

## The Crowned Ones

Denied a World War II draft exemption, a determined teen and his disabled brother embark on a desperate escape to a Mexican island amid a violent storm, only to be forced into a moral dilemma when a Navy patrol ship capsizes nearby.

INT. SELECTIVE SERVICE OFFICE - DAY

Every desk filled. Military personnel, teenagers, family members. Posters for war bonds line the walls.

SUPER: SAN DIEGO, DECEMBER 1942

At a cramped desk in the corner, an OFFICER (40M) reads through a folder of documents. Across from him--

FEDERICO 'KIKO' PEREZ (18M) shifts in his seat. Rubs his sweaty palms on his pants. Restless feet doing a drumroll.

OFFICER

Sorry, Mr. Perez. There's just no justification for your exemption.

KIKO

But my little brother. He has--

OFFICER

He has a father to care for him.

KIKO

Yes, sir. But my father, he's...

The officer waits. Kiko decides against sharing more.

KIKO (CONT'D)

So, what now, sir?

He hands Kiko a stack of papers with a government stamp.

OFFICER

Means your number will be drawn and you'll report to Fort Rosecrans. Monday, next Monday at the latest.

Kiko shakes his head as he heads out the door.

KIKO

Shoulda known better. Why would the government start helping us now?

INT. PEREZ HOUSE - DAY

Kiko pushes through the messy living room. A console radio plays staticky big band jazz.

POP (48M) passed out next to empty alcohol bottles and crumpled cigarette packs. Dirty dishes on the coffee table.

Kiko navigates the mess to a bedroom. Smiles as he sees--

HECTOR (13M) mimics hitting a baseball with his crutch.

KIKO  
Now batting, Number 5, Joltin' Joe  
DiMaggio!

Hector waves to the crowd. Hits a home run. Hugs Kiko.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Kiko loads stuffed canvas bags into a 12' aluminum boat. He opens a cigar box. Prized possessions- an old photo of a pretty Hispanic woman. Rosary beads. A revolver.

INT. PEREZ HOUSE - MORNING

Kiko has the house spotless around his unconscious dad. Places new alcohol bottles and cigarettes on the coffee table.

He grabs Pop's ivory pocket knife and slices open a cigarette pack. Pockets the knife.

Kisses Pop's forehead. He doesn't budge. Snores.

Hector limps through the hallway in a shirt and tie. Leans against his crutch, posing like a leading man.

KIKO  
Whoa, no one told me I was going to  
church with Gary Cooper!

Hector smiles. Notices dad passed out on the sofa.

HECTOR  
Guess Pop isn't coming again.

Kiko rubs Hector's back. Hector sighs.

KIKO  
Got a surprise for you, mano.

Hector beams.

KIKO (CONT'D)  
Instead of lunch at Pepe's and  
fishing in the bay, we're going  
night fishing later.

Hector's smile fades.

HECTOR  
I don't like the water at dark.

KIKO  
Be brave for me. Can you do that?

HECTOR  
Are there bigger fish at night?

KIKO  
Definitely. They eat all day so  
they're the biggest at night.

Logical. Hector nods bravely.

INT. CHURCH OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION - DAY

A packed house. An old Hispanic PRIEST commands the room.

PRIEST  
Today, we reflect on a vital yet  
misunderstood virtue—self-reliance.  
It is not to isolate from God;  
rather, it is an invitation to  
actively participate in life.

Kiko loosens his collar. The message is hitting him hard.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
As St. Paul reminds us in  
Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all  
things through Christ who  
strengthens me."*

Kiko closes his eyes. Silent prayer. A nod.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Kiko and Hector carry their bibles and bottles of Coke.

KIKO  
We need to make a quick stop.

They walk through a white picket gate covered in vines.

EXT. CEMETERY - CONTINUOUS

HECTOR  
Why are we here, Kiko? You never  
talk to her.

They navigate an endless row of tombstones.

KIKO

Just need to check in with her,  
mano. It's been too long.

They reach a small headstone- MARIA ANNE PEREZ (1903-1940)

They sit at her grave silently. Kiko pours Coke onto the grass. Hector giggles. Pours some for her also.

They each allow the other a moment for private conversation with mom.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Kiko and Hector walk silently. Hector stops.

HECTOR

Are you gonna tell me what's going  
on? I'm crippled, not an idiot.

Kiko unfolds paper from his pocket. A government stamp.

Hector reads. He breathes heavy. Scared.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Kiko, are you leaving for war? What  
will happen to me while you're--

KIKO

Mano, I'm not leaving you. We're  
getting away. Together. Tonight.

HECTOR

How? It says you have to go or--

KIKO

Pop can't take care of you.

Hector shakes his head. Begins to cry.

HECTOR

Don't be a slacker for me, Kik.  
People will call you a coward.

KIKO

As long as you're safe, I don't  
care. Better than you being dead or  
in a facility. They're awful  
places. I can't let that happen.

HECTOR  
So, what's the plan then?

Kiko unfolds a torn section of a map. Hector stares.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Whoa. You sure?

EXT. MARINA - SUNSET

Kiko helps Hector into the boat. Places his crutch next to him and helps secure Hector's life jacket. They take a final look at San Diego.

KIKO  
Ready, Mano? Storm's coming. It'll  
be scary but we're king fishermen.

Kiko hands Hector an ivory pocket knife.

KIKO (CONT'D)  
Pop wanted you to have it for being  
brave.

Hector admires it. Proudly pockets his prized possession.

Kiko pushes off. Starts the onboard motor. They glide through the marina, passing sailboats and yachts. Pass Navy ships.

The sun sets as they reach the open water. Rain begins to fall. Kiko reaches top speed. The city lights fade away.

Hector closes his eyes. Kisses his cross necklace.

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

Rain falls harder. The boat bounces on angry waves. Kiko shines a flashlight on his map and compass.

Hector taps Kiko with his crutch. Points to the darkness.

In the distance, lights bounce in the water.

The storm rages as they near the lights. Lightning illuminates for a flash- a capsizing Navy patrol boat.

Kiko and Hector stare at each other. They instantly realize their impossible decision.

Kiko cusses under his breath. Hector prays. Nods to Kiko.

Kiko turns toward the sinking ship.

As they reach the scene...chaos. Screams in the dark as the waves batter the boat. It finally sinks under the surface.

Sailors flailing. Some float lifelessly. Hector scoops up life jackets from the water and tosses them at sailors.

Two sailors in life jackets, PESTOCELLI (22M) and ANSLEY (20M), swim to Kiko's boat. They grab the edge and try to pull themselves in. The boat nearly tips.

Kiko hits their hands with a paddle. They let go.

KIKO  
Stop! You'll tip us too!

Kiko tosses Hector a rope. Hector ties one end to the boat and the other into the water.

The sailors grab the rope for dear life. Kiko circles the debris and bodies.

KIKO (CONT'D)  
Tie everyone off!

As they pass the bodies, some injured and some dead, the sailors wrap the rope under their arms. The rolling waves and torrential rain make the process slow and treacherous.

A daisy chain of nine sailors dangles from the small boat.

The small boat struggles to pull the added weight.

Kiko checks his map and compass.

PESTOCELLI  
Thanks, fellas. We owe you a beer!

Kiko smiles, nods. The boat fights through the storm.

PESTOCELLI (CONT'D)  
We should just drift here until help comes but we gotta get these fellas out of the water. Back to the harbor?

KIKO  
Too far. We'd never make it in this storm with this much weight.

Pestocelli scans the area. Gets his bearings.

PESTOCELLI  
The Coronados?

KIKO  
Yes. South Island.

ANSLEY  
Fleet will check for us there.  
That's perfect. Appreciate it!

HECTOR  
Navy know you sank?

PESTOCELLI  
No time to radio in. Rogue wave  
tipped us. We didn't even have our  
gear on.

ANSLEY  
They gotta know something's wrong  
by now. They'll be out soon.

Kiko opens the throttle but the boat struggles.

Hector leans into Kiko.

HECTOR  
We're already low on gas, Kik.

Kiko nods. Contemplates.

KIKO  
Use our other can.

HECTOR  
Then how will we get back?

KIKO  
One problem at a time, mano.

Suddenly, the boat is jerked backwards. The engine sputters.  
Another violent jerk. The engine dies.

PESTOCELLI  
We grounded? Did we catch on  
something?

Kiko shines the flood light behind them. All eyes widen at--

Thrashing at the end of the rope. A body bouncing. Blood. A  
tail. A fin...A GREAT WHITE SHARK.

HECTOR  
Shark!!!

Kiko restarts the engine. Full throttle. Jerks from the rope  
like a fishing line. But they're on the receiving end.



Screams from the injured sailors. Panic. Fear. Pain.  
More sharks join in, devouring the floating meal of sailors.  
Kiko and Hector eye the rope that is slowing their escape.  
Hector grabs his ivory pocket knife. Kiko shakes his head.

PESTOCELLI  
Give me the knife, kid!

Hector looks to Kiko. Kiko nods.

Hector hands Pestocelli the knife, then kisses his cross.

HECTOR  
I'm sorry, mama.

Pestocelli hands Ansley the pocket knife.

ANSLEY  
Pesto, no! They're our--

PESTOCELLI  
Cut it, Ansley, or we're all dead!

Ansley cries as he saws through the rope behind him. The sailors behind Pestocelli and Ansley beg for help.

The shark frenzy intensifies. Horrific screams. Thrashing.

The final strands of rope snap as the boat lunges forward. Two boys and two sailors pull away from the carnage.

Pestocelli and Ansley stare back as they're towed away from the doomed sailors.

Hector empties the remaining fuel into the motor. The storm dies into a gentle rain. The shapes of the islands are seen through the fog.

EXT. SOUTH ISLAND, CORONADOS

They reach shore. Kiko helps Hector out of the boat, hands him his crutch.

They collapse on the wet sand. Kiko hands everyone a Coke.

KIKO  
I'm really sorry about your friends. How many were--

ANSLEY

12. Ready for war and they all died  
a few miles from fucking San Diego?

The group sits in silence as the rain stops. The rising sun  
cuts through the dense island fog.

PESTOCELLI

Why were you fellas out in that  
mess, anyway?

HECTOR

Night fishing! Kiko says night fish  
are the fattest!

Pestocelli notes the bags of gear in the boat. Ansley catches  
this and raises an eyebrow.

ANSLEY

You boys from Tijuana?

HECTOR

Nope, San Diego. Sweetwater High!

PESTOCELLI

Why are high school boys fishing in  
a storm on a school night?

Before Kiko can answer--

HECTOR

No, Kiko graduated! I'm a freshman!

The sailors eye Kiko. Then the boat.

PESTOCELLI

These islands are Mexico's. You  
wouldn't be running, would ya?

Hector is scared. Kiko slides his hand into the cigar box.

KIKO

Running? From what?

ANSLEY

The Japs. The Krauts. You know  
exactly what, Chicano.

Kiko and Hector's shoulders sink. They are caught.

PESTOCELLI

We have a problem, boys.

ANSLEY  
Fucking coward.

Ansley spits on Kiko. From the cigar box, Kiko pulls--  
His mom's photo. Holds it up. Hector's eyes well up.

KIKO  
She died two years ago. Cancer. I  
was going into my junior year with  
my crippled brother with the palsy  
and a dad who tried to join her by  
drinking himself to death.

ANSLEY  
Oh, boo hoo! Ain't no excuse. You  
could--

KIKO  
What? I could WHAT? Leave Hector  
with a drunk? Have him put in a  
home where he'd rot away?

Before Ansley can respond--

PESTOCELLI  
Like I said, we gotta problem. A  
draft dodger and a cripple sitting  
with us with the Navy on the way.  
But we wouldn't be sitting alive  
without them.

ANSLEY  
The military court can sort that  
out. Above our pay grade.

Kiko reaches into the box again. Pulls the pistol.  
The sailors freeze. Hands up.

PESTOCELLI  
Look kid, you ain't gotta--

Hector places his hand over Kiko's. Lowers the gun.

KIKO  
They're gonna get us killed.

HECTOR  
We didn't save them just to kill  
them, Kik. That's not who we are.

KIKO  
They'll rat once they can. Then  
we're dead, mano.

HECTOR  
Then we died putting their lives  
over our own. Ma would be proud of  
that. Be brave for me this time.

Kiko places the gun into the box. Buries his face in his  
hands. Hector rubs his back. The sailors relax.

PESTOCELLI  
Fellas, we'll figure this out.

ANSLEY  
What exactly is your plan? These  
islands are uninhabited.

Kiko points at the top of the cove. An old, abandoned two-  
story building. Weathered. Dilapidated.

KIKO  
Some rich guy built the place in  
the '30s for gambling and drinking.  
It went under when prohibition  
ended. We'll have shelter and a  
well. All we need.

HECTOR  
And we fish like kings, so...

The sailors exchange glances. Through the fog, a Navy rescue  
boat appears.

The sailors wave their arms. Kiko and Hector hide behind  
their grounded boat.

A small raft from the rescue boat reaches the shore. Sailors  
grab Ansley and Pestocelli. The sailors climb into the raft.  
Pestocelli looks back, points at the beached boat.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Pesto just told 'em we're here,  
Kik. We're dead.

The raft pushes off into the fog. Kiko helps Hector up a  
rocky ledge.

As they reach the abandoned hotel, the raft emerges through  
the fog. Only one sailor.

Kiko grips his pistol. Hector hides behind rocks.

The raft lands. Pestocelli, alone, carrying items.

He places a giant can of fuel on the sand. Then a case of Coke bottles. He salutes towards the hotel.

He pushes the raft away and into the fog.

Kiko wraps an arm around Hector.

KIKO

We're gonna be OK, mano. She's  
looking out for us. Let's go pick  
our rooms.