

DEATH OF AN ANGEL

by
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FOR MIA AND FLORIAN GALDAU

FADE IN:

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAY

One of those hot summer mornings when the smog is so thick that it distorts the perspective. The towers of downtown Los Angeles seem to be hanging in the air. Sprawled from ocean to mountain, the City of Angels looks like a huge secretion of the sick earth.

ALTER THE ANGLE to include the busy loops of the Santa Monica and Harbor Freeways. The smog seems to have muted the sounds: the traffic comes to us like a HUM, although the movement of the cars displays the usual morning panic.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a LONE FEMALE VOICE starts SINGING, incongruously loud and clear:

VOICE

Awake my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run.
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
To pay the morning's sacrifice.

The lines and the voice's purity have an almost sarcastic effect. WE LOSE the crossing highways, float across a boulevard of banks and office highrises, then

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET - DAY

A middle class avenue lined by palm trees. MUSIC and a vigorous CHOIR start catching up with the voice:

CHOIR

Lord, I my vows to thee renew.
Disperse my sins as morning dew.

A stately building ENTERS THE SHOT. We brush past a plaque: "St. John's Episcopal Cathedral: Enter, Pray, Rejoice".

CHOIR

Guard my first springs of thought
and will,
And with thyself my spirit fill.

CUT TO:

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

THE CHOIR -- thirty young faces intoning zealously:

CHOIR

Praise God, from whom all
blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures
here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

They draw a powerful AHHHHHHH-MENNNNNNNN, then wait, standing stiffly, as if watched, in the altar's left hand pews. There is an abundance of light on their violet cassocks and white cottas. The CAMERA MOVES right and stops on BISHOP JOHN LUCY, resplendent in gold brocade and red lining. He sits facing the nave, with the altar's soft gleaming in the background.

Compared to the smog outside, the screen is now painfully clear.

Lucy is in his sixties, skeletally thin and as ugly as a monkey-faced gargoye. His VOICE is a GRUMPY BARITONE.

LUCY

Grace McKenzie, you are called
now to work as a priest,
proclaiming by word and deed
the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Behind Lucy stands his CHAPLAIN, holding the Bishop's pastoral staff and a Bible.

LUCY

My sister, do you believe that
you are truly called by God and
His Church to this priesthood?

A WOMAN'S VOICE answers, clear and strong as a mountain stream:

GRACE (O.S.)

I believe I am so called.

LUCY

Will you endeavor so to minister
the word of God that the
reconciling love of Christ may
be known and received?

REVERSE ANGLE

Facing the Bishop's seat, GRACE MCKENZIE stands on the sanctuary steps, vested in an alb which gathers so much light that she strikes the eyes as a white flame.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

I will.

She is a well-shaped woman in her mid-thirties, with sandy hair cut in a page-boy style that requires no care. She wears no make-up, which makes her face a little older (and less pretty) than it really is. Her charm comes from the extreme honesty of her green eyes and from a general air of Anglo-Saxon confidence -- a person without doubts and probably without sins.

LUCY

May the Lord who has given you
the will to do these things
give you the grace and power
to perform them.

GRACE

(a slight tremor
in her voice)

Amen.

ANGLE ON HARRY HOLMES

He is the Bishop Coadjutor: youthful, mid-forties, handsome. He watches in pleased excitement.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Full shot of the ceremony. The sanctuary is floodlit, the nave is in semi-darkness. Behind Harry Holmes, a group of PRESSPEOPLE complete with TV cameras watch the ordination.

Lucy stands, extends his hands. Grace kneels before him. A dozen priests step out of the right side altar pews, and come to lay their hands on her head, in consecration.

ON GRACE

Low angle on her profile, under a live roof of hands. She is elated. LIFT THROUGH the hands and REST on Lucy.

LUCY

Father, through Jesus Christ
your Son, give your Holy Spirit
to Grace, and make her a priest
in Your Church.

The hands withdraw. Grace stands just as a fiery red chasuble comes down around her head and drapes her body. An embroidered priest's stole is placed about her neck. She smiles broadly

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

as if God himself -- a very straightforward and positive guy -- her best friend -- were here. Lucy takes the Bible from his Chaplain, offers it to Grace.

LUCY

Receive this Bible as a sign
of the authority given you to
preach the Word of God and
administer His Holy Sacraments.

ANGLE ON LYDIA

A rapacious reporter, she watches the performance of this fellow woman who has liberated herself by diving into the deepest of traditions.

BACK ON LUCY AND GRACE

Lucy examines the freshly ordained priest for another moment, then his face breaks into a smile, and he murmurs in an unofficial voice:

LUCY

Now you may give the peace.

Looking truly inspired, Grace turns halfway towards the nave and halfway towards the choir. She raises her hands:

GRACE

The peace of the Lord be always
with you.

From the choir and the attending clergy, as well as from some of the watchers in the nave comes a dense, well-rehearsed answer:

CHOIR/CLERGY/PEOPLE

And also with you.

Immediately, choir members, clergy and audience hurry out of their pews and benches to congratulate Grace, who starts shaking hands and returning hugs, while the press surrounds Bishop Holmes, who starts answering their questions.

ON A DRAWING PAD

A girl's hand stops drawing a portrait of Grace, leaving it half-sketched. Even so, it radiates the same air of straight happiness.

REVEAL THE ARTIST: VERA, age sixteen, bears a close resemblance to Grace. She is pale and skinny, with long brown hair, her

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

features tightened by an air of passionate inner search. A t-shirt stresses her fragile frame.

She sits in the nave (empty except for a handful of people) right next to the central aisle. By her side sits ROSALBA, a Chicano maid of the same age. A golden cross nests between her already full breasts.

MOVE AWAY from the two young girls, until Holmes re-enters the shot: the Bishop Coadjutor talks fast and cleverly, pointing towards the sanctuary.

HOLMES

Look at Grace and tell me if you think women at the altar are dangerous. A lot of people will feel reassured by seeing her there. And that's why we need all the coverage we can get.

LYDIA

Will people be equally reassured by seeing gays at the altar?

HOLMES

(grinning)

I knew that one was coming.

BACK TO THE SANCTUARY

The congratulations are over, and Lucy, relaxed, is cracking jokes with Grace, his chaplain and a couple of the younger priests.

LUCY

(pointing at
Grace's hair)

At least you don't spray your hair. You touch a priest's head these days and your hands get sticky.

GRACE

(laughing good
naturedly)

I was actually surprised that you didn't oppose women's ordination.

LUCY

My dear girl, I'd rather be shocking than bigoted. So what's our next crusade?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE
(only half a joke)
Women bishops, of course.

Laughter. Holmes joins the group, grabs Grace's elbow:

HOLMES
You were terrific. Come on now--
(he points at
the press)
You'll have to face the lions.

He pushes her down the sanctuary steps, and the reporters instantly start flashing their cameras. Stepping aside, Holmes bumps against Vera's elbow.

HOLMES
Oh. I'm sorry, Vera.

A black line has messed up Grace's portrait.

VERA
That's alright.

She erases the black line, starts touching up the portrait. Holmes bends quickly to take a better look.

HOLMES
(appreciatively)
Pretty, isn't she?

She shoots up a sideways glance, way beyond her age.

VERA
Interested, bishop?

Holmes just shakes his head -- "today's kids...". Meanwhile, Grace has been assailed by Lydia.

LYDIA
What's the first thing you plan
to do as a priest?

GRACE
I'm going to take a silent
retreat.

LYDIA
A what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE
(surprised at
Lydia's ignorance)
I'll spend six days in a
retreat house.

Lydia still looks confused.

GRACE
(continuing)
I thought it might be a good
idea to rest a little and get
myself together for whatever
lies ahead.

LYDIA
(she's finally
got it)
And you won't speak at all?

GRACE
(peacefully)
I won't speak out loud. But
I'll pray.

Lydia jots this down, then steals away from the group. She stops slightly behind Vera, who is back to completing her drawing, and peers over her shoulder. Vera looks up.

LYDIA
(cheerfully)
Hi. I'm Lydia.

VERA
(folding her pad)
Hi.

LYDIA
Are you gonna call your mother
"Father" from now on?

Vera is about to give her some acidic answer, when she notices Grace, who is now heading toward Vera and Rosalba, re-becoming a mother on the way. Vera instantly ignores the reporter and makes a pouting face at her mother.

VERA
At last.

GRACE
I'm sorry, honey. Why don't
you two wait in the car while
I change?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE (CONT'D)
(a token question)
How did you like it, Rosalba?

ROSALBA
(a token answer,
strong Spanish
accent)
Very nice.

GRACE
I'm sure the Catholics will
ordain women sooner than we
think. In fact, the Jesuits
are all for it.
(seeing that this
is rather wasted)
I won't be a minute.

She runs up the steps and across the sanctuary and vanishes
into the sacristy, right past Lucy and Holmes.

Vera remains seated. Rosalba pulls out from the pew behind
them a foldable wheelchair, places it in the aisle next to
Vera. Vera slides sideways into it, puts it in gear and zooms
toward the cathedral's porch, followed by Rosalba.

One beat, and then they're followed by the press people,
gathering their equipment and lighting cigarettes as they troop
away towards the exit. Suddenly, the cathedral seems darker,
and very large, and no one's left in it except Lucy and Holmes.

LUCY
I hope she doesn't fail.

HOLMES
Grace? Look at the way she helped
Vera after the accident. Instead
of letting her wallow in self-
pity, she treated her like a
normal girl and made a normal
girl out of her.
(total confidence)
She saved the person closest
to her. How many priests can
say that?

EXT. HANCOCK PARK/STREET - DAY

Looking down a quiet avenue in a well-to-do, distinctly Anglo

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CONTINUED:

area. A station wagon stops at a four-way crossing, waits courteously for the other cars to pass.

TELEPHONE RING, off screen.

The station wagon turns into a driveway while the phone goes on RINGING, LOUDER. Grace is at the wheel. Vera and Rosalba are in the back seat. The car stops on SCREECHY gravel, and we lose it to establish a white, two-story house.

INT. GRACE'S STUDY - DAY

Grace talks on the phone, crossing items off a list. On the wall behind her, a framed degree in theology.

GRACE

Tell Father Fred that from now on, he'll have to do that himself.

(she listens)

Oh, goodness. I left the vestry meeting papers on his desk.

Someone in another room switches on a wild disco tune.

INT. VERA'S ROOM - DAY

TIGHT ON A "ghetto blaster", then ENLARGE to show Rosalba, discoing to the savage rhythm, while Vera watches from her wheelchair, mesmerized.

ROSALBA

I found this great place, El Disco Latino.

(a transported sigh)

The guys there are so funny, they put stuff in their pockets, so you know they mean business.

The room looks almost like an artist's studio: there's an easel and stacks of cardboards and canvases with unfinished paintings. Rosalba grabs a paint-stained rag, balls it up and stuffs it in her pants' pocket. It instantly looks like an obscene bulge.

ROSALBA

See what I mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She moves with the music, imitating a horny guy mashing hard on a girl -- and Vera starts laughing so loud and wholeheartedly that there is no choice for Rosalba than to join her. The Chicano maid simply collapses with her face on Vera's knees, and they both keep laughing. Suddenly, Rosalba raises her head; her expression is serious, dramatic.

ROSALBA

Tonight after your mom goes to sleep, we start to pray.

The intent of her voice, the pagan strength of her stare are such that Vera is instantly silenced. Rosalba grabs Vera's hand.

ROSALBA

(an intense whisper)

We pray real hard that God makes a miracle.

Totally fascinated, Vera listens. Rosalba is squeezing her hand so hard that Vera's mouth starts twitching in pain.

VERA

What miracle?

ROSALBA

After I fall asleep, you take my body and go to the disco and dance. You wanna do that?

This is enormous -- yet somehow not too crazy for Vera, who suddenly squeezes Rosalba's hand back with matching strength. Both their knuckles are white, and their voices are low and raspy with the tension of this impossible wish.

VERA

Sure.

ROSALBA

You'll have my breasts, my legs, my feet. But your face will be yours.

(practically)

Cost three dollars to get in, okay?

Vera gives Rosalba's hand a deadly squeeze -- and then promptly releases it: behind them a door has opened. Grace advances into the room.

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CONTINUED:

Rosalba rises. Grace walks up to the two girls with the uncertain expression of an adult who's decided not to examine this friendship too closely.

GRACE
(to Rosalba)
I left the shopping list in the kitchen.

Rosalba starts for the door; Grace turns towards Vera.

GRACE
I'll help you with your bath.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Wrapped in a big towel, Vera sits on the bathtub's edge. SOUND OF THE TUB DRAINING.

GRACE
If you and Rosalba want to talk about sex -- that's fine with me. But I want you to know there are other ways of being a woman than just having sex.

She uses another towel to dry up the girl's hair.

GRACE
Not that they're easy -- it's been hard for me after your father died, believe me.

Vera shakes her head, and her face comes out of the towel.

VERA
Oh come on, mother.

GRACE
What do you mean, come on?

VERA
You can have any man you want, you just don't care. I heard Bishop Holmes raving to the press: poor Mrs. McKenzie -- lost her husband in a car crash -- devoted herself to God and to her crippled daughter -- isn't she divine?

(sarcastically)
He must be fantasizing about you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

Vera, I told you -- I won't
tolerate such talk!

She regrets having raised her voice, because Vera instantly averts her eyes, and looks like nothing but a sad, crippled girl, something Grace will never manage to handle.

VERA

Maybe I shouldn't have come.

She looks up and straight in her mother's eyes, adds with unmistakable sincerity.

VERA

I'm jealous of you, mother, and
I can't help it.

Grace stares back at her: it seems that they're both hanging on the edge of a painful crisis.

GRACE

(with sadly
impotent love)
It's not my fault, Vera. What
happened is no one's fault.

VERA

(a change of tone)
I got you a present.

Such leaps of humor are frequent, and Grace has to take them in stride. She breathes, and runs her fingers through her daughter's hair.

VERA

But you have to find it.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

On the bed, a decorously wrapped package. Grace opens the door, locates the package, picks it up.

INT. VERA'S ROOM - DAY

She carries it down to Vera, who is combing her hair.

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CONTINUED:

GRACE

I should've looked in the
bedroom first.

(she tears it open
and suddenly whoops
like a little girl)

Vera, this is gorgeous! Where
did you get it?

It's a stole, a beautiful one. Grace's hands relish its touch.

VERA

Try it on.

GRACE

(a little shocked
at the idea)

Now?

VERA

Why not?

GRACE

Well, it hasn't been blessed
yet. You can see me in it
next Sunday.

VERA

I want to see you in it now.

Intrigued, Grace kisses the stole, places it about her neck,
turns toward a full-length mirror. Over her lay clothes (a
short-sleeved blouse and blue skirt), the stole shines passion-
ately red.

VERA

(objectively)

Wonderful.

The praise melts Grace. She bends and kisses Vera, puts her
cheek against hers.

VERA

I really don't mind all those
men staring at you. You're
beautiful; you deserve it.

Grace stiffens and distances her face.

GRACE

Vera, I'm your mother. Can you
imagine what my mother would've
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE (CONT'D)
done to me if I had talked to
her like that?

VERA
Well, she didn't get the kind
of daughter you got.
(before Grace can
get upset over
this, Vera adds
good-humoredly)
I'd like to paint you with this
on, okay?

Grace searches her daughter's face -- she seems truly in a
good mood, and that means more to Grace than anything else,
except her priesthood. She bends, puts her arms around Vera.

GRACE
Sweetheart. I sometimes think
that my calling comes from you.

FRAME their faces in the mirror. Grace's eyes are closed.

CUT TO:

EXT. RETREAT HOUSE - MORNING

The next day.

The CAMERA is facing a convent-like structure with a roof of
red tiles, flanked by two clusters of big trees.

Grace's station wagon rolls under the baroque arch of an iron
gate, and along the driveway toward the convent, fronted by a
double file of white collonades.

Grace drives around to one side, parks next to a service
entrance.

A ruddy nun's face looks out. SISTER DEO GRATIAS, a sturdy
sixty, fills the door. Grace walks up to her, carrying a
small suitcase.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

The Sister walks before Grace, their figures decreasing down
a long lobby. They stop before a door. Grace takes her bag,
disappears inside.

INT. ROOM - DAY

The room is clean and bare. Grace throws the suitcase on the bed, pops it open. A Bible rests on her underwear. She flings it on her pillow.

INSERT - A CHISELLED WOOD PANEL

"The branches are holy if the root is holy - Romans 11:16."

INSERT - A TYPED SCHEDULE

SILENT RETREAT: Holy Communion
Breakfast
Meditation
Intercessions
Luncheon

We can only read this far.

CUT TO:

GRACE IN THE SHOWER

A glimpse of an attractive body, which Grace dries up vigorously, almost rudely.

INSERT - HER NAKED THIGHS

with a pair of underpants flashing up.

INSERT - GRACE'S MOUTH

She fiercely brushes her teeth.

INSERT - BATHROOM MIRROR

She plows her hair straight down.

CUT TO:

A HANDBELL

furiously shaken by a liver spotted hand.

CUT TO:

INT. REFECTORY - NIGHT

A square window with a counter. Hands from inside the kitchen push out oblong metal trays: cream of pea soup, spaghetti and meatballs, blueberry muffins, tapioca pudding.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SR. DEO GRATIAS (O.C.)
And when he had taken the five
loaves and the two fishes, he
looked up to heaven and blessed
and broke the loaves --

FOLLOW a tray across a room with communal tables, seating the
usual variety -- from heavy theologians to redeemed alcoholics.
They eat primly and keep their voices down.

SR. DEO GRATIAS
-- and gave them to his disciples
and the two fishes divided he among
them all.

She stands on a tall lectern, reading and supervising the
progress of the dinner.

PAN from her to three smaller tables: the silent retreatants.
They look down into their plates and touch each other's arm
lightly for the passing of the butter and salt.

SR. DEO GRATIAS (O.C.)
And they that did eat of the loaves
were about five thousand men.

Next to Grace, an OVERWEIGHT LADY in her fifties eats ravenously,
self-conscious of her appetite and yet unable to control it. In
the absence of dialogue, the SOUNDTRACK fills with clicking of
knives and forks, slurping and chewing NOISES.

The overweight lady COUGHS. Everbody keeps their eyes down.
She COUGHS AGAIN. A couple of people frown.

A CHOKING SOUND. Red in the face, the overweight lady is rolling
terrified eyes. Her open mouth GASPS desperately.

The clicking of forks stops. The choking woman drops her knife,
knocks down her glass of water, and clings to the next person --
Grace.

Somebody noisily pushes a chair back. The woman is pulling at
Grace's blouse with one hand and grasping her throat with the
other.

It's like a mute shipwreck scene. A couple of people are already
opening their mouths, to break the silent retreat and call for
help. So Grace has to act fast.

She glares at the table, sealing her lips with her pointer
finger, then places her fist below the victim's rib cage, and
presses into her stomach with a quick upward thrust.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The whole table is standing. The only SOUNDS are the victim's MUFFLED NOISES.

From the height of her lectern, Sister Deo Gratias is aware of the accident. She stops reading. The victim seems about to expire. Grace gives her stomach another thrust. And another. And yet another.

The victim lunges forward and coughs into her plate. Grace gives her a sharp rap on the back, and her throat is cleared.

It's all over. The standing people seat themselves again. Someone across from Grace gestures his admiration.

PAN to Sister Deo Gratias, who sighs in relief. Start hearing the bubbling call of an ALARM CLOCK and

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GRACE'S ROOM - DAY

Grace's head bobbing up from the pillow. The alarm clock goes on maddeningly, and she opens her mouth in a mute curse, then jumps out of bed.

She opens the blinds, blinks at the strong light and rubs her eyes -- then notices

A WHITE ENVELOPE

showing under her door. She picks it up, opens it and glances at the top line, still not quite awake. Suddenly she stands rigidly upright, brings the letter closer to her eyes, and an expression of panic spreads on her face.

Then she rushes to pick up her suitcase, opens it and starts stuffing her things in.

EXT. SILENT RETREAT - DAY

SOUND OF BELLS from the chapel. Dressed in haste and carrying her suitcase, Grace rushes out of the front door.

She sprints to the parking lot, yanks open the door of her car.

INT. CAR - DAY

Grace zooms on the freeway. The letter lies open on the front seat next to her. We catch a glimpse of the handwriting -- big characters flashing wildly in all directions.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM - DAY

A room retaining a lot of Vera's childhood atmosphere. Empty. Several closets are open, and there's a pile of abandoned clothes on the floor.

NOISE of the car coming up the driveway and braking abruptly. Downstairs, the front door opens.

GRACE (O.C.)

Vera!

Her footsteps up the stairs. And then she bursts in.

INT. STUDIO/STAIRS/KITCHEN - DAY

FOLLOW Grace HANDHELD as she rushes into her daughter's studio, calling.

GRACE

Vera! Rosalba!

She stops, listens to her own heartbeat in the otherwise complete silence.

We now take a BETTER LOOK at the studio. Vera has turned the walls into murals. They are, in want of a better term, biblical: contorted Christ-like faces, naked bodies in poses of effort and pain, etc.

Then she races out of the studio, down the stairs, into the equally empty kitchen.

GRACE

Vera!

On a plate on the counter, a half-eaten sandwich: it looks at least a day old.

INT. BISHOP'S OFFICE - DAY

Stunned, confused, Harry Holmes sits at his desk, wearing a cardigan over his Roman collar. His right hand holds the letter. His voice is high pitched from nervousness.

HOLMES

But we can't annul your ordination!
Not without very strong spiritual
or personal reasons!

GRACE

I have strong reasons. Both
spiritual and personal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She stands by the window, arms crossed. Although her red eyes witness that she has been crying, now she is grimly determined, and almost calm. Harry jumps up, comes out from behind the desk and revolves around her, gesturing somewhat comically with the letter.

HOLMES

Dammit Grace, think of the flak we'll be getting. So many women in this country want to see you up there at the altar! You're going to let them all down?

(reasonably)

Grace. Kids run away at this age. Even crippled kids.

GRACE

Run away?

(she takes the letter)

Listen to this: "Dear mother, for two years you have pretended that I am just like any other girl -- a sickening lie no matter how well intended. You chose not to see the cripple in me and the woman in me -- sadly, they are the same person. Please give me a chance to find myself among people like myself -- and don't call the cops."

(giving him a straight look)

D'you frankly think I can relieve the suffering of strangers when I could do nothing about hers?

HOLMES

(pointing to letter)

How much of this is true?

GRACE

Quite a bit of it -- unfortunately.

(eyes staring away at the missing girl)

She's very talented and clever, Harry. I couldn't treat her as a cripple. I felt that would insult her.

He sighs, breaks away toward a cabinet, produces a bottle of Scotch, pours himself a stiff drink.

HOLMES

(holding up his glass)

Want one?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She shakes her head.

HOLMES
You had a maid.

GRACE
Rosalba. She's gone, too.

He carries his drink to the window, kills half of it looking outside -- and chuckles bitterly.

HOLMES
Tomorrow's Sunday. Your first mass.

So many expectations were tied into that Sunday that Grace bursts into tears.

GRACE
I know. Please don't ask me to show up at the altar with a bright face; I just couldn't look those people in the eyes.

He drains his drink. He walks back to his desk, drums his fingers on it.

HOLMES
I'll ask Lucy for a leave of absence. It's all I can do.
(seeing her struggle with her tears, he hands her a box of kleenex)

Here.

He watches her gather her pocketbook and gets progressively angry as she drops the kleenex in a trash can and starts toward the exit.

HOLMES
Hey Grace.

She turns and finds his eyes full of theological reproach.

HOLMES
You act as if Vera were your faith.
If she's gone, your faith is gone.

She stares back for a moment, thinking deeply about what he said. Then she shuts the door behind her.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

ON AN OPEN FILE

lying on a desk, showing a stack of pictures of Vera -- different poses and ages. A porky, reddish hand taps its fingers on them.

INT. DETECTIVE'S OFFICE - DAY

TILT UP to FRAME the PRIVATE DETECTIVE: built like a football player, with a paunch aggressively splitting open his shirt, and a cheap wig.

DETECTIVE

We should sit tight and wait. See what turns up.

Grace sits before him, wearing a tobacco brown cotton shirt, a skirt a darker shade of brown, and matching fabric shoes and bag. She wears more lipstick and powder than in the previous scenes -- because she is very pale and in need of sleep.

DETECTIVE

Or join forces with the police.

She shakes her head, "no," in stubborn loyalty to Vera's letter, and rises. He rises too, accompanies her towards the door.

DETECTIVE

If you don't mind my asking, what's it like to be a woman priest? My wife is killing me with questions.

INT./EXT. STAIRS/STREET - DAY

Grace closes behind her an old-fashioned glass door, with the name of the investigation firm in faded gilded letters.

She comes down a flight of linoleum-coated stairs, walks out into a downtown street, turns into a parking lot walled in on three sides by tall, blind buildings.

The attendant is nowhere in sight. Grace stops by his booth, picks her keys off a peg on a wooden board.

She spots her car, walks across the lot toward it,

INT. CAR - DAY

throws herself wearily into the driver's seat and brusquely jerks her head right: WHIP PAN to a MAN who is sitting at the other end of the station wagon's front seat.

(CONTINUED)

ON THE MAN

A minor monster in a nightmare by Goya. Brown skin, a fighter's broken nose, a black moustache bristling over shiny silver teeth, one eye smaller than the other; a Latin beau, middle-aged and provincial. Smudgy white three piece suit, white shoes with high heels, a string tie, a wide-brimmed hat. A gun bulges under his left lapel.

He smiles showing a set of purple gums, and Grace gets her voice back.

GRACE

How did you get in?

He lets her wait one beat, then speaks. His accent is lighter than Rosalba's.

MAN

I found the door unlocked.

For a split second she keeps staring, then she forces her door open and is about to scramble out. He plays his ace in a low voice.

MAN

Vera.

Grace FREEZES.

MAN

I know where she is.

She brings her feet back in. Then SLAMS the door shut.

MAN

I can take you to her.

GRACE

Who are you?

He lifts his hat as much as the car's ceiling would allow it.

MAN

Sorry. Felipe Robles, at your service.

(friendly)

Call me Phil.

INT. CAR - DAY

Facing Grace and Robles. Grace is driving on Broadway somewhere between 2nd and 9th Streets, barely managing to control the wheel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Robles has turned the rear mirror so he can watch the traffic behind them. He also steals glances out, scanning the sidewalk.

ROBLES

You don't tell the police, or your private eye, or even your bishop. You don't tell a soul. Otherwise, no deal.

GRACE

Is she all right?

ROBLES

Fine. Very bright girl.

GRACE

Where is this place?

ROBLES

Not far. Three hours drive. We'll drive together.

(pointing)

You got a red light.

She brakes violently -- both are thrown forward.

GRACE

Doesn't it have a name?

ROBLES

Our people are very poor. No English. No papers. Why should they call it something? To bring the immigration there?

(one beat)

They don't even have a church. They worship in an old cantina. So we are raising money to build them a church.

GRACE

We?

Robles nods, self-evidently sinister.

ROBLES

We.

(pointing to the light)

Go.

She jerks the car forward. They start cruising again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE
I offered a reward. You can use
the reward for that.

ROBLES
We need a lot more.

GRACE
(dryly)
How much?

He pulls a pen and a notebook out of his breast pocket, jots down a figure, tears the slip and passes it to her. She glances at it. It must be a staggering sum. She bites her lips and examines him again, realizing what kind of a dangerous racketeer he is.

ROBLES
(kindly)
You can write me a postdated check.
And you only give it to me when
you see Vera.

GRACE
(stammers a little,
afraid it might
be true)
Are you -- are you people keeping
her there?

ROBLES
Oh, no. She's as free as a bird.
Turn right.

Grace noses into a side street.

ROBLES
Here.

It is a shabby Mexican food joint. He gets out, then leans in inquisitively over the rolled down window.

GRACE
(answering his mute
question)
All right.

ROBLES
Very good Mexican food here. Tacos
al carbon. Want a taco al carbon?

He realizes that the very thought makes her sick, smiles tolerantly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBLES

We start tomorrow at seven. I'll
come to your house.

(reassuringly)

I know where it is.

He lifts his hat in a widely courteous gesture, then turns and walks to the taco joint's door. Now we are able to better take in his suit, his high-heeled shoes. He has a kind of dancing macho walk, like a featherweight fighter's -- he is actually very small.

He vanishes inside.

STAY ON GRACE who stares at the taco joint's facade, so real that it looks unreal, then

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

ON A BLINKING ANIMAL'S EYE

in EXTREME CLOSE-UP. All we can tell is that the animal is very scared, and furry.

The SHOT gives no other indications of place and circumstances. Suddenly a massive object THUDS down over the eye, blocking the screen.

PERFECTO (V.O.)

Uno por la chota.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

PERFECTO is hitting the head of a large hare with a coarse wooden cudgel.

He is a Chicano boy of perhaps twelve, small and undernourished, dressed in the usual white shirt and cotton pants, very tattered and dirty. He wears over his shoulder an old, patched satchel.

PERFECTO

Uno por la chota. Uno por la migra.
Uno por los coyotes. Uno por Don
Tarjetas. Uno por Don Robles.
(One for the police. One for the
immigration. One for the coyotes.
One for Mr. Greencards. One for
Mr. Robles.)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He picks up the dead animal, stuffs it into the satchel, then straightens himself. His hair completely hides his forehead, making his eyes glitter like embers under a wild bush.

Around him, the desolate vastness of Southern California. Burnt out fields, dusty shrubbery, cacti and ailing trees, under a merciless summer sun. Far away, the mountains pull the desert up toward the blue freshness of a different sky.

ANGLE ON A BIG SNAKE

Black under a crust of dirt, it meanders quickly under the shade of bushes, avoiding the lethal sun.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Perfecto allows himself to be a kid for a minute and to marvel at one of nature's most ingenious creations. Then he gives chase.

The long handle of his cudgel has a forked end. Perfecto tries to pin down the snake with it.

ANGLE ON THE SNAKE AND FORK

He misses twice, then catches the snake's body with his fork. The snake swells its body under the fork and dislodges it, and quickly slithers away.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Perfecto CURSES LOUD in Spanish and gives chase once more. Fascinated by the hunt, he does not notice how close he's come to a country road -- a regular dirt track, surely not mentioned on maps.

ANGLE ON THE SNAKE

The fork misses again, and Perfecto stumbles and falls which gives the snake some advantage. Suddenly a fancy white shoe crashes down over the snake's head. It pins it down but does not kill it, witness the snake's body and tail, which wrap frantically around the shoe and ankle and a white trouser leg.

Perfecto gets up, and we TILT UP with him to ESTABLISH Robles.

EXT. FIELD/ROAD - DAY

ROBLES
(pleasantly)
Buenas dias, Perfecto.

Perfecto peers at him obliquely from under his long hair, the very image of fright and suspicion. He knows the man well.

PERFECTO
Buenas dias, Don Robles.

ROBLES
Donde esta todo el mundo?
(Where is everybody?)

PERFECTO
Arriba en la loma.
(Up on the hill.)

ROBLES
Already? And why are you not there?

The snake beats strongly against Robles' ankle and leg.

ROBLES
Padre Angel has prayed all night
that the cross may bleed again,
as a sign of your redemption.
Don't you want to be redeemed,
Perfecto?

He thrusts his foot down. The snake unwinds and falls off his ankle. Robles steps off the squashed head and Perfecto lunges forward, but Robles is quicker. He picks up the dead snake.

ROBLES
(rhetorically, dangling
the snake)
I see. You have to eat. They're
all up there, praying to see the
miracle, but you have to eat.

And he SLAPS him across the face with the dead snake, so hard that Perfecto falls back and raises a cloud of dust.

ROBLES
You stupid, starved snake eater.
Get up and run uphill. And pray
all the way.

Perfecto grabs the snake, staggers up. A kick in the ass propels him into an uninterrupted flight until the bushes conceal him. Dusting off his pants with his hat, Robles walks back and WE PAN WITH HIM to find the station wagon, terribly dirty, with Grace behind the wheel. Robles has played this little scene for her benefit.

INT. CAR - DAY

She is wearing jeans, a checkered shirt, a scarf over her hair. Robles gets in, starts the car. The dirt track makes it dance like a boat on a rough sea.

GRACE

Does he really eat snakes?

ROBLES

(pleased by her
horrificed reaction)

Yes, and he makes belts from the
skins. Gringos like snake belts.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A village of sunken mud huts, like a bunch of crawling turtles. A yellow cloud of dust -- the car -- heads straight for it.

INT. CAR - DAY

ROBLES

We must hurry.

She puts her foot down, and they jolt forward, nauseatingly fast. The dirt track goes straight through the village. A fleeting impression of earth houses with tiny courtyards, clustered about a bare plaza shaded by cottonwood trees.

The hump of a barren hill rises suddenly in front, and Grace's eyes widen. About a hundred people are treading slowly toward the hill.

For a moment, the car is level with them. Grace scans the unknown faces.

GRACE

Rosalba!

Rosalba's silhouette appears between two other bodies. The combined movements of the car and the procession make her play a tantalizing hide-and-seek. Grace utters an exclamation: Vera herself is visible now, her wheelchair pushed forward by Rosalba.

ROBLES

Hey! Watch the road!

He puts his hand on the wheel. Grace fiercely SLAPS it away, then starts across the field to catch up with the procession. The car ROARS like a safari truck.

ON THE PROCESSION

SLIGHT LOW ANGLE as a wooden cross SHOOTs UP INTO THE SCREEN. TRACK BACK to keep it framed as the man who carries it heads the procession TOWARD THE CAMERA.

It is a very coarse cross, about four feet tall, with a sculpture of Christ crucified, very primitive and, therefore, very striking. Under a heavy crown of thorns, Christ's eyes goggle out of their sockets, as if in extreme astonishment. The body is very emaciated and painted a dead yellow. The traditional wounds are carved in visibly on the forehead and in the side. Extra large nails pin the palms and feet.

LOUD PRAYERS mix with the WAIL OF AN ALABADO. (Hymn in Spanish)

ADJUST ANGLE to include the carrier of the cross. PADRE ANGEL, forty or so, athletic in the fleshy, Latin way. Long black hair, a strong nose and full mouth, and eyes so dark that they seem to turn red when he is inspired, or angry. A heavy stubble dirties the lower half of his face, making his white teeth whiter. From the beginning, he is extremely powerful and hypnotic. He has, in his low class way, the imperially confident bearing of one of the twelve apostles, and wears nothing but a black, shapeless cassock, its bottom very dusty. He walks barefoot.

LOSE HIM to review the procession - men and women of all ages, kids. Chicanos, gringos, harmonized through similar shabbiness. Some wear peons' outfits (white shirts and drawers), others are in jeans and shirts. A few women are all in black, carrying candles and rosaries. Some have improvised crosses (often two branches fastened together) and there are a variety of naive icons on tall poles.

Many in the procession are invalids. Some limp, some are led by the hand, as they cannot see. But on the whole, the atmosphere is of moral distress rather than of physical crippledness.

Vera ENTERS THE SHOT, pushed forward by Rosalba. She seems peaceful and content. Rosalba HUMS the Spanish hymn.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Grace puts the car in park, pulls the key out and tears her door open. Robles firmly grabs her elbow.

ROBLES

The check.

She pours her pocketbook's contents onto the front seat, fishes out the check and SLAPS it into Robles' palm. She flings her legs out, but he grabs her elbow again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBLES

Don't tell nobody -- remember?

She yanks herself free. The procession has already started up the hill. Grace runs after it.

Robles takes out of the front seat mess Grace's cigarettes, lights one, examines the check. He puts check and pack of cigarettes in his pocket, leaves the car, walks away.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

FRAMING Rosalba and Vera. Far behind them, Grace is cutting through the crowd.

ROSALBA

(singing the alabado
in tune with other
voices)

De la nada fui formado
Por obra de mi criador,
Y en el juicio universal
El sera mi defendor.

Grace arrives from behind, panting from the run and the climb.

GRACE

Vera.

Vera turns in her chair, identifies her mother, frowns badly, then stares ahead again.

GRACE

(almost humbly)
I know you didn't want me to come
here, but I couldn't stop myself.
I'm so happy to see you, Vera.

Not far, a BALD BURLY MAN looking retarded is beating a wooden drum. Some people play coarse flutes, or rattle matracas (clackers), producing an appropriately BARBARIC SOUND. The NOISE becomes deafening.

GRACE

(shouting)
What you said in your letter was
right, Vera.

They are very close to the top. The procession stops.

GRACE

I -- I hope we'll go home together.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The icon carriers plant the poles in the ground. The Virgin of Guadalupe, Christ the King, the Sacred Family and a weird oil sanctification of John F. Kennedy!

GRACE

Speak to me, Vera.

Vera hushes Grace with a furious gesture. Facing the crowd, Padre Angel has raised the cross in his powerful hands. Most of the people kneel. Perfecto joins the crowd just in time, and makes a SCRAPING NOISE throwing himself on the ground.

ANGEL

May we all be forgiven, delivered,
and healed.

He blesses them all, drawing a wide cross in the air with the crucifix. Then he vigorously thrusts its end into the ground, planting it erect right on top.

The silence is instantly total. Angel starts almost in a WHISPER.

ANGEL

Brothers and sisters. As I walked
under the cross today, the Lord
asked me a question.

Everyone is instantly under his spell.

ANGEL

"Man named after my angels, who
are you?" he asked, as I trod
under Christ up the Calvary. And
before I could lie - not to him,
to myself - I knew I was everything
that fought and hurt Jesus. And
so are you, brothers and sisters.

He raises his voice, beautifully, passionately.

ANGEL

For two thousand years, day after
day, we've been the hammer that
nailed him on the cross. We've
been the thorns that pricked him
and the vinegar he drank. We've
been the spit on his face, and
the dirt of the Romans fouling
his tomb.

He stops suspensefully, then raises his finger toward the wooden Christ.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL

(louder)

And yet he showed his blood to us.
And today he will do it again.

A triumphant AAAAAHH! clamors over the crowd.

ANGEL

(very loud)

He has faith in us, as we have
faith in Him. But His miracles
are not free. Brothers and
sisters, he asks miracle for
miracle.

A ripple of approval goes through the crowd.

ANGEL

(a shout)

The miracle of our faith, brothers
and sisters! Let's give Him that
miracle today!

Shouts of "Si! Si! Today! Now!" Angel turns his back on the
crowd, falls on his knees and hugs the cross and wooden Christ.

Everybody hits the ground, kneeling or prostrating themselves
face down in the dust and arms stretched out. Rosalba helps
Vera out of her chair, and they both stretch in the dirt.

Grace is the only one standing. She hesitates, then kneels too.

DISSOLVE TO:

AERIAL SHOT

The brown, round hill is littered with colored specks -- the
prostrated bodies. Angel is a black speck clinging to the cross.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HILL - DAY

The murderous sun gives the landscape and faces an appearance of
harsh illumination.

A hot breeze plays with people's hair and tattered clothes.
They are otherwise motionless. Some time has passed.

DISSOLVE TO:

GRACE

whose knees hurt too badly. She sits on the ground, exhausted, not quite believing that all this is happening.

In the distance, her station wagon -- like a denial of all this.

She moves forward quietly to look at Vera. Vera is on her belly, her chin stuck in the dirt, her narrowed eyes shooting out a tireless beam toward Angel.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE SUN

firing up the sky -- a burning beyond words.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE HILL - ANOTHER ANGLE

PAN level with the dirt, past faces who seem dead. Now and then a mouth soundlessly twitches in prayer.

DISSOLVE TO:

THREE HAWKS

Soaring and diving, soaring and diving, in an aerial dance.

DISSOLVE TO:

GRACE

The heat is about to make her sick. She notices the retarded-looking man, whose baldness gathers all the sunshine: he spits in the dirt and molds it into a piece of clay, pastes some over his hairless skull and some over his face, making it into a strange mud mask.

DISSOLVE TO:

VERA'S FACE

A big beetle is going straight for her mouth. Vera blows it gently away.

DISSOLVE TO:

AN ALMOST PURE-BLOOD INDIAN

There is a traffic of ants all over his face. He stands this penitence, stoically, just fluttering his eyelids.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANGEL

In a pose of superhuman worship, his eyes blinded by the sun, hugging the cross -- has he fainted?

A red flower of blood blooms under the crown of thorns. It grows slowly, catching the sunlight. It travels down on the wooden cheek, and from there falls onto Angel's face.

He opens his eyes, staggers up.

Blood oozes out from between two of the wooden ribs.

EXT. HILL - DAY

A moment passes before someone notices and WHISPERS:

VOICE

Miren! La sangre de Christo!
(Look! The blood of Christ!)

The people look up. MURMURS, then SHOUTS of "Milagro!" ("Miracle!")

Angel wipes his forehead. He can hardly talk:

ANGEL

Our faith made it happen.

He smears his palms in the blood, then shows them to the crowd. He gathers his strength, and:

ANGEL

Brothers and sisters! I read in this blood Christ's word, clear as print! Save every penny for a new church, says Christ. Stop buying greencards from Don Tarjetas, and don't be afraid of his coyotes. For faith is the true everlasting greencard, and there is no border than can check your faith.

(a shout)

Faith is the miracle! Faith will heal us!

His shout echoes and meets a huge CLAMOR. He comes forward, holds out his hands to the nearest person -- a woman. The CLAMOR reverently DIES.

ANGEL

The blood of Christ.

The woman touches his red palm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN
Unto life everlasting.

Perfecto scrambles up and crowds Angel to be next.

ANGEL
The blood of Christ, Perfecto.

Perfecto touches the palm with his lips. Angel starts walking from one person to another. They either touch his palm or kiss it.

Rosalba helps Vera back into her chair, turns toward Grace.

ROSALBA
She cannot speak to you.

GRACE
Why not?

ROSALBA
Padre Angel ordered her to be silent.

GRACE
Did you bring her here?

Rosalba nods.

GRACE
How did you know of this place?

ROSALBA
A cousin of mine lost all her hair.
She came here in Spring, and it
grew back.

Angel is very close now, holding out his palm to the mud-caked man.

ANGEL
The blood of Christ, Demecio.

DEMECIO gurgles out a blurred, idiotic SOUND, touches his hand.

ANGEL
The blood of Christ, Vera.

She eagerly touches his palm. Showing no surprise at her presence, he does the same to Grace. She leaves him with hand outstretched, then she touches it very swiftly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL
The blood of Christ, Rosalba.

ROSALBA
(seriously)
Unto life everlasting.

He walks away, carrying the chalices of his red palms.

GRACE
How long is she supposed to be
silent?

ROSALBA
(serenely)
Until she is healed.

HOLD on Grace, whose eyes follow Angel with unqualified hatred.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Two hands are breaking homemade bread. They keep a slice and pass the rest to other hands who do the same, till we come to Vera.

Outside the cluster of mud huts, the pilgrims sit on stones or on the grass, in the shade of cottonwoods, sharing a meal: plates of beans, tortillas, red peppers. They TALK relaxedly and LAUGH.

Grace is leaning against a tree, some fifteen yards away. Dark patches of sweat show under her armpits. She looks angry and disgusted.

She tears herself away from the tree and walks resolutely into the village.

MOVING WITH HER, we pass a row of houses. Not all of them are earth structures -- there are some sheer improvisations of wood, tin and cardboard. A broken down VW bus shows under clothes drying up in its windows. By the time Grace comes to the empty plaza, she is MUTTERING to herself:

GRACE
Father Angel. Father Angel!
Father Angel!

Shaking from hunger, thirst and exhaustion, she rehearses
LOUDLY:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

I am Vera's mother. And I want my daughter back.

She charges towards a big, square box of earth with small windows and a blind two panel wooden door, crowned by a coarse cross -- the improvised church. She RAPS her fist on the door. Armed with a broom, Perfecto opens the door.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Angel, raising his head from a plate of beans, a laden fork in his hand.

GRACE (O.C.)

(shrill from nervousness)

Father Angel, I am Vera's mother.
I've come to take my daughter back.

He is having his meal right next to the entrance, on a table left over from the former cantina.

ANGEL

(as if the world
stopped outside
the village)

Back where?

GRACE

Back to Los Angeles. With me.

He puts the spoon in his mouth and chews slowly and elaborately, examining her. Even eating, he is full of hypnotic authority.

Perfecto waits poutingly in the background, broom in hand.

ANGEL

Why?

GRACE

You wouldn't understand why.
(fearing his possible
reaction; he displays
none)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you; it's just that we are from such -- different worlds. Anyway she's here because I've hurt her. I came to apologize, but she won't even answer me, because you --

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE (Cont'd)
(an outburst of
indignation)
Listen, I didn't pay that dirty-
nailed, fancy dressed crook a lot
of money just to watch your cross
bleed. Let her speak to me.

He pushes his plate away and passes his first judgement on her.

ANGEL
You don't look alike.

The room is a low roofed rectangle with a sunken floor. Benches
of all kinds and sizes face an improvised altar. A doorway on
the left has been curtained into a makeshift confessional.
Candle smoke has blackened the walls.

He rises, comes up to her, makes an effort to be warm and
persuasive:

ANGEL
If she speaks to you now, it would
only shake her faith. Why don't
you wait till she's healed?

She cannot repress a contemptuous SNORT:

GRACE
Healed! If she could be healed,
I'd wait here till Kingdom come.
But that's impossible -- I was
told so by the best doctors in this
country. They tried everything --
except a nice Easter pageant like
yours.

ANGEL
(calmly)
The blood says they were wrong.
Besides --
(as a concession)
Vera was unhappy where she was.
She was not with her people.

GRACE
Are you her people?

ANGEL
Of course. We share the pain, and
we'll share the healing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

Why don't you heal her in L.A.?
See if your cross works long
distance.

He x-rays her with his black eyes, reducing her to her blasphemy.

ANGEL

I will pray that Christ gives you
patience.

(coldly)

Would you like to pray with me?

She is all a mute "no." He shrugs his shoulders. Perfecto
throws away his broom.

PERFECTO

I'll pray with you.

ANGEL

(pats him on the head)

Thank you, Perfecto.

They both walk toward the altar: a table covered with home-spun
linen. The only embellishment is a profusion of wild flowers:
every kind that could be found in the fields. Behind the altar,
a wooden pedestal supports the miraculous cross. They kneel,
faces buried in their hands.

NOISE OF A TRUCK BRAKING abruptly in front of the church, of
people jumping out of it.

PERFECTO

Los coyotes!

FOOTSTEPS are already THUDDING toward the entrance. They both
get up. Angel is worried but full of self-control. His eyes
search the church, stop on Grace.

ANGEL

(to Perfecto)

Hide her.

A BLOW nearly unhinges the door.

VOICE

Open up!

Angel rushes to the door, leans his powerful back against it,
his arms outstretched.

ANGEL

(whisper)

In the confessional! Quick!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Before Grace can react, the kid grabs her wrist, pulls her toward the curtained exit.

GRACE

Let go of me. What is this?

PERFECTO

(fiercely)

SSSSHHHHH!

VOICES (O.C.)

Hijo de la chingada, abre la puerta.
Donde andas, pinche ratero? No te
escondas en tu cruz.

(Son of a harlot, open the door.
Where are you, you cheap bastard?
Don't hide behind your cross.)

Perfecto and Grace vanish behind the curtain. The two panels of the door flap like wings trying to break into flight. A supreme blow SLAMS Angel on the floor. Five MEN fall with the broken door on top of him. He struggles up, and they cling to him like dogs to a cornered bear, shouting in a gibberish of English and Spanish.

VOICES

Den le duro! Hit the filthy crook!
Metele! Con cuidado, he may have
a knife.

The coyotes -- the rural Hispanic Mafia -- are all barely in their twenties, with costumes varying from vaquero to urban mugger.

Angel knocks two of them cold. Someone brings a gun down on his head. He collapses. The OLDEST COYOTE kicks him in the groin.

VOICE

Not in the balls.

OLDEST COYOTE

He don't need them. He's a priest.

LAUGHTER. The oldest coyote kicks Angel in the groin again. He passes out. They get down to frisk him.

VOICES

What's he got on? Just this black
rag. Roll him over. Nothing? Try
the armpits.

A bucket of water is showered over Angel's head. He gets up on all fours. They pin him down, weigh on his body and are brusquely silent. A strange CREAKING/WHIRRING NOISE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From ANGEL'S POV, the wheels of an antiquated wheelchair ENTER THE SHOT. Above them sits DON TARJETAS (Mr. Greencards), a bull of a man with a huge moustache, white hair, face pocked by scars. He looks like a latter-day Pancho Villa. Behind him, Robles.

DON TARJETAS
(deep bass)
Donde esta la lana?
(Where is the bread?)

The only answer is Angel's painful panting.

DON TARJETAS
I waited two weeks. Where is the money?

(silence)
Listen, cabron, a year ago, when you came from nowhere carrying your cross, I gave you a parish and I let you keep half of every dollar you made. Now you're late with your dues, and you're stirring those worms against me. I'll give you one more chance before I wipe my ass of you.

(formidable)
WHERE IS THE MONEY?

Someone jerks Angel's head up by pulling at his hair.

ANGEL
In the bank. I -- opened an account.
For the -- new church.

Don Tarjetas throws his head back and LAUGHS like a cyclops.

DON TARJETAS
In the bank! Those sweaty crumpled dollaritos from heartbroken cripples' mothers! Are they in your name?

Another savage tug at Angel's hair.

ANGEL
OW! Yes!

DON TARJETAS
Swear. Swear on your cross.

Silence. Robles smirks like an urban dweller amused by a peasant tragedy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DON TARJETAS
Bring him closer.

They pull Angel by the hair, inside the Patron's reach. Don Tarjetas SLAPS him thunderously. A strand of hair tears off, and Angel's head falls.

DON TARJETAS
Search the altar.

They look at each other in superstitious fright.

DON TARJETAS
Cobardes. Get me there.

INT. CONFESSIONAL - DAY

A beam of light falls on Grace's frightened eyes. Behind Grace and Perfecto, a passageway full of junk leads to the disused kitchen.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A thug pushes the wheelchair up to the altar.

Don Tarjetas avoids touching the cross. He goes straight for the table, pulls the flowers down, tears off the altar linen.

The coyotes watch apprehensively. They cross themselves, or touch their testicles.

Don Tarjetas uncovers the table: bare wood with its center carved out to fit the 9 by 12 inch altar stone. The group watches him in extreme suspense. He scoops up the altar stone. The coyotes cheer: a wad of bills is taped to the bottom of the stone.

Angel is still lying in the same spot, with several boots weighing on his back.

Don Tarjetas grabs the money, drops the stone. He peels off a layer of bills from the wad, throws it to his handymen. They leave Angel and roll on the floor over the money.

DON TARJETAS
Now take away his cross.

Freed from fright, two thugs pull it off its pedestal. A ROAR: Angel gets up and sprints to protect his cross. He topples the two, recovers it, but is instantly confronted with all the others.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A knife flashes. He has no choice than to use the cross as a weapon, and he fights desperately. Someone attacks him with a chain.

Cornered and hit from all directions, he collapses flat on his face, his heavy body crushing the cross to pieces.

INT. CONFFESIONAL/DISUSED KITCHEN - DAY

Grace cannot stand it anymore. She pushes Perfecto away, flashes through the empty kitchen, opens a back door and bursts into an empty alley.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

She runs in the direction of the pilgrims' lunch, calling:

GRACE
Help! Help!

PAN BACK to include the CHURCH ENTRANCE, with a truck parked before it, its engine throbbing.

Don Tarjetas is pushed out of the church by Robles. The other coyotes lift Don Tarjetas from his chair, help him next to the driver, pack into the truck and drive off.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Angel is sitting on the floor, in a pool of cross splinters and blood -- from his own nose. Perfecto inefficiently wipes his face with a rag. Around them, the help Grace has brought: about twenty of this morning's pilgrims, looking terribly shocked. They pay more attention to the broken cross than to Angel. Vera's chair is right next to him.

After a moment, Grace tries to pull Vera's chair out of the crowd and away, but Vera puts the brakes on and stays planted next to her savior. Terribly self-conscious, Grace has to WHISPER to her right before everybody else.

GRACE
Vera, be reasonable. This man is
involved in some kind of racket.
He may not be a priest at all.

Vera turns, glances at Rosalba, who instantly pulls a pencil and pad out of the chair's back pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE
Come back with me. Everything will
be different.

Vera starts drawing large letters, and WE READ as they come from
under the pencil: "TAKE HIM AWAY FROM HERE."

GRACE
(desperately)
Vera, what do you know about him?
He's just like the others.

Perfecto follows this closely. So does everyone present. Vera
starts drawing again: "IF YOU DO, I MAY COME BACK HOME."

GRACE
For the love of God, Vera, what
did he do to you?

Angel MOANS behind them. Vera punches her finger on the pad
for emphasis.

ROSALBA
Take him away, senora. Otherwise
they'll kill him.

Grace looks around: twenty begging faces, forty imploring eyes.

GRACE
Jesus Christ.

Tears from nervous exhaustion start rolling down her cheeks.
She wipes them off, but they keep coming.

GRACE
Jesus Christ, please help me. Help
me. HELP ME.
(a huge effort)
All right. Let's take him to the
car.

The least impaired of the crowd prop Angel up, start helping
him toward the door. Grace stops on the threshold, looks back
at Vera. HOLD ON VERA, her eyes very deep.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

TIGHT on an IRRIGATION SPRINKLER spreading a rainbow of water
over a field. Angel is washing his face in it, getting plenty

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

of water on his cassock.

Grace stands by, out of the sprinkler's reach.

Angel probes his teeth with his finger (several of them are shaky), grinds his jaws together and grimaces in pain, then turns toward her a face all black and blue, eyes feverishly inspired.

ANGEL
I know of another cross.

GRACE
What?

ANGEL
I know of another cross like that one. A healing cross.

GRACE
Where is it?

ANGEL
In Juarez, Mexico.

He brusquely limps toward her (she draws back), his whole being a mystical flame.

ANGEL
I must bring it to them. Otherwise they'll lose their faith.

She walks toward the car. He limps after her. The sun has started to go down.

INT. CAR - DAY

She drives off, stone-faced from exhaustion and from having to cope with this madman.

After a moment she sniffs: the sweat and blood, the water turned mud on his dusty cassock have made Angel anything but fragrant. She rolls her window down.

GRACE
How much money was there?

ANGEL
About six hundred.

GRACE
Where did you gather that much?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL
From people's families. Each
family sends twenty to fifty dollars
a week.

GRACE
For how long?

ANGEL
(candidly)
Until they are healed.

GRACE
I suppose I owe you six weeks of
back payments.

He misses the sarcasm, gestures generously: "It's alright."

GRACE
Has anyone been healed yet?

ANGEL
Not yet. But we were getting close.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The car turns from the country road into a paved highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

AERIAL SHOT of the highway's junction with the Interstate Freeway.
The car pulls over and stops right before the junction.

INT. CAR - DAY

Grace cuts the engine. She turns toward Angel, speaks crisply,
testing his reactions.

GRACE
All right, here's what we'll do in
L.A. I'll get you a room to spend
the night. Don't worry about the
money, we have an understanding
with a motel for itinerants in your
situation. Tomorrow morning you
can have breakfast at our church,
and then we'll go to the police.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE (Cont'd)
(seeing his reaction)
I know you're worried because your people don't have papers, but they're not going to be harmed. We have contacts in the police department. If you told the police what's going on back there, they could help your people. They could teach those bandits a lesson.

He is silent, testing her as much as she is testing him.

ANGEL
(finally)
And then?

GRACE
What do you mean?

ANGEL
What happens then? After the police help my people?
(one beat)
You want to help -- you give me a ride to Juarez.

For a moment she cannot believe it. Then she tilts her head back, explodes into HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER.

GRACE
A ride to Juarez! This is too much!
A ride to Juarez! A ride straight to the immigration office, that's the ride I ought to give you, Mr. Miracle Maker! Now get out of my car and find yourself another dummy!

His eyes excommunicate her silently. Then he gets out and starts south across the yellowish expanse of the desert.

She watches him for a moment, then puts the car in gear and roars after him over the dusty shrubbery. She catches up with his bare feet, puts her head out.

GRACE
Where are you going?

ANGEL
(calmly)
To bring the cross.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

And milk every penny out of those poor bastards. Sell them hopes you'll never fulfill. Go on. I know your kind of man of God.

ANGEL

(definitively)

You know nothing about God.

And he keeps walking south, the pain of the beating still showing in his movements. She backs violently into the highway and takes the northbound ramp onto the Interstate.

EXT./INT. GAS STATION - DAY (LATER)

As the pump's nozzle throbs gas into the tank's mouth, Grace comes out of the restroom and walks into the station. She goes for the cigarette machine, pulls out a pack, tears it open and lights a cigarette, her gestures before the first puff like a junkie's before a fix. Then she combines more change, pulls out a Diet Pepsi and gurgles it down, pulls out a Hershey bar. Her teeth sunk into the candy bar, she turns and looks at the setting sun: it is about to fall below the horizon line, huge, red, like a bleeding wound.

ATTENDANT

Nine seventy.

She walks to the counter and stops, money in hand, her eyes on a rackful of road maps.

GRACE

Do you have a map of the Southwest?

ATTENDANT

There must be one over there.

She thumbs through the maps, finds the one she needs. She looks up, lost in thought: the sun has been halved by the horizon line.

GRACE

How far are we from El Paso?

ATTENDANT

'Bout nine hundred miles.

She puts the map down on the counter together with a twenty dollar bill.

GRACE

I need some change.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Attendant indifferently breaks the bill, gives her a pile of quarters and dimes. Grace pulls out another pack of cigarettes, two more Hershey bars, a bag of chips and some cheese-peanut-butter crackers. Loaded, she walks to the car, gets in. This time she starts south.

EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT

The usual interplay of white and red: headlights coming, tail-lights going.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Cigarette in her mouth. Grace drives in the slowest lane, straining her eyes to see out, across the dark desert. On the seat beside her there is the first pack of cigarettes, open, and a mound of torn up paper wrapping.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Half-smoked cigarettes are sticking out of the car's ashtray. The first pack sits crumpled in the front seat. The second is now open. Grace keeps trying to see out, with almost no chance of spotting Angel. There is a touch of panic in her features.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Angel is walking in the dark, with the Interstate's lights on his left.

Very tired, he stops, like a penitent who has completed his penance. Then he starts toward the Interstate.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Grace's high beams discover Angel, standing far ahead, on the shoulder. Before she can pull over she is overtaken by a battered pick-up truck, driven by a Chicano farmer.

It carries a handful of peons wrapped in blankets, faces shaded by sombreros. Angel thumbs it down. It does not stop, just slows down enough for Angel to fling his body up and land among the peons. Then the truck speeds away.

Grace BANGS the wheel with her fist and speeds to catch up with the truck. Tailgating dangerously, she flicks the high beams

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

on and off. The peons stare back, confused, until Angel understands and KNOCKS on the back of the truck cabin.

Both vehicles stop. Angel jumps off, walks to the station wagon, gets in. Strong reaction from the peons: they bend out of the truck, nearly falling off, and SHOUT and WHISTLE.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

They are driving together again, with car lights playing on their faces. Angel is inspecting the discarded chip bags. He skillfully extracts from them precious minuscule leftovers, pops them in his mouth.

GRACE

(almost friendly)

This -- Don Tarjetas. Who is he anyway?

ANGEL

Judas. Judas selling greencards. The border patrol shot his legs full of bullets. It was God's warning. But he won't listen.

(confidentially)

He never wanted to build a church -- that's why I took his money.

They drive for a moment in silence.

GRACE

Is Angel really your name?

ANGEL

Yes.

GRACE

My name is Grace.

He smiles.

GRACE

I don't see anything funny about it. Now listen, I'll make a deal with you. I'll drive you there and back. Then you'll give me Vera.

ANGEL

After she's healed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE
(exasperated)
Oh, for heaven's sake. Can you
drive?

ANGEL
I can drive.

She pulls over, and he takes her place. Grace gets in the back seat, disappears with an exhausted sigh, and instantly pops up again.

GRACE
Wait a minute. Have you got a
license?

ANGEL
An American license? No.

GRACE
What do we do if they stop us?

ANGEL
(infallibly)
They won't.

She considers the situation, then shrugs her shoulders and crashes in the back seat, disappearing again. He starts the car.

ANGEL
Grace.

GRACE
(already gone)
What?

ANGEL
You are a very brave woman.

GRACE
Mm-hm.

And she breathes quietly, asleep.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

TIGHT ON ANGEL'S HANDS counting out money, receiving change.
ENLARGE TO FRAME a very seedy MOTEL OFFICE. A sleepy Chicano
hands Angel two keys. He takes the keys, slips the change into
Grace's pocketbook.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

It is a ten unit rundown adobe, undoubtedly Angel's choice. The station wagon is parked facing a room. Grace is in the back seat, sound asleep.

Angel unlocks the room door, then walks to the car, bends inside and extracts Grace's body with infinite precaution. She stirs but is still asleep as he lifts her and carries her inside.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Her eyes open as her body touches the bed, and for a second she blinks in panic finding Angel's face so close, his mouth panting a little from the effort.

GRACE

What -- what are you doing?

Her face turns crimson red, and she glances down at her fully dressed body before realizing that she was in no danger. Angel arranges her pocketbook, room key and car keys on the shabby bed table, points his finger at them, then presses his joined hands against his cheek in a "sleep well" gesture and walks out.

She gets up and makes sure the door is locked, sits on the bed, trying to think. Then her head falls on the pillow, and she sinks into sleep, in her clothes, lights on.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

A pair of jeans, a white male shirt and a pair of flipflops are handed to Grace by a provincial looking salesgirl. Grace takes them, walks across a small department store, its windows full of the glare of the desert sun, to a fitting room. Angel's hand comes out from behind the curtain, takes the newly bought clothes and hands her the cassock, wrapped into a disgusting black bundle. STAY ON THE CASSOCK and

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

The red eye of a washer blinking off at the end of a cycle. Angel opens the washer, takes out the cassock. He looks very ill at ease in his white shirt and jeans.

ENLARGE TO SHOW GRACE, who wears a newly acquired, un-chic blouse. She opens the next washer and takes out the blouse and underwear she wore yesterday. This operation was her idea; also hers was the scruple of not washing her things together with his.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She walks to a dryer, throws her things inside. From behind, he throws in his cassock. They start revolving together. Grace opens her pocketbook and hands Angel a gift: a toothbrush. He turns, irritated, faces through the glass front a desert town of half a dozen streets with the mountains in the background.

She stands next to him staring at the landscape.

GRACE

(softly)

I like the desert. It's very dry and very pure. I'm not surprised that so many saints received their calling in the desert.

ANGEL

I received mine at sea.

GRACE

How did it happen?

ANGEL

(simply)

We used to fish with dynamite -- me and a friend. He blew himself up, and I nearly drowned. When I made it to the shore, I found God there, waiting for me.

(laughing at
the memory)

First I thought he was a cop. He wore a suit and black shoes.

This is so enormous that Grace's jaw falls.

ANGEL

He said save the cripples, the way I saved you. Soon after that, another friend made that cross for me.

A silence. They look back at the revolving clothes, then at each other.

GRACE

I don't really know when I was called. Two years ago, Vera and her father had a crash -- that's why she can't walk now. About an hour before he died, Bob told me he thought I was called. I believe that people know at such times. He wasn't even a religious man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She stops, noticing his total stupefaction.

GRACE

I'm a priest. I was ordained just before Vera left.

His astonishment is cosmic. His mouth rounds soundlessly the word "priest."

GRACE

(irritated)

What's the matter? D'you think women are not worthy of being priests?

He turns his back on her.

GRACE

Well, sorry. This is the U.S., not Mexico.

He turns and faces her vehemently, his eyes red with anger.

ANGEL

It's not THAT! If you're a priest, why did you doubt the blood when you saw it?

GRACE

(angry herself)

Now listen, Mister Only Holy One! For your information, blood never comes warm and live out of inanimate objects. Not today anyway.

He grabs her by the shoulders, bringing his face extremely close to hers.

ANGEL

Do you think it wasn't blood?

GRACE

I don't know.

ANGEL

Do you think it wasn't Christ's living blood?

But his mystical passion is up against fifteen centuries of scientific rationalism. She squirms under his pressure and turns pale.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

I don't know. Maybe it was.

ANGEL

Why did you come with me, if you don't believe it?

GRACE

Because we have a deal, remember? You latins make miracles. We gringos make deals.

He almost sends her crashing into the wall. Then he points his finger at her.

ANGEL

(irate like Christ
in the Temple)

A priest! Jesus falls on His knees before you every day and begs you to make a miracle for Him. The easiest, tiniest miracle. Open your eyes, He begs. Open them and see my signs.

(choking)

Your daughter -- your daughter walks faster than you! Your daughter runs! You crawl!

He rushes to the dryer, tears the door open and snatches out his cassock. It comes together with a piece of Grace's underwear, which he angrily flings back in. Without a look back, he flashes out the door.

EXT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

He crosses the street and starts south again, straight across the desert.

Grace comes out after him.

GRACE

Wait. Angel, wait.

Without turning, he kicks off one flipflop. The other clings to his toes. He snatches it off angrily and throws it back, almost hitting her.

LIFT ABOVE the incredible sight of the man and woman, leaving the little town behind. Soon enough they become two human specks in the yellow-greenish vastness.

ON GRACE

running to keep up with him and yelling angrily:

GRACE

Why do you bully me like that? To
please your macho God?

He goes on. A hot midday wind rolls tumbleweeds. One rolling cluster nearly hits Grace, who utters a small cry. Angel doesn't turn. Tumbleweeds bump into him. He does not try to avoid them.

ON HIS FEET

implacably treading south, over sand, sagebrush, yucca.

ON HER FEET

following, sometimes stepping on his footprints.

ON GRACE

She decides that she can only fight him on his terms. She grits her teeth and walks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The sun has moved: a couple of hours have passed.

Grace walks slowly, overcome by the desert's openness, by the passion of the hot wind, by this whole experience, so primitive and sensual.

She stops. Angel is far ahead.

The landscape is a silent, white hallucination.

Suddenly her knees give in: she has to sit down, alone, under the cruel sun.

Far ahead, his silhouette shivers through the heat's fog. Grace starts tittering soundlessly: is all this really happening?

ON ANGEL

He stops, looks back: she is a barely distinguishable spot. He thinks deeply for a moment, then starts back.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Finally he materializes next to her. She tries to get up but simply does not have the strength to do it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL

(in a reconciling tone)
That's the way to look for the
cross. Walking in pain through
the desert, not driving in cars.

She LAUGHS.

ANGEL

What's the matter?

GRACE

My things must still be in the
dryer.

She looks back. The little town is almost invisible.

GRACE

I wish my friends could see me now.

He picks up several dry branches, takes off his shirt, improvises
from them a kind of canopy.

ANGEL

Hold it over your head. I'll bring
the car.

She shrinks under the narrow shade, gratefully closes her eyes.
He starts back, his gaze hollow with thirst.

EXT. INTERSTATE - DAY

A picnic area, miles deeper into the desert. Not far from it, a
faded billboard vaunts some Texas attraction.

There's nobody here, except Grace and Angel. They sit across
from each other at a standard picnic table, with Kentucky Fried
Chicken leftovers between them.

ANGEL

People treat God like some kind of
UFO. Whenever they meet him, they
claim he wasn't really there, or
maybe he was someone else, or they
were drunk or something. They go
to their friends, to their doctors,
even to their priests, and ask to
be told that it was just a dream.
And that's what they are told. You
were drunk. You are ill. You need
a vacation.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL (Cont'd)

(sighing)

So they believe they didn't meet Him, and they relax.

Rested, Grace draws on a cigarette. She is both intrigued and amused by this and tries to keep a straight face.

GRACE

In your opinion, everybody can meet God.

ANGEL

Everybody does meet Him, sometime or other.

GRACE

You mean it happens all the time, and it just goes unreported?

ANGEL

I'm reporting it!

She shakes her head, crushes her cigarette, gathers the food leftovers, stuffs them into a trash can, then starts toward the car. He follows her.

GRACE

(to make up)

What's the Spanish for Grace?

ANGEL

Gracia. It means the same thing.

GRACE

Does Vera mean anything?

ANGEL

Vera?

(he pronounces "vay-rah"
not "vee-rah")

It means true. Like Vera Cruz --
the true cross.

She reaches for the car door, and he suddenly blocks her way. She starts, then notices his expression which is very entreating.

GRACE

What's the matter?

He stretches his arm toward a spot a few hundred yards away: a disused trailer camp.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL

Do you want to meet him? Just go over there. He is there.

A silence. NOISE of cars zooming by.

GRACE

How do you know?

ANGEL

(begging)

It'll take a couple of minutes. Please.

She shrugs her shoulders, steps toward the trailer camp, but backtracks immediately and confronts him.

GRACE

No.

ANGEL

Why not?

GRACE

Because you're trying to prove that your faith is better than mine. You want me to go there and find no one, and blame myself. Same trick as your cross: we could all make it bleed, if only we had Angel's faith.

ANGEL

You're worse than Thomas.

(takes her hands,
all warmth and
gentle persuasion)

You could make the cross bleed.
You'll go there and find him and talk to him.

(one beat)

Grace. He wants to see you.

She frees her hands, turns and walks toward the trailer camp.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

MOVING WITH HER. Gradually, her irritation makes room for curiosity -- could this crank be right?

Close to the camp, she slows down. Her face shows a touch of apprehension.

EXT. TRAILER CAMP - DAY

Half a dozen abandoned trailers. Buzzards doze on their roofs. By night the place would be spooky.

As Grace walks into the camp, the buzzards wake up and flap into flight. She advances carefully, almost on tiptoe. The silence amplifies her FOOTSTEPS.

Like toothless mouths, like hollow sockets, the doors and windows gawk as she passes.

Eyes searching the place, she stumbles and nearly falls.

She stops before a trailer with most of its wall panels missing -- it looks like a whale's skeleton. Through the holes she can see the picnic area, her car, and Angel, who waits patiently.

A NOISE makes her start, then breathe in relief: it is only an unhinged door, banging against a wall.

Nobody.

She decides that she is completely alone. At ease and yet disappointed, she starts back.

EXT. PICNIC AREA - DAY

From her MOVING POV, we approach Angel, who sees Grace and rises, his smile visible from quite a distance. She gets closer, and he beams more and more, as if indeed the predicted encounter had occurred.

ANGEL

Well?

She ENTERS THE SHOT, inspects his face, finds only insanely candid conviction. She lowers her eyes.

GRACE

He was there.

Transfigured, awed, he stares at her: now she is a different person for him.

ANGEL

Did he -- say anything?

She decides to play it for all it's worth.

GRACE

Yes, he did.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE (Cont'd)
(savoring his emotion)
He said: "Help Angel. He's a good
man. He'll bring Vera back to you."

He drops to his knees, jumps up again, ecstatic, tries to take her hand. She rejects him gently and walks to the car, with Angel waltzing joyfully after her.

ANGEL
What was he like?

She gets in, speaks over the rolled down window:

GRACE
He wore a suit and black shoes.

EXT. EL PASO - EVENING

From the height of a slope in El Paso, SHOOT OVER the crowded lights of Juarez, low-powered and flickering. Railroad tracks meander at the bottom of the frame, carrying endless freight trains. Somewhere behind them runs the border.

ANGEL (O.C.)
When we were kids, my father told us a story about how the flood will come again, and it will swell the Rio Grande so much that there'll be no fences left, no towers, no police, no border at all.

PULL BACK including Angel and Grace, standing at the end of a little street which simply cuts off and falls into a deep ravine.

GRACE
How are you going to cross over tomorrow?

ANGEL
It depends on the day. Sometimes you can cross anywhere, sometimes not at all.

They turn, start walking up the street through a poor Chicano neighborhood. They stop in front of a motel, a twin brother of last night's.

ANGEL
Now. We meet at the cathedral.
If you don't find me there --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

I leave my car, take a cab, drive to Mariposa.

ANGEL

Right. It's a street without numbers. Ask for Ciego.

GRACE

The blind man.

ANGEL

Right. If he doesn't trust you, let him feel this.

He pulls out from under his cassock a large, coarse rosary, gives it to her.

ANGEL

He remembers things he made.

He takes her hand. She starts, searches his eyes -- apparently, there's nothing romantic in his expression, just his usual intenseness and inspiration.

ANGEL

Remember, whatever happens to me, don't call the police. Just get the cross, take it back to L.A. and wait for me there.

(he lets go of
her hand)

Good night. God be with you.

He walks across a dark patio, enters his room. She watches him vanish, walks up to her own room, which is right next door to his.

INT. GRACE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Kicking off her shoes, she notices there is a door between the two rooms - blocked by a dressing table. She smiles, starts taking off her blouse.

INT. ANGEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

He falls on his knees and prays for a couple of seconds, facing toward the other city and unseen other cross. Without taking off his cassock, he throws himself on the bed. **HOLD ON HIS FACE** as he closes his eyes.

EXT. HILL - DAY (ANGEL'S DREAM)

He is alone on the cripples' calvary, under the glaring midday sun.

AMPLIFIED SOUNDS of his HEARTBEATS, of his PANTING.

Looking very scared, he walks up to the cross, leans his back against it, spreads his arms in the classic pose, his palms open.

He shudders violently noticing that the ends of the cross beam are two human palms. Indeed, the whole cross has turned into a person -- Grace.

Grace stands erect, her arms spread in the same pose, and Angel leans back against her body, arms spread, frightened and yet elated.

He ventures to turn his head to shoot a backward glance at her. She smiles. The CAMERA MOVES AWAY, over Angel's face, along his arm and suddenly

A LARGE NAIL ENTERS THE SHOT and a savage hammer blow drives it straight through Angel's and Grace's hands and blood gushes out.

ANGEL

Noooooooooooo!

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

He bangs his head against the wall. The pain wakes him up. He sighs in relief, wipes his brow, lies back.

He closes his eyes again and drifts back into sleep.

EXT. HILL - DAY (ANGEL'S DREAM)

Now he is alone again, hugging the cross in the position we have seen.

ON ANGEL'S PROFILE

pressed against the rugged wood. The brown coarseness of the wood starts fading strangely into a voluptuous white fabric. Stunned, he looks up as we ENLARGE: he is hugging Grace's thigh and waist. She is dressed in an alb.

TIGHTEN again around his profile, as he presses his face against her body, his nostrils hungrily breathing in this new fragrance.

INT. ROOM - DAY

Angel smiles in his sleep, his face lit by dawn. He opens his eyes, becomes aware of SOUNDS in the next room: Grace is awake, getting ready.

INT. GRACE'S ROOM - DAY

A KNOCK finds her buttoning the last button on her blouse.

GRACE
I'm afraid that door is locked.

INT. ANGEL'S ROOM - DAY

He grabs the knob and yanks -- not too hard. The door opens.

INT. GRACE'S ROOM - DAY

He looks at her over the obstacle of the dressing table.

GRACE
(as a grown up to
a kid)
Good morning. Did you sleep well?

ANGEL
(almost a confession)
Wonderful.

GRACE
I'm ready. Let's see who gets
there first.

He nods, starts closing the door. She pushes it open again.

GRACE
Actually, there's no reason you
should go. There's no reason you
should cross twice and perhaps
get caught.

ANGEL
That's alright. I'll see you
there.

GRACE
You can wait here. I'm perfectly
capable of bringing your cross.

ANGEL
I know you are.

He closes the door.

EXT. MOTEL/STREET - DAY

They come out of their two rooms almost at the same time. Grace gets in the car and waves as she drives off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOLD ON HIM as he watches the departing car, his face telling us simply, primitively, that he loves this gringo lady. As soon as the car vanishes, he hurries up the street to the spot where they stood watching Juarez last night. At the bottom of the ravine, the trains puff and WHISTLE, like grumpy dragons.

He pulls a belt from under his cassock, ties it around his waist, which pulls the cassock up and makes it less cumbersome.

He sprints down the cliff at stupendous speed. In a second, he is down in one piece, and keeps running like a champion until he vanishes, as if sucked in by the earth.

EXT. BORDER BRIDGE - DAY

American cars drive past two sets of customs booths, under the twin flapping of the U.S. and Mexican flags. The station wagon eases into Mexico.

INT. CAR - DAY

Nervous and yet excited, Grace drives down Avenida 16 de Septiembre, stealing glances at the colorful chaos of the busiest street in Juarez. She turns the radio on -- a male voice reads the news in Spanish. The main plaza opens before her, topped by the cathedral. She starts looking for a parking spot.

EXT. PLAZA - DAY

She parks right under an "Estacionamiento Prohibido" sign. She gets out and is faced with a Traffic Officer. She sticks a dollar in his hand, and he nods her away.

A crowd of unemployed peons are camping in the middle of the Plaza. She has to walk across them, followed by virile glances from under sombreros. The space before the cathedral is covered by a multitude of peddlers, selling from push carts, icons crosses, rosaries and other cheap religious articles.

Walking fast toward the cathedral, Grace cannot help noticing the old women in black haggling over the price of the cheap icons, the picturesquely filthy and unshaven sellers, and yes, the beggars, many of them cripples. A number of them are sitting on the cathedral's steps, and she has to zigzag through them to reach the entrance.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

She enters the devout Catholic hum of a crowded nave.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Here is Angel, lighting an army of candles and crossing himself abundantly after each one of them. Tied at the waist, his cassock looks now like a caftan. He gets down on his knees and crawls penitently toward the altar.

Grace watches him stop at the communion rail and line up with other people to receive the bread and wine. There is an empty spot next to him. She is tempted to take it. It is filled by another man.

ON ANGEL AND THE MAN

from the priest's POV as he gives away the wafers.

PAN ALONG THE MOUTHS chewing and swallowing, past Angel, to include a face so carved by knives that it looks like an old butcher block. The man is larger than Angel, in his forties, and murderous-looking.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Grace's eyes widen. ZOOM TO THE COUPLE'S BACKS. The man is pressing his fist against Angel's side, his gun almost concealed by the closeness of their bodies. They drink the wine one after the other, then get up like Siamese twins and walk in step toward the entrance. Angel's eyes spot Grace, spell a mute command. She hurries out through one of the side doors

EXT. PLAZA - DAY

and sees a line of taxis. She safely gets into one.

INT. TAXI - DAY

The taxi fights its way through the crowded plaza. Angel suddenly flashes past its window, leaving the taxi behind. The man with the knife is running after him. For a moment he runs in step with Grace's frightened profile. They cross the taxi's path and are almost run over. The DRIVER honks stridently.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Grace stands in a narrow alleyway between two rundown hovels, both less tall than she is. Behind her, WE SEE a slice of a nightmarishly poor barrio. Strident SHOUTS of kids playing. She is being watched by a little girl who sits on an entrance step, dangling a toy -- a dead lizard with a cord around its throat. The door behind the girl opens.

INT. SLUM - DAY

Five women of five generations, all in black, stand like a tribunal in a room of dry mud, facing Grace. The youngest, in her twenties, wears black, tight fitting slacks and a black silk blouson. She could be a prostitute.

GRACE

(struggling with
the accent)

Yo estoy amiga de Padre Angel.
(I am a friend of Father Angel's.)

The youngest woman starts LAUGHING.

GRACE

Vengo buscar el cruz. Padre
esperando otro lado de frontera.
(He sent me for the cross. He is
waiting for me across the border.)

The old woman nods. The youngest woman beckons Grace out of the room.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

They come out into a backyard that looks like a garbage dump. Trying to keep her clothes unsoiled, the YOUNG WOMAN winds through piles of junk, comes to a half-sunken little barn.

WOMAN

Ciego! Orale, Ciego!
(Blind man. Hey, blind man.)

INT. BARN - DAY

The SCREEN is DARK. Realistic NOISE of a carpenter at work. The young woman pushes the door open as far as it will go. Confused, Grace stops on the threshold.

Being blind, Ciego needs no light. He is in his sixties, with a long beard, his unseeing eyes covered by monstrously poxed eyelids -- a pair of squashed toads. His hands are whittling off a beam.

WOMAN

(walking up to him)

No podras ver la pero aca te visitan.
(You can't see it, but you have a
visitor.)

He drops what he was doing and, like a lustful mole, he gropes around and grabs the woman. Before she can fight him off, he has a good feel of her tits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Quita tus pinches manos. Orale ya,
fijate que fina la senora.
(Lay off your dirty hands. Look
what a fine lady we've got here.)

CIEGO

(incredulously)
La senora?

WOMAN

Si. Angel manda por su cruz.
(Yes. Angel has sent for his
cross.)

(to Grace)

He can't see, but he can feel.

She LAUGHS coarsely, steps out and SLAMS the door shut, leaving Grace alone with Ciego. She expects to be pawed in the same manner and prepares heroically to take it. Ciego's fingers travel up her arm, touch her chin, mouth, forehead.

CIEGO

Did he send you?

Grace produces the rosary, stuffs it in Ciego's hand. Ciego feels it, smiles.

CIEGO

Angelito! Where is he?

GRACE

In -- California.

CIEGO

(whistling in
admiration)

Oh, California. Beautiful girls
in California.

He takes her hand again, passes it over his own face, enjoying its softness. Then he points to a corner. Straining her eyes, Grace sees an almost identical replica of the first cross.

CIEGO

Is he still handsome, Angelito?

Grace picks up the cross. It is much heavier than she expected.

CIEGO

He could have all the girls.
(sighing)

He's loco.

EXT. BORDER BRIDGE - DAY

A U.S. Customs Official peers into the station wagon, and Grace holds up her only purchase: a bottle of expensive Centenario tequila.

As she does so, she suddenly notices over the Official's shoulder

A PICK UP TRUCK

in the next inspection lane. One of the men in the front seat is the murderous-looking thug who tried to capture Angel in the cathedral.

He turns his head -- his heavy, dead stare sweeps at random over the station wagon and over Grace.

The cross lies in the back of the station wagon wrapped in newspapers -- did he see it?

The Official waves Grace back into the U.S. She turns the key, hits the gas so abruptly that the engine cuts off. With shaky hands, she starts the engine again.

ON GRACE

She drives back into El Paso, staring constantly at the rear view mirror -- is she being followed?

EXT. THE FREEWAY - LATER

The station wagon races northbound, overtaking other cars.

DISSOLVE TO:

GRACE

Her features taut, she looks like a different person after this experience. After one more glance at the mirror she decides she can relax.

She rolls down her window. The wind starts ripping the newspapers off the cross, pasting them against the car's back door.

Slowly, Christ's tragic nakedness emerges.

DISSOLVE TO:

CAR'S HEADLIGHTS

puncturing the night towards us.

DISSOLVE TO:

CAR'S HEADLIGHTS

being turned off as the car plunges into the L.A. suburban wasteland.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HANCOCK PARK - GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

The car jolts into Grace's driveway. Grace turns off the engine, and her head falls on her chest. After a moment she gathers enough strength, gets out, breathes the morning air. Then she pulls the cross out of the car, carries it inside the house. She reappears, leaving the house door open, collects her pocketbook and bottle of tequila from the front seat, then notices the car's condition; dust has painted its front an oxydated yellow. As for the windshield:

ANGLE ON THE WINDSHIELD

It is encrusted with all the beetles that frolicked through the air last night. Fascinated, she watches this macabre collage, and a man's face suddenly mirrors itself in it.

ROBLES (O.C.)

Welcome home.

WHIP PAN: He's right behind her. He grabs her wrist.

ROBLES

Give me the cross.

Her other hand brings down the tequila bottle on his head -- something she has never done before. It frees her wrist, but he races her to the house.

INT. HALL - DAY

She gets in a split second before him, slides the chain shut, but he pushes the door open as far as the chain will allow and hisses furiously, spitting her in the face.

ROBLES

You think that can keep me out?

GRACE

Maybe I can.

She is as strong as he is, which brings the door to a standstill.

ROBLES

Where is Angel?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE
Didn't your boys get him?

ROBLES
They did. But they lost him again.

Her face lights up with intense, almost physical pleasure.

GRACE
Oh, thank God. Thank God.

ROBLES
You dig him, huh?

Panting, he steps back. His open coat shows the gun. His hand goes for it.

GRACE
Go ahead.

Their eyes fight. Then he leaves the gun alone.

ROBLES
Listen. We don't want him back there.

GRACE
Maybe you don't, but those people do. He's their priest.

ROBLES
We have another priest. Me.
(one beat)
And we have Vera.
(one beat)
Don't let him come back there. If he comes, Vera goes.

He pulls out a pen and paper, scribbles a number.

ROBLES
If you want to make a deal, call me.

GRACE
What if I don't want to make a deal?

He shows his gums in pleased anticipation and flicks the paper in.

ROBLES
You will. I'll sit on you like a fly on shit. You will.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He tips his hat, trots to the street and vanishes like a vision. Drained, she SLAMS the door. Her hand still holds the bottle.

ENLARGE to find the cross propped up against a coat rack, the way Grace left it.

INT. PARLOR/HALLWAY - DAY

Grace carries the cross into the parlor, looks for a place for it. There is no such place in a middle class room. She stands it upright against the couch.

This is her first chance to examine closer the wooden Christ's primitive features.

ON THE WOODEN CHRIST

Motionless, and yet expressive and haunting.

INT. PARLOR - DAY

She walks up to the cross. Trying to remember the way Angel did it, she kneels, puts her arms around it. She presses her face against the wooden chest, rubs her forehead and cheeks against its roughness, finding in it a strange relief. She shivers and hugs the cross tight. She remains like this for a long moment, in total silence.

A drop of blood drips on to her face.

ON THE WOODEN CHRIST

blood oozing out of it -- a hallucination?

ON GRACE

Her BREATHING FILLS THE SOUNDTRACK, alternating with the ever so subtle dripping. She steps back, wipes her face, examines her palm.

GRACE

(whisper)

Vera. VERA.

Then she realizes that she is alone -- and bites her clenched fist. The blood has stopped running. The front door bell RINGS. Grace does not react.

Another RING. And ANOTHER. Could it be Robles again?

HOLMES (O.C.)

Grace?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Grace draws a deep breath, tiptoes back to the hall, unlocks the door. It is indeed Harry Holmes, and he panics seeing her face.

HOLMES

I -- saw the car in the driveway.

GRACE

(a huge effort)

Come on in.

INT. PARLOR - DAY

Standing at a safe distance from the cross (the blood has dried up on it), Harry makes no attempt to conceal his feelings.

HOLMES

So what's next -- voodoo? You left a sane person with a degree in theology, and you came back an image-worshipping half-wit? And who the fuck is this guy?

GRACE

(tiredly)

Harry, please don't swear.

HOLMES

I'll swear plenty, so help me God. You want me to make a couple of calls and find out he's a self-styled, self-appointed, self-ordained crank?

(one beat)

You're not going back there.

GRACE

Yes, I am.

HOLMES

(pointing)

With this?

GRACE

I could go even without it. I know I can win. I'll break that ring. I'll deliver them.

HOLMES

(starting to panic)

Grace, I am your bishop and your friend. I forbid you to go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

(stunned)

Harry! Harry, don't you believe
in God at all?

Door bell RINGS.

They both start toward the door, but Harry beats Grace to it. It is Angel, in his cassock full of holes, some showing his body; his beard overgrown, his face black and blue again, and about to collapse from hunger and exhaustion. Harry reacts as if he's seen a Martian. Grace rushes to Angel, takes both his hands in hers.

GRACE

I'm so happy you're back.

His eyes flash a mute question.

GRACE

Yes. Yes, it's here.

(touches his face)

Oh, my. You have a fever. Go sit
in the parlor. You need a drink.

(brusquely aware of
the other man)

Oh, I'm sorry, Harry. You want a
drink, too?

HOLMES

(making for the door)

No thanks.

GRACE

You're not leaving.

HOLMES

Yes, I am. I don't want to be in
the way.

He stops before Angel. They take each other in: who they are, what they represent. Harry turns toward Grace.

HOLMES

God be with you. I mean it, Grace.

He swiftly walks out, pulls the door shut.

In the parlor, immensely relieved, Angel drops in an armchair.

GRACE

I'll get you a drink.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

She gets the Juarez-bought tequila, pulls out glasses, pours a generous drink for him and a smaller one for herself, which she promptly tosses down. Carrying his drink, she stops by a little mirror, combs her free hand through her hair and sees him in the mirror, standing in the doorway. She blushes, hands him the drink.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Grace is pulling fresh towels out of a cupboard. She turns, arms loaded, and finds Angel by the sink, holding a minuscule razor, marvelling at its size.

ANGEL
Your husband's?

GRACE
No, no. I use it.

She feels like she has made a risqué statement. For a moment he is culturally confused, then understands, gives her a male look, and CHUCKLES softly.

ANGEL
Can I shave with it?

She starts laughing, hands him the towels.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Grace's hands open the stove, revealing a pork roast. She checks it with a fork, pulls it out of the oven.

She wears an apron over her dress, and her stocking feet pace quickly over the tiled floor.

THE DINING ROOM AREA

The table has been set for two, with two candles. Angel steps into the shot, stands by the dinner table watching Grace -- still busy at the stove.

She turns and starts, not expecting to see him there: shaven and cleaned up, he looks quite a bit younger -- and quite handsome.

GRACE
(does her best to
sound natural and
cheerful)
Come here and help me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He ambles slowly to the stove. She hands him a tray with the roast. He carries it gravely, like an offering, to the table, while she zooms past him with a book of matches. She has to steady her hands to light the candles.

GRACE

Oh -- I forgot my shoes.

On the floor, her feet are facing Angel's bare feet. They both start laughing, then stop at the same time -- and in one rather solemn motion, they sit down at the table.

THE CANDLES

Halfway gone now. PAN from their peaceful light to Grace: her face is full of emotion and her eyes are shining.

GRACE

I get so scared sometimes; I watch the news every day and it always sounds like the world is about to explode. So many nations so angry, so needy. I ask myself: what good are we, with our vestry meetings, and fund-raisers, and sermons? No matter what we do, we'll never get the world back on the track.

Angel's been listening with quiet sympathy. He moves his glass and hers out of the way, reaches over the tablecloth and takes her hand. She contains a slight shiver and leaves her hand in his.

GRACE

And yet -- I know you might find this very hard to accept -- there are still a lot of good people in this country.

ANGEL

Yes. You are a good woman.

Grace smiles nervously and pulls back her hand.

GRACE

Had anyone told me a week ago that I'd be having dinner with you here --

(smiling more)

-- with no shoes on --

For a moment his stare is very heavy and masculine. Then he averts his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

Can I come with you tomorrow?

He ponders and she waits suspensefully until he nods yes.

GRACE

We should try to start early.

(a thought)

Are you scared?

ANGEL

No.

She reaches over the table, blushing to the roots of her hair, and takes his hand.

GRACE

Are you ever scared?

ANGEL

(very gently)

No.

Their hands part. They rise at the same time.

ANGEL

(gravely)

You are a very good woman.

INT. GRACE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Grace is in bed, her eyes wide open. Somewhere a CLOCK COUNTS THREE A.M.

She sits up, makes a dramatically intimate decision. She gets out of the bed (she is wearing a proper-looking cotton nightie) and we FOLLOW HER out the door.

INT. STAIRS/PARLOR - NIGHT

She comes down the stairs, the night's faint light playing in her eyes, scared and excited like a teenager. She stops in the hall; a beam of light from under the parlor door stretches all the way to touch her bare feet.

She tiptoes to the door. ALL SOUNDS grow to full intensity. Angel's breathing, heavy, as if in pain, reaches out from inside. With utmost care, she turns the knob. CAMERA goes in OVER HER SHOULDER, FRAMES HIS FACE: sweating, gritting his teeth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TILT DOWN along his arm: Angel has pricked open a vein on his bulging biceps. It drips blood into a coffee cup. Next to the cup on the table he is sitting at, a blood-stained jackknife, a lit candle, and heap of dried up roots. They have been half ground into powder with a tablespoon.

He ties a rag around the wound, gathers the powder, pours it into the cup, mixes it in with the spoon's handle. ENLARGE to find Christ's wooden head, detached, lying oddly on the table. Next to it lies the cross. The beheaded body shows a round opening at the neck.

REVERSE ANGLE - GRACE

She savagely bites her lower lip, to be able to watch this in silence.

INT. PARLOR - NIGHT

Sheets and a blanket make a bed of the couch -- obviously untouched. Angel stands the cross against the table, pours the blood into the body's tiny container. It fits it to a drop. He screws on the head like a lid. Grace's shadow falls on his face, and he looks up.

She points at the ground dry roots, manages to articulate.

GRACE

What's that -- stuff?

The silence hums between them, like a cord ready to snap.

ANGEL

(heavily)

Quita que la sangre se agruesse.

(realizing he is

speaking Spanish)

It keeps the blood from --

(he searches for

the word)

GRACE

(a stunned whisper)

Coagulating?

ANGEL

Yes.

He folds his arms, undefiant, unashamed, resigned that she knows the truth.

GRACE

(can hardly speak)

How -- does it -- work?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL
If you hug it tight --
(demonstrating with
his hands)
-- you press on Christ's chest --

GRACE
(dazed)
The blood runs out.

He nods: that's all there is to it.

GRACE
(low)
Liar.
(like in a trance)
You nearly died and God showed
himself to you. And you thought
he was a cop. And he told you,
"Save them as I saved you."
(one beat)
We should look for the cross
walking through the desert. Not
driving in cars.
(a scream)
Liar! LIAR, LIAR, LIAR, LIAR --!

She SLAPS him as hard as she can, then hits him with her fists.
He puts his arms around her to make her stop. She tries to reject
him, her face a pit of disgust.

GRACE
You liar! You crook! You filthy
blasphemous crook!

ANGEL
(shaking her)
Shut up.

GRACE
(screaming and
crying in his arms)
Oh, Jesus. Oh, VERA, VERA, VERA --!

ANGEL
Shut up, woman! Listen to me! He
told me to save them! He never
told me how!

GRACE
You have no pity... no pity for
those poor...
(a wail)
Crip... P... p... ples.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL

I did it for them! What does it
matter if I lied? They're not
lying!

GRACE

(delirious)

God damn you! God blind you!
God smite you RIGHT NOW!

ANGEL

He'll smite me, not them! They'll
be healed!

She breaks free from his grip, tries to smash the cross. He
prevents her, and she bursts into tears.

GRACE

I saw the blood before you arrived!
I believed it was real! I believed
in your miracle! I believed in
you! I...

She stops, sickened at the thought that she was just about to make
love to him. He looks at her nightie, understands why she came
here.

A sad, strange satisfaction smoothes his features. He kneels
before the cross with his back to her.

ANGEL

Woman, you were right then. You
are wrong now.

She stares at his back, sobbing. He raises a finger.

ANGEL

I have only one more day here.
And I am tired.

She runs out.

MATCH her exit with

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

her running feet on the sidewalk, lifting to show her whole body
as she turns a corner.

She has come out of her street into Beverly Boulevard, empty and
silent at this hour. We watch her sprinting to a solitary pay
phone, putting in a coin.

EXT. PHONE - NIGHT

GRACE

We start tomorrow morning at seven.
We'll be there by ten.

Robles' voice comes through modified by the filter.

ROBLES (O.C.)

Fine. We'll wait two miles before
the village.

GRACE

I want no violence. Just take him
and give me my daughter.

ROBLES (O.C.)

Fine.

She hangs up, steps out of the booth, her face as dark as the
night.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The next day, about eleven a.m.

LONG SHOT of the station wagon, laboring across the desert.

A pick up truck suddenly jolts forward from behind the dunes, cuts
the station wagon's way.

Several people jump out of the truck, open the station wagon's
doors and climb in.

We are too far to hear any sounds. The station wagon takes off
again and the truck follows.

CLOSER ANGLE

The two cars drive towards the camera, slow down on a very rough
stretch, and we clearly distinguish

GRACE

driving with Robles next to her in the front seat. In the back
seat, Angel and the cross are prisoners between two coyotes.

As the cars pass another dune, the top of the dune suddenly moves
and we see

PERFECTO

on all fours, eyes goggling out of his head. He stares after the two cars: instead of heading for the village, they start cutting across the field, towards a cluster of trees and a house surrounded by a tall mud wall: Don Tarjetas' stronghold.

The top of the dune moves again, and another kid shows up next to Perfecto. Perfecto gets down next to him and whispers excitedly:

PERFECTO

I think the gringo lady brought him another cross.

KID

They'll kill him this time.

PERFECTO

(confidently)

He'll come back after three days.
He is Jesus.

In the distance, the gates to the stronghold open, and the cars vanish inside. The kids get up, start running towards the village.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The mud wall is about six feet tall. A large brick patio surrounds a rectangular house, its narrow windows all barred. A coyote sits on the porch, a rifle beside him.

Angel and the cross are whisked inside. Another coyote leads Grace around the house to a back door. He opens it, pushes her in, bars the door, sits in the shade of a joshua tree and starts rolling a joint.

INT. STORE ROOM - DAY

Grace stumbles in and bumps against Vera's empty chair. She is in a storeroom momentarily promoted to prison. Vera lies on the ground, wrapped in a blanket, asleep.

Grace squats next to her. Vera opens her eyes.

VERA

aching?
Hi, mom.

Serene and well rested, she stretches her arms, and Grace helps her sit up.

VERA

Is he back?

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN ROOM - DAY

Angel's head splashes down into a water barrel. Three men keep it there. PAN from him ACROSS a low room, its roof supported by wooden posts. Several coyotes lounge against the walls, their brown faces melting into the wall color. On a table, the remains of a meal. STOP on the bluish muzzle of a revolver, with Robles' hand behind it, oiling it. He is sitting on a disused barber's chair.

Don Tarjetas is wheeling his chair all over the place, like a man pacing nervously. He stops by the water barrel as the coyotes allow Angel to raise his head.

DON TARJETAS

Angelito. Stop torturing me. Tell me how you make it bleed.

Through a superhuman effort, Angel straightens himself. His eyes focus.

DON TARJETAS

(all candor)

We need money, Angelito. To build you a new church. Don't you want a decent shrine for your cross?

The cross is visible in the background.

ANGEL

And the devil took Jesus up on a mountain. And showed him the kingdoms of the world. And said if thou will worship me, all shall be thine.

DON TARJETAS

Hijo de la chingada! I'll eat you raw and shit on your bones! Drown him!

They push his head down again.

INT. STORE ROOM - DAY

Grace and Vera sit under a barred window. A muffled YELL from the other end of the house.

VERA

Did you make love to him?

GRACE

No, I didn't.

VERA

Why not?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Another muffled YELL. For the first time, Grace acknowledges this other woman, Vera.

GRACE
Well, I nearly tried.

VERA
Tell me.

GRACE
(embarrassed and
yet relieved)
He spent the night in the living
room. I saw the light on, and I
went in.
(one beat)
That's not true. I stayed awake
until three, then I went down to
see him.

Vera's gaze is so deep that it frightens Grace.

VERA
What happened?

GRACE
I found him putting blood inside
the cross. He thought up this --
gimmick. If you hug the cross, the
pressure makes the blood run out.

Vera WHISTLES in amazed appreciation.

VERA
He's smart, isn't he?

Grace cannot believe it. She moves away from Vera to see her better.

GRACE
Did you know?

VERA
I knew he was doing something. I
didn't know what it was.

GRACE
But Vera, that's -- that's all
there is to that miracle. He puts
blood in -- then lets it run out.

VERA
What did you expect?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Grace's astonishment makes her laugh.

VERA
Mother, that's just a piece of wood.
HE is the cross.

The muffled YELLS start again.

GRACE
(as if talking to
a lunatic)
You mean -- he will heal you?

VERA
Of course.

INT. MAIN ROOM - DAY

They have spread Angel on the ground. Robles brings a bench, places one end on Angel's heaving chest, choosing the spot carefully, like a scientist.

ROBLES
Have a seat, Chinche.

CHINCHE (his nickname means "clap," and he walks bow-legged) seats himself on the bench.

ROBLES
And you, Miradaza.

MIRADAZA (named after his big, crazy eyes) sits down next to Chinche. Angel's face turns blue and his voice bursts out in feverish gasps.

ANGEL
And Jesus -- spat -- on the ground.
And made clay -- of the spittle.
And annointed -- the blind man's
-- ah-eyes.

ROBLES
And you, Caspon.

CASPON owes his name to his abundant dandruff. He packs a hasty sign of the cross over his mouth, walks to the bench, sits down.

ANGEL
And the man -- washed in the pool
of Siloam -- and came -- seeing --
seeing --

Caspon starts SHAKING, stands up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBLES

Sit DOWN!

The others stand too. The man on the floor seems dead.

ROBLES

Cowards.

He resumes oiling his gun. Don Tarjetas wheels around for a moment, then gets a new idea:

DON TARJETAS

Bring the women.

They drag Angel up, tie his hands around a post.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

The church door opens. People start coming out carrying candles or makeshift crosses. Perfecto and kids are among them.

They form a column. The whole column kneels. They start walking on their knees in the direction of Don Tarjetas' house.

HOLD on the place as it empties. Crawling away, the people break into a vigorous alabado:

. CHORUS

Recuerda si estas dormido,
Deja de vivir atroz
Porque el vivir divertido,
Hombre, has olvidado a Dios.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

They have pushed Vera's chair next to Angel's post. Grace watches in agony.

DON TARJETAS

Look at this girl. You were
never with a man, were you? Pure
as the Virgin. We'll break her
arms if you don't tell.

ANGEL

(hoarsely)
Forgive me, Vera.

VERA

I forgive you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Don Tarjetas sighs impotently. Two coyotes start for Vera's chair.

GRACE
All right. I know how he did it!
I'll tell you!

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The column is tenaciously working its way toward the walled house. Perfecto and the kids are sweating along and having a great time.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Robles unscrews Christ's wooden head and steps back as some blood spills out.

The men lounging around the walls come out of the shadows. Their superstitious fright finally overcome, they touch the cross; they dip a finger inside the blood container, amazed at Angel's ingenuity (Caspon licks his finger -- it is blood), and suddenly, with a CREAKING/WHIRRING sound, Don Tarjetas ENTERS THE SHOT.

He is pale under his olive complexion.

DON TARJETAS
(lowly)
Out.
(no one hears him)
OUT, ALL OF YOU.

The coyotes herd the women out and exit. Don Tarjetas circles around Angel, prey to an unnameable anxiety.

DON TARJETAS
Now I have to kill you.

ANGEL'S FACE

stained with dried up blood, hanging on his chest, looks like the head of the wooden Christ. He seems to have fainted. Don Tarjetas pokes him hard in the ribs. Angel moans and opens his eyes.

DON TARJETAS
Remember how we met?

Angel nods painfully.

DON TARJETAS
You came out of nowhere with your
cross on your back and asked me to
let you be these people's priest.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DON TARJETAS (Cont'd)
I agreed if you paid me half of
every dollar they gave you.

His face is a mixture of resentment and yet of regret -- almost
like that of a father deceived in his expectations.

DON TARJETAS
Then your cross started to bleed.
Why didn't you tell me it was a
fake?

(enraged, he hits
the tied up man)
Cabron, descojonado, why didn't
you tell me? I know why you didn't
tell them --

(he makes a gesture
pointing at the
whole world outside)
-- but why didn't you tell me?

He stops hitting him. He seems sad beyond belief.

DON TARJETAS
Instead, you stopped paying me.
You started raising these pobretones
against me. Why?

(shouting his outrage)
We could've made it big together!
Bring people from all over the
South and Mexico and California!
Make big money!

He grabs Angel by the collar, brings him inches close to his own
face.

DON TARJETAS
(points at the
dark ceiling)
Is He up there?

Angel's eyes suddenly light up. He examines the patron's face
with amused curiosity, then shakes his head, no, and Don Tarjetas
almost has a coronary.

DON TARJETAS
Don't lie to me again, puto! Is
he up there?

ANGEL
No.

He watches the Patron's face with delicious satisfaction -- it
pearls up with sweat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL
Now kill me. You'll get away with
it.

The cripple's forehead is now one compact wave of sweat. It goes down so hard that the patron's eyes start blinking. He literally shakes in his chair with panic at the thought that the sky might be empty.

Angel prolongs this torture another beat, then smiles.

ANGEL
What do you care? Now you know
how the cross works, you can bring
people from all over to see it.
(mercilessly)
You won't get your legs back, but
you'll make it big.

Don Tarjetas gags and simply sits there, watching Angel, his eyes dark pits of panic. Finally, he manages to gag:

DON TARJETAS
Is not true.

Angel takes pity on him. He nods.

ANGEL
It's for you to find out. Like I
have.

Don Tarjetas wheels his chair back, away from the post. He squeaks miserably.

DON TARJETAS
Robles!

Obviously, Robles was listening at the door. He bursts in, followed by the whole gang. The last coyote pushes the women back in. Robles stops by the post and blurts into Angel's face.

ROBLES
Now it's our turn to make miracles!
(brusquely becoming
the leader)
Chinche, let the women go. Caspon,
get the truck ready.
(to Don Tarjetas)
We'll dump him at Arroyo Negro.
Let the lizards chew up his face.

He walks to Angel, stands grinning before him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBLES

We'll find you after a week,
Angelito. We'll know it was you by
the rags of your cassock. We'll
bring you back in a sack, and we'll
give you the nicest burial ever,
with Christ the King, with the
Virgin of Guadelupe, and with your
cross. And every time we'll make
the cross bleed again, we'll pray
for the peace of your soul. And we
won't tell nobody that you were not
a saint, but just a filthy cunning
lying asshole, like all of us.

(turning)

Ready?

He finds Chinche behind him, grim faced.

CHINCHE

She doesn't want to go.

ROBLES

Who?

He points toward Vera.

ROBLES

What the fuck.

He bends over Vera and SHOUTS as if she were deaf.

ROBLES

Go home. HOME. YOU'RE FREE.

She shakes her head. He points to the cross.

ROBLES

It's a fake -- didn't you see?

VERA

He's not a fake.

Total silence. Then Robles STAMMERS from anger.

ROBLES

M-m-madre de D-d-dios! Chinche,
get this crazy cunt out of here.

CHINCHE

(unexpectedly strong)

Why? If she wants to stay, let her
stay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBLES

All right. All right. Why don't we lock them up together? Let him work her over? How about a fresh piece, Angelito?

ANGEL

Ssssshhhhhhhhh!

He is cocking his ears, listening to a yet unheard sound. And suddenly there is a loud THUD outside.

And a third, and a CLAMOR of VOICES.

CASPON

(first to understand)

Jesus.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The column has arrived. They are breaking the wooden gate.

EXT. PATIO - DAY

A couple of coyotes have frozen behind the wall.

The first row crashes inside, with SHOUTS of "Padre Angel! Padre Angel!" The coyotes are sucked in and simply vanish.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Caspon pulls his gun. Robles knocks it out of his hand.

ROBLES

Are you crazy?

Then he runs to the cross, screws back on Christ's wooden head and carries the cross out.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

He finds the patio black with people. Last week's peaceful pilgrims are now an infernal vision of angry eyes, bared fangs, fists, cudgels and knives. They instantly grab Robles.

ROBLES

(desperately)

Brothers and sisters! Brothers and sisters!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But his voice is covered by the crowd's terrible racket.

VOICES

Where is Father Angel? And the
cross? We want the old cross.
Where is the blood?

This last request finds a unanimous approval. Shaking Robles and the cross like two dummies, they chant in unison.

VOICES

We want Christ's blood! We want
the miracle!

With chattering teeth, Robles raises the cross, starts making wide blessing gestures. That calms the crowd down somewhat.

ROBLES

Father Angel is inside, mortifying
his flesh, begging the Lord's
forgiveness for having failed you.

(his teeth stop
chattering; his
voice grows)

For after the cross bled for the
first time, Father Angel was stung
by pride. He believed only he
could bring blood out of wood,
warm and fresh as on the Golgotha
in the third hour.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Robles' voice is perfectly audible.

ROBLES (O.C.)

He angered God. And God turned
his face from you and put off the
day of the healing.

The coyotes venture their heads out to watch Robles' performance.

ROBLES (O.C.)

Here is a cross that will bleed at
anyone's touch, if that man or
woman or child has the faith.

Angel tries to break the rope that ties his hands. He struggles in vain, making the post shake. There is a suspenseful silence outside.

Vera follows his efforts, smiling, as if pleased. She is right next to the table with food leftovers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Demecio. ROBLES (O.C.)

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The idiot steps forward, gurgling happily. Robles pushes the cross in his arms.

ROBLES
Even you can do it, Demecio. Just
hug it tight and pray with all
your heart.

Demecio throws his arms around the cross and, somewhat obscenely, falls on the ground with it.

All the coyotes are now outside. So is Don Tarjetas.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Vera picks up a knife off the table, moves over to Angel, cuts the rope. He wants to lunge toward the door, but she grabs him by the soiled front of his cassock, pulls him down and catches his lips with hers in a powerful kiss.

A CLAMOR from outside.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Demecio gets up and lets the sun shine on a drop of blood. He starts dancing in place, in idiotic ecstasy. Robles raises his hands.

ROBLES
Brothers and sisters, here is the
proof. We must keep praying and
tirelessly gather the money to
build a shrine for our cross!

Before another ovation can rise, Angel shouts off screen.

ANGLE (O.C.)
Don't listen to the devil!

He storms INTO THE SHOT, snatches up the cross, unscrews Christ's head, throws it at random in the crowd. Then he turns the cross upside down pouring the blood on the ground.

Perfecto bursts into tears.

Drained, Angel wipes his forehead. The people are prostrate, unable to accept the truth. Then a hand grabs the cross, pokes inside

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

the hollow Christ. Robles SQUEAKS, frightened out of his wits:

ROBLES

We didn't know! I didn't know!

The cross starts zigzagging frantically through the crowd.

ROBLES

He did it for the money! He
deceived you! He deceived God!

Snatched from hand to impatient hand, the cross is the center of
a human whirlpool, from which come WHISTLES, SHOUTS, CURSES.

VOICES

Where's the money? Crucify him!
We want the money back! Bring
wood! Burn him!

Hands grab Angel, tearing his cassock even more. He SCREAMS at
the top of his lungs:

ANGEL

Listen to me! People thirsty for
anyone's blood, Christ's or mine,
listen to me!

They stop, without letting go of him.

ANGEL

You were dead when I found you.
You breathed, you moved, you moaned
in pain, but you were dead. You
were not worth the blear in a blind
goat's eye. I brought you the
cross. I led you up on calvary and
taught you that Christ was one of
us. With festering wounds, with
bleeding bare feet. With no money,
or papers.

VOICE

Whose blood did you put in the cross?

ANGEL

My own blood.

ROBLES

He thinks he is Jesus.

ANGEL

I lied to you to give you hope.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGEL (Cont'd)

You saw my blood and for the first time you were not afraid of hunger, of the police or of Don Tarjetas.

The hands let go of him.

ROBLES

We want Christ's blood, not yours.

ANGEL

That girl who came from her wilderness into our wilderness saw through my trick. And it never defeated her faith.

He points: Vera is framed in the door with Grace beside her. All eyes focus on her.

ANGEL

She knew from the start that this wood can only be wood. But she also knew that anyone's blood is a drop of the blood of Christ. You bowed to my power. They...

(point to the coyotes)
... feared my power. She saw through my power the power of God. She knew before she came here that God could fight the devil through a barefoot priest, too frightened, too hungry, too weak to lead you to the cross without tricks.

(with a strange modesty)
She kissed Jesus -- through me.

Someone throws the cross at Angel's feet. He picks it up.

ANGEL

I don't ask you to forgive me. Just follow me one more time.

Silence. Perfecto slinks through people's legs up to Angel and fits the head back on Christ's body. Angel LAUGHS softly.

ANGEL

You are the rock, Perfecto.

He places the cross on his shoulder and recovers his whole majesty. His voice BOOMS:

ANGEL

Just one more time. We'll be healed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He walks out through the open gate and starts toward the hill as the CAMERA PANS BACK and describes the crowd, still somewhat doubtful, but rather tempted to try. PAN ACROSS Perfecto, Rosalba, Demecio, Vera, Don Tarjetas and Grace, until the gun ENTERS THE SHOT, in HUGE CLOSE-UP. The instant it does, it BLASTS enormously, deafeningly

ON ANGEL

He is hit. He freezes, then turns. BANG. Christ's head flies to pieces. Stunned, Angel takes a step back toward the crowd.

ON ROBLES

He locks in a marksman's pose and takes careful aim: BANG.

ON ANGEL

The third bullet rips open his chest, smears richly the cross with his blood.

Still walking, he raises the cross at arms' length and opens his mouth. Just as he is about to re-enter the patio, Robles charges forward and shoots him again, point blank.

ANGEL

Grace!

He collapses inside the gate.

Robles bends over Angel. His body shakes so badly that he needs both hands to point his gun again, right into Angel's ear. He never fires.

Angel stirs, gets up on one elbow, slurs in agony:

ANGEL

Grace.

She reels forward, mouth gaping in a silent scream. He is trying to get up, using the cross as a crutch. She rushes toward him. Robles blocks her way.

ROBLES

Get back.

He raises the gun. She shoves him aside, throws herself on the dying man's body, locks her hands under his neck and helps his head up.

ANGEL

You --

His eyes are already foggy. He smiles affectionately, from far away, tries to speak and gurgles out blood. He gestures, begging

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

for her patience, coughs, WHISPERS:

ANGEL
Gracia. Que gracia.

He grabs her wrist, squeezes it so hard that she grimaces in pain. His gaze is a world of regret.

ANGEL
Lastima.

He rolls his eyes backwards.

GRACE
No!

He is dead in her arms. Robles inserts the gun between their faces.

ROBLES
Get up.

She lets the body fall and rises, as if hypnotized.

ROBLES
Get out of here.

She looks at her hands: they are red -- Angel has bled all over them. From her hands, her eyes travel to the crowd: a constellation of feverish eyes, all riveted on her.

An inspiration lights up her face, and she stretches her arms toward the crowd, palms upwards, the way Angel did on the hill.

A CLAMOR of hope. She smiles offering her palms. Robles aims his gun at the crowd.

ROBLES
Don't move.

But they are moving forward already. He brings the gun to Grace's temple. Her smile widens into a blinding grin of triumph:

GRACE
He's spilling the blood of Christ!

A mad rush forward. Robles drops the gun, dashes away. He falls, gets up, starts running again. In a second he is a cloud of dust melting against the yellow landscape.

The people mob Grace. They touch her hands, her blood-stained clothes, even her face, in a noisy show of loyalty and gratitude. Rosalba pushes forward Vera's chair, and they both touch Grace's dress. So does Perfecto, tears rolling down his cheeks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They stand in a circle around her, brown-faced, barefoot, in rags: this is her priesthood.

Pale, her clothes dirty, her hair a mess, Grace cannot wipe the grin off her face. She is every bit herself again: the aggressively pure Anglo-Saxon we saw in the beginning.

Demecio stands closest to her.

GRACE

Help me, Demecio.

She picks up the cross. The idiot helps her place the weight of the beam on the nape of her neck. The crowd explodes into a happy TUMULT.

She braces herself, adjusts to the weight, and points her chin to the dead priest at her feet.

GRACE

He's coming with us.

Several men rush to lift Angel, revealing blood underneath. Grace starts out the gate toward the hill. Angel's carriers promptly follow, and so do all the others.

Left behind, Don Tarjetas tries to move his chair. A wheel is caught in a crack of the patio's floor. He vainly tries to free it.

DON TARJETAS

Don't leave me here!

But no one stops, no one backtracks to help the patron join the procession. He SCREAMS, flails his arms, while the patio around him empties.

Completely alone, he is sitting a few yards from where the bleeding body has dyed the patio red. Don Tarjetas crashes out of the chair and WAILS in pain. Then he plants his elbows in the dust, starts dragging himself toward the blood.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Following Grace, the procession is heading straight into the declining radiance of the sun, singing the alabado:

CHORUS

En Dios espero reposo,
En Dios espero consuelo,
De que en el juicio tremendo
Me abra las puertas del cielo.

ON GRACE

panting from the weight, elated, happy.

ON VERA

Rosalba is helping Vera's wheelchair over the rough track.

Suddenly one of the wheels gets stuck in a crack in the ground and, as Rosalba tries to push the chair forward, the wheel breaks.

Several people stop to help. Demecio, the idiot, stops too -- mouth gaping, he watches Vera: she grabs the wheelchair's arms and, by sheer muscular power, she lifts her half-paralyzed body. She stands for a moment in precarious balance.

DEMECIO

Miren, hermanos! (Look, brothers!)

Rosalba slips her shoulder under Vera's arm just as someone else does the same from the other side. Supported by the two people, Vera looks as if she's about to step out of the wheelchair, and that breaks Demecio's face into a horrible grin of ecstasy.

DEMECIO

Miren! Caminal! Milagro! (Look!
She is walking! Miracle!)

He runs by, still flailing his arms frantically to impart the news, while Vera slowly progresses uphill between her two supporters.

ENLARGE to show Grace ahead, leading the procession. Demecio runs past her, toward the top of the Calvario, shouting on.

EXT. HILL - DAY

FRAMING the top. Demecio is the first to emerge over the edge, his face red from the setting sun. He dances in place, head tilted back, announcing to the sky:

DEMECIO

Milagro! Milagro! (Miracle!
Miracle!)

Grace emerges over the edge, followed by the whole procession.

FADE OUT.

THE END