

THE CLEVER GIRL

by

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FADE IN:

INT. BEIMLER PLANTATION - BALLROOM - DAY

Sunrise. Gold glows beyond the windows. Once an elegant chamber defined by its hand carved oak panels, crystal chandeliers, and silver wall sconces, the ballroom is now a dingy cavern packed with rows of tarnished brass beds.

SUPER A TITLE....

NEW ORLEANS, 1878

As we drift past the empty beds, all of them draped with frayed mosquito netting, we hear a soft feminine voice...

MONIQUE (V.O.)

There was once a beautiful young princess, kind of heart and sharp of mind, who took a long walk in a dense wood.

We come upon a woman, 19, raven hair and eyes, skin the color of cafe au lait, dressed like a servant in a cheap gingham dress. On her knees, she's scraping away at an ugly blotch on the floor with a horse hair brush.

MONIQUE (V.O.)

As the sun set and night fell, she realized she had lost her way.

When the girl dips the brush in the bucket, iron-red flakes of dried blood cloud its water.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEIMLER PLANTATION - LATER THAT DAY

The girl, whose name is MONIQUE, is pouring a can of pitch into a steel drum.

MONIQUE (V.O.)

Deep in the woods, the princess met an evil wizard with a soul as dark as his eyes.

Monique drops a lit torch in the drum. While orange flames leap, she walks down an avenue flanked with mature Southern Live Oaks. Steel drums filled with tar are blazing away on each side of the avenue, black smoking rising into the air.

MONIQUE (V.O.)
 The wizard said, "Fair princess,
 give me your heart so I may consume
 your youth and vitality."

Monique approaches the main house which, like the ballroom,
 has fallen into a state of despair and neglect.

MONIQUE (V.O.)
 Terrified, the princess fled
 through the woods, the wizard not
 far behind her.

INT. BEIMLER PLANTATION - STUDY - DAY

Monique sits at a cluttered desk in the disordered study,
 polishing a scalpel with a velvet cloth. She carefully slips
 it inside the open leather medical case set on the desk.

MONIQUE (V.O.)
 She found refuge by a magic pond in
 an enchanted glade. As the girl
 slaked her thirst, the pond asked
 her why she was so frightened. She
 replied, "An evil wizard is
 determined to steal my heart."

While Monique reaches for another surgical instrument...

CUT TO:

EXT. BEIMLER PLANTATION - MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Monique rocks in a bench swing on the porch as she reads
 aloud from a book of fairy tales. A GIRL, 7, pale and thin,
 wearing a burlap sack dress and holding a French bisque
 Juneau doll, is seated beside her. Listening intently.

MONIQUE
 When the princess asked the magic
 pond to kill the wizard, it
 declined, saying it could not
 employ its great power to do harm
 to others.

A CANNON SHOT reverberates in the distance. Frightened, the
 little girl grabs at Monique, who merely smiles.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)
 Eight o'clock, Bridget. The cannons
 always start at eight, don't they?

While the child relaxes, Monique continues reading.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

Thinking quickly, the princess begged the magic pond to transform her into a rush of clear water so she may join it. When the pond resisted, the princess smiled and said, "Have trust in me. For I am a clever girl."

A bright red Robinson & Cook brougham carriage drawn by four white horses proceeds up the avenue and approaches the house. Monique pays it no heed.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

The wizard arrived. Hot and thirsty, he drank deeply of the pond. And from inside his stomach the princess called out, "Magic pond, return me to my rightful form."

As the carriage stops before the main house, the liveried driver clammers down from his perch, opens its door, and offers a helping hand to the only passenger.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

The pond complied and, as she regained her human form, the princess tore her way out of the wizard, killing him.

A man dressed in a top hat, frock coat, and high collared shirt denies the driver's assistance and evacuates the brougham on his own.

Ignoring him, Monique continues to read from the book.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

Impressed, the magic pond said "You are indeed a very clever girl."

While she shares a smile with the child beside her, the visitor joins them on the porch. Glares down at Monique.

FALCON

Young woman. Who you are reading to?

Monique turns to face Bridget, but the little girl is gone. The swing is empty save for Monique and the Juneau, which she indicates with a shrug.

MONIQUE

Are you not aware that dolls
appreciate a good fairy tale?

Another CANNON SHOT startles the visitor. Off balance, he
glares at the steel drums erupting black smoke.

FALCON

May I dare ask why you are burning
pitch?

MONIQUE

The city fathers insist on it at
threat of fine and felony.

FALCON

But why?

MONIQUE

For the same reason the militia are
firing their cannons. To banish
bronze john. The yellow fever.

Panicked, the man covers his mouth with a lace handkerchief.

FALCON

But the papers in Biloxi report the
epidemic ended weeks ago!

MONIQUE

The papers in Biloxi are
misinformed.

FALCON

Lord save us!

MONIQUE

He needn't bother. The plague has
all but burned itself out, no
thanks to burning pitch or blazing
cannons. We lost our final patient
on Friday. A little girl. Her name
was Bridget. Bridget O'Mara.

She glances at the doll. Sighs. Faces the man.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

What is your business here?

He hands her his card.

FALCON

I am Howard William Falcon, senior partner of the firm of Falcon, Shelby, and Falcon.

MONIQUE

Should I be impressed?

FALCON

(a scowl)

I must say, you display extremely poor manners for a Creole servant.

MONIQUE

I must say, I agree.

FALCON

Is your master, Doctor Fritz Beimler, or your mistress, Desiree Beimler, currently present?

MONIQUE

For the foreseeable future.

FALCON

Then take me to them at once. We have an urgent matter to discuss.

MONIQUE

Urgent or not, the discussion will be limited.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEIMLER PLANTATION - GARDENS - DAY

What was once a fine rose garden is now a crude graveyard. Rows of rough crosses are planted at the heads of hurried burials. Falcon observes while Monique kneels before a pair of graves marked FRITZ VICTOR BEIMLER and DESIREE GARCIA BEIMLER and yanks away the fresh weeds.

MONIQUE

The fever raged through the poor immigrant neighborhoods, especially the Irish. When the city hospitals turned them away, Doctor Beimler took them in. Treated them in the ballroom. Or tried to. The death rate was fifty percent. You could say he saved half or failed half. Depends on your point of view I suppose.

FALCON
The man should have sent his family
to safety.

MONIQUE
He tried, but they refused. They
wanted to help.

FALCON
Foolish.

MONIQUE
Fearless.

Falcon vainly surveys the graves.

FALCON
Where is she buried?

MONIQUE
She?

FALCON
The daughter. They had a daughter.

MONIQUE
They still do.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDY - DAY

Monique, actually MONIQUE GARCIA BEIMLER, is seated at her
father's desk, reading through a thick document clad in
foolscap. Falcon is seated across from her, full of excuses.

FALCON
You must forgive me. Your
appearance and affect; I just
assumed you were Creole.

She finally slams the document shut.

MONIQUE
Shameless!

FALCON
It was an honest mistake.

MONIQUE
I am referring to this writ. You
can't be serious.

FALCON

As serious as the local magistrate
who notarized it.

Monique rises to her feet and paces the room.

MONIQUE

Get out. Go.

FALCON

You must go.

MONIQUE

Leave my house.

FALCON

This is not your house.

MONIQUE

Your fancy red brougham and its
white horses are waiting.

FALCON

Do not disregard your grandmother's
resolute intent in this matter.

MONIQUE

(disbelief)

I am nineteen years of age. In all
that time, I have never set eyes on
that woman. No visits or letters,
nary a holiday missive or birthday
regard. This writ is her first
expression of any interest in any
aspect of my existence.

Falcon indicates the garden graveyard past the windows.

FALCON

The cause is plain to see. She is
concerned for your very survival.

MONIQUE

So she files a warrant against my
father's property, denying my
ownership?

FALCON

She can not deny what you never
possessed, madame. This estate's
deed is titled under the name
Evelyn Beimler, not your father's.
If she demands you leave it, she is
well within her legal rights.

MONIQUE

And no conceivable moral authority.

FALCON

This is not an endeavor to harm but an attempt at rescue. Belated for your parents but not for you.

MONIQUE

Rescue through eviction?

FALCON

And sanctuary. From now on you will be living with your grandmother.

MONIQUE

On which part of God's green planet might that happen to be?

FALCON

Soledad Springs. A community in western Texas at the far south edge of the Hill Country.

A CANNON SHOT in the distance. Monique looks through the window at her parents' graves and smiles bitterly.

MONIQUE

And I actually thought the worst of this was behind me.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTHERN HILL COUNTRY - DAY

A 4-4-0 American Standard pulls a half dozen passenger cars across a fevered terrain of majestic mesas, capstone mountains and dry river beds. We hear a violin playing *The Ballad of Barbara Allen*.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - TRAVELING - DAY

A young man in a pinstripe suit, brogans and bowler, long hair, bushy muttonchops, plus frameless, bottle glass specs, is lounging against the red leather squabs of his bench seat, playing a Mittenwald violin.

While his bow flies across its strings, Monique listens from a seat one row down and across the aisle. Our girl is wearing a plain, fringed travel coat and dress. She only has eyes for the young man and his violin, as if the music they are making together is providing food for her troubled soul.

As he finishes his rendition of *Barbara Allen* with a flourish, Monique's applause echoes throughout the otherwise empty car. The young man leans out of his seat, doffs his bowler and smiles past his muttonchop whiskers.

HERBERT

An artist appreciates an avid audience. I go by the name of Herbert.

MONIQUE

You may call me Monique.

HERBERT

Shall I join you, Monique?

As she nods, he takes a seat beside hers.

HERBERT (CONT'D)

If I might be so bold, may I ask what brings you to these first class accommodations on the Texas and Pacific's most southerly route?

MONIQUE

This seat is not my purchase. A cattle car would suit me just as well.

HERBERT

Which does not answer my question. Why are you here?

MONIQUE

You are bold.

HERBERT

Forgive me. I'll be on my way.

He starts to rise, but she grabs his arm. As he returns to his seat, she takes a deep breath. Decides to share.

MONIQUE

My mother once told me life is about loss and change. I lost her, and my father, and now I'm on this train. Headed from nothing to nowhere.

HERBERT

That is a very big change. But I'm sure you can handle it.

MONIQUE

I don't share your conviction.

HERBERT

Monique, I learned the violin at Oberlin, took acting at Frobisher, and studied voice at St. Alban's.

MONIQUE

A fine education.

HERBERT

In art and artifice but not courage. Which you own in abundance.

MONIQUE

You can't know that.

HERBERT

I possess scant character myself, but I can judge it in others. You will do well wherever you go.

MONIQUE

Even Soledad Springs?

Herbert's smile slips a bit.

HERBERT

A bustling metropolis.

MONIQUE

You know the place?

HERBERT

Only by reputation. My destination is the next to last station on this line. Vanderpool.

MONIQUE

Does said community bustle as well?

HERBERT

A whistle stop sans whistle. My future audiences will be limited to horn toads and rattlers.

MONIQUE

Perhaps your musical talents would be better appreciated in Soledad.

HERBERT

I doubt it. Will you be taking residence there?

MONIQUE

With a relative. Evelyn Beimler.

Herbert gapes at her through his thick nanny glasses.

HERBERT

Evelyn Louise Beimler?

MONIQUE

You know her?

HERBERT

That woman is your relation?

MONIQUE

My grandmother.

The train slows, steam blows, and a shabby station rolls into view past the windows. Herbert quickly returns to his seat and stows his fiddle in its case. Grabs his grip.

HERBERT

I wish you safe travel.

MONIQUE

Wait! How do you know her? Wait!

She watches helplessly while Herbert hurries off the train and seemingly out of her life.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SOLEDAD SPRINGS TRAIN STATION - DAY

Much larger and better fitted than the one in Vanderpool. As the train arrives, Monique disembarks, a large carpet bag in hand. She looks about, disorientated. No one is waiting for her; no one is offering welcome or relief.

She is alone in this strange new world.

EXT. HILL ROAD - DAY

Monique walks away from the station and down a steep road built into the side of a hill.

EXT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

She passes a large, white building constructed in the Greco-Roman style with wooden Doric columns supporting its portico. Beside it stands a tower, eighteen stories high, with a water tank at its summit, an iron stairway curved around its surface and four statues erected at its base.

Monique pauses to stare at the statues; Zeus, Athenae, Hera and Ares. Sword held high, the God of War glares down at her with malicious intent.

A shrill blast of steam erupts from a release pipe on the roof of the building. Flustered, Monique hurries down the road...

... toward the good sized town nestled at the foot of the hill. Soledad Springs.

EXT. HIDALGO STREET - DAY

Lively, thriving, but still in flux. Tents, lean-tos and temporary structures share space with freshly built brick and wood buildings. Freight wagons and horsemen compete with pedestrians and vendor carts for street space.

Monique traverses the boardwalk, takes a seat on a bench, and surveys the organized chaos. She stiffens as she sees...

... Bridget O'Mara. The pale little girl in the burlap dress stands on the boardwalk across the street, watching Monique. A mail coach passes between them... and Bridget is gone.

On the bench, Monique Beimler sits alone. In despair.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIDALGO STREET - DAY

Well past noon. The street is even busier, if that's possible. A tired and hot Monique still waits on the bench, her carpet bag lying in the dirt beside her. As a shadow covers the girl, she looks up at...

... A rough looking man in range gear, his Manhattan Navy five shot slung low in its holster. He grins down at Monique through tobacco stained teeth.

RENO

Now ain't you a pretty Mex girl.
New to town?

MONIQUE

(tense)

I require an introduction.

RENO

Why I'm the chair of your welcome committee.

RENO POOLE sticks his fingers in his mouth and whistles so shrilly Monique covers her ears. Two more men of similar dress and attitude, BASS and VIRGIL, join him; all of them grinning at the unsettled girl.

RENO (CONT'D)

And this is the committee. As part of our welcome festivities, you'll join us in the bar for a libation.

VIRGIL

(shocked)

In front of everybody?

BASS

Shouldn't we get a room first?

RENO

Libation, lizard brains, is a drink. First we drink with the Mex, then we get a room with same.

MONIQUE

You may drink and get rooms wherever you desire, but I will not be involved.

Reno's tone turns cold.

RENO

Your lack of escort or protection allows for a different outcome...

Bass abruptly nudges Reno's arm and points off. Monique turns to see...

... the lone horseman approaching from the far end of the street. Clean shaven, hair cut short under his wide brimmed hat, eyes sharp. His dark travel dress and drover coat match his mount, a jet black stallion, and he's armed with a pair of ivory handled Colt Frontiers in copper leather holsters.

The way he rides in the saddle, the way he carries himself; an air of studied menace wafts off the man like an ill wind.

The horseman, whom we will call BILLY, stops near Monique, Reno and his men. Quickly assesses the situation. And nods.

BILLY

Reno.

RENO

Billy.

BILLY

You bothering this young lady?

RENO

Just passing a piece of time.

BILLY

Pass it elsewhere.

RENO

For a man that spends but one month out of ten in this town, you work a heavy hand.

BILLY

Want to see how heavy, keep talking 'stead of walking.

Reno glares and sulks. A nervous Bass and Virgil grab him, but he shakes them off. A final hard look at Billy, and Reno leads his men away.

As the horseman turns his attention to Monique, she clears her suddenly dry throat.

MONIQUE

Thank you, mister...

BILLY

Billy. I go by Billy. And you may best express your gratitude by vacating this street.

Anxious and off balance as she might be, Monique's ire rises.

MONIQUE

Not before my ride arrives.

BILLY

A foolish choice.

MONIQUE

I appreciate your candor but not your tone, Mister... Billy.

BILLY
My feelings are identical to yours.

MONIQUE
And to little point. Good day.

Billy sighs. Tips his hat. Then he rides across the street to dismount, sits on a bench across from hers... and waits.

The two of them watch other from opposite sides of the street. A distaff Mexican standoff.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIDALGO STREET - DAY

Mid afternoon. Siesta time. The town is seemingly devoid of life save for Billy and Monique, still seated on their benches.

Dozing, head nodding, Monique's eyes flutter shut. Then a hand taps her shoulder, and she snaps awake.

A young woman stands over her. Latina, pretty, simply dressed. DULCE SANCHEZ nods a curt greeting.

DULCE
Signora Beimler?

MONIQUE
Yes.

DULCE
You were not at the station.

MONIQUE
I got tired of waiting.

DULCE
Your train must have been early.
Follow me.

She grabs the carpet bag, turns and walks away. Monique accompanies her to a two horse phaeton parked down the street; a middle-aged Hispanic man standing beside it. LUCERO smiles and tips his hat.

LUCERO
Good afternoon, signora.

He helps Monique into the back of the phaeton, then climbs into the driver's seat. After Dulce joins him, he cracks his whip and the small carriage rolls up the street.

As they pass him, Monique shoots a hard look at Billy, who simply responds with a smile.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The phaeton bumps across a rough, dirt road past a landscape as well suited to the surface of Mars as southwest Texas. From beneath the shade of the phaeton's barouche top, Monique glances at the brutal scenery. And stiffens.

Several plumes of black smoke are rising toward the sky in the distance.

Disturbed, she sits back in her seat.

Dulce glances at their passenger, then snaps at Lucero.

DULCE (IN SPANISH)
Look at her, basking in the shade
like a princess from Seville.

LUCERO (IN SPANISH)
What should she do, Dulce? Run
along side us like a kitchen dog?

DULCE (IN SPANISH)
She is the image of the old woman.

LUCERO (IN SPANISH)
She looks more like you. She could
pass for one of us.

DULCE (IN SPANISH)
She is a Beimler, Lucero. It's her
duty to add to our troubles. As if
we didn't have enough as it is.

EXT. MILAGRO RANCHERO - MAIN GATE - DAY

The phaeton drives through the open gate in a posted fence that stretches for miles; MILAGRO RANCHERO scrolled in iron over its threshold.

As they pass a seemingly endless herd of Oregon cattle, even Monique appears to be impressed.

EXT. MILAGRO RANCHERO - RANCH HOUSE - DUSK

The sun is setting as the phaeton arrives at a massive wooden structure, three stories tall, with balconies on each level and turrets at each end. A complex of adobe barns and support buildings surround it.

Lucero parks before the house, dismounts and helps Monique climb down from the phaeton.

LUCERO

Welcome to the Milagro Ranchero,
signora.

Monique grins at Lucero -- and responds in perfect Castilian.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)

It is truly a miracle such a fine
house should stand in such a remote
place. Much thanks for your help
and kindness, Lucero.

LUCERO (IN SPANISH)

You are much welcome, my lady.

Monique faces Dulce, whose mouth is hanging open in shock.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)

Next time, if you like, I will ride
with Lucero and you may bask in the
shade like a princess from Seville.

Monique heads for the house while Lucero roars with laughter.

As she climbs the porch steps, Monique glances up at the balcony on the second floor. A man, 50's, grey-bearded, wearing a silk smoking jacket, stands behind its railing. As he sips from a crystal glass, he smiles down at her.

Uncomfortable beneath that smile, Monique enters the house.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DUSK

As elegant and well appointed as the exterior. A Seth Thomas grandfather clock stands against the wall, its French style matching the room's davenports, chairs, and tables.

Monique stands on the Savonnerie carpet and listens to the clock's brass workings tick. She can also hear voices, a spirited, if inaudible exchange, somewhere deep in the house.

INT. HALLWAY - DUSK

Monique heads down the narrow hallway, drawn by the voices.
Clearer now.

ANGUS (O.S.)
He'll arrive Sabbath day at the
latest.

EVELYN (O.S.)
Your son is aware of our
arrangement?

ANGUS (O.S.)
Fully. We have communicated via
both letter and telegram.

She steps through a doorway...

INT. DINING ROOM - DUSK

Rich and French like the rest of the house. A man, 50's, is seated at a washed trestle table with a woman, 60, the pair sipping post supper tea from the splendid Boulenger silver service arrayed on a silk taffeta dining cloth.

ANGUS AUGUSTUS WARREN, tall and snow haired, is garbed in a perfectly tailored British riding suit and Coffeyville boots.

EVELYN LOUISE BEIMLER is wearing the latest in Parisian fashion, an ornamented lace tea gown with a high bodice and brass fittings. She sips her Earl Grey as she nods to Angus.

EVELYN
Good. I desire this matter to be
announced, facilitated and
concluded by first day Octoberfest.

ANGUS
Undue haste might appear improper.

EVELYN
In what possible sense? They've
never even met...

That's when they realize Monique is watching them. Evelyn scowls at her.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
I have no use for you, girl.

MONIQUE
Pardon?

EVELYN
My current cook is still in place.
She is not leaving her service
until two days hence.

MONIQUE
I am not a cook.

Evelyn shrugs at Angus.

EVELYN
I bid the Alcalde send me a cook, I
get a parlor maid.

MONIQUE
I am not a maid either.

EVELYN
Then what in Heaven's name are you?

MONIQUE
Your granddaughter.

EVELYN
What?

MONIQUE
If you are Evelyn Beimler, then we
are related. If we are not, may I
return to New Orleans? I don't like
it here very much.

Evelyn is speechless. Quickly covering for her, Angus rises
to his feet and offers Monique his hand.

ANGUS
You must forgive our confusion. We
expected you late tonight...

EVELYN
(snorting)
Dressed properly.

ANGUS
My name is Angus Warren...

EVELYN
Not like a cook or a parlor maid.

ANGUS
And this is your grandmother...

EVELYN
Must you use that term?

ANGUS

What term would you prefer, Evelyn?

EVELYN

Evelyn. As in the legal appellation on my birth record that is suitable for any conceivable circumstance.

(to Monique)

Go to the kitchen.

MONIQUE

I told you, I am not a cook.

EVELYN

To eat, girl. To eat. You must be famished post journey. It's well past proper supper time, but I will make exception on this single occasion.

(points off)

Well? The kitchen is that way.

Monique stares at her. Angus manages an awkward smile.

ANGUS

Welcome to Soledad Springs.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Monique enters to find a Hispanic woman cleaning the grill on a large iron Monarch stove. As the cook, or PAOLA, faces her, Monique reacts to the tears in her eyes.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)

Is there a problem, good lady?

PAOLA (IN SPANISH)

No problem. How may I help you?

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)

I was sent here to partake of your fine food.

Paola grabs a bowl, ladles chili into it, hands it to the girl and returns to cleaning the Monarch's grill. Monique watches her for a moment, then leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK PORCH - NIGHT

The stars are out as Monique sits in a wicker chair and takes a long look at the majestic if desolate scenery that surrounds the rancho. With a heartfelt sigh, she spoons some chili and gulps it down. Only to moan in pain as she vainly waves at her burning mouth.

KONRAD (O.S.)
Paola's chili is an acquired taste.

KONRAD KOWALKSI, the man in the silk smoking jacket we saw on the balcony, approaches her, crystal glass still in hand.

MONIQUE
(agonized)
What... what's in this?

KONRAD
The Rio Grande Reaper, a scalding hot pepper which, ironically, grows many miles from said river.

She gestures frantically at Konrad's glass, which he hands over. She takes a stiff drink. Coughs and gags.

KONRAD (CONT'D)
(grinning)
I take it you are no more familiar with Emerald Straight whiskey than the Rio Grande Reaper.
(offering hand)
Konrad. Konrad Kowalski.

MONIQUE
(gasping)
Monique... Monique Beimler.

KONRAD
Oh, then you're the granddaughter. Which makes me your grandfather, or step grandfather.

MONIQUE
You're not a Beimler?

KONRAD
Otto Beimler was buried two deceased husbands ago. Evelyn took my vocative on the marriage license but nowhere else.

MONIQUE

She does appear to have strong feelings about her name.

KONRAD

And her property rights.

He makes a grand gesture.

KONRAD (CONT'D)

Beimler land, all four hundred and seventy two thousand acres. Not one square inch Kowalski. Which is as it should be. I'm no rancher, I'm an entertainer. After a long day of managing the myriad affairs of the Milagro Rancho, Evelyn is often in dire need of song and story, which I am pleased to provide.

MONIQUE

You do seem to have the vocabulary for it.

KONRAD

If you're saying I talk too much, I agree with your assessment. And will leave you with your chili.

But as he starts to go, Monique stops him.

MONIQUE

Why? Why does Evelyn want me here? She's clearly not pleased by my presence; why hire a lawyer to force it?

KONRAD

Your grandmother has survived three panics, as many husbands, and more droughts, famines, storms, and pestilence than are catalogued in the Hebrew Bible. She managed all this by being proactive.

MONIQUE

How does that relate to me?

KONRAD

Not my place to say. But I'm sure Evelyn will inform you shortly. Good night, Monique. Pleasant dreams.

Draining his glass, he staggers off. Monique sags into her wicker chair, concerned and apprehensive.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

As Monique observes, Dulce places her carpet bag on the quilt cover of the Phoenix four poster that nearly fills the room.

DULCE
Breakfast is an hour past sunrise.

MONIQUE
(concerned)
Chili?

DULCE
(confused)
No. Eggs, flapjacks, and biscuits.
(then)
Any garments in need of launder may be hung on the door hook. If you like, I may draw you a bath.

MONIQUE
Tomorrow before breakfast. I require sleep more than hygiene.

DULCE
Very well, madame.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)
Please don't call me madame. I prefer my given name, Monique.

DULCE
Your Spanish, it's Castilian.

MONIQUE
My mother was born in Leon.

DULCE
I'm sorry for what I said earlier.

MONIQUE
All is forgiven if you explain exactly which troubles you figured I might add to.

Dulce ducks the question and heads for the door.

DULCE

I'll draw your bath at dawn. Is that acceptable... Monique?

Monique nods and Dulce leaves. Our girl reaches for the carpet bag and starts to unpack it, removing a few items of clothing, then a medical book. She examines its title.

Text Book of Modern Medicine and Surgery on Homoeopathic Principles

By E. Harris Ruddock

She lays it aside. Pulls out the leather medical case we saw her deal with earlier and stares at the *DR. FRITZ VICTOR BEIMLER* brass name plate on its catch. She shoves this under the bed. Then reaches into the carpet bag for a final item... the Juneau doll with the hand painted smile.

Clutching this to her chest, Monique sits on the bed. Tears start to flow. This a strong young woman, but even she can take only so much. She bends over the doll and weeps.

A small hand touches her shoulder. She turns to face Bridget O'Mara, now seated on the bed beside her.

The child in the sack dress smiles at Monique, who visibly brightens. As she shares the moment with this gentle ghost...

CUT TO:

EXT. MILAGRO RANCHERO - DAWN

The VAQUEROS and WRANGLERS quartered in a barracks building head for their horses and the day's work. As they ride off...

... Lucero leaves the main house and approaches a well, tin bucket in hand. As he pumps it full...

INT. WASH ROOM - DAWN

... Dulce empties a similar bucket into a cast iron claw footed tub while a naked Monique luxuriates inside it.

MONIQUE

Muy bueno. Gracias, Dulce.

DULCE

Don't thank me, thank Lucero. He gathers and heats, I only pour.

MONIQUE

Then I thank you both from the tips
of my dirty toes to the nape of my
filthy neck.

DULCE

In English or Spanish, you do not
express yourself like a Beimler.

MONIQUE

My father was quiet and reserved,
which suited his calling as a
healer.

DULCE

Then you take after your mother?

MONIQUE

Desiree Santa María López Monique
de Garcia was the first woman in
Leon, both city and province, to
earn a law degree. She brooked no
disrespect, in or out of court.

DULCE

No wonder your father was so quiet.

Monique smiles and Dulce responds in kind. Which is when the
door slams open and Evelyn powers in, dressed for travel in a
carriage dress and wide brimmed bonnet. She glowers at the
bath water.

EVELYN

Black as coal. As expected.

MONIQUE

I'll be done and dressed in time
for breakfast, Evelyn.

EVELYN

No, you will not be dressed, you
will be covered. Acceptable wear is
available in town at Adele's. I've
scheduled a noon appointment with
their dress makers.

She grabs a sponge and shoves it at Dulce.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Her back. Do the best you can.

As she marches out, Monique shrugs at Dulce.

MONIQUE

My mother would have adored her.

They share a laugh. Their first.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Lucero is driving the Phaeton; Dulce seated beside him, Monique and Evelyn in back. As they pass the black plumes rising in the distance, Monique frowns. Faces Evelyn.

MONIQUE

That smoke. What does it signify?

EVELYN

Some nuisance in the barrio, the land grant the Spanish locals occupy. They have their ways, none of which matter or make sense. Please disregard.

Monique catches Dulce's eye. And registers her distress.

EXT. HIDALGO STREET - DAY

As the phaeton joins the heavy traffic in the busy street, Monique surveys the boardwalk filled with a rich variety of farmers, tradesmen, vaqueros, soiled doves, and proper women.

But its the entrance of a saloon that catches her eye. Reno, Bass, and Virgil lounge before its split door, gulping beer from pewter steins.

Monique nods to Evelyn.

MONIQUE

Those men there. Who are they?

EVELYN

Thieves and vagabonds. Their kind roll across these hills like so many tumbleweeds.

MONIQUE

How do they make their living?

EVELYN

Any way they please.

Reno Poole spots Monique, makes a sharp comment to his men, and they all enjoy a nasty laugh.

EXT. ADELE'S DRESS SHOP - DAY

While the phaeton parks outside the store, Monique reacts to the sizeable crowd of young women visible past its windows.

MONIQUE

Is Adele tendering a merchant's offer?

EVELYN

These young ladies represent the best families in this community. I have arranged this introduction so they may assist you in preparing for your presentation to society.

MONIQUE

Presentation?

EVELYN

Your cotillion ball. Which I have scheduled for three days hence.

As Lucero helps Evelyn out of the phaeton, Monique fires a horrified look at Dulce, who simply shrugs.

INT. ADELE'S - DAY

As Monique and Evelyn enter, the young women packed into the store explode in a cacophony of greetings.

ZENOBIA

Evelyn, where is she?

HARRIETT

Where's Monique?

ROSALIE

Beckon her in.

VERA

Long lost granddaughter, come forth!

Raucous laughter. Evelyn gestures for quiet. Points at Monique.

EVELYN

She's here.

ZENOBIA

Who's here?

EVELYN

Monique. My granddaughter. Monique Garcia Beimler.

They all stare, shocked, at our Latin looking girl. SABRINA SMITE, a silver eyed young lady cooling herself with a Chinese fan, shakes her head ruefully.

SABRINA

The "Garcia" explains everything.

CUT TO:

INT. ADELE'S - DAY

As a team of dress makers carefully measure every curve and line of Monique's frame, the women gather around, chattering.

ROSALIE

You must inform us as to the latest fashions in New Orleans.

HARRIETT

Is the high bustle in or out?

VERA

Are corsets bone or steel framed?

ZENOBIA

Is the belted waist still in vogue?

ROSALIE

What is a woman's primary need?

MONIQUE

Milk.

A pause. Confused looks all around.

ROSALIE

Milk?

MONIQUE

For the women I knew their primary need was to provide milk for their children, whether from their breasts or other means.

Scandalized, Evelyn struggles to provide cover...

EVELYN

New Orleans. A place renowned for
its brash and daring humor.

SABRINA

And its epidemics. I hear the
yellow fever is still raging there.

Tension rises in the room. Even Evelyn takes offense.

EVELYN

This is not a proper subject for
gracious conversation, Sabrina.

SABRINA

I apologize, Mrs. Beimler. I was
simply offering your granddaughter
the opportunity to share her
personal perspective on this
blight.

MONIQUE

You desire an education on bronze
john?

Sabrina fans herself with studied disinterest.

SABRINA

Whatever you wish to call it.

MONIQUE

Initial symptoms. Extreme body
heat, chills, headaches, nausea...

EVELYN

Monique...

MONIQUE

In terminal cases, yellow skin,
intense pain, bleeding gums...

SABRINA

And in less than two weeks, half
the community is infected.

(to Monique's look)

We have our own experience with the
disease.

MONIQUE

(alarmed)

Bronze john is here?

VERA

Oh Lord no, not here.

ZENOBIA

In the stinking, filthy barrio
where it belongs.

ROSALIE

It would never come here.

SABRINA

Let alone afflict normal people.

Monique's anger rises beyond her control.

MONIQUE

Normal people? You mean like those
whose hearts break when their loved
ones perish? Who bury the dead but
still press bravely on, tending the
sick? The incurable, doomed sick?
Like the child, this amazing child,
I watched suffer and die, never
losing hope, no matter the pain or
indignity she was forced to
endure...

(takes a breath)

Tell me, ladies, how would you
fare? How would you behave were a
plague to shatter your world? What
would you do? *What would you do?*

A stunned silence. Which Evelyn breaks.

EVELYN

We are done here.

She grabs her granddaughter's arm and leads her out.

EXT. HIDALGO STREET - TRAVELING - DAY

As Evelyn marches Monique off down the street, Dulce and
Lucero try to follow, but she waves them off.

MONIQUE

Where are we going?

EVELYN

In Paris, tea time is referred to
as *l'heure du thé*. The hour of the
tea. A time to reflect, converse,
and imbibe. We require all three.

CUT TO:

INT. TEA SHOPPE - DAY

The women share a table; Monique pensive, Evelyn concerned. She yanks a long pin from her bonnet, then removes it.

EVELYN

You should wear a headdress. They serve fashion as well as protection from the sun or whatever...

She jabs the pin back into the bonnet with a sharp thrust.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Or whoever.

MONIQUE

Like the girl with the Chinese fan?

EVELYN

Disregard Sabrina Smite. A child of good family but poor character.

MONIQUE

And informed animus. She would not assault me with the spectre of bronze john without knowing how my parents died.

EVELYN

There are few secrets in a hamlet this size.

MONIQUE

And no safety when the fever leaves the barrio.

EVELYN

The disease is contained.

MONIQUE

Not for long...

EVELYN

And not available for polite discussion over a decent tea.

A Hispanic waiter places a pair of ceramic cups on their table and leaves. Monique watches, eyebrows raised, as Evelyn refreshes hers with the contents of a brandy flask.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Pour vivre bien il faut aimer une bonne boisson.

MONIQUE

To live well one must love drink.

Her own eyebrows raised, Evelyn pours a dash in Monique's cup. As they sip, the young woman nods.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

A fine Armagnac.

EVELYN

I'm surprised.

MONIQUE

That I speak French or that I possess a taste for distilled wine?

EVELYN

That my son allowed any form of liquor inside his home. He was a severe teetotaler.

MONIQUE

Merlot at mid day, Chablis for supper, brandy after. If my mother would have it, then so it was.

EVELYN

I met her but once. At your parents' wedding. Regal, fine-necked, perfect skin, well versed in four languages...

MONIQUE

You hated her.

EVELYN

Please offer your evidence.

MONIQUE

You've avoided any contact with her since before my birth.

EVELYN

Desiree and I did have our issues.

MONIQUE

You were too much alike.

EVELYN

That was one.

MONIQUE

And she supported my father in anything he wished to do.

EVELYN

Which included running a free clinic off family property. My property.

MONIQUE

You could have stopped him with a writ similar to the one that brought me here.

EVELYN

And driven him even further from me than that pestilential city on the Gulf. When I heard of the latest and worst plague, I finally acted. Too late. Much too late.

(pained)

I know you might not believe this, but I did love him. My son. My only child. That damn, damn city...

She trails off, eyes wet. Monique takes her hand.

MONIQUE

I'm sorry, Evelyn.

EVELYN

For what? Being my grandchild? Being alive? Don't be foolish. And as for that Evelyn business, you may call me grandmother.

(stern)

But only when we are alone.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEA SHOPPE - DAY

When Monique exits the shoppe, she practically runs into Billy, who doffs his hat and smiles.

BILLY

Ma'am.

MONIQUE

Billy.

BILLY

I am pleased to see you well.

MONIQUE

And I am pleased to take this opportunity to beg your forgiveness. I did not properly thank you for your help yesterday.

BILLY

I appreciate your candor and your tone. Good day.

After he moves on up the boardwalk, Monique joins Dulce and Lucero. Who look shocked, even frightened.

DULCE

You know *him*? You know Waco Jack?

MONIQUE

He goes by Billy.

LUCERO

But kills by Waco Jack.

DULCE

He is a lethal pistoleer.

LUCERO

One who has slain men all over Texas.

DULCE

Odessa, Bejar, Galveston...

LUCERO

Three in Abilene.

DULCE

In a single night!

MONIQUE

(astonished)

This can't be true!

DULCE

(crossing herself)

True as death.

Monique is reeling as they watch Billy enter the largest brick building in town, which is signed *THE WARREN BANK*.

MONIQUE

(horrified)

Are we about to witness a robbery?

DULCE

He would never rob *that* bank.

Before Monique can inquire as to why, Evelyn hurries from the shoppe with a bag of sweets.

EVELYN

No tea is complete without sour
drops. To home and hearth, Lucero.

As Lucero helps Evelyn into the phaeton, she gestures impatiently at Monique and Dulce.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Don't just stand there like a pair
of sleepy sheep. Come now.

Dulce and Monique climb into the phaeton, and it rolls away. While it passes the bank, Monique looks through its windows to catch a glimpse of Billy inside it, lighting a cigar. Their eyes lock. She quickly turns away, but she can feel his gaze follow her, stalking her, all the way out of town.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

As the phaeton bumps across the road, Monique eyes Evelyn.

MONIQUE

You drove him away how? My father.
You said you drove him to New
Orleans.

Evelyn considers, sighs, and answers.

EVELYN

The Navarro family established the Milagro Rancho in 1691 on the same day Spain appointed the first governor of Texas. Strong people the Navarro's. Strong enough to survive contagion, drought and flood. But not the Comanche. Your great grandfather, Victor Adolph Beimler, was not afraid of the Comanche or anything else. He took over the rancho and built it into this state's largest cattle enterprise. A birthright any child should be thrilled to inherit.

MONIQUE

Should?

EVELYN

My son was addicted to science and medicine from an early age. Before Fritz could walk, he was examining ants with a convex glass. On one occasion, he set fire to the porch.

(as Monique laughs)

I was not amused then or later, when he insisted on attending Harvard Medical School. Or marrying your mother. Or leaving my house. But the harder I held on, the less hold I had.

MONIQUE

Now you have a hold on me.

EVELYN

You're all I have left.

MONIQUE

You have a husband.

Evelyn snorts with derision.

EVELYN

That buffoon? My bedwarmer, nothing more. Soon as I change my will, he'll be less than that. Birthrights don't travel to fools.

MONIQUE

But what do you expect of me?

EVELYN

That you'll allow me to protect you. And your birthright.

(tapping her foot)

Increase speed, Lucero. We will be late for supper.

Lucero snaps his whip and the phaeton races ahead. As she ponders Evelyn's words, Monique gazes at the horizon.

The plumes of black smoke are still rising toward the sky.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Konrad and Monique are seated at the trestle table with Evelyn, who is tapping her spoon impatiently against her empty dinner plate. She glances out a window.

EVELYN

The sun has set. Unconscionable.

Konrad shrugs as he pours himself a glass of wine.

KONRAD

I've heard that the evening meal in Paris is called dinner and served after nightfall.

EVELYN

I prefer supper. Now.

(calling)

Dulce! Dulce! Are you deaf, girl?

Dulce enters, visibly pale and shaken.

DULCE

Many pardons, signora. The food will be served soon.

EVELYN

Soon? As in an hour past?

DULCE

Many apologies. There has been a problem in the kitchen.

As Dulce disappears, Evelyn scowls at Monique.

EVELYN

Now you know why I handed the cook her notice.

Concerned, Monique rises and follows Dulce into...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

... where she finds the servant girl comforting a weeping Paola.

MONIQUE

What's the problem here?

DULCE

Paola's daughter. She is very sick. The yellow fever.

MONIQUE
What does the doctor say?

DULCE
There are no doctors in the barrio.

Monique is shocked, even horrified.

MONIQUE
But there must be a doctor in town.

DULCE
He won't help. Why would he? The
barrio is beneath anyone's notice.

MONIQUE
Not mine.

DULCE
Even if that is so, what assistance
can you provide? You are no doctor.

Before Monique can respond...

EVELYN (O.S.)
Monique! Come here! Monique!

MONIQUE
I'll be right back.

She hurries out...

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

... to discover Angus Warren standing beside Evelyn. Konrad
still sits at the trestle table, drinking.

EVELYN
Look who decided to pay us a visit.

ANGUS
I know it's quite late, but I was
impatient for you to meet my son.
He has been conducting family
business in Abilene. Returned only
yesterday.

As he beckons off, Monique turns to face...

... Billy, the man in black, the fearsome shootist known as
Waco Jack! As Monique gapes at him, Angus smiles easily.

ANGUS (CONT'D)
Monique Beimler, Billy Warren.

Billy doffs his hat.

BILLY
Pleased to make proper
acquaintance, Miss Beimler.

EVELYN
Disregard all ceremony, young man.
Feel free to call her Monique.
And Monique, you may greet him in a
similar fashion.
(a frown)
Has the cat stolen your tongue,
girl? Offer a greeting.

MONIQUE
Hello... Billy.

A long beat. Konrad shrugs.

KONRAD
Better than nothing.

Angus reaches for his hat.

ANGUS
We'll be on your way then. A good
evening, all.

He leaves. Billy takes Monique's hand.

BILLY
Until we meet again, Monique.

He kisses her hand and follows his father out. Evelyn beams.

EVELYN
A fine young man. A great match.

MONIQUE
Match?

EVELYN
We'll publish the banns in
September. I'll order your
trousseau out of Chicago; Adele's
will simply not suffice. Only the
best for my granddaughter.

The ground shifts beneath Monique's feet.

MONIQUE
You can't be serious!

EVELYN
I see no humor in announcing an
engagement.

MONIQUE
I don't see it at all. I'm not
marrying this, this Waco Jack.

Konrad laughs, but Evelyn scowls.

EVELYN
His father prefers Billy. As do I.

MONIQUE
You prefer a pistoleer?

EVELYN
He's nothing of the like.

MONIQUE
He's killed men all over Texas.

EVELYN
Rumors.

MONIQUE
Three in Abilene in one night!

EVELYN
Nonsense.

MONIQUE
Just look at him. Can't you see?

EVELYN
I see a boy from a good family with
rich prospects. You should be
thankful.

MONIQUE
Thankful?

EVELYN
For the heir to a bank, a hotel,
and a water company? You better be.

Monique has reached the third stage of Kubler Ross.

MONIQUE
I can't believe this! I will not
believe this!

EVELYN

Reality beggars belief.

(to Konrad)

Tell the cook I've lost my
appetite. Which is fortunate
considering she's decided to starve
us out.

Evelyn starts to leave, but Monique stops her.

MONIQUE

Grandmother... I was actually
beginning to think you cared about
me.

Evelyn's tone turns gentle.

EVELYN

What would happen if I pass on with
you still mired in maiden status?
Every cut throat in this county
would descend on this place and
have their way with you.

MONIQUE

I can take care of myself.

EVELYN

That's what I said two husbands
ago. One way or another, they died
in service to my survival.

MONIQUE

And your birthright?

EVELYN

Which will be yours now. Whether
you like it or not.

She leaves. Konrad grins and raises his glass.

KONRAD

Proactive. That's my Evelyn.

Monique stumbles out...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

... to rejoin Paola and Dulce; their shocked expressions
clear.

DULCE

I knew Signora Beimler was a hard woman, but Waco Jack as a husband?

PAOLA

Madre de dios!

MONIQUE

Tell Lucero to hitch up the phaeton.

DULCE

You're running away?

MONIQUE

Just do as I say.

She hurries out.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Monique finishes packing her carpet bag, the Juneau doll the final and clearly most cherished item. She then reaches under the bed for her father's medical case. Carrying both bags, she crosses to the door. Suddenly stops. Turns to face...

... Bridget O'Mara. The little girl in the burlap sack dress is seated on the edge of the bed. Watching her.

Monique's features set. Hard and committed.

MONIQUE

Not again. Never again.

EXT. MILAGRO RANCHERO - RANCH HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

The Phaeton is hitched and ready to go, Lucero at its reins. Dulce and Paola observe as Monique approaches.

DULCE

You'll have a long wait at the station. Trains don't run tomorrow.

MONIQUE

I'm not taking a train. You're taking me to the barrio.

PAOLA

Why would you ever go there?

MONIQUE
 For your daughter, Paola. And
 anyone else who may need my help.

Monique climbs into the phaeton. Shoots a look at Dulce as she taps the seat beside her.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)
 Well?

As Dulce clambers into the phaeton and it rolls away, Paola crosses herself in a desperate hope.

INT. PHAETON - TRAVELING - NIGHT

An astonished Dulce stares at a calm Monique, who responds...

MONIQUE
 Two years at the London School of
 Medicine for Women. Top of my
 class. I would have graduated Magna
 Cum Laude if I had not returned
 home to assist my father in his
 battle against the bronze john.

DULCE
 Why are you telling me this?

MONIQUE
 To prove that when I say I can help
 I am not insane.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARRIO ZOCALO - NIGHT

A long established and extensive settlement of simply constructed adobe and wood dwellings built around a village square, or zocalo.

There are many fires, but not for cooking. Steel drums are belching smoke toward the sky; people tending them with tired gestures and haunted eyes.

Sounds of mourning and pain are mixed together with the crackle of the fires. This is a community in turmoil.

The phaeton arrives and the girls dismount. Monique immediately reacts to the air of torment and devastation.

MONIQUE
 The sick are housed where?

DULCE

The church was the only place large enough.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The big doors swing open to reveal rows of filthy pallets covered with moaning patients, many of them elderly. Flies buzz in the air, the fetid stench almost visible.

Dulce leads in Monique, who almost gags at the reek of illness and death. Covering her mouth with a kerchief, she surveys these benighted people until her gaze settles on...

... Bridget O'Mara. The tiny ghost in the sack dress stands in the center of the room, staring at Monique accusingly. "Do something" her eyes seem to be saying.

Furious and determined, Monique glares at Dulce.

MONIQUE

Who is in charge here?

INT. HACIENDA - STUDY - NIGHT

The largest, finest house in the barrio; its drapes, carpets, and furniture all shipped here at great expense from Madrid. The furnishings match the quality of the silk robe and slippers worn by ENRIQUE JUAN MANUEL GORDILLO, the Alcalde, the barrio's mayor, as he lounges behind his mahogany Louis XVI desk, glaring at Dulce and Monique.

GORDILLO

Young lady, it is only due to the great respect that I have for your *abuela* that I climbed out of a warm bed for this pointless meeting.

MONIQUE

You would describe curbing an epidemic as pointless?

DULCE

She simply wants to help, Alcalde.

GORDILLO

We require no help.

MONIQUE

The dozens of sick and dying in your church would say otherwise.

Gordillo rises and crosses to a bar. As he pours carbonated water from a Cobb-neck bottle into a clear glass, bubbles gather inside it.

GORDILLO
They are being dealt with.

MONIQUE
With which doctors and what medicine?

GORDILLO
When I finish drinking this glass of tonic, this meeting is over.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)
As is your career as the mayor of this community.

Gordillo is shocked as much by her Spanish as her statement.

GORDILLO (IN SPANISH)
You have no power here.

MONIQUE
But my grandmother does. A single word from me, and you'll be slicing pork in a *carnicería*.

The man turns pale.

GORDILLO
What do you wish of me?

MONIQUE
Nothing. Drink your tonic, go back to bed, and leave the real work to the women.

She stalks out. Dulce grins at the shamefaced Gordillo before she follows.

EXT. HACIENDA - NIGHT

Dulce has to run to join Monique as she hurries along.

DULCE
When the Alcalde contacts Signora Beimler...

MONIQUE
She'll send someone to drag me home.

(MORE)

MONIQUE (CONT'D)
Until that happens, we do what we
can. Starting with sanitation...

CUT TO:

EXT. BARRIO ZOCALO - MONTAGE - NIGHT

QUICK SHOTS of water being drawn from open wells, poured into
iron kettles, then heated over open fires.

MONIQUE (V.O.)
First, we'll need water. Massive
quantities of water. Boiled to
steam.

INT. CHURCH - MONTAGE - NIGHT

QUICK SHOTS of bedding being aired, sheets and utensils
boiled in the iron kettles, floors being scrubbed.

MONIQUE (V.O.)
Every inch of that church, every
shred of bedding, every utensil and
instrument must be cleaned white.

EXT. BARRIO ZOCALO - MONTAGE - NIGHT

The steel drums. Belching smoke into the air.

DULCE (V.O.)
What about the tar fires?

MONIQUE (V.O.)
Useless. Extinguish them.

QUICK CUTS -- barrel after barrel are knocked over, flurries
of red sparks rising toward the night sky.

DULCE (V.O.)
And what then?

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Several village women, their faces shielded behind hand made
surgical masks, tend to the sick. Also wearing masks, Dulce
and Monique move past the pallets.

MONIQUE
We hydrate and provide pain relief.

DULCE
That's all?

MONIQUE
Bronze john is a malignant malady
beyond any known cure. All we can
do is tend and hope...

A child's cry cuts through her like a knife. She rushes to a
pallet and a six year old girl thrashing in pain.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)
Water!

As Dulce brings a cup, Monique feels the girl's forehead and
reacts to the sweaty heat.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)
How long has this child been sick?

DULCE
A week.

MONIQUE
And she's still alive? A strong
girl.

DULCE
Takes after her mother. This is
Paola's baby. Gabriel.

Monique reacts with distress. Tries to sponge the heat off
the child's head. Frowns as Dulce starts to serve Gabriel a
dose of white powder in a small cup.

MONIQUE
What's this?

DULCE
Willow bark. For pain relief.

MONIQUE
For hemorrhage and death. That's an
anticoagulant. She'll rupture
internally and vomit blood.

DULCE
But we've been giving all the sick
willow bark since the disease
appeared. With no ill effect.

A scream at another pallet as two of the women are forced to
hold down a man while he thrashes and babbles. Monique and
Dulce rush to his side.

MONIQUE

You have any sedatives? Bromide,
opium, even alcohol?

DULCE

There is pulque. Fermented agave.

MONIQUE

That will do.

While the women hold the man down, Dulce grabs a bottle and pours its contents into a glass. As Monique serves it to the patient, and he starts to calm down, she shakes her head.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

Why is he so agitated?

DULCE

They're all like this when the
sickness begins. They yell, they
fight, they even see things.

MONIQUE

But that's not proper to the fever.

DULCE

There is a proper yellow fever?

Before Monique can respond, she notices a woman bring in a bucket of water that is not steaming.

MONIQUE

Has that water been heated?
(to woman's confusion, in
Spanish)
Did you heat that water?

WOMAN (IN SPANISH)

I took it from the spring. I know
it was wrong, but it must be safe.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)

Safe for the mosquitos to lay their
eggs. Not to drink.

The Woman and Dulce exchange confused looks.

WOMAN (IN SPANISH)

What mosquitos?

CUT TO:

EXT. SOLEDAD SPRING - DAWN

The sun is rising over a sizeable body of water, more a small lake than a spring, nestled at the base of rolling, green covered hills. Dulce observes as Monique kneels beside the spring and runs her hand through its water.

MONIQUE

Clear. Not stagnant.

DULCE

An aquifer beneath those hills feeds this spring.

MONIQUE

(thoughtful)

Free running water. No mosquitoes.

DULCE

Why do such vermin matter to you?

MONIQUE

Not to me but to Carlos Finley, a Cuban doctor who posits that the genus Aedes, a breed of mosquito, is a carrier for yellow fever.

DULCE

This Finley, he has proved this?

MONIQUE

Not proved or verified. I only know of his theory thanks to letters he exchanged with my father.

DULCE

So the mosquitos are of no concern.

MONIQUE

Especially when they're not here. How much water does the barrio draw from this spring?

DULCE

Not a drop. The Alcalde signed our rights away to the gringos in town.

MONIQUE

To blazes with the Alcalde. From now on, we restrict your people to this source and nothing else.

DULCE

And our wells?

MONIQUE
Seal them for now.

DULCE
What are you thinking?

MONIQUE
What Finley thinks. That stagnant water relates to the spread of bronze john.

DULCE
Our wells are not stagnant.

MONIQUE
But is their water safe? I'll require samples to make sure.

DULCE
You were right.

MONIQUE
About what?

DULCE
You needed to prove you're not insane.

They share a smile. As they move off...

... Enrique Gordillo, the barrio's Alcalde, stands on a nearby hill, watching them go, his face dark with fury. He turns and climbs down the back of the hill...

... to join Reno, Bass and Virgil; their horses at hand. The Alcalde yanks a saddle bag, its twin pouches full, off his own horse and hands it to Reno.

GORDILLO (IN SPANISH)
You know what to do?

RENO
Spare my American ears the pidgin greaser talk.

GORDILLO
Go to the town and do your work as our employer wishes you to do it.

RENO
Better than you here, *pendejo*.

Reno and his men mount up and ride off.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

At a makeshift desk, Monique is examining a slide in her father's microscope. She tenses and slowly looks up, sensing Bridget O'Mara, who is standing behind her. She turns to face...

... Dulce, frowning with concern.

DULCE

Well?

Monique sighs and shakes her head.

MONIQUE

Water water everywhere, all fit to drink.

DULCE

The samples are clear?

MONIQUE

Of mosquito larvae, bacteria, effluents, any conceivable contaminant. Outside of traces of iron and plant matter, which you would expect in ground water, the wells appear to be clean.

DULCE

That is good.

MONIQUE

That is confusing. Like everything else about this outbreak. Yellow fever has two stages. First phase; fever, headache, chills, back pain. Second, toxic phase, extreme fever, jaundice, abdominal pain, bleeding in the mouth, the eyes, and the intestines, *vomito negro*...

DULCE

But no one is vomiting blood.

MONIQUE

And there is no second phase. No jaundice, no stomach pain, no extreme death rate. Half our patients should be gone by now.

DULCE

We've only lost a few people. Mostly the very old.

MONIQUE

While bronze john feasts on the young. Either this is a relatively benign form of the fever...

DULCE

Or it is not the fever at all. But what is it then?

MONIQUE

I have no idea. But in germ theory there is always an answer. I'm still not sure of the water. Further analysis might...

(reacting)

Dulce, what's wrong?

The other girl is in tears.

DULCE

Me. I am wrong, I am terrible. When I met you, I saw what I wanted to see, a cold, selfish *gringa*, not your true self. A *santo*, a saint...

MONIQUE

Friend. Your friend. That is the only title I will ever accept from you.

They hug. As they separate and wipe their tears away...

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

Now. Let's get back to work.

BILLY (O.S.)

You will do no such thing.

They look up at Billy Warren, his face stern, tone cold.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You will come with me.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARRIO ZOCALO - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

As Billy drags Monique toward his waiting horse, she maintains her dignity as best she can.

MONIQUE

I expected a squad of Evelyn's
vaqueros, not a single pistoleer.

BILLY

One runaway, one pistoleer.

He stops as a crowd of people armed with farm implements, machetes, and axes gather between him and his horse. Monique can't help grinning.

MONIQUE

Which appears to be inadequate.

Her humor vanishes as Billy draws a pistol with his free hand and holds it, barrel down, by his side.

BILLY

Tell them to move or I shoot.

MONIQUE

Innocent, unarmed people?

The crowd closes in. Billy raises his weapon.

BILLY

They're not unarmed.

MONIQUE

And you're not that kind of man.

He cocks the pistol.

BILLY

You don't know me.

MONIQUE

I know you rescued a girl you'd
never met from the kind of men that
would shoot these people. Please
allow me to do as much for the sick
here.

BILLY

But you are not safe in this place.

MONIQUE

That is of little consequence.

BILLY

Not to me.

The look in his eyes make her uncomfortable in a way she doesn't understand.

MONIQUE

While we waste our breath, the sick
are losing theirs. Please let me
go.

Billy considers. Holsters his pistol. The crowd relaxes.

BILLY

Only if you allow me to help.

MONIQUE

(taken aback)

You would risk your life for a girl
you just met and people you don't
know?

Billy shrugs.

BILLY

Words fail me. I have a friend
whose words never fail, but he's
not here. If he was...

MONIQUE

He would tell you to go home.

BILLY

And I wouldn't listen. Will you
accept my help or not?

Monique considers, finally nods, and he releases her. She marches back toward the church, almost running into Dulce, who is holding a scythe.

MONIQUE

Get rid of that thing and get back
to work.

As she moves on, Dulce scowls at Billy.

DULCE

You heard her. Work.

She marches off. The crowd also moves away, leaving Billy Warren alone in the zocalo.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. ZOCALO/CHURCH/SPRING - MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

A SERIES of SHOTS as Dulce and the women tend to the sick...

... as Billy, sans his guns, gathers water at the spring, carries it to the church, pours it into the heating pots...

... Monique reads through her father's medical book, examines slides in his microscope, makes detailed notes...

... while the sick get better. They smile at their tenders. A child even laughs, an old lady rises off her pallet...

... and the pallets start to clear, the church starts to empty.

... and Monique continues her work, her search for answers.

... as Bridget O'Mara, that calm little ghost, stands behind her. Watching.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAWN

As a new sun glows past the windows, we can see the church is almost devoid of tenders and patients. Monique still sits at her makeshift desk, slaving away at her microscope. She glances up. Stiffens.

Face hidden in the shadows, a little girl stumbles toward her.

Monique rises to her feet.

MONIQUE

Bridget?

The girl steps out of the dark to reveal a tired, pale face. Gabriel. Paola's baby. Relieved if slightly disappointed, Monique places her palm against the child's forehead. Smiles.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)

You are well, Gabriel. For that you get a present.

She reaches into her carpet bag, retrieves the Juneau doll, and stares at it for a long moment. It almost physically hurts her to let this go, but Monique finally gives the doll to the little girl. Who holds it close, beaming.

A cry of surprise and relief. They turn to face Paola as she rushes to her daughter and takes her into her arms. Weeping with joy, the woman carries Gabriel away.

Monique slumps into the chair by her desk and stares into space, lost in her own exhaustion.

A child's hand appears from the dark behind her and rests on her shoulder.

Monique smiles. Understanding. Accepting.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

Goodbye.

The hand slips away, and Monique is alone again.

Until Billy Warren joins her and surveys the empty church.

BILLY

You did a fine, great thing here.

MONIQUE

I did nothing but change the barrio's water source. Which shouldn't have been enough.

BILLY

Since it was, may we leave now?

MONIQUE

Not until I learn what caused this contagion.

BILLY

You need to go home. Your grandmother is worried.

DULCE (O.S.)

Worse than that.

They face a terrified Dulce.

DULCE (CONT'D)

She's here.

INT. HACIENDA - STUDY - DAY

As Gordillo sips tonic water from his perch behind his desk, he shares an uncomfortable silence with Evelyn and Konrad, who occupy a pair of chairs. While Evelyn fumes, her husband sips from his own glass. Purrs with satisfaction.

KONRAD

Tell me, Alcalde, how did you ever procure such a fine *Licor de Orujo*? Hasn't it been banned in Spain?

GORDILLO

Banned but not forgotten.

KONRAD

Or unavailable.

They laugh together. Scowling, Evelyn takes Konrad's glass, empties it across the floor, and returns it to him. He sighs miserably as Monique enters the room with Dulce, who draws a furious glare from Evelyn.

EVELYN

Miss Sanchez, you may return to the main house and pack your things. You are no longer in my service.

MONIQUE

But she is still in mine. Or would you prefer I follow her example and leave as well?

Struggling to contain her anger, Evelyn nods to the others.

EVELYN

I would like to be alone with my granddaughter.

Gordillo and Konrad exit. Dulce hesitates but a reassuring look from Monique sends the girl on her way.

Evelyn crosses to the bar, grabs a glass and fills it. Takes a shot. Nods.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

My current husband is an utter idiot, but he's right about the Alcalde's Orujo. It's excellent.

She pours another glass and offers it to Monique, who gladly accepts. They quaff their drinks with no visible ill effect.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

At least you can manage your liquor. Which is more than I can say for your personal safety.

MONIQUE

I am in no danger here.

EVELYN
 (astonished)
 With these people and yellow fever?

MONIQUE
 These people are as human as you or
 I. And there is no fever.

EVELYN
 Then why were they sick?

MONIQUE
 If you leave me to my work, I will
 find out.

EVELYN
 No, Monique. You will take your
 leave with me. To town. In that.

She indicates the *Polonaise* gown hanging on a wall hook.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 Get dressed. Do not tarry. Your
 cotillion is but hours away.

She starts to leave. Turns back.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 Do you know how I felt the morning
 I awoke and discovered you were
 gone? I had no idea where you were,
 what you were doing, what dangers
 you were facing...

She breaks off. Monique takes her grandmother into her arms,
 and they indulge in a moment of relief and reconnection. Then
 Evelyn pulls away.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 You are just like your father.

MONIQUE
 Is that a compliment or a critique?

EVELYN
 Ask me tomorrow when I no longer
 feel like throwing you over my knee
 and paddling you with a birch
 switch.

She exits. Monique crosses to the gown hanging on the wall to caress its silk panels and lace trim. The girl smiles; even she is impressed with this garment's skill and quality.

CUT TO:

EXT. HACIENDA - DAY

Resplendent in the handsome new dress, Monique leaves the hacienda to pass its veranda. Where Konrad and Gordillo are seated at an oak table, sipping from crystal glasses. The Alcalde smiles thinly at her.

GORDILLO

A lovely day for the end of an epidemic, is it not?

Konrad shoots Gordillo a warning look, which Monique catches. Frowning, she moves on down a flagstone walk...

... to encounter Billy. Struck, he doffs his hat.

BILLY

You look as fine as any high born woman on Knob Hill.

MONIQUE

What would you know of high born women?

BILLY

That none match you in character or courage.

MONIQUE

I could say the same for you as well. I thank you for your help.

BILLY

And I am pleased and honored to know you. I only wish... things could be different.

MONIQUE

Different?

BILLY

There is something I must tell you. A great guilt I must admit to.

MONIQUE

I know.

BILLY
 (shocked)
 You *know*?

MONIQUE
 The men you've killed, the lives
 you've taken. I know all about it.

To her astonishment, Billy laughs heartily.

BILLY
 If only it was that simple.

Before the girl can respond...

EVELYN (O.S.)
 Monique.

She turns to face the phaeton; Evelyn seated under its barouche top, Dulce and Lucero in the driver's position. As her grandmother waves impatiently, Monique nods to Billy.

MONIQUE
 Until our next meeting.

BILLY
 Which will be sooner than you
 think.

Not sure how to answer that, Monique climbs into the phaeton and sits across from Evelyn, who nods approvingly.

EVELYN
 That Polonaise, it suits you.

MONIQUE
 Thank you, Evelyn.

EVELYN
 May we finally leave now?

MONIQUE
 Only if Dulce joins us.

From the driver's seat, Dulce shoots a frightened look at Evelyn, who rolls her eyes and sighs. She gestures at Dulce, who clambers down and sits beside Monique.

EVELYN
 (calling)
 Konrad? Where are you? We must
 leave this place. Konrad!

KONRAD (O.S.)

Coming.

Konrad strolls up with Gordillo, the two men all smiles.

GORDILLO

Be assured, my friend. I receive my next shipment I will make certain to send a bottle your way.

KONRAD

Beware. I may test it for purity.

GORDILLO

My best to our friend Marsh.

Konrad's smile fades for but a moment, but then the man laughs before he mounts the Phaeton. Evelyn glowers.

EVELYN

At last! Lucero! *Vamos!*

The carriage launches itself down the track that leads out of the barrio. As they ride along, Konrad's eyes suddenly widen.

KONRAD

Dear Lord!

Every man, woman, and child in the barrio is standing on each side of the road, quiet and expectant. As the phaeton passes each member of the community, they bow their heads in turn, the men removing their hats, the women clenching their hands over their hearts.

Not a word is spoken but the message, the sincere gratitude, is crystal clear.

Konrad shares a confused frown with Evelyn.

EVELYN

What strange business is this?

DULCE

They are offering their thanks. To her.

She indicates Monique, who is beyond surprised. It is a short journey down the road past these people, but the emotions it creates in Monique are profound.

As they leave the barrio, its clear the moment has had a huge impact on Evelyn as well. Her eyes lock with her granddaughter's. Nothing need be said.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT OUTSIDE SOLEDAD SPRINGS - NIGHT

The lights of the town are visible in the distance. A horseman glides out of the dark. Reno Poole reacts to the voices echoing across the desert. Rides toward them.

EXT. TOWN HALL - MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

This is the largest structure in the community with a roofed portico supported by wooden Doric columns. A fleet of horse traps, victorias, landaus, and broughams are disgorging a sizeable and colorful crowd.

Men and women dressed at the height of eastern fashion are climbing the wide limestone steps that provide access to the hall.

Reno rides by, offering the busy hall a cool appraisal as he goes. He continues on down the street.

EXT. SALOON - NIGHT

Bass and Virgil watch while Reno dismounts and joins them.

BASS

Done?

RENO

Smooth as sassafras.

VIRGIL

What now?

RENO

We wait.

He lights a cheroot. Stares at the Town Hall.

EXT. TOWN HALL - MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Lucero and Dulce stand by the phaeton, observing the best of Soledad Spring society parade past. The older man reacts to the girl's tense expression.

LUCERO (IN SPANISH)
 If she can defeat the fever, she
 can handle anything.

DULCE (IN SPANISH)
 The fever targets the body. These
 people, they will attack her pride.

Off Dulce's concern, we go to...

INT. TOWN HALL = SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

... a frustrated Monique, who is bowing before an angry Evelyn.

EVELYN
 Like a swan! I keep telling you,
 girl, it's as if a swan were
 genuflecting. Try again. Dip, dip!

Monique bows and dips. Evelyn scowls.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 Instead of a swan dipping for grace
 we get a chicken pecking for seed.

MONIQUE
 I'm bending as far as I can.

EVELYN
 (sighs)
 If one wants something done...

She spreads her arms.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 Face the audience. Hand your
 bouquet to your escort.

She mimes handing a invisible bouquet to an unseen escort.
 Then performs the rest of the ritual as she outlines it for
 Monique...

EVELYN (CONT'D)
 Arms forward, level with the floor.
 Cross your ankles, spread your
 arms, and bend at the knees. Sink
 gracefully to the floor while
 maintaining eye contact with those
 in attendance. Lower your forehead
 to the floor, then bring it up
 again. And smile, always smile.

Evelyn has executed the procedure perfectly. Even Monique is impressed.

MONIQUE

That looked wonderful. What's next?

Evelyn looks up from the floor, face flexed with discomfort.

EVELYN

You help me up!

Monique pulls the older woman to her feet.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Any questions?

MONIQUE

Just one. Who's my escort?

EXT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Dressed to the nines in a black stetson, tailcoat and boots, Billy Warren rides up on his stallion, dismounts, and ties it off at one of the town hall's hitching posts. As he enters the hall he tips his hat to Dulce and Lucero. Who shrugs...

LUCERO (IN SPANISH)

At least he dresses well.

DULCE (IN SPANISH)

For a killer.

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - NIGHT

Large enough to contain half the town's population. Refreshment tables line the walls, a dance area has been cleared in the center of the room, and a stairway leads to a second floor balcony.

As he enters, Billy makes a big impression on the crowd, especially the women, many of whom whisper to each other from behind their Chinese fans.

Angus Warren approaches him. Indicates the tailcoat.

ANGUS

Galt & Gieves?

BILLY

You should know. It's yours.

ANGUS
 (grinning)
 Excellent choice.

As Billy moves on, Sabrina Smite and her friends, who we met in Adele's dress shop, surround him.

ROSALIE
 Billy Warren, as I live and breathe.

HARRIETT
 It's been so many weeks since you made your presence known.

VERA
 Will you be in town long?

ZENOBIA
 Who will you be escorting tonight?

Sabrina takes his arm.

SABRINA
 An absurd question, considering the finest families in this community are the Smites and the Warrens and the two go together like twin roses in a single vase.

Billy looks up at the balcony, grins, then gently removes Sabrina's arm from his.

BILLY
 You must excuse me. I have a prior commitment.

As he climbs the stairway, the girls all look up to see Monique standing on the balcony, holding a rose bouquet. While Sabrina goes pale with rage, her friends shrug.

ZENOBIA
 The Smites and the Warrens may be the finest.

ROSALIE
 But the Beimplers are the richest.

INT. SECOND FLOOR BALCONY - NIGHT

Billy joins Monique, who offers him an anxious look.

BILLY

Ready?

MONIQUE

No.

Smiling, he takes her arm, and they head down the stairs.

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - NIGHT

The sizeable crowd goes silent as Billy escorts Monique down the stairs, a journey that seemingly takes forever.

On the main floor, Evelyn joins Konrad, who is sipping from a glass abrim with whiskey. She watches her granddaughter anxiously, hoping for the best.

Sabrina and her cadre of friends also watch, hoping for the worst.

As Billy and Monique reach the bottom of the stairs, the girl hands her bouquet to her escort, faces those in attendance, smiles, and dips. Arms spread, ankles crossed, head bowed. Every move perfectly addressed. When she finally rises to her feet, the crowd applauds enthusiastically.

Sabrina fumes. If looks could kill.

With a relieved grin, Evelyn grabs Konrad's glass and gulps its contents down.

An equally relieved Monique retrieves her bouquet from Billy.

BILLY

Welcome to society.

MONIQUE

A short visit I hope.

As an amateur quartet launches into an Austrian waltz, couples flood the dance area.

BILLY

Do you dance?

MONIQUE

Reluctantly.

He takes her into his arms and off they go. We follow them across the floor, sweeping past the other couples. The music, the colors, the light; it's all so grand, elegant, and exhilarating.

Monique finds herself lost in the moment, lost in Billy's embrace. Headed she knows not where.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN HALL - ROOF - THAT NIGHT

As Monique and Billy leave a stairwell, the girl reacts to the star filled heavens above.

BILLY

Was I correct? Is this not amazing?

MONIQUE

I must admit I've never seen anything like this in New Orleans.

BILLY

(quoting)

Tw'as noontide of summer and mid-time of night and stars in their orbits shone pale thro' the light.

MONIQUE

(quoting)

I gazed awhile on her cold smile; too cold, too cold for me.

(grim)

Did you truly think a star filled sky and a few lines of Poe would empty my head of all reason and logic?

BILLY

A man can hope.

MONIQUE

And a woman can choose. My mother told me life is about compromise save when it comes to pride and romance. On the first, I could offer concession if need be.

BILLY

But not romance.

MONIQUE

Which rarely flourishes under forced circumstance.

BILLY

You are referring to our engagement.

MONIQUE

I do not share our families' enthusiasm for derived dynasty and combined fortune.

BILLY

Or relish the opportunity to marry a Waco Jack. A man of violent reputation.

MONIQUE

Reason dictates otherwise.

He steps closer to her.

BILLY

Reason? Not lack of feeling or attraction?

MONIQUE

(uncomfortable)

Without reason, we are animals.

BILLY

Without love, we are not alive.

As he leans down to kiss her, she almost acquiesces. Then she comes to her senses and shoves him away.

MONIQUE

In the last year I've witnessed more "love" than most people see in a lifetime. The kind displayed in unspeakable misery at the death of a child, husband, wife, or parent. The kind expressed over funeral pyres, graves and death portraits. I myself experienced that wondrous emotion in all its poetic glory as I buried it with my own parents and good riddance to it. I've traversed an ocean of tears, a sea of sadness. No more. Not one more tear. If we're not alive without love, I prefer to be the living dead.

She walks away and back down the stairwell.

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - NIGHT

Flushed, Monique approaches a refreshment table. As she ladles punch into a crystal stem, Konrad joins her, brandy glass in hand. He taps the punch bowl.

KONRAD

Lime, sugar, water, ambergris, and gin. Traditional punch. Once a British sailor's drink designed to ward off scurvy and the ocean's chill; now a mixed spirit served at elegant functions so the hoi polloi may so finely and politely drink themselves insensible.

MONIQUE

You do not approve?

Eyes turning cold, Konrad stares at the crowd.

KONRAD

Of alcohol and merriment? Of course. But this assemblage? They never approve. Of people like me, you, the Alcalde, the divergent, the different, the lesser born. A drink fit for a drunken sailor, that they'll accept. A self educated escapee from an impoverished hollow in Kentucky such as yours truly? Never.

He catches Monique's look, slips a smile back on his face.

KONRAD (CONT'D)

Enjoy the punch. It suits you.

As he moves off, Billy steps up. Reacts to Monique's frown.

BILLY

Something askance with the punch?

MONIQUE

Haven't had a taste.

BILLY

A fact we shall rectify together.

He reaches for a stem.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Our acquaintance has been short and eventful, Monique, but it's clear to me what an amazing, even unique woman you happen to be, and how our marriage would be anything but a mistake. I will tell my father there will be no engagement.

He ladles punch into the stem.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Shall we drink to it?

She hesitates. Billy is surprised.

BILLY (CONT'D)

It is what you want, isn't it?

Confused by her own reluctance, Monique raises her glass.

MONIQUE

To no engagement.

BILLY

To no engagement.

They are about to drink when a spoon strikes crystal.

SABRINA (O.S.)

Allow me to gain your attention.

Sabrina has taken a position in the center of the dance floor, tapping a silver spoon against her stem glass. Her voice is high, her eyes too bright.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

We are gathered here to witness the public presentation of Monique Garcia Beimler, the youngest member of one of our community's most illustrious families. A toast should be in order.

She wobbles on her feet. Monique asides to Billy.

MONIQUE

What is wrong with her?

BILLY

Too much punch.

Sabrina regains her aplomb and linguistic momentum.

SABRINA

But what is a toast? To quote Mr. Raleigh's superlative text, "American Etiquette and Rules of Politeness," a toast is a formal ritual in which a drink is taken as an expression of honor or goodwill. However, I must ask you, good people. Is there honor in toasting a woman whose father wasted life and limb on the wretched poor? Is there goodwill in the soul of an individual who possesses no respect for the provisions of class and society that govern our community?

Eyes ablaze, she advances on Monique.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

Mr. Raleigh devotes ten rules to the proper performance of a true toast, but the first supersedes all the rest. Your glass must be full.

She tosses the contents of her glass in Monique's face. The crowd reacts, horrified, but Sabrina simply smiles.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

Oh, my. Can't do the toast now.

An enraged Evelyn presses forward and confronts the girl.

EVELYN

Leave this place at once, you drunken fool.

Monique steps between them and stares into Sabrina's eyes. Which are red and extremely dilated.

MONIQUE

She's not drunk. Look at her eyes.

Sabrina tries to slap Monique, who easily ducks the blow.

SABRINA

Get away from me, you witch! You don't deserve him. We grew up together, shared childhoods together. He's mine! You can't have him. He's mine...

Billy tries to step in.

BILLY

Sabrina...

She shoves him away.

SABRINA

Don't touch me. I need Billy.
Where's Billy? I don't see Billy!

She suddenly collapses into a refreshment table. Punch bowls, stems, and plates fly, the crowd screams. Monique bends over a comatose and trembling Sabrina. Feels her forehead.

MONIQUE

She's afire.

Zenobia is the first to scream it out.

ZENOBIA

The fever! She has the fever!

Howls of terror arise as the cotillion's participants rush for the exits, knocking aside chairs and tables, smashing through doors and against windows. People literally trample each other to escape. Utter chaos.

EXT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Lucero and Dulce react as the high society of Soledad Springs flees the town hall like panicked rats.

EXT. SALOON - NIGHT

Reno, Bass and Virgil watch the screaming exodus. Pleased.

RENO

I'm buying.

They push their way into the saloon.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TOWN HALL - OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

A whimpering, delusional Sabrina lies on a couch in the cramped office. Monique takes her pulse. Turns to face Sabrina's desperate and frightened parents.

MR. SMITE

Is it the fever?

MONIQUE

Whatever it is, you can do nothing here. Please go home. I will contact you when there's news.

MRS. SMITE

She is our only child. Please take care of her.

MONIQUE

To my best ability. I promise you.

The couple exits, leaving the moaning Sabrina alone with Monique. Dulce enters.

DULCE

Your grandmother is very anxious.

MONIQUE

(indicates Sabrina)
Will you stay with her?

DULCE

I'm not going anywhere.

Monique offers her a grateful smile. Then exits into...

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - NIGHT

Strewn with the detritus of distress and escape. Konrad sips whiskey as Evelyn paces the floor. Stops to face Monique.

EVELYN

Is it the fever?

MONIQUE

I don't know.

EVELYN

No matter. We are leaving.

She reaches for Monique, who slips free of her grasp.

MONIQUE

My patient requires my assistance.

EVELYN

This is no time to be yourself.

MONIQUE

There is no better time.

EVELYN

By reason, persuasion, or force,
you are coming with me.

MONIQUE

The first two will be useless. As
to the last, how much force are you
willing to employ?

Flummoxed, Evelyn faces Konrad, who throws up his hands.

KONRAD

Don't look at me. Force and I are
ill friends.

Evelyn turns back to Monique.

EVELYN

Very well. If you won't leave, I'll
stay and provide support.

MONIQUE

I can't allow it, Evelyn. This
contagion attacks the elderly first
and worst. You must go.

Evelyn sighs. Resigned.

EVELYN

I don't know which hurts me more.
You denying my assistance or you
calling me *elderly*.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN HALL - MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

While Lucero drives off with Evelyn and Konrad in the
phaeton, Angus and Billy watch from the hall's limestone
steps, smoking Cabanas.

ANGUS

Headed home. Like you should be.

BILLY

Not tonight. Monique has designated
this place a treatment center. I
have offered her my services.

ANGUS

Didn't you tell me that girl
refused to marry you?

BILLY

No matter. She needs my help.

ANGUS

(with a sigh)

When it comes to women, the Warren men have always been fools.

BILLY

I promise to uphold that proud family tradition.

They laugh together. Then Angus turns serious.

ANGUS

Your mother, God bless her soul, was a paragon of grace and humility. Well lettered. Consumed by the arts. You take after her.

BILLY

I appreciate the compliment.

ANGUS

It's not. I've been concerned you lacked the brass to survive this place. That worry is gone.

Billy pats his holster.

BILLY

Because of this?

ANGUS

Any coward can fire a gun. The brave man doesn't need one.

BILLY

Until he meets a coward with a gun.

ANGUS

If and when that happens, I know you will do the right thing. Stay well, son.

BILLY

As should you.

Angus mounts a roan mare and trots away.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Under a full moon, Evelyn's phaeton rolls down the road and off into the night.

In the gloom beyond, shadowy figures appear, taking shape as they come close. Three horsemen. When they ride out of the dark and into the moonlight, we see their faces.

Reno, Bass and Virgil. Trotting along. Quiet and intent.

They glide off down the road, following the phaeton.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - NIGHT

Billy is watching Monique, who is sound asleep in a chair. As Dulce joins them and moves to wake Monique, he stops her.

BILLY

Let her sleep. Something tells me
we'll be busy enough soon enough.

DULCE

Are you not afraid?

BILLY

Only for her.

He pulls a discarded table cloth off the floor and drapes it across Monique. As the young woman stirs in her sleep...

TIME LAPSE CUT:

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - MONTAGE - NIGHT/DAY

-- While night transforms into day, Monique disappears from the chair as the room fills with pallets, cots, and mattresses.

-- Monique reappears, Dulce helping her place Sabrina Smite upon a mattress.

-- More patients fill more pallets, Dulce and Monique in different positions.

-- Billy appears. Pours steaming water from a bucket into a glass pitcher.

-- More patients materialize with family members in attendance, exhibiting tears of grief or gestures of concern.

-- And then the room is full. Every pallet, mattress, and cot is taken.

-- Dulce wipes her brow. She dips a ladle into a wooden bucket filled with water and raises it to her lips...

... just as Monique slaps the ladle back into the bucket, water flying. Dulce stares at her, shocked.

DULCE

But its spring water. You checked it.

MONIQUE

I may have missed something. For now, nurses drink only tonic.

She hands a Cobb-neck bottle to Dulce, who grins wryly.

DULCE

I'm a nurse now?

MONIQUE

My best.

She passes on to Rosalie, who is tucking a blanket around a comatose man prone on a pallet.

ROSALIE

We're out of beds, willow bark, meadowsweet, everything but the ill. The ill are in ample supply.

MONIQUE

We'll need more help. Is there a local physician...

Rosalie indicates the unconscious patient on the pallet.

ROSALIE

Meet Doctor Felix Mutter, a capable man. Also a very sick one.

MONIQUE

Just do the best you can.

ROSALIE

For whatever that's worth.

MONIQUE

Have I thanked you for helping?

ROSALIE

That's the third time. No, the fourth.

Monique moves on to Billy, who is pulling a sheet over the pale face of a lifeless woman lying on another pallet.

BILLY

Mrs. Schindler. She taught our Monitorial school. Cruel woman, quicker with her paddle than I am with my guns. But we learned. Math, letters, history. The only thing we never learned was her first name. She was always Mrs. Schindler.

His eyes are wet. Monique rests a comforting hand on his shoulder.

MONIQUE

A quick rest is in order.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN HALL - THE ROOF - DAY

While they look down on the town, Billy puffs a Cabana as he compares notes with Monique.

BILLY

Mrs. Schindler will be only one of many lost if we don't root out this infection at its source.

MONIQUE

It's the water. Must be the water.

BILLY

Which comes from only one place.

MONIQUE

The Springs. Which is safe to drink from in the barrio but not here.

BILLY

Which makes no sense. Did you check the latest local samples?

Monique nods wearily as she takes the Cabana from a surprised Billy and puffs on it.

MONIQUE

No mosquito larvae, effluents or other contaminants. Only traces of iron and plant matter. As in the barrio's wells.

BILLY

So it can't be the water.

MONIQUE

Not according to Occam's razor. Among competing hypotheses that predict equally well...

BILLY

The one with the fewest assumptions should be selected.

(to her amazed look)

Just because I possess guns doesn't mean I don't possess education.

MONIQUE

Then you see my point.

BILLY

Even if it is the water, the sick still require it. Thirst will kill them faster than illness.

A blinding realization hits Monique.

MONIQUE

Not if we use the right water.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN HALL - MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY

Monique speaks to Dulce, who sits at the reins of a trap.

DULCE

The Alcalde won't like this.

MONIQUE

Then don't tell the Alcalde. Can I count on you?

DULCE

To my last breath. But I can not speak for the rest of the barrio.

MONIQUE

Just do your best.

DULCE (IN SPANISH)
Go with God.

MONIQUE (IN SPANISH)
And his angels with you.

As Dulce rides off, Monique turns to climb the steps into the hall. She picks up a Cobb-neck that's been discarded on the steps. Suddenly stops. Frowns...

INT. HACIENDA - STUDY - NIGHT

That moment Gordillo poured tonic water from a similar bottle into a glass. As he drinks...

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Scowling with rage, Monique throws the bottle against the limestone steps, smashing it to fragments.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILL ROAD - DAY

Billy drives a two horse carriage up the steep road as Monique sits beside him, furious with herself.

MONIQUE
I've been criminally stupid. I should have known from the moment I met the Alcalde in the barrio.

BILLY
He only drank tonic water?

MONIQUE
When the wells there were making people sick. He knew their water was unsafe.

BILLY
Ergo, he poisoned the wells in some fashion.

MONIQUE
As well as the water here.

BILLY
But why would the Alcalde do such an evil thing?

MONIQUE

The why doesn't matter. We must learn the how.

BILLY

What if the Alcalde simply likes his tonic, there is no poison, and we are on a fool's errand?

MONIQUE

Then Occam's Razor deserves a re-examination.

CUT TO:

EXT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

Steam is rising from the roof of the Greco-Roman building as Billy helps Monique down from the carriage.

BILLY

This is the largest pump station between Frisco and Dallas. It can draw up to ten thousand gallons a day from the same aquifer that feeds the Springs.

MONIQUE

I sense pride of ownership.

BILLY

My father built this place so our community may grow. It would break his heart if it killed it instead.

INT. WATER PUMP STATION - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Three large Cornish steam engines span the width of the building, their single acting pistons pumping mindlessly away. Their action is surprisingly quiet except for the occasional release of steam through the roof pipes.

A large man in sweat-stained overalls escorts Billy and Monique past the heaving engines.

BILLY

How many people work here, Herr Kronert?

Kronert gestures at another large man shoveling coal.

KRONERT

(Bavarian accent)

Hoffman and me. If we not poison
water no one does. And we not
poison water.

BILLY

How late is your shift?

KRONERT

Six to six. Then we tamp boilers
and lock doors.

MONIQUE

Which does not preclude someone
finding their way in here at night.

Kronert frowns at her, then at Billy.

KRONERT

Why is woman here? Not belong.

BILLY

If someone wished to taint the
water, what would be the best place
to do it from?

KRONERT

Holding tank. Top of tower. Or
retaining pond. There.

He indicates a large mere set level in the floor, its super
heated water hazing the air. Monique heads for the door.

MONIQUE

I will examine the tank.

BILLY

Monique, wait!

But she is already gone. Kronert shrugs.

KRONERT

Not belong.

EXT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

Monique starts to climb the iron stairs that curve up the
side of the hundred and eighty foot tall tower. It's a
difficult journey; there is no railing on this stairway, and
Monique is forced to cling to the tower as she goes, laboring
to not look down.

INT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

Billy stands over the mere to stare at the large iron wheels and gears whirling inside it, roiling its water.

BILLY

I don't see anything, Herr Kronert.
Is there another place...

Billy turns just as a shovel swings through the air, knocking him down and out. While Hoffman lowers his shovel, Kronert reaches for Billy's holsters to removes its twin pistols. Shoves one in his belt. Takes Hoffman's shovel.

KRONERT (IN GERMAN)

I bury him. You kill girl.

HOFFMAN (IN GERMAN)

I take money from Herr Reno to
poison water not kill girls.

KRONERT (IN GERMAN)

You'll take more money. It's called
a bonus.

He shoves a pistol at Hoffman.

EXT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

Monique has reached the catwalk that circles the summit of the tower. She finds an access panel with a handle, pulls it open, and looks down into the tank. But all she sees is a glint of water in the midst of utter darkness.

The catwalk shakes beneath her heels as someone begins to climb the stairway. She looks over the catwalk's edge...

... to see Hoffman climbing the stairway easily and quickly. Holding one of Billy's ivory handled Colt Frontiers.

Monique gasps, as concerned for Billy Warren as for herself.

INT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

Kronert is dragging a senseless Billy by his coat's cuff across the floor with one hand, the shovel held in the other. When he reaches the door, he releases Billy and opens it. Turns back.

But Billy is gone.

Clenching his teeth along with the shovel, Kronert surveys the big station and its pumping, steaming engines.

EXT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

Hoffman has also reached the catwalk at the top of the stairway. Frontier in hand, he circles the summit of the tower, and finds himself back at the junction of stairway and catwalk. Looks down the stairs. No sign of the girl anywhere.

INT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

... Kronert moves cautiously through the pumping, hissing Cornish engines, hefting his shovel like a weapon.

He doesn't see Billy clinging to the housing of the engine above him. The young man launches himself at Kronert and lands hard.

As they collide, the shovel goes one way and the pistol slides out of Kronert's belt to clatter in another direction.

A quick, intense scuffle as the two men roll across the floor, kicking and punching at each other.

Billy pulls free and rises to his feet, just as Kronert launches a vicious counter attack. While the pair swing away at each other like dock fighters...

EXT. WATER TOWER - DAY

... Hoffman sits on the edge of the catwalk, his feet dangling toward the ground eighteen stories below. He glances in one direction, then the other, then down the curved stairway. He can't figure this out. Where did that girl go?

HOFFMAN

Verdampte!

Then his eyes settle on the tank's access panel. Grinning, he leaps to his feet and yanks it open.

INT. WATER TANK - DAY

Backlit, Hoffman looks down through the open panel into the tank's dark waters. Quiet, silent, no sign of life.

Utterly confused, the man scratches his temple with the barrel of the pistol. As he frowns down at the tank again...

... we push through its water to reveal Monique is clinging to the tank's curved wall, her eyes wide with terror as she struggles to keep her natural buoyancy from dragging her back to the surface.

INT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

This is one hell of a fight. It's an all out, knock down, raise the roof battle as Kronert and Billy punch each other around every inch of the pump station, crashing through furniture, tool cupboards, and anything else in their way.

A final blow, a last kick, and Kronert is down. Seemingly out.

Grinning past bloody teeth, Billy reaches for his gun on the floor. But it's not there.

He turns to face Kronert, who is holding the ivory handled Frontier. With an ugly smile, the big German raises the weapon and points it directly between Billy's shocked eyes.

Kronert cocks it. His finger tightens on the trigger. There's a loud shot...

... from the sky above. As Kronert involuntarily looks up, Billy tackles him, and the gun goes flying again.

Another shot from above...

INT. WATER TANK - DAY

Hoffman is firing his own Frontier down into the tank...

... where Monique reacts as the bullet burns through the water right past her shocked eyes. She struggles to find cover beneath some packed saddlebags hanging from a hook just below the surface of the tank.

INT. WATER PUMP STATION - DAY

The battle here reaches its climax as Kronert grabs the shovel and swings it at Billy. Who ducks beneath the blow. Kronert is thrown off balance for just a moment, which is long enough for Billy to shove him into the retaining pond.

Kronert instantly rises back to its surface, screaming as the pond's super heated water scalds his flesh. His feet get caught in the whirring gears of the tank, and he's quickly dragged below into the lethal machinery where he is mulched like hamburger in a meat grinder.

Billy reacts, horrified, as the pond is clouded red, followed by bloody water cascading out of every flywheel, gear and piston in the Cornish engines. It's a spectacular and ghastly sight, and Billy gags at it.

Then he hears another shot from above. He grabs his pistol off the floor and runs out.

INT. WATER TANK - DAY

Hoffman fires into the water once again...

... and the shot tears into the saddlebags Monique has taken cover behind. White-green powder clouds the water. With a bubbly, muffled yell, Monique rises to the surface.

... to face Hoffman and his stolen Frontier. He aims it at her shocked face and pulls the trigger. Click. Empty.

Monique barely has time to react before Hoffman reaches down into the tank, seizes her by the arm, and yanks her up.

EXT. WATER TANK - DAY

Hoffman pushes the girl into the catwalk's railing, grabs her feet, and starts to shove her over its edge to a quick and certain death. Monique screams.

A shot rings out, a hot slug whines through the air. Hoffman looks down the stairway.

Billy is standing at the tower's base, firing up at him.

Frowning, the massive Hoffman drops Monique back onto the catwalk and starts climbing down the stairs. He reaches for his boot. Pulls out a nasty looking work knife.

Billy fires at Hoffman again and again, always missing. He starts to reload. Hoffman is getting closer. Billy fumbles with the rounds, dropping them in the dirt. Hoffman is even closer. Billy slips two or three shells into their chambers, raises his pistol, and fires again.

The slugs scream through the air or hit the tower, but Hoffman is unscathed. The big Bavarian is almost half way down the tower, grinning.

In tears by now, Billy fumbles at his belt, yanks out a cartridge, and immediately drops it. He kneels in the dirt to scramble for the bullet like a panicked child searching for a lost toy.

He finally finds the round, shoves it into a chamber. Raises the pistol toward Hoffman...

... just as the other man throws his knife, which lands in Billy's shoulder. He falls back, firing.

Hoffman, two stories up on the last section of tower stairway, reacts as if struck. He feels at his ear. A trace of blood.

Hoffman laughs at Billy, who lies on his back in the dirt; wounded, helpless and defeated.

Then Hoffman's laugh transforms into a scream as Monique shoves the big German from behind. He flies off the stairway to tumble twenty feet...

... to land on Ares' sword. Skewered, Hoffman's body slides down the stone blade until he's eye to eye with the fearsome statue. As lifeless as the monument he is impaled upon.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILL ROAD - DAY

Monique drives the carriage as Billy, his shoulder crudely bandaged, sits beside her. Tears pour down her cheeks.

MONIQUE

That was terrible.

BILLY

You had no choice in causing that man's death.

MONIQUE

Oh, piffle on him! That beast deserved worse. I meant your marksmanship. For an experienced pistoleer, you are a truly awful shot.

BILLY

At least we found our quarry.

He reaches behind his seat and pulls up the bullet-riddled, water soaked saddlebag that was hidden in the tower.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Now we just need to clarify what toxin this is and why the Alcalde had it planted at the pump station.

MONIQUE

The first should do service to the last. Damn it!

(wipes tears away)

The detritus from that saddlebag is burning my eyes.

He pulls his kerchief off his neck and dabs her tears.

BILLY

Swallow any water?

(as she shakes her head)

No harm then.

She slaps his hand away.

MONIQUE

No harm? Two men killed; it's only by God and chance you're not the third. You could be dead. You could be gone!

BILLY

You find that unacceptable?

MONIQUE

Inconvenient. I've gotten used to your presence. Stop smiling.

He doesn't.

EXT. TOWN HALL - MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY

As they arrive, Rosalie rushes out to meet them.

ROSALIE

Billy, thank heavens you're back.
It's your father. He just rode in.
Practically fell off his horse.

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

A moaning, insensible Angus Warren lies on a pallet as Billy observes, helpless; Monique and Rosalie at his side.

MONIQUE

We can spare him further pain by giving him tonic.

BILLY

That would be unfair to the other patients. When he recovered, he would be deeply ashamed.

ROSALIE

A pointless discussion since we are out of tonic.

Billy and Monique share a horrified look. For the first time, our girl's hope and confidence are shaken. Then a cry outside draws their attention.

EXT. TOWN HALL - MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY

Billy, Monique, and Rosalie rush out to see a long line of wagons with barrio residents at their reins, loaded down with wooden barrels, water slopping through their lids. Dulce hops down from the lead wagon to join Monique.

DULCE

Water, water everywhere, all fit to drink.

Monique gratefully and lovingly hugs the girl.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - DAY

The people of the barrio mingle freely with the people of the town, offering fresh water to the sick, who are visibly better.

Billy kneels besides Angus, who is pale but conscious and smiling. Father and son share a silent if grateful moment before Billy stands and crosses to the town hall's office.

INT. TOWN HALL - OFFICE - DAY

Billy joins Monique, who sits at a desk, peering into a slide nestled in her father's microscope.

BILLY

Occam would be laughing in triumph. Fresh water, happy patients.

MONIQUE

(distracted)
That's good.

HER POV - MASKED SHOT

Of the slide: a specimen of water containing two distinctly different elemental traces with multi-planed structures.

BACK TO SCENE

Frowning, Monique grabs her father's medical book, the Riggs volume, and frantically pages through it.

BILLY

Monique, did you hear me? Our people are recovering. You were right about the water.

Monique looks up from the text. Haggard.

MONIQUE

I was wrong. Utterly wrong.

BILLY

You've lost me.

She taps at a passage in the book.

MONIQUE

Arsenopyrite is an iron arsenic sulfide with a structure similar to ordinary iron.

BILLY

Did you say arsenic?

MONIQUE

I thought the mineral traces in the water were iron, God forgive me. Couldn't see my mistake until we obtained a pure undiluted sample from that saddle beg.

BILLY

The Alcalde polluted the water with arsenic?

MONIQUE

The symptoms match save for the delusions and hyperactivity. But there's another substance in these samples. Organic. Some kind of flowering plant.

BILLY

Could be locoweed. Grows wild
around here. Drives the livestock
crazy.

MONIQUE

And creates symptoms in humans that
would preclude any diagnosis of
arsenic poisoning. Brilliant.

BILLY

Pointless. Why would the Alcalde
want to kill off his own people?
The entire town?

MONIQUE

I have no idea. What do you know
about the man?

BILLY

Not much. He stays close to the
barrio; has little contact with
anyone outside it. Save for Konrad.
They enjoy drinking together.

And then it hits her. The penny drops as Monique remembers...

EXT. HACIENDA - FLASHBACK - DAY

That moment where Konrad took his leave from the Alcalde.

KONRAD

Beware. I may test it for purity.

GORDILLO

My best to our friend Marsh.

INT. TOWN HALL - OFFICE - DAY

Monique reels from the shock of her realization.

MONIQUE

The arrogance. The unmitigated
arrogance! He admitted everything.
Right in our presence.

BILLY

Who admitted what?

MONIQUE

The Alcalde made a joke about Marsh
and a test for purity.

(MORE)

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

James Marsh is a British chemist who developed a test for arsenic poisoning.

BILLY

Did Konrad get the joke?

MONIQUE

Absolutely.

BILLY

Which means Konrad is part of this.

MONIQUE

And there could be only one possible reason.

BILLY

They're after your grandmother.

Monique races out...

INT. TOWN HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM - DAY

... to snap at Dulce as she hurries by.

MONIQUE

Take charge here.

Dulce follows her, dodging patients and tenders as they go.

DULCE

Why? What's the matter?

MONIQUE

Did you see the Alcalde at the barrio today?

EXT. TOWN HALL - MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY

They rush out of the building and down the limestone steps.

DULCE

If I had, I would have had to fight him for the water. I don't know where he is.

MONIQUE

But I do.

Monique arrives at the town hall hitches and untethers Angus Warren's roan mare.

DULCE

Please tell me where you're going.

MONIQUE

No time to explain. Just tend to the sick while I'm gone.

DULCE

Only if you swear you'll return.

MONIQUE

On my heart.

They hug and Dulce moves off. As Monique adjusts the roan's stirrups for her height, Billy joins her by the hitches.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

You're coming with me?

BILLY

An absurd question.

Monique is struggling with the stirrups.

MONIQUE

Damn it! Damn this to purgatory!

BILLY

May I?

Billy finishes readjusting the stirrups while Monique fumes.

MONIQUE

An entire town. They poisoned an entire town to cover the murder of a single woman. So much death and pain.

BILLY

So much at stake. The Milagro Rancho. What's a few dozen murders compared to four hundred and seventy thousand acres?

MONIQUE

For the Alcalde and Konrad, less than nothing.

BILLY

But why initiate this horror now? Evelyn is an old woman. Konrad was due to inherit in any case.

MONIQUE

In no case. Evelyn intended to change her will to my advantage.

BILLY

So Konrad wants the Milagro and the Alcalde wants whatever Konrad has promised him.

MONIQUE

And they both want my grandmother dead.

BILLY

But why not just shove her down a flight of stairs?

MONIQUE

Two reasons. First, an accident raises many questions, a plague not a single one.

BILLY

And second?

MONIQUE

Konrad hates this town and its people more than life itself. I heard him say as much last night.

Billy mounts his stallion.

BILLY

Be careful of my father's mare. She is a spirited creature.

MONIQUE

Then we have much in common.

As she expertly vaults into the roan's saddle, Billy shakes his head.

BILLY

A multilingual medico who can ride. Is there anything you can't do?

MONIQUE

Sew, cook, or entertain.

BILLY

(ironic)
How disappointing.

They gallop off.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

As the sun burns high in the sky, Monique and Billy race across the moonscape that is southwest Texas.

MONIQUE (V.O.)

After the princess defeated the evil wizard, she returned home to marry a handsome prince. When her father died, she became queen, and she raised her children, and her kingdom prospered and all was well.

EXT. MILAGRO RANCHERO - DAY

The big ranch house is visible in the distance as Monique and Billy dismount. They use a rocky ridge for cover while they lead their horses closer to the rancho.

MONIQUE (V.O.)

Then a terrible dragon attacked the kingdom. The queen's husband and his army met the beast in battle but all were killed. The queen and her children mourned, her people pled for rescue. All seemed lost.

EXT. BEHIND ROCKY RIDGE - DAY

The main house is closer but still distant. Billy and Monique secure their horses then climb the ridge to peer across its edge. Billy produces a spy glass, extends it, and scans the property.

BILLY

No sign of any vaqueros. Gone to tend the cattle I would assume.

THROUGH SPY GLASS - MASKED SHOT

Drifting across the house to settle on the front porch and the four saddled horses tied to its railing.

BACK TO SCENE

Billy frowns into the glass.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Four mounts with rifle scabbards.
Vaqueros don't tend cattle with
rifles.

MONIQUE

One of them must be the Alcalde.

BILLY

I'd say Reno is another. He rides
the paint with white socks.

MONIQUE

Reno? The ruffian who accosted me
in town the day we met?

BILLY

And he's never without Bass and
Virgil.

MONIQUE

Four armed men.

BILLY

Five. Don't forget Konrad.

MONIQUE

How could I? What do we do now?

BILLY

We wait until nightfall, sneak in
and attempt to sneak Evelyn out.

MONIQUE

Sneak?

Billy lowers the glass and faces her.

BILLY

I see no other option.

MONIQUE

I see at least one. I ride in
through the front and distract them
while you come in through the back
and shoot them.

BILLY

Not possible.

MONIQUE

Anything's possible for the
pistoleer who killed three men in
one night in Abilene.

BILLY

And now five here? You are too free
with their blood and my bullets.

As Billy climbs back down the ridge to their horses, an
anxious Monique follows him.

MONIQUE

I have no love for murder but my
grandmother may not last until
nightfall. She may already be dead.

BILLY

She might as well be, if you are
depending on me to be her savior.

MONIQUE

Who could I better depend on than
Waco Jack?

Billy laughs, which draws an angry scowl from Monique.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

I am blind to the humor in this
situation.

BILLY

As well as the man standing before
you.

MONIQUE

Please explain.

BILLY

I tried to explain back at the
barrio, but you wouldn't listen.

MONIQUE

I'm listening now.

Billy sighs and shakes his head.

BILLY

Napoleon once said a good sketch is
better than a long speech. Perhaps
a piece of music would do as well.

He reaches into his saddlebag. Pulls out a violin case, opens
it, and removes a bow and a Mittenwald violin. Begins to play
The Ballad of Barbara Allen.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

As the tune lilts and echoes across the plains, Reno's man, Bass, rifle in hand, steps out onto the porch. Listening.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Konrad, drinking brandy from a crystal glass, stands at a window, listening as well. Unsettled, he turns to stare at the bed where Evelyn lies. White faced. Seemingly lifeless.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

Gordillo, the Alcalde, is seated in a fine chair, sipping his own brandy. He listens to the ballad with a frown.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Reno and Virgil sit at the table, playing poker. Reno reacts to the music and scowls.

RENO

What in the Devil and Tom Walker
was that?

EXT. BEHIND ROCKY RIDGE - DAY

Billy lowers the violin and grins bitterly at a stunned Monique. He pulls out a pair of frameless specs and slips them on. Then he doffs his hat in a familiar gesture, his entire aspect, even his voice, radically changing.

BILLY

An artist appreciates an avid
audience.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. PASSENGER CAR - FLASHBACK - DAY

The young man Herbert, his face almost completely obscured behind long hair, the thick glasses and mutton chops, doffs his bowler and smiles.

HERBERT

An artist appreciates an avid
audience.

EXT. BEHIND ROCKY RIDGE - DAY

Monique is knocked back on her heels. In utter disbelief.

MONIQUE

Herbert?

BILLY

William Herbert Warren. At your service.

MONIQUE

Vanderpool was not your stop...

BILLY

It was my staging area. A place to prepare for my role as Waco Jack.
(paraphrasing Shakespeare)
Sans hair, sans beard, sans eyeglasses, sans everything Herbert.

As Monique's legs buckle, she slumps onto a rock.

MONIQUE

You are no pistoleer?

BILLY

If you might have noticed at the pump station, I can barely hold a pistol let alone fire it.

MONIQUE

But all the men you killed!

BILLY

Fictitious. Stories I published in dime novels. I could be the next Edward S. Ellis.

MONIQUE

And you did all this, created this elaborate persona, to achieve what?

BILLY

My father has always been concerned I lacked the brass to outlive this place. I wished to mislead him.

MONIQUE

Your wish came true in my case.

BILLY

I would offer my deepest apology if
I felt it was right for you to
accept it.

Monique's features set in a determined fashion that should be
familiar to us by now.

MONIQUE

Waco Jack need not apologize.
All he must do is perform his part.

BILLY

Not in this play.

MONIQUE

You are more than capable enough
for this adventure.

BILLY

For art and artifice, not courage.

MONIQUE

You displayed true bravery at the
barrio and the pump station.

BILLY

Against peasants with farm
implements and Germans with
shovels. Against a skilled
shootist, I am useless. For me,
guns are but a prop for a role.
Their magic is beyond me.

MONIQUE

Point and shoot. How magical is
that?

BILLY

You are not hearing me.

MONIQUE

Because there is no point to it.
Mater artium necessitas.

BILLY

Necessity is not the mother of
invention when it relates to five
armed men. You can not count on me.

MONIQUE

To do your best. That is all I
count on.

Scared, angry and cornered, Billy loses all patience.

BILLY

Don't. Don't count on me, look at me, talk to me. Pretend I don't exist. In a sense, I never did. There is no Waco Jack the infamous shootist. There is only William Herbert Warren. The actor, coward, and fool. Look elsewhere for your hero.

Monique places her face in her hands and moans. For the first time in our story, she is utterly lost in a moment of deep anxiety and defeat. Then she regains control, raises her head and stares at Billy with a fresh commitment.

She crosses to the man. Grabs him. Kisses him. Long and hard. Then she releases Billy, returns to the roan, and leaps into its saddle. Overwhelmed with emotion, he glares up at her.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Was that a cruel taunt, a harsh farewell, or an expression of love?

MONIQUE

If I survive the next ten minutes, I will be pleased to tell you.

She spurs her mount and rides away.

EXT. MILAGRO RANCHERO - RANCH HOUSE - DAY

As if proceeding to her own execution, Monique rides at a measured pace toward the big ranch house.

MONIQUE (V.O.)

As the dragon continued its reign of terror against her kingdom, the brave queen saw only one solution. She consumed a powerful and toxic potion, entered the dragon's cave, and allowed it to feed on her.

She arrives at the house, dismounts and climbs the steps that lead to the porch where Bass is waiting.

MONIQUE (V.O.)

As her body was consumed, the toxin was released and the queen and the dragon died together. The entire kingdom mourned the clever girl. Her like will never be seen again.

Grinning, Bass pulls Monique into the house.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

Bass escorts her past the Alcalde in his chair. He smiles.

GORDILLO
Buenas tardes, signorita.

The girl ignores him as she moves on.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

While Monique is shoved into the room, Virgil and Reno greet her with malicious smirks.

VIRGIL
Now if it ain't the pretty Mex
girl.

RENO
Allow me to correct your
misconception, Virge. No Mex girl
is standing before us but a
Beimler. Local royalty worthy of
true regard and full attention.

VIRGIL
I stand corrected.

Reno faces Monique, his tone turning cold.

RENO
Your great white knight follow you
here?

MONIQUE
If you are referring to Billy
Warren, I have no idea where he is.

RENO
Now would you be lying to me, Miss
Beimler? No matter if you are. Even
if Waco Jack decides to come a
calling, we got enough firepower in
this house to do for him.
(to Bass)
Keep an eye on the main road.

As Bass leaves, Monique presses.

MONIQUE

I wish to see my grandmother.

RENO

Do you now?

MONIQUE

Yes. Please.

He considers. Finally shrugs.

RENO

Virge, take this girl to the old lady. And when she's done, bring her back here to share a libation.

VIRGIL

That's a drink.

RENO

No, Virge. It's much more than that. We won't need a room this time. The table here will do.

His meaning is clear, but Monique is not phased.

MONIQUE

My grandmother. Is she... alive?

RENO

Ask her when you see her.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Virgil leads Monique to Evelyn's bedroom. Opens its door.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Monique finds Konrad by the window and her grandmother lying in the bed, pale and still. Konrad quickly crosses to her.

KONRAD

Monique, none of this was my notion. It was all the Alcalde...

She slaps him so hard, the man's head rocks, and he drops his brandy glass. Virgil laughs as Konrad, shamed to tears, rushes from the room.

MONIQUE

Please allow me a moment alone with my grandmother. To say goodbye.

VIRGIL

You just remember the favor when it comes to libation time.

As Virgil exits, Monique sits on the edge of the bed and takes Evelyn's pulse. Checks her pupils. Which is when Evelyn slaps her hand away. Glaring.

EVELYN

If you must know, I'm still breathing.

MONIQUE

Thank God! How are you feeling?

EVELYN

Terrible. Sicker than a dying dog.

MONIQUE

You are not sick. Konrad has poisoned you.

Evelyn rolls her eyes.

EVELYN

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. Bad things come in threes. In my case, it's husbands. And I saved the worst for last.

MONIQUE

We must take our leave. Can you travel?

EVELYN

Even if I could, how far would we go before Konrad stopped us?

MONIQUE

Konrad is not the problem. It's the men he brought with him. We require weapons and support.

EVELYN

What about Billy? If you're here, he must be close by.

MONIQUE

We can not count on Mister Warren.

Evelyn gives Monique a long look.

EVELYN

Well, that shoves us into a freshly packed pickle jar.

MONIQUE

I know this is a foolish question, but are there any weapons at hand?

EVELYN

Only one.

She points at her bonnet perched on a rack. Monique crosses to the rack, yanks out its long, wicked looking pin and slips it inside her sleeve. As she hurries to the door, Evelyn watches her. Concerned.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Can you do what's necessary?

MONIQUE

(a grim smile)

Grandmother. I can do anything.

And she leaves.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

While Virgil yanks Monique down the stairs, Konrad waits for her at its bottom steps. Beside himself.

KONRAD

You must understand. There are mitigating circumstances to this situation.

MONIQUE

Go drink with your friend the Alcalde. If you're fortunate, he won't poison you.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

As Monique enters with Virgil, Reno rises from the table.

RENO

Remember the first thing I ever said to you?

MONIQUE

The same as what your friend here said today.

(MORE)

MONIQUE (CONT'D)
 Something along the lines of my
 being a pretty Mex girl.

RENO
 And my being the head of your
 welcoming committee. And I got your
 welcome right here.

He grabs his crotch. Before Monique can respond, there's the
 sound of a shot and breaking glass. Reno gestures at Virgil.

RENO (CONT'D)
 Deal with it.

Virgil rushes out.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

Virgil finds the Alcalde slumped across a sofa, moaning, his
 head bleeding. A frantic Konrad gestures at a broken window.

KONRAD
 Someone shot at us!

Virgil hurries through the front door...

EXT. RANNCN HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

... to find Bass crouched behind one of the portico's
 pillars.

BASS
 Came from the barn. I think.

VIRGIL
 You think?

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

As Reno throws Monique on her back on the table, she
 struggles to remain calm.

MONIQUE
 This is not the wisest course of
 action considering your men are
 being fired upon.

RENO
 They can manage their own business.

He bends over the girl and rips at her bodice. Doesn't notice her slip the hat pin out of her sleeve.

MONIQUE

Please don't make me do this.

He bends closer. His face just inches from hers.

RENO

Do what? Cry for help? Beg for mercy?

MONIQUE

Defend myself.

She jabs the pin into his face, driving it through both cheeks, its sharp end exposed and dripping blood. Howling, Reno rolls off Monique, who leaps to her feet and rushes into...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

... where she trips over Lucero's body. The man is dead on the floor, his throat slashed. Gasping at the awful sight, Monique rises and runs...

... right into Billy, who slaps a hand over her mouth to keep her from crying out. As he releases her, she whispers...

MONIQUE

You came!

BILLY

Of course. Where's Evelyn?

MONIQUE

Upstairs.

BILLY

Go. Get out.

MONIQUE

No. Never.

With a sigh of resignation, he hands her a Frontier.

BILLY

Make yourself useful then.

As she gapes at the gun, appalled, he simply shrugs.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Point and shoot.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Their weapons at the ready, Billy carefully and slowly leads Monique down the dark, narrow passageway. A journey of but a few yards seems to take forever, but they eventually reach the stairwell...

... just as Bass and Virgil appear at the opposite end of the hallway and start firing. Billy and Monique return the fire, bullets shrieking in every direction, striking wall pictures and book shelves, side tables and light sconces. A black cloud of cordite rises, almost obscuring the scene.

When the firing finally stops, the only sound is Monique and Billy coughing as they breathe in the acrid haze. While he grabs Monique's Frontier away from her and reloads it, the smoke clears to reveal Virgil has disappeared but Bass is lying face down on the floor.

Monique is aghast.

MONIQUE

Did I actually shoot that man?

BILLY

Who knows, who cares?

He grabs the girl and pulls her up the stairs.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

As they rush in, Billy stays by the open door, standing guard while Monique helps Evelyn out of the bed.

EVELYN

What on earth was all that gun play about?

MONIQUE

I'm deeply sorry, grandmother, but your hallway will require extensive redecoration.

A bullet smashes a lamp. Billy turns to exchange fire with Virgil, who is standing on the balcony outside, shooting through an open window.

They blaze away at each other, Billy striding across the room between each round. Until he finally shoots Virgil square in the sternum.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - DAY

Virgil tumbles backwards off the balcony, screaming until he hits the ground below.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Gasping for breath, chest heaving, Billy faces an astonished Monique and a calm Evelyn.

EVELYN

Better reload your weapon, young man. Something tells me your work is not done.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Billy leads Monique and Evelyn, who is leaning heavily on the girl for support. They reach the hallway and move down it. As they achieve the end of the passage way, Billy gestures at Monique for his second pistol, which she immediately hands over to him. He raises them both. Moves into...

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

... where they find Konrad Kowalski seated in a chair, drinking and sweating. Billy points his pistols at him.

BILLY

Where's the Alcalde?

The Seth Thomas grandfather clock by the wall suddenly tumbles over to reveal a furious, bloody Alcalde standing behind it. The time piece crashes into Billy and crushes him to the floor, his revolvers sent flying.

As the Alcalde reaches for one of the Frontiers, Monique releases Evelyn and jumps on his back. He staggers about the room, crashing into furniture, firing the pistol wildly.

The Seth Thomas chimes prematurely as bullets tear through its oak frame and into its mechanism, barely missing Billy, who is pinned beneath it.

The Alcalde finally throws Monique off his back and into a love seat, which collapses under her. Cursing in Spanish, he raises the pistol. And shots ring out.

The Alcalde glares at Monique with furious, dying eyes before he collapses.

Konrad drops the Frontier he killed the Alcalde with and looks down at Evelyn, who is glaring up at him from her position on the floor.

EVELYN

Don't you dare say you're sorry.

Konrad doesn't have time to say anything before he's shot three times and is knocked flat.

Reno strides in holding his own pistol, the hat pin still lanced through both cheeks. While Monique staggers to her feet, the man slowly pulls the pin out of his bleeding face, tosses it aside, and grins horribly at the girl.

RENO

Where were we?

Crash! Billy shoves the clock aside, leaps to his feet, and grabs Reno. The two men stagger across the room, locked in a stern embrace of death and conflict.

Reno's pistol goes off. Once. Twice.

Reno shoves Billy away from him, and the two men stare at each other. Until Reno sags to the floor and lies on his back. Eyes open and sightless.

Billy turns to grin at Monique, who smiles back at him. Then her expression of joy turns to horror as she sees the blood pouring out of his side.

MONIQUE

Billy!

As the young man crumples to the floor, she kneels beside him to examine his wound. Rips off part of her skirt to bind it.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

It's through and through. You have a fine chance, Billy. Stay awake. You must stay awake.

But Billy's eyes are closed. Her panic grows.

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

Listen to me, William Herbert Warren. That kiss, it wasn't a taunt or a farewell, it was love. I've been in love with you since that moment we looked at the stars together and every moment since. If you die, I will never love again.

(MORE)

MONIQUE (CONT'D)

There will be tears, endless tears.
Can you hear me? Do you hear me?

Evelyn watches sorrowfully as her granddaughter bends over her man's body, weeping and keening. Her grief unquenchable.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

A high hill overlooking the town contains the memorials to Soledad Springs' dead. We see Dulce, Paola, and many more from the barrio. Also Rosalie, Zenobia, even Sabrina Smite. Both sides of the community have gathered together in their darkest finery around a freshly dug grave to offer their condolences.

The crowd turns to pay due attention as Monique joins them, pushing Evelyn, who is seated in a Satin-Birch wheelchair.

EVELYN

Are you deaf, girl? I keep saying I am fully recovered and have no need for this ludicrous baby carriage.

MONIQUE

Doctor's orders.

EVELYN

So it's official then? You are my doctor.

MONIQUE

Yes.

EVELYN

Why do I even try?

As the crowd parts to allow them access, Monique shares a small smile with Dulce, Paola and Gabriel before she nods to Angus Warren, who is pale and quiet. But when Monique finds herself standing over the new grave, her eyes grow wet.

Evelyn glowers at the girl.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

You barely knew the man.

MONIQUE

He did save our lives. And I treated him so cruelly.

EVELYN

Spare your tears for someone who matters. Like him.

She points at Billy Warren, who limps toward them, favoring his side. He grins at Angus.

BILLY

You look well, father.

ANGUS

(small smile)
No better than you.

Dismayed, Monique tugs at Billy's sleeve.

MONIQUE

What in the Lord's name are you doing away from your sick bed?

BILLY

Attending my late father in law's funeral. Or is that future late father in law?

MONIQUE

You sutures are vulnerable to tear. This is foolish bravado.

BILLY

This is necessity. I am not leaving your side ever again. You draw danger like honey attracts hornets.

Evelyn sighs elaborately.

EVELYN

Would you please cease your pointless palaver? Minister Garvey is about to say words over the least of my three dead husbands.

MONIQUE

(wryly)
His eloquence could never match yours, grandmother.

The minister opens his good book.

MINISTER

We are gathered here today to bid farewell to an esteemed and respected member of our community...

EVELYN
(under her breath)
In a pig's eye.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Monique and Billy stand together beneath a carpet of stars.

MONIQUE
Considering your present state,
climbing up here was foolishness.

BILLY
There is no better place for me to
propose.

MONIQUE
You are way too bold.

BILLY
Then you did not mean what you said
about falling in love with me?

MONIQUE
A desperate ploy to encourage you
to regain consciousness.

BILLY
Which worked quite well. In due
course I opened my eyes, you
treated my wounds and saved my
life.

MONIQUE
And that is all. Nothing more.

BILLY
Then why are you here?

MONIQUE
Those stars. I wanted to see the
stars.

BILLY
And I want to see you. In my home.
In my arms. With me. Forever.

He reaches for her, but she pulls away yet again.

MONIQUE
I can't. I can't love. Not anymore.

BILLY

Monique Garcia Beimler. In the last year you've witnessed more love than most people see in a lifetime. The kind displayed in the unalterable devotion of a child, husband, wife, or parent. The kind expressed through joy, pain, loss, and celebration. What is life without it? What is your life without me?

She smiles through her tears.

MONIQUE

I don't know what to say.

BILLY

It's about time.

He takes her into arms and they kiss under the stars.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SOLEDAD SPRING - DAWN

Monique and Billy stand together, arm in arm, while the sun rises over the clear blue waters of the spring.

MONIQUE (V.O.)

There once was a clever girl. Too clever to believe in love. Then she went on a long and dangerous journey. Which ended on the day she held her baby daughter in her arms for the first time. On that day, she believed in nothing else.

FADE OUT.

THE END