

NO VOLVERE (POINT OF NO RETURN)

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - PARK AVE - DAY

It's a vibrant summer day, with luxurious brownstones lining the swanky, tree-lined street.

INT. PARK AVE APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

The pristine bathroom is adorned with elegant white Carrara marble. REINA, (40s), her hair slightly disheveled with streaks of gray, wears a gold cross around her neck, diligently scrubs the toilet.

A YOUNG MOM, (late 20s), visibly overwhelmed, approaches with her crying baby girl in her arms.

YOUNG MOM

Can you please do the laundry
before you go?

REINA

Yes.

The young mom shuffles out of the room. Reina glances at her watch, growing slightly annoyed. She takes out her cell and dials a number, but it goes straight to voicemail.

REINA (CONT'D)

(into phone)

I-- I'll be home late tonight.

Reina hangs up.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Reina stands in a crowded bus, surrounded by a diverse group of people.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Emerging from the supermarket, Reina carries two large shopping bags.

EXT. EAST VILLAGE STREET - NIGHT

The East Village street pulses with life, crowded with trendy dog owners, distant bongo drums echoing through the air, and a blend of bridge-and-tunnel girls, hipsters, and yuppies. Reina weaves her way through the vibrant throng.

Suddenly, a BOY, (10), on a hoverboard crashes into Reina, causing her to stumble and drop her groceries.

REINA

Damn it.

The boy's EMBARRASSED MOTHER (30s) rushes over to assist Reina.

EMBARRASSED MOTHER

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

She helps Reina gather up her spilled groceries.

EXT. RED BRICK TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Reina's hand bleeds from the fall, as she fumbles with the key.

INT. REINA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Small, homey, and meticulously tidy. In one corner, a small shrine holds a statue of Jesus, accompanied by a flickering candle.

Reina is greeted by blaring music.

REINA

Alejandra, could you please turn that down?

INT. REINA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Reina runs water over her bleeding hand. As she looks up, she notices a trail of scattered clothes and books strewn across the hallway.

REINA

(muttering to herself)

I'm not going to get upset. I'm not going to get upset. I'm not going to get upset.

INT. REINA'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Reina, visibly tired and irritable, bends down to gather the scattered items from the floor.

REINA

Alejandra! How many times do I have to tell you not to leave your stuff on the floor? I spend all day cleaning other people's houses, and I don't want to come home to this mess...

Reina opens the bedroom door and finds ALEJANDRA, (17), blue eyes, light brown hair, wearing buff Gregory Peck eyeglasses, kissing TONI, (17), a tomboyish girl.

Reina releases a bone-chilling, primal scream that echoes through the house.

ALEJANDRA

Mom!

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Reina kneels before the altar, her eyes fixed on the large crucifix hanging above it. She crosses herself and bows her head, tears streaming down her cheeks.

REINA

Please help me, Jesus. Help me-- help me stay strong. Tell me-- please tell me what to do.

She takes a deep breath, feeling a sense of peace wash over her. She's made a decision.

INT. REINA'S APARTMENT - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra methodically packs a suitcase while Reina stands in the doorway, holding a glass of wine.

REINA

Have you finished packing?

ALEJANDRA

No!

REINA

Do you need help?

Alejandra snaps back at her.

ALEJANDRA

I got it! Just leave me alone!

Reina's eyes well up with tears as she looks at Alejandra.

REINA

I don't understand. Everything seemed normal. You're normal. How did you become... that? I sent you to Catholic school for God's sake. I raised you to be good. It's-- it's disgusting!

ALEJANDRA

Mom, please stop it!

REINA

It's a disease. It goes against the teachings of the church.

ALEJANDRA

You live in a world based on religion, not reality.

REINA

Alejandra, damn it, you have to stop this. Nobody in our family is like that.

ALEJANDRA

What does it matter?

REINA

I just don't understand. It's a mistake. I don't believe it. You can't be...

ALEJANDRA

I really wanted to be the daughter you needed me to be, Mom. I really tried. But I can't anymore.

REINA

Why are you doing this to me? You need help!

ALEJANDRA

I don't need help.

REINA

Everyone will talk!

ALEJANDRA

No one gives a shit but you, Mom! This is my life. This is who I am. Do you understand that?

REINA

No. I don't. I can't--

ALEJANDRA

You're ashamed. You're so ashamed
of me, right?

Reina is silent, unsure of how to respond.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

All my life, I've been trying to
make you proud. But no matter what
I do, you will never be proud of
me.

Alejandra grabs a pack of cigarettes from under her mattress,
leaving Reina stunned.

REINA

You smoke?

Alejandra lights a cigarette.

REINA (CONT'D)

Stop smoking!

ALEJANDRA

Stop drinking!

Reina looks visibly disappointed. Alejandra flicks the
cigarette out the window.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

Please, don't send me there. I... I
won't see her again, okay?

REINA

You're not going to ruin your whole
life... like I did.

ALEJANDRA

I'm not gonna pay for your
mistakes. I'm not going. You can't
make me!

Reina delivers a harsh ultimatum.

REINA

I-- I won't paid for college, and
you will have to move out.

Alejandra slams her suitcase shut.

ALEJANDRA

You'll regret this.

REINA

I'm saving you. You'll thank me later.

INT. NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART - DAY

Alejandra and Toni walk hand in hand through the museum.

TONI

She can't be serious.

ALEJANDRA

She is.

TONI

You didn't do anything wrong. This is crazy. She can't do this!

ALEJANDRA

She's my mother.

TONI

Stand up for yourself. If you don't, she'll keep controlling you forever.

ALEJANDRA

I... It's just... I can't. She's giving up so much for me.

TONI

That doesn't mean you have to sacrifice your happiness for hers. You-- you can stay with me.

Alejandra cackles.

ALEJANDRA

Really? And what about your mother?

Toni doesn't say anything.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

She hates me.

TONI

No. She just--

ALEJANDRA

I see the way she looks at me.

TONI

She's not a racist. She just...

ALEJANDRA
Enough said.

Toni looks down, ashamed.

TONI
I'm sorry.

ALEJANDRA
It's not your fault.

TONI
We can runaway together. We can go
to Canada.

ALEJANDRA
How? We don't have any money.

TONI
I'll steal some of my mom's
jewelry. She deserves it for being
a fucking--

ALEJANDRA
No way! She'll think I did it and
call the police on me.

Toni gives up, sees it's hopeless.

TONI
How long?

ALEJANDRA
The whole summer.

Toni looks down, visibly depressed.

TONI
What if something happens? You
can't go.

ALEJANDRA
Don't worry. It's just for a couple
of months.

Alejandra looks at Toni.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
I promise you. I'll come back.

INSERT - PLAQUE ON THE WALL

Inscribed: "Rivane Neuenschwander. A Day Like Any Other. I
Wish Your Wish."

INT. NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART - GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Alejandra and Toni head past the plaque toward thousands of colorful silk ribbons hanging on the wall.

INSERT - WALL OF RIBBONS

A selection of ribbons containing messages, including:

-- "I WISH UNICORNS WERE REAL."
 -- "I WISH TO WIN THE LOTTERY."
 -- "I WISH I COULD TURN BACK TIME."
 -- "I WISH YOU WERE HERE."
 -- "I WISH TO DIE WITH NO REGRETS."
 -- "I WISH FOR LOVE."
 -- "I WISH FOR GOD."

CURATOR (O.S.)

You are all invited to remove a ribbon, tie it to your wrist, and replace it with a new wish written on a slip of paper.

Toni selects a ribbon [message unseen] from the wall and ties it around Alejandra's wrist.

TONI

When the ribbon falls off, your wish will come true...

Alejandra reads the ribbon and is moved by its message.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Reina and Alejandra stand in the main terminal. Alejandra looks down at her feet, clearly upset.

ALEJANDRA

This is not fair. Please don't make me go.

REINA

You might end up liking it.

ALEJANDRA

I won't.

REINA

I bet you will.

ALEJANDRA

I don't know anyone there.

REINA

You'll make new friends. Sometimes,
changing your friends is what
changes your life.

Alejandra sighs.

REINA (CONT'D)

Your uncle is dying to meet you.

She hands Alejandra a bank card.

REINA (CONT'D)

It's your college savings account.
Don't spend too much. Have fun.

Alejandra pockets the card. Reina reaches for a hug.

ALEJANDRA

No-- You're sending me to hell.

Reina shows Alejandra her damaged hands.

REINA

Everything I've done, I've done for
you. All those years of scrubbing
toilets--

ALEJANDRA

"I'd rather die on my feet than
live on my knees."

REINA

Enough!

ALEJANDRA

You're pathetic. I hate you!

Reina snaps and slaps Alejandra across the face.

REINA

You don't know what sacrifice is.
I've given up everything for you.
You will learn.

They just stare at each other for a long moment. Both on the
verge of tears.

INT. EL SALVADOR AIRPORT - DAY

Alejandra steps onto the automatic walkway, visibly
depressed.

INT. EL SALVADOR AIRPORT - DAY

The bustling airport is filled with a flurry of people. Alejandra looks around, feeling slightly overwhelmed.

EXT. EL SALVADOR AIRPORT - DAY

Alejandra walks out into the burning sunshine. For a moment all she sees are flashes of light.

Alejandra walks out of the airport and is immediately mobbed by a group of begging CHILDREN. They plead for food and money.

Dialogue in Spanish.

CHILD #1

Miss, we're very hungry.

CHILD #2

Please, Miss. We haven't eaten for days.

Alejandra digs through her bag, looking for change to give them. Suddenly, RAÚL, (50s), marshmallow build, squeezed into a Tony Manero-style shirt, approaches waving a five-dollar bill in the air.

RAÚL

Alejandra?

ALEJANDRA

Yeah.

Raúl hands the bill to the children, who run off with it. He then hugs Alejandra.

RAÚL

It's great to finally meet you.

He looks at her strangely.

RAÚL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Blue eyes?

ALEJANDRA

What?

RAÚL

Oh, nothing. I-- I like your glasses. They're very cool.

ALEJANDRA

Thanks.

He takes her suitcase, and they start walking.

RAÚL

How was your flight?

ALEJANDRA

I got sick.

RAÚL

Oh no, your first time on a plane?

ALEJANDRA

Yeah.

RAÚL

Would you like something to eat or drink?

ALEJANDRA

No, thank you. I'm still feeling a bit queasy.

RAÚL

Are you sure?

ALEJANDRA

Yeah, my stomach still--

He chuckles.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

RAÚL

I'm sorry-- I'm just impressed by how good your Spanish is.

ALEJANDRA

Mom made sure I learned it.

INT. RAÚL'S TRUCK - DAY

Alejandra stares out the window, taking in the breathtaking scenery of towering mountains, ancient ruins, lush tropical trees, and majestic volcanoes.

Dialogue in Spanish.

RAÚL
So, how's your mother doing? Still
cleaning other people's toilets?

ALEJANDRA
Yeah.

RAÚL
I keep telling her to come back.
Business is booming, but she
refuses to return.

Alejandra shifts in her seat, uncomfortable with the
conversation.

ALEJANDRA
She's never coming back.

RAÚL
Why not?

ALEJANDRA
I don't know.

They drive in silence for a moment before Raúl turns up the
radio, filling the truck with music. The tension dissipates a
little.

EXT. EL SALVADOR - NIGHT

Daylight fades. There is just a pink streak left in the sky.
Vast ocean frames primitive, empty coastline.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Raúl's truck stops outside a modest but dreamy house on the
beach. A beat-up truck sits in the driveway.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Alejandra steps out of the truck. She looks at the house, the
ocean, and the stars. Raúl walks up to her.

Dialogue in Spanish.

RAÚL
I know it's not much, but it's
magical, isn't it?

Alejandra nods.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra takes in the house. Bare, with just the essentials.

Dialogue in Spanish.

RAÚL

Your mother and I grew up here.

ALEJANDRA

Where's your wife? Kids?

RAÚL

The road is my life. I travel all over Central America delivering coffee. You'll have the place mostly to yourself.

ALEJANDRA

You live alone?

RAÚL

Don't worry, you won't have to lift a finger.

Alejandra shakes her head.

ALEJANDRA

No, that's not what I meant.

RAÚL

Estela, comes a few times a week to clean and cook.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Another sparse room: hammock, TV, desk, and not much else.

Dialogue in Spanish.

RAÚL

Your mother's old room. I didn't have time to get you a bed, but I did get you a television.

ALEJANDRA

I prefer to read.

Alejandra picks up an old Chavela Vargas record.

RAÚL

Your mother loved that record. You know it?

ALEJANDRA
Of course. She plays it all the
time.

He laughs.

RAÚL
She would sing it all night.

ALEJANDRA
She sings?

He looks stunned.

RAÚL
You never heard her sing?

Her silence says it all. A sad realization hits him.

RAÚL (CONT'D)
That's a shame. It made her so
happy.

There is a pause.

RAÚL (CONT'D)
Do you know how to drive?

ALEJANDRA
A little. I live in the city. Don't
get much practice.

RAÚL
It's perfect.
(switches to English)
I'll practice my English and you
your driving.

She looks at him, surprised. They will now speak to each
other in English.

ALEJANDRA
You speak--

RAÚL
I've been studying. Taking classes.

He hands her a key.

RAÚL (CONT'D)
It's for the truck in the driveway.
It's old. But it'll get you where
you need to go.

He crosses to the desk and scribbles something on a piece of paper. He then hands her the note.

RAÚL (CONT'D)

The coffee plantation is not far from here. Drop by tomorrow for lunch... I really think you're going to like it here.

Alejandra gives him a small smile.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Alejandra drives through a winding road in the countryside, looking lost and anxious. Suddenly, she spots ESTELA, (18), a young woman with tanned skin and long brown hair, pushing a bike on the side of the road. Alejandra pulls up beside her, rolling down the window.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ALEJANDRA

Hey. Hey!

Estela stares at the truck for a moment, recognizing it.

ESTELA

Yes?

ALEJANDRA

I'm lost. Do you live around here?
Can you tell me--

ESTELA

Let me guess. The coffee
plantation?

ALEJANDRA

Yes, uh, my uncle works there.

ESTELA

Where you from?

ALEJANDRA

New York.

Estela beams.

ESTELA

Oh, I love New York! It's the most
amazing place.

ALEJANDRA
You been?

ESTELA
Not yet.

Estela looks at Alejandra.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I'm going to live there one day.

ALEJANDRA
You'll love it.

Estela spots cigarettes on the dash and points.

ESTELA
Can I have one?

ALEJANDRA
Yeah, sure.

Alejandra pulls over and gives Estela a cigarette. Estela just stares at her. Alejandra stares back, confused.

ESTELA
Light me up.

ALEJANDRA
Oh, right, right.

Alejandra lights the cigarette.

ESTELA
Thank you. See that bus over there...

Alejandra looks up.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
Follow it. You're very close.

Estela stares at Alejandra, studying her.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
Hey...

ALEJANDRA
Yeah?

ESTELA
Could I have another cigarette for later?

Alejandra hands Estela the entire pack, their eyes meeting briefly.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Estela jumps on the bike and takes off.

ALEJANDRA

Hey, wait! What's-- what's your name?

Estela rides off into the distance.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA ANA - DAY

The Cathedral is quiet and empty. Estela walks toward the back where hundreds of candles burn. She slides a cigarette into her mouth and leans over a candle.

Dialogue in Spanish.

FATHER ANTHONY (O.S.)

You can't smoke in here.

She looks up at a large crucifix.

ESTELA

I won't tell Him if you won't.

FATHER ANTHONY (60s) reaches for the cigarette and breaks it.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

You know, the one thing that would really piss me off is being nailed to a cross.

He shakes his head.

FATHER ANTHONY

How's your mother's prayer group going?

She rolls her eyes.

ESTELA

Oh, you know, those crazy bitches are so loud. I can't sleep.

He slaps her across the head.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

Sorry, Father.

She hands him an envelope filled with cash.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
Last week's collection from mom's
prayer group. Can I ask you
something, Father?

FATHER ANTHONY
What's on your mind, Estela?

She pauses before replying.

ESTELA
Is it all a big scam?

FATHER ANTHONY
What do you mean?

ESTELA
Is Jesus a con man? Why does he
take all our money? Everyone's
broke, but not Him.

He shakes his head.

FATHER ANTHONY
What do you think?

She looks up at the crucifix.

ESTELA
What a crook. He runs a successful
business, though. Playing on fools
who believe they can buy their way
into heaven. It's clever.

He rubs his head and sighs.

EXT. COFFEE PLANTATION - DAY

Alejandra stands captivated, her eyes fixed on the COFFEE
PICKERS (men, women, children) working under the scorching
sun.

RAÚL (O.S.)
Alejandra!

She turns around to see Raúl approaching her.

EXT. COFFEE PLANTATION - MOMENTS LATER

Alejandra and Raúl walk past busy workers. Raúl tries to make small talk.

RAÚL
How are you doing?

She quietly laughs to herself.

ALEJANDRA
Great.

RAÚL
All settled in?

ALEJANDRA
Yup.

RAÚL
Think of me as a friend, okay?

With a sideways glance at him.

ALEJANDRA
Sure.

RAÚL
You don't have to pretend. I know everything. Your mother told me why you're really here.

She looks nervous, but tries to appear cool.

ALEJANDRA
You do?

RAÚL
Your father.

ALEJANDRA
Oh, right.

RAÚL
Your mother told me.

ALEJANDRA
Uh-huh.

RAÚL
You're ready to know about him.

ALEJANDRA
Yeah... I'm ready.

RAÚL

I'll be gone for a few days. Estela will show you around.

Alejandra looks hesitant.

ALEJANDRA

Oh, no. It's-- it's okay. That's not necessary--

RAÚL

Please. I'm doing her mother a favor. She's always getting into trouble. Keep an open mind. You'll like her. I promise.

She kicks a rock.

ALEJANDRA

I can't hardly wait.

EXT. MARKET - DAY

Bustling with vendors selling everything from fresh fish, herbs, and candy, to indigenous crafts and serapes.

Alejandra stops by a booth selling cowboy hats and tries on a few, but none of them fit quite right. She turns to the VENDOR, an elderly man, with weathered hands.

ALEJANDRA

(in Spanish)

Can you make me one?

VENDOR

(in Spanish)

Yes, of course.

The vendor takes out a tape measure and starts to measure Alejandra's head. She can't help but notice his weathered hands, a testament to a lifetime of hard work. She feels a pang of sadness, thinking about her mother's own damaged hands.

EXT. MARKET - DAY

As Alejandra exits the market, she sees two POLICEMAN roughly shoving a YOUNG MAN (16) with tattooed arms into a crowded cargo van. The young man eyes meet hers, full of fear and desperation. Alejandra feels her heart sink.

ALEJANDRA
 (in Spanish)
 Help, help!

Other PASSERS-BY in the area turn a blind eye.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
 (in Spanish, to policemen)
 Stop! What are you doing? Let him
 go!

The policemen ignore her cries for help and quickly speed off, leaving Alejandra feeling helpless and angry.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
 (to herself)
 Fuck.

EXT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - DAY

Raúl's truck pulls in front of a modest house on the beach.

EXT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Estela stands at the shoreline, gazing at the ocean. A FISHERMAN, (20s), in a small boat passes by and waves. She playfully blows him a kiss. She thrives on the attention.

Raúl walks over to join Estela, pointing towards the horizon.

Dialogue in Spanish.

RAÚL
 What's over there?

Estela smiles.

ESTELA
 We'll soon find out.

There is a brief pause.

RAÚL
 Alejandra is here.

She smiles a little to herself.

RAÚL (CONT'D)
 Can you spend some time with her,
 show her around?

ESTELA
Sure. I'd be happy to.

RAÚL
Thank you.

Raúl gives her a grateful smile before turning and heading back to his truck.

Estela takes a deep breath, a sense of anticipation building within her.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - DAY

Estela rides up to the beach house on her bike. She grabs a shopping bag from the basket and approaches the front door. She knocks, but there is no response. She knocks again, still no response. She slinks around back.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Alejandra stands at the shoreline, admiring the view.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ESTELA (O.S.)
Beautiful, isn't it?

Alejandra turns to see Estela standing there.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I'm Estela.

Alejandra looks surprised.

ALEJANDRA
(almost to herself)
Estela...

They look at each other for a moment. Estela wipes sweat from her forehead.

ESTELA
It's hot.

ALEJANDRA
So fucking hot.

Estela takes a lemon out of her shopping bag.

ESTELA
Lemonade...?

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Several books on the kitchen table (Shakespeare, Neruda, a Gauguin Autobiography) alongside an overflowing ashtray. Estela sets down two glasses of lemonade.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ESTELA

So, what did you do to end up here?

ALEJANDRA

I pissed my mother off.

ESTELA

Yeah. That would do it. What happened?

ALEJANDRA

We just don't get along. That's all.

Alejandra lights a cigarette and offers one to Estela.

ESTELA

What do you do?

Alejandra lights Estela's cigarette.

ALEJANDRA

I'm in school.

ESTELA

Still?

ALEJANDRA

It's my last year.

ESTELA

And then?

ALEJANDRA

College. My mother has been saving since I was a baby.

Estela takes this in.

ESTELA

She must have a small fortune saved.

ALEJANDRA

Yeah, I guess. You still in school?

Estela shake her head.

ESTELA
I got kicked out.

ALEJANDRA
What for?

ESTELA
For smoking.

They both laugh. Estela picks up a book.

ALEJANDRA
It's Shakespeare...

ESTELA
(switches to English)
...*Romeo and Juliet*. My favorite
story.

Alejandra looks at her, surprised.

ALEJANDRA
Love makes people do extraordinary
things.

ESTELA
I hope so.

An intense look between them. Estela opens the book, turns to
a page.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
(reads in English)
"These violent delights have
violent ends and in their triumph
die, like fire and powder."

Estela puts the book down.

Remaining dialogue in English.

ALEJANDRA
You speak and read English?

ESTELA
I've been studying.

ALEJANDRA
(almost to herself)
You too.

ESTELA

What?

ALEJANDRA

Never mind. It's just-- More people speak English here than in New York.

Alejandra pushes the book towards Estela.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

For your studies.

Estela takes the book. Their eyes meet. A moment.

ESTELA

I'll show you around.

ALEJANDRA

You don't have to.

ESTELA

I want to.

INT. OLD MOVIE THEATRE - MIDNIGHT SHOWING - NIGHT

Enchanted, Raúl watches *Saturday Night Fever*. The dance contest scene, with Tony and Stephanie dancing and kissing.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is small with hand-me-down furniture and heavy religious iconography. Isabella, (50s), very beautiful, reads the Bible. Estela enters.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ISABELLA

Where were you all day?

ESTELA

I went to see Raúl's niece, she's visiting from New York.

Isabella raises her eyes to the heavens, crosses herself.

ISABELLA

Where all the prostitutes and drug addicts live.

Estela rolls her eyes. Whatever.

ESTELA

He asked me to spend time with her,
you know, show her around. He's
paying me. We have to eat, right?

ISABELLA

Those types of girls will get you
into trouble. Please be careful.

Estela ignores her and heads into her bedroom.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - ESTELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Poster of New York skyline above the bed. Estela flops down
on the bed with the book Alejandra gave her. A photo falls
out.

INSERT - PHOTO

Alejandra in a romantic embrace with Toni.

Estela runs a finger across the image, intrigued.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alejandra sips lemonade, deep in thought as she thinks of
Estela.

EXT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - ESTELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela lies on her bed, staring at the photo, deep in
thought. Suddenly, she hears a tap on the window. She quickly
hides the photo under her pillow and goes to open the window.
Raúl is standing outside.

RAÚL

(in Spanish)

What are you doing?

Estela shows him the book.

Remaining dialogue in English.

ESTELA

I'm practicing my English.

RAÚL

I was practicing too. I just
finished watching *Saturday Night
Fever*.

Estela laughs.

ESTELA
That's the third time this week.
You're obsessed.

RAÚL
I can't wait for our trip.

ESTELA
Me too.

RAÚL
I'll be on the road for a couple of
days. Keep an eye on Alejandra for
me?

ESTELA
Of course.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra lies in the hammock, deep in thought. Her cell rings. She glances at the screen, contemplating whether to answer or not. After a moment of hesitation, she decides to pick up the call.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Reina sits on the couch, holding a glass of wine.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

REINA
Hi.

ALEJANDRA
Hey.

An uncomfortable silence hangs between them. Neither one knows what to say.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
So, you told my uncle that I'm here
because I want to know more about
my father.

REINA
Do you?

ALEJANDRA
I guess.

REINA
Are you staying in my room?

ALEJANDRA
Yeah.

REINA
In the closet there is a box. Open
it...

Alejandra stares at the closet door.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. EL SALVADOR - BEACH - NIGHT

Reina, (19), and ALEJANDRA'S FATHER, (20s), with dark sunken
eyes, stand at the shoreline.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ALEJANDRA'S FATHER
Please, don't go.

REINA
We need the money.

ALEJANDRA'S FATHER
What if-- It's dangerous. I'm
really scared.

REINA
The earthquake destroyed
everything.

He looks down.

ALEJANDRA'S FATHER
I can't leave my mother now. Who
will take care of her?

REINA
There's nothing left.

ALEJANDRA'S FATHER
We'll rebuild. Start over.

REINA
With what money?

He's on the verge of tears.

ALEJANDRA'S FATHER
Just hold me. Please hold me.

She wraps her arms around him, trying to calm him.

REINA
It's going to be okay.

ALEJANDRA'S FATHER
It may be years before I see you
again.

REINA
I'm coming back. Just wait for me.

ALEJANDRA'S FATHER
I love you so much.

END FLASHBACK

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Reina's hand trembles, and the wine glass slips, shattering on the floor. Tears well up in her eyes, overwhelmed by a rush of emotions.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The closet door is ajar, revealing an open box. Alejandra sleeps, surrounded by old letters and photos.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

Alejandra picks wilted flowers when Estela comes out with the garbage.

ESTELA
Are those for me?

Alejandra flushes.

ALEJANDRA
Uh, no they're for-- for my father.

ESTELA
Your father?

ALEJANDRA
I was thinking of visiting him.

ESTELA

I'll take you. You'll get lost
without me.

Estela takes the flowers from Alejandra and tosses them
aside.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

We'll pick fresh flowers on the way
there.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Alejandra and Estela walk, picking flowers as they go.

ESTELA

So, why didn't your mother come
with you?

Alejandra hesitates for a moment before answering.

ALEJANDRA

She works all day and drinks all
night.

ESTELA

It's better than praying. My mother
is obsessed with it.

Alejandra looks away, her emotions bubbling to the surface.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

Alejandra takes a deep breath before answering.

ALEJANDRA

I read my father's love letters to
my mother.

ESTELA

And?

ALEJANDRA

They loved each other so much. I
don't understand why she never
returned.

ESTELA

Love changes. It ends.

ALEJANDRA
No, that's not it. Something
happened.

ESTELA
She never remarried?

Alejandra shakes her head.

ALEJANDRA
Not even a boyfriend. She was so
beautiful when she was young. Still
is.

A small plane flies overhead. Estela looks up wistfully.

ESTELA
Maybe she just wanted to get out of
here. I would have done the same.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Alejandra stands before her father's grave, her expression
heavy with melancholy. Estela stands a few feet away,
watching her.

ESTELA
Alejandra, are you okay?

ALEJANDRA
Something doesn't feel right.

ESTELA
What doesn't?

Alejandra looks ashamed.

ALEJANDRA
I feel nothing.

ESTELA
That makes you sad?

ALEJANDRA
Shouldn't I feel something? He's my
father.

ESTELA
It's okay. Don't feel bad. You
didn't know him.

ALEJANDRA

Do you ever get the feeling there's something going on, but you don't know what?

EXT. TAZUMAL RUINS - DAY

Alejandra and Estela amble through the Tazumal Ruins.

EXT. TAZUMAL RUINS - DAY

Alejandra and Estela walk up narrow steps, stealing glances of each other.

EXT. TAZUMAL RUINS - DAY

Alejandra and Estela look out at the breathtaking view. The sun shines brightly on their faces.

ESTELA

Isn't it amazing?

ALEJANDRA

It's beautiful.

DIEGO, (7), a skinny boy in a faded shirt, approaches them with a pan flute.

Remaining dialogue in Spanish.

DIEGO

Hi, I'm Diego. Would you like to hear a song?

ALEJANDRA

Shouldn't you be in school?

DIEGO

I need to work. My mother is very sick.

ALEJANDRA

Where's your father?

Diego looks away, sadness in his eyes.

DIEGO

He left to America. Never came back.

ALEJANDRA

Sometimes, the ones who leave
suffer more than the ones they
leave behind.

Alejandra and Diego look at each other for a moment.

ESTELA

All right, play us a song.

DIEGO

Ten dollars.

ESTELA

Ten dollars?

DIEGO

I'm very good.

ESTELA

I'm sure.

DIEGO

Money first.

ESTELA

You can trust us.

DIEGO

I trust no one.

Alejandra hands him some bills. Diego counts them, which amuses her.

Diego begins to play, his music sad and haunting. Alejandra looks deeply moved.

ALEJANDRA

That was beautiful. Where'd you
learn it?

DIEGO

My father taught it to me.

Diego and Alejandra share a sad smile. He walks off, looking for other tourists.

INT. BUS - NYC - DAY

AMY, (40s), and Reina sit together at the back of the bus.

AMY

Where were you last night? You missed the community board meeting. The landlords are trying to lift the rent freeze. They handed out forms to fill out. Do you think Alejandra can come over and help me with them? She's so smart.

Reina looks preoccupied, on the verge of tears.

AMY (CONT'D)

What's wrong? Did something happen to Alejandra?

REINA

She's...

Reina pauses, struggling to find the words. It truly is a difficult moment for her.

AMY

What is it?

REINA

Alejandra... kissed a girl.

AMY

What?

REINA

She's sick.

Amy sighs in disbelief.

AMY

Because she kissed a girl?

REINA

One thing leads to another.

Reina mimics smoking a joint with her hand.

REINA (CONT'D)

Then she'll experiment with drugs, and who knows what else. So I sent her away.

AMY

Where did you send her?

Reina pauses before replying.

REINA
El-- El Salvador.

AMY
You're joking, right?

REINA
No.

AMY
You sent her to a war zone?

REINA
War zone?

AMY
I keep up with the news.

Reina rolls her eyes, finding it ridiculous.

REINA
She'll spend the summer at the
beach, reading.

AMY
Are you out of your mind?

REINA
Why are you so upset?

AMY
Yeah, I know. Alejandra is so
terrible. She got accepted into
every college she applied to. She's
never been in trouble. She's such a
disgrace.

REINA
You don't understand. I'm trying to
protect her.

AMY
From what?

Reina remains silent.

AMY (CONT'D)
My daughter can't even pass the GED
and is on her way to having a
second baby.

REINA
But--

AMY

Get over it. I wish my daughter was kissing girls. They're going to run the world one day.

EXT. SANTA ANA TOWN - DAY

Cathedral bells tolling. Decaying colonial streets. An OLDER WOMAN, (50s), crawls on her knees towards the Cathedral, whipping her bloodied back with a rope.

Alejandra is taken aback by the scene.

ALEJANDRA

Jesus.

Estela chuckles.

ESTELA

Oh, that's terrible.

ALEJANDRA

Should we help her?

ESTELA

It's nothing. Don't worry about it.

ALEJANDRA

But-- she's hurt.

ESTELA

Oh, who cares. She loves it. Suffering is mandatory here.

ALEJANDRA

I don't understand.

ESTELA

You know, the cross. The damn crucifixion. Catholics are obsessed with suffering.

ALEJANDRA

What do they hope to gain from God?

ESTELA

I don't know. Religion makes people do stupid things... like love.

ALEJANDRA

Are you religious?

ESTELA
I'm the devil.

They both laugh.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
Let's go inside. You should light a
candle for your father.

Estela takes out a white lace veil from her bag and places it over her head. Alejandra finds it amusing.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA ANA - DAY

Alejandra and Estela wander through the church.

A PRAYER GROUP led by IRENE, (20s), recites the "Our Father" prayer.

Irene waves, but Estela ignores her.

ALEJANDRA
Who's that?

ESTELA
One of my mother's crazy disciples.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA ANA - DAY

Alejandra walks towards the back of the church where hundreds of candles burn.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA ANA - CONFESSIONAL - DAY

Estela kneels, Father Anthony seated on the other side.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ESTELA
Bless me, Father, for I have
sinned.

FATHER ANTHONY
What are your sins, my child?

ESTELA
I lie all the time, Father.

FATHER ANTHONY
I know.

ESTELA
I can't help myself.

FATHER ANTHONY
Say a rosary for every lie.

ESTELA
That's a lot of rosaries, Father.

FATHER ANTHONY
Be careful, Estela. Lying can cause
a great deal of pain.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA ANA - DAY

Alejandra drops money into a donation box and lights a candle.

ALEJANDRA
For my father.

Alejandra lights a second candle.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
For my mother.

Estela exits the confessional and watches Alejandra.

In the background, the PRAYER GROUP fervently recite the "Our Father" prayer.

PRAYER GROUP (O.S.)
(in Spanish)
"...forgive us our trespasses, as
we forgive those who trespass
against us; and lead us not into
temptation, but deliver us from
evil. Amen."

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra reclines in the hammock, her cell pressed to her ear.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Panicked, Reina flicks on the bedroom light and answers her cell.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

REINA

What's wrong? Are you okay?

ALEJANDRA

Yes, Mom. I'm fine. Please, calm down. Don't worry.

REINA

What is it?

Alejandra pauses before replying.

ALEJANDRA

I read all the letters. I need to know the truth.

REINA

What do you mean?

ALEJANDRA

Why didn't you come back? He was waiting for you. It killed him.

REINA

The war--

ALEJANDRA

But the war ended before I was born. Why can't you tell me the truth?

REINA

Our country was in a constant state of war back then.

ALEJANDRA

What are you hiding?

REINA

Nothing.

ALEJANDRA

I need to know the truth, Mom!

REINA

I don't want to talk about this. Let it go!

Reina abruptly ends the call, leaving Alejandra screaming in frustration.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Upset, Alejandra dials another number. It rings.

INT. WEST VILLAGE BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

The Manhattan skyline shimmers through the floor-to-ceiling windows of a contemporary room bursting with mid-century furniture and bookcases. MRS. FRANK, (40s), an elegant woman, sits at her desk, going through emails.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

MRS. FRANK

Yes?

Alejandra rolls her eyes.

ALEJANDRA

Hi, Mrs. Frank, it's Alejandra. Can I speak to Toni?

MRS. FRANK

Antoinette isn't here. She's visiting her father.

ALEJANDRA

Could you please let her know I called?

MRS. FRANK

Why don't you just leave her alone?

ALEJANDRA

Why?

MRS. FRANK

Must I spell it out for you?

ALEJANDRA

Just say it.

MRS. FRANK

I don't like you.

ALEJANDRA

I know.

MRS. FRANK

You're not on her level, you know that, right? Your mother cleans toilets, for God's sake.

A long, uncomfortable silence between them.

ALEJANDRA
I really need to speak to her--

Mrs. Frank abruptly ends the call.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
Fucking bitch.

INT. NAIL SALON - DAY

Reina sits in a nail salon chair, getting her nails done.

MANICURIST
Your hands are a mess.

Reina looks at her hands.

REINA
Yeah, I know. I clean two houses a day.

MANICURIST
Work, work, work! It never ends.
Bills to pay, food to put on the table, kids to support.

Reina's gaze drifts to a GIRL (4) playing with a doll while her MOTHER (20s) gets her nails done.

REINA
(to herself)
I've spent my whole life working...
just for her.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Alejandra sits at the table, crying. Estela enters with an armful of cleaning products and puts them away in a drawer.

ESTELA
What's wrong?

Alejandra wipes away her tears and opens a book.

ALEJANDRA
Nothing.

Estela rummages through the kitchen, searching for something to eat.

ESTELA
Do you hate it here? Do you miss
New York?

Alejandra shakes her head.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
You miss *someone*?

ALEJANDRA
Why would you say that?

ESTELA
Just curious, that's all.

Alejandra fiddles with her book.

ALEJANDRA
No, I'm just angry.

ESTELA
Why?

ALEJANDRA
I hate my mother. I do everything
she tells me.

ESTELA
Yeah, I know. Me too.

Estela opens the fridge, finding it empty.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
What am I going to feed you?

Estela looks at Alejandra.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I can eat anything.

Alejandra blushes, absentmindedly adjusting her glasses.

EXT. SANTA ANA TOWN - DAY

Alejandra and Estela walk among falling flowers. They share a comfortable silence that speaks volumes. Alejandra offers a flower to Estela, who smiles in response. Alejandra returns the smile.

ESTELA
Where in New York do you live?

ALEJANDRA
In the city.

Estela's eyes light up.

ESTELA
Where the movie stars live.

ALEJANDRA
And the forgotten ones.

A funeral procession led by a MARIACHI BAND approaches.
Estela tosses the flower onto the coffin.

INT. PUPUSERIA STAND - DAY

Estela and Alejandra at a picnic table, eating pupusas.

ESTELA
Delicious, right?

ALEJANDRA
Yes, it's really good.

ESTELA
There's a party tonight. We should
go.

ALEJANDRA
Oh, no. I don't think so.

ESTELA
Come on, let's try something new.

ALEJANDRA
I... I don't know.

ESTELA
It could be fun.

Alejandra remains hesitant, unsure of herself.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
What is it?

ALEJANDRA
The truth is I never... I don't
know how to dance.

Estela laughs.

ESTELA

You don't have to dance if you
don't want to.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra slips on a shirt. She stops in front of the mirror and stares at her blue eyes. She pulls out a photo from a drawer.

INSERT - PHOTOGRAPH OF ALEJANDRA'S FATHER

Alejandra runs a finger around her father's brown eyes, deep in thought.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - ESTELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela applies lipstick in front of a mirror. Isabella enters, casting a critical gaze.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ISABELLA

Where are you going?

ESTELA

Please, don't start.

Isabella gives her a fierce look.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

To a party.

ISABELLA

With the American girl?

ESTELA

Yes.

ISABELLA

What are you up to, Estela?

ESTELA

I'm doing the work of the lord.

Isabella does not seem convinced.

ISABELLA

Sure you are.

ESTELA

I took her to church. Ask Irene if you don't believe me. She was there praying.

ISABELLA

Be careful, Estela.

Isabella kisses the cross around her neck.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

Jesus loves you so much that he sacrificed himself on the cross for you.

She looks at Estela.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

God wept buckets for his son.

ESTELA

God abandoned him. He watched him die and did nothing.

ISABELLA

He died for our sins!

Estela laughs.

ESTELA

Then I can sin as much as I want. He'll forgive me, right?

Isabella shakes her head.

ISABELLA

Why do you mock me?

Estela looks her in the eyes.

ESTELA

Maybe you should find a job so that I don't have to work so hard.

Estela walks out. Isabella drops to her knees, and starts praying.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Alejandra steps out, proudly wearing her white, custom-made cowboy hat. Estela is waiting for her outside.

ALEJANDRA

Isn't it awesome? They made it just for me. I had one just like this when I was a kid. What do you think?

Estela looks at the hat.

ESTELA

It's nice. I like it.

They share a smile.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

The house is crowded, filled with young people socializing and dancing. Alejandra sits on the sofa, captivated by Estela's seductive dancing.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela wander through the house.

ALEJANDRA

Do you know anyone here?

Estela shakes her head.

ESTELA

Not really. My mother never lets me go to parties.

They hear clapping and cheering coming from another room and decide to check it out.

ANOTHER ROOM

A young DRUNK MAN (18) holds the microphone, attempting to sing the Spanish version of Madonna's "Like a Virgin."

ALEJANDRA

Come on.

Estela hesitates, shaking her head.

ESTELA

I don't want to right now.

ALEJANDRA

You're scared.

Estela's silence confirms it.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
It's okay if you can't sing.

Estela looks down, a small smile on her lips.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela swig whiskey amid flickering fireflies. Across the street, a group of DRUNK MEN play guitars.

ESTELA
So, what do you plan to study?

ALEJANDRA
My mom wants me to--

ESTELA
No. What do you want?

ALEJANDRA
I-- I'm not sure.

ESTELA
We all have dreams. What's yours?

Alejandra thinks for a moment.

ALEJANDRA
I want to see the world! Tahiti,
Paris, Italy, The Sistine Chapel,
The Birth of Venus. Then go to
college and learn about everything.
I want to have the courage to do it
all!

ESTELA
You will.

They share a smile.

ALEJANDRA
What about you? What do you want?

Estela jumps up.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
Wha--

ESTELA
I'll show you.

Estela skips over to the group of drunk men and engages in a conversation with them.

The group begins playing Chavela Vargas' "No Volveré."

Estela sings along. She can really sing!

Alejandra watches in awe.

As Estela hits the last note, their eyes meet.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela stumble along the road, a bit drunk.

ALEJANDRA

I had no idea you could sing like that.

ESTELA

Nobody does. I think I would like being famous.

ALEJANDRA

You look like a star.

Estela beams.

ESTELA

Really?

ALEJANDRA

Of course. Are you recording? Do you have a manager?

Estela laughs.

ESTELA

Manager? Look at where I am. Who's going to discover me here?

EXT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They approach Estela's house, their steps slowing. Estela turns to Alejandra.

ESTELA

Tell me something.

ALEJANDRA

What?

ESTELA
Why did your mother really send you
here?

Alejandra hesitates.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
You can trust me. I can keep a
secret.

Alejandra considers whether to reveal the truth. She takes a
deep breath.

ALEJANDRA
I... I kissed a girl.

ESTELA
Your mother caught you?

ALEJANDRA
Yes.

ESTELA
How?

They inch closer to each other.

ALEJANDRA
What?

Estela's eyes on Alejandra's mouth.

ESTELA
Show me.

Estela takes a step closer, their bodies almost touching.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
Show me how...

Feeling the intensity of the moment, Alejandra kisses Estela.

The moment is broken by a primal scream.

Startled, Alejandra pulls away.

ALEJANDRA
What's that?

Estela chuckles.

ESTELA
It's my mother's prayer group. The
holy spirit touches them.

Estela runs off.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

Good night!

Estela quickly disappears into the house, leaving Alejandra standing there falling in love.

ALEJANDRA

Fuck.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Estela bursts in to find Isabella and a group of WOMEN conducting a religious ceremony, and reciting the rosary prayer.

Dialogue in Spanish.

WOMEN #1

"O clement, O loving, O sweet
Virgin Mary. Pray for us, O holy
Mother of God that we may be made
worthy of the promises of
Christ..."

Irene approaches Estela.

IRENE

Come pray with us.

Estela looks at Isabella.

ESTELA

No.

Estela heads for her bedroom.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - ESTELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela lie in bed, with her eyes closed.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The praying grows louder.

WOMEN #1

(in Spanish)

"O my Jesus, forgive us our sins,
save us from the fires of hell."

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - ESTELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela on her stomach, with her hand between her legs.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The prayer reaches a crescendo.

Dialogue in Spanish.

WOMEN #1

"Lead all souls to Heaven,
especially those who have most need
of your mercy."

WOMAN #2 screams as she falls to the floor, trembling.

WOMEN #3

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

WOMAN #4

Praise God!

ISABELLA

Thank you, Jesus! Thank you!

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - ESTELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela breathing hard and trembling. She gasps with pleasure.

ESTELA

Oh, God! Oh, God!

After reaching climax, she laughs.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA ANA - NIGHT

Raúl knocks anxiously at the door of the cathedral.

RAÚL

(in Spanish)
Father! Father!

Father Anthony opens the door.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA ANA - NIGHT

Raúl bursts into the cathedral, his emotions running high.

Dialogue in Spanish.

FATHER ANTHONY
What is it, Raúl?

RAÚL
Father, I need to confess!

FATHER ANTHONY
Now?

RAÚL
Yes.

FATHER ANTHONY
Have you been drinking?

RAÚL
No.

Father Anthony takes a seat, motioning for Raúl to kneel before him.

RAÚL (CONT'D)
I'm a sinner, Father.

FATHER ANTHONY
What is your sin, my son?

RAÚL
I'm in love.

FATHER ANTHONY
Love is not a sin.

RAÚL
This type of love is.

FATHER ANTHONY
Have you acted on it?

Raúl shakes his head.

RAÚL
I'm scared. I know it's wrong. I can't stop it. Have mercy on me, God. Have mercy on me.

FATHER ANTHONY
Let's pray.

Father Anthony puts his hand on Raúl's shoulder, offering comfort and support, and begins to pray with him.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Reina sits at the table, sipping her coffee. She checks her cell. Nothing. She considers, then dials. The phone rings.

INT. RAÚL'S TRUCK - MORNING

Raúl on the road.

Dialogue in Spanish.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

REINA

How is she?

RAÚL

She's making progress. She looks...
happy.

REINA

Really?

RAÚL

Yeah. She smiles all the time.
Don't worry. I got it under
control.

Reina looks puzzled.

EXT. CHORROS DE JUAYUA - DAY

Alejandra and Estela sit by the waterfall, watching CHILDREN play in the water. Alejandra sighs wistfully.

ALEJANDRA

Children are so happy for no
reason. They aren't afraid of
anything.

Estela splashes Alejandra with water.

ESTELA

The circus is in town.

Alejandra smiles.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Reina picks up her cell. Alejandra's cell rings, but the call goes to voicemail.

REINA

(into phone)

I just wanted to tell you... I'm proud of you. Really proud. I'm sorry I didn't say it more often. I love you, Alejandra.

EXT. CIRCUS - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela make their way through the bustling crowd.

ESTELA

You know, I didn't actually get kicked out of school. I used to get pretty good grades. But I had to quit.

ALEJANDRA

Why?

ESTELA

I have to work.

ALEJANDRA

Your mother doesn't work?

ESTELA

She works for God. She gives Him everything.

ALEJANDRA

Is that why you hate Him so much?

ESTELA

I just... wish my mother loved me as much as she loves Him. Anyway, I just wanted you to know I'm not dumb.

ALEJANDRA

I would never think that about you.

As they approach the main stage, their attention is captured by a magical act. A CLOWN is bound in chains, struggling to break free. The MAGICIAN holds the key high above his head, teasing the audience.

The crowd cheers and laughs.

The magician pulls on the lock, and to everyone's surprise, it swings open.

It was never locked.

The clown steps free, his face a mix of defeat and surprise. The magician turns to the audience, a beatific smile on his face.

MAGICIAN

(in Spanish)

The truth is all around us. Open
your eyes.

Estela and the crowd erupt into cheers and applause, but Alejandra remain transfixed.

INT. REINA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Drunk, Reina picks up her cell again and dials. The phone rings, but it goes to voicemail once again.

REINA

(into phone)

Why-- why don't you pick up? Stop
punishing me. I miss you. I miss
you so much...

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Alejandra drives. Estela sits beside her, deep in thought.

ESTELA

Can you drive me somewhere
tomorrow?

ALEJANDRA

Yes, anywhere. Where?

Estela looks up at the stars.

ESTELA

My way outta here...

EXT. EMBASSY WAITING ROOM - DAY

The waiting room is packed and noisy. Estela rests her head on Alejandra's shoulder.

ESTELA

Tell me about winter. What's snow
like?

Alejandra pauses while she thinks.

ALEJANDRA

It's like... tiny stars falling
from the sky. Sometimes slow,
sometimes fast. Turning everything
white. It's as if all the ugliness
in the world disappears.

ESTELA

White falling stars...

EMBASSY CLERK (O.S.)

Estela del Rio!

Alejandra offers a reassuring smile.

ALEJANDRA

Good luck.

Estela rises and makes her way toward the office, filled with
hope.

INT. EMBASSY OFFICE - DAY

Estela sits across from a stern EMBASSY CLERK, (40s), who
looks over her documents.

Dialogue in Spanish.

EMBASSY CLERK

What kind of visa are you applying
for?

ESTELA

A tourist visa.

EMBASSY CLERK

Do you have a passport?

ESTELA

No.

EMBASSY CLERK

Where are you traveling to?

ESTELA

New York.

EMBASSY CLERK

What's the purpose of your trip?

ESTELA

I have friends there.

EMBASSY CLERK

You have friends in New York?

ESTELA

Yes, and one of them is actually here with me. She's waiting in the waiting room. You can check if you want.

EMBASSY CLERK

That won't be necessary. Any criminal records?

ESTELA

No, of course not.

EMBASSY CLERK

Do you have a bank account? Property? A job? A car?

ESTELA

No. I, uh, I don't own anything. I-- I don't have a bank account. I do have a job, though.

EMBASSY CLERK

What kind of work do you do?

ESTELA

I clean.

EMBASSY CLERK

What is your educational background?

Estela looks down, embarrassed.

ESTELA

I... I never finished school.

The embassy clerk examines the application.

EMBASSY CLERK

The most important criteria for granting a visa is evidence of societal and economic stability, and unfortunately, you don't meet either requirement.

Estela's face crumples with disappointment.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Alejandra drives, visibly frustrated. Estela sits beside her, deep in thought.

ALEJANDRA
They can't do this!

ESTELA
Only if you're poor.

ALEJANDRA
Fuck them!

Estela looks at Alejandra.

ESTELA
Don't worry... I'll find another way.

EXT. COFFEE PLANTATION - NIGHT

Raúl loads his truck for a delivery. His face brightens when he sees Estela arriving on her bike.

ESTELA
How long will you be gone?

RAÚL
A couple of days.

She looks irritated.

ESTELA
You forgot to pay me.

He quickly hands her some bills from his wallet, and she snatches them.

RAÚL
What's wrong?

ESTELA
They're not giving me the visa. I can't go on our trip!

He pauses while he thinks.

RAÚL
Marry me.

ESTELA
What?

RAÚL

If we're married, they can't refuse you a visa. We'll just say we're going on our honeymoon.

He leans in for a kiss, but she stops him.

ESTELA

No, stop! What are you doing?

RAÚL

I love you.

She looks surprised.

ESTELA

What? You're not gay?

RAÚL

No!

ESTELA

You've seen *Saturday Night Fever* a hundred times.

RAÚL

I like the music and clothes.

ESTELA

Exactly.

RAÚL

I'm not gay!

ESTELA

I thought... Well, it runs in the family.

RAÚL

What do you mean? What runs in the family?

ESTELA

Never mind. Forget it. I'm just angry, saying crazy shit.

He leans in closer.

RAÚL

I love you. I love you so much. You have no idea. I want you so bad.

She bursts into laughter, leaving him confused.

RAÚL (CONT'D)

Why are you laughing? What's so funny?

Mockingly imitating him.

ESTELA

"I love you. I love you so much."

She looks at him with disgust.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

You're an old, fat man.

RAÚL

I thought... I don't understand. We've been learning English together. I was taking you to America. I paid for your classes and visa application.

ESTELA

We're just friends, trying to get out of this fucking place.

RAÚL

Wh-- Friends?

ESTELA

We were always just friends.

RAÚL

Are you kidding me?

A shocking realization hits him.

RAÚL (CONT'D)

You used me.

ESTELA

You're a fool. A stupid fool.

RAÚL

You little bitch!

He raises his hand to hit her, but he stops himself.

RAÚL (CONT'D)

You're not worth it. You'll get what you deserve.

He jumps into his truck and speeds off.

ESTELA

Find someone your own age, old man!

A raindrop falls on her face, and she holds out her hand to feel the rain. She then hops on her bike and takes off.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Rain pours relentlessly. Estela hurriedly drops her bike and dashes towards the door.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's dark. Alejandra lights a candle. There's a loud knock on the door. She opens it to find Estela standing there, soaked from the rain.

ALEJANDRA

Wha-- What are you doing here?

ESTELA

I couldn't sleep. My mother is having one of her religious orgies. Those crazy bitches are so loud.

Estela notices the candles.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

The lights went out?

ALEJANDRA

Yes.

ESTELA

Do you have something to drink? I'm freezing.

ALEJANDRA

I'll make you some tea.

Estela points to the liquor cabinet.

ESTELA

I'd prefer whisky.

Alejandra pours Estela a drink and hands her the glass. Estela is visibly shaking.

ALEJANDRA

You're trembling.

ESTELA

I'm glad you noticed. Do you have something I can change into?

ALEJANDRA

Yes, of course.

Alejandra heads into her bedroom.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra searches for a shirt, feeling nervous.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra returns with a shirt and finds Estela flipping through her mother's old records. Estela hands her a record.

ESTELA

Can you play this for me?

Alejandra hands her the shirt, and as Estela starts undressing, Alejandra quickly turns away.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

What's the matter? Are you embarrassed? We have the same body parts, you know.

Alejandra puts on the record. Chavela Vargas' "Paloma Negra" begins to play.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

I love this song.

Estela starts swaying to the music while Alejandra watches her.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

Your trip is coming to an end. You'll be gone soon.

ALEJANDRA

The summer went by so quickly.

ESTELA

I'm going to miss you.

They share an intense moment, but it's interrupted by a loud crack of thunder.

ALEJANDRA

You can stay here if you want. You
can have Raúl's bed.

ESTELA

We can share your hammock.

Alejandra looks down, feeling nervous.

ALEJANDRA

No, no, uh, it's too small.

Alejandra walks towards the record player, and the music
stops.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

Good night.

ESTELA

Good night.

Estela blows the candles out.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - RAÚL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela lies in bed, staring at the rotating ceiling fan.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra lies in the hammock, staring at the rain.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - RAÚL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela sits up in bed, a thought crossing her mind.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Estela makes her way towards the record player in the living
room.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra hears the music playing and sits up in surprise.

Estela enters the room and undresses, then climbs into the
hammock beside Alejandra.

ALEJANDRA

What are you doing? I-- I've never done this before.

Estela looks taken aback by Alejandra's confession.

ESTELA

Never?

ALEJANDRA

I swear.

ESTELA

That's okay.

Estela begins to undress Alejandra.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

How hard can it be? It's just like in the movies, right?

Estela kisses Alejandra.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Rain pounds against the window as the hammock sways back and forth.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - MORNING

Birds chirp and the sound of ocean waves fills the morning air.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Alejandra is sound asleep in the hammock. Estela is nowhere to be found.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Alejandra lies in the hammock, lost in her thoughts. Suddenly, her cell rings. She glances at the screen, seeing Toni's name.

ALEJANDRA

Fuck.

She considers answering, but decides to turn off her cell instead.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela walk along the shoreline.

ESTELA
Does it get this hot in New York?

ALEJANDRA
Sometimes.

Estela starts to undress.

ESTELA
Shall we?

ALEJANDRA
What are you doing?

ESTELA
I'm hot.

ALEJANDRA
Someone might see us.

ESTELA
Don't worry. We're alone.

ALEJANDRA
I... I can't.

Estela jumps into the water.

ESTELA
Come on. It feels so good.

Alejandra looks down, embarrassed.

ALEJANDRA
I-- I can't swim.
(sighs, to herself)
There's a lot of things I can't do.
(to Estela)
My mom never let me do anything.
She was always so protective, so
afraid... all the time.

ESTELA
Why was she so afraid?

This question stumps Alejandra.

ALEJANDRA
I don't know.

Estela extends her arms.

ESTELA
Just hold on to me...

Alejandra undresses and cautiously enters the ocean, holding tightly onto Estela.

ALEJANDRA
Don't let go.

ESTELA
I won't.

They kiss.

Irene, hidden behind a palm tree, watches them in shock.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Estela dashes in with a big smile on her face.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ISABELLA
Well, look at you. Why are you so happy?

ESTELA
Go have sex. It'll cheer you up.

ISABELLA
How dare you?

ESTELA
Oh, for God's sake--

Isabella grabs Estela's arm firmly.

ISABELLA
Stop!

Estela gives Isabella a defiant look.

ESTELA
God damn it.

Isabella shakes Estela.

ISABELLA
Don't say His name in vain!

Estela looks Isabella in the eyes.

ESTELA
 Jesus Christ!

Without warning, Isabella slaps Estela across the face. Estela is momentarily stunned but quickly regains her composure and continues.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
 Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.

Isabella slaps Estela with even more force, causing her to fall to the ground.

ISABELLA
 Irene saw you two together! You disgusting monster!

ESTELA
 I'm sick of you!

ISABELLA
 What you've done is a sin! You'll go to hell for it!

ESTELA
 God sent her to me! To save me from you!

ISABELLA
 You filthy whore! How dare you shame me like this? How dare you?!

Isabella's anger boils over, and she slaps Estela, again and again.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Alejandra at the table, eating breakfast. Raúl trudges in.

ALEJANDRA
 You off again?

He nods, his demeanor subdued.

RAÚL
 What are your plans for today?

ALEJANDRA
 Depends on Estela.

RAÚL
 You like her, right?

She looks off, smiling.

ALEJANDRA
Yeah, she's unlike anyone I've ever
met.

He puts his hand compassionately on her shoulder.

RAÚL
Just... be careful. It's not all
real.

He walks out. She takes in his words.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra checks her cell, six missed calls from her mother.
She dials.

INT. PARK AVE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Reina is folding laundry. Her cell rings; she answers, happy.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

ALEJANDRA
Hi, Mom.

Reina smiles.

REINA
What are you up to, baby?

Alejandra laughs.

ALEJANDRA
Planning my escape.

REINA
I miss you so much. I made a
terrible mistake. I want you to
come home now.

ALEJANDRA
No, I want to stay. You were right.

Reina drops the laundry, perplexed and at a loss for words.

REINA
What?

ALEJANDRA
Being here is good for me. I'm
learning a lot.

REINA
What are you doing, Alejandra?

ALEJANDRA
Opening my eyes.

There are several loud knocks at the door.

REINA
Alejandra, what the hell is going
on?

ALEJANDRA
I have to go, Mom. I'll call you
later.

REINA
Wait--

ALEJANDRA
What?

REINA
I love you.

ALEJANDRA
I love you too, Mom.

Alejandra hangs up.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Alejandra opens the door. Estela bursts in, her mouth bloody
and eye swollen.

ALEJANDRA
Oh, my God-- What happened?

Estela clings to Alejandra, wincing in pain.

ESTELA
It hurts so much.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alejandra gently applies ice to Estela's swollen eye and
cleans the blood from her mouth.

ALEJANDRA
Who did this?

Estela pauses for several seconds before replying.

ESTELA
Raúl... He came to see me before he
left for his trip.

ALEJANDRA
But why-- I don't understand.

ESTELA
To confess...

Estela looks down.

ALEJANDRA
What is it?

ESTELA
He's in love with me. He threatened
to kill me if I don't marry him.

Estela starts crying.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I don't know what to do.

Alejandra puts her arms around her.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Estela and Alejandra sit on the couch, staring straight
ahead.

ESTELA
Please, don't leave me here.

ALEJANDRA
I'll come back, I promise.

ESTELA
Just like your mother came back for
your father?

Alejandra doesn't say anything.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I will never see you again.

There is a long silence.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I'm crossing the border.

Alejandra looks shocked.

ALEJANDRA
Alone?

Estela looks annoyed by the question.

ESTELA
I don't need anyone.

ALEJANDRA
But it's dangerous. You could die.

ESTELA
I'll die here if I stay.

ALEJANDRA
You can't do it alone, Estela.

Estela looks at Alejandra.

ESTELA
Cross with me.

ALEJANDRA
I'm not like you.

ESTELA
What do you mean?

ALEJANDRA
You're brave. I'm not.

ESTELA
I'm just trying so hard not to end
up like my mother.

Alejandra looks down.

ALEJANDRA
I'm... I'm scared.

ESTELA
You're American. Nothing will
happen to you.

Estela stands up, grabbing the keys to the truck. She looks
at Alejandra.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I'll be back before sunrise.

Estela leaves. Alejandra covers her face with her hands, overwhelmed by the weight of her decision.

EXT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The truck screeches to a halt, and Estela quickly jumps out.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Isabella stares at a black and white photo of Estela's first communion. Estela rushes in.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ISABELLA

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Estela confronts her.

ESTELA

Look at me.

Isabella turns away.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

Look at what you've done to me!

ISABELLA

Please, forgive me.

Isabella holds up the photograph.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

You used to be so perfect.

ESTELA

Go to church. Ask God for forgiveness while you drink his wine and eat his little cracker.

Estela storms into her bedroom, and Isabella follows, desperate to make amends.

INT. ESTELA'S HOUSE - ESTELA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Estela shoves things into a suitcase.

ISABELLA

Where are you going?

Estela slams the suitcase shut.

ESTELA
Far away from you.

Isabella physically blocks Estela's exit, pleading with her.

ISABELLA
Please, don't go! I need you!

A struggle ensues, but Estela manages to push past Isabella, causing her to fall to the ground.

ESTELA
I'm never coming back!

Estela runs out of the house, leaving Isabella in tears.

ISABELLA
Why are you doing this to me? I'm
your mother!

Isabella rips off the gold cross from her neck.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
Goddamn you, God!

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - ALEJANDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Reina lies passed out on the bed. Next to her, her cell vibrates, accompanied by a cherished photograph.

INSERT - PHOTO

Alejandra (6) wearing a white cowboy hat.

The call goes to voicemail.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alejandra is on her cell.

ALEJANDRA
(into phone)
I understand everything now, your
sacrifice. Please, don't worry...

There is a loud honk. Alejandra hangs up.

EXT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Alejandra, wearing her white cowboy hat, swiftly makes her way towards the truck, a backpack slung over her shoulder.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Estela guns the engine and speeds off.

ESTELA

My cousin is a coyote. He can help
us cross the border...

Estela looks at Alejandra.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

How much money do you have in your
savings account?

ALEJANDRA

My-- my mom worked so hard for that
money...

ESTELA

It's a loan.

ALEJANDRA

Yeah. But...

ESTELA

I'm gonna be a famous singer. You
said it yourself.

Alejandra remains silent, unsure of what to say.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

Don't worry. She'll get it back.

Estela looks at Alejandra.

ESTELA (CONT'D)

This is for us.

ALEJANDRA

I know.

EXT. MEXICO LANDSCAPE - DAY

The truck speeds past a sign, "Welcome to Mexico."

INT. BANK - DAY

The BANK TELLER (30s) hands Alejandra an envelope filled with
cash.

EXT. LA ESTRELLA VACIA - NIGHT

Estela parks outside a sleazy hellhole with a red neon sign flickering: "La Estrella Vacía." (SUBTITLE: "The Empty Star.")

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Alejandra's cell rings. It's Reina.

ALEJANDRA
It's my mother.

ESTELA
Don't answer it.

ALEJANDRA
She must be worried.

Estela turns off the cell.

ESTELA
We won't be like them. We'll be
happy.

Estela holds Alejandra's hand.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
Just imagine the life we can have.

Alejandra hands Estela the envelope.

INT. LA ESTRELLA VACIA - NIGHT

The place is dark and smoky. Estela hands HUMBERTO (30s) the envelope.

HUMBERTO
Are you sure about this?

ESTELA
Yes.

He counts the money.

HUMBERTO
Expect a call. Be ready to leave at
any moment.

ESTELA
We'll be ready.

HUMBERTO

There are a lot of bad people out there.

ESTELA

The only thing I'm afraid of is snakes.

He shakes his head and laughs.

HUMBERTO

I hope you know what you're doing.

EXT. LA ESTRELLA VACIA - NIGHT

Alejandra stands under the glow of the red neon sign. She turns on her cell, and dials.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Reina picks up, relieved.

ALEJANDRA

Hey, Mom...

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

REINA

Tell me about the girl.

ALEJANDRA

What?

REINA

That's it, isn't it?

ALEJANDRA

I know what I'm doing.

REINA

Please, stop. I'm begging you. Please don't do this. I'm sorry. I was wrong. I made a mistake. It was never about you; it was always about me. My self-hatred blinded me. Listen to me. I love you exactly as you are.

Tears well up in Alejandra's eyes.

ALEJANDRA

I forgive you.

REINA
Come home, baby.

ALEJANDRA
I'm sorry, Mom.

Alejandra hangs up.

REINA
No! No, don't do this! I'm sorry.
I'm so sorry.

Crying, Reina hurls her cell against the wall.

INT. BLUE STAR MOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Estela and Alejandra walk in. The lobby is bathed in an eerie blue light. A faded poster of the NYC skyline, including the Twin Towers, hangs on the wall. The MOTEL MANAGER (60s) shovels food into her mouth.

ESTELA
We need a room. We got money.

Estela slides some cash across the counter. The motel manager lights a cigarette.

MOTEL MANAGER
I'm not getting up.

The motel manager slides a room key across the counter.

MOTEL MANAGER (CONT'D)
There are rats everywhere. Make
sure they don't bite you.

Estela takes the key.

ESTELA
What's the room number?

MOTEL MANAGER
I don't care. They're all empty.

INT. BLUE STAR MOTEL - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela lie in bed, deep in thought.

Alejandra's cell rings. Estela quickly answers, listening intently to the instructions being given. She grabs a pen and paper, jotting down the details.

INT. RAÚL'S BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Raúl sits in the dark, his cell pressed to his ear.

Dialogue in Spanish.

INTERCUT PHONE CALL:

REINA
Where are they now?

RAÚL
I don't know... There's no way
Estela can pull this off.

REINA
Pulls what off?

He looks too scared to answer.

REINA (CONT'D)
Tell me. Tell me!

RAÚL
They're in Mexico.

REINA
Mexico?

As realization dawns on her, she breaks down, sobbing.

REINA (CONT'D)
Oh, no. My baby. My baby. What have
I done?

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Mexican and Central American MIGRANTS stand against the wall,
waiting anxiously. Among them, Alejandra and Estela.

A beat-up cargo van screeches into the parking lot. The
COYOTE, (30s), jumps out and opens the back doors.

COYOTE
(in Spanish)
Let's go! Let's go!

The migrants hurry into the back of the van, followed by
Alejandra and Estela.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The cargo van speeds through the vast, desolate landscape of the desert, the headlights cutting through the darkness.

INT. CARGO VAN - NIGHT

Darkness and silence. Estela tightly grips Alejandra's hand.

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Reina opens the door to find Amy standing there.

AMY

We won! They're not going to raise our rent! Well, not this year, at least.

REINA

It doesn't matter.

Amy sees an empty wine bottle on the floor.

AMY

What's going on?

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Car lights flare on Reina (19). A white BORDER PATROL OFFICER (30s), blue-eyed, violently strikes her, knocking her to the ground.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Reina wakes up face down. The border patrol officer is raping her from behind.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Half-naked and bloody, Reina, stumbles through the harsh desert terrain.

END FLASHBACK

INT. REINA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Amy's eyes well up with tears. Reina just sits there, broken.

AMY
You still made it across?

REINA
A couple of missionaries found me
and took me in.

AMY
And Alejandra... does she...

Reina shakes her head.

REINA
No one knows.

AMY
That's why you never went back?

Reina nods slowly.

REINA
I didn't want him to see me like
that... like a whore. I felt so
dirty.

AMY
It wasn't your fault.

REINA
He begged me not to go. But I was
so stubborn.

Reina lets out a bitter laugh, tinged with regret.

REINA (CONT'D)
Look how I ended up. I have
nothing.

AMY
(almost to herself)
Alejandra's blue eyes...

Reina nods slowly.

REINA
She was conceived that night.

AMY
Jesus. Why would you send her
there?

REINA
I thought... I wanted her to see...

AMY

See what?

Reina starts crying.

REINA

I don't know. I don't know. I just
wanted to protect her. I wanted to
save her. I needed to save her.

Reina falls to her knees.

REINA (CONT'D)

Oh, God. I'm so sorry. So sorry.
Please, save my baby.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The coyote opens the back doors of the cargo van, and the migrants squint at the blinding sunlight. Estela and Alejandra exchange a worried glance.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ESTELA

You're leaving us here?

The coyote nods.

COYOTE

Someone will be waiting for you on
the other side.

The coyote lights a cigarette, his face devoid of hope.

COYOTE (CONT'D)

Now you walk.

The coyote jumps back into the cargo van and drives off.

Alejandra, Estela, and the other migrants look around, fear etched on their faces. A shocked silence envelops them.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Under the scorching sun, Alejandra, Estela, and the migrants trudge through the unforgiving desert. Exhaustion and desperation weigh heavily on them.

Dialogue in Spanish.

ALEJANDRA

We're going the wrong way. We're walking in circles.

MIGRANT #1, (30s), a rough-cut man exuding a palpable machismo, locks eyes with Alejandra.

MIGRANT #1

No, we're not.

ESTELA

Stop!

They all come to a halt, their eyes searching for answers.

MIGRANT #1

(to Alejandra)

How do you know?

ALEJANDRA

The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

Migrant #1 laughs dismissively.

MIGRANT #1

You girls think you know everything, huh?

ESTELA

It's basic science. If it's rising, that's east. If it's setting, that's west. Everybody knows that. Sorry you didn't go to school.

Alejandra nudges Estela, signaling her to be quiet, and then points toward the sun.

ALEJANDRA

We follow the sun.

MIGRANT #1

The sun will kill us! We follow God.

Estela scoffs.

ESTELA

God's leading you the wrong way.

MIGRANT #1

Shut up!

The rest of the migrants are unsure of what to do. They whisper among themselves.

MIGRANT #1 (CONT'D)
Come on, let's finish this before
we all die.

ALEJANDRA
The desert plays tricks on you.

ESTELA
She's real smart. We should listen
to her.

Migrant #1 looks at Alejandra defiantly.

MIGRANT #1
I'm telling you we go this way!

Migrant #1 starts to walk, and the others hesitate for a moment before following him.

ESTELA
Yeah, good luck. God will save you,
right?

Estela and Alejandra separate from the group and go in the opposite direction.

EXT. DESERT - DAY - MONTAGE

Estela and Alejandra deteriorate as the days pass:

- Their faces burned by the scorching sun.
- Their shoes scuff along the rugged terrain.
- Alejandra vomits.
- Estela drinks the last drop of water.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Alejandra and Estela struggle to keep moving.

INTERCUT

Reina (19) walks alongside Alejandra in the desert.

The ribbon around Alejandra's wrist falls off and is carried away by the wind. It reads: "I Wish For Courage."

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The sun starts to fade. Alejandra gazes at it, a sense of urgency in her eyes.

EXT. DESERT - TWILIGHT

Alejandra and Estela walk on the brink of exhaustion.

ESTELA

How much-- how much longer do you think?

ALEJANDRA

I don't know, Estela. I don't know.

They stumble upon a decaying corpse. Estela looks visibly shaken by this.

ESTELA

We're going to die out here.
There's-- there's no way out!

Alejandra, her voice carefully steady, turns to Estela.

ALEJANDRA

Estela, close your eyes.

Estela closes her eyes.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

Now, imagine white. You are surrounded by a pure, serene blanket of white...

Estela's face softens as she slips into this imagined world.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

Look up. Can you see it? White skies, fluffy white clouds...

In Estela's mind, tiny snowflakes fall on her.

ESTELA

White falling stars...

ALEJANDRA

Yes.

Estela sticks her tongue out, pretending to taste the snowflakes.

ESTELA
It's beautiful...

Estela opens her eyes, and Alejandra gently brushes away her sweaty hair from her face.

ALEJANDRA
We'll make it. I promise you.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Estela and Alejandra stagger across the desert. Seemingly out of nowhere, Estela starts singing "Amazing Grace."

ESTELA
(in Spanish)
Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound--

Alejandra is wide-eyed, unable to believe Estela is singing a religious hymn.

ALEJANDRA
(in English)
Really?

Estela shivers as a cold gust of wind sweeps through. She gazes into the vast expanse of the dark sky.

ESTELA
(in English)
We need Him more than ever. Maybe
He will hear us.

Estela continues singing:

ESTELA (CONT'D)
(in Spanish)
*That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see...*

Alejandra joins in.

ESTELA AND ALEJANDRA
(in Spanish)
*Through many dangers, toils and
snares, We have already come
'Tis grace that brought us safe
thus far, And grace will lead us
home.*

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Estela struggles to walk, then suddenly comes to a stop.

ALEJANDRA
What are you doing?

ESTELA
I can't walk anymore.

ALEJANDRA
We're almost there. It's almost over.

ESTELA
Please, I can't--

ALEJANDRA
We're getting close to the end. I can feel it.

ESTELA
It's dark. We can't see anything.

Estela drops to the ground.

ALEJANDRA
Come on, get up!

ESTELA
Alejandra, please...

Exhausted, Alejandra collapses to the ground.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela face each other. Estela is on the verge of tears.

ALEJANDRA
What's wrong?

ESTELA
What do you see?

Alejandra looks at her for a long moment.

ALEJANDRA
A liar.

ESTELA
You know?

Alejandra's silence confirms it.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
You never believe anything I said?

Alejandra shakes her head.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
You're not mad?

ALEJANDRA
No.

ESTELA
Alejandra, I--

ALEJANDRA
Don't explain.

ESTELA
You don't belong here.

ALEJANDRA
This is where I'm meant to be.

Estela looks down, feeling ashamed.

ESTELA
I'm sorry.

ALEJANDRA
No more lying, okay?

ESTELA
I promise.

They look at each other, realizing something.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
I love you.

ALEJANDRA
I love you too.

Estela kisses Alejandra.

A blinding light suddenly shines on them. A car screeches to a stop. Alejandra and Estela jump up and see, an American border patrol car.

Estela turns to run, but Alejandra stops her.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)

Wait! They're Americans. Maybe they can help us.

ESTELA

No, you don't understand.

Two uniformed BORDER PATROL OFFICERS (30s) step out of the car.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #1

(in Spanish)

Don't be afraid. We're here to help.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2

(in Spanish)

You're safe now.

ALEJANDRA

(in English)

We speak English.

Remaining dialogue in English.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #1

Oh, really.

The officers offer them water, which they eagerly accept.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

How long have you been walking?

ESTELA

Forever.

ALEJANDRA

We don't know what day it is anymore.

There's a brief pause as the officers assess the situation.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #1

Just cooperate with us.

ALEJANDRA

We will.

ESTELA

We don't have much money.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2

That's not what we're after.

Officer #2 eyes Estela.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)
I want her.

ALEJANDRA
No!

Estela holds onto Alejandra tightly, realizing the danger they're in.

Officer #2 forcefully separates Estela from Alejandra, dragging her towards the car.

ALEJANDRA (CONT'D)
No! You can't take her! Let her go!

ESTELA
Alejandra!

ALEJANDRA
Estela!

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #1
Shut the fuck up!

Officer #1 pushes Alejandra to the ground.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
Be nice, and I won't hurt you.

Officer #1 attempts to force Alejandra's legs open, but she fiercely fights back. She is a New Yorker after all!

ALEJANDRA
Get the fuck off me!

Officer #1 presses his gun against her chest.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #1
Stop! I'll fucking shoot you.

INT. BORDER PATROL CAR - NIGHT

Officer #2 holds Estela down, trying to restrain her.

ESTELA
Please! No! Don't do this! Oh, God!

Officer #2 starts undressing her. Estela SCREAMS.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

ESTELA (O.S.)
Alejandra!

Alejandra's senses heighten at the sound of Estela's scream. Fueled by a surge of adrenaline, she quickly lunges forward and sinks her teeth into Officer #1's arm. He drops the gun, which falls to the ground.

A fierce struggle ensues as Alejandra and Officer #1 engage in a desperate wrestling match, both determined to gain control over the gun.

INT. BORDER PATROL CAR - NIGHT

Officer #2 slaps Estela.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2
Shut up!

Estela fights to free herself from his grip, determined to break free.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)
Fucking bitch!

Officer #2 unzips his pants.

Suddenly, a deafening GUNSHOT ECHOES through the desert.

Officer #2 jerks away, hastily zipping up his pants.

Then, a second GUNSHOT follows.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)
What the--

Officer #2 jumps out of the car.

Officer #2 swiftly exits the car, leaving Estela relieved as she scrambles up.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Estela and Officer #2 rush over and discover Officer #1 dead, covered in blood. Alejandra is holding the gun, blood flowing down from her arm.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2
No! No! Fuck me!

Officer #2 looks at Alejandra.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)
You fucking bitch! I'm gonna kill
you!

Alejandra points the gun at him.

ALEJANDRA
You better fucking run.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2
Fuck you.

Alejandra shoots at the ground near his feet. He breaks down,
crying.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)
No! No! Stop! Please stop!

ALEJANDRA
Run!

Officer #2 turns around, looking out over the dark desert.

BORDER PATROL OFFICER #2
Where the fuck am I supposed to go?

Estela takes the gun from Alejandra's hand and shoots him in
the back multiple times.

ESTELA
Fucking hell.

Officer #2 falls to the ground. Dead.

Alejandra and Estela embrace tightly.

Estela notices Alejandra's bleeding arm.

ESTELA (CONT'D)
Oh, God. You're hurt-- You're
bleeding.

ALEJANDRA
It just my arm. I'll be all right.

INT. BORDER PATROL CAR - NIGHT

Estela searches the car and finds a first aid kit.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Estela cleans Alejandra's wound.

ESTELA

What now? What are we going to do?

A long silence between them.

ALEJANDRA

We keep walking.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Estela wipes down the gun meticulously, then tosses it among the officers' dead bodies. She packs the first aid kit and a few bottles of water. They continue their journey.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Alejandra and Estela trudge forward.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

The sun rises, casting its light on The Wall. Estela and Alejandra look up in disbelief.

ESTELA

We made it...

They make their way towards The Wall. Suddenly, Alejandra falls to her knees, overcome with sorrow and realization about her mother's fate.

ALEJANDRA

My mom... Oh, God, no. No!

Estela embraces her.

ESTELA

What's wrong, Alejandra?

ALEJANDRA

I wanna go home. I wanna go home.
Mom! Mom!

Alejandra's cries echo through the desert.

FADE TO BLACK.