

"A PLACE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH"

by

William Arthur Barnhill

Adapted from the novel

A PLACE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

By

William Arthur Barnhill

WGA WEST #1064832

William Barnhill
430 Printz Road
Arroyo Grande, CA 93420
(805) 440-3763
Mplanet@wgn.net

EXT. MICHOACAN - MEXICO 1522 AD

Scorching hot, late afternoon sun -- a giant pyramid blazes gold in the light high on a hill. It commands an incredible view of volcanic mountains and an enormous lake.

Several hundred, fully armored, Spanish conquistadors are on guard at its base. A cavalry prepares to leave heading out to patrol the surrounding countryside.

Their commander gives a signal -- dust rises up from the hooves of the horses -- one by one they file onto a narrow dirt trail.

SUPER:

"The Spanish armies, after conquering the mighty Aztec empire set their sights on western Mexico and the proud but little known Tarascan kingdom. Their King, Tangaxoan II, realizing that the invaders were a superior power, spared his people from bloodshed by surrendering and martyring himself at the hands of the Spaniards."

EXT. TOP OF THE PYRIMID - CONTINUOUS

Two naked Indians -- one fat -- one old, tall and lean -- seen from behind kneel before a Spanish soldier.

Their hands are bound and bleeding -- the old Indian is proud but defeated -- fat Indian is confused.

The commander nods -- a Toledo sword SINGS out of its scabbard -- the blade rushes down passing surgically through the neck of the old Indian.

The soldier side steps -- adeptly brings the sword across and cleanly through the neck of the fat Indian -- sadly surprised.

Bouncing heads roll down the steps of the pyramid landing at the feet of a large group of natives. LOUD GASP -- they pull back -- men MOAN and women CRY.

NATIVE MAN

(Tarascan)

By the Gods of Tingambato they have killed our great lord and his holy shaman, the one who does not speak.

Two headless bodies are thrown down the steps -- commander turns and rides away -- smugly confident.

High up on the pyramid -- POP -- ghost of old Indian appears -
- POP -- ghost of fat Indian appears. They are unseen by those gathered.

The old ghost is TANGAXOAN II -- tall, stately looking -- piercing eyes. Adorned in fine cloth, a parrot feather cape and a parrot feathered brim around his head.

Fat ghost is MOTAS -- perky, squat, slightly infantile -- wearing only a leather loincloth. Motas grabs at his neck -- slowly opens his eyes -- looks around.

TANGAXOAN II

It's time, the time that I saw in
my dreams, the time that the old
ones had foretold.

Motas signs with generous movements of his hands.

TANGAXOAN II

You're right Motas my friend,
strange days indeed. Why the
counsel informed me, just the other
day that people have seen the old
ones back from the grave...dead and
wondering about. How disturbing.

Motas signs quickly.

TANGAXOAN II

What, yes of course I know I'm
dead. Do you think me a fool?

Motas waves his finger in the air, places the finger tip below his chin and curtsies.

TANGAXOAN II

Apology accepted, now, bring me the
grand, golden scepter of Juantinapa
at once. I must expel these vermin
from our land.

Motas shakes his head, signs and points to the Spanish soldiers.

TANGAXOAN II

Yes, yes you're right, now I
remember. The priests were bringing
it from the great temple a distance
away and couldn't make it in time.

(MORE)

TANGAXOAN II (CONT'D)

That is why we could not defend ourselves. That is why we are...well...our heads are down there.

Motas sadly cocks his head to one side then suddenly smiles -- signs feverishly.

TANGAXOAN II

What's that you say? Our people still have it and they were able to conceal it from the white men? That is good news. How brave my people are.

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE PYRIMID - CONTINUOUS

In the crowd below a native priest is concealing the scepter. Seeing what has happened to the king and Motas he fears he will be executed if the scepter is found on him.

He hands off the scepter behind his back to the next priest in line. That priest doesn't want it either. He hands it off to the next native in line.

The scepter makes it way through the crowd until it reaches the last person. The last person doesn't want it either -- tosses it behind the crowd.

The scepter arcs through the air -- PLOP -- it lands inside a wooden mold being used by the natives to make adobe brick -- it sinks into the wet goo and is lost.

EXT. TOP OF THE PYRIMID - CONTINUOUS

King sits down on a big stone -- looks to the west across the lake -- sun is hanging low.

TANGAXOAN II

Yes, the mighty, golden scepter of Jauntinapa. When wielded in the right hands it can control the elements. The only power left to me now are the circles of zephyr, the magic rings that control the wind.

The king points down at the rings on the hands of his headless body. Motas signs and points to the horizon.

TANGAXOAN II

Will I be traveling today? Yes
Motas I believe that I will be.

Motas signs and points to himself.

TANGAXOAN II

No my friend, I alone will be
traveling.

(beat)

What's that? Yes, oh yes, a great
distance, one that you can not
follow, at least not yet. I go to
my ancestors, to the tomb of my
fathers in the north.

(beat)

It is my time, my time to join
them. As it was my father's time
and his father's before him. My
time on this earth is done for now.

Tangaxoan rises -- walks to the steps at the edge of the
pyramid. Motas pulls a toy made of a stick, string and ball
from his loincloth -- plays with the toy trying to get the
ball on the stick.

TANGAXOAN II

I'll be taking my leave of you now
Motas...Motas...MOTAS!

Fumbles the toy.

TANGAXOAN II

I said, I'll be taking my leave of
you now.

Motas signs -- points down at the natives.

TANGAXOAN II

What will become of our people?
Why they are strong, if they are
nothing else they are resilient.
They might have to bend a bit under
the hands of the white men, but
like the reeds on the lake during
the months of the strong winds I
can assure you they will not break!
I will see to that!

Motas waves his hands and holds them palm up.

TANGAXOAN II

How? I'll tell you how. When my
soul leaves this plane and rides
the high Yacata over the mountains
I will see everything. If I see
that our people are being ill
treated, why, I'll come back and
walk around bringing with me the
wrath of the fire God Curicaueri.

The king mutters an ancient chant -- slaps his hands together hard.

Sparks fly -- for a brief second the king's clothing transforms to fine, white cloth trimmed with gold and silver.

THUNDER RUMBLES in the distance -- the wind begins to blow. The soldiers cough from the dust thrown into the air by the wind. Motas signs one last time.

TANGAXOAN II

OK then very well, come Motas walk
with me one last time before I go
to meet my ancestors and lay down
in the tomb of boundless treasures.

Silhouettes before the setting sun, they walk together down the pyramid toward the lake. Motas scratches his buttocks and plays with the toy -- they walk away.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MICHOACAN - MEXICO PRESENT DAY - INSIDE A CAVE

Complete and total blackness -- SOUNDS OF HAMMERING AND ROCKS BEING MOVED. Suddenly a hole opens up -- an oil-soaked, rag torch cuts the darkness illuminating the course, hard, sweating face of a Mexican man.

Cautiously he enters the hole holding the torch before him. The torch fills the chamber with yellow light exposing a pre-columbian treasure beyond the man's wildest dreams.

He gasps -- eyes wide -- slowly takes in the incredible sight. The man quickly recovers -- removes a sack from his belt -- begins filling it with ceramic figures, pots, gold and silver masks.

In one corner of the chamber laying prone upon a high slab of granite are well-prepared, mummified human remains thick with the dust of the ages.

A strange breeze raises up from the floor of the chamber, rushes over the mummy creating a cloud that fills the chamber and blows out the torch. Once again in complete and total darkness -- COUGHING.

FADE TO:

EXT. MICHOACAN - EL RANCHO LA FALICIDAD - FOLLOWING MORNING

An impoverished ranch community of adobe homes situated beside a large muddy reservoir. Muffled GRINDING is coming out of a smaller adobe structure adjacent to one of the homes

The grinding stops. JUANITA, a strikingly handsome, dark-skinned, Indian woman in her thirties looks out the doorway of the small building. She is dressed in traditional clothing.

EXT. THE RANCH - MAIN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A thick, stockade-like, wooden door of the middle bedroom opens slowly -- hinges CREAK loudly.

PALOMA, the seven-year-old daughter of Juanita looks out rubbing one eye with her fist.

PALOMA

Teeko, Teeko donde estas, Teeko,
where are you Teeko?

Paloma disappears from the doorway -- returns with a pair of sandals.

PALOMA (CONT'D)

Teeko, what am I going to do with
you?

Runs to a set of faded, white chairs around a table on the patio -- sits down and puts on her sandals -- crosses herself toward a picture of Christ and a statue of the Virgin Mary.

She runs across a brown yard. Just outside the doorway of the small utility shed is a dog.

PALOMA (CONT'D)

Teeko, there you are. I've been
looking all over for you.

She bear hugs the dog's neck -- a large wad of corn masa flies out of the doorway of the shed -- the dog snatches it up.

JUANITA

Let the dog eat daughter. Let him eat.

PALOMA

Teeko, Teeko mio!

Juanita's hands are full of masa paste -- smiles as she watches her daughter play. Juanita looks out across the ranch -- smile fades -- something's terribly wrong.

Wipes her hands -- dips a copper ladle into a large steaming caldron. She pours hot, brown steaming liquid into an old blue mug -- hands it to Paloma with several hot tortillas.

JUANITA

Here Mija, here's your breakfast. Drink the champurrado slowly. It's very, very hot.

PALOMA

Here you go Teeko mio.

Tosses a small piece of tortilla to the dog.

JUANITA

Don't feed the dog your breakfast.

PALOMA

Si mama.

Teeko begins to licks the girl's face.

JUANITA

Don't let the dog lick your face either.

PALOMA

I want to go for a walk with Teeko.

JUANITA

Ok, Paloma but don't go far and stay away from the water's edge. Do you hear?

PALOMA

Si mama, si.

JUANITA

And don't go near the ant mounds.

PALOMA

Si mama, si.

Paloma opens a rickety gate -- the dog follows. Together they walk across a stretch of brown grass between the ranch and a cactus wall surrounding the reservoir.

Up and down the grass corridor cows and goats are chewing the withered grass. Juanita watches her daughter walk away. A young boy several years older than the girl passes by, leading a steer.

The boy, FRANCISCO (aka PANCHO) wears a T-shirt full of holes. His trousers are gathered into wrinkles over his skinny hips. His pants are held up by a length of braided hemp.

His medium-length hair is disheveled sticking straight up in places. Francisco's skin is as dark as coffee -- he is barefoot. Juanita studies the boy for a moment -- bites her trembling lower lip.

EXT. FLASHBACK - A FIELD ON THE FAR EDGE OF THE RANCH - DAY

A younger Juanita is on her back in a secluded field. Her skirt is shoved up around her waist -- her blouse is ripped open.

On top of her is a man, his pants lowered to his knees. His buttocks pumps in a quick rhythmic motion.

She tries to push him away -- he strikes her face -- she SCREAMS.

EXT. THE RANCH - PRESENT DAY - MORNING

FRANCISCO
Buenos Dias Paloma.

PALOMA
Good morning Francisco.

FRANCISCO
How is Teeko this morning?

Dog BARKS and GROWLS. Francisco waves a willow stick at the dog.

PALOMA
Don't tease him or he'll bite you.

FRANCISCO
Where are you going?

PALOMA
Over to the ant hills to play.

Paloma does not look back -- walks quickly away with the dog at her side.

FRANCISCO
Hey, wait.

PALOMA
(over her shoulder)
Wait for what?

FRANCISCO
Perhaps I could walk with you.

PALOMA
But you have your chores. You must watch that cow for your uncle.

FRANCISCO
(guffaws)
This is no cow. This is a ferocious bull. Un toro salvaje! I watch it to make sure that it does not hurt anyone.

The steer's eyes flare wide -- it belches -- Paloma giggles.

FRANCISCO
What are you laughing at? Every word is true. Wait up!

In the distance a group of men are making their way on a dirt road to surrounding fields.

EXT. THE RANCH - ON THE DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Paloma's father, MIGUEL, and other men walk in silence. Miguel is a lean, dark Mexican man in his mid-thirties.

They head toward a stretch of rusting barbed wire fence suspended from gray weathered posts.

They stop at the fence. Miguel removes his straw hat -- wipes his brow with a handkerchief.

MIGUEL
We need more water out to this side.

1ST RANCHER

We know but that means another trench from the reservoir and you know what he said about that.

MIGUEL

So, we have a right to do what's best for the ranch. He can't deny us that.

2ND RANCHER

He can deny us access to go through his land and he has.

MIGUEL

But we've always been given right-of-way to trench for irrigation for all of us, all of our families.

1ST RANCHER

He's changed all that.

MIGUEL

(picks up a dirt clod)
This has been my family's home and every family here for many generations. It's not fair.

1ST RANCHER

Fair or not, that's the way it is.

MIGUEL

(crumbles the dirt clod in his hand)
I know what my grandfather would think about all this.
(nods toward a high spot of land)
He planted the first crops right over there. There were no boundaries, no restricted access. He use to tell me that the earth and the sky showed him what to do. Told him when to rise, when to go to bed, when to plant and when to harvest. One would shout and one would whisper, he'd say, between the two, we all live in this place...a place between heaven and earth.

EXT. THE RANCH - BY THE ANT MOUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Paloma and Francisco reach the end of the cactus barrier stopping beside conical mounds of earth. Large red, fire ants scurry up and down each mound.

Francisco ties the steer to a nearby shrub. Paloma begins to throw twigs and stones at the mounds. The ants attack the twigs and stones with ferociousness.

FRANCISCO

Be careful.

PALOMA

Just take care of your cow.

Francisco lies down by a cactus -- chews on a piece of grass. Paloma joins him -- they look up at the passing clouds -- she points.

PALOMA

That one.

FRANCISCO

Que?

PALOMA

The cloud, it looks like my Tia Lupe. Look. Don't you see? The big nose.

LAUGHTER -- Francisco points.

FRANCISCO

That one looks like my uncle's sister Rosa. See the big behind, fat head, and big ears?
(more laughter)

The dog's ears suddenly snap to attention -- its slow, GUTTURAL GROWL quickly changes to a loud, SNAPPING BARK. In the distance a large dust devil springs from the dry earth.

The spinning vortex slowly transforms into the figure of a man -- he walks toward the children in a painfully slow manner. His dark brown, reddish face sits beneath a wide brim made of parrot feathers.

Thick, silvery white hair protrudes through the center of the feathery brim. The incredibly old-looking man is firm though slightly bent. He brushes dust from his arms and coughs.

On his shoulders is a poncho made of gray, woven tulle reeds. Through its open sides below his armpits a slim, bumpy rib cage is exposed.

Covering his lower stomach and private areas is a colorful loincloth made from fine threads. He reaches the children -- stares off in the direction of the ranch.

Paloma HICCUPS -- the old man slowly turns as if floating on a cloud -- a wall of dust blows between the children and the man. He reappears looking directly at them.

The old man's eyes appear as two chunks of obsidian: shiny, glassy and black. A dust devil passes -- the old man vanishes. The steer BELLOWS over the noise of the wind -- the cloud of dust passes -- the old man is gone.

FRANCISCO

What...Who was that?

PALOMA

I don't know. I've never seen him before.

FRANCISCO

Did you see his eyes?

PALOMA

I thought, well, I thought I saw something black and empty...I'm not sure.

FRANCISCO

Look!

Francisco and Paloma run to the steer. The steer is laying on one side -- thousands of ants cover its face -- Francisco crosses himself -- the steer is dead.

FRANCISCO

Dio's mio.

PALOMA

What happened? What Happened?

FRANCISCO

My tio will kill me. He's gona kill me.

PALOMA

Oh, Francisco.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - THAT AFTERNOON.

Francisco cowers before his uncle CARLOS GARCIA (the man from the cave). Carlos is stocky with a thick wide mustache -- his hair slicked back with grease.

CARLOS

You worthless son of a whore. I told you never to leave the animals out of your sight. Now, look what you've done.

FRANCISCO

But uncle it, it wasn't my fault their was this man and_

CARLOS

Don't tell your lies again. Do you think I'm stupid?

The uncle's large meaty hand crashes down across Francisco's face. Francisco falls and covers his face -- the uncle kicks him repeatedly.

CARLOS

Hijo de punta madre!

FRANCISCO

Stop uncle please stop or I'll tell someone.

CARLOS

No one cares if I beat you boy.

FRANCISCO

They would care about the old things.

CARLOS

The what?

FRANCISCO

The old things that you found. I saw them in boxes, the boxes you've been bringing from the old volcano.

Picks him up by his shirt.

CARLOS

Listen good, you keep your mouth shut! You hear? You tell anyone, I mean anyone and you won't have to worry about getting another beating.

He throws Francisco to the dirt and walks away.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Francisco is balled-up laying in the spot where he was beaten. One eye is swollen shut. He tries to stand and falls. Finally he stands -- holds his ribs -- spits out blood and a tooth.

A crescent moon is sinking behind a volcanic peak. Coyotes HOWL in the distance. He stumbles his way to the reservoir -- washes the blood from his face and mouth.

FRANCISCO

If my mother and father were still
alive everything would be OK.

Picks up a rock and throws it at his reflection in the water.

FRANCISCO

Why God, why? Why are you punishing
me? Or maybe it is one, no, all of
the saints.

INT. UNCLES HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT.

Francisco enters the doorway of a small shed on the corner of his uncle's property. ANIMAL NOISES are coming from inside.

He staggers toward a pile of hay covered with an old moving van quilt -- lies down -- covers himself with an old pancho. A nightingale is SINGING -- he falls asleep.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S DREAM - CONTINUOUS.

Francisco walks across a landscape abstractly resembling the ranch -- all is monotone.

The faces of the people are twisted, long and mute. A blue sun is setting. He looks up the road -- sees his uncle coming toward him.

FRANCISCO

Help, help me please.

Pleads with the faceless figures in the doorways of the houses. His uncle lumbers closer. Francisco runs to the house of Paloma -- pounds on the thick wooden door of her room.

The uncle is coming fast from across the garden. Teeko growls -- charges the uncle. The dog is beaten down by his uncle.

FRANCISCO

Paloma, Paloma, let me in, please
let me in!

His uncle is almost upon him -- Paloma's door slowly opens. An ethereal light inside casts a glow on simple furnishings. Paloma stands in the shadows of one corner.

FRANCISCO

Paloma! Help me! Paloma...Paloma!

Paloma floats toward him -- her figure only a silhouette. Closer, closer -- suddenly she is before him.

Her body, face, mouth, nose, ears and eyes are covered with stinging, biting, crawling ants. Flesh from the girl's face, neck and arms begins to fall away.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. FRANCISCO'S DREAM - CONT'D.

Francisco is standing on the very top of a giant pyramid in what appears to be pre-Columbian times. Far below are native people dressed in colorful native costumes.

Francisco suddenly notices that he is cleaned up and wearing a suede loin cloth with beaded belt, a wide flat gold studded collar and a headdress filled with exotic feathers.

On the wrist of both arms are gold bracelets. There is someone behind him -- he turns quickly -- seated upon a throne made of stone is Tangaxoan.

He is dressed in fine cloths befitting a King. Tangaxoan motions to Francisco to sit beside him. Francisco reluctantly complies.

FRANCISCO

Where am I...and...who are you? He studies the boy for a moment.

TANGAXOAN II

You are on the great pyramid of Zinzutzan in the heart of the Tarascan empire. As for my self, I am, I was King of these people. I am Tangaxoan the second.

FRANCISCO

They look very busy down there. What are they doing?

TANGAXOAN II

They prepare for the festival of
Boba Mon Chaga.

FRANCISCO

What kind of festival is that?

TANGAXOAN II

One that renews our lands for next
years crops, drives out the chaga,
the stagnated forces of the earth
and brings back the boba.

FRANCISCO

The boba?

TANGAXOAN II

Renewed energy, the life force that
makes all things grow and keeps
everything and everyone in balance.

FRANCISCO

This place...is it...is it real?

TANGAXOAN II

Yes, but not like this I'm afraid.
You see it now as it was in my
time.

FRANCISCO

Are you dead? I mean you, you are a
ghost, aren't you?

TANGAXOAN II

Yes, no, there's more to it than
that. One day you will find out...
hopefully not too soon.

(beat)

I was...I am the father of your
father's, father and so on. I like
to think of myself as the keeper of
the boba of our family.

FRANCISCO

You are my Grandpa?

TANGAXOAN II

No, well yes, I mean I guess you
could say that.

FRANCISCO

But Grandpa, you killed the animal
by the ant mounds.

(MORE)

FRANCISCO (CONT'D)

You got me in trouble with my
uncle. You got me beaten.

The old man raises an open hand.

TANGAXOAN II

That was unfortunate mi nieto, but
you seamed...too resigned, resigned
to a, dare I say it, fate.

FRANCISCO

The priest at the church told me
that fate is a good thing. My uncle
told me it is my fate to help him
on the ranch and it's my fate to
work hard.

TANGAXOAN II

Oh, I'm sure he did but sometimes
your destiny needs a little push or
a shove to get out the chaga and
bring in the boba. Sometimes things
get really, really stuck and the
only way to get beyond a locked
door is to burn it down.

FRANCISCO

Grandpa, what is destiny?

TANGAXOAN II

Destiny grandson, is a story yet to
be told. It's your story, the story
of your life. It is the rising and
setting of every sun that you will
be fortunate to see. It is the
coming of the full moon. It is the
summer rain on your face and the
sting of the winter chill upon your
feet. It can be the worst thing you
can ever imagine or the most
beautiful you can ever hope to
realize.

Destiny is a place and a companion that you must never fear,
yet always respect.

FRANCISCO

I still don't understand, must I
live this...destiny?

TANGAXOAN II

Destiny is only a destination as
there are many roads that lead to
many different places.

(MORE)

TANGAXOAN II (CONT'D)

In other words you choose the sun rises that you see and who you see them with. That's the beauty of it all. The choice belongs to you and no one else. It seems you've already made a choice. You know what you want to do. Now go and do it.

FRANCISCO

But Grandpa, will I see you again?

The old man pats Francisco on his head -- turns -- speaks to an unseen person.

TANGAXOAN II

I wouldn't be surprised.

(to Motas O.S.)

What? OK, already, I'm coming Motas. Patients my friend, we have all eternity.

INT. THE SHED - NEXT MORNING BEFORE DAWN.

Francisco awakes in the darkness -- rubs his head. Two cats are fighting in the garden just outside. He reaches beneath a bail of hay -- removes an opened letter with an address on it.

Francisco gathers up his few belongings -- puts on an old wool poncho. He slides the letter into his pocket and walks up the dirt road away from the ranch.

FRANCISCO

Goodbye Paloma.

TANGAXOAN II (CONT'D) EXT. VIA HEMENEZ - NOON THAT DAY.

Francisco reaches the outskirts of a small town. The dirt road becomes a crooked, rolling carpet of concrete-encased cobblestones. Francisco stands on the main street -- small shops, tables and carts run in both directions.

He pulls out a large bronze coin -- approaches one of the vendors -- exchanges the coin for a half of a mango and a small cup of milk. He eats quickly, nervously looking in both directions.

Suddenly his uncle appears coming at a fast pace up the sidewalk -- looking in every shop, door and alleyway. He sets down the cup -- drops the rest of the mango on the ground.

Francisco starts up the sidewalk away from his uncle. He ducks in to an alley but is chased out by an old woman with a broom -- goes into a store but is confronted by people from the ranch.

RANCH PERSON
Francisco? What are you doing here
alone?

He runs from the store -- his uncle is getting very close but still has not seen him. Frantic he sees an old, green mail van parked in the street near the post office.

He runs to the van and checks the door -- it's open -- he crawls in -- buries himself beneath the bags of letters -- footsteps stop beside the van.

RANCH PERSON (O.S.)
Buenos dias Señor Garcia.

CARLOS (O.S.)
Have you seen a small boy with
brown pants and white shirt
wondering about?

RANCH PERSON (O.S.)
You mean Francisco?

CARLOS (O.S.)
You saw him?

RANCH PERSON (O.S.)
Only a moment ago.

CARLOS (O.S.)
Which way did he go?

RANCH PERSON (O.S.)
I'm not sure. Why he ran out of the
shop like the devil himself was
chasing him.

The van rocks from side to side -- the van door opens with a loud CLICK. Francisco peeks out from beneath the tarp. A mailman, who is now sitting in the driver's seat, sees him and is startled.

They stare at each other not speaking. The mailman can clearly see the cuts and bruises on Francisco's face. At that moment the door on the passenger's side opens quickly.

CARLOS
You seen a small boy, a ranch boy?
Kind of dirty with an old poncho.
(MORE)

CARLOS (CONT'D)

(beat)

Well, have you?

MAILMAN

Señor, I see a lot of people on my rounds and a lot of children.

CARLOS

So you're saying you didn't see him.

MAILMAN

I saw no one in the streets that matches that description.

CARLOS

Well if you do let the postmaster know right away. He's a friend of mine. Here.

He hands the mailman a letter.

MAILMAN

What's this?

CARLOS

What in the hell does it look like? Make sure it gets on the next truck. It's very important that it gets to where it's going and soon. You guys were suppose to have picked up the mail at the ranch over a week ago.

MAILMAN

I'm sorry for the delay. You know how the road can be. I will do my best to get it on its way quickly.

CARLOS

Sorry my ass, just make sure or I'll be having a talk with your boss.

Carlos leaves -- the mailman reaches over and closes the passenger door.

MAILMAN

A very nice fellow. OK, he's gone. Now you tell me what you're doing under there?

Francisco cautiously comes out from under the bags in the rear of the van.

FRANCISCO

Sorry Señor, but he would have beaten me again.

MAILMAN

Did he do that to your face?

(no answer)

I see, well he's out of sight for now. I think it's safe for you to go.

FRANCISCO

Señor, por favor, might I get a ride with you to the next town. Only to the next town. I would not ask but I have to get to my cousin's house and_

MAILMAN

Sorry son we're not allowed take passengers.

FRANCISCO

Please, I have no where else to go but there. I can't go back.

MAILMAN

What's your name?

FRANCISCO

Francisco. My friends call me Pancho.

MAILMAN

Alright...Pancho, I hope I don't regret this but, just to the next town, Zacapu, OK?

FRANCISCO

Thank you Señor, thank you very much.

Mailman waves away the boy's thank you with his hand.

EXT. VIA HEMENEZ - CONTINUOUS

They take the road out of Via Hemenez. Francisco sits in the front seat. The road is paved but in bad shape.

The outskirts of town are arid, spotted with cactus. They pass a burrow loaded with bags of grain -- its master drives it forward with the CRACK of a whip.

The mailman drives by waving, smiling and blowing his horn. They pass a huge cinder cone of an extinct volcano.

MAILMAN

El Poso del Diablo, The Devil's Hole. There's a deep lake at its center filled with water. There's a rumor that people have swam there and disappeared without a trace. Pulled under by a mysterious force, they say.

FRANCISCO

Have you ever swam in it?

MAILMAN

I'm here talking to you, aren't I? I've only been to the rim and looked down inside.

FRANCISCO

Señor, why did you want to look inside?

MAILMAN

Curiosity I guess. Legend has it that there's a fabulous treasure hidden somewhere within.

FRANCISCO

A treasure?

MAILMAN

Yes, a treasure-filled tomb left by the ancient ones.

(beat)

So, where do your cousin live?

FRANCISCO

In Patzcuaro Señor, the town by the lake.

MAILMAN

I know where it is. Patzcuaro's several hours drive from here. That's a long ways if you're walking. I have a friend that might be able to help you out.

(Francisco yawns)

You look tired boy. Climb in the back and close your eyes.

INT. ZACAPU - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Francisco awakes to the CRIES of street venders and the NOISE of buses and motorcars.

MAILMAN

A very sleepy young man you are,
que no?

The van stops at an intersection. A street vender comes to the window -- they wait for the light to change.

STREET VENDER

Popitas, refresco al tempo,
papayas!

The mailman waves off the vender -- they pull away. A large yellow bus pulls in front of them spewing black plumes of smoke each time the bus driver shifts. Francisco coughs and holds his nose.

MAILMAN

Not use to city life, eh boy?

FRANCISCO

The air Señor, it is heavy with
smoke.

MAILMAN

This is nothing I tell you, nada.
In, DF, the capital, the air is so
thick you can hang meat out and it
will cure overnight.

They follow the smoking bus for several more blocks and turn into a gated yard behind the post office building.

At the rear of the building the mailman backs up to a small dock. They get out of the van -- walk up the steps to the top of the dock.

MAILMAN

This way.

The mailman stamps his time card in a box on the wall -- sees someone -- sloppily waves.

MAILMAN

Jose, wait, I want you to meet
someone.

The supervisor walks out from his office onto the dock. The mailman quickly lowers his hand and approaches JOSE.

MAILMAN

(whispers)

Jose, por favor, my young friend here needs a ride over the mountain to Patzcuaro.

JOSE

You know the rules as well as I do.

MAILMAN

Just this once, por favor?

JOSE

OK, son wait in the street. I'll pick you up when I leave. Give me about 15 minutes.

Francisco bids farewell to the mailman.

MAILMAN

You be careful now, mijo and have a safe journey.

FRANCISCO

Gracias señor, gracias.

EXT: STREET OUTSIDE POST OFFICE - LATER

Francisco stands by the curb in front of the post office -- a pair of large, meaty hands crabs him from behind.

The uncle spins him around in one movement. Francisco stares up at the uncle's face beneath a large, cowboy hat.

CARLOS

I'm gonna fix you good boy. Fix you good so you'll never run away again.

Carlos's fingers dig into Francisco's shoulders. Francisco kicks Carlos in the shins and runs. The uncle falls back on his behind. Francisco runs toward an alleyway.

CARLOS

You brat, when I get my hands on you!

Francisco disappears into the alleyway -- the uncle follows. Tangaxoan suddenly appears in the alley in front of the uncle.

CARLOS

Who the hell_

Tangaxoan blows into the palm of his hand -- dirt and paper from the alleyway are blown up into the face of Carlos. He stops momentarily to cough and spit. Tangaxoan disappears.

Francisco emerges from a side street -- the mail van is waiting with its passenger door open. Francisco stops running a few feet from the van -- looks behind -- hops in -- shuts the door.

JOSE

I thought you had changed your mind about the ride.

(beat)

Kid, you OK?

Francisco looks in the mirror -- sees his uncle running out from the side street brushing himself off.

JOSE

Francisco? Isn't it? I said, are you OK?

The uncle -- steaming -- walks toward the van.

FRANCISCO

I'm OK señor, gracias, if you would like to go.

JOSE

OK son, as long as you're OK.

Francisco looks again -- his eyes meet his uncle's -- the uncle lunges as the van pulls away. Carlos's fingernails scrape over the passenger side of the van -- he falls, rolling into the gutter.

The van speeds away spewing exhaust into his face. Motas appears -- blows the cowboy hat off of the uncle's head into the street where it is flattened by a passing cab.

TANGAXOAN II (O.S.)

The hat. The hat, that was a nice touch.

(beat)

You're welcome. What? You're right we must take care of that letter and get the boy's cousins involved.

INT. ENTERING PATZCUARO - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

They enter the outskirts of the town -- the road divides. A large, bronze statue of a very handsome, semi-naked, muscular man with Favio-like hair rises above the center of a roundabout where several streets converge.

FRANCISCO

Who is that?

JOSE

A Tarascan king. The town elders erected that to honor him. His name was Tangaxoan the Second.

FRANCISCO

Was he a great man?

JOSE

The old stories say that when the Spanish came he sacrificed himself for his people so that they would not suffer a bloody defeat. His people stole his body away from the soldiers in the night and hid it away in a grand tomb full of riches. The old stories say the tomb is carved into the bowels of the earth.

They come to a stop light -- Francisco studies the statue for a moment.

FRANCISCO

That's not a very good likeness.

JOSE

What?

FRANCISCO

The statue, it doesn't look like him.

JOSE

And how would you know?

FRANCISCO

I'm not sure how, I just know.

JOSE

You're a funny boy Francisco.

They drive on -- the ghost of Tanganxoan suddenly appears leaning against the statue.

Motas appears in front of the statue -- looks at the statue -- looks at Tangaxoan and back at the statue. He shakes his finger in the air and signs.

TANGAXOAN II

What? I think it's a damn good likeness myself. Very accurate.

He sucks in his gut and thrusts out his chest and strikes the same pose as the statue. Motas signs and turns away.

TANGAXOAN II

Well, that's your opinion. I don't see any statues of you around here. Let's get this show on the road.

EXT. PATCUARO - THE POST OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

JOSE

I won't be long. Just this one sack of letters and this box.

He bounds out the door -- goes to the rear of the van -- removes a gray bundle. With the sack over one shoulder Jose enters the post office.

Francisco waits patiently -- he sees Tangaxoan in the rear view mirror. The rear doors open with a METALLIC SQUEAL -- Francisco jumps -- a large brown bag lands inside with a LOUD THUD.

JOSE

Wow, that was heavy. Everyone is writing to their aunt, uncle, mother or brother.

Closes the rear doors to the vehicle.

FRANCISCO

An old man, did you see him?

JOSE

Old man, what old man?

EXT. OUTSIDE POST OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUSLY

A young pregnant women leaves the post office -- looks up -- sees the transparent ghost of Tangaxoan looming over her. He's eyes are two glowing orbs. She panics -- turns quickly -- sees a ghostly Motas standing behind her.

INT. INSIDE THE VAN - CONTINUOUS

LOUD SCREAMS come from close by -- Francisco jumps -- his head hits the roof of the van.

EXT. OUTSIDE POST OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

PREGNANT WOMEN

(screams)

Aye, Madre de Dios! God help me,
please!

The young woman, pregnant, in her early twenties is laying down in front of the glass doors of the post office building.

She is on her side grabbing her bulging, extended belly with both hands. Jose runs to help the woman.

PREGNANT WOMEN

The spectre, the ghost, did you see
it?

JOSE

(kneeling on one knee)
Spectre? Lady, are you OK?

WOMEN IN LABOR

It...they frightened me terribly.
My baby...I think my baby is
coming.

The woman's face is bright red -- her eyes squeeze shut.

JOSE

Boy, come help me, quick! Come on,
quickly now!

Francisco fumbles the door latch -- stumbles out to the sidewalk.

JOSE (CONT'D)

It'll be alright. We'll get you to
the clinic.

(to Francisco)

Help me carry her to the rear of
the van! Get her legs.

Jose grabs the woman by her armpits -- Francisco holds her under both knees. They struggle lifting the squirming woman.

They make it halfway -- have to stop -- they reposition their grip.

JOSE

Hold her, I'll open the doors!

Francisco holds the woman against the side of the van. Jose drops his key twice -- finally opens the door.

WOMEN IN LABOR

AYE MADRE MIO, IT HURTS!

The women is slipping to the ground. Francisco fights to push her up -- their legs entangle.

WOMEN IN LABOR

My water has broken!

Jose flings bags wildly to clear a space in the back of the van. They wrestle the slippery, pregnant woman to the back of the van. The rope around Francisco's pants comes loose.

JOSE

All right. Let's get her in!

They get the woman to the back of the vehicle -- Francisco's pants are falling down. They lay the woman in the back of the van.

Francisco's pants are lying around his ankles he is covered only his underwear.

WOMEN IN LABOR

AYE! AYE!

The woman whips her head from side to side -- involuntarily spreads her legs.

Her housedress is hiking up beyond her navel -- her broad, strong hips, muscular thighs and protruding belly are exposed.

Her knees are bent -- the heels of her shoes dig into the gap between the bumper and the van.

JOSE

Too late, it's too late. It's coming!

FRANCISCO

It's coming?

WOMEN IN LABOR

IT'S COMING!

Francisco holds onto the woman -- she grabs onto him. The water-stained underwear between her legs swells and bulges.

WOMEN IN LABOR
 AYE! HELP ME! OH DIOS MIO IT HURTS!

Jose removes his shirt -- wipes the women's forehead. He removes a small knife from a side pocket.

JOSE
 Muchacho, quick take this and cut
 off her underwear while I hold her
 and be careful not to cut her!

FRANCISCO
 But, I_

JOSE
 DO IT NOW!

Fumbles the knife -- the bulge between the woman's legs grows larger, larger.

WOMEN IN LABOR
 AYE! AYE! AYE!

He finally slips the knife behind the underpants -- closes his eyes -- pulls the blade towards him. The women SCREAMS.

Several old women who are passing by take in the scene quickly.

A boy half naked from waist to ankles brandishing a knife -- a SCREAMING woman with her legs spread wide -- the wrestling, shirtless, hairy-chested mailman on top of it all.

Jose looks back -- calls for them to help. The old women cross themselves quickly and run away. The knife falls CLATTERING on the ground.

In the midst of the commotion a strong breeze suddenly rises up -- blows through the van, lifts Carlos's letter from the mail bag blowing it out into the street and into a sidewalk drainage grid.

A little baby girl pops out into the hands of Francisco and starts crying.

FADE TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE THE POST OFFICE - LATER - EARLY EVENING.

The exhausted women cradles the baby girl in her arms and waves good-bye from the back of an ambulance.

Inside the red-and-white vehicle an attendant secures her body straps -- the rear doors close. The ambulance leaves with flashing lights and siren wailing.

The tail-end of the ambulance disappears over the hill into the gathering darkness -- siren fades into echoes against the mountainside.

Francisco tightens the rope on his trousers. Jose flaps his shirt several times in the air -- puts it back on. They sit together on the bumper of the van.

FRANCISCO

I'm glad that's over.

JOSE

You and me both son. What a day my young friend, what a day indeed. Well, let's get out of here before we lose our pants and shirt a second time.

FRANCISCO

Here is your knife Señor.

JOSE

Oh, you keep it, as a souvenir.

They get into the van and drive away.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S COUSIN'S HOME - LATER THAT EVENING

JOSE

All right, this is the address.

The van pulls next to a single-story home, its front entrance, a ten-foot high, run-down, brick wall encircles the property.

Francisco thanks the driver and exits -- goes to the door -- RAPS using large cast iron door knocker. After a moment Francisco's cousin MARIA opens a peep hole in the door.

MARIA (O.S.)

Who's there?

FRANCISCO

Francisco, your cousin from the ranch.

MARIA (O.S.)

Panchito?

Maria, a pretty women in her late twenties, opens the door.

FRANCISCO
Si, Maria, Pancho.

MARIA
Where are your aunt and uncle?

Looks beyond the boy to the street.

FRANCISCO
I am alone.

MARIA
Alone?

FRANCISCO
Alone.

MARIA
Well, come in then.

INT. ESTABAN AND MARIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

MARIA
Luis, Lupe, this is your cousin
Francisco. Say hello.

LUPE, four, and LUIS, six, sit in silence with eyes wide and
mouths hanging open.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Children.

LUPE
Hello Francisco.

Luis GRUNTS and goes back to eating soup.

MARIA
Sit.

Francisco sits down beside Lupe -- she smiles at him
intently. Her wispy brown hair sticks out in all directions.

LUPE
(gurgling laugh)
Panchito.

Maria places a bowl of steaming soup in front of Francisco.

MARIA

In that dish are tortillas. Go on,
eat while it's hot.

FRANCISCO

Gracias.

Francisco lifts the lid of the ceramic container exposing a hot pile of tortillas -- takes one -- eats rapidly.

MARIA

Slow down, there's more in the pot.

Lupe tugs at Francisco's shirtsleeve.

MARIA

Lupe behave. Pancho why are you
traveling alone?

FRANCISCO

Maria I...

MARIA

Have you run away?

Francisco looks down at the table -- slowly nods his head.

MARIA

(softly)
Luis, Lupe go and play in your
room.

LUIS

Mama?

LUPE

(mimics her brother)
Mama?

MARIA

Go on now.
(they are alone)
Now, take your time and tell me
what happened.

FRANCISCO

Tio Carlos...he_

MARIA

Did he do that, those bruises
did...did he hit you?

Francisco shakes his head. Maria moves to Francisco's side -- she comforts him.

LUPE (O.S.)
Popi, Popi!

ESTEBAN is standing in the doorway. Luis grabs him from behind.

ESTEBAN
Mijo, you're a fast runner.

Hugs his father.

MARIA
(bothered)
How was your day?

ESTEBAN
OK. I was able to take extra loads.
Tino called in sick. I made an
extra 100 pesos.

MARIA
Doesn't Tino drive the route to
Uruapan?

ESTEBAN
Yes, but there weren't any
problems.

MARIA
You know it's dangerous in the
evenings on that road alone.
Remember what happened to Yolanda's
brother.

ESTEBAN
That was different. Everyone knew
he was carrying money. It was
planned and it was someone who knew
him.

MARIA
They could just as easily learn
about those looted treasures you've
been delivering for Carlos.

ESTEBAN
(whispers)
Shut up, these walls have ears, you
know. Don't mention that again. You
know as well as I do, the guy next
door knows what I'm having for
dinner before I do.

MARIA

I'm sorry but why can't Carlos take them himself?

ESTEBAN

We've been through this before.
It's too far for him to come.
Besides, he has a lot to do at the ranch.

MARIA

A lot to do? He wants someone else to risk being arrested or worse yet having the robbers...well you know.
(beat)
We have company.

ESTEBAN

Panchito?

FRANCISCO

Primo.

ESTEBAN

What brings you here?

MARIA

Esteban.

ESTEBAN

Where are Carlos and his wife? Did they go into town?

MARIA

They're not here. Francisco came alone.

ESTEBAN

Came alone? I don't understand, why?

(puts a hand on
Francisco's face)

What the heck happened to you?

MARIA

Luis, Lupe say good night to your father and go to your room.

The children kiss their father and go out to their room.
Maria looks to make sure the children are out of ear shot.

MARIA

He ran away.

ESTEBAN

What? Ran away? Is that true,
Pancho?

Francisco looks down -- nods his head.

ESTEBAN

But why? You have a good life on
the ranch, no? Your uncle will be
very worried.

MARIA

Show him Pancho.

Francisco lifts his shirt. The little girl and boy are
standing at the door. Lupe points -- elbows her brother.

MARIA

I said go to bed.
(Children leave again)

ESTEBAN

(whispers to Maria)
This could have been done by
anything. A cow kick or a fall. Who
knows what.

(turns to Francisco)
Listen, Pancho, I don't know how
you got these bruises but I am sure
that your uncle only cares for your
well being. Besides you must
remember, if you misbehave there is
a price to be paid and lessons to
be learned.

(to Maria)
We need to let him know he's here.

FRANCISCO

I won't go back. I don't care, I
would rather live in the streets.
The cows and pigs are treated
better than me.

(beat)
Prima, do I have any other family
outside of the ranch? Please I need
to know.

She Looks knowingly at Esteban.

MARIA

No Pancho, just us. All the family
you have are on the ranch.

ESTEBAN

Look, you can stay here for now until we can figure this out. In the meantime you can sleep with Lupe and Luis.

FRANCISCO

Primo, you won't tell my uncle where I am...will you?

ESTEBAN

No, at least not until we figure this out.

INT. LUPE AND LUIS'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Francisco lays on a bed roll on the floor in darkness -- feet facing the narrow door. A lacy curtain on the room's only window breaths in and out.

Beside him, in a twin-size bed, the two children snuggle. He slowly closes his eyes and dreams.

Consciousness melts into visions of himself, the mailman, Tangaxoan and the young woman giving birth. He is the baby being born; new, naked, scared and crying.

INT. ESTEBAN AND MARIA'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Maria and Esteban lay in twin beds several feet apart. He has both hands behind his head. Maria is on her side facing away from Esteban.

ESTEBAN

That has to be it. He got caught doing something, or was in a place he shouldn't have been, I'm sure of it. That boy is always getting into trouble. Anyway, sometimes a strong beating's good for a child's character. Only when it's necessary mind you.

MARIA

Would you leave marks like those on little Lupe or Luis.

ESTEBAN

Of course not, but, that's beside the point.

MARIA

What is the point?

ESTEBAN

The point is I drive again tomorrow, I'll mail a letter to Carlos telling him he's here. He can come get the boy. What do you think?

MARIA

You know what I think. I think you need to stop delivering those artifacts for Carlos before you get yourself and your family in serious trouble with the federales.

ESTEBAN

Hush, I'm not going through that again. I told you before, I want more than living from payday to payday. Besides, the extra money has been good, hasn't it?

MARIA

Of course, but what price will you have to pay for it in the end? What price will your family have to pay?

FADE OUT.

EXT. THE STREET -- DAY BREAK -- NEXT DAY

An old women painfully pushes a colorfully painted cart filled with tortillas, sweet bread and a large ceramic pot containing steaming hot liquid.

OLD WOMEN STREET VENDER

Orchata, pan dulce, tortillas!
Orchata, pan dulce, tortillas!

INT. LUIS AND LUPE'S ROOM -- SIMULTAIOUSLY

Light filters in -- Francisco's eyes pop open -- looking cross eyed. Lupe reaching from the bed -- her finger is touching his nose.

LUPE

Panchito, buenos dias.

FRANCISCO

Buenos dias.

LUPE

Today is one day closer to the celebration. Soon we will visit Grandmother at the cemetery.

Francisco gently pushes the finger away. Luis sits up -- pulls his sister's hair.

LUPE

Stop it or I'll tell mama.

MARIA (O.S.)

Come children, no funny business. It's time to get up.

FRANCISCO

Lupe, what do you mean, at the cemetery?

LUPE

Our grandmother lives at the cemetery.

LUIS

She doesn't live there, she is dead there.

LUPE

Mama! Mama!

LUIS

Be quite, I told you before that she's dead.

LUPE

She is not. Mama said that she is living there until Jesus comes and takes her home. Mama!

LUIS

She is too dead. You were there, you saw how cold and purple she was. She's all stinky and moldy with maggots by now.

LUPE

MAMA!

MARIA (O.S.)

You two stop it and get dressed. Francisco there's a shirt and pants out here on the chair. Try them on and bring me your ranch clothes.

(MORE)

MARIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'll wash them and try to get that
smell out.

FRANCISCO
Si Maria.
(whispers)
What do you do at the cemetery.

LUIS
We celebrate the day of the dead.
Don't you know anything? It's the
day when we leave flowers and food
at the graves of our ancestors.

FRANCISCO
What for?

LUIS
To remember them stupid.

INT. THE KITCHEN -- LATER

Maria serves sweet bread and hot chocolate. Esteban inserts a
letter into an envelope and seals it.

ESTEBAN
I've only got two deliveries today.
I'll drop this at the post office
on my way in.

Maria starts to refill Esteban's cup -- stops -- takes the
hot chocolate away. Esteban's eyes follow her.

ESTEBAN
Pancho, you've been here a few days
now would you like to get out of
the house and go with me today?

FRANCISCO
Si, Primo si.

MARIA
I don't know Esteban, are you sure
it's OK to take him along.

ESTEBAN
It'll be fine, besides I can use
the help.

Maria places food inside a canvas bag -- hands it to
Francisco. Esteban puts the envelope in the side pocket of
his jacket.

MARIA

Very well then, but take care of
Francisco.

ESTEBAN

There's nothing to take care of.
It's just going to be a nice ride
through the countryside. Come
on...nothing will happen.

EXT. THE STREET -- LATER

Esteban and Francisco drive away in a battered, old pickup
truck. Down to the main street -- downhill toward the center
of town.

They enter the town -- colonial style buildings rise on both
sides. Esteban turns onto a wide avenue -- pulls over --
mails the letter.

He drives on turning into a narrow alleyway -- the alley
enters a loading area with three roll-up doors. Esteban backs
up to one of the doors -- they get out.

ESTEBAN

OK, follow me. Don't say anything
and don't touch anything unless I
say so.

They walk up concrete steps to a thick metal door. Esteban
pushes a button marked DELIVERIES -- a BUZZER sounds.

The door cracks open. A squat, middle-aged man peers out --
looks them up and down -- looks at the alleyway behind them.

WAREHOUSE OWNER

Who's the boy?

ESTEBAN

My cousin. I brought him to help. I
hope that's OK?

WAREHOUSE OWNER

It's not OK. You pay him out of
your cut. There's no extra. Get in
here, quick.

ESTEBAN

(they enter)
Francisco, this is Señor Gonzales.

FRANCISCO

Mucho gusto.

Francisco extends his hand to the man. The warehouse owner says nothing -- does not shake his hand.

WAREHOUSE OWNER

What door are you parked at?

ESTEBAN

That one. What do you have for me today?

WAREHOUSE OWNER

Those boxes over there and one more in back. Here is the address in Uruapan. It's a store on the hill above the town in front of the water park.

A worker appears from the darkness of the warehouse and raises one of the roll-up doors.

ESTEBAN

Come on, we don't have all day.

Esteban unties a rope that secures the rear door of the camper shell -- they load the boxes. The warehouse owner comes back with another box.

WAREHOUSE OWNER

Here, this is the stuff from Carlos.

Esteban looks back at Francisco.

ESTEBAN

Same customer as the last one?

WAREHOUSE OWNER

(whispers)

Yea, what's with the kid? I thought I told you that you do this alone.

ESTEBAN

He's OK. He's Carlos's nephew.

WAREHOUSE OWNER

Starting him early, that smart son a va whore.

They finish -- Esteban extends his hand to the warehouse owner -- the owner waves him off.

WAREHOUSE OWNER

Just get the stuff there and don't be late this time.

(MORE)

WAREHOUSE OWNER (CONT'D)

The guy who's getting that stuff
doesn't like delays. Ya got it?

ESTEBAN

Si Señor.

WAREHOUSE OWNER

(pulls him close)

Remember, you get caught by the
police with that stuff you know
nothing, got it?

ESTEBAN

Got it.

EXT. THE ROAD OUTSIDE OF PATZCUARO - LATER THAT MORNING

Esteban and Francisco are leaving town. An SUV with two men
follows them for a bit then speeds around them and up the
road.

ESTEBAN

Idiots! Their going to get someone
killed.

The road curves up into the pine-covered mountains that
surround the lake.

Higher and higher they climb -- Francisco watches the lake
disappear in the side mirror. They are engulfed by a thick,
dark forest of pines.

GUN SHOTS -- several of the truck tires blow out -- a huge
tree is down across the road in front of them.

Esteban applies the brake -- the truck SCREECHES sideways --
SLAMS with bone-jarring force into the tree trunk. They hit
the windshield -- Glass splinters and cuts their faces.

Quiet -- except for: a busted HISSING radiator, a rolling,
falling hub cap. Francisco lifts his wobbling head -- blood
drips from the tip of his nose -- splatters onto his
trousers.

In the rear view mirror the two men that passed them in the
SUV approach on foot.

One of the men, YELLOW BOOTS, appears at the driver's window -
- jerks Esteban up by his collar -- points a large, chrome
plated hand gun at Francisco -- pulls back the hammer --
CLICK.

YELLOW BOOTS

You want ta die boy? THEN GET OUT!

Someone enters the back of the truck -- boxes are being ripped open and tossed to the ground.

Ceramics bust into tiny shards upon the hard surface of the road. Francisco tries to get out -- the door is jammed shut.

YELLOW BOOTS

I said get out now or I'll kill you
where you sit!

A huge man, DARK BOOTS, reaches in -- pulls Francisco out through the passenger window over pieces of broken glass -- the boy hits the road like a sack of potatoes.

DARK BOOTS

What do we do with the boy?

Francisco looks up at a towering giant of a man.

YELLOW BOOTS

If he gives you any trouble snap
his neck.

Francisco lays on his side facing the undercarriage of the truck. A pair of yellow, snakeskin boots shuffle on the drivers side.

Esteban's door grinds open -- he falls onto the road. Esteban and Francisco stare at one another under the truck.

Esteban looks quickly at something under the rear of the truck. Francisco's eyes follow -- there's something in the spare tire holder -- the box of artifacts.

A snakeskin boot comes down with a THUD against Esteban's chest.

YELLOW BOOTS

OK you son-a-va-bitch, where's the
stuff?

Pulls Esteban's head up by the hair.

ESTEBAN

All we have are those boxes.

YELLOW BOOTS

Look, Esteban, isn't it? I should
put a bullet in your head right now
but I'm going to be nice.

(MORE)

YELLOW BOOTS (CONT'D)

I'll give you a chance to answer some questions.

(beat)

That double crossing uncle of yours was suppose to send a letter with a list to my boss over a week ago. A list detailing everything that my boss will be getting. Do you understand? DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

ESTEBAN

I don't know about any letter I just deliver the boxes. I don't see what's in them. I don't ask questions.

YELLOW BOOTS

No, well, my boss is asking a lot of questions. You see, he thinks because he didn't get his list, that Carlos is trying to sell the stuff to someone else for more money. The only problem is your uncle has an agreement with my boss. My boss has agreements with other people. Do I have your attention? DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION?

Lets Esteban's head fall to the pavement -- kicks Esteban in the ribs. Esteban MOANS -- pulls his knees up to his chest. His face and mouth are a wash with blood.

Francisco is lifted into the air. Dark Boots holds Francisco at arm's length -- carries Francisco to the other side -- throws him in front of Esteban.

Esteban is fading in and out of consciousness. Dark Boots kneels down -- sticks the barrel of his pistol against the side of Francisco's swollen, bloody nose.

DARK BOOTS

Hey boy, I got death right here, right here inside the barrel of this here gun.

YELLOW BOOTS

(to Darkboots)

That's enough.

(to Esteban)

Look, just give us the package you're carrying and tell that uncle of yours that we need that list.

ESTEBAN
 It's, it's under_
 (passes out)

YELLOW BOOTS
 What did you say? What did he say?

DARK BOOTS
 He's sleeping.

YELLOW BOOTS
 He's knocked out you idiot. Give me
 the bottle of water.

Yellow boots pulls Esteban by the collar -- throws water into his face. Esteban revives with a spitting cough.

DARK BOOTS
 How does this feel?

Dark Boots slams the toe of his boots into Esteban's lower back.

YELLOW BOOTS
 You better hand it over or he'll
 work the boy over for good measure.
 Once he gets going he's kinda hard
 to stop.

Suddenly the wind picks up -- a dust devil springs from the ground enters the woods -- sucks up all the hornets from a hornets nest.

The dust devil whips its way down the street toward the robbers.

DARK BOOTS
 What da hell is that?

The dust devil filled with hornets slams into the robbers -- they are stung many times and run away down the road followed by the angry swarm.

The toy ball, string and stick fly through the air like a bolero tripping the robbers. The swarm of hornets catches them -- the robbers get up swatting as they run away.

Esteban lays motionless. Francisco sits up -- rubs his neck -- hears someone -- turns quickly. Ambling up the road toward the truck, is Tangaxoan.

Tangaxoan is wearing a loose-fitting, bright yellow gueyabera shirt, black leather pants and a straw fedora.

He becomes a silhouette encased by a glowing aura of gold. Only his face and his eyes are clearly visible -- he chews on a tooth pick.

TANGAXOAN II

Mijo, you certainly have a talent for finding trouble. If I didn't know better I'd swear you're testing me.

FRANCISCO

Are you, are you real?

TANGAXOAN II

Real enough I guess. More to some and less to others. Heck, I'm a lot more real then some things I see now-a-days.

FRANCISCO

But you were in my dream.

TANGAXOAN II (CONT'D)

Dream? Oh, yea that was me.

FRANCISCO

And the post office?

TANGAXOAN II

Guilty as charged.

FRANCISCO

I knew it, I knew it.

TANGAXOAN II

(speaks to Motas O.S.)

What? OK, OK don't worry I'll get your damned toy.

(to Francisco)

I was hoping he'd forget about that infernal noise maker of his.

FRANCISCO

Who are you talking to.

Tangaxoan picks up the toy -- Francisco turns to his cousin -- Esteban moans.

TANGAXOAN II

An associate of mine.

(points to Esteban)

By the way, he's gona be OK. Listen boy...Mijo, remember when I said that I'm gona need your help.

FRANCISCO

Yes...Grandpa, I remember Grandpa.
What do you need me to do Grandpa?

TANGAXOAN II

I'm glad you're anxious but let's
not wear the Grandpa thing out, OK.
Look there's this island in the
middle of that lake back there.

FRANCISCO

Janitzio, si I know of it.

TANGAXOAN II

Good, cause I need you to go out
there and get something of mine
that I lost a long, long time ago.

FRANCISCO

Where on the island can I find it?

TANGAXOAN II

Well as best as I can figure it's
somewhere in that big stone statue
on top of the island.

FRANCISCO

What is it? What does it look like?

The wind blows -- clouds start to cover the sun --
Tangaxoan's image slowly fades away.

TANGAXOAN II

(echo)

Don't worry kid, you'll know it
when you see it and don't tell
anyone about our little talk.

FRANCISCO

Grandpa! Grandpa wait!

Esteban sits up.

ESTEBAN

Who are you talking to? Did you say
Grandpa?

FRANCISCO

No one. It must have been the hit
on your head. Are you OK?

ESTEBAN

No, but I'll live. How 'bout you?

FRANCISCO

I'm OK. I thought you...we were
dead.

ESTEBAN

Tomorrow I'll probably wish I was.

A bus from town comes to a screeching halt behind the truck. The door of the bus opens quickly -- the driver and several people exit surveying the crash scene.

EXT. ESTEBAN AND MARIA'S HOUSE - DAYS LATER - MORNING

It is Friday morning -- Francisco sits in the small yard listening to the traffic noise and vendors passing in the street.

INT. ESTEBAN AND MARIA'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Esteban is bedridden with injuries. Maria is by his side treating him.

ESTEBAN

We both came close out there. Too
close, too close to dieing.

MARIA

Don't think about it. It's over no,
you're OK. I just thank God you two
are still alive.

He moves slightly, squeezes his teeth together in pain -- exhales a long breath. Luis and Lupe are at the foot of the bed.

Esteban reaches out -- gently takes his wife's wrist. She drops a compress -- he pulls her to him -- they embrace.

ESTEBAN

What will we do now? Me, like this,
without a job?

MARIA

We will get by as we have always
done, by the grace of God.

FADE TO:

EXT./INT. ESTEBAN AND MARIA'S HOUSE - DAYS LATER - MORNING

Esteban walks out of the bedroom -- puts on a jacket.
Francisco helps Maria with chores.

MARIA

Children come and eat breakfast!

Luis runs to the kitchen -- drops a tattered, leather ball on the cement porch. Esteban rubs his sore neck.

MARIA

Are you sure you should be up?

ESTEBAN

I am fine and ready for work if I can find some.

MARIA

Your breakfast is ready.

Lupe's sleepy face looks up at his -- he bends over, grits his teeth with pain -- lifts Lupe up with one arm.

ESTEBAN

Let's go, mija, or we'll be late for breakfast.

Enters the kitchen -- places Lupe in a chair.

MARIA

Tell me how you really feel.

ESTEBAN

Almost like new. I think I'll go into town today and try to find some work.

Maria pours hot chocolate -- places a bowl of sweet bread in the middle of the table.

MARIA

Do you think you're ready for that?

ESTEBAN

Ready enough.

FRANCISCO

May I go along and find a job?
Please.

ESTEBAN

you're old enough. I don't see why not.

MARIA

Esteban if Francisco is to stay here we must first think of his schooling.

ESTEBAN

Well, maybe a part-time job then.
(winks at Francisco.)

FRANCISCO

That would be fine.

Francisco waits for Maria's response.

MARIA

You can go today but it depends on what kind of job.

EXT. PATZCUARO TOWN SQUARE - LATER THAT MORNING

Francisco and Esteban step out from the bus onto the curb of the plaza square. Vendors are preparing for another day of business.

Esteban points toward a group of buildings at the far corner of the square.

ESTEBAN

Let's try there first.

FRANCISCO

What kind of places are they?

ESTEBAN

The buildings on that side of the street make furniture and most of the ones on the other side make ceramics.

INT. CERAMIC STORE - CONTINUOUS

FIRST SHOP OWNER

We just filled a position.

INT. FURNITURE STORE - CONTINUOUS

SECOND SHOP OWNER

Nothing, try back in a week or two.

Esteban goes to shop after shop after shop -- finally enters the last one.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - CONTINUOUS

FINAL SHOP OWNER

I'm sorry son I barely have work
for myself. It's been a tough
season.

ESTEBAN

I understand, thank you.

EXT. THE PLAZA - LATER

They are back in the plaza sharing an orange soda.

ESTEBAN

Now I remember why I started doing
deliveries. This town is like a dry
well as far as employment is
concerned.

In the center of the plaza people are preparing for the Day
of the Dead celebration. Vendors erect booths -- city workers
string lights from the trees and hang decorations.

Beneath stone arches behind them a large sign is being hung
at the Tourist Information Center. It is a painting of the
lake and the island of Janitzio.

INSERT - SIGN

PATZCUARO CELEBRARS DIA DE LOS
MUERTOS.

Esteban hands the near-empty bottle of orange pop to
Francisco. Francisco tilts back the bottle -- cross-eyed he
watches the last swallow disappear.

FRANCISCO

Cousin, have you ever been to the
island?

ESTEBAN

Once or twice a year, ever since I
was a boy about your age.

FRANCISCO

What is it like?

ESTEBAN

Well, it is mostly houses and
tourist businesses.

(MORE)

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

The only open piece of ground is the park at the top that surrounds the statue.

FRANCISCO

I would like to go there. Today if it is possible.

ESTEBAN

You would, well I don't we should keep looking for work.

FRANCISCO

Please cousin.

ESTEBAN

Well, OK, today then but don't tell Maria. I have a friend who runs the ferry to the island.

EXT. LAKE PATZCUARO - LATER THAT MORNING

A RICKETY bus door opens. Esteban and Francisco depart -- they stand before the giant lake. The bus door snaps shut -- the old engine GROANS pulling it forward.

Black smoke billows from the bus tail pipe -- it disappears up the road. Esteban walks toward the docks of an old marina.

ESTEBAN

Follow me.

They reach a tour boat in the marina. A man wearing blue soccer shorts and plastic flip-flops kneels in the back of the boat.

He bails water with a converted, plastic gallon milk jug. His name is LALO.

ESTEBAN

You give rides or do you just sit around on your ass all day!

The man stands up -- he is five feet tall with thick, muscular arms. A big-tooth smile explodes across his dark, handsome face.

LALO

Only when I can get away with it hombre.

(the two men hug)

Long time no see. How are Maria and the children?

ESTEBAN

They are fine, my friend, just fine.

LALO

And who's this young fellow?

ESTEBAN

Lalo I would like you to meet my cousin Francisco. He is staying with us a while. Francisco, this is my good friend Lalo who lives on the island with his family.

LALO

Mucho gusto.

Lalo wipes his hand on his shorts -- shakes Francisco's hand.

FRANCISCO

Equalmente.

LALO

So, Esteban, to what do I owe the pleasure?

ESTEBAN

Well, my cousin has never been to the island. I was hoping you could give us a ride over.

They look at an old woman asleep in a ticket booth at the marina.

LALO

Well, OK, it's been a slow day. Let's be quick and quiet. Come on, help me push her out.

Lalo unties the ropes of the long boat -- quietly jumps in -- Esteban and Francisco push the boat.

LALO

OK, get in.

Lalo turns a key -- an old outboard motor BUBBLES and PURRS -- the craft crawls forward. Large clumping mats of water hyacinth and reeds float by.

Lalo waves at people in several dug-out canoes. The marina grows smaller and smaller -- the water changes from muddy to turquoise.

The island grows larger and larger -- it looms before them. Businesses and dwellings of all types, sizes and colors intertwine tightly lining the shore and slopes.

A large statue commands the very top of the island. Francisco tilts his head back to see the figure reaching into the sky.

ESTEBAN

So, my friend, how is life on the lake these days?

LALO

Not like before I'm afraid.

ESTEBAN

What's the problem?

LALO

The fish, the fish are fewer in numbers and smaller. What once could be caught in several hours takes several day.

Lalo extends two fingers to indicate the size of the fish.

ESTEBAN

And the tourists?

LALO

Oh, they come, spend their money and go, but the water, she suffers. At the rate the lake is filling with mud and sediment, we'll be able to walk to Patzcuaro in another ten years.

ESTEBAN

How is that happening?

LALO

The water level is far below what it use to be. They've block up all the streams and springs that use to fill the lake with fresh water and keep the channels clear.

ESTEBAN

The dredging machine, it's still working?

LALO

Using that thing is like bailing a boat with a spoon.

(MORE)

LALO (CONT'D)

Eventually this body of water will go the way of the great lake that once filled the basin of Mexico City. I'm telling you, enjoy this place while you can. Unless something is done soon, the water, along with our way of life, the Tarascan way of life, will be gone forever.

FRANCISCO

Who built that statue at the top of the island?

LALO

That was built by the Tarascan Purepecha people of the area. The outside is stone. The inside is lined with adobe brick taken from the ruins by the great pyramid at the edge of the lake. Hang on we're almost there.

Lalo whips the wheel -- lines up with the main dock. A large sign hangs above the plaza beyond the docks.

INSERT - SIGN

BIENVENIDOS A JANITZIO.

Along the shore women and children bathe totally nude.

FRANCISCO

Those people are naked.

LALO

That's because they are bathing. It's the only way to enjoy the waters of the lake.

They reach the dock.

LALO

Take care of the rope.

ESTEBAN

Sure thing.

Esteban moves to the bow of the craft -- grabs a coil of thick, braided hemp.

Several boys come running from the plaza across the planks of the dock. Esteban throws the coiled rope to the boys -- they secure the boat.

Esteban and Francisco follow Lalo up a wooden ladder on the dark, creosote coated pylon of the dock.

LALO
Gracias, Javier, gracias, Marcos.

The two boys, wearing only shorts stand with open palms out stretched.

LALO
(to the boys)
Don't bother, they're not tourists.
(to Esteban and Francisco)
These are my nephews Marcos and
Javier.

Francisco shakes their hand and at the same time looks up at the huge statue on top of the island.

JAVIER
Would you like to go up there?

FRANCISCO
Very much.

ESTEBAN
Go ahead, we'll meet you back here.

The boys take off running -- Francisco is close behind. They run across the dock -- through the plaza -- up steep, winding, narrow cobblestone streets.

They reach the top of the island -- the road fades to two dirt tracks. The boys enter a grassy summit. Francisco stops - - looks up at the entire statue.

JAVIER & MARCOS
Come on.

Follows running toward the statue. Javier, Marcos and Francisco scurry up the steps of the base and stop at the entrance.

A very old man dressed in a pure white cotton shirt and pants greets them. His face is hidden by a large, straw hat soiled with sweat around its wide brim.

A large fishing net spills from his lap to the ground. His old wrinkled hands work a large needle in and out of the net.

OLD FISHERMAN

Ten pesos each and no photography
inside.

The old man's eyes are frosted with cataracts swimming in a
field of bloodshot yellow.

JAVIER & MARCOS

(Tarascan)

Abuelo, it is us, Marco and Javier.
We brought someone to see the
statue.

His toothless mouth smiles -- he hugs the two boys -- motions
them to the entrance.

OLD FISHERMAN

Go on, but be careful.

A thick, metal door SQUEALS open -- the boys enter -- they
walk to the center of the giant statue.

A staircase on the inner wall spirals upward in lighthouse
fashion disappearing out of sight high up in the head of the
structure.

FRANCISCO

Can we go to the very top.

MARCOS

Sure let's go.

They climb upward around and around. Colorful frescos cover
the walls. The staircase becomes steep and narrow at the top.

Francisco looks down -- grabs the railing. They enter a room
at the top. The lake, the city of Patzcuaro and all the land
beyond is framed through a large open window.

JAVIER

Nice view isn't it?

FRANCISCO

It sure is.

Francisco sees a narrow opening. The light coming through has
a strange golden glow.

FRANCISCO

It must be up there.

MARCOS

Where did he go.

INT. JANITZIO - ON THE ARM OF THE STATUE - CONTINUOUS

Francisco climbs through the opening -- looks out across the large shoulder of the statue. There is a sign.

INSERT - SIGN

DANGER! DO NOT ENTER! AUTHORIZED
PERSONAL ONLY.

A narrow catwalk flanked by short bronze railings crosses the arm to the hand. On the hand is a small opening.

TANGAXOAN II (V.O.)
In there. Across the arm and in
there you will find it.

FRANCISCO
Si Grandpa

Francisco leans out -- sees the old man far, far below. He grasps the bronze rails tightly -- moves forward -- almost loses a sandal.

The wind whips his hair and clothing about. He makes it to the other side and enters the opening in the hand.

FRANCISCO
Now where?

He looks around in the darkness of the small room -- a shaft of sunlight suddenly pierces the darkness.

It lands upon the inner crumbling wall striking a small, barely exposed corner of an imbedded object.

The tiny exposed piece reflects the sunlight setting the room ablaze in a golden glow.

FRANCISCO
That must be it.

He uses his folding knife to dig out the object. He removes a foot long scepter made of gold and encrusted with precious stones. He looks at it in awe.

FRANCISCO
I have found it Grandpa.

TANGAXOAN II (V.O.)
Good boy. Now be careful.

He hides the scepter inside his belt and starts across the arm. He is almost across when a strong gust of wind surges from below -- he loses his balance. Marcos and Javier appear at the opening on the other side.

JAVIER

What is he doing out there?

Francisco's hand clings to the bronze rail -- he is dangling in mid air. Marcos and Javier cautiously move onto the arm

JAVIER & MARCOS

Give us your other hand!

Javier and Marcos reach for Francisco -- the wind grows stronger. Francisco's grip on the rail loosens.

One of his sandals slips off -- falls to the cement below -- impacts with a muffled thud beside the old fisherman.

OLD FISHERMAN

Ten pesos each and no photography
inside.

Francisco's fingers ease away from the metal railing -- with his free hand he pushes the scepter deeper into his belt to keep it from falling out.

MARCOS

Grab him, he's falling!

Javier grabs Francisco's collar -- Francisco's fingers slip away.

JAVIER

PULL, PULL!

They are unable to pull him back up -- their grip weakens. Both boy's fingers loosen -- they lose their grip -- Francisco is gone.

Two hands appear on the railing beside them. A foot wraps over the bronze railing. Francisco, slowly pulls himself back up onto the shoulder.

All three go back inside the statue -- fall exhausted on the floor.

JAVIER

I thought you were dead for sure.

MARCOS

For sure.

FRANCISCO
That was exciting.

MARCOS
Well, that's enough excitement for
one day?

FRANCISCO
Lately I have not been lacking.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO THE STATUE - MINUTES LATER

Exiting the bottom of the statue, Francisco looks way up at
the arm -- picks up his fallen sandal -- puts it on.

FRANCISCO
Wait, I want to thank your
grandfather.

MARCOS
Don't bother, he's gone home.

FRANCISCO
Who's that?

MARCOS
His replacement. The elders from
the village take turns throughout
the day tending the monument.

Francisco turns -- waves at the man repairing the net --
Tangaxoan waves back and watches the children depart.

EXT. THE BOAT DOCK - LATER THE AFTERNOON

Esteban pats his stomach -- they reach the boat.

ESTEBAN
Your mother sure makes good white
fish and beans.

LALO
Only the best for my friends. We
better get going and quickly. Looks
like we're gona get some rain. Very
unusual for this time of year.

Lalo unties the lines -- Francisco says goodbye to Javier and
Marcos. They climb into the boat and leave.

EXT. PATZCUARO - STREET NEAR THE PLAZA - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Pounding, driving rain -- the hood of a big white bus SHUTTERS, SHAKES -- smoke pours from under the hood -- the bus crawls to a stop.

The driver exits -- yelling expletives -- soaked in seconds. He lifts the hood -- more smoke -- steam from rain hitting the hot motor.

Esteban waves Francisco to the door of the bus

ESTEBAN

Let's go, this could take a while.

They run from the bus -- duck in and out under storefronts, awnings and overhanging facades. THUNDER RUMBLES over the town.

Slowly they make their way -- rain falls harder -- they stop beneath a large, green awning. There is a sign in bold white letters.

INSERT - SIGN

MUEBLES DE MADERA FINA.

ESTEBAN

Let's wait here until it eases.

Someone is staring at them -- the door behind them slowly opens -- a hand waves them in.

Inside they are handed towels by a gray-haired man in his early sixties. His name is DIEGO.

DIEGO

Dry yourselves. Well, go on.

FRANCISCO

Thank you.

ESTEBAN

Thank you señor.

The man allows them to remove the rain from their arms and face -- he approaches the boy with his hand extended.

DIEGO

Young man, my daughter tells me that you helped deliver her baby.

A young woman in a sleeveless, black dress walks from behind the counter carrying a bundle wrapped in a pink blanket.

INFANT NOISES come from beneath the blanket. The young woman's name is REYNA

REYNA

I thought that was you.

She hugs Francisco with her free arm and kisses his cheek.

REYNA (CONT'D)

I never got a chance to properly thank you. What you did was heroic and selfless.

FRANCISCO

I did what I could.

DIEGO

You are a very modest young man. You helped save her life and the life of my grandchild.

REYNA

Father.

DIEGO

Oh, I apologize, my name is Diego Martinez and this is my daughter Reyna and her daughter Rosa.

ESTEBAN

My name is Esteban and this is my cousin Francisco.

DIEGO

Mucho gusto.

The young woman lifts the top of the blanket -- a small, brown, chubby face capped with wispy, jet-black hair peeks out.

DIEGO

Come, sit with us a while.

(beat)

Please, we would be honored.

Diego motions to the back of the store -- they follow him and his daughter through a large storage room of furniture.

They enter a small office in the back -- a kettle is set to boil on a hot plate.

DIEGO

Will you have tea and sweet bread
with us?

ESTEBAN

We wouldn't want to impose.

DIEGO

Nonsense, have a seat. What are you
doing out in this terrible weather?

ESTEBAN

We were returning from Janitzio
when the bus broke down.

DIEGO

What took you to the island?

Francisco fingers the scepter hidden beneath his shirt.

REYNA

Father.

ESTEBAN

It's OK. I have a friend there I
hadn't seen in a while and my
cousin, Francisco, had never been.

DIEGO

What did you think of our island?

FRANCISCO

I hope I can return again soon.

DIEGO

Excuse me for asking so many
personal questions but might I
inquire what you do for a living.

REYNA

Papa, please.

ESTEBAN

That's fine. Up until a week ago I
had my own business making
deliveries but my truck needs work
and as you can image it's hard to
deliver things without a truck.

DIEGO

My lucky day then. Are you looking
for work?

ESTEBAN

Am I looking for work? Well, yes
sir, as a matter a fact I am.

INT. LA FALICIDAD RANCH - THAT AFTERNOON

Paloma stands in the middle of a browning strip of grass with her dog Teeko. She looks down the rows of cactus that line the reservoir.

PALOMA

Over there Teeko. That's where it
happened. That terrible, terrible
thing.

A breeze lifts the pink, pleated edges of her dress. Teeko's legs are covered with reservoir mud up to his belly.

The dog looks toward the ant mounds -- gives a fading
WHIMPER. Paloma's eyes swell with tears. Her mother is
standing at the gate of their home.

JUANITA

Paloma, Paloma, come now or we'll
miss the bus!

Paloma wipes her eyes -- runs with the dog.

Juanita wears a pure white dress -- her thick, black hair is
covered by a blue and gold rebosso.

MIGUEL

Juanita, are we ready?

JUANITA

I found her, we're ready.

They all walk across a small garden to the edge of the road,
holding hands with Paloma who is between them.

A dozen residents of the ranch are already waiting dressed in
their finest clothing. In the distance a cloud of red dust
rises into the air.

OLD WOMEN

Here she comes.

The bus grows larger and larger -- bouncing with every mud
hole and dip in the dirt road, riding the crest of a wave of
red dust.

It chugs along -- windows RATTLING; rusty metal sides CREAKING -- a hefty plume of diesel smoke spewing from its tail.

The bus comes to a lumbering stop beside the families -- envelopes them in a cloud of dust. The battered door of the bus SQUEAKS opens.

Juanita, Miguel and Paloma are the last to enter -- the door is shut -- the driver prepares to pull away.

OLD MAN

Wait! One more, one more coming.

The door SQUEAKS open again -- Carlos gets on -- grudgingly pays his fare -- walks toward the rear of the bus. His eyes fall upon Juanita.

He smiles at her as he passes -- lightly touches her shoulder with his hand as he passes -- she pulls away -- Miguel is near exploding.

Carlos sits several seats behind them. Beside Carlos is an elderly gentleman in an old, tattered suit with a pitted, sucked-in-toothless face -- a patch covering one eye.

OLD MAN

Good morning, Juan Carlos.

CARLOS

Is it?.

OLD MAN

Going into town for the festival?

CARLOS

NO.

Paloma turns -- looks at Carlos. His stern eyes fall upon the little girl. She pulls her head down until her eyes are level with the top of the bus seat. She holds her eyes on his until he looks away.

EXT. VIA HEMENEZ - LATER THAT DAY

The bus pulls into Via Hemenez -- banners, flags, paper skeletons adorn every building, lamp post and wall.

A mariachi band is playing -- cheeks of the three horn players expand to near bursting -- bass, guitar and violin phased in and out of tune.

A player steps forward -- legs apart -- points of his boots pointing outward. Shiny silver buttons and spurs glisten in the sun.

A violin hangs by his side in his thick fingers -- he BELTS OUT the words of a song.

The bus SQUEALS to a halt beside the market stalls -- people exit -- Paloma bounds off -- runs to the nearest merchant to examine the candies.

MIGUEL

Paloma!

Carlos is the last to leave the bus. He walks quickly up the street to the post office and enters -- Paloma watches.

Carlos emerges reading a letter -- looks up in disgust -- crumples the letter -- tosses it into the gutter.

He walks to a man waiting by a black Camaro. They talk for a moment -- keys are exchanged -- Carlos speeds away in the car.

Paloma sees that her parents are busy with a vendor -- she retrieves the ball of paper -- places it in her dress pocket.

JUANITA

Paloma!

PALOMA

Si, mama.

JUANITA

Don't wander off.

PALOMA

Si, mama.

Paloma slowly unfolds the ball of paper -- word by word reads the letter slowly.

INSERT - THE LETTER

"Carlos, Just a line to let you know that we have Juanita's son Francisco in our care and will keep him here until you can arrive. Also, I will continue to make the deliveries this week as long as you can have the items ready. Thanks, Esteban"

PALOMA
 Juanita's son, Francisco?

She reads the words again.

JUANITA
 Paloma, come, we are going to the
 mercado to buy a few things.

Paloma lowers the paper quickly -- puts it in her pocket.

JUANITA
 What do you have, mija?

PALOMA
 Nada, mama.

JUANITA
 Let me see what nothing looks like.
 Come on, let me have it.

Paloma puts her head down -- reluctantly hands over the
 letter.

JUANITA
 And where did you get this.

PALOMA
 Señor Garcia dropped it in the
 street.
 (beat)
 Mama...is Francisco my brother?

Stunned she reads the letter.

JUANITA
 Dios mio.

Juanita takes a handkerchief from her purse -- wipes her eyes
 -- gets down at eye level with Paloma.

PALOMA
 Mama is Panchito my brother?

Juanita hugs her daughter -- whispers gently into her ear.

JUANITA
 Si, mija, si.

MIGUEL
 Are you two ready to...what's
 wrong? Juanita, what is it?

She hands him the letter -- he reads quickly -- slowly lowers the hand holding the letter. He loosens his grip -- allows a strong breeze to take it away.

JUANITA

Miguel, I can't live this way anymore. This can't go on any longer. The boy has to know that his mother is alive and cares for him. He has to know that I'm his mother.

MIGUEL

Let's go back to the ranch. I'll borrow my brother's truck and go to Patzcuaro.

Juanita -- frightened -- starts to speak -- touches his forearm.

MIGUEL

No, I'm going. I should have taken care of this along time ago. I'm...I'm sorry I put you through this. I'm sorry I put the boy through this. I'll try and make it right if I can.

JUANITA

We'll go together and make it as right as we can.

EXT/INT. ESTEBAN AND MARIA'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

An owl, perched in a tall tree turns its head 180 degrees to watch Esteban return home.

Maria is wrapping bread, candles, marigold flowers and other types of food.

ESTEBAN

I'm home!

LUIS

Popi, Popi!

Luis runs from the kitchen hugs his father's legs. Maria comes out of the kitchen wiping her hands.

MARIA

How was work?

ESTEBAN

Going very well. Diego is a good man. I got the truck back today from his brother-in-law who is a mechanic. It runs better than it ever has. Is everyone ready?

LUPE

Popi, mama look what I found under Francisco's blanket.

She holds up the golden scepter just as Francisco steps out of the bathroom.

ESTEBAN

Francisco where did you get this?

MARIA

That looks like one of the things that Carlos found.

ESTEBAN

You took this from the box didn't you? TELL ME!

MARIA

Esteban please.

ESTEBAN

Please nothing we brought him into our home and trusted him and this is what he's done.

FRANCISCO

No it's not what you think I found it in the statue on Janitzio.

ESTEBAN

Is that right. Why didn't you show it to me then?

MARIA

Janitzio? When were you two at Janitzio?

FRANCISCO

Grandpa, ah, Tangaxoan told me not to tell anyone. It belongs to him.

MARIA

Belongs to who? What's he saying and why didn't you tell me you two went to Janitzio. Esteban you have some explaining to do.

ESTEBAN

Don't listen to him he's making up stories.

MARIA

So you didn't go to the island? You never said that you went to the island.

ESTEBAN

No I didn't, yes we did but he's lying.

MARIA

I'm not sure who is lying.

ESTEBAN

Oh for God sake.

MARIA

Let's just go to the festival and settle this later.

EXT. ENTERING PATZCUARO - DAY OF THE DEAD - LATER THAT EVENING

In a nearby cemetery candles glow beside grave markers -- food, flowers and other items are illuminated. People of the town stand beside tombstones of their departed loved ones.

EXT. PATCUARO - TOWN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The bus comes to a halt. -- Esteban and his family get off. Francisco follows -- dejected. The streets are swimming with people -- crowds pulse in and out.

A punching OOM-PAH-PAH rhythm of ranchera music fills the air. A wad of firecrackers EXPLODES on the road -- ladies scream -- men laugh -- a plume of spent powder wafts upward.

Francisco, Esteban and his family are consumed by the human tide. Lupe rides on the shoulders of her father.

On a plaza corner a fire-eater is performing -- he wears a red, tight-fitting devil's costume with a black cape and a long pointy tail.

Esteban and family watch -- the entertainer drinks from a tin can -- with torch in hand he spits -- ignites the liquid -- a huge ball of fire rises up into the evening air. The fire-eater bows deeply.

FIRE EATER

And now I will need some help.
 (looks at Francisco)
 How about you, my young friend?

He looks at Maria -- she nods her head. Francisco steps forward. The fire-eater positions Francisco in the very middle of the circle of people.

The fire-eater places a smoldering torch in each of Francisco's hands.

FIRE EATER

Señoras and Señores my young
 assistant.
 (whispers)
 OK now boy, hold them high if you
 don't want your hair burnt off.
 Now, stand very, very still and no
 matter what you see, do not move.

There is a loud BANG -- flames appear in the hands of the performer. He moves his hands with a waving motion up and down.

He runs at Francisco -- jumps into the air with a bright, blinding flash -- a moment of silence -- the crowd explodes into APPLAUSE.

Francisco looks up -- the tips of the two rods burn brightly. He looks for the fire-eater. The crowd begins to search.

From the far end of the encircling people, a person emerges covered from head to toe with a jet-black cape -- moves toward Francisco -- stops several feet in front of the boy.

Another flash of black powder -- the cape is whipped spinning into the air -- the fire-eater appears before the crowd.

The performer bows -- points at Francisco.

FIRE EATER

Everyone, please, applause for my
 young friend! Here son this is for
 you.

He hands Francisco some pesos.

LUIS

Popi, can I get some candies?

ESTEBAN

Come on then.

EXT. PATZCUARO - IN THE PLAZA - CONTINUOUS

LUIS

That one!

LUPE

(points)

There.

A stall keeper hands candy to Luis and Lupe. On a stage in the plaza a mariachi band bursts into a version of "Juan Colorado".

The crowd surges over to the band. Maria purchases candles and a bag of incense.

MARIA

For the grave of our Grandmother.

The next booth over a very old man is selling wood carvings of Don Quixote in varying sizes. He sits upon a wooden stool - his back turned to passersby.

He is dressed in a pure white cotton shirt and pants protected by a long leather apron. Esteban elbows Francisco

ESTEBAN

(whispers)

That old fart must be using himself as the model for these.

TANGAXOAN II

Better to model the old and confident than the young and impetuous.

ESTEBAN

What did he say. Old man did you say something?

TANGAXOAN II

I might have.

Esteban scuffs -- moves along with his family.

FRANCISCO

Excuse me, señor, Señor. Excuse me Señor! Are these for sale?

TANGAXOAN II

(faces the boy)

Yes Mijo, which one were you interested in?

FRANCISCO
 Gandpa! I found what you wanted.
 (looks down)
 But they took it from me.

TANGAXOAN II
 I know. The important thing is you
 found it.

FRANCISCO
 What must I do now?

TANGAXOAN II
 You've done well Mijo now be
 strong, you must be strong.
 Things will work out you'll see.

FRANCISCO
 Sometimes it seems they never will.

He reaches out to touch Francisco's face -- his hand stop
 short -- he points to one of the smaller figures.

TANGAXOAN II
 Take that one, that one over there.
 It might come in handy.

Francisco turns -- reaches into the booth and grabs a small
 wooden statue of Don Quixote and Sancho Pansa.

FRANCISCO
 Grandpa_

Tangaxoan is gone -- Francisco searches the area -- pushes
 through the crowd until he is standing beside Esteban and his
 family. He puts the carving in his back pocket.

EXT. EDGE OF THE PLAZA - CONTINUOUS

A pair of large, dark leather boots taps the sidewalk to the
 beat of the mariachi band.

Beside them a slightly smaller pair of yellow snakeskin boots
 are motionless. A match EXPLODES, illuminating a two stone-
 hard faces covered with welts.

Yellow boots inhales deeply from a hand-rolled cigarette.
 Darkboots scratches the hornet stings on his neck and arms.
 They watch Francisco, Esteban and his family.

DARK BOOTS
 Let's get them now? What do ya'
 think?

YELLOW BOOTS

Are you crazy? You know what the boss said. We follow and wait until they lead us to the source.

DARK BOOTS

And if they don't?

YELLOW BOOTS

It's been almost week since they tried to make the last delivery. He'll either go or someone will come to him, and when they do we'll be ready.

Dark Boots rubs the pistol beneath the left side of his jacket.

DARK BOOTS

What's to keep us from taking the loot for ourselves?

YELLOW BOOTS

Remember who we work for.

DARK BOOTS

Yea, so what?

YELLOW BOOTS

I said, remember who we work for.
(Dark Boot's nods)
Good, now don't forget it!

Yellow Boots throws his cigarette to the ground and crushes it beneath the heel of his boot.

YELLOW BOOTS

Come on, it looks like they're leaving the plaza. Let's not lose 'em.

EXT. EDGE OF THE PLAZA - SIMULTANEOUSLY

ESTEBAN

OK, it'll soon be time for the parade of dancers. If we go now we can get a good spot.

Together they head for the corner side street just off of the plaza center. The street is completely cleared.

On both sidewalks yellow ropes hang from three-foot-high poles up the quarter-mile length of the street.

Colored lights twinkle the length of the route. At the very end of the street is a large, multi-spire church.

ESTEBAN

Over here.

Esteban points at the sidewalk at the very corner of the town plaza. They squeeze their way forward and stand on the edge of the sidewalk.

MARIA

Look, here they come!

She points toward the church at the end of the long street. Tiny dots of candlelight dance and twirl at the foot of the church.

The mariachi music stops -- silence falls over the plaza. Distant cheers, from the onlookers near the church, reach them. Slowly the procession starts down the hill toward them.

Somewhere within the parade, a local marching band begins to bang out the Mexican National Anthem.

LUPE

Here they come!

Yellow Boots and Dark Boots move closer to Esteban and his family.

LUIS

They're almost halfway.

Flag bearers lead the procession followed by dancers dressed in red and white skeleton costumes.

Row after row of children follow singing to the music of the band -- each holds a glowing candle.

The children file by -- their faces awash in candlelight.

ESTEBAN

Look, here come the old men.

Behind the children are twelve masked figures, each dressed in loose-fitting, blue, flowing cotton shirts, white pants and sandals. Their faces are hidden by white wooden masks.

On their heads are white straw, gaucho-type hats. On the brim of each hat, spaced inches apart, hang foot-long strips of multi-colored cloth.

In the hand of each man is a cane -- with it they TAP out a beat on the hard cobbles of the street. They move down the street -- spinning -- TAPPING.

One of the dancers moves in and out around the others -- brings his cane down with a LOUD CRACK upon the street.

He separates from the group -- stands before Francisco, tapping, twisting, weaving about. Francisco looks into the eyes behind the mask -- two glowing orbs of fire shine back.

A large, meaty hand clamps down on the boy's shoulder from behind -- Francisco's knees buckle -- he looks up into the face of his uncle.

CARLOS

You're coming with me, boy!

ESTEBAN'

Wait, Carlos, just a minute. Wait, where are you taking him?

CARLOS

Where do you think?

MARIA

You're not taking him back to the ranch!

CARLOS

Look, I appreciated you letting me know where this little bastard was, but now it's none of your business.

Francisco looks at Esteban -- their eyes meet briefly. Esteban looks down at the sidewalk. Maria moves forward -- kneels by Francisco's side.

MARIA

You know you can always stay with us if you want.

CARLOS

Boy's got no choice in the matter. He's going back where he belongs.

Maria and Carlos lock eyes -- the dancer moves closer -- brings his cane down with a LOUD CRACK -- everyone turns to look.

The masked dancer moves closer -- twirls the end of his stick inches from the uncle's face. The stick moves up, down, sideways almost poking Carlos in the nose.

Carlos's eyes follow the movement -- annoyed he swats away the point of the stick.

CARLOS

Get that thing out 'a' my face.

The dancer turns away -- then back -- feigns another jab -- the uncle steps back. The dancer leans over close to Francisco's ear.

TANGAXOAN II

Go Mijo, trust me and go.

Tangaxoan turns -- skips off, tapping his way into the plaza with the other dancers.

ESTEBAN

Can we talk about this?

CARLOS

The only thing I want to hear from you is what the hell happened to the last box. I got a letter from the buyer saying they were never delivered. Gonzales said something about being ambushed.

ESTEBAN

Don't worry the box is safe at home.

CARLOS

Good, then you can deliver it on Monday. I'll stop at my...source on the way back and replenish the supply.

ESTEBAN

Carlos,...I am through delivering for you.

CARLOS

What's wrong, not enough money in it? I'll give you ten, no twenty more pesos per load.

ESTEBAN

No, it's just not worth the risk. Besides, I've never felt good about it.

CARLOS

You felt good about spending the money.

MARIA

We don't need your dirty money.

ESTEBAN

Maria!

(to Carlos)

I'm sorry, but I can't.

CARLOS

You're too god damn soft, just like this wife of yours, that's the problem. Very well then, give me the box and I'll be on my way.

MARIA

One day you bastard. One day.

CARLOS

You need to teach her some manners.

Carlos squeezes Francisco's shoulder -- the boy winches from the pain. Maria gets in Carlos's face -- fists clenched tightly by her side. Esteban pulls her back.

EXT. ESTEBAN AND MARIA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Esteban hands the box of antiquities to the uncle -- steps away from the dusty, black Camaro.

ESTEBAN

I'm sorry, Pancho.

(to Carlos)

Oh, and this as well.

Esteban hands Carlos the golden scepter.

CARLOS

What's this.

ESTEBAN

We think he took from the box. We found it under his blankets.

CARLOS

Why you little son of...where did you say he got this?

ESTEBAN

From the box. It's the only place he could have.

CARLOS

Oh, yea right.

Carlos holds on to the scepter and stows the box in the trunk -- gets in the car. Francisco is in the passenger seat -- defeated -- looking down.

CARLOS

If you change your mind about delivering this stuff, let me know.

ESTEBAN

I won't. I've got my family to think of.

CARLOS

That wife of yours has got you by the balls. She's holding you back from opportunity.

(beat)

Ah, what's the use?

The uncle turns the key -- 8 cylinders jump to life -- the Camaro speeds away.

EXT. / INT. ESTEBAN AND MARIA'S HOUSE - SOMETIME LATER

A LOUD KNOCK -- a teary-eyed Maria answers the door.

MIGUEL

Buenas noches, señora, I don't know if you remember us. I am Miguel Ruiz and this is my wife Juanita. We are from La Falezidad. Is your husband at home?

(beat)

Señora, is everything OK?

MARIA

I'm sorry, of course I remember you and no, everything is not OK. Please, come in.

MIGUEL & JUANITA

Gracias, señora.

They enter -- Maria shows them to the kitchen -- Lupe is crying -- Esteban is sitting at the table -- looks up.

LUPE

It's all my fault their taking Pancho away.

MARIA

Don't cry Lupita it's not your fault. Esteban, this is_

ESTEBAN

I know who they are.

MIGUEL

Excuse me, I must be frank and to the point. Is the boy still here?

ESTEBAN

What business is it of yours?

MIGUEL

I...we believe Carlos means to harm him.

ESTEBAN

Look, my uncle's capable of many things but not murder. Besides, you didn't want the boy nine years ago. What's changed?

MIGUEL

(looks at Maria)

He's come and gone, taking the boy with him?

MARIA

Less than a half hour ago.

MIGUEL

Like I told you, I believe that my wife's...Francisco may be in danger.

ESTEBAN

I know he can be tough but I don't believe he would harm the boy.

JUANITA

YOU KNOW NOTHING!

MIGUEL

Juanita! Señor, please excuse her it's been, well, a hard situation for both of us. Look, I know he's your uncle, but we have lived on the same ranch with the man our entire lives. We are quite aware of what he is capable of. I personally have seen the results of the beatings he gives the boy.

MARIA

Juanita, Señor, please sit.

MIGUEL

No gracias. Forgive us Señora, but we have little time. I know from the letter you sent to Carlos that you are aware of at least some things. But what you may not know are the circumstances under which it all transpired.

ESTEBAN

And just how did you come to read my letter?

JUANITA

Your letter was thrown into the street by Carlos after he read it. He was overheard to say that he would get rid of the boy forever. My daughter, mind you, Francisco's sister, found and read it.

MARIA

She didn't know?
(Juanita tearfully shakes
her head)

ESTEBAN

But I thought...

MIGUEL

Too young, that's what we thought. Telling her and him later would be easier for them to accept.

ESTEBAN

You really think he will harm Francisco?

JUANITA

Without hesitation.

MARIA

What can we do to help?

MIGUEL

We can stop Carlos before he does something that we will all regret. Do you know where he is heading?

ESTEBAN

Back to the ranch, no, wait, he said something about going, well, going to somewhere else.

MARIA

Tell them! Tell them or I will.

ESTEBAN

The Devil's Hole, the old cinder
cone just outside of the village.
I'll get my jacket and go with you.

JUANITA

I'm going with you.

MIGUEL

Juanita, please. Let us take care
of this. Go to the ranch and wait
with the rest of the women.

ESTEBAN

Maria, ask your sister if she can
watch the children. You and Juanita
can take our truck and meet us at
the ranch. We'll get this worked
out and be there as soon as we can.

MARIA

OK, but be careful.

EXT. THE ROAD TO THE RANCH - LATER THAT NIGHT

Far behind the Camaro, unnoticed, a pair of headlights bobs
and weaves with every bump in the road.

INT. THE ROAD TO THE RANCH - SIMULTANEOUSLY

A pair of dark boots presses down harder on the accelerator
of a new SUV.

YELLOW BOOTS

Don't crowd him or he'll get
spooked.

Yellow Boots grips the dashboard with his left hand -- holds
a cigarette in the other. Dark Boots is quiet -- grips the
wheel tightly -- forearms bulging.

The two men exchange an icy glance -- Dark Boot's foot slowly
eases up off of the accelerator.

YELLOW BOOTS

That's better, now just keep his
taillights in sight.

INT. THE ROAD TO THE RANCH - LATER THAT EVENING

Halfway to the ranch.

CARLOS

(holds up the scepter)
OK, where in the hell did you get
this and don't tell me the box
cause you and I both know it wasn't
in there.

FRANCISCO

From the statue on the island. He
told me...showed me where to find
it.

CARLOS

Who? Who in the hell told you.

FRANCISCO

You wouldn't believe me if I told
you.

Carlos swings at Francisco with the scepter -- Francisco
ducks -- Carlos hits the glass of the passenger window with
the scepter -- the window SHATTERS.

CARLOS

Look what you made me do! This
isn't even my car!

Carlos punches him several times -- Francisco desperately
protects his face with his hands. Francisco slumps to the
floor out of reach.

CARLOS

You're not even worth the gas it
took to bring you back.

Francisco reaches for the door handle.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

No you don't.

Carlos swats Francisco's hand away. Francisco grabs his knees
-- curls into a fetal position on the floorboard.

TANGAXOAN II (V.O.)

Everything will be alright, trust
me, everything will be alright."

The uncle looks down at Francisco.

CARLOS

You're not going to cause anymore trouble for me, boy. I'll make sure of that.

EXT. EL POSO DEL DIABLO (DEVIL'S HOLE) -- LATER THAT NIGHT

The camaro turns off onto a set of dirt tracks. They round the wide base of the extinct volcano.

The car comes to a GRINDING stop at the base of the volcano -- turns off the engine -- Carlos gets out -- tucks the scepter behind his belt. He pulls Francisco forcefully from the car.

CARLOS

Come on. At least you can help me first.

A full moon illuminates the volcano -- a lone coyote howls from somewhere on the top of the ancient cinder cone. Francisco is dragged stumbling.

The uncle releases his grip on his neck -- pushes him forward. Strange noises -- RUSTLING -- HOOVES CLICKING. Carlos flips on a flashlight.

CARLOS

What the_

A large white billy goat with pink eyes and long horns is captured in the flashlight beam.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Go on, it's just a damn goat! Up to the top with you. Move it!

Francisco is pushed -- he falls to his knees -- slowly gets up. Carlos kicks him in his rear end.

CARLOS

Keep moving!

They climb upward -- reach the top -- a strong breeze breaks across the summit of the volcano. Carlos pauses -- looks back down at the car -- surveys the road beyond.

FRANCISCO

Uncle, please can we rest here a moment?

CARLOS

Keep going down the trail to the water.

Francisco stumbles ahead across the rim -- the trail slopes down out of sight into thick, dense jungle growth.

Hundreds of feet below is a giant cobalt circle of water -- dead calm -- a perfect replica of the moon shimmers on its surface. Francisco hesitates.

CARLOS

Go on, get down there!

Flashlight flickers -- once -- twice -- goes out. He slaps it with no result.

CARLOS

Damn thing.

(to the boy)

I said get going!

FRANCISCO

There's no light, It's hard to see.

CARLOS

Get down there or I'll push you down.

Francisco starts down the narrow, dark trail. They are quickly engulfed by a canopy of trees and vines.

Silhouettes of orchids and talenzias are highlighted by the moon-glow. Francisco's foot catches on a vine -- he falls.

CARLOS

You stupid idiot, get up and watch your_

Carlos catches the same root -- goes down with a LOUD THUD.

CARLOS

Son of a bitch!

His voice echoes across to the far inner wall -- a flock of birds explodes from their roost -- SQUAWKING in all directions.

Carlos and Francisco get back up -- proceed down. They near the bottom -- a weave of growth closes in above -- only tiny spots of lunar light penetrate.

Blackness presses in -- there are sounds of FROGS, INSECTS and the occasional GROWL or BARK of a predator.

The trail emerges from the jungle slopes onto a small semicircular clearing at the edge of the lake.

Trees and undergrowth hang out over the lake -- continuous -- impenetrable -- around the entire edge. The immense circle of water is eerily clear.

A rocky bottom is visible only at the edge. The water drops off into glowing, shimmering shafts of refracted moonbeams -- stretching down into seemingly bottomless depths.

A turtle scurries away -- PLOPS into the water. A small school of dark, cigar-shaped fish hang in the crystal liquid half-asleep.

CARLOS

Get over here and help me!

FRANCISCO

What are we doing here? Why did you bring me here?

A pair of mallards break from the trees -- flying low -- wing tips dapple the surface.

CARLOS

To help me, now get over here.

The uncle pulls a small boat from the brush -- they pull it to the water's edge. There are paddles and a metal toolbox inside.

Carlos removes several items from the box -- pushes the boat onto the surface of the lake.

CARLOS

Get in.

(Francisco hesitates)

Get in and stop messing around!

Francisco gets in -- Carlos pushes off against the muddy shore. The small boat sinks down leaving only inches of sideboard above the water.

Carlos stabs the water with the paddle -- guides the boat across to the opposite shore.

He aims the boat toward a small opening in the brush. The small craft silently glides into the hole -- the bow pushes up onto the opposite shore.

CARLOS

Go on, out with you.

Carlos gets out, removes a pistol from his pocket -- drags Francisco into the jungle. They stop before a tall, vertical rock face of volcanic stone.

At its base is a thick, dense bush climbing upward. Carlos separates several branches -- they push through.

They walk in total darkness -- stop several yards inside. There is a quick SCRATCHING sound -- a match head flares.

The cave is revealed in a bright flash -- the ceiling is tall -- walls of the ancient lava tube are curved and pocketed.

Fine roots and fungus cling to the entrance surface -- the floor is paved with large, flat stones. Carlos grabs a torch from the wall -- lites its bulbous end.

The oil soaked rags ignite -- a bright, orange flame licks upward. With the torch in one hand, the uncle pushes Francisco toward the rear of the tunnel -- Francisco turns.

FRANCISCO

Uncle, please tell me. What are we doing here?

The uncle pushes the hot torch within inches of Francisco's face -- he turns -- they continue on. Back and back they go. There is the sound of a huge volume of falling water.

A large pile of rubble, stretching from floor to ceiling, emerges from the darkness -- a cave-in from long ago. Francisco stops before the pile of rubble.

CARLOS

That way, go on!

Carlos points the torch to a bulge in the cave wall that conceals a narrow, dark passage.

CARLOS

In there, go!

They move into the blackness of the smaller passage -- the torch reveals smooth, hand-cut walls. Figures of coyotes, snakes and owls are carved into the flat surface.

Oil filled, inverted clamshell-like pockets are cut into the walls. One by one Carlos lights the oil.

They reach the end of the passage -- a thundering roar of falling water comes from the next chamber -- they enter.

More than fifty feet above their heads is a huge rock-studded, vaulted dome. On the far side of the chamber the dark circle of the lava tube continues.

They walk toward the center of the giant room -- there is a large hole over 20 feet in diameter. Francisco stands reluctantly at the edge of the chasm.

Directly below him a huge column of crystal clear water pours from a cave in the side of the shaft falling straight down into open blackness.

Carlos picks up a large rock -- tosses it into the rushing torrent. It quickly disappears into the darkness -- Francisco backs away.

CARLOS

(guffaws)

Don't worry, I need you to help me carry something or I would have tossed you down there already.

The uncle drives him forward to the far side to the continuation of the lava tube -- they enter.

Francisco stumbles into another chamber -- falls -- looks up. Before him is an incredible treasure.

Filling most of the floor of the chamber are hundreds of pots, figurines. Life-size basalt statues sprout from the fine dirt that covers everything.

At the far side of the chamber a four-foot-high stone obelisk rises from the floor.

Carlos lights several torches on the walls -- grabs bags from the floor -- throws them at Francisco.

CARLOS

Wrap that group of pots and statues over there and be careful. If you make so much as a scratch on any of 'em I'll throw you down that hole.

Points to a pile of objects close to the obelisk -- Francisco picks up the bags -- cautiously walks over to the antiquities.

The light from the torches casts an eerie glow over the relics that fill the room. Francisco picks up an object -- wraps it carefully.

He grasps another figurine -- holds it up to the light -- examines the finely carved statue made of black stone.

On top of the obelisk are human bones draped with a decaying grass tunic, parrot feather cap and blanket. Francisco crosses himself -- gently touches the grass tunic.

FRANCISCO
(whispers)
Grandpa.

EXT. ROAD TO THE RANCH - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Esteban sits calmly on the passenger's side of Miguel's truck -- an old double-barrel shot gun is propped between him and Miguel.

ESTEBAN
What do you think he'll do to the boy?

MIGUEL
Like I told you, he's capable of anything. Either way it might come down to this. Are you prepared?

Miguel pats the shotgun.

ESTEBAN
You can't be serious. Look, I came along because I just don't want to see that boy hurt anymore, that's all. I'm not gona be part of your personal vendetta against the my family.

MIGUEL
Fair enough. In that case just do it for the boy's sake. Look, for my part, I should have done this a long time ago. I can see you need the whole story.

ESTEBAN
The whole story?

MIGUEL
Look, you already know the boy, Francisco, is my wife's son. A month before we were to be married, Juanita was walking to town to buy ribbons and cloth flowers for her hair when...when Carlos's older brother passed by on horseback. He improperly offered her a ride. When she refused...the bastard raped her.

ESTEBAN

I heard a different version of that story.

MIGUEL

You only heard what they wanted you to hear.

(beat)

When I learned of it, I swore I'd kill him but was stopped by my family. They didn't want to start a blood feud that could only end in revenge with many deaths on both sides of our families.

ESTEBAN

Your family was wise to have stopped you, if that's what happened.

MIGUEL

It happened and more.

(beat)

I sought peace in knowing I would soon be marrying the most beautiful woman on the ranch. I just, tried to forget. Soon after we were married, Juanita gave me the news...she was pregnant and the child was not mine. I went crazy again. I ignored the wishes of my family. I went to the reservoir where I knew that Carlos's brother would pass. Where...where I knew I could kill him without being seen.

ESTEBAN

That might have been easier said than done.

MIGUEL

Maybe so, but not that day.

(beat)

I hid behind a tall stand of cactus, after awhile I noticed I wasn't alone. Another man came along the same route as I had taken, along the bank of the reservoir. He also hid in the cactus. He was so close to me I could hear him breathing. It was all that I could do to keep from being detected.

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Minutes later, sure enough, as I had figured, Carlos's brother came on horseback. As he passed, the man that was hiding near me left the cover of the cactus and walked out to meet him. The stranger's back was to me. I could not see his face but I definitely recognized his voice.

ESTEBAN

Who was this mystery person?

MIGUEL

They talked for several minutes then the brother started to leave on his horse and as he turned the man on the ground picked up a long stick, struck the brother, knocked him to the ground and beat him to death. Afterwards he dragged the body up to the reservoir and I heard the splash of the body rolling into the water.

ESTEBAN

Well, who was he? Who was the killer?

MIGUEL

Carlos.

ESTEBAN

What! You don't expect me to believe that do you? Look, what could he have to gain?

MIGUEL

A large inheritance not to mention controlling seat on the ranch council. Look, hombre, when I said that he was capable of anything, I meant it.

ESTEBAN

We had always been told it was an accident.

MIGUEL

Because there was no gun play, your family could not conceive that their strong, capable brother could have been manhandled by the likes of me, so they wrote it off as an unfortunate accident and made Carlos the sole heir. So from the day that their father died Carlos has been manipulating, bullying and threatening the people of the ranch to get whatever he wants.

ESTEBAN

And the boy, what does he know?

MIGUEL

He was told that his father drowned at the reservoir.

ESTEBAN

And his mother?

MIGUEL

That she died giving birth...to him.

ESTEBAN

But she never_

MIGUEL

I rejected the child. I made her give him up. She pleaded with me for many days. I made her swear never to let him know.

(beat)

If only I had been older and less stupid I would have kept Francisco and raised him as my own. But back...back then...I could only see the face of Carlos's brother every time I looked at the face of that poor, innocent, little baby.

They turn onto the small dirt road that runs around the base of the volcano. Miguel stops -- turns off the engine -- turns off the headlights.

ESTEBAN

Look up there.

At the very top close to the rim a small, white shaft of light bobs through the brush.

MIGUEL

Let's go.

INT. INSIDE THE CAVE - MOMENTS LATER

The boy stands before the skeletal remains.

FRANCISCO

It's here Grandpa...he has it.

CARLOS

Shut up and get to work.

YELLOW BOOTS

So this is the great tomb of
Tangaxoan the second, last king of
the Tarascan empire.

Carlos spins around -- desperate -- fumbles for the gun in
his jacket pocket.

YELLOW BOOTS

No you don't.

DARK BOOTS

Go on, go on ahead, I'll just blow
your head off!

Dark Boots' huge frame fills the chamber opening -- he levels
a forty-four magnum at the uncle's head -- smiles.

DARK BOOTS

Go on, go for it.

YELLOW BOOTS

Shut up and keep an eye on him
while I search the boy.

Dark Boots waves the uncle away from the wall with the end of
his pistol -- moves in close -- takes the small caliber, snub-
nose pistol from Carlos's hand.

DARK BOOTS

(guffaw)

Hombre, you couldn't even kill a
pero with this little thing.

Dark Boots laughs loudly -- exposes two large gold teeth.
Yellow Boots pats down Francisco -- finds the wood carving --
tosses it to the floor.

He motions for the boy to join his uncle. Darkboots pats down
Carlos -- finds the gold scepter.

DARK BOOTS

Wait a minute, what the hell?

Darkboots studies the scepter for a moment then tries to put it inside his jacket.

YELLOW BOOTS

No you don't. Put it with the rest of the stuff.

Darkboots reluctantly lowers the scepter to the floor placing it beside some masks -- Francisco watches.

YELLOW BOOTS

So joven, we meet again. This time it looks like we've found what we're after.

CARLOS

I'm warning you, this is a federal archeological site!

DARK BOOTS

Yea, and I'm the president of Mexico.

CARLOS

OK then, I have obligations to deliver these objects to a very important man. If he finds out that you have crossed him, you're the ones that will be sorry.

Yellow Boots removes a 45 semi-automatic pistol from inside his jacket -- walks to the uncle -- places it to the uncle's head.

YELLOW BOOTS

You gotta a deal. Well, we gotta deal to. Who in hell do you think sent us here, STUPIDO?

CARLOS

(gingerly pushes the gun away)

Look, I tell you what, let's make a deal, muchachos. You help me package this stuff up, get it out of here and I'll give you guys half. How 'bout it?

Yellow Boots slowly leans forward -- his mouth is inches away from the uncle's ear.

YELLOW BOOTS

Don't you get it? You and the
boy...you're gona be dead real
soon.

Yellow Boots turns -- walks to the middle of the room -- surveys the large quantity of objects before him. He walks to the obelisk -- pauses -- inspects the remains of the Indian king.

Dark Boots moves forward to examine the remains -- his eyes fall upon the gold rings and semiprecious stone necklaces that adorn the skeleton.

Dark Boots reaches out -- his hand is smacked away by Yellow Boots.

YELLOW BOOTS

No you don't! You know what the boss said, the pots and statues first. He wants pictures of this before we move it.

Dark Boots starts to raise his weapon -- stops -- smiles and walks back to the uncle.

YELLOW BOOTS

(to Carlos)

OK, you and the kid here are going to help us load up a few things.

DARK BOOTS

OK, get busy baboso.

Dark Boots jams the point of his pistol into the uncle's chest -- the uncle turns -- Dark Boots kicks his rear end with the sharp point of his boot.

The uncle falls to the floor beside a stack of antiquities. Dark Boots sticks the gun up to the uncle's forehead -- pulls the trigger.

The hammer falls upon the pin -- the pin falls upon an empty chamber -- LOUD CLICK.

Carlos collapses -- trembling -- sweating profusely. A dark stain grows on his crotch -- runs down the side of one pant leg.

DARK BOOTS

He's pissed himself.

YELLOW BOOTS

Have your fun later. Let's get this stuff ready and get out of here. The boss doesn't like being kept waiting

The two men exchange looks -- Dark Boots smiles -- nods his head. Francisco packs the last piece from his pile -- stands up with the bulging sack.

Yellow Boots takes his sack -- places it by the entrance. Dark Boots feigns another kick to the ass of Carlos.

The uncle flinches -- stumbles to his feet with a bag full of looted treasures.

DARK BOOTS

That's right, baboso, the next time this hammer goes down there's going to be a big hole in your head.

(Carlos staggers)

Hey, baboso, what's wrong? You need ta go pee-pee again?

YELLOW BOOTS

OK, let's go.

Carlos staggers to the chamber opening with a bulging gunnysack. Francisco picks up his bag.

YELLOW BOOTS

Wait! No you don't. You're too small to carry that out. The boss doesn't want any broken pieces!

(to Dark Boots)

Grab that.

Yellow Boots motions with his eyes toward the sack. Dark Boots ambles to the sack -- lifts it like a feather over his shoulder.

YELLOW BOOTS

OK boy, follow him and no funny business.

The group makes its way back through the passages by the hole of rushing water -- through the narrow, hand-cut passage.

EXT. THE CAVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

They reach the entrance and are out standing in the jungle by the water.

YELLOW BOOTS

Put the sacks over there.

The uncle places his sack beside the other. Dark Boots pulls the uncle toward him -- gets him in a headlock beneath his massive arm.

DARK BOOTS

Hey, Señor Pee Pee, are you ready to play?

YELLOW BOOTS

Put him down and help me with this boat.

(no response)

Are you deaf? I said, put him down.

Dark Boots reluctantly complies -- they push the small boat to the water's edge.

YELLOW BOOTS

Turn around and put your hands behind you.

Francisco turns -- Yellow Boots wraps hemp rope around his wrists.

YELLOW BOOTS

Now, get in the boat.

Yellow Boots positions Francisco on the rear seat -- binds his feet -- attaches them to a gunnysack filled with rocks.

YELLOW BOOTS

Get 'em in, tie 'em up and weight 'em down.

Dark Boots pats Carlos on the top of his head.

DARK BOOTS

OK Señor Pee Pee, fun and games are over. Get your rotten, stinky ass in the boat.

Carlos's hands are tied -- he is placed in the boat -- his feet tied to a bag of rocks. Dark Boots gives the boat a hard push -- the boat with Francisco and his uncle floats out toward the middle of the lake.

Yellow Boots pulls out his forty-five -- points it at the small boat -- uses an overhanging branch to steady his aim.

The first shot EXPLODES in the water several feet in front of the vessel. A spray of water erupts over the boat.

Carlos thrashes back and forth like a wild animal -- attempts to free his hands and legs.

EXT. ON THE RIM OF THE CRATER - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Esteban and Miguel hear a GUN SHOT echoing up from the lake's surface below. Large flocks of birds are spooked into the sky around them.

ESTEBAN
(points)
Look, down there!

They see two figures in a small boat on the far side of the lake -- a white splash of water erupts beside the boat. A second later they hear another GUN SHOT.

MIGUEL
Let's get down there.

They run down the trail -- several more shots ring out.

EXT. THE WATER'S EDGE - CONTINUOUS

Yellow Boots lowers his empty, smoking pistol. Beside him Dark Boots squints one eye -- lines up the boat in the sights of his large weapon.

The magnum EXPLODES like a small cannon, its hefty recoil hardly causing a nudge in the large hands of Dark Boots.

A bullet CRASHES through the wooden hull of the boat grazing Carlos's ankle.

Carlos cries out in pain -- a second bullet rips through the midsection of the boat at the water line -- grazes the tips of Francisco's shoes.

Several more bullets tear through the hull -- water starts pouring in.

YELLOW BOOTS
OK, that's enough! Let it go down.
We don't want bits and pieces of
'em for the federales to find.

Yellow Boots pushes the barrel of Dark Boot's large magnum down. Yellow boots starts to reload his weapon -- Dark Boots raises the magnum -- shoots Yellow Boots point blank.

The force of the blast sends Yellowboots flying back. He crashes to the ground in a heap -- his shoulder shattered -- one arm twisted, doubled behind him.

Yellow Boots raises his empty forty-five -- pulls the trigger several times -- CLICK -- CLICK -- CLICK -- eyes wide -- disbelief.

Dark Boots points his large magnum down at Yellow Boots' head.

DARK BOOTS

A Dios amigo.

The gun erupts with a THUNDERING BELCH of fire and smoke. Yellow Boots becomes a twisted, faceless, lifeless corpse.

EXT. THE WATER'S EDGE - CONTINUOUS

Esteban and Miguel reach the water's edge -- witness the final moments of the sinking boat.

The vessel, spinning slowly, gently tilts to one side.

ESTEBAN

Pancho is in that boat!

MIGUEL

Let's get to the other side!

They search the clearing -- find a small trail hugging the lake's edge -- follow the trail to the other side. The boat starts to slip under.

A final, DESPERATE CRY from Carlos shoots over the surface of the lake.

EXT. THE BOAT - CONTINUOUS

Carlos whips about -- his body enters the cool, deep water. The rear of the boat lifts up. Carlos slides in up to his shoulders -- the boat slowly sinks.

Francisco's feet go under -- Carlos gurgles -- takes his last breath -- slips below the surface. The stones tied to the uncle's legs fall away -- he is gone.

Francisco pulls hard at the ropes but cannot free himself. The water rises above Francisco's waist -- he pulls again without success.

The water reaches his neck -- the boat slowly leans to one side -- his bag of stones slide away.

Francisco grabs a final breath before going under. The weight of the stones pulls him from the seat -- he slides down into the abyss of the lake.

A figure is swimming up toward him from the dark depths -- closer -- closer -- it is Motas. He is wearing a loincloth.

He reaches Francisco, unties his feet and hands, freeing him from the bag of stones.

Motas pushes Francisco upward. Francisco breaks the surface alone -- takes large SUCKING BREATHS.

He looks around for the person who helped him. The overturned boat bobs with its stern only a few inches above the surface.

EXT. THE WATER'S EDGE - CONTINUOUS

ESTEBAN

I'm swimming out!

Esteban throws off his boots and jacket.

MIGUEL

If the shooting starts again go under quickly.

Esteban dives -- swims to the boat.

EXT. THE CAVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Miguel approaches the cave entrance with shotgun raised. A CHORUS of frogs and crickets begins. He pulls out a flashlight -- snaps it on.

The narrow beam of light searches the trail -- a pair of bright yellow snakeskin boots pop out of the darkness.

He works the light slowly up the corpse -- sees the remains of Yellow Boot's head.

EXT. THE BOAT - CONTINUOUS

Francisco, afraid to move, remains still by the hull of the boat. A SPLASHING sound -- something is swimming.

ESTEBAN
 Panchito, Panchito, are you there?
 (reaches the boy)
 Thank God you're alive.

Francisco clings to his cousin.

ESTEBAN
 It's OK, you're OK now. Hold on and
 we'll swim back to shore.

They swim to shore -- back to the trail.

ESTEBAN
 Listen, Pancho, who was shooting at
 you?

FRANCISCO
 Two men...the same two men that
 tried to rob us on the road.

Esteban looks up the trail toward the cave.

ESTEBAN
 Wait here, I have to go help
 Miguel.

Esteban removes a small revolver from his pocket.

FRANCISCO
 Paloma's father? I'm going with
 you.

ESTEBAN
 OK, but stay behind me. If shooting
 starts head back up the trail as
 fast as you can and get out of
 here.

They make their way toward the lava tube.

EXT. THE CAVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Twigs are SNAPPING on the trail -- Miguel turns off the light
 -- crouches low -- levels the shotgun from his hip. He thumbs
 the double hammers back slowly -- two loud clicks.

His finger taps the double triggers -- more BREAKING branches
 -- RUSTLING leaves closer, closer. He raises the gun --
 raises the flashlight -- trigger finger squeezing.

Esteban and Francisco enter the clearing -- Miguel's
 flashlight snaps on. Esteban raises his gun to fire.

MIGUEL
Wait, wait! It's me.

FRANCISCO
Miguel?

MIGUEL
God that was close.

ESTEBAN
You'll telling me.

Miguel eases up off the trigger of the shotgun -- motions Esteban over to the dead man.

FRANCISCO
That's one of them.

ESTEBAN
That leaves one more, somewhere. He might be back in the cave.

MIGUEL
And Carlos, your uncle, where is he?

FRANCISCO
He went down...in The water.

MIGUEL
Our business is done then. let's get out of here.

There is a loud click.

DARK BOOTS
Drop the guns! I said drop them.
NOW!

Esteban and Miguel reluctantly comply.

DARK BOOTS
You listen real well. Now you three come with me I need some help to get a few more thing.

MIGUEL
The boy, let him go please. He's not involved in this.

DARK BOOTS

Oh señor he's involved alright all the way up to his skinny little neck. Now move or you'll end up like Mr. Know-it-all over there.

INT. INSIDE THE CAVE -- THE BUTRIAL CHAMBER -- LATER

DARK BOOTS

You two get over there. Put those gold and silver things in this bag. Boy, go over to that old pile of bones and bring me those rings.

Francisco starts to walk toward the monolith -- he hears the voice of Tangaxoan.

TANGAXOAN II

Francisco...Mijo.

FRANCISCO

Grandpa?

DARK BOOTS

Sorry sonny but there ain't no grandpa here.

TANGAXOAN II (V.O.)

Mijo the scepter, get it...place it in my hand.

Francisco spots the golden stick -- grabs it and walks toward the remains of Tangaxoan. Miguel and Esteban are reluctantly putting artifacts into bags.

Francisco nears the obelisk slowly -- raises the gold scepter. Dark Boots cocks his pistol -- points it at Francisco.

DARK BOOTS

Kid wait! What have you got there? What are you doing? Bring that over here.

(beat)

I said bring that over here.

Francisco sees the wood carving of Don Quixoti -- picks it up -- throws it hard into the face of Dark Boots. Dark Boots is thrown off balance.

Francisco runs toward the skeletal remains. Dark Boots fires at Francisco -- Francisco falls in a heap by the obelisk.

ESTEBAN

You bastard, you didn't have to do that!

DARK BOOTS

(turns to Esteban and Miguel)

You want the same thing?

(beat)

Yea, that's what I thought. Shut up and get back to it.

Francisco painfully rises -- places the scepter upon the skeletal hand of Tangaxoan's remains. There is a high pitched DING as if a bell had been struck.

A low rumble starts at the back of the cave and slowly builds. A whorl wind whips up from the outer passageways, rushes in blinding Darkboots.

Fire springs from the floor burning Dark boots hand -- he drops the gun. The rumbling subsides and the dust settles. Standing before them in all his glory is the ghost of Tangaxoan. By his side is Motas.

DARK BOOTS

That's my great, great, great, great, great grand son you just shot. Now you're going to pay for it.

Motas makes an angry, seemingly obscene signing at Dark Boots. Both Tangaxoan and Motas grow in size until their ghostly heads fill the chamber.

Their eyes turn to red glowing orbs. Dark Boots trembles -- runs from the chamber up the lava tube chased by the gigantic ghostly heads.

Dark Boots turns back to look -- forgetting about the hole of rushing water he falls in -- his screams echo away down into the bottomless pit.

The entire cave starts to shake -- the cave floor splits open -- pieces of the roof start to fall.

ESTEBAN

LETS GRAB THE BOY AND GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE IT COMES DOWN ON US!

They grab hold of Francisco and run for their lives to the entrance. As they leave the chamber the ceiling caves in sealing the opening.

They scramble for the entrance barely keeping ahead of the collapsing lava tube crashing down behind them.

EXT. LAKE PATCUARO - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Strong tremors rip through the mountains and land surrounding the lake causing the bells in the church towers of the old town to ring.

The ground splits open in many places. Dry river beds are suddenly filled with rushing water. Springs suddenly open bubbling out of the ground. A large volume of water sweeps down into and through the lake.

EXT. ISLAND OF JANITZIO - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Lalo runs from his home to the edge of the island to witness the great event. He sees the water level rising and the current once more restored -- fish are jumping. He is joined by his wife, kids and his cousins Javier and Marcos.

LALO

Gracias a Dios, its a miracle a true miracle.

JAVIER

Cousin, will it be like it was before.

LALO

Yes and maybe even better. As our people would have said in the old days, the boba has returned to refresh the land.

INT. THE CAVE ENTRANCE - DAWN - SECONDS LATER

They barely make it to the entrance throwing themselves to the ground outside. The entire rock-face collapses behind them. The dust slowly settles.

ESTEBAN

Man that was close.

MIGUEL

The boy, is he OK.

ESTEBAN

Francisco?

FRANCISCO

(holds his arm)

I think I'll be OK. He wasn't a very good shot.

MIGUEL

Let's get you home. Back to your real home and family.

CARLOS

You're not going anywhere.

Carlos dripping with water picks up Esteban's pistol and points it at them.

ESTEBAN

Carlos, you're OK. We thought you were dead.

CARLOS

(guffaws)

So did I until that half-naked, crazy bastard untied my legs and pulled me up from the bottom.

ESTEBAN

Put that away their gone, finished.

CARLOS

You don't get it do you, stupid idiots. You start a cave in and cover up one of the greatest treasure ever found. It's going to take me months, maybe years to get this dug out. Do you honestly think I can have you three telling everyone about it while I'm trying to get back in there. No, no I'd have every collector and treasure hunter from here to the border sniffing around, not to mention the Federales.

ESTEBAN

I don't understand.

CARLOS

You will soon enough.

MIGUEL

I told you he was no good.

CARLOS

Shut up and start swimming out. Not too far so I get a good head shot but far enough so you sink nice and deep.

ESTEBAN

You can't be serious.

CARLOS

Dead serious. It's a long way down. No one's gona find you anytime too soon.

MIGUEL

Carlos not the boy.

CARLOS

Oh especially the boy that worthless little shit caused me a lot of trouble. I still have to deal with that son of a bitch collector when we, oh excuse me, when I get back. Now get in the water NOW!

Esteban and Miguel help Francisco up -- they slowly begin to wade into the water.

Two loud clicks -- Carlos turns his head -- Juanita has picked up Miguel's shotgun and is pointing it at Carlos.

JUANITA

You evil man, you're not going to harm my son, my husband or anyone else.

MIGUEL

Juanita thank God, but how?

Maria steps out.

MARIA

We decided you might need the help from a couple of women.

Carlos slowly starts to turn and face Juanita.

JUANITA

Don't move!

CARLOS

Why it's the lovely Juanita. You know I always wished it had of been me instead of my stupid brother. Not the dying part of course but you know the other part.

Carlos makes a pushing motion with his hand and laughs.

JUANITA

Shut up or I'll kill you where you stand.

CARLOS

You're not going to do anything. You never did and never will. Just like your good for nothing husband over there. He couldn't stomach having your little bastard son living under his roof. We took him in when no one else wanted him.
(thumbs at Francisco)

MIGUEL

That's a lie Pancho. It was my mistake not your mothers. I made her give you up because I was a young, ignorant fool. We're your family son, we want you, we want to comes live we us...if you want to.

Juanita crying -- lowers the shotgun slightly -- Carlos suddenly raises his gun and shoots at Juanita. Juanita shoots him with both barrels in the chest.

Smokes clears -- Juanita is not hit. Carlos crumples and spits blood -- a bewildered look is on his face. The others wade back in. Francisco moves slowly toward Juanita -- confused.

FRANCISCO

Mother?

JUANITA

Si mijo.

Juanita teary eyed lowers the smoking gun, slowly nods her head. Francisco runs to her -- they embrace. Miguel goes to them and all three embrace.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EL RANCHO LA FALICIDAD - WEEKS LATER - AFTERNOON

The sky is a polarized blue, dotted with strong, white, puffy clouds -- they slowly drift from horizon to horizon.

Francisco and Paloma lay against the bank of the lagoon by the cactus row. Francisco's arm is bandaged. Teeko the dog is close by.

Smoke is slowly rising from the shed at the home of Miguel and Juanita.

PALOMA

Big brother I think dinner will be ready soon.

FRANCISCO

That sounds good little sister cause I'm getting real hungry.

PALOMA

Who are you calling little sister?

Very serious -- then she laughs -- he laughs. Suddenly Teeko starts to BARK. A spinning vortex of dust sweeps up from the field -- it moves toward Francisco and Paloma.

The dust devil slowly subsides into a pile of dirt and twigs in front of them. Francisco looks around for Tangaxoan.

Something sparkles in the dust -- Francisco reaches down -- picks up a golden ring and the stick, ball and string toy.

He blows off the dust -- smiles -- places the ring in his pocket -- plays with the toy.

PALOMA

What's that?

FRANCISCO

A gift from our Grandpa.

PALOMA

Do you think he'll sleep peacefully now that everything is back the way it was.

FRANCISCO

For now maybe but you never know where and when Grandpa might pop up next.

Large, popcorn-shaped clouds pass over.

PALOMA

(points to the sky)

LOOK! That one looks like our
cousin Lupe with her big behind.

FRANCISCO

That one looks like our tia
Yolanda. See the big hips and big
ears.

Laughing they both point toward the sky.

THE END