

DO YOU BELIZE IN CHRISTMAS?

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FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A sign on the whiteboard reads, "English Literature," "Mr. Robins, Sixth Period," "Holiday Break Oral Book Reports," and "Only half-credit for banned books!" Snow falls outside the windows and the students are in winter clothes.

MR. ROBINS (40s), a strict teacher in a tweed sports coat, stands behind the podium. Next to him is, ANGELA SANCHEZ (13), a confident but often poorly-prepared student who hides a book behind her back.

We see the backs of 8-10 successful Students (13, males and females) from a few rows back.

MR. ROBINS

Ms. Angela Sanchez asked to go first, something she's never done.
(glares at Angela)
It's been a long day. Keep it short!

Mr. Robins steps to the side, and Angela steps to the podium and shows the book to the class.

ANGELA

"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain.

The Students groan and jeer.

MR. ROBINS

Half-credit is the best you can do, Mr. Sanchez. I warned you!

Angela ignores Mr. Robins and smiles at the class.

Angela pulls out a folded "Treasure Map" from the middle of the book. It's a colorfully drawn map of Belize with the capital city, Belmopan, at its center.

ANGELA

I was innocently looking at the banned book section at our town library...

MR. ROBINS

You were required to select a book from our school...

ANGELA

(interrupting)

When the strangest thing happened.
I found this treasure map in a copy
of this book. And much like
Huckleberry Finn took an adventure
down the Mississippi River, I went
home and politely suggested to my
parents to go on an adventure
during the holiday break. They were
strongly supportive of my idea from
the start.

The students scoff.

INT. SANCHEZ HOME - DAY

Angela stands at her seat around the small kitchen table in a
modest home. BUZZ (9) plays video games on his phone while he
sloppily eats a bowl of brightly colored cereal and milk.

We see DAD, (DIEGO SANCHEZ; 36) shaking his head "No."

DAD

Out of the question. Money doesn't
grow on trees.

BUZZ

(mumbles sarcasm)
Not on trees. Huh?

Angela elbows Buzz in the arm, but he doesn't notice.

MOM (MARIA; 35) paces around the table angrily and yells.

MOM

You know how much your grandparents
look forward all year to taking
everyone to midnight mass at St.
Theresa's! It would kill them.

BUZZ

What are they, eighty? They had a
good run.

Dad glares at Buzz. Angela is angry.

ANGELA

Knock it off, Buzz.
(to Mom)
But I feel Dad's pain.
(MORE)

ANGELA (CONT'D)

He hates endangering our lives
driving the grands and us on snowy
cold nights just to hear the grands
snore during mass.

Mom glares at Dad. If looks could kill.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Patricia's mom is taking her to
Florence, Italy over Christmas.
Madalyn's entire family is going to
Paris. The Guptas are going to New
Zealand. And we're staying home to
do nothing with old people again!
It's so embarrassing!

DAD

Use all your savings for college
and join them in New Zealand!

Mom gets in Angela's face.

MOM

You have an English Lit assignment
that's due the first day back from
Winter Break. I bet Buzz has a...

BUZZ

Nope! I got nothing for two weeks.

Angela elbows Buzz so hard he falls off his chair.

ANGELA

You've done nothing your entire
life but play stupid video games!

DAD

That's true. I've never seen Buzz
voluntarily go outside to play.

ANGELA

(to Dad)

Flights to Belize are super cheap
right now. Don't you have a sister
down there? We could stay with her.

MOM

She works at an orphanage. I don't
think...

Mom stops herself and smiles.

DAD

We haven't seen Miriam since Buzz was born.

ANGELA

We haven't gone on a family vacation since Buzz was born.

Mom pauses and smiles wickedly at Dad.

MOM

Honey, Angela's right about that! Why haven't you taken me on a vacation?

DAD

Don't be silly. We signed up for that Caribbean Cruise, but it got canceled because of...

BUZZ

Black plague? Norway rats? Legionnaire's Disease?

ANGELA

(angrier)

That was an adults-only cruise!

BUZZ

I don't do boats.

Angela shows them a TRAVEL BROCHURE of Belize, which interests Mom and Dad.

ANGELA

We need to do something as a family with the spirit of Christmas! Belize is calling us!

BUZZ

Don't answer it! I don't do "outdoors."

ANGELA

(to her parents)

You two can finally get a vacation.

(to Buzz)

Buzz can finally grow up -- a week without his stupid video games. And I can read my book on the beach and get an A in English Lit!

MOM
I don't know... there's my
parents...

Dad grabs the brochure.

DAD
(upbeat)
Cheaper than I thought!

MOM
(sarcastic to Dad)
Poor Buzz. The excitement could
kill him! He has a fear of the
outdoors, and especially, wild
animals.

We see a side profile of Buzz sitting in his seat and shaking
in fear.

BUZZ
Live fish, snapping turtles, deadly
snakes and crocodiles, and...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Buzz has the window seat. He wears EarBuds and plays a video
game on his phone while continuing his list of feared
animals.

BUZZ
And monkeys especially creep me
out. And spiders, and ants, and
crabs.

We see Angela is sitting next to Buzz and opening her book to
page 1 in "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." Blaring music
escapes her EarBuds.

She glances at Buzz who looks out the window of the plane and
freezes in fright.

Angela looks the opposite way to see her parents enjoying
drinks, looking at travel brochures of Belize, and whispering
to each other lovingly.

Angela takes off her EarBuds, pats Buzz's hand, and whispers
angrily at him.

ANGELA
Snap out of it, you little monkey!
I need your help on this trip.

She grabs Buzz's suspicious attention.

BUZZ
You never need me!

Angela turns to the page in the book hiding the "Treasure Map" she found in it.

Buzz's eyes open wide and Angela puts a finger to her lips demanding silence. She secretly shows Buzz the map.

BUZZ (CONT'D)
So what?!

ANGELA
It's not just any map! It's a treasure map.

She points to the star on the map marked "Belmopan."

ANGELA (CONT'D)
That's where I think the treasure is.

Buzz's eyes open wide. He sneaks a peak at his parents, who are drinking and whispering to each other.

BUZZ
Do they know about the map?!

Angela glances secretly at her parents and then whispers to Buzz.

ANGELA
Hell no, and you better not say a word or you don't get half the treasure!

BUZZ
Where did you find it?

Angela proudly points to her book, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn."

ANGELA
This is a banned book I got at the town library, not the school library! It's by a really smart-ass old guy who's dead.

BUZZ
Did they kill him for the map?

ANGELA

No. I don't think so. But I Googled him and you know what he said about the treasure?

BUZZ

What?

ANGELA

"There comes a time in every rightly constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure."

Buzz is stunned.

BUZZ

And you think that's us he was talking about?!

ANGELA

Darn straight it was!
(emphatic)
This is our time!

Buzz pauses and smiles devilishly.

BUZZ

Do you have a plan?

ANGELA

Mostly. We hunt for clues at the fancy resort. Then, one night, we sneak out and dig it up.

Buzz turns suspicious and sarcastic.

BUZZ

If it's that easy to find, how come nobody's found it yet?

Angela grabs and squeezes his arm hard.

ANGELA

'Cause they don't have the map, idiot!

Buzz smiles.

BUZZ

I'm in.
(looks away, mumbles)
(MORE)

BUZZ (CONT'D)

As long as it's indoors at the fancy resort.

Angela fist-bumps Buzz, replaces her Earbuds, and reads her book.

INT. BELIZE AIRPORT - DAY

The Sanchez family stands at the "Lost Luggage" counter. They wear their winter clothes. Mom and Dad have small carry-on bags, while Angela and Buzz have backpacks. They try to remain calm. A Customer Service REPRESENTATIVE (female, 50s) smiles compassionately staring at her computer.

REPRESENTATIVE

I see you transferred in Denver, Colorado, in the middle of a snowstorm.

DAD

Yes, but there should have been plenty of time...

REPRESENTATIVE

Under ideal conditions, yes. I bet you're happy to be in sunny and warm Belize.

ANGELA

My clothes! My swimsuit!

BUZZ

My extra pair of underwear.

MOM

(to Buzz)

You only packed one pair...

(to the Representative)

How soon...?

REPRESENTATIVE

Your bags never made it out of Denver. Probably buried in snow on the tarmac. We're on it! I can assure you. Our people will notify you immediately when we find anything.

They pout as they leave the Lost Luggage counter.

Mom glares at Dad with beautiful blue skies behind him.

MOM
This was all your idea!

DAD
(smiles at Angela)
She made me do it!

MOM
Maybe your sister can loan us a few things.

DAD
Good ol' Aunt Miriam, huh kids?

ANGELA
I doubt she's my size.

BUZZ
(freezes)
My adapter cords and spare games?

MOM
Don't worry, kids. The town of San Pedro will have shops and the resort will have a gift shop.

DAD
But first, I have a surprise in mind: A visit to the Mayan ruins at Altun Ha forty-five minutes north!

ANGELA
Ancient ruins?
(whispers to Buzz)
A perfect place to find treasure.

The kids look excited.

INT. TAXI - DAY

The Cab is decorated for Christmas which delights everyone.

Angela and Buzz are in the backseat while Mom and Dad sit in the middle seat behind the DRIVER (30s).

DRIVER
Welcome to Christmas in Paradise!

MOM
Our luggage will be enjoying a white Christmas in Denver. I should have stayed with the luggage.

DRIVER

All you will need here is a swimsuit and sunscreen! Clothing is optional.

Everyone laughs.

MOM

I guess we'll make the best of it.

Dad caresses Mom's hand and kisses her.

DAD

It'll be like a second honeymoon.

MOM

(laughs)

We didn't have a first one, did we?

DAD

Please take us to Altun Ha.

DRIVER

(laughs)

Then I hope you brought bug spray.

The Driver races away.

EXT. ALTUN HA - DAY

An archaeologist guide JENI (30s) meets the Sanchez family.

JENI

Welcome to Belize, the home of the Mayans for thousands of years. My name is Jeni. Your driver says we only have a short time, so we move quickly, yes?

The family looks around in awe.

JENI (CONT'D)

We don't know the real name of the site but archaeologists named it Altun Ha, or Stone-Water. It was occupied from 200 years before Christ to 900 years after Christ, as a trading post for jade, obsidian, and flint. But jade to Mayans was like their diamonds and gold to us.

ANGELA
Treasure!

JENI
Exactly.

Angela and Buzz quit listening to look for jade on the ground, which they never see. Mom and Dad listen to Jeni.

BEGIN MONTAGE

-- Walking across the plaza.
-- The kids get excited climbing the steps of a temple.
-- The entire family is in awe looking out.

JENI (CONT'D)
The Mayans grew corn, chili
peppers, avocados, beans, and the
first chocolate in the world.

BUZZ
Now we're talking.

-- the family walks around and enjoys the site. They talk and laugh. Angela and Buzz are no longer looking for jade treasures.
-- Jeni guides the family back to the taxi.

END MONTAGE

The family thanks and hugs Jeni.

INT. TAXI - DAY

DAD
Please take us to the ferry to San
Pedro. We're on another adventure
in paradise.

The Driver races off.

Angela and Buzz stare at the Treasure Map, while Mom and Dad talk to the driver.

DAD (CONT'D)
How long of a drive is it to the
San Pedro Express?

DRIVER

Ninety minutes. Warm weather, palm trees, Caribbean Sea views. Sit back. Enjoy.

Angela is perplexed.

ANGELA

Are we heading southeast?

DRIVER

Yes, first we go to Belize City.

Angela tracks her finger on the map for Buzz, from the general area of the airport to Belize City.

Buzz nods in approval.

Angela then tracks a route to the northwest from their current location to Belmopan (the star on the map).

Angela and Buzz fist-bump.

They all enjoy the sights along the coast.

DAD

Looks like paradise, huh, kids?

BUZZ

I bet pirates loved it here too!

Angela elbows Buzz and he winces.

DRIVER

Many pirates, yes.

LATER

They see Belize City.

MOM

We're in for a real adventure.

DAD

(laughs)

Does anyone miss the snow yet?

The kids stare out the window.

DRIVER

Very nice. Resorts, shops, Mayan ruins, restaurants, nightlife. Everything.

LATER

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Here we are. Express Ferry to San Pedro.

ANGELA

(surprised)
Ferry?

BUZZ

(frightened)
On the water?

DAD

We'll be at Aunt Miriam's in ninety minutes.

MOM

(to Buzz)
That's why it's called the Caribbean Sea and not the Caribbean Highway, silly!

Angela stares at the Treasure Map, concerned.

ANGELA

I was hoping to see Belmopan.

DAD

That's in the opposite direction, dear.

Angela's eyes open wide.

DRIVER

Capital City of Belize. Eighty kilometers away.

ANGELA

Kilometers?

DRIVER

Fifty miles away. Home of the Sleeping Giant? It has resorts in the lush tropical forest. Very beautiful. You take my card, yes?

The Driver stops, and reaches his hand back with a card.

Dad reaches to take the card from the driver's hand, but Angela snatches it.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Remember, there are no bathrooms on
the ferry!

Angela's and Buzz's eyes open wide.

Mom tips the Driver and he smiles.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
'For the children,' as we say.

They each say 'Thank you' as they exit the cab.

The cab driver reaches under the seat and pulls out an empty
can of peanuts. A label on the can reads, "For the children."
He adds the tip money to the can and replaces it.

INT. FERRY - AFTERNOON

On the ferry the water is smooth, but Buzz looks straight
down to the deck of the Ferry. Mom and Dad sit on either side
of Buzz. Across from them, Angela reads her book.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Angela continues with her book report.

ANGELA
The main character in Mark Twain's
book was Huck Finn who was poor as
dirt and had a drunken abusive
father. Huck's best friend, Tom
Sawyer, had an overactive
imagination, but he found a stash
of gold, and shared it with Huck,
who was then adopted by a kindly
old lady named the Widow Douglas,
who made Huck wear clean clothes
and go to church and school which
he hated!
(pauses)
Did I mention Huck Finn was exactly
our age, thirteen years old?

The Students grumble, unimpressed.

MR. ROBINS
Stick to the main points in the
story, Ms. Sanchez.

ANGELA

Anyway, Huck's drunken dad shows up to steal his money, so Huck kills a pig, spreads the blood all around, and fakes his own death, almost like the dangerous blood-letting ceremonies of the Mayans at Altun Ha which I definitely can't talk about here. Trust me, you boys wouldn't like it!

MR. ROBINS

Stick to the book, Ms. Sanchez.

ANGELA

Okay. Then, Huck heads off on the biggest adventure of his life when he set off down the Mississippi on a small raft with an escaped slave named Jim!

The Students groan with boredom.

Angela ignores the groans and continues.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

The thing I thought about most as Huck and Jim floated down the longest river in America was, where do you pee?

The students stare, unimpressed by Angela's story.

BACK TO:

INT. FERRY - DAY

Buzz'e knees are bouncing up and down. He has to pee.

MOM

You should have gone at the ferry terminal.

DAD

You'll just have to hold it.

Angela sees Buzz about to burst.

ANGELA

Quick, to the back of the ferry!

Buzz leaps to the stern.

Angela pulls Dad and Mom with her to surround Buzz so no one can see him.

BUZZ
I can't go with you watching.

They turn their backs on Buzz.

BUZZ (CONT'D)
I'm afraid of sharks.

DAD
No sharks can jump that high.

ANGELA
For so little food.

MOM
I'll hold your shirttail so you don't fall in.

ANGELA
Just go!

Buzz sighs of relief and turns around to see everyone on board glaring at his family.

EXT. SAN PEDRO DOCK - AFTERNOON

SERIES OF SHOTS

The dock area is awash with booths of Christmas gifts and toys.

Dad buys Santa's caps for everyone. Angela and Buzz reluctantly put them on.

The Sanchez family rents a golf cart for island transportation.

Everyone smiles.

They follow a map to find the Resort.

END SERIES OF SHOTS.

INT. RESORT, FRONT DESK - LATE AFTERNOON

The CLERK (20s; male) at the front desk smiles when approached by the Sanchez family.

DAD

We're the Sanchez family. Has our luggage arrived yet from the airlines?

The clerk looks behind him and sees nothing.

CLERK

What day and time did they say it would arrive?

MOM

They didn't.

CLERK

We'll watch for it. In the meantime, let's get you checked in.

The clerk stares at the computer.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Your room was only recently reserved.

DAD

I think we got the last open room on the island.

CLERK

Looks like you did.

(smiles big)

It's the smallest room we have. A room for two. One queen bed.

ANGELA

Two? Where are we...

CLERK

Take a look at the room, take a few hours to tour the island -- maybe go to Secret Beach.

Angela whispers to Buzz while the Clerk continues speaking.

CLERK (CONT'D)

And maybe we'll have a cancellation for one of our suites.

ANGELA

Secret beach! That may be where the treasure was buried.

BUZZ

(loudly)

We'll take it!

Mom and Dad are surprised by Buzz's enthusiasm.

MOM

Well, then, let's go explore the
Secret Beach.

ANGELA

Don't we need swimsuits?

CLERK

It's not a clothing-optional beach.

Buzz shakes his head in disgust.

BUZZ

That's a good thing.

DAD

We'll all be fine in our winter
clothes for one afternoon.

The Clerk smiles as they depart in the golf cart.

CLERK

I doubt it.

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

Dad drives the family on a bumpy road following the signs to
"Secret Beach."

Everyone is sightseeing, and Dad pays little attention to the
road.

A taxi RACES toward them, but Dad doesn't notice it until
it's too late. Everyone panics.

MOM

Look out!

Dad drives off the side of the road to avoid being hit.

DAD

I thought everyone had to drive
golf carts!

ANGELA

I guess not!

BUZZ

I'm lucky to be alive.

They drive on.

EXT. SECRET BEACH - LATE AFTERNOON

Everyone is sweating in winter clothes and exhausted when they arrive at Secret Beach, but it is spectacularly beautiful.

They see the big red sign, "SECRET BEACH."

DAD
It's breathtaking.

MOM
Beautiful.

Everyone peels off a layer of winter clothes.

Angela whispers to Buzz.

ANGELA
It's paradise.

BUZZ
The treasure has to be here!

Angela and Buzz explore further down the beach while Dad and Mom have drinks at a cabana bar. Angela carries her book with her.

Angela and Buzz approach a smiling old hermit, MR. ZARGUS (75), strolling along the beach observing and drawing plants and animals in a notebook. He wears tattered clothes, binoculars around his neck, and an old knapsack on his back.

Two GOONS (30s-40s), big men with goofy expressions wearing gray business suits approach Mr. Zargus.

Mr. Zargus shrugs his shoulders innocently and the kids overhear him.

MR. ZARGUS
Please stop. You look like morticians but sound like grave diggers. I know of no Mayan sites near here and there is no treasure that you would appreciate.

The Goons look at each other perplexed.

GOON #1
We were told you know every square inch of Ambergris Caye.

MR. ZARGUS

You're not archaeologists. Go away
or I'll call the police.

The Goons stomp away as the kids draw near.

BUZZ

He mister, do you know if there's
any treasure around here?

Angela elbows Buzz.

ANGELA

Dumb question, sorry.

Mr. Zargus sees Angela's book.

MR. ZARGUS

Not a dumb question at all.

(whispers)

There is a treasure to be found in
every adventure and in nature all
around us. My name is Mr. Zargus.
I'm an adventurer and naturalist.

Buzz and Angela look puzzled as Mr. Zargus shows them a
detailed drawing of a Ceiba tree in his notebook.

ANGELA

I'm Angela and that's Buzz. What's
that?

MR. ZARGUS

That's a Ceiba tree in the tropical
forest on the mainland. It's what
the Mayans called the Tree of Life.

(studies the kids)

I see you are adventurers too.

Mr. Zargus pulls out a pencil and notebook from his knapsack
and takes a few notes as the kids look on.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)

Many people are too blind to see
the value of a good adventure.

(glares at the Goons)

Those two men have been following
me for months. They showed me fake
badges from the Department of
Cultural Preservation in our
capital city, Belmopan.

ANGELA

How do you know the badges were
fake?

Mr. Zargus glares at the Goons who walk away faster.

MR. ZARGUS

I checked the computer at the
library and there is no Department
of Cultural Preservation in Belize.
Those men are grave robbers and
looters.

(to the kids)

Trust no one.

(laughs)

Except other adventurers.

Angela pulls Buzz away by his sleeve.

ANGELA

We'd better be going, Mr. Zargus.
Nice meeting you.

Mr. Zargus smiles, waves, and strolls off as Angela and Buzz
head back to their parents.

Mom turns to see Mr. Zargus in the distance and the kids
approaching.

MOM

What do you suppose they were
looking for?

Dad turns and laughs.

DAD

Their Christmas presents are in our
lost luggage?

Mom panics and jumps up.

MOM

We have to find a thrift store to
get a change of clothes and a drug
store for toothbrushes!

DAD

(yells)

Angela, Buzz, we have to go!

Angela whispers to Buzz on the way back to the golf cart.

ANGELA

We took the ferry in the opposite direction of the star on the treasure map. We need to hire a local guide.

BUZZ

My ten dollars is in my suitcase.

ANGELA

So is my twenty dollars, along with my clothes and toothbrush.

BUZZ

You packed a toothbrush?

Angela shakes her head in disgust.

EXT. ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

About a mile from their resort, the golf cart begins to sputter (out of gas).

ANGELA

Nice going, Dad.

DAD

Who's idea was it to come to Belize?

Mom grabs two large bags from the floor of the golf cart.

MOM

At least we can brush our teeth tonight and change clothes tomorrow.

They trudge to the resort.

INT. RESORT, FRONT DESK - EVENING

The Clerk remains smiling even when presenting the bad news.

DAD

Did our luggage show up?

Mom holds up two shopping bags of supplies.

MOM

I thought we had enough gas to search for stores for supplies.

CLERK

Good thinking, but bad planning,
because your luggage hasn't made it
here yet, and you're out of gas,
huh?

(beat)

I'll have a maintenance crew fetch
your golf cart. They'll fill it
with gas and add it to your room
bill, but sadly, I don't have a
larger room for you. We're booked
up for Christmas and so is everyone
else on the island.

The Clerk hands Dad the key to the room.

DAD

Don't worry about the kids. My
sister lives on the island. I'm
sure she'll have plenty of room for
them for tonight. We'll worry about
better accommodations tomorrow.

They turn from the front desk.

MOM

I could use a shower.

ANGELA

That pool sure looks good.

BUZZ

I could use a pizza or a burger.

DAD

We'll check out the room and I'll
call my sister. Everything will
work out fine.

They trudge to the room.

INT. RESORT, ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They enter a spotlessly clean but small room with a bed that
looks smaller than queen-size.

ANGELA

Maybe they have smaller people in
Belize.

Buzz dives on the bed and coos in comfort.

MOM
I call the shower first.

DAD
I'll join you.

Mom grabs a shopping bag and her carry-on and races to the shower while laughing.

MOM
(to Dad)
No, you'll call your sister! This room won't sleep four. That bed might not even sleep two!

Dad sits on the bed by the phone and makes a call.

SPLIT SCREEN with Aunt MIRIAM (40), a beautiful and saintly woman, answering the phone in the messy kitchen of the orphanage (a large older house). Dad has it on "speaker."

MIRIAM
Kindness Home, Miriam speaking.

DAD
(excited)
Miriam, it's Diego. We arrived, our luggage is in a snowstorm in Denver, but we're checked in at the resort.

MIRIAM
I'm so happy you decided to visit us. Have you eaten?

Dad looks at Buzz.

DAD
We could use a bite.

MIRIAM
Drop in for a Christmas Hug and we'll take care of you.

DAD
Thanks, Miriam. Your present is frozen in Denver, but the Christmas Hug sounds great. Maria's in the shower. Give us thirty minutes.

MIRIAM
Can't wait to see all of you! It's my first Christmas with my other family in many years.
(MORE)

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

You have the address. It's just a few minutes from you.

DAD

See ya soon, Miriam. It's been too long.

Dad hangs up.

ANGELA

What did she mean, "her other family?"

Mom exits the bathroom refreshed and in a tropical shirt and shorts.

DAD

The rest of us will have to hurry.

ANGELA

I'll go.

Angela takes a shopping bag and races to the bathroom.

EXT. ORPHANAGE - NIGHT

Dad drives the golf cart up to a large old house with a small sign that reads, "Kindness Home. Love, Hope, and Charity."

Mom is her thrift store outfit. Dad is in thrift store shorts, flip-flops, and a Belize T-shirt. Angela is in a lightly-used tropical swimsuit cover-type dress, and Buzz is in his winter clothes.

DAD

Kids, this is where your aunt has worked for the past twelve years.

Angela and Buzz are speechless, but look sad and puzzled.

MOM

I think she's a saint.

Aunt Miriam pops her head out of the kitchen door on the side of the house. She's smiling big.

MIRIAM

This way, family.

Miriam pops back inside, but the door is open and they hear upbeat drumming and singing from speakers.

ANGELA

Do we have to go inside? It's an orphanage, right?

Buzz takes a step back and looks nervous.

DAD

Only if you're hungry.

They all head to the kitchen door.

INT. ORPHANAGE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The family enters the kitchen to see Miriam stirring rice and beans in a large pot, and a handsome, ever-smiling and shirtless orphan, TANIGI (13), washing a large stack of bowls, spoons, and plastic cups.

MIRIAM

Tanigi, I'd like to introduce you to my other family in the States. Tanigi loves happy music. He helps me with kitchen work when he's around, and I'm very grateful to have him.

Tanigi dries his soapy hands with a towel as he comes to shake hands.

Angela can't take her eyes off Tanigi.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Tanigi, this is my brother, Diego, who owns a successful contracting company.

As Tanigi and Dad shake hands, Dad whispers to Miriam.

DAD

Not that successful, I'm afraid.
 (to Tanigi)
 Very nice to meet you, Tanigi.
 (points to his family)
 This is my wife Maria, Angela, and Buzz.

Tanigi shakes everyone's hand and gets back to work.

TANIGI

Welcome to Belize.

Miriam brings bowls of rice and beans to each of them.

MIRIAM

(laughs)

It's not much, but it will fill the
need and stick with you 'til the
end of time, as we say.

Buzz and Angela eat quickly and make yummy sounds.

Dad and Mom eat slowly and politely.

MOM

Thanks for hosting us, Miriam.

Miriam smiles.

MIRIAM

You're family.

Angela speaks to Miriam without taking her eyes off Tanigi.

ANGELA

This is tasty, Aunt Miriam. What's
in it?

MIRIAM

Rice and beans are the staple foods
of Belize and the region. We add
Garifuna spices if Tanigi's in
town, otherwise, Mayan, Mexican, or
South American spices.

BUZZ

(innocently)

Do you ever add meat?

DAD

Buzz! You...

MIRIAM

(interrupts)

We add chicken after someone gets
adopted, and on local feast days we
might add a gibnut.

Angela is partially listening, frequently eyeing Tanigi.

ANGELA

What's a gibnut?

MIRIAM

A gibnut is a paca, a large rodent
native to the region.

Buzz's eyes open wide and he stops eating.

BUZZ

Like a rat?

Tanigi turns to see Angela staring at him.

TANIGI

A very big rat! They taste best
barbecued with Garifuna spices.

Angela's eyes open wide and she stops eating.

Aunt Miriam interrupts to change the topic.

MIRIAM

Diego, Maria, can we talk in my
office for a minute? The kids will
be safe here with Tanigi.

DAD

Sure.

Aunt Miriam flashes the "greater than" sign: two fingers,
facing sideways, against her heart with her left hand.

Tanigi flashes the same sign back as Dad and Mom follow
Miriam to her office.

ANGELA

What did that hand signal mean?

BUZZ

Was that a gang symbol?

TANIGI

It's mathematics.

ANGELA

It's the 'greater than' sign.

TANIGI

Miriam teaches the sign to everyone
on their first day. It means our
best days are still to come. We can
overcome any hardships. Tomorrow,
we will be greater than what you
see today.

They all smile, and Angela and Tanigi share a moment.

INT. ORPHANAGE, OFFICE - SAME

Miriam sits behind her desk cluttered with papers and bills.

Mom and Dad sit on a small couch opposite Miriam. The walls are filled with photos of Miriam with many orphans (various ages and types, but most are below age 10). One photo shows a 2-year-old mixed-ethnicity boy sitting in a Mayan dugout canoe. Two photos away, we see a one-year-old girl being handed to Miriam (then 28) by Mr. Zargus (then 63).

MIRIAM

What really brings you here, Diego?
It's been years since I visited the States, and you've never visited me here.

Diego looks down sadly.

DAD

Our spoiled children need of a wake-up call.

MIRIAM

(looks to Mom)
Just them?

Mom looks down.

MOM

Us too.

MIRIAM

They don't know how the other half lives. Is that it? Once they see their crazy aunt and the orphanage they won't be spoiled anymore?

DAD

Angela takes every shortcut imaginable in school.

MOM

Buzz plays video games all day and is afraid of the outdoors.

DAD

Angela begged us to come to a fancy resort in Belize so she can brag about it to friends who spend Christmas in Paris, Geneva, or New Zealand.

Mom looks sadly at Dad.

MOM

Diego's contracting business is doing okay, but we're not rich, and we couldn't go on spoiling the kids so we gave into Angela as a last-ditch effort to teach the kids humility.

DAD

We bragged about you graduating law school at the top of your class and working at a top firm in New York for a few years before cashing out and coming here.

MIRIAM

And buying an orphanage?

DAD

You're our idea of a success in life.

MOM

We wanted our kids to be inspired by you because we don't cut it as inspirations for them.

Miriam looks away sadly.

INT. ORPHANAGE, KITCHEN - SAME

The kids remain talking and laughing as they help Tanigi dry dishes and cups.

BUZZ

I never do dishes at home.

TANIGI

If I don't do them, I don't eat.

ANGELA

That sucks.

Tanigi laughs.

TANIGI

I'm grateful for the meals and the roof when it rains.

Angela shows Tanigi her library book.

TANIGI (CONT'D)

So?

ANGELA
Have you ever read it?

TANIGI
Yes, and hundreds of others.

Angela's eyes open wide.

ANGELA
Really? Can you tell me all about
it. I have a big book report due
when I get home.

TANIGI
How far have you gotten?

BUZZ
She's on page two.

TANIGI
Hmmm. Then you haven't made it to
the part where Huck is not thrilled
with cleanliness? Or Tom's new
Robber's Gang? Or Huck's escape on
the raft?

Angela looks away, embarrassed.

ANGELA
None of that.

TANIGI
Then you're in more trouble than
Huck or Jim! I see this orphanage
like Huck Finn and Jim saw their
raft. It keeps me afloat until I
get where I'm going.

Angela and Buzz stare at Tanigi like a god.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Angela continues with her book report to uninterested
students and an impatient teacher.

ANGELA
In Belize, we stopped by my Aunt
Miriam's old house which she turned
into an orphanage, which is where I
met Tanigi.

MR. ROBINS

That's not a character in Huck Finn.

ANGELA

I'm getting to that. You see, Tanigi looked like a mix between Huckleberry Finn and Jim the slave in the book, except Tanigi was drop-dead gorgeous and part Garifuna.

MR. ROBINS

Define your terms, Ms. Sanchez.

ANGELA

Tanigi told me the Garifuna people are descendants of West African slaves who washed ashore on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent around 1635. They mixed with Native Americans but maintained their distinct African culture. They came to Belize in the late-1700s. They are the happiest people on Earth, always dancing, drumming, and smiling.

Mr. Robins smiles briefly, but the students are bored.

MR. ROBINS

Hold their attention, Ms. Sanchez.

Angela continues, more excited than before.

ANGELA

Poor Tanigi was orphaned at age two. Huck was finally taken in off the streets at age 13 by two old ladies who owned slaves. They made him clean up and go to school and church which he hated, but he was happy with the steady meals. "Once you reach 13," Tanigi told me, "it's hard to get adopted."

MR. ROBINS

Stick to the book, Ms. Sanchez.

ANGELA

I'm trying, Mr. Robins, but I couldn't help but notice the awful ways people of color are treated, identical to the way Jim was treated. It made Mark Twain's story come alive in my head!

A few students sit up in their seats.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

And from the moment I met Tanigi, I knew I had to educate him about Huck Finn. I also knew we needed his help to find the treasure we would now split three ways!

Mr. Robins hits his forehead with his palm.

A few female students swoon and some male students smirk, but at least they are starting to pay attention.

BACK TO:

EXT. ORPHANAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tanigi details more of the Huck Finn story to Angela as Buzz dries more dishes.

TANIGI

You see, Huck's dad was an abusive drunk. I never knew my dad, but I remember the old man who found me in the mangrove forest.

(smiles)

Mr. Zargus, a nice man who draws plants and animals.

Angela steps closer to Tanigi.

ANGELA

But you and Huck were both orphaned. I'm so sorry...

(lights up)

Hey, we met Mr. Zargus at Secret Beach. He's an adventurer like Mark Twain.

TANIGI

I suppose he is.

They are interrupted by Mr. Zargus sticking his head in the back door. He's smiling. Angela and Buzz step back.

TANIGI (CONT'D)

My second hero aside from Ms. Mirium. Mr. Zargus! We were just talking about you.

Mr. Zargus hesitates at the door holding out three paperback books on birds, plants, and natural history.

MR. ZARGUS

I found three more nature books abandoned on Secret Beach by tourists.

(smiles at Angela and Buzz)

I thought you would end up here! Birds of a feather! This makes me happy.

Tanigi grabs two burritos from the fridge and hands them to Mr. Zargus.

TANIGI

For the books: my Tree of Life.

MR. ZARGUS

(laughs)

Good trade. See you in the park tomorrow night for the Christmas Eve pageant.

Mr. Zargus heads back out of the kitchen.

TANIGI

I'll see you then, my friend!

Mr. Zargus smiles as he leaves.

They hear Mom, Dad, and Miriam enter the kitchen, and Tanigi instantly smiles and laughs.

TANIGI (CONT'D)

You missed my hero, the man who brought me here 11 years ago from a crocodile and snake-infested mangrove forest!

Buzz laughs nervously.

BUZZ

I hate snakes and crocodiles.

DAD

Buzz has a fear of wildlife.

MOM

And everything else. But it's time for us to go kids.

MIRIAM

Mr. Zargus is one of my favorite people in the world. He's a naturalist who taught science at the high school forever. He brings the children books.

Buzz takes a step toward the back door.

ANGELA

We didn't finish talking to Tanigi about the treasures of Belize.

DAD

Not so fast, Buzz. You and your sister are spending the night here with Aunt Miriam.

MOM

She set up two cots in her office.

MIRIAM

You'll be quite comfortable.

ANGELA

(to Miriam)

Where does Tanigi sleep?

Tanigi gazes out the back door.

TANIGI

Out there with my people. The stars.

Tanigi grabs a sweatshirt and puts it on.

MIRIAM

Tanigi enjoys sleeping outdoors, but he always has a place in our kitchen or den.

MOM

(to Tanigi)

Maybe you can join us around the pool at the resort tomorrow.

TANIGI

Maybe. I have a job bussing tables until noon.

Tanigi moves to the back door.

Mom hugs Angela and Buzz.

MOM
We'll pick you up tomorrow morning.

MIRIAM
Tanigi, I need kitchen help
tomorrow evening.

Dad and Mom are the first to exit.

DAD
Sis, thanks for a lovely dinner.
You are a saint.

Miriam yells with a smile to Mom and Dad from the back door.

MIRIAM
You're welcome anytime.

Mom and Dad wave as they drive away.

Tanigi exits like a brave young man.

Angela turns with a worried look to see Tanigi flashing his
"greater than" sign to Miriam and she flashes it back.

INT. ORPHANAGE, OFFICE - NIGHT

Miriam helps Angela and Buzz get "settled" on small cots with
a thin pillow and small blankets.

MIRIAM
It's just for one night.

BUZZ
Is this how the other kids in the
orphanage sleep?

MIRIAM
Exactly like this... but they never
know how long their situation will
last.

ANGELA
This isn't what I had imagined for
a Christmas vacation.

MIRIAM

Your dad is looking into better accommodations for you tomorrow night.

Angela softly grabs Miriam's hand.

ANGELA

You don't think our dad and mom are trying to teach us a lesson about being spoiled, do you?

MIRIAM

(acts surprised)

No. They'd never do a thing like that.

Miriam shuts off the light and locks the door.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

I'm the only one with a key to my office. You'll be safe in here.

ANGELA

Goodnight, Aunt Miriam.

BUZZ

Goodnight, Aunt Miriam.

MIRIAM

Goodnight. Sleep tight.

Aunt Miriam shuts the door. The kids' eyes are wide open.

Angela turns on her flashlight to read more of her book.

BUZZ

We'll need Tanigi's help to find the treasure.

Angela turns to Buzz and smiles.

ANGELA

I know!

BUZZ

Do you think he's a pirate?

ANGELA

He's an orphan.

(beat)

But we'll ask more questions tomorrow at the pool. Now, shut up and let me read!

Buzz looks worried as Angela returns to reading.

EXT. BEACH - SAME

Tanigi lies under a blanket and looks up at the stars. He uses his shirt as a pillow. A small fire burns near him. He smiles.

The Two Goons wearing suits approach and show Tanigi their fake badges.

GOON #1

We're from the Department of
Cultural Preservation looking for a
Mr. Zargus.

TANIGI

I see him around sometimes.

GOON #2

Where does he live?

TANIGI

(laughs)
How should I know?

GOON #1

We think he has sensitive
information about a buried Mayan
trading post on the Caye, so we
need to track him down before the
information falls into the wrong
hands.

TANIGI

Who did you say you worked for?

Goon #2 kicks sand on the fire while Goon #1 kicks Tanigi in the ribs.

Goon #2 fakes a kick but then holds back.

GOON #2

(to Goon #1)
He don't know nothin'.
(to Tanigi)
Next time you see him, tell him
we're looking for him.

Tanigi rolls into a ball and groans.

EXT. RESORT, POOL - MORNING

Angela and Buzz are in ugly bathing suits that are poorly sized. They sit comfortably in lounge chairs by the pool. They are drinking orange juice from coconut cups. Angela reads her book while Buzz plays a video game on his phone.

ANGELA

They better deliver our luggage today. This bathing suit is embarrassingly small.

Buzz isn't listening, so Angela slaps him with her book.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

You're in the most adventurous country in the world and all you do is play stupid video games.

BUZZ

This is all the adventure I want. And all you do is read your stupid book!

AT THE TABLE

Dad and Mom laugh and enjoy fancy coffee drinks at a table out of earshot from the kids.

DAD

I bet that slice of humble pie was just what the kids needed.

MOM

This is a disaster. You think they'll ever forgive us?

DAD

Not if they learn we booked the smallest room available on purpose.

Dad and Mom giggle and share a moment.

Mom smiles at the kids by the pool.

MOM

They're enjoying themselves now.

AT THE POOL

Dad and Mom stroll over to the kids, who cover their bodies with towels and pretend to be asleep.

ANGELA
Go away. Find our luggage.

BUZZ
I didn't sleep a wink at that
rundown orphanage.

ANGELA
I'm definitely changing before
Tanigi gets here at noon.

The kids look up to see Dad and Mom holding four pairs of
swim fins and snorkeling masks.

DAD
Let's try these things out in the
pool before we take them to the
beach.

MOM
A little practice session. What do
you say?

SERIES OF SHOTS

Angela reluctantly puts on a life preserver.

Buzz refuses to put one.

Dad and Mom demonstrate how to use the snorkeling gear.

Angela picks up the skill with a lot of work.

Buzz won't put his face in the water.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

DAD
Good effort, Angela. Maybe later,
Buzz. It will be so much easier in
the saltwater later.

MOM
We're going to make some phone
calls and hunt down our luggage.

ANGELA
And a larger room?

DAD
Go ahead and order lunch when
Tanigi gets here and charge it to
our room.

BUZZ

You mean your room.

Mom and Dad chuckle and dry off while they walk away.

ANGELA

When Tanigi gets here, I'll do the talking.

(whispers)

We have to know if we can trust him.

BUZZ

About the treasure?

ANGELA

(looks away)

About everything.

They don't see Tanigi limping up from behind. He's fully clothed in a sweatshirt and long pants, and smiling.

BUZZ

(whispers to Angela)

I'm never going in the open sea.

ANGELA

Because of sharks?

TANIGI

The real sharks are on land.

Angela leaps to his side.

ANGELA

Great to see you, Tanigi. Did you sleep under the stars?

TANIGI

There's nothing like it. You'll have to try it sometime.

Tanigi groans as he settles onto a lounge chair.

A Resort WAITER (20s) races up to Angela.

WAITER

Is this boy bothering you?

Tanigi looks up and glares at the Waiter.

TANIGI

Shark attack!

Angela takes Tanigi's arm and leads him to their table.

ANGELA

He's with us. We were all about to order lunch. May we have three menus and water to start? Sanchez, Room 1572.

WAITER

Are you sure...?

BUZZ

Our parents will be joining us soon.

ANGELA

If another waiter would like our enormous tip, you may send him or her to our table.

The Waiter caves.

WAITER

Yes, Ma'am. Right away.

He races to the kitchen.

LATER

AT THE TABLES

The three youths enjoy fish tacos and French fries. Tanigi is devouring his food while being pounded with questions. The four sets of snorkeling masks and fins are under the table.

ANGELA

How do you manage to smile all day, every day?

TANIGI

I've been given a chance at life!
I'm not gonna waste it!

BUZZ

Wouldn't you rather be rich?

Angela glares at Buzz.

TANIGI

I am rich. I have food and a roof when I need one. I have Ms. Miriam and a few trusted friends. And, we have the friendliest library in the world! My second home!

ANGELA
A library? Here?

Tanigi chuckles.

TANIGI
I'll take you there sometime.

Tanigi's eyes track two women by the pool who set their purses next to their lounge chairs. Angela and Buzz see this.

Tanigi looks back to his French fries.

Angela and Buzz look suspiciously at Tanigi.

ANGELA
How was work today? Didn't you say you had a job bussing tables?

TANIGI
I needed to return a book to the library. I got caught up in a book called "To Kill a Mockingbird" where a Black man is falsely accused of rape.

ANGELA
That's another banned book at my school!

TANIGI
Another shark attack on land.

BUZZ
You must be the smartest kid I know.

Tanigi smiles at Buzz and he backs up in his seat.

TANIGI
I couldn't put the book down. So I missed work.
(smiles)
I'm glad you had food for me.
Thanks.

ANGELA
How else do you get food?

TANIGI
Most people are kind... like your Aunt Miriam. I'm underage but many restaurant owners let me help out for a free meal and a few tips.

ANGELA
And you need the money.

Tanigi looks away.

BUZZ
What for?

TANIGI
For college.

SILENCE

Tanigi eats.

TANIGI (CONT'D)
But right now, I can't afford the
time to go to school, okay?

Tanigi sees two women leave an adjacent table and one forgets her purse strapped to the back of the chair.

Tanigi eyes the purse like prey, which Angela and Buzz see.

He starts to get up from his chair.

Angela sees the woman returning for her purse, and she pulls on Tanigi's arm to set him back down.

TANIGI (CONT'D)
I was going to return it to her.

The woman grabs her purse and walks away.

ANGELA
(embarrassed)
Sorry, I thought...

Buzz looks sadly at Tanigi.

Tanigi glares at Angela, then at Buzz.

TANIGI
I'm not a thief!

Tanigi gets up from the table and begins to walk away.

TANIGI (CONT'D)
I need a swim.
(he turns and smiles)
Follow me. Bring the masks and
snorkels.

Angela is giddy. Buzz is alarmed.

BUZZ

The swimming pool is right here!

Angela scoops up the snorkel gear, hands half of it to Buzz, and pushes him toward Tanigi. Angela grabs two towels.

EXT. BEACH - AFTERNOON

Tanigi leads them to a quiet beach. Angela and Tanigi take in the beauty and serenity.

Buzz's eyes open wide as Tanigi strips to a swimsuit under his pants. He has bruises all over his body.

ANGELA

What happened to you?

TANIGI

I fell. Forget about it.

Tanigi grabs a mask (with a snorkel) and enters the water up to his waist.

Angela does the same, while Buzz stands at the shoreline with his toes barely in the water.

Tanigi slowly walks back to Buzz. Angela can't take her eyes off Tanigi.

TANIGI (CONT'D)

Ever seen an aquarium?

BUZZ

We have one in our classroom.

TANIGI

Odds are, it's filled with beautiful tropical fish.

BUZZ

So?

Tanigi shows Buzz his mask.

TANIGI

So instead of pressing your nose against the side of the aquarium, you look at the same beautiful fish through your mask.

He takes Buzz by the arm and guides him slowly into the sea.

BUZZ
How deep is it?

TANIGI
Up to your waist.

BUZZ
What about sharks?

TANIGI
They have only nurse sharks right here. They are the Buzz's of the shark world.

Buzz laughs.

BUZZ
Kind of wimpy?

TANIGI
Trust me. This will be better than any video game you own.

Buzz is intrigued and walks slowly out next to his sister.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Tanigi demonstrates techniques in snorkeling.

-- They follow Tanigi to chest-deep water.

-- Tanigi shows them how to properly fit the mask to their faces (adjust the mask strap using the tightening buckles if needed).

-- Tanigi has them practice breathing with their mask and snorkel on outside the water.

-- Tanigi has them squat down until the Mask is submerged.

UNDERWATER

-- Buzz is excited to see a grouper fish and points it out to Angela and Tanigi.

-- Angela sees a more colorful tropical fish, points to it, and grabs Tanigi's arm. They smile and share a moment.

-- Tanigi sees a school of Atlantic tarpon. They all smile.

-- Tanigi's hears a girl scream from shore and his eyes open wide.

-- All of them lift their heads out of the water.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Buzz and Angela are excited about snorkeling.

BUZZ

That was amazing. So many colors...

Tanigi sees a beautiful, mixed-ethnicity young woman (NAOMI; 12) in a small bikini and an angry disposition glaring at him.

NAOMI

I had to pull an extra shift at the restaurant because you were a no-show!

Tanigi glances at Angela then sheepishly answers.

TANIGI

Sorry, I was at the library...

NAOMI

Again? Well, I had to work!
(glares at Angela)
While you're playing tour guide to snobby tourists.

Angela begins to defend herself.

ANGELA

We're not...

Naomi forms two fists and starts to enter the water.

Buzz is smitten with the powerful Naomi.

BUZZ

My sister didn't mean nothin'.
She's just jealous!

Naomi laughs, and Buzz laughs too.

Naomi begins to walk away.

NAOMI

Don't forget tonight, Tanigi.
You're taking me to the Christmas
Eve pageant.

Angela glares at Naomi as she strolls away confidently.

Buzz and Angela can't take their eyes off Naomi as Tanigi heads to the beach.

Tanigi grabs one of the towels and towels off while Angela whispers to Buzz.

ANGELA
That girl looked like a pirate to me.

Buzz gazes at Naomi, speechless.

Angela elbows Buzz as they trudge to shore.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
Don't you dare say a word about the treasure.

Tanigi tosses down his towel and snorkel gear, and he strolls after Naomi as Dad and Mom approach from a distance. They are excited.

DAD
Was that our Buzz snorkeling?

BUZZ
(excited)
We saw dozens of tropical fish, grouper, and a school of Atlantic tarpon as long as your arm.

Mom sees that Angela is glaring at Tanigi down the beach.

MOM
(to Buzz)
Did Tanigi teach you all of that?

ANGELA
And he thanked you for lunch. Did you find our luggage?

Dad picks up the snorkeling gear.

DAD
It's on a flight from Denver now!

ANGELA
Good, because I have to get out of this stupid swimsuit.

Angela leads the family back to the resort at a fast pace.

BUZZ
Did you get us a bigger room?

MOM

I'm afraid not. We have to stay put until our luggage arrives.

DAD

You'll have to stay with Aunt Miriam one more night.

Angela glances back toward Tanigi and then marches faster.

ANGELA

(smiles)

That's great news! Tanigi's working there tonight.

They are all smiles as they head into the resort.

EXT. SAN PEDRO PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Christmas decorations surround the park. A Santa Claus in a red Santa coat and short pants hands out candy canes to a dozen Children in the square. Caribbean-style Christmas music blares in the background.

The Sanchez family strolls into the park to enjoy the scene. Angela has her book in her hand.

ANGELA

Dad and Mom, I need to borrow some money to buy Christmas presents.

DAD

How much? We don't expect gifts. This trip was our gift to each other.

ANGELA

I want to buy something small for Aunt Miriam and Tanigi for helping us.

MOM

That's sweet.

BUZZ

And I want to buy something for Naomi. She's sweet.

Dad, Mom, and Angela stare at Buzz with surprised looks.

MOM

You're too young to be thinking about girls.

BUZZ
(surprised)
That's all the boys in my class
talk about. I thought they were
crazy, but on closer examination...

Angela grabs Buzz's arm.

ANGELA
If she's Tanigi's girlfriend,
she'll eat you alive.

Buzz turns on Angela.

BUZZ
You just don't want anyone to share
in your stupid treasure hunt.

All eyes turn to Angela.

DAD
What's this treasure talk about,
Angela? I should have known you
were up to something pushing us to
come down here.

Angela glares at Buzz and hits him softly with her book.

ANGELA
I wanted to go on a family
adventure over Christmas break, so
to get my idiot brother away from
his stupid video games and go along
with the idea, I told him we might
find a historic treasure in Belize.

BUZZ
She has a m...

Angela grabs Buzz's arm again and interrupts him with a fake
smile.

ANGELA
(interrupts)
Marvelous idea about where to take
Buzz shopping to buy his new
girlfriend a Christmas gift.
There's a souvenir shop we passed
just down the street.

DAD
Angela, don't be ridiculous. Buzz
doesn't have a girlfriend. And you
don't have to buy Tanigi anything.

MOM
 (to Dad softly)
 Let them enjoy Christmas dear. Give
 them some money to shop.

Dad reluctantly pulls out his wallet and counts out bills.

A short distance behind them is Mr. Zargus (POV), who sees
 and hears Dad handing money to the kids.

MR. ZARGUS
 (smiles)
 I'd better see that they're safe.

Angela and Buzz run down the street as Mr. Zargus laughs and
 follows them.

MOM
 You think they'll be okay?

DAD
 They'll be fine.

The local Christmas music is intoxicating to Mom and Dad.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A few more students are paying attention to Angela's story.

MR. ROBINS
 We don't care what type of fish you
 observed in the sea, Ms. Sanchez.
 Get on with your book report.

ANGELA
 I'm getting to that, Mr. Robins. I
 was reading the book in one hand
 and imagining Tanigi's entire life
 in the other hand. It was like Huck
 and Jim floating down the mighty
 Mississippi and running into a lot
 of prejudice and corruption. Tanigi
 calls them, 'Land Sharks.'

Angela gets angry and paces up and down the classroom as she
 rants and holds up her copy of the book.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
 The more I read, the angrier I got
 about people who banned this book!
 (MORE)

ANGELA (CONT'D)

They want us to forget that Huck and Jim intended to leave their raft at the mouth of the Ohio River and head up that river to the free states, where slavery is prohibited. They want you and me to forget we were cruel enough to allow slavery and kill escaped slaves and people like Huck Finn who helped them escape!

MR. ROBINS

Settle down, Ms. Sanchez. Return to the podium

Angela returns to the podium but sees every eye is upon her.

ANGELA

(quietly)

We may not have slave states anymore, but we have plenty of poor people and immigrants we treat like slaves.

(a little louder)

So, I felt good when I read that Huck and Jim ran into a gang of robbers on a wrecked steamboat and escaped with the robbers' loot.

(louder still)

And that's what I wanted to do to help my new orphan friend, Tanigi, in Belize. And I didn't care how much trouble I got in! I was going to get my hands on that treasure!

BACK TO:

INT. SOUVENIR SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Angela and Buzz shop in different parts of the store.

Mr. Zargus enters the store trying to blend in with the few Rich Tourists (various types) to keep an eye on the kids. Mr. Zargus has his notebook and pen in hand.

Angela spots a colorful tropical shirt and checks the price. Her eyes open wide.

Mr. Zargus smiles at Angela, puzzled.

Buzz wanders over to women's bathing suits. Mr. Zargus chuckles.

Angela spots an area of postcards and placemats. Her eyes open wide when she sees a placemat with the exact image of her treasure map. She's puzzled.

ANGELA

More treasure maps. Belmopan?

She opens her book to her treasure map and compares the two images. She checks the location of the star on both maps. Identical. Her chin drops to her chest.

MR. ZARGUS (V.O.)

They showed me fake badges from the Department of Cultural Preservation in our capital city, Belmopan.

ANGELA

(mumbles)

The star doesn't show where the treasure is buried. It shows the capital city. I'm such an idiot. And this entire stupid trip was my dumb idea.

As Angela turns to find Buzz in the store, she spots Mr. Zargus staring at her and the tourist map of Belize. Mr. Zargus heard her mumbling.

The two Goons enter the store with their eyes fixed on Mr. Zargus, but they are easily distracted by the souvenirs.

Angela ducks and moves to collect Buzz.

BUZZ

Hey, I'm still shopping.

Mr. Zargus glances in Buzz's direction and sees Angela taking a photo of the two goons on her phone.

Angela puts her finger to her lips and pushes Buzz from the back of the store toward the counter where Mr. Zargus now stands.

The Two Goons stand behind Mr. Zargus with goofy glares.

As Buzz and Angela approach the counter, Angela pushes Buzz between the Goons and Mr. Zargus.

Angela speaks in a deep voice and keeps her head low.

ANGELA

Excuse us. Coming through. My brother has to pee.

As Angela passes the Goons, she pushes them into a display rack of T-shirts that crashes to the floor.

Angela, Buzz, and Mr. Zargus exit toward the Park.

The Goons are left to pick up the T-shirts from the floor.

EXT. SOUVENIR SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Mr. Zargus exits while laughing.

MR. ZARGUS

Thanks for your help back there.
What was so special about the
tourist map?

ANGELA

Nothing.
(embarrassed laugh)
Nothing at all.

MR. ZARGUS

Ya know, life wouldn't be much of
an adventure if someone told you
where the treasure was buried.

BUZZ

(laughs)
It's okay, Sis. We'll just have to
find the treasure somewhere else!

Angela laughs and leads them toward the crowd in the park.

INT. ORPHANAGE, KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Tanigi cleans an enormous stack of dirty dishes and cups, while Miriam inventories the cupboards. He wears an apron over his T-shirt and shorts. He smiles and laughs.

TANIGI

They were so excited to see the
fish I see every day!

MIRIAM

(laughs)
That was kind of you to take them
snorkeling.

Dad, Mom, Angela, and Buzz enter with arms full of grocery bags.

Miriam turns with a smile that says it all.

DAD

We thought we'd get you something
useful for Christmas.

Miriam laughs.

MIRIAM

What? No tacky Christmas sweater
this year?

MOM

Those were all his idea.

Tanigi glances at Angela and goes back to work as Angela
steps slowly to the sink to help wash dishes.

DAD

We ate in town with your very kind,
elderly naturalist friend, Mr.
Zargus.

ANGELA

(softly to Tanigi)

He thinks the two pirates who
roughed you up are the same guys
following him for the past two
months. I got a photo of them in
the souvenir shop.

Angela shows Tanigi the photo on her phone.

TANIGI

Land Sharks.

ANGELA

Mr. Zargus says they're after Mayan
artifacts.

MIRIAM

Then they're criminals. And they
may be dangerous.

Buzz grabs a towel.

BUZZ

I'll dry... if you tell me about
Naomi.

Tanigi laughs.

TANIGI

You guys will be gone in a week.
You don't have to get involved with
our troubles. I'll help Mr. Zargus.

Miriam steps over to Tanigi.

MIRIAM

They're after his notes. He takes copious notes of everywhere he visits. He must have volumes of them by now.

Tanigi has an epiphany.

TANIGI

That's it! He can tell me the exact spot he found me ten years ago. I was three and a half. That could be the key to me getting my passport.

Miriam turns to Dad and Mom.

MIRIAM

Tanigi can't get a passport without his original birth certificate and an adult Belizean citizen to sign off a recommender.

DAD

Getting a copy of your birth should be straightforward.

Tanigi turns sad. He takes off his apron and steps to the kitchen door.

Angela stands in his way.

Tanigi stops and gazes into Angela's eyes.

TANIGI

After I help Mr. Tanigi, I'm leaving on a fishing boat... right after Christmas.

(gazes at Miriam)

I can do high school online, but need a better job to afford college.

Tanigi heads to the kitchen door as Miriam yells to him.

MIRIAM

See you at the Christmas Eve festival tonight. You can always sleep here in the kitchen.

Tanigi flashes the "greater than" sign and exits. Angela turns to Miriam.

ANGELA

Is he going to be okay?

MIRIAM

He's in a tough spot. We think his father abandoned him at birth. His mom disappeared when he was about three and a half years old.

MOM

(sad)

Disappeared?

MIRIAM

It's not uncommon here. Tanigi's not certain of his mother's surname, father's surname, or exact date and location of birth, so he can't request a copy of his birth certificate.

DAD

That's awful.

ANGELA

We have to help him.

MIRIAM

He's never missed the Christmas Eve pageant.

MOM

How can we help him?

MIRIAM

I'm not sure. I should have asked Mr. Zargus many more questions when he brought him to me ten years ago. I just know that a lot of teens head out on fishing boats and are never seen or heard from again!

Angela storms out of the back door.

ANGELA

That's as dangerous as Huck Finn floating down the mighty Mississippi on a small raft. Let's go save him.

The others follow.

EXT. SAN PEDRO PARK - NIGHT

It remains very festive in the park as townsfolk and tourists gather for the annual Christmas play outside the Catholic Church. Santa Claus is surrounded by children waiting for the play to start. Local Carolers sing Christmas songs which everyone enjoys.

Miriam, Mom, Dad, Angela, and Buzz all look for Tanigi.

Several children and young adults secretly flash the "greater-than finger sign" over their hearts when they make eye contact with Miriam, and she secretly signs them back. The Sanchez's are oblivious to the hand gestures.

MIRIAM

(loudly to Dad and Mom)

I'll make extra beans and rice, and we'll stir in one of the chickens you brought us tomorrow for Christmas. I'm sure Tanigi will come. We'll invite Mr. Zargus and find a way to help.

Dad gets a text message on his phone and reads it excitedly.

DAD

The airlines are bringing our luggage to the San Pedro Airport sometime tonight.

MOM

Miriam, if you could watch the kids for a few hours we'd be eternally grateful.

MIRIAM

We'll be right here for a while. There will be carolers, a nativity play by the children of the village, and confessions at the Catholic church, to get ready for midnight mass.

Mom and Dad hug their kids.

Aunt Miriam gets a phone call and steps away to answer it.

DAD

Be good for Aunt Miriam. We could be late.

Dad hands Angela the keys to the golf cart.

DAD (CONT'D)

We'll take a taxi. Ask Aunt Miriam to drive you back to the orphanage.

Angela puts the keys in her pocket and smiles.

MOM

We might get back before midnight mass. If not, we'll pick you up tomorrow morning before church.

Mom and Dad wave as they exit.

Miriam ends her phone call and pulls Angela aside to whisper to her.

MIRIAM

Naomi and Tanigi hang out sometimes. Naomi was at the orphanage years ago before she was adopted by the nice couple. Naomi's new dad is a policeman and her new mom owns the restaurant where they both work.

Angela is stunned.

ANGELA

They were both at your orphanage?

MIRIAM

They were inseparable as kids, even though they arrived a few days apart. Naomi doesn't come by the orphanage because it's a painful reminder that she was abandoned earlier in life.

BUZZ

That's awful.

MIRIAM

Mr. Zargus brought Naomi to me. He knows everything that goes on in the Caye. Tanigi tells me he's always at the library when he's not exploring the Caye or interviewing every local he can.

ANGELA

He doesn't interview tourists?

MIRIAM

No. Or transplants, like me.

Angela pauses to think.

ANGELA

Buzz and I saw him three times: at Secret Beach, at the orphanage, and in the souvenir shop. He must have thought we were locals.

MIRIAM

Latin skin tones? Less-fashionable clothes.

Buzz tilts his ear to their conversation.

BUZZ

Where does he live?

MIRIAM

I heard his shack is somewhere in the swamp. He demands his privacy.

ANGELA

I need to ask him some questions about Tanigi's past so he can get his birth certificate.

MIRIAM

I'll do that tomorrow at Christmas dinner.

BUZZ

Ask him about Naomi, too.

MIRIAM

I will.

Miriam spots Mr. Zargus writing in his notebook in a dark corner of the park. He's eyeing the crowd, looking for someone.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

There's Mr. Zargus now. I'm going to ask him a few questions.

Miriam gets a loud phone TEXT MESSAGE and reads it.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

My interview with Mr. Zargus will have to wait. I've got a new child to check-in. We should get back.

ANGELA

Can Buzz and I stay for the
nativity play? We'll be back right
after.

MIRIAM

I don't know.

Miriam sees Tanigi and Naomi wave over Angela and Buzz.

BUZZ

Please, Aunt Miriam? It's Christmas
Eve?

ANGELA

We'll stick together and be right
back. No more than an hour. I
promise.

Angela and Buzz put on "puppy dog eyes."

MIRIAM

Okay, but come right back!

Miriam exits, and Angela and Buzz quickly make their way over
to Tanigi and Naomi.

ANGELA

Come on, Buzz. Let's go talk to
Tanigi.

BUZZ

(smiles)
And Naomi.

As Angela and Buzz make their way to Tanigi and Naomi, they
see Tanigi's eyes open wide as he sees the two Goons enter
the park on a golf cart (from the far side) and drive
directly to Mr. Zargus.

Angela tosses the golf cart keys to Tanini and whispers.

ANGELA

Bring our golf cart around, but
hang back.

Tanigi nods and races away.

GOON #1

You're coming with us.

MR. ZARGUS

I'd rather not...

Goon #2 flexes his muscles to Mr. Zargus.

GOON #2
We're going to your home to pick up
all your stupid notebooks.

GOON #1
In case you forget where the Mayan
trading post is.

Mr. Zargus has a terrified look on his face but gets into their golf cart.

Angela whispers to Buzz.

ANGELA
Give me your flashlight and stand
in front of their cart to stall
them.

Buzz stands in front of the golf cart and pretends to be lost.

BUZZ
Mom, Dad, where are you?

GOON #1
Get out of the way, kid!

Naomi joins Buzz and puts her hands on Buzz's shoulders.

NAOMI
(angry)
There you are, you little brat!

Angela crawls up from behind and puts Buzz's flashlight between the seat cushions in the back.

NAOMI (CONT'D)
Your mom is looking all over...

GOON #2
Get out of the road!

Angela turns on the flashlight and crawls back away.

Goon #1 steps on the gas and almost hits Buzz as he pulls away.

Mr. Zargus looks terrified.

With the headlights off, Tanigi pulls up to the kids. Angela sits up front with Tanigi. Naomi and Buzz hop in the back.

ANGELA
Follow that penlight flashlight.

The CHASE SCENE is on.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Tanigi drives surprisingly well, and hangs back just far enough so as not to be seen. Angela whispers.

ANGELA
This isn't your first joy ride, is it.

Tanigi smiles but turns serious.

TANIGI
I may have "borrowed" one of these before.

Angela hands her phone to Naomi in the back seat.

ANGELA
You're dad's a police officer, right?

Naomi nods yes.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
Text him the photo of the two goons in the souvenir shop and tell him we think they are in the black market for archaeological artifacts, and they just kidnapped Mr. Zargus. Does your dad know him?

NAOMI
He was my parents' favorite high school teacher of all time.

ANGELA
If they have an address for him, we'll need it if they lose us.

TANIGI
They won't lose us. But hang on tight.

The two golf carts speed up through the crowded streets.

BUZZ
(eyeing Naomi)
This is the best adventure ever.

EXT. DARK STREET - LATER

The chase is on, and it's bumpier and more dangerous.

TANIGI

He must live way out of town.

Buzz almost gets bumped out of the backseat, so Naomi puts an arm around him. He smiles and giggles nervously.

Angela sees her a low-battery message on her phone.

ANGELA

I've got to save my battery for an emergency call.

TANIGI

There's no service out here.

The Goon's golf cart makes a hard right turn onto a thin two-track trail back to a dark shack.

Angela puts her arm across Tanigi's chest and her eyes open wide in embarrassment. She whispers.

ANGELA

Sorry, I meant to tell you to slow down and pull off the road.

Tanigi is unphased.

TANIGI

Follow on foot. Good idea.

BUZZ

I'm not going down there. I don't have my flashlight.

Naomi grabs his hand.

NAOMI

You're coming with us.

Buzz's eyes open wide.

ANGELA

Let's find out what they're up to.

Tanigi, Naomi, Angela, and Buzz walk slowly in the pitch dark.

EXT. SHACK - CONTINUOUS

The kids sneak up on the shack to see a single light on inside. They hear the crashing of lamps, plates, and glasses.

Angela glares at her phone, while Buzz retrieves his penlight from the Goon's golf cart. They whisper.

ANGELA

No service. But I can take video until my battery dies out.

Angela gets video of the golf cart and the shack, with the inside destruction ongoing.

TANIGI

All he has to do to divulge the location of a Mayan trading post buried in the swamp.

ANGELA

I'll hide and get video of their exit.

NAOMI

The rest of us should hide way back.

Buzz gives Angela a big hug.

BUZZ

I'm worried bout you, Sis.

The noise inside stops.

Angela waves everyone back, but Tanigi finds a shovel leaning against the side of the house to protect Angela who stands against the side of the shack and points the phone toward the door.

The Goons rush out of the shack carrying three notebooks.

GOON #1

We'll leave from the dock at first light.

GOON #2

The first light in our room or the first light outside?

GOON #1

(angry)
Sunrise.

GOON #2

I knew that!

They hop in the golf cart and race off.

The kids race into the shack.

INT. SHACK - CONTINUOUS

Mr. Zargus on the floor but there's no blood.

Angela helps Mr. Zargus to his stuffed old chair.

ANGELA

How badly are you hurt?

MR. ZARGUS

I'm fine. They wore gloves so they wouldn't leave fingerprints.

BUZZ

They may be smarter than they look!

MR. ZARGUS

No, I don't think so.

TANIGI

Did they get what they came for?

MR. ZARGUS

They stole three of my notebooks, but the other twenty-seven are in a waterproof box under the floorboards under my bed. Better get them out of here. I gave them an approximate location. We'll have to catch them in the morning.

TANIGI

I'll get the golf cart.

Mr. Zargus stands.

MR. ZARGUS

Not yet. I have to show you something first.

He leads them to his small refrigerator. Buzz shines his penlight on two photographs. One of Tanigi and one of Naomi. They are copies of the photos that Aunt Miriam has in her office.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)

I'll tell you the story on the way back to town. First, get my other notebooks. They mean everything to me, outside of you kids.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Tanigi drives with Mr. Zargus in the front passenger seat. Buzz is squeezed behind the two girls in the backseat and loving it.

MR. ZARGUS

They know about where the old Mayan trading post is buried, but they'll never find the exact location. The five of us will beat them to the site and catch them red-handed.

NAOMI

Uh, my dad may wanna join us.

MR. ZARGUS

That's fine. He was a good student. Plus, we'll need his motorboat.

INT. ORPHANAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mom and Dad return with sets of clean clothes.

ANGELA

We're happy with our thrift store clothes.

Angela looks at her clothes.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

They are just going to get trashed in the jungle, anyway.

DAD

What jungle?

ANGELA

Tomorrow morning before church, Mr. Zargus said he would take us to the place where he found Tanigi.

BUZZ

We're leaving before dawn so we have time to change into our good clothes for church.

TANIGI

We only need the boat for an hour.

NAOMI

We'll use my dad's motorboat!

Naomi sends a text message.

MOM

Sounds dangerous.

MR. ZARGUS

Not at all. Twenty minutes each way with a few minutes there. We'll all have life vests, but the waterway is like glass that early in the morning.

Naomi checks a text message.

NAOMI

My dad says he'll loan Mr. Zargus his boat, and he'll stand by with the police boat.

DAD

That sounds okay. I can't believe Buzz is going into the jungle.

Buzz gulps but looks at Naomi.

BUZZ

We... we got this!

Buzz gives Miriam the 'greater than' sign with his fingers and everyone laughs and rallies around Buzz.

EXT. MOTORBOAT - PRE-DAWN

Mr. Zargus helps the kids into the tiny motorboat and hands out life vests. He moves to the bow of the boat.

Tanigi positions himself at the stern and starts the motor.

ANGELA

(to Tanigi)

Let me guess. This isn't your first joy ride in a motorboat, is it Huck?

TANIGI

Look who's talking more like Tom Sawyer every day!

Everyone laughs as Tanigi lowers the propeller and sails away.

BEGIN SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Mr. Zargus passes around bug spray.

-- The kids all apply it, but Buzz uses an extreme amount.

-- They enjoy their adventure as the sun rises. It's a beautiful sight.

-- Mr. Zargus grabs a long rope (40-50 feet) and fashions a knot with a fist-sized loop in the middle of it.

-- The kids look on curiously.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The students are sitting up in their seats and listening intently. Even Mr. Robins is paying close attention.

ANGELA

Huck and Jim ran into all sorts of trouble as they floated miles and miles and days upon end on the mighty Mississippi. The river floods one night and nearly kills them. They run into slave hunters, a smallpox epidemic, feuding aristocrats, armed bandits,
(louder)
and the worst of the lot, con men.

MR. ROBINS

(in disbelief)
Why were they the worst of the lot?

ANGELA

Because just like Huck and Jim, my brother, and our new friends ran into two con men who had fake government badges but they were really out to steal precious Mayan artifacts from an ancient trading post swallowed by the jungle and lost for centuries!

The students gasp and Mr. Robins is intrigued.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

(softly)

We sailed a small motorboat across the miles of the Caribbean Sea before dawn to beat the con men to the buried treasure.

(she paces as she speaks)

Armed with only one long rope in a swamp filled with crocodiles and poisonous snakes, we were going to set a snare trap that the ancient Mayans used to catch ferocious jaguars that were as common as mosquitoes...

The students gasp again.

BACK TO:

EXT. DOCK - CONTINUOUS

It's dawn and the sun comes up fast.

Mr. Zargus helps everyone out of the boat and onto a decrepit dock.

MR. ZARGUS

First, we hide the boat.

They pull the small boat to the shore and into the jungle.

They cover the boat with vegetation.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)

Couple of things to watch out for, though all are rare. There are venomous snakes in Belize, but snake bites are exceedingly rare because most snakes do not bite people without being provoked.

(eyes the kids)

If you see a snake, step away from it.

BUZZ

Now you tell us!

MR. ZARGUS

You probably won't see any snakes on this short hike.

BUZZ

(mumbles)

Probably?

(MORE)

BUZZ (CONT'D)

That's what I'm afraid of. They're there, but I won't see them.

MR. ZARGUS

Second, the American Crocodile will avoid you, but you might be treated to a Black Spiny-tail Iguana, Green Iguana, Raccoon, Northern Anteater, or Greater Grison.

ANGELA

Are there jaguars here?

MR. ZARGUS

A jaguar was illegally shot and killed a couple of years ago on the Caye. They avoid the top predators in Belize... humans.

ANGELA

That's sad.

MR. ZARGUS

Very sad, indeed. So, mosquitos are our number one threat, but we all spayed up. Just follow closely behind me, and we'll be fine. We must hurry to the site.

Mr. Zargus leads the kids who follow very closely bunched up along a trail into the jungle.

Tanagi reaches for Angela's hand, so Naomi reaches for Buzz's hand. Buzz is the only one smiling.

EXT. JUNGLE TRAIL - DAY

Mr. Zargus leads the kids to a clearing in the forest, where Tanagi immediately starts walking around and "sniffing" the trees, plants, and soil.

The others stare at Tanagi, who is solemn yet delighted.

TANIGI

This is it. This is my home. This is where I was born.

Mr. Zargus smiles and the others follow.

MR. ZARGUS

I wondered if you might recognize the place I found you ten years ago.

Naomi walks around and smells the environment.

NAOMI

That's odd, I think I remember it too.

Tanigi and Naomi gaze at each other and share a moment, as Mr. Zargus smiles.

MR. ZARGUS

This is where I found you, too.

(sadly to Naomi)

Three days later. Your brother kept mumbling something about his sister and mother... But he was too young for any of us to understand.

NAOMI

My brother?

MR. ZARGUS

(points)

It was a dark time. There was a small hut and cooking fire over there. And a woman's clothes hanging to dry. The police thought your mother either wandered off or was abducted. I rescued Tanigi, but you were nowhere in sight. I returned here every day until I found you. How you survived out here for days was a miracle.

Naomi and Tanigi hug Mr. Zargus.

Mr. Zargus pulls out a jade carving from his coat pocket.

The kids look at the jade carving in awe.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)

While looking for Naomi, I found this, partially buried. I knew this was the ancient Mayan trading post I'd been searching for, but I couldn't report it until I could take you here.

TANIGI

Ms. Miriam took us both in?

MR. ZARGUS

Yes, but we had no way of knowing you were related, but it makes sense now.

Angela hugs Naomi.

ANGELA
You were so brave.

She hugs Tanigi.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
You too.

BUZZ
I wish I could be as brave as all
of you.

Mr. Zargus puts an arm around Buzz.

MR. ZARGUS
Bravery appears only when it's most
needed.
(beat)
And I need you to help me set the
snare trap while the others gather
leaves to hide the rope. We have to
hurry, the grave robbers will be
here very soon.

Mr. Zargus paces and looks for an appropriate tree.

He whispers to Buzz as he points at a tree.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)
See how the bark of this tree is
different from the others?

BUZZ
Yes.

Buzz reaches out to touch the tree, but Mr. Zargus stops him.

MR. ZARGUS
Don't touch. Gather around, kids.

The kids approach the tree slowly.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)
This looks exactly like a
Poisonwood tree, *Metopium*
toxiferum. But it's not.
(touches the tree)
But it's relative, the poisonwood
tree that lives here in the forest
is related to poison ivy and poison
oak, but far more toxic. We'll set
our snare trap here.

Mr. Zargus points down to a depression in the forest floor.

He places the rope with a slip knot on the slight ridge of the depression.

He ties a half-knot behind the tree and holds up the two ends of the rope. He points left to a thick patch of vegetation.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)

Angela, Buzz, and I will take that side. Naomi and Tanigi will take this side. When I yell "now," we all pull back on our ropes fast and hard.

ANGELA

Until their feet are stuck.

MR. ZARGUS

Exactly. Then, before they can untie their feet, we run around them in opposite directions and secure them to the tree. We'll practice a few...

They HEAR a motorboat approaching. Mr. Zargus whispers.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)

Here they come. Cover the loop. And take your positions. And take videos on those silly phones of yours!

The kids cover the loop.

They stretch the rope out behind the tree and cover the rope with leaves, while Mr. Zargus places the jade carving in the trap, burying it a little, but it's clearly visible.

Everyone takes their places.

TENSE MOMENTS

The two Goons slowly walk up the trail, carefully surveying the forest around them. They each carry a shovel.

GOON #2

Are you sure this is the spot?

GOON #1

It better be, or we'll kill him and those nasty orphans.

GOON #2
If something doesn't kill us first.

GOON #1
Shut up and look for pieces of
pottery. That's how we'll know
we're close.

They study the ground as they walk.

Goon #1 finds a small chard of pottery.

GOON #1 (CONT'D)
Pottery! We found it.

GOON #2
Now all we have to do is find a
burial site.

They spot the forest clearing and smile.

GOON #1
We're there.

Goon #2 wanders into the forest near Angela, Buzz, and
Tanigi, but doesn't spot them. They see him but duck low and
remain quiet.

TENSE MOMENTS

Goon #1 sees the tip of the jade carving.

GOON #1 (CONT'D)
Over here! Quick.

Goon #2 joins Goon #1 who stands in the with one foot inside
and one foot outside of the snare loop and holds up the jade
carving as Goon #2 runs to hug his partner. Goon #2 has both
feet in the snare trap.

The shovels are thrown to the side.

GOON #1 (CONT'D)
The burial site! We did it!

MR. ZARGUS
(yells)
Now!

The kids and Mr. Zargus pull back on the ends of their rope.

They feel the knot tighten around the Goons' ankles.

Only one foot of Goon #1 is in the trap, but Goon # 2 clutches Goon #1 in a bear hug and won't let go.

GOON #1

What the...

GOON #2

Don't worry! I got ya! I won't let go.

Mr. Zargus and the kids pull tight as they circle the tree in opposite directions around the tree taking turns going under and over the other's ropes.

GOON #2 (CONT'D)

You can't do this! We have badges!

GOON #1

(to Goon #2)

They had be by one leg, you idiot.
If you didn't hug me, I could have gotten away!

The kids take over the wrapping of the Goons to the tree as Mr. Zargus admires their work.

MR. ZARGUS

You're clinging to a poisonwood tree. The Mayans called it the Chechem tree. Much more toxic than poison ivy! It causes itching rash and blisters extending from your head to the bottoms of your feet. Your leg will swell up, followed by infected lesions. you'll barely be able to walk. Recovery will take months.

(pulls out EpiPens)

Unless you have an EpiPen to prevent anaphylactic shock.

The Goons try to avoid contact with the tree, but they cannot.

MR. ZARGUS (CONT'D)

We'll need a full confession and the names and addresses of the people you're working for.

Angela takes video.

GOON #1

We don't work for nobody.

MR. ZARGUS

Your fingerprints are on the jade carving, the two shovels, and my three notebooks that are probably on your boat. Breaking and entering and antiquities theft.

ANGELA

Leave 'em here for the jaguars.

TANIGI

And the crocs.

NAOMI

And the vipers.

BUZZ

And the gibnuts.

Everyone stares at Buzz.

Goon #2 panics.

GOON #2

We're gonna die!

Goon #1 rolls his eyes in disgust.

GOON #1

Okay, we'll talk.

The kids smile as the Goons give full confessions, which we don't hear.

LATER

The POLICE OFFICER (45), arrives. Naomi gives him a hug.

NAOMI

Thanks for coming, Dad.

POLICE OFFICER

Didn't want any of you to miss church.

(beat)

You all need it more than ever for this stunt!

He handcuffs the two suspects as the kids untie them.

MR. ZARGUS

(to the Goons)

By the way, that's not a poisonwood tree. It's a harmless relative.

The Goons glare at Mr. Zargus and each other.

The Police Officer bags the jade carving as evidence as we resume the AUDIO.

TANIGI

Officer Martinez, can Angela and Buzz hold the carving for a few seconds?

The Officer hands it to Angela who quickly hands it to Buzz who quickly hands it back to the Officer.

ANGELA

This treasure belongs to the Mayan people.

BUZZ

Yep! But it was fun to hold it for a second.

POLICE OFFICER

We think these two looters work for an organized syndicate that was about to auction hundreds of sacred Mayan artifacts on the black market. There could be a big reward for you all.

ANGELA

I'm giving my share to Aunt Miriam.

BUZZ

Me too.

TANIGI

Exactly what I was thinking.

Tanigi kisses Angela.

NAOMI

That's my brother for you. I'm in.

Buzz sneaks in to kiss Naomi.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Don't even think about it.

Everyone laughs.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Until you're thirteen.

Everyone laughs again.

The Police Officer leads the Goons away while talking to his daughter.

POLICE OFFICER
He's your brother, huh? I suppose
we should unite the family.

Tanigi and Naomi smile and walk arm-in-arm down the trail.

Mr. Zargus smiles and he walks behind everyone.

EXT. ORPHANAGE - EVENING

The kitchen has extra Christmas decorations all around. A large chocolate cake rests on the back counter.

Various Orphans (5-10 years old) run in and out of the kitchen to hug Miriam and stare at the chocolate cake throughout this scene.

The Sanchez family is in their Sunday-best clothes, as are Miriam, Tanigi, Naomi, Mr. Zargus, and Naomi's dad (the Police Officer) and his beautiful wife, NAOMI'S MOM, (45). They all hold modest plates of rice and beans, with chunks of chicken. Everyone is laughing, talking, and eating.

MIRIAM
That sounds like quite an adventure
you all had. Mark Twain would be
proud!

Miriam hugs Angela and Buzz.

POLICE OFFICER
The police in Belize City found the
warehouse full of artifacts. The
detailed books and descriptions of
locations should put all those
criminals in jail for decades.

Miriam hugs Mr. Zargus.

MR. ZARGUS
They are very brave children.

Miriam hugs Dad and Mom. She gazes lovingly at Angela and Buzz.

MIRIAM
It will be quiet around here
without you and Tanigi.

Naomi's mom hugs Tanigi.

NAOMI'S MOM

But we're happy to have him join
our family.

POLICE OFFICER

He won't be able to boost as many
golf carts or motorboats.

Everyone laughs.

TANIGI

(to Mariam)

I'll be happy to drop in to help
with the dishes.

NAOMI'S MOM

(laughs)

After his school work, of course.
And we hope Mr. Zargus will visit
every Sunday for dinner.

Mr. Zargus smiles.

Buzz chews a piece of chicken.

BUZZ

This chicken's really good.

TANIGI

(laughs)

It might be gibnut.

Buzz's eyes open widely and everyone laughs.

MR. ZARGUS

The Agouti Paca.

ANGELA

The royal rat.

Buzz smiles.

BUZZ

It's pretty darn tasty.

MIRIAM

It's chicken, thanks to your
parents.

DAD

We've had a marvelous time, but
we're off to explore the other
great sites and attractions of
Belize before we fly home.

ANGELA

The jungle zip-line and waterfalls.

Buzz's eyes open up.

MOM

The Blue Hole and snorkeling on the second-largest barrier reef in the world.

Buzz's mouth opens.

ANGELA

The jaguar reserve.

Buzz takes a step toward the back door.

DAD

So we've asked if Tanigi and Naomi can join us for a few days to show us the sights.

Buzz stops, turns, and smiles. The kids cheer.

POLICE OFFICER

(to Tanigi)

You'll have no trouble getting a passport now.

TANIGI

I'm never leaving my beautiful country of Belize.

ANGELA

Then we'll have to visit every Christmas!

BUZZ

And every other holiday.

Angela holds up her book and sounds excited.

ANGELA

That reminds me! I still have some chapters to finish.

Miriam moves to the chocolate cake.

MIRIAM

After we serve Christmas chocolate cake to all the children, of course.

Everyone laughs. Angela moves closer to Tanigi and they share a moment.

Buzz moves closer to Naomi trying to impress her.

BUZZ

The Mayans invented chocolate.

NAOMI

(laughs)

Yes, Buzz. We know.

The others begin to deliver generous slices of chocolate cake, leaving Tanigi and Angela are alone in the kitchen.

They share a short, sweet kiss, and gaze into each other's eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Angela slaps the book in her hand and grabs the attention of everyone.

ANGELA

I'll admit to three things when I picked up this book at the library. First, I didn't know who Mark Twain was or why his book was banned. Second, I never read any novel cover to cover, and the only reason I picked this one up was because a previous reader left this tourist map of Belize in the book.

She holds up the tourist map.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Third, it wasn't until I got to Belize that I learned that the star on the map indicated the capital city, Belmopan, and that I had tricked my family into going to Belize over Christmas. But that was the only way we could rescue all those stolen Mayan artifacts.

MR. ROBINS

You don't expect us all to believe...

Angela walks up and down the classroom holding a newspaper story with a photo of Mr. Zargus standing behind Angela, Tanigi, Naomi, and Buzz. The Headline reads, "Archaeological Looters Caught: Teens to share reward with local orphanage."

Mr. Robins sees the article and his eyes open wide.

ANGELA

But maybe it was adventure calling.
If we didn't go to Belize, a
warehouse full of stolen Mayan
artifacts would have disappeared
forever into private collections,
cheating the good citizens of
Belize. Now, I not only Belize in
Christmas, I believe in adventure!

The Students clap for Angela.

MR. ROBINS

Stick to the book report, Ms.
Sanchez. Finish up!

ANGELA

Mark Twain's book taught me that
most treasures are buried in your
heart and are only revealed when
you take an adventure. The real
treasure is in discovering things
for yourself. Huck Finn's treasure
was learning that Jim should be a
free man.

(fights back tears)

The saddest part of the book was
near the end when Jim sacrifices
his freedom to help Tom Sawyer. I
couldn't imagine such a selfless
act. I cried out loud on the plane
ride home.

(looks around the room)

I saw first-hand what life must
have been like for the orphan,
Huckleberry Finn. In Belize,
Tanigi's treasure was a warm meal
and a roof over his head when it
rained; and a good banned book to
read from the public library! None
of us can imagine having so little,
yet being so happy.

MR. ROBINS

Fine report, Ms. Sanchez, we...

Angela and the students glare at Mr. Robins.

ANGELA

I'm not done.

MR. ROBINS

Fine. Proceed.

ANGELA

(to the class)

My Aunt Mariam's treasures were the kids she helped at the orphanage. She asked nothing more of life. My family gave all our Christmas gifts to the orphanage. We'll do that every year.

The students fight back tears.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

For Mr. Zargus, his treasure was a sense of place, knowing where in the world he belonged. Like Mark Twain knew the Mississippi River, all Mr. Zargus wanted to do was protect the natural and cultural resources of Belize for future generations.

(glances at Mr. Robins)

For me... my treasure was in reading "The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn," while being on our family adventure in Belize.

Angela glares at Mr. Robins and ends her speech loudly and confidently.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

When I grow up, I'm going to write stories about the lives of the everyday people I run into on my adventures, just like Mark Twain!

(beat)

And if I do a good job, my book will be banned too!

Angela gets a STANDING OVATION from the class for her book report.

The Students chant, "Full Credit" and "A+"

Mr. Robins stands and smiles in agreement.

The Students cheer and gather around Angela.

FADE OUT.

ROLL CREDITS

If desired, show vignettes of the kids recreating in Belize.

- Sailing to the Blue Hole.
- Snorkeling in the Barrier Reef.
- Riding a zip-line in the jungle.
- Swimming in waterfalls.
- Hiking in the Jaguar Reserve.
- Visiting the Marco Gonzales Archaeological Reserve.
- Dancing with the Garifuna.
- Lounging at a pool at a deluxe resort.
- End with file footage of the Christmas Parade in San Pedro.

THE END