

LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS

by

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October 22, 1999

FADE IN:

A MECHANICAL HARNESS

Made of solid gold, exquisitely crafted to represent a human hand. It lies discarded in a pile of sand, devoid of purpose or meaning.

The sound of WIND...

FADE OUT.

DARKNESS

Delicate, twitching bars criss-cross the screen: the thin legs of a SPIDER in extreme close-up. A shining strand of silk extends from the creature as it spins a web.

A TEXT scrolls up:

1862, TEXAS/MEXICO BORDER

IN THE UNITED STATES, CIVIL WAR.

IN MEXICO, REBELLION.

MEXICANS UNDER JUAREZ FIGHT AGAINST MAXIMILLIAN, THE
EUROPEAN EMPEROR.

A TIME AND PLACE RIPE FOR TREASON.

THIS IS A STORY OF BETRAYAL...

BIG AND SMALL.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal the WEB spanning the open mouth of a long-dead CADAVER. The body, little more than a dry husk, hangs from an improvised gallows. A HAND-LETTERED SIGN is nailed into the post: "REBEL".

EXT. DESERT - DUSK

Rows of crude GALLOWS flank a CANYON. Dangling from each scaffold, a burnt CORPSE.

Silhouetted by the fiery red sky, hundreds of HEADS of cattle move past the human remains, driven by a handful of wary COWBOYS.

CAMERA closes on one drover, EDMUNDO DANTES, 19. His high cheekbones, full mouth and deep-set eyes suggest Indian blood. He stares at the corpses, then spurs his horse.

LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS 2.

DANTES

reaches another COWBOY, guiding a horse.

Behind it, tied to a travois, is CALDERÓN, the trailboss. He's pure-blooded Mexican, forty hard years etched on his leathery face.

Dantes dismounts and covers the old man, trying to shield him from the the wind. CALDERÓN stares up at the swaying corpses.

CALDERÓN

Rebels... Never seen this many.

DANTES

Don't talk. You need to rest.

CALDERÓN

Justice, the Emperor's justice... Some of them... they were very young.

DANGLARS

They were nothing but thieves.

The voice belongs to ETIENNE DANGLARS, a wiry and bespectacled Frenchman. The paymaster of the cattle drive.

DANTES

Mexican soldiers, Monsieur Danglars.

He points: fluttering on one cadaver, a charred scrap of the Mexican flag.

DANGLARS

This country should be grateful to have an Emperor to guide it, to civilize it...

Dantes mounts, and moves away. Danglars catches up with him. The cattle are being herded into a canyon, over a narrow road.

DANGLARS (cont'd)

You're taking us through the canyon?

DANTES

Yes. Weather's moving in.

DANGLARS

Two days late already, Dantes, and you say we should stop?

DANTES

You saw the trailboss: We'll layover in the caves until dawn. Let him rest.

CONTINUED:

He trots his horse through the herd, leaving Danglars behind.

THE CAVE - LATER

The cave is a natural wonder, the size of two stadiums, big enough to accomodate the entire herd. Outside, a sandstorm rages. Inside, the COWBOYS rest.

Danglars is polishing his boots. He looks over to a smaller chamber where shadows are moving.

CAVE CHAMBER

Firelight flickers on a SILVER CHAIN and an intricately carved, highly-polished HALF-MEDAL.

CALDERÓN' VOICE

A man will come.

The medallion dangles from CALDERÓN'S hand.

CALDERÓN (cont'd)

If he has the matching half...

Dantes kneels next to the feverish man, whose shirt is soaked with sweat. His head rests on a saddle.

CALDERÓN

...you give him this.

He produces the sealed ORDNANCE BOX and thrusts it into Dantes' hands. A NOISE makes Edmundo turn. Danglars is there. He carries some wet rags and a jug of water.

DANGLARS

I thought that as paymaster I should bear witness to any -

DANTES

(takes the water)

Leave us alone. Now.

Danglars politely retreats, but his eyes stay on the ordnance box.

DANTES

(turning back to Calderón)

I'll see to it, sir. But you'll be -

Calderón clasps Dantes' hands in his own.

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED:

CALDERÓN
(urgent)

Something so small, uh? So small a favor!
Don't - make a mistake!

DANTES

You have my word. Now, drink...

Dantes brings the water jug to Calderón's lips. Too late. Dantes' reflection glazes over in Calderón's eyes. He's dead.

GRAVESIDE

A few COWBOYS hammer a wooden cross into the dry, cracked soil of the cavern floor. Dantes watches sadly. The cattle lazily move by, snorting and lowing.

CUT TO:

EXT. MORALES RANCH - DAWN

The sun rises over a range of mountains. Nestled in a snug valley near Monterrey, RANCHO MORALES is like a small town. It boasts a palatial hacienda, barns, corrals, workers' houses and a small bullfight arena. A place of hope and youth.

Several BOYS are perched in the branches of a majestic tree. JACINTO, age 9, climbs higher, slowly eating a guava, his face covered in pulp. As he reaches for another piece of fruit, he sees...

...a cloud of dust on the horizon.

JACINTO

They're here! I see 'em! I see 'em!!

Jacinto scurries to the ground and runs like a little demon. A dozen kids join in.

EXT. BUNKHOUSE - DAY

A battered American COWBOY stands on the porch of a bunkhouse, squinting into the sun. As the dust cloud rises over the hills, his face broadens into a crinkled smile. This is LEE DANTES, Edmundo's father.

LEE

Edmundo.

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INT. MORALES BEDROOM - SAME

A benign king, DON RAFAEL MORALES, early 60's, shaves carefully at his mirror. Behind him, three MAID SERVANTS make his majestic bed. A YELL from outside.

JACINTO

(v.o.)

They're coming! They're here!

RANCH HOUSE

The front door to the big house swings open and MORALES steps out, wiping shaving cream from his face.

JACINTO

I saw them first!! I'm the one!!

Morales digs through his vest pockets and tosses out a handful of silver coins. The house servants join a group of beaming ranch hands as the herd comes into view.

TOP OF THE HILL

Cresting the rise, Dantes eagerly leans forward, seeing the hacienda below.

DANTES

Run 'em in!!

WHOOPING, the cowboys drive the longhorns down into the valley. Quite a spectacle as...

THE HERD

swarms through the majestic gates of the hacienda. Everybody greets the incoming riders, a feudal welcome for the crusader heroes. The boys pat the cattle; the women bring fresh water in clay jugs. Dantes waves to his father and gallops over.

LEE

I knew it! I told 'em! Today's the day.

Father and son tearfully embrace. All around them, the cattle pour into the waiting corrals.

INT. RANCH'S BULLFIGHT ARENA - DAY

In the middle of the ring, the cowboys line up, receiving pay packets from Danglars. As one of the drovers takes his money and moves off, Danglars RAPS on his desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANGLARS

Garcia. You didn't sign.

GARCIA

Don't make no difference, do it? Cattle's here, safe and sound-

DANGLARS

Sign, or give it back.

Garcia takes the pen, dips it in the inkstand, and draws an X under a long column of similar marks. Danglars observes Morales, Dantes and Lee moving amidst the cattle.

DANTES

...so I thought we'd stay to the West. Rest at the caves. Storm was too strong.

Lee alternately eyes his son and the patrón.

MORALES

Your decision?

(Dantes nods)

How old are you?

DANTES

Almost twenty, sir.

MORALES

Still plan on getting married?

DANTES

This coming weekend, sir.

Morales nods thoughtfully.

MORALES

Herd looks fit. You did good.

Morales smiles at Lee and then turns to the men.

MORALES

Listen up. You all know how I felt about Joaquín Calderón. There wasn't a better cowhand in all of Mexico. God, he loved this land.

The men all listen attentively, their heads uncovered as a sign of respect. Dantes and Lee stand to one side.

MORALES (cont'd)

But we need us a ranch manager, so...

CONTINUED: (2)

There is an expectant pause. Danglars wipes the perspiration off his forehead. He's waited a long time for this.

MORALES

Take a look at him.

Danglars gets to his feet. But Morales turns towards DANTE. The young man is amazed.

DANTE

(blushing)

Me, sir? Is this a joke?

LEE

Son, that man, he ain't got no sense of humor!

Laughing, Lee embraces his son. He's terribly proud.

MORALES

You take this job, and the biggest fiesta money can buy, as your wedding present!

With dozens of men thumping his back, Dante seizes Morales by the hand and awkwardly shakes it. The men burst into spontaneous YELLS and APPLAUSE. All except...

Danglars, who regards the young man with hatred.

INT. STABLE - STORAGE AREA

Danglars sorts through the tack until he finds Dante's trailbag. He pulls out the ordnance box. It's sealed with wax. Using a knife, he expertly pries open the lid.

Inside, he finds MAPS of Puebla City, its fortifications and weaknesses. Attack plans.

A sudden noise makes him jump. Dante and a group of COWBOYS. Danglars swiftly replaces the papers.

DANTE

Danglars?

Danglars closes the ordnance box.

DANTE (cont'd)

What are you doing? These are Calderón's things.

DANGLARS

Oh, I - I thought - we should look for names. Next of kin...

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED:

Dantes calmly takes the box and locks it inside his shelf space.

DANTES

Let it be.

DANGLARS

Also, I came here looking for you. I wanted to congratulate you. On your new position.

Dantes swings up into the saddle. He softens a bit.

DANTES

Thank you, Danglars.

Dantes turns his mount and heads out of the building. Danglars watches him go.

EXT. MONTERREY OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Dantes rides across the mountains into the Monterrey valley. The city sprawls in the distance.

DANTES
(smiles)

Mercedes...

INT. DRESS SHOP - DAY

Sunlight pours in through the big window facing the street. Seated near the door is FERNANDO MONDEGO, a handsome, raw-boned, enlisted man. His tunic is unbuttoned and his rifle is propped up next to his chair.

Incongruously, in Fernando's big, rough hands: four samples of fine French lace.

MERCEDES

Hand me the silk brocado, please...

Hidden by a wooden screen, a woman (MERCEDES) is getting dressed. When she reaches for the lace, he grabs her fingers.

MERCEDES
(pulls her hand free)

Silk. I need silk. Where is my veil??

FERNANDO

Would you slow down? Just for a minute?
You haven't even noticed our uniforms.

... feet away is GUSTAVE, a young Frenchman, also in uniform.

CONTINUED:

GUSTAVE
Personal guard to the Emperor!

FERNANDO
It's got to count for something -

MERCEDES
Yes, yes, this is a good time for us all.

FERNANDO
(to Gustave)
See?! That's exactly what I mean! She
answers, but she never answers!
(to Mercedes)
War is a business now, Mercedes. A
soldier with brains can make out well.

The shop owner, SEÑORA ROQUE, leans out from the workroom in the
back. She addresses the girl behind the screen.

SEÑORA ROQUE
We have to finish the fitting.
(to Fernando)
Are you boys coming this weekend?

FERNANDO
I wasn't invited.

MERCEDES
You were, too! You know you were!

FERNANDO
Not by him, I wasn't.

MERCEDES
Don't be ridiculous! You're my cousin.
You will come. You'll stay at the ranch.

Fernando signals for Gustave to leave, then moves closer to the
screen. He lowers his voice.

FERNANDO
What if Dantes don't come back? They're
almost a week overdue... What then?

The wooden screens part and out comes MERCEDES SEBASTIAN, 19, a
stunning Mexican beauty, wrapped in a virginal white wedding
dress.

MERCEDES
If he is dead. I have no reason to live.

Fernando looks away. He knows she is serious.

CONTINUED: (2)

MERCEDES

I want you to be my friend. To wish me the best.

Sra. Roque bustles in, gathering up the wedding dress.

SRA. ROQUE

He's here! Out front, quick, hide! You want a curse on your wedding day?

Dantes enters the shop in time to see the wedding veil trailing into the back room. He smiles. Fernando's jealousy is almost palpable.

DANTES

Fernando..?

Fernando nods and quickly leaves. Dantes enters the -

WORK ROOM

Dress mannequins, sewing machines, bolts of fabric. Dantes looks for Mercedes. She ducks behind a row of antique mannequins.

MERCEDES

Eeck! Sneaking up like that! Turn around!

Smiling, he sits on a chair, his back to her. She approaches, and embraces him from behind.

MERCEDES (cont'd)

It's bad luck to see the bride!

She covers his eyes, pulls his head back, kissing him softly on the mouth.

MERCEDES (cont'd)

I knew you'd be back! You said you would.

Dantes brings out a length of lace. Unrolls a few inches.

DANTES

From my father. The old man had it tucked away. It's mother's. Maybe you'll find a way to work it into the dress.

Touched, she kisses him again, then steps back. Dantes catches a glimpse of her bare feet in a mirror. Unable to resist, he looks up.

Her back to him, unaware of his gaze, she's backlit by the morning light. Golden, glowing, like an angel.

CONTINUED:

Dantes hastily closes his eyes...

FADE OUT.

EXT. MORALES RANCH - AFTERNOON

Wedding preparations are underway. Servants clean massive clay pots, wash the patio, hang crisp white linens and set up tables. Other workers ferry buckets of grain from a basement granary.

INT. BASEMENT GRANARY - SAME

Warm light pours in. Dantes and Mercedes wade through a soft sea of kernels, handing buckets up to servants at ground level.

Like kids misbehaving, they carry their buckets faster and faster, laughing and throwing grain at each other,

INT. MORALES KITCHEN - DUSK

Activity here is even more frantic. A small army of MATRONS plucks chickens, a mountain of feathers at their feet. Other servants shell peanuts, pine-nuts and almonds, pouring everything into bubbling vats of mole sauce.

Two rows of women make tortillas, their men stoking an oven the size of a barn. Jacinto and his friends hover, ready to steal little bites of food.

At one end of the long tables in the back, under smoky lamplight, a very drunk FERNANDO drowns his despair in shots of tequila. GUSTAVE struggles to get him on his feet.

FERNANDO

Oh, go! I'll see you tomorrow! Just go!

Gustave gives up and leaves. On his way out, he bids good night to another man, who dines quietly a few feet away, his back to CAMERA.

Fernando pours himself a fresh tequila, then looks at the eating man.

FERNANDO (cont'd)

My friend is worried I'm drinking too much.

Takes some salt and lime, gulps his drink, slams down the glass.

FERNANDO
(mumbles)

But, you know? Someone has-

CONTINUED:

He moves closer to the eating man, dragging the bottle, knocking over a couple of shot glasses.

FERNANDO (cont'd)
He's taking her - my life away. If he'd fight for her, I'd take him, no problem -

He peers at the man, who steadily, indifferently, keeps spooning beans into his mouth.

FERNANDO (cont'd)
But, come tomorrow, I'd give anything to be Edmundo Dantes...

The other man stops eating. Pushes his plate aside.

EATING MAN
You said... Dantes?

FERNANDO
I'll shoot him. In the gut...

The other man is revealed to be...

DANGLARS
Shhh. If you mean what you say, you should lower your voice. Here...

He fills another tequila glass for Fernando, hands it to him.

DANGLARS (cont'd)
My name is Etienne Danglars. I think we can be of mutual assistance.

Fernando stares blankly. Danglars nods, smiles, the oven fire reflecting in his glasses.

DANGLARS (cont'd)
We can do better than a gun. I have a far more powerful weapon.

He takes something out of his jacket, holding it up: A PEN.

INT. BASEMENT GRANARY - DUSK

Shirtless, covered in sweat, Dantes hands up the last bucket of grain. He climbs down the ladder, looks for Mercedes.

She's nowhere to be found. A handful of grain hits him on the back of the head. He turns. Nothing.

DANTES

CONTINUED:

He takes a few steps. BAMM!! The ladder falls and disappears into the grain. Someone has pulled it down.

DANTES (cont'd)

(smiles)

Great! Now we'll never get out of here.

SLAM! Behind him, Mercedes is playfully shutting all the open portholes, leaving the room in darkness.

MERCEDES

They'll find us, years from now...

He grabs her. They tumble onto the grain bed.

MERCEDES (cont'd)

...long dead, two skeletons still holding onto each other...

Their breath mingles, their sweat-covered skin making contact.

MERCEDES (cont'd)

...and when they try to pry us apart... we will crumble... to dust...

Mercedes runs her fingers through his hair, caresses his bare back, biting his neck. His hands cradle her head, then slide down her shoulders. He stops himself.

DANTES

(a whisper)

Tomorrow night. You'll be my wife.

Mercedes looks at him with a mixture of desire and awe.

MERCEDES

I already am.

They kiss again, bathed in the dying light.

CUT TO:

EXT. HACIENDA - DAY

The main house and garden are draped with colorful bunting and bouquets of flowers. In the courtyard, the servants finish decorating long tables for the wedding feast.

At the main gate, Lee Dantes takes his place alongside Morales greeting dozens of GUESTS as they draw up on horseback and in fine carriages.

CONTINUED:

Morales glances over at the old American, who is bursting with pride.

MORALES

I recognize the suit. Had it made in Veracruz.

LEE

It never fit you right, no how. You got that gut on you.

Behind them: Danglars.

DANGLARS

(approaches Morales)

Good afternoon, sir. Is there anything you'll be needing?

MORALES

For once in your life, Danglars, take the day. Enjoy it!

Fernando hurries by in full uniform, hung over and covered with nervous perspiration. He barely looks at them.

DANGLARS

(smiling)

I will, sir.

Morales steps forward to meet the finest carriage of the day. A steward hops down from behind a pair of matched horses and opens the door.

A distinguished middle-aged man with long, gray hair descends. This is ALFREDO NORIEGA, gachupin and statesman. He smiles fondly at Morales.

MORALES

Governor.

NORIEGA

Please. I'm not -

Noriega takes Morales by the arm. They stroll past the admiring crowd, acknowledging a smattering of APPLAUSE.

MORALES

You are still Governor here, Alfredo. My warmest welcome. You honor my house.

As they approach, the CAMERA locates something glinting, half-concealed under Noriega's collar. It is a silver half-medal.

CONTINUED: (2)

From somewhere inside, WEDDING MUSIC begins.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MORALES FAMILY CHAPEL - DAY

Dantes stands at the altar, resplendent in a black charro suit dotted with gold conchos. He beams at Mercedes, who approaches, surrounded by old ladies in black. She takes the arm of Morales and starts up the aisle. Dazzling.

The wedding MUSIC ENDS as the bride reaches the altar. Her gown is trimmed in the old Dantes lace. Bride and groom kneel before the priest. Behind them, the guests solemnly take their seats. The priest clears his throat:

PRIEST

In nomine patrii -

And he stops. A FRENCH MAJOR stands in the aisle, hand resting lightly on the hilt of his sword. He half-bows to the priest, then looks coolly at the crowd.

FRENCH OFFICER

(in French, subtitled)

My humblest apologies, messieurs dames,
for this... most awkward interruption.

An ARMY TRANSLATOR repeats the apology. Lee, in the front row, is on his feet, outraged.

LEE

What the hell do you want here??!

ARMY TRANSLATOR

This will take no time...

He swivels to face the assembly, scanning the crowd.

FRENCH OFFICER

(in French)

Is there an Edmundo Dantes here?

Utter silence. Mercedes grips Edmundo's arm. NO!

ARMY TRANSLATOR

Is there -

DANTES

I am Edmundo Dantes.

The officer realizes that the groom is addressing him.

CONTINUED:

ARMY TRANSLATOR
(astonished)

You, sir?

(recovers)

We are here to take possession of a certain ordnance box. Transported over the American border to this very ranch.

Danglars glances at Fernando in the back row, clutching the pew with trembling hands. Discreetly gestures: "silence".

LEE
(sputtering)

It's a mistake!

ARMY TRANSLATOR
(to Dantes)

Are you in possession of such a box?

Dantes wavers. This couldn't be what Calderón asked him to do. Lee Dantes shoulders his way forward.

LEE
There's no such box! You got the wrong man! That's my son!

DANTES
(makes a decision)
Father... I'll handle this.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Silent. Surreal. Dozens and dozens of red-coated FRENCH SOLDIERS fill the patio. On horseback. On foot. Some sit on the tables, calmly picking fruit from the ornate bowls. Crows feasting.

The wedding party emerges from the chapel, gazing in silence as Dantes crosses the courtyard. The major and ten soldiers follow. No sound but the hollow ECHO of their boot steps.

INT. STABLE - EMPLOYEE STORAGE AREA - SAME

Dantes looks inside Morales' bag. Pulls out the box. Pockets the medallion. Keeping his composure, he walks back -

OUTSIDE

DANTES
Is this what you're looking for, Major?

ARMY TRANSLATOR
Whose box is this?

CONTINUED:

DANTES

I made a promise. I need to see the -

Abruptly, the Major signals his soldiers, who wrench the box from his hands. The Major opens it and flips through the papers.

ARMY TRANSLATOR

Whose box is this?

DANTES

A dead man, sir.

The French officer nods and begins a formal indictment.

ARMY TRANSLATOR

Sir, you are under arrest by order of the office of the state prosecutor.

Now the crowd gasps and starts BUZZING. LEE holds his son. Soldiers pry the two apart.

LEE

This can't be right! What's the charge?

FRENCH OFFICER

Treason to the Empire.

Mercedes bursts from the crowd.

MERCEDES

Edmundo! No!

Dantes turns. She clings to him, too frightened to cry.

MERCEDES

I'll go with you!

DANTES

I'll be back by dark. Don't be afraid.

Closes his eyes, whispers in her ear.

DANTES

You're already my wife, remember?

In front of all the guests, Dantes is handcuffed and taken to an armored carriage.

The carriage accelerates through the gates. Lee holds Mercedes tightly.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILITARY CAMP - NIGHT

A large French encampment. About a hundred soldiers are carrying cannon, ammo and horses. Bonfires pierce the surrounding darkness.

INT. MILITARY TENT - NIGHT

Two SOLDIERS lead Dantes to a plain wooden chair in the middle of the tent. He sits calmly and looks around.

He is dwarfed by towering file cabinets and musty stacks of legal documents. The soldiers stand by his side, chatting in French.

Dantes notices a slight gap in some curtains in the back. The gap quickly closes.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

VILLAFUERTE

I want his back to me.

GERARDO VILLAFUERTE - a man in his mid-thirties, tall, gaunt, dressed in black. His rigid, pale face looks like marble in contrast with to jet-black, widow-peaked hair and small, darting eyes. He addresses a FRENCH OFFICER. (Their dialog is in French, subtitled.)

The French officer parts the curtains and gestures to the TWO SOLDIERS. They rotate Dantes' chair.

FRENCH OFFICER

We could blindfold him.

Villafuerte examines the contents of the ordnance box.

VILLAFUERTE

No. I need his trust. Draw the curtains,

Villafuerte starts dimming the oil lamps, one by one.

FRENCH OFFICER

(half a smile)

Yes, sir.

VILLAFUERTE

Do you find this amusing?

FRENCH OFFICER

So much like... theater, sir.

CONTINUED:

VILLAFUERTE

I'm glad it entertains you, Major, but neither that man nor I are actors who may, after our performance, change our likeness. I need anonymity to work... as an advisor to the Empire.

A wintry smile from Villafuerte. For the intimidated French officer, any hint of informality is gone.

VILLAFUERTE

The accused must not see my face. Should he do so, he could never be released.

INT. MILITARY TENT - SAME

The two guards dim the remaining oil lamps and leave.

DANTES

Sir, I have no interest in politics.

Dantes sits stiffly. Behind him, Villafuerte remains out of the light, an inscrutable silhouette.

VILLAFUERTE

So you say...

(holds up some papers)

But these are maps of Puebla City.

(he opens one)

The entire garrison. Planning a honeymoon visit?

DANTES

No sir, I didn't -

(beat)

Someone was supposed to pick it up.

VILLAFUERTE

But no one did.

Dantes shakes his head.

DANTES

(half turns)

Maybe Calderón was a rebel spy, I don't know. But I liked him. Everyone did. He -

VILLAFUERTE

Go on, and don't turn.

CONTINUED:

DANTES

My first roundup. He showed me how to...
(blushing)
...geld a calf.

In the dark, Villafuerte smiles. When he speaks, his voice is warm and frank. He places a friendly hand on Dantes' shoulder.

VILLAFUERTE

Well, somebody doesn't like you...

He shows Dantes a LETTER, written in an awkward, backward-slanting hand. As Dantes reads it, he pales.

DANTES

It accuses me. But there's no signature.

VILLAFUERTE

Of course not. I see dozens like that every day. Do you recognize the writing?

Dantes shakes his head.

VILLAFUERTE

(almost chatty)

I do. Lefthanded writing. Some people think they can use us to settle petty quarrels. You must have an idea.

Dantes thinks, then shakes his head, rejecting the notion.

DANTES

...but he couldn't. He's a coward.

VILLAFUERTE

"The more wit, the less courage." He had the wit. Who had the courage?

Dantes' mind is racing. Villafuerte briskly starts writing. A pardon???

VILLAFUERTE (cont'd)

Pray, tell me, how were you supposed to recognize the person who came for this?

Dantes reaches into his pocket, extracts the half medallion. Villafuerte abruptly STOPS WRITING.

DANTES

This. He'd be wearing the other half.

The prosecutor lays down his pen and reaches out his hand. He examines the silver piece, his hand trembling just a bit.

CONTINUED: (2)

VILLAFUERTE

I see you are - telling the truth. I am most grateful, Edmundo Dantes.

Villafuerte struggles to reach a decision. When he speaks, his words carry a death sentence:

VILLAFUERTE (cont'd)

Look at me.

DANTES

Sir?

Villafuerte comes into the light. Dantes's eyes shine with hope.

VILLAFUERTE

Has anyone seen this medal? Your fiancée? Your arresting officer?

DANTES

No sir, no one. Am I free to go?

Villafuerte looks across the tent, where the officer is waiting. He gives a tiny nod.

Dantes turns.

A SOLDIER cracks his GUN across Dantes's face! Another SOLDIER smashes his RIFLE into Dantes's ribs! When he tries to rise, someone hits him again, this time across the back of the head.

FADE OUT.

EXT. OPEN SEA - DAWN

A smear of gray light at the Eastern horizon. Dantes' hand bobs in and out of the water, handcuffed to a long chain.

A longboat's sail is stretched tight, drenched in spray. Lying on the dinghy's floorboards, Dantes is unconscious, chained to a steel plate. Blood oozes from a gash on his head.

Up ahead, a jagged fist of rock rises from the gulf. At its summit, the squat silhouette of a stone fortress: SAN JUAN DE ULUA.

INT. - SAN JUAN PRISON/CELL-BLOCK (THE WELLS) - ANYTIME

Weak daylight penetrates an octagonal chamber. The floor is lined with round steel doors, like manhole covers.

CONTINUED:

A FAT GUARD pushes a cart full of buckets and filthy tin plates. He opens one of the hatches and peeks down, chuckling. Then, with a rope, he lowers a plate of spoiled potatoes.

DANTES' CELL

The guard approaches a holding cell in the center of the room. He flings a bucket of gray water onto the man inside.

Dantes jolts to consciousness. Dried blood cakes his swollen and purple face. He looks up at the FAT GUARD.

DANTES

Sir, please... I'm not a prisoner... Let me talk to the warden.

The guard closes in. Puts a finger to his mouth: "silence."

Dantes pulls off a few gold conchos from his wedding suit. Then gestures, as if writing.

DANTES

Paper. Give me paper... and a pen. I'll pay you.

The Guard opens the cell door. Tempted.

GUARD

(in English)

How much you have?

Dantes quickly plucks off a couple more conchos. Hands them over. Looks at the guard expectantly.

DISSOLVE TO:

IN THE CELL - NIGHT

Dantes works by the light of the guard's sputtering torch. With a stub of charcoal, he writes a few painful lines.

DANTES

(a whisper)

Father, please help me. I am in hell...

INT. LEE DANTE'S ROOM - NIGHT.

Lee is buttoning his best shirt. His hands shake, his eyes are swollen.

DANTES' VOICE

...with no one to hear me... with no one

CONTINUED:

The old man carefully combs his white hair.

DANTES' VOICE
(cont'd)

Tell Mercedes I think of her constantly.

Lee can barely knot his worn-out silk tie. MERCEDES observes from the doorway.

DANTES' VOICE
(cont'd)

You must find me.

She helps him with the tie. He tries to smile, but can't.

DANTES' VOICE
(cont'd)

Contact the Magistrate. Why am I here?
What am I to expect?

The old man puts on his jacket. Mercedes kisses him on the cheek.

DANTES' VOICE
(cont'd)

I don't even know how many days have gone
by. It seems, father...

Lee picks up his hat and leaves with Mercedes, taking the oil lamp, leaving the room in darkness.

DANTES' VOICE OVER

...that I could die.

EXT. NORIEGA'S MANSION - DAWN

A carriage draws up to an elegant Monterrey house decorated with scrolled ironwork. Lee Dantes, Mercedes and Morales climb out. Fernando emerges last.

At the doorstep, the distinguished ex-governor NORIEGA is waiting for them. He greets Morales with open arms. They hurry inside.

INT. NORIEGA'S MANSION - DAWN

Early morning sun pokes through the central patio. The house is deserted.

NORIEGA

I've sent the servants away.

(to Lee)

If anyone can help you, Mister Dantes,
it's my son. But he is in - shall we say?
- an awkward position.

LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS 24.

CONTINUED:

Lee nods weakly, seeming to age by the minute. Mercedes holds him gently by the arm.

NORIEGA (cont'd)
As a patriot, however, he has contacts.

INT. NORIEGA'S MANSION CORRIDOR - DAWN

The group goes through a series of sliding doors. Black, lustrous CROWS start to appear in the hallways, CAWING raucously as the group goes by.

NORIEGA
My son loves these birds. He says crows are better than watchdogs. Less emotional.

(to Morales)
You remember my son, don't you?

MORALES
(nods)
Such a pale, serious boy...

NORIEGA
Too serious. Sometimes he worries me.

MORALES
All the other children would run around in the dirt. He would just observe. Always at a distance.

NORIEGA
Yes, well, that boy is now a very powerful man. He'll know what to do.

INT. AVIARY - DAWN

The AVIARY is a large glass room, full of caged and free birds. A tall, dark figure, its back turned, is feeding a plump crow.

NORIEGA
Gentlemen, my son...

The man turns.

VILLAFUERTE
Enchanted.

CUT TO:

INT. DANTES' CELL - ANYTIME

Another splash of cold water awakens Dantes as TWO GUARDS open his cage. Babbling in French, they snatch him out.

INT. SAN JUAN PRISON, MAIN NAVE - ANYTIME

The GUARDS take the prisoner to a central nave and climb an iron staircase, spiralling into infinity. Multi-chambered vaults and distant screams evoke a Piranesi-like architectural hell.

INT. GUARDS' KITCHEN - SAME

XCU - Dantes' pathetic LETTER, next to a steaming SOUP BOWL.

HEAD GUARD

How did you write this?

The bowl tips over; thin SOUP washes the words into a blur. PULL BACK. Naked and wet, Dantes shivers before a sadistic HEAD GUARD. The FAT GUARD stands by at attention, looking at nothing.

DANTES

Sir. I am here by mistake. I - I admit to carrying the box, it -

The Head Guard bites into an ONION and wipes the juice from his chin. Breaks the onion into the soup.

HEAD GUARD

Mexican onions. Sweet as apples.

DANTES

I'm not political... Whatever was in it, I'm sorry...

Dantes' trousers are on the table. The Head Guard rips off the remaining conchos.

DANTES (cont'd)

I'm not asking you to believe me. But if you could at least send the letter.

No answer. The Head Guard gets up. Walks to Dantes and gestures: show me your hands. Dantes complies, extending his fingers. The man yanks a ring off Dantes' finger. Admonishes the other guards in French for their stupidity.

DANTES (cont'd)

You can keep everything, sir. Plea -

HEAD GUARD

Sign it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Puzzled, Dantes falls silent. The guard indicates Dantes' letter.

HEAD GUARD (cont'd)

You want them to know who sent it, don't you? Sign it.

He offers a pencil. Edmundo seizes it and signs the letter. Satisfied, the Head Guard nods at his men.

HEAD GUARD (cont'd)

Right handed.

PRISON GUARDS slam Dantes against the wall. The Head Guard dabs at his mouth with the letter.

HEAD GUARD (cont'd)

Two simple rules: No prisoner talks. No prisoner writes.

The men pin Dantes' right hand to the wall. The HEAD GUARD removes his jacket, rolls up his sleeves and lifts a heavy club.

DANTES

(realizing)

OHNOJESUSPLEASENOPLEASENONONONONO!!!!

Dantes fights with all his might, but they hold him fast.

FAT GUARD

(in English, whispered)

Don't fight! It only makes it -

The Head Guard clobbers Dantes' hand, cracking bones. Dantes' face flushes, the veins on his neck almost exploding as the Head Guard hammers AGAIN AND AGAIN! Dantes convulses as the Head Guard works up a sweat... and a smile.

When they finally release him, Dantes sags to the floor. His hand is red pulp.

He collapses.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK.

DARKNESS

Horrible cries. Incomprehensible words and prayers.

GUARD

(in French, subtitled)

Listen to him. All day long.

FADE IN:

TWO GUARDS

The FAT GUARD and a YOUNG one. Walking down a long, winding corridor. Torchlight shines off the wet rock.

FAT GUARD

That's him, you hear it?

TITLE: 1867 (FIVE YEARS LATER)

The FAT GUARD pushes the cart full of grub down the hall.

THE WELLS

FAT GUARD (cont'd)

Number 34. Edmundo Dantes. He's not praying. Not anymore. Cursing the Lord Jesus. Horrible.

(beat)

Feed him only bread.

(reveals a scarred ear)

The bastard bit me two months ago. Last meat he'll ever taste.

Using his foot, he slides a loaf of moldy bread down the hole.

INT. DANTE'S CELL - DAY

The bread falls through the opening:

A long, long fall. Just when it seems as if the bread has vanished... it hits the floor, thirty feet below!

DANTE'S CELL

A cylinder of solid stone, deep in the ground. At the bottom, a bunk, a broken stool and an upturned wooden bucket.

The only light comes from a small window, recessed into the outer wall, high above.

A claw-like hand emerges from the darkness and gathers in the bread. Dantes crouches in the dark. Bearded, dirty, shockingly thin... he's HOWLING. He has scored himself with hundreds of little cuts, tiny crosses scabbing his chest and arms.

CAMERA MOVES IN on his face as, from above, a voice floats down.

FAT GUARD

(in French, subtitled)

Number 34. I can smell you from here. Die

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

FAT GUARD (cont'd)
already. Save me the trouble of feeding
you.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME

Dantes recedes into darkness. Eyes shut. Legs drawn up.

His bread, pushed aside, thick with mold.

Shadows play around the nearby ROCKS, sculpting them into an
APPARITION, the shape of his father.

DANTES
(a whisper)

Father.

Then, a chipping sound. Midway up the wall, around one irregular
rock - a few hallucinatory LIGHT RAYS beam through. The magical
LIGHT flickers on Dantes' ravaged face. He shields his eyes.

DANTES (cont'd)

Father...!

From the wall: A MAN'S VOICE.

VOICE (OFF)
(surprised)

Yes.

Dantes freezes. Now, the irregular rock inches from the wall.

VOICE (OFF)

Help me.

Dantes springs up. His brittle fingernails break as he claws at
the rough stone block. He see-saws it out - THUD!

CLOSE SHOT - MAN

Now, head first, a MAN wriggles through the hole. He's old,
craggy-faced, with a long, sinewy body and bedraggled gray hair:
the ABBÉ FARIA. He blows rock-dust from his nostrils. He holds a
small oil lamp. Odd TOOLS are tied across his chest.

Dantes is stunned, but laughing!

MAN
(unceremoniously)

Good. Very good day. Hold the noise, now.
You'll bring the guards.

He moves along the wall, muttering in LATIN.

CONTINUED:

FARIA

Name. My name. It's Faria... 67 degrees north, 73 east... Prisoner, say your crime, the crime you did, what is that crime?

DANTES

I - don't know...

FARIA

Treason, then - always treason. The crime when they don't know.

He touches his bony fingers to the wall. Stops: here some rocks are moist.

FARIA (cont'd)

(licks his fingers)

Salt water. I was right. Sea's just on the other side.

Dantes stares. Can't grasp all this.

FARIA (cont'd)

(matter-of-fact)

I'm on my way out. This way. My way.

He opens his palm. He's holding a handful of anonymous-looking quartz marbles.

FARIA (cont'd)

A full treasure awaits me outside. Half can be yours if you help me.

Dantes glances at the marbles, and pities the old man.

DANTES

I thought - you were here - to rescue me.

Faria sadly puts his stones away.

FARIA (cont'd)

Rescue? No. No one will rescue you. Why? No one knows you're here. To the outside world: nothing and no one. That's who we are.

INT. FARIA'S CELL - LATER

PULL BACK: Dantes wriggles through the communicating tunnel and squints at Faria's cell, amazed.

CONTINUED:

Across the WALLS: gouged markings. Cosmology. Mathematics.
Poetry.

FARIA

I did this! With tools. Carving tools,
digging tools: As many as I need.

He moves a rock. Uncovers a hidden stash of handmade implements.
Then he tips another ROCK.

Inside, a drying chamber. He pulls out BONES. Inserts them into
holes drilled into a WOODEN STICK.

FARIA

Every Wednesday, chicken day... tool day!

He hacks with it, chipping mortar away from a ROCK!

FARIA

Calcified bones. Rock-hard. Bones-salts-
minerals and time. I have everything!

(raises his lantern)

Oil, for my lamp. Extracted from the beef
our guard delivers on Mondays...

He kneels next to his bunk, pulls off one of the legs. It neatly
splits into two steel digging tools.

FARIA (cont'd)

It's small, my cell. Fifty books wide,
eighty-three high.

(gestures)

Codex, Livres, Buchen - carved from
memory. From when I served God's glory -
hallelujah - forty-five years ago, the
Vatican library.

Faria pulls Dantes to the wall, fingering a set of markings:

FARIA

Description of the World, 1296. Marco
Polo. Dictated while in chains,
imprisoned in a Geneva galley! Jail is an
auspicious place for writers...

(in Italian, subtitled)

"In the middle of my life I woke up to
find myself lost..." Inferno, 1320. A
book condemned by the Church...

(laughs)

But God... God reads everything. Knows
everything. We wait long enough, he'll
get to us.

CONTINUED: (2)

Dantes smiles, for the first time in years. The old man puts a fatherly hand on his shoulder and smiles back.

FARIA
The wheels of God grind slowly. But they grind exceedingly fine.

CUT TO:

FARIA'S CELL - NIGHT

The FAT GUARD lowers the empty bucket, the food plate, the water and a piece of stale bread.

FARIA takes it all, then hurries to the facing wall. Unplugs the interconnecting tunnel and dives in.

DANTES' CELL

Using his good hand, Dantes furiously digs at the soft lime around the largest stone on the outside wall. When Faria knocks from the tunnel, Dantes opens the rock "doorway," letting the old man in.

LATER

In his cell, Faria massages Dantes' withered, mishapen right hand, applying pressure here and there.

FARIA
No movement. Not yet. Pressure, relief and tension, maybe a harness.

He opens a niche. Extracts a small rock tray with various fungi growing. With a thin copper blade he "shaves" the spores.

FARIA (cont'd)
Every ten days, our guardian angels change breads. Wheat, sorghum, they will help cure you. Rye...
(smiles)
Rye will make you fly...

Faria takes three tiny vials hanging from his neck. He mixes the spores with some liquid from one of them, then smears it onto the tip of a hand-made needle.

FARIA (cont'd)

Don't look.

Dantes turns away, eyeing the communicating tunnel between cells as Faria spins the needle into his forearm.

CONTINUED:

FARIA (cont'd)

Twenty feet from cell to cell. Thirty-six more through your wall. Alone, I dug one and a half feet in -umm- twelve months. Now with you, three feet a year.

DANTES

Three feet a year... That's twelve years!

Faria gestures at a beam of sunlight that falls on a gauge he's carved on the wall.

FARIA

Time is all we have, with nowhere to spend it. Now, try your hand.

And miraculously, Dantes is able to move his fingers a little bit.

FARIA (cont'd)

They grind exceedingly fine.

CUT TO:

DANTES' CELL - DAY

SLOW PAN around the empty cell. From far below, the sound of scraping, chipping. CAMERA finds the connecting tunnel, MOVES IN.

TUNNEL - SAME

The men lie on their backs, working by lamplight. The tunnel is low and oppressive, like a tomb.

A small harness made of bones and bandages supports Dantes' hand.

FARIA

Keep up! It's almost daybreak, the limestone's soft...

DANTES

(gasping)

I can't breathe! Talk. Talk about your treasure.

FARIA

Yes, the treasure, it was many years ago...

DANTES

In 1832! It was 1832...

CONTINUED:

FARIA

...yes... when the government tried to seize everything from the Jesuit order... I came from Rome, an important man! They trusted me! I hid away every piece of gold, every jewel... so they couldn't find it... Hid it well...

DANTES

(laughing)

Yes, yes... very well!!

He breathes easier. Hand tools echo the rhythm of the words.

FARIA

I swallowed some of the diamonds, time and again... until they became smooth... round...

CUT TO:

EXT. QUERETARO. LA CRUZ - DUSK

The fortified walls of

Title: LA CRUZ in Queretaro, Mexico.

FERNANDO, five years older, limps along an inner parapet, stepping over wounded soldiers. Dried blood covers the side of his face and a bloody bandage is tied around his left leg.

Fernando looks over the wall: outside, under columns of smoke, a large Juárista encampment is visible in the main plaza.

He addresses some FRENCH SOLDIERS guarding the watchtowers.

FERNANDO

(in French, subtitled)

I want two men on every post tonight! Do you understand?

FRENCH CAPTAIN

(in French, subtitled)

We don't have two men!

Angry, frustrated, Fernando pushes him away.

FERNANDO

(in French, subtitled)

Get them, then!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He hobbles down a ladder to a patio full of more injured men. Medical tents and cobblestone floors are awash in blood, swarming with flies.

MAXIMILIAN'S VOICE

The word forgiveness does not exist in the language of war.

INT. LA CRUZ REFECTORY - SAME

The kitchen-refectory has been turned into an improvised war room where MAXIMILIAN, EMPEROR OF MEXICO, addresses GUSTAVE and FERNANDO.

EMPEROR

(in French, subtitled)

My brief moment in Mexico won't last much longer. So, Lieutenant Mondego, Sergeant Dulac... I take this moment...

He takes two gold medals from his uniform. Hands one to each.

EMPEROR (cont'd)

...to honor you, and thank you for all that you've done for me and my family. History will remember us all.

Gustave is genuinely moved. Muttering expressions of loyalty, he bends to kiss the Emperor's hand. As he straightens up, Fernando looks him straight in the eye, full of doubt, and then bows respectfully to the Emperor.

CUT TO:

ESCAPE TUNNEL

Faria concentrates on a daily ritual: pushing bits of bone into the tunnel's mud roof, making a complex mosaic.

Dantes digs expertly now. The tunnel has become spacious enough to let them work side by side. Faria takes a drop of liquid, puts it on his tongue. He then passes his flask to Dantes, who does the same. They work faster.

Suddenly: EXPLOSIONS echo through the prison!

INT. DANTES' CELL - SAME

Dantes exits the tunnel and quickly scales the steel rungs, pressing up against the hatch. Through the grate, he sees JUÁRISTAS in the cell block! More EXPLOSIONS as they overwhelm the French guards.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Dantes drops back down, disbelieving. Seizing Faria:

DANTES

Juáristas... They've taken the prison!

BURNING PAPERS shower down. He ducks back from the dancing flames, joy surging within him.

DANTES

It's over now...

Faria traps some burning paper in his hands.

FARIA

Ashes. The fruit of paradise lost.

He lifts the BURNING FRAGMENT close to Dantes. The flames turn a list of prisoners' names to a scroll of ash. Faria blows it away.

PRIEST

We're still on the wrong side of these rocks, Edmundo. I say more! We're on the wrong side of history.

INT. MAIN HALL - DAY

Lines of filthy prisoners in heavy chains stand before three MEXICAN BUREAUCRATS and heavily-armed JUÁRISTA SOLDIERS.

An anonymous Dantes is fascinated by the sparkling sunlight beyond the blown-out walls. VOICES reach him, as if from afar.

BUREAUCRAT 1

(consulting his book)

Number... thirty-four.

BUREAUCRAT 2

Are you being well fed?

DANTES

(recovering himself)

Sir... I'm a Juárista, like you. Please, free me, I've waited -

BUREAUCRAT 1

We're still at war, number thirty-four. But progress dictates that we check on the humane state of prison life...

DANTES

You have only to get my files.

CONTINUED:

BUREAUCRAT 1

Unfortunately, it will take some time to reconstruct paper records. We must ask you to be patient.

DANTES

How long...? How long do you need?

BUREAUCRAT 2

Long enough: Order begets order.

BUREAUCRAT 1

Are you being well fed?

DANTES

Don't you listen to me?!

BUREAUCRAT 3

First, we must check if you're being fed properly. Second, if your quarters are sanitary.

Dantes grows numb.

DANTES

Listen to me... You have to believe me.

BUREAUCRAT 3

Are you being fed properly?

With an animal ROAR, Dantes leaps on the puny man, wraps the chain around his neck and jerks it tight! Something cracks!! Blood splashes across his chest and he's still screaming as two JUÁRISTA GUARDS haul him away.

INT. DANTES' CELL - LATER

JUÁRISTA GUARDS straddle Dantes and lace him into a SAILCLOTH. It's a crude STRAITJACKET. Then they dump buckets of sea water onto him. Over and over until he's drenched and choking.

Now the GUARDS hold FLAMING TORCHES near the cocooned man. As the sailcloth dries, it slowly tightens. When Dantes tries to speak, only half-words come out.

MATCH-DISSOLVES: TIME CHANGES - DAYS & NIGHTS MIX UP

Dantes coughs awake. Shivering. Tied upright against the stones.

Each time Dantes loses consciousness, guards SOAK him. They wave their FLAMES near the cloth, shrinking it further.

MATCH-DISSOLVES: TIME DISAPPEARS. AN EYE-BLINK TAKES FOREVER

There's too much pain. Dantes can no longer pass out. Stares wide-eyed, catatonic.

MATCH-DISSOLVES: NO TIME

Dantes is skeletal, near death. Faria is leaning over him.

DANTES

How... long... now?

FARIA

Shhh... my son. Don't talk.

DANTES

How... long...?

FARIA

Five...

DANTES

Five... months?

FARIA

Days. Listen to me. You...

The old man shuts his eyes, trying to hide his fear.

FARIA (cont'd)

...will stop breathing soon.

He pulls out one of the vials. A CRIMSON liquid glows within, surging towards Faria's fingers.

FARIA (cont'd)

I... will bring you back. With this potent distillation. Seven seconds after your heart stops. Three drops will go in.

Dantes is too spent to reply, but a single tear spills over his cheek. The old abbé caresses Dantes' wild hair.

FARIA (cont'd)

You have to trust me, you hear...?

No reply. Faria tenses. His fingers probe the sailcloth for a heartbeat.

DANTES' POV

FARIA (cont'd)

...Seven...six... five...

CONTINUED:

Sound and image slowly...

FADE OUT.

INT. LA CRUZ PATIO - SAME

GUSTAVE walks among the injured and the dying. He looks up:

Emperor Maximilian is at his tower window, calmly reading *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. The Emperor smiles down at Gustave, who sadly salutes him.

INT. LA CRUZ MAIN CORRIDOR - SAME

Gustave checks the doors. One of them is ajar. He sees the glow of firelight from below.

INT. LA CRUZ WORKSHOP AREA - SAME

Fernando is downstairs, at a large fireplace, burning files. His shirt is open and he's covered in sweat. Sensing Gustave behind him, he briefly turns. Gustave examines one of the papers.

It is an Imperial letter of command.

GUSTAVE

What is this?

Fernando empties another crateful onto the flames.

FERNANDO

We have only hours to change sides.

GUSTAVE

Change sides??

FERNANDO

Yes, and save ourselves: If our names disappear, we do, too.

GUSTAVE

Are you crazy?

FERNANDO

No, but this goddam country is. I have a family back home. I have to protect them.

Gustave points at the medal awarded to them by the Emperor.

GUSTAVE

He put his life in our hands. He trusts us!

CONTINUED:

Fernando takes his medal, hands it to Gustave.

FERNANDO
I never asked for this.

GUSTAVE stares in dread. Flames are spreading, getting dangerous.

FERNANDO
War is a business! We have only one thing
left to trade: His life!

Gustave runs up the stairs. Fernando catches up with him.

FERNANDO (cont'd)
You can't leave! I'm doing this for you,
too. We're friends. Brothers.

GUSTAVE
Not anymore.

FERNANDO
Forgive me, then.

He produces a small knife and swiftly covers his friend's mouth. Fernando shuts his eyes in shame and pain while stabbing Gustave repeatedly in the heart. There is an odd intimacy, an oblique passion at work.

FERNANDO (cont'd)
(a trembling whisper)
Please, forgive me... Please...

Covered in blood, he tenderly lies the body next to the growing flames.

INT. LA CRUZ MAIN CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Fernando rips all the military honors from his clothes, and pulls savagely at his bandages. Blood gushes from his leg wound. He stifles a cry with his fist, then painfully limps to the side door.

He kicks out a sand barricade, removes his shirt, and steps outside.

EXT. QUERETARO PLAZA - DAWN

Fernando advances towards the awakening troops of Juárez. He waves his white shirt in the air.

CONTINUED:

FERNANDO
(in Spanish, subtitled)
I'm an ally!! Don't shoot, I'm an ally!!

CUT TO:

INT. DANTES' CELL - DAY

GUARDS hack impassively at the sailcloth.

The men step back, gagging. A moldy stench comes off Dantes' naked body. He slides down the wall, his thin legs twisted, his chest caved in. The right hand hangs limp and black.

Is he dead? One of guards leans in, checking for breath or pulse. Dantes eyes are open.

GUARD
(in Spanish, subtitled)
He's alive. The bastard is alive.

The other guards shake their heads and climb out. One of them empties a last bucket of sea water onto the prisoner.

Dantes addresses the wall that hides the interconnecting tunnel.

DANTES
(whispers)
...thank you...

INTERCONNECTING TUNNEL

In the dark, Faria leans against the rock, and smiles.

FARIA
You're welcome...

THE TUNNEL

Immensely long. Breathtaking.

FARIA'S VOICE
"...and I crossed over and began to go up
that little-known and lightless road to
ascend into the shining world. Again -
(faltering)
Again to see the stars."

Emaciated, exhausted, Dantes looks at Faria. They are both covered in sweat and dust.

DANTES
So he finds a road out of Hell?

CONTINUED:

FARIA

"Stars." It's how the story ends - the last word in each of Dante's three books: "stars."

Dantes feels the muddy wall. WATER trickles over his fingers.

Faria hammers at a rock. Suddenly, DAYLIGHT! A faint wind carries in the fresh smell of the gulf! Faria squints at the searing needle of light, weeping.

FARIA (cont'd)

Hear that? The sea! Look -

BAMMMMM!!!! WOOSH!!! Seawater surges in through the walls! Flooding them! Suddenly Dantes is sinking into MUD.

DANTES

We're too deep... It's high tide!

BAMMMMM!!! Another surge from the ocean brings in more water. Without warning, the tunnel roof collapses! When Dantes frees himself, the foamy water is red with blood.

The old man's skull has been crushed by a falling block of stone.

Dantes lifts the abbé away, trailing blood.

DANTES

No!! No!!

IN FARIA'S CELL

Dantes lays Faria down on the rock bench. Blood puddles under the old man's head.

FARIA

Our way out... gone.

DANTES

No, no. We'll start again - !

He finds the vials around Faria's neck.

FARIA

I'm dying...

DANTES

No! Seven seconds, three drops!

The abbé stops him.

CONTINUED:

FARIA

I'm old now. God wills it.

(in a whisper)

In 1832, I had a great fortune. Hid it well...

DANTES

Yes, yes, the story of the treasure... Shall I tell it to you?

FARIA

No!! For once, just believe it!

He hands Dantes his three lumpy stones.

FARIA (cont'd)

These are *diamonds!* By the lord Jesus, listen to me!

(running out of breath)

You must go... to *Montes de Cristo!* Twenty miles south of La Mesa, the monastery ruins... I am so tired...

DANTES

You'll be there with me. You will!

FARIA

(seizes Dantes)

You must leap. Abandon yourself to the Hand of God. *La main du seigneur...*

Tears rim the abbé's eyes. He strikes them away with a curse.

FARIA (cont'd)

All that I know, you know. All that I have, you have, my son -

His eyes roll up as he dies. Dantes embraces the limp body, and quietly cries at the loss of this, his second father.

FARIA'S CELL - LATER

Dantes wipes away the trail of blood leading to the tunnel.

He overturns the stool and places the plate and cup on the floor, simulating an accident. He arranges Faria's body on the floor in a sprawling position, then retreats into the interconnecting tunnel, pulling the stone in.

DANTES' CELL

The Guard lowers Dantes his bucket and food, then moves away.

CONTINUED:

the old man's cell.

Dantes hears an exclamation, then the sound of footsteps hurrying away. He sits on his bunk and waits in silence. Three sets of footsteps return.

Then, dimly, from above, VOICES (in Spanish, subtitled.)

GUARD 2 VOICE

He's dead, probably fell. Hit his head.
That's blood, there.

GOVERNOR'S VOICE

Get a sack, stitch him in. Throw him out
tonight, before he begins to stink.

IN FARIA'S CELL

A GUARD, alone, on his knees, sews Faria's corpse into a canvas shroud. CAMERA moves towards the wall, where...

INTERCONNECTING TUNNEL

DANTES observes the process through a small crack in the rocks.

FARIA'S CELL - SAME

The GUARD finishes his work, snaps the thread, then climbs out.

DANTES silently pushes the stone away and cautiously crawls to the body. Stares at it. Then starts to undo the stitches.

INT. ESCAPE TUNNEL

Dantes drags Faria's corpse down the remains of the escape tunnel and lays it out. He kisses the forehead.

DANTES

Father, forgive me. Your death, my life.

His eye catches something peculiar about the bone mosaic. He moves the oil lamp around, casting shadows. A simple, geometric pattern appears again and again: A hand with an eye at its center: **THE HAND OF GOD.**

Dantes quickly collapses the tunnel around the dead Priest. Then, voices. (Subtitled Spanish.)

GUARD 2 VOICE

...I admit it. I'll miss him.

INT. CELL BLOCK ("THE WELLS")

Two GUARDS head for the cells, carrying a length of ROPE.

CONTINUED:

GUARD 1 VOICE

Old number 24. Never much trouble...

INTERCONNECTING TUNNEL

Dantes hurriedly plugs his side of the tunnel and inches painfully backwards into Faria's cell.

INT. CELL BLOCK ("THE WELLS")

Up top, the GUARDS drop the rope next to Faria's open cell lid.

GUARD 1 VOICE

Never tried to escape. A true gentleman.

DIRECTLY BELOW - SAME

Dantes shoves the stone into place, but it tumbles out. He manages to catch it before it hits the floor. He freezes.

GUARD 1 descends. If he looks down, he'll spot Dantes. Above him, GUARD 2 measures arm lengths of rope... one, two, three...

GUARD 2

There's not enough here, you idiot!!

Ten feet above Dantes, GUARD 1 stops.

GUARD 1

It'll do. Come on.

GUARD 2

No, it won't do. You're not doing the pulling, I am! Get more!

GUARD 1 sighs, then climbs back up the steel rungs.

Dantes replaces the stone. He wriggles into the shroud and, using a bone needle, quickly re-stitches the seam.

INSIDE THE SHROUD

From inside his claustrophobic wrappings, Dantes maneuvers the needle as best as he can.

INT. CELL BLOCK ("THE WELLS")

GUARD 2 is waxing the rope. GUARD 1 arrives with more line.

GUARD 1

I'll tie them together at the bottom, just throw it.

CONTINUED:

He starts down.

FARIAS' CELL

GUARD 1 reaches the bottom as Dantes finishes the last stitches. The needle goes out one last time, and FALLS TO THE FLOOR!!!

GUARD 1 reacts to the tiny sound.

INSIDE THE SHROUD

Dantes holds his breath!!! Total silence...

DANTES' CELL

THUD!! as the rope hits the floor!!! GUARD 1 turns away and knots the two pieces of line together. He steps over the body bag and expertly binds it up. His boot are inches away from the needle on the floor.

GUARD 1

Pull!

GUARD 2 VOICE

Son of a bitch! He's heavy as hell!

Foot by foot, the shroud rises through the stone cylinder.

EXT. STAIRCASE - MIDNIGHT

Blasting RAIN. LIGHTNING stabs at the Gulf of Mexico!

The two GUARDS haul the body up rickety wooden steps leading to the highest parapet.

EXT. SAN JUAN - PARAPET - NIGHT

They lash a CANNONBALL to one end of the corpse and remove a stair rail. Two hundred feet below, waves CRASH against the prison walls,

Working together, grunting, they swing the weighted body.

GUARD 1

(following the rhythm)

May-you-rest-in-peace!!

They hurl it into space... into the sea.

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - SAME

UNDERWATER: Lightning bolts sizzle through the water, illuminating the shroud spiralling down. The cannonball comes to rest on the rocky sea bed.

Then, Dantes tears his way out! More lightning silhouettes SKELETONS in RAGGED SHROUDS... Underwater graveyard!!

Dantes panics, caught amid the fabric and the corpses! Expelling his last air, he finally rakes out, propelling himself upward!

ABOVE WATER: Dantes surges up through the waves! Gulping air, he HOWLS! He's free!! He cries with joy, his tears mixing with the rain and sea water.

DISSOLVE TO:

BEACH - DAY

Brilliant sun. Huge white clouds. The distant shape of San Jose prison is a just a smudge on the horizon. In the shallows, Dantes drags himself onto the sand. He lies there, among the shells and seaweed, letting the surf roll over him.

WALKING (MONTAGE)

■ Inland. He harvests pitayas (cactus fruit). Eats it.

■ Night. Dantes plods through the desert blackness. He gazes wistfully at the warm, yellow lights of a distant town. A few notes of a PIANO drift on the wind. He moves on.

■ Dantes camps at the foot of a ceiba tree. Rain pours down.

■ Dantes climbs a steep set of natural rock steps. He spots smoke near the top of the mountain.

EXT. CAVE - DAWN

Dantes quietly approaches the mouth of a cyclopean cave at the bottom of a CANYON.

The immense cavern in which CALDERÓN died, so many years ago.

From behind a tree trunk, he peers inside. A community of several dozen rough men are cooking over campfires and cleaning their rifles.

TCHINK!!!! From out of nowhere, two shining blades sink into the tree trunk, millimeters from his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

An enormous figure, half-Indian, half-black, stands over him. Then, a thin, smiling man with a vest made of bones appears: MANUEL.

DANTES

Are you soldiers?

MANUEL

War's over, compadre. We're just bandits. I'm Manuel, that's Pinyo. He doesn't talk much. But he loves to listen, so start talking.

Manuel glances down, sees the shackle scars on Dantes' legs. His expression changes.

INT. CAVE - SAME

Manuel and Pinyo take Dantes to the center of the massive cave where a chubby man is having his head shaved.

The CROSS marking CALDERÓN'S GRAVE serves as a towel holder for the bandit. A soapdish, a razor and a GLASS EYE lie on a table nearby.

The man turns around. SAGRARIO: a scarred, bald bandit. Mouthful of gold teeth, a missing eye. He studies Dantes with bemused curiosity.

DANTES

Were you sent by the Federales?
(Dantes shakes his head)
You want to join us?
(a negative again)
What's your name?

DANTES

My name is all I have. I don't give it away.

Sagrario eyes Pinyo and Manuel, not sure what to make of this.

DANTES (cont'd)

You may call me Sinbad the Sailor.

SAGRARIO

And what is your destination, my dear Sinbad?

Dantes hands over the three diamonds that Faria gave him. Sagrario pops the GLASS EYE in. Examines them.

CONTINUED:

DANTES

I'm heading for the Montes de Cristo. I need water, food, clothing and a horse.

SAGRARIO

(throws the stones away)

What about a hand job while you're at it?

Pulls out his gun. Everybody laughs. Manuel whispers something in Sagrario's ear. He lowers the gun.

SAGRARIO

You broke out? Is that true?

DANTES

San Juan Prison.

SAGRARIO

Hey, everyone! This son-of-a-bitch broke out of San Juan prison!!!!

Cheering, whooping, even shooting in the air, the men gather around Dantes. Tequila bottles appear.

But suddenly, Dantes sees a man. Wild hair, pale, gaunt face, half animal...

It's a REFLECTION OF HIMSELF in Sagrario's dirty, broken shaving mirror. Transfixed, Dantes moves close to it.

DANTES

What year is this...?

SAGRARIO

1876...

Dantes is devastated. His voice trickles out, barely audible.

DANTES

Fourteen years.

Sagrario offers a toast, and in response, dozens of hands lift shot glasses. Like a congregation, they all drink.

CUT TO:

DESERT - MOUNTAINOUS AREA - DAY

A lonely rider - Dantes - moves through the desert. In the distance, a chain of jagged mountains.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

On foot, Dantes leads his horse along a narrow trail at the edge of a chasm.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROUTE - DAY

The fog swirls as he patiently scales the rocky cliffs. His bare hands search for crevices in the wet granite. His foot slips, but he saves himself by grabbing a protruding root. Slowly, methodically, he keeps moving up.

EXT. MONASTERY - SAME

Nothing but stone ruins. Dantes finds a staircase and descends into darkness.

INT. MONASTERY CELLARS.

Using a small oil lamp, Dantes searches the Stygian intestines of the building.

A scene of desolation. Wine barrels lie broken on the ground. Guano mounds rise up in the lamplight. Waist-thick roots penetrate from above. Dantes is weary, frustrated.

DANTES

...the hand of God..?

His light plays over bat-infested ceilings, sending leathery wings brushing past his face.

A rope and bucket hang from a pulley overhead. Why? There's no well here... He lowers the bucket. THUNK! It hits the floor. The stones look different here. He circles the spot, shifting the oil lamp from side to side. The moving shadow reveals a design.

DANTES (cont'd)

(awe)

The hand of God...!

A large version of Faria's bone mosaic!

MONASTERY CELLARS - LATER

Dantes lifts the central stone from the motif on the floor, leaving a man-sized hole. He tries to peer down, but his oil lamp is of little use. He sets it to one side.

INT. DARKNESS - SAME

As seen from below, Dantes' face floats in a universe of black.

MONASTERY CELLARS - SAME

The lamp slowly slides, then falls into the hole. It briefly illuminates some indistinct shapes below and goes out.

DANTES

(remembering)

...abandon yourself and leap... abandon yourself...

Yes. He closes his eyes and lets go...

UNDERGROUND CAVE - A GROTTO

SPLASH!!! Dantes plummets into an eerie, ice-cold lake. Above, a shaft of light enters through the broken ceiling.

Dantes drags himself onto an embankment. Suddenly, he gropes with his hands, realizing he's on a beach of loose gems!

He finds the oil lamp, strikes a match. As the flame grows everything is bathed in an other-worldly gold light. Shivering, he gawks at the walls. They sparkle with gold tankards, relics, icons and carvings. Everywhere, riches beyond comprehension.

Suddenly dizzy, Dantes thrusts his arms into a heap of gold coins. Lets the money shower down. Praying. Weeping.

DANTES

(gasping)

The world... is... mine!!!

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. RANCHO MORALES - DAY

Swirling dust CLEARS, revealing fire-ravaged ruins: adobe walls, scattered roof tiles, charred timbers. A broken sign still announces RANCHO MORALES. The wind rocks it: squeak-squeak...

Small dust devils whip through the blackened remains of the barn, over the weed-choked courtyard. A few chickens and geese scratch for bugs.

Near the entry, an old, WHITE-HAIRED MAN is seated in a bathtub, and two INDIANS pour water over him.

The old man is MORALES. Haggard, beaten by time. As he wipes the water from his eyes, he squints, then steps buck naked from the tub. He grabs a rusty shotgun and marches through the dust...

MORALES

Who goes there??

CONTINUED:

A stranger CLOAKED IN BLACK emerges from a dust twister. A gold cross glints on the his chest.

MORALES

(approaching)

Go away, Priest! God left this house a long time ago.

The stranger uncovers his bearded visage. It is DANTES, barely recognizable even from the last scene.

DANTES

(dismounting)

You must be Rafael Morales.

One of the Indians drapes a serape over Morales' shoulders. The old man nods.

DANTES (cont'd)

You knew Edmundo Dantes?

Morales nods again, intrigued.

DANTES (cont'd)

As he lay dying, he asked me to come here and inquire about his father, Lee.

He hands Morales a bagful of gold. The old man is shocked.

MORALES

He - he's here, with me.

EXT. DINING ROOM - DUSK

Morales leads Dantes through the ruins of the once-luxurious dining room. The ceiling is gone, the walls covered with cow horns and bones.

MORALES

My right vest pocket, full of silver coins. My left pocket: only gold.

He stuffs his ragged vest pocket with the newly acquired gold.

MORALES (cont'd)

My herd, the best in Northern Mexico.

(indicates the bones)

I ate it all. Land dried up. Nothing grows here. It's poison.

DANTES

The woman, Mercedes? Did she believe that Dantes died?

CONTINUED:

MORALES

None of us did, oh no, not at first. Then the war came, pulled this place to pieces. What was left of it, anyway. My ranch manager, a man named Danglars, he was stealing from me.

THE CHURCH - SAME

Not much left of the Morales church. Bare arches point upwards to half a ceiling. Underfoot, some overturned pews and crumbling adobe walls.

MORALES (cont'd)

There he is. Lee's like me, he won't leave.

He points into the underbrush. Through the blowing sand, Dantes sees a man sitting on a pew. His father! He rushes to him.

The wind dies for a moment. The figure was just an illusion in the tall grass. It's a TOMBSTONE.

Dantes kneels next to the gravestone. He brushes off the dust: LEE DANTE. Date of death: 1870.

DANTES

How... did he die?!

Morales' words come reluctantly.

MORALES

Hunger.

(a whisper)

He... died of hunger.

Dantes turns in disbelief.

MORALES

He wouldn't eat. Pushed it away. Threw it out. Mercedes she tried, so did I -

DANTES

(overlaps)

Even a dog gets fed!

Dantes looks at the carved CRUCIFIX over the altar.

Once a beautiful, suffering Christ. Over time, vines have entered the wood. Now, they protrude from the broken hands, the face, the crown of thorns.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MORALES

He fought us all. Days. Weeks. Every time we heard news of Edmundo's death.

Dantes turns away, his face drawn with pain.

MORALES

Every which way: plague, drowning, suicide.

Dantes smashes the stone marker with his right hand. Once, twice... until it's wet with his blood. Then his voice comes hissing through clenched teeth.

DANTES

Leave me be...

Morales obeys. Dantes presses his face against the stone, his hands tightening their already white-knuckled grip.

DANTES

Father. Here is your son. He did die. In prison, of sorrow... and a broken heart.

Out of the cracked soil at the base of the tomb, a group of black SCORPIONS emerges. Dantes takes one on his dead right hand.

DANTES (cont'd)

But I have taken his place... And I have no tears.

The scorpion STINGS Dantes! Barely flinching, he calmly transfers the creature onto his other hand and crushes it.

DANTES (cont'd)

And I have no heart.

The lonely figure remains immobile before the gangrenous Christ until they're both overwhelmed by a curtain of blowing sand.

As the sand turns to SNOW...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHIHUAHUA FOREST - DAY

In a steady snowfall, two hundred weary men, most of them CHINESE, lay railroad track over a wild, flat landscape. The end of a long, brutal day.

A date FADES ON... 1877.

... the shape of a DARK MAN riding

CONTINUED:

slowly through icy woods. Beyond the pine trees: the roofs of a TOWN.

INT. OPIUM HOUSE - SAME

Throngs of Chinese men lie in bunks, staring at clouds of blue smoke. In the background, a shadow-puppet play is in progress.

TONG, a wiry young Chinese, talks to the DARK MAN at the end of a hallway. He vehemently denies something, then moves off, glancing cautiously over his shoulder.

BACKROOM - SAME

TONG expertly balances his opium and coin tray on top of a crate, then nervously pushes a secret spring behind a mirror.

The mirror moves aside and Tong slips in. As it closes behind him, the reflection of the DARK MAN appears.

SECRET CORRIDOR.

A music box tune. Tong hurries past shelves full of elaborate mechanical toys, handcrafted in silver and gold.

SECRET WORK ROOM

Tong enters a wonderful workshop where an old Chinese man, ZHANG, is piecing together a mechanical bird.

TONG

(in Mandarin, s.t.)

A Dark Man was asking for you.

ZHANG

(in Mandarin, s.t.)

Was he?

The mechanical bird CHIRPS and flaps its wings. Tong drops some coins in a coffer, using the abacus to add them up.

TONG

(in Mandarin, s.t.)

Called you by name: ZHANG LEE, Imperial weapon and toymaker. He said -

DARK MAN

(interrupting, in Mandarin, s.t.)

- he was not after you for your crimes against the Emperor.

Both Chinese men turn to face a man shrouded in darkness. Tong moves toward a bell.

CONTINUED:

DARK MAN (cont'd)
(in Mandarin)

Don't -

Zhang signals Tong to be still. The DARK MAN deposits a velvet pouch of gold on the work table. His right hand is dried-up, claw-like. Then light hits part of his face: a terrible smile emerging from the dark.

DARK MAN (cont'd)
(in Mandarin)

I designed this. I need you to build it.

He unrolls a paper scroll, full of complex mechanical designs, in the shape of a human arm and hand.

CUT TO:

INT. FIGHTING PIT - DUSK

An explosion of feathers as two fighting cocks clash in mid-air.

A dirt arena is drenched in blood: the roosters wear RAZORS on their claws!

A MADHOUSE. An excited mob is placing bets, yelling for action. Among the gamblers and drunks, several young Monterrey aristocrats (PACO, HUGO and LUIS), out slumming. Tagging along is ANA, a girl of sixteen in sharp, masculine attire.

Disgusted as blood spatters the enclosure, she turns and sees...

A couple kissing wildly amid the excitement. ANA smiles faintly at the shocking overlap of violence and desire.

A BETTING MAN pushes someone violently, demanding payment and satisfaction. The BOUNCERS descend upon him.

At a rear table, the BLACK-DRESSED MAN intensely watches Ana. Intrigued, she tries to make out his features but gets distracted by...

...a horrible SCREECH! HANDLERS seize and revive the roosters. A gaudily-dressed Frenchman, JEAN, cares for his bird with tenderness, blowing air onto its beak, smoothing its feathers.

The betting turns into a frenzy, with GAMBLERS waving their money. Ana looks at her friend PACO who matches all bets, throwing handfuls of dollars on the white rooster!

When the DARK MAN gets up and leaves his table, Ana glimpses only a swirl of his black cape.

CONTINUED:

The two roosters circle, leap! Slashing, panting, they leap again. Suddenly, the white rooster falls back, gasping, and dies. Grinning amid CHEERS and CURSES, Jean triumphantly raises his black rooster above his head.

BLAM!! - BLACK FEATHERS EXPLODE!

Jean lowers his bloodied hands. Half a rooster.

PULL AROUND: PACO. A smoking GUN in his hand. He throws down more dollars.

PACO

You win! Here! For your damn chicken!!

A rumble from the audience. Ana pulls Paco to the back door. Their young friends applaud mockingly as they pass.

BACK ALLEY

Dying sunlight bathes rows of stacked ROOSTER CAGES. Ana leans the drunken Paco against a wall as he urinates.

PACO

(incoherent)

Ooooh... I taught those fuckers- BAM!
Chicken feathers, wooah!-

ANA

Paco, shut up.

She pushes the lid off a water barrel. Paco kisses her, hard.

PACO

You liked it, uh? You like me more now -
it gets you going, uh?

She dunks his head into the cold water. He comes up, gasping.

PACO (cont'd)

Jeezus fucking Christ, it's ice c-

Footsteps! Ana shoves Paco into an alcove, covering his mouth. She peeks out: JEAN appears at the end of the cage corridor, holding a large KNIFE. His friends MEZIÈRES and GIRAUD move silently alongside him.

ANA

I'll get the others...

No answer. Paco has passed out. Ana carefully lowers him to the ground. Pulls out his GUN, quietly loads it. She squeezes between the pens. A rooster eyes her from its cage; Jean is visible behind it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BAM! another Frenchman, JACQUES, knocks her gun into the dirt! LOUIS, still another thug, stands behind her. JEAN leaps at Ana, slashing her forearm.

JEAN
(in French, subtitled)
Cut him up.

Another BOWIE KNIFE slices her shoulder. Ana reels but comes back with a kick that sends LOUIS to the ground clutching his balls.

The other Frenchmen laugh. Mezières slashes open her shirt.

MEZIÈRES
(in French, subtitled)
He's a girl. The bastard is a girl!

Blood-soaked, Ana swings, hitting Mezières in the face!

ANA
Insult me in English, you French fuck!

They corner Ana. But now, deeper in the alley, a TICKING SOUND:

VOICE
You shouldn't be doing this.

An animated shadow steps into view. A supremely elegant man, tall, composed, expensively dressed in black leather and silver. His pale face is framed by long, dark hair and manicured beard. Eyes covered by compact, blinkered sunglasses. This is THE COUNT OF MONTECRISTO.

JEAN
(to Louis, in French, subtitled)
Tell him to go, or we'll cut a piece out of him, too!

With the dexterity of a magician, the stranger produces a cigar in his gloved right hand.

MONTECRISTO
(in perfect French, s.t.)
You can tell me yourself...

The French men realize that under the leather glove...

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)
(in French, s.t.)
This young lady is a friend of mine.

...the hand is ticking!!

CONTINUED: (2)

A match materializes in the man's hand. With precise, mechanical moves, he lights the cigar.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)
(in French, subtitled)
Treat her accordingly.

His cultivated voice has a refined, untraceable foreign accent.

JEAN
(in French, subtitled)
A friend? Then you're both in trouble.

MONTECRISTO
(in French, subtitled)
Trouble?

JEAN
(in English now)
There's five of us, asshole.

All five of them sheathe their knives and pull out guns.

MONTECRISTO
Yes. Five.

(beat)
But no one wants to be the first to die.
Two will wait and see. The other three I
can handle -

He shrugs back his coat. Across his chest, a BANDOLERO holster, holding four GOLD REMINGTON SINGLE-ACTION REVOLVERS. Inlaid on each of their handles, an exquisite ivory SCORPION.

Jean lifts his gun. Eye-blink fast, Montecristo's gloved hand locks onto the first gun, pulls, aims and FIRES TWO SHOTS!

Jean's gun is hit, pin-wheeling up and out of his hand, shattering in mid-air!

Giraud's hit. Three shots into his right shoulder deaden his arm. More shots into each knee chop him down.

In another eye-blink, the first gun is holstered. The mechanical hand pulls, aims and cocks a second six-gun. Unstoppable.

A bullet rips through Mezière's wrist. He falls down, screaming.

Abruptly, the guns - and the roosters - fall silent. Two other Frenchmen run off, unable to comprehend what has happened. Only Jean and the wounded Mezières remain.

CONTINUED: (3)

JEAN

I - I'm sorry.

MONTECRISTO

Not to me. Apologize to her. Now.

Ana, astonished, finds the Frenchman bowing courteously. Then, the weakened Mezières does likewise, as blood pours from his arm.

JEAN

(to Ana)

Please accept our humblest apologies.

ANA

Am I free?

MONTECRISTO

Gentlemen?

Once again, Jean bows low. He humbly removes his hat, as does Mezières. They back away. Montecristo kneels next to Ana.

ANA

Sir... how can I thank you?

He examines her soaking shirt.

MONTECRISTO

They've hurt you, child...

Ana leans her head on Montecristo's chest.

ANA

My name is Ana...

She passes out.

MONTECRISTO

Ana Mondego.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. HOTEL PENTHOUSE - DUSK

Ana slowly awakens. She finds herself tucked into a massive canopy bed. Beauty waking up in the palace of the Beast. From outside, she can hear the cheering of a crowd, the roll of SNARE DRUMS. She gets out of bed.

Finery overwhelms the modest hotel room. Carpets, chests, silks, oil paintings, some still in their crates. A dozen different

CONTINUED:

A massive oak table is crowded with chemicals and dozens of tiny vials: the precious CRIMSON LIQUID Faria administered to Dantes. Ana touches one of the vials; the liquid bubbles toward her finger.

On a desk, a spectacular feast. Ana timidly tries some fruit. It's exquisite. She eats more, this time with gusto.

MONTECRISTO V.O.

Do you like it?

Startled, Ana finds Montecristo sitting in the darkness. How long has he been there? When he gets up, she sees a flash of gold on his right arm. Then he moves into darkness again.

ANA

Never in my life have I eaten like this. No one would believe it. These peaches -

MONTECRISTO

- from Cuba. But prepared according to an old Indian recipe.

ANA

Forgive me, sir, I -

MONTECRISTO

Montecristo. Count of Montecristo. At your service.

He extends his right hand. Ana is taken aback. An exquisite glove/harness is fitted to his thumb and forefingers. Gold and ivory knuckles, clockwork machinery. He flexes; it CLICKS.

MONTECRISTO

(watching her)

La main du seigneur. The hand of God.
(before Ana can answer)
It saved your life.

ANA

No, it didn't. You -

MONTECRISTO

(cuts her short)

It did as much as I.

He lowers his hand to the table. Timidly Ana goes to touch it. CLACKETY-CLACK!! The hand twitches spasmodically, a mechanical spider. Ana jumps, then laughs.

CONTINUED: (2)

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

You use your hand for eating, caressing, touching... Mine does very little, apart from... killing. But at that, it's unsurpassed.

Montecristo takes her hand, guides it over the shiny metal.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

Cold, isn't it? Like touching death.

A servant approaches, pours wine. He looks familiar... PINYO.

ANA

I must ask you... Who tended my wounds, put me in bed... ?

(blushing)

Who - who undressed me?

MONTECRISTO

It was me -

(points at Pinyo)

- and Pinyo.

This thought is not unpleasant to Ana, who looks at Montecristo while talking to Pinyo.

ANA

Then I must thank you, Pinyo...

Pinyo nods.

MONTECRISTO

He cannot answer you.

(moves closer)

His Father was African, a prince, his mother, pure Blackfoot Indian. Therefore, white men had no reason to like Pinyo. One night - he was fifteen...

He makes a slicing gesture over his tongue.

ANA

Oh, God.

MONTECRISTO

Don't feel sorry for him. Feel sorry for them. He tracked them down. Every one of them.

The SNARE DRUMS again. A crowd CHEERS. Montecristo gets up.

CONTINUED: (3)

MONTECRISTO

Come. We'll have tea on the balcony.
(smiles at Ana)
You don't want to miss this.

EXT. HELL TOWN - DAY

In the plaza below, throngs of people surge around a newly-built GALLOWS. THREE BANDITS are marched up the steps and arranged under three nooses. The condemned men's heads are covered with black sacks.

THE BALCONY

Ana joins the Count at the railing. Almost directly below, the HANGMAN drops a noose over each man's neck.

ANA

I - I don't know if I can watch...

The DRUMS suddenly stop. A CRY goes up from the crowd. The three men drop.

With a wet, loud CRACK! their heads snap. Under the dark cloth, legs jerk spasmodically. The crowd APPLAUDS.

MONTECRISTO

(serves tea to Ana)
Nonsense. In life, our greatest preoccupation is death. The more men you see die, the easier it becomes to accept it. Milk?

ANA

Blood for blood, as my father says.

MONTECRISTO

Does he? In my opinion, dying is not such a terrible punishment, as it lasts only a short time.

PINYO joins them on the balcony, with MANUEL by his side. Manuel whispers tensely into Montecristo's ear. The Count nods and hands him a small velvet pouch. Manuel EXITS.

ANA

Is this why you came to Mexico? To watch men die?

Down below, the HANGMAN readies the nooses for THREE MORE PRISONERS. Manuel pushes through the crowd.

CONTINUED:

MONTECRISTO

No... I am here for business.

The HANGMAN talks to Manuel, examining the pouch: full of gold.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

(drinks his tea)

What can you tell me about Monterrey?

ANA

Monterrey - ?

MONTECRISTO

That's where I plan to establish myself.

ANA

(enthusiastic)

I- I live there. My father's a famous General. His name is Fernando Mondego

MONTECRISTO

Not the General Mondego.

ANA

Yes! I can show you everything. You can meet everyone.

Montecristo looks at her, smiles cannily.

MONTECRISTO

And I'll be delighted.

The crowd goes wild, chanting... "A PARDON! A PARDON!" The HANGMAN is untying one of the prisoners.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

Sometimes we find mercy. At the last second, God's hand spares the condemned.

Below, the pardoned prisoner's head is uncovered. His bald head gleaming, glass eye sparkling... SAGRARIO! Astounded, he looks wildly around, then directly at Montecristo. And he smiles.

SAGRARIO

Sinbad.

Now, the OTHER PRISONERS struggle violently.

OTHER PRISONERS

No!! Why is he free?! We die together!

Ana turns away, but Montecristo watches.

CONTINUED: (2)

MONTECRISTO

It's curious. Those prisoners were at peace, knowing they all had to die... But spare one, the others protest.

(beat)

The strong will kill you. The weak will betray you.

The prisoner's SCREAMS are cut short by the rope. Montecristo stands erect and triumphant, like an Avenging Angel.

CUT TO:

EXT. MONTERREY STREETS - NIGHT

Burning pyres and colored Christmas lanterns illuminate the muddy tangle of streets.

A single word FADES ON: MONTERREY

Above the infernal street, a palatial home occupies an entire block near the top of the Cerro del Obispado. The brightly-lit entry is decked with poinsettia and mistletoe.

Watched by gawking peasants, liveried SERVANTS unroll a red carpet.

INT. DINING HALL, MONDEGO MANSION - SAME

At the dining table, A STERN HOUSEKEEPER checks the distance between plates with a glass ruler. MAIDS turn up the gas lamps and position a massive flower arrangement.

Ana, dressed elegantly, but still in masculine garments, eyes all the preparations with delight.

FERNANDO V.O.

It's not every day I open my house to entertain a perfect stranger...

INT. AN UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SAME

Assisted by more scurrying servants, the owner of the house stands before a full-length mirror.

FERNANDO

You know, these days a title may be bought and sold.

With his moustache and flushed, drinker's face, it takes a moment to recognize... FERNANDO MONDEGO. Ana sprawls on a divan behind him.

CONTINUED:

The servants button up the sides of his pant legs, then tuck in his shirt, underwear... and genitals.

FERNANDO (cont'd)

You had no business in that hellhole in the first place! You try and act like a boy, but -

(to the valet)

I dress to the right, you idiot!

The valet shifts Fernando's genitals, this time "to the right".

ANA

He saved my life.

A low, melodious VOICE from the adjoining room.

VOICE

Your father's right. You're too young to go off like that. Look what happened.

Ana gets up and crosses into...

...her mother's DRESSING ROOM. An exquisite woman is seated at her mirror, bathed in the light of a dozen candles.

It is Mercedes. Ravishing in maroon silk.

Ana toys with a pearl necklace. Looks at herself in the mirror.

MERCEDES

Interested in pearls now, are you?

ANA

(evasive)

Not really.

MERCEDES

(a whisper, a smile)

What is going on, then?

(Ana blushes)

This Montecristo, what sort of man is he?

ANA

I don't know -

(a notch below dreamy)

Some kind of prince, travelling incognito. Sicilian, Greek.

FERNANDO

I'll tell you what he is.

CONTINUED: (2)

Fernando wanders in, sipping a whisky. Two servants remove the silk night robe from his shoulders. Two more ease him into a tailored jacket, heavy with medals. When Mondego slips it on, he becomes a genuinely impressive MAJOR GENERAL.

FERNANDO

One look at him. That's all I'll need.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MORALES HACIENDA - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Shirtless, illuminated by an oil lamp, Montecristo lays out the complex wrist and arm fittings of his mechanical hand. The animal skulls watch from the wall as the golden, molded casings slip snugly over his withered fingers.

INT. RANCHO MORALES' HACIENDA - NIGHT

Sagrario hurries from room to room, lighting his way with a candelabra. The enormous, decaying rooms are filled with crates of furniture, paintings, rugs, sculpture.

Manuel and other bandit friends are busy uncrating, cleaning, arranging.

MANUEL

(polishing a bowl)

What are we doing here? It's a mess!

Sagrario approaches the dining room door, motioning for silence.

INT. THE MORALES HACIENDA - MONTECRISTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Montecristo harnesses the hand to his forearm. He activates a row of tiny levers. Five needles unfold and dig their sparkling tips into the dead skin, connecting with muscle and tendons.

Montecristo locks the harness in place, then turns to discover Sagrario, watching in disbelief.

SAGRARIO

The carriage... it's ready...

Montecristo closes his eyes, a film of perspiration covering his forehead.

MONTECRISTO

I'll see you outside.

Sagrario backs away.

EXT. RANCHO MORALES' HACIENDA - SAME

Out front, Manuel catches up with a shocked Sagrario.

MANUEL

Look! If we were different men...

He displays the golden bowl he's just cleaned - delicately engraved, covered in precious stones.

MANUEL (cont'd)

This is just a soup bowl!! We could live off it for a decade, never go hungry.

Sagrario helps Pinyo with a magnificent set of carriage horses.

SAGRARIO

If we were different men, Manuelito, he would kill us.

EXT. MONDEGO MANSION - NIGHT

BLACK SMOKE from street fires drifts through a splendid courtyard as Monterrey's wealthiest citizens descend from lacquered carriages. Ana stands at the top of the steps, disinterestedly greeting everyone.

Then, an expectant HUSH among the Monterrey aristocrats, who watch as the door of a spectacular carriage opens.

Montecristo steps down and greets Ana. He's in perfect evening attire, his right hand covered by a supple leather glove.

MONTECRISTO

Ana... It's good to see you at home, safe and sound.

ANA

Ready to take on all of Monterrey?

Ana takes Montecristo inside.

INT. SALON - NIGHT

Ana escorts Montecristo past the well-dressed Europeans and Americans, who mingle with *nouveau riche* Mexicans. At the sight of the mysterious stranger, women's heads turn and men bow.

ANA

(muttering)

There's Mr. Wind-Bag. Lord Greed-Snake,
Over there: Lord Stock-Swindler...

CONTINUED:

A MAN observes them as they move through the room. In his middle years, but remarkably unchanged: DANGLARS. He eyes Montecristo with intense curiosity.

As Ana moves off, Montecristo catches his own reflection in a mirror. He's suddenly lost, full of doubt. Before he can flee...

MERCEDES (OFF)

My daughter insists you're something more than human, sir.

In the mirror, Montecristo sees the approaching hem of a woman's maroon dress. He lifts his eyes. Standing behind him, smiling warmly into the mirror: MERCEDES.

He steels himself and turns.

MONTECRISTO

I am only a man, señora. Like any other.

MERCEDES

But forever special to us. We can never thank you enough.

Her dark eyes are shining. Montecristo bows, not trusting himself to reply. Closing his eyes, he kisses her hand.

Ana threads her way through the guests, father in tow.

ANA

Father, this is the Count of Monte Cristo.

Again, Montecristo bows low. Mondego seizes him by the hand, then recoils at its mechanical touch.

MONDEGO

I - You have a father's gratitude for Ana. For her rescue. May I introduce you to my other guests?

He can't take his eyes off Montecristo's harnessed hand.

MONTECRISTO

Sir, Ana was doing just that. She seems to know everybody's name by heart.

Ana exuberantly takes him by the arm. Mercedes observes this.

EXT. TERRACE - LATER

Ana moves out to the terrace, eating an apple. She smiles and bows pleasantly, listening to the women gossiping.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN 1

Did you see his clothes?

WOMAN 2

Italian. But I hear he's from Spain.
Obviously royal blood.

As Ana keeps moving, her friends PACO, HUGO and LUIS remain at the fringes, following her. She avoids them.

WOMAN 3

He looks like- a pirate.

WOMAN 4

A vampire. Doesn't come out 'til sunset.

PACO gathers his courage and approaches Ana.

PACO

Hey, Ana... I looked for you all day.

He takes her by the arm.

ANA

Let me go Paco, I don't want to see you.

PACO

You didn't talk like that last week.

MERCEDES observes from a distance. She sees Ana heading off to the gardens. Paco walks off, crushed.

GARDEN BALCONY

In the garden, Ana slowly climbs a trellis and peeks inside the house.

INT. MONDEGO'S GUN ROOM - SAME

Cognac, cigars and old leather. And Mondego's obsession: EXOTIC GUNS in display cases.

Various MEN lift their glasses: "To The Republic Of Mexico!"

Ana spots Montecristo by the FIREPLACE, standing alone, looking into the flames. Enraptured, she watches him. He puffs cigar smoke into his cognac glass and inhales it back.

EXT. MONDEGO MANSION, THE GARDENS - NIGHT

At the foot of the trellis, Mercedes calls up to her daughter.

CONTINUED:

MERCEDES

Ana!

Startled, Ana turns to face her mother.

MERCEDES

Stop spying on your father's guests!

INT. MONDEGO'S GUN/STUDY ROOMS - SAME

Montecristo turns in time to see Ana, starting to climb down. Embarrassed, she ducks and loses her grip. There's a soft THUD!! as she lands. Behind him, A MAN arrives. His voice is deep, melliflous... familiar...

VOICE

Gentlemen, my apologies for being so late. I've been in court all day.

(to all, explaining)

We're clearing the dockets of a mountain of old cases. Corruption will be eradicated.

(beat)

The courts of Monterrey will have a new judge soon. A good judge.

Montecristo slowly turns to face the MAN at Mondego's side: VILLAFUERTE, visibly older, but still chilling in his sober, almost clerical mien.

MONTECRISTO

Forgive my ignorance, sir, but... what, may I ask, makes a good judge?

VILLAFUERTE

(eyeing the stranger)

A dedication to the law, of course.

MONTECRISTO

The law, at any cost. Most commendable. But what about justice?

VILLAFUERTE

They're one and the same.

The other men murmur in approval. Villafuerte turns to them, ready to resume conversation when -

MONTECRISTO

That is only your opinion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VILLAFUERTE
(shocked)

Pardon?

MONTECRISTO
I said: That is only your opinion.

FERNANDO
(uncomfortable)
May I introduce you to our honored guest,
the Count of Montecristo...

VILLAFUERTE
Gerardo Villafuerte, Attorney General for
the state of Nuevo Leon.

Montecristo bows lightly. The guests move closer attracted by the
repartée.

VILLAFUERTE
Perhaps, sir, you should... educate us as
to the difference between law and
justice.

Some faint chuckles from the men around them.

MONTECRISTO
With pleasure.
(beat)
When you speak of the law, you mean the
law of men. Where everything is relative.
Man-made laws are often merely...
documented lies. Lies to serve the most
skillful, but not the innocent. Justice -
like the truth - is natural and
transcendent. The law can destroy the
innocent, justice cannot.

(beat)
With justice, only the guilty have
something to fear.

Villafuerte isn't used to being cornered. He tries again.

VILLAFUERTE
You're a philosopher, sir. Explain
yourself. What is the basis of this
"natural justice?"

MONTECRISTO
Why, revenge, señor. Revenge.

... goes back to the other room. Ana walks in.

CONTINUED: (2)

ANA

(playing host)

Father, gentlemen: the dance has begun.

BALLROOM

A monumental Christmas tree dominates the darkened ballroom. In a HOLIDAY DANCE, three concentric circles of GUESTS move rhythmically clockwise and counterclockwise, while MUSICIANS play. Each GUEST holds a LIT CANDLE.

Ana grabs two candles - for Montecristo and one for herself. They join the outermost circle.

Dozens of guests observe and clap along with the tune. Suddenly the MUSIC stops. JOYOUS CHAOS. Everybody covers his own candle while trying to blow out as many as they can! The last person holding a lit candle will win.

Danglars, blowing out candles all around. Dances next to Montecristo, extends a business card..

DANGLARS

Baron Etienne Danglars. President of
Danglars Financial-

MONTECRISTO

Member of the City Council, Board of the
Stock Exchange.

DANGLARS

(flattered)

I - You've studied me - ?

Montecristo extinguishes Danglars' candle.

MONTECRISTO

I like to look ahead. We will do
business. A very great honor, Baron.

DANGLARS

(nodding haughtily)

The honor is all mine.

MUSIC re-starts. Now: two circles of candles.

Ana dances with Montecristo. MUSIC stops again. More candles go out. Mondego, quite drunk, keeps dancing anyway. He finds himself briefly face-to-face with Montecristo.

Ana tries to dance her way back to the Count's side, but she is pulled away. Suddenly, the music STOPS. Ana playfully blows out her father's candle. Mondego forces a laugh and pulls out.

IN A CORNER

Villafuerte watches Montecristo with care. As Fernando, flushed and flustered, comes alongside, he takes his arm.

VILLAFUERTE

(whispers)

General Mondego: What do you know of this man? Who speaks for him...?

THE DANCE .

Now, only one candle-lit circle. Ten dancers left. And Montecristo discovers Mercedes before him, her candle steady.

MUSIC re-starts. Montecristo circles Mercedes. Past her. It's like a dream from his prison days. MUSIC stops. Haphazardly, the other candles go out. Except for two.

CLOSE ON MONTECRISTO AND MERCEDES

MERCEDES

(softly)

Guard the flame, sir. Guard it carefully.

Final MUSIC starts. Slower, more meaningful. Mercedes moves close - eyeing him - passing him. For Montecristo, agony.

Montecristo and Mercedes dance - close and back, alone in a circle of darkness. He's tangled in feelings of FAITH - LOVE - and ANGER.

Fernando and Ana watch from the outer circle of darkness: both equally jealous.

ANA

Mother looks... radiant.

MUSIC stops. Montecristo steps toward Mercedes. Anticipation ripples through the murmuring crowd: whose candle will go out? But Mercedes makes a deep curtsy. Holds out her candle.

MERCEDES

For my daughter.

MONTECRISTO

For you.

With his gloved fingers, Montecristo puts out his own candle. The guests applaud Montecristo's gesture. He bows - fades back into the dark.

ABANDONED CHURCH

Montecristo bursts into the chapel, kicking and smashing the pews, sweeping the altars of dusty candles and ornaments.

EXT. MORALES COURTYARD - SAME

Sagrario and the others come running. Montecristo's ruckus is audible even outside.

INT. ABANDONED CHURCH - SAME

Exhausted, Montecristo kneels, looks up at the deformed crucifixion.

MONTECRISTO

(under his breath)

Praised be thou in thy infinite mercy,
which I now understand!! Good men suffer
and die. Evil prospers and is rewarded!

(stands up)

So preserve thou the righteous!! For I
will gather the wicked unto me!!

His mechanical hand SNAPS CLOSED in the air, a steel trap.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN MONTERREY - DAY

Lots of activity in the commercial heart of town. Heads turn as Montecristo's carriage rumbles noisily over the cobblestones. With Pinyo driving, the matched grays pull to a stop in front of a bank building. An ornate sign reads: DANGLARS FINANCIAL.

Montecristo steps out of the carriage and notices a group of WORKERS climbing a TELEGRAPH POLE. He enters the bank as the last CUSTOMERS exit; two ARMED GUARDS shut the doors behind him.

INT. DANGLARS FINANCIAL - SAME

Montecristo observes the activity in the office as dozens of clerks sweep past. Outside the window, the telegraph workers are finishing their repairs.

The telegraph wire leads from the street to a private office on the second floor. From within, the CLATTER of a telegraph key. A clerk, SAM, apologetically approaches Montecristo .

SAM

Good afternoon, sir. You are the Count of Monte Cristo?

(at his nod)

(MORF)

CONTINUED:

SAM (cont'd)

Samuel Leary, sir, Baron Danglars' private secretary. I'm very sorry for the delay, but it's Christmas season, and the Baron wishes to deal with you personally.

MONTECRISTO

To deal with him personally. I'll wait.

SAM

Very good, sir, thank you, sir.

SAM takes the stairs to the PRIVATE office above.

INT. DANGLARS' OFFICE

A regal office of golden oak and maroon leather. As SAM enters, Danglars is eagerly waiting by the door.

DANGLARS

What did he say??

SAM

Oh, he will wait, sir.

DANGLARS

Good, good. Were you, um, firm?

SAM

Very much so.

DANGLARS

Oh, good, good.

(looks at his watch)

In five, no- ten minutes, show him in.

SAM

All the typists are working --

DANGLARS

Good, you did good! A busy bank. Get that new adding machine! Have someone... add something.

SAM

Yes, sir...

He EXITS. Danglars enters a CUBICLE at the back of his office. There, a TELEGRAPH OPERATOR is receiving some news.

DANGLARS

Is the line back up?

INT. DANGLARS' FINANCIAL - SAME

Behind a frosted glass, Montecristo can see the silhouette of Danglars, bent over a high table, writing something down as the telegraph keeps CLICKING.

INT. DANGLARS' OFFICE

Danglars slowly rises from his chair as Sam opens the door for Montecristo. As they exchange bows...

DANGLARS

Sorry to keep you waiting. We're terribly busy this time of year.

MONTECRISTO

(takes a seat)

I can see that. Very impressive.

SAM hands Danglars a letter from a leather portfolio.

DANGLARS

Yes, yes... Count, I... I have here your bank's letter of credit. Thompson and French, of London, a fine old firm. But not very clear in their communications. Perhaps you could explain this?

He shows Montecristo the letter. Taps on it like an old teacher.

MONTECRISTO

(scans it)

"Unlimited credit." What is unclear about that?

DANGLARS

Sir, I am a banker. The term unlimited... it's vague. Doubtful, at best, and where there's doubt, there's danger. I hope you understand.

MONTECRISTO

I don't think I do.

Danglars is taken aback by Montecristo's cold response.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

You're suggesting that your firm has financial limits. Is that what you're trying to say?

Danglars feels the insult. Sam discreetly leaves.

CONTINUED:

DANGLARS

The solvency of Danglars Financial has never been in question. I am in a position to meet the largest demands. If you were to require a million -

MONTECRISTO

A million?

The Count opens his satchel, turns it over on Danglars' desk. A MOUNTAIN of bound bills and gold coins.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

Two million. Fifteen more coming from Rome. Each month. Over the next year.

Suddenly pale, Danglars can barely refrain from caressing the wealth on his table.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

I hope that helps you define "unlimited". Otherwise, I can simply take my business to a bank with a better dictionary.

DANGLARS

Oh, no, no. No. Sir - Count - or is it Your Excellency? I regret any mistake - I assure you, that's quite unnecessary. Let me offer you a drink... yes, some tequila...

Trembling, he reaches for a carafe. Sloppily pours a glass - but Montecristo is on his feet, closing his empty satchel.

MONTECRISTO

Thank you, no. As you say, you are busy. A Happy Christmas to you, Baron.

Montecristo leaves. Staring at the money, Danglars gulps down his drink. He begins to smile... then to LAUGH! He covers his mouth, holds back tears of joy. The VOICES of a CHOIR soar up.

CUT TO:

INT. CATHEDRAL - SAME

Monterrey's best families are gathered in the baroque church, attending midnight mass.

Danglars hurries up the aisle. He's intercepted by a sacristan. Muttering in annoyance, Danglars deposits a handful of coins in the collection basket and moves on.

PEWS

Danglars lurches into a pew next to the Mondego family. Leans over to Fernando.

DANGLARS

(whispering)

You may thank the Lord, my friend. Fate walked in today and guaranteed our little operation.

ANOTHER PEW - MONTECRISTO AND SAGRARIO

Off to one side, Sagrario sweats uneasily, the proverbial bandit in church. Seated alongside him, Montecristo watches Danglars and Mondego.

MONTECRISTO

Anything they do, at any time, important or not, I want to know about it.

Now at the COMMUNION RAIL: Villafuerte. Montecristo watches with interest as the prosecutor tenderly steadies an ELDERLY GENTLEMAN receiving the Host.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

And that one, Villafuerte. State Security. Watch his house, his every move. I want to know how he rose to power. Start today.

SAGRARIO

Christmas? The Government Archives will be closed.

MONTECRISTO

(half-smile)

Knock at the front door. Talk loud. Bribe big. Use gold. Ask terrible questions.

SAGRARIO

(more puzzled)

He will find out immediately.

MONTECRISTO

I know.

Montecristo recognizes the ELDERLY GENTLEMAN by Villafuerte's side. Long gray hair, a noble bearing: old man NORIEGA.

MAIN NAVE

Noriega leans on Villafuerte's arm as they retake their seats. Danglars and the Mondego family rise and proceed the communion rail. As the PRIEST begins his liturgy...

DANGLARS (cont'd)

(whispering to Mondego)

This count... Montecristo. He deposited two million today! Can you believe it?

FERNANDO

(whispering)

I don't trust him! We know nothing -

Mercedes looks crossly at her husband. Now is not the time for business! The priest dispenses wafers and wine.

DANGLARS

It's cash, you fool. I trust cash.

Fernando takes communion. Danglars breathes deep, calming himself down.

DANGLARS (cont'd)

Next week the railroad will be buying the right of way through a town between here and Saltillo. You and I will acquire that land - all of it!!

FERNANDO

How?

PRIEST

The body of Christ...

Danglars takes it; the priest moves on.

DANGLARS

(mouthful of wafer)

Through my bank. Using Montecristo's money as collateral. We risk nothing!!

FERNANDO

(whispering)

And your information?

Danglars grins like a schoolboy, pantomiming a telegraph key.

DANGLARS

(gleeful)

I'll have the name of the town by Friday!

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

DANGLARS (cont'd)

Five o'clock: Twenty minutes before
anyone else. Are you in?

FERNANDO crosses himself. Looks surreptitiously at Danglars, and
nods his head: Yes.

CUT TO:

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - SHOOTING RANGE - DAY

Half a dozen stern-faced target SHOOTERS blast away at paper
targets. All the marksmen hit their marks. Steel casings TINKLE
to the ground as reloading begins. A MAJOR DOMO raises a red flag
over the winner's target: Fernando.

In an observation area, well-bred GUESTS play cards, sip tea and
eat light snacks. Everyone is dressed in white, except for
Montecristo, who, in his usual black, sits at a table with
Mercedes.

MERCEDES

You haven't touched your lunch.

MONTECRISTO

I eat very little, señora.

He shuffles a deck of cards.

MERCEDES (cont'd)

In your many travels, sir, have you
suffered a great deal?

MONTECRISTO

Why would you say that?

MERCEDES

You have an air of sadness about you.

Montecristo arranges the cards by figure and type.

MONTECRISTO

I have suffered, señora. But I make no
complaint.

MERCEDES

Have you never married?

He lays the ace of hearts on the table.

MONTECRISTO

Never. But I came very close. In...
Malta. I loved a young girl... but...

CONTINUED:

MERCEDES
(rapt)

But, what?

No answer. Mercedes searches his face. A happy YELL from the garden. Montecristo turns away to see Ana approaching.

MONTECRISTO
Nothing. My past... it's as if it
belonged to another man. I look ahead...

Ana happily kisses Montecristo's cheek and sits by his side.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)
The future is so full of promise.

FERNANDO signals two RANGE ATTENDANTS to move the targets further away. He proudly walks over to the Count.

FERNANDO
It's difficult today. Some of these men,
they served under me. All experts.

Fernando eats a small sandwich from the tray and gulps some tea.

FERNANDO
Why not join us? Ana reports that you're
quite the marksman.

ANA
He is!!

MONTECRISTO
I wouldn't presume.

ANA
(excited)
Go ahead. Show them!

She grabs his arm. Mercedes notices how she holds him.

FERNANDO
I can move the target closer, if you
want. No one will object.

MONTECRISTO
The distance is fine.

He gets up. Pleased, Fernando shows him his gun.

FERNANDO
Try mine, Remington, '61, Army issue, 44:

CONTINUED: (2)

FERNANDO (cont'd)
features: barrel length, action...
(pause)

The rest... not a work of art... But it
has some small place in Mexican history.

Fernando shoots. A bullet hole dots the bull's eye, dead center!
Everyone APPLAUDS.

MONTECRISTO

Is this the gun?

Montecristo examines the gun with seeming reverence.

FERNANDO

(chortling, pleased)

Yes. I used it to administer the coup de
grâce to Emperor Maximilian on the day of
his execution.

MONTECRISTO

Was the Emperor still alive when you
fired the final shot?

Montecristo takes off his jacket, revealing the gold harness. A
murmur ripples through the crowd. Some of the guests get up for a
better view.

FERNANDO

Quite... One must be ruthless in these
matters. All of Mexico was watching.

Montecristo flexes the golden hand. This time an audible "aaaaah"
from the crowd. Fernando stares with the rest.

MONTECRISTO

Today, cynics think of officers as
profiteers. Using war to make money.

Montecristo whispers something in Ana's ear. The girl smiles,
takes the pack of cards and jumps the barrier, heading towards
the targets. A small crowd gathers around them.

FERNANDO

War is not a business. But I did well, I
admit it. A matter of luck, that's all.

Montecristo takes Fernando's weapon and hefts it, checking for a
full round. Then, CLICK! CLACK! he smoothly wraps his GOLD HAND
around it.

MONTECRISTO

General, a man makes his own luck.

CONTINUED: (3)

ANA
(shouts)

Ready!

Montecristo smiles. Lowers the gun. ANA throws the cards up in the air. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! One of the cards jerks through the air as Montecristo's bullets send it up, again and again.

Fernando looks at him, smirking.

FERNANDO
You never aimed, sir...

MONTECRISTO
I never do.

Ana runs over, displaying the single card. It's the ace of hearts. Five shots in a perfect circle. One hit dead center. The crowd goes wild.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)
The key to shooting is... don't think.
Let your eye and your hand do the work.

FFFT! Montecristo sets his metal forefinger against FERNANDO's forehead.

MONTECRISTO
It should be as simple as that. Like pointing a finger... to things you seek to destroy.

Fernando pulls back, shocked. Mercedes is speechless. As Montecristo lowers his hand...

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)
Your gun is too heavy, sir. The burden of history, perhaps.

Forcing a laugh, Fernando suddenly puts his arm around the Count, patting him on the back.

FERNANDO
Bravo! Today's newest champion...!

Everybody around them joins the laughter and fresh applause.

CUT TO:

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - GLASS CORRIDOR - DUSK

Montecristo walks alone through a small glass corridor. Outside, on the deserted terrace, NORIEGA watches the sunset from a wicker wheelchair.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - VERANDA - SAME

Montecristo takes out two cigars and offers one to Noriega, who graciously accepts. As Montecristo lights both cigars, they observe the wealthy guests below, playing croquet, sipping tea and playing cards.

NORIEGA

Vultures... What more do they think they can take from this poor country?

The old man enjoys the taste of his cigar. The crowd below claps enthusiastically at a guest's good shot.

NORIEGA (cont'd)

Blood and bones of a thousand heroes. Did they all die just so we could play -

Montecristo enjoys the Noriega's hardness. Leans closer:

MONTECRISTO

- croquet.

NORIEGA

Croquet...

(beat)

You're not like the rest of them -

MONTECRISTO

No. Like you, I am... an antique.

EXT. CROQUET LAWN - SAME

Mercedes swings her mallet. She hits the ball, then smiles at her daughter.

MERCEDES

Darling, your turn.

Ana's watching Montecristo. She snaps out of it, takes her shot. It goes wide. Mercedes comes alongside her daughter.

MERCEDES

(offhanded)

He's a strange man, the Count...

CONTINUED:

ANA

Rare, you mean.

MERCEDES

No, strange.

ANA

Not a casual choice of words, Mama.

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - VERANDA - SAME

NORIEGA

My son brings me here, most afternoons.
(gestures at the horizon)
Best sunset in all of Monterrey.

Montecristo sees the HALF-MEDAL around the old man's neck.

MONTECRISTO

(barely breathing)

Sir. Your... medal-piece. I've seen it
before... May I -

Montecristo runs his good fingers over the half-medal. Exactly
like the one Calderón put in Edmundo's hands.

NORIEGA

(startled)

I don't think so. It's a Juárezista symbol.
The other half, I'm sorry to say, is long
gone.

MONTECRISTO

How did it disappear?

A MAN'S HAND reaches in, tucks the amulet back under Noriega's
coat. It is VILLAFUERTE,

VILLAFUERTE

Lost in the war, señor. Why do you ask?

He stares icily at the Count.

MONTECRISTO

Nostalgia, nothing more.

NORIEGA

But he claims he saw it!

(to Montecristo)

Where? In Spain? Somewhere in Europe - ?

CONTINUED:

VILLAFUERTE
(cuts him off)

Impossible, father.

Montecristo reacts sharply. Father?

MONTECRISTO
Am I to understand that you are this
gentleman's son?

The old man answers with a weary irony.

NORIEGA
My son, Gerardo Villafuerte: Federal
prosecutor, formerly in service to the
Empire

MONTECRISTO
And now?

VILLAFUERTE
Now, a diligent Juárezista.
(chilly smile)
You must understand, sir, we are a family
of survivors.

EXT. CROQUET LAWN - SAME

Mercedes follows Ana's look to Montecristo, who now stands alone
on the balcony.

MERCEDES
You shouldn't spend so much time with
him.

ANA
I'm having dinner with him Friday night.

MERCEDES
No, you're not. Your friend, Paco - he is
so much closer to your own age.

ANA
He is just a child.

MERCEDES
And you're not?

ANA
No mother. I'm a woman.

CONTINUED:

MERCEDES

As a woman then, Ana, hear me. That man is dangerous. He's not meant for you.

ANA

He scares you. Not me.

MERCEDES

Scare me? I don't know what you're talking about.

ANA

You do. I see you and Father: Separate beds, polite thank you's and no touching.

Mercedes looks around nervously. The players quietly play on.

ANA (cont'd)

And then I saw you dancing with Montecristo. I saw the way you moved, how you looked at him.

(beat)

If you really want him, Mother, you'll have to do better than this.

Mercedes SLAPS her. A horrified murmur all around them.

ANA (cont'd)

Father always wanted a son. I failed in that from birth. And as a woman, I seem to please you even less.

In the darkened terrace above, Montecristo calmly observes and finishes his cigar.

AIDE'S VOICE

It's as if he doesn't exist. He has no past.

CUT TO:

INT. NORIEGA MANSION - DAY

Villafuerte is solemnly locking up the aviary. An AIDE consults a thick file.

AIDE

We went back a decade. No records at Customs and Immigration...

They start down the stairs.

CONTINUED:

VILLAFUERTE

I see the infernal man, don't I? He exists! There must be something...

The Aide keeps silent for an instant. Then...

AIDE

Sir... yesterday a man offering gold tried to bribe his way into the archives. Asking about you.

Villafuerte turns.

VILLAFUERTE

Me?

AIDE

Your "brilliant political career, all the way back to the French."

VILLAFUERTE

He was arrested?

AIDE

(uncomfortable)

Without a formal complaint from you - But he's under surveillance at his hotel...

VILLAFUERTE

Take me to him.

EXT. NORIEGA MANSION - DAY

Villafuerte and the aide board the carriage. As it leaves, two ARMED GUARDS close a set of heavy iron gates and walk off. From out of nowhere, Pinyo appears in the shadows. Moments later, he is climbing the scrolled ironwork to the nearest balcony.

INT. MONTECRISTO'S CARRIAGE - SAME

Montecristo and Sagrario observe as Pinyo disappears inside.

MONTECRISTO

Will he find it?

SAGRARIO

He will.

MONTECRISTO

(nods)

He's our best tracker.

CONTINUED:

SAGRARIO

Pyno's not a tracker...
(smiles)
He's a poet.

INT. AVIARY - SAME

Pinyo picks the lock and enters.

In the dusty sunlight, law books are everywhere. The big crows perch on top of furniture and on bookcases. Some of the birds turn, spotting an intruder.

Pinyo throws a handful of needle-like silver daggers. Five birds fall soundlessly to the ground.

Pinyo examines the wooden floor, quickly finding a well-worn spot next to a large bookcase. He feels his way to a hidden spring. The bookcase slides away, revealing...

SAFE CORRIDOR

A narrow corridor, lined with sturdy, locked cabinets. And at the end... a heavy iron safe.

FROM INSIDE THE SAFE

It opens. Pinyo pushes some old deeds aside and takes the SILVER HALF-MEDAL. He leaves behind a tiny hand-written card.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

A rather dark, gloomy sitting room on one of the upper floors. Villafuerte peers at a figure seated near the windows, in semi-silhouette, smoking.

VILLAFUERTE

When detained, you mentioned the name Montecristo. Why?

When the other man speaks, it is with a familiar accent.

MAN

I needed to know what sort of man you were. I wanted to know if I could trust you, enlist your help.

VILLAFUERTE

But what does Montecristo -

MAN

That's not his real name.

CONTINUED:

VILLAFUERTE
(smiles)

I knew it. Who is he?

MAN

Son of an Italian ship builder. The name
is Zaccone.

VILLAFUERTE

And his wealth?

MAN

Not so very great.

VILLAFUERTE

I see... Does he have any friends?

MAN

Yes, all who know him. He's quite
generous.

VILLAFUERTE

But has he any enemies?

MAN

I - have a scar... Let me show you.

SAGRARIO leans into the light his empty eye socket fully exposed.
He is all dressed up and manicured. For that, his ugly scars are
all the more evident.

SAGRARIO

A duel. He couldn't kill me, though.
(laughing and coughing)
He wanted my silence about his past.

VILLAFUERTE

Your silence about...?

SAGRARIO
(beat)

Prison.

Villafuerte moves closer, eager to hear more.

SAGRARIO (cont'd)

San Juan de Ulua, 1875.

EXT. SAN JUAN PRISON - DAY

The familiar sight of San Juan prison, now partly in ruins.

CONTINUED:

A smart-looking government yawl ties up at the dilapidated prison pier. Villafuerte comes down the gangplank and is greeted by the GUARD-CAPTAIN. He salutes.

INT. SAN JUAN PRISON - DAY

As Villafuerte and the Aide proceed down the dank, arched entry, the Guard-Captain runs alongside.

GUARD-CAPTAIN

...the old prison area? But there's no more prisoners. Just madmen transferred from Mexico City -

VILLAFUERTE

(cuts him off)

I need to see the files. 1875.

GUARD-CAPTAIN

That far back? It's wreckage... trash...

Villafuerte shakes his head intensely:

VILLAFUERTE

I know what I'm looking for.

CUT TO:

INT. DANGLARS' OFFICE - DUSK

The TELEGRAPH OPERATOR waits patiently by his key, reading the paper. In the adjoining area, Danglars and Fernando nervously sip some tequila. Fernando eyes the wall clock.

DANGLARS

Not until five...

EXT. DESERT TELEGRAPH STATION - DUSK

Pinyo, Manuel and some bandits lash T.N.T. to the base of several telegraph poles. A mile downhill: A SMALL TELEGRAPH STATION.

Watching from a rise, Montecristo, Sagrario, and more bandits on horseback. The Count consults his POCKET WATCH.

MONTECRISTO

Do it. Light it.

SAGRARIO

Pinyo is not finished. He needs another -

CONTINUED:

MONTECRISTO
(shakes his head)

Light it.

Sagrario lights a long fuse. Below, Pinyo hastily ties the last charges to a pole as the sparks race toward him...

...and the DYNAMITE STICKS!!

Pinyo frantically ties the cords together.

Sagrario eyes Montecristo reproachfully. Montecristo smiles: "He'll make it". Pinyo finishes just in time. He leaps onto his horse and rides away.

EXPLOSION! Montecristo spurs his horse!

TELEGRAPH POLES topple like a row of crucifixes against the dying light. The first pole falls... the wires grow taut... yanking down the next pole... the next...

INSIDE THE TELEGRAPH OFFICE - SAME

Workers quietly go about their business. A YOUNG EMPLOYEE reacts as the line goes dead. He looks out the window.

YOUNG EMPLOYEE

Oh, my God...

OUTSIDE - SAME

Montecristo racing alongside the toppling poles, as if trying to outrun them. The other men hot on his heels.

The last pole tumbles, ripping out the side of the station!

IN THE SHACK

The EMPLOYEES scatter as horsemen leap in! The riders' GUNS are drawn; they disarm a GUARD.

Montecristo jerk-stops his horse at the MAIN TELEGRAPH CAGE. Shoves a note in to the TELEGRAPH MAN.

MONTECRISTO

Send this.

(pointing)

To Monterrey. Now.

TELEGRAPH MAN

(shakes his head)

Can't do that. Ain't legal.

CONTINUED:

MONTECRISTO

Just one word.

TELEGRAPH MAN

Don't make no difference. One word, a hundred. I can't.

Montecristo drops a leather sack on the man's desk. The CHINK of gold coins.

MONTECRISTO

One word, a thousand dollars.

The telegraph man looks inside, eyes getting huge. He's never seen this kind of money in his life.

TELEGRAPH MAN

I am a Federal employee. I'm not for s -

Montecristo pulls out his gun, cocks it.

TELEGRAPH MAN

(cont'd)

I've dealt with your kind be -

BANG! The bullet turns him around, his left ear half ripped off. Everyone's shocked, including Sagarario and the gang.

MONTECRISTO

Never with my kind.

He cocks the gun again.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

I'll get your left arm next, then your right. After that, you're of no use to me. Do you understand?

TELEGRAPH MAN

(recovering)

I - I can't hear you! The word - what is it?

Montecristo places two more sacks of gold on the table. He leans close to the poor man's ear.

MONTECRISTO

(loud and clear)

Gua-da-lupe!

INT. DANGLARS' OFFICE

Danglars and Fernando at the telegraph machine. The CLERK rips a page from his pad, holds it out.

DANGLARS
Guadalupe! I thought so.

FERNANDO
(uneasy)
Wire for confirmation.

The clerk shakes his head.

CLERK
Line's dead, gentlemen. I'm very sorry.
But that last transmission: clear as a
bell. Three times: Guadalupe.

FERNANDO throws himself into one of the big leather chairs.
Agonizing.

FERNANDO
Oh, God. I don't know. What do you think?
That land is worthless. How long have we
got?

DANGLARS
We have twenty - no, nineteen minutes to
stay ahead of the market.
(to the clerk)
How's the line to Mexico City?

CLERK
Open, sir. Ready to transmit.

DANGLARS
Good. Put us in for fifteen million, the
Guadalupe right-of-way, all shares.

The clerk reacts. FERNANDO sits up, aghast.

FERNANDO
Everything? Every investor in your bank?

DANGLARS
Except one, it seems.

FERNANDO
(can't stand it)
No. Put me in. I'm in.

CONTINUED:

DANGLARS

Congratulations, then. You're about to become a king.

CUT TO:

XCU - PRISON RECORDS

Villafuerte's hands methodically turn fragile, blackened PAGES. Clumsily-lettered ENTRIES, the names mostly unreadable.

VILLAFUERTE

This is useless. Did anyone ever escape?

GUARD-CAPTAIN

Never.

Villafuerte squints at a particular piece of paper.

VILLAFUERTE

What is this...?

Villafuerte gently blows some ash off two pages.

INT. DANTES' CELL - "THE WELLS" - LATER

VILLAFUERTE

(reading)

December, 28th, number 34 found dead in collapsed tunnel. Body partly decomposed.

The Guard-Captain holds up a LANTERN. Villafuerte peers into the escape tunnel, awash in sea water.

Villafuerte starts climbing out, but suddenly stops.

VILLAFUERTE

What's on that side of the wall?

Villafuerte points at the opposite wall.

GUARD-CAPTAIN

Number 24's cell...

VILLAFUERTE

Read me his record!

GUARD-CAPTAIN

December 15th: number 24, found dead in cell.

CONTINUED:

With the rumble of thunder...

CUT TO:

INT. MONDEGO MANSION - NIGHT

Rain drums on the window panes. Mercedes moves down a corridor, dimming the gaslamps. She pauses in front of a closed door.

INT. MONDEGO MANSION - ANA'S ROOM - SAME

The lights are off. Mercedes quietly opens the door.

MERCEDES

Ana..?

Looks at her daughter, who is bundled under a goose down duvet.

MERCEDES (cont'd)

If you don't want to talk, I understand.
But believe me. It may hurt today-

She approaches the bed covers. Opens them. No one is there, only an heap of carefully arranged pillows.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - RECEPTION AREA - NIGHT

A storm is in progress. Two ELEGANT COUPLES in tuxedos and evening gowns confront the MAITRE D'.

POMPOUS MAN

This is outrageous. What do you mean "You're sorry"? We've been coming here for years! It's raining outside.

MAITRE D'

Señor Cañedo, we will make it up to you.
But the restaurant is entirely booked.

POMPOUS MAN

But I don't see any "party" in progress!

MAITRE D'

We expect only two tonight.

Bored to tears, Manuel and Pinyo watch from the nearest table. They wear nice jackets.

POMPOUS MAN

Don't be ridiculous, the place seats a hundred people -

... get up and stand next to the man.

CONTINUED:

POMPOUS MAN (cont'd)

Do you mind? I'm t -

Fast as a rattlesnake, Pinyo sticks two tiny knives into the man's nostrils. Manuel politely removes his hat.

MANUEL

Good evening. I'm Manuel, this here is Pinyo. We regret to inform you that the restaurant is booked for the night.

Wide-eyed, everybody nods. Manuel turns to the pompous guy, who carefully nods as well. The knives send a trickle of blood onto his waxed moustache.

MANUEL (cont'd)

Say you understand, sir.

POMPOUS MAN

Ha-Hunetan-

MANUEL

(pleasantly)

Very well, then. Good evening.

They all murmur "Good night."

Pinyo pulls the knives out. The party hurries off into the rain and the Maitre D' closes the door. Manuel and Pinyo sit down again.

MANUEL

You ever need help running the joint, let me know.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Empty, luxurious, lit by silver candelabra. Montecristo waits patiently, sipping an apertif.

Sagrario sits at his side, gulping a bottle of beer. He looks at a line of waiters standing at attention behind them. He takes a cautious bite of food, but a WAITER instantly swoops in to exchange his plate for a clean one. Sagrario glares at him.

The waiter moves away, mortified.

SAGRARIO (cont'd)

She's not coming.

MONTECRISTO

You think?

CONTINUED:

Sagrario grabs a roll, breaks it in two and sponges up some sauce.

SAGRARIO

You're not hungry?

MONTECRISTO

I will be.

SAGRARIO

Are you all right?

MONTECRISTO

Quite all right.

SAGRARIO

You don't look it, that's all...

A bit unnerved by the Count's coolness:

SAGRARIO

I know you saved me from hanging. And believe me, I thank you. Thank you very much, and yes, we are bound for life and whatever else you want, but can I ask you just one tiny question?

No answer.

SAGRARIO

All right. It's simple, really.

(beat)

What good is all this money, you don't give a damn?!

Still no answer.

SAGRARIO (cont'd)

How about we go back to the coast, get a boat? Find Sinbad! I liked that guy!

Manuel enters.

MANUEL

She's here.

The main doors to the dining room open and Ana enters, Her rain cloak is removed, revealing her dressed in a magnificent gown. It's obviously her mother's, but it confers on her an awkward, youthful beauty. Her hair is wet with rain.

CONTINUED: (2)

The count gallantly stands up, takes off his jacket, covers her damp shoulders and kisses her hand.

CUT TO:

INT. THE WELLS - NIGHT

A tapping sound, almost inaudible.

Villafuerte moves closer to the stone wall. Tap-tap-tap-tap... Villafuerte moves his hand along the rocks.

VILLAFUERTE

Go up! The next row!

Tap-Tap-Tap- TOCK! TOCK! Tap-Tap... Faint light shines through!

VILLAFUERTE (cont'd)

There! Go back! Two stones!

TOCK! TOCK! Villafuerte scrapes away loose mortar, then pushes hard. The rock falls into a communicating TUNNEL! Villafuerte squeezes his thin frame into the opening and comes out into...

FARIA'S EMPTY CELL

Villafuerte uses the lantern to inspect the engraved walls. He is riveted by the sight confronting him on the wall.

It is a carving - new, fresh, enormous. THE MEDAL-PIECE!

VILLAFUERTE

(strangled voice)

The name... of prisoner #34...?

As the Guard-Captain leafs through his book.

GUARD-CAPTAIN

#34... *Edmundo Dantes.*

CAMERA PUSHES IN on Villafuerte as he hears this name for the first time in fifteen years.

CUT TO:

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Montecristo and Ana finish their dinner. The Count pulls out a cigar.

ANA

May I...?

CONTINUED:

Amused, he hands her one.

ANA (cont'd)
What about some brandy? I want you to
teach me that thing you do with the
smoke.

MONTECRISTO
(to waiter)
Two glasses of your best brandy.

The waiter lights their cigars and withdraws. Montecristo turns
to Ana.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)
You were watching.

ANA
I watch the things I want. Don't you?

MONTECRISTO
I do.

ANA
I came here because I thought you- My
mother thinks you are some kind of wolf-

The waiter brings the two glasses. Montecristo makes a toast.

MONTECRISTO
To a brave Red Riding Hood, then.

They drink. Ana coughs a little, but braves it down.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)
I've felt that fear from your mother. And
I've thought of a way to change it.
(beat)
That is, if you help me.

ANA
I will.

MONTECRISTO
(moving closer)
Good. This time tomorrow, your father
will receive an invitation to a ceremony
in his honor. Completely unexpected.

(beat)
The Governor will preside and offer
congratulations to your father on his
heroic war effort. Voilá! I will reveal
myself as the sponsor.

CONTINUED: (2)

Ana suddenly kisses the Count on the lips. It is a disturbing kiss, quick and tentative, but with a tenderness that promises much more. The Count finds it absolutely unexpected.

ANA

Pride is his weakness.

MONTECRISTO

We all have one.

He exhales smoke in the glass and then breaths it back in. Ana does the same, at once sensuous and playful. The SOUND of a riot grows-

CUT TO:

EXT. DANGLARS' FINANCIAL - SAME

An unruly tangle of horses, coachmen and carriages. YELLING CLIENTS jostle each other as they push their way into the bank.

INSIDE

The tellers can't keep up with the chaos. Customers shout and heave, on the brink of a riot. CAMERA CRANES UP to Danglars' PRIVATE OFFICE, where clerks are coming and going.

IN DANGLARS' OFFICE

Danglars stands behind his desk, in shirtsleeves. Tie loose. Wiping sweat from his gold spectacles.

DANGLARS

I will not go out there. I am the Bank of Danglars, it's not seemly.

SAM is ready to faint. He holds onto a chair, swaying like a marionette.

SAM

But, sir -

DANGLARS

What are you? A child? Go out there!!
You talk to them.

SAM

(miserable)

Yes, sir.

CONTINUED:

DANGLARS

Give me that telegram. I - I need it.
(sudden rage)

I NEED IT!

Quaking, Sam passes him a TELEGRAM. Danglars stares at it, shaking his head.

DANGLARS (cont'd)

Montemorelos. I can't understand it. We were told Guadalupe, you were here!

SAM

What shall I tell them?

DANGLARS

You go tell them- my bank stands ready to meet their deposits - every one of them!

BAM!! FERNANDO appears at the door. He's in his full dress uniform - every ribbon and star - but he's deathly pale.

DANGLARS (cont'd)

Oh, Jesus...

Fernando charges Danglars.

FERNANDO

How could you let this happen!? You idiotic, scheming little shit!

Roaring, he overturns the entire desk. Military medals clink together.

FERNANDO (cont'd)

Use the Montecristo credit, that's what it's for! Use it!!

DANGLARS

Of course I will! What do you think?!

They stand and glare at each other, huffing for breath.

ANA

(off)

Father?

Ana trots up the stairs, smiling. Like her father, she's immaculately attired. In a dress.

ANA (cont'd)

There you are! Hello, Baron. Are you coming with us?

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANA (cont'd)

(to FERNANDO)

Mother's downstairs. She wants me to make
sure you two don't make us late.

(seeing the desk)

What happened?

Fernando looks at Danglars.

FERNANDO

Nothing happened, isn't that right,
Baron?

FERNANDO leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. MUNICIPAL THEATRE - NIGHT

The theatre is richly decorated for a great occasion. Under a huge, crystal chandelier, rows of velvet seats. The place is bustling with Monterrey aristocracy.

BACKSTAGE

Montecristo strolls backstage, inspecting. A VOICE turns him around. It's a MAN covered in burn scars, standing in the stage door. He holds an INVITATION.

SCARRED MAN

You, sir, are the Count of Montecristo?

Montecristo bows. The man brushes past, onto the stage. Looks out into the seats.

SCARRED MAN

Where will I be seated? I want to sit...
there.

He points at the back row, the chair in the middle.

MONTECRISTO

From there, the view should be superb.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK HALLWAY - LATER

Some alarmed DEPOSITORS burst in, overturning desks and chairs. Danglars wheels around, holding a bottle of tequila.

DANGLARS

Out!! All of you!

He climbs the stairs back to his office.

CONTINUED:

DANGLARS
This is Danglars Financial! Your funds
are all covered! To the last dollar!!

INT. DANGLARS' OFFICE - SAME

Closing the door behind him, he finds that Montecristo is there,
sitting calmly. Sam is behind him, wringing his hands.

MONTECRISTO
Is this a bad time?

DANGLARS
No, no... "The madness of crowds", as a
philosopher once put it. Who was it?
Sam flees as Montecristo flings himself into a chair.

DANGLARS (cont'd)
How may I help you?
Danglars composes himself and sits down at his desk, where
several large bonds are ready for signature.

MONTECRISTO
I hope this doesn't prove inconvenient.
Somewhere, someone breaks a window. Montecristo hands Danglars a
DOCUMENT. Danglars scans it briskly. He hides his mortification.

DANGLARS
Not at all... Your funds... Right away,
always a pleasure.
(forced laugh)
For both of us, yes... I have... several
large bonds right here.

Danglars' voice dies. Now, only the sound of his pen SCRATCHING
as he signs away all his assets. Sweat pours down his face as he
hands the bonds to Montecristo.

MONTECRISTO
What a king you are, sir. That you deal
in such sums.

DANGLARS (cont'd)
Uh, I'm afraid- with these denominations
we seem to be short a few- um- thousands.
Montecristo puts the bonds in his portfolio.

CONTINUED:

MONTECRISTO

(rising)

Keep it. For your trouble, Baron.

He leaves. Danglars stares after him in horror. The bellowing crowd downstairs is getting out of hand. Danglars breaks open a stack of SAFETY DEPOSIT BOXES. Emptying CASH, STOCKS, COINS, JEWELRY, into a large TRAVEL BAG.

BACK ALLEY

Danglars opens a window and throws the bag out. Then, he jumps. A bad fall - his leg snaps! He falls in the mud, then gets up with difficulty. Starts limping towards the main street.

A pack of filthy stray dogs watch him, their mouths FROTHING.

CUT TO:

INT. MUNICIPAL THEATER - DAY

Dozens of glittering DIGNATARIES jump to their feet and begin to APPLAUD!! CAMERA TRACKS past rows of Monterrey aristocrats, many in uniform, as they offer their ovation to...

...FERNANDO, who proceeds regally down the aisle to the stage. He waves to his friends, smiling gamely. Ana and Mercedes are seated near at the front. Montecristo, resplendent in dark blue velvet, stands to one side.

The MAYOR of Monterrey is at the podium.

MAYOR

My friends, tonight, we have special cause to celebrate. My good friend, General Fernando Mondego, an old war horse like me, is being honored -

From the back, a CRY OF DISGUST. The Mayor, startled, looks around. A MURMUR of confusion. He tries again.

MAYOR (cont'd)

He is being honored by -

SCARRED MAN

Honor? You speak of honor?

The scarred man gets to his feet. More murmuring and concerned glances. FERNANDO clearly has no idea who it is.

SCARRED MAN (cont'd)

Let me then speak of honor.

CONTINUED:

The strange man advances toward the stage.

SCARRED MAN (cont'd)
June, 1867! The delivery of Maximilian,
my Emperor, to his enemies! Judas took
seven pieces of silver!

(to Fernando)
You took an army commission!

In the spotlight now. It's GUSTAVE, older, disfigured, but alive.
He throws down the medals Maximilian handed to him and Fernando.

MAYOR
This is absurd - ! General Mondego, do
you know this man?

GUSTAVE
Of course he knows me! We were young
fighters... I wasn't yet twenty-five!

He turns to the crowd. Draws himself up, open his shirt, showing
sinewy scars across his chest.

GUSTAVE (cont'd)
He thought he'd killed me. He took the
Emperor's gratitude, kissed his hand!
Then, he betrayed him! He conducted his
execution! A Mexican hero. This... is
your honor.

He SPITS IN FERNANDO'S FACE!!

Pandemonium. In the crowd, Ana looks over to Montecristo... who
has vanished through a side door. She runs after him.

MERCEDES

Ana!

EXT. MUNICIPAL THEATER - NIGHT

Montecristo is about to board his carriage, when Ana tearfully
assaults him.

ANA
Why are you doing this?! You used me! To
get at my own family!

MONTECRISTO
It's not your fault - or mine - that he
dishonored himself. Let it be.

ANA
Why? What did he ever do to you? What??

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Montecristo backs rigidly towards his carriage.

ANA

Fight him, at least! As a man!! You will not rob us of our honor...

A cold, deadly pause. His gold hand starts TICKING as it pulls a glove from her pocket.

MONTECRISTO

I take it you want a duel. Fine. Tell your father I accept your glove and I'll return it to him with a bullet. Anytime.

He climbs up and leaves. Ana is left alone on the muddy street. Mercedes comes to her and embraces her.

CUT TO:

EXT. - DESERT - DAY

A harsh wind sprays the dunes, making a sand halo. DANGLARS rides into the eerie landscape, shielding his bare head with the travel bag. A GUNSHOT spooks his horse. Danglars reins up as a handful of men seems to rise from the earth.

INT. HACIENDA CHURCH/CRYPT - NIGHT

Under the smashed church altar: Danglars behind makeshift BARS in the cell-like CRYPT. He straddles the bulging travel bag.

At the altar steps, bandits feast at a table overflowing with food and drink.

DANGLARS

(calls out)

I think... After how many hours?! You! It's time you gave me something to eat...

Sagrario spits out a mouthful, approaches, picking his teeth.

DANGLARS

Bring that chicken, and, and some wine-

SAGRARIO

We have very strict orders about your dining, your Excellency...

DANGLARS

"Orders"? From whom? You're not some sort of police, are you?

CONTINUED:

Bandits break out laughing. Danglars uncertain, but agreeable to anything, laughs too.

SAGRARIO
Can you pay for your food?

DANGLARS
(sneers)
I always pay! What kind of question -

SAGRARIO
(in Spanish)
Manuel! Serve his excellency!

Manuel brings a juicy chunk of chicken and a glass of wine. Danglars rifles CASH out of the travel bag.

SAGRARIO
(figuring elaborately)
Wine and chicken in pepper sauce: a bit on the hot side but very, very tasty. Ten thousand dollars...

DANGLARS
What??! How much? A sliver of chicken!

SAGRARIO
And wine.

DANGLARS
You can't be serious!

Sagrario dumps the food on the floor and walks away. The bandits turn back to the table.

DANGLARS
No!! What? What're you doing?! Are you not human??!

SAGRARIO
Not tonight. Tonight we're working.

CUT TO:

INT. MONTECRISTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Candlelight shines on silver. Montecristo sleeps in an enormous canopy bed. He hears a shuffling sound, wakes up, bathed in sweat. Looks for his GUN.

It's gone. A shadow darts behind the canopy. Montecristo gets up... and finds himself standing in the middle of the -

ABANDONED CHURCH

The bed has disappeared. He hears a shuffling noise.

MONTECRISTO

Father?

He turns again. The crucifix above the altar is empty! The Christ figure is nowhere to be seen. Montecristo abruptly doubles over in pain, clutching his withered hand. He looks at it: The skin shrivels, mummifying...!

VOICE

(behind him now)

You are alone.

He turns. And there... moving, living...

...the wooden Christ. It steps into a ray of moonlight, madness shining in its carved, shell-like eyes.

CHRIST

All alone.

INT. MONTECRISTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Montecristo sits up, out of breath. He looks around. Everything is back to normal. His harnessed hand firmly in place. He peers outside. and sees that -

EXT. ABANDONED HACIENDA - NIGHT

-a sandstorm is brewing. Crossing the windy terrace, Montecristo sees a female figure waiting by the church door. As the dust clears:

MERCEDES

I knew it was you, Edmundo. I knew I'd find you here.

Montecristo freezes. It's Mercedes.

MONTECRISTO

Don't make a mistake. That name, "Edmundo"...

She lifts the veil from her anguished face.

MERCEDES

I recognized you - By your voice! That first night at the party.

(pause)

CONTINUED:

MERCEDES (cont'd)
with fear, every night... even after they
said you were dead.

(beat)
Look around you! Everything that once was
good and clean is dead! Do you
understand? It died with Edmundo Dantes.

MONTECRISTO
You will pay for each minute of Freedom.
For each time you ate, slept or walked
free. Your life offends me. Your
happiness offends me. You will pay.

MERCEDES
Leave Ana aside.

MONTECRISTO
She's part of her father.

MERCEDES
Her father, not Fernando.

MONTECRISTO
(cold)
You lie.

MERCEDES
Nothing left to lie for.

A long, painful pause, and then:

MONTECRISTO
Then know this: I will not stop. For
anyone. I will destroy all of us.

Montecristo walks away and, in a matter of seconds, is swallowed
by the mounting sandstorm, in a cloud of dust.

INT. HACIENDA CHURCH/CRYPT - LATER

Dawn light filters through a crack in the outside door. Danglars
gnaws at himself in hunger and humiliation. Finally, he yanks
open the travel bag. Brings out a wad of cash.

DANGLARS
(mumbling)
Eight... nine... ten... ten thousand.

Twisting the bills through the bars.

DANGLARS
I am paying! Now! Here!! I want the
chicken, and the wine!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Clearly hungover, Sagrario delicately picks up the chicken from the floor. Scoops the puddled wine back into the glass.

DANGLARS

What are you doing?? You have my money! I paid!!

SAGRARIO

Yes: you pay for this chicken and this wine. Anything else will cost you...um, Ten thousand more?

He pushes the grimy food through the bars.

DANGLARS

Are you mocking me!!? You intend to starve me to death??

SAGRARIO

No, your excellency. You pay, you eat. You starve only if you choose not to eat.

Suddenly Danglars shakes the bars:

DANGLARS

Just... just get me out! Out of this hellhole! Here!! Take it - take it all!!

He throws out the travel bag. Bills and jewelry spill out.

Now at the small, barred window: ANOTHER FIGURE, dressed in black, face in shadow. A gold cross shines on his chest... As if hearing confession: Montecristo.

MONTECRISTO

Is this your money? Why are you throwing it away?

Danglars springs to the bars. Clutches at Montecristo's clothes.

DANGLARS

Sir! Count! Help me - ! These men- They are torturing me! I need food... water...

MONTECRISTO

Then tell me: how did Lee Dantes die?

DANGLARS

Who-? I- Who- died?

MONTECRISTO

Lee Dantes. Edmundo Dantes' father.

CONTINUED: (2)

A long pause as Danglars remembers.

DANGLARS

I - I don't know wh - please, some other
time - I am very hungry -

Without warning, the gloved hand reaches through the bars and
grabs Danglars by the throat.

MONTECRISTO

Look closer. You made this hellhole - ran
our lives to ruin...

Montecristo wrenches out the makeshift bars. Danglars flattens
back against the crypt wall:

MONTECRISTO

Tell me: How did my father die...?

Danglars shudders, clearly knowing the answer.

DANGLARS

(gasps for breath)

Oh, no- I don't know- I'd already left -

Montecristo's gold hand tightens around the chubby man's neck,
metal sinking into soft flesh.

MONTECRISTO

How did my father die?!

Sagrario and Pinyo come closer, worried. Danglars twists, blood
bubbling from his mouth and nose. Sagrario reaches for
Montecristo.

SAGRARIO

Enough. He's not going to -

Montecristo lashes out with his left hand, knocking Sagrario
back. Hauls out a SIX-GUN and FIRES, driving Pinyo away.

MONTECRISTO

How did my father die?!

The ticking HAND tightens even more. Danglars head is going to
explode. His eyeballs almost bursting. He gurgles and spits pink
foam. Montecristo's eyes glitter in triumph, but his men stare at
him in fear.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCRUBLAND - DAY

Montecristo and a few of his bandits trot their horses through a region of low hills and gnarled trees. Danglars is on foot, tied up and jerked along by ropes attached to the pommels of the mens' saddles.

MONTECRISTO

Hold up here. Cut him loose, Pinyo.

Pinyo dismounts as the men slacken their lines. He razors through the ropes, then steps back.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

Go!

But Danglars stands there, mechanically scanning the horizon. Montecristo dismounts, pulls his gun out.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

GO! Go I said!!!

He shoots at Danglars' feet. Danglars observes the bullets with mild interest. Montecristo pushes him. Danglars lurches forward, like a blind man.

Sagrario walks his horse over to Montecristo.

SAGRARIO

We're even now. You've been repaid.

Montecristo gives him a quizzical look.

MONTECRISTO

Repaid?

SAGRARIO

I'm done with you. Seen enough. How many years - ? How many lives - ?

(spits)

It's not my madness, amigo. I didn't know how far you could go.

MONTECRISTO

You still don't. It's not over.

Sagrario backs his horse up, then turns.

SAGRARIO

No. Your way, it will never be.

He spurs his horse and rides off. Montecristo looks for Danglars, but only an airless figure on the horizon.

EXT. DESERT - DAY/DAWN (LATER)

Stumbling across the shimmering sandscape: Danglars. Turning, sinking in the sand. A man in terror fleeing demons.

Ahead, a MUD-HOLE. Danglars throws himself down the dune. Hesitates before splashing in the dirty puddle, as if it's not real.

DANGLARS

Who...?

Stares at his own shaking REFLECTION in the water. Doesn't know who he sees. A ruin of a man...

Cries out wordlessly.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED HACIENDA - DAY

A squad of SOLDIERS breaks open the heavy front doors of Montecristo's hideaway. Followed by Villafuerte, they pour into the salon. Their boot steps ECHO in the vast, empty room.

VILLAFUERTE

Search every room.

MONTECRISTO'S ROOM

With his walking stick, Villafuerte pushes open the door. He is greeted by the sight of a hand-written note, atop an empty table.

VILLAFUERTE

(reading)

"What you're looking for is at Avenida San Martin 222..."

(to the Aide)

My address?

CUT TO:

EXT. NORIEGA'S MANSION - DAY

A gust of wind sends New Year's decorations and balloons down the cobbled street. Colored streamers cling to the grillwork; palm trees rattle against the windows.

Flanked by uniformed riders, Villafuerte's carriage thunders through the heavy iron front gate.

INT. AVIARY - SAME

Villafuerte charges in, barely pausing to acknowledge the five dead birds rotting on the floor. He slides the secret bookcase aside.

SAFE CORRIDOR

He sees the open safe, runs to it: *The medal is gone.* He reads the note left by Pinyo, and pales. "DOWNSTAIRS, JOIN US"

INT. DOWNSTAIRS BEDROOM - SAME

Two trembling old hands push the two halves of the silver half-medal together. They join with an audible CLICK. The intricate intaglio in the raised center now forms a heart.

Old man Noriega shows the completed pendant to Montecristo.

NORIEGA

Many men died for this. And you...
(he lowers his gaze)

I was there, on your wedding day. We were that close... And I didn't know.

SHOUTS from above as the soldiers come running. The two men look at each other as the noise builds. Suddenly, the door bursts open and Villafuerte enters.

VILLAFUERTE

Arrest him.

He stands clear as his soldiers seize Montecristo and surround him with bayonets. Montecristo makes no resistance.

VILLAFUERTE (cont'd)

(triumphant, to Montecristo)
Charge him with fraud, evasion and trea-

NORIEGA

No. Not him. Take me.

The old man holds up the medal piece. Villafuerte blinks in surprise.

NORIEGA

He found it here. In our house! In your safe!

VILLAFUERTE

(to his aide)
Take the prisoner to the city magistrate.

CONTINUED:

VILLAFUERTE (cont'd)
Inform him that I will conduct the
interrogation personally.

NORIEGA
Have you no shame??!!

Noriega manages to get up from the wheelchair.

NORIEGA (cont'd)
For years... I tried to justify you...
who you are, what you are...

He totters to his desk. Villafuerte whirls on his aide.

VILLAFUERTE
What are you waiting for? Didn't you hear
my order?

The aide quickly signals, and the troops hustle their prisoner
from the room. Montecristo looks back, concerned for the old man.
Villafuerte slams the door shut.

NORIEGA
I cleared your name with President
Juarez, invoked the family honor! My
honor!

He displays the silver medallion.

NORIEGA (cont'd)
And all the while, you had this -

VILLAFUERTE
For your protection! It would have ruined
you - !

NORIEGA
No! It was not me you were guarding!! I'm
only a prestigious souvenir!! All you
ever cared about is you!! your career,
your future!

VILLAFUERTE
They'd have killed you. Except for my -

NORIEGA
(cuts him off)
So what?? I was at war!!! It was my
war!! Not that poor man's!!!
(beat)

Blood. Loyalty. Country. All my life -
we've said these words together. All your
life... But they mean nothing to you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Noriega stares at Villafuerte. Villafuerte tries... but he can't hide from his father's eyes. Finally, Noriega looks away. Making a decision.

VILLAFUERTE
Father before you do anything -

NORIEGA
(cuts him off)
I'm giving our name back some shred of dignity. I will denounce you.

VILLAFUERTE
You'd take everything away from me.

NORIEGA
You have nothing.

Villafuerte opens a drawer in his desk.

VILLAFUERTE
Father.

Noriega turns to face his son again. Villafuerte is holding a Derringer.

VILLAFUERTE (cont'd)
Please.

Noriega smiles quietly and starts shuffling toward the door.

NORIEGA
Do what you have to do. So will I...

Villafuerte cocks the gun.

INT. VILLAFUERTE HALLWAY - SAME

As the soldiers escort Montecristo down the stairs, a GUNSHOT. Montecristo and the others bolt back and burst through the upstairs doorway.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM - SAME

Holding the smoking Derringer in his hand, Villafuerte cradles his dying father. He stares at the men, overwhelmed with terror and shame.

VILLAFUERTE
Don't... come... near... him...!

Villafuerte recoils - clutching his father's body tighter. He points the Derringer point-blank at Montecristo.

CONTINUED:

VILLAFUERTE
(hisses)

One more bullet here!
(to his aides)
Let him go. Let him go.

He then stares straight into Montecristo's eyes.

VILLAFUERTE (cont'd)
Is this not enough for you...?!

Abruptly: Villafuerte puts the Derringer under his own chin and
FIRES!

The horror-stricken aide and the other soldiers back out of
Montecristo's path as he walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. MORALES RANCH - DUSK

Montecristo quietly rides his horse toward the stables.

Standing fifty yards away, a CLOAKED FIGURE awaits him: MONDEGO,
a six-gun in each hand. At Montecristo's approach, Mondego
withdraws, disappearing around a corner.

Smiling, Montecristo clicks his GUN HAND into place and follows.
He takes out a cigar and lights it. Spurs his horse toward...

THE BULLFIGHT RING

Entering the arena, Montecristo finds himself alone. As he
dismounts, the horse balks, trying to back up. Then Montecristo
sees a metallic glint.

Moving in the shadows all around him, a dozen gunmen!

MONTECRISTO

Mondego... you prefer an ambush to a
duel?

Montecristo whips the horse; as it leaps ahead, the shooting
starts.

GUNFIGHT

Montecristo marches forward, the GUN HAND doing its infernal
work. Muzzle flashes... rhythmic, mechanical, relentless. Men die
as he stalks Fernando, who cowers behind a water trough.

Bullets begin to find Montecristo. One grazes his face. Another
grazes his shoulder. He stumbles.



8

9

CONTINUED:

Two of FERNANDO's men WHOOP and close in for the kill.

Suddenly, an explosion!!! SAGRARIO pops out from behind a bull barrier, lighting a second stick of dynamite!! Throwing it!!

He then blasts the survivors with a SHOTGUN! He grins at Montecristo.

SAGRARIO

Couldn't let you die alone, Sailor man...

More gunmen appear.

Montecristo empties his gun, clicks in more bullets! FIRES! SAGRARIO reloads and joins in.

Bullets fly ripping apart walls, flesh and bone.

Montecristo and Sagrario walk in circles at the center of the arena, covering each other, while firing in almost balletic synchronicity.

BULLFIGHT ARENA CORRIDOR

The long, dark corridor is half-filled with sand. Everywhere, moaning men are bleeding, crawling. Montecristo roams from corpse to corpse, looking for FERNANDO.

A man appears at the end of the corridor: FERNANDO.

Montecristo turns to face him. Finally, a duel, amidst a sea of death.

FERNANDO

That... machine... on your hand, sir -
Prove that you're not a coward. Take it
off.

Montecristo considers this. Decides. Slides off his gold harness, almost ritually exposing his dead, colorless fingers.

The two men stare at each other, hands at their sides. A BLUR...

BAM!! BAM!! They each fire. Montecristo's shirt floods with fresh blood. He lurches backwards.

Then Fernando crumples over face first into a pool of his own blood.

Montecristo staggers forward. With his boot, he rolls the General over.

CONTINUED:

FERNANDO
(fading)

Who - are you? What are you?

Montecristo brings his face close to his victim, pressing the muzzle of his gun against the dying man's forehead.

MONTECRISTO
(whisper)

I am the past, Fernando.

Fernando's eyes grow large with the pain of revelation.

FERNANDO

...Dantes?

Eyelock. A full second goes by. Montecristo fires.

BULLFIGHTING RING

Montecristo steps out from the corridor to greet Sagrario, who reacts to the blood covering his friend.

Montecristo smiles reassuringly.

Suddenly, A SERIES OF SHOTS blast down from a balcony!

SAGRARIO is hit square in the chest, and, as he falls, two more shots thud into his back. His GLASS EYE bounces out like a marble. He's dead.

Montecristo shoots at the SNIPER, then takes cover inside the

BALCONY STAIRWELL

Fighting off the pain, Montecristo slaps another clip into his gun and looks up. The sniper is directly above. He slowly hauls himself up the stairs.

THE BALCONY

Roof gone, wind whistling through, A body lies shivering in the furthest corner, half-hidden by fallen beams: young Ana, lying on the floor, dressed once again in a boy's garments. Montecristo lunges toward her, rips her shirt. A bullet hole stains her naked flesh.

ANA

(smiling at Montecristo)

...you said... don't aim, don't think about it. But I couldn't -

CONTINUED:

MONTECRISTO

Don't talk. The bullet went right through you... You will live... I'll see to it...

She is losing consciousness. He fumbles for the vial of crimson fluid. He locates it! Hanging on his chest!

MONTECRISTO

Three drops... Seven seconds.

Mercedes appears at the top of the stairs.

MERCEDES

Don't touch her!

Montecristo presses his hand to Ana's chest. Finds the dying heartbeat. TH-UMP... TH - It stops!!

MONTECRISTO

God... One, two, three, f-

Mercedes holds Mondego's gun in her hand. She shoots Montecristo in the back.

MERCEDES (cont'd)

You... destroyed... everything!

Montecristo lifts his head, looks at the vial. The last fluid seeps out from the shattered glass.

MONTECRISTO

...six... seven...

Only a few drops left. He moves to Ana's body. BAM!: his body shudders at the impact of another bullet. He uses both hands to steady the broken vial: a drop gathers at the tip.

MERCEDES

Could you not spare your daughter?

The liquid slowly falls into Ana's mouth. A second drop swells and falls.

With his last ounce of strength, Montecristo waits for the third drop, which seems to be gathering in slow motion.

Finally, trembling, it falls in.

MONTECRISTO

She... will live.

He lets go and slumps to the floor. Each exhalation forms a small cloud of dust.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Mercedes watches, amazed, as color and life shudder back into the girls' body.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

Don't let me go... alone...

Mercedes takes his shattered hand in hers. Growing weak, Montecristo clings to her.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

This time I won't be coming back, you know that, don't you?

He rolls onto his back, seeking some kind of release. Through the roof, the first stars appear. His breath comes in short gasps.

MONTECRISTO (cont'd)

Stars... My name. Say my name...

Montecristo looks at her, tears flowing freely now.

MERCEDES

Edmundo...

Montecristo smiles beatifically. Mercedes' mournful face shows a trace of the nineteen year old she once was. As she gazes down...

...she holds the young DANTE.

DANTES

Edmundo Dantes... That is my name. And my name... is all I have.

Ana moves close to them. As she touches her father, kneeling beside him... Bathed in a golden halo of redemption, Montecristo dies.

THE MECHANICAL HARNESS

lies discarded... devoid of purpose or meaning.

FADE OUT.

Texas, FALL, 1999.