck swings off the road and down the dirt/grass entrance to a quaint residence with a barn, tractor, and cattle being herded by two Hispanic men on horseback. They wave cheerfully.

Once parked, the three passengers step out of the truck and approach the two ranch hands. They are MANUEL and DIEGO, both about 35 years old, and strong-bodied.

REX

Victor, this is Manuel and over there is Diego, our two ranch hands. Don't know what we'd do without 'em. Boys, this here is our guest for the night, Victor

MANUEL

Nice to meet you, Victor.

Diego, across a dozen head of Hereford, salutes with a smile. Victor looks quizzically at the horses, then up at the riders.

VICTOR

Hi.

LISA

Now let's go inside and I'll fix you something to eat. You must be hungry, I'm willin' to bet ya.

Lisa leads Victor to

INT. GIBSON HOUSE - DAY

Via the kitchen door, then into the living room. The first thing he notices is a series of framed pictures of a young man at various ages adorning the shelves and walls.

LISA

You were traveling with just the clothes on your back?

VICTOR

Uh, no ma'am. I... I mean, yes ma'am.

LISA

That's okay honey, I'm sure I can rustle up something just your size 'round here. Set yourself down there and I'll getcha a peanut butter and jam sandwich. Would you like that?

VICTOR

Yes ma'am.

Lisa exits to the kitchen, and Victor proceeds to examine the pictures of the young man. Most are photos of infancy, baseball poses, and then most dramatically, a solitary photo on the mantelpiece of the handsome youth in military dress. The effect resembles a shrine. An engraving on the attractive frame reads:

William Gibson
Served With Honor 1950-1951 United States Army
Company A
23rd Regiment
2nd Infantry Division

Lisa sees Victor taking interest in the photos while she sets a place at the table.

LISA
That's our son, Billy. Looks like his father, doesn't he?

VICTOR
Yeah, lucky guy.

She flashes a melancholy smile, then sets his plate down on the table.

LISA
Come on.

Victor hobbles over to the table and sits. Lisa sits at table with him.

LISA (CONT'D)
When was the last time you ate?

VICTOR
This morning.

LISA
Victor, who have you been--

VICTOR
Can I wash up first?

LISA
Of course. First door in the hall on the right.

Lisa watches Victor hobble to the bathroom.

INSIDE THE BATHROOM

Victor takes it all in. This is a country home, even the bathroom says so. He looks fondly at the flowered shower curtain, the neatly folded and arranged bath towels, the flowers on the commode, and then his eyes fall on a framed, embroidered wall hanging which says in ornate design: "HOME SWEET HOME".

EXT. GIBSON'S FARM YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Victor hobbles from kitchen door to the corral fence to watch Manuel and Diego herd the Herefords. They are both master horsemen, and Victor is enthralled by their maneuvers.

MANUEL
(Spanish)
You like horses?

VICTOR
I love them.

Manuel rides over to the fence and extends his arm to Victor. Victor looks at him excitedly.

With difficulty, Victor scales the corral enclosure with his crutch in one hand and hops on to horse with Manuel.

A MONTAGE OF SHOTS:

Victor using his crutch to herd the cows.

Laughing with the ranch hands.

Feeding the horses a snack.

Petting the dogs.

The Gibsons watching with pleased smiles.

INT. GIBSON HOUSE - NIGHT

Manuel, Diego, Victor, Lisa and Rex have dinner at the table. Victor is the object of concern and interest.

REX
You seem to be quite comfortable
with a horse.

VICTOR
The only horse I knew was a
friendly one. And boy, was he
fast.

LISA
Is that how you got hurt, with your
limp?

Victor hesitates, and answers with difficulty.

VICTOR
No, that would be a different kind
of horse.

REX
What'dya mean?

VICTOR
A train. I fell from a train.

Lisa gawks in horror.

DIEGO
Madre de dios!

LISA
You're kidding!

REX
How'd that come to happen, son?

VICTOR
A very bad man tried to kill me.
He didn't think I'd survive. But I
did. And now he's after me again.

Lisa reaches over to touch Victor's arm.

LISA
When did this happen, Victor?

Victor plays with his food, looking tortured.

VICTOR
Will you be mad at me if I don't
tell you the whole story?

More concerned looks. Some silence.

LISA
Of course not, child. We just want
to know how we can help, that's
all.

VICTOR
Actually I have a friend who's
trying to help me. He's gonna take
me to some other friends, up North.
We got separated back there on the
road. We stopped for a bathroom
break... and then some banditos
came and attacked us. I made it to
the highway, but my friend... I
don't know.

REX
Then we need to call the Sheriff,
son and get some help!

VICTOR

No! You must promise me not to do that! I can't tell you why... just, please... don't call the Sheriff. I need to find my friend, and then I'll be on my way.

MANUEL

But what if your friend needs help?

VICTOR

No, he is fine. He got away, I know it. He... he's fine.

REX

All right then, Victor. Tomorrow we'll go lookin' for your friend. But if we don't find him--

VICTOR

Don't worry. We'll find him.

Lisa rises to gather everyone's plates.

LISA

You men folk, always gettin' into trouble.

EXT. GIBSON'S FARM YARD - NIGHT

Victor crosses the yard to the barn, where there is a light on within. He pulls open the big wood door with a creak and sees Manuel and Diego, relaxing, having a smoke.

DIEGO

(Spanish)

Come in, young one.

VICTOR

Is this where you guys sleep?

DIEGO

Naw, we have rooms in the house.

Victor ventures in further. Manuel and Diego eye him curiously as he looks with boyish wonderment at the quiet, cozy barn interior.

MANUEL

You're from the boys home, aren't you?

Victor snaps to attention at this.

VICTOR

What?

MANUEL

The Alameda Boys Home. You're on the run, aren't you?

Victor stares back with quiet shock on his face.

MANUEL (CONT'D)

Don't worry. Ma and Pa Gibson, they're good people. Like family to Diego and me. They won't betray you.

Victor begins to distress at this.

VICTOR

They're looking for me. They are really bad people. Senor Hideras, the county deputy, he--

DIEGO

Eduardo Hideras?

VICTOR

Yes.

Manuel and Diego exchange knowing looks with each other.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You know who he is?

MANUEL

We know him well. Diego and I, we have no parents. We were once in the Boys Home as well.

DIEGO

And so was Eduardo Hideras.

Victor is speechless.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

He was almost of age to be released when we met him. About eighteen. Manuel and I were just twelve or thirteen. He was BAD NEWS.

MANUEL

Yeah he was scary right from the start.

(MORE)

MANUEL (CONT'D)

They used to have a chapel at Alameda when we got there, a place to worship. He burned it down. No one knew why.

VICTOR

He's the one who hurt me, on the train! He's the one who is chasing me still!

Diego slides off straw bundle to close barn door.

DIEGO

Don't worry, little man. You are safe here.

They all soak in these revelations for a moment. Victor regains his composure.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Ma and Pa Gibson took us in all those years ago, when we left the boys' home and had nowhere to go.

Diego's words seem to comfort Victor.

VICTOR

Did you know their son?

DIEGO

No, he died just a few years before they took us in. They were really sad from the loss. Manuel and I helped to fill that emptiness for them.

MANUEL

I guess we all needed each other at the right time. And we have been here ever since.

VICTOR

You are lucky, then. You have found home.

CAMERA PANS from Victor, across barn interior, THROUGH THE WALL, to the

OUTSIDE

Where Rex is eavesdropping intently.

EXT. BOYS HOME DRIVEWAY - DAY

It's a rainy morning. Sheriff Bebb drives in to compound, parks, and enters.

INT. BOYS HOME CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

The boys are eating breakfast. Sheriff approaches Mr. Brackman.

SHERIFF

Excuse me, Brackman. I'm sorry to interrupt you at meal time.

The superintendent is nervous at the sight of the uniformed officer.

BRACKMAN

Sheriff Bebb, what can I do for you? Is everything okay?

SHERIFF

Well I don't know, Mr. Brackman. See, I got a report from one of my deputies of some runaway orphans. You wouldn't be missing any of your boys now, would ya?

BRACKMAN

No, Sheriff. All are accounted for. As you can see, we are all present eating breakfast. If there were any problems I would alert Deputy Hideras right away. You know I answer to him.

SHERIFF

And first deputy Eduardo Hideras answers to ME.

He lets those words sink in.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Now as I recall, there were two bus loads of new arrivals here in the past six months carrying, I'd say, oh at least a dozen each, wouldn't that be right?

BRACKMAN

Oh I can't be sure right off the top of my head. But if we could call Deputy Hideras we could--

SHERIFF

I do recall at least two dozen boys arriving here in the past six months. Now as I look around this room I see no more than, oh, thirty-five, maybe forty boys right now. This home, which has eighty beds, has never been less than half capacity. You trying to tell me you couldn't even put together a baseball game before the buses came in? I do recall a lot of baseball goin' on round here, plenty of kids for two full teams out there. That would be two pitchers, two shortstops, two first basemen, two second base--

BRACKMAN

No, Sheriff. I think your numbers are wrong. I don't know where you get your information but--

SHERIFF

Any adoptions in the past six months? And placed in homes?

BRACKMAN

Yes, two.

SHERIFF

Was a boy named Victor one of them?

Brackman's face flushes with terror.

BRACKMAN

No, I don't think so.

SHERIFF

Well then he must still be here, right?

He turns to the boys.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Victor! Victor Valdez, stand up son! Which one are ya?

The boys sit silently.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

You don't mind if I take a little roll call now, do you Brackman?

He pulls out a paper.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Chavez Sepulveda, are you here son?
How 'bout Arnold Daniels, where are
ya? Shawn Torres?

Finally one terrified youngster, "ORPHAN 1", stands up.

ORPHAN 1

They ain't here, Sheriff Bebb.
They was taken away like the
others, like all of us will be!

BRACKMAN

That's enough! Sheriff, these boys
are terrible liars. They tell tall
tales every chance they get.

Another boy, "ORPHAN 2", rises.

ORPHAN 2

That's not all. A lot of us were
taken from our families up in oil
country. No one will listen to us!
My parents are still alive!

A third, DEXTER LEE, breaks down.

DEXTER LEE

I wanna go home!

BRACKMAN

Dexter Lee, you will--

SHERIFF

Shut up!

Sheriff turns to Dexter.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

It's okay son, I'm listening.

DEXTER LEE

It's true, Sheriff. I've been here
for five months and I've seen it
happen. You go to bed at night
wondering if it will be you. In
the morning you see your friend's
bed empty and all made up like no
one was ever there. And all his
stuff gone too.

ORPHAN 1

And it's usually when Senor Hideras
is here, sir.

Sheriff hands Dexter a clipboard and pen.

SHERIFF

Now see here, young man. You write
your name there and pass it 'round
the room. Everybody write your
name here on this paper.

He turns to Brackman.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Now I'm coming back here tomorrow
morning, and I'm gonna take
attendance myself. And if any of
these boys are not accounted for,
Mr. Brackman, you will be the next
missing person. Am I understood?

BRACKMAN

(mumbles)
Yes, Sheriff.

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - DAY

Boys labor under the watchful eyes of the sanctuary guards. Shawn, Arnie and Chavez push wheelbarrows of stone and gold along a carved path of the cavernous room.

Their demeanor is calm and obedient, yet there is a look of mischievous determination in their eyes. The hissing Sanctuary Guard 1 follows the boys in their descent down the path. The boys seem to slow down, on cue.

The demon passes the boys on the path. As soon as the frightful guard precedes them, the three youths spring into action.

ARNIE

Now, Chavez!

Chavez grabs a shovel, raises it high, and swings down hard on the demon guard's head. It passes right through the unsuspecting demon. The boys stand in complete terror and shock.

The demon guard stops and turns to face the boy; his face pulls back in glowering malice. Shawn reaches for a rock from the wheelbarrow and throws it hard at the evil spirit. It passes through again.

CHAVEZ

You gotta be freakin' kidding me!

The demon's eyes narrow into slits of evil intent.

SANCTUARY GUARD 1

Stupid boys.

The boys cower in anticipation of violent retribution. The demon's form SHIMMERS in a RED GLOW, and as he LAUGHS with spine-tingling effect, he ENTERS SHAWN.

Shawn's eyes GLOW RED, and his expression morphs into an evil sneer. His little form is in full demonic possession, and Chavez's eyes widen in horror.

ARNIE

Shawn?

Shawn glares at Arnie malevolently.

ARNIE (CONT'D)

Shawn are you there? Can you hear me?

SHAWN

Your little friend is here. But I am sitting right on his head.

Arnie and Chavez step backward, frightened beyond belief. Shawn pounces on the two boys, his arms a blur of wild assault.

INT. GIBSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lisa busies herself over dinner preparation. The kitchen door opens, Rex kicks the dirt off his shoes and enters.

REX

Storms a-comin'.

At these words, Victor hobbles over from the living room.

VICTOR

A storm?

REX

Yeap. I can feel it in my knees.

He looks kindly at the anxious youth.

REX (CONT'D)

Can't you?

Victor teeters a little from side to side, perplexed by the odd question.

VICTOR
Uhh, no sir.

A DISTANT THUNDER CLAP punctuates their conversation perfectly, drawing everyone's attention to the window.

Rex shows Victor a comforting smile, as though the night is packed with excitement. The boy catches it, and smiles back.

The sound of Diego's and Manuel's VOICES from outside as they corral the final ponies is instantly drowned out by the sound of POURING RAIN.

REX
This won't put a damper on anything. Ain't nothing wrong with a wet kiss from the Almighty now and then.

Lisa turns to Victor with oven mitts on her hands.

LISA
Wanna keep an old lady company in the kitchen?

He nods shyly.

VICTOR
Sure.

He ambles into her work space.

LATER

Rex watches TV in the living room as Lisa and Victor move about the kitchen.

ON THE TV:

INT. TEXAS STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

A crowd gathers outside the Texas Governor's Office. Mostly Mexican in number, they flaunt signs that read "Oil Workers Unite", and "What's More Precious, Man or Mineral?"

A REPORTER places a microphone in the face of a passionate spokesperson. The spokesperson is Romell Valdez, and behind him stands Miss Anthony.

ROMELL

We are here to tell the honorable Governor of the great State of Texas that all people are deserving of respect and fair treatment in the eyes of God, and the Law. What is good for one man, is good for another.

Romell glances over at Miss Anthony.

ROMELL (CONT'D)

We deserve decent work conditions, fair pay, and most importantly, the right to raise our families. We want our children back, and we are here to tell our story.

The crowd cheers in support.

BACK TO SCENE

Rex mutters to himself on the couch.

REX

Good God almighty, what the hell's going on out there?

IN THE KITCHEN

Several pots boiling on the stove. Lisa flows between sink, cutting board, and stove with ease. Lisa points to the far counter with a knife.

LISA

Can you get me those peppers over there, sweetie?

From her side, he turns to fetch them and catches the long handle of a stove-top pot on his elbow. Boiling hot beans spill onto his naked arm as he falls. He writhes in pain on the floor.

Lisa rushes to his aid, in horror.

LISA (CONT'D)

Oh baby! Oh no, my poor baby!

She gently helps him to his feet and props him against the counter. He holds his blistering arm out as his face contorts in agony. She rushes to the sink and soaks a washrag, then gingerly wraps it over his injury.

Lisa is in complete torment over the mishap, and studies his face intently.

LISA (CONT'D)
Oh Victor, I'm so sorry! Could you
ever forgive me?

Victor simply gasps with effort to dispel the throbbing pain. On impulse, she grabs him with maternal care and pulls him to her chest, holding him close.

LISA (CONT'D)
I'm so, so sorry!

Victor's wincing melts into quiet sobs as he surrenders to her loving embrace. Tears fall down his cheeks as he soaks in the long-forgotten touch of a mother. He embraces her back as she strokes the hair on his head.

LISA (CONT'D)
Please forgive me, I'm so sorry...

A MONTAGE:

Victor looks out the window at a rainy morning...

Rex and Victor cooking Jiffy Pop on the stove at night...

Diego uses Victor's crutch as a rifle prop. Victor and Manuel run throughout the house, fleeing as "robbers" from the "cop", flinging themselves onto piles of pillows in laughter...

Victor and Lisa watch Manuel and Diego hauling hay in the rain...

Victor shows off his twirling skills with his crutch. Manuel tries it, the thing goes flying...

END ON:

INT. GIBSON HOUSE - VICTOR'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Victor sleeps in bed. A GENTLE KNOCK on the door wakens him. He opens his eyes and looks at the rain persisting against the window. Rex quietly peeks in.

REX
Mornin' son. Rise and shine.

VICTOR
Doesn't look like it.

Rex gazes at the outside wetness and sighs.

REX

This damn storm turned out to be more like a wet spankin'. Supposed to let up soon though. Least that's what I heard.

Victor props himself up against the headboard, then looks wistfully out the window again. Rex seems to know what he's thinking.

REX (CONT'D)

We can still go lookin' for him if you want. It ain't no big deal for me. I just don't know where he woulda gone to for a whole week in all this.

The boy says nothing, muzzled by frustration.

REX (CONT'D)

At least somebody's been safe and warm and sleeping like they never slept before!

Victor musters a smile at Rex's morning charm.

REX (CONT'D)

Now come on boy, Ma's got us breakfast made and ready. We all's just waitin' on you.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Hideras enters, shaking off rainwater from his jacket. Dolly looks up from her desk.

DOLLY

Good morning, Ed.

HIDERAS

Morning Dolly. Where's Sheriff?

DOLLY

Hasn't come in yet. Got some messages for him though.

HIDERAS

Might be tied up with this damn rain. Anything I can take care of?

She shuffles through the messages.

DOLLY

There's one here, let's see... a
Rex Gibson called. Found a
runaway. Wanted to discuss
adoption.

Hideras, pouring coffee, spins at this news.

INT. GIBSON HOUSE - NIGHT

Rex, Lisa, Victor, Manuel and Diego sit at the dining room
table. They play feverishly at Monopoly. Spirits are high,
a warm family atmosphere despite the pouring rain outside.

Lisa rolls the dice, moves her piece.

LISA

Hmmm, Marvin Gardens. And it's
available. All right, I'll buy it.

REX

Real sorry 'bout today, son. I
know we were fixin' to look for
your friend.

Victor takes the dice and rolls.

VICTOR

That's okay. I'm betting he'll
find me first. Oh damn, "Go To
Jail"!

Lisa rises from her seat.

LISA

More hot cocoa, anyone?

VICTOR

Sure.

MANUEL

No thanks.

DIEGO

None for me, Ma.

Rex takes the dice and rolls. He moves his piece and lands
on Boardwalk. Victor's eyes light up.

VICTOR

Ha! Boardwalk, that's mine! Let's
see, with two hotels that's gonna
be... whoa, a lot.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

I think I just took your wealth,
Mr. Gibson. Everything you got,
everything you own, you gotta give
it to me. Hand it over, it's all
mine!

Victor taps his hands on the table like a celebratory drum beat.

Rex's face suddenly twists into a visage of pain and stifled grief. His eyes swell with tears as he stares at the board. He looks up at Victor and before he totally loses it, leaves the table in a sudden move. As he exits the room, Lisa comes back with drinks, looking at the stunned faces of the young men.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

What did I say?

DIEGO

Nothing, amigo. Pa is still
haunted by some things. You did
nothing wrong.

Lisa puts the cocoa down and follows Rex into their bedroom. The three guys sit quietly at the table, and after a long silence:

VICTOR

My friend Arnie says he'd do
anything to see a family come
together. I guess I know what he
means.

MANUEL

Rest easy, chico. Just you being
here brings them much comfort.

INT. GIBSON HOUSE - VICTOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Victor tries to sleep. Rain and lightning provide a constant show. His eyes glance towards the closed door. A soft light illuminates beneath the door.

He climbs out of bed and quietly opens the door, entering

THE HALLWAY

From there he can see Rex in the living room, standing at the mantelpiece, staring at the picture of his son. Victor softly enters the room.

VICTOR
You're still up.

Rex's face is mournful.

REX
Victor, son, didn't mean to wake
you.

VICTOR
Mr. Gibson, I'm sorry if I upset
you earlier.

Rex's gaze continues to take in images of his son.

REX
He was supposed to stay home, with
us, and take over the ranch
someday. He was our only son, our
only child.

Victor politely listens, aware of the heaviness in the room.

REX (CONT'D)
But he wanted to see the world,
join the army, be a hero. I
shouldn't have taken him to so many
war movies, you know?

Victor draws closer.

REX (CONT'D)
I wish we didn't give him a choice.
We should have made him stay, keep
up his duties here at the farm. He
was a good kid, wanted to do right
by us.

Rex moves on to Billy's baseball picture.

REX (CONT'D)
But we must've somehow been too
much for him, not exciting enough.
He had to find adventure out there,
away from his smothering parents.

VICTOR
No...

REX
He put himself in immediate danger,
joining the army. He was one of
the first to die in Korea.

(MORE)

REX (CONT'D)

I wish I could have been there,
taken the bullet for him. A Papa's
supposed to save their kids, not
send them to their untimely death.

VICTOR

Mr. Gibson, did he know you loved
him? In his heart, was there any
doubt at all?

Rex caresses the frame of Billy's photo.

REX

Oh no. Billy knew how much he was
loved. If nothing else, he knew.

Victor seems to carry a new understanding as he measures his
words carefully.

VICTOR

Then you DID save him. Even in his
darkest hour, it pushed away all
the pain. The way you loved him,
it was like a rescue. If I were
him, I would not feel alone. At
all. I promise you this.

Rex looks up at Victor, epiphany in his expression. As the
tears flow from his face, he seems relieved of a burden. He
strides over to the sympathetic youth and hugs him closely.
Victor yields to a father's protective arms.

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Chavez and Arnie labor alongside Jerald. Possessed Shawn
stands at the top of the path near Barracks Guard 1, eyes
GLOWING RED, face contorted into a menacing smile as he
watches. His form has withered thin. The demon possesses a
gaunt, malnourished boy's body.

CHAVEZ

He's looking bad. Real bad.

JERALD

That thing is killing him.

ARNIE

I don't think he's eaten in days.
That thing won't let him.

CHAVEZ

You mean won't feed him.

ARNIE

What are we gonna do? Just watch
him slowly die?

Jerald plants his shovel in the ground as an act of defiance.

JERALD

I've had enough of these Gestapo
tactics.

Arnie and Chavez watch Jerald with reticent support. Jerald marches up to Shawn and his frightening cohort. The demons study his display of bravado with haughty amusement.

JERALD (CONT'D)

You're gonna kill him, you know.

The demon guards simply glare at the lanky human.

JERALD (CONT'D)

If you don't let him eat, he'll
die! What good is he to you if
that happens?

A low, evil rumble emanates from Shawn's throat. It's the barest trace of a diabolical laugh.

JERALD (CONT'D)

Do you hear me? He's going to DIE
if you don't feed him!

The low laughter now cranks up a notch to blood-chilling. Chavez and Arnie watch now with fear in their eyes.

CHAVEZ

Jerald...

The laughter stops. The demons look at each other with a kind of telepathic understanding.

BARRACKS GUARD 1

Feed the boy.

Their eyes seem to GLOW with even greater ferocity as Shawn turns his gaze on Jerald.

SHAWN

You're right. Dinner.

Shawn licks his lips as he emanates a wild predatory rage. Then he pounces without warning on the unprepared youth.

JERALD

Aaaaahhh!

Shawn's teeth find Jerald's neck, and he tears into him like a vampire. The hapless victim is easily subdued by a preternatural strength fueling Shawn's skeletal frame.

Chavez and Arnie race to Jerald's aid. Boys from around the sanctuary stop to watch the horrific assault.

By the time they reach Jerald, he has a gaping bloody wound in his neck. They pry Shawn off and push him hard. He grins a broad sneer as he wipes blood from his lips, then licks it.

The rumbling throaty laughter percolates again as Shawn watches the youths help Jerald to his feet. Chavez pulls his shirt off and wraps it around Jerald's profuse, sanguinary neck. Arnie looks at Shawn with disgust.

Suddenly the RED GLOW disappears from Shawn's eyes, and a frightened vulnerability takes its place. Shawn's boyish voice returns, shaky and frail.

SHAWN
Arnie, help me!

Chavez ceases the first aid, turns to look at Shawn whose limbs quiver with fatigue and starvation.

ARNIE
Shawn?

SHAWN
Please help me. He's so strong!
He ties me up! I can't--

The demon regains control as the humanity drains from Shawn's face, and the voice becomes otherworldly.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
Okay, who's next? Any volunteers?

The bewildered trio recognize the threat in Shawn's manner. Jerald leans heavily on Arnie and Chavez as they slowly retreat down the path.

INT. GIBSON HOUSE - VICTOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Victor bolts upright from a sound sleep, wakened by a nightmare. Or was it?

He looks frantically around the room, trying to get his bearings. His attention is drawn to the window where the rain continues to beat down. He gets up and creeps close for a view. A flash of lightning reveals the lone figure of

HIDERAS

Standing before the house.

Victor scrambles for his crutch and shoes, then enters the dark hallway and down to

MANUEL'S BEDROOM

He enters without knocking, and approaches the bed with a horse whisper.

VICTOR
Manuel, wake up!

He does, and peers in the darkness at Victor's terrified face.

MANUEL
What is it?

VICTOR
It's him, Senor Hideras! He's found me!

MANUEL
What? He is here?

VICTOR
Yes, he is outside! I saw him!

MANUEL
What do you think he will do?

VICTOR
You don't want to know. But we must get me out of here, take me back to the highway.

MANUEL
In this rain? You are crazy!

VICTOR
No I am serious! We must leave!
Please Manuel, trust me on this.
You remember how he was, he is only worse now.

Manuel rises from bed and they both venture over to

DIEGO'S BEDROOM

MANUEL
 (Spanish)
 Diego, get up. We must take our
 little brother away from here.

Diego stirs and barely opens his eyes.

VICTOR
 (Spanish)
 Please hurry! He's outside!

DIEGO
 (Spanish)
 Who?

VICTOR
 (simultaneous)
 Hideras.

MANUEL
 (simultaneous)
 Hideras.

Diego's eyes snap open.

IN THE HALLWAY

The 3 young men are creeping towards the living room. Flashes of lightning reveal their path. They suddenly hear the sounds of the DOGS BARKING outside. A MAN'S SHADOW is cast in the kitchen during the next flash of lightning. The trio stop in their tracks.

DIEGO
 (whispering)
 Let us go out the other way.

They duck down and creep through the living room towards the formal entrance to the house. Manuel unbolts the door and together they creep

OUTSIDE

Into the rain. They sneak around the house, spying the barn across the yard. Deftly they make their way to the barn door, looking back towards the kitchen door. No one there.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Manuel and Victor get in the truck, while Diego opens the barn door wider for an exit. He then joins them in the truck. Manuel fumbles all over the interior for the keys.

MANUEL

Where the hell are the keys?

A crash of thunder and lightning and then

IN THE BARN DOORWAY

The silhouetted figure of Eduardo Hideras, dangling keys from his outstretched hand. The lightning reveals his smirking face. The trio in the truck are mortified.

HIDERAS

You have something I want.

MANUEL

There is nothing here for you.

Hideras brandishes a gun, glimmering against the outside rain.

HIDERAS

Don't even try to stop me. You know what I can do.

Without warning, a shovel is raised behind Hideras' head, and comes down on his cranium with a solid WHACK! The other end of the shovel is held by a rain-drenched Lisa Gibson.

LISA

He shoulda known what a mother can do.

INT. GIBSON'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Manuel drives. Diego and Victor take turns looking back into the truck bed at the figure of Hideras, tied up with a lasso in the pouring rain.

MANUEL

Just let me take you to the train station. Diego and I have money.

VICTOR

No, Manuel. Please, keep driving. I must find my friend first.

DIEGO

In this weather? I hope you are right, amigo.

VICTOR

Me too.

They drive down a dark and stormy highway.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Okay slow down. We're close.

Through the flashes of lightning, the shape of Miguel's rock formation appears.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
There! Pull over!

The truck pulls over across the street, on the shoulder.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Stay here. Please don't follow.

Victor emerges from the truck and limps across the street, crutch in hand. He presses through the thickness of shrubs, and hikes onward, across the rocky terrain he once fled through. He finds himself at the foot of the granite plateau: Miguel's prison.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Miguel!

Nothing.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Miguel, come out! I need you!

Nothing.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Miguel, my friend, where are you?

Victor stands drenched in the rain, staring at the rocks, disappointment soaking his face. With frustration and anger, he raises his crutch and slams it to the ground at the foot of the formation.

Beyond the din of the plentiful raindrops, somewhere in the midst of the storm, the faint sound of a man's voice.

Shouting.

At first an indiscernible sound, it grows. It becomes audible as a voice, then a man's yell packed with emotion, and desire, to be free.

The sound becomes enormously loud as Victor, Manuel, and Diego all shutter their ears. Instinctively, Victor drops to the ground, just as the granite boulder cracks, then EXPLODES from a GREEN LIGHT within.

The rocky debris flies, and then falls, leaving a winged angel standing alone. At first encased within his cocooned wings, he unfolds them and stretches as though wakened from a refreshing slumber.

Victor rushes to the angel and they embrace fiercely.

Miguel looks at Victor squarely.

MIGUEL

I knew you'd come back.

Victor sighs in comfort at the sight of his heavenly friend.

VICTOR

He found me.

MIGUEL

And now you found me. So I guess it's my turn.

VICTOR

For what?

MIGUEL

To find somebody.

AT THE ROADSIDE

The truck drives off, leaving a bound Hideras on the shoulder of the road.

INSIDE THE TRUCK

Manuel drives, Diego and Miguel in front seat, Victor squeezed behind the seat.

DIEGO

So this is the friend you told us about?

Victor nods with a smile.

MIGUEL

I thank you both for helping Victor.

MANUEL

(Spanish)

Holy angels from on high...

MIGUEL

It is almost daybreak. Can you take us to the train station?

MANUEL

You got it.

EXT. PECOS COUNTY TRAIN STATION - DAWN

The truck pulls up to the station. A beautiful sunrise breaks through the dissipating rain clouds. The four passengers pile out of the truck and gather.

DIEGO

I trust you are in good hands now?

Victor smiles warmly.

MANUEL

So I guess this will be our little secret? The great escape from Alameda.

VICTOR

I couldn't have done it without you.

MANUEL

Well chico, I know where you have been, and what you've been through. Diego and I made it, and now it is your turn to find a better place.

DIEGO

And we had no angels.

MIGUEL

Actually...

They all look at Miguel, whose eyes brim with secret knowledge.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

The rodeo, when you were both nineteen. Do you remember? The Gibsons were there. That was the first time they saw you.

A FLASHBACK:

EXT. MESQUITE, TEXAS - A RODEO - NIGHT

Large crowds gather at this exciting venue. A YOUNG LISA and REX GIBSON watch the Bareback Bronc Riding event in the enclosure before them.

Nineteen year-old Diego comes bursting into the corral on a brilliant white pony. The animal kicks and bucks, but seems to intuitively twist in concert with the rider's efforts, sparing a fall.

Young Manuel cheers on from the rider's gate. The crowd rallies loudly at the impressive display of horse and rider. Lisa and Rex look at each other as if sharing the same thought.

LATER

The Gibsons cheer with the crowd as Diego accepts his 1st place trophy atop a square hay bale.

LATER

In the same corral, young Manuel rides the same magnificent horse in the Tie-Down Roping event. He skillfully lassos the running calf with ease.

LATER

Manuel receives his 1st place trophy atop a bale of hay, and acknowledges the enthusiastic cheers of the crowd. Rex and Lisa Gibson whistle and applaud from the corral fence.

BACK TO SCENE:

MANUEL

Yes, I remember. That's when we first met Ma and Pa.

DIEGO

Manuel and I both won that night. We were very lucky.

Miguel smiles at their recollection.

MIGUEL

With the same horse.

Diego and Manuel stare at Miguel, trying to fathom his meaning. Their eyes widen with amazement as they understand. Manuel quickly turns to Victor.

MANUEL

Victor, do whatever this man tells you to do. Do you understand? Trust him.

Victor studies all three men curiously, then nods.

VICTOR

Okay.

Diego and Manuel pat him on the shoulder.

MANUEL

Come visit us anytime.

DIEGO

Take care, chico.

VICTOR

Adios.

Manuel and Diego hop in the truck and drive off.

MIGUEL

This is where I leave you too. My assignment is complete.

VICTOR

You're not coming with me?

MIGUEL

No, Victor. You don't need me anymore. You will find your family at the other end.

Victor stares at the ground, then over at the train tracks, then up at the light blue sky.

VICTOR

If I do have a family, as you say, waiting... they can wait a while longer. I have family here too, and they need me.

Miguel raises an eyebrow with bemused pride.

MIGUEL

Then so be it.

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY SHOULDER - DAY

Hideras struggles to free himself. An Alameda County Sheriff car approaches from a distance.

IN THE SHERIFF CAR

Frank Benitez squints at the strange figure on the side of the road. He gawks in disbelief as he draws closer and pulls over to a stop. He rushes from the car to Hideras' aid.

BENITEZ

Ed!

HIDERAS

Goddammit! The boy is not alone anymore.

BENITEZ

You found him?

HIDERAS

Yes, and his traveling companion. Balaam will need to know about this.

Benitez unties Hideras's bonds and helps him into the car. They zoom off.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Carl Bebb walks into a seemingly empty office, goes to Rolodex, then picks up phone and dials.

While Sheriff is on the phone

HIDERAS

Enters the building quietly and listens from the reception area.

SHERIFF

Yessir, that's right. These boys apparently are taken from their families and wind up at our Boys Home down here. And then from there I don't know where they're going.

He pauses to listen.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Well, they're disappearing sure enough, right under our noses... Yes, my first deputy is overseer of that there orphanage, but I believe he's not telling me everything that's going on... yessir Governor, I'll really need some of your boys to come on down and help me sort this out... much obliged Governor... sure enough, g'bye.

Sheriff hangs up and sees Hideras standing at the door.

HIDERAS

What a saint you are, Carl. Almost an angel.

SHERIFF

Ed, you're just the man I want to talk to. I've got some questions for you about that there boys home.

HIDERAS

Is there something I should know?

SHERIFF

You have a whole crop of missing boys floating around this county, and I haven't heard a word from you about this. Are you keeping track of those kids?

Hideras fingers his gun.

HIDERAS

Yes Sheriff, missing persons are my specialty.

Hideras steps into the office. Sheriff sees the dried mud on his clothes and shoes.

SHERIFF

Where the hell have you been?

DEPUTY MCKENNA sneaks up behind Sheriff and knocks him over the head with a gun. Sheriff collapses.

HIDERAS

Where the hell have YOU been?

MCKENNA

I don't know, Ed. Everything's been just one big fuzzy blur the past week or so. I hope I don't have a fever or somethin'.

HIDERAS

Well help me get this cow into his pen.

They drag Sheriff and lock him in a jail cell.

HIDERAS (CONT'D)

After tonight Sheriff, you will no longer be in charge. I will be unstoppable.

EXT. RURAL TEXAS ROAD - DAY

Victor rides bareback on a magnificent white pony, crutch in hand.

MIGUEL (V.O.)

Hideras and others are in alliance with the forces of darkness. They provide a steady harvest of children as laborers, young recruits to be educated in their ways, and then sacrificed.

The uninhabited grasslands of the Texas countryside whiz by as the angelic horse and his rider speed down the muddy side roads.

MIGUEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It will not be easy, nino. In fact, it will be quite dangerous. He is a provincial demon with a desire to be worshipped. Quite powerful within the ranks of his kind. He has gone by many names through the years, and he seems to like this area the best. The Aztec called him "Tezcatlipoca", a deity that ultimately deceives, then destroys.

Victor holds the thick horse mane as the wind whips his own hair from his fearless face.

MIGUEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

No spirit being, neither demon nor angel, can spill human blood. He must take human form to do so, but remember the risks? He'd rather have human henchmen do it for him, in exchange for some promise he made.

VICTOR (V.O.)

Like what?

MIGUEL (V.O.)

Immortality and power.

A welcome silence as the picturesque hills in the distance catch the late morning rays of sun in their splendor.

MIGUEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Victor, Man already is an immortal
 being. You have years and years to
 acquire wisdom, to appreciate this
 life. There are no short cuts.
 And remember this if nothing else:
 power without love breeds
 corruption. Therein lies the
 deception of Balaam's promise.
 Only a fool would accept it.

THE SUN TRAVERSES THE SKY

MIGUEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 We'll go at nightfall.

EXT. TEXAS DIRT ROAD - TWILIGHT

Miguel and Victor stroll past spacious grasslands. Victor's
 limp is pronounced.

MIGUEL
 You sure you're up for this?

There's no doubt in Victor's mind.

VICTOR
 Heck yeah.

In the distance, the gold mine looms in the fading light.

MIGUEL
 Stay here while I go scout ahead.
 I'll be back very soon.

Victor stops.

VICTOR
 Okay.

Miguel strides down the road. Victor heaves a sigh and leans
 against his crutch. Crickets begin their evening CHIRPS.
 The countryside settles down for the night.

A rustling in the tall grass behind him goes unnoticed. The
 ensuing SNORT does not. Victor turns to see a buffalo emerge
 from the shrubbery and grass. Buffalo and boy stare at each
 other, both confounded at the sight of the other.

Victor raises his crutch as a weapon as he slowly backs away.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Nice buffalo.

MIGUEL (O.S.)
What's this?

Miguel steps between boy and beast.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
What have we here?

Miguel pets the buffalo with ease.

VICTOR
How do you know that's really a
buffalo?

The animal SNORTS a retort.

MIGUEL
He feels friendly. I think he
wants to help us.

Victor is not fully convinced.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
We'll call you... Santino.

Victor lowers his crutch, relieved. Miguel looks at him.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Ready?

Victor nods. Santino snorts.

EXT. GOLD MINE DRIVEWAY - TWILIGHT

Barracks Guard 1 stands vigil outside the barracks. A SQUEEKY WHEEL catches his attention. At the other end of the driveway, a BOY pulls a wheelbarrow with a BEAR CUB in it.

The guard intercepts this curious pair.

WHEELBARROW BOY
Excuse me sir, me and Cuddles are
lost. Can you help me?

BARRACKS GUARD 1
Of course, child. Let me take you
inside where it's safe and warm.

Barracks Guard 2 emerges from the barracks to witness this strange sight.

WHEELBARROW BOY
He's so heavy. Can you pull?

Barracks Guard 1 reaches for the handle as the boy MORPHS into Miguel. He quickly boxes the guard's ears, knocking him out. Barracks Guard 2 runs to his aid, blade weapon drawn.

He gives Miguel a decent fight. The bear MORPHS into Victor, who wields his crutch to the leg of the unsuspecting demon guard. The demon falls; Miguel turns his blade against him and slays him. Both fallen demons disappear in a POOF of RED SMOKE.

From the tree branches above, three owls MORPH into corporeal demons. They surround angel and boy and quickly have the upper hand. Demon swords are drawn and raised, closing in.

Miguel spreads his arms wide then slaps them together with power. The ensuing BOOM causes a shock wave, throwing the demons in the air.

The SONIC BOOM echoes throughout

THE GOLD MINE/TEMPLE BARRACKS AND SANCTUARY

THE DARK ROADS

THE ENTIRE TOWN

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS

Balaam snaps to attention at the sound with leering eyes.

INT. TEMPLE BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

The boys' shackles fall off. The metallic door pops open with a CLANK. Guards jump, confounded and ready for action.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - JAIL CELL - CONTINUOUS

The cell door pops open with a gentle CLICK. Sheriff Bebb looks around, perplexed, and rises to exit the cell. He looks in the darkness for keys on his desk. Finding them, he proceeds to

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

He boards the orphanage bus and starts the engine.

EXT. GOLD MINE DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Miguel snatches a dropped demon sword as they regather. He is grabbed from behind as Victor watches helplessly. The two armed demons close in again with swords raised.

A SNORT in the dimming light stops their track. THUNDERING HOOVES come too quickly for a reaction: Santino charges and rams the two demons, impaling them on Miguel's raised sword.

They disappear into RED SMOKE. Miguel scoops the sword over his head, piercing the demon who has him by the neck. POOF!

Miguel strokes the buffalo's head.

MIGUEL
Gracias 'tino.

Chico SNORTS in response. Miguel peers through the window. Corporeal demon guards surround the frightfully thin boys who shiver in loin cloths. He moves to the door.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
(to Victor)
Stand behind me.

He enters the barracks and unfolds his wings. The demons throw all manner of weaponry at Miguel. His wings wrap a protective shield around him. When the barrage stops, he unwraps his wings. Dozens of feathers turn to SHINY GREEN DARTS. He flaps the wings once, releasing the darts. They find their demon targets, who vanish in clouds of RED SMOKE.

Arnie shivers in the midst of the huddled boys.

ARNIE
Victor!

VICTOR
Arnie!

ARNIE
I knew you'd get help! Just in time. It's already started! They've got Chavez and others in the sanctuary for some bad-ass ceremony. Victor, we've got to save them!

EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK

The Alameda Boys Home bus creeps along. A dilapidated sign off the road reads "Dead Pine Road".

Sheriff Bebb peers at the words, looks around for any sign of life, then hauls the bus forward.

INT. TEMPLE BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Miguel wraps the frightened boys in bed sheets, then walks to the interior door. Still locked. He puts his hand on it.

MIGUEL

There is a great evil within.

ARNIE

(to Victor)

Who is that?

VICTOR

He's my friend, and he's going to get us all out of here.

MIGUEL

Name is Miguel.

The boys look at him with awe.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I want you boys to promise me, no matter what, you will not follow me in.

The frazzled boys nod.

ARNIE

Promise.

Miguel's hand GLOWS GREEN on the door. It pops open.

EXT. GOLD MINE DRIVEWAY GATE - CONTINUOUS

The bus has come to a stop at the gate. Sheriff steps off the bus and examines the chunky opened lock. He pulls it off the chain and swings the gate wide, then hops on the bus and rolls up the driveway. Santino lazily observes from the other end.

INT. TEMPLE BARRACKS - DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Miguel and Victor proceed into the dark, abandoned room. The golden double-doors at the far end barely conceal a great throng within, a SPOOKY CHANTING.

MIGUEL

A spirit requires the blood of a human to get power, to advance his cause. We are here to prevent this.

Victor swallows hard.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Your friends will live their final hour if we do not stop Hideras and his evil associates. You may be the only one who can stop them.

VICTOR

Me?

MIGUEL

Spirit to spirit, blood to blood. That is why Balaam will not perform the ritual himself. He needs flesh and blood to commit the deed.

Victor processes the thought, then summons confidence.

VICTOR

Okay.

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS

The room is a brilliant golden glow. Hideras, Benitez, and McKenna, cloaked in red robes, chant from a platform around an altar. Chavez lies on the altar in a loin cloth, staring blankly at the ceiling. Standing over him, Hideras stretches his arms in supplication. Next to him, Possessed Shawn holds a ceremonial dagger.

Behind him, within a dark recess, the FAINT GLOW of Balaam seated on a throne. Along the walls, transparent demons float. Standing in line on the pathway to the altar, a dozen frightened boys in loin cloths.

The golden doors open, allowing a snake to slither in, and a hawk to soar throughout the room. The hawk lands and transforms into Miguel in his full angelic glory. A collective GASP from the demons.

SANCTUARY GUARD 1

It's Miguel!

A diabolical laugh from Balaam breaks the ensuing silence. The floating demons' eyes GLOW RED.

Shawn throws the dagger with blinding speed at Miguel. He handily catches it, and throws it back with equal speed. Shawn catches it with ease.

As if on cue, the transparent demons soar to the boys, possessing each one. Their EYES GLOW RED as they turn to face the angel. In unison, they stampede down the path to attack him. Miguel pulls his wings back and sends a pulse of wind, blowing the boys back against the wall.

Shawn SHRIEKS in anger as he leaps off the altar platform, dagger raised. Miguel steps back, caught off guard.

The thin boy thrusts at the dodging angel, drawing blood in a quick slice to the leg. Shawn cackles with delight. Miguel traps the boy in a judo move. Enraged, Shawn's eyes burn even brighter as he summons strength, and shoves the angel off.

The serpent slithers down the path towards the deputies who watch the duel, faces uncloaked.

The possessed boys regather behind Shawn, hatred in their eyes.

The serpent wraps around McKenna's ankles and squeezes. He falls as the snake postures to bite Benitez, who freezes in fear.

Miguel inhales deeply, then BLOWS a GREEN MIST on the possessed boys. They all freeze, entranced by the breath.

Hideras yells with rage and jumps off the platform. He retrieves the dagger from Shawn's fist, and scrambles back to the altar. Once there, the serpent MORPHS into Victor, crutch in hand. Hideras raises the dagger, poised to slay Chavez.

Victor slams the robed deputy in the legs with the crutch. As he crumbles, Victor comes down hard on his head. He's out cold. Victor drags Chavez off the altar, slapping his face.

VICTOR

Chavez! Chav, it's me, Victor!

Chavez's glazed eyes fill with slow recognition.

CHAVEZ

Victor?

The two youths amble off the platform, just as a FIRE BALL soars from Balaam's dark recess. It passes right through Miguel.

MIGUEL

Really?

A bigger FIRE BALL crackles through the air at the angel. Same effect. Miguel rolls his eyes.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Come on Balaam. Let's do this right.

With a howling SHRIEK, the large demon emerges from his shadowy recess. His face is a contortion of rage. Miguel smiles with mischief.

INT. TEMPLE BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Bebb enters, overwhelmed at the sight of the ragged boys.

SHERIFF

Well I'll be damned!

JERALD

Is that you, Sheriff?

SHERIFF

It sure is, son! I just don't believe my eyes. Are you all okay?

ARNIE

Kinda hungry.

SHERIFF

Is this the lot of ya?

JERALD

No, there's a bunch more inside.

Sheriff follows his gesturing hand to the interior door.

SHERIFF

Well let's get the lot of ya on the bus. Now come on.

They amble

OUTSIDE

Where the sun dips below the horizon. Darkness falls. Several SNORTS in the blackness cause Sheriff to turn.

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS

Balaam floats across the heads of the frozen boys, and lands within feet of Miguel.

BALAAM

You will regret this challenge.

MIGUEL

It's about time you grow some balls.

Balaam's face contorts bizarrely. He GROWLS like a pack of wolves. As he growls, he CORPOREALIZES. Miguel grins from ear to ear. Balaam exhales in steaming puffs, his body rippling with muscles. He waves his hand at the altar. A brilliant crackling fire roars from its golden surface.

BALAAM

You recognize Hellfire. Only one thing will satisfy it. Not even you can put it out, oh magnificent Miguel. Only blood will quench it.

Miguel HORSE WHISTLES.

MIGUEL

Such amazing timing. Sundown. Know what that means?

Balaam grabs Miguel by the throat.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

The day is over. My fortieth.

Balaam's eyes register fear and comprehension, just as Miguel becomes a transparent spirit form.

BALAAM

Damn you angel, you tricked me!

The SOUND OF THUNDERING HOOVES. Angel and demon look to the door, where Benitez and McKenna attempt to sneak out. The golden doors burst open under the force of a herd of stampeding buffalo.

Santino leads the charge. McKenna and Benitez are flung backwards, clearing the way for the angry buffalo as they head straight for Balaam.

Balaam turns to clash with the rushing onslaught. He goes down, trampled by the powerful bison. Dozens of hooves crush the demon. Miguel turns to the altar platform.

MIGUEL

Victor!

Victor looks at the transparent angel, instantly understanding his summons. He grabs the dagger, and limps down the path. The buffalo herd part, clearing a path to the fallen Balaam.

Miguel's eyes urge him to do the obvious. Victor brandishes the dagger as he leans over the demon. His arm raises, it swoops down in an arc.

Balaam's strong hand intercepts the descending arm as his eyes pop open with bloodthirst and vengeance.

BALAAM

I'm not done yet!

His other hand clutches Victor's fragile throat, crushing the boy's windpipe.

On the platform, Hideras awakens. He sees Chavez, still foggy, mere steps away. He rises to his feet and grabs Chavez, dragging him towards the horrific flames.

Miguel thinks quickly, then acts. He GLOWS BRIGHT GREEN, and slides into Victor's body. In an instant, Victor's eyes GLOW GREEN.

VICTOR

Neither am I!

Supernatural strength fuels Victor's frail arm, and he completes the trajectory with the dagger into Balaam's massive chest. The demon shouts earsplitting decibals. The RED fades from his eyes as he becomes a RED CLOUD OF SMOKE.

RED VAPORS escape the demon-possessed boys in the room. They revive.

Arnie and Sheriff Bebb stand at the entrance, gawking at the bizarre sight.

HIDERAS

I... WILL HAVE... WHAT IS... MINE!

Hideras props the defenseless Chavez against the altar, readying for the final heave into the thirsty fire. Arnie makes a break for the platform, running at full speed.

Furious flames are inches from Chavez's face, but Arnie is an unstoppable force. He slams into Hideras, sending him into the fire. Chavez drops to the ground.

The fire BURNS TO THE CEILING, like an incendiary burst of fireworks. Then it snuffs out without a trace, taking Hideras with it.

Benitez and McKenna stir.

SHERIFF

Well, well. Here are my best men,
keeping the peace.

He brandishes two guns, pointed at each deputy. They raise their hands in surrender.

EXT. BOYS HOME DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The bus pulls in. Miss Anthony waits at the door with concern on her face. Sheriff and boys step off the bus. Miss Anthony rushes forward to greet the ragged youths, then looks questioningly at Sheriff Bebb.

MISS ANTHONY

What on earth?

SHERIFF

Don't ask. What are you doing up?

MISS ANTHONY

I don't sleep very well. Is it any
small wonder?

SHERIFF

Where's Brackman?

MISS ANTHONY

Sleeping like a baby.

Sheriff whips out a pair of handcuffs.

SHERIFF

Will you look after these young'uns
for a bit? I know they're hungry.

Sheriff marches into the building. Miss Anthony rounds up the emaciated teens.

MISS ANTHONY

Come on inside now. Let's fix up
some breakfast.

INT. BOYS HOME CAFETERIA - DAWN

It's a full house of boys, eating and talking with enthusiasm. Arnie and Chavez sit across each other.

CHAVEZ

Arnie...

Arnie looks up.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)

What kind of crazy stunt were you trying to pull back at the temple?

ARNIE

I--

CHAVEZ

Don't ever do something that stupid again, you got that?

They both smile with good humor. All faces turn to the front window as 3 State Trooper vehicles, a farm truck, and a limousine pull up.

OUTSIDE

Sheriff Bebb welcomes the arrivals. GOVERNOR REDMOND emerges from the limousine, pleasant and distinguished. Six Troopers emerge in uniform from their vehicles, while Lisa and Rex Gibson emerge from the truck.

SHERIFF

Governor Redmond!

The two shake hands heartily.

GOVERNOR REDMOND

Sheriff Carl Bebb, nice to see you again!

SHERIFF

Well Governor, I got quite a story to lay out for ya. You ain't heard nothing like it in your life, I'm telling ya. The good news is that we got the kids back, all safe and sound.

The Sheriff gestures to the window, with a multitude of young faces peering out at them.

GOVERNOR REDMOND

And I have some good news too. I got a call from these nice folks, Lisa and Rex Gibson. Seems they have a heart after these kids, and have made an offer to help out.

Arnie and Chavez step out from the orphanage door and listen.

SHERIFF

Is that right? I'd love to hear it.

REX

Well Sheriff, we live on a ranch up the road a ways, and there's lotsa fun to be had by a bunch of boys over at our place--

LISA

--and we'd love to have the boys, the whole lot of 'em, stay with us on weekends. If that's all right with you, that is.

Sheriff looks over and sees Arnie and Chavez light up at the idea.

SHERIFF

Why, I think that's splendid. Mighty nice of y'all too.

GOVERNOR REDMOND

Well the news gets even better. Been working with the FBI and got a list of names. Families missing their kids. Boys in fact. Quite a few of 'em.

Chavez radiates a huge smile.

CHAVEZ

Did you hear that Arnie? I'm going back home! I'm gonna be going home!

Arnie looks more dejected than happy.

ARNIE

That's great, Chav. Fantastic.

Lisa, who is eavesdropping, comes over and places her hand on Arnie's shoulder.

LISA
So you're Arnie?

ARNIE
Yes ma'am. Arnold Daniels.

LISA
Your friend Victor told us all
about you.

Her smile envelops him like a soft blanket.

LISA (CONT'D)
Well Arnie, how'd you like to be
Arnold Gibson?

He looks into her gentle face, stunned.

ARNIE
Huh?

LISA
That's right. Do you think you'd
like to live on a ranch? You'd see
your friends on weekends.

Her offer hits him like a winning lottery ticket. She wraps
her arms around him, his new Mom.

An ambulance pulls up the driveway as Miss Anthony wheels
frail Shawn on a rickety wheelchair. Chavez accompanies him
to the waiting med techs. As they load him onto a gurney,
Chavez comforts his thin pal.

CHAVEZ
Hey Shawn, you eat up now, you hear
me? As soon as I find Victor,
we'll come and visit you. Okay
buddy?

Shawn musters a weak nod of agreement.

SHAWN
Okay.

They load Shawn into the ambulance. Chavez mutters to
himself.

CHAVEZ
Now where is Victor?

EXT. RURAL TEXAS ROAD - MORNING

Victor and horse gallop past picturesque countryside.

MIGUEL (V.O.)

Victor, as you live your years, the road before you will be colored by the road that has passed beneath you. And you will remember the miracles you have seen. Let your memories teach you, your experiences shape you, and you will become an act of kindness. Continue to lead with your heart, and what a fine man you will be.

EXT. CORSICANA TRAIN STATION - AFTERNOON

Victor and horse canter in to this desolate stop. A quaint train station, very country. The horse kneels, Victor slides off with his crutch. He looks around at the serene vistas of northeastern Texas.

He turns to the horse, vulnerable and anxious. The horse simply whinnies.

Victor turns and heads up the dirt road to a shanty town. Still unsure, he turns back.

VICTOR

What should I... ?

The horse is gone. He continues on alone...

... over a hill

... past children playing

... an old woman looking into a ramshackle mailbox

The old woman looks at Victor. It is the Fortune Teller. She drops her mail, in shock at what she sees. Victor recognizes her too. Speechless, she simply points up the hill. He heads in that direction.

He hobbles onward. He sees another woman slowly walking towards a small house on the hill. He quickens his pace.

CLOSER

He hears her voice. She is humming a song, now singing it, now humming it. It is the lullaby. A spectacular shaft of sunlight illuminates her path.

CLOSER

Victor stops. Eyes moisten. He draws a breath.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Mama?

The woman stops. Her song pauses. Her scarfed head turns and their eyes meet. It's Elena. Time seems to stand still.

ELENA

Victor?

He drops his crutch and runs, at first with a limp, then normally. He is running like a boy should run. She races to meet him, and they embrace joyously. They spin round and round as they hug. Victor looks over her shoulder at his fallen crutch. She covers him with kisses.

In the distance, Romell and two children emerge from the house, running to join the reunion.

INT. TEXAS STATE CAPITOL BUILDING - DAY

S.O. "2013"

A camera crew stands outside the Governor's office, along with an elderly Romell and Elena Valdez, two young children, 10 and 12, and their smiling mother, 45. Lots of hustle and bustle in front of the door with the sign "Governor Victor Valdez".

Laughter and levity accompany the dapper man that emerges from the office. Victor, spry in his 50s, strides into the foyer where he quickly kisses his parents, wife, son, and daughter.

A TV JOURNALIST stops him for a sound bite. He acquiesces agreeably.

JOURNALIST

Now Governor Valdez, if I heard this correctly, today's event is something you hold near and dear to your heart. Could you please explain?

The Governor is all natural smiles.

VICTOR

Absolutely. If anyone has heard or read my story, they know that I was once in a boys home. Yes, I was an orphan for awhile.

His family members all radiate a hard-earned joy.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Today's Grand Opening is a wonderful gift for our community, for our orphans, part of our greater family, to have and to benefit from for as long as there is the need. I hope you can all attend.

JOURNALIST

Thank you Governor. We will be there!

VICTOR

Great! Come on kids!

He grabs the children by the hand as the entire joyous entourage leaves the foyer.

EXT. GOLD MINE/GIBSON DUDE RANCH - DAY

The driveway to the abandoned gold mine is now a model of landscaped beauty. The sign above the entry: "Gibson Dude Ranch". The Governor's limousine and accompanying cars park in the generous corral-style lot. Camera crews gather as Victor and his family queue up for picture-taking.

A bus arrives, sporting the words "Alameda Boys Home" on the side. Dozens of teen boys step off the bus, followed by Superintendent Arnie Gibson, grizzled but smiling at 56. His smile widens at the sight of Victor.

VICTOR

Arnie!

Arnie laughs all the way through their heartfelt embrace.

ARNIE

Looking good old man.

VICTOR

Ha ha! You're just in time. Ribbon cutting's in a few minutes.

A CAR HONKS. Everyone turns to see a shiny Sheriff car amble up the driveway. The driver cuts the engine and emerges with a passenger: a sheriff and deputy look at the gawking crowd behind intimidating sunglasses.

They remove their shades, and grin from ear to ear. Victor and Arnie grin back at Sheriff Chavez and Deputy Shawn.

ARNIE

Crowd control is here.

Victor addresses the large, enthusiastic crowd and news crews.

VICTOR

Okay, everybody gather 'round!

He leads the pack to the perimeter of a grand corral adjacent to a large club house. Within the corral, dozens of horses amble freely. Two elder latinos on horseback trot up to the activity: Diego and Manuel.

Arnie grabs hold the end of a big yellow ribbon, Romell the other end. Victor holds oversized scissors as he poses for the cameras.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You know, this was a real scary place when I was a kid. Nobody came here unless they were looking for trouble. And now, thanks to the generosity of Manuel, Diego, and Arnold Gibson, we have turned it into something else. A place where boys can learn to become men, decent men. Where they can interact with families, they can understand and experience the joys and dynamics, the rhythms of the basic social unit most of us take for granted.

The breeze blows gently over the picturesque grounds. Cameras CLICK. Cell phones capture video of Victor's speech.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Boys need contact and exposure to this social unit, the family. They deserve to experience the sense of belonging and being appreciated, being important.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

This is why we are here today, to launch a new chapter, a fresh beginning and a comforting promise to our young men, the fathers of tomorrow, the boys of Alameda.

APPLAUSE all around.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

We are grateful for this opportunity, this partnership between Alameda County and Gibson Ranch, in cooperation with our ever diligent Sheriff Chavez Sepulveda and Deputy Sheriff Shawn Torres, to establish a place for our boys to develop fun, new skills, to have a home away from home on weekends, and to give the community at large the pleasure of creating one big happy family right here, in our own backyard, in the great State of Texas! Welcome everybody to Gibson Dude Ranch!

He cuts the ribbon to the CHEERS of the crowd.

The crowds disperse throughout the dude ranch. Kids pet the pigs, horses, dogs. Refreshments in the clubhouse. News crews converge on Chavez, Shawn, and Arnie.

Victor quietly leans against the corral, watching the fun, taking it all in. From across the enclosure, a white horse breaks away from the herd and trots a straight line to Victor, stopping a few feet away.

They look at each other curiously. The horse draws nearer, and nuzzles Victor briefly.

The horse retreats a few steps, still staring at the human. Victor's look melts into one of familiarity and comfort. The horse whinnies, turns, and gallops back to the herd.

Victor's children run up to their pensive father, pulling on his arms.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Okay kids, let's go have some fun!

He joins the throngs of Dude ranchers, under the sunny blue sky.

(CONT'D)