

DEPORTADOS

Written by

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BLACK SCREEN

BEN (V.O.)

I've always wondered why corn comes
out whole in pieces of shit. You
chew it, you swallow it down, but
there it is... same as it went in.
Just slips right through.

Endless cornfields swaying in the wind.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Turns out it's the shell...cellulose.
Tough as all get out. Protects it,
keeps it useless. Nothing gets in.
Nothing gets out. But break it
down, process it right... sweetens
your soda, fuels your car, thickens
your soup.

An unbroken kernel drifting through a digestive tract.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Otherwise? It just passes through.
Like it was never even there.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMAYAGUA HONDURAS BUS TERMINAL - DAY

BEN (30s, Midwestern, out of place) rests on a concrete
bench, duffel at his feet, a mother and child by his side.

Two more benches bracket him, forming a three-sided
rectangle under a rusted awning. Locals perched quietly.

A donkey-drawn cart rattles past the worn edge of the
terminal. A mini school bus pulls away with a sharp crack as
it flattens a soda bottle beneath its wheels.

The pop startles the donkey - it jolts forward, snapping
it's reins. The cart crashes into a rusted light pole. The
pole shudders. Wavers. Then starts to fall - tipping
straight toward the passengers.

Ben sees the shadow and jumps into action. Clearing the
mother and child just as the pole crashes, splintering the
spot where they sat. He claws at his side, in obvious pain.

Silence. Dust settles. The mother clutches her child.

BUS BARKER (O.S.)

¡La Paz! ¡Ajuterique! ¡Lejamaní!

Ben's head turns. A weathered bus idles nearby.

He digs into his duffel and pulls out a creased paper map—unfolds it fast. A Polaroid slips out, flutters down.

Ben picks it up without fanfare. A photo of him and a woman (SUYAPA), arms around each other. They're smiling. Behind them, a palm tree leans toward a bright strip of ocean.

Ben tucks the photo back into the folds of the map, presses it flat. He shoulds his bag and climbs aboard.

INT. CONVERTED AMERICAN SCHOOL BUS - CONTINUOUS

Ben boards the crowded, sweltering bus. He locates a seat halfway back, his head rests against a sizzling window. With a grunt, a MARKET WOMAN slams a bulging sack of vegetables into the seat next to him.

MATCH CUT TO:

I/E. BEN'S TRUCK - RURAL MIDWEST REST STOP- WINTER AFTERNOON

Ben yanks the door and slams it shut, frozen breath already fogging the frozen windshield as he turns the key. The radio kicks in mid-sentence -

RADIO ANCHOR (V.O.)

In Washington today, former
Republican presidential candidate
Bob Dole, still vocal after his
recent defeat, criticized the
Clinton administration's
immigration policies.

Ben's eyes narrow. He reaches for the volume, turns it up.

BOB DOLE (V.O.)

Now, if America cannot control its
borders, it cannot control its
destiny. Legal immigration is an
American tradition and a
contribution to our society - but
illegal immigration is a crime and
a drain on scarce public resources.

Ben plucks a cassette from the passenger seat, shoves it into the player. Cheesy synth music kicks in.

He eases out of the rest stop, scanning the map - lines swim, the route dissolving. The truck veers. The driver rearview mirror slams a road sign and shears clean off.

BEN

Son of a...

He stomps the pedal — tires screech as he veers onto the shoulder and shudders to a stop.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ben climbs out to inspect the sheared-off driver's side mirror — intact, but laying on the ground. He snatches a roll of duct tape, tears off a strip, and presses the mirror back into place — crooked, but holding. Another strip, and another. He smooths it down with both thumbs, slow and firm.

BEN

That'll have to do for now.

I/E. BEN'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

The mirror wobbles in the wind as he pulls onto the highway. The cheesy synth music gives way to the sales guru.

RON DANIELS (V.O.)

You can't win today using
yesterday's playbook, folks. You
wanna break through? You gotta
break the mold.

His eyes drift. The road stretches ahead — endless, gray.

FADE TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. INDUSTRIAL CORN PROCESSING PLANT - VARIOUS

Thunderous machines. Conveyor belts rattle. Corn cascades from a torn sack. Ben moves toward his father — hunched, trembling, struggling to sweep. The clamor feels miles away.

BEN

Let me clean it up, Pop.

His father hesitates, then lets go. Ben sweeps up the spill.

BEN (V.O.)

Third time this week.

Ben glances at his father, then down the plant's expanse — a dulled painted sign, clings above a door: SUPERVISOR.

FLICKER— INT. SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Manila folders tower in stacks, HR. Claustrophobic. Quiet.

SUPERVISOR (O.S.)
Funny how concern can look a lot
like ambition in a place like this.

BEN
Ambition? I don't want his job or
his life. Let 'em think what they
want — he's a danger. I'm just
trying to protect him... and them.

Flicker-Flashback - INT. FACTORY FLOOR - DAY

A jammed chute spits corn; Elbow deep, Ben clears the clog.

Mocking claps echo behind him — laced with spite. A worker
with "Jason" on his nameplate smirks. Ben hurls the busted
part aside, slams the new sensor in place, and strides off.

FLICKER- INT. BEN'S DAD'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben sets a bowl of grits it in front of his ailing father.

BEN
Just a little, Pop.

His father's eyes stare through the bowl, somewhere else.

BEN'S DAD (CONT'D)
Hey Deb...Deb, that ranch... your
cousin's, in Texas. Big ol' place.
With the porch swing... Finally our
big break. Why didn't we... we were
gonna go... Now where's your mama off
to? She's taking forever.

BEN
She's been gone a while.

A long silence, Dad gently returns to the present.

BEN'S DAD
You want me to eat this?

Ben tucks a napkin gently in his dad's collar.

Flicker- Flashback - INT. LOCKER ROOM - EVENING

Outside Ben's locker: a worn nameplate — "BEN ARNOLD."
Scuffed, but still fixed in place. He swings it open.

Inside: On the back wall, a half-faded British flag, crudely
drawn in marker. Beneath it, a heart and the name "Jason." A
Beanie Baby chick perched in front — a novelty knife buried
in its back.

Ben pulls the knife free, its blade catching the light. He pockets the toy, white stuffing leaking from the wound.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY GAS STATION - SOUTHERN GEORGIA - AFTERNOON

As Ben pulls his wallet out to pay at the pump a diesel rig rumbles to a stop nearby - behind the wheel, a Good Ol' Boy (40s, sun-faded hat) eyes Ben's plates.

GOOD OL' BOY
Nebraska eh?

BEN
You bet.

GOOD OL' BOY
Long way from home.

BEN
Headed to Florida.

GOOD OL' BOY
That right? What's pullin' you down
that way?

BEN
I s'pose, just a change of scenery.

The Good Ol' Boy smacks a mosquito on his neck, jerking his head toward the tree line.

GOOD OL' BOY
You hear 'em?

Ben tilts his head. Cicadas shriek.

GOOD OL' BOY (CONT'D)
Used to think that sound was just a
Georgia thing. Grew up with it... But
they got the same noise everywhere.
Texas. Alabama. Even up in
Tennessee. Dig outta the dirt,
climb up a tree, start singin'.

Ben stays silent - but his gaze doesn't leave the tree line.

GOOD OL' BOY (CONT'D)
Don't matter where they come up...
red clay, gravel lot... only know one
song... No such thing as change of
scenery. Just who you are,
somewhere else.

BEN
I guess you're right.

GOOD OL' BOY
Ain't no guess about it son.

He slaps another mosquito, wiping the blood on his jeans, walks toward the store. The pump clicks off. Cicadas scream

FADE TO:

INT. BOXCAR - LA BESTIA TRAIN - NIGHT

The thin howl of cold train tracks hum. Two migrant women curl into each other, trying to hold on to at least body heat. One sleeps, her head tucked against the others shoulder. The second stirs.

Her eyes drift to the jungle and stars streaking past the wooden slats.

DREAMLIKE VISION - INT. SUYAPA'S HONDURAN HOME - NIGHT

A weathered wooden door blasts open, hinges scream.

A cowboy hat enters first, clutched in a weathered hand. YOUNG TÍO (late 20s) fills the doorway - swaying, sweat-soaked, eyes dull.

He plants his hat on a hook by the door, same as always.

YOUNG TÍO
Suyapita...

The scrape of his boots creep, closing the distance.

Five-year-old Suyapa clutches a wooden spoon, slips under the table, and folds into the shadows.

She sees his boots edge into the light, slow and grimy. His voice drips in, too quiet, too close.

YOUNG TÍO (O.S.) (SPANISH)
Where are you, sweetheart?

She shifts. The table groans, betraying her hideout.

Tío crouches, a wicked grin spreading as he reaches for her.

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD - SUYAPA'S HONDURAN HOME - DAY

A sharp clap — masa hits hot metal. Suyapa flinches, hands bunching the fabric of her dress. DOÑA LETICIA (50s) rolls the next ball, never looking away.

DOÑA LETICIA (SPANISH)
Sweetie, can you buy some cheese?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Yes, mami.

She drifts toward the kitchen—

DOÑA LETICIA (SPANISH)
And call for your uncle, lunch is ready, it's ready now.

Her body locks, then releases. She keeps moving. Obedient.

CUT TO:

INT. SUYAPA'S HONDURAN HOME KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Suyapa stands to clear the plates. TÍO's (50s, broad) hand finds her wrist — calm, controlled.

TÍO (SPANISH)
Where do you think you are going?

She blinks once, chin dipping.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Do you want some more, Tio?

Beneath the tangled mustache, a smile slithers in.

TÍO (SPANISH)
If a man wants more, he takes more.

A fingertip skims her wrist before he finally lets go.

She rubs her wrist, her eyes focused on the knife resting on the table. Tío picks up a tortilla, tearing off a bite.

TÍO (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
What you need Suyapita is patience.

He drags the fork along the plate, loud in the quiet.

TÍO (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
But with you, my patience is running out.

Motionless, she stares down at the chip on her own plate.

CUT TO:

INT. SUYAPA'S HONDURAN HOME - KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Boots dangle as TÍO snores, dead weight on the couch.

At the kitchen table, SUYAPA and DOÑA LETICIA sort red beans under candlelight. Pebbles drop with faint clinks.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Mama why didn't you pay the clinic
bill? You told me you would. Now my
aunt says you didn't pay a cent!

DOÑA LETICIA (SPANISH)
I wanted to... but your Tio said
there wasn't enough money.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Oh, yeah? But there's always enough
for the bottle, right? There's
always money for him to get drunk.

A quiet spill. Three beans. She picks each bean up like it matters, returns them to the order she's created.

DOÑA LETICIA (SPANISH)
If he weren't here, without his
help we wouldn't...

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
He doesn't help anyone. He only
knows how to touch... what isn't his.

Without a word, she tugs on a shawl that was resting from on the back of her chair and draws it over herself.

SUYAPA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
I'm not going to stay here waiting
for him to start at it... again.

Behind her, TÍO murmurs. Suyapa slides a folded map from her waistband, smooths it flat on the kitchen table.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Miguel gave me this.

She traces a think line on the map.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
This is the route north. I'm
leaving tomorrow.

DOÑA LETICIA (SPANISH)
Miguel? He barely made it. And if
they catch you—?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
If I stay, they catch me here. At
least this way, maybe I can send
you something back...More than beans.

Doña Leticia focuses on her daughter. No words. Slowly
rising she crosses the room, and reaches behind the pots.
The box she brings down is old. And heavier than it looks.

The lid creaks open. Inside — a small, neat bundle of U.S.
bills, folded and waiting.

DOÑA LETICIA (SPANISH)
Your aunt and I saved for years... in
case you couldn't take it anymore.

Suyapa lifts the bills. Presses them flat against her chest.
Then tucks it away, silent, precise.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Time to get you out of this.

A groan from the couch. Suyapa enters. Her fingers brush the
heel of her Tio's boot. Her eyes pierce.

SUYAPA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
I'm out of patience.

FADE IN:

INT. CORN PROCESSING PLANT - DAY

The whine of machinery fades in — eerily like cicadas. Ben's
boots trudge toward the control booth. Workers heads turn.
Faint whispers burst just loud enough. No one meets his eye.

Ben steps into the elevated control booth.

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

At the wall, Ben kneels. A panel hangs open. Wires spill
out, dry, splintering. Rust crusts the edges like old blood.

Ben works — quiet, focused. His fingers untangle years of
makeshift fixes. Across the room, his BOSS (50s) leans on
the desk, sipping from a scuffed thermos.

BOSS
Last time that circuit blew, it was
your old man who fixed it up.

Ben keeps his focus, fingers moving without pause.

BOSS (CONT'D)
Always stayed late for those
things. Needed to be done right.

Ben pauses, for a second. Then fingers back in the wires.

BEN
He stayed late a lot.

He separates the wires — tight, snarled. His brow knots.

BEN (CONT'D)
Here's the problem.

He lifts the splice — crude twist, no cap, tape peeling
back. The ends charred to ash.

BEN (CONT'D)
Pulling too much load.

The Boss moves in for a look. His posture softens.

BOSS
Dad's handy work?

Ben meets his eyes.

BOSS
Even the best miss one sometimes.

Ben threads in the new wire — smooth, exact.

BOSS (CONT'D)
When he started slipping... it
should'a been me who said
something. Not you.

Ben doesn't stop working. Just listens.

BOSS (CONT'D)
He deserved better. So did you.
Didn't think they'd twist it like
they did. You never wanted any of
this. His job- That talk — that's
on me.

Wire set. Panel sealed. Ben stands and wipes his hands clean
— or close enough.

BEN
Doesn't matter now.

BOSS
Does to me.

Ben stays quiet. Slings the canvas work bag over his shoulder. Looks once at the panel, then out a filthy window, nothing but frozen fields and a sky the color of ash.

BOSS (CONT'D)
Who's gonna fix this place up now?

Ben pauses at the door.

BEN
I don't know... But I'm done with the cold. Done with the corn.

Ben's boots echo as he walks away. The Boss's gazes moves toward the window and the frozen sky beyond.

FADE TO.

EXT. NEBRASKA - COLD DAY - MORNING

Gray clouds press low over bare trees. A pickup sits by a leaning garage. Above it, a cracked pane rattles.

INT. BEN'S NEBRASKA APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Bare walls. Warped counter. Ben threads the empty room, stiff. On the back of the door- a crooked, yellowed notice:

MOVE-OUT INSTRUCTIONS "Set thermostat to 55°F. Lock windows. Place key in sealed envelope. Slide beneath doormat. Noncompliance forfeits deposit."

Ben pulls an envelope from the instruction packet. Slides the key inside. Cold morning wind cuts through as he opens the door. He slips the envelope under the mat. One corner flutters loose. He sees it. The door swings shut behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP, LEJAMANI VILLAGE - MORNING

Pale sun spills warmth across the dirt road. In the distance, a repurposed American school bus lurches into view, coughing exhaust. SUYAPA stands alone in the soft morning, an underwhelming backpack slung over her shoulder.

Suyapa's bus is almost there. She shifts her pack. Then - a flicker of motion. Her TÍA, just ahead, wrestling a bent shutter at the pulperaia (connivence store). She wasn't supposed to be out this early. A crate of sodas teeters beside her. Suyapa hesitates. Then hurries toward her.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Let me help, Tia?

TÍA (SPANISH)
Hold this for a second.

Tía braces the shutter while Suyapa fights with its weight.

TÍA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
Where are you going so early?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
To Comayagua. To pay my mom's bill
at the clinic.

The BUS BARKER barks down the road.

BUS BARKER(O.S.)
¡Comayagua, Comayagua!

The bus jerks forward, tires spitting dust.

TÍA (SPANISH)
We'll be waiting!

She hesitates just long enough to meet her TÍA's eyes. A quick smile – then she bolts.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Wait, wait!

The driver slows – just barely. Tires grind through dust.

DRIVER (SPANISH)
Get on then! Hurry!

She leaps onto the steps, the bus already pulling away.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

She settles into the window seat, shoulders tight. Fingers clenched around her bag. Lejamani drifts past – rooftops, dirt roads, the last of home. She keeps her focus forward.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S TRUCK FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE - DAY

A sign flashes past: WELCOME TO FLORIDA – THE SUNSHINE STATE. Then another sign: MIAMI – 471 MILES. Ben turns up the stereo. '90s Latin rock crashes through the speakers.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE - MIAMI - DAY

Soft bachata music drifts from a tabletop radio, warm and low. The café is nearly empty – chipped tile floors, sun-faded posters. One server. Two customers. A dusty TV hums above the counter, muttering to itself

Damp shirt, slouched posture – BEN watches the TV from his table. Hillary Clinton fills the screen – cool, crisp, unbothered.

FIRST LADY HILLARY CLINTON (ON TV)
We've got to do several things, and
you know I am adamantly against
illegal immigration. Certainly,
we've got to do more at our
borders, and people have to stop
employing illegal immigrants.

A CUBAN WAITRESS (20s) strolls up – towel on her shoulder.

CUBAN WAITRESS
¿Y tú, gringuito? ¿Qué quieres?

BEN tears his eyes away from the TV.

BEN
I don't know... café con leche.

CUBAN WAITRESS
¿Nada más? You need more than
coffee, papi. I bring you a
sandwich too.

Ben shrugs. She starts to leave, then pauses, eyes flicking to the TV. Clinton speaks, "illegal" frozen on the captioning. She scoffs, shakes her head, and struts away.

Ben spots a free weekly paper on the table. Grabs it. Skims. Flips to the classifieds – and stops. LATINA GODDESS – CALL NOW. Glitter text. Grainy cleavage.

She returns just as he lingers on the ad. Their eyes meet.

BEN
It's not – I'm looking for
apartments, I swear.

She gives him a look that doesn't need translating.

CUBAN WAITRESS
Relax. You want a Latina Diosa?

Fingertips tap her chest – grin sharp, playful.

CUBAN WAITRESS (CONT'D)
She's already bringing your coffee.

She slaps down a copy of The Miami Times.

CUBAN WAITRESS (CONT'D)
Oye, this one's got the apartments.

She moves in – calm, her voice all heat and control.

CUBAN WAITRESS (CONT'D)
When you find a place, papi... call
me. I'm not in black and white. And
I single now – *they* just send my
boyfriend back home.

She turns, hips in motion. Ben stares after her – amused,
off balance, already losing ground. The TV hums back into
focus – Clinton mid-sentence, fading.

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTH BEACH BUILDING - DAY

Faded walls. Weeds curling through cracked concrete. Ben
kills the engine, steps into the heat.

EXT. SUPERINDENT APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ben knocks. The door swings open – ROSA (mid-30s,
transgender), nightgown loose, earrings loud, lashes louder.
Ben doesn't blink. Just smiles like he's been here before.

ROSA
Here For me or the apartment?

BEN
Uh... Apartment, I guess.

ROSA
You a cop? La migra?

BEN
A cop? No, here for the apartment?

Rosa looks him over, grins wide, folds a key into his hand.

ROSA
Down the hall, number 7, you look.

INT. BEN'S MIAMI APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ben walks in – tidy space, tired tile, fan ticking overhead.
ROSA leans, now in the doorway, fingers drumming.

ROSA
So? Apurate papi, I got peoples
coming to see me.

He scans the room, then slides the key into his pocket.

BEN
How much?

Rosa tilts her head, sizing him up.

ROSA
How long you going to stay?

Ben shrugs, honest.

BEN
Long as I can pay the rent, I guess

She watches him a moment. Then her smile tilts

ROSA
Four fifty. But for you? Four
twenty-five, papito.

Ben musters his best Spanish.

BEN
Dale pues.

Rosa laughs – deal sealed. She starts to turn away... then
pauses, casting a glance over her shoulder.

ROSA
You still got the key, papito?

Ben feels for the shape in his pocket.

ROSA
Good. I don't got no copies. I go
get the paperwork.

ROSA is off, flip-flops slapping the tile. Ben guides the
door shut and falls into step behind her.

INT. BEN'S MIAMI APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lamp flickers. Boxes crowd a corner. On the sill, a torn
Beanie Baby slouches open – white stuffing exposed. Ben lies
shirtless on a blow-up mattress, flipping through *The FAB
Factor sales book*. He scans his planner: "RAY - Calling
Cards - 9 AM, 1050 N Miami Blvd, 905." Shuts the day
planner. Outside, the city murmurs.

CUT TO:

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Peeling walls. Cramped space. A sign hangs behind RAY (40s, Cuban-American): INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS - Affordable Calling Cards. Ray oozes swagger. Ben sits opposite.

RAY
Miami's a goldmine, man. Immigrants
calling home, spending their last
peso for mamá.

He spins a card like a poker chip. It flies across the desk.

RAY (CONT'D)
Gas stations. Bodegas. Laundromats.
Any place that smells desperate?
That's your market.

BEN
Why not sell 'em yourself?

RAY (GRABS A TROPHY)
Did that hermano. Made a killing.
Cashed out. Now I scale. Boom. 1992
Calle Ocho Entrepreneur of the
Year. Just a pager and a dream.

Ben smirks at the sight of the trophy.

RAY (CONT'D)
Two-fifty to start. You flip for
five. Double up every time. You
don't eat? That's on you. You
hustle? That's steak, amigo.

BEN
Steak huh?

Ray opens a box of cards like he's unveiling a diamond engagement ring.

RAY
You in?

Ben digs into his wallet. Reluctantly slides over five hundred. Ray lifts it to the light, gives it a quick sniff.

RAY (CONT'D) (SLIDES THE BOX)
Smells like victory. Let's make you
rich, Nebraska.

BEN
You betcha.

CUT TO:

BEGIN VARIOUS MIAMI BUSINESSES - MONTAGE - UPBEAT

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

DING - Ben enters, tanned, hair untrimmed, folded inward.

STORE OWNER (O.S.)
No, gracias.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

DING. Spanish ballads crackle from an old radio.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)
Que? No, no, no.

INT. LATIN BUTCHER SHOP - DAY

Fans whirl above. Butchers move behind smeared glass, aprons streaked red. BEN steps up, already making his pitch.

MANAGER (O.S.)
We're good, man. Try next door.

A tight breath from Ben. Spins - right into a man in pressed slacks and polished shoes.

BEN
Ope, sorry bout that.

JULIO (O.S.)
Oye, hold up a sec.

Ben turns. By the register, JULIO (40s) - crisp suit, one hand holding a meat order, the other jingling car keys.

JULIO
You selling those calling cards?

BEN
Trying to I guess.

JULIO
Smart hustle. You running solo?

BEN
Pretty much, I mean yeah-just me.

Julio lays the bag down on a round table. Inside: a few thick-cut ribeye's, perfectly wrapped in butcher paper. Offers Ben his card.

JULIO

I move product for small businesses. If your cards can deliver, I get 'em in supermarkets, tienditas, wherever they can move.

THE CARD: JULIO MENDEZ MENDEZ IMPORT & LOGISTICS -
WHOLESALE, SHIPPING, TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ben's eyes light up. His fingers twitch around the card.

BEN

That'd be huge.

From his inner jacket pocket, Julio reveals a checkbook.

JULIO

Nothing crazy... two hundred to warm things up.

Ink flies. Paper tears. The check lands in Ben's hand.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Cash it tomorrow. If things go good, we do some real business.

Fingers close around the check. Cards slide across the circular table top.

BEN

Can't believe it, man I'm in.

Julio snatches the cards, chin dipping in approval.

JULIO

Right place, right time, hermano.

Ben stands still— card in one hand, check in the other. Julio's BMW fades down the street. He watches it go. Like a kid on the curb, clutching a crumpled bill — waiting for the ice cream truck to come back around.

FADE TO:

EXT. BUSY STREET, GUATEMALA CITY BUS STOP - DAY

Smoke rises off a battered grill. A VENDOR fans the coals — meat crackling over warped metal.

SUYAPA perched on a plastic stool, close to the heat lost in her tired map, focused on the location, Tecún Umán. MARICELA (25, sharp-eyed, Panamanian) stands over her – calculating, waiting for the right moment to announce herself.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
You're heading north, right?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
What you're talking about? Who are you anyway?

Suyapa snaps her map shut and abruptly stands, escaping into the crowd. Mari scurries behind, unfazed – like a stray that's already picked its packmate.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Relax, not here to mess with you. I saw you get off the bus from San Pedro Sula, now, Tecún Umán.

They weave through the chaos. Street dogs scatter underfoot.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
And what's it to you?

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Well, heading the same direction...

Suyapa glides through the crowd, bag cinched close. Eyes dart across the stalls. She clicks her tongue – unimpressed.

MARICELA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
My cousin crossed through Tecún Umán about a year ago – but not where all the migrants cross, further south, by a tire shop. Says you can cross the river into Mexico almost on foot there.

They skirt a puddle – and a woman barking into the street.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
And with that, what you're in Mexico?

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Yep. First step, more to come.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Did your cousin make it to the states?

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Yeah, Texas. Wasn't easy, but he
made it. Sends letters when he can.

Suyapa pauses a moment to catch her breath in the chaos.
Mari pulls out her own, brand new map—but a sudden gust
tears it from her hands. It tumbles into the dirty street.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Damn!

She darts into the street. A bus wails — horn blaring, tires
shrieking.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Careful!

As the bus thunders past — Suyapa snatches Mari's arm and
yanks her out of the street just in time.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
So, you do care about me, huh?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Didn't want you to get flattened.

Mari beams as she guides the map back into her waistband.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Two are better than one.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Two attract more attention.

A group of kids kick a crushed soda bottle through the dust.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
When are you leaving?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
As soon as possible.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
To the north, skinny. But if we get
lost, don't blame me.

They pivot around the corner swallowed by sound.

CUT TO:

INT. RURAL GUATEMALA BUS - DAY

Cramped in a single seat, SUYAPA and MARICELA sit knee-to-knee. A a battered deck back and forth, cards dangling in a loose game on their legs. MARICELA leans in, voice low.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Listen, when we cross into Texas,
my aunt says to go straight to the
terminal and buy a ticket to Miami.

With a sharp flick, Suyapa plays a card. Her face, still.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
What if you come with me? My aunt
has an apartment, a job at the
laundry. Says the beaches are
beautiful... and the men, uff...

The wheels hit a dip, sending a card tumbling to the floor.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Do you hear what you're saying?

Maricela pauses then scoops the card off the floor.

SUYAPA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
I love you, amiga. But if you think
I came all this way for beaches or
men, then you understand nothing.

MARICELA lowers her eyes, shuffling the deck and dealing out the new cards - her hands trembling.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Don't distract me. Not now.

Suyapa's hand finds Mari's, gives it a calming squeeze.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUCHIATE RIVER - TECÚN UMÁN COROSSING TO MEXICO - NIGHT

Darkness shrouds the trees. Crickets chirp. The river roars. MARI and SUYAPA crouch low in the foliage - plotting.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
This is it. My cousin said the
water only came up to his waist.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Current is too strong. No way your
cousin crossed in summer.

With a crease in her brows, Mari sweeps the river.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
This is the place. No lights, no
guards. We cross alone, now.

They slide down the bank, shoes sinking. Shivering, Suyapa and Mari clasp hands —and wade into the waist-deep water.

MARICELA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
Cold as hell... damn it...

The river snatches Mari, pulls her under. Suyapa's eyes dart — frozen — then she surges forward, battling the current, fingers clamped on Mari's arm, dragging her to the shore.

As they reach it — Mari rips free of her grasp, vanishes beneath the mud-dark water.

Suyapa screams.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Mari!

Suyapa thrashes upward — water everywhere, mud in her mouth — clawing her way to shore.

Suyapa drags herself onto the bank — gasping — and sees Mari already there, coughing, soaked, painted in mud... but alive.

SUYAPA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
Mari, thank God. I thought that...

MARICELA (SPANISH)
I'm fine, just wet, that's all.

Mari collapsed the mud. Suyapa kneels beside her. They face the river, the current softer, the water calm on this side.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
Welcome to Mexico amiga, even the
mud is spicy here.

Moonlight warms them. Mexico underfoot.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL MEXICO ROAD - DAY

A faded road sign: CHIAPAS 20 KM. The highway shimmers with heat. Three figures — MARICELA, SUYAPA, and a TIRED WOMAN (30s) —press on, heads down.

TIRED WOMAN (SPANISH)
 I crossed three times. They sent me
 back three times. Here I am, again.

A glance between them. Suyapa clutches her bag closer.

TIRED WOMAN (SPANISH)
 In Mexico, you're nobody. If you
 make it to the U.S. — even less.

She stops. Turns. Eyes sharp — scanning the distance.

TIRED WOMAN (SPANISH)
 You hesitate, someone will see and
 take advantage. Don't accept help.

Her voice lowers — reverent, a confession in a dark booth.

TIRED WOMAN (SPANISH)
 Getting here is nothing. Mexico can
 swallow you — and in the capital,
 La Bestia is waiting. It's not a
 train; it's a demon. Maybe you get
 on, maybe you get off.

She hesitates, eyes back on Suyapa and Maricela.

TIRED WOMAN (SPANISH)
 If you cross that border, thank
 God. But don't get me wrong — life
 there isn't a dream. It's survival,
 always looking over your shoulder.

Her gaze softens, a flash — then hardens, a scar.

TIRED WOMAN (SPANISH)
 No one warned me my first time.
 That's why I'm telling you. Now on,
 only two paths — you learn fast, or
 you disappear without a trace.

The Tired Woman stumbles away. Suyapa watches — then drives
 her heel into the dirt, grinding it deep. She takes a step
 then another, each step leaves a mark.

FADE OUT.

INT. MIAMI BANK - DAY

A line creeps forward, foot by foot. BEN shuffles ahead,
 shoulders slightly hunched. BEN steps up, hands a check to
 the TELLER (30s, no-nonsense). Her station's cluttered: a
 ceramic flamingo, a chipped mug. Tucked near the keyboard —
 a tiny plastic pirate, sword raised mid-charge.

TELLER
Account's closed.

BEN
Wait, what? Dang it!

TELLER
Closed a while now.

BEN
But he said it was good—

TELLER
—Happens more than you'd think.

The teller stamps "VOID" across the check. Ben glances at the tiny pirate — sword frozen mid-swing. The teller pushes the check across the counter.

TELLER (FLAT)
Next.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben sinks down on the stoop, shirt damp, head bowed.

ROSA
Ay, papito, come. Help me hang
laundry. Too hot to let it sit.

She straightens, already walking. Ben follows a step behind.

EXT. COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

ROSA snatches up a beat-up basket from beside the stoop.

ROSA
Let me school you on business.

A clothespin clicks open. She hangs a red lace bra without hesitation. Ben watches — caught between curiosity and awe.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Rule number one: cash only. Rule
number two: everybody desperate,
you not the only one.

She flicks her cigarette. The ember arcs in the dark.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Oh, and I bought you something.

He squints, head tilting slightly toward his apartment.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Your place was too depressing. Need
some color. I put a plant by the
door. Try to keep it alive, si?

BEN lets out a dry laugh, amused and a little worn out.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Get some rest tomorrow almost here.

She turns. The line of bras and panties sways gently – a
quiet dance in the breeze.

FADE TO:

EXT. EL PASO DIRTY BUS STATION - DAY

SUYAPA and MARICELA stand in line – Gritty clothes, sweat-
stained and travel-crusted. Suyapa's backpack is gone. A
loudspeaker crackles overhead – rapid English blares. They
flinch but don't understand a word.

At the desk, the CLERK (40s, bored) barely looks up

BUS STATION CLERK (SPANISH)
Where are you going, girls?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Miami, please.

BUS STATION CLERK (SPANISH)
Forty-seven each.

Suyapa threads bills through, the clerk hammers the keys.

COP VOICE (O.S.)
Carla, someone said a guy's been
acting weird. You see anything?

The girls tense, backs rigid. They don't understand.

TWO UNIFORMED COPS step in, eyes sweeping the terminal.
Suyapa and Maricela exchange a glance. The CLERK, unaware of
the tension, gestures vaguely in their direction.

The cops advance – heading straight for them. SUYAPA's
shoulders lock MARICELA's eyes flick to the exit – The cops
pass right by them—and keep walking. A pause.

COP (O.S.)
We'll check it out. Holler if he
comes back. Don't work too hard.

Their footsteps recede. The clerk shoves two tickets across.

BUS STATION CLERK (SPANISH)
Buen viaje.

Suyapa and Maricela stand frozen – not relief, just breath. Just enough to move. Gather what little they have. And turn – slow, deliberate – like surfacing from deep water.

FADE TO:

INT. BEN'S TRUCK MIAMI STREETS- DAY

BEN camped in his car, staring at Bodega Latina – a narrow, cinderblock storefront with a sun-faded awning and neatly swept entry. Sales tape drones. The driver's side mirror clings on, still held by flimsy duct tape.

RON DANIELS (V.O.)
Confidence. That's the difference between begging and closing. You walk in with doubt? You're already walking out broke. But if you walk in knowing you're the deal-bam-you make it happen. Like a smack of lightning. Fast. Sharp. Final.

Ben rewinds the tape a few seconds.

RON DANIELS (V.O.)
But if you walk in knowing you're the deal-bam-you make it happen. Like a smack of lightning. Fast. Sharp. Final.

BEN
Make it happen.

He snags a stack of cards, and steps out. Shoulders hunched.

INT. BODEGA LATINA - CONTINUOUS

Fluorescent lights buzz. Shelves brim with Goya cans, Virgen de Guadalupe candles. Soft salsa hums. BEN enters, cards under arm, his polo shirt damp. Behind the register – empty.

BEN
¿Hola?

A CRACK rings out!

SUYAPA (mid-20s, quick) pops up, banging her head on the register. She gasps, hand dashes to forehead.

BEN
Oh shit are you okay?

SUYAPA
I stand up very fast.

Suyapa rubs her temple blood streaks her palm. BEN pales.

BEN
You're bleeding!

SUYAPA
Oh... I ok, I can clean.

Ben doesn't hesitate, he drops the cards, toppling over a lollipop stand, bolts out the door. Moments later, he's back with a first aid kit, kneeling beside SUYAPA.

BEN
Let me take care of this.

He dabs her cut – then sways. Color drains from his face. He's going down.

BEN
Oh... man...

SUYAPA
Siéntate hombre.

She pulls a chair, grabs an OJ. BEN sips, steadies himself.

BEN
Sorry... blood is not my thing.

BEN exhales, stands, still a little shaky. Clumsily, he begins to bandage her forehead. His hands fumble, uneven. Crooked tape. He smooths the final strip into place gently with thumbs.

BEN
That'll have to do for now.

Their eyes meet – a beat too long, heavier than it should be. He discards the bloody wipe.

BEN
Came in here trying to sell you
calling cards but, if this gets
worse, maybe we go to a doctor-

SUYAPA
No hospital.

Ben nods — unsure why but he trusts her.

BEN
Okay, sure no hospital.

He tosses another wipe, then extends his business card and two calling cards and an offering.

BEN (CONT'D)
For your boss. These—for you. To
call home. Least I can do.

SUYAPA'S fingers hover, then touch the cards—hesitant.

BEN (CONT'D)
Can I break anything else while I'm
here? Maybe steal some money?

The smile finds her slowly — a second behind his sarcasm.

SUYAPA
I talk my boss. Maybe he call si?

BEN
Thanks, really. Feel better. Sorry.

The door jingles as he steps out. SUYAPA stows the cards.

CUT TO:

INT. BODEGA LATINA - MORNING

Three CUSTOMERS wait, SUYAPA hustling to keep up. The bell DINGS — another walks in. NELSON (early 60s, Guatemalan, kind-eyed) slips behind the counter. They fall into rhythm — clearing the line together. Then his eyes catch the bandage.

NELSON (SPANISH)
What happened to your forehead?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Yesterday I hit my head on the
register. But some gringo helped
me... he got all woozy from the
blood, but he was sweet, he cleaned
me up well.

NELSON (SPANISH)
That's good, that's good, sweetie.
And the gringo, what did he want?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
He was selling calling cards.

She stalls at the till, organizing bills before she speaks.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
You know, boss, the ones we have
right now have been giving me some
problems – they don't always give
all the minutes they promise.

NELSON (SPANISH)
Have customers complained?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Some, yes.

Nelson's gaze drifts over her shoulder.

NELSON (SPANISH)
And what do you think?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
The gringo cleaned my wound... that's
worth something, right?

Then his attention snaps back to her.

NELSON (SPANISH)
Tell him to come tomorrow. Let's
see what the gringo has to say.

SUYAPA nods, a faint smile flickering – Ben's in. NELSON
grabs his mail and heads out. The bell chimes in his wake.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Beat-up patio table sits on the balcony – yard sale junk.
Pieces of a jigsaw puzzle stretch across it – fractured
blues and greens, a coastline taking shape. Or trying to.

They sit across from each other, a red-light Kmart fan
whirring between them. Ben toys with a puzzle piece. Rosa
exhales smoke, scans the pieces like they owe her answers.

ROSA
¿Cómo vas, gringo?

BEN
Not all bad. Ate mofongo—you heard
of that? Some Puerto Rican lady
made me to eat it. Pretty good.
Yesterday, cleaned blood off a
cashier I was pitching. But still
nada. Like they don't hear me.

ROSA
Maybe they don't, papito.

BEN
What's that mean?

ROSA (*SPANISH*)
They don't buy 'cause they don't
trust you. You look like your with
immigration.

BEN
Thanks. Not much I can do about it.

ROSA
Sí hay. But you no desperate yet.

Ben's jaw tightens. He clicks a puzzle piece into place,
harder than necessary. It doesn't fit, but he leaves it.

BEN
Maybe more than you think.

ROSA (*SHE TAPS HER CHEST*)
No papi you can just go home.
People here? Got no home to go to.

She selects a piece, this time it clicks in.

ROSA (*CONT'D*)
Had a client once - quiet, paid
upfront. One night, he shows up
late. Borracho... Says his wife left
him and he no know why.

Ben watches her, puzzle piece forgotten in his hand.

ROSA (*CONT'D*)
I laugh. Not to make fun, just por
favor, he no know why she leave?

She presses a piece into place - Not a fit. Scoffs.

ROSA (*CONT'D*)
He not like that laugh.

Her hand finds her ribs - unthinking, but not empty.

ROSA (*CONT'D*)
But he paid, cash. Always did,
cause I let him come back again.
That's desesperacion papito.

The fan spins, steady. Night hums beyond the balcony rail.

ROSA (CONT'D)
You not desperate 'til you bleed.

From inside Ben's phone pierces through quiet contemplation.

ROSA
Go on, Mr. Businessman. Maybe
that's your big break... But if not,
that's okay.

She lights another cigarette, watching as he rises. Ben pauses— then turns to go, leaving Rosa with a piece resting in her hand.

His foot catches the new house plant by the door of his apartment — a thoughtful gift that he keeps nearly destroying. It wobbles but doesn't fall.

INT. BEN'S MIAMI APARTMENT / BODEGA LATINA - CONTINUOUS

Ben snatches the phone, breath short, movement sharp.

BEN
Hello, International Calling Cards.

At the BODEGA, SUYAPA braces against the counter, phone cradled to her ear — voice steady, but guarded.

SUYAPA
This is Ben?

He rises from the slouch like a switch flipped.

BEN
Yes, this is Ben. Who's calling?

SUYAPA
I calling from Bodega Latina. You came yesterday.

BEN
Yes—of course. I remember... How's your head?

A breath, then her tone shifts — softer, almost tender.

SUYAPA
Still hurt. But I ok now.

BEN
I'm really sorry that happened. I should've been more careful.

SUYAPA

No, my problem. I no look where I stand up... My boss-Don Nelson-he say you come back tomorrow. He listen. Be here at 8:30.

BEN

Wow, really? thanks, that's great. I'll be there.

SUYAPA

Just so you know... he no like the fast talkers.

BEN

Fast talk's never been my problem.

He lingers, phone still to his ear. Not ready to hang up.

BEN (CONT'D)

I missed your name yesterday.

SUYAPA

Suyapa. Suyapa Castro. Adios.

The line clicks and she's gone.

Ben sets down the receiver, smile not quite faded. ROSA stands in the doorway, arms crossed, reading him.

BEN

Suyapa.

ROSA

You're in trouble now papito.

His eyes shift to the clock on the wall.

CUT TO:

I/E. BODEGA LATINA - MORNING

BEN's car idles across the street. An empty coffee cup. A mangled pack of Pengüinos. Patience, unwrapped.

8:24-Ben cracks his knuckles. Taps his foot. Wipes his hands on his jeans - twice. Checks the rearview. 8:25. He snatches the calling cards and eagerly exits.

INT. BODEGA LATINA - MOMENTS LATER

Radio hums through the quiet shop. SUYAPA sorts receipts behind the counter - lost in it. DING. BEN steps inside.

BEN
Your head doing any better?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Better, thanks.

Ben fumbles for the right words – they don't come clean.

BEN
Su..Suayapa... that's—uh, that's a
beautiful name.

SUYAPA
Sí?

BEN
Where's it from?

SUYAPA
Honduras. I from Honduras.

He nods – a little too quickly, like a child pretending he's
in on the conversation.

BEN
Honduras... that's, uh... near Chile,
right? Or... not even close?

SUYAPA laughs brightly.

BEN
I guess geography—also not my
thing.

A ding rings out as NELSON enters the store, scans his
kingdom, notices SUYAPA's smile, redirects to the employee
door.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)
No, not near Chile.

NELSON
Buenos días.

BEN & SUYAPA
Buenos días.

NELSON notices their sync.

NELSON
Come, come to my office. Venga,
como te llamas?

BEN
Ben Arnold sir.

Ben fidgets with the box of cards. Turns to follow – In that moment Suyapa slips off her cardigan. A clean white tank top underneath. Sunlight skims her shoulder, tracing the easy lines of her waist.

Ben's breath catches – the kind of detail you miss when someone's bleeding. Now he's noticing.

He pivots quickly, trailing Nelson – heart hammering harder than it should be.

INT. BODEGA LATINA STOCK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A cramped, cluttered space – boxes stacked high. NELSON sits, arms crossed, watching. BEN stands across from him, clutching the box of calling cards.

NELSON
Sit, sit- Phone cards eh?

Ben place the box between them.

BEN
Yeah, I guess. Cheap rates for
Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador...

NELSON snorts, Ben already speaking too fast.

NELSON
Slow down amigo, cheap mean bad
quality. Bad quality, customers no
happy.

BEN strains, searching for the right word, taking his time.

BEN
A...Affordable and these really work.

NELSON leans in.

NELSON
Y? If not? What if customers
complain?

BEN
Maybe I can talk to the company...

NELSON smirks.

NELSON
And then what, they say no their
problem, right?

SUYAPA tracks the conversation from behind the counter.

NELSON (CONT'D)
You take responsibility?
Responsibilidad?

BEN
Well-

NELSON
Then don't waste my time amigo.

BEN shoulders sagging. He starts to rise, already turning to leave—but SUYAPA cuts in.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Don Nelson, these are the same
cards Mari always used. According
to her, they're really good.

NELSON looks at her, then lifts the box of cards.

NELSON
Segura? - Bueno if problems, no me
who call you, she call you.

His gaze settles on Suyapa. She doesn't flinch - just rolls back her shoulders, standing a little taller.

NELSON
She looks sweet, small hands, but
she can punch harder than you think
amigo, much harder.

Their eyes lock - a smirk tugs at the corner of her mouth.

Ben lets out a breath - NELSON peels off \$200 in cash. Ben tucks it away. His gaze lands on Suyapa - an oasis.

CUT TO:

EXT. MIAMI STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

BEN drives, buzzing from the sale. The driver's side mirror wobbles in the thick, humid breeze.

RON DANIELS (V.O.)
Selling's about dominance. You
bless them with the chance to buy.

BEN laughs, flips to Spanish pop radio. Under his breath:

BEN
Ways to go yet.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

A faded sign above a dusty office window: "INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS." BEN parks. Grabs the cash. Sprints out.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stacks of cards. Coffee-stained mugs. RAY slouched in a cracked vinyl chair, phone pinned to his shoulder

RAY (SPANISH)
Yes, I'll send you the money
tomorrow... stop bothering me, man.

He slams the phone down like it was burning his hand.

RAY (CONT'D)
Buenos días, Bob!

BEN
It's Ben.

RAY
Correcto. My Nebraska warrior.
How's business?

BEN
Been kinda slow. Real slow. But I'm
working a system, I guess. Just
sold a \$200 order to a bodega

RAY straightens slightly, one brow cocked

RAY
Aha! You're in the game hermano!
You get that re-order?

BEN
Re-order? I just made the sale.

RAY hands fly around like a coach at halftime.

RAY
Always gotta lock the re-order,
amigo! You don't just sell- you
plant the next seed while the ink's
still wet. C'mon!

Ben taps the cash on the desk, then sets it down — \$200.

BEN
Maybe I can use another box then.

RAY
That's \$250, champion.

BEN
Yeah, I know, I'll bring fifty tomorrow but I gotta get that re-order now right?

RAY
¡Eso! Now you speaking my language.

He slides a new box across like it's a crown.

RAY (CONT'D)
Go, Nebraska. Make me proud.

The phone erupts — again.

RAY (SPANISH)
No, mami, I said with cheese, not without cheese. What you thinking?

BEN walks out, grinning. The door snaps shut with a bang.

INT. BODEGA LATINA - EVENING

With a warm ding as BEN enters — sweat-darkened shirt clinging, hair tousled. He spots SUYAPA at the counter, wrapping up with a CUSTOMER.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Do you need a calling card?

CUSTOMER 1 (SPANISH)
Yes, a ten-dollar one. To talk to my little girl back home.

The customer transaction is over. Ben opens his mouth to speak—then stops. Something about her tonight: the overhead light catching the curve of her cheek, the way her sweater lifts just slightly as she reaches to reset the till.

BEN
Thanks.

SUYAPA
For what?

A flirty pause hangs between them — Then from the door:

CUSTOMER 2 (O.S.) (SPANISH)
Are you about to close?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Almost.

Customer 2 buys cigarettes and exits as Suyapa stretches.

BEN
Almost closing time. You always
close alone?

SUYAPA
Sometimes Nelson help.

BEN
I didn't see another car outside?

SUYAPA
I take the bus.

BEN
Maybe I can take you. It's safer. I
can wait if you need some time...

She lingers over the register, fingers resting on the till.

SUYAPA
Bueno, no... not home. Tonight, study
group.

Ben starts to pull back — then sees the possible opportunity.

BEN
Study group huh... Well I am a little
busy tonight, but sure, I guess I
can come to study.

SUYAPA
To study group? You want to study
English?

BEN
Well my grammar is terrible.

SUYAPA
Is loud. Crowded. We talk over each
other in three languages.

BEN
If there is a test at the end, I
plan on passing it.

She blinks — then smirks, sarcasm landing a second late.

SUYAPA

No test, just an invitation... But if
you come tonight... you come next
week, too.

She swings a woven backpack over one shoulder – black,
streaked with bright colors. On her way to the door, she
flips the light off – passing Ben without a word.

BEN

So I guess I passed the first test
by showing up tonight?

SUYAPA

You pass the test by showing up
every week.

The door glides shut behind her, Ben exhales, then follows.

CUT TO:

I/E. RINCONCITO CATRACHO - NIGHT

A modest Honduran restaurant hums – faded fútbol posters on
the walls, a telenovela flickering above the counter.

At one table, voices blend – Spanish, Creole, English.
Laughter spills. With the chime of the door, BEN and SUYAPA
step in.

Ben stalls – a little out of place, but Suyapa is swept in –
cheers, hugs, kisses. She glows, then gestures proudly
toward Ben.

SUYAPA

Friends, mi amigo Ben.

A dozen glances meet his. Ben lifts a hand – a sheepish
half-wave.

BEN

Uh... hola.

HAITIAN GROUP MEMBERS

Bonjou.

A POLISH GUY, arms crossed, smirks.

POLISH GUY (POLISH)

No, no, he's teaching us Polish.

The group laughs, trading jabs. Suyapa laughs too – her hand
brushing Ben's arm, light as breath. So casual it could be
nothing. But it isn't.

SUYAPA

Ben is my American friend. He's
learning Spanish, we teach him, he
teach us.

She leans in, lips near his ear, voice barely a thread.

SUYAPA

It ok, they no bite.

He lets out a slow breath – a smile curling.

They slide into the last two open seats – shoulder to
shoulder, close. Ben's thigh grazes hers – a flash of heat.

Her woven bag rests by her side. He shifts, unsure if he
should pull away – but she doesn't. She just smiles –
effortless, easy.

A plate of golden Honduran pastelitos lands in front of him.

SUYAPA

Eat. Pastelitos—from my country.

Ben takes a bite – eyes light up, a small nod of approval.
Suyapa beams – soft, proud.

FADE TO:

EXT. RINCONCITO CATRACHO - NIGHT

They step into the night. Miami shimmers around them.
Streetlights buzz overhead as they drift toward BEN'S truck.

BEN

So... how about that ride home?

Suyapa's body answers first.

SUYAPA

Claro que sí.

She pauses at the passenger door. Ben, clueless, keeps
heading for the driver's side. She remains planted. Just
tilts her head – waiting.

He reaches for his keys, then captures the situation. Stops.
Flashes a flustered grin as he doubles back.

BEN

Right. Of course. Second test...

He swings her door open and she settles into her seat, securing her bag – as she does, her hand grazes his arm. Just enough to leave a charge under his jacket.

Ben lingers, then tenderly shuts the door and rounds the truck. Takes his seat at the steering wheel. The engine rumbles to life.

BEN

So... how will I know when you need to order more calling cards?

Suyapa studies him, her gaze softening into a slow smile.

SUYAPA

Maybe you come tomorrow and check.

His head up, shoulders squared, a smile as her merges out.

FADE OUT.

I/E. BEN'S TRUCK / RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Radio low, BEN threads through traffic. He taps the wheel, glances at the clock. Tires crunch into the lot. He's out in a flash – crumpled \$50 in hand.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stacks of calling cards. An old fan hums in the corner. A plastic Jesus nods on the desk- silent, judgmental.

RAY (ON THE PHONE) (SPANISH)

I didn't know she was married, and to my neighbor can you believe it!

BEN

Here's your fifty.

Ray bursts into a cackle at the sight of BEN, and casually snatches the \$50 like a napkin offered by a waiter.

RAY

Bob, you're learning!

BEN

Still Ben.

RAY

Eh, Bob Ben... if the money's green, I call you whatever you want.

He's moving before Ray can finish.

RAY
Go get rich, Nebraska!

BEN
Working on it.

The door slams behind him.

FADE TO:

Latin pop surges. Ben's hustle sharpens:

— At a FRUIT STAND, a VENDOR folds his arms — Ben leans in close. A beat. The vendor cracks, trades cash for cards.

— At a CAR WASH, the OWNER unconvinced — until Ben gestures to his own truck. The man sighs, pulls out his wallet.

— Inside an INSURANCE AGENCY, a CLERK gives Ben a flat look. behind her — a sign reads "SEGURO DE AUTO." Ben taps the advertisement. Then the stack of calling cards. The clerk hesitates... then slides open the till.

His confidence builds as his pitch tightens.

CUT TO:

INT. LAUNDROMAT - EVENING

BEN strides into a laundromat — shoulders loose, confidence humming. The heat hits him, dryers spinning in rhythm like applause.

At the counter, the LAUNDROMAT OWNER (50s, Latina, guarded warmth) folds towels with practiced efficiency. Beside her, a small black-and-white TV flickers.

ON THE TV — A NEWS ANCHOR leans forward, serious:

NEWS ANCHOR
Today, Attorney General Janet Reno
addressed the press regarding the
hiring scandals that have rocked
the Clinton administration.

CUT TO — JANET RENO at a press conference, stern yet calm:

JANET RENO
I've never hired any illegal
aliens, and I think I've paid all
my Social Security taxes.

She shakes her head, turning down the TV. BEN's already moving — that high still in his step.

BEN

Buenas tardes, I sell the best international calling cards—low rates, good margins. Thought you might be—

She folds, unimpressed. Ben catches it — adjusts. A new angle forming.

BEN (CONT'D)

—You know Nelson from Bodega Latina down the street, he just signed on. Said I should stop by here next.

Her stance softens. Reaches for a framed photo on the counter: two young women in aprons, beaming with pride.

LAUNDROMAT OWNER

See her, this is my niece, Maricela. Came up from Panama. Two years ago now. The friend she came with—Nelson helped her. Gave her a job, a place to stay. He's always looking out his people. Good man

BEN

Good to have some help. This city can chew you up fast.

LAUNDROMAT OWNER

It can. Fast and quiet.

She looks past him — watching the dryers tumble.

LAUNDROMAT OWNER (CONT'D)

Sometimes slow.

She studies him for a moment — silent, unreadable. Then simply turns back to folding towels. BEN takes in the worn machines, the quiet solitude of the shop.

BEN

You run this place alone?

LAUNDROMAT OWNER

Ever since Mari... left.

Ben meets her eyes — steady, no pitch this time. He slides the cards onto the counter, careful not to crowd the moment.

BEN

First batch is on me. No games. Just thought—maybe they could help.

The cards sit untouched. She folds another towel.

LAUNDROMAT OWNER
These cards— people trust them?
They work good?

BEN
They do. And if they don't, they
call me. I fix it.

Ben reaches for a towel mimics her rhythm —slow, carefully
folds it neatly. Then reaches for another.

LAUNDROMAT OWNER
Okay, mijo. We'll try these. Maybe
people can use them for Semana
Santa, Easter almost here.

BEN
That's a good idea. How about I
come by next week, check in on you.

She draws the cards in, sets them beneath the counter. Ben
eyes the clock behind her.

BEN (CONT'D)
Shit—Sorry...I'm late. Sorry...

He darts toward the exit.

LAUNDROMAT OWNER
Tell Nelson I say hello!

BEN
Will do!

EXT. MIAMI STREETS - CONTINUOUS

He throws himself into the truck. He tears down the street,
eyes locked on the glowing sign of BODEGA LATINA ahead.

EXT. BODEGA LATINA - MOMENTS LATER

He tries the main entrance — glass door locked, lights off
inside. No hesitation — he turns down the alley.

EXT. BODEGA LATINA ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Under a flickering light, BEN knocks.

SUYAPA (O.S.)
¿Quién es?

BEN

Ben.

The door swings open. SUYAPA stands there – smudged cheeks, a red streak on her brow, wrapped in shadows.

BEN

You shouldn't be here all alone.
Let me finish up with you.

SUYAPA

Why so late? I thought you no come.

BEN

Had to grab my first aid kit.

His eyes land on the red streak on her forehead, a pause, of concern.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hit your head again?

SUYAPA

Just cleaning up.

BEN

Looks like no bandage needed.

Their eyes lock. They lean in – slow, inevitable. A breath away –then–ACHOO. SUYAPA sneezes, jolting back. She fumbles for a tissue from inside her always close, black woven bag.

SUYAPA

So much dust...

She wipes her nose, shaking her head, still smiling.

Ben pulls another tissue from the packet, gently dabs the streak on her forehead – intimate.

His hand drifts lower, grazing the hollow of her throat. She stills – but doesn't move away. His thumb lingers there... then trails to her waist, grounding them both.

Her body leans into his. He kisses her – deep, certain, earned.

As they part, breath caught between them, she pulls her forehead against his. A whisper – just for him:

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

Stay close.

FADE OUT.

EXT. A1A MIAMI BEACH - NIGHT

Fireworks burst overhead—red, white, and blue reflected on the water. Crowds cheer. Music pulses from a nearby speaker. Hand in hand, threading through families and couples along the boardwalk, the crowds rhythm no match for their own.

SUYAPA

I miss my mamá. My tía. My whole pueblo. We were always together.

BEN

Think you'll go back?

SUYAPA

Maybe. Someday. It's complicated.

They continue hand in hand.

Up ahead, a family forms a loose circle of folding chairs — grandparents, kids, a dog curled at their feet. An open cooler, mini American flags dot the setup. A baby sleeps on someone's chest. Laughter bubbles up — simple, warm, whole.

Suyapa watching, her woven bag flung over her shoulder.

BEN

What do you miss the most?

She pauses, turning her eyes on the gathered family.

SUYAPA

Cosecha. The corn harvest.

BEN

Harvest?

SUYAPA

Sí. We dry corn in the sun. Lot of corn! We sit together me, my cousins, mi mamá, break it open, pull the seeds. Is how we make tortillas. Every day. Every food. Tortillas. But no just food. Was peace. Mi tío... he no like too many eyes. So, cosecha time... he go.

She avoids his eyes, rubbing her wrists.

SUYAPA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)

Mi tío... he barked like a dog. Broke things with his... His dirty hands.

In silence Bens hand hovers — unsure where to land.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)
But we need his money. So I leave,
I come here to make enough moneies
so she can push him away. She no
more have to pretend to need him.

Fireworks crack again—reflected gold in the water.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)
They say it's better now. He gone,
like a dog in the street.

BEN
Well... You did that.

SUYAPA
I say myself, they still need me?

Ben gently squeezes her hand.

BEN
Two weeks ago, when I got real
sick...

SUYAPA
You have a little cold.

BEN
And a fever. You gave me that nasty
tea... what was that?

SUYAPA
It was manzanilla tea.

BEN
Tasted like boiled dirt.

SUYAPA
It's good for your kidneys.

Laughter bubbles up — a gentle thread pulling them to light.

BEN
Wasn't the tea. I was just so lucky
to have you close... and now I am
scared what it would be like if you
weren't.

They stop. SUYAPA turns to him, leans in — her forehead
resting gently against his. Above them, a firework blooms.
Red and gold light wash over their faces.

SUYAPA
Then stay close.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACHFRONT CAFE - DAY

A sun-washed patio perched above the shoreline. Waves lap gently below. Umbrellas flutter in the breeze. BEN and SUYAPA sit at a intimate table near the railing, the ocean stretching out behind them—glinting, alive.

BEN

It's called brunch. Combo of breakfast and lunch.

SUYAPA

Sound fake.

BEN

Hey, tell Nelson thanks for giving you the morning off.

WAITRESS brings check, he hands over his credit card.

WAITRESS

Just need to see your ID.

Ben takes out his ID, shows the waitress, but before he can put it away:

SUYAPA

Let me see.

She peers.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)

Benedict Arnold? ¿En serio? No Ben?

BEN (MOCK-SERIOUS)

Shhh! We don't say that name.

SUYAPA

Why? What name?

BEN

You wouldn't know the story.

SUYAPA

No.

EXT. REVOLUTIONARY WAR ERA - 1770S - DOCUMENTARY STYLE

MUSKETS CRACK. SMOKE. MEN CHARGE. Mud. Cannons. Screams.

BEN (V.O.)

Back before the U.S. was even a country, we were fighting the British for independence. One of our top guys was Benedict Arnold. Smart. Brave. Respected.

ARNOLD rides through battle, piercing eyes.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But he always thought he deserved more. More praise. More power.

Arnold scribbles furiously at candle lit desk.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So he made a deal. Betrayed his side. Sold plans to the British.

Arnold approaches a REDCOAT, glancing over his shoulder. He slips the plans into the man's hand.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Nearly cost us the war. A lots of men died because of him.

Explosions. Screams. Fallen bloodied soldiers.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He joined the enemy. Fought against us. He lost everything in the end.

Arnold, older, in a torn uniform, staring at the sea.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He died broke, in England. No legacy. No honor. Just a name that means traitor.

EXT. BEACHFRONT CAFE - PRESENT

SUYAPA holds BEN's license.

SUYAPA

So why your family give you this name?

BEN

My mom died giving birth. My dad never knew how to handle that. Who does...

Suyapa nudges her woven bag behind her, out of sight, and leans forward, her hand gently grasping his.

SUYAPA

Lo siento, amor, I never know that.

BEN

He wasn't cruel. Just... stuck. He gave me that name like a test... Now I'm here. With you. From a some place I can't even pronounce.

SUYAPA

Lejamani.

BEN

Exactly.

Suyapa shifts in her seat. Her eyes drop then lift tenderly.

SUYAPA

You know, maybe no a test. Maybe... a, confession. He try to forget he give up on his future. Maybe he give you that name... to remember. So when he say your name... all he hear is traidor, not you, him?

Ben's hand drifts toward her arm. Intentionally anchoring himself to her.

BEN

But when you say my name, it just means me.

Her lips curve softly, eyes glassed with unshed tears.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S MIAMI APARTMENT - NIGHT

Torrential rain pelts the sidewalk. Escaping the rain, BEN (in a clinging blue shirt, soaked through) and SUYAPA dash toward the stoop.

A SHOUT erupts from above—sharp, male, angry.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

What was that?

BEN

Rosa...

He bolts for the stairs. SUYAPA surges after him, eyes wide.

EXT. APARTMENT STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Voices erupt, a sharp crack and heavy thump sting the air.

BEN
Stay behind me.

With one arm, he shields Suyapa, the other drives him forward.

INT. ROSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The door crashes open. BEN surges through, eyes blazing. A DRUNK MAN (30s, smoldering in his glare) traps ROSA against the wall, his grip bruising her wrist.

MAN (SPANISH)
Don't ignore me, bitch!

ROSA (SPANISH)
Let go of me, you son of a bitch!

BEN charges, snatches the man's collar, and rips him away.

BEN
Back. Off. Now.

The man staggers, then braces himself—his gaze raking BEN's rain-drenched blue shirt, fists tightening.

MAN (SPANISH)
And who the fuck are you?

BEN
The one giving you a choice.

The man's sneer twists, then he barrels past, slamming his shoulder into Ben. The door thunders shut. Stillness.

Ben's chest heaves, knuckles white as the echo fades. He stares at the empty space, locked in place. ROSA's hand grazes his arm, jolting him back.

BEN
You okay?

ROSA
I let him in... Wasn't losing. I was about to fuck him up.

BEN's lips twitch upward, easing under Rosa's quip.

BEN
I believe you.

ROSA
Mi príncipe azul, brave and wet.

BEN
Your what?

ROSA
Forget it, papito.

Rosa grabs at her wrist, wincing – Ben's hand is there, steadying her before she sways.

Ben's eyes return to SUYAPA, she stands in the doorway, a broom handle clenched tight, body coiled, ready for a fight.

Her gaze locks onto Ben's. His presence softens her. She steps forward, hands him the broom. He receives it. Analyzes it, before returning it to a corner.

BEN
Let's get you inside. Vamos.

Suyapa meets Rosa's eyes a silent moment. Then Suyapa steps aside, fingers tightening around her bag.

FADE OUT.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

The door slams shut. Thunder rumbles outside and inside.

BEN and SUYAPA statues in the dark, rainwater dripping from their hair, clothes clinging to their bodies. Eyes locked – both still breathing heavily. Suyapa breaks the stillness. Their mouths collide.

They stumble backward, spilling the houseplant by the door. It topples, dirt pouring out.

Ben's back hits the wall. Suyapa collapses into him, her hips pinning his. She grabs his wrist – raises it above his head, pinning his hand to the wall.

Suyapa's lips brush his ear. Then, Ben pulls back – just an inch, gasping for air. Suyapa keeps her grip on his wrist.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Don't go.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BEN'S MIAMI APARTMENT - MORNING

Sun filters through mismatched blinds. On the desk - the injured Beanie Baby slumps sideways, stuffing poking out.

BEN and SUYAPA lie tangled in sheets.

With a sharp knock BEN stirs, lurches out of bed. He cracks the door, spilled houseplant still there, mess undisturbed.

ROSA
Escucha, papi. Stay home today,
¿sí? No work.

BEN
What, what are you...?

ROSA
My clients—you know some big
Latinos, business mens—they calling
you today. I say them you want
Rosa, you help my friend.

Ben rubs at his eyes, sleep still clinging to him.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Don't want to kick you out, papito.

She squeezes his cheek.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Time to try something new.

BEN
I s'pose today's as good as any.

She's gone. The door clicks

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - LATER

BEN's coffee splashes as the phone blares mid-pour.

BEN
Good morning, Calling Cards!

VOICE (V.O.)
Sí, I need some cards. My friend
say you got some, what you got?

BEN
I have a special today—\$150 gets
you \$200 in cards, cash up front.

Offer made.

VOICE (V.O.)
Dale hermano. Take my address,
bring it today, okay?

Ben gets it down just before the line cuts out. A blink. The machine whirs.

RECORDED VOICE (V.O.)
Yes, hello... um, I need cards. Rosa
say... bueno call me. 305-545...

He scribbles fast, stunned. Another call coming in...

FADE TO:

INT. RINCONCITO CATRACHO - NIGHT

A respectful silence settles over the study group. A woman's voice carries across the long table. MARISE (early 40s, Haitian,) sits with her hands wrapped around a cup.

MARISE
Back home... I lived with my mamá and
her second husband.

The table stills. Forks pause mid-air.

MARISE
When he drank...Said I made him think
bad thoughts...Said it was my fault.

She speaks with quiet steel, pain folded into resolve.

MARISE (CONT'D)
I used to wear two shirts in the
summer. So his eyes wouldn't...

No one at the table moves.

MARISE (CONT'D)
One day, he tried to come into my
room. And I hit him. Hard. I ran. I
never go back.

Suyapa stands - not rushed. She flots across the room, silent. Kneels beside her friend. Marise crumbles. They hold on. Ben watches - under the table, his fists slowly release.

As Suyapa settles back into her seat next to Ana (40s, Dominican- sharp-eyed, maternal) leans in - gentle:

ANA (SPANISH)
 Marise's story so sad...There are men
 who don't deserve to be called men.

Ana cups Suyapa's shoulders, before smiling and moving on.

ANA (SPANISH)
 But some men, who do. When's the
 wedding?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
 Wedding? Don't start!

SUYAPA glances toward Ben, deep in conversation with Marise.
 He runs a hand through his hair – absent, unthinking – and
 his forearm tightens, muscle shifting beneath the skin.

Her gaze lingers – just a breath too long. ANA catches it.

ANA (SPANISH)
 Look at how you stare at him.
 You're practically drooling!

With a bright laugh, Ana hands Suyapa a napkin.

ANA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
 You know what? A good man is like a
 Christmas tamale. Takes a while to
 come around, and if you miss it...
 you're waiting until next year.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
 Oh, I don't know... maybe

ANA (SPANISH)
 Or someone else eats it first!

Their laughter an invitation for Ben to return.

BEN
 Hey, you doing ok love?

Suyapa looks at him – caught between answers.

BEN (CONT'D)
 I was talking with Marise, must
 have felt good to smack that son of
 a bitch. Proud of her.

SUYAPA
 I very good amor, just start to
 make me feel like is Christmas.

Their hands brush–instinctively, their fingers intertwine.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MIAMI STREET - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

BEN'S truck glides down a empty road. Wipers struggle across the windshield, fighting the Miami downpour. Inside, it's dry, and calm. SUYAPA settled in her copilot seat.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
These heavy, late summer squalls
will continue through the weekend
so keep your umbrella handy...

Red and blue lights flash behind them, refracted in the mirror. Ben adjusts the rearview. He signals and pulls over.

INT. BEN'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

A police cruiser spotlight unexpectedly bursts on -cutting through the cab. SUYAPA stiffens. A hand tightens on her black bag, the other lands on the door handle.

BEN lowers the radio and cranks the window down halfway.

Through the downpour, a COP emerges from the glare-mid-20s, calm, professional-rain sheeting off his jacket like he's done this a hundred times. His flashlight sweeps the cab, pausing a beat too long on Suyapa. Ben shifts, angles himself to shield her-cuts in, voice casual but firm.

BEN
How can I help you officer.

The cop's flashlight tracks back to Ben.

COP
Tail light's out. License and
registration please?

BEN
Didn't realize. Of course...

Ben hands over the papers. The cop casts another glance at Suyapa-less focused now-as he flips through the documents beneath the shelter of his clipboard, shielding them from the rain. Satisfied, he turns and heads back to his cruiser.

Rain thrashes the roof. Wiper blades scrape in a relentless rhythm. SUYAPA frozen-hands fixed, exactly where they were.

BEN
He's not here for you.

No answer. Ben finally kills the radio.

BEN

And if he was... you're not alone.

She stays frozen—but slowly, her hand retreats from the door, settling in her lap.

Headlights flood the cab. The cruiser idles like a beast behind them. Then—shadows shift. The COP reappears, looming at the window, rain streaking his face.

Ben's frame stays firm—angled in front of her.

COP

You're all set. No ticket. Just get that light fixed.

Looks back at his cruiser, then back to Ben.

COP

Better to catch it now than drag you off the pavement later... hey and get this mirror fixed, duct tape won't hold on forever.

One final blast of light—Suyapa caught in its glow.

BEN

Will do. Thank you sir.

The cop pivots his boots slapping the wet pavement.

Only when the lights dissolve into the distance does Ben dare to move. He looks at Suyapa—her breath still caught, ribs barely rising.

BEN

You sure you're okay?

Sheets of rain pelt the cab. The truck doesn't move.

SUYAPA

With my tío, I knew where to hide.

His hands choke the wheel. They merge into the dark road.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S TRUCK / SUYAPAS APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

The rain has eased. No longer a storm—just a steady, moody drizzle. Inside the cab: stillness. Not peace—exhaustion.

SUYAPA leans into the door, arms folded, eyes somewhere else. They sit in the lull, heavy with everything unsaid.

BEN glances over—

BEN
You wanna know something kind of
pathetic?

SUYAPA
Mm. Just one thing?

Her sarcasm starting to mirror his own.

BEN
That first day I sold cards to
Nelson—that was my first real sale.

At last, her eyes find his.

SUYAPA
¿En serio?

BEN
Before that, it was all no's. Me
walking around with sweaty flyers
and bad Spanish. But after you,
everything had a reason. Not just
the business. Everything.

She leans in slightly, eyes clear, mouth still.

BEN (CONT'D)
Finally started picturing something
beyond surviving the week.

He nervously shifts, desperate for the words.

BEN (CONT'D)
And now, it so much more. Not some
perfect dream. Just... a place that's
ours, maybe, one day... someone small
watching us figure it all out.

She remains motionless.

BEN (CONT'D)
I'm not saying its gotta happen
tomorrow. But I needed you to
know—I want that. With you... we have
time. I'm not going anywhere.

Rain taps slowly on the roof.

SUYAPA
We no know how much time we have.
And I no control if I stay or go.

Ben rifles under the seat, finds the umbrella, extends it gently toward her.

BEN

Take this. At least I can keep you dry.

She takes it. Cracks the door.

Steps into the rain—umbrella blooms with a soft click. She walks. Doesn't look back.

Ben watches her go. Then his eyes drift to the seat—still warm. The rain returns, harder now.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

A beautiful day spills through the windows. The apartment breathes now—bed made with a real headboard, furniture mismatched but claimed. A place becoming home.

In the LIVING AREA, the TV crackles with breaking news: crumbled buildings, dazed survivors, dust choking the sky. A banner scrolls beneath the chaos — EARTHQUAKE IN VENEZUELA - JULY 9, 1998.

ROSA sits rigid on the couch, hands knotted tight. SUYAPA and BEN hover nearby. Chaos—shouts in Spanish, sirens wailing, bodies moving through dust. A REPORTER (V.O.) cuts in—voice urgent, unsteady.

REPORTER

Rescue efforts are underway, but communication is still limited—

Ben pulls a calling card from his wallet, offers it to Rosa.

BEN

Here. Try again.

ROSA

Already tried. Phones no working.

He hands it to her anyway. The news cuts to a LOCAL REPORTER outside a donation center.

LOCAL REPORTER

...to help the victims of the earthquake in Venezuela, you can drop off donations at the American Red Cross, Greater Miami Chapter, located at 335 SW 27th Avenue...

Rosa digs into her bra and pulls out a crumpled hundred, handing it to Ben.

ROSA
Go. Get whatever you can.

BEN
Let me pay for...

ROSA
Just go, please.

Suyapa lingers. Her hand finds Rosa's shoulder—gentle pressure. Rosa doesn't turn. Suyapa watches her a moment, then follows one step behind Ben.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Ben and Suyapa roll a cart through the bottled water aisle. He lifts a jug, drops it in with a dull thud. Then another.

SUYAPA
Do Nebraska get earthquakes?

BEN
Nah. Just tornadoes... and ice storms.

They move to the canned goods aisle, grabbing flats of beans and soups. The cart rattles forward.

BEN (CONT'D)
There was one ice storm when I was a kid I remember... everything just stopped. Like the whole world froze.

SUYAPA
Sound scary and beautiful.

BEN
Calm. No cars. No noise. Just... white. Even Pops had to stay home from work.

Suyapa plucks cans of tuna from the shelf. Drops them in.

BEN (CONT'D)
I remember looking out the window and thinking it was... beautiful. Whole town just... turned off.

He lifts another flat of cans—halts mid-motion.

BEN (CONT'D)

My neighbor's wife had a stroke that day. All the phone lines were down. Couldn't get his truck out—snow was too deep. He sat with her all day and night. By the time someone got through... she was gone.

He drops the cans with a soft thud. Suyapa's hand finds his neck—Intimate. Familiar.

BEN (CONT'D)

That always stuck with me. Guess I always thought I'd end up somewhere warm. That cold... it was beautiful. But it was deadly.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - EVENING

Ben and Suyapa heft water and canned goods into the truck bed. The tailgate groans—a tired, metallic ache.

BEN

That was probably the most beautiful day I'd ever seen. For him, him... it was the day he lost everything.

Suyapa looks to him, hand firm on the truck bed.

SUYAPA

Sometimes pretty days lie to you.

Ben exhales a dry, bitter laugh. They finish loading in silence. The truck pulls away with a blazing Florida sunset sprawling across the horizon.

FADE TO:

EXT. SUYAPA'S MIAMI APARTMENT / BEN'S TRUCK - DAY

Upbeat Spanish music drifts from BEN'S idling truck. He leans against the passenger door, arms crossed, grin easy. SUYAPA steps out—shoulders heavy, woven black bag slung.

BEN

Finally. C'mon—I got a surprise.

Her steps falter, hesitation flickering across her face.

SUYAPA

Amor, remember I have to work tonight. Nelson counting on me. I just sent money home—my mamá need more tests. I can no miss a shift.

BEN

I know. Trust me—you'll be back in time. I promise.

Her grip cinches on the woven strap.

BEN (CONT'D)

We never get to relax. You work so hard. You deserve a break.

SUYAPA

Amor... I don't get to relax. ...Every day I work is a day I can stay. Is no a choice.

BEN

Okay. Yeah. I get it. But come with me. We'll be quick. It's Labor Day!

She searches his face. Her eyes settle—answer enough. He opens the door. She slides into her familiar copilot spot. He studies her for a beat, then turns the key.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

Where are we going?

BEN

It's a surprise.

CUT TO:

CONTINUED SCENE: BEN'S TRUCK / AMTRAK STATION - DAY

BEN'S TRUCK glides into the lot, sunlight dancing across the windshield. The towering AMTRAK sign looms above—bold, blue, unwavering as they roll beneath its shadow.

SUYAPA's posture changes instantly. Her body rigid.

The truck rolls to a stop. BEN turns to her—But she doesn't move. Eyes locked on the sign, body stiff, like the wind's been knocked out of her.

SUYAPA

I no like trains. Not again.

BEN

Just a day trip up to West Palm.

Ben watches her face shift—frustration melting into something heavier. She shifts her body as if bracing for a wave only she can feel.

FADE TO:

FLASHBACK EXT. BUS STATION, CUERNAVACA - NIGHT

SUYAPA and MARICELA step off a bus, clutching worn bags. Two sharp-dressed TROUBLEMAKERS lounge against a wall, eyes tracking them. Suyapa tenses warning grip on Maricela's arm.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
Mari, we need to find a place to
stay. Hurry, come on!

They hurry toward a flickering HOSTAL sign. Inside, the CLERK doesn't even glance up. Abandoned to the street, they veer into a narrow alley—claustrophobic, a dead end.

TROUBLEMAKER #1 (SPANISH)
Heading north, right, girls?

Suyapa and Maricela skid to a halt. The Troublemakers close in, sealing the alley.

TROUBLEMAKER #2 (SPANISH)
Alright, we'll take you — almost
for free... just one little favor.

Suyapa's nails press into Maricela's wrist. The men close in—boots scraping pavement, eyes locked. No exits.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
We don't want any trouble...

TROUBLEMAKER #1 (SPANISH)
Well, trouble is what you're gonna
find on your own.

A hand goes for Suyapa's bag— then a door explodes open.

EL SEÑOR (O.S.) (SPANISH)
Leave them alone, assholes!

EL SEÑOR (50s) emerges from a dark door, machete glinting. The Troublemakers take one step toward him, then slink away.

EL SEÑOR (SPANISH)
Get in. Now!

They dart in, the door slamming like a gunshot.

INT. EL SEÑOR'S HOME - NIGHT

A flickering bulb casts shadows on bare walls. A chipped plate of tortillas con queso waits on the table.

EL SEÑOR (SPANISH)

Eat.

They eat, heads down. He silently watches.

EL SEÑOR (CONT'D) (SPANISH)

Where are you going?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

North... on La Bestia. As soon as possible.

His gaze lands on her like a parent watching the fuse burn.

EL SEÑOR (SPANISH)

La Bestia... Everyone thinks they know it. Everyone's wrong.

He traces a burn mark on the table.

EL SEÑOR (CONT'D) (SPANISH)

A lot of girls have passed through here. Hungry, broken. I never opened that door for them... You can still turn back, girls. Go back to your families.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

No, sir. We're going for them.

His hand drifts to the back of his neck—fingers pressing in.

EL SEÑOR (SPANISH)

My daughter she stood right there, like you. Backpack ready... I told her it was crazy, she didn't know anything about the world. I offered her something to eat, at least that. She looked at me and said, "I don't even want to owe you that."

His lips press into a hard thin line. Voice catches.

EL SEÑOR (CONT'D) (SPANISH)

She left with nothing. And she never came back.

He moves forward, like the tide pulling in.

EL SEÑOR (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
 I drove her away. Years of being
 the man people run from.

The light shifts across his face verdict etched in his brow.

EL SEÑOR (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
 Tomorrow I'll take you to the spot
 where it's easier to jump on... But
 listen to me, if you keep going,
 promise me one thing... Don't let go,
 take care of each other. So your
 mothers can sleep... just one night
 without seeing ghosts.

He stands. Disappears down the hallway. The girls stay
 seated, shoulders easing for the first time.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS, LA BESTIA - EARLY MORNING

Mist hugs the rails. EL SEÑOR'S TRUCK idles near the tracks.
 SUYAPA and MARICELA climb out. Maricela offers a few bills.

MARICELA (SPANISH)
 Just in case.

EL SEÑOR glances at the money, shakes his head.

EL SEÑOR (SPANISH)
 Unless they're pesos, girl... Keep'em
 don't even want to owe you that.

Maricela grins, slips the money into her waistband. In the
 distance, a train horn cuts through the morning fog.

EL SEÑOR (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
 Run, girls!

The train thunders into view - a metal monster rips through
 the haze. Dozens of migrants break into a sprint.

A YOUNG MOTHER grips her baby, steadied by a STRANGER'S
 HAND. Men leap, clawing at metal rungs. With a sickening
 crunch, a YOUNG MAN trips - swallowed by the wheels.

Suyapa recoils, a gasp trapped in her throat.

MARICELA
 Mari!

Suyapa seizes the cold steel-grit biting into her palms. Maricela scrambles up beside her. They cling to the side of the train.

I/E. BOXCAR, LA BESTIA - CONTINUOUS

The surviving IMMIGRANTS huddle in the dim, rattling boxcar. Shadows sway across tired faces. SUYAPA and MARICELA slump in a corner, breathless.

Suyapa digs through her backpack, hands frantic-then pauses. Her fingers close around something soft. She draws out a wrapped bundle. Peels it open. Tortillas. Jerky. Oranges.

SUYAPA

El Señor...

Maricela breaks off a piece of tortilla, slow and reverent, and takes a bite-eyes glistening. World passing by outside.

BACK TO SCENE - INT. BEN'S TRUCK / AMTRAK STATION - DAY

Suyapa exhales hard, gaze searing through the train. She finally speaks-quiet, quiet, steady-as her fingers clutch the strap of her black woven bag, yanking it close like she's pulling a ripcord.

SUYAPA

On that train... four days. No food.
No water... Two men-bad men-wanted
Mari. I gave them everything we
have. No enough. They take what
they want from Mari and... me

She finally turns to Ben, resurfacing from the deep.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)

I fought a monster in my home. Rode
a monster to get here. And I see
many more on the way. Monster don't
relax... Every dollar I send home
keeps the first one away. But they
never far. Always watching.

Ben's eyes don't leave her, hands quiet but ready.

BEN

Let's get you back to work... I'll
help around the store. How about I
help keep them away for today.

She presses her palm flat against the dash. He puts the truck in gear. The Amtrak sign disappears behind them.

CUT TO:

INT. BODEGA LATINA - STOCKROOM - NIGHT

Cardboard boxes half-stacked. The store is closed — BEN and SUYAPA, still in the same clothes from the train station, are restocking together. They move in rhythm, folding boxes, stacking inventory. A storm outside rumbles low.

Ben stops with a box in hand, watching her for a moment.

BEN

Mari... what happened to her? Why
haven't I met her?

Suyapa doesn't answer right away. She folds the cardboard with quick, practiced hands—creases sharp.

SUYAPA

Deportada... The night they take her,
she ask me to work for her at the
lavanderia, her tia, you know her.
I was so tired. I say no.

She slides the box aside. Doesn't meet his eyes.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)

So she hurry trying to go from one
job to the next. Her aunt's car. No
license. No papers. Too fast. They
stop her car. Immigration come. She
go before the sun.

She wipes her hands on a rag, slow and methodical. Outside, thunder murmurs through the walls.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)

No goodbye. Just-gone.

BEN

Yeah but that's not your fault.

SUYAPA

Feel like it is...

Her eyes stay fixed on him—unblinking, glassy.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)

We promise to stay together, no let
go. But I feel safe, I let go. And
now... she gone... And I'm here.

Ben doesn't move. Just listens. The storm murmurs outside, the AC compressor groans to life. He steps toward the corner, kneels by his backpack—fingers clumsy, buying time.

BEN

Could that happen to you?

SUYAPA

Any day. One wrong move. One policia with the wrong mind... standing still is dangerous.

Ben returns, slowly. In his palm — a small, weathered envelope. He holds it out, not pushing, just open-handed.

BEN

I was gonna give this to you on the train but...

She takes it, cautious. Fingers brush his palm. Inside — a single key, that reads in small print — No Copies.

BEN

If you're with me... at least you won't be standing alone.

She curls her fingers around it. Then, without a word, she turns and picks up another box. He joins her. Thunder rolls outside. Inside, the lights shudder.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

A breeze flutters the curtains. Halloween decorations hang haphazardly—orange pumpkins strung across a bookshelf.

BEN planted on the floor, engulfed by stacked card boxes. SUYAPA sharp at the desk, phone wedged, scribbling notes.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

Yes, Fernando, two more... tomorrow afternoon. Ok, thanks.

She hangs up with a sharp clack, whips around to Ben.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)

Two more for Fernando. After el huracán, people wanna call home.

BEN

When's this Hurricane Georges supposed to hit?

SUYAPA
Maybe three four days, mi amor.

As Ben grabs a shipping label, something on the shelf stops him in his tracks. The Beanie Baby. He Lifts it gently. The torn seam—stitched shut. Not perfect. But mended.

BEN
You... fixed this?

Suyapa studies him, measuring his tone.

SUYAPA
If you no like, I can—

BEN
—No. I just didn't expect it.

She tucks her hair behind her ear, trying to hide a smile.

SUYAPA
He was sad like that. Now he happy.

Ben traces a thumb over the stitching. Sets it back on the shelf with reverence. On the far side of the bed, Suyapa's black woven bag, sticking out beneath a pile of sheets.

BEN
He does looks good next to these
Halloween decorations you made me
put up... in September.

SUYAPA
Because back home no free candy! My
dream, déjame en paz.

From outside—

ROSA (O.S.)
And my commissions? Where's my
money, papito?!

Suyapa stifles a laugh. Ben smirks.

SUYAPA
En el banco, Rosa!

Suaypa rises.

SUYAPA (*SPANISH*)
Time for work amor. Bring me?

BEN
Coffee first!

They meet at the door. A quick kiss. Ben steps out first—his leg bumps the plant. It teeters. He catches it, steadying it without looking back.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S TRUCK / MIAMI STREET - DAY

BEN pilots the truck, SUYAPA tucked against the window, rain misting the windshield. On the radio—through static—a NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.) cuts in:

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O. RADIO)
Today President Clinton announced expanded efforts to crack down on illegal immigration, pledging more enforcement at the border and faster deportations of illegal aliens.

Ben reaches for the dial—twists it up slightly.

PRESIDENT CLINTON (V.O., RADIO)
That's why our administration has moved aggressively to secure our borders—by hiring a record number of new border guards, by deporting twice as many criminal aliens as ever before... It's wrong to reward illegal behavior. We must protect American jobs and American families first.

Ben swipes a look at Suyapa just as a police cruiser blazes past—sirens screaming by, lights strobing. She doesn't flinch. Just stares out the window, shoulders stiff.

They pull into a narrow lot. A small Cuban café—dark inside. Chairs stacked. Windows shuttered. A handwritten sign taped to the glass: Cerrado.

Ben kills the engine. They sit in silence as rain snakes down the glass.

BEN
We were running late anyway... At least I can get you to work on time. Dinner tonight at eight?

She shifts, scanning the cab. Her eyes catch the empty floorboard.

SUYAPA
Amor, I left my bag at home.

BEN
You can get it after dinner
tonight, my treat I guess.

The truck pulls away. Rain hammers—not a snake, but a swarm.

CUT TO:

INT. BODEGA LATINA - NIGHT

SUYAPA, apron off, hair messily pinned, counts bills behind the register. The bell DINGS—BEN steps in, messenger bag slung, a box of calling cards tucked under one arm.

BEN
Right on time. Like a gentleman.

SUYAPA)
You know you no permitted to be in
here, señor. We closed.

BEN crosses to SUYAPA. He rests his forehead against hers, their eyes closed for a beat. Then back to business.

BEN
Just needed to fix the Lincoln
Street drop. Two packs short—I
think. Didn't write it down.

SUYAPA
Mmhmm. Romantic dinner
conversation.

BEN
A man of passion and invoices.

They move in sync, practiced rhythm. At the exit, SUYAPA yanks down the gate—metal rattling, locks snapping shut.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

They arrive at BEN'S TRUCK. SUYAPA owns her spot. She kicks off a shoe and rubs her aching foot, wincing slightly.

BEN
Shit.

He pats his pockets, then fumbles with his bag.

BEN (CONT'D)
Left the cash drop—on the counter.

SUYAPA
We come back early, it ok I
promise.

BEN
I'll be quick.

SUYAPA
Fine, I no putting my shoes on.

They cross the street. BEN reaches for her hand—she pulls it away. A glance, almost annoyed, shoes on. Then she grabs his hand, sliding in close, her head tucking gently against his shoulder.

CUT TO:

EXT. BODEGA LATINA - MOMENTS LATER

SUYAPA steps to the metal gate, her keys jangling softly. She slides one in. The gate groans open, a long, scraping wail that echoes.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - WINTER - YEARS AGO

A cemetery gate groans open, ringing across empty, frost-covered graves. YOUNG BEN (7), in an oversized coat, walks beside his DAD (30s, unshaven). They stop at a headstone. Deborah Arnold etched in cold, gray stone.

BEN
Why do we have to come here?

DAD
Somethings you don't walk away from

His dad lowers himself, slowly, locking eyes with Ben.

DAD
That day you were born Benny boy.
We lost your mama... The best day,
all ground up into the worst.

His father's grip tightens on his shoulders not angry - resolute.

DAD (CONT'D)
I think you'll do better son.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BODEGA LATINA - PRESENT

From the shadows, a SHAPE lunges. A MAN - hood up, knife glinting in the low light.

ASSAILANT

Inside. Both of you. Now!

He slashes the blade toward SUYAPA-closing the gap. BEN reacts, throwing himself between them.

BEN

Back off.

He doesn't break eye contact, positioning his body between Suyapa and the threat.

BEN

Call the cops, then run...

She remains rooted in place.

BEN

Amor... RUN!

Suyapa bolts, vanishing into the bodega.

ASSAILANT

Bad idea asshole.

With a slash the knife opens BEN's side. A quick, bright flash of blood. BEN doesn't go down.

The fight is raw - all instinct. BEN ducks a wild swing, drives a fist into the ASSAILANT's ribs, slams him against the wall - one punch, another, too much. The knife clatters away as the ASSAILANT slumps, groaning, BEN pulls back, chest heaving, fist trembling, shirt dark with blood.

INT. BODEGA LATINA - SAME TIME

DISPATCH (V.O.)

911, what's your emergency?

She peers through the window, BEN stumbles into view, blood dripping.

SUYAPA

He bleeding bad, please come fast.

She chokes on her breath, abandons the phone and sprints out.

EXT. BODEGA LATINA - CONTINUOUS

Just as his knees buckle. Her arms catch him mid-fall cradling his head before it hits the pavement. Blood stains her hands. She hurls the knife aside without looking.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

Love - hey - no, no - stay with me.

Sirens wail in the distance. Red and blue lights begin to wash across the storefront. She clutches him, bloody hands pressed to his wound, pleading.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

Don't you leave me... please...

EXT. BODEGA LATINA - MOMENTS LATER

Red and blue lights now strobe the night. Sirens whine. PARAMEDICS hoist BEN onto a stretcher - soaked in blood.

At the curb - SUYAPA stands rigid, arms cinched around herself, eyes flicking from the ambulance to the alley. A COP (40s, Latino) approaches, notepad in hand.

COP (SPANISH)

So, you work here?

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

Yes, we were closing up.

COP

Your friend...left the guy, messed up

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

He was protecting me-

Her poker face falters. Her eyes flash to the alley again.

COP (SPANISH)

-Well self-defense... that's tricky.

DISPATCH RADIO (V.O.)

Unit 11, be advised, 34A - possible assault charges pending against male suspect. Victim en route to Jackson Memorial.

Her head jerks toward the radio. Eyes sharpen.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

Charges?

COP (SPANISH)
 Maybe. Do you have ID? Address?
 Social Security?

SUYAPA
 No...I left it...

The cop's eyes lock onto hers. The alley is still clear.

COP (SPANISH)
 Ah shit, you don't have pap...?...then
 run, just go.

She stares down the alley. One step could change everything.

COP (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
 If you stay and talk, they're going
 to ask for your papers. Understand?

The cop closes their gap.

COP (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
 The gringo will be fine. But you...
 you lose everything.

Suyapa's eyes flick to the ambulance—Ben, unconscious, blood
 crusting his temple. Her foot shifts—one small step toward
 the alley. Then -she stops. Looks the cop dead in the eye.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)
 No.

The cop shakes his head, his countenance darkens.

COP (SPANISH)
 You sure?

Suyapa nods, eyes hard.

SUYAPA (ENGLISH)
 I want to make my official
 statement.

The cop's pen hovers.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)
 The man with the knife attacked
 first. Ben was protecting me.
 That's it. That's what happened.

He begins to scribble.

COP (ENGLISH)
 Alright. You gotta come with us.

Suyapa lifts her chin, staring straight ahead.

SUYAPA (SPANISH)

I know.

The cop guides her toward the squad car.

Suyapa, small against the flashing lights. Not cuffed. Her eyes follow the ambulance as it disappears into the dark.

FADE OUT.

DREAM SEQUENCE - BEN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Dark. Dim, gray light spills through half-open blinds. BEN lies in their bed.

Across the room, SUYAPA squireling on a wooden chair, backlit, a shadowy silhouette. She's lacing up her shoes. Her hair is damp, fresh from the shower.

Her words flat, practiced—like muscle memory not emotion.

SUYAPA

...I always knew when he coming. The door to my room go...eeecch when he opened it.

She sinches he laces stiff, eyes fixed on the floor.

SUYAPA (CONT'D)

That sound still wake me up sometimes.

Ben's breathing thins. The world smears at the edges. A slow, unnatural creak unfurls through the memory—longer than it should be, bending reality. Suyapa's silhouette wavers, dissolving like steam.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A soft, slow groan as the door opens. A NURSE steps in, checking a monitor. BEN jerks awake, gasping for air.

A female SHAPE rests by his bedside—soft, blurred.

BEN

Suyapa...?

He blinks. The blur sharpens—ROSA. No makeup. No armor. Just her. Slouched in the chair, fingers knotted in her lap. Eyes a deep, dark red, as if she hasn't slept for days.

BEN

Where is she? Is she okay?

ROSA won't meet his gaze.

BEN

Where is she, Rosa?

She scrambles to say anything.

ROSA

She call me... from the center.

BEN blinks, creased brow.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Detention center. La Migra picked her up that night. She gave them her name and... that was it.

He surges up—too fast. He gasps, clutching his side.

BEN

No—no. That can't—

He doubles over with pain. The monitor spikes. ROSA rises to his side, attempting to calm him.

ROSA

Shh—papito. Please. She just—she said don't let you wake up alone.

Her fingers thread through his hair —trembling as they go.

ROSA (CONT'D)

She made me promise. Said if she ran, if she no talk to the cops, maybe you get in trouble.

BEN trembles eyes darting—unsure if this is still his dream.

BEN

I told her to run.

ROSA just shakes her head. BEN crumples—one hand clutching hers, the other pressing hard to his ribs.

BEN

Goddammit—

ROSA draws him close, her own voice fractured.

ROSA

—Lo siento... lo siento, papito...

The beeping monitor slowly steadies again.

FADE OUT.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The door swings open.

ROSA steps in first, steadying BEN as he limps behind her. His face is pale, jaw shadowed with days of unshaven growth. A gauze pad peeks from beneath his shirt—his body stiff.

ROSA
I'll come by later. Bring food.
Make sure you don't bleed on my
floors, papito.

Her voice barely reaches him—soft, uncertain. BEN doesn't respond, just stares ahead. ROSA gives his arm a final squeeze, lingering for a beat, then slips out.

The door clicks shut. Silence settles over the apartment

Same cluttered desk. Same flickering lamp. BEN stands, unsure where to be. He drifts toward the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The bed's unmade. Her side still shaped into the pillow. At the foot—half-buried in tangled sheets—her black woven bag. Out of place. He stares. Then slowly kneels.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

BEN unfolds the bag. Gently, like it might break.

Inside— A coin purse with some crumpled bills. A notebook page with names and numbers. A picture of Ben and Suyapa tucked into her passport and a weathered map.

He carefully unfurls it.

A paper map of Central America, creased, sun-faded. In the middle of Honduras, drawn in soft red pen— A heart circling one name: LEJAMANI.

BEN sinks to the hard floor, staring at it.

CUT TO:

INT. BODEGA LATINA STOCK ROOM - DAY

BEN sets a box down. NELSON signals to the same old chair.

NELSON
Sit, sit hombre.

BEN lowers himself carefully—NELSON perforates the box, starts verifying inventory, but his eyes remain on BEN.

NELSON (CONT'D)
You okay amigo?

Ben exhales through his nose, shoulders barely rising.

NELSON (CONT'D)
You saved her. And my store. Most people don't do that.

Ben avoids Nelson's eyes.

BEN
Doesn't feel like I saved anything.

NELSON closes the box. His hands palming the table.

NELSON (CONT'D)
I miss her too... Sabes, back home in Guatemala, my papa had this dog. Smart. Loyal. Never left our side. One problem—he chase cars. Couldn't help it... One day, he caught one. Got the bumper, wouldn't let go.

NELSON shakes his head, remembering what came next.

NELSON (CONT'D)
Start crying... Now what? Driver gets out. Kick him. Right in the mouth.

Ben raises an eyebrow.

BEN
Jesus.

NELSON
Dog let go, he look around... then see another car. Take off again.

NELSON finishes his review and closes the box of cards.

NELSON (CONT'D)
Cards still sell good. But if you need someone to kick you in the mouth mijo... I'm available.

NELSON slides and envelope full of cash across the table.

BEN stands, distracted. Takes a few steps toward the door—Stops. Turns back, grabs the money and heads out.

INT. MAIN STORE - CONTINUOUS

Ben steps into the front. The NEW YOUNG CLERK stocks a shelf, not looking up. Ben approaches the door. His hand hovers over the handle. He glances back toward the register — where Suyapa used to stand.

On the counter a large display of calling cards catches his eye — bright designs, each stamped with flags of Central American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua...

And Honduras. Ben's gaze locks onto the Honduran flag.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

In the blistering heat, BEN lifts a heavy box of calling cards into the back of his pickup. Nearby, RAY stands by his cherry-red Corvette — gleaming beside Ben's rusted truck.

Ray grabs the box from Ben and hurls it into the truck bed with a thud. Ben reaches into his pocket, pulls out a folded check, and holds it out.

RAY

Damn. This one's worth more than my car. And that's saying something.

Ben doesn't smile. Wipes sweat from his brow. Ray sets another box down, slower this time. Eyes on Ben.

RAY (CONT'D)

You used to look like a guy with a dream. Guess the dream ran you over, hermano.

BEN

Feels like it.

Ray flashes a glance at the truck — packed with boxes, the fading paint. Back to Ben, the check still in his hand.

RAY

You just hand me the biggest check I ever seen — and now you're acting like you a dog with his tail between his legs.

Ben opens the driver's door. Ray drops the last box—not in the truck bed, but hard at Ben's feet. Cards rattle inside. His eyes locked on the check like it's a betrayal.

RAY (CONT'D)
You leave now, hermano — how the hell am I keep all this?

Ray nods toward the Corvette, the parking lot, the whole flimsy empire he's built on Ben's back.

BEN
I'm sick of the heat, man. Sick of the cards... This can't be... it.

Ray now leaning against his shiny sportscar.

RAY
You can do better than this?

Ben doesn't answer right away—his gaze distant, fingers tightening on the hot doorframe.

BEN (SPANISH)
Yes I can.

Ben drives off, the truck kicking up a cloud of dust. Ray watches him go, the check crumpled in his fist, the Corvette glinting behind him like a mirage.

CUT TO:

INT. LAVANDERÍA MARICELA - LATE AFTERNOON

Dryers hum, their rhythm steady and low. The sun leans through the window, warm and slanted.

MARICELA'S TÍA folds a stack of towels behind the counter. A tray of Ben's calling cards sits, half-used, a little bent.

The bell jingles. She doesn't look up.

MARICELA'S TÍA
If that bag stink again, I charge double price. No cards for laundry, real monies this time.

BEN
Less stink, more sadness.

She snorts, finally looks up.

MARICELA'S TÍA
Mmm. Sad no wash out so easy.

Ben sets a laundry bag on the counter, then slides over a thicker-than-usual stack of calling cards. She catches it.

MARICELA'S TÍA
That more card than normal.

BEN
They'll have to last.

She folds another towel. Quieter now.

MARICELA'S TÍA
Nelson tell me what happen.
Pobrecita la Suyapita.

Ben barely reacts. Numb

MARICELA'S TÍA (CONT'D)
Nelson hurting bad... Looks like you
still bleeding too, just not where
people see.

Ben watches the dryer spin. Doesn't argue. She taps the stack of cards, lines the edges.

MARICELA'S TÍA (CONT'D)
When my Mari got, you know
deportada, I say her, you can't
escape what yours mija. Only thing
you can do is walk toward someone
who wants it too... And you know
what? She got a good man in Panama
now. Baby on the way.

Ben drifts toward the exit. At the vending machine, he stops. Slides in a crumpled dollar. Presses C7 - Corn Nuts. They drop with a clatter. He pops them open, chewing loud as he's about to push through the door.

MARICELA'S TÍA
Come tomorrow, clothes ready then.

The bell jingles once behind him. Then folds the next towel.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

BEN emerges from his truck, Pollo Tropical bag in tow. He moves slower than usual, wincing as he climbs the stairs.

He raps the door. The door swings. ROSA eyes him-his bandaged side, stiff posture, pain in his movements.

ROSA
Dinner?

BEN
Only the best.

ROSA
Ya voy. I get us a beer.

She disappears.

BEN eases into a chair by a small table—half-covered in a nearly completed jigsaw puzzle. ROSA reappears with two beers. They clink bottles and settle in. They eat in silence for a beat—both occasionally placing puzzle pieces without comment.

ROSA
How's the king of calling cards?

BEN
Sore.

He chews, swallows. No taste. ROSA studies him—

ROSA (CONT'D)
Still hurts?

BEN
All the time.

ROSA
I ever tell you I came here for university? Got a scholarship. Business administrations. First from my family to leave Venezuela. Thought maybe, finally, maybe somebody'd see me.

BEN glances up. She's not looking at him—just talking.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Second year, before I was Rosa, I met a man. Older. But he say I was beautiful. Paid my rent. Took me places. I thought—maybe this is love... One night, I tell him the truth. I showed him Rosa, just one time. He not like that.

She brushes her hair back, shows a faint scar on her temple.

ROSA (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
After that, on my own. Learned to
disappear... But I go home to
Venezuela that summer, Rosa went
home. My father looked at me one
time and say—I have a son or I have
no child.

Ben's jaw tightens. His hand drifts to his side.

ROSA (CONT'D)
My sister—five years younger,
corazón puro—she find me that night
she say, "You brave. You make me
proud."—I finally talk to her on
the phone today Everyone okay.
Thank you...

A loving smile.

ROSA (CONT'D)
I try for years to be lovable.
Small, quiet, whatever it took... But
you know, she love me like this.

She gently presses a puzzle piece into place.

ROSA (CONT'D)
I used to tell myself, if a man buy
me a designer purse, that's enough,
I marry him on the spot.

She looks directly at BEN now.

ROSA (CONT'D)
But now... I got something maybe
better. No romance. No perfect. But
a real man who see me. Who listen.
Who bring me chicken and never once
make me feel small.

She reaches out, gently lays a hand over his.

ROSA (CONT'D)
And now you—you look like a man
who's been through war. But you're
still standing papito.

BEN
Barely.

ROSA
That's enough.

A breath together.

BEN
I don't know if I can fix this.

ROSA
Maybe it not broken.

Another breath.

BEN
And the business?

ROSA
Give it away. Burn it down.

Ben reaches to the edge of the table. He picks up the final puzzle piece. Holds it a second, gently extends it to her.

BEN
You finish it.

She receives it with a wry smiles. Presses it into place—with a click. Puzzle complete. They sit there a moment.

BEN
Thank you. Te quiero, amiga. How'd you get so smart, anyway?

ROSA
Don't forget beautiful.

He softly chuckles— His hand moves to his side, but the smile lingers.

FADE OUT.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Soft light filters through the blinds. A half-packed duffel sits on the bed. Coffee cools on the counter.

A knock. Ben crosses the room, opens the door—light spilling in from outside.

Ben swings the door open to find two Miami-Dade cops, glowing in the morning sun.

COP #1
Ben... Benedict?

He re-checks his small notepad

COP #1 (CONT'D)
Benedict Arnold? Man, that's a
tough name walk around with.

BEN
Depends on who you're walking with.

A genuine smile.

COP #2
Just wanted to let you know--no
charges. Guy you stopped was
already wanted. Robberies,
assaults. He's being charged with
aggravated assault.

Ben offers a mechanic nod.

BEN
Thanks.

COP #1
Sure thing.

Ben moves to close the door--

COP #2
Actually--one more thing.

Ben presses his lips together. then fully reopens the door
without a word.

COP #2 (CONT'D)
Julio Mendez. That name familiar?

Ben's face says it all.

BEN
Yeah. I knew him.

COP #1
He got picked up yesterday. Check
fraud, fake accounts. One of the
banks linked your name as a
potential victim.

COP #2
Figured you'd want to know.

Ben nods again--less mechanically this time.

BEN
I do. Thanks.

Ben closes the door but it drifts open an inch. Ben stops. His eyes drop to the familiar house plant – slightly askew, almost falling again, a few spilled leaves on the floor.

Then – he gathers it up.

He studies it for a moment, before carries it across the room. He places it down by the kitchen window, adjusting it so it gets just the right amount of sun light.

Steps back. Takes it all in. It's not perfect, but it's no longer in his way. Now he crosses back to the door.

This time, he closes it firmly. The latch clicks. Solid. No drifting open. Ben takes a breath.

CUT TO:

EXT. AVENTURA MALL - DAY

BEN walks through an outdoor plaza, careful with each step—his side still tender beneath his shirt.

Shoppers pass. A Louis Vuitton store gleams across the way—sleek glass, clean lines. It doesn't register with him.

A sun-faded storefront appears: TRAVEL AGENCY.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAVEL AGENCY - MOMENTS LATER

A familiar bell ring as BEN steps inside.

Behind the counter, a TRAVEL AGENT (40s, big hair, bigger earrings, attitude) looks up from a bowl of hard candy.

TRAVEL AGENT

Well look at you dear. You need a flight or a hug?

She laughs at her own joke, BEN offers her a small smile.

BEN

Honestly... both.

She raises an eyebrow—intrigued.

TRAVEL AGENT

Come here, sweetie. Let's get you taken care of. Where you headed?

BEN

Honduras, one way.

That gets her attention. She sets the candy down.

TRAVEL AGENT

Well well, Not exactly numero uno
tourist destination. Business or
pleasure?

BEN

Personal. Have to find someone.

Her face softens as her heart melts a bit.

TRAVEL AGENT

Okay, sweetie. Now you're speaking
my language, a romantic... Passport?

BEN

Yeah.

TRAVEL AGENT

Credit card?

BEN

Unfortunately.

TRAVEL AGENT

Perfect. Let's get you there before
you change your mind.

She starts typing-loud, fast.

BEN

I've never even bought a plane
ticket before-

She pauses her typing. Looks at him- amused, half mothering.

TRAVEL AGENT

Then here's your crash course: Pack
light, don't drink the tap water,
and if the overhead bin doesn't
close- it's not your problem.

She slides a form toward him.

TRAVEL AGENT (CONT'D)

You got someone meeting you in...

BEN

Lejamaní.

TRAVEL AGENT

Now you made that up dear.

BEN
I didn't. It's real.

She types it in, still skeptical.

TRAVEL AGENT
Alright. One-way, looks like San
Pedro Sula is your spot, hunn.

BEN signs the form. She hands him the printed ticket.

TRAVEL AGENT (CONT'D)
Whatever you're going after... I hope
it's worth it.

BEN
She is.

CUT TO:

EXT. AVENTURA MALL - MOMENTS LATER

BEN back outside in the sun, ticket in hand.

Across the way—Louis Vuitton, glowing like a beacon. He
doesn't look at it directly. But we do. He turns. Strolls
right toward it without hesitation.

FADE TO:

EXT. STORAGE FACILITY - DAY

Ben's truck scrapes the wall as he backs into a storage
unit, breaking loose the duct-taped mirror. Ben exits
carefully, retrieves it, casually tosses it into the bed,
locks the unit, wincing as he extends his arm. Then snags
his duffle. Without looking back, he enters a waiting cab.

INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS

BEN
To the airport, please.

The cab pulls away, one tail light out — flickering dim.

CUT TO:

INT. MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

At a bustling gate, BEN stands apart from the crowd, duffel
over his shoulder, hands in pockets, scanning.

A YOUNG MOTHER scrambles by, gripping her SON's hand.

YOUNG MOTHER
¡Apuráte, papito, apuráte!

The word papito lands—a flicker of emotion. Rosa.

BEGIN FLASHBACK MONTAGE - BEN'S FINAL DAYS IN MIAMI

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

BEN on the phone, one hand pressing gently to wound.

BEN (V.O.)
Rosa will take the orders from now
on. You pay her. Everything runs
through her.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

BEN walks ROSA through his system—inventory signs, order bins, reorder stacks. He moves meticulously, occasionally leaning against the table to ease pressure off his ribs.

EXT. BODEGA LOADING AREA - DAY

NELSON clasps BEN's hand. Ben's jaw tics—just barely—as pressure lands on the bruised muscle. But he holds firm.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mountains of calling card boxes, labeled and organized. BEN, moving slow, adjusts one—pauses to catch his breath.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - FINAL MOMENTS

BEN planted in the middle of the apartment takes one last look around. A small, meaningful object rests atop the highest stack of calling cards. (We don't see it—yet.)

ROSA (V.O.) MEMORY
You look like a man who's been
through war. But you're still
standing... that's enough.

He steps to the door, winces slightly as he shoulders his bag. Locks the door behind him, puts the key in his pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - GATE AREA - DAY

The boarding area for the flight is alive with movement. Families gathered close. Plastic bags tied in knots. Loud conversations in Spanish bouncing in every direction.

BEN sits stiffly in a row of chairs, a small duffel bag at his feet. He shifts, grimacing, hand brushing his side.

Tucked into a side pocket of his duffel – the Beanie Baby peeks out. Mended.

A LITTLE BOY, maybe seven, perched beside him. A coloring book balanced on his lap, a crayon behind his ear. The boy pulls himself away from his coloring and glances over.

LITTLE BOY
You are going to Honduras?

BEN
Yeah.

LITTLE BOY
Me too. To see my abuela. She has chickens and a mango tree.

Ben leans forward, voice low, a message meant just for him.

BEN
Sounds like a nice place to visit.

The boy shrugs as only little boys can.

LITTLE BOY
It's dusty and hot. But she lets me sleep in the hammock... Are you going to see your abuela?

BEN
No. I'm going to find a friend.

The boy considers this.

LITTLE BOY
How you gonna find him?

BEN hesitates, ponders the question.

BEN
Her... And I don't know really.

The boy aggressively frowns.

LITTLE BOY
I don't know, man... You might not find her. It's a big crazy place.

BEN raises an eyebrow—startled by the honesty. The boy leans in—like he's letting him in on a secret this time.

LITTLE BOY (CONT'D)
 But my uncle always says if you
 don't give up, you always find what
 you're looking for.

The boy lifts his hand for a high five. BEN leans in,
 connects—wincing from the motion. The boy pulls back.

LITTLE BOY (CONT'D)
 Sorry! Did I hurt you?

BEN
 Nah. Just sore.

LITTLE BOY
 You don't look sore. Maybe just a
 little scared.

BEN
 Maybe I am a little scared, but I'm
 going anyway.

He glances down at his belongings. Pulls out the Beanie
 Baby—mended, worn, but whole. Offers it to the boy.

BEN
 For the trip... He's tougher than he
 looks.

The boy's eyes light up — electric smile.

LITTLE BOY
 For real?

BEN releases the toy into the boys hands. The boy clutches
 the Beanie Baby, beaming.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Final boarding for Flight 234 to
 San Pedro Sula.

The boy's MOTHER appears, frantically gathering bags.

MOTHER
 ¡Vámonos, hijito!

The boy grabs his coloring book, cradling the Beanie Baby
 under his arm like treasure. Before leaving, he turns back
 to BEN.

LITTLE BOY
 Hope you find who you're looking
 for!

BEN

Me too.

The boy dashes to catch up with his mother.

BEN rises at almost full speed. Shoulders his duffel with a muffled groan. And steps forward—ticket in hand.

INT. BOARDING TUNNEL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

BEN approaches the gate. The line inching forward. He clutches his paper ticket, duffel slung over his shoulder.

A UNIFORMED GATE ATTENDANT (20s, tired but alert) clocks the size of his bag as he steps forward.

GATE ATTENDANT

That bag is too big for carry-on
sir. You'll need to check it.

Ben reacts, shoulders slump—already halfway turning, ready to comply —But he straightens, just a little.

BEN

I can make it fit... It's all I've
got.

She pauses, watching him. Then rolls her eyes and huffs.

GATE ATTENDANT

Just make sure it doesn't block the
aisle. Full flight today.

She scans his ticket. Ben meets her eyes, calm. Ben takes one long step onto the jetway—and vanishes from view.

FADE TO:

INT. SAN PEDRO SULA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Humid air pulls beads out from BEN'S temples. No AC—oppressive. Travelers bustle. Spanish blasts over the PA.

He stands at a glass-enclosed money exchange kiosk, its digital exchange rate screen blinking behind the counter. A YOUNG FEMALE CLERK motions him forward.

YOUNG CLERK (SPANISH)

Good morning.

BEN (SPANISH)

Good morning, I want to exchange
dollars.

Accent lands on the "a"—a subtle mistake—but she get it.

YOUNG CLERK (SPANISH)

How much?

BEN slides five \$100 bills over. The exchange rate blinks:
\$1 = 14.82 Lempiras.

The clerk cautiously counts. Stacks the heavy bills.

YOUNG CLERK (CONT'D) (SPANISH)

Seven thousand four hundred and ten
Lempiras.

Ben stares at the stack of bills—not expecting it to be that thick. He tucks the cash into a bank envelope, zips it shut. The clerk leans forward, kindly.

YOUNG CLERK (CONT'D) (SPANISH)

Anything else I can help you with?

BEN fumbles a bit, searching for words.

BEN (SPANISH)

Help... yes... where are the taxis?

She smiles, charmed by his effort.

YOUNG CLERK (SPANISH)

Over there. Go straight and you'll
see them on your right.

A crooked grin tugs at Ben's face.

BEN (SPANISH)

Thank you, thank you so much.

He slings his bag carefully and continues on his way.

EXT. SAN PEDRO SULA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Heat and chaos crash into BEN. Taxi drivers shout. Buses belch black exhaust. Ben blinks, disoriented.

A HONDURAN TAXI DRIVER (40s) waves him over.

HONDURAN TAXI DRIVER (SPANISH)

Where you headed?

BEN (SPANISH)

The bus station.

Without a word, the driver taps the roof twice, then gestures toward the door.

HONDURAN TAXI DRIVER (SPANISH)
 Okay, let's go. 80 Lempiras.

Ben lumbers into the battered Datsun. The taxi lurches into the sprawl of San Pedro Sula.

CUT TO:

I/E. SAN PEDRO SULA TAXI - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The radio blares. Dust kicks up outside. Traffic and chaos.

Ben's bag cinched in his hands, as he watches the unfamiliar chaos blur past the windows. A whistle pierces the chaos and a POLICE OFFICER steps into the road, hand raised.

The taxi brakes hard. Two POLICEMEN approach—rifles slung, bored expressions.

POLICEMAN #1 (SPANISH)
 Papers.

The driver opens the glove box, hands over a crumpled folder.

POLICEMAN #2 (SPANISH)
 And the vehicle registration?

The driver shrugs, knowingly uneasy.

HONDURAN TAXI DRIVER (SPANISH)
 I had it. It must be at home.

The cops exchange a look. One taps the roof.

POLICEMAN #1 (SPANISH)
 Get out. We're going to the
 station. Can't be left like this.

The driver grumbles, gets out. A cop opens Ben's door.

POLICEMAN #2 (TO BEN) (SPANISH)
 The taxi can't keep going like
 this. You have to get out, sir.

BEN (SPANISH)
 What? I... I need... to get to the
 station... please...

The cop just shrugs. Ben starts to reach for the door—resigned, shoulders falling. He's about to step out...

He hesitates. Looks at the cop's sweat-soaked collar, the rifle, the dead heat rising off the pavement.

Something shifts. Ben retrieves his passport, opens it, then slowly folds a \$20 bill inside.

BEN (SPANISH)
 Could you check my papers, please?
 Maybe you gentlemen are thirsty?

He offers it up. Not slick. Not cocky. Just... hoping. The cop smirks. Flips through the passport. Takes the \$20 and nods.

POLICEMAN #1 (SPANISH)
 Yes, sir, very thirsty, right? Very thirsty.

The cop returns his gaze to the taxi driver:

POLICEMAN #1 (SPANISH)
 Get your papers in order, buddy.

The driver quickly jumps back in—relieved. The taxi springs back into traffic. Ben doesn't speak or slump.

EXT. SAN PEDRO SULA BUS TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

The taxi weaves through carts and shouting vendors, finally pulling up in front of the crowded terminal.

BEN reaches for his cash. Only hundred-lempira bills. Ben offers a 100. The driver waves it off.

HONDURAN TAXI DRIVER(CONT'D) (SPANISH)
 No, man. Thanks for the help with
 the police. Seriously, thanks.

Ben pauses, then places the bill on the center console.

BEN
 No, take it.

The driver gives a quick look—surprised, almost respectful. Ben steps out into the chaos. The taxi drives off, swallowed by the swirl of noise and exhaust. He shoulders his duffel, takes a breath—then heads toward the terminal doors.

CUT TO:

INT. SAN PEDRO SULA BUS TERMINAL - MOMENTS LATER

Vendors shout. Buses roar. Humid air presses in. At the front of the jostling line, BEN stands still. Behind him—grumbles, shifting feet, impatience building.

A KIND-FACED MAN (50s) behind scratched glass waves him up.

KIND-FACED MAN (SPANISH)

Next.

Ben steps forward, duffel over one shoulder, unfolding a creased paper map.

BEN (SPANISH)

I am going... Here.

His finger finds the red heart left by Suyapa. The man nods, tracing the route.

KIND-FACED MAN (SPANISH)

Bus 18 to Tegucigalpa. Get off in Comayagua. Then, another bus to La Paz. It passes through Lejamaní.

BEN

Si, si.

The man checks the log. Frowns.

KIND-FACED MAN (SPANISH)

...But, I'm sorry there are no seats left. It's full.

Ben deflates—shoulders start to drop.

BEN (SPANISH)

But I need to go... Today

KIND-FACED MAN (SPANISH)

There is another one tomorrow.

A man behind Ben groans loudly. A sharp

MAN (O.S.) (SPANISH)

Hurry up!

Ben clutches the map tighter, then leans back in. Voice shaky but strong:

BEN (SPANISH)

No. Today. I'll pay more. It's fine. But I need to go... It's...important.

The man watches him for a moment, then shrugs—pulls out a different ticket pad.

KIND-FACED MAN (SPANISH)

There's one. Executive class. More expensive...

Ben doesn't hesitate, reaches into his pocket. Pulls out a 100-lempira bill. Slides it under the glass.

KIND-FACED MAN (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
...More expensive.

Ben this time hesitates. Then pulls out another 100-Lempira bill. Hands it over. The man coyly pockets one of the bills, the other goes in the register, and tears off a ticket.

KIND-FACED MAN (CONT'D) (SPANISH)
Bus 18. To the left. It leaves in
15 minutes.

Ben grabs the ticket, tucks the map into his bag. He scurries off-flushed, breath tight, but still moving.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS PLATFORM - MOMENTS LATER

Ben stands near Bus 18, ticket in hand. Heat presses down. He checks the number again--then again.

A VENDOR KID (10), wiry and quick, weaves through the crowd, tugging a battered cooler on a rope-tied cart.

VENDOR KID (SPANISH)
Cold water! Five lempiras!

Ben smacks his lips, then digs in his pocket. Pulls out some coins. Hands one over.

The kid arm dives into the cooler, pulling out a square plastic bag of cold water, and tosses it to Ben. Ben stares at it, puzzled. No cap. No straw. No clue.

He flips it in his hand, trying to find the "opening." The kid watches for an amusing moment.

Then, without a word, the kid grabs another bag from the cooler, bites off one corner, and guzzles it down. Ben closely observes, then smiles, gets it now.

He lifts his bag of water, mimics the kid, bites off the corner--successfully this time.

A quick sip. Cold. Refreshing. He nods in thanks.

BEN
Gracias.

The kid shrugs, grinning, and keeps moving through the crowd.

Ben takes another sip, adjusts his duffel, as he boards the bus. Dust swirls. Engines roar. BEN is aboard Bus 18—destination: Comayagua.

CUT TO:

INT. HONDURAN BUS - DAY

The bus rattles. BEN's head rests on the warm glass, eyes closed, duffel jammed at his feet. Outside—rolling hills blur.

IMAGINED MEMORY- INT. BEN'S MIAMI APARTMENT - NIGHT

ROSA bursts into Ben's apartment. The room is still. Boxes packed, a Louis Vuitton purse rests on top of the stack.

She glides to it and gently opens the purse. Inside: a folded note. She unfolds it—deliberately.

BEN (V.O.)

Rosa, Everything hurt when I woke up. It still does. But you were there. Not fixing. Just there.

She reads, a motionless statue in the middle of the room.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I know it's not easy for you. People don't always see you. Some look through you. But I didn't. I don't. I didn't fall for your body, or what you can give me. I stayed because you stayed. You loved me without needing to be asked.

Her eyes for the first time, wet with tears.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This business only worked when I finally stopped talking and started listening. You taught me that

She see's the reflection of herself in the window.

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's yours now. All of it. The clients, the books, the story we built. I know you'll do better. You already know how to keep it alive—you gave it its heart. Time for you to give it your voice.

She folds the note tenderly. Clutches it to her chest. She reaches for a binder, breath steadying. Her eyes sharpen.

EXT. HONDURAN COUNTRYSIDE - CONTINUOUS

The bus rattles along an unknown highway. Green hills unfold. A loud hiss. The bus jolts, smoke billows. Ben's eyes open.

BUS DRIVER
Everyone out! Out of the bus!

Passengers groan. BEN confusingly grabs his duffel, steps into the heat. The driver lifts the hood—steam pours out. BEN stands to the side—no shade, no help in sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1 HOUR LATER

A diminutive, faded yellow school bus stops on the shoulder of a sun-bleached road. Hand-painted across the back window: *El Camina Con Nosotros - Misión Hondureña*

Crosses sway from the rearview mirror. A worn Spanish-language Bible sits on the dash.

Passengers restlessly mill in the heat. BEN steps forward from the group, waving his arms to be seen.

GERRY (O.S.) (60 YOUTH PASTOR GRINGO)
Hey, gringo! You alright?

BEN
Bus broke down.

GERRY
Yeah, that happens. Another'll come quick. Give it a little while.

BEN
Already been an hour, I need to get to Coma...Comayagua—today.

Gerry leans out the window, assessing him.

GERRY
Sorry, can't help. We're headed to El Conejo. Running late already. Outreach group's waiting.

Ben closes the gap, without breaking eye contact.

BEN
I get it, but... look, I'm not asking
for much. Just a ride close. Drop
me anywhere along the road, I can
figure from there. I got cash.

Sally leans over from the driver's seat, eyeing him.

SALLY (50'S YOUTH PASTOR WIFE GRINGA)
You traveling with someone?

BEN
No. Just me.

SALLY
You with a church?

BEN
No ma'am.

Steadies himself with his shoulders back.

BEN (CONT'D)
I just... just need to get there. I
wouldn't ask if it didn't.

GERRY
That your only bag?

Ben eagerly nods affirmative.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Alright. Toss it in. But if we
smell trouble, you're kicked off
the ark.

BEN
Understood.

Gerry opens the side door with a loud creak.

Ben climbs aboard. His eyes drift to the Bible on the dash,
the crosses, the hand-painted lettering.

BEN (CONT'D)
I, uh... I'm not that religious.

GERRY
Me either. I'm just here for the
girls.

He jerks a thumb toward the front.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Been chasing that one for thirty
years. Only way she'd let me tag
along.

SALLY
Says he's here to serve the Lord,
but all he does is flirt with the
cook.

Ben chuckles—grateful, relieved. The bus powers on.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSIONARY BUS - LATER

The bus hums through the hills. Wind whistles faintly
through the cracked windows. BEN sits behind GERRY and
SALLY, his duffel between his feet.

He contemplates the world through the window as he speaks.

BEN
...They patched me up. She had called
my neighbor to come sit with me so
I wouldn't wake up alone. But she
couldn't stay. Immigration had her
before I even knew what happened.

Silences except for the wheels thrumming underfoot.

GERRY
Man, that is tough stuff.

Gerry stares straight ahead at the open road. A warm smile
comes to his weathered face.

GERRY
You ever hear the story of the road
to Emmaus? Always pictured it like
a Nebraska highway, lined up with
endless corn fields on both sides.

Ben doesn't respond.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Anyway, couple of guys, walking
back home after the crucifixion.
They'd just watched the man they
believed was the Son of God... die.
Beaten. Hung on a cross. Buried.
Everything they believed in—gone.
Just like that... They didn't know
what else to do.
(MORE)

GERRY (CONT'D)
So they walked home. Seven miles.
Heads down. Grieving. Just... trying
to make sense of it.

Ben sees Gerry in his periphery.

GERRY (CONT'D)
And then this guy joins them. Just
some dude, falls into step with
'em. Listens. Talks. Walks the
whole way. I guess they liked him
cause they invited him over to eat.
break bread as they would say...
suddenly they realize—it was Jesus.
He'd been with them the whole time.
They just couldn't see it 'til they
were ready.

Gerry settles back into his seat as he takes a swig from his
dented water bottle.

SALLY
Well I'll be. You did listen at
Bible study.

GERRY
Only after they stopped passing out
the coffee and donuts.

Ben lets out the softest laugh. Then looks out the window
again. No smile this time—just thought. The bus rolls on.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMAYAGUA BUS STOP - SUNSET

Their little bus pulls to a stop, glowing in the amber
light. Ben steps down, shouldering his duffel once more.

BEN
Let me give you something for gas.

GERRY
Not a chance.

Sally leans over, with a wide, excited grin.

SALLY
Go get your girl son.

Ben lingers a moment, overwhelmed.

BEN
God bless.

GERRY
Already did.

Gerry gives Sally a side hug, pulls her in gently

GERRY
Every day.

The door swings shut. BEN steps down, duffel slung over his shoulder, and heads toward the makeshift terminal.

Through the smudged glass, GERRY and SALLY watch him go—quiet, concerned. Like parents watching their child walk into school alone for the first time.

FADE TO:

EXT. COMAYAGUA HONDURAS BUS TERMINAL - DAY

The yellow school bus pulls away, engine rumbling.

CRACK—a soda bottle crushes under the tire.

A nearby donkey spooks. His cart slams into a leaning light pole. The pole groans—tips toward the benches.

Shouts. Movement. Ben on his bench, next to the woman and her child. Ben grabs them—yanks them clear— just as the pole crashes down, inches from where they sat.

Silence. Dust.

BUS BARKER (O.S.)
¡La Paz! ¡Ajuterique! ¡Lejamaní!

Ben eyes jolt up. Pulls out his map. Eyes the waiting bus.

He shoulders his bag—and boards.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY TURNOFF - LATE AFTERNOON

The next bus hums down a quiet stretch of highway, mountains looming ahead. A dirt road veers left—its crooked sign reads: La Paz.

At the fork, a woman in a crisp nurse's uniform lifts her arm for a cab. Sunlight gleams off her white dress, her posture steady, unhurried.

Through the window-BEN sees her. Eyes locked. Then-THUMP.
The bus lurches onto the dirt road.

SMASH CUT:

INT. MIAMI HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A heavy knock on a door, flickering fluorescent light hums overhead. Muted Spanish news flickers on a corner-mounted TV. Soft beeping keeps time.

BEN lies still in the hospital bed. Gauze wraps his side. One hand clutches the thin blanket, pulled halfway to his chest. Eyes open. Watching.

A NURSE (50s), steady hands and sun-worn skin, leans in to adjust the IV. Her badge: Santos, R.N. She shifts-accidentally brushes his bandaged side.

BEN flinches, a sharp breath escaping.

BEN

Ah-

NURSE

Sorry, mijo. Still tender.

She hums a faint salsa tune under her breath-cheerful, effortless. Moves with practiced grace, adjusting his IV gently, then the blinds. Never missing a beat.

BEN

You seem, happy... you must like what
you do?

Her head snaps to attention.

NURSE

At first? No. It was... too much. All
the blood, the noise. People crying
out... I used to take it all home
with me.

She smooths the blanket over him.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Now I try to focus on the ones who
get better.

Ben studies her as she works.

BEN

What's their secret? The people who
get better?

She considers the question.

NURSE

Simple, they got someone who loves them... Someone they believe they'll see again.

BEN

What if that someone is far away?

She looks at him— like the answer is obvious.

NURSE

Then you've got all the reason in the world to get better mijo.

She pats his shoulder, and turns to the door.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Rest now. Sounds like you got a long road ahead of you.

She exits quietly, leaving the door cracked. Ben lies back. Stares at the ceiling. Then — slowly, deliberately — he flexes his feet beneath the blanket. One at a time.

CUT TO:

BACK TO PRESENT - INT. BUS - DAY

Ben shifts more vertical in his seat, hand hovering over his side to offer protection as he moves.

Outside the window: fields give way to the edge of town.

CUT TO:

EXT. PULPERÍA CASTRO - SUNSET

Ben gingerly exits the bus, duffel on his shoulder. The air hums with the quiet of a small village. He stops just outside the pulpería— a tidy little shop with fresh paint, a noticeably new and even shutter, and a swept threshold.

The contrast to Comayagua and San Pedro Sula is striking—no vendors shouting, no horns. Just breeze and birdsong. Ben breathes it in. Noticing. He steps inside the humble store.

INT. PULPERÍA CASTRO - CONTINUOUS

Dim and clean. A single fluorescent hums. A fan spins lazily overhead. Tiny shelves, neatly arranged.

Behind the counter: SUYAPA'S TÍA—sturdy, mid-60s, iron-straight spine. She notices as Ben steps inside.

Ben confidently snags a bag of water from a cooler in the corner, as he turns to the counter to pay he bumps a crate of plantains with his foot. A few thump onto the floor.

Ben steadies himself, calmly picks up the plantains, and piles them back in order. She finally breaks the silence.

PULPERÍA OWNER (SPANISH)

One lempira.

Ben digs into his pocket. Pulls out a handful of coins. Sets down two single lempira coins. She pauses. Dramatically slides one back to him.

Only then does she break eye contact, dropping the coin into a jar with a quiet clink. Then:

BEN (SPANISH)

I am looking for Suyapa Castro.

She takes a look at him, head to toe. Silent. Expression unreadable. She doesn't respond.

BEN (CONT'D) (SPANISH)

She is my girlfriend.

A short burst of breeze cools the tension. The tía finally gives the faintest nod. Then, without a word, she puts two fingers to her lips and lets out a cool, commanding whistle.

A barefoot boy—CHEPE—skids into the doorway, cookie in hand.

She gestures with her chin and lips.

PULPERÍA OWNER (SPANISH)

Take the man to your aunt's house.

Chepe thrilled at the task, already turning.

Ben follows, pausing just briefly at the door. He touches the doorframe in passing — a small, grateful gesture. Behind him, TÍA mutters to herself—part judgment, part intrigue.

PULPERÍA OWNER

He's handsome... kinda clueless, but handsome.

He steps out bathed in the golden afternoon light.

EXT. DUSTY VILLAGE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

BEN follows the barefoot GRANDSON down a narrow dirt road.

The village is quiet—orderly, intentional. Outside each adobe home, corn dries carefully on tarps—golden rows arranged like offerings. This is the cosecha, and it's treated with quiet reverence.

Neighbors glance up, then return to their tasks. No one speaks, but their eyes track on the out of place gringo.

The boy turns a corner—then stops abruptly.

Near the gate to a house, a lean, wiry street dog peers from the shadows. Ears flat, lip curled, low growl.

The boy says nothing. Intuitively stoops, picks up a small rock from the road. The dog flinches, then runs off, disappearing behind a fence.

The boy drops the stone, approaches the door, raps it once—then bolts, cookie gone from his hand. Ben is alone.

A few silent beats. Ben adjusts his bag. From behind him—the soft crunch of paws. The growling watchful mut is back.

Closer now. No panic from Ben.

Deliberately, he bends down, fingers brushing the dirt near a fresh stone. The dog hesitates—turns and bolts for good.

Ben returns to upright position. Exhales. Brushes off his knee as the wooden door creaks open.

SUYAPA'S MOTHER stands in the frame. Small. Tough. Eyes locked on him.

For a moment, neither moves. Then she steps forward, gently takes him by the wrist and pulls him over the threshold.

SUYAPA'S MOTHER (SPANISH)
Come, come in.

He allows himself to be guided in.

INT. SUYAPA'S HONDURAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

Simple. Clean. Still.

Crucifixes hang above doorways. A worn Bible rests on a shelf. A small table holds faded photos in tarnished frames.

Near the front door, a faint square of lighter paint—where a hat hook once hung. A small meaningful absence.

Ben takes the time to take it all in.

His eyes land on a framed photo—tucked among the others. Ben and Suyapa. Smiling. Arms around each other.

He moves to it. Picks it up. Stares at it for an extended moment. No smile—just calmed breathing.

He pivots. Meets the eyes of SUYAPA'S MOTHER.

Carefully he returns the picture to its previous location.

Then quickly crosses to her—and wraps her mother in an emotional embrace. A homecoming hug—two people who share something real. She holds it. A moment longer than expected.

Then, pulling back just slightly, her hand returns to his wrists. She gestures with her chin and lips, voice quiet.

SUYAPA'S MOTHER
Let's, let's go sweetheart...

Ben breathes deep. And trails her out.

EXT. SUYAPA'S COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Sunlight pours through the open doorway, flooding the scene in gold. BEN steps through the light, pausing at the threshold.

Before he sees them — He hears it: the low, rhythmic sound of stone grinding corn masa — a gentle, deliberate scrape, just out of sight.

As his eyes adjust—

He sees SUYAPA'S FAMILY MEMBERS, gathered in a loose circle under shade provided by mature mango trees. They sit on stools and overturned buckets, plucking kernels from dried corn cobs into bowls. Their movements are easy, practiced — work and conversation woven together.

And there, among them — SUYAPA. Her back is to the doorway, working quietly. Beside her, an empty chair.

One by one, the others begin to notice Ben in the doorway. Their hands slow. Voices fade.

AT THE EDGE OF THE COURTYARD The woman at the metate pauses, her stone held mid-air. She looks toward the doorway, silent.

Then — Suyapa stills. Her vision fixed on his frame.

Their eyes finally meet. The moment stretches — distance collapsing without a word.

Then — she sprints to him.

She wraps her arms around his middle, her hand pressing gently to his injury. He leans into her touch — not away from the pain, but toward it. Lets himself be held.

She rests her forehead against his. For a moment, everything is still. A familiar whisper, just for him:

SUYAPA
Stay close.

Then — the woman at the metate resumes her work. The scrape of stone against stone begins again.

Suyapa guides his hand without ceremony. Leads him to the circle. She gestures to the empty chair beside her.

He takes his seat. The masa grinding continues.

She places a cob in his hand. He begins to work — slowly, a little awkward, but present.

Around them, conversation resumes — soft and real. The rhythm of life returns.

BEN is home.

The sound of masa grinding carries on.

FADE OUT.