

Zorro

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Based on:

"Zorro"
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ZORRO

FROM THE DARKNESS...

An old woman we will come to know as **WHITE OWL SPEAKS--**

WHITE OWL (V.O.)

According to legend, our people
once lived in a cold, dark world,
until the clever fox stole fire
from the sun and gave it to us.

EXT. CAVERN OF SHADOWS - DUSK

A FLURRY OF STYLIZED IMAGES--

An ARMED SPANISH CONVOY moves through a cramped, shadowy
canyon. FLASHES of hooves, wagon wheels, rifles--

WHITE OWL (V.O.)

The Spanish do not care about our
legends.

Soldiers guard crates bursting with GOLD.

WHITE OWL (V.O.)

They do not respect these lands.
(beat)
They do not know about the Fox.

The Soldiers react to something unseen, approaching from
behind them...coming fast.

RIFLES *BLAST!* but what they are shooting at keeps coming--

WHITE OWL (V.O.)

But one day they will...

GLIMPSES OF BLACK-CLAD SPECTRAL FORM on horseback charging
out of the dark canyon. It wields a SWORD--

WHITE OWL (V.O.)

Because the Spanish word for
"fox"... is "Zorro."

As the Spectre--ZORRO--slashes a "Z" across the screen we--

SMASH TO BLACK:

EST./EXT. PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES - DAY

The modest pueblo sprawls across a picturesque countryside.
We glide over haciendas, houses, a town plaza and a mission.

SUPER:**ALTA CALIFORNIA, PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES - 1812**

PUSH IN on the largest Hacienda, that of Don Alejandro de la Vega, Spanish Lord, owner of the finest horses in California.

INT. STABLES - SAME TIME

DIEGO (16. Piercing eyes, devilishly handsome), walks beside the elegant **CATALINA** (also 16, the object of affection for every adolescent in California). Their chemistry is obvious.

They approach a stall. Inside is a young but powerful foal--black as night--**TORNADO**. Catalina is captivated--

CATALINA

He's magnificent... Is he fast?

DIEGO

Tornado's the fastest horse in Don de la Vega's stable.

CATALINA

Tornado... strange name for a horse.

DIEGO

Well earned, I'm afraid.

He points to the next stall where a gentle cream-colored horse awaits.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

I was thinking of a horse with a more appropriate temperament for a lady such as yourself.

(introductions)

Señorita Catalina, meet Buttermilk.

She cocks an eye, playfully--

CATALINA

Diego, are you saying that there is a horse that you could handle that I couldn't?

DIEGO

I make no such claims.

(beat)

What I mean to say is that *no one*--man or woman--can handle this horse except for me... And maybe Don de la Vega.

CATALINA

Oh, really? We'll see about that--

As she reaches out for Tornado--

DIEGO

I wouldn't do that--

--He BUCKS, SPINS AROUND wildly in his stall, as if to bust out of it. Diego jumps between them--

Slowly, he holds his hand out. Tornado instantly settles down. Diego moves in, strokes his nose, calming the horse.

CATALINA

Amazing. Will you teach me how to do that?

Diego looks back, smiling as he feeds Tornado a carrot--

DIEGO

I can try. Maybe he just needs to get used to you.

(beat)

Are your parents expecting you to be home any time soon?

CATALINA

If I'm not home within the hour they will start to wonder.

Diego thinks for a moment, then--

DIEGO

Well, luckily he's a very fast horse.

Off his grin--

EXT. SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS - TWILIGHT

Green mountains, brown dirt, fading blue sky, the ocean visible in the distance. Tornado comes galloping up a path-- on it, Diego, Catalina holding on behind him.

They stop, dismount. She takes in the view of the sunset--

CATALINA

It's so beautiful up here.

He's only looking at her--

DIEGO

Yes. There's nothing like it.

CATALINA

(flirty)

I'm beginning to think this was all
an elaborate ruse to get me alone.

DIEGO

I am but a lowly orphan. Certainly
not capable of planning elaborate
ruses.

*Fixing him in her gaze, as if aware of a destiny that he
doesn't yet see...*

CATALINA

Something tells me you are capable
of great things, Diego.

Consumed with teenage passion, they move toward each other--

But are interrupted by the sound of GALLOPING HOOVES! They
look down the path to see a trio of horses. On the lead
horse, **LORENZO DE LA VEGA** (20. Well-dressed, entitled),
barely hides his jealousy as he pulls to a stop.

Catalina and Diego look up at him as the dust settles--

CATALINA (CONT'D)

Lorenzo...?

LORENZO

I've been searching all over for
you señorita Catalina.

(then)

The Indians are moving through
these mountains and aim to attack
the Pueblo. I must get you to the
safety of the Mission immediately!

Diego doesn't believe Lorenzo--

DIEGO

Padre Mendoza says the Indians are
peaceful.

LORENZO

Padre Mendoza should stick to
teaching prayer, not politics...

(then to Catalina)

I have summoned the Garrison--

CATALINA

Where is Don Alejandro?

LORENZO

My father is fighting in the North.
The Russians are challenging The
Mission in San Jose. Until his
return I have full authority.

(then)

Come, señorita, we must hurry.

Lorenzo pulls Catalina onto his own horse--

CATALINA

What about Diego?!

He looks at Diego with disdain--

LORENZO

You share their blood, do you not?
Surely the *peaceful* Indians would
never hurt one of their own.

He kicks his horse, and gallops down the hill, his riders
following. Catalina looks back at Diego--

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - GATES - DUSK

Lorenzo (Catalina on back) and his two riders arrive at the
gates of the massive Spanish Mission. He dismounts.
Catalina doesn't wait for his hand, jumps off herself.

He bangs on the door--

LORENZO

Open for Lorenzo de la Vega!

A beat, then we hear the BOLT RETRACTED. ***CREAAAK!*** The door
is opened--by DIEGO! Lorenzo's eyes go wide.

DIEGO

Señor Lorenzo, glad you made it safely.

(to Catalina)

He really is a very fast horse.

Catalina tries to hide her smile as Lorenzo simply pushes him
aside. He enters, yelling--

LORENZO

Bar the gates behind us. The
Indians are on the warpath!

KA-CHUNK! The massive door is closed and locked. The
soldiers secure the building, herd the SPANISH SETTLERS to
the safety of the cellar. Guns uncrated, cannon rolled out.

The simple mission is transformed into a fortress. Another orphan runs up--Diego's best friend **BERNARDO** (16. Indian. Smaller than Diego, perpetually worried)--

BERNARDO

Where were you? I feared you'd been attacked by the Indians...

DIEGO

We're Indians, why would they attack us?

BERNARDO

They're saying they slaughter and scalp anyone in their way.

VOICE (O.S.)

Be careful, Bernardo...

The voice belongs to **PADRE MENDOZA** (40s. Stern face, kind heart). Diego and Bernardo turn to see him looming over them.

PADRE MENDOZA

Rumors spread panic. Panic makes people do foolish things.

DIEGO

I want to help defend the mission.

PADRE MENDOZA

You may make yourselves useful in the cellar. See that the people are cared for. Let soldiers be soldiers. We are men of God.

DIEGO/BERNARDO

Yes, Padre Mendoza.

As they go, off Mendoza, saying a quick prayer for peace--

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - WALL - LATER

Lorenzo looks out over the city with a spyglass as preparations for war continue around him.

INT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - CELLAR - LATER

The huddled, scared citizens of the Pueblo are crowded into the hot, dusty cellar of the Mission. Door barred for safety. Diego and Bernardo pour water.

Diego can barely keep his eyes off Catalina, who watches the door nervously. Instead of her, Diego catches the eye of CATALINA'S FATHER.

Quickly looking away, Diego sees several terrified, young ORPHANS, holding ORANGES in their trembling hands.

Diego goes to them, grabs three oranges. Then tosses them up in the air...and juggles. The orphans smile.

ORPHAN

How do you do that?

DIEGO

Read your prayers like you are supposed to and I'll teach you later.

He hands the oranges over as the Orphans go back to reading, distracted enough for now. Diego sees Catalina watching him.

She comes over to grab an orange from a sack.

CATALINA

We can't stay here. We have no way to defend ourselves if the Indians breach the mission walls.

Diego realizes she is right, leads Catalina and Bernardo to the back of the cellar. Moving some sacks of grain he reveals a wall of mismatched stones--*a secret passageway!*

DIEGO

I know a way out. There's a cavern that runs under the entire Mission--
(then)
An underground river that once fed the old well. We can sneak out through that.

CATALINA

What about everyone else?

He looks over, catches her Father eying Diego distrustfully. Bernardo whispers--

BERNARDO

He doesn't seem to like you.

Diego ignores him.

DIEGO

I'll go first and see if it's safe. If it is we can lead everyone out the same way.

CATALINA

You would do that for me?

DIEGO
I would die for you, Catalina.

Bernardo rolls his eyes.

CATALINA
Diego... thank you...

She looks at him like she wants to kiss him. Diego is aware they are being watched, just bows, gracefully.

DIEGO
(to Bernardo)
Help me move this stone.

After they do, Diego steps in, looks back at Bernardo.

BERNARDO
I would die for you...

He loves busting Diego's chops. Rolling his eyes, Diego climbs through.

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - DUSK

Diego emerges from the old well.

SHOUTS from the lookouts. Everyone on the Mission wall looks out to the valley to see--HUNDREDS OF INDIANS ON HORSEBACK! Riding toward the Mission. Diego's blood goes cold.

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - WALL - SAME TIME

Lorenzo, in command pulls his saber, shouts--

LORENZO
Ready cannons. Do not fire until I
give the command!

As the Indians ride closer, everyone goes tense, waiting--

LORENZO (CONT'D)
Ready...

Fuses are readied, muskets are aimed, a tense beat--

Then a booming voice shouts--

VOICE
STOP!

Diego sees SPANISH CAVALRY riding up in front of the Mission. Dismounting at the lead, **DON ALEJANDRO DE LA VEGA** (40's).

Battle-tested armor covers the wide frame of this powerful, noble man, like a hero out of a storybook.

Alejandro shouts up at his son, Lorenzo.

ALEJANDRO

Do not fire! I order you.

Lorenzo is unmistakably disappointed.

Removing his helmet, Alejandro walks to the line of fearsome Gabrieleño warriors on horseback. They slow and stop, only one traveling forward. Alone.

As she gets closer we see she is their elder, **WHITE OWL** (60. Leathery and wise. The voice from the opening scene). She rides up to Alejandro. He knows her--

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)

White Owl, what has happened to cause the Gabrieleño to ride against my settlement?

WHITE OWL

A group of Spaniards attacked and robbed a barge of our pearl-divers, Don Alejandro.

Alejandro frowns at the news of his people doing this--

ALEJANDRO

Not with my knowledge.

WHITE OWL

I know. You have been in the North. But now that you have returned will you give us justice?

ALEJANDRO

Please, come in. We will talk.

He signals and the giant door to the Mission is opened. As he leads White Owl in, he glares up to the wall--directly at his son, Lorenzo. Diego can't believe what he just saw.

INTERCUT:

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - CHAPEL

As Alejandro and White Owl speak in the chapel--

The townspeople come outside to get a look at the waiting Warriors. Diego comes up to Catalina and Bernardo, breathless, a kid who just saw fireworks--

DIEGO
That was incredible...
(then)
Are you alright?

Catalina laughs, takes Diego's hand.

CATALINA
Yes. Thank you for your bravery.

Diego smiles ear-to-ear, until--

VOICE
Come Catalina!

They all turn to see her Father, frowning at Diego. Catalina looks back as she's whisked away.

Diego watches them go, still entranced by her touch. Padre Mendoza comes up, watching Alejandro and White Owl.

DIEGO
Thank God Don de la Vega arrived
when he did.

PADRE MENDOZA
I prayed for peace. My prayers
were answered.

DIEGO
If they hadn't been, I would have
fought. With the Spanish. I don't
care if I have Indian blood...

PADRE MENDOZA
Loyalty is an admirable quality,
Diego. But sometimes things are more
complicated than they appear. Often
the ones who claim to be righteous
are wrong, and the ones accused of
wrongdoing are righteous.
(beat)
To be truly moral, one must see the
difference.

DIEGO
If everything is so complicated,
how am I supposed to know what the
right thing to do is?

Padre gives a rare smile and a hand on his shoulder.

PADRE MENDOZA
 You'll learn from experience,
 Diego. Just as we all do.

Alejandro takes White Owl's hand in his: they have an agreement.

Exiting the Chapel, the Spaniards--including Lorenzo and his guard--watch White Owl's recession.

White Owl smiles warmly at Diego as she passes--as if she knows him. *Strange.* As she rides away with her warriors, Alejandro walks past Lorenzo to shake hands with Mendoza.

ALEJANDRO
 Thank you for sending word, Padre.
 (eyeing Lorenzo)
 This could have gotten out of hand.

PADRE MENDOZA
 Of course, Don De La Vega.

Diego looks to Mendoza--*So that's how he "prayed."* Mendoza winks. Lorenzo glares darkly at Mendoza.

ALEJANDRO
 (controlled fury)
 Lorenzo, return to the hacienda.
 Now.

Lorenzo takes off on his horse, revealing--Tornado.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
 What is Tornado doing here?

DIEGO
 (guilty)
 I borrowed him, Don De La Vega.
 (beat)
 I will return him to your stables
 immediately.

ALEJANDRO
 It has been a long day for
 everyone. You may return him
 tomorrow.

Diego watches Alejandro ride off, hero worship in his eyes.

EXT. DE LA VEGA HACIENDA - STABLES - DAY

Diego leads Tornado into his stall. Tornado takes one look inside it and REARS BACK! Knocking Diego to the straw.

Diego, almost trampled, dodges the frantic movements of Tornado *who does not want to go in his stall.*

DIEGO
Tornado! No!

Unable to control Tornado, Diego grabs a WHIP off the wall. Unsure of exactly what to do, he unfurls it and ***CRACK!***

--gives himself a split lip. Tornado gets more agitated as Diego is suddenly pulled out of harms' way, by Alejandro--

ALEJANDRO
It's not the whip he fears...

Alejandro calmly enters Tornado's stall. Returns holding a rat. Tossing it out of the stall, Tornado instantly calms.

DIEGO
He was afraid of a rat?!

ALEJANDRO
He is like any of us, afraid of the unexpected.

He locks up the stall, then takes the whip--

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
Come. Let's see to that lip.

Alejandro leads Diego to--

INT. DE LA VEGA HACIENDA - TACK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Diego sits on a table as Alejandro steps up with a washbasin. As he hands Diego a cool wet cloth to blot his lip--

ALEJANDRO
Tornado is not like the others. He is half mustang. Wild but with great potential.

DIEGO
He's half-Indian?

ALEJANDRO
(nodding)
His father was a mighty Spanish Andalusian that I brought from Spain. His mother was a gift from White Owl...
(off Diego's surprise)
A peace offering.

DIEGO

So you have fought her before.

ALEJANDRO

(nods, remembering)

When I first came to Alta California I was young and arrogant, ready to make a name for myself so that all those back in Spain would hear of my exploits.

(beat)

Well, my exploits were talked about. Especially when I was captured in battle.

DIEGO

And you escaped?!

ALEJANDRO

No. Escape was impossible. I had been foolhardy and knew I would suffer the consequences. But White Owl chose to let me go.

DIEGO

Why?

ALEJANDRO

Because she knew that it would make a friend of an enemy. And she was right.

(beat)

I learned from White Owl that true strength comes from how one uses power.

He looks at the whip, darkens slightly--

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)

It is a lesson I hope one day Lorenzo will understand. His mother died of small pox when he was young. He has missed a woman's influence.

DIEGO

Maybe you should send him to White Owl.

Alejandro likes Diego. He smiles, then it fades--

ALEJANDRO

Perhaps it is too late... the Russians are at our doorstep. If they come in force I will not be here to teach him. Nor to hold him in line.

He looks at Diego, then, holding up the whip--

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
 Enough of my rambling. I should
 teach you how to use one of these
 correctly--

Alejandro stands, moving to the middle of the room as he
 uncoils the whip. Diego follows.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
 The power is not in the arm, but
 the wrist--

With a flick of the wrist--*CRACK!*--the air snaps.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
 (handing it over)
 You try.

Diego holds it out from his body and--*CRACK!* Smiling--

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
 Well done. Again. But a lighter
 touch this time.

CRACK! FROM OUTSIDE, Lorenzo seethes with jealousy
 watching his father bond with this orphan--

EXT./EST. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - NIGHT

Autumn, rain pouring. The greenery shows weeks have passed.

INT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - SLEEPING QUARTERS - LATER

A room of beds, orphans of all ages sleep. By the window,
 Diego and Bernardo. Diego whispers down from the top bunk.

DIEGO
 It's been weeks. And when I see her
 in church she barely looks at me.
 (beat)
 Why would she be so nice and then
 ignore me?

BERNARDO
 Women are a mystery.

DIEGO
 Maybe she finally thought of what it
 would be like to marry a poor orphan.

BERNARDO
 That's probably it.

DIEGO
What do you mean? No it isn't.

BERNARDO
Then why did you say it?

DIEGO
So you'd disagree, make me feel better.

BERNARDO
Oh. Well next time say something I disagree with.

Diego swats Bernardo with his pillow.

plink, plink, plink. Out the window, a figure... Wiping away the condensation, Diego sees--Catalina.

DIEGO
She's here!

GROANING from orphans and SHUSHES. Catalina waves--"come out." Diego looks down at Bernardo, a big grin.

BERNARDO
Try whining about sweets, see if you can make them appear, too.

Diego jumps down from the bunk, throwing clothes on.

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - NIGHT

Diego joins Catalina in the pouring rain. Diego just looks at her, not sure what to say.

CATALINA
I'm sorry...
(beat)
My father said I shouldn't be seeing you.

Diego's face falls. But then again--

DIEGO
Then why are you here?

CATALINA
Because I keep seeing you anyway...
in my dreams.

DIEGO
(devilish grin)
I think God is telling you to disobey your father.

Catalina smiles. Diego has an idea, takes her hand --

INT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - CHAPEL

Diego leads Catalina through the empty chapel by candle-light to--THE VIRGIN MARY. A carved wooden statue.

DIEGO

Tell your father you want to become a nun. You can come here to pray and he won't stop you.

CATALINA

(getting it)

You were simply a childish crush. I have seen the light... but I will need to pray day and night.

DIEGO

Who knew you'd be so good at being sneaky?

CATALINA

You're a bad influence on me.

Diego grins, pushes the statue aside, revealing--A DARK CREVICE IN THE WALL. She looks inside and then down, just darkness. Looks back at him, unsure...

CATALINA (CONT'D)

What's down there?

DIEGO

The cavern that runs under the mission. Come on...

He goes ahead and she follows, into the darkness.

After a moment, Padre Mendoza enters, puts down his travel bags. He blows out the candles, turns in for the night.

INT. FOX DEN - CONTINUOUS

Diego and Catalina make their way through a cramped walkway past dripping stalactites. At the end, Diego turns around--

DIEGO

This part is tricky, wait for me.

Diego works his way down a cliff-face, jumping between jutting stones like a cat. He lands gracefully--

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Okay...jump.

Catalina takes a deep breath, and goes for it.

Landing right in Diego's arms. As he puts her down. She looks out at--

A GIANT UNDERGROUND CAVERN. Rocks jut around a waterfall, which pools in the middle--a calm lagoon. Catalina's eyes go wide at this hidden oasis.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Welcome to my secret hiding spot.

As Catalina takes in the beauty of it all--

He motions over to blankets and a stack of books--

DIEGO (CONT'D)

It's the only place I can call my own.

Catalina sits on the blanket, looks through a variety of adventure books like *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Odyssey*. Inside the books, Diego's own hand-drawn scenes of adventure: Matadors and bulls, pirates and the sea.

CATALINA

Where do you get all of these books?

DIEGO

I find them here and there...

CATALINA

(dubious)

"Find?" You mean you steal--

DIEGO

I only take the ones that people have already read--

CATALINA

--It's still stealing.

She's smiling though, she actually finds it kind of hot. Comes close to him--

CATALINA (CONT'D)

I fear for your mortal soul, Diego. I must take it upon myself to save you.

INT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - MENDOZA'S ROOM

Mendoza enters his simple room to find a lone candle burning. IN THE SHADOWS, at his desk, Lorenzo is reading a letter. Many letters, already read, are spread out across the desk.

PADRE MENDOZA

Lorenzo, what is the meaning of this?

LORENZO

How was your journey, Padre? Were you off converting the Indians? Or being converted by them?

PADRE MENDOZA

What are you talking about?

LORENZO

I've read your letters.

Mendoza realizes the information in those letters.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

It's suddenly clear why you seek to frustrate me at every turn from dealing with Spain's enemies--

PADRE MENDOZA

Lorenzo, you do not fully understand--

LORENZO

--I understand all too well!

He throws a handful of letters at Mendoza.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

Every conspiracy, detailed in your own handwriting. Going back years.

PADRE MENDOZA

I have nothing to hide! And I will take this up with your father!

Mendoza makes to leave but Lorenzo pulls out a revolver.

PADRE MENDOZA (CONT'D)

Son, be very careful. A man must never act in anger--

LORENZO

I find anger to be the perfect time to act. It brings such clarity:

(MORE)

LORENZO (CONT'D)

(then)

You have sided with the Indians
against Spain.

PADRE MENDOZA

They are not our enemy! The
Russians--

LORENZO

--are merely a distraction. The
Indians, *and their conspirators
among us*, are the ones who must be
wiped out.

PADRE MENDOZA

(nervously)

I'm sure much of what you read in
those letters must be very
confusing. But we will pray
together for understanding.

Lorenzo has a moment of hesitation, then committing--

LORENZO

I don't need a Priest--

BANG! Lorenzo shoots Mendoza. He grabs his chest,
collapses, DEAD.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

I need a war.

The rain POUNDS on the windows and roof, drowning out the
sound. Lorenzo throws the letters into the fireplace.

INT. FOX DEN - NIGHT

Catalina looks into his eyes--

CATALINA

Your eyes are so...
(beat, looking off)
...green.

DIEGO

I think they're brown...

CATALINA

No--

She points to the cavern behind him. A FOX looks at them,
his green eyes piercing through the darkness.

DIEGO

Oh, it's okay. It's his den. He
won't hurt you.

Diego goes to the water and kneels down. The fox walks
towards him. It's strange. But when Catalina moves, it
scampers off, across the water and into the darkness.

CATALINA

You need to teach me how you do
these things!

Diego sees his REFLECTION in the pool, his tattered clothes--

DIEGO

What if your father is right?
(beat)
What if I could never provide for
you... make you happy?

CATALINA

Do you think riches are all that
would make me happy?

DIEGO

No, but... one day you might regret
choosing me--wish you'd married
someone like Lorenzo.

CATALINA

Lorenzo?! What gave you that idea?

DIEGO

I've seen the way he looks at you.
And he could give you everything.

CATALINA

Except the things that matter. He
just wants to possess me like a
trophy.

Catalina moves closer to him...

CATALINA (CONT'D)

You would die for me, Diego.
That's true love. That is what I
want.

They stare into each other's eyes, then kiss--awkward at
first but then long and deep. Each other's first. Their
hearts are beating fast--

DIEGO

I promise you, when I can give you everything you deserve, I will ask you to marry me.

CATALINA

And I promise you that *whenever* you ask, I will say yes.

Exhilaration, a future full of possibility. They kiss again.

FADE TO:

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - LATER

The happy, young lovers exit the Chapel. Instantly, they are surrounded by mounted soldiers...and Lorenzo.

CATALINA

Lorenzo? I can explain...I was praying and--

LORENZO

It's alright, señorita. You needn't fear him. You're safe from this murderer...

DIEGO

What?!

LORENZO

Don't try to deny it. You killed Padre Mendoza.

Diego is shocked and saddened at the news, rage burning in him suddenly as he realizes--

DIEGO

What did you do to him?!

Diego attacks Lorenzo. He's so fast that before the soldiers even have time to react, Lorenzo is knocked to the ground.

A soldier steps in to pull them apart--Diego trips him, sends him to the dirt.

CATALINA

Diego, no!

The other soldiers jump in. One raises his rifle butt and ***crack!*** knocks him unconscious.

Dusting himself off and wiping his bloody nose--

LORENZO
Take him into custody.

As Diego is dragged off, Catalina can only watch in shock.

INT. DE LA VEGA HACIENDA - COURTYARD - PRE-DAWN

An impressive, stone and tile courtyard. Lorenzo bursts in--

LORENZO
Father! Father!

After a moment, Alejandro appears from an upstairs balcony.

ALEJANDRO
What's wrong?

LORENZO
Padre Mendoza has been murdered.

Alejandro takes that in, shocked. As he descends the stairs--

ALEJANDRO
By who? How?

LORENZO
Your stable boy shot him.

ALEJANDRO
Diego?! Impossible.
(then)
Where is the proof?

LORENZO
*My word is proof enough. Are you
going to believe your son or put
your faith in some orphan?*

ALEJANDRO
I know the boy's character. He
would never do what you describe.

Lorenzo is bitterly disappointed, but not surprised.

LORENZO
I thought you would say something
like that... once disloyal, always
disloyal.

ALEJANDRO
What are you talking about?

Lorenzo pulls the letter from his breast pocket.

LORENZO

I went looking for proof of treason
from the Padre. What I found was
much worse.

Alejandro almost goes white. He knows what is in the letter
and he knows what it means that Lorenzo is holding it.

ALEJANDRO

What have you done?

LORENZO

I always had my suspicions, Father,
but dared not admit them...even to
myself. Now I have the truth,
written in your own hand.

ALEJANDRO

If it is you who harmed Mendoza I
will see you punished. You will
not be treated as my son--

LORENZO

--Nor will I expect to be.
Whatever ties of blood we have,
they are severed.

Lorenzo opens the doors to the courtyard and Alejandro see
what is beyond--TROOPS. Massive men enter with hats of bear
fur and long beards--*guys not from around here*--RUSSIANS.

The biggest of them all, MAJOR **REZNOV**, steps forward--

REZNOV

(heavily accented)
De la Vega. Pleased to finally
make your acquaintance.

Alejandro looks at his son, horrified--

ALEJANDRO

Lorenzo, you have let the wolves
into our house!

LORENZO

The Russians are fellow pioneers
and trading partners. I have
simply ensured that they will make
no further incursions into our
territory so *I* can focus on the
real enemy.

REZNOV

Our only request was to meet the man who had caused us so much pain.

LORENZO

Apparently they have taken your stance against them rather personally.

ALEJANDRO

Killing me won't bring peace.

LORENZO

Death is too good for a traitor like you, Father.

REZNOV

We have far more worse plans for you, de la Vega...

LORENZO

My friends have taught me an interesting new word: "Gulag."

Lorenzo looks at Reznov.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

Our treaty is cemented, Major Reznov?

REZNOV

(with a wolf's grin)

Da.

LORENZO

Goodbye, Father.

The Russians grab Alejandro and drag him out.

ALEJANDRO

No! Lorenzo! You will destroy everything!

LORENZO

Not everything. Just the people who deserve it.

Alejandro is dragged off, the gates clanging shut behind him. Off Lorenzo, alone in *his* hacienda.

EXT. PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES - TOWN PLAZA - DAY

A shackled, badly bruised Diego is led through the square. REVEAL -- A FIRING SQUAD awaiting him.

The execution has drawn a crowd of hundreds showing every emotion: pleased Spaniards, angry Mexicans, weeping orphans. Up front with them, Bernardo, ashen. In a far corner, White Owl with other Indians, weapons concealed under their cloaks.

Diego sees Bernardo, praying fiercely. He looks up at Lorenzo on the balcony. If looks could kill--

The **OFFICER** reads the charges as Diego is lashed to a mighty oak, soldiers at-the-ready with rifles.

OFFICER

You, Diego...

No last name listed, he looks at Diego--

DIEGO

Mendoza.

OFFICER

Diego Mendoza, have been found guilty of the following crimes against the Crown, and the Viceroyalty of New Spain...

(reading)

Murder...kidnapping...conspiracy against the King...sedition....

EXT. BALCONY - SAME TIME

Lorenzo watches from above. SPANISH NOBLEMEN, known as the **DONS**, greet him with deference--Lorenzo is now in power. Among the observers, a ship's Captain, **VASQUEZ** (40's).

As Lorenzo receives guests, the **CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD** steps in, whispering something to Lorenzo. An eye-brow goes up and Lorenzo excuses himself to walk into--

INT. ADJOINING STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Catalina waits for him. He smiles warmly--

LORENZO

Catalina...

CATALINA

I have come to beg for Diego's life.

Disappointed, the smile slips. Puffing his feathers--

LORENZO

He was involved in an Indian conspiracy to kidnap my father and murder Padre Mendoza. Why would you beg for the life of such a man?

CATALINA

Because he is innocent.

(beat)

I was with him that night.

Catalina tries to keep her dignity as she risks her reputation. Lorenzo works to hide his jealousy--

LORENZO

Perhaps he murdered the Padre before seducing you...

(then, puffing up)

No matter. His guilt is established. And he refuses to mitigate his sentence by telling me the location of my father. He has bound my hands. His fate is sealed, Señorita Catalina.

Cutting to the chase--

CATALINA

Please...I will do *anything*.

Anything? She kneels before him, kisses the ring of his hand, trying not to vomit--

CATALINA (CONT'D)

I beg you, Don De La Vega.

That's more like it. Lorenzo lets the moment linger, then--

LORENZO

I will spare him--if, when you're of age, you marry me.

The things we do for love... Faking it as best she can--

CATALINA

That would please me very much, Lorenzo.

LORENZO

But... the people must see that there are repercussions for siding with the Indians against us.

(then)

(MORE)

LORENZO (CONT'D)

Diego must be still be punished for his crimes. He will serve out his sentence in Spain.

CATALINA

Spain...?!

LORENZO

Forced labor in service to The Crown seems like his best opportunity for rehabilitation, does it not?

CATALINA

It just... seems like such an imposition for you.

Nodding to the door where the dignitaries stand watching the preparations for execution--

LORENZO

Nonsense. Captain Vasquez, is leaving tomorrow for Cádiz. I will personally see to the arrangements for Diego's trip. You have my word.

Lorenzo steps to the doorway, summoning The Captain Of The Guard. Off Catalina, making a deal with the devil--

EXT. PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES - TOWN PLAZA - MOMENTS LATER

Diego is blindfolded. The firing squad readies. The crowd tenses. White Owl's warriors look to her, *should we make our move?* Before she can answer, the Captain of the Guard appears, issuing orders to the Officer and his firing squad.

They stop their preparation, then march off. The Captain removes Diego's blindfold and leads him away.

Diego is confused as is the rest of the crowd. Bernardo smiles, relieved, crosses himself, *thank God*. White Owl looks to her warriors. They disappear into the crowd.

Diego is handed off to Captain Vasquez who moves with an armed escort through the crowd. Bernardo gets close--

BERNARDO

Where are they taking you?!

DIEGO

I don't know!

He looks up to see Lorenzo on the balcony--keeps looking at him as he is dragged away, but he does not see Catalina in the next window--

INT. ADJOINING STUDY - SAME TIME

She looks down as he is taken away, her face wet with tears.

CATALINA
Goodbye, Diego...

He is taken out of sight, towards the docks in the distance where a SPANISH GALLEON awaits.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STORMY SEA - NIGHT

Thirty foot swells. Nothing for miles, except--a *Spanish Galleon*, the *Madre de Dios*, rising and falling on the waves. Thunderheads above promise rain and thunder to come.

EXT. MADRE DE DIOS - MAIN DECK - SAME TIME

Captain Vasquez orders the men to batten down the hatches, pull in the sails, etc.

SUPER:

THE SARGASSO SEA - THREE MONTHS LATER

As crewman scurry about he finds the **FIRST MATE** (20's). The Captain has to yell to be heard over the sea--

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ
Bring the Prisoner out.

FIRST MATE
(RE: the waves)
Captain, are you sure it's wise to deal with him now?

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ
I gave my word. I'm going through with it before the sea deprives me of the chance.

FIRST MATE
Aye, aye.

The First Mate looks over at THREE BEASTLY CREWMEN, gives them a nod. They don't look thrilled.

INT. MADRE DE DIOS - LOWER DECK - MOMENTS LATER

Bowels of the ship. The three Crewmen make their way aft, two carry cutlasses, one carries a set of heavy shackles. As the ship dips and heaves they push forward, past barrels of brined meat, rum ...scurrying rats.

Thunder ***BOOMS!*** outside, but the storm isn't what concerns them; it's what they're headed toward. Arriving at a wrought-iron gate, the lead man, call him BEAST, takes out a set of keys, tries to hand them to the second crewman.

BEAST

Open the cage.

The other guy looks at him like he's crazy--shakes his head.

No choice, Beast steps forward himself, works the lock--

FROM THE SHADOWS, the thing chained up in the cage moves into the light--DIEGO.

Long, greasy hair, tattered shirt. Chained to a metal ring bolted to the floor, a prisoner. Alert, angry. A very different person from when we last saw him.

Beast opens the cell door. Approaching tentatively, he unlocks the metal ring.

CLUNK! The chains fall to the floor. Diego stands, causing the men to all take a step back--

Beast reaches for Diego. Then, he stops, noticing *Diego's hands are clasped together*.

BEAST (CONT'D)

What've you got in your hands?

DIEGO

My friend. He wants to meet you.

Diego reveals he is holding a rat. He tosses it right in the face of Beast--who lets out a ***SCREAM!***

Diego slams Beast into the bars, dropping him. The others try to subdue him. Diego fights viciously--a skinny 17-year-old giving three grown men all the fight they can handle.

He leaps up, grabs a wooden cross beam, flings himself over the pile-up and out of the cage. About to make a run for it when there's a sword at his throat. *The First Mate!*

EXT. MADRE DE DIOS - MAIN DECK - MOMENTS LATER

Rain pours, thunder ***BOOMS!*** Diego is brought, in shackles, before Vasquez.

DIEGO

Spain looks much different than I'd imagined.

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ

Don Lorenzo gave me a handsome bonus to make sure you never see it.

(then)

He ordered me to dump you in the deepest chasm of the Atlantic. At first I did not understand why he had such hatred for a boy...but I have come to understand him very well.

Diego is walked to the gunwale, ready to be tossed over as another swell crests above them...this one MUCH larger--FIFTY FEET OF OCEAN break over the bow of the *Madre de Dios*.

The bow tips so the ship is facing straight down at the water; as it swings back up, Diego catches sight of something hidden between the coming waves:

A RED FLAG--EMBLAZONED WITH A SKULL AND CROSS BONES.

Visible for only a moment--like a shark's fin--but it was unmistakable. Vasquez and the crew don't see it.

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

It will be a pleasure watching you die.

A slow smile spreads across Diego's face.

DIEGO

It's not too late to beg for mercy.

Vasquez and the rest of the crew laugh. Then, to the men--

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ

Throw him overboard!

Diego struggles against five men from being thrown overboard. Diego knocks one man's leg out from under him, he goes down hard. Still shackled, he yanks a sword from another man, brandishes it against the rest of the crew to hold them off.

In the stand-off, no one notices the subtle ***knock!*** of something--or *somethings*--striking the hull of the ship.

Vasquez, having grown tired, gestures to the First Mate--

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

Shoot him!

Out of their view, ***Clank!***--a steel hook grapples to the port railing, rope attached to the end of it. The rope goes taught--someone is climbing up the outside of the ship.

The First Mate pulls his revolver, centers the sights on Diego, pulls back the hammer and--

BANG!

The First Mate drops dead, shot from behind. Vasquez wheels around to see a PIRATE climb over the rails just as--

A dozen more hooks fly over the ship's railing from both sides. The entire crew now sees--

Pirates swarm over the sides of the Madre De Dios, attacking! Diego's situation is improved...slightly. He sees--

THE BODY OF THE FIRST MATE. ON HIS BELT: the pouch containing the keys to his shackles.

He goes for the keys--is ATTACKED by two crewmen. Diego grabs the sword--arm of one, uses his momentum to KICK the other. He twists his shackled arms, spins one into the other as they both *WHACK!* into the main mast--

They crumble next to the body of the First Mate. Diego grabs the keys, opens the lock and frees himself!

He watches as pirates lay waste to the Spanish crew, then--

AT THE HELM

Vasquez fending off pirate after pirate.

ON THE DECK

Diego's eyes glow with revenge as he pulls a saber out of a dead Sailor. Leaping stairs three at a time, Diego makes his way to the helm just as Vasquez kills another pirate.

Vasquez sees Diego, squares himself. Diego jumps up on the ship's wheel, leaps and flips, landing behind Vasquez.

Diego attacks with his sabre--short on technique, long on rage. He's relentless, knocks Vasquez to the deck, the sword from his hand. Defenseless, Vasquez pleads--

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

I beg your mercy...

Diego raises the sabre to strike--then brings it down--

clank! Instead of meeting Vasquez's neck, it meets another cutlass. Diego turns to see--

JEAN LAFITTE (40), Gentleman Pirate. Dashing. Handsome. Clean-shaven, covered in gold from his buckled boots to his rings, a silk sash around his waist--

LAFITTE

I appreciate the help, kid. But if you hadn't noticed, this ship is now mine. That includes everything on it, even you.

The ship is out of the storm, the rains have stopped...and we reveal the battle is over. Captain Vasquez is the last Spaniard alive.

DIEGO

Move or die.

LAFITTE

Are you generally murderous or do you have a specific grudge against this man?

DIEGO

You have one last chance.

Lafitte assesses Diego. Has seen that rage before--

LAFITTE

You have me in a bind here. I can't let you kill him, and yet the idea of dying *myself* doesn't appeal to me at all.

Lafitte stalls as his second-in-command, a black pirate with a pair of sharpened wooden teeth, **MAMBA**, moves behind Diego.

Mamba lunges with a dagger but Diego's sixth sense kicks in; grabbing Mamba's arm (and the dagger) as he turns, ending up BEHIND Mamba, holding Mamba's own dagger to his throat.

The crew freezes...except for Lafitte, who gives a non-chalant golf clap, adding--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

You have reflexes like a cat. Maybe that'll be my nickname for you. Every member of my crew gets a name.
(dramatic)

Gato!

(MORE)

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
 (shaking his head)
 No, that's terrible.

DIEGO
 I'm not a pirate.

At the word "pirate" the Pirates GASP.

LAFITTE
 Pirate?! How many "pirates" do you
 know with a license issued by
 President Andrew Jackson himself?
 (then)
 My boy, I'm no pirate. I am Jean
 Lafitte, *Privateer*.

DIEGO
 I don't care.

Lafitte looks down at Vasquez, who's still frozen in fear on
 the deck. He asks--

LAFITTE
 This boy hates you like the Pope
 hates Satan. Why?

DIEGO
 He's in league with my mortal
 enemy.

Lafitte ping-pongs between Diego and the Captain--

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ
 I did as I was ordered!

DIEGO
 You were bribed to murder me!

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ
 (to Lafitte)
 If you spare my life you will have
 my weight in gold as ransom.

DIEGO
 I don't care about gold!

The pirates again GASP. Lafitte addresses the blasphemy.

LAFITTE
 Now you've gone too far.

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ
 He's insane!

Lafitte silences him with a boot to the head.

LAFITTE

Chatterbox, that one.

(to Diego)

If there is one thing I've learned plying my trade it is this: a live Captain fetches a hefty ransom. A dead one, less so.

(beat)

Thus, he lives.

Diego has had it. He shoves Mamba away while pulling Mamba's sword from its scabbard, swings wildly at Lafitte.

Lafitte ducks, bobs, weaves. Diego is no match for him. The other pirates move in but Lafitte holds them off. Calmly--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

Stop swinging with your arms...

Diego hacks, slashes, strikes with all his might. Lafitte retreats, easily defends...

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

...strength comes from the legs...

Diego keeps coming as Lafitte dances backwards over fallen bodies, debris, etc...

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

You'll note how you are drenched in sweat while I maintain a gentlemanly glisten.

The duel is epic. Destructive. Ropes, support beams, barrels, the whole ship is collateral damage. The swordfight scene from Princess Bride on steroids.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

Keep the wrist light, full of spring. Like this...

Lafitte whips his wrist, sends Diego's sword flying into the mast. Diego, undaunted, grabs the first thing he can--a large plank--throws it at Lafitte, pulls the sword free.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

(impressed)

You're fierce, like a wolf.

(thinking)

Lobo!

(then)

Nope. Where were we...?

Lafitte advances, taking the fight to Diego. Their swords cross and clang--polish and practice versus fire and passion.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
You're full of raw talent but it's
as if you've been taught sword
fighting by a butcher.

DIEGO
I taught myself!

LAFITTE
You don't say?
(then)
I've seen this kind of rage before--

Lafitte catches Diego's sword hand by the wrist, bringing the
duel to an abrupt pause--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
Who did they kill? Someone you
loved, obviously. Mother? Father?

A moment of humanity in Diego's eyes.

DIEGO
Padre Mendoza. The only father I
ever had.

LAFITTE
Ahh, you're an orphan. You are
truly pitiable.
(beat)
And who killed him?

DIEGO
Lorenzo! And when I get back to
California, I'll kill him!

Diego breaks free. Renews his attack, fiercer now. The last
of his energy burning away as Lafitte still glistens--

LAFITTE
Revenge. A noble goal.

The Pirate crew nods.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
The only problem is this:

Lafitte flips BEHIND Diego, knocking his legs out from
underneath him and disarming him--all in the same move.

Lafitte's boot is on Diego's chest, sword hovers at his neck.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

You'd be dead before you got within fifty feet of him.

(beat)

What is your name?

DIEGO

Diego.

Lafitte considers him a moment, then--

LAFITTE

Perhaps we can help each other.

DIEGO

You'll let me kill the Captain?

LAFITTE

(sighs)

Forget about the Captain. This Lorenzo--he is the one you want. And I will help you get him.

Now he has Diego's attention.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

I will turn you into a master swordsman. I will make you wealthy beyond dreams of avarice. And when you return to California, you will have your revenge.

DIEGO

Why would you do that?

LAFITTE

Because I am always on the lookout for new talent, and am recently short a few crew members.

The bodies around the deck attest to this.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

You give me your service, your loyalty, your talents, and when I deem you ready, I will give you leave to take Lorenzo's head.

Lafitte pulls off his glove, offers his hand.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

You will find no fairer deal on this earth or in Heaven.

Diego considers it, then takes it. As Lafitte pulls him up--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
 Welcome aboard. I have one rule:
 Do as I say when I say or be fed to
 the sharks.

Diego only cares about one thing:

DIEGO
 How soon will I get back to
 California?

LAFITTE
 (shakes his head)
 First things first, my boy. We
 have a Captain to ransom and two
 ships to repair.

Lafitte pulls a map out of his boot, slaps it down on a
 barrel. Mamba joins him.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
 (re: the map)
 Set course for Barataria.

MAMBA
 Aye.

Lafitte addresses the crew...

LAFITTE
 Set the tow winch and grab the
 rope! Let's go home!

A cheer from the crew as they spring into action. Mamba grabs
 Diego, shows him what to do, as we--

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MAIN DECK - DORADA - DAYS LATER

Lafitte's Ship, *The Dorada*. Mis-matched and worn, she's more
 than the sum of her parts, fast and strong and dependable.
The Millennium Falcon with sails.

SUPER:

THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

The *Dorada* tows the much larger *Madre De Dios* through the
 murky green swamp. It's a place unlike any Diego's seen
 before. Diego's eyes go wide watching a hungry-looking
 alligator crawl across a rotted stump.

He turns to Lafitte--

DIEGO

I pictured America differently.

LAFITTE

America's a big country. From mountains to valleys, and everything in between.

(smiling)

This is Louisiana.

DIEGO

You've been all over the world?

LAFITTE

Most of it that's worth seeing.

DIEGO

And you chose to live here...?

LAFITTE

The two most important things in your new line of work: a home base for repairs, restocking and relaxing...and an escape route.

(gesturing)

New Orleans is thirty miles due north, the mouth of the Mississippi is thirty miles south. In between are 60 miles of nearly unnavigable swamp.

(pointing to his temple)

Luckily, I have a map.

He turns the helm, pointing them directly at a large bank of giant moss-covered Mangroves--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

It's not Paris, but perfect for the man who appreciates discretion.

The ship seems to speed up as it continues on it's collision course with the giant trees.

Diego grabs the rail, but it slides gently through a hidden gap in the moss--inches from the massive gnarled branches of the trees. On the other side--

AN ISLAND OASIS IN THE SWAMP.

EXT. BARATRIA - GRAND ISLE - DAY

A quaint fishing village tucked in the moss and mangroves. Houses on stilts, row-boats of all sizes crisscrossing between. Old and injured pirates keep the enterprise running along with women who farm and raise children.

The *Madre De Dios* is led to the dry dock as Captain Vasquez is escorted off his ship, to be ransomed back to Spain. The *Dorada* continues on...

RISING ABOVE IT ALL on the highest hill -- A MARVELOUS CARIBBEAN ESTATE. White shutters and deep green palms frame a large porch. Lafitte gestures--

LAFITTE

Welcome to Barataria, my Grand Isle.

The ship glides to the island's main dock, people of every kind appear to meet its arrival. White, black, Indian. Men, women and children. Barataria is a pirate utopia.

The ship is moored as Lafitte's men practically trip over themselves to hit dry land.

Some women are holding babies for men who learn they have become fathers. There are hugs and kisses, as they hold their new sons and daughters.

DIEGO

How long have you been at sea?

LAFITTE

Too long.

(then)

We'll stay here awhile. Let them spend time with their families.

Diego notes Lafitte doesn't mention having a family. As he grabs two of the mainlines, handing one to Diego--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

Come. Let me show you around--

He grabs the line and swings out over the dock as his men ***CHEER!*** He's a star. Diego follows, landing on--

THE GRASSY HILL leading up to the house. When Diego catches up to him, Lafitte is dispensing coins to the children...and coy winks to the ladies. As they walk toward the house--

DIEGO

How many pirates work for you?

LAFITTE

(tired of correcting him)

Privateers.

(then, nodding)

Once you've served under my flag,
you've earned safe harbor here at
Grand Isle. There's always
something to be done. Everyone is
put to use.

As they step up on the porch, a trio of exotic, buxom MAIDENS appear before Lafitte.

They smile warmly as one of them, **VALENTINA** (20s. Exotic, gorgeous) slides her arm in Diego's. Uncomfortable at first, he can't help but enjoy it as they step past the porch into--

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

The inside is as impressive as the outside. It may be all heisted loot, but Lafitte is the most tasteful decorator in Louisiana. Lafitte turns to--

LAFITTE

Valentina, why don't you show
Master Diego to his new room.

(quietly)

Stumpy's old room.

(outloud)

Help him get dressed for the
festivities tonight.

DIEGO

But I have no clothes.

LAFITTE

Stumpy was your size. Don't
worry...

(with a wink)

Valentina will take care of
everything.

DIEGO

It's okay, I'll find it.

Diego goes off--alone--Lafitte looking after him.

PRELAP: RAUCOUS SEA SHANTIES AND PARTY SOUNDS

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - DINING ROOM

Music, food and dancing on and around a massive table in the middle of a high-ceilinged dining room.

ON THE STAIRCASE

Diego, cleaned up and in the slightly ill-fitting but fashionable garb of a Privateer, watches the revelry.

He descends the stairs, finds Valentina waiting. He gives her a gentlemanly half-bow, but slips past and exits the hall. Valentina is disappointed.

Beyond her, Lafitte at the head of the table--rum goblet in hand--watches Diego slip out.

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - HALLWAY

Diego explores the house. Candles light the cavernous hallways--empty since everyone is at the party.

The place is huge, he opens a door, finds--

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - LAFITTE'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

A book-lined study bursting with maps, globes, paperwork. Bits of intelligence Lafitte has collected, plans for future raids, drawings, etc. *Diego is amazed, so much to see.* He sees a BUST on the bookshelf--of Lafitte. Shaking his head--

DIEGO

He has a bust of himself.

MAPS are laid out on the desk, hand written notes charting the Atlantic crossing of the *Madre de Dios*. A MARK where Lafitte planned to take it. Weather charts, an open almanac predicting a storm at that time. Lafitte is quite a planner.

Diego traces his finger to where they are now, the Mississippi Delta. Then across the country, much of it blank, to an area of *Missions* dotting the California coast. *Then: Pueblo de Los Angeles.* So far away. He sighs.

On the mantle of the grand fireplace he sees an object under a glass dome. He steps closer to get a good look.

UNDER THE GLASS: A withered, mummified human hand! Diego gasps, turns back to see--

LAFITTE

Valentina is not the type of woman who is used to rejection.

Did he see Diego going through his things? Lafitte betrays nothing as he swigs from his goblet--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
Perhaps Nathaniel the Smithee is
more your preference.

Diego reacts: *what?!* Lafitte *snaps* his finger, realizing--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
Ah, there is a girl back home...

That hits a soft spot with Diego, he nods--

DIEGO
Catalina...
(adding)
She's the most beautiful woman in
the world. And smart, and
courageous--

LAFITTE
--My God, man, you're in love.
(off Diego's nod)
That's not good at all.

DIEGO
Why not?

LAFITTE
A man in love is soft, distracted.
Afraid to lose what he thinks he
has, and yet willing to risk
everything for an illusion.

DIEGO
Catalina's not an illusion.

LAFITTE
It's all an illusion! Everything
you hold dear--it can all be taken
away in the blink of an eye.

DIEGO
There must be some reason you keep
going out on the sea. A reason you
built all this.

LAFITTE
Once it was for women and gold and
whatever else I wanted. Then I
found love.
(beat)
And then *he* found me.

Lafitte nods to the hand in the jar.

DIEGO

The hand?

LAFITTE

Idiot. The man the hand was attached to. A man with no name...

(beat)

We call him The Man In Black.

As he talks, Lafitte opens a book of sketches, lands on one of the Man in Black--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

They say he is a spectre from the bowels of hell, a scourge sent by the devil. They terrify children with his tales--*he has a whip for a hand, a blade made of poison, he'll take your soul if you misbehave.*

(beat)

The truth is a bit less terrifying: He is in the employ of the Spanish Crown, hired to reclaim his Majesty's lost treasures. And he most certainly is made of flesh and blood.

Lafitte looks at the hand under glass.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

I have this to prove it. Every time I set out to take the King's gold, I pray to see him again. What began as two men simply playing their roles has become much more personal.

(re: the hand)

Every time we meet in battle we take something from each other.

DIEGO

And what has he taken?

Draining his goblet, he darkens as he answers--

LAFITTE

He took my wife and child.

Lafitte sees the fear and sadness in Diego's eyes. Lafitte sets down his goblet. Looks right through Diego--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

If you ever encounter the Man in Black a moment's hesitation is all it will take for him to put his mark--

With his finger, Lafitte draws an X--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

--right across your heart. And you will be dead.

(beat)

But the desire for vengeance, that will keep you focused. Your anger will be sharper than any steel, and will never dull. Embrace it, and then I can teach you.

Diego takes all of that in. Finally, he nods--

DIEGO

All I care about is Lorenzo de la Vega. I will not stop until he is dead.

Lafitte puts a hand on his shoulder, brightens considerably--

LAFITTE

That's my boy.

He opens a set of french doors to reveal--

EXT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - TRAINING GROUND - DUSK

A vast deck overlooking the entire Bay. Stepping out, Diego takes in the breathtaking panorama, an impressive array of WEAPONRY and TRAINING APPARATUS.

Diego eyes every imaginable weapon known to man. As Diego steps into the marble training circle--

Lafitte opens the pad-lock on an intricately decorated mahogany chest, inlaid with purple velvet. He reaches in, producing: A BEAUTIFUL SWORD that gleams in the torch-light. As he lays it down in the center of the circle--

LAFITTE

My pride and joy. Made of the finest steel in the world, you won't find a stronger sword that is lighter to wield.

(then)

Your first test: Pick up the sword.

(off Diego's look)

Whenever you are ready...

Easy enough. Diego moves for the sword and ***SHINK!*** Lafitte swipes down his cutlass in front of Diego with the speed of a guillotine. Diego looks up at him, shocked.

DIEGO
You nearly killed me!

LAFITTE
I thought you were ready.
(adding)
When you can pick up the sword,
we'll begin.

Diego makes his move--*charging toward the sword with all his might*. Lafitte uses Diego's momentum against him, FLIPS HIM off the porch and into the tall grass.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
I think that's enough for one
night. We'll try again tomorrow.

With that Lafitte picks up the sword and heads inside.

Off Diego, this won't be as easy as he'd hoped.

INT. DIEGO'S ROOM - DAWN

Dawn is breaking as Diego snoozes, face down on his bed--

The door to his room is flung open by Mamba. He tosses a bucket of water on him--

MAMBA
Wake up. There's work to be done!

Diego sits up in terror, shakes off the cobwebs--

DIEGO
What do you mean? Lafitte said he
would train me.

MAMBA
Training isn't your job, it's your
reward. Now get dressed!

EXT. DRYDOCK - MADRE DE DIOS - VARIOUS

Diego is put to back-breaking work making repairs on the ship. Mamba gives him twice as much lumber to haul.

He is last in line for food. By the time he reaches the barrel of grog, it's empty. He doesn't even have time to scowl as Mamba shoves him back into action, until--

INT. DIEGO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Diego drags himself in after a long day. He plops down on his bed, boots and all. His head barely hits the pillow as--

LAFITTE BURSTS IN. Carrying the gleaming sword--

LAFITTE

Now then, time for tonight's
training session. Let's see if we
can pass the first test, shall we?

Lafitte exits. Groaning, Diego drags himself out of bed.

EXT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - TRAINING GROUND - NIGHT

The same candlelit circle. Sword in the middle. Diego sees--
no sign of Lafitte. Looks easy but Diego doesn't trust it,
he rushes to grab the sword before he can be attacked.

From the darkness, he hears a strange ***whirrr!*** and ***zzzwip!**
BAM!* his legs are entangled and yanked out from underneath
him by BOLAS.

From the ground, Diego groggily asks the night:

DIEGO

What exactly is the first test
testing?

From the darkness:

LAFITTE (O.C.)

That is the right question.
(beat)

I took the same test when I was your
age...took me three months to solve
it. I hope you do better.

Diego groans.

THE DAYS PASS

Diego, on the *Madre De Dios* being repaired in dry-dock,
nimble passes over the scaffolding and ropes with an armload
of lumber, the nails to drive it into the hull and the tar to
waterproof it. Mamba smiles, turns to see an approving nod
from a nearby Lafitte.

Diego's promoted, given more advanced tasks--

FORGING IRON with the blacksmith. His hands are now
calloused and confident.

LOADING CANNONS, muscles rippling, getting stronger.

MAP READING with Mamba--his mind growing sharper. Mamba now
lets Diego drink FIRST from the grog barrel.

Diego is becoming well-liked...respected.

BUT EACH NIGHT, when Diego attempts to take the sword, he's felled by a different weapon--dagger, crossbow, trident--

UNTIL ONE NIGHT --

Lafitte kicks open the door of Diego's room, like he has every night for weeks. But this time--

IT'S EMPTY. DIEGO IS GONE. Lafitte grins.

EXT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - TRAINING GROUND - NIGHT

Lafitte comes out with the sword. Only moonlight, no Diego.

But there's something in the middle of the circle--

A PAIR OF GREEN EYES glow in the darkness.

A shiver runs up Lafitte's spine. He reaches for a nearby candle, lighting the torches to reveal--

A FOX. Sitting in the middle of the circle, staring at him. Lafitte takes a step into the circle toward it. *It stays still as he approaches, the fox is alone in the circle.*

Lafitte cocks an eyebrow as--

SNIKT! A dagger at his neck, Diego behind him.

DIEGO

Taking the sword isn't a test of force, it's a test of cunning.

Diego pulls the Sword from Lafitte's hands. Lafitte smiles, proud as a father.

LAFITTE

And now the sword is yours.

Diego exhales, relieved. Lafitte stands--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

We set sail soon. Your instruction will begin in earnest tomorrow.

As they walk back to the Mansion.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

When did you have time to train a fox?

DIEGO
 (shrugs)
 I have a way with animals.

Nodding, thinking...

LAFITTE
 "The Beastmaster!"
 (considers it)
 No, still haven't got it.

BEGIN TRAINING MONTAGE:

LAFITTE AND DIEGO

The training accelerates as they battle back and forth with their sabres across the Training Circles.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
 Mastery of the sword is a matter of repetition and variance. Soon your muscles will learn to react without thinking. That is the easy part.
 (adding)
 Learning to think like a Privateer, that takes some work.

A little more evenly each time...swords ***clang!*** as the men spar faster and faster until--

FLASH TO:

EXT. LAFITTE'S SHIP - DECK - DAY

The ship pulling out of dock. Among the crew, Diego and Lafitte at the rails, waiving goodbye to the family of the Grand Isle who are giving a rousing send-off.

FLASH BACK TO:

EXT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - ROOF - DAY

Diego and Lafitte dueling on top of a pitched roof--

Lafitte attacks, Diego giving ground across the dangerous roof. As they fight--

Lafitte lunges, Diego steps back onto a spot where the roof is rotted, *he falls through to his waist.*

LAFITTE
 What did you learn?

DIEGO

I'll need to be prepared for anything.

Diego swipes at Lafitte's boots, launches himself from the hole, fights Lafitte across the roof.

LAFITTE

You didn't fall into that hole by accident, I angled you into it.

(the lesson)

Choose the time and place of the battle to maximize your advantage.

Backed to the edge of the roof, Lafitte uses a loose tile to spin around, switching places, driving Diego to the edge--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

I know every inch of this roof, as I know every plank on the *Dorada*, every whirlpool on the approach to Madagascar, and each jagged rock off the coast of the Carolinas.

He puts Diego back on solid footing.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

They will always have more men, more firepower. We must have patience, and the boldness to act when--and where--others will not. Surprise is the last emotion before death. We aim to surprise.

(beat)

When would a Spanish Captain least expect to be attacked?

Diego realizes--

FLASH TO:

EXT. LAFITTE'S SHIP AT SEA - RAGING STORM

Like the attack on the *Madre de Dios* but now from the hunter's perspective. Storm SWELLS wash across the deck as Lafitte looks out over the waves and spots their prey through his LOOKING GLASS: A Spanish Galleon.

DIEGO (V.O.)

During a storm at sea.

The Crew prepares to battle an unwary foe.

LAFITTE (V.O.)
When do we attack?

DIEGO (V.O.)
At the height of the storm.

A wall of sea in front of them, then the wave drops revealing--
-THE GALLEON. In boarding distance. Lafitte gives the
command and grappling hooks are fired. *We watch from the
ship as Diego boards the Galleon along with Lafitte's men.*

THROUGH LAFITTE'S LOOKING GLASS:

LAFITTE (V.O.)
We embrace what is terrifying to
most. The treacherous roof, the
raging storm...

The Spanish Crew is overtaken and subdued, Diego at the lead.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - DINING HALL - NIGHT

The Crew celebrates--dancing, card playing. Diego eats,
feels a tug at his pants. Looks down to see a LITTLE GIRL
with a crush on him. She gives him a DOLL and runs away.

He looks at the doll, an X cut across it's chest. Creepy.
He looks up from it to the dance floor, Valentina watching
him. Lafitte--attractive woman on his lap--leans over.

LAFITTE
You've never danced with a woman,
have you.

DIEGO
(lying)
Of course I have.
(lying badly)
Just not in this style...

LAFITTE
Once you have properly seduced a
woman she will forever be an ally.
She will be your eyes and ears in
every port.
(leaning in)
Shipping routes, manifests, the
women *know everything*. They are
merely happy to be asked... and
thanked... repeatedly. How did I
learn to be a great seducer of
women? First, I learned to dance!

Lafitte kicks Diego out of his chair. He stumbles into Valentina's arms. Diego obviously has no idea what to do.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
Its just sword fighting, without
the swords!

Diego is a pretty good dancer. Valentina might be in love.

As WE PUSH through the open window to the night sky above. A shooting star transitions us back down to--

EXT. LAFITTE'S SHIP - DECK - DUSK

The same stars, but Diego is now a GROWN MAN, an experienced member of the crew. They are at sea, stalking another ship.

LAFITTE
I've never done this in calm seas.
I feel naked.

DIEGO
You're not naked, you're just
wearing someone else's clothes.

We see now they're dressed as Spanish sailors and officers--
and the flag they are flying is Spanish.

LAFITTE
My flag was designed to strike fear
into sailors. People tend to
perform poorly when they are
terrified.

DIEGO
They do the same when they are
complacent. Trust me... it's
already working.

They get within shouting distance of the Spanish Galleon.
Lafitte calls out to the other Captain, who waves--

LAFITTE
Ho, there!
(beat)
Would you mind surrendering your
vessel?

The cannons jut out, loaded--point blank range. Lafitte's crew immediately boards. Diego smiles.

DIEGO
And not a shot fired.

LAFITTE

A privateer never gloats.

Diego rolls his eyes. *Right.*

EXT. CAPTURED GALLEON - LATER

The men loot the ship, round up prisoners. Amongst them is a SPANISH PRIEST. One CREWMAN takes his golden cross as another binds his hands. Diego shoves them away, grabs the cross, hands it back to the Priest.

DIEGO

Padre, I apologize.

The Crewmen turn to Lafitte--

LAFITTE

Perhaps a lesson I forgot to impart: *We steal things from people.*

With an authority that means he's not to be trifled with--

DIEGO

Not from men of the cloth.

Lafitte considers Diego a moment, then to his men--

LAFITTE

Leave the Priest be. Return his things. You will be compensated from Diego's share.

The Crewmen nod, satisfied, and everyone moves along. Lafitte gives a long look at Diego, then turns to the crew--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

Everything else is up for grabs; leave the crew enough food and water. Then secure the *Dorada* and set course for Barataria.

Lafitte walks off leaving Diego alone--

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - DINING HALL

Party in full swing. Wine flows, women dance. Diego sits alone in the corner, working on a very good charcoal sketch of Catalina, beautiful as when he last saw her.

Lafitte drops down next to him, nearly spilling his goblet. Diego turns over the sketch--on the other side is Lorenzo, hanging from a noose.

But Lafitte's too smart, grabs the paper and--despite Diego trying to stop him--flips it over, sees the sketch of Catalina. Annoyed--

LAFITTE
Still pining for this girl?

DIEGO
You're drunk.

LAFITTE
(in Latin)
In vino veritas--
(then)
I'm just trying to spare you the misery that befell me. Trust me when I say that nothing good will come of your quest for vengeance with her on your mind.

Lafitte stops. Sniffs the air--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
Something is burning...

They both smell it now and run out. Lafitte sobers quickly--

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - TRAINING GROUND - MOMENTS LATER

They rush out the door of the training ground to see--

The Dorada...on fire!

Chaos. Women scream, men shout. The fire spreads to the other ships in drydock...the nearby outfitters and more...

Lafitte and Diego rush to help. Mamba runs alongside, joining them as they race down the grassy hill to find--

The first of many bodies. *Dead. An "X" carved over his heart.* Mamba see the X, immediate terror. The other men shout in many languages, Diego doesn't understand them.

DIEGO
What are they saying?

LAFITTE
The Mark of the Demon.
(beat)
The Man in Black's here.

KA-BOOM! The ammo cache explodes, sending them all down to the grass. Lafitte grabs Mamba--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
See to the crew and their families.

Mamba takes off as Lafitte races back up the hill to the armory, Diego hot on his heels.

The smoke flows up through the mangroves obstructing the view. As Lafitte and Diego grab their swords--

DIEGO
Where is he?

LAFITTE
We don't need to find him, he'll find me.

In the circle, back-to-back, ready to do battle--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
This isn't your fight. Go back to California. I give you your leave.

DIEGO
You're drunk and not as young as you think you are. You need my help.

Lafitte nods--*fair point.*

LAFITTE
Then one last bit of advice--the part about his sword being poison... it's true. He coats it with oil of oleander and slashes the heart with an X to drive the poison in fast. Don't let the blade touch you.

A ***WHIPCRACK!*** Then, from out of the smoke--

The MAN IN BLACK appears. Dressed all in black, including his HOODED CLOAK. GLEAMING SWORD in one hand; the other is a stump with a whip connected to a gauntlet.

As he moves closer we see his HALF-BURNED FACE. Diego gasps-- he truly looks like a spectre from hell.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
Stay behind me!

Lafitte engages and the Man in Black ***snaps!*** his whip from a distance before closing in with the sword. Diego charges as well--The Man in Black more than matched for both men.

They trade blows until Lafitte takes a whip to the forehead. Diego steps in, *CLANK!* preventing the Man in Black from finishing his mentor. Lafitte nods thanks as they fight on.

An EPIC SWORDFIGHT across the isle: Lafitte and Diego side-by-side taking on The Man in Black's sword and whip. People run in terror as the battle rages into--

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - VARIOUS

THROUGH THE BURNING MANSION. The halls are too small for Diego to fight alongside Lafitte. The Man in Black takes advantage, SLICING Lafitte across the upper chest. He falls.

Thinking fast, Diego KICKS a burning support beam. It collapses on the Man in Black. Diego pulls Lafitte into--

INT. LAFITTE'S MANSION - STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Diego bars the door. Lafitte is sweating profusely--

DIEGO

I need to get you out of here.

LAFITTE

I can finish him. You need to go.

Clearly, Lafitte is in no condition for more battle--

DIEGO

I'm not leaving you...

LAFITTE

See, this is what I was afraid of.
Death by sentimentality...

He nods off to sleep. Diego SLAPS HIM. We wakes with a start as if not missing a beat.

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

We lost focus! And now look at us!
(grabbing Diego)

There is a sloop hidden in the mangroves on the west side of the island. In it is enough gold to get you to California. Enough to transform an orphan into a Don. Lorenzo will never see you coming.

Diego doesn't move so Lafitte grabs his sword--

LAFITTE (CONT'D)

I had this forged for a son who never got to wield it.

(MORE)

LAFITTE (CONT'D)
Use it to get your revenge. Or I
will haunt you...

As the Man in Black kicks at the door--

DIEGO
You're stronger than his poison.
We can escape together!

LAFITTE
(smiling, at peace)
I am right where I want to be.

Diego understands, knows not to fight his mentor, gives one
last nod of thanks before he dashes off out the back door--

CRASH! The Man in Black knocks the front door down. Framed
in the door way, lit only by the fires behind him--

MAN IN BLACK
Are you ready to see your wife
again, Lafitte?

LAFITTE
I will rejoin her only after I have
sent you back to hell.

CLANG!--off the glint of the swords meeting--

EXT. BARATRIA - GRAND ISLE - NIGHT

Diego sets off through the swamp, on the sloop. He glides
past the island lit by the fires and the moonlight. He looks
down at the crate he's sitting on--GOLD, just as promised.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA BAY - DAY

The golden mountains and blue surf of Santa Monica Bay greet
a luxurious sailing ship as it docks--

SUPER:

SANTA MONICA BAY, 1818

A few dozen passengers climb off the gangway as a crowd of
anxious and excited family waits to greet them.

Among the crowd, BERNARDO -- older but unmistakable, wearing
the clothes of a servant and the same Indian necklace.

A low murmur, then the crowd parts to reveal--

DIEGO! Shiny boots, rich red cape, hair coiffed perfectly, a thin mustache and goatee on his face. People stare at him-- *especially the ladies*; he's Lafitte reborn.

He looks over as a WARSHIP unloads SOLDIERS. Platoon after platoon muster up and march off toward the distant--

Pueblo de la Reyna de los Angeles. No longer some sleepy Mission, Los Angeles is 10,000 citizens strong. CANNON and SMALL ARMS FIRE in the hills above. A revolt is in progress. But Diego has other concerns.

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - LATER

Diego stands in front of his old home--the Mission, now nothing more than a burned-out shell. He takes it in a moment, then walks with his bags, deep into the ruins.

Along the old back wall of the chapel, he finds the CHARRED statue of Virgin Mary. Clears away the ash and rubble, pushes the statue to the side revealing the fissure.

INT. FOX DEN - LATER

Diego opens his bags, sheds the fine clothes of Don Castillo, starting with a REVOLVER hidden in the small of his back.

BERNARDO (O.S.)

Who are you and what have you done
with my friend?

Diego looks up to see Bernardo, older now, but same worried eyes. He jumps down, lands awkwardly. Diego is there to pull him up into a big hug.

DIEGO

Bernardo! You came--

BERNARDO

If only to find out where you
learned to dress like that.

DIEGO

From Jean Lafitte.

BERNARDO

The pirate?!

DIEGO

Privateer.

(then)

We have much to talk about.

(MORE)

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Things I wouldn't dare write in my letters to you for fear of who might be reading--

BERNARDO

(already knows)

You've returned to kill Lorenzo de la Vega.

(off Diego's non response)

Some things can be read even when not written.

(then)

I work in the house of Don Sepulveda. If it ever came to light that I helped--

DIEGO

Trust me, no one will ever know of your involvement.

BERNARDO

Father Mendoza would say vengeance is the Lord's--

DIEGO

He *would* say it had he not been killed! Lorenzo murdered him and burned this mission to the ground. He deserves worse than death.

Bernardo steps closer to his old friend--

BERNARDO

I never thought I'd see you again and here you are. You could go anywhere, live whatever life you want...

DIEGO

The fort on the cliffs. From your letters I assume it is El Diablo.

BERNARDO

(nodding)

Lorenzo never leaves it. The fort is impregnable.

(then)

Don't you understand? It's impossible for you to even get close to him!

DIEGO

If you want to help me, help. If not, you are free to go. I will see this through alone.

Off Bernardo's look, Diego realizes he's being too harsh, puts an arm on his friend's shoulder.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

I have learned much while I was away, Bernardo. Nothing is impossible.

(beat)

Soon I will be inside the walls of El Diablo.

BERNARDO

You found a way to sneak in?

DIEGO

(matter-of-fact)

I won't need to. Lorenzo will be bring me inside personally.

BERNARDO

I'm finding it difficult to share your confidence.

DIEGO

If I fail, you can have my clothes.

Bernardo holds up one of Diego's shirts, which looks ridiculous on him.

BERNARDO

Then you must not fail.

Diego laughs, followed by Bernardo, two friends who have missed each other greatly.

EXT. LOS ANGELES RIVER - NIGHT

Long before it was a concrete trench, the Los Angeles River flowed free and wild--*an important way to ship cargo to and from the North*. The moon shines down as the current carries a FLAT-BOTTOMED BARGE DOWN past groves of mighty oaks.

EXT. BARGE - SAME TIME

TORCH-LIGHT illuminates a dozen Spanish soldiers--and one cannon--guarding the cargo tied down onto its deck--

A chest of gold bars. Payment for the thousand soldiers deployed throughout Southern California.

The current carries the barge under a bridge spanning the river, as a soldier notes TORCHES burning in the DISTANCE.

SOLDIER

Watch for rebels!

The soldiers ready muskets and pistols, prepared for an attack from the front...

Which means they don't even see the DARK SHADOW SWING DOWN from the bridge above!

His sword glints in the glow of the torches--before the torches GO OUT plunging the barge INTO DARKNESS.

CHAOS as men are knocked into the fast-moving waters by unseen assailant--*twelve are now six.* The moon peaks out through the clouds and suddenly in the moonlight--

DIEGO! Dressed in a mishmash of pirate garb--a bandana tied around his mouth to hide his face, sword pointing at them--

DIEGO

Flee or perish!

The hardened soldiers look at him a beat, then LAUGH.

SOLDIER

What kind of rebel are you?
(beat, to the others)
Kill him!

BANG! BANG! Musket fire rings out. Diego flips backwards, losing his balance as he falls into the rushing river. The Soldiers run over to look... shaking their heads and laughing. But in the water, no body...

Suddenly, a soldier goes sprawling into the water, kicked from behind. The others TURN BACK to see a SOAKING WET and ANGRY Diego. ***SLASH!*** He sends another soldier into the water, then retreats as the four soldiers reload and aim--

Their POV: THE BARREL OF A CANNON. Diego holds the last lit torch over it--

DIEGO

You should have run.

Ka-BOOM!, he blows off the back of the barge, sending the soldiers into the river in a HAIL OF FIRE and SPLINTERS.

Making his way to the chest of gold, he sheathes his sabre, smiles at the sight of his haul, very pleased with himself.

On the banks ahead, a PILE OF FINE LUGGAGE sits between the burning torches and a LARGE TREE--and it's closing in fast--

The barge has been accelerated into the current by the explosion. A collision is imminent, his smile disappears--

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BRIDGE OVERLOOKING THE RIVER - DAWN

The sun rising in the sky, leading the way for--

LORENZO DE LA VEGA (older, wearing spit-polished boots that looks like they've never seen battle) galloping full-speed across the bridge--an entire squad of Cavalry behind him. They race along the riverbank. Coming up to--

THE BARGE

...or what's left of it. Smashed against a tree. There's already a group of SOLDIERS on station, including **COLONEL RIOS** (50'S. Leathery).

COLONEL RIOS
We have a survivor!

As he dismounts--

LORENZO
What about the gold?

Thunk! A brick of gold lands at his feet. Lorenzo looks where it was thrown from, sees the survivor in the torn and tattered clothes of a Spanish Dignitary--

SURVIVOR
Don't worry, I rescued your gold.

The survivor looks up--*Diego in disguise*. Fine clothes, sculpted goatee and several years older, he is unrecognizable as the orphan that Lorenzo once knew. He sits on the pile of luggage as if he pulled it from the wreckage. (His sword hidden safely away inside his baggage).

Colonel Rios walks Lorenzo over, introducing--

COLONEL RIOS
Don Elio de Almendara Castillo.
(explaining)
He was on the barge when it was attacked by rebels. His servant fought them off, protecting the gold--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

As he was in *my* employ I prefer to think of it as *I* protected the gold. Of course, if his body is ever recovered a proper burial would be appropriate.

LORENZO

Don Castillo, I am Lorenzo De La Vega, Envoy Plenipotentiary of King Ferdinand--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

I know who you are, Don De La Vega.
(then)

I was sent South by the Viceroy in Monterey on behalf of his Majesty the King to report back on your progress with the insurgency.

(then)

You will understand that my report will not glow with praise.

LORENZO

My apologies Don Castillo. Had I been informed of your visit I could have offered extra protection.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

The essence of a surprise inspection is that it be a "surprise." Rebels don't inform you of their attacks beforehand, do they?

Lorenzo hates looking foolish and hasn't in quite some time. Diego savors it, knowing Lorenzo has to take it...

LORENZO

Of course not. And let there be no doubt, these rebels will be found and dealt with harshly.

(gesturing to Rios)

Colonel Rios, my military commander in the region will make sure of it.

(off his nod)

In the meantime, you will be my guest until your wounds have healed.

He waves a hand and a carriage pulls up, a half-dozen men instantly there to help "Don Castillo" into it.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Hopefully your doctors are better with surprise visits...

He laughs at his own joke as they put him into the carriage.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO (CONT'D)

I do find that maintaining a
pleasant disposition at such times
is invaluable.

As the door is latched, the horses pull the cart away.
Colonel Rios approaches Lorenzo who watches the cart recede--

LORENZO

Did he have Letters of Introduction?

Colonel Rios nods, hands over tattered, singed letters.

COLONEL RIOS

Barely survived intact, but they
appear to be in order.

Lorenzo takes them. As he looks them over, *something
scratches in his unconscious.*

LORENZO

Make sure our guest is well
attended to.

Colonel Rios nods as Lorenzo looks on, darkly.

EXT. GATES OF EL DIABLO - LATER

Diego's carriage arrives. The massive gates are opened
allowing entry, as he predicted. Inside the fort, a complex
of buildings, armory, stables, etc. One building stands out--
a grand casa. This must be where Lorenzo lives.

INT. CARRIAGE - SAME TIME

Diego looks out at as he passes through. Takes a deep
breath. No turning back now. He looks up at the casa. From
an upper window someone appears to be watching him. The
curtains quickly close.

INT. EL DIABLO - CORRIDOR - LATER

The camera tracks down a lavishly appointed corridor toward a
door, TWO GUARDS on either side. Inside, the sounds of
FEMALE LAUGHTER. The Guards open the door for the figure
moving toward them, revealing--

INT. EL DIABLO - DON CASTILLO'S SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Diego, lying in bed. Shirt off, bruised all over. He is
attended to by TWO PRETTY NURSES, who are seeing to his
wounds, and flirting with him.

PRETTY NURSE
Don Castillo...

Whoever is in the doorway CLEARS THEIR THROAT. Diego looks up to see--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
Catalina...

CATALINA has grown into her beauty, dressed in fine clothing. She looks at all three of them disapprovingly.

CATALINA
 Thank you, ladies.

EVEN PRETTIER NURSE
 But Don Lorenzo insisted--

CATALINA
That will be all.

The nurses scramble to exit, leaving the door open. Diego stares at Catalina, completely thrown. Then, covering--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
 Talk of your beauty was not exaggerated.

CATALINA
 Unlike the talk of your injuries,
Don Castillo.

Hard to tell if she recognizes him or not. She certainly doesn't seem to care for what she sees in either case.

CATALINA (CONT'D)
 If you know my name then you know I am
 the fiancé of Don Lorenzo de la Vega.

Diego shows little reaction but his heart is broken. Guards just outside, he dare not break character. He smiles...

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
 Surely no man is more deserving.
 Did he ask you to look in on me?

Catalina eyes him as she brings a chair over. Sits.

CATALINA
 I came on my own accord. I was
 curious to hear about your attack.
 The rebels are elusive. Few have
 been so close and survived.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
 They were fierce fighters. Only by
 the grace of God--and my natural
 cunning--was I able to survive.

CATALINA
 I'm sure the Crown appreciates your
 part in saving its gold.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
 (adding)
 Single handedly.
 (then)
 Although your husband-to-be, who
 arrived to the scene after the
 action, deserves credit as well.
 Marshalling his forces to clean up
 the field of battle... removing the
 debris... the King appreciates
 anyone who maintains the
 cleanliness of his holdings.

Catalina smiles in that way people do when they hate someone.

CATALINA
 So these rebels...how many were
 they?

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
 Hard to say, attacking in the night
 as they did.

CATALINA
 Five...ten...twenty...a hundred?

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
 Ten... or twenty.
 (deflecting)
 Interested in military matters are
 you?

CATALINA
 It's hard to see much of the world
 from behind these walls. Always
 happy to hear what is going on
 outside.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
 Why not ask your beloved?

CATALINA
 He works hard to protect me from
 the harsh truth of things...

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Well, when a man possesses a fiancé as beautiful as yourself, it's hard to blame him.

(smiling)

If I may offer some unsolicited advise...

CATALINA

(*fuck yourself*)

Please do...

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Focus on womanly matters. Keeping your hair full of luster, staying in the latest fashions, maintaining your figure... A man of Lorenzo's stature likes the finer *things*. That's the best way to support him.

Ouch! Catalina hides her emotion, instead focuses on--

CATALINA

Speaking of support, you must be uncomfortable Don Castillo...

She moves in close to him--*he can smell her perfume*. She adjusts the pillow behind his head, when--whoops--his head smacks the headboard, hard. *Was it on purpose?*

CATALINA (CONT'D)

Forgive me, Don Castillo. I was only trying to help...

The guards appear, see all's well and head back to their position. Diego recovers his demeanor.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

No apologies necessary. It was quite invigorating.

CATALINA

Wonderful. After all, you'll need your energy for tomorrow.

(beat)

Don de la Vega would like you to be his guest at the bullfights.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

I can barely wait to be in his presence again.

CATALINA

Until tomorrow, *Don Castillo*.

She exits, closing the door. Diego stands, head aching, angrier than ever. He goes to his dresser, unpacks a shirt, hidden in the fold--the SMALL REVOLVER.

DIEGO
Until tomorrow...

PRE-LAP: The sound of FLAMENCO DANCERS building to a feverish finale--

EXT. BULLRING - DAY

The dancers--*the pre-match entertainment*--finish their routine to the uproarious applause of a jam-packed stadium. Thousands of fans, pretty much all of Southern California has come to see the bullfights.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. LUXURY BOX - SAME TIME

In a private (and well-guarded) section at the center of the ring above the crowd, the well-dressed (and well-fed) DONS watch the fights. Behind them, their servants in attendance, including Bernardo. At the front of the box, Lorenzo. Catalina to one side, Diego/Don Castillo to the other.

THE CROWD CHEERS!

The star of the event, a proud and preening MATADOR enters the ring. Black cape and a very familiar-looking black Spanish sombrero...he faces off with an angry bull. Less a fight and more a dance, the crowd *GASPS* and *CHEERS* as the Matador teases and *spins around the bull, inches to spare.*

Taking in the action, then, turning to Diego--

LORENZO
You are either crazy or suicidal...

Diego's heart skips a beat, until--

LORENZO (CONT'D)
...to be so close to a bull that size. Much less an angry one.

Breathing again, conversationally--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
This is the new style in Spain. The Matador's goal is to never be more than inches from the bull at any time.

Catalina shifts uncomfortably in her spot, *it seems like they are talking about more than just bullfighting.*

CATALINA

I'd imagine you have seen many an injured Matador.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Without danger there is no glory.

CATALINA

Glory is Vanity.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Now I won't have anyone speak ill of vanity in my presence.

More cheering from the crowd as the Matador slips and recovers, spinning away from the charging bull.

LORENZO

This was once a sport of Kings; in the ring they demonstrated their skill to the admiration of the masses. Eventually Monarchs became more civilized but *the people--*
(re: the crowd)
--would not let the sport die. Where once stood a nobleman now stands a Matador. He is only a commoner but they see him as a hero.

As the Matador elegantly struts and spins below them--

LORENZO (O.S.)(CONT'D)

For a few moments they can forget their miserable lives and imagine they are him, dancing in the face of danger as if death could never touch them...

A servant arrives offering Diego a glass of wine. He grabs it. Downs it. Forces a smile.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Don de la Vega... I wouldn't have thought you a man of the people.

LORENZO

Since the time of the Romans, entertainment has been the way to placate the masses.

(MORE)

LORENZO (CONT'D)

As long as enough of them are entertained, they are not rebelling.

A ROAR from the crowd. Lorenzo and the Dons surge forward, focused on the chaos--

On the ground, the Matador has been gored by the bull. As the *Picadores* come out on horseback to drive the bull away, the enraged bull attacks the horses--

With everyone distracted, Diego sees his opportunity--the perfect moment to kill Lorenzo. He brushes back his coat--

ANGLE ON: The Revolver hidden in his waistband, before he can grab it, his vision starts to swim. *What's wrong with him? He looks in the glass he just drank from--a powdery residue left behind. Poison!* He turns, face-to-face with--

CATALINA

Don Castillo...are you well?

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

(woozy, disoriented)

I think I need some fresh air.

He stumbles off, past the guards. Lorenzo looks on--

LORENZO

Some men can't hold their liquor.

(re: the bullfight)

It's a shame. He never got to see the people's glory...

Lorenzo smiles, being ironic. In the bullfighting ring below the Matador lies dead, the crowd stunned into silence.

EXT. BULLFIGHTING STADIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Diego stumbles out, sweating profusely. Everyone is watching the bull fight, no one sees him *THUD!* drop to the dirt.

DIEGO'S HALLUCINOGENIC AND HAZY POV FROM THE GROUND: Tires of a carriage roll up and stop. Then *everything goes **BLACK!***

A SERIES OF IMAGES --

Snippets of Diego's life flash past, in reverse order: The Sea, Grand Island, Lafitte--back further--Mendoza, a young Catalina, Alejandro, a much younger White Owl and more images we don't yet understand from Diego's unconsciously remembered youth... Faster and faster until one image remains--

THE FOX.

It stares directly at us, cocking its head...that's when we realize the Fox is real. Diego blinks...groggy, waking. It sits at his feet, as if keeping vigil. On Diego, looking back at the fox. We pull out to reveal we are in--

INT. FOX DEN - NIGHT

It takes a moment for his eyes to focus but when he does he sees a familiar face, a white-haired figure--

DIEGO
...White Owl?

WHITE OWL
Stay calm, you have been drugged.
She had no choice.

DIEGO
(confused)
She...?
(then)
Catalina!

Stepping forward--

BERNARDO
She knew you would try to kill
Lorenzo at the bullfight.

DIEGO
Bernardo? You too? I don't
understand...

WHITE OWL
Diego, your anger hides the most
obvious truths from you.
(beat)
You only are alive today because of
Catalina's sacrifice years ago.

Bernardo nods. It all hits Diego at once--

DIEGO
No... the things I thought of her.
The things I said to her. Bernardo,
why didn't you tell me?

WHITE OWL
I swore him to secrecy, we had no
idea what kind of man you had
returned as.

BERNARDO

I told her you could be trusted. No one in the world hates Lorenzo more.

WHITE OWL

And that is what I feared. Kill him now and everything she has sacrificed... for you, for the revolution, will be in vain.

DIEGO

(holy shit)
She's a spy.

WHITE OWL

The information she provides is the only reason we have survived this long. If Lorenzo dies he will be replaced, and the revolution will have no eyes inside El Diablo.

Diego needs air, he stumbles off into the darkness.

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - MOMENTS LATER

Diego in the ruins, under the moonlight, a fox at his feet.

WHITE OWL (O.S.)

He is always with you, yes?

The fox scampers off as White Owl and Bernardo join him.

WHITE OWL (CONT'D)

The fox. He is your spirit animal.

DIEGO

You don't know anything about me.
(beat)
I don't know anything about me.

WHITE OWL

I was there the night you were born, as was the fox.

DIEGO

(surprised)
You knew my parents? What happened to them?

WHITE OWL

Your mother died giving birth. Your father put you with Padre Mendoza for your own protection.

DIEGO

Why would I need protection?

WHITE OWL

Because he was a Spaniard and your mother was an Indian. If you stayed with the tribe you would always be in danger from his people, and yet he could not raise you as his own.

Diego isn't sure what to believe but she sounds honest.

DIEGO

My father was Spanish?

WHITE OWL

An Officer in the Army, captured in battle. He fell in love...with my daughter. When she died, he returned to his people with a promise of peace, and that promise held until his son broke it.

Diego realizes what it all means--

DIEGO

(remembering)

He was trying to tell me... that Tornado was very special. That his father was Spanish and his mother was Indian. He was telling me about my parents.

(off her nod)

Alejandro de la Vega is my father.

WHITE OWL

I thought only Father Mendoza and I knew the secret, but one way or another Lorenzo learned the truth. That's when he traded your father to the Russians to ensure peace, so he could focus his rage on my people.

DIEGO

So this entire war has been about Lorenzo getting revenge for his father's indiscretions?

WHITE OWL

War would have come, eventually. The Spanish do not respect these lands, or the people.

(MORE)

WHITE OWL (CONT'D)

Lorenzo was only a spark on a great pile of kindling.

Bernardo looks off into the distance, warning--

BERNARDO

The sun will rise within the hour.
I must get him back to El Diablo.

WHITE OWL

We will continue this another time.
For now, Diego. Be patient. The
Fox is wily, cunning. It knows the
time to act.

As they move off, Diego looks back--*at his grandmother*. Can barely register it, but he's no longer an orphan.

DIEGO

Goodnight, White Owl.

INT. EL DIABLO - DON CASTILLO'S SUITE - DAWN

As the sun rises, Diego enters his room to find Catalina there, waiting for him. Diego is enamored all over again. He kneels, takes her hand--

DIEGO

I am in awe of you. Your bravery
is surpassed only by your beauty.

CATALINA

Save it for your bathing nurses...
Did White Owl tell you everything?

DIEGO

How have you managed to hold him off
from marrying you for so many years?

CATALINA

It hasn't been easy. I had a
"religious epiphany" and joined a
nunnery. I stayed there for three
years until he pressured the
Archbishop to release me.

DIEGO

I couldn't want you more.

(beat)

But that leaves Three years...

CATALINA

(sad)

I went into a long mourning when my father died... That was real.

DIEGO

I'm sorry...

CATALINA

Finally, a year ago he moved me inside of El Diablo "for my own protection..." By then I had realized the good I could do here.

(smiling)

And then it so happened that the revolution gained strength, and he hasn't had much free time for planning a wedding.

DIEGO

And now that I'm here he won't need to.

CATALINA

You should know, Lorenzo has made inquiries about you with the Viceroy.

DIEGO

I've paid off every messenger from here to Monterey to intercept all of his letters. Of course, I had expected to make my move by now.

Catalina's eyes flash with anger--

CATALINA

You've been here for two days, wherever did you find the patience?

DIEGO

Catalina--

CATALINA

--This isn't about one man, it's about freedom from tyranny. We must bide our time, grow our numbers. Wait until the people join our cause.

DIEGO

You'll be waiting forever.

CATALINA

And what about you? Did you come back for *anything* other than revenge?

He steps in very close, looking deep into her eyes, desperate to kiss her.

DIEGO

Every night while I was away I dreamed of the moment we would be reunited.

Letting him get close enough to feel her breath on his lips--

CATALINA

You can have revenge or me. But not both.

--and then she's gone. Off Diego, mind spinning.

EXT. EL DIABLO GATES - DAY

The massive gates are opened. A HORSE-DRAWN CONVOY enters, dragging a BLOODY MAN behind one of the horses.

INT. EL DIABLO - DON CASTILLO'S SUITE - MOMENTS LATER

Diego, asleep in bed, awoken by a LOUD BANGING AT THE DOOR.

SERVANT'S VOICE (O.S.)

Don Castillo! Don Castillo!

Diego wakes with a start, disoriented. He looks confused until his brain turns on--oh right, *I am Don Castillo*. As he jumps out of bed, throws on clothes--

EXT. EL DIABLO - COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON: a bloody, beaten man. Bound by rope. THEN: Diego/Don Castillo, shocked at the sight. He stands in front of a group who have gathered around the convoy. Lorenzo, at his side, points--

LORENZO

Does this man look familiar to you?

Diego catches Catalina's eye. She fights to remain stoic, transmitting a message with her eyes: *Don't do anything stupid*. In the bemused detachment of his alter ego--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Should I know him? Hard to tell, he certainly looks worse for wear.

LORENZO

He is one of the rebel's that
attacked your convoy.

Diego knows immediately this is a lie, but can't show it.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Hm, I'm not so sure. Those men
were broad-shouldered. Taller.

LORENZO

Memories can become confused in the
heat of battle. Perhaps in your
terrified state they appeared larger.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

And perhaps you've scooped the
wrong fish from the sea.

Catalina goes over to the lifeless man. Feels his pulse...

LORENZO

Catalina, be careful--

CATALINA

(sadly)

I'm in no danger, my love. This
man is dead.

LORENZO

Shame. He won't be able to tell us
anything now.

(to Colonel Rios)

Next time you catch a rebel, bring
him inside El Diablo before you
interrogate him. Done correctly, a
man can be tortured for years
without dying.

Diego eavesdrops as they discuss--

LORENZO (CONT'D)

What of the next shipment?

COLONEL RIOS

Arriving via land this time. With
armored cavalry as escort.

LORENZO

Are they fast?

COLONEL RIOS

(nodding)

We used horses from your own
stables, Don de la Vega.

LORENZO

The next galleon for Spain leaves
tomorrow. If that shipment is not on
board, it will be the heads of the
cavalrymen that go back instead.

Rios nods. As Lorenzo walks away... and passes by Diego--

LORENZO (CONT'D)

And hang the body in the town
square with a warning. He needn't
be a total waste.

(beat)

Fear is worth nearly as much as
information.

Off Diego...barely holding in his rage.

INT. EL DIABLO - CASTILLO'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Diego tears through his suitcase. Catalina doesn't even
knock before entering--

DIEGO

You shouldn't be in here.

CATALINA

I've seen that look in your eyes
before...

As he draws his sword from the fake bottom in his case--

CATALINA (CONT'D)

And clearly my concerns are
justified.

DIEGO

Lorenzo wants fear? I'll give him
fear. I'll take away everything he
cares about. Starting with his
shipment of gold.

CATALINA

(quiet but fierce)

One man is no match for an entire
squad of elite cavalry.

DIEGO

You'd be surprised by what one man
can do.

CATALINA

We've lost *twenty* men at a time
trying to take one of those convoys
head-on.

DIEGO

Well, there was your mistake. I
won't be doing it head-on.

As Diego talks he strips out of his clothes. Catalina turns
away--but sneaks a peek in the mirror.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

I learned a thing or two about
strategy and tactics since I've
been away.

CATALINA

Is that where you got all those
scars?

DIEGO

Are you watching me undress?

CATALINA

I don't want you getting hurt.

DIEGO

I've given more than I've gotten.
And I've taken more in gold from
Spain than they have taken from
these lands.

Catalina turns away from the mirror, to the window. Outside:
The Pueblo of Los Angeles, teeming with soldiers. Smoke
billowing from skirmishes in the hills.

CATALINA

Is that what this is about? Gold?

DIEGO

It's the key to Lorenzo's power.
He sends them gold, they send him
soldiers. I take that away, he
grows weaker, your revolution grows
stronger.

(explaining)

Gold buys weapons, ammunition, horses
--you'll have whatever you need.

As she finally turns--

CATALINA

And what will become of...*you*.

She sees him dressed now, all in black. Halfway between the Man in Black and what will soon become Zorro.

DIEGO

If I'm not allowed to kill him,
then at least I can make him know
what it's like to be afraid.
They'll all know.

(with emotion)

And the next time they consider
dragging a man to death, they'll
think of me first.

CATALINA

It wasn't your fault, Diego.

(then)

This is crazy.

She tries to stop him but his determination is obvious.

DIEGO

Which is exactly why they won't see
me coming.

He ties a black bandana around his mouth, turns to leave--

CATALINA

Wait!

She pulls up her dress revealing her thigh--and *a sharp knife hidden in her garter*.

Unsheathing the knife, she pulls off his bandana, carves two holes in the fabric...eye-width apart. A BLACK MASK. As she ties it over his eyes--

CATALINA (CONT'D)

If anything gives you away, it will
be your eyes.

(then)

Promise you'll return to me.

Once again they are close to kissing... but this time *he* gently pushes *her* away.

He winks. Then WHOOSH, he's gone--out the window.

She GASPS, runs over to see him bounding down the walls of El Diablo on the cliffside, right past the guards on the ramparts who can't see him. As he lands on the soft grass and darts off, Catalina crosses herself and prays.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BRIDGE CROSSING - LATE AFTERNOON

The fading light of day. Mounted CAVALRY and a fortified WAGON thunder down a dirt road. They're suddenly stopped in their tracks by a MASSIVE BRUSH FIRE spread across the road. *No way to proceed except down through the canyon.*

The Cavalry **CAPTAIN** turns to his **LIEUTENANT**--

CAPTAIN

We'll take the long way.

The Lieutenant *gulps!* knows what this means...

CAVALRYMAN

(nervously)

Through The Cavern?

(then)

The Indians say it is cursed,
Captain!

CAPTAIN

Do you want to explain to Don De La Vega why we were not at El Diablo by dawn?

The Lieutenant relents. The Captain spins his horse, and leads the caravan off toward a menacing lump of rocky mountains in the distance.

EXT. CAVERN OF SHADOWS - DUSK

Perpetual darkness down in the craggy cavern. A narrow path has been cut down deep into the sharp rock by a long-dried out bend of a river. Barely a road, the heavily-armed caravan slowly makes its way through. (NOTE: This is the same canyon from the opening.)

The Captain has a lit torch, leads them through the eerie shadows. His Lieutenant rides alongside. Another two CAVALRYMEN ride behind the massive covered wagon being pulled by two equally massive draft horses.

AT THE BACK OF THE CARAVAN

One RIDER loses pace with the others as he fights with his horse--A LARGE BLACK STALLION. He curses as it bucks, ignoring his commands.

As he does, A DARK SHADOW PASSES OVER HIM--whisking him off the horse before the Rider can even shout!

The NEXT RIDER looks back with concern. A moment, then he's face-to-face with a black spectre as--***SWOOSH!***--a blade drops him out of his saddle.

THE FRONT OF THE CARAVAN

Hearing the commotion The Captain looks back. It's too dark to see anything behind the carriage. He ***SHOUTS!*** for his men. No answer. Silence.

He and his Lieutenant exchange a look. Then, tossing the Lieutenant his torch--

CAPTAIN

Check on them.

The Lieutenant--*already spooked*--is not happy, but follows orders. He signals to the other Cavalryman, pulls up his reigns, and they fall back to--

THE BACK OF THE CARAVAN

The Cavalryman is ready with his carbine as his Lieutenant, torch in one hand, reigns in the other looks and sees--

A CAVALRY HORSE. Riderless. Calmly grazing on a little patch of grass between rocks. *But where are the men?* He waves the torch again...and finds the first body...then another...then hoofbeats, he turns--

*A flash of the Legend in action--it is ZORRO! Everything but the iconic cape and hat. His sword *glints!* as he strikes!*

The Lieutenant crumples to the dirt as Zorro--now on the back of the mighty black stallion--spurs the horse forward! As he rides, Zorro looks down at this horse. *So fast, so graceful. There's something familiar about him...*

THE WAGON

The grizzled DRIVER sees Zorro making his advance. A SOLDIER riding "shotgun" pulls his carbine, waits for a shot. As Zorro gets close--he sees the rifle.

Zorro slips down off the saddle, as ***BLAM!*** the shot misses. He *grabs a large rock from the ground*, pulls himself back up and heaves it--***whack!***--squarely between the soldier's eyes!

He tumbles from the Wagon, tripping up the horse -- it bucks to keep it's footing! Throwing Zorro--

***SLAM!* IN THE DIRT**

The wagon tears away. Zorro shakes off the cobwebs. Then he feels something warm breathing on him--he looks up to see THE BLACK STALLION. It nudges him impatiently with his nose...Zorro smiles as he recognizes--

ZORRO

Tornado!?

Now a mighty stallion, Tornado ***neighs!***, clomps his hoof--
come on, they're getting away!

ZORRO (CONT'D)

You think you can catch up with
them, my old friend?

He climbs back atop Tornado, *who takes off in pursuit before he's even in the saddle!*

IN THE WAGON

The Driver looks back, sees Zorro--approaching at full-speed.

The Driver ***cracks!***, speeding up his horses. But an entire team of colts is no match for the mighty Tornado!

Closing the gap, once again Zorro is next to the driver. Between ***cracks!*** at his colts, the Driver turns his long bullwhip on Zorro--who CATCHES the tail and YANKS, pulling the Driver out of his seat and down into the dirt.

The Driver and the bullwhip fade into the dust. As the wagon rolls on, Zorro gives Tornado a thankful pat on his neck--

ZORRO (CONT'D)

Well done, Tornado. But let's not
get cocky.

As Tornado ***snorts!***, Zorro leaps off the horse and onto the wagon! He pulls himself up to the top of the driver-less wagon, SLICES the bridles--

The colts gallop away as the wagon slows to a stop. Zorro jumps inside the open back, lands face-to-face with the Cavalry Captain--a pistol in each hand, pointed at Zorro!

Behind the Captain--stacks and stacks of gold bars.

Before the Captain can shoot, Zorro ***ka-SHING!*** slices off both barrels of his pistols with one swipe.

On him in a flash, Zorro shoves the Captain back onto one of the stacks of gold, sword at his throat.

CAPTAIN

I beg for your mercy.

ZORRO

You will deliver a message to Lorenzo de la Vega--

(then)

For every person he kills, I will kill ten of his. For every ounce of gold he takes, I will take a pound of his. He will leave these lands, or he will leave his bones. Do you understand?

He gulps, nods. Then--

CAPTAIN

...who are you...?

Diego looks up, sees two eyes staring back at him from the shadows. A fox. He smiles, thinking of Lafitte.

ZORRO

I am Zorro!

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh! Three swipes of his blade and we--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. EL DIABLO - BANQUET ROOM - DAY

A banquet table bursting with delicacies. The Dons and their servants are in attendance, including Bernardo. Lorenzo sits next to Catalina as everyone listens to Diego/Don Castillo--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

...so the pirate asks if he can have a minute to compose himself before the execution. The Commander, being an amiable sort, nods. That's when the pirate pulls a sash from his coat--and BANG!

(clapping for effect)

He's gone!

DON SEPULVEDA

What do you mean gone?

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Puff of smoke, no pirate. Gone! Voodoo magic I suppose--

LORENZO
--Classic misdirection.

Everyone turns to Lorenzo who loves the attention.

LORENZO (CONT'D)
The sash was full of some type of
gunpowder. He used the moment of
confusion to dive over the side of
the ship.

The Dons nod, impressed. Diego nods as well.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO
Hm, well reasoned...

Just then Colonel Rios appears at the end of the hall with
the Captain of the convoy--

Curious. Lorenzo gets up to meet them.

The Dons all crane their necks to get a look. Meanwhile,
Bernardo shifts nervously as Catalina looks at Diego.

A silver service ***SMASHES!*** against the wall. Lorenzo fumes--

LORENZO
How is this possible?!
(then, disbelieving)
One man did all this?!

COLONEL RIOS
He says it was a ghost.
(off Lorenzo's look)
And the ghost had a message.

Lorenzo looks at the Captain. **A LARGE "Z" SLASHED THROUGH HIS
UNIFORM COAT.**

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
He said his name was Zorro...
(then, afraid to say it)
...and that he was coming for us all.

Lorenzo processes all of this as BACK AT THE TABLE--*Diego who
gives Catalina a subtle wink.*

LORENZO
Zorro?!

Catalina gives Diego a look--*Zorro?* He gives a little shrug.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

(to Rios)

This...Zorro is obviously the rebel leader. I want him found!

(beat)

Put the word out that I will execute ten rebel prisoners before the next bullfight if he fails to show himself!

COLONEL RIOS

(leaning in)

Sir, we have no live prisoners.

LORENZO

Then find some!

Lorenzo storms out. Diego looks down at his food--*a new wrinkle created by his actions. A new problem to solve.*

PRELAP: A DRUMBEAT

EXT. BULLRING - DAY

A packed house but the energy is different. Tense. In the ring, TEN MEN tied to poles, awaiting execution.

Soldiers stand with muskets in a firing line.

EXT. LUXURY BOX - SAME TIME

Lorenzo looks on, the Dons in attendance (Bernardo among the servants). Next to Lorenzo, Catalina twists with barely concealed anxiety. The Drumbeat stops. It's deadly silent.

LORENZO

These rebels have been found guilty of thievery, treason and sedition, against the Crown, and the Viceroyalty of New Spain...

(beat)

But I am willing to commute their sentences if the rebel leader who calls himself Zorro shows his face.

No one moves. As Lorenzo looks around, Don Sepulveda whispers to Catalina--

DON SEPULVEDA

Where is Don Castillo?

CATALINA

He remained at El Diablo. He does not have the stomach for such a display.

DON SEPULVEDA
 (nodding, unsurprised)
 That dandy doesn't seem to have a
 stomach for anything other than port.

As she laughs politely with him--

INTERCUT AS NEEDED WITH:

INT. MATADOR STAGING AREA - SAME TIME

UNDER THE STADIUM. Several Matadors in full dress watch and wait. Even here it is tense. BEHIND THEM, someone moves THROUGH the SHADOWS. Then, A HAND picks up a BLACK CAPE and SPANISH-STYLE SOMBRERO...

LORENZO
 Apparently, Zorro cares more about
 his own hide than that of his
 rebels.
 (pausing for effect, then)
 Very well. Then these rebels shall
 die for their crimes, and for his!

He raises a hand and the DRUMBEAT starts again. Before Lorenzo can drop his hand the gates open and SEVERAL BULLS charge into the ring.

The crowd REACTS with a CHEER. Lorenzo is angry, confused--

LORENZO (CONT'D)
 What are they doing?!

In the middle of the Maelstrom (having hitched a ride on the side of a bull), appears--

ZORRO. Black Sombrero and cape, the look is now complete.

ZORRO
 Lorenzo de la Vega, your fight is
 with Zorro, not these people! It
 is I who have taken your gold!

The bulls charge! The executioners flee leaving only the "rebels." Throughout the action Zorro frees them one-by-one and they run to safety.

FACES of the CROWD: shock, smiles, confusion--*they have never seen anything like this.* Lorenzo shouts to the soldiers--

LORENZO
 Shoot him! Now!

The Soldiers step forward to shoot but it only draws the bulls. ***BANG! BANG! BANG!*** Their shots go wild as they try to fire and run simultaneously.

One Soldier is caught like a deer in headlights as a bull charges. Suddenly, Zorro swoops in, grabs the bulls horns while cart-wheeling, twisting the bull to the ground.

SOLDIER
Thank you, Zorro!

ZORRO
Any time my good man.

Lorenzo shouts to the guards stationed all around--

LORENZO
Stop him!

The Guards advance, terrified. Zorro uses the cover of the bulls to engage them one-on-one. He slashes a soldier's rifle in two, spins another into a wall, knocking him out. With each takedown the crowd cheers LOUDER and LOUDER.

Lorenzo, needing to take control, runs out of the luxury box, nearly knocking over Bernardo on the way. Next to him, Catalina tries to hide her smile.

As the LAST SOLDIERS FALL or FLEE, Zorro stands in the middle of the ring and bows towards Catalina.

Zorro with arms outstretched, soaks in the glory as he is SHOWERED with ROSES.

The bulls are finally corralled, as Lorenzo appears in the ring--with a detachment of soldiers and his sabre at the ready. But they're too late--Zorro is gone.

He seethes, standing in the middle of--

CROWD
Zorro! Zorro! Zorro!

The people have a new hero.

INT. EL DIABLO - LORENZO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Lorenzo paces in his office. Finally he stops...

LORENZO
In effect your Royal Highness, I am asking for help...

We see a SCRIBE is writing a letter to the King of Spain. From a crack in the doorway, Catalina listens.

EXT. PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES - TOWN PLAZA - DAY

Zorro runs from rooftop to rooftop, soldiers try to give chase but slide off the tile.

The CROWD CHEERS Zorro from below, PELTING SOLDIERS WITH FRUIT as they try to shoot him. Zorro tosses gold coins down to the people as chants of Zorro are heard from every corner.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Several teen BULLIES chase a little KID down an alleyway. Seeing the dead-end coming, the kid stops, stands his ground. Grabs a broomstick, breaking it over his knee, holding the pointed end like a sword--

KID
I am Zorro!

The bullies laugh as they advance. They suddenly run away. The Kid can't believe it.

ZORRO (O.S.)
Bend at the knee. Keep the spring
in your step.

The Kid wheels to see--Zorro! (having jumped down off the roof behind him). The Kid's in awe.

ZORRO (CONT'D)
And never run into a blind alley...

Soldiers enter the other end of the alley. Coming at Zorro.

ZORRO (CONT'D)
At least until you learn to run up
walls...

As Zorro does exactly that, disappearing onto a rooftop, the Kid just stares, mouth agape.

EXT. LAKESIDE ROAD - MORNING

A broken down line of stagecoaches, American settlers argue about what to do. One looks up just as a WHISTLE rings out--

Zorro--like a black wind--blows past. A bunch of Z-marked gold coins land at their feet. As they pick them up--

AMERICAN
This California ain't so bad.

INT. EL DIABLO - LORENZO'S OFFICE - SUNSET

Catalina enters, dressed for dinner. Lorenzo looks out the window, distracted. Doesn't even turn around.

CATALINA

The Dons are asking after you, my dear. Will you be joining us for dinner?

Colonel Rios enters behind her. Now he turns.

LORENZO

Was that our guest from Monterey who just arrived?

COLONEL RIOS

Yes, sir. And he has brought word from the Viceroy.

Colonel Rios hands over a LETTER, as Catalina quickly exits--

CATALINA

Well, I hope you can join us soon.

INT. EL DIABLO - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Catalina sneaks down the hall towards Don Castillo's suite. Coast clear, she turns the knob and enters--

INT. EL DIABLO - DON CASTILLO'S SUITE - CONTINUOUS

To see Zorro, looking out the window.

CATALINA

You need to leave El Diablo. Lorenzo is about to find out you are not Don Castillo--

Zorro turns, REVEALING--not Diego but the melted and horribly disfigured face of **THE MAN IN BLACK!**

Off her scream--

EXT. EL DIABLO - BANQUET TABLE - MOMENTS LATER

Around the table: Diego/Don Castillo and the rest of The Dons. Their servants (including Bernardo) are in attendance. Everyone stops eating as Lorenzo enters. He sits, calmly.

LORENZO

Don Castillo, I am curious--have you lost a great deal of weight recently?

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

I should say quite the opposite since enjoying your hospitality. I hear in the kitchen they refer to me as "Don Gordito."

Laughter all around. Lorenzo smiles perfunctorily--

LORENZO

Perhaps, and yet you can imagine my surprise to see you described as "obese and balding."

DON SEPULVEDA

(aghast)

Don de la Vega...

Alarm grows in Bernardo's eyes. He tries to subtly indicate that Diego should go but Diego plays it cool.

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

(still smiling)

My vanity is like a ship being tossed on the sea.

LORENZO

Oh, pardon my rudeness. It's just that with the strange nature of Don Castillo's arrival I wanted to confirm some details. Until today all of my correspondence went mysteriously unanswered. But finally a letter from the Viceroy came through...

Lorenzo takes a letter from his pocket--

LORENZO (CONT'D)

And it proves that you are an impostor. I didn't want to see it, couldn't see it...

(then)

You were supposed to be dead...
Diego Mendoza.

Diego eyes his escape, heads for the door as--

DIEGO/DON CASTILLO

Surely this is all a miscommunication. I'll have words with the Viceroy myself.

LORENZO

You've already had the chance to kill me, so clearly you're up to more. And whatever it is, Zorro is obviously the mastermind. You're not smart enough to have planned this on your own.

It FLIES OPEN, REVEALING The Man in Black! ...a squad of soldiers behind him. Diego's eyes go wide with fear.

THE MAN IN BLACK

Leaving so soon?

LORENZO

First I will break you, then Zorro, then the Revolution.

The squad closes in on Diego--his only chance to escape: clear across the banquet table on the other side of the hall.

CRACK! the whip of the Man in Black drives Zorro backward.

Diego looks up, stunned to see the Man in Black--

MAN IN BLACK

You seem familiar...

In the background Lorenzo and the Dons watch as the circle of soldiers hems Diego in with bayonets.

Diego jumps up on top of the table, *running clear across to the safety of the other side*, ending in a feet-first slide that knocks food and wine all over the Dons.

Bernardo sees The Man in Black readying his whip--

BERNARDO

Look out!

He slams his silver tray against the Man in Black, who spins and Bernardo is ***SLASHED!*** by his poisoned sword.

Diego sees this, doubles back to grab his friend. Throwing Bernardo over his shoulder, he grabs a torch on the wall and swings it, making the Man in Black jump back--along with a pair of soldiers, who ready their muskets, and--

BLAM BLAM! Their lead chews up the doors as Diego escapes with Bernardo, into--

INT. EL DIABLO - SITTING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The double-doors of the dining room at one end, a side door leading to the courtyard near the other, stained glass windows let in moonlight. He bars the dining room door and crosses to a window, putting down Bernardo on a cushy sofa.

Ignoring the pounding coming from the dining room, Diego looks around for a way out of El Diablo--

BERNARDO

I don't feel well, Diego.

DIEGO

You've been poisoned, stay still.

Diego ***crack!***, KNOCKS A PANE OUT THE STAINED GLASS, sees the front gates across the courtyard.

Two SOLDIERS enter from the side door. Diego makes quick work of them hand-to-hand. Knocking them both out, he uses one of their muskets to bar the door, picks up the other--

BERNARDO

Give it to me. I'll cover your escape.

DIEGO

I've got a better idea...

BLAM! Diego fires a trick shot at the intricate pulley system that opens and closes the gate.

A moment...then ***CREAK!*** the GATES SWING OPEN. As more soldiers muster outside--

DIEGO (CONT'D)

...We escape together.

BERNARDO

There's at least a dozen more of Lorenzo's men between here and the gate. You can't save us both. Go!

Diego smiles, then gives a long ear-shattering ***whistle!***

DIEGO

Always so gloomy...

BERNARDO

One day you'll know an impossible situation when you see it.

Diego looks out the window, smiles.

DIEGO

This isn't it. Cover your head--

CRASH! The entire stained-glass window implodes--

TORNADO! Mouth white with foam from having run at a full gallop in from the front gate. Diego looks up at him--

DIEGO (CONT'D)

What took you so long?

Tornado snorts.

EXT. EL DIABLO - COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Tornado at a full gallop--right through the SOLDIERS who are MASSING to aim. Just as Lorenzo and The Man in Black-- arrive. Lorenzo shouts to his scattering men.

LORENZO

Close the Gates! Stop him!

Soldiers attempt to but it's still non-operational after his trick-shot. Anyone in Tornado's path dives for safety as--

Our heroes race away into the countryside! Left standing along with The Man in Black, Lorenzo seethes--

INT. EL DIABLO - LORENZO'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Where Catalina is bound by rope and guarded--

LORENZO

Every time we found the rebels, they managed to just get away in time. I could not figure out how they seemed to know our every move. And all this time *my fiancé was the spy*.

(beat)

When did Zorro turn you?

CATALINA

Turn me?

(beat)

Even now your arrogance won't let you see the obvious--I was always with the rebels. You were the lie.

Lorenzo takes that in, then ***CRACK!*** smacks her so hard she is knocked out of the grasp of the guards and to the ground.

Catalina gets up, defiant.

CATALINA (CONT'D)

You will never find them; they have suffered for years, biding their time. Building their army. You will only see their true strength when they are at your doors, with Zorro leading them.

LORENZO

That is what I am counting on, my darling.

As she is taken from the room--

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - SUNSET

Diego rides up to the ruins, pulls Bernardo off Tornado. His friend is weakening--

INT. FOX DEN - MOMENTS LATER

Diego carries in Bernardo, finding White Owl already waiting.

DIEGO

He has been poisoned. Oil of Oleander.

White Owl springs into action, going to her chest of remedies.

WHITE OWL

Then I must work quickly.

DIEGO

I left Catalina behind. I must save her--

White Owl stops him with an iron grip--

WHITE OWL

Have you learned nothing?! Only death awaits you. They are too many, you are only one.

DIEGO

I am Zorro.

WHITE OWL

That is why you must not die. They will keep Catalina alive to draw you out. Help me with Bernardo now, we fight the Spaniards later.

INT. EL DIABLO - DUNGEON - DUSK

Catalina--shackled--is thrown into a dank, dirty cell by soldiers. The cell doors ***SLAMS!*** shut. From the other side, Lorenzo--

LORENZO

You will be hung tomorrow. We have summoned a Priest to take your last confession. I do hope you are thorough.

She spits in his face, then--

LORENZO (CONT'D)

The fires of hell will make the gallows seem like a walk in the meadow.

Lorenzo and his men exit. All Catalina can do is look out through a high window at the moon, and pray.

INT. FOX DEN - NIGHT

White Owl mixes a potion in a clay bowl. Diego uses a horse-hair brush to apply a thick paste to Bernardo's wound.

WHITE OWL

It is ready. Help me sit him up.

Diego helps raise up Bernardo so she can pour the potion down his throat. It's slow going, Bernardo chokes a bit as Diego sits over his friend, the only sound is Bernardo's labored breathing.

EXT. MISSION SAN GABRIEL ARCANGEL - NIGHT

Under a bright full moon. Diego brushes Tornado's mane. Nothing left to do but wait.

Bernardo comes up, chest bandaged. Clearly weak.

DIEGO

You should be resting.

BERNARDO

White Owl says I am through the worst of it...and that she had a vision of your death.

DIEGO

My life is not the one in danger. Catalina's is.

BERNARDO
She will be hung at dawn.

As Diego gets on his horse--

DIEGO
I will die first.

He wheels Tornado around and is stopped by White Owl.

WHITE OWL
Yes, you will. Because you are
being led by your anger.

Diego gets off Tornado--it gets heated.

DIEGO
And what is your plan? To wait...
the time will come... and while we
sit on our hands Lorenzo hangs
Catalina!

WHITE OWL
She knew the risks, better than any
of us. Act recklessly and her
sacrifice will be for nothing.

DIEGO
I'm not going to let her die.

Bernardo steps in front of Diego, to White Owl--

BERNARDO
He's right. The time to act is now.

DIEGO
Exactly! Now get out of my way!

BERNARDO
Not you. Zorro!

DIEGO
Zorro isn't real! He's a cape, a
hat and a mask.

BERNARDO
You're wrong!

Diego is taken aback by Bernardo's passion and anger.

BERNARDO (CONT'D)

The ghost of a dead matador, the leader of the revolution--whatever the people think he is, they all know he's real.

(then)

He is the heart and soul of my best friend. And if he calls the people to action they will come.

DIEGO

Leading a handful of rebels against El Diablo would be slaughter.

WHITE OWL

Bernardo, he is right.

BERNARDO

There are more of them than you know! They've been waiting for this moment. If we take a stand tomorrow, we will find thousands at our backs. I know it!

(then)

Only Zorro can make the people rise up. Only Zorro can breach the Gates of El Diablo. Only Zorro can save Catalina.

Diego and White Owl think about what he is saying. White Owl nods to Diego, Bernardo is right.

DIEGO

(to Bernardo)

I think that's the most I've ever heard you talk at one time.

Bernardo can't help but smile. Diego looks off at El Diablo on the cliff. Where both his greatest enemy and greatest love wait for him.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Come. The hour approaches. And we have an army to raise...

EXT. PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES - VARIOUS - NIGHT

In the plaza, a gathering of people outside a bar. A GIANT NOTICE regarding the HANGING of a REBEL SPY at DAWN posted in the middle of the plaza.

HOOFBEATS as a black blur swoops past--

SHINK! SHINK! SHINK!

The people run over to see Zorro already receding in the night. Now carved into the posting -- the LETTER Z.

Around the pueblo. More Z's. Looking out of doors, settlers of every race and creed, knowing what the signal means.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BAY PIER - NIGHT

A peaceful moment, boats resting on the smooth water. Fisherman disembark from their boat. The end of a long day.

Then--a flaming arrow hits the water and ***WHOOSH*** it ALIGHTS with FLAMES--

EXT. HILLS OF CALIFORNIA - NIGHT

A group of men advances on the cliffs, suddenly dancing with light. They look down on the shoreline below and see the letter Z emblazoned on the waters.

The fires burn in the eyes of the men. They look back at *El Diablo*, determination on their faces.

Not alone, groups of people from all over the area can be seen on cliffs and hillsides looking down at the signal.

We find the person who shot the arrow--WHITE OWL. Her eyes alight with the distant fire as the shouts echo across the hillsides... "Viva Zorro! Viva Zorro! Viva Zorro!" and then..."*Viva la Revolucion!*"

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. EL DIABLO - PRE-DAWN

Soldiers line the ramparts of the giant citadel overlooking the city. Standing amongst them, Lorenzo, looking out with a spy-glass. Colonel Rios steps up--

COLONEL RIOS

All sentries and scouts have reported in. No sign of him, Don de la Vega.

Lorenzo grits his teeth, shakes his head--

LORENZO

Tell your men to keep on their toes. It's only a matter of time before Zorro shows himself, I'm sure of it.

He stops, something is making its way toward *El Diablo*--

THROUGH HIS SPYGLASS -- A **PADRE**, riding a horse-drawn wagon.

COLONEL RIOS
It's just the Priest...

Lorenzo turns to Colonel Rios--

LORENZO
Search him. Take no chances.

Colonel Rios clicks his heels, heads off to--

EXT. GATES OF EL DIABLO - MOMENTS LATER

The giant wooden gates **creeeak!** open, revealing A HUNDRED OF LORENZO'S BEST MEN. And a hanging gallows--mid-construction. Colonel Rios steps out to meet the wagon.

Colonel Rios investigates. Everything about it seems harmless, almost pathetic: The wagon is so rickety it looks like it may fall apart. The Padre's beard is thick and gray, his flowing hooded robe is threadbare. The Padre explains--

PADRE
I am here to administer the last rites for the Condemned...

Then, pointing to the casket he carries on the wagon--

PADRE (CONT'D)
...and to deliver the body to its final resting place.

Colonel Rios eyes the back of the wagon. Suddenly, he pulls his sabre and PLUNGES IT INTO THE CASKET!

He listens for any sound--NOTHING. He pulls out the sword, pries open the casket--EMPTY. *It's not hiding anything.*

Rios looks up to the ramparts, locks eyes with Lorenzo: *looks legitimate*. Satisfied, Rios waves the wagon in.

ANGLE ON THE WAGON -- Allowed to pass, we watch the wagon roll through the outer wall as we tilt down, revealing--

ZORRO! *Underneath the wagon! Unseen, he's lashed himself to the axle.*

As the massive doors **SLAM!** closed behind the wagon, sealing the priest and his "cargo" inside, we--

INT. EL DIABLO - DUNGEON - MOMENTS LATER

Catalina stirs in the darkness, steps forward to see--

The old Padre--*carrying a massive cross-topped staff in one hand and giant bible in the other*--being led toward her cell by a phalanx of soldiers. In the shafts of light, he looks almost like a cross-carrying Grim Reaper. She shrinks with fear, *maybe she won't be saved after all.*

Her cell ***creaks!*** open. Two GUARDS step inside with the Padre, as the rest disperse--

PADRE

I am here to prepare you for the salvation that awaits.

(then, in Latin)

In nomine patris filii spiritus sancti...

EXT. EL DIABLO - COURTYARD - SAME TIME

Parked inside the gate, the Padre's wagon sits unguarded. All attention turned to the construction of the gallows. With the sun rising in the sky, we get our first view of the muddy horse that draws the rickety carriage. Underneath all the mud, it's strong. Sleek. Familiar looking...*Tornado!*

CLOSE UP -- black-gloved hands reach in and detach the horse from the reigns of the wagon.

INT. EL DIABLO - DUNGEON - SAME TIME

Catalina, behind bars with the Padre. As he prays over her, she looks deeply into his face.

PADRE

Do not be afraid, my child.

CATALINA

I am not afraid. My conscience is clear.

UP ON THE RAMPARTS

Still focused on the hill below the citadel, Lorenzo stands, unmoving. It's quiet...too quiet. Then, he hears the muffled sound of horse-hoofs. On dirt at first, then on the wood of the ramparts!

He turns in the direction towards the east. The SUN RISING BEHIND THE WALL, the orange of dawn suddenly eclipsed by the silhouette of a MAN ON A HORSE--

SPANISH SOLDIERS

Zorro!

Lorenzo shouts--

LORENZO

Fire!

As guns turn toward Zorro and erupt on the top of the ramparts--

HUNDREDS OF REBELS--Mexicans, Indians, White Americans-- appear from the hills below! *BLAM! BLAM!* They rush up the hill, firing on El Diablo!

Zorro was simply a diversion!

EXT. PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES - TOWN PLAZA - DAWN

As the sun rises, Townspeople gather to see a hanging instead look to the hills and see the battle raging--*El Diablo under siege*. Maybe this can really work. As they grab whatever weapons they can find--

EXT. EL DIABLO - RAMPARTS - SAME TIME

Torn between catching Zorro and firing on the oncoming army of rebels, the soldiers--who, only moments ago, had the advantage--*now have their hands full!*

Lorenzo pushes towards the fleeing Zorro, sees Zorro nearly fall off his horse as he gallops off the ramparts.

That misstep is all Lorenzo needs to start putting the pieces together. Sword in hand, he jumps off the ramparts.

LORENZO

Ten men on me! Now!

As Lorenzo heads off, destination unknown--

INT. EL DIABLO - DUNGEON - MOMENTS LATER

The Padre finishes his prayer. Catalina scrutinizes him--

CATALINA

You remind me of someone.
What is your name, Padre?

PADRE

(beat, smiling)
Mendoza.

CATALINA

A good name.
(then)
I have a confession.

She gestures for the Padre to lean in. One of the guards steps forward, eyeing her suspiciously as she gets intimately close to this Man of the Cloth--

CATALINA (CONT'D)

I have longing in my heart for a man who is not my fiancé.

(then, whispering)

...and the taller guard is blind in his left eye.

The Padre nods--***CLUNK!***--cracks the Taller Guard in the head with his crucifix!

As the other guard advances, Catalina slams into him, throwing him off balance as the suddenly spry Priest wheels on him, takes him out. Fight over, the Padre pulls off his grey beard to reveal a smiling Diego.

Catalina throws her arms around him.

CATALINA (CONT'D)

I knew you'd come...

DIEGO

You're a bad influence on me.

(then)

We don't have much time.
Bernardo's brave but he's terrible with a sword.

He opens the burlap cloak, revealing a familiar black outfit underneath, ties on a mask, adjusts his cape--

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Can you hand me my bible?

She does. It's HOLLOW! INSIDE -- a black sombrero. Then, he turns to the gold crucifix. He unscrews the cross...it's also hollow. He pulls out his sword--

In the blink of an eye Zorro stands before Catalina.

CATALINA

I take it you have a plan.

ZORRO

Open the gates, let in the rebels, defeat Lorenzo, kiss you.

CATALINA

That's a good plan.

Catalina takes the revolvers off the hips of the two guards, checks the sights. Pulls off their ammo belts and crosses them over her head. *Gun in each hand, bandoliers crossing her chest, Catalina's no damsel in distress, she's a rebel.*

CATALINA (CONT'D)

What are you waiting for?

Now it's Zorro's turn to be impressed. He follows her out--

INT. EL DIABLO - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Running down the stone corridor, *they freeze -- Ten soldiers armed with rifles flood in, parting to reveal Lorenzo!*

ZORRO

I'll hold them off. Get to the gates.

Catalina nods, runs the other way. Zorro looks around the hallway. Nothing to hide behind--*he's in a shooting gallery.*

LORENZO

Form ranks!

The men square up into two ranks, the front row kneels, *all rifles pointed towards Zorro.* Lorenzo knows he has him.

ZORRO

(calmly)

I accept your surrender.

Zorro reaches into his belt with his free hand--

LORENZO

Fire!

A FLASH of LIGHT as -- ***BOOM!*** -- guns blaze. A candelabra held by rope falls from the ceiling. The smoke clears. No Zorro. The men are confused. Lorenzo looks up.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

The rafters! He's in the rafters!

Before they can reload -- Zorro drops into the center of their ranks--

As his sword FLASHES and CAPE WHIPS LIKE A MATADOR. It's over in moments.

Zorro stands among the bodies. Lorenzo didn't expect that.

ZORRO

As I was saying...

Lorenzo bolts out the door he came in. Zorro after him--

EXT. EL DIABLO - COURTYARD - SAME TIME

Down below the hail of bullets and cannons up on the ramparts, Bernardo--*still dressed as Zorro*--crouches out of sight, twenty feet from the LATCH that will open the gate. *But how to get there without getting killed?*

He looks across the courtyard, sees TORNADO calmly drinking from a trough. Bernardo tries to WHISTLE like Zorro. Tornado looks over at him... and goes right back to drinking. Bernardo, shakes his head, goes towards the horse--

--and stands face-to-face with two soldiers. Guns trained, about to fire--

BANG! BANG! Bernardo hears the shots, but isn't bleeding. Then, the Soldiers drop dead, Catalina behind him with smoking revolvers.

BERNARDO

That was close...

(beat)

This outfit draws too much attention.

Catalina looks at the dead soldiers.

CATALINA

If we're going to get to that gate, we'll need to blend in.

As the soldiers' bodies get dragged off to the side where no one is looking...

EXT. EL DIABLO - WATCHTOWER - MOMENTS LATER

Zorro chases to the top of El Diablo. Hoping to catch Lorenzo, but instead--

THE MAN IN BLACK stands before Zorro. Looks Zorro up and down, a man dressed almost exactly like him.

MAN IN BLACK

How do I know you?

ZORRO

We have a friend in common.

As they talk Zorro is scanning the area, taking in every last inch of it, including the wobbly board under foot.

MAN IN BLACK

(remembering)

Ah, Lafitte. Killing you will be almost as fulfilling as my revenge against him.

ZORRO

I've come to realize that revenge is overrated. Have you considered finding a girl instead?

The Man in Black attacks but rather than retreat, Zorro charges forward, close in--grabs his sword hand--

ZORRO (CONT'D)

Very well then, but you'll find the whip far less effective at close range.

The two men battle around the BELL of the watchtower, tight space, little room for error.

Lorenzo slips away, Zorro focused on the Man in Black.

OUTSIDE THE GATES

The rebels fight on, fiercely. But under withering fire they are being cut down--

IN THE COURTYARD

TWO SOLDIERS (in slightly ill-fitting uniforms) roll a cart full of barrels marked "GUNPOWDER" up to the gate. An OFFICER sees them, shouts--

OFFICER

What are you doing? This is for the cannons up on the wall--

POW! One of the soldiers levels him with a right cross. It's Bernardo. As he massages his knuckles--

BERNARDO

This is exactly where it belongs.

THE RAMPARTS UP ABOVE

Colonel Rios, seeing what is about to happen, leaps down, and runs at them. Catalina levels her revolver at the cart--

BANG! ***KA-BOOM!!***

The Gate is blown to smithereens, knocking anyone within fifty feet onto their back--*including Rios.* As the smoke clears, Rebels pour into El Diablo. *The tide has turned!*

Rios looks up from the dirt, faced with the muzzles of a dozen rebels. Putting his hands up slowly--he surrenders!

Catalina sees the fight happening up on the watchtower, runs toward it as Bernardo helps the rebels.

ALONG THE WATCHTOWER

Zorro and the Man in Black still locked in combat--

ZORRO

Do you not find the black outfit attracts too much heat in the sunlight? I'm considering going with something more summery.

The Man in Black refuses to banter, increasingly frustrated by Zorro's lack of fear.

ZORRO (CONT'D)

And perspiration can be a real problem. Between us, I find the sombrero and mask to be helpful in that regard.

MAN IN BLACK

I don't care!

ZORRO

Oh, you should my good man. The Devil, as they say, is in the details. I spent a week adjusting my inseam to get it just right.

MAN IN BLACK

You talk too much, Zorro.

The Man in Black swipes and slashes harder and harder but Zorro uses the cape to obscure his movements, thrusting and parrying back with grace and ease--

ZORRO

I see no reason why good conversation must be a casualty of swordplay. You know who taught me that? Lafitte... why he could talk up a storm, never miss a beat. I learned much from him.

Now Zorro takes the offensive, driving the Man in Black from the tight confines around the bell--

ZORRO (CONT'D)

But you know what lesson stuck with me the most?

MAN IN BLACK

Do you ever--

The Man in Black steps on THE WOBBLY BOARD that Zorro had noted earlier, and his foot goes right through, as--

SHINK! Zorro drives his sword right through the heart of The Man in Black--

ZORRO

Know every inch of the ground you fight on.

As the light goes out of the Man in Black's eyes--

CATALINA (O.S.)

Zorro!

Smiling at the sound of her voice, he turns to declare--

ZORRO

We have done it!

Catalina stands before him, LORENZO HAS A PISTOL TO HER HEAD. Lorenzo pulls her close.

ZORRO (CONT'D)

Don't--

LORENZO

Why shouldn't I?

Lorenzo sees the fort being overrun by rebels, knows the game is over.

LORENZO (CONT'D)

Let me guess, you'd let me go?

ZORRO

Perhaps I would. After all, we share the same blood...

Lorenzo realizes what that means--

LORENZO

Diego?!

ZORRO

...de la Vega. Hello, brother.

He takes off the mask, Lorenzo's shock registers.

LORENZO

It can't be! Where is the real Zorro?

DIEGO

Anger has blinded both of us from many things, Lorenzo.

(beat)

Let her go and I give you my word... you can return to Spain in peace.

LORENZO

Humiliated?!

DIEGO

Consider the offer, it is more than you gave our father.

LORENZO

He's not our father! He's mine! You are only the half-breed bastard of an Indian whore!

Lorenzo pulls back the hammer on the pistol and--

In a flash, Zorro grabs the whip off the Man in Black's arm and with precision--

KA-RACK!! SNAPS THE PISTOL from Lorenzo's hand. The momentum puts Lorenzo off balance...and right over the wall of the Watchtower!

Lorenzo screams as he falls to his death.

AT THE BASE OF THE WATCHTOWER

The battle is over. Revolutionaries gather around the BODY OF LORENZO, including White Owl, who looks up proudly seeing--

THE WATCHTOWER

Catalina rushes to Diego. They embrace. And finally, then **THEY KISS.**

DIEGO

That was worth the wait.

Zorro puts the mask back on, looks down at Man in Black's whip. *Hmm, this thing is pretty useful.*

Zorro coils the whip and ties it to his belt as A CHEER GOES UP FROM THE CROWD!

CROWD

Zorro! Zorro! Zorro!

A wave of triumph! As they look down--

DIEGO

The war is not over. Spain will not let go because they have lost one battle.

As Bernardo climbs the stairs to join them--

BERNARDO

With Zorro on our side, we cannot lose.

Diego smiles sadly, thinking...

DIEGO

Zorro can only do so much. The people need a real leader. A man they can respect, who can show his face...

CATALINA

A man like Diego de la Vega?

He turns his head, ***whistles!*** Then--

DIEGO

I was thinking of his father, Alejandro de la Vega. He's still alive, somewhere...

Bernardo and Catalina look at each other, realizing what he means to do next. When they look back--Zorro's already gone.

Swinging down off the Watchtower, Zorro lands in Tornado's saddle in the middle of the crowd.

Tornado draws back on his hind-legs--the iconic image of him silhouetted by the sun as the crowd shouts his name--

CROWD

Zorro! Zorro! Zorro!

Catalina and Bernardo watch as he races off into the light of day, smiling as--

SHINK! SHINK! SHINK! A large Z cuts across the frame as we--

SLICE TO BLACK:

ROLL CREDITS

TAG:

INT. FRENCH QUARTER BAR - NIGHT

A DRUNK MAN, splayed across the bar, his head buried in the crook of his arms as he ***snores.***

SUPER:

FRENCH QUARTER, NEW ORLEANS

TWO BOUNTY HUNTERS (big, scary, piercing eyes) enter, one with a thick creole accent, the other a Spaniard. The Spaniard ***slaps!*** a few Doubloons onto the bar.

SPANIARD BOUNTY HUNTER

Two bourbons...and whatever he's drinking.

The bartender puts down two bourbons and then a third drink: something like a Daiquiri with an umbrella in it. The least manly drink imaginable. The Bounty Hunters look at each other: *who the hell would drink that?*

CREOLE BOUNTY HUNTER

Zanmi...your drink's here.

The Drunk mumbles, barely stirs.

SPANIARD BOUNTY HUNTER

We hear you have a ship. We need to get to Mexico, would prefer to avoid entanglements on land.

The Drunk reaches out, grabs the Daiquiri, pulls it over and sucks it down through the metal straw without ever raising his head. He pushes back an empty glass. ***Buurp!***

SPANIARD BOUNTY HUNTER (CONT'D)

It's a million dollar bounty.
We'll cut you in if you can get us all the way to Alta California.

The Bounty Hunter slaps down a WANTED POSTER, slides it over.

The Drunk opens an eye, looks at the poster.

CREOLE BOUNTY HUNTER
Spain's already upped the bounty
twice. No telling what it'll be
worth by the time we get there.

The POSTER: A DRAWING of a Man in a SOMBRERO, eyes barely
visible peering out of a mask.

WANTED: ZORRO aka MATADOR DE LA MUERTE aka THE CURSE OF
CAPISTRANO...

The Drunk raises his head...sees his reflection in the
mirror, *immediately fixes his hair*. His face comes into
focus:

It's Jean Lafitte. He looks at the Poster, smiles--

JEAN LAFITTE
Zorro... *that's* a good name.

SMASH TO BLACK:

END OF MOVIE