

LIVING ON HOPES & DREAMS

Screenplay by
Teri Anne Kopp

Story by
M. J. Isaacs

Based on a true story.

redcampchair@gmail.com
WGAW: 2156326

EXT. NEW MEXICO MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

Framed like a travel postcard, a moment of perfect stillness showcases the majestic desert mountains of the southwest. Dusted with fresh snow, the ancient mesas rise and dominate the rugged landscape under a brilliant blue sky.

SUPERIMPOSE: "NEW MEXICO - February 21, 2021"

Ripping through the picturesque moment, a gust of WHISTLING WIND kicks up dust, bends sagebrush, quakes ice crystals.

EXT. TRAIL ROAD - DAY

Centered in this valley of wonder in the middle of nowhere, a sign of life appears. Settled near the top of a mesa, a white 2003 GMC DENALI XL flies an AMERICAN FLAG high over the roof.

SUPERIMPOSE: "DAY 1"

Another RIP OF WIND sends a flurry of mini DUST DEVILS into a dance around the Denali. The SUV rocks, despite being heavily laden with CAMPING GEAR hanging from the roof rack, including a mountain bike which tugs at the straps holding it out at a ninety degree angle over the left rear tire. A single, faded sticker, "CSULB," is centered on the back window.

The open space beneath the SUV is occupied by storage crates, water jugs, a generator, and various tools. At the rear, a CURIOUS LARGE MASS is strapped off under a tarp.

INT. DENALI - DAY

Inside the crowded confines of his Denali, MICHAEL, 62, reclines on top of a sleeping bag spread over a CAMPING COT. Snack-food wrappers piled at his side. Blue eyes, fair skin, short silver hair. He is fully focused on his LAPTOP, tapping the keys with intense rapidity.

The wind WHISTLES. The Denali SHAKES. Michael barely notices.

He stops typing - an EMAIL, subject: "Consultant Position." Playing with the whiskers on his chin, he reads aloud:

MICHAEL

Dear Mr. Corwin, The generous offer you've suggested for the position as Chief Marketing Consultant is well received and much appreciated. However, I will need a few days to consider relocating... to South Dakota.

Michael looks out the window and sighs. He grabs his thermos. Tilts it back, but it's empty. He SHOUTS out in frustration.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

CRAAAAAAP! Why would I leave the one place that finally keeps my soul happy?

He rifles through the snack pile, nothing but empty wrappers. He scoops them up and throws them. They float to his knees.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Great God, if you really do exist, I'm not sure how much more of this I can take. Honestly, man. I've run out of rope. I've run out of gas. And I'm running low on time...

(sighs)

Don't get me wrong, I am sincerely grateful for everything I do have. Every day I actually find something new to appreciate. And thank you for that, but, this... this is not where I pictured myself... ever. Nor do I picture myself in South Dakota...

(sighs)

How about a little encouragement with my vision for a change? Like these two guys...

Turning his attention back to the laptop, Michael clicks open a second unfinished EMAIL. Subject: "Tymmer Development."

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Dear Ryan and Brian, Truly appreciate your interest in Tymmer Outdoor. Completely agree, timing couldn't be better. Especially with so many people working remotely these days. Spending more time outdoors! Let's keep the momentum going and set a time to discuss the next steps...

Caught up in his own enthusiasm, he grabs the thermos again. Still empty. He checks his battered SMART-PHONE, an old model from the last decade.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Two ten. Forty-seven degrees... Terrific.

He closes the laptop and stretches cramped muscles before crawling between stacked DUFFEL BAGS and STORAGE CRATES to the side door. He stares out the window. Watching the brush get thrashed by a WAVE OF WIND. He refocuses, the reflection of his face looking back at him in the glass.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Time to make a decision, my friend.
Stay the course, or jump off a new
cliff?

Michael sighs, pulls on a fleece cap, grabs a jacket. He shuts his eyes and pumps himself up for the cold sting.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Fighting his way into his jacket, making his way to the rear of the SUV, the bitter cold prompts a bark-like outburst.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Holy... Great. Pyramids. Of. Giza!

Michael removes the straps and tarp from the large mass, revealing a CUSTOM-MADE WORKSTATION. Half kitchen, half tool bench. Skillfully built with stained wood and flanged pipes. The framework, for a table and overhanging tool rack, connects to a modified bike rack extending from the rear hitch. A logo on the frame reads: RAAK.

He pumps water into a kettle. Fires up a PROPANE STOVE.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I just don't get it. I've got a
boatload of great ideas that could
seriously change people's lives for
the better.

(points to the Raak)

Convenient, adaptable, affordable.

(gestures to the camp)

My knowledge comes from years of
research and practical experience.
Everyone loves my concept...

(various voices)

"Great idea!" "Can't wait." "Tons
of potential." "Love to be in on
Tymmer from the ground up"... But
then, cricket serenade.

From the cooler, he pulls out bread and DELI BAGS. Tosses them onto the tabletop. A stiff breeze SCOOTs the thin plastic bags to the edge. Before flying off, Michael picks up a rock, plops it on the bags. Apparently, a common routine.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Although, maybe a change of scenery would be good for me. Keep working on Tymmer in my spare time... But, last time I tried doing both, it didn't work out so-

A LOUD YELL stops him cold.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Heavy BREATHING. Strained GRUNTS.

Sounds of someone struggling to keep up their momentum - wearing BLACK SNEAKERS. Dusty and scuffed, the sneakers move unsteadily through brittle brush not far from a road. Each step he takes CRUNCHES down on a fusion of ice and rock. Between steps, a softer TAP proves to be a Yucca stick.

WHOOMPF! A sudden trip over a half-buried TREE ROOT leaves one sneaker stuck in a clump of ice. A LOUD GROAN is followed by a cry of disappointment mixed with fatigue, frustration.

After some blurry movements, and a DEEP BREATH, the sneakers stand back up. They move forward, alongside the road which appears to lead nowhere in particular.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael stands dead still, his eyes searching, his ears tuned into every sound available. The sky is clear. Only the trees and the flag are ruffled by intermittent gusts.

MICHAEL

Huh... That was... odd.

He returns to the Raak. Opens the bag of bread, hesitates. With a sigh, he turns off the stove.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

Michael pulls out his POCKET KNIFE. Hurries away from the Denali, crossing to a small PLATEAU with a spectacular view of the western horizon. A single RED CAMP CHAIR sits next to a table-type rock, a neat stockpile of wood, and a charred FIRE-PIT - dug deep, lined with stone and a cooking shelf.

Michael steps up on the table rock and turns full circle. Slowly, he scans his desolate neighborhood.

He steps down and follows a FOOTPATH, neatly lined with stones. Moves gingerly around Cacti, Prickly Pear, and Sagebrush to a ring of Yucca and Mesquite, all encircled with stones. Total zen vibes. Behind this natural windbreak, the path opens to a STONE DECK with a large FIRE-PIT taking center stage, furnished with a BLUE CAMP CHAIR, woodpile, axe, and chopping stump.

Michael's gaze drifts to the panoramic view beyond the cliff. The surrounding mesas feel less rugged, more dazzling, topped with sparkling snow.

MICHAEL

What a gift...

Michael checks his watch. With a shrug he pockets the knife, turns to go. After two steps away, he returns for the axe.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

The BLACK SNEAKERS continue stumbling through the brush. A harsh WIND sends DUST scurrying across the rough terrain.

The sneakers stop, the PERSPECTIVE CHANGES -

LOOKING UP from the sneakers to the dirt road ahead, the mesa rises in the distance like a great pyramid. A GASP of relief as the top of AN AMERICAN FLAG WAVES over the crest. Moving forward, the BREATHING gets more determined with each step.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael sets the axe against the rear bumper then circles the Denali, ensuring straps and gear are tight and secure.

MICHAEL

I know I heard something...

He glances up to the FLAG - waving freely. He scans his camp once more, then looks over to the road. With a sigh, he locks the Denali and pockets the key fob.

EXT. TRAIL ROAD - DAY

Michael surveys the road to the south. No movement.

Pulling his cap down tighter, he walks up a slight hill to the north. Stopping at a bend in the road, he surveys the hilltop, the valley below, and everything in between.

MICHAEL

Okayyy... Guess it was just another unidentified freaky occurrence.

He turns to go. But movement across the valley catches his attention. Three matching BOX TRUCKS, white and unmarked, slowly climb the steep grade up the mesa.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What are you guys up to over there?

As the third truck disappears around the mountain's curve, Michael turns to step away, throwing a quick glance over his shoulder. He stops. Squints. Stares into the muddled haze between him and the opposite mesa. A DARK SPOT manifests against the sun-bleached landscape.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What the...?

Michael rubs his eyes. Refocuses. The dark spot grows, slowly taking shape as the distance decreases. It's a person. A man.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Holy smokes... Who the hell would be walking out here... All alone...

Suddenly concerned, Michael searches for others he might have missed. He checks the valley floor. Mountain crevices. A nearby grove of trees. Back toward the Denali. Turning back, Michael watches the man pause briefly, then continue at a slower pace. He uses a walking stick.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(checks his watch, sighs)
Oh man, no lost guys today...

A RUSH OF WIND nearly topples Michael over, whipping up a DUST DEVIL that ZIGZAGS down the slope like a drunken sailor.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

HEY!!

The man looks up. Sees the twister and no escape. He drops to the ground, tucks into a ball. The dust devil blasts him and switches direction, then moves off across the barren land. The man carefully lifts his head. He stands, checks all his parts and smiles. Covered in dirt, his teeth shine extra bright. He waves to Michael.

Michael sends back a half-ass wave, too busy assessing this guy who appeared out of nowhere.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

If he's looking for trouble, I still got moves from my three years in the Wrestling State Finals... Okay, forty-some years ago, so my moves might be a bit rusty, but this guy doesn't look like he spends much time at the gym.

FIFTY YARDS AWAY - Their eyes trained on each other.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(glances west)

Maybe three hours of light left... Oh Lordy, what am I in for here.

TWENTY YARDS AWAY - The man's pace slows. He slaps dust from his clothing, thin and inadequate for the wintry conditions: dark sweatpants, hooded jacket, BLACK SNEAKERS.

He's early-thirties. Hispanic. Shorter than Michael. A bit on the chunky side. A dusty surgical mask tucked under his chin. A tattered BACKPACK hanging on his back. Nervous. Excited. He pulls down his hood, but leaves the knitted cap underneath. He approaches Michael. Friendly. With a shy smile that grows as he closes in. Stopping within spitting distance.

MIGUEL

Hello! Hello! My name Miguel-

MICHAEL

You okay, man? That was a nasty hit you took. I tried to warn you, but-

MIGUEL

(catching his breath)

Sí, sí... Ok, no problema... Feel like the inside of blender!

MICHAEL

I don't want to know how you know that, but good drop and tuck-

Much to Michael's surprise, Miguel steps even closer. Like they're old friends on a crowded street. Michael steps back, placing his hand on his hip - closer to his pocket knife.

MIGUEL

I so very happy to see you... Your flag, I see for long way. Give me courage. Keep going. My heart know, American flag, good guy...

(breathes deep)

Mountains, all look same, no?

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I am, I am lost, amigo. Two days walking no food, no water. My legs, pesadas, so heavy. Sorry, my English not so good.

MICHAEL

It's way better than my Spanish...
(spots something)
Hey, what's with the wristband?

Miguel loses his smile, lowers his head. Holds up his wrist wrapped with a color-coded WRISTBAND: "Llegadas - 3721."

MIGUEL

I am migrant. Seek asylum, here in your country, America. Is ID for passage. The men move us, use ID, track money. No money, no go north.

MICHAEL

Didn't know that was a thing-

MIGUEL

Some water, por favor?
(dry smile)
Muy seco. My mouth dry as desert.

MICHAEL

Uhhmm...

Michael wasn't expecting this type of situation. The moral code of humanity he's lived by his entire life suddenly challenged by the unpredictable risks of letting this particular lost stranger into his camp. He looks directly into Miguel's eyes. Searching for a sign of deception. Eyes don't lie. Michael only sees desperation, exhaustion, maybe a slight speck of hope... For water.

Miguel's stomach GURGLES, then GRUMBLES.

MIGUEL

My belly desert dry, too.

Genuine and infectious, Miguel smiles with his entire face. No sign of embarrassment, just life-or-death priorities. His belly GRUMBLES again, LOUDER. Michael remains cautious, but slightly relaxes his territorial stance.

MICHAEL

Mucho gusto, Miguel. I'm Michael-

MIGUEL

You are Michael?! I knew... I knew you good guy! Michael, Miguel. Our mothers gift us same name!

Miguel's stomach ROARS like a hungry tiger. He giggles.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

My belly also happy meeting you.

MICHAEL

Yeah, okay... I was just about to make a sandwich.

MIGUEL

I love sandwich. Love water. More today than any day.

Michael stays alert while he guides Miguel down to his truck.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Standing by the Raak, Miguel downs a Gatorade as Michael manages two sandwiches from the last of his ham and cheese.

MICHAEL

Help yourself to the water. You're probably dehydrated.

Michael points to a ten-gallon jug of WATER with a pump dispenser. As Miguel rushes to fill his bottle, Michael quickly stashes the axe out of sight.

MIGUEL

Gracias, Michael. Body so dry. Last water, from the road.

(demonstrates)

Beanie in water, twist, drink.

Clever, no?

(flashes a smile)

Your water much better!

MICHAEL

Just pace yourself, man. Too much, too fast, not good for you. It'll make you sick.

Miguel takes a small sip as his attention wanders to the workstation. He studies the framework, undercarriage, and connection points.

MIGUEL

This too, very clever-

MICHAEL

Yeah... It's a work in progress.

A beat goes by as Miguel ponders the RAAK logo.

MIGUEL

RAAAAK. Espera... You make this?

MICHAEL

More like, I collected the parts and built something that fit my needs. For extreme weather. Easy to assemble and transport... It's the prototype for my-

MIGUEL

Proto-qué?

MICHAEL

Prototype. A template for more copies to be made.

MIGUEL

Ohhh, sí, I see. Proto-type.

MICHAEL

Part of my Tymmer product line, built specifically for outdoor life-

MIGUEL

Why no trailer? RV? Come with kitchen... Y, el baño-

MICHAEL

Mucho dinero. No tengo mucho dinero.

He opens a snack bag of chips, splits it between both plates.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Sorry, it's not much-

MIGUEL

Is good! I very blessed you share with me. Thank you, Michael.

Miguel takes the plate and looks around for a place to sit.

Michael realizes this isn't going to be a quick grab and go situation. He checks his watch with a quiet sigh, reluctant to bring him further into his camp. But with no decent rocks to sit on nearby, Michael motions for Miguel to follow him.

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY

Miguel follows Michael up the two rocky steps to the fire-pit. He looks over the lounge area and the view.

MIGUEL

Ohh... Buena vista, Michael.
Beautiful.

Miguel takes the camp chair. After a silent two-second prayer, he dives into the sandwich with ferocity. Michael purposely builds a SMALL FIRE while keeping a close watch.

MICHAEL

So, Miguel, where you from?

MIGUEL

Guatemala... The land of trees.

Miguel shoots Michael an ironic smile.

MICHAEL

Bet it feels like a different
planet to you out here.

MIGUEL

Sí... Land of no trees.

MICHAEL

We've got trees-

MIGUEL

Guatemala trees go to sky.

MICHAEL

We have sky-high trees too. Just
not so much here in the southwest-

Michael fans the flames before sitting on a big rock to eat his sandwich. Miguel finishes his last bite and tries to scoot the chair closer to the fire. It doesn't budge.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's staked into the ground. So the
wind doesn't send it to Texas.

MIGUEL

Wind very strong, no? Almost send
me back to Guatemala!

Miguel inches forward in his seat, warms his hands. An awkward moment follows when Michael doesn't respond.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

So, you camp here long time?

MICHAEL

I'm not camping. I am not a camper. Camping and outdoor living are two different things.

MIGUEL

So, you live outdoor, here, to be far from corona virus?

MICHAEL

Not avoiding anyone or anything.

MIGUEL

You be here long time though?

Off Michael's incredulous look, Miguel nods to the fire-pit and the lined path wandering away from the plateau.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Walk desert many days. See sign of people. Fire. Pero, nothing like this... Like art. Take time, no?

Michael takes a bite of his sandwich. Chews on how much personal information he's willing to share.

MICHAEL

Why do you assume it was me? How do you know I built any of this?

Miguel looks over at the Raak then back to Michael.

MIGUEL

You make things. Things you need.

Michael's tough-as-nails shell softens just a tad.

MICHAEL

Yeah, it took a couple weeks. One day I had an overwhelming desire to put more order in my messy life... Mostly, I got tired of walking on rocks. Can't afford a broken ankle. Leg, wrist, whatever.

MIGUEL

Oh, sí, sí... So you been here...?

MICHAEL

Longer than expected.

MIGUEL

Longer you expect, because...?

MICHAEL

I like the view... Hey, what's with the interrogation? Why are you so interested in my time here, Miguel?

Miguel sips his water, thoughtfully.

MIGUEL

Nothing here... Big place, but nothing inside. Rocks. Dirt. How you live with nothing, no one?

Now Michael sips his drink, thoughtfully.

MICHAEL

I've lived in Las Cruces for nearly thirty years. Explored these mountains like my own backyard. This mesa, this spot in particular, is one of my favorites. Sunrise and sunset are equally spectacular... Solid bandwidth so I can work-

Miguel jumps up from the chair and hastily digs through his backpack, then holds a CELL PHONE up to Michael's face.

MIGUEL

You have charger?

MICHAEL

Maybe.

Michael gives Miguel a silent maybe as he shifts away from his close proximity. Michael grabs the plates and heads back to the Denali. Miguel follows like a newly adopted puppy.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael takes a quick glance at his watch before pointedly unlocking the Denali with his remote.

MICHAEL

I hate to burst your happy bubble, but after your phone's charged I need you to move on. Okay, Miguel?

MIGUEL

OK, Michael. No problemo.

Too easy. Michael's relief is replaced with suspicion.

MICHAEL

Okay, good. I'm glad that's not a problem-

MIGUEL

Charge phone. Call mi familia. Tell them, I still alive. Call handler. Get pick up.

MICHAEL

There's a big ranch down by the highway... Only a couple miles. If you leave soon, you might reach it by sundown. Rough road. Dangerous at night... I'll draw you a map.

Trying not to leave his back fully exposed, Michael opens the side door, locates a small duffel bag, then digs through a jumbled mess of cables and electronic gadgetry.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Should be on top here... I juiced it up this morning-

MIGUEL

Is no problem. I walk many rough roads. Many, many nights.

Michael hears a LOW SIGH of despair. He looks to Miguel, watches his body sag against the Denali's front side.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Not easy, walk nights. Pero, walk night better for us...
(looks up to the sky)
Stars. Light the way to my new life in America.

Michael shakes his head and turns back to the cables.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Mi hermana, my sister, as small girl, believe stars be diamonds of the angels. At night, diamonds shine. We see angels with us.

Michael leans back against the Denali.

MICHAEL

My sister wasn't quite as poetic. She thought somebody kicked over a bucket of glitter. Then a galactic windstorm blew it all across the universe...

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(chuckles at the memory)
To show me how it worked, she
dumped a full jar of glitter on my
new blue shag carpet. Borrowed
Mom's kitchen fan and blew it all
over my room... What a disaster! We
wore glitter for at least a year.
No big deal for us kids, but Mom
and Dad were in the military-

He pulls out a clump of tangled cables from the duffel.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

How does this always happen?

MIGUEL

You need good woman. You have wife?

Michael answers with narrowed eyes and tight lips.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Your sister? One sister only?

MICHAEL

And a brother.

MIGUEL

Be happy one sister. I receive five
sister. One brother.

MICHAEL

Five sisters! No wonder you're
running away from home.

MIGUEL

No, no... I no run. Is for other
woman. Girlfriend...
(eyes welling)
My girlfriend, she... Sorry, tears
from my heart. My girlfriend, she
to have our baby-

MICHAEL

Oh! Ah... Well, congratulations!
That's great... Right? Or, maybe
not, if you're unhappy about it-

MIGUEL

Very happy! Happy tears. Thank you,
Michael. We very blessed... Pero,
much to do. Need money for family.
Sisters say, better life only in
America. Mom, Dad, Grands say, stay
for baby. Try for America later...

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Pero, but I know, later not come.

(playful)

Brother say, please Miguel, no
leave me alone to five sisters...

(surrendering)

I decide for America. Sisters win.

MICHAEL

They usually do. Mine convinced me
to disconnect from the city, to "Go
reconnect with nature." Here I am.

(dumps the duffel)

What's your girlfriend say?

MIGUEL

She want better life and me home
for baby. Imposible...

MICHAEL

Aha!

Michael turns, holding up a PORTABLE CHARGER, not realizing Miguel has moved from the front of the truck to his side - Michael staggers back. Drops the charger. Both bend down simultaneously, CRACK HEADS. Michael swears. Miguel laughs.

Miguel picks up the charger, softly blows into the ports, wipes the DUST off with the inside of his jacket and hands it to Michael. Michael rolls his eyes, hands it right back to Miguel. Miguel makes several attempts to connect the cord to his phone with trembling hands.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You okay there, Miguel?

MIGUEL

Very happy. But feel like flan. No
talk to family two weeks. Hope all
OK. They be happy for calling. Be
happy for you save me. My family
say prayers for you.

MICHAEL

Good. I could use a few prayers.

Michael jams everything back into the duffel. Closes the door, locks the truck. Miguel takes a deep breath then easily connects phone to charger. The charging SYMBOL appears.

MIGUEL

One day, you, me, thank our sisters
for this special day we meet... In
big beautiful place of nothing.

MICHAEL

(sarcastic)

Yep... Can't wait to thank my
sister for this special day.

Michael moves to the Raak to clean up. Miguel follows.

MIGUEL

My brother, he try for America.
Seven years long ago. No make it...
Me, as boy, hear of place, màgico.
Estados Unidos de las Américas. My
dream to come here. I study very
hard for living in America... But
still my English no good-

MICHAEL

You're English is almost too good,
Miguel. Especially for someone from
a non-English speaking country... I
speak poquito Español, but I sure
can't hold a conversation like this-

MIGUEL

I learn multiple languages. At
home, Huehuetenango, speak western
Jakaltek. Pass down from Mayan
ancestors. Español, Spanish, common
language for all Guatemala and many
region Central America. Inglés, the
English, all study in school-

MICHAEL

So wait, Spanish isn't your native
language?

MIGUEL

Sí, no... Guatemala, many native
language from ancestors. Maybe
twenty dialect. Much history. So
government make Spanish language
for all peoples.

MICHAEL

Interesting... Didn't know that.

MIGUEL

Good to learn new every day. I read
many subjects, many books. You read
books, Michael?

MICHAEL

Yes, I read books, Miguel.

MIGUEL

Books... To me, like door open to world of secrets. Go places. Meet peoples... What reading you like, Michael?

In no mood for a Book Club chinwag, Michael checks his watch.

MICHAEL

I... Look, Miguel, I've got-

Miguel's phone BUZZES REPEATEDLY, as new messages pour in.

MIGUEL

So sorry, Michael... My phone working! More talk later? Muchas gracias, Michael of the mountains.

Miguel moves off to the fire-pit with extra pep in his step.

Michael stands on the Denali's running board and scans the area with lingering concerns. His eyes land back on Miguel, now seated by the fire. He looks up to the sky.

MICHAEL

Please, don't make me regret helping this guy out.

INT. DENALI - DAY

Michael stares at his laptop screen, but is lost in thought. A shadow passes over as the SHRILL CALL OF A HAWK pulls his attention back to the present. His eyes look to the open sunroof. He shivers. Stretches. Checks his phone: 4:51pm, 45F. Out the window, he sees Miguel on his phone by the fire.

His laptop CHIMES. Responses to an email recently sent to a few family and friends: *"Guess what happened to me today?!"*

JEREMY: *Dad, ARE YOU CRAZY? Only you would find some random lost guy in the middle of the desert while out testing your latest design! Please be extra careful... And call soon.*

JP: *WOW. Never thought you could be that kind of a Samaritan. HUGE RISK! Send him away.*

BEN: *Serious? You need help? I'm only an hour away! BTW, I'll let Ellie know her dad's got an unexpected visitor.*

RON: *No! Not a good idea. What are you thinking? Nothing but trouble. Call BLM. DHS. LCPD. Get rid of him. ASAP!*

With mixed emotions, Michael closes the laptop. He glances out at Miguel, pacing around the fire-pit on his phone.

MICHAEL
(sighs heavily)
What the hell am I thinking?

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY

Waiting for Miguel to finish his phone call, Michael stokes the FIRE. Adds more wood. He notices Miguel has made himself right at home - backpack under the chair, water bottle in the cup-holder, knit cap and phone charger dangling over the arm.

MIGUEL
(on phone, in Guatemalan)
I will do my best. My phone is
charged. I will call again soon.

The words, tone, rhythm - far different than Spanish. Michael throws a questioning look at Miguel's back. As if Miguel senses the look, his tone changes and he SWITCHES TO SPANISH.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
(on phone, in Spanish)
I am missing you too. Tell baby I
say hello. I must go. Bye for now.

Miguel wipes his wet eyes. Takes a deep breath. Turns to meet Michael's eyes with a forced upbeat smile.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
My girlfriend. Much worry for me...
She say thank you, to hombre con un
corazón hecho de oro. Man with
heart made of gold.

Miguel marches over to Michael. Michael can't tell whether he's going to be hugged or slugged. His HEARTBEAT thunders in his ears. Shifting his weight, he plants his feet solidly in the dirt. Flexing his hands, he grasps the butt of his knife.

Miguel stops - barely an arm's-length away - bursting with pride and excitement. He raises his phone to Michael's face.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Valeria. My girlfriend. Pretty, no?
Bambino, or bambina, soon to come.
Ria feeling muy gorda. Send photo.
Her belly grow so big...

To Michael - MIGUEL'S VOICE sounds like it's coming from the other end of a tunnel.

An overpowering anxiety washes over him as he struggles to appreciate Miguel's friendly banter. He forces himself to look at the PHOTO ON THE PHONE. VALERIA. A young woman with a pleasant face, glowing smile, and an eight-month baby belly.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Difficult to leave her... Pero,
baby have better future, no?

The interaction leaves Michael drained. He studies Miguel, light and joyous as he scrolls through more photos. No sign of the desperation and exhaustion at his arrival. He starts to wonder if this is all a big set-up.

MICHAEL

Congratulations and all that...
But, uh, look Miguel, I'm sorry
man, but I've reached my generosity
limit for the day... Your phone's
charged. You've had food and rest.
It's time for you to move on-

Miguel is confused by Michael's abrupt dismissal.

MIGUEL

Michael... Please... Rest more to
walk more. One hour... Por favor.

MICHAEL

No. Now would be better... Not much
sun left. Head on down to that
ranch. Meet your ride there.

MIGUEL

Please, Michael-

MICHAEL

No, dude. Seriously. I've done all
I can for you. You gotta go...
(offers an envelope)
Here's a map to the highway-

Miguel is dumbfounded. He takes the map, barely looks at it. He circles the fire-pit. Frustrated and panicked. He checks his phone, willing it to provide answers. He stops, looks up to Michael with pleading eyes.

MIGUEL

Michael, I thank you, all you do
for me. Muchas, muchas gracias.
Pero, one thing more... You can
take me to highway?

MICHAEL
 (laughs)
 Not a chance, Miguel.

MIGUEL
 Driver call soon... I make no
 trouble... Please, Michael. I help
 you here... I pay you... I-

MICHAEL
 No, Miguel. Don't need your help.
 Don't want your money. I'm not
 going to report you and I wish you
 nothing but the best. But I need
 you to just walk away. Okay?

MIGUEL
 I do something bad? Why you-

MICHAEL
 Because, Miguel... You don't look
 like you're going to keel over
 anymore. So, time for you to go.

MIGUEL
 OK, Michael. OK. I understand. You
 do your best... I be fine... Thank
 you, Michael of the mountain. You
 no turn me away. Share food with
 me. You be good guy I pray for.

Michael clenches his hands into fists, not sure what to expect as Miguel grabs his backpack. Miguel throws Michael a thin smile as he trudges by, then slowly goes down the steps.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael follows Miguel, keeping his distance. He stops at the rear of the Denali, close to the axe he stashed.

MICHAEL
 Hey Miguel-

Miguel stops, hoping Michael has changed his mind.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Take your water with you.

Michael tosses the water bottle to Miguel. He catches it one-handed, nods gratefully, clear disappointment in his eyes, as his phone starts RINGING. Miguel fumbles around in a panic trying to get his phone out of his pocket as it continues to ring.

MIGUEL
 (into phone)
 Bueno?
 (beat)
 Sí... OK... OK. Muchas gracias.
 (to the sky)
 ¡Gracias, Dios! I know you hear me.

Miguel holds the phone up and beams a smile at Michael.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
 Good news, Michael! They coming for me! Esta noche. Few hours. Promise to be here by three-

MICHAEL
 Three? Three A.M.?

MIGUEL
 Sí. Drivers drive all hours. No money for sleeping... My handler work hard, find driver for mountains. Many... obstáculos.

MICHAEL
 Obstacles.

MIGUEL
 Sí, yes. Obstacles.

MICHAEL
 Yes, obstacles... Like I said, you should head to the highway-

MIGUEL
 Pero, but now, now they coming. Few hours. I wait for them here-

MICHAEL
 Them? How many is them? Never mind. It doesn't matter. Dude, this is a massive mountain range. Eighteen miles long. No road signs-

MIGUEL
 GPS?

MICHAEL
 Miguel! My point is, these guys are probably not prepared, or equipped, to drive miles of slow-going, tire-shredding, bumpy rough road all the way out here in the middle of the night.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Will be much easier to find you
closer to the highway... And...
And, I like it here. I don't want
them ever coming back-

MIGUEL

Oh, I see. Yes, I like it here too.
I walk down hill for meeting them.
Never see you. I be no problem,
Michael. Please, few hours more-

Michael stands his ground, shakes his head.

MICHAEL

No, Miguel... I feel bad about your
situation, but it's time for you to
carry on with your journey so I can
get back to mine.

Michael walks out to the road. Miguel reluctantly joins him.

EXT. TRAIL ROAD - DUSK

Michael points up the rise of the hill to the north.

MICHAEL

Go back down the same way you came
up the mesa, then follow the map...
Good luck, Miguel. I hope things
work out for you, man. I really do.

MIGUEL

Gracias, Michael. Good luck you
too. Bless you for share with me.

Miguel walks up the rise, retrieving his dropped Yucca stick
along the way. He spins around and waves at Michael. The
setting sun highlights one final bright smile before Miguel
disappears around the bend.

MICHAEL

Buena suerte, amigo.
(checks his watch)
Okay. Well, guess that takes care
of my good deed for the day... Did
what I could for him, anyway.
(heads to the Denali)
Now, back to work. But first...

EXT. DENALI - NIGHT

SOLAR LIGHTS outline the footpath and illuminate the tall brush, creating a bubble of light in a sea of darkness under a HALF MOON. Across the canyon, COYOTES YIP and HOWL their nightly greetings to each other.

The truck's hatch is up, so is Michael's cot as he shoves a crowbar in with the other tools he's collected from around the camp: shovel, handsaw, the axe, assorted knives.

MICHAEL

One good crack on the skull and
he's driving away in my home...

He drops the cot. Shifts bins blocking the view of the road.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Just my dumb luck... Find a good
spot, as far away from drama as
possible, but the drama comes to
find me anyway... Another dreamer.
Another desert desperado...

He steps back to assess all his belongings in the truck.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Tough enough downsizing into an XL.
Can't imagine starting a new life,
in a new country, with nothing but
a backpack.

He looks up to his American flag - fluttering.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Amazing, the power you have that
inspires people to risk everything
for their dreams...

(looks to campsite)

If he really is an immigrant, then
he risks it all, multiple times,
just for the chance of a better
life... If he's not, then he's a
damned good con artist. Or, one
hell of a border agent... Problem
is, I can't tell which one he is...
And not one of those options work
in my favor.

Michael grabs his laptop, sets it on the table. He flips on a surge strip and the Raak lights up with TWINKLE LIGHTS. He pours out the last third of a bottle of RED WINE then raises his glass to the western horizon.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Good night, Sunny... In case you missed it, I had a visitor today. Tell you all about it tomorrow.

Michael unfolds a BAR STOOL - another custom accessory to the Raak - opens his laptop and checks his emails.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Still no contact from Ryan or Brian. And I thought our meeting went so well...

(taps his fingers)

Well, maybe it's time to face my reality...

(looks to the road)

If I had started this venture at Miguel's age, I would've had a better chance... So, maybe I give up now, before I turn into the bitter old man I don't necessarily want to be... Head north, to South Dakota, for greener pastures.

He sighs. Clicks to compose an email, typing in the subject line, "Miguel Update." He dictates the message:

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

All is good... Miguel left half hour ago. Interesting experience. Requires more thought at a later time. I will say, out of all the possible immigrants I could have ended up with, I'm glad it was Miguel. All things considered, a decent dude. One of many doing all he can to make a better life for himself and his family.

Michael adds a smiley and sends. Seconds later, an INSTANT MESSAGE pops up from his son, Jeremy.

JEREMY: *So he's gone now? No problems?*

MICHAEL: *He wanted to stay longer, but I was done.*

JEREMY: *Good. Still can't believe you didn't take any of my guns with you. Dangerous world right now!*

MICHAEL: *World is always dangerous, J. You know how I feel. Always a better solution.*

JEREMY: *For protection, Dad! You are too nice to strangers.*

MICHAEL: *Nothing but strangers out here.*

JEREMY: *Whenever you want to come visit, we finished the guest room reno...*

MICHAEL: *Appreciate it, but I'm good! Got to go. Maître d' just called my name.*

JEREMY: *Fancy! Talk tomorrow... Stay frosty.*

MICHAEL: *Always. Night, J.*

Several more emails CHIME their arrival. Michael sighs.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Deal with the rest of you later...

EXT. DENALI - NIGHT

Stars fill the sky like sparkling diamonds. A fire BLAZES on the plateau in the background. Standing at the Raak, Michael HUMS a familiar tune while preparing his dinner. He gets carried away, freely performing a PERCUSSION SOLO with wooden spoons and the kitchen kit. As a pot of water comes to a boil on the stove, he rushes the finale to pour in a packet of Knorr's rice.

MIGUEL (O.S.)
Hey, Michael...

MICHAEL JUMPS. Dropping the rice packet into the hot pot.

MICHAEL
Dammit!

OUT OF THE DARK - Miguel hurries to Michael's side. He looks terrible. Red teary eyes, dirt-stained cheeks, body shaking.

MIGUEL
You OK, Michael?

Michael gives Miguel a sharp look and fishes out the rice packet. Looking back at Miguel, he sees genuine concern on top of the complete mess already in place.

MICHAEL
What the hell, Miguel?

MIGUEL
Por favor... Forgive me, Michael. I try, I try leaving. Pero, I can no walk more. I cry to God. Pray for my American dream.
(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Pray for refill faith. Pray I be fine. Pray to God.

(looks up to sky)

No diamonds of angels there. All glitter.

(smiles through tears)

My heart say, Michael good guy, he understand.

Michael sighs, looking around, half expecting more men to show up for an ambush. Seconds go by and nothing happens. So he rips off a few paper towels for himself, hands the rest of the roll to Miguel with a surrendering sigh.

MICHAEL

Go clean yourself up, Miguel... Tonight's special is rice that tastes like chicken and broccoli. No charge for the extra grit.

MIGUEL

Gracias, Michael. Thank you, thank you, thank you. God bless you-

Michael's hand immediately goes up, keeping Miguel at bay.

MICHAEL

Okay. You're welcome... Stay the night, until they come for you.

EXT. PLATEAU - NIGHT

The FIRE CRACKLES. Embers rise like fireflies. Miguel sits in the red chair, devouring his rice. Michael sits on a rock, eating slowly. The air is not tense, not comfortable either.

MICHAEL

So, what part of the US you headed to, Miguel?

MIGUEL

Miami of Florida. Felix, mi amigo, have job for me... No good work in Guatemala. Pay for day, not for hours. Hours very long. Is not enough money for family.

MICHAEL

What's the job in Miami?

MIGUEL

Restaurante. Cocina. Kitchen.

MICHAEL

And this job at a restaurant is worth risking your life? Hundreds of miles to cross the border, with no guarantee you'll ever make it?

MIGUEL

To live in America, I take risk. Must try. For my family, is big honor. The money help their farm-

Miguel's PHONE RINGS.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Siento, Michael. Is contractor.

Miguel moves off to the path as Michael stares deep into the fire reflecting on his own struggles. He lets out a pensive sigh and stands with a groan, then heads back to the Denali.

EXT. PLATEAU - NIGHT

Carrying a BLANKET and an EXTRA JACKET, Michael sets them on the chair seat. Repositions the phone charger on top. Scanning the campsite, he catches sight of Miguel sitting on a large tortoise-shaped rock in the middle of the footpath.

Michael adds wood to the FIRE. Straightens some solar lights. Takes photos of the moon shining on the snow-topped mesas. With an impatient sigh, he checks the time and starts walking back to the Denali. He pauses, returns to the chair. Pulls out his wallet and slides out a TYMMBER BUSINESS CARD.

MIGUEL

(pockets his phone)
More kind things, amigo?

MICHAEL

Gets colder than a polar bear's butt out here...
(hands Miguel the card)
Put this someplace safe. In case...
Well, in case you ever want to get a hold of me. My number's on there.

MIGUEL

Gracias, Michael. Me, mi familia, we pray for you. Success for your dreams of better life.

MICHAEL

I wish you success too, man...
(turns to go)
(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Oh, uh, stay charged till the driver shows up, then leave it-

MIGUEL

On your super cool Raak? No problemo. So many good things you do... But, maybe, one thing more?

MICHAEL

Jeez, Miguel. What now? Dessert? Nightcap? Two tickets to Paradise?

Confusion replaces Miguel's nervousness.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Never mind... What's up?

MIGUEL

Where are Truth, and Conse, Conse-

MICHAEL

Truth or Consequences. Northeast of here. Other side of I-25... Why?

MIGUEL

One driver can meet in Truth, or Consequence. I not sure which one?

MICHAEL

It's just one place... The city name is Truth or Consequences. Formerly known as Hot Springs... From here, four hours by car.

MIGUEL

Hmm. OK... Why change Hot Springs to Truth or Conse-Consecuencias?

MICHAEL

Uh, well, back in 1950, a radio show, named Truth or Consequences, held a nationwide contest to broadcast their tenth anniversary show from any town in the USA that renamed itself after the show... Hot Springs officially changed its name, hosted the show, and kicked off a yearly event called Fiesta.

MIGUEL

Is big party town?

MICHAEL

Not quite. More of a sleepy town with one big party a year... How do you plan to get there?

MIGUEL

Contractor say ask you for ride-

MICHAEL

(stands abruptly)

Stop there, Miguel. Like I said before, I can't do that... Look, you seem like a good guy, and I'm okay with helping you out with the basics. But you need to work out your own plan with the handler, driver, contractor, whoever-

MIGUEL

OK, Michael. OK... Keep fire high for driver. Or, tomorrow, day time-

MICHAEL

(shakes his head)

You still don't get it... These old trail roads are not on any maps. They're hardly used, even by the locals. Which is why nobody is out here. Which is why I am out here.

Miguel stares blankly at Michael. Michael steps away from the fire-pit. Grabs a HANDFUL OF ROCKS and a LONG STICK. Miguel's eyes go wide with concern.

Much to Miguel's relief, Michael uses the stick to draw a bunch of lines in the dirt. Miguel leans in closer as Michael places the rocks on several lines.

MIGUEL

I send photo of map. They no understand.

MICHAEL

That's because it was meant for you, not them... Whatever, okay, and now, the envelope please...

Miguel pulls the crumpled envelope from his pocket, passes it to Michael with a stifled giggle.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What is so funny, Miguel?

MIGUEL

You sound like the Oscars...
 (uses dramatic American
 accent)
 "And nooow, the envelope please!"

MICHAEL

The Oscars, huh? Wow. You really do
 have it bad for America, don't you?

Michael places the map on the dirt, sets a rock on top.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Focus, Miguel. Maybe you won't feel
 so lost if you see where you are...
 (points with the stick)
 We are here. This rock over here,
 Las Cruces. This rock, Truth or
 Consequences. No roads go directly
 from this rock to that rock. From
 here, a couple slow rocky miles to
 the highway. Take this highway east
 to that highway, and head north-

MIGUEL

You choose place very hard to get
 to, no?

MICHAEL

That was the whole point, Miguel!

MIGUEL

Pero, so far away. You work hard,
 make this place muy especial. Muy
 tranquilo. But no share-

MICHAEL

It's just temporary, Miguel. This
 whole set up is just temporary-
 (softens)
 Someday, Miguel... Someday, someone
 will come across this campsite and
 say, "Wow, look what somebody took
 the time to build. Way out here in
 the middle of nowhere. This place
 must have been really special"...
 That's good enough for me.

Michael tosses the stick into the fire. Checks his watch.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You've got enough wood to last all
 night. If you need it.

MIGUEL

Mi mamacita, she say you my angel-

MICHAEL

I'm no angel, Miguel. Just another dude with big dreams and a long bumpy road to get there. I get your frustration, and your passion. I really do...

(beat)

I hate to sound like an old fart, but, if you do make it... if you do start a life here in America, don't waste the opportunity. Keep your shit legit. No drugs, no crime. Work hard. Stay true to your family... And if you can, pay it forward. Help somebody else out along the way.

MIGUEL

(nods)

All times, try to be best Miguel.

(holds out his hand)

Muchas gracias, Michael. Pray God grace you kind blessings like you show me.

MICHAEL

(shakes Miguel's hand)

Good luck, Miguel... It sure has been... an experience.

As Michael trots back to the Denali, Miguel quickly puts on the jacket and wraps up tight in the blanket. He sits. Watches Michael cut the Raak lights. His gaze moves to the FLAMES. Solemn. Thoughtful. A smile creeps over his face.

MIGUEL

Keep your shit legit.

INT. DENALI - NIGHT

Michael WAKES with a start, having nodded off while working on his laptop. He checks his phone: 12:34am, 38F.

Looking out the window into darkness, he sees Miguel adding wood to the fire from the chair. SPARKS FLY.

Michael sets his laptop to the side. Adjusts his pillow, settles back, shuts his eyes with a sigh. The quiet moment lingers, then a CHORUS OF COYOTES pops his eyes back open.

MICHAEL

Terrific.

INT. DENALI - NIGHT

Michael fumbles for his phone. Eyes half open: 2:04am, 36F. Raising his head just enough, he sees Miguel sitting by the glowing FIRE. Michael drops back down with a sigh.

INT. DENALI - NIGHT

Michael wakes with a jolt. In a slumberous panic he checks his surroundings. All is good. He fades back out. Then his eyes snap back open. He pushes himself up, turns to the window.

The FIRE on the plateau is faint. Miguel's silhouette in the chair is unmistakable. Michael checks his phone: 4:44am, 34F. He lowers himself, closes his eyes with a sigh.

INT. DENALI - DAY

Michael rolls onto his side. Pulls the blanket up tighter.

A second later, he springs upright and peers out the window. His blood-shot eyes are met with harsh MORNING LIGHT, a SMOLDERING FIRE, and Miguel cocooned in the blanket.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

It's a cold dewy morning. Michael tumbles out of the Denali. His breathing comes out in little puffs as he zips his jacket with gritted teeth, mindful of Miguel.

MICHAEL

Holy... F-French Riviera... Monaco.
M-Monte Carlo. Grand P-Prix!

He looks up to the flag - flapping restlessly.

SUPERIMPOSE: "DAY 2"

The eastern horizon is streaked with peachy-pink clouds, stretched like pulled taffy.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Mornin', Miss Sunny.

Michael blows into his cupped hands and heads out for his morning pee. He walks by the sunny side of the Denali - GLEAMING extraordinarily bright in the morning light.

EXT. DARK ROAD - NIGHT - (MIGUEL DREAM #1)

WHITE LIGHT. Blindingly bright.

MIGUEL'S P.O.V. - Accompanied by his HUSHED BREATHING:

HEADLIGHTS. A CAR passes by at ground level, leaving silent darkness in its wake. A sliver of MOONLIGHT reveals DARK FIGURES rising from the roadside, moving quietly forward.

Looking down - WHITE SNEAKERS, new and spotless, step from muddy grass to a carpet of leafy greens.

Looking up - MACHETES cut through dense vine, creating a narrow tunnel. An ORCHESTRA of insects, birds, and night critters reach a crescendo as the JUNGLE wraps its arms around him and pulls him in.

EXT. PLATEAU - MORNING - (BACK TO PRESENT)

MICHAEL

Hey! Miguel!

Miguel's eyes blink until they're open, disengaging from the dream. His face lights up when he recognizes Michael.

MIGUEL

Hey, Michael! I so happy to see you-

MICHAEL

Yeah, well, I'm not so sure I'm so happy to see you... What happened?

Michael drops an armful of broken branches. Miguel yawns.

MIGUEL

Three come and go. Four. Five. No come, no answer phone... Culos de burros.

Miguel stands, stretches, walks off into the bushes - blowing into his cupped hands. Michael shuffles ash and embers, then REBUILDS THE FIRE. Miguel's phone RINGS from the chair and he rushes back to answer before it stops ringing.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Buenos días, cómo estás?

Michael heads back to the Denali with a resigned huff.

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY

Returning with a wood tray, Michael unloads two STEAMING bowls, spoons, coffee pot, cups. He fills the cups, then sets the coffee pot on the shelf in the pit to stay warm.

Miguel ends his call, smiles at Michael with gratitude.

MIGUEL

A feast! Bueno. Gracias, Michael.

MICHAEL

Hardly... It's just oatmeal.

MIGUEL

Oat-meal... Taste like...

MICHAEL

Apples and cinnamon, I hope.

MIGUEL

Sí! Manzanas y canela. Bueno.

MICHAEL

Anybody on their way yet?

MIGUEL

(smile fades)

Drivers want to come for me, but they no trust mountain. Border patrol... Oscar, he work on it.

MICHAEL

Okay... But somebody's definitely coming for you today, right?

MIGUEL

Sí, sí... Call all drivers in area. El Paso to Hatch. Where Hatch?

MICHAEL

East. Between Truth or Consequences and Las Cruces.

Miguel nods, continues eating his oatmeal. Michael stirs his own oatmeal, noticing Miguel seems a lot less cheerful today.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

So, I've been wondering... Don't you guys usually travel in groups? How'd you get this far on your own?

MIGUEL

Umm, sí.. Twelve in my group. Pray
they OK... We together much time.

MICHAEL

What happened?

Miguel takes a long deep breath, his eyes sad then angry.

MIGUEL

Machos Vatos! Idiots! El jueves...

EXT. BORDER FENCE - DAY - (MIGUEL FLASHBACK #1)

Late in the day, an early-80s DATSUN PICKUP TRUCK skids to a stop at a barbed wire fence, spraying an arc of dirt across landscape that is the definition of desolate.

Doors open. TWO YOUNG MEN, their features shrouded by dark sunglasses, beards, and hats, jump out of the pickup, armed with RIFLES.

A beat later, a PASSENGER VAN, no windows, pulls up behind. TWELVE MIGRANTS - men, women, children of various ages and skin color - get hustled from the van to the fence. Miguel's black sneakers among them.

BOLT-CUTTERS cut the fence. GLOVED HANDS pull it open. ONE BY ONE, twelve migrants squeeze through, holding few belongings.

BEARDED MAN

(in Spanish)

Hurry, hurry! Go through! Go! Go!
Direct to mountain. Three hours to
meeting point. Go! Go! Go!

Clearing the fence, the twelve walk through high dry brush in a jagged line, toward the snowy mountain ahead.

Miguel looks back - the hole in the fence no longer visible. The truck and van speeding away in a thick CLOUD OF DUST.

Miguel looks forward - to the vast flatland leading to the steep rise of the daunting mountain.

A rough hand softly touches Miguel's shoulder. An OLD MAN WITH A LIMP gently encourages him to keep moving. He gestures to the YOUNG WOMAN WITH LONG BRAIDS in front of them. She is the heaviest of the group, her BREATHING labored, but she walks with unstoppable determination. Miguel's despair twists and turns into a firm commitment to soldier on.

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY - (BACK TO PRESENT)

MICHAEL

No escort? No guide? They just drop you off, and good luck... How much you pay for that kind of service?

MIGUEL

Twelve thousand-

MICHAEL

Twelve thousand dollars?

MIGUEL

Sí. For three tries-

MICHAEL

Three tries for twelve grand. Damn. That's a heck of a lot of money. If you were making that much, why not just stay in Guatemala?

MIGUEL

This money, from all my life. My family help too. Work hard. Study hard. Dream every day, come to America. Try two time before, but send me home. Then Ria and baby... Now my last chance.

MICHAEL

I get it, Miguel. You're on a mission to make your dreams come true. That's exactly why I'm here too... And I bet your eleven friends had dreams too-

Miguel gets a bit misty-eyed.

MIGUEL

Sí. All have big dreams for America-

MICHAEL

So what happened to them, Miguel?

Miguel's phone RINGS. He bounces up with visible relief.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hey, when you're done we need to go gather some firewood-

MIGUEL

Sí, sí... Happy to help, Michael.
 (into phone)
 Hola, mi amigo. ¿Qué noticias...

Michael gathers the dishes as Miguel climbs up and sits on an OUTCROP OF ROCKS. The Spanish switches to the other language. Heading to the Denali, Michael's suspicions creep up again.

EXT. TRAIL ROAD - DAY

Michael and Miguel walk toward the crest of the hill. A LIGHT BREEZE sends wavelets through the surrounding sagebrush.

MICHAEL

So that means, what? Someone's coming tonight or tonight someone's calling about coming tonight?

MIGUEL

One driver from El Paso. One driver from Tucson. El Paso, doing other job. Tucson, fix broke car. Who finish first come for me... Oscar say, other driver, no answer yet.

Miguel shrugs. The arms of the jacket flop at his sides.

MICHAEL

Guess that jacket's a little big for you-

MIGUEL

Is good big. Warm more parts... I ready for Miami, not Alaska!

Michael stops at the hill crest to catch his breath and take in the awesome view. Miguel steps up beside him.

MICHAEL

Yesterday, while you were down there dancing with that twister, I noticed a grove of trees-

MIGUEL

Look, Michael! The big ball!

MICHAEL

Big ball? What big ball?

Miguel points to the mesa across the valley. On a bed of flat rock on the west side, the sun hits a WHITE DOMED STRUCTURE.

MIGUEL

There... Big white ball. I try to climb to it. Pero, but the rocks move like avalancha. Half up, I fall, slide down, down-

Miguel lifts the back of his jacket, revealing a small portion of a much larger SWOLLEN BRUISE with abrasions.

MICHAEL

Ouch. Jeez, Miguel. That looks painful... Why did you pick that mountain?

MIGUEL

Only building I see, many miles... But she difficult mountain. I give up, sleep on her side at night. With sun, try one time more. But I see your flag, hope fill my heart-

MICHAEL

Used to be an observatory. Some type of hi-tech radar installation now. All this land is owned by the government...

Michael looks over at Miguel, questioning if their random meeting really was just coincidence.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hey, before you saw me up on this hill yesterday, did you yell out for any reason? Or hear a yell?
(Miguel shakes his head)
You didn't fall and scream, or yell at a wild animal...?

MIGUEL

No... no yell. No hear nothing...

Not sure what to make of the anomalous sound, Michael sighs.

MICHAEL

There's an old legend about that mountain... Supposedly, a group of Mexicans were surrounded by Apaches on the west side with no escape. Praying for a miracle, that night, at sunset, an impression of Mary Magdalene's face appeared on the mountainside when the golden light hit the scrub brush in just the right way.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

The Apaches fled and the Mexicans called it a miracle. Ever since, it's been Magdalena's Mountain.

Miguel gazes out at Magdalena Peak with newfound respect.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And, it's a good thing you didn't make it to that big ball... They don't open their electrified gate unless you have the super secret magic password.

MIGUEL

Super magic secret password?

MICHAEL

The military loves super secret passwords.

MIGUEL

I pray for miracle, she save me from bad mistake.

This truth takes a moment to sink in. Michael pulls a pair of NEW WORK GLOVES from his back pocket, hands them to Miguel.

EXT. HILLTOP GROVE - DAY

Miguel admires the new gloves as they wander through brush to a RING OF SPINDLY TREES. Michael pulls on his own well-worn gloves and starts gathering branches. Miguel doesn't move.

MICHAEL

What's up, Miguel?

MIGUEL

They beautiful. I no can-

Michael takes off his gloves and trades with Miguel.

MICHAEL

Better?

Miguel flashes a brilliant smile and dives right in, gathering sticks. Michael grins, slides on the new gloves.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

So, you can see my flag from all the way across the valley, huh?

MIGUEL

Sí, yes. If no wind, maybe no see
red white blue. Is sign for me. Go
to flag. Find flag. Pero...

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - DAY - (MIGUEL FLASHBACK #2)

Miguel sits on a mound of rocks, shaking pebbles from his black sneakers. Sneakers back on, he wipes his brow and looks up to the sky. Closing his eyes, he leans into the warmth of the sun. A rare moment of peace. Smiling, he opens his eyes.

MIGUEL'S P.O.V. - TWO BLACK VULTURES circle above.

Miguel jumps up, inspired to move on, as a distant noise becomes clearer as it draws near. A ROARING ENGINE. Miguel NOSEDIVES behind the rocks as the vehicle stops and the engine goes silent. Miguel tries to tame his RAPID BREATHING while he searches for better cover.

Risking a peek over the rocks, he sees nothing. He moves away from the mound, low and slow, toward the sound of MALE VOICES. TALKING. LAUGHING. Miguel, passing behind a set of leafless trees, hits the dirt upon seeing a mud-splattered monster of a jacked-up 4x4 TRUCK. Meaty tires. Roof lights. Antennas. Stickers. Loud all around.

Nervously, Miguel advances toward the truck. HEAVY METAL MUSIC and SMOKE billow out the open windows. TWO RIFLES hang on a rack behind the heads of TWO HUNTERS in their twenties.

Miguel looks up to the driver and smiles.

MIGUEL

Hola...

The two glossy-eyed roughnecks hoot and holler with laughter. The driver fires up the engine. CRANKS the music. Shoots Miguel with his finger.

HUNTER #1

Piss off, Illegal Alien Man.

HUNTER #2

Yeah, go back to the shithole you
came from-

Driver floors it, CIRCLING Miguel enough times to generate a CYCLONE OF DUST. Fishtailing out of the loop, the truck comes within inches of striking Miguel, then takes off. A beat later, Miguel opens his eyes. Checks that he's still in one piece. He sighs with relief, then coughs out a mouthful of dust.

EXT. HILLTOP GROVE - DAY - (BACK TO PRESENT)

MICHAEL

Hold on a sec, those two clowns
just laughed and left you out in
the middle of the desert?

MIGUEL

Sí. I spit dirt for miles-

MICHAEL

That's just so... cruel.

MIGUEL

Sí... I want ride, but not with
matones-

MICHAEL

I hope that's a bad word.

MIGUEL

Nice word for bad men... So, I
still walking...

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - DAY - (MIGUEL FLASHBACK #3)

Down the road a click, Miguel - covered in dust - picks up a
YUCCA STALK lying in his path. He snaps it down to a good
size and continues on with his new walking stick.

He tramples through low brush and sandy pits, rounding a bend
of boulders. Up the road sits a JEEP CHEROKEE, hunter green.
Miguel dashes to a nearby Creosote bush, squatting behind it
to study the situation.

A MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE, tourists maybe, stand together gazing
up one towering mesa. The Woman points a long-lens SLR CAMERA
toward the summit. The Man returns to the Jeep, raises the
rear hatch, grabs a soda from a cooler - his back to Miguel.

Miguel moves casually out to the road. His sneakers, TREADING
lightly on the dry rocky road, give him away. The Man turns,
sees him. Miguel smiles and waves. The Man SHOUTS to the
Woman. She turns, stares at Miguel. Within seconds, the
couple scrambles into the Jeep and drive off. Hatch open.

Once again, Miguel is left in a shower of DUST.

EXT. HILLTOP GROVE - DAY - (BACK TO PRESENT)

Miguel shrugs with a what-can-you-do smile.

MICHAEL

Oh, man, Miguel... That's messed up. Sorry, but I'm not surprised. This close to the border, people just don't want to get involved. It's too risky-

MIGUEL

You take risk for me, Michael.

MICHAEL

Yeah, well... Only cause I don't know what else to do with you.

MIGUEL

Some who cross, not so lucky as me. Lose life. You hear of Guatemalans they find in Camargo? Killed by bad policia. Muy trágico.

(prayer hands)

Very blessed I am. Not so clean, but very blessed.

MICHAEL

Survival. You're in survival mode.

Michael snaps long branches in half. Tosses them on the pile.

MIGUEL

Michael, we make Americans angry?

MICHAEL

Well, how would your town feel if one day five busses pulled up, dumped fifty people from each bus, then drove off. Now you have two-hundred and fifty men, women, and children to feed, clothe and house. Jobs, school, medical needed for all of them... All at once... Then multiply that by the three-hundred and sixty-five days of the year. Then multiply that by ten years.

MIGUEL

(grasps the enormity)

Ay, ay, ay.

MICHAEL

On the other hand, millions of Americans are either immigrants themselves or descendants of immigrants from all over the world.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This land became a country because of immigrants... So, we, as Americans, appreciate that our country is a refuge. A land of great opportunity and many freedoms that other nations don't allow... But the numbers of people seeking asylum are soaring-

MIGUEL

Is this America big enough for dreams of all peoples coming?

MICHAEL

Probably. At least for now. But... Look, I don't want to crush your spirit. I get why you're doing this and I respect your efforts. But, there's a right way and a wrong way to start a new life in America. The wrong way allows the bad guys to walk in with the good guys-

MIGUEL

Always the baddies making life more hard for us good guys, no? I wish to do right thing, right way. But not so easy... When border open to us, must take chance.

Miguel drops his gathered branches on the pile.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I expect if I were in your shoes I'd probably do the same. Opportunity pops up, you go for it.

Michael pulls a couple coils of rope from his jacket. Miguel takes a step back, alarmed by the rope.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This should do for the day.

Michael begins bundling the wood with the rope, adding a carry loop to each. Miguel's relief is apparent.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'll make some calls today, Miguel. Maybe there's a way I can help, without getting us in trouble. No promises...

MIGUEL

All help much appreciated, Michael.

INT. DENALI - DAY

Stretched out with his laptop, Michael reads a NEWS ARTICLE:
"Migrant Massacre in Camargo."

"On 22 January 2021... Authorities discovered two vehicles on fire... 113 bullet impact points... 19 charred bodies... 16 Guatemalans... All migrants traveling with evident intentions of crossing the international border..."

Michael's phone RINGS, jarring his unnerved nerves. He taps the phone and carries the conversation on SPEAKER:

MICHAEL

Hey, Mateo, thanks for calling back-

MATEO

(from phone)

Been awhile, Mike. Haven't seen you at any city events lately. I mean, since before this pandemic thing-

MICHAEL

Yeah, I've been on a mission to start my own business for the last few years. Sucks up all my time, and, well, you know how it is-

INT. MATEO'S OFFICE - DAY

MATEO, late 50s, first and foremost a proud MEXICAN-AMERICAN. Local bigwig. Big man with a big personality. On the corner of his massive Mesquite desk sits an upturned cowboy hat. He swivels around in his king-sized leather chair to face the wall behind him. A picture window, framing the distant mesas like a magnificent painting.

MATEO

(into phone)

Sure do, amigo... So, que paso?
What can I do for you on this glorious day in the southwest?

INT. DENALI - DAY

Michael takes a quick deep breath and launches his pitch.

MICHAEL

Sort of an interesting situation...
I'm really just looking for some friendly advice-

MATEO
 (from phone)
 Always happy to share my infinite
 wisdom, amigo.

MICHAEL
 So, I'm up in the mountains working
 on this project. And yesterday, I
 came across a guy from Guatemala.
 Separated from his group somehow.
 Now he's trying to hook up with a
 driver to-

INT. MATEO'S OFFICE - DAY

MATEO
 (into phone)
 Hang on, un momento, amigo...

The big man rises, puts on his hat, grabs the phone and a
 pair of snazzy sunglasses before exiting the BACK DOOR.

EXT. MATEO'S TERRACE - DAY

Slipping the sunglasses on, Mateo strolls through a cushy
 SITTING AREA set up for a business meeting. He passes lavish
 floral arrangements on his way to an ornate railing that
 overlooks his MASSIVE FARMING OPERATION. Acres upon acres of
 land, livestock, barns, and corrals. Tractors and trucks.
 Farmhands and drivers. It's an empire, and Mateo is king.

MATEO
 (into phone)
 My advice... Give him some water so
 he don't die and point him to the
 nearest road... No joke, amigo. If
 you met him yesterday and he's
 still there, you've done more than
 enough... You're a good man, Mike.
 I have respect for you. But, as my
 sweet Lucia reminds me every day,
 you can't save the whole world...
 (laughs)
 Just the ones that matter... Amigo,
 is best for all for you to not be
 involved... Comprende?

INT. DENALI - DAY

Michael, stung by the smug undertone, struggles to find his
 voice.

MICHAEL

Uhh, yeah, sure, I hear what you're saying... But, uh, I'm not trying to get involved. Just thought you might know someone to call-

EXT. MATEO'S TERRACE - DAY

MATEO

(into phone)

Call BLM. Let them deal with your situation. Gotta go, Mike...

INT. DENALI - DAY

Michael puts down the phone. Looks out the window at Miguel - pacing around the campsite on his phone.

MICHAEL

Ouch... Okay, no problem, big ranch man. The whole county knows not all your farmhands are legal, but no one calls BLM on you... Okay, who's next? Someone with less land and bigger huevos.

With a mischievous grin, Michael picks up his phone. Searches his "Contacts" until he comes to the name "Danny."

INT. DANNY'S GARAGE - DAY

DANNY stands at his WORKBENCH, staining a custom-carved door. Late-forties, thick black mustache, thick waist, rosy cheeks. Wearing a t-shirt, stained jeans, and sturdy work boots.

Behind him, open doors provide a glimpse of a WORK-TRUCK. Painted on the side panel: "Daniel's General Contracting." Beyond the truck, a row of scrawny pecan trees leads to the FAMILY HOME. An old house with little character. The paint stripped by harsh desert winds. The front garden, once lush and vibrant, now untended and withering.

Danny's phone rests on the open lid of a toolbox, ON SPEAKER:

MICHAEL

(from phone)

I feel bad for the guy, you know. They keep promising they're on their way, but nobody shows up...

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This immigration thing is so far out of my wheelhouse. I'm hoping you might have some insight, or-

DANNY

No problem, amigo. If no one come for him tonight, I come tomorrow. He have safe place to stay, food, work. Whatever he needs.

MICHAEL

(from phone)

Oh man, Danny, that's so awesome-

DANNY

Call me mañana. Work finish at six... He need clothes or anything?

INT. DENALI - DAY

MICHAEL

I think he's good for now. I'll let you know what happens next, but I got a feeling it won't be much... Thanks, Danny. For being a solid dude. Really, truly appreciated.

DANNY

(from phone)

That's what amigos for, no?

Michael clicks off, sits back, ponders the American spirit.

MICHAEL

Hmm... Somehow I was sure that would go the other way around.

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY

Strolling from the Denali to the plateau, Michael spots a tiny trail of TINY FOOTPRINTS, and RAT SCAT, in the sand.

MICHAEL

Terrific...

(reaches the fire-pit)

Hey, Miguel!

Miguel is ending a call with an elated smile.

MIGUEL

Hey Michael! Good news! They coming today for sure. By six or seven. He call me at four.

MICHAEL

Okay, good. Great. That's great...
(beat)
But, if for some reason it doesn't go as planned, I've got another solid option for you-

MIGUEL

I so happy, Michael...
(looks up to the flag)
I know, no, my heart know, this right place to come. Gracias, Dios mío. Thank you, Michael... I be fine now. I have opciones!

Miguel's relief is evident, while Michael hides his skepticism with light-hearted enthusiasm.

MICHAEL

Heck yeah! The key to success is a solid plan with a couple of good back-up plans tucked in your back pocket-

Miguel's phone RINGS. He checks the screen.

MIGUEL

Is Oscar. He talk to Felix.
(into phone)
Hola, Oscar. Un momento...
(to Michael)
Muchas gracias, mi amigo.

Miguel takes to the footpath. Michael stares after him.

MICHAEL

No wonder this operation is such a mess. It's run by The Odd Couple.

EXT. DENALI - DAY - LATER

COUNTRY MUSIC plays from a PORTABLE SPEAKER tied to the top of the Raak - transformed into a workbench. Michael uses a cordless POWER SCREWDRIVER to build another handy attachment.

MICHAEL

This is going to be great for-

The BATTERY DIES. Two screws left to go.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Oh man. You gotta be kidding me-

MIGUEL (O.S.)
Hey Michael!
(shouts)
Michael... ¿Dónde estás?

From the plateau, Miguel makes eye contact with Michael.
Waves him over.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
¡Ven a mí, Michael! Hurry!

Miguel runs back into the brush. Michael sets down his screw-gun with an exasperated sigh.

MICHAEL
What now...

EXT. STONE DECK - DAY

Tightly holding his pocket-knife by his thigh, Michael cautiously peers out from behind the windbreak. Finding Miguel - DANCING ON THE DECK.

MIGUEL
¡Muy chiller! Is awesome, Michael.
You make this?

Michael shrugs with a modest nod. Pockets his knife.

MICHAEL
I assembled it. Rocks came with the territory-

MIGUEL
Is masterpiece! And the view...
Magnifico! Lots of days you work
for this, no? I tell you here, now,
is very, very cool-

MICHAEL
Well, thanks Miguel. I appreciate
your appreciation... Maybe next
time, a little more info... I
thought maybe you found Bigfoot, a
UFO, Santa's reindeer... Something.

MIGUEL

This something, Michael. Artesanía.
You artist with your hands.

MICHAEL

This is where I spend my mornings.
Everyday, the sun rising over the
mesas energizes my soul... Another
day, another chance.

MIGUEL

Chance... for?

MICHAEL

To do more. Learn more. Be more.

MIGUEL

You have faith, Michael?

MICHAEL

Yes, but, I'm still working out
what exactly I have faith in.

MIGUEL

Faith is tricky, no?

MICHAEL

Very tricky.

Miguel waits for Michael to say more, but Michael just stares
out at the snow-capped mountains.

MIGUEL

Amigo, you find perfect place for
heavy-duty thinking.

Miguel circles the fire-pit, charmed by the craftsmanship.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

This place, I like very much.

MICHAEL

Yeah... It's chillero.

EXT. STONE DECK - NIGHT

YIPS and HOWLS carry across the valley as a fiery display of
sunset colors fade into black night and shimmering starlight.
The campsite GLOWS. A fire BLAZES. Miguel now sits on the
side of the camping cot from the Denali. He wears his cap,
the extra jacket, and the blanket. Michael hands Miguel a
STEAMING plate of curly noodles in a creamy orange sauce.
After a quick prayer, Miguel digs in.

MIGUEL

Mmm... Cremoso.

MICHAEL

An iconic American delicacy. Mac and cheese!

MIGUEL

Macs? Come from where?

MICHAEL

Macaroni... Pasta-

MIGUEL

Ahh, pasta! Italiano!

MICHAEL

More of an Americanized version of a French adaptation of an old Italian recipe... My son once wrote an essay on the history-

MIGUEL

Son? You family man! Never say.

MICHAEL

Two sons, two daughters. All adults now, but they still love their mac-

MIGUEL

Where your wife?

MICHAEL

Ex-wife... Nearly twenty years together. Best mistake of my life.

MIGUEL

Best mistake? How that work?

MICHAEL

My kids. Best human beings I know. The beginning and end for me-

MIGUEL

But wife, not so much?

MICHAEL

Our youngest, Jeannie, smart as a whip, graduated high school early. Days after we moved her to university, the wife told me she was moving out too. Wanted, no, she said she deserved a more stable man.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

No silly dreams to drain the bank account on things not for her or the kids... So now, she's married to a nine-to-five guy. Stable income. Stable life... She never did like mac and cheese-

MIGUEL

And you? Live here, mountains of the desert. Work on computer. Build rocks. Eat American delicacies.

MICHAEL

Well, yeah, but this is just temporary... And, we divorced years ago... I came out here to immerse myself in nature. To dump some of the clutter in my head that's been smothering my creativity lately... Refocus. Find a new path-

MIGUEL

How long temporary? You have house? Las Cruces, maybe?

MICHAEL

Sold it to start my own business. Which took longer than expected to set up. Then, Covid killed the deal I had put together-

MIGUEL

Your kids, they know you live this?

Michael gets up, tosses some sticks into the fire, and totally ignores the question.

MICHAEL

If they don't come for you tonight, we'll need to go out for more wood first thing-

MIGUEL

For sure, no problem... I sorry, Michael, I-

MICHAEL

This's been a long journey for me, Miguel. So many unforeseen crappy circumstances. But, I made a choice to embrace the experience, wherever it takes me... No, it's not ideal, but I manage. I've got it better than a lot of others-

Miguel shoots him a doubtful look.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Seriously, dude. Living outdoors has inspired me in ways I never expected, or imagined...

MIGUEL

How so?

MICHAEL

Honestly, the day it all changed, I was at a lake during the drought. The water level was so low you could literally park on the beach...

EXT. LAKE - DAY - (MICHAEL FLASHBACK - 2018)

Settled on the shoreline, the Denali sits thirty feet from ebbing water. Dotted around the lake, the few VEHICLES and RVs leave enough space for all to have their own zip code.

Michael, a LITTLE LESS GRIZZLED, sits in his red camp chair, a little less weathered, under a blue shade drawn out from the roof. He's relaxed, dressed in shorts, bopping his head to MUSIC, working on his laptop.

The SOUND of a SUPER-DUTY TRUCK hauling a TRAILER gets louder as it gets nearer. When it stops right next to the Denali, Michael goes through a sequence of facial expressions: Suspicion. Doubt. Disbelief. Annoyance. Anger. He SIGHS.

EXT. STONE DECK - NIGHT - (BACK TO PRESENT)

MICHAEL

Later, I found out it was the spot where he proposed to her forty years ago. In a boat. So, okay, it was significant, and they were only there a couple days, but... But, they never left the trailer. Never took a walk along the shore. Didn't barbecue. Didn't even come out to watch the sunset. It absolutely boggled my mind. Why go to all the trouble to go to the lake to sit inside and watch TV all day?

MIGUEL

So... What you do?

MICHAEL

I have a plan-

Miguel's phone RINGS, cutting off the conversation.

MIGUEL

Lo siento. Tell me later...

Michael nods as Miguel steps away, answering the call.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

(to phone, in Guatemalan)

Hello... Everything good? Please be calling with good information...

Michael picks up the empty bowls and walks away slowly. Paying close attention to this other language.

INT. DENALI - NIGHT

A soft wind WHISPERS through the open vent of the sun-roof. Michael kicks back with his laptop and thermos, chatting with his son via INSTANT MESSAGING:

MICHAEL: *Overall, not a bad guy. Abundantly enthusiastic. Just trying to build a better future for his family.*

JEREMY: *Sure, Dad. But worth the risk of going to prison?*

MICHAEL: *Prison for food, water, blanket?*

JEREMY: *Human trafficking is a crime!*

MICHAEL: *Haven't trafficked him anywhere. He showed up here!*

JEREMY: *You should have told him to keep moving. How do you know anything he's told you is true? He could be anybody. Drug runner. Fugitive. Terrorist... That other language might not even be Guatemalan.*

MICHAEL: *Feels real. Only 30 miles from the border. Told me about his Mayan ancestors. Showed me pic of his pregnant girlfriend. On the phone constantly to get a ride.*

JEREMY: *Truth is, those could all be lies.*

MICHAEL: *He doesn't know me from Adam either, J. - My gut tells me I'm not in any danger.*

JEREMY: *I don't trust your gut. Too much hot sauce. Who's Adam?*

MICHAEL: *Hey, when did you become the worried parent?*

JEREMY: *Hey, when will you be done with your research and heading home?*

Michael drops his head with a heavy sigh.

MICHAEL: *I hear you. Seriously, I'm good. He'll be gone soon.*

JEREMY: *Hope so. I'm too young for an ulcer... Big storm moving in tonight. Need my Zzzzs to shovel snow in the AM! Night, Dad. Stay frosty.*

MICHAEL: *You too. Night, J.*

Closing the laptop with a wistful sigh, Michael looks out the window. He watches MIGUEL'S SILHOUETTE crisscrossing the campsite, phone to ear. Once again, Michael considers the risks he's taking and blows out a long sigh.

INT. DENALI - DAY

A HAWK CALLS OUT on its morning hunt startling Michael awake.

He sits up fast and hard. SMACKING HIS HEAD on the AIR VENT. He wipes STEAM from the window. Peers out. A STREAM OF SMOKE rises from the stone deck.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael jumps out of the SUV with untied shoe-laces, shoving his arms into his puffy jacket.

MICHAEL

Holy mother of... M-Mardi Gras! F-French Quarter... N-New Orleans!

He jumps up and down, looks up to his wind gage.

SUPERIMPOSE: "DAY 3"

The flag flutters under a clear blue sky. The warmth of the sun melting the last bits of night FROST.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Mornin', Sunny.

Michael blows into his cupped hands, hurries off into the bushes. Moments later, he reappears and hurries over to the footpath, then disappears into the campsite...

INT. STASH HOUSE - NIGHT - (MIGUEL DREAM #2)

From total darkness, a MALE VOICE shouts out:

GUARDIA
Identificación!

MIGUEL'S P.O.V. - Accompanied by his INTENSE BREATHING:

His arm is jerked up from around his legs. His wrist wrenched to the side for an ID check. A dark figure with a hidden face, the GUARDIA, armed with an AK-47, blinds him with the beam of a FLASHLIGHT. Miguel's wristband lights up for a half a second. Then his arm is thrust back at him as the guard moves on - opening his view of THE ROOM.

Wall to wall, men, women, and children. Dirt floor. Tin siding. WIND blows dust through holes that stream bits of LIGHT on the faces around him. A CHILD, clutching a not-so-stuffed animal, stares at him with piercing dark eyes. He looks away, putting his head back down to his knees. He stares at his white sneakers - new and spotless.

EXT. STONE DECK - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Michael steps lightly around the windbreak of trees.

MIGUEL is asleep. Wrapped in the blanket, curled on the cot, back-pack for a pillow. Under the cot, Miguel's water bottle is FROZEN SOLID.

As deftly as possible, Michael adds the last few sticks to the SMOLDERING FIRE. An imprint in the soft dirt draws him in for a closer look. A PAW PRINT. A mountain lion's paw print.

His gaze follows several more prints leading into the brush. He looks back at Miguel. Steps closer. Miguel looks fine - SOFTLY SNORING. Michael retreats, lightly as he came.

Hearing Michael's FOOTSTEPS fading, Miguel half opens his eyes. Sees the FIRE begin to thrive again. He smiles.

EXT. STONE DECK - DAY

Washed and dressed for the day, Michael returns to the deck carrying a bundle of branches - FULL STOP when he sees the blanket neatly folded on the cot. No Miguel. No back-pack or water bottle. Michael drops the wood and surveys the camp.

MICHAEL
Son of a-

MIGUEL
Hey Michael! Good morning!

Miguel appears, carrying a load of BRANCHES and a warm smile. He drops the load, then his backpack. Together they stack the wood in a neat pile.

MICHAEL
I thought I missed your grand exit-

MIGUEL
No, mi amigo... Not leave with no thank you. No adios!

Michael is relieved. But then concerned that he is relieved.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
(sighs)
I losing my hope for them to come-

MICHAEL
It's all gonna work out, Miguel...
The key is good timing-

Miguel's PHONE RINGS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
See... A call this early has to be good news.

MIGUEL
Felix. He always call early. His work day very busy...
(into phone)
Buenos días, Felix. Sigo acampando.

Miguel steps away with a disheartened stride. Michael feels for his frustration. He sighs, checks his watch, heads back.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael adds spoons to two bowls of STEAMING OATMEAL set next to the kettle and cups on the wood tray.

Miguel joins him at the Raak, even more dispirited. He sighs deeply. The weight of his dilemma growing heavier by the day.

MICHAEL
What's up, Miguel?

MIGUEL

More excuses. More mothers sick,
more cars not work. More sit and
more wait. Wait for life to begin.

MICHAEL

Believe me, Miguel, I feel your
pain. I'm, what, thirty years
older, and I'm still waiting for my
life to begin too.

MIGUEL

No way... You sixty?

MICHAEL

Sí. Sesenta y dos.

MIGUEL

No! I think you not so old as my
grandpa... You look good sixty.

MICHAEL

Gee, thanks.

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY

The FIRE keeps the kettle hot as Michael and Miguel dig in.

MIGUEL

Mmmm... Muy dulce. Sweet, no?

MICHAEL

Maple and brown sugar.

MIGUEL

Good oatmeal...

(another bite)

I confused, Michael. How you wait
for life to begin? Have big family,
skill to make things beautiful.
Business. Many good years... But
still have big dreams, many goals?

MICHAEL

Sometimes it takes a little longer
to figure out how you can really
make a difference... But first, I
needed courage. The kind of courage
that I realized I didn't have. I
found strength and courage, here.
Now I can let go of some of my
needs to make it all happen.

MIGUEL

Like... I leave my home, to make better life for family.

MICHAEL

Exactly.

MIGUEL

You have plan?

MICHAEL

There's a lot more to it, but basically my plan is to reconnect humans with nature. I'm not talking about a two-week vacation. I'm talking a new lifestyle. People are struggling. They're trapped. Both physically and mentally... But move away from all that anxiety and you learn to breathe again. You breathe sunshine and rain, soil and trees. The stress dissolves. Your body changes, your mind fills with inspiration and aspirations-

MIGUEL

What about girlfriend? Amor? What you do for pleasure?

MICHAEL

Oh, jeez, I'm horrible with women-

MIGUEL

Why so? You looking good, okay cook, muy inteligente...

(smiles)

Sometime, you be funny-

MICHAEL

I was blessed with special radar. Leads me directly to the one woman in the room that can make my life a living hell...

(laughs)

Currently, my life is way too unpredictable for a relationship.

(spreads his arms wide)

This is my pleasure. Miss Mother Nature. She has all the great qualities I look for in a mate.

Miguel's face says it all - *Yeah, sure buddy*. He opens his mouth to ask another question but Michael cuts him off.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

So where exactly in Guatemala is your family? In the city, or...?

MIGUEL

West Guatemala. Two hundred miles from Guatemala City. Near border to-

MICHAEL

Hang on a sec...

Michael dashes off to the Denali, leaving Miguel to shrug and check phone messages. He removes his KNIT CAP, handmade, with a native Guatemalan design, and hangs it on the seat-back.

Miguel slips the phone back in his pocket as Michael returns, carrying an iPad. Michael opens GOOGLE EARTH. Zooms in on the country of Guatemala. Passes the tablet to Miguel.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Show me where you came from.

Miguel studies the map. He rubs his fingers on his pants before touching the screen, zooms in on Guatemala City.

MIGUEL

Quauhtlemallan, mean place of many trees. Is beautiful. Jungles. Trees so high they kiss sky. Many farms. Grow sugar cane, banana, melon, corn, spice, coffee beans. Lots of sheep, for the wool, like my hat-

MICHAEL

Of course... Guatemalan coffee!

MIGUEL

Sí, café. Sweet and strong.

MICHAEL

Ha! Just like I like my women-

MIGUEL

Oh? I think you not interested-

MICHAEL

It's an expression, Miguel. I'm just saying it's a good combo... Sweet and strong... Hey, just because I don't have a current thing going doesn't mean I'm not still looking.

MIGUEL

Sí, sí... One more goal for you.

MICHAEL

Maybe. Someday. If it's meant to be.

MIGUEL

No, Michael. There is woman for you out there. Well, somewhere maybe... Is big map, lots of places to look for her...

(points to the iPad)

So, here... my family farm, many generations. West side, but not by ocean. Up high, four thousand feet. Much rain, last years, very bad for crops... One more reason for my leave, Guatemala.

(hands back the iPad)

Show me where you come from.

Michael zooms out and scrolls north to California.

MICHAEL

Okay, I was actually born on a military base in Germany. Both parents served in the Air Force. Every year we moved to a new base. New house. New school. All over Europe. Moved back to the States when I was eleven. Southern California. This area...

(zooms in on O.C.)

Orange County... That's where I met most of my long-time friends, spent my college years, met my wife. Our kids were born there... Lots of history. Great memories... The beach was always my sanctuary-

MIGUEL

So why you in desert? No beach.

MICHAEL

After we married, we moved around looking for a good place to settle. Seattle. LA. Then I got this great job opportunity, but it required a move to Las Cruces. Wife has family here, so it was a good move for all of us... I immediately fell in love with the landscape, slower pace.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Kids had plenty of space to be kids. Great place to raise a family-

MIGUEL

But you no leave when wife go with stables man?

MICHAEL

Stables man? Oh. Stable man... Nah, I boogied to Colorado. Bounced around a couple years. Then another great job offer pulled me back here-

MIGUEL

Not so great job. You living here.

MICHAEL

It was a great job. Great company. We were on the verge of expanding. Then one day, our biggest financial sponsor, and our most encouraging supporter, dropped us like a hot potato. Never heard from him again.

MIGUEL

Why he drop you like hot potato?

MICHAEL

No idea... Everything fell apart after that. I hit rock bottom faster than the Titanic... Took some time to pull myself together after that... But, it convinced me to build my own business from the ground up... Sold my house for enough money to last a year, while I set everything in motion. Things were finally falling into place... Then, BOOM. Covid. And, now, I'm waiting for my new life to begin-

MIGUEL

Like me. Ready for new chapter... But God no send us on road with perfect lines to follow.

Miguel points to the rock-lined path. Michael laughs in agreement. Notes the time as he closes the iPad.

MICHAEL

No, no guiding lines... It's almost nine. I got a ton of work to do.

Michael grabs the tray, starts heading back to the Denali.

MIGUEL

OK. I work too. Pray for pick up
today. Call everyone for report...
(his phone rings)
Maybe today the day!

Michael rolls his eyes as he continues to the truck.

INT. DENALI - DAY

Michael is fully fixated on his laptop, rotating a 3D schematic drawing of his latest design: THE SOLAAR HUT. A portable, elevated, sun-powered, home away from home.

He hears Miguel's phone RING outside. Looking out, he watches Miguel set off on his loop around the campsite.

MICHAEL

Never imagined so much traffic on
my little path...

A new MESSAGE BUBBLE pops up on the computer screen:

X-MARIA: *I hear you have unexpected guest...*

Michael rolls his eyes as another message pops up:

JEREMY: *All good, Dad?*

MICHAEL replies: *Yep. All good, J... Hey, if I recorded some of Miguel's "other" language, is there an app to translate?*

He scans other unread messages, waiting for a reply.

ELLIE: *Hey Dad, Ben and I checking in. Everything ok?*

JEANNIE: *Dear Daring Daddy, Why am I just now hearing about a strange man at your camp? And why am I hearing it from Mom?? Call me!! I want to hear all about it. Your darling daughter, Jbug.*

Michael smiles with fatherly love before clicking on the reply from Jeremy:

JEREMY: *He came back? Had a feeling he would. Something not right there... Several apps. Will review. Get back to you.*

JEREMY: *FYI... Normal dads just read suspense thrillers!*

MICHAEL: *Normal dads are boring... Thanks, J.*

Michael grabs his thermos. It's empty. He sighs. Looks out the window - Miguel now walks in the opposite direction. He checks the time: 1:16pm, 72F. He scrolls down through emails.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Huh. Thought for sure I'd hear back from Ryan and Brian by now... Well, since you guys are too busy to get back to me, I'm going out to lunch.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael stretches out stiff muscles. Fills the kettle. Selects a tea bag and various ingredients to make sandwiches.

MICHAEL

Our special today is tuna. Kissed by a star. Mixed with a dollop of mayo, spread liberally over sun-baked wheat bread. Accompanied by brined pickle and thinly sliced potatoes, fried to a golden crisp then tossed in salt from the sea of-

Miguel, rounding the corner to the plateau, spots Michael and slowly walks over to him while finishing his call.

MIGUEL

Amigo, you look... happy? Work go good?

MICHAEL

It goes... How about you?

MIGUEL

Felix, have friend he trust, live in Tucson. Guatemalan. If I go to-

MICHAEL

No way I'm driving you to Tucson.

MIGUEL

He know Indian man, from Hatch-

MICHAEL

Felix has a lot of friends.

MIGUEL

Sorry to ask, pero-

MICHAEL

You can ask all you want, Miguel. But no, no, and no.

MIGUEL
Entiendo. Is OK, Michael. I be
fine.

Michael sighs, finding a single bag of chips left. He splits it between both plates while Miguel fills his bottle, and a big water bubble settles.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Water going low-

MICHAEL
Hey, have you been telling all
these possible drivers my location?

MIGUEL
Felix only explain general area.

Michael looks Miguel in the eye for a lie. Miguel smiles and picks up the tray of sandwiches, heads to the path. Not sure how high his level of concern should be, Michael sighs.

EXT. STONE DECK - DAY

The deck side is BREEZY. A revived FIRE burns low. Michael and Miguel take their seats and plunge into their sandwiches.

MIGUEL
Thank you, Michael, for sharing
more sandwich... What this one?

MICHAEL
Tuna, mayo, pickle relish.

MIGUEL
What its name?

MICHAEL
Tuna sandwich.

MIGUEL
Oh... Is good tuna sandwich.

MICHAEL
Enjoy it. It's my last can of tuna.

A few bites later, Miguel tries for light conversation.

MIGUEL
Valeria go to doctore. Hear baby
heart beat...
(tears up)
She happy, like no day I know her.

MICHAEL

Yeah, having kids does that to you... One minute you're bitching about them, next minute they do something simple and amazing, and you turn into a big pile of daddy mush.

Miguel nods and wipes the tears off his cheeks.

MIGUEL

She have big up and down days. Try to make her feel better-

MICHAEL

You can't... make her feel better. Her body is making a tiny human. She's going through changes you and I can't possibly understand. All you can do is listen... To all her random thoughts, wild ideas, and crazy concerns. Just listen.

MIGUEL

Just listen?

MICHAEL

Trust me. I was on a business trip during three months of our second pregnancy. After weeks of saying all the wrong things, I figured out she didn't need me to say or do anything... Just listen, then assure her it will all be okay.

MIGUEL

How I know it all be OK?

MICHAEL

You don't. And it probably won't. Hardly anything ever goes to plan. The key is to go with the flow... Slow down for sharp curves. Avoid potholes. Keep your tank full. Try not to make too many wrong turns-

MIGUEL

(laughs)

You like my Papa P. He say, sometime wrong turn take you to right place.

MICHAEL

My dad used to say, some of the most scenic roads are the crazy detours you didn't see coming.

MIGUEL

If God want us stay one place, we grow roots, not feet.

MICHAEL

Good one.

MIGUEL

Yours good too... Pero, I tire of crazy detours.

MICHAEL

You and me both, amigo.

Michael stands and stretches. Miguel's phone RINGS. His eyes sparkle when he reads the name on the screen.

MIGUEL

(into phone)

Ria! Estábamos hablando de ti...

Michael grins as Miguel's voice turns warm, nervous, excited. He tosses his BREAD SCRAPS and heads back to the Denali.

EXT. STONE DECK - DAY - MINUTES LATER

Michael pauses at the windbreak, hearing Miguel end his call with Valeria, followed by a melancholy sigh. Michael steps out, holding three one-gallon JUGS OF WATER.

MICHAEL

Hey, Miguel-

Miguel looks up at Michael, then the water jugs. His reaction carries more shock and confusion than it should, but Michael writes it off to Miguel missing his girlfriend.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You want to join me for a little excursion?

MIGUEL

Excur-sion?

MICHAEL

Yeah, a little trip beyond the walls of basecamp.

MIGUEL
 (eyes the jugs)
 How far we go?

MICHAEL
 Not far... Come on. Give me a hand
 here.

Michael gives him one of the jugs, sets off to the south. They quickly reach the end of the cleared path. Miguel looks beyond the neat borderline of rocks - Not much out there.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY

Leaving the campsite behind, Michael and Miguel walk across open land covered in rock, shrub, and patches of crusted ICE.

With no obvious destination in sight, Miguel's uneasiness grows, as does his distance from Michael.

MICHAEL
 Ground's still too cold for the
 snakes to leave their cubbyholes-

MIGUEL
 Snakes... Cubby-holes?
 (avoids a snaky branch)
 Where you take me, Michael?

Michael grins and veers toward a low ravine surrounded by a huddle of saguaro, sagebrush, mesquite, and scattered boulders. A tiny oasis in the rock-strewn desert.

Miguel GASPS as Michael disappears under arching branches.

EXT. HIDDEN GROVE - DAY

Miguel steps into a shaded grove - the wild west version of a secret garden. Instantly captivated with the secluded spot, he zeros in on three SHALLOW POOLS - descending like steps, lined with stones, crossed with perching branches.

Michael grabs a hefty STONE, looks back at Miguel. Miguel tenses up. Michael kneels and SMASHES the top sheets of ICE on the pools. He pours his two jugs into the slushy mix, then holds out his hand for the third jug. Miguel doesn't move.

MICHAEL
 Miguel?

MIGUEL
 Is paraíso-

MICHAEL

It's for the birds.

MIGUEL

The birds? Oh, sí... You build for birds?

MICHAEL

Rainwater doesn't last long out here... When my air mattress refused to hold air anymore I didn't want to just throw it away. Try to repurpose when I can-

MIGUEL

They come? The birds?

Michael grins, takes the water from Miguel, pours it in.

MICHAEL

The Little Generals, I call them. They've been quite an inspiration. Many times, I watched them fly in after a rainstorm. Big group of bluish-grey birds I've never seen anywhere else, hanging out all over the boulders. Drinking rainwater, bathing in the puddles, chatting away like they were catching up on all the latest gossip. I spent weeks glued to my camera absolutely mesmerized... Observing their personalities and social habits... Made me feel like a kid again. Curious. Excited about the future.

MIGUEL

You here alone. No TV. No movies. So, you watch nature channel.

MICHAEL

Very funny... But seriously, it's more than that, Miguel. Those birds opened my eyes to an entire world I'd never bothered to pay attention to... Like this colony of rock statues I'm living in. No two days are ever the same. Nature is in constant motion. There are countless little nuances to the way nature operates, and it all works together so seamlessly. So... perfectly.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I mean, what must God have been thinking when he created his grand plan for this place... How do you design billions of elements to work together so harmoniously?

MIGUEL

Perfect harmony-

MICHAEL

Yes, perfect harmony... It's a system. A very intricate multi-layered system. Assimilation is the key. Looking at how every single thing serves a specific purpose for everything else to continue on. The constant circle of life. Integrate all the pieces together to build the system... So I'm trying to build a lifestyle system for humans that replicates natural systems. From production to disposal, every element needs consideration, for the manufacturer and the consumer.

(looks to Miguel)

Do you get what I'm saying?

MIGUEL

Some. Many words, no... Pero, but I hear your passion. You build good things. Think hard, how you can help peoples... This why you angel.

MICHAEL

Not even close... I'd just like to steer the next generations in a more conscientious direction... Maybe, hopefully, help out a few others along the way.

Miguel takes a seat on a semi-smooth boulder. He studies the bird pools, while Michael removes debris from the corners.

MIGUEL

You have good heart, Michael. So very like my Papa P. Before I leave, come here, he say to me,
(mimics his grandpa)

"Mi valiente nieto... my brave grandson, for journey to America, and journey of life, always you carry three pitchers."

(nods to the water jugs)

"Pitcher one, fill with your faith.

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

God walk with you every step...
Pitcher two, fill with your love.
Love for life. Man, nature, all
life. Pitcher three, fill with
patience. Patience must be full all
times. No patience, leave no hope
for faith and love."

MICHAEL

I like that. Sounds like something
I'd say, if I said such things...
Hey, who is this Papapee?

MIGUEL

Mi abuelo. Mi papa's papa... All
call him, Papa de Pacífico. Papa P.

MICHAEL

Ahh, yeah. I've definitely had my
fair share of ice cold Pacificos-

MIGUEL

No, no cerveza... Pacífico mean
peace. Papa P, man of peace. Like
Océana Pacífico. Sea of peace. He
very kind. Wise. Help peoples with
small problemas... He very cool.
You like him. You much the same.

Michael raises an eyebrow. Miguel laughs.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Same funny faces! Pero, but
Michael, you come with the three
pitchers... Crazy conexión. Papa P,
you, teach me new things. More than
books I study. Help me see picture
bigger... Is sign.

MICHAEL

Yeah? Sign for what?

MIGUEL

Sign for... Maybe... I right place
at right time, for change.

Michael laughs while he picks up the empty jugs.

MICHAEL

Well that must be a pretty strange
feeling out here in the middle of
nowhere... But I know exactly what
you mean.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY

Strolling back toward the campsite, Miguel walks backward beside Michael. Eyes stuck on the hidden grove.

MICHAEL

Rock!

Miguel spins around, narrowly missing a wipe-out.

MIGUEL

What is simil, similate?

MICHAEL

Assimilate. To absorb and integrate. To learn and use.

MIGUEL

As-sim-i-late.

MICHAEL

After I built the pools, it only took one little general to fly over and check it out. Went back and told his friends. Next thing I know the whole group moved over. They learned all they needed to know then used every inch of it to their benefit... So basically, acquire knowledge, then apply it to your situation.

MIGUEL

Ay ay ay. Much to learn in America.

MICHAEL

You studied English to speak it in America, right?

(Miguel nods)

You're speaking English with me in America right now. Assimilation.

MIGUEL

Am I now assimilator?

MICHAEL

Possibly an assimilationist.

They laugh as they walk on, almost back to camp.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hey, do I really make funny faces?

EXT. STONE DECK - DAY

Michael and Miguel recross the line into camp, laughing. They stop at the fire-pit as Michael's phone BUZZES a message.

MICHAEL
 (reads the text)
 Danny can't make it today. But good
 for tomorrow. Oh well, maybe your-

An ear-piercing DOG WHISTLE makes them both JUMP.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 What the-

Michael drops the water jugs and runs toward the whistler, pulling out his pocket knife. Miguel picks up the jugs and follows cautiously.

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY

Rounding the bend to the plateau, Michael skids to a stop as he sees another WHITE SUV parked alongside the Denali. His next step reveals "BORDER PATROL" on the side panel. Michael sighs, pockets his knife. Braces himself for a confrontation.

Standing at the far side of the fire-pit, CBP OFFICER DRAPES, 55, removes his Aviators and sizes Michael up with a sharp eye. Michael does the same. Drapes is taller and thicker, built like a boxer. Intimidating. He waits for the attitude.

OFFICER DRAPES
 Afternoon... This your camp?

MICHAEL
 Yes, sir.

OFFICER DRAPES
 Just checking for hot embers. Last few days, gusts up to forty, fifty miles an hour... But, looks like you've done this a time or two... Fire area is well established. Good distance from brush...
 (glances around)
 No shovel?

MICHAEL
 Oh, yeah, it's-

Michael points to the Stone Deck. Remembering he's moved the tools, he twists his arms and awkwardly points to his truck.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's, uhh... I'll be sure to put it
back, uh, back by the fire, Officer-

OFFICER DRAPES

You on medication?

MICHAEL

What? No. No medication. Just a
beer now and again.

OFFICER DRAPES

How many beers today?

MICHAEL

None. Maybe with dinner tonight-

OFFICER DRAPES

Guessing you've been here awhile.

MICHAEL

A few months... I'm doing some
research, and photography-

OFFICER DRAPES

You a wildlifer?

MICHAEL

A wildlifer? Oh, well, yeah, kind
of, I guess. I'm researching the
practicalities of living outdoors.
(points to the Raak)
I'm designing modular equipment for-

OFFICER DRAPES

No RV? No tent? Just your Yukon?

MICHAEL

It's just temporary-

The WIND picks up, rustling leaves and snapping the flag.

OFFICER DRAPES

You alone?

(looks over Michael's
shoulder)

Aside from your little buddy over
there...

Michael turns stiffly, HEART BEATING like a brass band.

Atop the rock-table by the fire-pit sits a grey DESERT MOUSE.
Big ears, long tail. Munching on the crust Michael tossed.

Feeling a bit conspicuous with both men staring, it hops down and runs off into the brush. After a brief SQUEAL and a TUSSELE in the brush, an empty water jug rolls down the path. Then all is quiet.

Michael, beet red, turns back to Drapes with no idea what to say.

OFFICER DRAPES (CONT'D)

(laughs)

Crazy critters... Well, you two sure picked a great spot. What a view... Sunset must kick ass!

MICHAEL

Highlight of my day.

OFFICER DRAPES

I bet...

Drapes eyes sweep over the campsite. Michael follows his gaze - spotting Miguel's hat on the camp chair. His heart races.

OFFICER DRAPES (CONT'D)

Good vantage point. I'll make a note of that...

Replacing his sunglasses, Drapes sends Michael a two-fingered salute. Starts making his way back to the patrol vehicle.

As soon as Drapes is out of earshot, Michael starts letting out a deep sigh of relief. Drapes stops. Turns around. Motions to Michael.

OFFICER DRAPES (CONT'D)

One more question...

EXT. FOOTPATH - DAY

Crouched behind a clump of sagebrush, Miguel's brow beads with SWEAT. He watches Michael and the patrolman meet halfway between the plateau and the vehicles. His eyes fill with uncertainty while the two men have a short discussion.

Michael gestures in Miguel's general direction, before turning to the Denali. The patrolman reaches into a pocket, gives something to Michael.

Miguel considers making a run for it, looking behind him for an escape. A car door SLAMS SHUT - bringing his wide eyes back to witness the Border Patrol SUV driving off - and Michael walking back to the Denali.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Rounding the Denali's back bumper, Michael collapses against the side.

MICHAEL

Man, I haven't sweated that much since my wedding day.

MIGUEL

Ohh? Maybe I change mind for wedding day.

Miguel has magically appeared beside Michael.

MICHAEL

Jeez... How do you do that? One heart attack is enough for one day.

MIGUEL

Sorry, Michael. I worry, getting you trouble...

They watch the SUV kick up a TRAIL OF DUST negotiating the road down into the valley. Both let out huge sighs of relief.

MICHAEL

For the record, I answered all of his questions truthfully. He never mentioned you, so neither did I.

MIGUEL

What his, 'One more question?'

MICHAEL

He wanted to know where he could buy one of my Raaks. Called it a game changer... Told him I'd let him know when they hit the market. So he gave me his business card...
(holds up the card)
Boy, I bet that rat really scared the crap out of you-

MIGUEL

Almost I scream! He no expect me. I no expect him-

MICHAEL

I didn't expect any of this!
(checks his watch)
I got work to do... You should-

Michael's tone comes out harsher than intended. Miguel nods, pulls out his phone and promptly heads off to the deck.

MIGUEL

I call Oscar. Ask for good news-

MICHAEL

Yeah... it's been three days now.

EXT. DENALI - EVENING

The sunlight is fading fast as Michael exits the SUV donning his fleece cap and down jacket.

MICHAEL

Holy mother... of... B-Blue Pearl
diving in New Z-Zealand!

He looks over to the Stone Deck, catching a glimpse of amber FLAMES and Miguel's shadowy SILHOUETTE pacing the path.

Michael flips on the lights and rearranges the Raak for food prep. He fills the kettle, sets it on the burner. Grabs a pot, a packet of Knorr's Stroganoff, can of green beans, and can opener. He flicks the ignition switch on the stove, but no joy. He checks the plugs. Tries again. The tank is dead.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

C'mon! Are you kidding me? You
couldn't last one more meal...

Michael sighs as the last whispers of sunlight dissolve into night. The camp's SOLAR LIGHTS flicker on and the coyotes begin their nightly chorus of YIPS AND HOWLS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Terrific.

EXT. STONE DECK - NIGHT

The stroganoff is BUBBLING as it's pulled from the cooking ledge in the fire-pit. Michael stirs and spoons the noodles onto plates already half-filled with mushy green beans.

MIGUEL

Gracias, Michael. I'm so much
grateful...

MICHAEL

Sorry it's not a better dining
experience-

MIGUEL
 Fire. Food not old, rotting...
 (holds up his beer)
 Cerveza. Ta bueno. ¡Salud!

MICHAEL
 Salud, Miguel.

They drink, in good spirits. Michael waits for Miguel to say his prayer of thanks, then both dig into their noodles.

MIGUEL
 Mmm... muy bien.

They eat in comfortable silence surrounded by starlight. Once they come up for air and beer, Michael has a thought.

MICHAEL
 Hey... You never finished telling me how the heck you ended up way out here without your amigos.

MIGUEL
 Oh, sí, sí... Uh, well, we, we...
 (gulps down his beer)
 We walking to the mountain...
 (off Michael's nod)
 Many miles we walk. Old man, he say each hour go by. One, two, three hour, we stop. Nothing there. No mark. No one come. We wait. Night come. Cold. We all hungry. Wait more... Everyone get mad. Then get more mad. Discutiendo. Shouting very big, What we do? Where we go?

MICHAEL
 No phone reception?

MIGUEL
 No... no phone work. No power for two week.

The light evening BREEZE is becoming more brisk. Michael zips up his jacket, as Miguel, looking flushed and uneasy, unzips his own. Michael cracks open two fresh beers.

MICHAEL
 Okay, so you're stranded in the middle of nowhere, everyone's mad... What happened next?

Miguel's phone RINGS. Again, he looks relieved. Smiles an apology. Moves away quickly to answer.

Michael stares after him, not sure what to make of his fidgety behavior or the story he's unrolling.

EXT. STONE DECK - NIGHT - MINUTES LATER

Michael adds a few more logs to the FIRE as Miguel returns. Miguel grabs his beer, downs nearly half of it.

MICHAEL

Miguel?

MIGUEL

They make it.

MICHAEL

Who made what?

MIGUEL

My friends. My group. They make Miami today.

Miguel sits on the cot like a deflated balloon.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I happy for them. Happy they OK.

MICHAEL

But sad you're not with them.

MIGUEL

Sí...

(sips his beer)

They happy I not dead.

MICHAEL

Well, but now you have a much cooler story to tell-

MIGUEL

If only I-

MICHAEL

Don't go there, man. The "what if" game will take you to too many dark places. Can't change the past. Just use it to make better decisions in the future.

Miguel thinks on this. Sips his beer. Something still gnawing at his nerves.

MIGUEL

Some mistake more bad... You make bad mistake?

MICHAEL

Ha! Every damn day, Miguel. It's part of human nature. How else do you learn what works and what doesn't... And, you've got a kid on the way. Prepare yourself for making all kinds of dumb mistakes. Oh, and the more kids you have, the more mistakes you make!

Miguel chokes on his beer and coughs through it.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Don't worry. All fathers make mistakes... Just don't let your fears make your decisions for you.

Recovering from the cough, Miguel breathes deeply then sighs.

MIGUEL

My fears. More fears with family now... Maybe this why I leave-

MICHAEL

Wait, where'd you leave?

MIGUEL

(with a ton of guilt)

I... I not separate... I leave, to look for something to help-

MICHAEL

You left who? Your group?

MIGUEL

Sí. They fight like roosters and hens... No one talk about what we do next. No water. No food. How long we wait? What if no one come. We, we out in open land. Can see us from air. No plan. Just fight... Me impaciento. This my last chance.

MICHAEL

You went with your gut instincts.

MIGUEL

Sí, más o menos... My gut not so smart sometime...

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

No tell them I go. Leave when all
sleep. No want them not let me go.

Michael pieces the story together, empathizing...

MICHAEL

So you snuck away in the middle of
the night and feel bad about it...

(Miguel nods)

I get why... When you share an
idea, no matter how good or how
crazy, people try to talk you out
of it. So you just do what you do,
hope for the best, explain later.

Miguel's face twists into a smile, but Michael looks away. It
was more of a personal statement. Miguel picks up on it.

MIGUEL

Maybe, we meant to cross roads.
Like special chapter to life... I
no give up, because of you... One
day, maybe you no give up, because
of me.

Michael sips his beer, doubting that possibility.

MICHAEL

Maybe... You know, Miguel, I just
want to say, no matter how I feel
about the whole immigration thing,
I am incredibly impressed by how
gutsy you have to be, to walk away
from everything and everyone you
know. Go hundreds of miles to try
to start a new life. No money, no
documents, one backpack. Not sure I
could do that. Tough enough just
going state to state.

MIGUEL

You here in nowhere to start over,
no? Walk away from home and family-

MICHAEL

Yeah, but it's not another country-

MIGUEL

I much love my Guatemala... Pero,
no money, no future. Family say
journey be difficult. Stay home.
Work farm. Much trouble for better
life... But this always my dream.
As boy, hear talk of land of hope.

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Dreams come true in America. Think, this where I go! Work to become excellent chef. Open restaurante, 'Esperanza.'

MICHAEL

Hope.

MIGUEL

Sí. Hope.

MICHAEL

Well, I commend you for following your dreams. This country needs more people like you who care what America stands for. No less, willing to risk your life to be a part of it... It's a complicated system. I wish it was organized better to let you good guys in but keep the bad guys out.

MIGUEL

Oh, you think I good guy?

MICHAEL

At first, I thought you were going to be a royal pain in the butt... But yeah, I think you're a good guy-

MIGUEL

I think you more good guy than you think you be.

MICHAEL

I think there's a lot of people that would disagree... Life get's complicated. You do what you think is best at the time... Looking back, you realize, maybe you could have done more...

Michael's voice fades. His eyes TEAR-UP. Miguel busies himself with the fire. Michael swigs his beer, sighs.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Man, I did not see that coming.

(takes a deep breath)

Hey, seriously, Miguel, I want you to remember something...

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

No matter what side of the fence you're born on, no matter how much or how little you have in your pockets, you have as much right to be an American as I do. As anyone does... Not many countries offer that kind of opportunity... We want you to do well. To prosper and participate. Contribute to the economy and our nation's future. We are not a perfect country, more of a historic work in progress, but we do work together toward a better future for everybody within our borders... So, if you're going to do something this brave and this bold in your life, then make sure you make it count... You have good potential, Miguel. Don't waste it.

Miguel has listened to every word with rapt attention.

MIGUEL

I try my best, for my family, and now you too... Michael, I thinking, maybe you try best for your family, but not work so good?

Michael leans forward, out of Miguel's eye-line. He checks his watch before pulling out the LAST TWO BEERS of the six-pack. A GUST OF WIND plows through the campsite, prompting Miguel to zip up again. Michael changes the subject.

MICHAEL

Looks like it's going to be another gusty night, Miguel... Any updates on your ride to Miami?

MIGUEL

Felix... Working on deal with amigos from Guatemala. In Columbus. You know Columbus?

MICHAEL

I do. Roughly two hours west-

MIGUEL

They can meet me, Walmart. Las Cruces. Think maybe you come too. See your family-

Michael stands abruptly.

MICHAEL
That's not a good idea.

MIGUEL
But your children miss to see you,
no? Long time?

MICHAEL
Very long time...

Michael hesitates, not wanting to share the truth. But what the hell, he'll never see this guy again.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
This might be a little hard for you to understand, but I haven't seen my kids for three years. That's how long I've been living in my truck. Three long years... I don't want them to see me this way. I don't want to be a burden to their young lives. I don't want them to worry... Which they already do. I'm sure they know something's up, but...

(sighs)
So, that's why I can't take you anywhere, Miguel. If I was caught transporting a migrant with no ID, I would lose everything. Including my children's respect.

MIGUEL
What they think you do out here?

MICHAEL
They think I'm traveling around, working on different projects. Which is partially true... Truth is, they're all so busy with their own lives, as long as I check in regularly and say I'm doing great they go along with my excuses.

Miguel sips his beer, transfixed on the flames.

MIGUEL
This make me sad for you, Michael.
I know you proud of them-

MICHAEL
And I want them to be proud of me too... But sometimes life doesn't work out like you planned.

Michael takes a big swig from his beer, while Miguel continues to sip his.

MIGUEL

Maybe I leave when sun rise... You make map for me?

MICHAEL

No problem, Miguel. That I can do.

They both look relieved to have the matter finally resolved. But neither looks ready to jump for joy. Miguel tries for a cheery smile, revealing a chunk of GREEN-BEAN stuck between his front teeth. Michael grins.

EXT. DENALI - NIGHT

Michael hands Miguel a spare TOOTHBRUSH KIT.

MIGUEL

You sure, Michael?

MICHAEL

It's all yours... Sorry I didn't think of it sooner.

MIGUEL

No, no, is OK. Gracias, Michael. My teeth be very happy.

(opens the kit)

Much time since last shower. Sorry I smell not so good. Try to clean, but no tools.

MICHAEL

Well, that's why God made wind. To keep the stink away. Far, far away.

Miguel laughs, stepping to the water pump to brush his teeth. Michael draws out a map to Walmart on the Raak's tabletop.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Well, I guess this is good-bye... It's been quite an experience, Miguel. I wish you lots of luck and hope you find that better life you've been dreaming about.

MIGUEL

Soon, I hope to buy your famous Raak for my truck... Pero, need buy my truck first.

His smile is clean and bright. He offers his hand to Michael. Michael shakes it with a good grip.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I never able to repay. Pero, will be thanking you all days my life. You good man... Gracias por todo... I be sad to leave our friendship tomorrow-

MICHAEL

Dude. We just spent three days in the mountains together. We're friends for life now.

MIGUEL

Bien, bien. Friends for life... Buenas noches, Michael... Maybe see you morning time...

Miguel jogs off. Michael cleans up and closes up, preparing for the windy night ahead. Double-checking the straps on the cooler, he peeks inside. Only a few items left. He sighs.

Michael rubs his hands together, moving to the front of the Denali. While standing there, unloading his beer, he hears a TINY CLICKING SOUND coming somewhere from the front end. A COYOTE BARKS, closer than usual. Deck-side, MIGUEL'S PHONE RINGS.

MICHAEL

Terrific.

INT. DENALI - NIGHT

Trying to check emails on his laptop, Michael taps a rhythm on his mousepad waiting for the download. The DOTS just keep circling. A BLAST OF WIND whistles through the vented sunroof and ROCKS the SUV with a good jolt. He sits up and peers out.

Sage is swinging. Path lights are flickering. The deck fire barely glows. He checks his phone: 10:18pm, 39F. He sighs.

EXT. STONE DECK - NIGHT

The WIND IS BLASTING from every direction. Michael makes his way to the deck with a FLASHLIGHT and a SHOVEL. Sitting on the very edge of the cot, wrapped tight in the blanket, Miguel huddles as close to the LOW FLAMES as possible.

MICHAEL

Come on, Miguel. Come stay in the truck with me tonight.

Miguel lifts his head. His face pale in FIRELIGHT. His body shakes. His teeth chatter. Michael shovels DIRT ON THE FIRE.

INT. DENALI - NIGHT

Miguel sits in the driver's seat. Warming his hands while marveling over the dashboard. Michael climbs in the side door and uses all his strength to shut the wind out. He maneuvers into his sleeping bag, now riding on a thin foam pad, and stretches out with a groan and a sigh. Looking up, he finds Miguel looking at him in the REARVIEW MIRROR.

MIGUEL

You sure for this, Michael?

MICHAEL

The last thing I need is to wake up and find you out there frozen like a popsicle.

MIGUEL

Oh, sí, no bueno. Ria no be happy with Miguel...

MICHAEL

Yeah, probably not.

MIGUEL

Is very fancy truck-

MICHAEL

Nah, the newer models are super fancy... But this old gal and I have been through a lot together.

Michael settles in and opens up his laptop.

MIGUEL

Hey, Michael... OK to say good night to my Ria as you working?

MICHAEL

Yeah, go for it... Just checking my emails... Been waiting to hear back on a business proposal I sent out last week... Not sure why these guys haven't responded yet.

MIGUEL

When no call back, no excitement
for your proposal. You know this,
amigo. Same for girlfriends.

MIGUEL - makes a HUSHED CALL to Valeria.

OUTSIDE - the wind MOANS, PELTS, and SWAYS the truck.

MICHAEL - sits in a daze. Miguel's statement, so simple, so profound, bounces around his brain. He quickly opens his PITCH DECK for the Tymmer products: The RAAK, The STUUMP, The SOLAAR Hut. The design illustrations, diagrams, and text, all in black and white.

He clicks open a PHOTO FILE, selects a jpeg and drags it over to the title page. After a few adjustments, he ends up with the text under a cool shot of his truck at sunset, campfire in the corner, the Raak - all set up and lit up.

MICHAEL

I need to invite people into my
world. So they can see my vision.

He sits back and stares at the image, letting the epiphany wash over him. He grins.

INT. DENALI - NIGHT

A SHARP SCRATCHING NOISE on the side of the truck wakes Michael in the dead of night. He shakes his head, clearing enough fog to listen carefully.

The WIND POUNDS the truck like a boxer.

He glances over to Miguel, SNORING like a Wookiee. He checks his phone: 3:03am, 28F. He lets out a sleepy sigh, punches his lumpy pillow, and crashes back down into it.

INT. DENALI - PRE-DAWN

The driver door softly CLICKS shut. As Miguel's FOOTSTEPS lightly tread away, Michael's eyes slowly open. He takes a deep breath, lets it out long and slow, the possibilities of the day ahead already racing through his veins.

MICHAEL

Different dilemma, same choices...
Stay the course, or jump into the
unknown?

EXT. DENALI - DAWN

Michael steps out of the Denali.

MICHAEL

Holy... Cannoli... a la Roma!

He stretches, shivers, blows into cupped hands. Trots off.

SUPERIMPOSE: "DAY 4"

The FLAG floats gently on a crisp, clear day.

Michael reappears. Walking back along the side of the Denali, he notices several vertical SCRATCH MARKS in the paint. He studies them, looks down. All that wind, but still definite traces of COYOTE PRINTS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Oh crap... Now that's a sign!

He tilts his head up, sniffs the air.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What the-

He rushes through a wash up, then while downing two Advil with water, notices the top strap on the cooler is loose, and the kettle isn't hanging in its usual spot.

EXT. STONE DECK - DAY

Michael follows the scent, charging out from the windscreen.

MIGUEL

Good morning, Michael!

(Michael stops short)

Make special food for you. Hope is no problem. End of your eggs with end of my chorizo.

Michael accepts the steaming coffee Miguel offers, then sits down in his blue chair next to a nice warm FIRE. The fresh sunlight, barely over the mesas to the east, create quite a picturesque moment. Michael lets out a content sigh.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

This thank you for all you share with me, Michael. The food, water, fire. Stories. Iluminaciones.

Michael grins, raising his mug to Miguel. He sips the coffee.

MICHAEL

Whoa, that is some strong coffee.

MIGUEL

Oh, I not sure for how much-

MICHAEL

It's fine, Miguel. And very much appreciated... Honestly, the last few days have been... iluminaciones for me too. Totally unexpected-

Miguel hands Michael a plate of scrambled eggs with chunks of chorizo. Michael digs right in, nearly burning his mouth.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hot! Dang. Hot! Mmmm, but so good. Where are all those flavors coming from? Miguel! This is amazing. And here I've been feeding you from a lousy box-

MIGUEL

(smiles)

Not so bad... Belly happy. Do what we must, no?

They eat in silence for a beat, both savoring the chorizo.

MICHAEL

Any word from your people yet?

MIGUEL

Three time I call. Nada... Michael, why they ask so much money but do nothing.

MICHAEL

One excuse or another, I expect...
(stuffs his mouth)
But, uh, well, all plans lead to Walmart, right? So we'll start there.

Miguel almost drops his plate as his jaw hits the ground.

MIGUEL

What you say, Michael?

MICHAEL

I would not be happy with myself if something happened to you between here and Cruces... I need supplies.
(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And, it just so happens, I shop at
the Walmart in Las Cruces-

The gleam in Miguel's eyes could spark a fire.

MIGUEL

You give me so much happy, I not
know where to put it all.

MICHAEL

After this delicious breakfast, you
can put it into helping me load up.

MIGUEL

Oh, sí. Much work. First, chorizo!

EXT. DENALI - DAY

All four doors and the hatch are open. Michael's lounge now
packed with the generator, the disassembled Raak, and camping
gear. Up top, strapped tight, all the leftovers.

Michael and Miguel stand back-to-back at the rear bumper. A
noticeable carefree camaraderie between them. Miguel finishes
brushing his teeth as Michael hastily zips over his scruffy
beard with a CORDLESS SHAVER. He offers the shaver to Miguel.

EXT. DENALI - DAY

The campsite looks naked. Truck doors are shut. Bike mounted.

Michael and Miguel giggle like school-boys at each other's
faces, now CLEAN-SHAVEN. And Miguel's got a new BUZZ CUT.

Smiles and selfies - on both their phones - capture a moment
in time never to be repeated. Surrounded by the mountains
that witnessed their few days together.

INT. DENALI - DAY

Michael and Miguel are seated. Ready to go.

MICHAEL

Seatbelts required, amigo. The next
hour is going to be very bumpy.

Miguel watches Michael click into his seatbelt, then does the
same. Michael turns the ignition key. The ENGINE SPUTTERS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Crap. I forgot to check the...

EXT. DENALI - DAY

Michael and Miguel stand at the front of the SUV. Michael lifts the hood to the engine. Their eyes go wide.

The ENGINE BLOCK is covered with a nest of twigs, chicken bones, peanut shells, leathery avocado skins.

MICHAEL
That stinkin' little rat!

INT. DENALI - DAY

Behind the wheel again, Michael turns the key. The ENGINE ROARS to life. Michael grins.

MICHAEL
Ready?

MIGUEL
Ready!

Michael puts the vehicle in drive and they both take one last look at the campsite before pulling away.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
I always remember this place.

MICHAEL
Me too, Miguel. Me too...

EXT. TRAIL ROAD - DAY

BIRD'S EYE VIEW - the scope of the rugged terrain Miguel walked to get to Michael's campsite is mind-blowing.

DOWN TO THE VALLEY - the Denali pitches and tilts over the rocky road, avoids ICY POTHOLEs, dips awkwardly down a DRY RAVINE. Coming out of it, the rear SCRAPES AGAINST ROCK.

Finally reaching the county road, the SUV kicks up a veil of DUST as it leaves the dirt and gains traction on pavement.

INT. DENALI/COUNTY ROAD - DAY - TRAVELING

Michael relaxes his iron grip on the steering wheel. Miguel releases his grip on the dashboard.

MICHAEL
Ever ride a bucking bronco before?

MIGUEL

No...

MICHAEL

Well, that's what it feels like.

MIGUEL

Oh... One ride only be good for me.

Miguel studies the landscape, pointing out a set of giant saguaros capped with ice.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Snow hats!

Miguel goes back to staring at the scenery.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

What does Sculeby mean?

MICHAEL

Sculeby? Where'd you hear that?

MIGUEL

Is on your back side.

MICHAEL

My backside? Oh, C-S-U-L-B. That's the California State University of Long Beach. The college I went to-

MIGUEL

You school on beach?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I majored in beach-volleyball and minored in girl-watching.

MIGUEL

Really?

MICHAEL

Nah. Really, I studied business and industrial design.

MIGUEL

Oh...

As the Denali clears a bend, the road straightens out and slopes down to the frontage road.

At the intersection ahead - FLASHING LIGHTS.

Approaching the scene, Michael slows down for the STOP SIGN. Parked to the side of the road, lights pulsing, an AMBULANCE and a BLUE MINI-VAN. Back doors open.

Passing by the vehicles, they see LAURA MAE, 60s, wearing a dark blue uniform. She pens notes on a clipboard, standing next to a body bag on a gurney. Two EMT's wait nearby.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Somebody didn't make it.

Michael waits at the stop sign for a white van that slows and turns at the intersection. A CORONER'S VAN.

Turning onto the frontage road, Michael continues at a slow, respectful pace. Miguel crosses himself, says a quiet prayer. The light mood crushed by a dark reality, they ride in silence for a spell, both tangling with sobering thoughts.

INT/EXT. DENALI/INTERSTATE 10 - DAY - TRAVELING

They drive by the SIGN posted at the interstate entrance.

MIGUEL
This number ten highway? Go from California to Florida! You ever go to Florida?

MICHAEL
A few times.

MIGUEL
Oh. Thinking, maybe we go together-

MICHAEL
Oh? I'm thinking, maybe you should stop while you're ahead.

MIGUEL
My heart so filled with excitement.
Never my dream so close...

Miguel's phone BUZZES with a new message.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
My phone, extra busy today...

Miguel reads the message. Rereads it. He looks at Michael for a split second, before his eyes return to the road.

MICHAEL
What's going on, Miguel?

MIGUEL

Oh... Umm... Felix. He say, he want send you money for me.

Michael says nothing. Miguel waits with doubtful hope.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Michael, por favor. You do for me?
I go no place if no money. Felix-

MICHAEL

Oh man, can't the drivers help you?

MIGUEL

No. No trust... Take my money,
leave me in trash...
(pats his pockets)
No ID. No one call mi familia...
Pero, trust you, Michael. You good
guy. Good heart. Help me when I
lost and giving up to God.

Miguel goes quiet. His words strike a strong chord with Michael. He takes a moment to consider.

MICHAEL

No... Definitely not a good idea. I
would be driving to Walmart today,
regardless of whether you were
sitting in that seat or not. But I
gotta be completely honest here...
Since I have no money, I have no
car registration, no car insurance,
and no valid driver's license...
Probably suspended by now...
Getting money for you would be a
documented transaction. My name
goes in the system...

MIGUEL

Oh, sí...

Seconds fly by. Miguel starts texting with speed. Michael reaches across, holds his hand over Miguel's phone.

MICHAEL

Just give me a sec, okay, Miguel? I
might even need one full minute...
My decisions affect my kids too...
This jeopardizes everything I've
worked so hard for.

Glancing over, Michael notes how much younger Miguel looks clean-shaven.

His eyes drift over the raw SCABS on Miguel's hands, a rip in his jacket, holes in his sneakers, and the knots holding his laces together. He sighs.

The RHYTHMIC BEAT of the road increases as they pass a road sign: "LAS CRUCES - 15 MILES."

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Crap on a crispy cracker. I really, really don't want to do this... But if I don't, who will? And if that's what we need to do to get you on your way, then that's what we do.

MIGUEL

Is much to ask. But you my angel. Good things bring blessings-

MICHAEL

A simple thank you will do, Miguel. Don't get too excited, if this all goes to shit, both of our American dreams go down the toilet.

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - DAY

The Denali cruises through the lot, eventually backing into one of many open spaces, under a SHADY TREE in a far corner.

INT/EXT. DENALI/WALMART PARKING LOT - DAY

Michael turns off the engine. Scans the parking lot.

MICHAEL

Wow. It's like a ghost town... Maybe that works in our favor. Maybe not. Maybe I should quit thinking about it and just go do it. C'mon, Miguel.

Miguel's going through his own anxieties. His eyes close and he takes long deep breaths.

MIGUEL

Each step, miedo, like walking in dark cave. Not know what inside.

MICHAEL

We call those jitters.

MIGUEL

Jitters. Jitters. No like jitters.

Michael puts on a baseball hat, grabs his US PASSPORT from the center console, and opens his door. Miguel hasn't moved.

MICHAEL

I got jitters too. They'll keep us on our toes. C'mon... Bring your jug of faith and your Hollywood smile, and let's go do this!

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - DAY

Michael and Miguel walk side by side across the lot with two dozen CARS parked miles from each other.

MIGUEL

Ayy, my clothes... Look like poor dirty immigrant... With money, I buy new clean clothes!

MICHAEL

Whoa there, Johnny Cash. Save your money. Buy new duds in Miami. You blend in fine just as you are.

MIGUEL

You right. Excitement for money.

MICHAEL

I hear ya, but hold your excitement till we cross the finish line... The key here is to just stay cool-

MIGUEL

So many keys you carry.

They reach the entrance, and an onslaught of Covid safety protocols. SHOPPING CARTS and TRASH CANS are lined-up, upside down, creating a cattle chute for single-line entry. Crosses on the ground mark six-foot increments. Walmart GREETERS stand to both sides of the line with gloved hands, masked faces, and bottles of sanitizer.

MICHAEL

This is nuts... Hey, pull down your sleeve.

Miguel checks his ID wristband and tugs both sleeves down.

INT. WALMART STORE - DAY

Michael and Miguel enter the store, stopping at a corridor of brightly lit royal blue and sunny yellow SIGNAGE.

Something shiny catches Miguel's eye. Then something else. He turns in a circle, catching glimpses of hundreds of products, blue banners, and CUSTOMERS zipping around with carts filled with toilet paper, charcoal, water, and cases of soup.

MICHAEL

Looking for Financial Services...
Okay, over there... Pharmacy,
Vision Center, Photo Center... Ah,
Money Center. Right next to
McDonald's, of course. This way,
Miguel... Miguel?

Michael looks down several aisles for Miguel, eventually finding him modeling sunglasses at a KIOSK.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hey... Miguel. What are you doing?

Miguel holds out a pair of wrap-around sunglasses.

MIGUEL

Perfect for you, Michael.

Michael checks his watch.

MICHAEL

Dude, we need to get your money
before you start spending it-

MIGUEL

Your watch OK? You always looking
at it.

Stunned, Michael looks at his watch, then Miguel.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Sorry, your time most important.

Miguel returns the shades to the rack, puts his hands in his pockets, starts moving away.

Michael hangs his head, realizing just how big of a moment this is for Miguel.

MICHAEL

Hey... Miguel.

Miguel turns as Michael puts the sunglasses on and grins.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What do you think?

MIGUEL

They good on you.

But Miguel isn't smiling. So Michael strikes a Vogue pose. Then another. Miguel cracks up. Michael tries another pair - WILD FRAMES that he would never wear. Another pose. Miguel's laughter is contagious. Michael notices people staring.

An announcement suddenly crackles over the store's PA SYSTEM:

FEMALE VOICE (O.C.)

Darlene, we got a Code Ninety-nine
on aisle five!

Michael rapidly replaces the frames and steers Miguel away - from aisle fourteen.

MICHAEL

What aisle is this?

MIGUEL

What Code Ninety-nine?

Michael passes a full-length MIRROR. He stops and backs up, bumping into Miguel. They stare at their reflections.

MICHAEL

Oh my God, what a pair.

MIGUEL

Parece que da miedo.

Michael takes off his hat. Smooths down his hair. Then he nods for Miguel to do the same. Miguel shakes his head, *No*. Michael nods his head, *Yes*. Reluctantly, Miguel slides back his hoodie and removes his knit cap. Feeling exposed, he rubs his buzzed crown and checks to see if anyone's watching.

MICHAEL

Better... Just be cool. Think about
ice cream or something. These folks
are more worried about Covid than
whether you're legal or not.

INT. WALMART STORE/MONEY CENTER - DAY

Michael and Miguel are next in line. Behind a barrier of plexiglass, a no-nonsense looking woman waves them forward as another customer leaves. Her name-tag bears the name: KARYN.

KARYN

How can I help you today, uhh,
gentlemen?

Condescending tone, duly noted. Steely eyes, ironically peering over a face-mask adorned with hearts and stars, convey Karyn's skepticism and iron grit.

MICHAEL

I'm here to pick up some cash from my friend, uh, Felix, in Florida. Here's the verification code and the transaction information...

He slides his ID and the note of numbers under the barrier. Karyn picks them up with gloved hands. Holding up a pair of reading glasses, she studies the numbers, before studying the mismatched pair trying hard not to look too nervous.

Miguel tries out his Hollywood smile. She looks right passed him to Michael. Her look makes it clear, she knows and challenges what he's doing.

KARYN

So, you know this man?

MICHAEL

Yes. Four days now.

KARYN

And, you trust him?

MICHAEL

Completely... He's a good guy. A good guy who ran into some bad luck and needs my help.

Karyn purses her lips. She eyes Miguel from head to toe. Her nails start TAPPING on the keyboard. They tap for a painfully long time, with several surly glances in their direction.

KARYN

Do you have another form of ID? This doesn't provide a valid address. It's expired.

MICHAEL

(passes her his passport)
Currently, I'm in-between valid addresses... We're just two guys living on hopes and dreams at the moment.

Miguel looks up at Michael. Sends him a little smile... *You got this!* It's an unfiltered moment, and Karyn sees it.

KARYN

Looks to me like you're living on
the edge of a very steep cliff.

MICHAEL

Comes with a terrific view.

MIGUEL

How she know you live on cliff?

She flips through the passport. Compares the photo to his face. Taps the keyboard some more. A PRINTER spits out two sheets that she snatches up, slides across with his IDs. Her eyes narrow in on Michael's, one final eye-to-eye challenge.

Pulling a pen from the "Clean" cup, Michael signs with a flourish. Slides the forms right back. Karyn takes a stack of bills from her cash drawer, counts it out like a metronome.

KARYN

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty,
fifty...

She stops at three hundred. Before Michael can scoop up the cash, she yells out to the ONE PERSON standing in line.

KARYN (CONT'D)

Next!

INT. WALMART STORE - DAY

Returning to the main shopping area, Miguel beams like he won the lottery. Michael looks closer to losing his breakfast.

MICHAEL

I'm too old to be an outlaw...
Definitely giving up my crime
career after today.

MIGUEL

You be fine, Michael. She not so
tough. Hard shell, soft middle.
Like candy bar.

MICHAEL

That woman does not have one sweet
bone in her entire body... But hey,
you got your cash. Now, let's go-

MIGUEL

Please, Michael. I buy few things-

MICHAEL

Okay, yeah. Might as well get my supplies now instead of later.

Michael points to the ENTRANCE/EXIT passed the registers.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Meet you outside the doors. Half hour or so-

MIGUEL

OK, Michael... Happy shopping!

Miguel wanders off into a sea of shiny merchandise while Michael chuckles and heads for the shopping cart corral.

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - DAY

Rolling a SHOPPING CART filled with food, water, beer and supplies, Michael searches for Miguel as he exits the store.

A MAN standing against a pillar slips his phone into his pocket in a familiar way as he ambles over to Michael.

MIGUEL

Hey, Michael... Good shopping?

Miguel is almost unrecognizable. Sporting NEW SUNGLASSES, a bright white t-shirt and ball cap. He does a little dance.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Because I think you forget these.

He presents Michael with the sunglasses he modeled earlier. Michael grins. He puts them on and looks to Miguel.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Chillero! Looking very cool now-

MICHAEL

I didn't look cool before?

MIGUEL

More cool now. Like... Rock Star!

MICHAEL

Yeah, thanks, okay... I got you a little something, too. Won't make you a Rock Star, but...

Michael digs in his cart. Hands Miguel a package of Chorizo.

MIGUEL
You think of me! Gracias.

MICHAEL
And a little extra something...

Michael pulls out a box of Quaker Oats breakfast squares.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Oatmeal for the road. No cooking.

MIGUEL
How they do that?

MICHAEL
Welcome to America, Miguel.

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - DAY

Michael tucks the newly purchased supplies into any open gap he can find in the back of the Denali. Miguel stands at his side holding a fanned out display of TEN DOLLAR BILLS.

MIGUEL
Please, Michael. For food, gas,
your troubles... One-fifty.

MICHAEL
No, Miguel... You weren't a hundred
and fifty dollars worth of trouble.
And I expected, expect, nothing-

MIGUEL
Must give you something.

Michael pauses his efforts to stuff a huge cube of toilet paper into the back.

MICHAEL
Fine, then make it an even hundred.

Miguel counts out ten crisp ten-dollar bills into Michael's hand. Then he shakes Michael's hand to seal the deal.

MIGUEL
Good deal. Thank you, Michael.

MICHAEL
Thank you, Miguel. I wouldn't
normally take anything, but-

MIGUEL
You help me, I help you. Is good.

MICHAEL

You still have enough for-

MIGUEL

Sí, my math work out perfect.

While Michael loads his wallet, Miguel rips open the outer plastic of the TP cube and slides four packs into four gaps.

MICHAEL

What am I gonna do without you?

INT. DENALI/WALMART PARKING LOT - DAY

Reclining in the driver's seat, Michael rests with his hat down over his face. Miguel types out a long message on his phone. His STOMACH GRUMBLES. Michael lifts his hat.

MICHAEL

What's the deal, Miguel... I've got other things to do today... Hey, is that them?

An 80s CUTLASS cruises by at a snail's pace, allowing them plenty of time to observe TWO LITTLE OLD LADIES inside.

THEY BOTH SIGH. Miguel checks his phone. His stomach GROWLS.

MIGUEL

Maybe, break for food?

MICHAEL

I know a sweet Mexican joint-

MIGUEL

Perfecto.

INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - DAY

Family-owned, authentic menu, no frills. Ten tables - widely spaced apart. Ceiling fans stir warm air. Michael and Miguel sit at a table with plates licked clean, glasses near empty.

A young WAITRESS with a pretty smile drops off the check.

WAITRESS

Gracias, señores. Disfruta del resto del día.

Miguel grabs the check as Michael reaches for it.

MICHAEL
Hey... I can take care of that.

MIGUEL
I know... Pero, me do this for you.

Miguel hands the waitress three crisp ten-dollar bills.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Muchas gracias, señorita. Tú
también, que tengas un hermoso día.

She nods, smiles, strolls back to the register as Michael and Miguel head toward a RESTROOM SIGN.

MICHAEL
(whispers)
Did you tell her she was pretty?

MIGUEL
(whispers back)
No, I say, have a nice day... She
know she pretty.

EXT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

Michael leans against the Denali, cell phone to his ear.

MICHAEL
(into phone)
Think I'll just bring him to your
place. No need for you to drive
up... Great. We'll see you after
six... Thanks again, Danny.

Miguel exits the restaurant checking his phone.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Any news, Miguel?

MIGUEL
Nada... Pendejos.

MICHAEL
Okay, well, Danny's expecting us...
So, if you're good to go...

MIGUEL
(sighs, frustrated)
Sí, OK, Michael... Un desvío más.

INT. DENALI/MEXICAN RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY - TRAVELING

Michael yields to the CROSS TRAFFIC at the exit. Several cars and trucks pass by, followed by THREE LCPD CRUISERS.

Michael and Miguel hold their breath as each cruiser slows and turns into the lot - driving right by the Denali. The THIRD DRIVER sends Michael a quick wave as he passes by.

MICHAEL

Ho-ly lucky charms.

Miguel blesses himself as Michael scoots away from the lot.

EXT. HIGHWAY 28 - DAY

Two-lane state highway. The Denali cruises south, passing FARM WORKERS and fertile land before hitting a long dry stretch, dabbed with an occasional succulent.

The Denali passes a small unimpressive SIGN: "RIO GRANDE."

INT. DENALI - DAY - TRAVELING

MICHAEL

There's the old Rio Grande.

MIGUEL

No look so grande.

MICHAEL

This section is mainly diverted for irrigation... Ice melts from the Colorado Rockies, runs all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico-

MIGUEL

Same miles Guatemala to Florida. One-thousand eight-hundred... Study maps, in case I get lost-

After a beat, they both dissolve into laughter. Michael turns on some TUNES as they cruise on down the highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY 28 (LA MESA) - DAY - TRAVELING

A blur of barren flatland gives way to small plots of land with simple houses. Barns. Stables. Fenced pastures. Farmer's market-style vineyards, pecan orchards, vegetable gardens.

INT. DENALI - DAY - TRAVELING

Michael slows to a stop for an ELDERLY MILITARY VETERAN, rolling his WHEELCHAIR down the side of the road. Accompanied by his LARGE DOG.

The vet takes the opportunity to cross the highway with a direct NOD TO MICHAEL. As he passes by, Michael and Miguel check out the WHEELCHAIR DECOR: decals, pins, bandanas, feathers, and a US flag flying high over the vet's left shoulder. A VULCAN SALUTE catches Michael's eye.

MICHAEL

Live long and prosper... That's the guy I want to help along the way, Miguel. That guy right there. A prosperity place for people who've fallen between the cracks and can't get out on their own.

Michael drives on, passing the "La Mesa City Limits" SIGN - "Population 728. Elevation 3825."

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Just do me a favor, Miguel. If you do make it, make it count. Do as much good with it as you can.

MIGUEL

I do my best, Michael. Promise... You do favor for me?

Michael looks over at Miguel, mildly surprised.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Don't be ermitaño. You find much life on mountain, but life out here too... Your kids, family, friends. La honestidad es la mejor política-

MICHAEL

No, no talking politics with my-

MIGUEL

No politics. Honest is best policy. Tell truth, feel better.

Rolling by a GROCERY STORE, GAS STATION, and POST OFFICE, all on one block, they turn off the highway at the next corner.

MICHAEL

So that was downtown La Mesa.

MIGUEL

Bueno. You good tour guide.

Michael drives down a block of housing that hasn't weathered well over the years. Rusted car parts embedded in front yards overgrown with cactus. Rusted cars parked in weedy driveways. Another turn, Michael pulls to the curb and CUTS THE ENGINE.

The neighborhood is quiet, except for a group of BOYS PLAYING SOCCER at the end of the road.

INT. DENALI/DANNY'S STREET - DAY

Michael surveys the street. Sees no curious neighbors.

MICHAEL

Danny should be home soon... Any new messages?

MIGUEL

Same auto-words, 'On the way.'

MICHAEL

Well, uh, Danny's a good dude. Good friend. Works construction. Comes from a big family. They've helped a few people in your situation... You can trust him like you trust me.

MIGUEL

Wife? Children?

MICHAEL

Lives here with his brother, Diego. Their sister passed away a few years back. Now, Danny and Diego are raising her two daughters-

MIGUEL

Sister die very young, no?

MICHAEL

Cancer. Really high rate for women in this area. Unexplained, and beyond sad. Fairly common to see brothers, uncles, fathers, even grandfathers, raising all the kids.

MIGUEL

Why the women?

MICHAEL

Supposedly, there are tests and studies happening. Air, water, soil. But so far, no results-

Miguel's phone RINGS.

MIGUEL

Sorry, Michael, you mind-

MICHAEL

Go to it, amigo.

Miguel climbs out of the Denali, answering the call in Spanish. Michael grabs his phone, checks a NEW MESSAGE:

JEREMY: He leave yet? Haven't heard from you in awhile. Still need translation app? Plenty to choose from. Call soon...

MICHAEL writes back: Plans changed. Down in Mesa. All good.

He puts down the phone with a sigh, reclines his seat, and lowers his hat over his eyes.

EXT. DANNY'S STREET - NIGHT

HOUSE LIGHTS and a STARRY SKY start to glow. A few STREET LIGHTS flicker on, most poles staying dark for one reason or another. Blocks away, TWO DOGS BARK back and forth.

Danny's work-truck drives by the Denali with a couple soft taps on the HORN. Turns into the driveway across the street.

INT. DENALI/DANNY'S STREET - NIGHT

Michael rubs his face, clears his throat. Looks to Miguel.

MICHAEL

You ready?

MIGUEL

Sí... I think ready.

Miguel smiles, then nervously rubs his hands on his thighs.

MICHAEL

You're in good hands here, Miguel. Danny can help you a lot more than I can... But if you have any problems, you have my number.

Miguel nods, takes a deep breath, picks up his backpack. Michael hops out, grabbing a six-pack of beer from the back.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Danny steps out of his work truck - his clothes caked with red dirt. He crosses the driveway with a welcoming smile.

DANNY

Michael, mi amigo. Good seeing you.

MICHAEL

You too, man. Been awhile... Danny, this is Miguel.

DANNY

Mucho gusto, Miguel. Welcome. Come to the house... Michael, I see you brought la fiesta. Good man. My day was long, working with a client who growled at me all day-

MIGUEL

You building dog house?

Miguel cracks a playful smile. Michael and Danny crack up.

DANNY

Ahh, I see how you are fast friends... Another wisecracker.

MIGUEL

Wise cracker?

Danny's laugh is exuberant, in sharp contrast to the untended yard and uninviting front porch.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Danny leads the way through a tidy but dreary living room. The decor not changed in the years since the sister passed away. A small SHRINE with photos of her sits in the corner.

They walk into a BRIGHT AND UNTIDY KITCHEN with a breakfast nook. Clearly, this is where everyone hangs out. The fridge and cabinets are covered with CHILDREN'S ARTWORK.

Danny washes his hands as Michael hands out beers.

DANNY

My nieces love their art class.
With school on-line, more home time
doing art. Getting good, you think?

MICHAEL

(takes a closer look)

Wow, yeah. Really good. Both have
some serious talent... No more
stick figures and gooey blobs.

Michael and Danny share a friendly laugh, as DIEGO, 40, and
FERNANDO, 32, enter the kitchen through a side door. Both are
dust-covered and sweat-stained from their workday.

DIEGO

Hey, big brother home early-

DANNY

(to Miguel)

This my brother Diego, our friend
Fernando.

MIGUEL

Hola. Mucho gusto.

MICHAEL

Hey, Diego... Fernando.

Diego sees the six-pack on the table. Michael hands a beer to
both Diego and Fernando. They nod with smiles of gratitude.

DANNY

Take the load off your boots,
amigos...

Danny sits at the table. Michael and Miguel join him, while
Diego and Fernando sit on the stools at the counter.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Miguel, I hear you've had a rough
journey... From Guatemala?

MIGUEL

Si, si. Very long journey. But get
close now. Is good.

DANNY

You're lucky to make it this far.
Many not so lucky.

MIGUEL

Me so lost, even God have trouble
to find me. Pero, but he help me
find Michael inside the big desert.

DANNY

He send you to a good man.

DIEGO

People die out there, amigo. The
day bake you, the night freeze you.

FERNANDO

So hot, the ants cook.

DIEGO

Fernando come from Mexico, two
years now. He no speak of it, but
he come close to, to not-

FERNANDO

I go for piss in bushes. Hear
trucks come... Men angry. Then men,
women, screaming, crying. Bambinos.
Guns of angry men... Ruidoso... Muy
ruidoso. Ring, my ears ring. Then
come no more screams. Trucks go.
Silencio. Muy silencio. I pray and
pray for each one, but no go back.

DIEGO

(to Miguel)

We find him on the highway. Bring
him home...

(smiles)

He never leave!

FERNANDO

These brothers save me...

Nobody makes a sound until Fernando wipes his eyes, takes a
deep breath, and chugs half his beer. Diego pats his back.

DIEGO

We pray for them each day, but we
make the feet move forward.

Sisters ANA, 11, and SOFIA, 9, timidly enter the kitchen.
Both tightly holding onto COLORFUL DRAWINGS.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Mis sobrinas, Ana, Sofia... Este es
Miguel. Mike's friend I tell you of-

ANA AND SOFIA
Hola, Miguel.

MIGUEL
Mucho gusto, Ana y Sofia.

ANA AND SOFIA
Hi, Mike!

MICHAEL
Hola, señoritas.

The sisters go to Diego to show him their artwork. Danny tries shifting the mood.

DANNY
So, Miguel, you go to Florida?

SOFIA
Flooorida! Disney World Flooorida?

MIGUEL
Sí, but I go Miami, not Orlando.
Maybe, someday I go. I love to meet
Donald Duck! He have best laugh...

Miguel laughs full-on Donald Duck, then breaks into his big infectious smile. Ana and Sofia giggle with delight.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Who you like to meet in the castle?

SOFIA
Mickey and Minnie and Cinderella
and Ariel and Belle and Snow and
Jasmine and Elsa and Anna and Moana
and... Mirabel!

MIGUEL
Oh, you have busy day...
(to Ana)
And you?

ANA
One only for me... Príncipe Azul.

Adding a bit of theatrics, Ana bats her eyelashes and beams with the sweet innocence of a young princess. Everyone in the room bursts out in LAUGHTER.

THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW - Fernando notices a DARK PICKUP creeping into the yard. He points it out to Diego.

DIEGO

You expecting anyone, bro?

Danny shakes his head. Miguel sneaks a peek at his phone.

MIGUEL

They here! The drivers! I must go.

Miguel jumps up, grabs his back-pack from under the chair, while Michael, caught off guard, is slow to stand and follow.

DANNY

Good luck, amigo!

Miguel stops at the front door. Turns to see Ana and Sofia at the kitchen archway. Danny, Diego, and Fernando behind them. Warm friendly faces, waves and well-wishes. Ana and Sofia run across the room holding out their drawings.

ANA

For you, Miguel. ¡Buena suerte!

Miguel glances over their drawings, truly touched.

MIGUEL

Muchas gracias, señoritas... If God
bless me with girl baby, hope she
very special... Como tú y tú.

(to everyone)

¡Gracias y que Dios te bendiga!

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Walking across the porch, Miguel raises a hand to TWO MEN sitting in the truck's cab. At the bottom of the steps, Miguel spins around and hugs Michael with all his might.

MIGUEL

Nothing impossible when dream come
from heart...

(stands back)

Words not be enough, amigo. My
heart, my soul, forever thank you.

Miguel dashes off. Climbing into the truck, he waves. Just like his first wave four days ago.

The pickup rumbles out of the driveway, leaving thick DUST to settle. Michael watches the TAILLIGHTS disappear around the corner. Danny walks up behind, hands him a FRESH BEER.

MICHAEL

Wow. And just like that, he's gone.

DANNY

Man, I can't believe those dudes actually showed up... But I'm happy for him. Hope he makes it.

MICHAEL

Salud.

DANNY

Salud... You did a good thing, man. Not many white dudes would risk his culo for a little Guatemalan guy.

Michael stares up at the stars as Danny drinks his beer.

MICHAEL

He's chasing his American dreams-

DANNY

Everybody have American dreams.

MICHAEL

Hopes and dreams get us out of bed every morning... I wish more Americans could see what this country means to the people who risk everything to come here... The American spirit doesn't just live in Americans, it lives in hearts all over the world.

DANNY

Hopes and dreams. Spirits and hearts. ¿Qué te pasó?

MICHAEL

So strange, knowing someone four days, but feels like a lifetime. Now, I'll probably never know what happens to him... Kind of a bummer, really. Under normal circumstances, I'd consider him a true friend.

DANNY

Exactly, what do you consider normal circumstance these days, amigo?

FADE OUT.

EXT. ELEPHANT BUTTE LAKE - EARLY MORNING

Michael climbs out of the Denali into a CHILLY BREEZE. He zips up his jacket and hops to the front of the SUV.

MICHAEL

Holy... M-Moly... M-Mayan Ruins of Guatemala! Land of trees!

Blowing into his cupped hands he looks up at a new, larger American flag - fluttering proudly over his Denali.

EXT. ELEPHANT BUTTE LAKE - DAY

High clouds thinly veil the sun, rising over the eastern mesas and a pristine lake with sandy shores. Michael walks out to his new campfire with coffee and oatmeal. He sits in his red chair, rests his feet on the rocks.

A HANG-GLIDER swoops down over his sandy bluff.

HANG-GLIDER

Mornin'! How's it going?

MICHAEL

Terrific!

He waves as she soars over the ridge and descends, gliding over the lakeshore, crowded with BOATS, JET SKIS, and RVs.

Michael takes out his phone, taps the screen, then SPEAKER:

JEREMY

'Bout time, Dad...

MICHAEL

Sorry, J. Wanted to get settled in first. Found a great spot at the lake in Elephant Butte-

JEREMY

So... you're not taking the job-

MICHAEL

I'm not taking any job, Boobo. My mission feels more important than ever now. Over the last few days, I saw the difference one act of kindness made in someone's life. My motivation and commitment have been reignited, and I need to follow my heart... So, I'm going to stay the course, jump in even deeper.

JEREMY

So I guess Miguel liked the Raak?

MICHAEL

Loved it. So did the BLM cop-

JEREMY

What? Dad! Are you messing with me?

MICHAEL

Life's funny sometimes...

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

Three weeks after they parted ways, Miguel was captured and sent back to Guatemala - just in time for the birth of his healthy and beautiful baby girl.

Months later, a message from Florida confirmed a fourth and final attempt. And so began a new chapter of life, sparked by childhood dreams and high hopes for a better future... in America.

THE END