

THE GARDENER

by

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*

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SUNRISE. LOS ANGELES.

We see the nodes of a life-cycle begin their daily pulse... *

EXT. BUS STOP -- EAST LA

On an unglamorous street, lined with Mexican produce stores, restaurants, general stores, 99 cent stores...a flock of women gathers. Mostly middle-aged, mostly dressed in uniform...

EXT. CORNER -- EAST LA

A PICKUP with ply-board wooden sides added to retain the branches and leaves to come. A man in the BACK reaches his hand out to pull up another who has been waiting on the corner, yawning.

CUT TO: *

EXT. BUS STOP - SUNSET BOULEVARD, BEL AIR - MORNING

Later in the morning, a BUS stops, disgorging the nurses and housekeepers onto a different scene entirely -- high green hedges hide an entirely different world, clean, green, festooned with bougainvillea, scarred only by the bus-stop there for exactly this purpose - ferrying the Mexican workers to their jobs. They shoulder their bags and their purses and start the walk, all the rest of the way to wherever it is they are going...

EXT. STONE CANYON ROAD - DAY

A lush road in Bel Air, the houses hundreds of feet apart and hidden by hedges, fences, electronic gates. We see a youngish maid on her long way up the slight incline... coming towards us, a nanny pushing a stroller on a morning walk. The child is, of course, not hers, but she rattles away to it in Spanish nonetheless, not at a loss for love or attention. *

The truck we saw earlier passes by and the men in it hoot their appreciation of her, slow to offer her a ride, which she waves off, not without good humor...

CUT TO: *

EXT. THE PRIVATE GROUNDS - DAY *

of a Mediterranean-style villa. Glorious mid-day sunshine. Sparrows tweeting in the bougainvilleas. A fresh-water swimming pool. A jasmined-entwined arbor. A bronze by Henry Moore reposed on the green lawn like some benign monster sunning itself.

Suddenly, we see FROND AFTER FROND of palm falling to the ground, beginning to pile up and obscure the statue.

WE LOOK UP TO SEE -- AN ILLEGAL MEXICAN GARDENER

Strapped in to the tree at a vertiginous height. He hacks away at fronds and tosses them behind him. We don't see his face.

ANGLE ON THE MEXICAN GARDENER

at the far end of the property digging into the earth with a shovel. We don't see his face yet. Just the motions of his labor. He's almost like a machine.

TIME CUT:

The still faceless gardener is now pushing a wheelbarrow laden with a 6ft tree over the freshly dug hole. He lowers the tree into the hole. Then, drops to his knees -- and with his hands -- lovingly covers the roots with soil. *

PULL BACK TO REVEAL That the gardener has, in fact, planted 8 identical trees. All in a perfect row to wall out the scrubby hills beyond the estate's property line. *

CLOSE ON THE GARDENER'S FACE as he stands to inspect his day's work. He's around 40 years-old: a simple, decent, self-contained man (a little sad, perhaps) who understands his station in life and has no desire to transcend it. When he was younger, upon arriving here in this country, he brought with him many dreams. But those dreams -- for whatever reason -- never materialized. And now all he wants to do is work. Work, and not get deported. OS, someone calls his name. *

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Carlos, *vamonos*.

Carlos Riquelme grabs the wheelbarrow and pushes it towards the voice. Then we crane up, high above the villa to see a:

EXT. PANORAMA OF DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES *

12 miles in the distance: a cluster of skyscrapers swaddled in smog and surrounded by the most densely-populated urban sprawl in America. *

OPENING TITLES

begin playing over this shot of the skyline while the afternoon light slowly -- via time lapse -- transforms to evening and then to night as the last title card appears, and we...

BLACK OUT.

The following screenplay is written in English. Minimal Spanish has been added for flavor. Note that many scenes in the finished film will be in Spanish with English subtitles. * *

FADE IN ON...

EXT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING *

A poor house in a shabby, gang-ridden section of East Los Angeles. *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME *

Carlos Riquelme sleeps on his living room couch under a flannel blanket. It's very quiet and still.

In the distance, a siren wails. Growing louder as it comes nearer until it screams past the house, up the street, and out of the neighborhood. The house falls quiet again. But...

RIQUELME opens his eyes: he can't sleep anymore. He reaches for his watch and checks the time. *

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER *

Riquelme boils water and places bread in the toaster. Then he opens the old refrigerator and removes some eggs.

TIME CUT:

Riquelme places a plate of scrambled eggs on the kitchen table.

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM *

He walks to a closed bedroom door, pauses, about to knock. Then he OPENS the door and looks inside.

ON THE BED, his handsome 14 year-old son Luis. Looking innocent, like most sleepers. Riquelme observes him for a beat. This is what matters. *

Closes the door. KNOCKS on it. *

RIQUELME
Despierta. *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SAME *

Riquelme's son, LUIS -- a handsome 14 year-old -- rubs his eyes and lets out a sigh. Disappointed that it's already morning. *

He lays there a long beat, listening to the OS sound of the back door opening and closing. Then the teen drags himself out of bed, into the hall to the... *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - SAME *

where he raises the toilet seat and pisses. Staring out the window at his father...

EXT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - SMALL BACKYARD - DAY *

...assiduously attending to his plants and shrubs. Then filling a plastic bird feeder with seeds. *

Luis shakes his head at his father's devotion to the yard. Then he flushes the toilet. *

TIME CUT:

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY *

Luis now sits before his breakfast plate, shoveling eggs into his mouth as...

RIQUELME re-enters the kitchen from the back-door and begins washing his hands in the sink. *

LUIS
(sleepily)
...Papi, I need ten pesos.

RIQUELME
Why?

LUIS
I gotta buy some shit for school.

Riquelme dries his hands on a dish towel, jibes the kid:

RIQUELME
Since when do you go to school?

LUIS
Every day.

RIQUELME
Right. How many days have you missed this year?

LUIS
I don't know...18,19.

RIQUELME
I don't want you to miss school anymore. School is...important.

LUIS
Oh, si, professor?

RIQUELME
I don't want you to be like me.

LUIS

Well I don't want to either, so...

Riquelme shakes his head. Then picks up his denim jacket. Slips it on.

LUIS (cont'd)

So can I get some money? *

RIQUELME

You want money? Come work. You used to come with me on Saturdays.

LUIS

I had to stop 'cause of futbol.

RIQUELME

You haven't played futbol in two years.

LUIS

Yeah, well, that league sucked. *
They was all disorganized and shit. *
(beat)
Papi, for real, I need some bolas.

OS, a horn toots from the street.

RIQUELME

(pulls on a baseball cap) *
If you want money in this world,
Luis, *necesitas trabajar*.

Riquelme walks out of the kitchen.

LUIS

(blithely)
A'ight then, I'll just jack an ol'
lady in the street. I don't care.

RIQUELME (O.S.)

That's not funny.

Luis hears the front door shut and he puts his fork down:

LUIS

Damn.

The kid goes into the living room and looks out the barred window. Sees his father climb inside his boss' pick-up truck. They drive off and...

LUIS looks down at a table by the door. Notices that his father left him a ten dollar bill. *

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. -- THE PICK-UP TRUCK - LATER *

driving through the Shangri-la streets of Bel-Air. This truck is a '97 Ford F-Series, dark green with a...

FLATBED rattling with old gardening tools: shovels, lawn mowers, leaf-blowers, rakes, etc. *

INSIDE THE TRUCK'S CAB two men are seated: the driver is a craggy-faced Mexican, age 54, with a belly, named: *

BLASCO MARTINEZ

...You ain't buyin' a truck. You ain't even buyin' a business.

(Raises his calloused index finger)

What you're buyin' is the American Dream.

The other man is:

CARLOS RIQUELME

...I ain't buyin' your truck.

Blasco removes his cell phone, continues his pitch:

BLASCO

Listen to me, carnal, I'm either sellin' my girl to you or to somebody else.

(Begins dialing phone)

And if I sell her to somebody else, then you gonna be outta fuckin' job. *Entiendes?* You gonna be back down there on that corner where I picked you up 6 years ago. Beggin' for work with all the other desperate mojudos. Duckin' La Migra. Not knowin' where your next dollar gonna come.

(Beat)

But, you buy ol' girl from me. You keep my tools. You keep all my customers. You keep a job you like. That you're good at...Shit. You gonna clear over a grand a week. Cash. Even more if you hustle.

(Raises phone to ear)

Your whole life's gonna change...I mean, how the fuck you think I bought my farm back home?

(Suddenly formal; to phone)

Hello, Mrs. Donnelley? This is Blasco Martinez...The gardener. What's your address again?

CLOSE ON RIQUELME pondering his boss' words, staring impassively out... *

THE WINDSHIELD, as the truck advances through Bel-Air, along a verdant street of secluded mansions: homes of the fantastically wealthy. *

CUT TO:

RIQUELME - ATOP A PALM TREE - SAME

75ft in the air (with nothing more securing him than a flimsy safety belt). He's pruning away dead fronds with a knife, making them fall down to the ground where...

BLASCO stands with the uneasy owner of the house: *

MRS. DONNELLEY
(looking up)
...Please tell him to be careful.

Blasco
If he falls I'll catch him.

MRS. DONNELLEY
(cringes)
Oh God, don't say that.

BLASCO
Ma'am, he does this all the time.
He's a professional.

TIGHT ON RIQUELME lathered in sweat. Taking pains not to fall to his death as he moves around the tree top. Note: it's very quiet in this yard. He can hear everything below: *

BLASCO (cont'd) *
...See how gentle he's being with the green fronds?

MRS. DONNELLEY
I can't see anything.

BLASCO
They don't look important but the green fronds feed nutrients to the whole tree. You can't cut them off or the--

MRS. DONNELLEY
(still worried)
Shouldn't you be using one of those cherry-picker things?

BLASCO
If I had a cherry picker, I'd have to charge more...This is the way we do it in Mexico. Believe me, it's safe.

RIQUELME
 (in Spanish)
 Then why don't you get up here,
 fatty?

*
 *
 *
 *

MRS. DONNELLEY
 Are you insured?

*

So that's what she's worried about.

BLASCO
 Mrs. Donnelley, I promise you. I'm
 fully insured and bonded.

MRS. DONNELLEY
 (vaguely satisfied)
 ...All right then.

The woman walks back to her house and -- when she gets
 out of earshot -- Blasco smiles mischievously up at:

RIQUELME
 (in a low, cynical voice)
 Fully insured and bonded, huh?

BLASCO
 Just a little white lie.

RIQUELME
 For the white lady.

BLASCO
 Exactamente, carnal. You're gonna
 make a good business owner.

CUT TO:

EXT. ESTEBAN TORREZ JR HIGH - EAST LOS ANGELES - SAME

*

fronted by 3 security guards and a Gang Task Force officer
 from the LA Sheriff's Department.

*

ANGLE ON LUIS standing in the middle of his school's crowded
 playground at lunch time with his best friend -- a burly,
 short kid with tattooed forearms named:

*

*

FACUNDO
 (furious)
 You believe that? That nigga's
 lochochon. I'm 'a fuck his ass up.

LUIS
 (staring across the
 playground at boy)
 Wha's his name?

FACUNDO
 I don't know. Ramon or some shit.

LUIS
Who he down with?

FACUNDO
I don't care who he wit'.

The two are joined by a pretty, 14 year-old girl named:

RUTHIE VALDEZ
Whassup, whassup!?

LUIS
Facu just got taxed by that big kid
over there at the fence.

RUTHIE
(looks over at the kid)
For real? ¿Que paso?

*

FACUNDO
Nada...
(sheepishly explains)
Me and Luis was talkin' 'bout
blowin' trees and I heard Ramon had
some yesca. So I went over to him,
confirmed what-was-what, and then I
gave 'im the bolas---

LUIS
My bolas.

FACUNDO
--and when I asked him for the
yesca he just said "step the fuck
off."

RUTHIE
(in disbelief)
What?

LUIS
He ain't lyin'.

RUTHIE
And y'all let 'im get away with
that shit?

Luis takes offense at the implication.

LUIS
I wasn't with him. He was alone.

FACUNDO
(points at the school
guards)
Yo Ruthie, the po-pos was right
there. What was I gonna do?

RUTHIE
 (shakes her head)
 You can't let motherfuckas take an
 inch or they'll take a mile. Come
 on.

The tough girl saunters over to the fence where...

RAMON stands talking to some kids from the 7th Grade. Luis and Facundo follow behind her. *

RUTHIE (cont'd) *

Yo, my man. You know who I am?

RAMON *

No. But I want to.

RUTHIE

I'm 'a have you killed. That's who I am.

RAMON

(smiles)

Why you wanna kill me, *chava*?

RUTHIE

(coldly)

You ain't believe me? Ask anybody who my uncles are. I'm 'a have you killed.

Ramon realizes the girl isn't kidding. His smile disappears.

RAMON

Whassup then?

RUTHIE

(continues)

You took my man's money?

RAMON

Nah...I told him I'd hook him up later when the guards weren't lookin' on.

FACUNDO

Lyin' motherfucka! You didn't say that.

RAMON

I said, hang back 'til after lunch. When we go inside.

Ruthie stares over at Facundo and then Luis who seems uncomfortable about the girl sticking up for them.

RAMON (cont'd) *
 (to Facundo)
 You want the shit or not?

FACUNDO
 No.

RUTHIE
 Just give 'im his money back.

RAMON
 Sure, no problem.

Ramon reaches into his pocket and pulls out a ten dollar bill. And as he hands it over to Facundo...

RAMON (CONT'D) (cont'd) *
 (smoothly)
 Nice doin' business wit' you.
 What's your real name, *chava*? *

LUIS
 Fuck you!

LUIS steps in and punches the big kid in his face, knocking him backwards. They begin fighting: Luis barraging the big kid with kicks and blows. Facundo and Ruthie join in, fists flailing. Soon... *

RAMON decides to run away. He darts over to the school fence. Bounds over it desperately. He's followed by... *

LUIS, FACUNDO, + RUTHIE, who all bound over the fence and begin chasing Ramon up the street. *

ANGLE ON A POLICE CAR parked in front of the school. Its doors open and a... *

GANG TASK FORCE OFFICER sprints after the kids, catching them at... *

THE CORNER, where Luis, Facundo and Ruthie are flailing at Ramon. *

GANG TASK FORCE OFFICER *
 ENOUGH!!

The cop grabs Luis and Facundo by their collars. Yanking them off Ramon. *

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DAY

Riquelme and Blasco are seated on the ground in the shade behind a TACO TRUCK. Eating amongst a DOZEN LABORERS -- every last one of them illegal. From the poorest parts of Central America. These men are very humble and reserved. *

They speak in low voices. They just want to eat their lunch in peace and get back to work.

BLASCO
Is it the money?

*

RIQUELME
(in disbelief)
Dios mio, cabrón, again?

BLASCO
I'm only askin' 14 grand for everything. The truck, the tools, the customers. You're gonna triple your income. What's holdin' you back?

Riquelme stares at Blasco long and hard. Hates having to state the obvious.

RIQUELME
I wish more than anything in the world I could buy your truck.

BLASCO
Then do it.

RIQUELME
I can't do it. That scum-bag lawyer wiped me out with all his promises about bein' able to get me my papers.

BLASCO
So you're gonna let him steal your dreams too?

RIQUELME
Blasco, you ain't hearin' me. I can't afford to dream. I don't have money. And even if I did, I don't have my papers. I can't get a driver's license. I can't get insurance. I can't register the truck. I can't get it inspected. Slightest thing happens, I get into an accident, I run a red light -- I'm finished. You know what they'll do to me. And then what happens to my son?

BLASCO
Lemme tell you about your son: you're worried about what happens to him if you buy the truck? Think about what happens to him if you don't buy it.

*

What you think's gonna happen if the Migra gets you and you don't have money? They don't give two shits about separatin' families, my friend. I told you about my cousin Ernesto. Think about what happens if you stay in that same neighborhood. Sendin' Luisito to that same fuckin' school, with those same fuckin' kids.

Blasco has struck a nerve.

BLASCO (cont'd) *

(lowering his voice)

You wanna get your papers? You wanna be legal? In a few months you'll have enough money to hire a real fuckin' lawyer. ...Believe me, everything can be taken care of. *

(Beat)

You're a good man, Carlos, the most hardworking, trustworthy man I know...I mean, shit, they let me become a citizen, didn't they?

(smiles) *

They outta make you the *pinchi* governor.

Riquelme stands up. Wipes the dust off his pants.

RIQUELME

Sorry Blasco... when you leave, I'm just gonna find another job. Keep my head down. Try to stay invisible. *

(Beat)

Let's go back to work.

CUT TO:

INT. A POLICE STATION - SAME *

where Luis is calmly seated at a desk being question by a: *

JUVIE OFFICER

Why'd you hit the kid?

LUIS

He said somethin' to me.

JUVIE OFFICER

What did he say?

LUIS

I don't know man...He talked shit and I hit him. What's the big deal?

There's ten fights everyday over
there. Much worse than this shit.

*

In the B.G., we see Facundo sitting on a bench, smiling.

JUVIE OFFICER
(deeply skeptical)
You want me to believe that this
ain't a gang beef?

LUIS
Believe what you wanna believe.

The cop opens a drawer. Removes a Polaroid camera.

JUVIE OFFICER
Take your shirt off.

LUIS
What?

JUVIE OFFICER
I want to take some shots of your
tattoos. For your file.

LUIS
Yo man, I ain't in no gang.

JUVIE OFFICER
(smiles)
Come on. Indulge me.

LUIS
(annoyed)
Why y'all try to make every Chicano
kid out to be a gangsta?

JUVIE OFFICER
Just take your shirt off.

Luis angrily pulls up his shirt: proving that he doesn't have
any tattoos.

LUIS
What I say?

The kid pulls down his shirt and glowers at the cop like a
hardened criminal.

JUVIE OFFICER
Okay, tough guy. Who do I notify at
home about this -- your mother?

LUIS
I ain't got no moms.

School SECRETARY
What about your father?

LUIS
You won't be able to reach him.

SCHOOL SECRETARY
Why not?

LUIS
He workin'.

CUT TO: *

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS - A SPECTACULAR SUNSET (5 HOURS LATER) *

Over the Pacific. Unbearably beautiful. So much so that our camera pans away from it, focusing on a... *

MODERN GLASS HOUSE glittering high in the Hollywood Hills. A familiar... *

PICK-UP TRUCK is parked in the driveway: Riquelme and Blasco are loading a lawn mower onto the flatbed. Then, they get in the truck and roll off. The long work day is over. *

INT. - THE MOVING TRUCK *

Blasco and Riquelme drive in exhausted silence. Listening to the AM radio. A torchy Ranchera ballad by Vicente Fernandez. *

REVERSE - THROUGH THE CRACKED WINDSHIELD

as the truck winds its way down...rattling past dream houses contoured into the cliffs...hybrid Hummers bulging out of garages...infinity pools...yawning vistas of the city.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HILLS, the truck turns east onto Sunset Blvd. Away from all this affluence and privilege. *

MUSIC GETS LOUDER - **MONTAGE** BEGINS

as the truck crosses La Brea...then Rossmore...continuing due east...the city becoming poorer, grimier by the block.

CLOSE ON RIQUELME *

reflecting on the exigencies confronting his life. A life we know so little about: only that he's been here 15 years illegally, and that he's soon to be unemployed. *

IMAGES OF EAST LOS ANGELES

begin collaging in the truck's windows: Pomeroy. Lopez. Soto. WE AIN'T GOIN' NOWHERE. Cesar Chavez Avenue. Adams Blvd. Spider Man 3 on DVD. Thai Kitchen. Hispanics Takin' Over. Belvedere Gardens. Repeto Avenue. 666 = 18. Sanchez and Steiner. SURENOS DON'T DIE THEY MULTIPLY. Vera Cruz Tires. Big Lots. El Mercado. One Million Mexicans in this Motherfucker. Western Loan & Jewelry. R+M Guns & Ammo. Taco Bell. Still Out Killin'. Monterey Pass and Floral. Sastre.

Legalización - NO DEPORTACIÓN. Brothers 99¢ Discount.
 Universal Church of God. Andy's Adult World. VILLARAIGO\$A =
 MENTIROSO. Iglesia Batista. L&M Liquor. MS-13. Frederick
 Case Pawn Shop. U.S. Army. MegaTV. WE ARE ONE. *

MUSIC MONTAGE ENDS

EXT. EAST LOS ANGELES STREET *

Single-story houses, dilapidated porches, barred windows,
 untended lawns and... *

THE SILHOUETTES of GANG-BANGERS

lingering in the shadows, holdin' down their territory.
 Note: the sun has completely set and it's dark...

INSIDE THE TRUCK

as Blasco stops before an old bungalow with a sagging roof.
 Riquelme grabs his jacket and opens the door.

RIQUELME

Nos vemos mañana.

Blasco

No, carnal. Tomorrow we don't work.
 I'm takin' the truck around to
 different dealerships. See who'll
 gimme the best price.

Riquelme lets this sink in for moment.

RIQUELME

...Okay, Blasco. I understand.
 Suerte.

He climbs out.

BLASCO

(through the window)
 Suerte, carnal.

Blasco pulls away leaving Riquelme standing there on the
 dark, gang-ridden street, watching the truck's tail-lights
 get smaller, as we... *

FADE OUT. *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - LUIS'S BEDROOM - MORNING *

A FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of a young woman with short black hair.
 Holding her baby in a delivery room. She looks overjoyed. *

PULL BACK WIDE TO REVEAL

Luis asleep next to this photo taped to the wall beside his pillow: presumably the photo is of his mother. *

HIGHER UP ON THE WALLS are posters of fútbol stars, Chicano rappers, and a Dos Equis clock which reads: 7:06AM. OS, a sound comes... *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - KITCHEN *

...where a fully-dressed Riquelme sits in front of an old coffee can: his bank. He removes the plastic lid and takes out some old photos, a scapular of the Virgin Mary, and then finally a thick wad of worn 20 dollar bills. He begins counting them out slowly. *

TIME CUT: 5 MINUTES LATER

Riquelme holds the kitchen phone to his ear. Looking bereft about making this call.

RIQUELME
(to phone)
If you can't help, I understand.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT/EXT. ANITA'S CAR - DAY *

his sister, Anita, 37, arrives at her house in Oxnard (an hour north of LA). She just worked a night-shift as a nurse's assistant. *

ANITA
(climbing out of her car)
...how much would you need? *

RIQUELME
...Twelve thousand. *

ANITA
(staggered)
Dios mio...

RIQUELME
...I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked you.

INT. ANITA'S HOUSE - DAY *

Anita enters her modest house and is barraged by three dogs.

ANITA
Don't say that, Carlos...
(pushes her dogs away)

It's just that we really can't manage it right now. I can barely afford to put gas in my car.

RIQUELME

I'd be able to pay you back in a year. Maybe sooner.

Anita walks by a painting of Christ: "Nuestro Senor de la Asuncion", enters the kitchen where her 10 year-old daughter:

LINDA

(sits, eating breakfast)
Who you talkin' to?

ANITA

Mi hermano.

LINDA

(loudly)
Hola tío!

ANITA (TO PHONE)

Look, I just got home. Umberto already left for work. I'm gonna speak with him about it tonight. But don't get your hopes up. You know how he is about money.

RIQUELME

I know.

ANITA

He's the cheapest man on the face of the earth.

A beat.

ANITA (cont'd)

(gently)
...What are you gonna do if you can't buy the truck?

RIQUELME

I'll figure something out.

Anita sees through his stoicism, and it pains her:

ANITA

God, I really wish I could help you.

(guiltily)

And Luis. You tell him I love him, okay? And to behave.

RIQUELME

Sure.

*

The dogs start barking loudly.

ANITA
(to her daughter)
Have they been fed?

LINDA
(guiltily)
No.

ANITA
(over barking; frazzled)
Carlos, lemme call you later. *

RIQUELME
Alright. *

Riquelme hangs up, embarrassed and angry with himself. He stares at the phone for a long beat. But there's no one else he can call.

His eyes then drift out the kitchen's barred window into...

THE SMALL BACKYARD

where his well-tended tropical plants are in bloom. We also notice a birdhouse built into the yard's only tree where...

A ROBIN is perched, pecking at a plastic seed-feeder. *

BACK ON RIQUELME

enough sulking: time to get moving. He stands up, grabs his denim jacket and walks over to... *

LUIS' BEDROOM DOOR

and stares in at his sleeping son.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
Hey. *

Luis doesn't stir.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
Hey, wake up. *

Still nothing.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
(louder)
Luis, you're gonna be late. *

LUIS
(mumbling with his eyes
closed)
I'm not goin' in.

RIQUELME
You sick?

LUIS
Nah, I got suspended.

RIQUELME
What?

LUIS
I got suspended.

A beat.

RIQUELME
...Why?

LUIS
I don't know...Some bullshit.
Don't worry about it.

RIQUELME
What do you mean don't worry about
it?

LUIS
Ah, come on, man. Lemme sleep. Go
do your thing.

TIGHT ON RIQUELME

do my thing? He opens his mouth to admonish the kid. But then suddenly refrains. And in this refrain we glimpse the gulf that exists between father and son. One that Riquelme can't possibly bridge this morning. All he can muster is:

RIQUELME
Your Tia Anita says behave.

LUIS
(bemused)
What? She can't tell me herself?

RIQUELME
I don't want you goin' anywhere
today. ¿Entiendes?

The kid doesn't answer.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
Hey Luis, you understand me?

LUIS
...Wha?

RIQUELME
Did you understand?

LUIS
 Yeah, I gotchu, man.
 (Under his breath)
 Go mow some lawns.

The insult stuns Riquelme.

RIQUELME
 Don't think about leavin' this
 fuckin' house.

Seething mad, Riquelme backs away from his son's room. Pulls on his denim jacket and exits the house.

ANGLE ON LUIS finally opening his eyes. Looking at the empty door where his father stood. *

CUT TO:

THE MORNING STREETS

of East LA coming to life. Stores opening. Sidewalk vendors setting up. People -- all Latino -- heading off to work.

ANGLE ON A BUS STOP

where Riquelme waits amongst a nurse, a laborer, a painter and some unruly high school students.

ON A MOVING PUBLIC BUS

it's crowded and the 16 year-old... *

STUDENTS are noisy, profane -- and clearly gang-influenced: Yo, fuck all dat shit man. Nigga do dat to me, I be up in MCJ the next ma'fuckin' day. I keeps it real, son. La neta verdad. *

RIQUELME ignores them, staring out the bus window as.. *

THE MEXICANIZED STREETS blur by: Soledad Church, Garcia Muffler, Barreras Chicharrones, The Virgen de Guadalupe will Save Us. *

CLOSER ANGLES OF MEN on foot, in the backs of trucks, at bus stops: going to work, searching for work -- stoic, anxious, wary -- just like... *

RIQUELME, who draws in a deep breath and exhales, as we... *

CUT TO:

EXT. A WORKER'S CORNER - MORNING *

where a dozen undocumented Central American men wait to be hired.

Riquelme joins them. It's already come to this. Just like Blasco said: you're gonna be back down there on that corner with all the other desperate mojos, beggin' for work.

EXT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - SAME

the old Bungalow sagging in the late morning sunshine. *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - SAME *

Luis serves out his suspension on the couch. Eating cereal, flipping through the TV channels: news shows, cartoons, infomercials, and fútbol highlights from the Mexican league.

He pours more cereal into his bowl and watches the highlights with mild interest. Soon, there's knock at the front door.

The 14 year-old walks over to the LIVING ROOM WINDOW and peeks through the iron bars to see his beefy friend... *

FACUNDO standing on the porch wearing a t-shirt that says Versace Mariachi. *

FACUNDO
What up, kid?

LUIS
Whassup?

FACUNDO
Nada, bro. Nada.
(scratches his neck; lets
out a sigh)
This suspension shit is borin'.

LUIS
I'm sayin'.

FACUNDO
Let's go somewhere. Go do
somethin'.

LUIS
Like what?

FACUNDO
Let's go see Rey. Tell that nigga:
we ready to jump in. We's down fo'
the get-down. Are you with me?

LUIS
I don't feel like goin' out.

FACUNDO
You don't feel like going' out? Or
you afraid to go out?

Your pops got like a radar tracker
or shit on you? Gonna whip your
ass?

LUIS
He don't do that. Just...
(beat)
I told him so, okay? Fuck.

FACUNDO
Alright then. Let's watch some
Oprah. I don't give a fuck. I'm
flexible.

LUIS
Sorry man. Ruthie's comin' over
after school.

Facundo scowls. Pretends his feelings are hurt.

FACUNDO
So that's how it is, huh? You gotta
girlie now, so you shut out your
oldest homey?

LUIS
Yup.

FACUNDO
You a cold ma'fucka, Luis.

LUIS
The coldest.

FACUNDO
But I still love you man.

LUIS
Me too, bro.

FACUNDO
Can I come in now?

LUIS
Sorry.

FACUNDO
(pleading)
Come on Luis! Open the door before
I get capped out here!
(Looks around
exaggeratedly)
These streets is caliente. Gangstas
and Po-pos be everywhere.

A beat.

LUIS
You got any yesca?

FACUNDO
(insulted)
Do I got any yesca? Do a
ma'fuckin' elephant gotta tail? *

LUIS
You mean a trunk? *

FACUNDO
He gotta tail too, don't he?

LUIS
Let's see the yesca, big boy.

Facundo smiles deviously and pulls out a fat bag of weed, as
we...

CUT TO: *

EXT. A WORKERS' CORNER - HIGH NOON *

No one on the corner talks or moves for a long while,
until...

A LARGE DUMP TRUCK PULLS UP and the workers suddenly become
animated, surging forward to get the attention of the: *

TRUCK DRIVER
I need two. Only two.

LATER - THE SAME CORNER

A Mercedes pulls away with two workers in the backseat.

Now only seven remain. Shifting about. The sun beating down
on them with a will.

RIQUELME stands there perfectly still and shuts his eyes: as
if to blot out reality. And when he opens them, he sees a
meek... *

SALVADORAN MAN in a straw hat staring at him, shrugging as if
to say: this is how it is, camarada, get used to it. *

EXT. A WORKER'S CORNER -STILL LATER *

only two remain: Riquelme and the meek Salvadoran who is now
munching on a bread roll. Riquelme looks up the street. No
one comes in the afternoon. The day has been a total bust. *

The SALVADORAN tears off a piece of his bread. Offers it to Riquelme who, embarrassed by the gesture, takes the bread -- nods awkwardly, gracias. *

CUT TO:

EXT. EAST LOS ANGELES - DUSK

A commercial stretch by El Mercadito. Bustling with after-work shoppers. Buying groceries. Browsing bootleg DVD's. Eating at taco stands. Drinking in bars. Norteño music blasting over everything. Soon...

A PUBLIC BUS stops and Riquelme gets off, exhausted and demoralized. He pushes through the crowd. *

TIME CUT:

Riquelme is now walking down a familiar street of single-story houses. He passes a group of...

TEENAGE GANG-BANGERS circled around a parked PT Cruiser blasting a Chicano Rap song. They ignore Riquelme and he continues up the sidewalk to his own house where he is stunned to see his sister... *

ANITA

dressed in her Nurse's Assistant uniform, getting out of her car. She seems anguished.

RIQUELME

What are you doin' here?

ANITA

Let's go inside. *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - SAME *

They enter the house and find a bare-chested LUIS half-asleep on the couch before the TV; the place is a shambles and reeks of weed from his earlier adventures. Once again, we note that... *

RIQUELME (while clearly disapproving) seems to feel it's useless to reprimand his son. All he says is: *

RIQUELME

Your tía's here. Get up.

Luis sits up and nods to his Aunt (but doesn't stand).

LUIS

(clearing his throat)

Hola, Tía.

Anita looks at the boy coldly: indicating her own history of disapproval.

ANITA
Hola, Luis.

LUIS
So you come to check on me?
Behavin'?

*

ANITA
...I came to see your father, Luis.

RIQUELME
(turning off the TV)
You want something to drink--
coffee?

ANITA
No, I can't stay long. I have to be
at work by ten, or I'll get docked.
(To Luis)
Can you leave us alone?

LUIS
(scratching his rib cage)
...Yeah, sure, okay.

Luis hauls himself into his bedroom. Shuts the door.

RIQUELME
What's goin' on?

Anita stares into her brother's eyes.

ANITA
(gravely)
I need you to tell me the truth,
Carlos.

RIQUELME
...About what?

ANITA
You said if I loaned you the money
for the truck, you'd be able to
repay it in under a year. How can
you pay me back so fast? Explain it
to me. I'm not good with numbers.

*

Anita's tone unnerves Riquelme: what's wrong with her?

*

RIQUELME
(uncomfortably)
...Well, with the truck and
Blasco's accounts... after all my
expenses, I'd be takin' home about
a thousand a week. Maybe more.

*

...That means I could pay you back at least \$1500 every month...So in 8 months, you have your money. And if anything were to happen to me, the truck would be yours. You could sell it and all the---

Anita doesn't let him finish. She forces something into his hands. Riquelme looks down at it: it's a bank withdrawal envelope, thick with cash.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
(barely able to speak)
...I don't understand. Umberto agreed?

*

A beat.

ANITA
...I didn't ask Umberto.

RIQUELME
What do you mean you didn't ask him?

ANITA
He would've said no.

Riquelme turns ashen, can't believe what she's done: what he's driven her to do.

ANITA (cont'd)
...Every month, since Linda was born, he gives me some money from his check to put away...in case one of us becomes sick or gets laid off, we'll have somethin' to fall back on...
(beat)
The bank account is in my name. He never bothers to read the statements.

*

RIQUELME
He trusts you.

Anita considers the irony of this.

ANITA
...Yeah, he trusts me.

Riquelme slowly shakes his head: I can't let you do this.

RIQUELME
(holding out the envelope)
I'm sorry, Anit--

ANITA
 (starting for the door)
 I have to go.

RIQUELME
 (grabbing her elbow)
 Wait, I can't take this.

ANITA
 (pushing him away, firmly)
 Yes, you can.

RIQUELME
 If something happens--

ANITA
 Nothing's gonna happen.

RIQUELME
 But you don't understand, if I
 get--

ANITA
 I understand everything.

Anita glares at him: enough arguing. I know all the risks. I want to do this for you. Riquelme, engulfed with grief and gratitude, is unable to speak. *

ANITA (cont'd) *
 (softly)
 ...Buy the truck, Carlos. *
 (Beat)
 And -- if you do well, like you
 say, things are gonna change.
 (Beat)
 That's why we came here, right?

Anita smiles at her brother. Then exits the house, shutting the door behind her.

RIQUELME stands there looking down into his calloused hands at the envelope. He doesn't know what to think or feel. His dreams have been buried for so long, it's almost impossible to disinter them. *

LUIS emerges from his room. Understands right away that something of great significance has occurred. In a low, concerned voice, he asks: *

LUIS
 ...What's goin' on?

CUT TO: *

A HAND - (3 DAYS LATER)

turning an ignition key, starting an engine. The hand grabs onto the stick-shift and drops it into 'D'. Then... *

AN OLD WORK BOOT presses down on the gas pedal, vroom! *

INT./EXT. IN THE REAR VIEW MIRROR - DAY *

we see Blasco's reflection: he's on the curb outside his house, getting smaller and smaller as his former...

LANDSCAPING TRUCK motors up the street (we still don't see who's driving). *

ANGLE ON THE FLATBED rattling with gardening tools: shovels, lawn mowers, leaf-blowers, etc. Finally, we... *

ANGLE ON CARLOS RIQUELME at the helm of his new truck, his new business, his new life. *

CLOSER ON HIS FACE

as a faint smile takes hold. And his chronic trepidation (the ever-present fear that all illegal's endure: no matter how well life is going) begins to recede. For the first time in years, he actually feels happy.

Riquelme turns on the radio. An upbeat song by Vicente Fernandez is playing: "El Nuevo Dia". He cranks up the volume and we...

BEGIN "A NEW DAY" MONTAGE SEQUENCE:

THE TRUCK accelerates up Cesar Chavez Avenue. Glorious, mid-morning sunshine. East LA's murals, mosaics, and Mexican heritage monuments never looked so bracing and bright. *

EXT. 'LA CASA DE ORACIÓN' -- DAY *

Riquelme exits this religious goods store. Climbs back in his truck. Hangs a...

SCAPULAR MEDALLION

of Our Lady of Guadalupe from the rear view mirror. Admires it a second. Then frowns at the crack in the windshield.

EXT. LOPEZ AUTO GLASS - DAY *

the OWNER writes up an estimate. Hands it to Riquelme (sitting in his truck) who grimaces at the price, Wow, that much for a windshield? Lemme think about it.

The owner walks away; Riquelme starts his engine.

INT. PRIETO SPORTING GOODS STORE *

Riquelme breezes up an aisle towards the fútbol section: why? *

EXT. ACAPULCO GOLD CAR WASH *

the truck is being hand-wiped by 6 ATTRACTIVE MEXICAN girls in tight white T-shirts and gold shorts.

REVERSE ON RIQUELME

in the waiting area with other MALE CUSTOMERS who leer at the sexy girls. Not Riquelme -- he only sees his truck.

DRIVING AGAIN - MUSIC GRADUALLY FADES OUT

as the truck -- sparkling clean -- slows to a stop, 50 yards from....

EXT. ESTEBAN TORREZ JR HIGH SCHOOL *

just letting out for the day. A spectacle to behold:

900 STUDENTS

teem amorphously onto the sidewalk. Some to buses, some to family cars, the vast majority to their own devices.

It's the most unsafe time of the day when fist-fights, muggings, box-cutter slashings, pick-pocketing, gang recruitment, drug sales, even riots occur. Something the... *

SECURITY GUARDS + GANG TASK-FORCE COPS

know full well: they prod the students along, bellowing over bullhorns: Keep it movin' people. Let's Go!

RIQUELME watches all this from his truck in troubled amazement. TORRENTS OF KIDS surge by the truck -- 5 abreast - *
- laughing, screaming, roughhousing.

THE SECURITY GUARDS continue exhorting them, KEEP IT MOVIN'! *

RIQUELME cranes his neck, looking for his son amidst the dispersing mob. Eventually, the street clears enough for him to spot... *

LUIS + RUTHIE coming out of the school building, lingering on the stairs. *

RIQUELME honks the horn a couple times until... *

LUIS looks over, sees his father waving at him. *

LUIS
(under his breath)
Oh, God...

RUTHIE
Who's that? *

LUIS
...Wait here a sec.

Luis slowly saunters over. Leans into the passenger window.
Makes no mention of the truck.

RIQUELME
Hey.

LUIS
(guardedly)
What are you doin' here?

RIQUELME
I wanted to come by, see you at
school.

The two stare over at the blighted school building.

LUIS
(dryly)
...Pretty nice, huh?

RIQUELME
Yeah.

Riquelme reaches down, picks up a bag. Throws it over to:

LUIS
(catching it)
...What's this?

RIQUELME
A present.

LUIS
For what?

RIQUELME
Just open it.

Luis opens the bag, removes an authentic LA Galaxy jersey.

LUIS
(still guarded)
...I don't understand.

RIQUELME
They're your team, right?

LUIS
...Yeah, I guess.

Riquelme sees the kid isn't going to mention the truck.

RIQUELME
(rubbing the dashboard)
So...you like it?

LUIS
I seen it before.
(Finally concedes)
...It's cool. Good for you, Papi.

RIQUELME
Good for us.

LUIS
Sure. Good for us.

This makes Riquelme happy.

RIQUELME
Get in. I'll give you a ride home.

LUIS
...No, I can't. I gotta go with
this girl. To her house.

RIQUELME
You guys gonna study?

LUIS
Yeah...Somethin' like that.

Riquelme smiles: he knows Luis doesn't study. But that's okay. He didn't come here to pester him about school (nor to flaunt his truck). His visit is a baby-step towards re-connecting with his son. Before it's too late. *
*
*

RIQUELME
...Alright well, maybe later then?

LUIS
Okay.

Riquelme starts the truck and Luis finally drops his guard.

LUIS (cont'd) *
Yo papi, you gonna let me drive
this bad boy when I'm 16?

RIQUELME
Of course.

LUIS
Fo' real?

RIQUELME
...If you get your license.

LUIS
(smiling)
You ain't got a license!

Riquelme grins: the kid has a point.

RIQUELME

Don't say that too loud.

He drives away and Luis walks back to Ruthie. Defaulting to his aloof, cool guy persona.

RUTHIE

...Who was that man?

LUIS

My pops. *

RUTHIE

(sees the jersey)

He gave you that?

(Smiling)

That's really sweet.

Luis holds up the jersey to his chest to check the size.

LUIS

I hope the shit fits.

RUTHIE

It fits. Why you always bitchin! Be happy for once in your life.

The girl wallops the boy with her book bag. Chases him out of frame, laughing.

CUT TO:

A PANORAMIC SHOT (LATER THAT NIGHT)

of East LA after dark lit by moonlight and sodium vapor.

EXT. SOTO STREET GARDENS *

340 low-rise dwellings considered (by Compstat) to be the most dangerous housing project in the city.

INT. SOTO STREET GARDENS -INSIDE A UNIT - NIGHT *

A LITTLE GIRL, age 4 -- in pink pajamas -- is singing the last stanza of a sappy love song by Selena into a home karaoke microphone: *

LITTLE GIRL

(off key but adorable)

And there's no-where in the world

I'd rather beeee!

(takes a huge breath)

Then here in my roooooom, dreaming of yooooou, endlesslyyy!!!

REVERSE ON 3 GANG-BANGERS (HER UNCLES)

mid 30's, squeezed on a couch cheering their niece's performance. Note: their heads are shaved, their bodies are covered with prison ink. And one of them is wearing a conspicuous CDCR ankle-tag indicating his home arrest status.

But these men are teddy bears, soft and loving with the girl, that was great! You're so talented, nena! Sing somethin else!

ANGLE ON LUIS, also here in the room, in the bosom of Ruthie's gang family. *

RUTHIE
(standing behind Luis)
That was incredible, nena!

The clapping stops and -- while the tiny songstress considers her next number -- Luis whispers up to Ruthie:

LUIS
I gotta be out.

INT. SOTO STREET GARDENS - INSIDE A UNIT - IN THE KITCHEN *

Luis says goodbye to Ruthie's MOTHER, 29, and some other WOMEN: all of them gang members. Yet very warm and friendly: *

RUTHIE'S MOTHER
(points to a pot of rice)
Luis, you sure you don't wanna take some of this with you?

LUIS
No, gracias.

RUTHIE'S MOTHER
(kissing his cheek)
Okay baby, nice seein' you again.

One of the uncles, shirtless, walks into the kitchen named...

MARCELO VALDEZ

he has StL tattooed on his chin and on his chest a massive family portrait of his three children.

MARCELO
(to Luis)
You out, son?

LUIS
Yeah, I gotta jet.

MARCELO
(hugging him)
A'ight, Luis, be easy. Come through tomorrow. We gotta talk about your future.

LUIS
A'ight, man.

MARCELO
A'ight, peace.

BY THE DOOR Ruthie kisses Luis quickly on the lips. *

RUTHIE
Get home safe.

EXTREME LONG SHOT *

of Luis descending the exterior staircase of the low-rise project building. He begins walking home through the 'HOOD... *

EXT. SOTO STREET GARDENS - NIGHT *

down a long street towards a crime scene; flashing lights, homicide detectives, bystanders casually staring at...

TWO CORPSES

(in body bags) being loaded into a medical examiner's truck.

ANGLE ON LUIS passing by indifferently, no biggie, he's seen it all before. *

EXT. ON A NEW STREET - NIGHT *

The 14 year-old takes out a joint from his pocket and sparks it up. Keeps walking. *

EXT. RIQUEME'S HOUSE - NIGHT - A FEW MINUTES LATER *

Luis has now arrived back home, he takes a last hit on the joint, then flicks it out into the street where his... *

FATHER'S TRUCK is parked (the flatbed is empty) but... *

LUIS doesn't notice. He goes up onto the porch and enters... *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - SAME *

...where it's dark and very still. The kid feels his way into the living-room and he sees his father sound asleep on the fold-out couch next to... *

ALL OF HIS GARDENING EQUIPMENT

mowers, shovels, blowers, wheelbarrows, spread all around the room (since they can't be left in his truck).

There's something very touching about this tableau..

WE CAN'T TELL from Luis's expression whether this moves him or not, but he lingers a moment, looking at his father asleep. *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - THE KITCHEN *

where he opens the fridge, drinks from a juice carton. Then moves over to his room.

His father's disembodied voice calls out to him gently. *

RIQUELME
What time is it?

LUIS
(stopping)
I don't know...twelve?

Both are illuminated only by street lamps coming through the barred windows. Just enough light to see their faces.

RIQUELME
(leans up on his elbow)
Where were you?

LUIS
I told you...with that girl,
Ruthie. I ate dinner at her house.

RIQUELME
Oh.

The kid starts for his room again but:

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
...Luis,..All I've done is work.
And then when I am home, I been too
tired to...to be what you need.
Your Mom...
(beat)
And then your Tia Anita. Well,
they had to leave, for themselves,
cause things had to change for
them. Money...

The stoned kid listens impassively.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
But I promise you, hijito, I'm
gonna make somethin' outta this
business. Really grow it into
somethin' big...We'll be able to
move outta here. Get you into a
better school...Things are gonna
change.

And I'm not gonna work Sundays no more. We can do things... spend time together. You know, if you want...

*

Luis stays quiet: doesn't seem ready to celebrate. Nor willing to release his father from whatever grudge he bears against him.

LUIS

I'm really tired, papi. I'm gonna go to sleep.

RIQUELME

(not the response he hoped for, but...)

Alright, hijito, good night.

The boy enters his room. Shuts the door and flops on his bed.

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - LUIS'S BEDROOM

*

LUIS, pensively mulling over his father's words. After a few beats, he reaches up for the lamp and kills the light.

*

FADE UP ON...

THE WORKERS' CORNER - WEST LA - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

we see 16 Central American MEN, standing on the familiar corner, awaiting deliverance, as...

RIQUELME'S TRUCK

zooms into frame: inciting the normal frenzy of pushing, shoving, gesticulating to get RIQUELME'S attention. He begins scanning the WORKER'S FACES for someone in particular, standing in the back of the pack, there's...

*

*

THE MEEK SALVADORAN

in his straw hat, extremely surprised to see:

RIQUELME

(pointing at him)

¡Tú!

The Salvadoran runs over, hops in the truck. He's a humble, uneducated man whose clothes appear filthy.

RIQUELME (cont'd)

Como te llamas?

*

The Salvadoran removes his hat: introduces himself as:

SANTIAGO

Santiago.

RIQUELME
 (shaking his hand)
*Mucho gusto, Santiago. Me llamo
 Carlos.*

And they're off: the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. BEL AIR - DAY *

THE TRUCK drives through the heavenly gates of Bel-Air. *

EXT. THE LUSH GROUNDS OF AN ESTATE - DAY *

Riquelme with kindness and patience shows Santiago how to start one of his old lawn-mowers. After many tries, the Salvadoran gets the machine to roar to life. *

EXT. AT A DIFFERENT MANSION - DAY *

Riquelme pushes a wheelbarrow while his helper SANTIAGO stands on a ladder, clipping hedges. *

EXT/INT. SUNSET PLAZA DRIVE - DAY *

THE TRUCK is now climbing up Sunset Plaza Drive, into the Hollywood Hills, stopping at Paloma's Taco Truck. *

EXT. PALOMA'S TACO TRUCK - DAY *

Riquelme treats his new employee to lunch.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DAY *

High up on Appian Way, Riquelme and Santiago walk from the truck (carrying tools) towards a contemporary house. *

IN THE BACK YARD, they set down the tools below a 70 foot high palm tree. *

SANTIAGO
 (in Spanish; subtitled)
 You're gonna climb this?

RIQUELME
 Yeah.

SANTIAGO
 'ta loco.

Riquelme smiles. And we watch in real-time, all of his preparations: putting on special shoes, emptying his pockets of his keys, and cellphone -- so they don't impede his legs. And lastly, putting on a pair of special gloves. Then:

In real-time again, we watch Riquelme climb up the trunk, all 70 dangerous feet to the palm tree's top. An impressive act of strength and courage.

AT THE TREE TOP Riquelme secures his safety belt. Wipes the sweat from his face and looks down at...

SANTIAGO

who appears extremely anguished.

BACK ON RIQUELME

(before starting his work) he takes a brief moment to admire the spectacular view he has of...

THE ENTIRE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

Downtown to the Pacific. Not a single cloud, nor a whiff of smog. Really, it looks like some kind of dream. A dream that's no longer beyond the reach of:

RIQUELME
(to Santiago; solemnly)
...*Mira la vista.*

No response.

Riquelme looks down but the Salvadoran is gone. He looks back towards the street and sees...

SANTIAGO

carrying his keys and cell phone, running towards the truck.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
(horrified)
NO! NO!

Riquelme descends the tree as fast as he can and hears the sound of his truck starting.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
(frantically)
¡Put a Madre, No!

EXT. BACK ON THE GROUND - DAY

Riquelme bursts from the yard out onto the street to see...

HIS TRUCK peeling away.

RIQUELME

starts after it: the roads up here are narrow, winding, and often blocked by other trucks: with some luck, there's a chance to catch him.

HIS POV

of the rear of the truck disappearing around a curve.

BACK ON RIQUELME

literally running for his life, screaming:

RIQUELME (cont'd)
Para!!!!

*

THE TRUCK goes around another switch-back bend. And this time...

*

RIQUELME, out-of-his-mind now, tries taking a short cut, straight down a dangerously...

*

STEEP HILL covered with chaparral which -- if he can get down it fast enough -- will allow him to head the truck off below.

*

RIQUELME descends the 45 degree slope -- and almost immediately slips...

*

TUMBLING SEVERAL TIMES in the scrubby dirt. He stands up just ten feet from the bottom, precisely as the...

*

THE TRUCK is passing by doing 45 m.p.h.

*

SANTIAGO

looks up -- the wretched soul -- and locks eyes with...

RIQUELME (cont'd)
(furiously)
¡Hijo de Puta!

*

Riquelme jumps off the hill onto the street, sees...

THE TRUCK

already 50 yards ahead, and picking up speed.

RIQUELME

stands there, chest heaving, mind seething -- when suddenly, OS, a horn toots!

ANGLE ON A TOYOTA PRIUS

coming down the hill directly towards...

RIQUELME, who begins waving his arms:

*

RIQUELME (cont'd)
STOP! PLEASE! STOP!!

*

But the car zips right past:

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
¡PINCHE CEROTE!

He looks behind him, but no more cars are coming, so--

-- Riquelme bounds off again, down the street, I've got to do something.

CUT TO: *

EXT. SUNSET STRIP - DAY *

Riquelme enters frame (having just descended the hills) and helter-skelter's up the sidewalk, past...

DESIGNER BOUTIQUES + OUTDOOR CAFES

crowded with tourists who stare up askance at the...

MEXICAN GARDENER

soaked in sweat, filthy from his fall, deranged by desperation -- running, craning his neck, scanning TRAFFIC as vehicles speed by, but no landscaping trucks. *

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - DAY *

Riquelme keeps wildly searching. Against all hope and logic. He cuts through a...

PARKING LOT -- and disappears amidst a sea of cars. *

EXT. AN INTERSECTION *

Seen wide. Riquelme runs into the shot, and stops right before our lens: a big, exhausted... *

CLOSE UP OF HIS SWEATING FACE

as he casts a final, futile look around in all directions, east, west, north, south. Doesn't spot the truck anywhere. But he does see the... *

EXT. WEST HOLLYWOOD POLICE STATION *

50 yards away on San Vicente Blvd. Riquelme thinks about it... he can't. We see that he is in front of -- *

EXT. THE PACIFIC DESIGN CENTER - DAY *

Where A TAXI CAB is pulling out of the lot. Riquelme waves and hurries over to the driver who rolls down his window. *

RIQUELME *
 How much to Santa Monica?

CABBIE
Where exactly?

*

RIQUELME
Olympic and 21st.

CABBIE
(thinks about it a second)
29 dollars.

Riquelme thinks. That's a lot. Looks at a nearby bus stand.
Reaches into his pocket.

*

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WORKER'S CORNER - DAY

*

where only one man is standing: a stocky Nicaraguan, age 24,
in a white T-shirt and jeans.

ANGLE ON THE TAXI dropping Riquelme on the other side of the
street. Then driving away.

*

Riquelme crosses over to the corner. Approaches the
Nicaraguan, trying to mask his terrible distress.

RIQUELME
(in Spanish; subtitled)
...Excuse me, I'm lookin' for
someone who's always here. He's
from El Salvador. Real short... His
name is Santiago. D'you know him?

*

The Nicaraguan doesn't respond. Stares warily at:

RIQUELME (cont'd)
He's my friend. He always comes
here. It's important...I owe him
some money, I have to pay him
before I go back home.

*

Riquelme moves closer, continues importuning the man.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
I had his number in my cell phone.
But I lost it today. You know where
he lives?

*

NICARAGUAN
(flatly)
I don't know him.

Riquelme takes another step towards the man.

*

RIQUELME
He's about 45. Really skinny.
(Holds up his hand)
About this tall.

He wears a straw hat. His name is Santiago. He's here everyday. You never saw him?

The Nicaraguan glowers at Riquelme, a look that means a definitive no.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
 You sure? Think about it a minute.
 This is really important. I gotta
 find him. His name is Santiago.
 He's real short. His clothes are
 torn.

Riquelme moves closer, crowding the Nicaraguan's space. *

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
 You from El Salvador?

NICARAGUAN
 No.

RIQUELME
 (raising his voice)
 This guy is here everyday. You
 must've seen him.

NICARAGUAN
 I told you, I don't know him.

RIQUELME
 (lays his hand on his
 shoulder)
 How long have you been comin' to
 this corn--

With the sudden violence of a donkey kick: the Nicaraguan punches Riquelme in the jaw. *

The Nicaraguan standing over him with a cocked fist, ready to hit him again. *

A beat passes.

And the Nicaraguan walks away leaving Riquelme sprawled on the corner, as we... *

CUT TO BLACK: *

there's a pause of 2 seconds, and we slowly...

FADE UP INTO:

A DARKENED BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

where a Dos Equis wall clock reads: 3:07am. OS, a doorbell sounds, and...

LUIS

turns on his bedside lamp. And, for some reason, stares at the photo of his mother taped to the wall. The bell sounds again.

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME *

Luis walks over to the front window. Peers through the bars at the silhouette of his father...

RIQUELME, standing on the porch (because his keys were stolen). *

LUIS

What are you doin' out there?

Luis opens the door and...

RIQUELME trudges into the house. Blind drunk. And goes into the living room, sitting clumsily on the couch. *

REVERSE ON LUIS

alarmed, he's never seen his father like this, ever. He shuts the door, bolts the locks, then walks over to...

RIQUELME, with his swollen face and filthy clothes. *

LUIS (cont'd) *

(in hushed, gentle voice)

What's the matter, papi? Were you in a fight? Are you okay?

Luis sits and touches his father's shoulder. Displaying a tenderness we thought him incapable of.

LUIS (cont'd) *

What happened?...

Riquelme stares down into his calloused hands.

LUIS (cont'd) *

What's goin' on? Why are you like this?

(Looks around)

Where's all your tools?

A long beat.

LUIS (cont'd) *

Papi.

RIQUELME
 ...I have to find him.

LUIS
 (angrily)
 Who did this to you?

RIQUELME
 No...I have find the truck. If I
 don't find it. I'm...

His voice trails off. He's so tired and drunk and lost that he can't even remember why he has to find the truck.

LUIS
 (holding back tears)
 Papi? Papi!

Finally Luis gives up trying to keep Riquelme in this world, and lets him fall asleep again..Riquelme begins snoring. He's out for good now.

LUIS, fear and compassion still welling out him, gently lays his father's back down on the couch. Pulls his feet up. Removes his climbing shoes. *

Then he covers him with a blanket. And turns out the light.

Then sits down in nearby chair in the dark watching him as we...

BLACK OUT:

FADE IN ON...

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING *

Riquelme -- severely hung-over -- stands under a torrent of steamy, hot water gushing down upon his head. Reviving him.

CUT TO:

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING *

where Luis is pouring coffee into a mug. He turns and sees...

RIQUELME entering, dressed and holding his jacket. Ready to leave. *

LUIS
 Here. *

Luis hands him the coffee mug, then two aspirins.

LUIS (cont'd) *
 Take these.
 (Beat)
 You want some breakfast?

RIQUELME
 Thanks, but I--

Riquelme pauses, what's gotten into this kid? [He's unaware of how shaken the boy was by seeing him at his nadir.]

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
 I gotta find the guy who stole it.
 (Putting on his jacket)
 That's my only chance.

He starts for the door. And Luis follows.

LUIS
 Hold up. I'm comin' with you.

RIQUELME
 No, Luis, this is my prob-

LUIS
 It's our problem.

Riquelme stops and groans inwardly: this "movie moment" just made his headache worse.

RIQUELME
 (gently; he can't speak
 too loud)
 Please...just go to school.

LUIS
 I ain't goin' in today.

A beat.

RIQUELME
 Don't tell me you got suspended
 again?

LUIS
 (insulted)
 Nah man, es Sabado.

CUT TO:

A PUBLIC BUS (MOVING)- 15 MINUTES LATER

Father and son stand in the back amidst several passengers.

LUIS (cont'd) *
 The truck have insurance?

RIQUELME
No, not theft.

A beat.

LUIS
What about the po-pos?

RIQUELME
What?

LUIS
The police. You reported it stolen,
didn't you?

RIQUELME
No.

LUIS
Why not?

Riquelme allows Luis to arrive at the answer himself, oh
yeah...

LUIS (cont'd) *
Well, I can report it for you. I'm
a citizen. They can't do shit to
me.

RIQUELME
It's registered in Blasco's name.

LUIS
Then have Blasco do it.

RIQUELME
He left for Mexico.

LUIS
Can't you call him?

RIQUELME
(annoyed)
I already did. He's not there yet.

A beat.

LUIS
What about Anita? She got her
papers. She can do it.

RIQUELME
(sternly)
Luis, these questions don't help at
all. Okay? Just stay quiet.

Riquelme turns his face to the window. And...

LUIS
 (mutters to himself)
 ...This shiz is really fucked up.

CUT TO:

*

THE WORKERS CORNER - AN HOUR LATER

where 45 CENTRAL AMERICAN MEN stand waiting.

ANGLE ON A PUBLIC BUS

stopping a block a way. Riquelme and Luis get out. Stare over for several seconds at...

THE MEN

who presently are besieging a Ford SUV in the hopes of being hired, please, please, pick me, over here, please, me! me!

The sight elicits contempt from:

LUIS (cont'd)
Que relaje... look at these
pendejos.. They out here hoin'
 themselves.

*

The boy doesn't realize how insulting this is to:

RIQUELME
 You think they want to do this?

LUIS
 Nah, but...

RIQUELME
 That was me out there! You
 understand?! That's gonna be me
 out there.

*

LUIS
 Well it's also the fucker who stole
 your *puta* truck.

RIQUELME
 Just wait here.

*

We wait with Luis as he observes his father approach the corner.

HIS LONG POV

of Riquelme interrogating the workers. Smiling, not to tip his hand, you know a short guy named Santiago? From El Salvador? Wears a straw hat? Always comes here? No? What about you? I owe him money, I gotta pay him back. We worked together. You never seen him here?

He moves through the large group, man by man.

-- Most shake their heads, no.

-- Others stare at him coldly (if we didn't grasp this yet, there is a pronounced antipathy between Mexicans and other Central American immigrants).

REVERSE ON LUIS

staring on, frustrated by his father's efforts. But then he sees...

RIQUELME talking more promisingly with a SCAR-faced SALVADORAN MAN in a Dodger's cap, about 30. Shifty-looking. *

The man keeps nodding as Riquelme plies him with more and more questions. They appear to be coming to an agreement.

And shortly, they walk away from the corner, back over to...

LUIS
What's up?

RIQUELME
This is Jesus. He says he knows him.

Jesus stands there, unable to follow their English.

LUIS
And?

RIQUELME
He'll show us where Santiago lives for fifty dollars.

LUIS
(cynically)
Sure he will.

Riquelme defends the logic of paying him.

RIQUELME
He can't work today if he takes us there.

LUIS
Just tell him to give us the address.

RIQUELME
He doesn't know the street. Just the building.

LUIS
Where?

RIQUELME
 (not sure himself; to
 Jesus)
¿Donde vive? Su edificio?

SCAR-FACED MAN
 (heavy accent)
 En South Central.

Riquelme looks at his son.

LUIS
 Great.

RiQUELME
 What?

LUIS
 That's Crip-land.
 (beat)
 Gangs, Papi. You heard of them?
 We're goin' to Crip-land to find a
 Salvatrucha.

Riquelme can't figure out if he is appalled or impressed by
 Luis's knowingness.

CUT TO: *

EXT. SOUTH CENTRAL LA - DAY *

Once a black stronghold, the area has absorbed a huge influx
 of Latinos resulting in serious black-brown tensions and
 significant violence. *

ANGLE ON A PUBLIC BUS

pulling over on Slauson Avenue. It's rear door opens and...

RIQUELME, LUIS + JESUS

get off: Lead the way, Jesus. And they begin walking up the
 street which dissects the infamous...

EXT. WALTER CARR HOUSING PROJECTS *

a gang-plagued, low-rise complex where presently some...

FIFTY BLACK RESIDENTS, mostly male teenagers are milling
 about the parking lots and the lawns, as our TRIO walks past
 them at a purposeful pace. *

EXT. A DIFFERENT STREET - 10 MINUTES LATER *

Riquelme and Luis continue following Jesus. But their faith is wavering: the neighborhood has become palpably more dangerous. Even the...

GRAFFITI

is ominous: "Too Many Mexicans, Not enough Bullets"

LUIS
(after reading it)
Where the fuck he takin' us?

Riquelme looks at Luis, be patient. But a half-a block later, he asks Jesus:

RIQUELME
¿Estamos cerca?

JESUS
(without stopping)
Sí, sí.

LUIS
Tell homey, if he's lyin', he's dyin'.

The boy's silly bravado wearies:

RIQUELME
You tell him.

LUIS
(smirks)
No hablo español.

RIQUELME
...You should be ashamed.

*

LUIS
How am I supposed to learn?

The kid has a point.

RIQUELME
...Still.

LUIS
Still nothin'. You viejos always cryin' about how we younguns can't speak Spanish right. But if you wanted us to learn so bad -- teach our asses. Sit with us.

RIQUELME
With all our free time?

LUIS

I ain't gonna learn from just watchin' telenovelas. And they ain't trying to teach us shit in school.

RIQUELME

Language.

(Off Luis's look)

The swearing. At least speak something right.

Suddenly...

JESUS

(stops walking and points)

Allí.

Riquelme and Luis look up and see a rundown... *

EXT. GARDEN APARTMENT COMPLEX *

-- with the air of a seedy, two-story motel. *

JSSUS

Santiago vive allí.

RIQUELME

¿En serio?

JESUS

Sí, sí, seguro.

RIQUELME

¿Que departamento?

JESUS

(shakes his head)

No se.

Luis looks at his father, what do we do now? *

EXT. GARDEN APARTMENT COMPLEX - THE SMALL PARKING LOT *

in the center of the U-shaped Garden apartment complex.

Riquelme and Luis (now trailed by Jesus) walk into frame, and see immediately that the truck is not parked here in the lot.

ANGLE ON AN OLD ASIAN MAN

dressed in pajama pants and slippers, taking his trash over to a dumpster.

RIQUELME

Excuse me. I'm looking for a friend
who lives here. Santiago. You know
what apartment he's in?

The old man ignores the query. Throws his trash out, and then
goes back in his unit on the ground floor.

Real friendly.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *

(resignedly)

...We're gonna have to go door to
door.

LUIS

...Nah, hold up. He stole your
phone right?

RIQUELME

Yeah.

LUIS

(takes out his prepaid
cell phone)

Let's call your number and see if
we hear it ringin' from one these
cribs.

Good idea: it's quiet enough in the lot to hear inside the
shoddily built apartments. Luis quickly speed dials his
father's number. Raises it to his ear: *

LUIS (cont'd) *

It's ringin'.

They then listen out and suddenly hear a faint ringing sound
coming from a unit somewhere on the 2ND FLOOR. *

RIQUELME + LUIS (FOLLOWED BY JESUS)

go over to the exterior staircase up to...

THE 2ND FLOOR

but then the ringing stops.

LUIS (cont'd) *

Your voicemail picked up. *

RIQUELME

Call it again.

Luis dials and the ringing begins again. The three follow the
sound 30 feet to a unit at the end of the hall.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
 (standing in front of a
 door listening)
 This is it.

*

It's a tense moment for Riquelme and Luis, but not for...

JESUS (still clueless as to why they seek Santiago; he just
 wants his finder's fee).

*

RIQUELME (cont'd)
Santiago aca?

*

Jesus shrugs and blithely knocks on the door, half-smiling
 at...

RIQUELME + LUIS

who try to remain cool as they hear footsteps coming to
 answer...

THE DOOR

which is slowly cacked open by a LITTLE BOY, age 5, with big
 brown eyes looking out at:

*

RIQUELME (cont'd)
...Hola chico--

*

But before he can say another word, Luis barges inside...

INT. THE APARTMENT

*

a kind of illegal-immigrant sleeping-den: the windows are
 blacked-out by blankets, and the floor is strewn with
 mattresses atop which:

*

SEVERAL SALVADORAN WORKERS

are out cold -- presumably men who work nights and sleep here
 during the days.

After getting over the initial shock of the place:

LUIS
 (calls out)
 Santiago?

*

No one responds.

LUIS (cont'd)
 (raises his voice)
 Hey, Santiago, wake up.

*

There's some stirring, but it's too dim to see any faces.

RIQUELME
 (under his breath; to
 Luis)
Tranquilo.

*

LUIS
 Nah, fuck this. If he's here, he's
 here.

A YOUNG WOMAN, 24, enters from the kitchen. Protectively
 picks up her little boy.

*

YOUNG WOMAN
 (to Riquelme)
 What's going on?

LUIS
 Where's Santiago?

YOUNG WOMAN
 Who are you?

More stirring from the mattresses.

RIQUELME
 (trying to control the
 situation)
 Senora, I'm sorry. I'm looking for
 my friend. I have to give him
 something. Do you know where he is?

YOUNG WOMAN
 ...What's his name?

RIQUELME
 Santiago.

She looks down at the sleepers, some of whom are now leaning
 up on their elbows, listening:

YOUNG WOMAN
 ...Anyone know a Santiago?

No one responds.

RIQUELME
 Are you sure? It's very important I
 see him.

THE PRONE MEN

are inscrutable: either they truly don't know Santiago, or
 they do know him and refuse to admit it. This galls...

LUIS

and he pulls off a blanket from one of the windows, flooding
 the room with light, infuriating:

SEVERAL MEN
¿Que te pasa, LOCO?!

The now bright room reveals that Santiago is not here.

ANGLE ON A MAN

getting up, angrily grabbing the blanket from Luis. Begins re-securing it to the window, muttering, ¡Dejanos en Paz!

RIQUELME
 (sternly)
 Luis.

LUIS
 (barking back) *
 Why you frontin? Tell 'em if they
 don't fess up, we callin' La Migra.

The mere mention of La Migra ratchets up the tension: the last thing these workers want is to be raided.

From OS, we hear someone clearing his throat.

RIQUELME

looks into the kitchen and sees a...

BEARDED MAN

nodding to him, come talk to me: we don't want any trouble. *

IN THE KITCHEN

Riquelme and Luis enter, noticing that even in here, there's a triple-decker bunk bed. (The apartment must sleep 25 people.)

BEARDED MAN
 I know Santiago. What do you want
 him for?

RIQUELME
 (sticking to his story)
 ...I owe him money. I want to pay
 him.

Bearded man
 He was here yesterday. I bought
 this cell phone from him for 40
 pesos.
 (Guessing)
 Is it yours?

Riquelme takes the phone. He reaches into his pocket --
 takes out his money --

LUIS
Papi, no!

BEARDED MAN
No -- no. The boy is right.

A moment of understanding between the two older men.

RIQUELME
Where is he now?

BEARDED MAN
(points to an empty bunk bed)
He took his clothes and said he was moving.

Luis walks over to Santiago's bunk, snoops around while:

RIQUELME
(keeps at the man)
Where to?

BEARDED MAN
He said he found a place closer to his job.

RIQUELME
...Where's he work?

BEARDED MAN
Some restaurant. As a dishwasher. Night shifts. During the day, I think he does construction.

RIQUELME
You know the name of the restaurant?

BEARDED MAN
Sorry. I don't.

Luis comes over with a photo he found. Hands it to his father.

LUIS
Is this him?

INSERT: A PHOTO

of Santiago in a dishwasher's smock standing with other kitchen employees outside their restaurant by an enormous statue of a donkey.

RIQUELME + LUIS exchange a meaningful look, this is a solid lead. *

RIQUELME
 (to the man)
 Can I take this?

BEARDED MAN
¿Porque no?

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN APARTMENT COMPLEX - STAIRCASE - 20 SECONDS LATER *

Riquelme and Luis bounding down the steps. They make it down to the parking lot and see...

JESUS (whom they'd forgotten) standing there awaiting his fee. *

LUIS
 Ah shit.

Riquelme ruefully digs into his pocket.

LUIS (cont'd) *
 Fuck this guy. He didn't take us to Santiago.

RIQUELME
 That wasn't the deal.

Riquelme takes out a small roll of cash.

LUIS
 (mutters)
 ...You shouldn't pay him.

RIQUELME
 And what? Spit in his face? Fight him?
 (Counting out the money)
 I don't wanna live in world like that. We had a deal: he kept his word, and I keep mine.

LUIS
 ...Give 'im half, then.

RIQUELME
 Stop talking like an ass.

Riquelme hands Jesus the fifty bucks.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
Gracias.

JESUS
Gracias amigos. Suerte.

Jesus walks off in one direction and Riquelme in the other.

LUIS
 (hangs back, sulking)
 He played us, man.

RIQUELME (off screen)
Vamonos!

CUT TO:

INT. ROSCOE'S CHICKEN & WAFFLES - SAME AFTERNOON *

a diner in the heart of South Central. Note: the STAFF and all the patrons are black.

RIQUELME + LUIS

enter and are shown to a booth by the:

HOSTESS
 Your waitress'll be right with you.

She walks off and:

LUIS
 (looks around at the all-
 black diner)
 ...What are we doin' here?

RIQUELME
 Eat somethin'.

LUIS
 Here?

RIQUELME
 Why not? The food is good.

LUIS
 How do you know?

RIQUELME
 Blasco and I used to come here once
 in a while on our way home.

The teen shakes his head, disapprovingly.

LUIS
 This ain't a place for us.

RIQUELME
 (understanding him now)
 You're kidding, right?

LUIS
 No, I ain't.
 (beat)
 These people don't feel Mexicans.

RIQUELME
Feel Mexicans?

LUIS
They don't like us.

RIQUELME
Who says?

LUIS
I say. Everybody says. Everybody knows.

(Lowers his voice)
We be beefin' with them all the time...The blacks be cryin' about us takin' their jobs and shit. Their houses.

(beat)
Up in the pinta, La Eme be battlin' with them, and when our veteranos come home--

(points out the window)
-- they be squarin' shit up out here...We shouldn't even be walkin' in this 'hood. Let alone eatin' in a diner.

(Beat)
They probably gonna poison us.

Riquelme is dumbstruck by his son's ignorance, as the..

WAITRESS
(appears, smiles to Luis)
What can I get you?

LUIS
...Um, you got fries?

WAITRESS
Sure.

Another long beat as the kid peruses the menu.

LUIS
...And um, you got donuts?

WAITRESS
What kind would you like?

LUIS
Just a regular one...I mean, Glazed...And a coke.

The waitress jots it down.

WAITRESS
(to Riquelme)
And you?

RIQUELME
Just coffee.

WAITRESS
Great.

RIQUELME
(stopping her)
Miss -- can I ask a big favor?

WAITRESS
Sure.

RIQUELME
I need a phone book to look up a
number. Would it be too much
trouble to borrow your copy for a
few minutes? It's really important.

WAITRESS
(thinks about it)
Hold on, lemme check if we have
one.

The girl walks off.

LUIS
A phone book? That's how we gonna
find the donkey restaurant? Readin'
through a big-ass book?

RIQUELME
(knows the kid is right)
We gotta start somewhere.

Luis shakes his head in mystification.

LUIS
Man, papi, you got a lot to learn
about the world.
(Deeply sarcastic)
They got this shit now called the
Information Highway. You ain't
heard?

But that's all going to change because -- coincidentally --
the:

WAITRESS
(returns to the booth)
I'm sorry sir, we don't have a
phone book. But my manager said you
can look up whatever number you
need on the PC in the office.

Riquelme is touched by the kind gesture, and stares at his son, these people don't feel us, huh?

CUT TO:

THE MANAGER'S OFFICE

Riquelme and Luis enter and are greeted casually by a black man, 30, sitting behind a desk:

MANAGER
(nods to the PC)
The computer is right there.

The manager, absorbed by a USC game on his TV, barely looks at them.

RIQUELME
Thanks very much. You sure it's no trouble?

MANAGER
(still looking at the TV)
It's all good. Don't worry 'bout it.

Luis takes a seat behind the computer and -- with a few key strokes -- brings up Google on the screen.

LUIS
(to his father)
Now check this shit out.
(Begins typing)
I'm gonna enter "Donkey",
"Restaurant", "LA", and a...
"statue".

The boy finishes typing, then hits enter. *

ANGLE ON THE SCREEN as 100 search results appear. *

REVERSE ON RIQUELME staring at the text, skeptical (he doesn't read English). *

LUIS (cont'd) *
(deflated)
Man there's a lot here. I don't know...

RIQUELME
It's not a donkey.

LUIS
What?

RIQUELME
It's not a donkey, it's a *burro*.

LUIS
 (looks up at him; shrugs)
 Okay.

The teen swaps out "donkey", inserts "burro", then hits enter.

THE SCREEN

comes alive with new search results: the first link being "El Burro Night Club". Luis clicks on this link and --

-- the website starts loading: a big photograph slowly fills up the screen with an enormous statue of a donkey.

This is the place.

LUIS (cont'd) *
 ...It's a club. Not a restaurant.

Riquelme looks at his son.

RIQUELME
 What's the address?

CUT TO:

EXT. IMAGES OF THE STREETS - LATE AFTERNOON *

streaming by at 35 mph: King Solomon Baptist Church, Compton Avenue, Hawkins Park, Avalon Boulevard, Sadie's Ribs, Teddy's Barber School, Ship of Zion Soup Kitchen.

MONTAGE OF STREETS CONTINUES

from South Central -- block after block -- to East LA. This sequence feels long, but it underscores the distance traveled on this quest -- while broadening our perspective of the city's poorest neighborhoods. *

TIGHT REVERSE SHOT of Riquelme staring out the bus's window: all of the above was his POV. (Luis is asleep in the seat next to him). *

The bus continues further into East LA, passing through an intersection where Riquelme sees and hears...

A CROWD

milling about on the sidewalk: 100 people carrying signs, flags, and banners. Apparently there was a rally somewhere today and they still are chanting: ¡Vamos a Ser Ciudadanos!

LUIS
 (wakes, hearing the crowd)
 What was that?

But the bus is already past them.

RIQUELME

Nothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. A STREET IN PICO RIVERA - 20 MINUTES LATER *

a less developed area: the buildings are spread-out and
separated by empty lots. The Public Bus enters frame and
stops, dropping off... *

RIQUELME + LUIS

who begin walking. Checking the sign numbers to orient
themselves.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *

(stops and turns)

No, we gotta go this way.

They head back in the opposite direction and before long:

LUIS

(points up the block)

Look at that shit.

ANGLE ON A GIANT STATUE OF A DONKEY (25 FEET TALL)

at the entrance of the nightclub. Like a Mexican Trojan
horse.

Riquelme and Luis walk up to the wooden beast which has a
sign dangling around its neck: *

EL BURRO NIGHTCLUB & KBUE: "LA QUE BUENA" PRESENTS:
'LA NOCHE DE NARCOCORRIDOS'

LUPE RIVERA + LAS VOCES DEL RANCHO + EL CHANINILLO
FIESTA TICKET HOLDERS GET IN FREE
DOORS OPEN 9PM *

ANGLE ON LUIS

staring around the...

FRONT PARKING LOT

it's deserted: not a single vehicle anywhere. And the...

NIGHTCLUB BUILDING

also looks closed.

LUIS (cont'd) *

What time is it?

RIQUELME

(checks his watch)

Four-thirty.

Riquelme walks towards the club's...

ENTRANCE AREA

and confirms that the doors are locked. Then he walks around the side of the building...

BEHIND THE CLUB

and stares inside a barred-window into the kitchen.

LUIS (O.S.)
Anybody there?

RIQUELME
(stepping back from the
window)
No.

A beat.

LUIS
(yawning, scratching his
neck)
Guess we gotta just wait for this
punk-ass bitch to show.

A beat. Neither knows what to do. Then, they hear music in the distance. It sounds vaguely like CIRCU MUSIC. The boy nods towards a --

*

PARK AREA

a quarter mile away from where they're standing -- an area dense with trees where the music seems to be emanating. It's SCATTERED WITH PARKED CARS.

LUIS (cont'd)
What's that over there?

*

RIQUELME
I think it's where they have
La Charrería.

LUIS
What?

RIQUELME
The Mexican Rodeo. You remember,
right?

LUIS
Not really.

RIQUELME
Your Tia Anita used to take you
there when you were little.

Luis stares over at the rodeo, then back over to his father.

CUT TO:

EXT. PICO RIVERA STADIUM - DAY *

A wide shot of LA's only rodeo ring, jam-packed with... *

5000 FANS cheering on a... *

MEXICAN COWBOY riding a bucking bronco. We hold on the cowboy *
'til he gets tossed off his horse. Then we...

CUT TO:

EXT - PICO RIVERA STADIUM - OUTSIDE THE ARENA *

where a huge Mexican Carnival is in full-swing. Today is the
Fiesta de la Virgen de Juquill; an annual event attended by
10,000 people from the Mexican community.

CAMERA SWEEPS OFF AISLES OF CARS -- But the truck is not
here. Riquelme and Luis give up on looking for it for the
moment and are swept into the spirit of the event -- *

ANGLE ON A FERRIS WHEEL

spinning with kids. Behind it, a...

ROLLER COASTER

roars over rickety tracks, beneath which...

SWARMS OF PEOPLE

(men in Stetson hats and women in cowgirl boots) move
amongst...

FOOD STALLS + VENDOR BOOTHS

it feels like Laredo, Texas. We don't see many gang-banger-
cholos at this carnival. Only charros: a dimension of Mexican
culture new to the story. And one that feels alien to... *

LUIS, approaching the fiesta with his father. Underplaying
his excitement (about seeing the rides) with disdain for the
rampant cowboy hats: *

LUIS

Look at these people. Do they
think they're in the Wild West and
shit?

RIQUELME

They're our people. Charros. *

Father and son enter the Carnival. The first one they've ever been to together.

CUT TO:

A LONG TRACKING SHOT

without any dialogue, just the sights and sounds of the fiesta as perceived by...

LUIS + RIQUELME

slowly pushing through the laughing, smiling crowd. The boy and his father walk along with serious expressions, soaking in all the atmosphere, moving past...

SIZZLING FOOD

of every conceivable Mexican dish. Past a...

BOOTH OF FACE PAINTERS

covering children's cheeks with bright colors. The kids suddenly start squealing when they see...

TWO MOJIGANGAS

(traditional entertainers dressed in costumes of giant, oversized heads) walking through the crowd on stilts.

RIQUELME + LUIS

step aside to let the strange stilt-walkers past and then look at each other.

CUT TO:

EXT. AN OUTDOOR STAGE - NIGHT

*

upon which 8 cowboy-hatted musicians (playing accordions, guitars and fiddles) are belting out a Los Tigres song:

LEAD Singer
(in a twangy voice)
*No tenía tarjeta verde cuando
trabajé en Louisiana, En un sótano
viví porque era espalda mojada,
Tuve que inclinar la frente para
cobrar la semana.*

They sing a couple more stanzas then we...

REVERSE on Riquelme and Luis in the rear of the audience: the boy trying to follow the lyrics. *

LUIS
What's he singin' about?

RIQUELME
You can't understand any of it?

LUIS
Nah.

RIQUELME
Give it a try.

LUIS
(listens; then sheepishly
ventures)
...Somethin' about some wetback in
Louisiana...He ain't have his green
card and he's tryin' to get paid?

Not a perfect translation but:

RIQUELME
(nods)
Close enough.

LUIS
...I hate this kinda music.

RIQUELME
What kind do you like?

LUIS
Lotsa stuff.

RIQUELME
Like what?

The accordionist suddenly goes off on a solo that pains: *

LUIS
Anything but this.

ANGLE ON THREE MOTORCYCLE ACROBATS

performing feats of derring-do in a ring set up in the
parking lot circled by a...

MASS OF SPECTATORS looking on keenly as... *

LUIS + RIQUELME

squeeze through bodies up to the front row, getting a clear
view of...

THE MOTORCYCLISTS

pulling off all kinds of stunts, standing up on their seats,
popping wheelie's, etc.

LUIS (cont'd) *
 (quietly)
 That shit is dope.

FATHER + SON

look on for several moments at the cyclists. A brief distraction from their problems.

CUT TO:

A FAJITAS STALL

Riquelme and Luis now wait on a line waiting to order. As a...

VOLUPTUOUS SHOT GIRL

walks by dressed like a gunslinger-cum-pornstar in a bikini-top, tight jeans and holster.

Twirling (instead of gun) a bottle of Jose Cuervo tequila.

SHOT GIRL *
 Tres pesos para shots!

The girl locks eyes with Luis and he looks away (he's less confident than we thought).

SHOT GIRL (cont'd) *
 (to Riquelme)
 Wanna a shot, sir?

Riquelme shakes his head.

RIQUELME
 (he's sworn off liquor for good)
 Not for me, thanks.

The girl smiles at him, then struts away and...

LUIS sneaks a peak at her ass. *

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
 (ribbing him; deadpan)
 Now you stare at her? When's she's gone?

A CROWDED PICNIC TABLE AREA - DUSK

People sit communally eating and drinking. Listening to a Mariachi ballad softly playing, almost mournfully in the b.g.

RIQUELME + LUIS sit off to themselves, finishing up the last bites of food. Their minds drifting back to their troubles. Luis looks up, a bit spooked by the sight of... *

SOME GANG-BANGERS at another table with their dates. These *
 men are covered with ominous prison tattoos. And their *
 presence portends the bleak future in-store for...

LUIS if the truck is not found: he's going to end up in the *
 gangs. The boy knows he has no other options. We hold on the *
 boy's face and let this fact sink in.

LUIS
 (in dead voice)
 ...What are we gonna do if Santiago
 is at that club?

A beat.

RIQUELME
 We're gonna take the truck back.

LUIS
 How?

RIQUELME
 (wiping his face with a
 napkin)
 I have a spare key. I'm gonna open
 the door. Climb in. Start the
 engine. And we're gonna drive home.

LUIS *
 What if it ain't there? *

Riquelme doesn;t have an answer for this. The silence hangs *
 in the air. *

LUIS (cont'd) *
 Why did you have me? *

A beat.

RIQUELME
 (taken aback)
 What?

Luis stares at his father long and hard. Desolately sad. *

TIGHT ON RIQUELME beginning to perceive exactly how much the *
 truck meant to his son. *

BACK ON LUIS as he looks around at some nearby tables. At the *
 simple people and their large families. His voice become *
 harder:

LUIS *
 Why do all these fuckin' poor *
 people have kids? What's the *
 point? *
 (beat) *
 What's the point? *

Riquelme searches his mind for something that might comfort his son. But all he can manage to say now is:

RIQUELME
I don't know.

CUT TO:

A DARKENED SKY - 5 MINUTES LATER

and the sound of feet crunching gravel.

ANGLE ON RIQUELME & LUIS

*

walking through the parking lot away from the carnival (100 yards behind them) back towards...

EXT. EL BURRO NIGHTCLUB

*

100 yards before them. Father and son walk without speaking for several beats.

*

CUT TO:

EXT. EL BURRO NIGHT CLUB

*

Presided over by the giant donkey statue.

*

ANGLE ON THE FRONT DOOR

where bouncers are checking IDs from a...

HUGE LINE of 500 people -- all Latinos in their 20s and 30s; the men dressed in crema de seda shirts, ostrich-skin boots and fancy Stetsons; the women in miniskirts and high-heels. This line snakes around back where...

*

*

RIQUELME + LUIS are just approaching. They stop and stare at the...

*

REAR PARKING LOT now filled with 300 vehicles.

*

REVERSE

Riquelme and Luis look at one another, nothing needs to be said. They start searching for their stolen truck.

RIQUELME

takes the left side of the lot and...

LUIS

takes the right.

HIS POV

as he passes 25 vehicles: none of them trucks.

REVERSE

Luis stops, looks across the lot to check the progress of... *

RIQUELME

walking through a row of SUVs, mini-vans, sport coupes, *
sedans, low-riders, even a couple of Harleys, but no trucks.

BACK ON LUIS -- Who JUMPS as if he's on a secret mission, not
just walking around a parking lot -- his TEXT BEEPER goes
off. Luis looks at the text -- "FROM: RUTHIE -- wr u at?"
Luis looks around him, can't help but laugh. Where is he at?
He writes out:

"HLPN MY POPS"

And is about to send it but then...thinks better of it. Too
sentimental. Presses the button to cancel.

RIQUELME is cutting through cars of all kinds; new, old, *
restored and beat-to-hell. But nary a truck anywhere. Then,
from OS, he hears: Psssst! Looks up and sees...

LUIS waving 50 yards away, next to a green Ford pick-up *
truck.

RIQUELME runs over: stares into the truck's empty flatbed: *
there's no tools.

LUIS
(whispers)
Is this...?

RIQUELME
(circling the truck) *
...I don't know.

Riquelme checks the windshield which is not cracked.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
No, this can't be it.

LUIS
Are you sure?

Riquelme isn't sure of anything.

RIQUELME *
My windshield had a crack.

LUIS
Maybe he got it fixed.

RIQUELME
This fast? No.

LUIS
See if the key works.

RIQUELME
This isn't the truck!

LUIS
Just check it!

Riquelme removes the spare key and tries the door as Luis looks around anxiously to make sure no one's coming. *

RIQUELME
It doesn't work.

LUIS
Lemme see the key.

RIQUELME
(snapping)
I told you it doesn't work!

He then points at the truck's body.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
(now he's certain)
It's not even the right color green. Come on! *

They both hustle off, continue searching.

CUT TO:

A WIDE SHOT OF THE PARKING LOT - 3 MINUTES LATER

We hold on this car-filled frame for a few beats. And then Luis enters from the right and Riquelme from the left.

Both have come up empty: the truck is not here. Their only hope is to see if Santiago is inside working. *

Riquelme moves over to the back of the club. Peeks inside the window of the... *

INT. EL BURRO NIGHTCLUB - KITCHEN *

buzzing with 20 workers: cooks, waiters, busboys.

Note: this window view is obscured by hanging pots and it's difficult to see people clearly.

LUIS
...Is he there?

RIQUELME
 (frustrated)
 I don't know. I gotta go in.

They walk around to the front, and see that the...

LINE OF PEOPLE

has grown in size. It'll take forever to enter this way. And besides, the...

BOUNCERS

don't appear to be the most friendly souls: presently they're turning away TWO MEN (in sneakers) who fail the dress code. So...

RIQUELME

(in his simple clothes) doesn't stand a chance at the door. If he wants in, he's going to have find another way.

CUT TO:

EXT. EL BURRO NIGHTCLUB - THE SIDE OF THE CLUB *

where there's a smoker's outdoor lounge watched over by a single...

BOUNCER

dressed in all black: a mountain of a man.

LUIS + RIQUELME stand in the shadows, weighing their options with furrowed brows. The boy floats an idea; albeit a cockamamie one: *

LUIS
 What if I go break a car window?
 Make an alarm go off.
 (Nods at the bouncer)
 Then you run up to big man here,
 and tell him that---

Riquelme holds up his hand, stop.

RIQUELME
 ...Just wait out here.

LUIS
 What're you gonna do?

RIQUELME
 ...I don't know.

Riquelme walks towards the bouncer. And we remain with Luis, observing the following interaction via... *

THE KID'S LONG POV of his father going over and entreating the bouncer (it's too far away to hear his words) with several direct sentences. *

After he's done, the stone-faced bouncer moves aside, allowing Riquelme to enter the club: no problema. *

REVERSE on Luis, baffled -- what the hell did he say to him? *

CUT TO:

INT. EL BURRO NIGHTCLUB - LUPILLO RIVERA'S FACE - ON STAGE *

(one of LA's most famous narcocorrido acts) crooning into a microphone:

LUPILLO RIVERA *

Dijero los policias al grupo de campesinos, "Todos las manos en alto, si es que quieren seguir vivos." Ahí empezó la masacre y sonaron muchas tiros, Fueron 17 muertos y comos 28 heridos. *

REVERSE SHOT of the jam-packed club: roiling with 700 people dancing to: *

LUPILLO RIVERO

Oye hermano campesino, yo te quiero aconsejar, Vamos cambiando el destino, ó así nos van a acabar. No te fíes de su palabra, aunque usen grandes nombres. Hay muchas que no usan faldas, pero tampoco son hombres. *

TIGHT ON RIQUELME trying to look over the crowd in the direction of the... *

KITCHEN DOORS, a good 25 yards away from... *

RIQUELME, who begins moving through the crush of... *

DANCING PEOPLE singing loudly along with: *

LUPILLO RIVERA

Ya me cansé de llorar por esto que ha sucedido, Mandaro a acribillar a indefensos campesinos. Bajaban de Atoyaquillo, con otros de Paso Real, Y los emboscó el gobierno criminal. *

ANGLE ON THE KITCHEN DOORS as a busboy comes out. Riquelme stops him. *

RIQUELME
 (in Spanish)
 Amigo, I'm looking for Santiago. Is
 he workin' tonight?

BUSBOY
 (not hearing him)
 Who?

RIQUELME
 The dishwasher, Santiago.

The busboy points at the kitchen and walks off.

RIQUELME takes a deep breath, this is it. Anger admixed with
 adrenaline begins coursing through his veins as he enters... *

INT. EL BURRO NIGHTCLUB - THE KITCHEN *

a capacious room where several cooks are preparing meals over
 steaming pots and flaming grills. Riquelme has to stop
 momentarily when another... *

BUSBOY comes towards him carrying a garbage can. *

INT. EL BURRO NIGHT CLUB -- ANGLE ON LUIS *

approaching the back window to try to see what's going on.
 As luck would have it, a cook removes two of the hanging
 pans, thereby freeing the boy's view of... *

INT. EL BURRO NIGHTCLUB - THE KITCHEN *

where Riquelme is on the move again, past refrigerators, food
 prep bays, stockrooms, etc.

RIQUELME'S EYES scanning every corner. *

EXT./INT EL BURRO NIGHT CLUB - KITCHEN -- INTERCUT *

LUIS is at the window, craning his neck, but losing sight
 of... *

RIQUELME, now nearing a dish-washing station where a... *

SHORT MAN with his back turned is rinsing martini glasses and
 placing them into a tall storage rack by the sink. *

RIQUELME
 ...Oye. *

The dishwasher turns around, and gasps inaudibly. It's:

SANTIAGO

...

The two immigrants share a frozen moment. One that allows Riquelme to look into Santiago's eyes and see something so pitiable that his anger diminishes: he just wants his truck back. But before he can demand this...

SANTIAGO

grabs hold of the STORAGE RACK OF GLASSES and pushes it at Riquelme; the rack cascades on top of him, and the glasses smash to the floor, allowing Santiago to take off like a shot over to the kitchen's emergency exit door... *

OUTSIDE

where he sprints off into the darkened parking lot. *

EXT. EL BURRO NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT *

LUIS looking up, seeing a figure burst out of the door. Knowing that it must be Santiago -- and taking off after him. *

INT. EL BURRO NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT *

BACK ON RIQUELME, getting off the floor -- now surrounded by kitchen workers abusing him in Spanish. He brushes the broken glass shards off him and bustles for the door. *

EXT. EL BURRO NIGHT CLUB *

SANTIAGO is sprinting as fast as his short legs can take him. He's a good 200 hundred yards away from the club. *

LUIS is chasing behind, gaining ground with every step. The teen is much faster and stronger than... *

SANTIAGO, who already appears to be losing steam. *

WIDE SHOT

only 10 feet separates them now and...

LUIS lunges out and tackles the thief. They roll several times on the ground. Then the teen springs up. And Santiago tries to punch and kick him. *

NOW, RIQUELME is racing towards them 50 yards away; all he can see is... *

A SILHOUETTED SKIRMISH too dark to know exactly what's happening. *

RIQUELME
(terribly afraid)
LUIS!

BACK ON LUIS standing over Santiago (who lays on the ground motionlessly as the teen beats him to a pulp), rifling through his pockets. Looking for anything. Keys? Money? *

All that he finds is a piece of paper. *

LUIS
(screaming in his face) *
Where's the FUCKIN' truck?

Santiago doesn't respond. So Luis kicks him in the ribs. Making the man groan. Then he kicks him again. Harder.

RIQUELME
(finally arriving)
STOP!!

Riquelme pushes Luis away. Looks down at Santiago, covered in blood and writhing in pain. In need of a hospital. *

LUIS
(waving the piece of
paper)
Look at this!

Riquelme grabs the paper. Reads it with shaking hands.

INSERT:

a Western Union Money Transfer receipt in the amount of \$2999; sent to an address in El Salvador.

LUIS (cont'd) *
(to Santiago; like a mad
man)
You sold the truck???

TIGHT ON RIQUELME'S FACE

staggered, could he have sold it for so little?

LUIS (cont'd) *
(shaking Santiago by the
collar)
DID YOU SELL THE TRUCK? Answer me *
you fuck!

Santiago says nothing, he looks semi-conscious now. That doesn't stop the teen from punching him again. *

RIQUELME
(grabbing his arm)
Luis, ENOUGH!

The boy struggles wildly to get free of his father's clutches.

LUIS
 (frothing)
 You wanna be nice to THIS BITCH?
 What about all that shit you said
 about movin' to a better
 neighborhood? A better house? *
 Changin' our lives? How DA fuck are *
 WE gonna do it NOW?

RIQUELME Falls to the ground and sits there, astonished. The *
 Western Union receipt has killed him... *

ANGLE ON SANTIAGO

getting to his knees, trying to stand, to muster the strength *
 to run away, but LUIS kicks him to the ground. *

Riquelme gets up and intercedes, slapping the boy on the side *
 of the head. He's afraid Luis will kill Santiago. *

RIQUELME
 (at the top of his lungs)
 DON'T TOUCH HIM ANYMORE!

LUIS
 (crying; shocked by his
 father hitting him)
 FUCK YOU!

Luis blindly lunges at Santiago (can the teen's fury really *
 be just about the truck?). *

RIQUELME pushes him away again, waving a clenched fist. This *
 has turned into something grotesque. Father and son appear at *
 the point of blows.

RIQUELME
 ENOUGH!

LUIS
 (through tears)
 YOU HIT ME? BUT NOT HIM???

RIQUELME
 CALM DOWN!

LUIS
 CALM DOWN?

Riquelme tries to grab the boy, to subdue him.

RIQUELME
 ENOUGH!

LUIS
 (pushing his father away)
 FUCK YOU!

The teen turns and runs off. And Riquelme watches him helplessly for several seconds. Then he follows after the boy, calling desperately -- *

Riquelme (CONT'D)
Luis -- Luis!
(In Spanish)
Stay there -- or you're a dead man.

FRANTIC SHOT

Riquelme goes looking for Luis amongst the cars, the streets, calling for him -- but he's gone.

FADE TO BLACK,
THEN FADE UP
ON...

EXT. EAST LA - A PANORAMIC SHOT *

Many storefronts are shuttered and silent. And... *

THE STREETS

are less noisy, traffic is lighter: it's Sunday.

EXT. A HOUSING PROJECT COMPLEX *

run-down and covered by gang graffiti.

CLOSE SHOT OF A DOOR

as a hand knocks upon it three times. No one answers, so the hand knocks again. And finally the door is opened by...

FACUNDO

in his boxer briefs. Obviously he was sleeping. At 12 noon. *

FACUNDO
(raspy)
Mr. Riquelme? *

REVERSE ON RIQUELME standing outside the door. *

RIQUELME
Sorry to bother.

FACUNDO
That's okay. No problem.

RIQUELME
...Is Luis here?

FACUNDO
Uh...

RIQUELME
I need to talk with him.

FACUNDO
...Yeah, he's here.
(Pauses)
You wanna come in?

RIQUELME
Thanks. I'll just wait outside.

FACUNDO
...A'ight. Lemme go wake his ass.

The teen disappears and Riquelme casts a look around behind him at the rundown project complex: the place his son has defaulted to. A few moments later...

*

LUIS comes to the door. Looks at his father coldly, like a complete stranger.

*

*

LUIS
'Sup?

RIQUELME
Hey.

A beat.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
...I tried calling you...your phone was turned off.

*

The boy shrugs.

LUIS
...What're you doin' here?

RIQUELME
...I wanted to make sure you were okay.

LUIS
I'm fine.

A beat.

RIQUELME
You sure?

LUIS
Yeah.

RIQUELME
I was really worried.

Luis doesn't say anything.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
You scared me last night. *
(a beat) *
I didn't want you to get in
trouble.

LUIS
You ain't gotta worry about me.

RIQUELME *
But I do worry... I worry about you *
all the time.

Luis has nothing to say to this. *

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
You asked me a question before, *
about why people have kids--

Luis averts his eyes. Refuses to be reached. Riquelme then
does something odd...he SINGS, in a small, somewhat halting
voice...something that sounds like a children's song...

RIQUELME (CONT'D) (cont'd) *
Yo le dije al zapatero, que me
hiciera unos zapatos, con un
piquito redondo, como lo tienen los
patos --

Luis
What the hell is that?

RIQUELME
A song.

LUIS
Well stop it. Damn. You losin' it
completely?

Riquelme tries another way in.

RIQUELME
...Santiago told me where he sold
the truck.

LUIS
(indifferently)
Oh yeah where?

Riquelme removes a slip of paper. Holds it out for Luis to
take.

RIQUELME

A mercado negro. He gave me the address. I'm gonna try to get it back.

The boy doesn't take the paper. So Riquelme places it back in his pocket. Then asks:

RIQUELME (cont'd)

...You wanna come with me? *

LUIS

No.

A beat.

RIQUELME

...Okay then Luis.

They share a last look. And Riquelme walks away.

LUIS watches him for a second, seems to want to say something, but then steps back... *

INSIDE THE APARTMENT

and shuts the door. Stands there a long beat thinking with his back turned to...

FACUNDO

on the couch: he overheard everything and seems amused by Luis' intransigence towards his father.

FACUNDO

(in a sleepy, sarcastic voice)

Man, you is one ruthless-ass gangsta.

Luis ignores him, walks towards the bathroom as Facundo turns on his TV set.

FACUNDO (cont'd)

If I had a pops, I'd never do him like that. *

(Pauses to yawn)

You is cold, kid...Freezin' cold.

ANGLE ON LUIS

inside the bathroom. Staring at himself in the mirror: an old, young man. Deeply confused and unhappy.

FACUNDO (O.S.) (cont'd) *
 Ayo, I decided I ain't jumpin' in. *

CLOSER ON LUIS' FACE

not paying attention to his friend; his mind is still with his father.

FACUNDO (O.S.) (cont'd) *
 I'm 'a do like mi hermano did. He *
 fought in. You knew dat, right?

Luis doesn't answer. *

FACUNDO (O.S.) (cont'd) *
 (Continuing his monologue)
 Yeah man. I just go in the street
 with da homies: They pick a
 ma'fucker at random and shit -- he
 gotta be bigga than me, that's all.
 (Pauses)
 Then I just go up to him solo, and
 start wailing, lanza chingadazos --
 you feel me? As long as I beat the
 man's ass, I'm in...Fuck standin'
 in a circle. Lettin' niggas batta
 me. I'm too pretty for that shit.

Luis leaves the bathroom, back into the living room, towards the front door.

FACUNDO (cont'd) *
 (looks up; surprised)
 Where you goin' kid?

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS SHELTER - DAY *

Riquelme sits alone in a bus shelter outside the projects. *

The streets are quiet and still. We hold on this static frame for a long beat. *

Then, from OS, footsteps are heard approaching.

Getting louder as they draw nearer. Until finally... *

Luis enters the shelter and sits next to his father.

CUT TO:

THE SKY - AT DUSK

as a 747 jumbo jet makes its final descent into...

EXT. LAX - SAME

*

where other planes are pulling up to the gates, refueling, taxiing on runways as...

RIQUELME + LUIS

walk along a service road just outside the airport but within earshot of the vacuum-cleaner drone of jet turbines.

*

EXT. STREET NEAR LAX - NIGHT

*

the drone is fainter as Riquelme and Luis now progress by the airport's rental agency lots teeming with cars.

We pan with them as they pass camera then crane up to see that father and son are heading towards the...

COMMERCIAL AREA

just east of LAX -- an enclave of shady businesses; pawnshops, strip clubs, bail bondsmen, etc. It's almost completely dark now.

CUT TO:

AN AMERICAN FLAG

rippling in the wind. We hold on Old Glory for a beat. Then slowly tilt down to...

EXT. ALL-AMERICAN AUTO-MART

*

a used-car dealership, dark and closed for the night. The lot is surrounded by a 12 foot barbed-wire fence with a...

SECURITY GUARD

sitting in a booth at the front gate.

REVERSE SHOT

of Riquelme and Luis across street. Surveying the dealership.

LUIS

...This is the black market?

Riquelme double-checks his piece of paper. Then nods back, this is it.

CLOSE ON RIQUELME & LUIS

*

staring at the guard in the booth. The teen remarks on the similarity of the situation:

LUIS (cont'd) *
 (nods at the guard)
 ...You gonna roll up on 'im like
 you did that bouncer last night?

Riquelme doesn't get the quip, huh?

LUIS (cont'd) *
 At the club. What did you say to
 that bouncer to get inside?

A beat.

RIQUELME
 Nothing.

.LUIS
 Nothin'?

Riquelme shrugs.

RIQUELME
 I just told him that my truck was
 stolen and that I needed to talk
 with Santiago the dishwasher.

LUIS
 That's all you said?

RIQUELME
 That's all.

LUIS
 And he believed you?

RIQUELME
 I was telling the truth.

The teen thinks about it, oh yeah.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
 Come on.

EXT. ALL-AMERICAN AUTO-MART *

Riquelme and Luis are now moving through a dark and empty
 field behind the dealership --

-- stopping when they reach the barbed-wire fence. Then
 staring into the...

DEALERSHIP'S LOT

filled with approximately 300 used vehicles. It's too dark to
 discern if the truck is here.

LUIS
 (whispers, nods)
 Look.

ANGLE ON A GARAGE BUILDING

at the far corner of the lot: a light burns inside.

RIQUELME
 Somebody's still working.

Father and son share a look, now what?

NEW ANGLE

Riquelme and Luis tiptoe along the barbed-wire fence until they get near the garage building.

The fence runs right up along side the building, allowing Riquelme and Luis to peak through...

THE WINDOW

into the garage where a Ford Mustang is being worked on by...

TWO MECHANICS, both Anglos, leaning over the engine block while nearby a... *

SIBERIAN HUSKY sleeps on the floor next to an oil stain. *

Riquelme and Luis retreat from the window.

CUT TO:

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LOT

Still by the fence: father and son regroup. Stare into the lot*

POV PANNING SHOT

from the back garage building -- all the way across the darkened car lot -- to the front gate where the guard booth sits.

BACK ON RIQUELME

as he reaches a decision.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
 I'm gonna climb over and look
 around.

The teen is hesitant, especially after seeing the big dog.

RIQUELME (cont'd)
 (removing his denim
 jacket)

*

I want you to stay out here and
 watch for the guard. If he leaves
 the booth, whistle and I'll climb
 back over. Okay?

LUIS

Okay.

Riquelme begins scaling the 12 foot fence.

And when he nears the top, he drapes his jacket over the barbed
 wire. Then pulls himself adroitly over and hops down...ONTO THE
 CAR LOT SIDE where he looks back through the fence.

*

RIQUELME
 Be careful, hijito.

LUIS

You too.

Riquelme takes off to search for the truck and...

LUIS

watches him disappear into the lot. Affected by his father's
 courage. He then scurries off to check on the guard.

*

ANGLE ON RIQUELME

creeping through the darkened dealership, through rows of
 cars, searching everywhere for his truck. Nothing yet.

*

ANGLE ON LUIS

lurking up to the guard booth. He gets about ten yards away
 and sees that...

*

THE GUARD

has dozed off in his chair: a stroke of luck. NOTE: we see
 that the guard has a holstered gun on his hip.

REVERSE

on the Luis drifting back towards his position along the
 fence. Concerned about his father.

CLOSE ON RIQUELME

now searching near the garage building. Being especially
 careful not to make noise and then freezing when he sees...

*

THE SIBERIAN HUSKY

*

standing at the garage door sniffing at the air.

CLOSER ON THE DOG

letting out three demonstrative barks: Woof! Woof! Woof!
After which, the dog mopes back inside the garage and...

RIQUELME

lets out a sigh of relief. Continues his search.

ANGLE ON LUIS

across the lot. Greatly alarmed by the dog's bark. He isn't
in a position to see anything, so...

He starts hastening along the fence, scouring the lot for
sight of his father when suddenly he sees...

THE TRUCK

parked in a darkened section of the lot just 15 feet on the
other side -- with a tarp over the flatbed, covering the
tools. But it's the truck: definitely.

*

REVERSE ON LUIS

wanting to scream out. He climbs up the fence half-way to get
a better view of the lot, to try to glimpse his father. But
it's too dark to see anything.

The teen hops off and runs 20 yards. Looks into the lot
again, but still can't spot Riquelme. So --

Luis decides to try to climb over into the lot. He looks up
at the formidable barbed-wire atop the fence. And --

-- begins climbing the fence to the top. Pausing to take a
deep breath. The boy hasn't anything to protect him from the
razor sharp barbs. But he mans up and --

*

*

swings his leg over, somehow clearing the barbed-wire and
finding a toe hold on the other side of the fence.

He takes another deep breath, and now swings his other leg
over but gets it ensnared in the barbed wired.

CLOSE ON LUIS

trying to pull it free, Fuck! He loses his grip and slips,
deeper into the barbed wire. Now he's completely caught --
between both sides of the fence.

*

*

LUIS (cont'd)
 (in agony; under his
 breath)

Putá!

TIGHT ON RIQUELME hearing something. He takes few steps,
 looks up and sees...

LUIS flailing atop the fence, in terrible distress.

RIQUELME races over. Rapidly climbs up to help his son.

RIQUELME
¿QUE PASO?

LUIS
 (though clenched teeth)
 The truck is here. I saw it. It's
 over there.

Riquelme doesn't care about the truck right now. He takes out
 his pocket knife and cuts his son's jeans and shirt --

-- freeing the boy and with one arm (his other is holding
 onto the fence) lifts him safely over the barbed wire.

They both climb down the fence and are now on the lot.

Ducking down so as not to be seen.

RIQUELME
 You okay?

Luis is shaken, and bleeding where the barbs cut his legs. He
 looks at his father gratefully. Then says:

LUIS
 The truck.

They hustle 20 yards over to...

THE TRUCK -- a moment of sheer elation, then --

-- seeing that the windshield has been removed. And not
 replaced yet. A gaping hole.

RIQUELME pulls back the tarp covering the truck's flatbed.

RIQUELME
 MY TOOLS ARE ALL HERE!

OS, the dog starts barking: he's heard them.

Father and son quickly get inside the truck.

LUIS
 (looking back towards the
 garage)
¡VAMONOS!

RIQUELME digs into his pocket and removes his spare key when suddenly... *

THE SIBERIAN HUSKY is upon them, leaping up, pawing Riquelme's driver's side window, barking, snapping his fangs ferociously. *

LUIS (cont'd) *
 START IT!!

RIQUELME'S HAND quakes as he inserts the key. Turns it, and starts the engine. *

ANGLE ON THE DOG

barking louder, more viciously. Trying to jump up onto the hood -- where there's no windshield glass.

LUIS (cont'd) *
 (looking back)
 They're comin'! GO! GO!

ANGLE ON THE TWO MECHANICS

running towards the truck, just 20 feet away.

ANGLE ON THE DOG

at the front fender up, climbing onto the truck's hood.

LUIS (cont'd) *
 (terrified)
 OH FUCK!

TIGHT ON RIQUELME

as his OLD WORKBOOT floors the gas pedal making... *

THE TRUCK peel out of it's spot, causing the... *

VICIOUS DOG to go sliding off the hood to the side. *

LUIS (cont'd) *
 (can't believe it)
 Holy--

The truck roars through the lot, through the rows of used cars, as...

THE TWO MECHANICS

continue chasing, as does....

THE DOG

running/barking right behind... *

THE TRUCK

barreling down the center lane of the lot, towards the closed front gate where...

THE SECURITY GUARD

stands directly in front of the gate, with his gun raised. Aiming it squarely at...

RIQUELME

who doesn't duck down or show any fear, this is my truck.

ANGLE ON LUIS

crouched in his seat. Watching his father. Confounded by his fearlessness.

LUIS (cont'd) *

DUCK DOWN!

TIGHT ON THE GUARD

squinting his eyes, aiming his gun, about to fire at...

RIQUELME

still not flinching as he bears down on the guard in a life and death duel of nerves. The truck is now just ten yards away from... *

THE GUARD

who pulls back the hammer on his gun. About to squeeze the trigger. But for some reason he wavers...

-- lowering his gun without firing, and stepping aside, allowing the...

TRUCK

to smash through the locked gate, CRASH! And out onto the street. Sparks flying as the front-end scrapes the concrete. And then turns wildly --

-- screeches away...

Luis puts his hand over his father's, trying to pry it off. Both hands.

LUIS (cont'd) *

Go!

But Riquelme's hand is too strong. He TURNS OFF THE TRUCK, removes the key.

A blond-haired cop sidles up to the truck and leans in.

COP

May I have your driver's license
and registration please?

CLOSE ON RIQUELME'S FACE

as he claps his eyes shut. Perhaps hoping that when he opens them again, this will have been a dream.

COP (cont'd) *

Sir?

Riquelme opens his eyes, looks up at the:

COP (cont'd) *

Your license? *

BLACK OUT. CUT
TO: *

EXT. PACIFIC COMMUNITY POLICE PRECINCT - 1 HOUR LATER *

just north of LAX on Culver Boulevard. *

INT. PACIFIC COMMUNITY POLICE PRECINCT - SAME *

a few uniformed cops are typing into PCs, doing paper work, rummaging through file cabinets, while across the office...

LUIS

sits on a bench looking at an...

AFRICAN AMERICAN COP

age 45, standing at a nearby desk. Finishing up a call in Spanish. He's the precinct's Immigration Control Liaison. A gruff man with a good heart named:

OFFICER ANDREWS (TO PHONE) *

(with a gringo accent)

Okay. Esta bien. Gracias.

The cop hangs up and looks at Luis. Studies the teen for a moment. *

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *
 ...You want somethin' to drink?

Luis glares at him coldly without answering, fuck you.

CUT TO:

INT. AN INTERROGATION ROOM *

Where Riquelme sits alone with his hands cuffed to the top of the table. Like a common criminal. *

Note: the room has a large plexi-glass window that allows him to look out at Luis and vice versa.

We hold on this shot of Riquelme bound, until the...

DOOR OPENS

and Officer Andrews enters, carrying a manila file jacket.

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *
 I spoke with Sandra Martinez, the daughter of the truck owner. She backed up your story.

The cop sits down at the table.

RIQUELME
 (softly)
 ...So can I leave now?

OFFICER ANDREWS
 I'm afraid not.
 (Points at the file)
 There's two outstanding warrants in here for your arrest.

The cop opens the file.

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *
 (begins reading)
 ...The first is for an '02 felony possession of false government documents.
 (Looks up; guesses)
 That would be a fake social security card, right?

Riquelme doesn't answer him, so:

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *
 (looks back down;
 continues reading)
 --which leads to the second warrant: DHS has you no-showing for a Removal Hearing on December 12th of '02.

And consequently, Immigration Court
deported you in absentia on May
13th of 2003.

(Stares up)

This is all you, right?

A beat. The cop closes the file and takes a human interest
in the illegal immigrant. *

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *

...How long you been here?

A beat.

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *

Mr. Riquelme, how long have you
been in this country?

RIQUELME

...A long time.

OFFICER ANDREWS

How many years exactly?

RIQUELME

16 years.

OFFICER ANDREWS

That is a long time.

(Beat)

What do you do?

Riquelme looks up.

RIQUELME

Excuse me?

OFFICER ANDREWS

What kind of work do you do?

RIQUELME

...I'm a gardener.

OFFICER ANDREWS

And your wife?

A beat.

RIQUELME

I don't have a wife.

OFFICER ANDREWS

I meant the boy's mother.

RIQUELME

She's re-married. She lives in
Mexico.

OFFICER ANDREWS
So you're raising him alone?

Riquelme nods. And the cop looks out the plexi-glass at Luis.

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *
...How old is he?

RIQUELME
14.

A long beat. The cop is still looking at Luis.

OFFICER ANDREWS
He's bangin' already, isn't he?

RIQUELME
No.

OFFICER ANDREWS *
He is. I can tell.

RIQUELME
No.

OFFICER ANDREWS
(shrugs)
Okay.

The cop stands and unlocks Riquelme's cuffs from the
tabletop. And for a fleeting moment -- *

-- the officer seems like he's considering releasing him. *
Toying with an act of grace. But then he says gravely:

OFFICER ANDREWS (cont'd) *
I'm sorry, Mr. Riquelme, the law
states that I have to transfer you
to detention at San Pedro SPC.
(beat)
If you need to make a phone call do
it now.

CUT TO: *

INT./EXT. OUTSIDE OF POLICE STATION - DRIVING *

Anita and Luis drive in silence for a moment, both miserable.

LUIS (CONT'D)
Papi says... you can sell the
truck. Get your money back.
Blasco's daughter's gonna pick it
up. So... you're cool.

ANITA

That's what you think? That I'm cool with that?

(Beat)

You know what's gonna happen now?

(Luis shrugs)

You want to know something about that man? When I got here, for six years, that man gave me a place and took care of me, and fed me, and protected me.

(Beat)

Everything I have in this world is because of his love and generosity.

LUIS

Yeah, and then you got the fuck out.

ANITA

Watch your language.

LUIS

You got the fuck out, didn't you? When you got your chance, and married some *pendejo* for a green card. You got out and left him, and you left me, so don't be tellin' me shit. Don't be tellin' me you know him! I know him! He was all I got!

Luis is crying now, bitter tears, and he's angry that they're being seen. Anita is stunned -- almost enough to take a different tack, and apologize, but her responsibilities take her down a different road...

ANITA

That's not true. You got me. Your Dad wants you to come stay with me, and...

(beat)

But I got rules in my house. You have to behave. You have to respect me and respect yourself. If I see the slightest sign that you're involved in any stuff -- drugs or gang stuff. You're out. Linda's only twelve years old. You understand?

The car has stopped at a light.

LUIS

Yeah, I understand.

Luis opens up the door and gets out of the car. Begins walking away.

*

ANITA
 (furious)
 Luis! What are you doing?!

The boy cuts across traffic. Disappearing down the rainy street with his Aunt's voice ringing out furiously:

ANITA (O.S.) (cont'd)
 LUIS!

BLACK OUT.

EXT. THE STREETS OF EAST LA

As Luis walks through the rain. A siren wailing in the distance...The streets ominous as always. The teen chances upon another crime scene. Another crowd of ghouls circled around a corpse...The boys keeps walking through the rainy 'hood until he arrives before...

EXT. SOTO STREET GARDENS

a familiar low-rise housing projects. We see some gang-bangers -- in their 20's and 30's -- under umbrellas, drinking forties in the parking lot as...

LUIS

approaches: greeting them with nods and pounds. One of the men we recognize (from his house arrest ankle monitor) as Ruthie's uncle:

MARCELO
 What up, youngin'?

LUIS
 Yo Celi.

They half-hug and another man named:

CHEZ
 (gives Luis a pound)
 'Sup li' Aztec all-star?

LUIS
 Whassup Chez?

CHEZ
 (rubbing his face)
 Just chillin' man. Out here on the grind. Puttin' in work. You know how we do.

OS, voices and music blare from a 2nd floor unit.

MARCELO
 (nods up at the noise)
 You here for the party?

LUIS

Party?

INSIDE RUTHIE'S APARTMENT

a party is in full swing with twenty high school kids drinking beer, smoking weed, and dancing to Reggaeton. It's noisy, and very dark. But we're able to discern that these kids are all gang-bangers or would be gang-bangers. Evidenced by their tatoos, hairstyles, and clothes.

REVERSE ON LUIS

standing in the threshold of the apartment's front door when:

FACUNDO

(runs up to him)

Whassup vato?

(hugs him)

You all wet, son. *¿Que paso?*

Facundo sees that something's not right with his friend.

FACUNDO (cont'd)

You okay?

*

Ruthie comes over carrying a balloon. Hits him Luis in the head with it.

*

RUTHIE

I tried callin' you earlier.

LUIS

(pushing the balloon away)

Get off me.

RUTHIE

What da fuck's wrong with you?

TIME CUT TO:

EXT. SOTO STREET GARDENS - THE 2ND FLOOR LANDING

*

just outside the apartment door. Rain falls in the b.g. as Ruthie and Facundo try to counsel Luis.

*

RUTHIE (cont'd)

They ain't lettin' no workin' man take up a cot. Calexico ain't got that kinda cash. They only want ballers and shot-callers up there.

*

The girl knows a little about the criminal justice system from her family.

RUTHIE (cont'd) *
 (continuing)
 I mean, at the least, they gotta
 give him a bond option. He puts
 down some loot with the bailiff.
 And they'll let him come home 'til
 his court date. That's how they
 always do.

Luis shakes his head. Knows that his father's situation is
 more complicated than that. OS, a girl screams out, Ruthie!

RUTHIE (cont'd) *
 I'll be right back.

She goes into her apartment and leaves Luis alone with:

FACUNDO *
 Whatever happens, Luis, you family *
 to me, man. You can come stay with *
 me. We got plenty 'a room in my *
 crib. And you know that mi abuela *
 got mad love for you.

Luis doesn't react to the kind offer and:

FACUNDO (cont'd) *
 (puts his big arm around *
 him)
 Yo, and fuck school. It's time for *
 us to step up. Make some *
 bolas...Stop all this kiddie *
 shit...I told Rey we gonna come in *
 this week. No more frontin'. *
 Estamos firme. Fo' real, and fo' *
 life.

Some boys step out to smoke a blunt on the landing and: *

FACUNDO (cont'd) *
 (bounds over to them)
 Look at these sneaky-ass niggas!
 Better share that shit: *pásame las*
tres. *

CLOSE ON LUIS staring into the rain, as we slowly... *

BLACK OUT.

FADE IN ON....

EXT. SAN PEDRO SERVICE PROCESSING CENTER - DAY *

an illegal alien detention center 18 miles south of LAX. Over
 35,000 adult men and women are processed, detained and
 deported from this facility each year.

VARIOUS ANGLES

of the detention center's several buildings which include separate male and female prisons, a hospital, an Immigration Court, the LA administrative offices for the Department of Immigrations & Customs Enforcement (ICE) and a branch office for the Department of Homeland Security.

CLOSE ON THE RECEIVING GATE

at the side of the men's prison building as a...

WHITE SCHOOL BUS

with caged windows pulls up. And...

17 MEN are led out of the bus with their hands and legs shackled. Riquelme is among them. *

CUT TO:

A LARGE RECEIVING ROOM

inside the prison where the 17 men stand listening to a: *

PRISON GUARD
(speaking in Spanish;
subtitled)

Welcome to San Pedro. Pay attention. I'm not going to repeat myself. You're going to remove all of your clothes. Everything. Socks, underwear, shoes. All jewelry, watches, necklaces, rings, etc.

PROCESSING MONTAGE BEGINS

we see a line of nude Central American men. Half of them are gang-bangers with bodies covered in menacing tattoo ink. The other half are simple workers. Everyone is holding their clothes. Standing outside a receiving window.

PRISON GUARD (V.O.) (cont'd) *
(In Spanish; subtitled)
There's no fighting allowed in this prison. If you are involved in a conflict of any kind you will be criminally charged just as you would be on the street.

CLOSE ON RIQUELME

having an plastic inmate ID bracelet affixed to his wrist.

PRISON GUARD (V.O.) (cont'd) *
 (Continuing in Spanish)
 We need to know right now if you *
 have HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, *
 Hepatitis or any other communicable *
 diseases or medical conditions. *

ANGLE ON RIQUELME

naked before a guard bidding him to open his mouth.

PRISON GUARD (V.O.) (cont'd) *
 A word to the gang-bangers. There *
 are no gangs inside here. If you *
 are caught congregating, *
 segregating, holding meetings, *
 organizing, recruiting, practicing *
 any kind of intimidation, throwing *
 signs, defacing property, you will *
 be swiftly sent to isolation. *

CLOSE ON RIQUELME in a communal shower with several other *
 prisoners. *

CUT TO:

RIQUELME in an orange jumpsuit with the letters ICE on his *
 back. Once again, he's waiting on line. *

PRISON GUARD (V.O.) (cont'd) *
 You're going to be processed into the *
 Department of Homeland Security's *
 immigrant database. Your *
 information will be made available *
 to all Federal Law Enforcement *
 Agencies as well as International *
 Agencies and Government's. *

CLOSE ON RIQUELME against a wall as his mug shot is taken. *

PRISON GUARD (V.O.) (cont'd) *
 You're going to receive a \$10 *
 calling card issued by the *
 Immigrant's Hope Charity Group of *
 Greater Los Angeles. The pay phones *
 also take coins or you may make *
 collect calls. *

CUT TO:

AN EXTREME WIDE SHOT

of a cavernous room filled with 500 male prisoners. 65% of *
 them are criminal detainees. Many are hardened gang-bangers *
 from El Salvador and Honduras being deported because of *
 serious offenses. *

PRISON GUARD (V.O.) (cont'd) *
 And finally, you're going to be
 released into general population.
 Thank you.

TIGHT ON RIQUELME

looking out over the enormous room. In his hand, he holds his
 prison issued telephone card. And, almost immediately, a...

PRISON THUG

walks right up to him and snatches his calling card.

PRISON THUG
 (calmly)
 I need that, yo.

He saunters away from Riquelme, and we...

CUT TO:

EXT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - DAY *

in the noon-day sun.

INSIDE

Luis sleeps soundly on the couch in the living room. For some
 reason, he choose to spend the night -- not in his own bed --
 but in his father's.

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - KITCHEN *

Luis makes himself a sandwich, looks out the window at the --

LONE TREE

that his father planted in the backyard. On the branch, the
 resident...

ROBIN

pecks at its plastic seed feeder which is empty; yet the bird
 continues pecking vainly, tap, tap, tap. It's so conditioned
 to being fed that it's unable to think for itself. Finally,
 the creature smartens up and flies away. *

REVERSE

on Luis (indifferent to the symbolism). He walks back... *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM *

and looks around. Feeling the emptiness of the space. A space -- he understands -- that his father will never return to. And that he'll have to leave shortly. *

INT. RIQUELME'S HOUSE - LUIS'S BEDROOM *

Luis looks around here as well. The posters, the dirty laundry, the wall clock. It all feels like someone else's stuff. *

Luis then reaches into the closet and removes a small bag of marijuana from a hiding space.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

The boy sits down on the couch. And in real time, we observe him rolling a joint. Going through the ritual which will allow him to ease his pain.

And when he's done, he sets the tip of the joint on fire, click, and inhales deeply.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DETENTION CENTER CAFETERIA *

at San Pedro. A pro bono lawyer, age 31, (from the California Immigrant Aid Society) sits at a lunch table -- a no nonsense man named:

GABE WETTENAL *

(looking at some papers
distractedly)

Mr. Riquelme, I'm an attorney. Do
want me to speak Spanish?

REVERSE ON RIQUELME sitting across from the lawyer. *

RIQUELME

I understand English.

GABE WETTENAL

I work for an NGO that helps
illegal aliens... Do you already
have an attorney to represent you
at your pre-hearing tomorrow? *

RIQUELME

I don't have any money.

GABE WETTENAL

I understand. My services are
free. *

The government doesn't provide legal representation to aliens, but San Pedro works with California's Legal Aid Society to offer its detainees access to pro bono council. *

Riquelme doesn't understand any of this.

RIQUELME

I'm sorry. I can't pay a lawyer.

GABE WETTENAL

Right... I'm free. I'm just here to help advise you about your pre-hearing. I don't cost anything. *

RIQUELME

...What's a pre-hearing? *

The lawyer tries to make it as simple as possible. *

GABE WETTENAL

Tomorrow you're going to go before an immigration judge. He's going to ask you a question: whether or not you plan on fighting removal from this country. *

(Beat)

If you tell him that you wish to fight, then he'll assign you a date in the future for your Removal Hearing.

(Beat)

If you tell him that you don't want to fight, then the judge will order your immediate deportation right after the hearing.

Riquelme is overcome with welter of questions and concerns.

RIQUELME

I have a 14 year-old son that was born here. I'm his only parent. *

GABE WETTENAL

...Where is he now?

RIQUELME

With my sister.

GABE WETTENAL

Will she take care of him for you?

RIQUELME

Yes.

The lawyer considers this. Then looks down at Riquelme's file. Reads it over again, then says:

GABE WETTENAL

Based on your prior deportation and felony offense, the judge is not going to offer you bail. Regardless of your sole provider status.

*

(Beat)

So, if you decide to fight deportation, you'll have to stay in this detention center until your Removal Hearing.

A beat.

RIQUELME

...How long will that be?

GABE WETTENAL

That depends on the docket schedule. But you can figure on at least three months. Probably more like six before you get a chance to argue your case in court.

The prospect of being locked up that long is stunning to:

RIQUELME

...Six months?

GABE WETTENAL

Now, if you can afford to sit in this jail for that amount of time. And not earn money while you do so. Maybe you can try to build a case against removal.

(Beat)

But my services are only for Pre-Hearing motions. For Removal Hearings, you'll need to hire a lawyer to represent you.

*

A beat.

RIQUELME

...How much?

GABE WETTENAL

In the thousands of dollars.

A beat.

RIQUELME

...What would be my chances?

*

GABE WETTENAL

Zero.

(beat)

Not exactly zero. But only 3% of all Removal Hearings result in an alien being granted asylum. Thousands of people are deported each year who have children younger than yours. Even aliens that have clean records and pay taxes.

Riquelme sits there in a quandary. And the lawyer stands up.

GABE WETTENAL (cont'd)

Give it some thought. You have until tomorrow to make your final decision.

(Closes his brief case)

But if it was me, I wouldn't waste any money fighting it. It's cheaper and faster to get deported and then just pay a coyote to bring you back in.

Riquelme looks up.

GABE WETTENAL (cont'd)

See you at the pre-hearing.

CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING PEN - DAY

Riquelme squats, his back literally against the wall. He is an island of fear and solitude in the hellscape. Nearby, a phone -- COVERED in scratches, ball-point pen ink messages... amongst them, over and over, "MS", "MS-13", "Mara Salvatrucha" -- the signs for the most violent and pervasive gang in the center, the Mara Salvatrucha. Central Americans from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua.

Riquelme takes several deep breathes... and STANDS.

BY A CORNER

A group of men, most naked to the waist, are rolling dice, putting down money, talking shit. Their backs are to the rest of the room and the rest of the room keeps clear. Their backs are also FESTOONED with tattoos -- "*solo dios puede juzgarme*", "Smile now, cry later". The circle is closed to Riquelme.

RIQUELME

Excuse me. *Lo siento. Lo siento.*
Lo siento.

Ignored, Riquelme finally, gingerly places his hand on the shoulder of one of the gang-bangers. At that, as if one organism, the entire posse turns and faces him, radiating hostility. It is a frightening view -- many of these boys (barely eighteen) have full body and FACIAL tattoos, generally with the MS motif. Signs of not ever being able to go back.

GANG-BANGER

Why you touchin' me, bitch? You a fag?

RIQUELME

No.

ANOTHER

You lookin' for a way out? You lookin' to die?

RIQUELME

I'm looking for the man in charge.

GANG-BANGER

That's me. And I'm telling you to step off, 'fore I got to end you, *puto*.

RIQUELME

I...I'm lookin' for the man in charge.

This doesn't satisfy them. They group around him, mad-dogging him, staring him down. Riquelme keeps his eyes low, not meeting their eyes but not leaving.

ANOTHER VOICE

Dejalo pasar.

The sea of hostile faces parts... to reveal, sitting there, a man in his twenties, his face unmarked, perhaps explaining his survival... he has the air of someone in his forties. This is LA RATA.

LA RATA

You know who I am?

RIQUELME

No sir.

LA RATA

You know where I'm from?

RIQUELME

El Salvador, I think.

LA RATA

And where you from?

RIQUELME
 (beat)
 I'm from nowhere.

LA RATA
 You're a fuckin' cholo from Mexico.
 Now who are you?

RIQUELME
 I'm nobody. Nobody.

LA RATA
 What does nobody want from me? You
 know you riskin' your life now.

RIQUELME
 A phone call.

LA RATA
 You got to call your boyfriend?

RIQUELME
 (Quietly)
 My son.

LA RATA
 What? Speak up, bitch?

RIQUELME
 Do what you need to do to me. Do
 what you need to. But I'm not
 nobody. I'm a father.
 (Beat, his head still
 down)
 I'm his father. I'm his father.
 I'm his father.

CUT TO:

THE BACKYARD

as Luis lays on the ground. Staring up at the cloudless blue
 sky. Under the full glare of the sun.

The boy appears extremely stoned: his eyes are glassy, and
 his limbs are torpid and numb.

OS, the phone begins ringing again. But he ignores it.

TIME CUT:

AN HOUR LATER

INSIDE THE KITCHEN

Luis enters from the yard and drinks water directly from the sink's faucet. Wipes his mouth on his arm and walks over to the...

*

ANSWERING MACHINE

blinking with a new message.

REVERSE

on Luis: not sure if he wants to hear it. Finally he presses the play button and:

RIQUELME'S VOICE
 (begins to fill the room)
 Hola Hijito. Are you there?
 (Beat)
 If you're there please pick up.
 It's important.

Luis can hear the echo of the prison on the tape. Buzzing sounds, menacing laughter and outbursts.

RIQUELME'S VOICE (cont'd)
 I just called tía. She said you aren't with her. Are you home?
 (Pauses)
 Please son, if you're there, pick up. I really need to hear your voice. And know that you're okay.
 I'm very worried about you.

*

*

CLOSER ON LUIS

closing his eyes to stave off tears: his father's worry and concern is palpable. And agonizing to listen to.

RIQUELME'S VOICE (cont'd)
 I have my hearing tomorrow at the Immigration Court, here at San Pedro. If you can come, I would really appreciate it. It may be the...
 (pauses, doesn't complete the thought)
 Hijito, I want you to know that I was trying to make things better for us... Better for you... The only thing that matters is that you're alright, that you're going to be okay. That you would have a chance to stay away from these--
 (pay phone beeps)
 You don't know important that is, hijito, please promise me that you'll--

*

*

*

*

Suddenly the message cuts off and Luis opens his eyes: he managed to keep his tears in.

Barely. But the call has thrown him deeper into despair.

And then from OS --

He hears the sound of footsteps coming up the porch stairs followed by a loud, happy knock on the front door.

FACUNDO (O.S.)

Ayo, Luis. Open up, gangsta.

HOLD ON LUIS

not moving a muscle.

*

FACUNDO (O.S.) (cont'd)

*

Come on, bee-atch, open up this door.

The burly kid begins drumming a Lil' Rob beat on the door, rapping mindlessly to the rhythm:

*

FACUNDO (cont'd)

*

One hell of a lookin' beat, the
least of my feats from west to
east...from north to south, not
knowin' what it's all about, top me
on the scout, looking for my new
recruits to follow my boots down
the route...If you're not in,
you're out: you know what I'm
about. I'm beggin' you to stay,
beggin' you to come play. But if
you're out, you better pray,
because we're comin' your way.
TRUCHA...

*

Facundo stops rapping, figuring his friend isn't home.

TIGHT ON LUIS

standing motionless, listening to Facundo walk off the porch, down the stairs, and away from the house.

Luis moves softly over to his barred window, looks stealthily out the curtains at his...

BEST FRIEND

disappearing down the street towards some tough looking male teenagers blurry in the distance, as we...

BLACK OUT.

FADE IN ON...

INT. SAN PEDRO IMMIGRATION COURT - THE NEXT MORNING

*

hundreds of Central Americans are massed out in front of the facility waiting to be allowed in: wives, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, babies, friends, priests, public advocates. The dread of deportation writ large upon the faces of these soon-to-be-severed families.

THE COURT ROOMS

are being organized by officers. Chairs being moved around, microphones adjusted, American flags fussed with.

THE HALLWAYS

are busy with immigration lawyers milling about, entreating judges, and court officials.

IN SMALL CONFERENCE ROOMS

more lawyers are prepping cases over coffee and bagels.

INTERCUT TO:

THE MEN'S PRISON

one hundred yards away as 15 prisoners in jumpsuits are being bound by guards with handcuffs and leg-irons.

CLOSE ON RIQUELME

as his legs are shackled and his wrists are bound.

GUARD

Alright, let's go.

We watch the 15 prisoners buzzed through a gate into...

THE CAVERNOUS GENERAL POPULATION ROOM

filled with 500 detainees, whistles, cat calls, Spanish curses, laughter, all echoing hellishly.

RIQUELME AND THE PRISONERS

are prodded around the periphery of the room, down a long hallway of cell-blocks and door-less toilets.

INTERCUT TO:

THE LOBBY OF THE COURT HOUSE

as the Central American families stream through the front doors towards the elevator banks.

ANGLE ON THE PRISONER'S ENTRANCE

on the side of the court building. One by one, the prisoners disappear into the facility. The last man in is Riquelme.

ON A 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY:

Riquelme dressed in his prison jumpsuit, hands and feet still shackled -- is directed by a guard into...

A SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM where

*

GABE WETTENAL
(stands and greets him)
Good morning, Mr. Riquelme.

RIQUELME
Good morning.

The guard helps Riquelme sit in a chair and then leaves.

GABE WETTENAL
(still standing)
Have you made your decision?

Riquelme nods, but doesn't reveal what it is.

*

GABE WETTENAL (CONT'D)
Fair enough. I think its for the best.
(Beat)
There's someone here to see you.

*

The lawyer exits the room, and we push in on...

RIQUELME'S FACE

waiting to see who this someone is. A moment later, the lawyer returns with...

LUIS

wearing the soccer jersey his father bought him.

GABE WETTENAL (cont'd)
I'll leave you alone.
(Looks at his watch)
You have about two minutes before we get started.

*

Luis sits down across from:

RIQUELME
(reaches with his cuffed hands, touches the boy)
Hijito.

*

*

Luis is very uncomfortable seeing his father like this.

RIQUELME (cont'd) *
 You came with Anita?

LUIS
 Yes.

The hallway outside has become animated as the court proceeding is about to get underway.

RIQUELME
 I want you to know that I'm very sorry about this. About failing you.

LUIS
 You never failed me.

RIQUELME
 I was never there--

LUIS
 You were always there. Always.

This comforts Riquelme.

RIQUELME
 Please tell me you're going to stay with Anita. Promise me you'll try.

Luis can't answer. And Riquelme tries one last time to reach him.

RIQUELME (to be improved) (cont'd) *
 ..When you were little. After your *
 mother left and we were all alone.
 I didn't know how was going to
 manage with a small boy and no *
 money. No regular job. I had a *
 lot anger inside me. But the *
 thing, the one thing that helped me *
 get over all that was you. Being *
 able to take care of you, and love *
 you. You're the most important *
 thing in this world to me hijito. *
 And I -- That's why I had you. For *
 me. For me. For a reason to live.

LUIS
 Yeah.
 (Beat)
 I been thinkin'...that song. I remembered it.

RIQUELME
 ...the song?

LUIS

Yeah. You used to sing it when I was little.

There's a pause. Then, unexpectedly, Luis begins to sing the little ditty.

LUIS (cont'd)

Yo le dije al zapatero, que me hiciera unos zapatos, con un piquito redondo, como lo tienen los patos -- Malaia zapatero, como me engagno, me hice los zapatos pero el piquito no --

*

RIQUELME

-- Malaia zapatero, como me engagno, me hice los zapatos pero el piquito no...

-- Which means, whether we choose to translate it or not, "I told the shoemaker to make me some shoes, with a rounded tip, like a duck. Damn shoemaker, he made me the shoes, but without the tip".

ANGLE ON THE LAWYER

poking his head back in the room.

GABE WETTENAL

I'm sorry Mr. Riquelme, we have to go right now. Then calling our case number.

RIQUELME

(flustered, tries to finish his thought)

Luis, you have to promise me you'll try to live with Anita...Please try. Please give the new school a chance. Promise --

*

*

A COURT OFFICER, meanwhile, enters and promptly raises Riquelme out of his chair, takes him away from...

*

But Luis shouts over him, as he's taken away. Luis is crying now, barely able to contain his emotions.

LUIS

-- You promise me! You promise me you're comin' back! Don't leave me alone! You promise me! You promise me you're coming home!

*

And then, he watches his father enter the court as our sound fades out to MOS.

CUT TO:

A SILENT SEQUENCE

of the packed courtroom. Efficiently carrying out its functions. MOS shots of various cases and motions. The judge hearing oral arguments, mouthing rulings, conferring at the sidebar with attorneys. Witnesses on the stand testifying. Men and women, all ages, being deported for all kinds of reasons, fair and unfair. We watch all of this in silence so as to minimize the pathos, until it's time for...

RIQUELME

to stand before the judge at his pre-hearing. Wettental exchanges some preliminary words with the judge and then we fade back in the sound at the fateful moment when:

JUDGE WINTER

It's the court's understanding, Mr. Riquelme, that do you not wish to contest this motion for removal?

CLOSE SHOT OF RIQUELME

turning around and spotting...

ANITA

in one corner of the packed court room. She nods to her brother with tears in her eyes.

RIQUELME

nods back and then spots...

LUIS

in the other corner of the courtroom: The boy locks eyes with his father: letting him know that he's going to try.

JUDGE WINTER (cont'd)

Mr. Riquelme?

WETTENTAL

(answering for him)
My client does not contest the motion.

JUDGE WINTER

Please confirm that that's true Mr. Riquelme.

RIQUELME
 (to the judge)
 Yes, it's true.

JUDGE WINTER
 (looks at the court
 secretary)
 Very well. Let the record show
 that the Los Angeles Immigration
 Court orders the deportation of
 Carlos Jose Antonio Riquelme
 effective immediately on this date.

*

The judge lowers his gavel and we...

SLOWLY DISSOLVE TO:

AN AMERICAN FLAG rippling in the wind outside the prison.

*

ANGLE ON A WHITE SCHOOL BUS idling beside the prison's side
 entrance as...

*

*

RIQUELME

emerges followed by several other fresh deportees. All of
 them dressed back in their regular clothes. Free of
 shackles.

*

The men walk towards the bus, along a barbed-wired fence
 which separates them from...

THEIR FAMILIES

on the other side. We see Luis and Anita standing at the
 fence peering through at...

RIQUELME

who stops to looks at them. He doesn't smile or wave. But
 something in his eyes communicates that his spirit has not
 been destroyed. That he's going to be okay. As long as...

*

LUIS

is okay. The boy stares back at his father resolutely, until:

PRISON GUARD
 (interrupts)
 Let's go. Keep moving.

Riquelme gets on the bus and...

LUIS & ANITA

*

walk slowly over towards the visitor parking lot. Anita
 places her arm around the boy's shoulder. A simple, healing,
 motherly gesture witnessed by...

RIQUELME in his window seat on the bus. *

PULL BACK HIGH AND WIDE

as Anita's car drives out of the parking lot, heading north, while...

THE BUS pulls away from the prison, due south. *

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. SOCCER FIELD -- DAY -- SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

Luis is playing soccer, an informal game with various other Latin American players. He's not half bad. It's a hot day, and he takes off his shirt, joining some of the others in going shirtless. No tattoos.

CUT TO: *

EXT. TRUCK DEPOT -- CIUDAD JUARES -- DAWN

RIQUELME waits nervously by a line of eighteen-wheelers, hard-used, dirty, Mexican plates.

A DRIVER appears from the cab, walks over to him.

DRIVER

¿Tienes el dinero?

Riquelme gives him a wad of bills. The driver looks it over. Okay.

He goes over to the rear of the trailer, and RAPS a signal on the door. The door opens from the inside.

INSIDE THE TRAILER -- Boxes of cheap electronic, but also, several MEN, workers like Riquelme. One of the men reaches down a hand.

MAN

(smiles)

Vamos a ir hacia el norte.

Riquelme

Vamos a ir a casa.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.