

COCO

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Screenplay By
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EXT. MARIGOLD PATH - DUSK

A path of marigold petals leads up to an altar lovingly arranged in a humble cemetery. An old woman lights a candle as the smoke of burning copal wood dances lyrically upward...

CARD: DISNEY PRESENTS

CARD: A PIXAR ANIMATION STUDIOS FILM

The smoke lifts up toward lines of *papel picado* -- cut paper banners -- that sway gently in the breeze.

PAPEL PICADO CARD: "COCO"

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Sometimes I think I'm cursed...
 'cause of something that happened
 before I was even born.

A story begins to play out on the papel picado.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 See, a long time ago there was this
 family.

The images on the papel picado come to life to illustrate a father, a mother, and a little girl. The family is happy.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 The papá, he was a musician.

The papá plays guitar while the mother dances with her daughter.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 He and his family would sing, and
 dance, and count their blessings...
 (beat)
 But he also had a dream... to play
 for the world.
 (beat)
 And one day he left with his
 guitar... and never returned.

The man walks down a road, guitar slung on his back. In another vignette his daughter stands in the doorway, watching her papá leave. Two feet step up next to her. It is her mamá, hardened.

She shuts the door.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 And the mamá...? She didn't have
 time to cry over that walkaway
 musician!
 (beat)
 After banishing all music from her
 life...

The woman gets rid of all of her husband's instruments and records.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 She found a way to provide for her
 daughter...
 (beat)
 She rolled up her sleeves and she
 learned to make shoes.
 (beat)
 She could have made candy!

Amongst the papel picado, a stick swings at a strung up piñata which bursts with candy...

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Or fireworks!

Fireworks go off in the background...

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Or sparkly underwear for wrestlers!

Sparkly underwear and a luchador mask hang on a line amongst other linens...

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 But no... she chose shoes...

On the papel picado, the little girl becomes a young woman.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Then she taught her daughter to
 make shoes. And later, she taught
 her son-in-law.

She introduces a suitor to the family business.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Then her grandkids got roped in.
 As her family grew, so did the
 business.

In the next vignette, a bunch of goofy grandchildren join in the shoemaking. The shoe shop is full of family!

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Music had torn her family apart,
 but shoes held them all together.
 (beat)
 You see, that woman was my great-
 great grandmother, Mamá Imelda.

TILT DOWN from the papel picado to the

OFRENDA ROOM - DAY

where a photo sits at the top of a beautiful altar. The photo features MAMÁ IMELDA -- serious, formidable. She holds a baby on her lap. Her husband stands beside her, but his face has been torn away.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 She died WAY before I was born.
 But my family still tells her story
 every year on *Día de los Muertos* --
 the Day of the Dead...
 (beat)
 And her little girl?

Fade from the face of the little girl to present day MAMÁ COCO (97), a living raisin, convalescing in a wicker wheelchair.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 She's my great grandmother, Mamá
 Coco.

A boy (12) walks into frame and kisses her on the cheek. This is our narrator, MIGUEL.

MIGUEL
 Holá, Mamá Coco.

MAMÁ COCO
 How are you, Julio?

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Actually, my name is Miguel. Mamá
 Coco has trouble remembering
 things... But it's good to talk to
 her anyway. So I tell her pretty
 much everything.

QUICK CUTS of Miguel with Mamá Coco:

EXT. COURTYARD

MIGUEL

I used to run like this...

Miguel pumps his arms with his hands in fists. Then he switches to flat palms.

MIGUEL

But now I run like this which is way faster!

CUT TO:

INT. MAMÁ COCO'S ROOM

Miguel, in a luchador mask, climbs onto the bed, arms raised.

MIGUEL

And the winner is... Luchadora
Coco!

Miguel leaps off the bed onto a pile of pillows that bursts, sending feathers onto Mamá Coco who wears a mask of her own.

CUT TO:

EXT. DINING AREA

Miguel leans toward Mamá Coco at the dinner table.

MIGUEL

I have a dimple on this side, but not on this side. Dimple. No dimple. Dimple. No dimple--

ABUELITA

Miguel! Eat your food.

Miguel's ABUELITA (70s) runs the table like a ship captain. She gives Mamá Coco a kiss on the head.

MIGUEL (V.O.)

My Abuelita? She's Mamá Coco's daughter.

Abuelita piles extra tamales on Miguel's plate.

ABUELITA

Aw, you're a twig, mijo. Have some more.

MIGUEL
No, gracias.

ABUELITA
I asked if you would like more
tamales.

MIGUEL
S-sí?

ABUELITA
That's what I THOUGHT you said.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
Abuelita runs our house just like
Mamá Imelda did.

CUT TO:

INT. OFRENDA ROOM - DAY

Abuelita adjusts the photo of her beloved Mamá Imelda. Then she perks her ear at a hooting sound.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Miguel idly blows into a glass soda bottle. Abuelita takes the bottle away.

ABUELITA
No music!

INT. MAMÁ COCO'S ROOM - DAY

Miguel listens as a truck drives by the window, blaring radio tunes. Abuelita angrily slams the window shut.

ABUELITA
No music!!

EXT. STREET - EVENING

A trio of gentlemen serenade each other as they stroll by the family compound.

MUSICIANS
(singing)
AUNQUE LA VIDA--

Abuelita bursts out of the gate and chases them away.

ABUELITA
NO MUSIC!!!

Terrified, the musicians stumble as they run away.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
I think we're the only family in
México who hates music...

INT. RIVERA WORKSHOP - DAY

We see the Rivera family tinkering in the shoe shop, no music to be heard. Miguel jogs past them.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
And my family's fine with that...

He grabs his shine box, and heads out of the shoe shop.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
But me?

MAMÁ
Be back by lunch, mijo!

MIGUEL
Love you, Mamá!

Once outside, Miguel makes his way through the small town of

SANTA CECILIA - MORNING

MIGUEL (V.O.)
I am NOT like the rest of my
family...

He passes a woman sweeping a stoop.

WOMAN
Hola, Miguel!

MIGUEL
Hola!

He passes a band of musicians playing a tune. Miguel joins with some air guitar and the further down the street he goes, the more instruments and sounds layer in. The bells of the church chime in harmony, a radio blares a cumbia rhythm.

Running past a food stand, Miguel grabs a roll of pan dulce and tosses the vendor a coin.

MIGUEL
Muchas gracias!

STREET VENDOR
De nada, Miguel!

As Miguel passes all these scenes, the music synthesizes and he can't help but tap out rhythms along a table of *alebrijes*. The fantastical wooden animal sculptures each play a different tone like a marimba. Miguel finishes with a SMACK on a trash can, out of which a pops up a scrappy hairless *Xolo* dog. The dog, DANTE, barks and jumps up to lick Miguel, who laughs.

MIGUEL
Hey, hey! Dante!

Miguel holds the pan dulce over Dante's head.

MIGUEL
Sit. Down. Roll over. Shake.
Fist bump.

Dante obeys to the best of his ability.

MIGUEL
Good boy, Dante!

Miguel tosses the pan dulce to his furless friend who topples back into the trash can.

CUT TO:

MARIACHI PLAZA - MOMENTS LATER

Miguel rounds the corner toward the town square. Vendors sell sugar skulls and marigolds, and musicians fill the square with music.

MIGUEL (V.O)
I know I'm not supposed to love
music -- but it's not my fault!
(beat)
It's his: Ernesto de la Cruz...

Miguel approaches a statue of a handsome mariachi at the heart of the plaza.

MIGUEL (V.O)
 ...The greatest musician of all
 time.

A tour group and their TOUR GUIDE are gathered around the
 base of the statue.

TOUR GUIDE
 And right here, in this very plaza,
 the young Ernesto de la Cruz took
 his first steps toward becoming the
 most beloved singer in Mexican
 history!

CUT TO:

CLIPS of de la Cruz in his hay day: playing as a young man in
 the plaza, serenading bystanders in a train car...

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 He started out a total nobody from
 Santa Cecilia, like me. But when
 he played music, he made people
 fall in love with him.

MORE CLIPS from de la Cruz's films. He leaps from a tree
 branch onto a galloping horse. He plays his signature skull
 guitar with flourish and flair.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 He starred in movies. He had the
 coolest guitar... He could fly!

A CLIP features de la Cruz dressed as a hovering priest, held
 up by strings, in front of a cycling sky flat.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 And he wrote the best songs! But
 my all-time favorite? It's--

A CLIP of de la Cruz performing in a fancy nightclub.

DE LA CRUZ
 (singing)
 REMEMBER ME
 THOUGH I HAVE TO SAY GOODBYE
 REMEMBER ME
 DON'T LET IT MAKE YOU CRY
 FOR EVEN IF I'M FAR AWAY
 I HOLD YOU IN MY HEART
 I SING A SECRET SONG TO YOU
 EACH NIGHT WE ARE APART
 REMEMBER ME
 (MORE)

DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)
 THOUGH I HAVE TO TRAVEL FAR
 REMEMBER ME
 EACH TIME YOU HEAR A SAD GUITAR
 KNOW THAT I'M WITH YOU THE ONLY WAY
 THAT I CAN BE...

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 He lived the kind of life you dream
 about... Until 1942...

As the audience swoons over de la Cruz, an absent-minded stagehand leans on a lever. Ropes and pulleys go flying.

DE LA CRUZ
 UNTIL YOU'RE IN MY ARMS AGAIN
 REMEMBER ME!

De la Cruz is subsequently crushed by a giant bell.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 When he was crushed by a giant
 bell.

CUT TO:

MARIACHI PLAZA - DAY

Miguel gazes up at the statue of de la Cruz in awe.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 I wanna be just like him.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - MOMENTS LATER

Miguel weaves up to de la Cruz's mausoleum and peeks in the window. He catches a glimpse of de la Cruz's signature skull guitar.

MIGUEL (V.O.)
 Sometimes, I look at de la Cruz and
 I get this feeling... like we're
 connected somehow. Like, if HE
 could play music, maybe someday I
 could too...

EXT. MARIACHI PLAZA - DAY

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
 ...If it wasn't for my family.

PLAZA MARIACHI
 (playful)
 Ay, ay, ay, muchacho.

MIGUEL
 Huh?

PLAZA MARIACHI
 I asked for a shoe shine, not your
 life story.

Miguel comes out of his reverie and looks up at the PLAZA MARIACHI whose shoes he is shining.

MIGUEL
 Oh, yeah, sorry.

He goes back to scrubbing the man's shoe. As Miguel shines, the mariachi plucks his guitar idly.

MIGUEL
 I just can't really talk about any
 of this at home so...

PLAZA MARIACHI
 Look, if I were you I'd march right
 up to my family and say, "Hey! I'm
 a musician. Deal with it!"

MIGUEL
 I could never say that...

PLAZA MARIACHI
 You ARE a musician, no?

MIGUEL
 I don't know. I mean... I only
 really play for myself--

PLAZA MARIACHI
 Did de la Cruz become the world's
 best musician by hiding his sweet,
 sweet skills? No! He walked out
 onto that plaza and he played out
 loud!

The mariachi gets an idea. He points to the gazebo where organizers are setting up for a show. They unfurl a canvas poster which reads "TALENT SHOW."

PLAZA MARIACHI (CONT'D)

Ah, mira, mira! They're setting up for tonight. The music competition for Día de Muertos. You wanna be like your hero? You should sign up!

MIGUEL

Uh-uh, my family would freak!

PLAZA MARIACHI

Look, if you're too scared, then, well... have fun making shoes.

Miguel considers this.

PLAZA MARIACHI (CONT'D)

C'mon. What did de la Cruz always say?

MIGUEL

...Seize your moment?

The mariachi appraises Miguel, then offers his guitar.

PLAZA MARIACHI

Show me what you got, muchacho. I'll be your first audience.

Miguel's brows rise, surprised. He reaches to take the instrument, regarding it as if holding a holy relic.

Miguel spreads his fingers across the strings anticipating his chord and...

ABUELITA (O.S.)

MIGUEL!

Startled, Miguel impulsively throws the guitar back onto the mariachi's lap. He turns to see Abuelita marching toward him. Miguel's TÍO BERTO (40s) and PRIMA ROSA (16), follow with supplies from the market.

MIGUEL

Abuelita!

ABUELITA

What are you doing here?

MIGUEL

Um...uh...

Miguel quickly packs away his shine rag and polishes. Abuelita barrels up to the mariachi.

She hits his hat with her shoe and waves him away.

ABUELITA

You leave my grandson alone!

PLAZA MARIACHI

Doña, please -- I was just getting a shine!

ABUELITA

I know your tricks, mariachi!
(to Miguel)
What did he say to you?

MIGUEL

He was just showing me his guitar...

Gasps from the family.

TÍO BERTO

Shame on you!

Abuelita lords over the mariachi, shoe aimed directly between his eyes.

ABUELITA

My grandson is a sweet little angelito querido cielito -- he wants no part of your music, mariachi! You keep away from him!

The mariachi scrambles away, snatching his hat off the ground before he goes. Abuelita hugs Miguel protectively to her bosom.

ABUELITA

Ay, pobrecito! Estás bien, mijo?

She peppers him with kisses then releases him from the embrace. He gasps for air.

ABUELITA

(distressed)
You know better than to be here in this place! You will come home. Now.

Abuelita turns toward home. Miguel sighs and gathers his shine box. Then, seeing a flyer for the plaza "TALENT SHOW", he can't help but pocket it. He follows Abuelita.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Miguel catches up to his family.

TÍO BERTO
How many times have we told you --
that plaza is crawling with
mariachis!

MIGUEL
Yes, Tío Berto.

Dante ambles up to Miguel, sniffing and whining for a treat.

MIGUEL
No, no, no!

Abuelita shoos him away.

ABUELITA
Go away, you! Go!

Dante darts off, scared.

MIGUEL
It's just Dante...

Abuelita throws her shoe at the dog.

ABUELITA
Never name a street dog. They'll
follow you forever.
(beat)
Now, go get my shoe.

CUT TO:

INT. RIVERA WORKSHOP

The Rivera workshop is abuzz with family making shoes. WHOMP! Miguel is plopped onto a stool, ready for a lecture.

ABUELITA
I found your son in Mariachi Plaza!

PAPÁ
(disappointed)
Miguel...

MAMÁ

You know how Abuelita feels about
the plaza.

MIGUEL

I was just shining shoes!

TÍO BERTO

A musician's shoes!

Gasps from the family. PRIMO ABEL (19) is so shocked he loses his grip on the shoe he is polishing, which zips away from the polisher and lodges itself in the roof.

MIGUEL

But the plaza's where all the foot
traffic is.

PAPÁ

If Abuelita says no more plaza,
then no more plaza.

MIGUEL

(blurting)
But what about tonight?

PAPÁ FRANCO

What's tonight?

MIGUEL

Well they're having this talent
show-

Abuelita perks her ear, suspicious. Miguel squirms, deciding whether to go on.

MIGUEL

And I thought I might...

Mamá looks at Miguel, curious.

MAMÁ

...Sign up?

MIGUEL

Well, maybe?

PRIMA ROSA

(laughing)
You have to have talent to be in a
talent show.

PRIMO ABEL

What are YOU going to do, shine shoes?

The shoe from the ceiling falls back down on Abel's head.

ABUELITA

It's Día de los Muertos -- no one's going anywhere. Tonight is about family.

She deposits a pile of marigolds in Miguel's arms.

ABUELITA

Ofrenda room. Vámonos.

CUT TO:

INT. OFRENDA ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Miguel follows his Abuelita to the family ofrenda, holding the pile of flowers as she arranges them on the altar.

ABUELITA

Don't give me that look. Día de los Muertos is the one night of the year our ancestors can come visit us.

(beat)

We've put their photos on the ofrenda so their spirits can cross over. That is very important! If we don't put them up, they can't come!

(beat)

We made all this food -- set out the things they loved in life, mijo. All this work to bring the family together. I don't want you sneaking off to who-knows-where.

She looks up to find Miguel sneaking away.

ABUELITA (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

MIGUEL

I thought we were done...

ABUELITA

Ay, Dios mío... Being part of this family means being HERE for this family... I don't want to see you end up like--

Abuelita looks up to the photo of the faceless musician.

MIGUEL

Like Mamá Coco's papá?

ABUELITA

Never mention that man! He's better off forgotten.

MIGUEL

But you're the one who--

ABUELITA

Ta, ta, ta-tch!

MIGUEL

I was just--

ABUELITA

Tch-tch!

MIGUEL

But--

ABUELITA

Tch!

MIGUEL

I--

ABUELITA

Tch-tch!

MAMÁ COCO

Papá?

They look to find Mamá Coco agitated.

MAMÁ COCO (CONT'D)

Papá is home...?

ABUELITA

Mamá, cálmese, cálmese.

MAMÁ COCO

Papá is coming home?

ABUELITA
No Mamá. It's okay, I'm here.

Mamá Coco looks up at Abuelita.

MAMÁ COCO
Who are you?

Sadness rises in Abuelita; she swallows it down.

ABUELITA
Rest, Mamá.

Abuelita returns to the ofrenda.

ABUELITA (CONT'D)
I'm hard on you because I care,
Miguel.
(beat)
Miguel... Miguel?

She looks around the room. Miguel is nowhere to be found.
Abuelita steps up to the ofrenda.

ABUELITA (CONT'D)
(sigh)
What are we going to do with that
boy...?

She looks to the photo of Mamá Imelda. Abuelita's eyes
brighten with an idea.

ABUELITA (CONT'D)
You're right. That's just what he
needs!

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDE STREET

Tío Berto unloads rolls of leather from a truckbed. Nearby,
Dante sleeps under the shade of a tree. He startles awake by
a faint TWANGING. The dog scrambles up to the roof.

He reaches a shoe sign advertising the Rivera Family business
and lifts it up.

INT. ROOFTOP HIDEOUT

Dante pokes his head in. Miguel turns and gasps.

MIGUEL

Oh, it's you. Get in here, c'mon,
Dante. Hurry up.

Dante wriggles into the hideout. Miguel is huddled over something. The dog peeks around his shoulder.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

You're gonna get me in trouble,
boy. Someone could hear me!

Miguel reveals a makeshift guitar, cobbled together from a beat up old soundboard and random other items.

He takes a china marker and sketches a nose on what appears to be his own version of a skull guitar head.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I wish someone wanted to hear me...

Miguel tunes the guitar.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Other than you...

Dante gives Miguel a big sloppy lick. Miguel gives a grossed-out chuckle. He lifts his guitar and strums.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Perfecto!

He crawls to the far side of the attic where he's built his own ofrenda to Ernesto de la Cruz. Posters, candles, and songbooks are arranged with care. Miguel lights the candles with reverence, illuminating an album cover of de la Cruz holding his skull guitar.

Miguel compares the head of his guitar to the album cover. Then he imitates de la Cruz's pose and smile.

He switches on a beat up old TV and pushes a tape into the VCR, "Best of de la Cruz" scrawled on the spine.

A montage of the greatest moments from de la Cruz's films plays out.

A clip from "A QUIEN YO AMO:"

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)

I have to sing. I have to play.
The music, it's -- it's not just in
me. It is me.

Miguel strums his guitar as de la Cruz imparts his wisdom. More clips run in the background as Miguel plays:

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
When life gets me down, I play my
guitar.

In a clip from "A QUIEN YO AMO:"

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
The rest of the world may follow
the rules, but I must follow my
heart!

De la Cruz kisses a woman passionately. Miguel cringes.

Another clip from "A QUIEN YO AMO:"

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
You know that feeling? Like
there's a song in the air and it's
playing just for you...

As Miguel watches de la Cruz play guitar in the video, he repeats the melody on his own guitar.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
(singing)
A FEELING SO CLOSE
YOU COULD REACH OUT AND TOUCH IT
I NEVER KNEW I COULD
WANT SOMETHING SO MUCH
BUT IT'S TRUE...

As a good-natured priest in "NUESTRA IGLESIA:"

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
You must have faith, sister.

NUN (FILM CLIP)
Oh but Padre, he will never listen.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
He will listen... to MUSIC!
(singing)
ONLY A SONG
ONLY A SONG
HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE A HEART...

Miguel loses himself in the music.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
 Never underestimate the power of
 music...

Miguel's tune intertwines with the melodies on the TV set.
 The clip jumps forward:

LOLA (FILM CLIP)
 But my father, he will never give
 his permission.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
 I am done asking permission. When
 you see your moment you mustn't let
 it pass you by, you must seize it!

The tape ends with an interview clip.

INTERVIEWER (FILM CLIP)
 Señor de la Cruz, what did it take
 for you to seize your moment?

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
 I had to have faith in my dream.
 No one was going to hand it to me.
 It was up to me to reach for that
 dream, grab it tight, and make it
 come true.

MIGUEL
 ...and make it come true.

The tape ends. The words sink into Miguel. He reaches for
 the flyer for the plaza "TALENT SHOW."

MIGUEL
 No more hiding, Dante. I gotta
 seize my moment!

Dante wags his tail, panting happily.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
 I'm gonna play in Mariachi Plaza if
 it kills me!

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERA COMPOUND - SUNSET

Children run by with sparklers as Abuelita opens the doors to
 the family compound.

ABUELITA
Día de los Muertos has begun!

In the courtyard, two TODDLER COUSINS haphazardly scatter marigold petals from their baskets.

MAMÁ
No, no, no, no, no.

Mamá corrects them, creating a path from the ofrenda room to the front gate.

MAMÁ (CONT'D)
We have to make a clear path. The petals guide our ancestors home. We don't want their spirits to get lost. We want them to come, and enjoy all the food and drinks on the ofrenda, sí?

As Mamá teaches, Miguel and Dante sneak across the roof and drop to the sidewalk outside the compound, Miguel clutching his guitar.

Suddenly Tío Berto and Papá round the corner carrying a small table from storage.

PAPÁ
Mamá, where should we put this table?

Miguel and Dante back up to avoid the adults, only to find Abuelita sweeping the sidewalk behind them! Miguel and Dante jump into the back into the Rivera courtyard before she sees them.

ABUELITA
In the courtyard, mijos.

PAPÁ
You want it down by the kitchen?

ABUELITA
Sí. Next to the other one.

INT. OFRENDA ROOM

Miguel backs out of the courtyard and into the family ofrenda room. Nearly cornered, he ushers Dante past a sleeping Mamá Coco. He stashes the dog and the guitar under the ofrenda table.

MIGUEL
Get under, get under!

ABUELITA (O.S.)
Miguel!

Miguel straightens up to notice the doorway of the ofrenda room darkened by three figures.

MIGUEL
Nothing!

His Abuelita and parents stare straight at him. A pit grows in his stomach; he's been caught.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Mamá -- Papá, I--

Papá lifts his finger to silence his son.

PAPÁ
Miguel...
(beat)
Your Abuelita had the most
wonderful idea!
(beat)
We've all decided -- it's time you
joined us in the workshop!

Abuelita hands Papá a leather apron, which he hangs over Miguel's shoulders.

MIGUEL
What?!

PAPÁ
No more shining shoes -- you will
be making them! Every day after
school!

Abuelita shuffles toward Miguel squealing. She squeezes his cheeks, full of pride.

ABUELITA
Our Migueli-ti-ti-ti-to carrying on
the family tradition! And on Día
de los Muertos! Your ancestors
will be so proud!

She gestures to the shoes adorning the ofrenda.

ABUELITA (CONT'D)
 You'll craft huaraches just like
 your Tía Victoria.

PAPÁ
 And wingtips, like your Papá Julio--

Miguel crosses away from the ofrenda.

MIGUEL
 But what if I'm no good at making
 shoes?

PAPÁ
 Ah, Migue... You have your family
 here to guide you...
 (beat)
 You are a Rivera. And a Rivera
 is...?

MIGUEL
 ...A shoemaker. Through and
 through.

Papá swells.

PAPÁ
 That's my boy!
 (calling out)
 Berto, break out the good stuff, I
 wanna make a toast!

Papá heads out of the room, Mamá follows. Last is Abuelita,
 who smothers Miguel with tons of kisses as she leaves.

With the family gone, Miguel deflates.

Suddenly, a noise comes from the ofrenda. Miguel turns to
 find Dante on the bottom tier, licking a plate of mole to his
 heart's content. Miguel is horrified!

MIGUEL
 Dante! No, Dante, stop!

Miguel pulls the dog away from the ofrenda, but the table
 shakes. The frame with Mamá Imelda's photo sways back and
 forth, then topples to the ground with a sickening crack.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
 No, no, no, no, no! No...

Miguel picks up the old photo of Mamá Imelda, which unfolds
 to reveal another portion, hidden all these years;

the man with no face is revealed to be holding a familiar skull-headed guitar.

MIGUEL
De la Cruz's guitar...?

MAMÁ COCO
Papá?

Miguel turns, startled. Mamá Coco points a crooked finger at the picture in his hand.

MAMÁ COCO (CONT'D)
Papá?

Miguel's eyes go wide as the connection dawns on him. Could it possibly be true?

MIGUEL
Mamá Coco, is your papá... Ernesto de la Cruz?

MAMÁ COCO
Papá! Papá!

CUT TO:

INT. ROOFTOP HIDEOUT

Miguel goes to his secret ofrenda, to the record album of Ernesto de la Cruz. He compares the guitar in the family photo with the guitar on the sleeve. An exact match!

MIGUEL
Ha, ha!

EXT. ROOFTOP

Miguel runs to the edge of the roof, overlooking the courtyard, photo in one hand, guitar in the other.

MIGUEL
Papá! Papá!

His parents stop, looking up at Miguel.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
It's him! I know who my great-great grandfather was!

MAMÁ

Miguel! Get down from there!

MIGUEL

Mamá Coco's father was Ernesto de la Cruz!

PAPÁ

What are you talking about?

Miguel whips off his shoemaker's apron, striking a pose with the guitar.

MIGUEL

I'm gonna be a musician!

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD - EARLY EVENING

Miguel's guitar is cast at his feet, along with his de la Cruz albums. The whole family encircles the boy.

ABUELITA

What is all this? You keep secrets from your own family?

TÍO BERTO

It's all that time he spends in the plaza...

TÍA GLORIA

...Fills his head with crazy fantasies!

MIGUEL

It's not a fantasy!

Miguel hands Papá the photo and points to the skull guitar.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

That man was Ernesto de la Cruz!
The greatest musician of all time!

PAPÁ

We've never known anything about this man. But whoever he was, he still abandoned his family. This is no future for my son.

MIGUEL

But Papá, you said my family would
guide me! Well de la Cruz IS my
family! I'm supposed to play
music!

ABUELITA

Never! That man's music was a
curse! I will not allow it!

MIGUEL

If you would just let--

MAMÁ

(warning)
Miguel--

PAPÁ

You will listen to your family. No
more music.

MIGUEL

Just listen to me play--

PAPÁ

End of argument.

Miguel lifts his guitar to play when Abuelita snatches the
instrument away. She points to the man in the photo.

ABUELITA

You want to end up like that man?
Forgotten? Left off your family's
ofrenda?!

MIGUEL

I don't care if I'm on some stupid
ofrenda!

Gasps from the family. Abuelita's brow hardens. She lifts
the guitar in the air.

MIGUEL

No!

PAPÁ

Mamá...

Abuelita smashes it to bits!

ABUELITA

There. No guitar, no music.
(softening)
(MORE)

ABUELITA (CONT'D)

Come. You'll feel better after you eat with your family.

She reaches out to comfort Miguel, but he is hurt beyond repair.

MIGUEL

I don't wanna be in this family!

He snatches the photo from Papá and bolts out of the hacienda.

PAPÁ

Miguel! MIGUEL!

EXT. SIDE STREET

Miguel bursts out of the compound, desperate to get away. Dante, nose buried in a trash bag, hears Miguel and chases after him. Miguel runs past a poster for the plaza "TALENT SHOW."

EXT. MARIACHI PLAZA - EVENING

Miguel approaches a STAGE MANAGER in the gazebo.

MIGUEL

I wanna play in the plaza. Like de la Cruz! Can I still sign-up?

STAGE MANAGER

You got an instrument?

MIGUEL

No... But if I can borrow a guitar--

STAGE MANAGER

Musicians gotta bring their own instruments...

(walking away)

You find a guitar, kid, I'll put you on the list.

Miguel looks distraught.

MOMENTS LATER:

Miguel approaches any musician he can find.

MIGUEL
Excuse me, can I borrow your
guitar?

MUSICIAN #1
Sorry, muchacho.

CUT TO:

MIGUEL
You guys have a spare guitar?

MUSICIAN #2
No.

CUT TO:

MIGUEL
I need a guitar, just for a little
bit--

MUSICIAN #3
Get outta here, kid!

Disheartened, Miguel walks away. He finds himself facing the
statue of de la Cruz.

MIGUEL
Great-great grandfather... What am
I supposed to do?

No answer. Miguel's gaze falls on a plaque at the base of
the statue that reads "Seize Your Moment!" Miguel looks at
the photo in his hand. He moves his thumb to reveal the
skull head guitar. Then, a firework illuminates the skull
head guitar that the statue holds. Miguel gets an idea.

EXT. CEMETERY - MOMENTS LATER

A sea of candles and flowers, families gathered at graves.

Miguel sneaks through the cemetery unnoticed, slipping from
one shadow to the next.

Dante suddenly catches up to Miguel. He barks excitedly.

MIGUEL
No, no, no, no, no, Dante stop!
Cállate! Shhh!

Miguel swipes a chicken leg off a neighboring grave, and
chucks it. Dante bounds after the food.

EXT. DE LA CRUZ'S MAUSOLEUM

Miguel slinks around the side of the tomb. He looks in one of the windows.

Inside, the famous guitar hangs above the crypt. Fireworks pop; bursts of light glint off the instrument. It seems to beckon him. He tries the window but it's locked.

More fireworks shoot into the sky.

MIGUEL

I'm sorry...

Timing to the explosions, Miguel throws his shoulder into the rusted-shut window pane and forces it open with a scraping KRRRR-LANK! He slinks inside the tomb.

INT. DE LA CRUZ'S MAUSOLEUM

Miguel drops down to the mausoleum floor. The noise from outside is muffled. He climbs onto the crypt, slightly moving the lid. He stifles a gasp.

He crawls over the marble sarcophagus and comes face-to-face with the famed guitar. Miguel wipes away a layer of dust, revealing the rich painted wood beneath. He looks up to the portrait of de la Cruz.

MIGUEL

Señor de la Cruz? Please don't be mad. I'm Miguel, your great-great grandson... I need to borrow this.

Heart in his throat, Miguel lifts the guitar off its mount. Unbeknownst to him, some marigold petals in the mausoleum begin to sparkle.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Our family thinks music is a curse. None of them understand, but I know you would have. You would've told me to follow my heart. To seize my moment!

He backs up, in full view of the painting.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

So if it's all right with you, I'm gonna play in the plaza, just like you did!

Confidence building, he strums it once.

The air around him vibrates -- radiating like a shock wave. The petals on the ground whirl and surge with light for just a moment. Miguel is visibly taken aback. What just happened?

Suddenly, a flashlight shines in the window of the mausoleum.

VOICES (O.S.)

The guitar! It's gone! Somebody stole de la Cruz's guitar! The window's broken, look.

Miguel hears keys jangling and the door unlocking. A GROUNDSKEEPER enters with a flashlight.

GROUNDSKEEPER

Alright, who's in there?

Startled, Miguel puts down the guitar.

MIGUEL

I... I'm sorry! It's not what it looks like! De la Cruz is my...

The groundskeeper walks straight through Miguel! He doesn't even see him!

GROUNDSKEEPER

There's nobody here!

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

A panicked Miguel runs out, trying to figure out what's going on! But the people in the cemetery walk through him too.

Suddenly he hears a familiar voice.

MAMÁ

Miguel!

Miguel turns to see Papá and Mamá still searching for him.

MIGUEL

Mamá!

PAPÁ

Miguel! Come home!

He reaches for his parents, but goes straight through them.

PAPÁ

Where are you, Miguel?!

Frantic, Miguel trips and falls into an open grave. A nearby woman gasps and peeks over the ledge of the grave.

WOMAN

Dios mío! Little boy, are you okay?

She reaches into the grave.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Here, let me help you.

Miguel takes her hand and she pulls him out.

MIGUEL

Thanks, I--

They see each other face to face. The woman is a skeleton! Miguel screams! She does too!

Miguel backs away. He turns to see another skeleton. He falls backwards and scoots away frantically. He bumps into another skeleton whose head falls off and lands in Miguel's hands.

SKELETON HEAD

Do you mind?

MIGUEL

Ahhh!

SKELETON HEAD

Ahhh!

MIGUEL

AHHH!

Miguel tosses the head away from him and turns to see the whole cemetery is teeming with skeletons! And they can all see him!

He races off and hides behind a grave. After a moment, he peeks over the headstone to watch the skeletons engaging with their living families.

One couple dances.

Another man reaches for offerings on his grave, which solidify in his hands when he takes them.

A couple of skeletons coo over a toddler.

SKELETON ABUELA
Look how big she's getting!

Suddenly Dante surprises Miguel and licks him on the cheek. Miguel screams.

MIGUEL
Dante?! You can see me? W-wait!
What's going on?!

Dante barks, points, and bounds through the crowd.

MIGUEL
Dante! Dante!

Miguel gives chase until -- BAM! He runs smack into a mustached skeleton and falls to the ground. The skeleton's bones break apart and scatter. The head pops up.

MIGUEL
I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

PAPÁ JULIO
Miguel?!

Miguel tries to gather the scattered bones.

TÍA ROSITA
Miguel?

TÍA VICTORIA
Miguel?

The bones magically pull away from Miguel.

PAPÁ JULIO
You're here! HERE here!

PAPÁ JULIO reconstitutes himself.

PAPÁ JULIO (CONT'D)
And you can see us?!

TÍA ROSITA charges through Papá Julio, sending his bones scattering again. She grabs Miguel, hugging him tight.

TÍA ROSITA
Our Migueli-ti-ti-ti-ti-to!

Miguel, smothered by Rosita's ample ribcage, struggles for air.

MIGUEL
 (muffled)
 Remind me how I know you?

TÍA ROSITA
 We're your family, mijo!

Tía Rosita's ofrenda photo flashes in Miguel's memory.

MIGUEL
 Tía... Rosita?

TÍA ROSITA
 Sí!

He looks at Papá Julio, whose head is still turned the wrong way. TÍA VICTORIA straightens it.

MIGUEL
 Papá Julio?

PAPÁ JULIO
 Hola.

MIGUEL
 Tía Victoria?

Tía Victoria pokes Miguel's cheek, skeptical.

TÍA VICTORIA
 He doesn't seem entirely dead.

A living person ambles through Miguel's non-corporeal form.

TÍA ROSITA
 He's not quite alive either...

PAPÁ JULIO
 We need Mamá Imelda. She'll know
 how to fix this!

Suddenly twin skeleton gents run, huffing, toward the family.

TÍO FELIPE
 (huffing)
 Oye!

TÍO OSCAR
 (winded)
 It's Mamá Imelda--

TÍO FELIPE
 (huffing)
 --She couldn't cross over!

The others gasp.

TÍO OSCAR
 She's stuck--

TÍO FELIPE
 --On the other side!

Miguel sees pictures of his Tío Oscar and Tío Felipe flash in his memory.

MIGUEL
 Tío Oscar? Tío Felipe?

TÍO OSCAR
 Oh, hey Miguel.

Tía Victoria turns her gaze on Miguel.

TÍA VICTORIA
 I have a feeling this has something
 to do with you.

TÍA ROSITA
 But if Mamá Imelda can't come to
 us...

PAPÁ JULIO
 ...Then we are going to her!
 Vámonos!

Papá Julio grabs Miguel by the arm and the family rushes through the cemetery, trailed by Dante.

EXT. CEMETERY - MOMENTS LATER

Miguel and his family weave through the graves, rounding a corner.

His gaze falls upon a glowing MARIGOLD BRIDGE arching before them.

MIGUEL
 Whoa...

The bridge extends into the mist. A stream of skeletons amble across for the holiday.

The family passes through an invisible barrier onto the bridge. Their bodies change from ghostly to solid. Miguel hesitates at the threshold.

PAPÁ JULIO
Come on, Miguel. It's ok.

Miguel follows after the family, the petals glowing under his feet. Dante takes off.

MIGUEL
Dante! Dante! Dante, wait up!

Miguel runs after Dante, finally catching up to the dog as he rolls in the petals at the crest of the bridge. He sneezes some petals into Miguel's face.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
You gotta stay with me, boy. We don't know... where...

Out of the mist, the sparkling cityscape of the Land of the Dead emerges. It's breathtaking. His family sidles up.

MIGUEL
This isn't a dream, then. You're all really out there...

TÍA VICTORIA
You thought we weren't?

MIGUEL
Well I don't know, I thought it might've been one of those made up things that adults tell kids... like... vitamins.

TÍA VICTORIA
Miguel, vitamins are a real thing.

MIGUEL
Well, now I'm thinking maybe they could be...

As skeletons pass in the other direction, Miguel receives some strange looks. A little skeleton girl gasps, pointing at him.

SKELETON MOTHER
Mija, it's not nice to stare at--
(seeing Miguel)
Ay! Santa Maria!

The woman goes wide-eyed, her head turning backwards to gawk at Miguel as she walks in the opposite direction. Miguel puts up his hood.

The Riveras continue on toward an arrivals area on the far side of the bridge. Miguel sees fantastical creatures crawling, flying, making nests in the nearby architecture.

MIGUEL

Are those...? Alebrijes! But those are--

TÍO OSCAR

REAL alebrijes. Spirit creatures...

TÍA ROSITA

They guide souls on their journey...

TÍO FELIPE

Watch your step, they make caquitas everywhere.

They get to the far edge of the Marigold Bridge.

EXT. MARIGOLD GRAND CENTRAL STATION

CANNED LOOP (V.O.)

Welcome back to the Land of the Dead. Please have all offerings ready for re-entry. We hope you enjoyed your holiday!

A sign reads RE-ENTRY.

ARRIVALS AGENT

Welcome back! Anything to declare?

TRAVELER

Some churros... from my family.

ARRIVALS AGENT

How wonderful! Next!

CANNED LOOP (V.O.)

...If you are experiencing travel issues, agents at the Department of Family Reunions are available to assist you.

Miguel and family get into the line for RE-ENTRY, along with other skeletons returning from the Land of the Living.

Nearby, skeletons exit the Land of the Dead through a gate marked DEPARTURES. Miguel watches.

DEPARTURES AGENT
Next family, please!

An ELDERLY COUPLE steps in front of a camera-mounted monitor. The monitor scans their faces and returns an image of their photos on an altar in the Land of the Living.

DEPARTURES AGENT (CONT'D)
Oh, your photos are on your son's
ofrenda. Have a great visit!

ELDERLY COUPLE
Gracias.

The couple unites with the rest of their family. They all step onto the bridge, which begins to glow as they gain footing.

CANNED LOOP (V.O.)
...And remember to return before
sunrise. Enjoy your visit!

DEPARTURES AGENT
Next!

A skeleton man, a smile full of braces, steps up to the monitor.

DEPARTURES AGENT (CONT'D)
Your photo's on your dentist's
ofrenda. Enjoy your visit!

JUAN ORTODONCIA
Grashiash!

DEPARTURES AGENT
Next!

HÉCTOR (early 20s), a ragged fellow, steps up to the monitor, disguised as Frida Kahlo.

HÉCTOR
Yes, it is I. Frida Kahlo.
(beat)
Shall we skip the scanner? I'm on
so many ofrendas, it'll just
overwhelm your blinky thingie...

The monitor scans him, but an "X" appears, accompanied by a negative buzzing sound.

DEPARTURES AGENT

Well shoot. Looks like no one put
up your photo, Frida...

Héctor peels off his unibrow and throws off his frock.

HÉCTOR

Okay, when I said I was Frida...
just now? That... that was a lie.
And I apologize for doing that.

DEPARTURES AGENT

No photo on an ofrenda, no crossing
the bridge.

HÉCTOR

You know what, I'm just gonna zip
right over, you won't even know I'm
gone.

Héctor bolts for the bridge. A security guard blocks the
gate. Héctor splits in two and slides past the guard, half
going over, half under.

HÉCTOR

Ha HA!

Héctor reaches the bridge at a sprint, but the magic doesn't
engage; he sinks right into the petals.

HÉCTOR

Almost there, just a little
further...!

The guards saunter to the bridge and casually pull Héctor
back toward the Land of the Dead.

OFFICER

Upsy-daisy...

HÉCTOR

Fine, okay. Fine, who cares...
Dumb flower bridge!

Miguel watches as the guards haul him out. Tía Rosita looks
up in time to see his back.

TÍA ROSITA

I don't know what I'd do if no one
put up my photo.

ARRIVALS AGENT (O.S.)

Next!

TÍA ROSITA

Oh! Come miijo, it's our turn.

The arrivals line moves forward. The Dead Riveras crowd around the gate. The arrivals agent leans out from his window.

ARRIVALS AGENT

Welcome back, amigos! Anything to declare?

PAPÁ JULIO

As a matter of fact, yes.

The family pushes Miguel to the front, very much alive.

MIGUEL

Hola.

The arrivals agent's jaw literally drops.

CUT TO:

INT. MARIGOLD GRAND CENTRAL STATION

Miguel and his family are escorted by a security guard across an arching second floor walkway.

VOICE OVER P.A.

Paging Marta Gonzales-Ramos. Marta Gonzales-Ramos, please report to Level 7.

Dante happily trots alongside. Miguel looks up to see gondolas traveling by.

MIGUEL

Whoa...

Skeletons stare at Miguel as he walks by. Suddenly Miguel notices Tío Oscar staring at his face in deep contemplation.

TÍO OSCAR

I miss my nose...

At the end of the walkway are doors emblazoned with "DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY REUNIONS." The family passes through.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY REUNIONS

Inside, they find case workers helping travelers work out holiday snafus.

DISTRESSED TRAVELER
 C'mon! Help us out amigo... We
 gotta get to a dozen ofrendas
 tonight...

CUT TO:

MIFFED WIFE
 We are NOT visiting your ex-wife's
 family for Día de Muertos!

CUT TO:

In a far corner, one traveler in particular is raising hell.

MAMÁ IMELDA
 I demand to speak to the person in
 charge!

A beleaguered CASE WORKER cringes as Mamá Imelda tears into
 her.

CASE WORKER
 I'm sorry, señora, it says here no
 one put up your photo--

Mamá Imelda coldly eyes the Macintosh 128k on the woman's
 desk.

MAMÁ IMELDA
 My family always -- ALWAYS -- puts
 my photo on the ofrenda! That
 devil box tells you nothing but
 lies!

In a swift movement, Mamá Imelda removes her shoe and smacks
 the computer.

PAPÁ JULIO
 Mamá Imelda?

She turns her shoe on Papá Julio, who leans back and yelps.
 Mamá Imelda softens.

MAMÁ IMELDA
 Oh, mi familia! They wouldn't let
 me cross the bridge! Tell this
 woman and her devil box that my
 photo is on the ofrenda.

PAPÁ JULIO
 Well, we never made it to the
 ofrenda...

MAMÁ IMELDA

What?!

PAPÁ JULIO

We ran into... um...

Mamá Imelda's eyes fall on Miguel.

Miguel looks at Mamá Imelda. Her photo flashes before him.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Miguel?

MIGUEL

Mamá Imelda...

MAMÁ IMELDA

What is going on?

Just then, a door opens and a CLERK pokes his head out.

CLERK

You the Rivera family?

The computer short circuits.

CUT TO:

INT. CLERK'S OFFICE

CLERK

Well, you're cursed.

The family gasps.

MIGUEL

What?!

The clerk searches through a huge stack of papers.

CLERK

Día de los Muertos is a night to
GIVE to the dead. You STOLE from
the dead.

MIGUEL

But I wasn't stealing the guitar!

MAMÁ IMELDA

Guitar...?

MIGUEL

It was my great-great
grandfather's, he would have wanted
me to have it--

MAMÁ IMELDA

Ah-ah-ah! We do not speak of
that...

(disgust)

...musician! He is DEAD to this
family!

MIGUEL

Uh, you're all dead.

Dante balances his paws at the edge of the clerk's desk and
tries to reach a plate of food.

CLERK

ACHOO! I am sorry, whose alebrije
is that?

Miguel steps up, trying to pull Dante away from the treats.

MIGUEL

That's just Dante.

TÍA ROSITA

He sure doesn't look like an
alebrije.

Tía Rosita gestures to the fantastical creatures fluttering
on the other side of the window.

TÍO OSCAR

He just looks like a plain old
dog...

TÍO FELIPE

...Or a sausage someone dropped in
a barbershop.

CLERK

Whatever he is, I am -- ACHOO! --
terribly allergic.

MIGUEL

But Dante doesn't have any hair.

CLERK

And I don't have a nose, and yet
here we are -- ACHOO!!

MAMÁ IMELDA

But none of this explains why I
couldn't cross over.

Miguel realizes something. He sheepishly pulls out the
folded photo.

MIGUEL

Oh...

He unfolds the photo.

MAMÁ IMELDA

You took my photo off the ofrenda?!

MIGUEL

It was an accident!

Mamá Imelda turns to the clerk, fire in her eyes.

MAMÁ IMELDA

How do we send him back?!

CLERK

Well, since it's a family matter...
(flipping pages)
The way to undo a family curse is
to get your family's blessing.

MIGUEL

That's it?

CLERK

Get your family's blessing, and
everything SHOULD go back to
normal. But you gotta do it by
sunrise!

MIGUEL

What happens at sunrise?

PAPÁ JULIO

Híjole! Your hand!

Miguel looks at his hand. The tip of one of his fingers has
started to turn skeletal. He turns pale. He starts to faint
when Papá Julio picks him up and gently slaps him awake.

PAPÁ JULIO

Whoa, Miguel. Can't have you
fainting on us.

CLERK

But not to worry! Your family's
here, you can get your blessing
right now.

The clerk searches the ground near Tía Rosita.

CLERK

Cempasúchil, cempasúchil. Aha!
Perdón, señora.

Tía Rosita titters. The clerk plucks a marigold petal from
the hem of her dress. He hands the petal to Mamá Imelda.

CLERK

(to Imelda)
Now, you look at the living and say
his name.

Imelda turns to Miguel.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Miguel.

CLERK

Nailed it. Now say: I give you my
blessing.

MAMÁ IMELDA

I give you my blessing.

The marigold petal glows in her fingers. Miguel brightens.
But Mamá Imelda is not finished.

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)

I give you my blessing to go
home...

The glow of the marigold petal surges.

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)

To put my photo back on the
ofrenda...

Each added condition makes the petal glow brighter. Imelda
delivers it like a scolding, but Miguel nods.

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)

And to never play music again!

The petal surges one last time.

MIGUEL

What? She can't do that!

CLERK

Well technically she can add any conditions she wants.

Miguel stares her down. Imelda is firm in her resolve.

MIGUEL

Fine.

CLERK

(to Imelda)

Then you hand the petal to Miguel.

Imelda extends the petal to Miguel, who reaches for it.

He grabs the petal. WHOOOOSH! He's consumed by a whirlwind of petals and disappears.

DE LA CRUZ'S MAUSOLEUM - NIGHT

He reappears in a whirlwind of petals. It seems like he's solid. He runs to the window and looks out.

MIGUEL

No skeletons!

Miguel laughs, relieved. Then, a mischievous smile on his face, he turns and eyes de la Cruz's guitar.

Miguel quickly grabs the guitar.

MIGUEL

Mariachi Plaza, here I come--

He takes two steps toward the door, then WHOOOOSH!

CLERK'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Miguel appears back in the clerk's office in another flash of the marigold whirlwind, without the guitar. The family turns, shocked to see him back so soon.

Miguel realizes his hands are still in guitar-holding position.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Two seconds and you already break your promise!

MIGUEL

This isn't fair, it's my life! You
already had yours!

Miguel grabs another petal, he marches over to Papá Julio.

MIGUEL

Papá Julio, I ask for your
blessing.

Papá Julio shakes his head and pulls his hat down.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Tía Rosita? Oscar? Felipe? Tía
Victoria?

They all shake their heads.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Don't make this hard, miijo. You go
home my way, or no way.

MIGUEL

You really hate music that much?

MAMÁ IMELDA

I will not let you go down the same
path he did.

Miguel gets an idea. He pulls the photo out and turns from
the group.

MIGUEL

The same path he did.

He gazes at the man with no face.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

(to himself)
He's family...

TÍA VICTORIA

Listen to your Mamá Imelda.

TÍO OSCAR

She's just looking out for you.

TÍA ROSITA

Be reasonable.

Miguel starts back toward the door.

MIGUEL

Con permiso, I... need to visit the
restroom. Be right back!

Miguel sees himself out. The family waits for a beat.

CLERK

Uh, should we tell him there are no
restrooms in the Land of the Dead?

INT. STAIRCASE - MOMENTS LATER

Miguel hustles down a staircase with Dante. Once on the ground floor, they huddle beneath the staircase. He looks to the upper floor. The Dead Riveras are there. Tío Oscar asks a PATROLWOMAN about a boy of Miguel's height. The patrolwoman picks up her walkie-talkie.

Miguel scopes the ground floor and spies a revolving door exit.

MIGUEL

Vámonos.

Miguel puts up his hood, tightening it to a tiny eye hole, and heads out. Dante pads after him.

PATROLWOMAN

We got a family looking for a
LIVING BOY.

MIGUEL

If I wanna be a musician, I need a
MUSICIAN'S blessing. We gotta find
my great-great grandpa.

The exit gets closer when Miguel is stopped by a PATROLMAN.

PATROLMAN

Hold it, muchacho.

Miguel's hoodie loosens to reveal his living face.

PATROLMAN

Ahh!

The patrolman frantically grabs for his walkie-talkie.

PATROLMAN

I've found that living boy!

A large family passes between Miguel and the officer, chatty, arms full of offerings.

PATROLMAN

Uh whoa, excuse me, excuse me
folks! Excuse me--

Once the family clears, Miguel is nowhere to be seen.

CUT TO:

INT. NEARBY CORRIDOR

Miguel and Dante hide from the patrolman. But Dante wanders off to inspect a side room.

MIGUEL

No, no -- Dante!

INT. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Miguel catches up to Dante. He overhears an exchange in a nearby cubicle.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

...disturbing the peace, fleeing an
officer, falsifying a unbrow...

HÉCTOR

That's illegal?

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

VERY illegal. You need to clean up
your act, amigo.

HÉCTOR

Amigo?

(verklemt)

Oh, that's so nice, to hear you say
that, because...

(misty)

I've just had a really hard Día de
Muertos, and I could really use an
amigo right now.

Héctor leans gratefully toward the officer, overwhelmed with mock emotion.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
 And amigos, they help their amigos.
 Listen, you get me across that
 bridge tonight and I'll make it
 worth your while.

Héctor spies a de la Cruz poster at the officer's
 workstation.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
 Oh, you like de la Cruz? He and I
 go way back! I can get you front
 row seats to his Sunrise
 Spectacular Show!

Miguel perks at the mention of de la Cruz.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER
 Uh--

HÉCTOR
 I'll -- I'll get you backstage, you
 can meet him!
 (beat)
 You just gotta let me cross that
 bridge!

The corrections officer pulls away.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER
 I should lock you up for the rest
 of the holiday...
 (beat)
 But my shift's almost up, and I
 wanna visit my living family... so
 I'm letting you off with a warning.

HÉCTOR
 Can I at least get my costume back?

CORRECTIONS OFFICER
 Uh, no.

In a huff, Héctor marches out of the room.

HÉCTOR
 Some amigo...

Miguel follows him.

INT. HALLWAY

MIGUEL

Hey. Hey! You really know de la Cruz?

HÉCTOR

Who wants to--
(noticing Miguel)
Ah! You're alive!

MIGUEL

Shhh!

CUT INTO:

INT. PHONEBOOTH

Miguel pulls Héctor into a phone booth to avoid suspicion.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Yeah I'm alive. And if I wanna get back to the Land of the Living, I need de la Cruz's blessing.

HÉCTOR

That's weirdly specific.

MIGUEL

He's my great-great-grandfather.

HÉCTOR

He's your wha-whaat...?

Hector's eyes drop into his mouth. He pops them back up with a punch to his jaw. Miguel is a little grossed out.

Héctor turns to conference with himself.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)

Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

Wait, wait...

(gasp)

Wait, no, wait, wait, wait. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait?

(beat)

Yes! You're going back to the Land of the Living?!

MIGUEL

D'ya know what, maybe this isn't such a g--

Héctor snaps his fingers rapidly, pistons firing.

HÉCTOR
 No, niño, niño, niño, I can help
 you! You can help me. We can help
 each other! But most importantly,
 you can help ME.

Miguel suddenly spies his family hurrying down a staircase.
 Mamá Imelda spots Miguel.

MAMÁ IMELDA
 Miguel!

MIGUEL
 AH!

Héctor extends his hand.

HÉCTOR
 I'm Héctor.

MIGUEL
 That's nice!

Miguel grabs Héctor by the wrist and drags him to the exit,
 away from his family.

EXT. MARIGOLD GRAND CENTRAL STATION

Miguel and Dante burst out the door and rush down the stairs.
 Héctor's arm snaps to get Miguel's attention. Miguel
 realizes it's no longer attached to Héctor's body. The arm
 signals backwards to Héctor who is ten paces behind.

HÉCTOR
 Espérame chamaco!

Miguel throws the arm back to Héctor as they disappear into a
 dense crowd.

Moments later, the Dead Riveras burst from the revolving
 doors. Mamá Imelda scours the crowd for Miguel. He's
 nowhere to be found.

MAMÁ IMELDA
 Ay, he is going to get himself
 killed... I need my spirit guide,
 Pepita.

Mamá Imelda looks to the night sky, puts two fingers to her
 mouth, and lets out a piercing whistle.

FWOOOMP! A giant winged jaguar lands in front of Mamá Imelda. She turns to the family.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Who has that petal Miguel touched?

PAPÁ JULIO

Here!

Papá Julio steps forward with a marigold petal. He creeps forward, jittery, holding it out for Pepita.

PAPÁ JULIO

Nice alebrije...

Pepita sniffs the petal's scent.

Suddenly Pepita's head darts, narrowing in on the scent. She takes to the air.

EXT. UNDERPASS TUNNEL - NIGHT

Miguel sits on a wooden crate. Héctor uses his thumb to smudge black and white shoe polish on the boy's face.

HÉCTOR

Hey, hey, hold still.

(beat)

Look up. Look up. A ver, a ver...

look up. Up, UP!... Ta-da!

Héctor opens a small mirror. Miguel's face is painted to look like a skeleton.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)

Dead as a doorknob.

(beat)

So listen, Miguel: this place runs on memories. When you're well-remembered, people put up your photo and you get to cross the bridge and visit the living on Día de Muertos.

(beat)

Unless you're me.

MIGUEL

You don't get to cross over.

HÉCTOR
 No one's ever put up my picture...
 (beat)
 But you can change that!

He unfolds an old picture. In it is a young, living Héctor.

MIGUEL
 This is you?

HÉCTOR
 Muy guapo, eh?

MIGUEL
 So you get me to my great-great
 grandpa, then I put up your photo
 when I get home?

HÉCTOR
 Such a smart boy! Yes! Great
 idea, yes!
 (beat)
 One hiccup: de la Cruz is a tough
 guy to get to. And I need to cross
 that bridge soon. Like TONIGHT.
 (upbeat)
 So, you got any other family here,
 you know? Someone a bit more...
 accessible?

MIGUEL
 Mmm, nope.

HÉCTOR
 Don't yank my chain, chamaco. You
 gotta have SOME other family.

MIGUEL
 ONLY de la Cruz. If you can't help
 me, I'll find him myself.

Miguel marches out of the alley, whistling for Dante to follow.

HÉCTOR
 Okay, okay, kid, fine -- fine!
 I'll get you to your great-great
 grandpa...!

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSTLING STREET

They make their way through a pedestrian path.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
 ...It's not gonna be easy, you
 know? He's a busy man.
 (beat)
 What are you doing?

Miguel slink-walks next to Héctor goofily.

MIGUEL
 I'm walking like a skeleton.
 Blending in.

HÉCTOR
 No, skeletons don't walk like that.

MIGUEL
 It's how you walk.

HÉCTOR
 No, I don't.

Miguel keeps walking funny.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
 Stop it!

Miguel notices a billboard advertising "ERNESTO DE LA CRUZ'S
 SUNRISE SPECTACULAR!;" "Remember Me" blares from attached
 speakers.

MIGUEL
 Whoa..."Ernesto de la Cruz's
 Sunrise Spectacular..." Qué
 padre!

HÉCTOR
 Blech. Every year, your great-
 great grandpa puts on that dumb
 show to mark the end of Día de
 Muertos.

MIGUEL
 And you can get us in!

HÉCTOR
 Ahhhh--

MIGUEL
Hey, you said you had front row
tickets!

HÉCTOR
That... that was a lie. I
apologize for that.

Miguel gives Héctor a withering look.

HÉCTOR
Cool off, chamaco, come on... I'll
get you to him.

MIGUEL
How?

HÉCTOR
'Cause I happen to know where he's
rehearsing!

CUT TO:

EXT. WAREHOUSE, BENEATH WINDOWS

Héctor uses his suspenders to slingshot his arm to a third
floor window. The hand taps on it.

INT. COSTUME ROOM

CECILIA, a costumer, turns from a costume to look at the
window. Héctor's hand waves. She rolls her eyes and goes to
open the window.

CECILIA
You better have my dress, Héctor!

HÉCTOR
Hola, Ceci!

EXT. BENEATH WINDOW

She lowers a ladder so Héctor, Miguel and Dante can climb up.
Héctor grabs his arm and reattaches it.

INT. COSTUME ROOM

They all crawl in through the window.

MIGUEL

Hola.

HÉCTOR

Ceci, I lost the dress--

CECILIA

Ya lo sabía! I gotta dress forty dancers by sunrise and thanks to you, I'm one Frida short of an opening number!

HÉCTOR

Ceci -- I know, Ceci. I know, I know. Ceci -- Ceci... Ceci. Ceci...

As Héctor tries to talk her down, Dante wanders away from the costume area.

MIGUEL

Dante... Dante!

Miguel chases after him.

INT. REHEARSAL AREA

MIGUEL

We shouldn't be in here...

Miguel follows Dante through a giant warehouse, divided into different artists workspaces. He passes papier-mâché sculptures, giant paper cut out banners, a skeleton posing nude for a painter...

Dante sniffs around. Suddenly an ALEBRIJE MONKEY jumps out at Dante. The monkey starts riding Dante, tormenting him. Miguel hustles after him.

MIGUEL

No, no, Dante! Ven acá!

The monkey jumps up onto the shoulder of FRIDA KAHLO, the REAL Frida Kahlo, who stands in front of a rehearsal stage. Miguel reins Dante in just as Frida turns to find them.

FRIDA

You! How did you get in here?

MIGUEL

I just followed my--

Frida's eyes go wide when she sees Dante. She kneels and takes his head in her hands.

FRIDA

Oh, the mighty Xolo dog...! Guider
of wandering spirits...!

(beat)

And whose spirit have you guided to
me?

Frida takes a closer look at Miguel.

MIGUEL

I don't think he's a spirit guide.

FRIDA

Ah-ah-ah. The alebrijes of this
world can take many forms... They
are as mysterious as they are
powerful...

The patterns on Frida's monkey swirl and he opens his mouth to breath a blue fire. He fumbles at the end with a chesty cough.

Then they look to Dante, who is chewing his own leg. Suddenly, Frida turns back to Miguel.

FRIDA (CONT'D)

Or maybe he's just a dog. Come! I
need your eyes!

Frida guides him to view the rehearsal space.

FRIDA

You are the audience.

(beat)

Darkness. And from the darkness...
A giant PAPAYA!

Lights come up on a giant papaya prop.

FRIDA

Dancers emerge from the papaya and
the dancers are all me!

Leotarded, unbrowed dancers crawl around the sides of the mesh papaya. Behind the papaya is an even larger half-finished mesh structure.

FRIDA (CONT'D)

And they go to drink from the milk
of their mother who is a cactus,
but who is also me. And her milk
is not milk but tears.

(to Miguel)

Is it too obvious?

MIGUEL

I think it's just the right amount
of obvious?

(beat)

It could use some music... Oh!
What if you did, like, doonk-doonk-
doonk-doonk...

Frida, inspired, cues some musicians who start playing the
tune.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Oh! And then it could go dittle-
ittle-dittle-ittle-dittle-ittle-
dittle-ittle -- WHAAA!

The violins follow; a trombone punctuates.

FRIDA

And... what if everything was on
fire? Yes! Fire everywhere!

The dancers gasp and look at each other, now concerned.

FRIDA

Inspired!
(leaning in)
You... you have the spirit of an
artist!

Miguel brightens. Frida turns back to the rehearsal.

FRIDA

The dancers exit, the music fades,
the lights go out! And Ernesto de
la Cruz rises to the stage!

A silhouette rises from a trap door. Miguel leans forward.

A spotlight shines on the silhouette revealing it to be a
mannequin.

MIGUEL

Huh?

FRIDA

He does a couple of songs, the sun rises, everyone cheers--

Miguel hustles up to Frida.

MIGUEL

Excuse me, where's the real de la Cruz?

FRIDA

Ernesto doesn't do rehearsals. He's too busy hosting that fancy party at the top of his tower.

She gestures out a large window to a GRAND ESTATE lit up in the distance, atop a steep hill.

Suddenly Héctor rounds the corner, out of breath.

HÉCTOR

Chamaco! You can't run off on me like that! C'mon, stop pestering the celebrities...

Héctor pulls Miguel away, but Miguel won't be wrangled.

MIGUEL

You said my great-great grandpa would be here! He's halfway across town, throwing some big party.

HÉCTOR

That bum! Who doesn't show up to his own rehearsal?

MIGUEL

If you're such good friends, how come he didn't invite you?

HÉCTOR

He's YOUR great-great grandpa. How come he didn't invite YOU?

Héctor walks away from Miguel toward the musicians.

HÉCTOR

Hey Gustavo! You know anything about this party?

GUSTAVO

It's the hot ticket. But if you're not on the guest list you're never getting in, Chorizo...

MUSICIANS

Hey, it's Chorizo! / Choricito!

HÉCTOR

Ha ha, very funny guys. Very funny.

MIGUEL

Chorizo?

GUSTAVO

(to Miguel, re: Héctor)

Oh, this guy's famous! Go on, go on, ask him how he died!

Miguel looks to Héctor, eyebrow cocked.

HÉCTOR

I don't want to talk about it.

GUSTAVO

He choked on some CHORIZO!

The musicians laugh. Miguel tries to stifle a giggle.

HÉCTOR

I didn't choke, okay -- I got food poisoning, which is a big difference!

More laughter.

HÉCTOR

(to Miguel)

This is why I don't like musicians... bunch of self-important jerks!

MIGUEL

Hey, I'm a musician.

HÉCTOR

You are?

GUSTAVO

Well, if you really want to get to Ernesto, there IS that music competition at the Plaza de la Cruz. Winner gets to play at his party...

Miguel's wheels start turning.

HÉCTOR

No, no, no, chamaco, you are loco if you think--

Miguel looks to his hands, progressed in their skeletal transformation.

MIGUEL

I need to get my great-great grandfather's blessing.

Miguel looks up to Héctor.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

You know where I can get a guitar?

Héctor sighs.

HÉCTOR

I know a guy...

CUT TO:

EXT. UNDERPASS TUNNEL - NIGHT

Pepita sweeps across the sky, landing in a darkened corner. She casts a shadow on the wall, then lurches into the light. She sniffs out the spot where Héctor painted Miguel's face, finding a canister of shoe polish. She lets out a low growl.

The Dead Riveras follow after her.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Have you found him, Pepita? Have you found our boy?

Pepita breathes on the ground, revealing a footprint. It glows for a moment. The family leans in to inspect.

TÍA ROSITA

A footprint!

PAPÁ JULIO
It's a Rivera boot!

TÍO OSCAR
Size seven...

TÍO FELIPE
...and a half.

TÍA VICTORIA
Pronated.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Miguel.

Pepita leans forward, breathes again, and the glow spreads to reveal a trail of footprints.

CUT TO:

EXT. NARROW STAIRWAY

Miguel follows Héctor down a steep stairway. Miguel looks to his bony knuckles, concern on his face.

HÉCTOR
Why the heck would you wanna be a musician?

MIGUEL
My great-great grandpa was a musician.

HÉCTOR
...Who spent his life performing like a monkey for complete strangers. Blech, no, no thank you, guácala, no...

MIGUEL
Whadda you know?

As Miguel descends the staircase, de la Cruz's distant glowing tower is obscured by old forgotten buildings.

MIGUEL
So, how far is this guitar anyway?

HÉCTOR
We're almost there...

Héctor jumps from the stairway and crashes on the ground below. But his bones reassemble immediately.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
Keep up, chamaco, come on!

Héctor leads Miguel through a stone archway.

EXT. SHANTY TOWN

Graffiti on the archway depicts skeletal angels with wings the color of marigolds.

Inside the archway, a group of ratty skeletons huddle around a burning trashcan and laugh raucously. They are gray and dusty, not unlike Héctor, but there's a camaraderie about them.

RATTY GROUP
COUSIN HÉCTOR!!

HÉCTOR
Eh! These guys!

RATTY MEMBER
HÉCTOR!!

HÉCTOR
Hey Tío! Qué onda!

MIGUEL
These people are all your family?

HÉCTOR
Eh, in a way... We're all the ones with no photos or ofrendas, no family to go home to. Nearly forgotten, you know?
(beat)
So, we all call each other cousin, or tío, or whatever.

They approach three old ladies playing cards around a wooden crate. One, TÍA CHELO looks up.

TÍA CHELO
Héctor!

HÉCTOR
Tía Chelo! He-hey!

Héctor hands them a bottle.

OLD TIAS
 Muchas gracias!

HÉCTOR
 Hey, hey! Save some for me! Is
 Chicharrón around?

TÍA CHELO
 In the bungalow. I don't know if
 he's in the mood for visitors...

HÉCTOR
 Who doesn't like a visit from
 Cousin Héctor?

INT. SHANTY BUNGALOW TENT

Héctor holds the curtain open. Miguel and Dante walk in.

The tent is cramped, dark, and quiet. Piles are organized everywhere: stacks of old dishes, a drawer full of pocket watches, magazines, records. This place belongs to a collector of things. Miguel almost knocks one stack over.

Héctor spies a hammock piled with old junk, a dusty hat on top. He lifts the hat and finds the grumpy face of CHICHARRÓN.

HÉCTOR
 Buenas noches, Chicharrón!

CHICHARRÓN
 I don't want to see your stupid
 face, Héctor.

HÉCTOR
 C'mon, it's Día de Muertos! I
 brought you a little offering!

CHICHARRÓN
 Get out of here...

HÉCTOR
 I would, Cheech, but the thing
 is... me and my friend, Miguel, we
 really need to borrow your guitar.

CHICHARRÓN
 My guitar?!

HÉCTOR
 Yes?

CHICHARRÓN
My prized, beloved guitar...?

HÉCTOR
I promise we'll bring it right
back.

Chicharrón sits up, incensed.

CHICHARRÓN
Like the time you promised to bring
back my van?

HÉCTOR
Uh...

CHICHARRÓN
Or my mini-fridge?

HÉCTOR
Ah, you see--

CHICHARRÓN
Or my good napkins? My lasso? My
femur?!

HÉCTOR
No, no, not like those times.

CHICHARRÓN
Where's my femur?! You--

Chicharrón raises his finger to give a tongue lashing. But then he weakens and collapses in his hammock, a golden flicker flashing through his bones. Héctor rushes forward.

HÉCTOR
Whoa, whoa -- you okay, amigo?

CHICHARRÓN
I'm fading, Héctor. I can feel it.
(looking to guitar)
I couldn't even play that thing if
I wanted to.
(beat)
You play me something.

Héctor looks surprised.

HÉCTOR
You know I don't play anymore,
Cheech. The guitar's for the kid--

CHICHARRÓN

You want it, you got to earn it...

Héctor sighs, then reaches over Chicharrón and takes the instrument.

HÉCTOR

Only for you, amigo. Any requests?

Héctor begins tuning the guitar.

CHICHARRÓN

You know my favorite, Héctor.

Héctor begins a lovely, lilting tune. Chicharrón smiles. Miguel's eyes go wide at Héctor's skill.

HÉCTOR

(singing)

WELL EVERYONE KNOWS JUANITA,
HER EYES EACH A DIFFERENT COLOR.
HER TEETH STICK OUT,
AND HER CHIN GOES IN,
AND HER...

Héctor eyes Miguel.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)

...KNUCKLES THEY DRAG ON THE FLOOR.

CHICHARRÓN

Those aren't the words!

HÉCTOR

There are children present.

(continuing)

HER HAIR IS LIKE A BRIAR,
SHE STANDS IN A BOW-LEGGED STANCE.
AND IF I WEREN'T SO UGLY,
SHE'D POSSIBLY GIVE ME A CHANCE!

Héctor finishes with a soft flourish.

Chicharrón is tickled, joyful. For a moment he's present and bright.

CHICHARRÓN

Brings back memories. Gracias...

His eyes close. He looks at peace. Héctor looks sad.

Suddenly, the edges of Chicharrón's bones begin to glow. A soft, beautiful light. Then... he dissolves into dust.

Miguel is stunned, concerned.

Héctor picks up his shot glass, lifts it in honor, and drinks. He places it rim down next to Chicharrón's glass, which is still full.

MIGUEL

Wait... what happened?

HÉCTOR

He's been forgotten.

(beat)

When there's no one left in the living world who remembers you, you disappear from this world. We call it the "Final Death."

MIGUEL

Where did he go?

HÉCTOR

No one knows.

Miguel has a thought.

MIGUEL

But I've met him... I could remember him, when I go back...

HÉCTOR

No, it doesn't work like that, chamaco. Our memories... they have to be passed down by those who knew us in life -- in the stories they tell about us. But there's no one left alive to pass down Cheech's stories...

Miguel is deep in thought.

Héctor puts his hand on Miguel's back, suddenly cheerful.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)

Hey, it happens to everyone eventually.

He gives Miguel the guitar.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)

C'mon "de la Cruzcito." You've got a contest to win.

Héctor throws open the curtain and exits. Miguel looks back at the glasses, then turns and follows.

EXT. LAND OF THE DEAD

Héctor and Miguel hang off the back of a moving trolley. Miguel holds Héctor's photo in his hands, scanning it, while Héctor fiddles on the guitar idly.

MIGUEL

You told me you hated musicians,
you never said you were one.

HÉCTOR

How do you think I knew your great-
great grandpa? We used to play
music together. Taught him
everything he knows.

Héctor plays a fancy riff, but botches the last note.

MIGUEL

No manches! You played with
Ernesto de la Cruz, the greatest
musician of all time?

HÉCTOR

Ha-ha, you're funny! Greatest
eyebrows of all time maybe but his
music, eh, not so much.

MIGUEL

You don't know what you're talking
about...

The trolley arrives at the stop for the PLAZA DE LA CRUZ. There's a giant statue of Ernesto de la Cruz in the center. Miguel pockets Héctor's photo.

HÉCTOR

Welcome to the Plaza de la Cruz!
(beat)
Showtime, chamaco!

Héctor hands the guitar to Miguel.

QUICK CUTS: Energetic plaza shots. Lights and colors, beautiful dresses, violins, pyrotechnic bullfight, dancing. A t-shirt vendor is selling "de la Cruz" shirts.

VENDOR

Llévelo! T-shirts! Bobble-heads!

A stage is set up in the plaza.

EXT. ON STAGE

An EMCEE greets her audience.

EMCEE

Bienvenidos a todos! Who's ready
for some música?

The audience whoops.

EMCEE (CONT'D)

It's a battle of the bands, amigos!
The winner gets to play for the
maestro himself, Ernesto de la
Cruz, at his fiesta tonight!

The audience cheers. Héctor elbows Miguel as they head
backstage.

HÉCTOR

That's our ticket, muchacho.

EMCEE

Let the competition begin!

QUICK MONTAGE: Acts perform on stage -- a tuba/violin act, a
saxophone player, a hard-core metal band, a kid who plays
marimba on the back of a giant iguana alebrije, a DJ with a
laptop and keyboard setup, a dog orchestra, nuns playing
accordions...

EXT. BACKSTAGE

Miguel and Héctor stand amongst other contestants.

HÉCTOR

So what's the plan? What are you
gonna play?

MIGUEL

Definitely "Remember Me."

Miguel plucks out the beginnings of de la Cruz's most famous
song. Héctor clamps his hand over the fretboard.

HÉCTOR

No, not that one. No.

MIGUEL
C'mon, it's his most popular song!

HÉCTOR
Ehck, it's too popular.

Elsewhere backstage, they notice multiple other acts rehearsing their versions.

SKELETON MUSICIAN
(singing)
REMEMBER ME, THOUGH I HAVE TO TRAVEL FAR,
REMEMBER ME...

OPERA SINGERS
(singing)
REMEMBER ME!
DON'T LET IT MAKE YOU CRY!

One man plays water glasses to the famous tune. Héctor looks at Miguel as if to ask, "Need I say more?"

MIGUEL
Um... what about "Poco Loco?"

HÉCTOR
Epa! Now that's a song!

STAGEHAND
De la Cruzcito? You're on standby!
(to another band)
Los Chachalacos, you're up next!

ON STAGE

An impressive banda group steps onto stage.

CROWD
LOS CHACHALACOS!

They burst into a mighty introduction and the audience goes wild. They're very good.

BACKSTAGE

Miguel peeks at the frenzied audience from backstage. He looks sick and begins to pace, fidgety.

HÉCTOR
You always this nervous before a performance?

MIGUEL
I don't know -- I've never
performed before.

HÉCTOR
What?! You said you were a
musician!

MIGUEL
I am!
(beat)
I mean I will be. Once I win.

HÉCTOR
That's your plan?!
(beat)
No, no, no, no, no, you have to
win, Miguel. Your life LITERALLY
depends on you winning! AND YOU'VE
NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE?!

Héctor reaches for the guitar.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
I'll go up there--

Miguel recoils, keeping hold of the instrument.

MIGUEL
No! I need to do this.

HÉCTOR
Why?

MIGUEL
If I can't go out there and play
one song... how can I call myself a
musician?

HÉCTOR
What does that matter?!

MIGUEL
'Cuz I don't just want to get de la
Cruz's blessing. I need to prove
that... that I'm worthy of it.

HÉCTOR
Oh. Oh, that's such a sweet
sentiment... at SUCH a bad time!

Héctor looks in Miguel's eyes. The kid is sincere. Despite
himself, Héctor softens.

HÉCTOR
 Okay... okay, okay, okay. Okay.
 Okay.
 (beat)
 Okay.
 (beat)
 Okay you wanna perform? Then
 you've got to PERFORM!

Miguel perks, surprised that Héctor wants to help.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
 First you have to loosen up. Shake
 off those nerves! Sáquenlo
 sáquenlo, sáquenlo!

Héctor does a loose-bone skeletal shimmy and Miguel copies.

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
 Now gimme your best grito!

MIGUEL
 My best grito?

HÉCTOR
 Come on, yell! Belt it out!
 OOOOOH HE-HE-HEY! Ha! Ah, feels
 good! Okay... now you.

MIGUEL
 (uncertain)
 Ah -- ah -- ayyyyy yaaaaayyyyay...

Dante whimpers.

HÉCTOR
 Oh, c'mon kid...

On stage, Los Chachalacos wrap up to raucous applause.

STAGEHAND
 De la Cruzcito, you're on now!

HÉCTOR
 Miguel, look at me.

STAGEHAND
 Come on, let's go!

HÉCTOR
 Hey! Hey, look at me.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

HÉCTOR (CONT'D)
 You can do this. Grab their
 attention and don't let it go!

EMCEE (O.S.)
 We have one more act, amigos!

MIGUEL
 Héctor...

HÉCTOR
 Make 'em listen, chamaco! You got
 this!

EMCEE (O.S.)
 Damas y caballeros! De la
 Cruzcito!

The crowd applauds as Miguel is led on stage.

HÉCTOR
 Arre papá! Hey!

Héctor's face contorts with a mix of encouragement and dread.

ON STAGE

Miguel slowly takes the stage, guitar in hand. He's blinded
 by the lights and squints out at the audience. He's frozen
 stiff.

OFF STAGE

HÉCTOR
 (to Dante)
 What's he doing? Why isn't he
 playing?

ON STAGE

Panic is painted across Miguel's face.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (O.S.)
 Bring back the singing dogs!

The crowd begins to murmur impatiently. Miguel looks to
 Héctor in the wing.

Héctor makes eye contact with Miguel and does the "loosen up"
 bone shimmy.

On stage Miguel shakes off his nerves. Deep exhale and...

MIGUEL
HAAAAAAAAAI-YAAAAAAAAAAAAAI-YAAAAAAAAAI!

The sound is full-throated and resonant. People in the audience whistle and whoop. Some return the grito, some applaud lightly. His brows go up and he begins his guitar intro.

MIGUEL
(singing)
WHAT COLOR IS THE SKY?
AY MI AMOR, AY MI AMOR
YOU TELL ME THAT IT'S RED
AY MI AMOR, AY MI AMOR
WHERE SHOULD I PUT MY SHOES?
AY MI AMOR, AY MI AMOR
YOU SAY PUT THEM ON YOUR HEAD
AY MI AMOR, AY MI AMOR

As the audience warms up, so does Miguel. Héctor perks up, he's got this!

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
YOU MAKE ME UN POCO LOCO
UN POQUI-TI-TI-TO LOCO
THE WAY YOU KEEP ME GUESSING
I'M NODDING AND I'M YES-ING
I'LL COUNT IT AS A BLESSING
THAT I'M ONLY UN POCO LOCO...

INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE. Dante grabs Héctor by the leg and drags him onto the stage with Miguel.

HÉCTOR
No, no, no, no...

Once in the spotlight, Héctor warms up and busts out some percussive footwork to Miguel's guitar.

MIGUEL
Not bad for a dead guy!

HÉCTOR
You're not so bad yourself,
gordito! Eso!

CUT TO:

EDGE OF AUDIENCE

A ripple of glowing footprints leads Pepita and the Dead Riveras to the edge of the audience.

MAMÁ IMELDA
He's close. Find him.

The Dead Riveras fan out through the audience.

ON STAGE

Héctor gets more creative with his dancing, head coming off, limbs spinning around. The audience hoots!

HÉCTOR
(singing)
THE LOCO THAT YOU MAKE ME
IT IS JUST UN POCO CRAZY
THE SENSE THAT YOU'RE NOT MAKING...

MIGUEL
(singing)
THE LIBERTIES YOU'RE TAKING...

HECTOR	MIGUEL
LEAVES MY CABEZA SHAKING	LEAVES MY CABEZA SHAKING
YOU ARE JUST UN POCO LOCO	YOU ARE JUST UN POCO LOCO

The audience starts clapping in time with the song. Dante lets out a howl.

The Riveras continue their search in the audience.

TÍO FELIPE/TÍO OSCAR
We're looking for a living kid...
about 12?

CUT TO:

TÍA ROSITA
Have you seen a living boy?

ON STAGE

HECTOR	MIGUEL
UN POQUI-TI-TI-TI-TI-TI-TI-TI-	UN POQUI-TI-TI-TI-TI-TI-TI-TI-
TI-TI-TO LOCO!!	TI-TI-TO LOCO!!

The audience erupts into applause!

Miguel smiles, soaking in the moment. He feels like a real musician.

HÉCTOR

Hey, you did good! I'm proud of you! Eso!

Miguel swells and looks back out the crowd when he suddenly spots Oscar and Felipe talking to a stranger. He looks over and there is Tía Rosita talking to someone else! Miguel looks to stage right, where he sees Papá Julio talking to the Emcee!

AUDIENCE

Otra! Otra! Otra!

Panicking, Miguel pulls Héctor off stage. Héctor tries to pull back.

OFF STAGE

HÉCTOR

Hey, where are you going?

MIGUEL

We gotta get outta here.

HÉCTOR

What, are you crazy? We're about to win this thing!

ON STAGE

The Emcee takes the microphone.

EMCEE

Damas y caballeros, I have an emergency announcement.

(beat)

Please be on the lookout for a living boy, answers to the name of Miguel. Earlier tonight he ran away from his family. They just want to send him back to the Land of the Living...

Murmurs of concern rumble through the audience.

OFF STAGE

EMCEE (O.S.)

...If anyone has information,
please contact the authorities.

HÉCTOR

Wait, wait, wait! You said de la
Cruz was your ONLY family. The
ONLY person who could send you
home.

MIGUEL

I do have other family, but--

HÉCTOR

You could have taken my photo back
this whole time?!

MIGUEL

--But they hate music! I need a
musician's blessing!

HÉCTOR

You lied to me!

MIGUEL

Oh, you're one to talk!

HÉCTOR

Look at me. I'm being forgotten,
Miguel. I don't even know if I'm
gonna last the night!

(beat)

I'm not gonna miss my one chance to
cross that bridge 'cause you want
to live out some stupid musical
fantasy!

MIGUEL

It's not stupid.

Héctor grabs Miguel's arm and pulls him toward the stage.

HÉCTOR

I'm taking you to your family.

MIGUEL

Let go of me!

HÉCTOR

You'll thank me later--

Miguel yanks his arms away.

MIGUEL

You don't wanna help me, you only
care about yourself! Keep your
dumb photo!

He pulls Héctor's photo out of his pocket and throws it at him. Héctor tries to grab it but it catches a breeze and drifts into the crowd.

HÉCTOR

No -- no, no, no! No...

MIGUEL

Stay away from me!

As Héctor scrambles to catch his photo, Miguel runs away. Héctor looks up but Miguel is gone.

HÉCTOR

Hey, chamaco! Where did you go?!
Chamaco! I'm sorry! Come back!

EXT. PEDESTRIAN THOROUGHFARE

Miguel hustles to get away from Héctor. Dante bounds after him, but looks back and whimpers. He barks to get Miguel's attention.

MIGUEL

Dante, cállate!

But Dante is insistent. He tugs at Miguel's pants, pulling him back to Héctor.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

No, Dante! Stop it! He can't help
me!

Dante grabs onto his hoodie sleeve. Miguel tries to shake him off, but his hoodie slips off, revealing the arms of a living boy. Dante redoubles his efforts.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Dante, stop! Stop it! Leave me
alone! You're not a spirit guide,
you're just a dumb dog! Now get
out of here!

Miguel yanks his hoodie away from Dante, who shrinks back, rebuffed. The scuffle has drawn the eyes of the crowd.

Startled skeletons see Miguel's arms. He hurries to get his hoodie back on.

CROWD MEMBERS

It's him! / It's that living boy! /
I heard about him. / Look! / He's
alive! / The boy's alive.

Miguel runs and jumps down some scaffolding. In the distance, he sees de la Cruz's tower. After only a few paces, Pepita lands in front of Miguel, cutting off his path! He skids to a stop.

MIGUEL

AAHH!

Then, peeking over the jaguar's head is an even more terrifying sight: Mamá Imelda riding atop.

MAMÁ IMELDA

This nonsense ends now, Miguel! I
am giving you my blessing and you
are going home!

MIGUEL

I don't want your blessing!

Miguel scrambles upright and bounds for a narrow alley staircase.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Miguel! Stop!

Not able to get through on her spirit guide, Imelda is forced to pursue Miguel on foot.

EXT. NARROW STAIRCASE

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)

Come back! Miguel!

He wriggles through an iron gate.

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)

I am trying to save your life!

She is stopped by the gate.

MIGUEL

You're ruining my life!

MAMÁ IMELDA

What?

MIGUEL

Music's the only thing that makes me happy. And you, you wanna take that away!

(beat)

You'll never understand.

Miguel heads away from her up the stairs.

MAMÁ IMELDA

(singing)

Y AUNQUE LA VIDA ME CUESTE,
LLORONA... NO DEJARÉ DE QUERERTE...

Miguel stops in his tracks. When Imelda finishes, he turns back, confused.

MIGUEL

I thought you hated music.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Oh, I loved it.

(reminiscing)

I remember that feeling, when my husband would play, and I would sing and nothing else mattered. But when we had Coco, suddenly... there was something in my life that mattered more than music. I wanted to put down roots. He wanted to play for the world.

Mamá Imelda pauses for a moment, lost in a memory.

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)

We each made a sacrifice to get what we wanted. Now you must make a choice.

MIGUEL

But I don't wanna... pick sides!

(beat)

Why can't you be on MY side?
That's what family's supposed to do -- support you.

(beat)

But you never will.

Miguel wipes the corner of his eye, frustrated. Imelda is shocked to see him so hurt, but Miguel turns away before she can answer and ascends the narrow staircase toward de la Cruz's tower.

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE TOWER

Miguel arrives at the foot of the hill to de la Cruz's tower.

Vehicles from all eras (limousines, motor cars, carriages) drop off finely dressed guests who line up to get aboard a funicular that scales the tower to the mansion.

A couple at the front of the line show a fancy invitation to a SECURITY GUARD, who then lets them onto the funicular.

SECURITY GUARD

Have a good time.

GUEST

Oh, how exciting!

EL SANTO, the silver-masked luchador, produces a fancy invitation to the security guard.

SECURITY GUARD

Oh! El Santo!

(giddy)

I'm a big fan.

The security guard sheepishly holds up a camera.

SECURITY GUARD

You mind if I--

El Santo nods. The security guard removes his head and hands it to the luchador for a selfie. His body proceeds to take the photo.

SECURITY GUARD

Gracias, señor!

The security guard puts his head back on and El Santo heads past the velvet rope. Miguel is revealed waiting in line behind him.

SECURITY GUARD

Invitation?

MIGUEL

It's okay. I'm Ernesto's great-great grandson!

Miguel strikes de la Cruz's signature pose with his guitar.

CUT TO:

Miguel is tossed out of the line. Just then he sees Los Chachalacos unloading their instruments from their van. He runs up to them.

MIGUEL

Disculpen, señores...

BAND LEADER

Hey guys, it's Poco Loco!

BAND MEMBER #2

You were on fire tonight!

MIGUEL

You too! Hey, musician to musician, I need a favor...

CUT TO:

The Band Leader hands an invitation to the security guard.

SECURITY GUARD

Ooo, the competition winners!
Congratulations chicos!

Los Chachalacos file onto the funicular, the sousaphone player angling his instrument away from the security guard. After they get onto the funicular, he turns to reveal a pair of legs hanging out of the bell of the sousaphone. With a deep "TOOT!" Miguel spills out onto the floor of the funicular.

MIGUEL

Thanks guys!

The funicular ascends.

EXT. DE LA CRUZ'S MANSION

The doors of the funicular open to reveal de la Cruz's lavish mansion. Los Chachalacos all file out.

MIGUEL

Whoa...

BAND LEADER

Enjoy the party, little músico!

MIGUEL

Gracias!

Miguel heads off toward the mansion.

On the stairs leading up, the party is bustling -- performers, servers and guests dressed to the nines.

A fire breather lets out flames that transform into a flurry of butterflies.

GUEST

Look, it's Ernesto!

Miguel catches a glimpse of de la Cruz heading deeper into the party. Miguel pursues.

MIGUEL

De la Cruz...

INT. DE LA CRUZ'S MANSION

Miguel heads into the foyer but loses de la Cruz in the crowd.

MIGUEL

Señor de la Cruz!

Miguel elbows his way through the room.

MIGUEL

Pardon me, Señor de la Cruz! Señor de la--

He finds himself in a huge hall with hundreds of guests, the heart of the party. Film clips play all around the room from de la Cruz's movies.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)

When you see your moment, you mustn't let it pass you by. You must seize it.

Miguel takes it all in. Synchronized swimmers make formations in a sparkling indoor pool. A DJ lays a decades-spanning mash-up soundtrack.

A clip of de la Cruz riding his noble steed plays behind Miguel.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)

We're almost there, Dante.

Miguel jumps to see above the crowd.

MIGUEL
Señor de la Cruz! Señor de la--

Miguel is unable to get his great-great grandfather's attention. Meanwhile, a clip behind Miguel features de la Cruz as a good-natured priest:

NUN (FILM CLIP)
But what can we do? It is
hopeless...

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
You must have faith, sister.

NUN (FILM CLIP)
Oh but Padre, he will never listen.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
He will listen... to MUSIC!

The passionate words embolden Miguel. He climbs a pillar to the landing of a grand staircase, he stands above the crowd.

Miguel takes a breath and throws out a grito as loud as he can. It echoes through the space, and party guests turn. The DJ fades the music.

Garnering some attention, Miguel plays his guitar. More guests turn.

As a hush falls on the crowd, the sound of Miguel's guitar becomes singular.

MIGUEL
(singing)
SEÑORAS Y SEÑORES
BUENAS TARDES, BUENAS NOCHES
BUENAS TARDES, BUENAS NOCHES
SEÑORITAS Y SEÑORES
TO BE HERE WITH YOU TONIGHT
BRINGS ME JOY! ¡QUÉ ALEGRÍA!
FOR THIS MUSIC IS MY LANGUAGE
AND THE WORLD ES MI FAMILIA

Miguel continues to play and sing as he nervously walks forward; the crowd parting, he moves closer to DLC.

MIGUEL
FOR THIS MUSIC IS MY LANGUAGE
AND THE WORLD ES MI FAMILIA

He passes a movie screen where a clip features de la Cruz singing the same song in one of his films, the songs overlapping for a brief moment.

MIGUEL & DE LA CRUZ
FOR THIS MUSIC IS MY LANGUAGE
AND THE WORLD ES MI FAMILIA

Miguel's soul pours into the strings as he approaches his hero--

MIGUEL
FOR THIS MUSIC IS MY LANG--

SPLASH! Miguel tumbles into the indoor pool.

The party-goers gasp, but it's Ernesto who rolls up his sleeves, and, in true movie hero fashion, jumps into the pool and lifts a coughing Miguel to the edge.

DE LA CRUZ
Are you all right, niño?

Miguel looks up, mortified. His painted face begins to run, revealing him to be a living boy. De la Cruz's eyes go wide. The crowd gasps and murmurs.

DE LA CRUZ
It's you... you, you are that boy,
the one who came from the Land of
the Living.

MIGUEL
You... know about me?

DE LA CRUZ
You are all anyone has been talking
about! Why have you come here?

MIGUEL
I'm Miguel. Your great-great
grandson.

More murmuring from the crowd. De la Cruz is shocked.

DE LA CRUZ
I... have a great-great grandson?

MIGUEL
I need your blessing. So I can go
back home and be a musician, just
like you.

(beat)

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

The rest of our family, they
wouldn't listen. But I... I hoped
you would?

DE LA CRUZ

My boy, with a talent like yours,
how could I not listen?

Miguel hugs de la Cruz who sweeps Miguel up onto his
shoulders, showing him off to the room.

DE LA CRUZ

I HAVE A GREAT-GREAT GRANDSON!

The crowd roars.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE TOWER

CROWD

Look, it's Frida!

The silhouette of Frida Kahlo steps up to the security guard.

HÉCTOR

Yes, it is I. Frida Kahlo.

The security guard lets her in immediately. No need to check
the list.

SECURITY GUARD

It is an honor, señora!

HÉCTOR

Gracias...

Hector steps onto the funicular, readjusting his unibrow to
maintain his disguise.

CUT TO:

EXT. DE LA CRUZ'S MANSION

Quick cuts over instrumental version of "Remember Me:"

De la Cruz barges into several conversations, proudly
introducing Miguel. He seems almost giddy. They wedge
themselves into a group laughing in the garden (which
includes Jorge Negrete & Pedro Infante):

DE LA CRUZ
 Hey Negrete! Infante! Have you
 met my great-great-grandson?

CUT TO:

De la Cruz and Miguel ride up on horseback while guests play polo:

DE LA CRUZ
 My great-great grandson!

CUT TO:

In the parlor:

DE LA CRUZ
 He's alive! And a musician to
 boot!

CUT TO:

Miguel chats away with de la Cruz and guests.

MIGUEL
 Dimple. No dimple. Dimple. No
 dimple.

De la Cruz laughs, delighted.

DE LA CRUZ
 No dimple!

CUT TO:

A film clip is projected in the main hall.

ON SCREEN: Don Hidalgo turns raising two glasses. Miguel acts along with the clip.

DON HIDALGO (FILM CLIP)
 To our friendship!...

DON HIDALGO (FILM CLIP)
 ...I would move Heaven and
 Earth for you, mi amigo.
 Salud!

MIGUEL
 ...I would move Heaven and
 Earth for you, mi amigo.
 Salud!

In the clip Don Hidalgo and de la Cruz drink. De la Cruz spits.

MIGUEL
 Poison!

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
 Poison!

Miguel and de la Cruz gleefully act out the ensuing fist fight.

DE LA CRUZ
You know, I did all my own stunts.

CUT TO:

A small crowd sways, arms around shoulders, as Miguel and Ernesto lead them in a chorus of "Remember Me."

INT. DE LA CRUZ'S OFRENDA ROOM

De la Cruz gestures to the massive piles of gifts from his fans: bread, fruits, flowers, instruments, etc. All piled up to the ceiling.

DE LA CRUZ
All of this came from my amazing fans in the Land of the Living! They leave me more offerings than I know what to do with!

Miguel takes in the room, it's almost too much to absorb. Something seems to be on the boy's mind.

DE LA CRUZ
Hey, what's wrong? Is it too much? You look overwhelmed...

MIGUEL
No -- it's all great.

DE LA CRUZ
But...?

MIGUEL
It's just -- I've been looking up to you my whole life. You're the guy who actually did it! But...
(beat)
Did you ever regret it? Choosing music over... everything else.

De la Cruz kneels down and looks into Miguel's eyes.

DE LA CRUZ
It was hard. Saying goodbye to my hometown. Heading off on my own...

MIGUEL
Leaving your family?

DE LA CRUZ

Sí. But I could not have done it differently.

(beat)

One cannot deny who one is meant to be. And you, my great-great grandson, are meant to be a musician!

Miguel smiles, chest swelling. He feels validated for the first time in his life.

DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)

You and I, we are artists, Miguel!
We cannot belong to one family.
The world is our family!

De la Cruz gestures to the sparkling city beyond his hilltop estate. Fireworks go off on the veranda.

DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)

Ooo, the fireworks have begun!

CUT TO:

EXT. VERANDA

The party guests move outside to watch the light show.

INT. DE LA CRUZ'S MANSION

The hall has emptied, the lights are turned down. Bursts of color from outside flash across the walls. The only light coming from inside the hall are de la Cruz's film clips that continue to play on the walls.

De la Cruz and Miguel descend the staircase into the empty hall.

DE LA CRUZ

Soon, the party will move across town for my "Sunrise Spectacular!"

(beat)

Miguel, you must come to the show!
You will be my guest of honor!

Miguel's eyes light up.

MIGUEL

You mean it?!

DE LA CRUZ
Of course, my boy!

Miguel's chest swells. Then deflates. He lifts his shirt, revealing the skeletal transition partway up his torso.

MIGUEL
I can't... I have to get home
before sunrise.

DE LA CRUZ
Oh, I really do need to get you
home.

De la Cruz plucks a marigold petal from a vase.

DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)
It has been an honor. I am sorry
to see you go, Miguel. I hope you
die very soon.
(beat)
You know what I mean.
(beat)
Miguel. I give you my bles--

HÉCTOR (O.S.)
We had a deal, chamaco!

They are startled.

DE LA CRUZ
Who are you? What is the meaning
of this?

From the shadows, Héctor, dressed as Frida, steps into the light.

DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)
Oh, Frida! I thought you couldn't
make it.

Héctor takes off the wig and throws his outfit off.

HÉCTOR
You said you'd take back my photo.
You promised, Miguel.

Miguel turns, backing into de la Cruz's arms. De la Cruz rises to his feet, hands defensively on Miguel's shoulders.

DE LA CRUZ
(to Miguel)
You know this, uh... man?

MIGUEL

I just met him tonight. He told me
he knew you--

As Héctor steps forward with the photo, de la Cruz slowly recognizes him.

DE LA CRUZ

Hé-- Héctor?

HÉCTOR

Please Miguel, put my photo up.

Héctor pushes the photo into Miguel's hands. De la Cruz intercepts it.

He looks from the picture to the gray, faded skeleton who kneels before him. Héctor looks weak.

DE LA CRUZ

My friend... you're being
forgotten...

HÉCTOR

And whose fault is that?

DE LA CRUZ

Héctor, please--

HÉCTOR

Those were MY songs you took. MY
songs that made YOU famous.

MIGUEL

W-What?

HÉCTOR

If I'm being forgotten, it's
because you never told anyone that
I wrote them--

MIGUEL

That's crazy, de la Cruz wrote all
his own songs.

HÉCTOR

(to de la Cruz)
You wanna tell him, or should I?

DE LA CRUZ

Héctor, I never meant to take
credit.

(beat)

(MORE)

DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)
 We made a great team but -- you
 died and I -- I only sang your
 songs because I wanted to keep a
 part of you alive.

HÉCTOR
 Oh, how generous.

MIGUEL
 You really did play together...

HÉCTOR
 Look, I don't want to fight about
 it. I just want you to make it
 right. Miguel can put my photo up--

DE LA CRUZ
 Héctor...

HÉCTOR
 --And I can cross over the bridge.
 I can see my girl.

De la Cruz looks at the photo, deliberating.

HÉCTOR
 Ernesto... Remember the night I
 left?

DE LA CRUZ
 That was a long time ago.

HÉCTOR
 We drank together and you told me
 you would move heaven and earth for
 your amigo. Well, I'm asking you
 to now.

MIGUEL
 Heaven and earth? Like in the
 movie?

HÉCTOR
 What?

MIGUEL
 That's Don Hidalgo's toast... in
 the de la Cruz movie, "El Camino A
 Casa."

HÉCTOR
 I'm talking about my real life,
 Miguel.

MIGUEL
No, it's in there. Look.

Miguel looks around and points to the movie clip projected across the room.

FILM CLIP:

DON HIDALGO (FILM CLIP)
Never were truer words spoken.
This calls for A TOAST! To our
friendship! I would move Heaven
and Earth for you, mi amigo.

MIGUEL
But in the movie, Don Hidalgo
poisons the drink...

DON HIDALGO (FILM CLIP)
Salud!

In the clip Don Hidalgo and de la Cruz drink. De la Cruz spits his drink.

DE LA CRUZ (FILM CLIP)
Poison!

Héctor's gears are turning too.

HÉCTOR
That night, Ernesto. The night I
left...

FLASHBACK:

INT. MEXICO CITY HOTEL ROOM

Héctor throws a songbook in a suitcase, shuts it. He grabs his guitar case like he means to leave.

HÉCTOR (V.O.)
We'd been performing on the road
for months. I got homesick -- and
I packed up my songs...

YOUNG DE LA CRUZ
You wanna give up now? When we're
this close to reaching our dream?

YOUNG HÉCTOR
This was your dream. You'll
manage.

YOUNG DE LA CRUZ
I can't do this without your songs,
Héctor--

De la Cruz grabs young Héctor's suitcase, but Héctor pulls away.

YOUNG HÉCTOR
I'm going home, Ernesto.
(beat)
Hate me if you want, but my mind is
made up.

De la Cruz looks angry. For a moment his face darkens. But he composes himself.

YOUNG DE LA CRUZ
Oh, I could never hate you. If you
must go, then I'm... I'm sending
you off with a toast!

De la Cruz pours a couple of drinks. He gives one to Héctor.

YOUNG DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)
To our friendship. I would move
Heaven and Earth for you, mi amigo.
Salud!

They both drink.

EXT. EMPTY STREET

HÉCTOR (V.O.)
You walked me to the train station.

They walk down an empty street at night, Héctor with suitcase and guitar case in tow. Héctor stumbles, de la Cruz steadies him, takes his guitar case.

HÉCTOR (V.O.)
But I felt a pain in my stomach. I
thought it must have been something
I ate...

YOUNG DE LA CRUZ
Perhaps it was that chorizo my
friend...

HÉCTOR (V.O.)
Or something I... drank.

A few more steps and Héctor collapses in the street. FADE TO BLACK.

HÉCTOR (V.O.)
I woke up dead.

BACK TO:

INT. DE LA CRUZ'S MANSION

HÉCTOR
You... POISONED me.

DE LA CRUZ
You're confusing movies with reality, Héctor.

HÉCTOR
All this time I thought it was just bad luck.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. EMPTY STREET

Héctor's suitcase is opened. A hand reaches in to take the songbook.

HÉCTOR
I never thought that you might have... that you...

BACK TO:

INT. DE LA CRUZ'S MANSION

Héctor clenches his jaw. Then he bounds at de la Cruz, tackling him to the ground.

HÉCTOR
How could you?!

MIGUEL
Héctor!

DE LA CRUZ
Security! Security!

Miguel watches as Héctor and Ernesto scuffle on the floor.

HÉCTOR

You took everything away from me!

Security guards rush in to pull Héctor off Ernesto. Héctor struggles, but it's no use.

HÉCTOR

You rat!

DE LA CRUZ

Have him taken care of. He's not well.

The guards drag Héctor through a wide doorway.

HÉCTOR

I just wanted to go back home! No, no, NO!

The doors slam shut and cut off his shouts. Miguel is left alone with de la Cruz.

DE LA CRUZ

I apologize. Where were we?

MIGUEL

You were going to give me your blessing...

DE LA CRUZ

Yes. Uh... sí.

De la Cruz pulls up a marigold petal, but hesitates.

DE LA CRUZ

Miguel, my reputation, it is very important to me. I would hate to have you think...

MIGUEL

That you murdered Héctor... for his songs?

DE LA CRUZ

You don't think that. Do you?

MIGUEL

I -- no! Everyone knows you're the... the good guy.

Doubt enters Miguel's mind. De la Cruz darkens, he places the photo of Héctor in his coat pocket, gears turning in his mind.

MIGUEL

Papá Ernesto? My blessing?

De la Cruz crumples the marigold petal.

DE LA CRUZ

Security!

De la Cruz's guards appear in the doorway.

DE LA CRUZ (CONT'D)

Take care of Miguel. He'll be extending his stay.

The guards grab Miguel by the shoulder.

MIGUEL

What?! But I'm your family!

DE LA CRUZ

And Héctor was my best friend.

Miguel goes pale.

DE LA CRUZ

Success doesn't come for free, Miguel. You have to be willing to do whatever it takes to... seize your moment. I know you understand.

Miguel is dragged away.

MIGUEL

No, NO!

EXT. DE LA CRUZ'S TOWER

The guards drag Miguel out the back of de la Cruz's mansion.

MIGUEL

Let go!

They throw him into a cenote, an inescapable sinkhole behind the estate.

INT. CENOTE

MIGUEL

NO! AHHHHHH!

He falls four stories and splashes into the pool at the bottom of the hole. He breaks the surface and swims to a stone island in the center.

MIGUEL

Help! Can anyone hear me? I wanna go home!

Miguel collapses on the stone island.

His soaked hoodie sags off his shoulders. The skeletal transition is almost complete.

A moment of silence. He is alone.

Suddenly, Miguel hears a noise. Footsteps. Héctor emerges from the darkness, looking beat up. Héctor stumbles.

MIGUEL

Héctor?

HÉCTOR

Kid?

MIGUEL

Oh, Héctor!

They run to each other. Héctor embraces Miguel. But Miguel is overcome with shame.

MIGUEL

You were right. I should have gone back to my family--

Héctor tries to calm him but Miguel is shaking.

HÉCTOR

Hey -- hey, hey...

MIGUEL

They told me not to be like de la Cruz, but I didn't listen--

HÉCTOR

Hey, it's okay...

MIGUEL

I told them I didn't care if they remembered me. I didn't care if I was on their stupid ofrenda.

Héctor holds Miguel to his chest. Miguel is tense.

HÉCTOR
Hey, chamaco, it's okay. It's
okay.

MIGUEL
I told them I didn't care.

Suddenly, a golden flicker flutters through Héctor's bones,
and he falls to his knees.

HÉCTOR
Hhuuh!

MIGUEL
Héctor! Héctor--

HÉCTOR
She's... forgetting me.

Miguel looks at Héctor with concern.

MIGUEL
Who?

HÉCTOR
My daughter...

MIGUEL
She's the reason you wanted to
cross the bridge...

HÉCTOR
I just wanted to see her again...
(beat)
I never should have left Santa
Cecilia. I wish I could apologize.
I wish I could tell her that her
papá was trying to come home. That
he loved her so much.
(beat)
My Coco...

A chill runs through Miguel.

MIGUEL
Coco?

Miguel reaches into his hoodie and pulls out the photo of
Imelda, Coco, and the faceless musician.

Miguel shows the photo to Héctor. Héctor is confused; it's
like he's seen a ghost.

HÉCTOR
Where... where did you get this?

MIGUEL
That's my Mamá Coco. That's my
Mamá Imelda. Is that... you?

Gears turn in both of their heads.

HÉCTOR
We're...

HÉCTOR
...family?

MIGUEL
...family?

Héctor is as shocked as Miguel. He looks at his great-great grandson.

He looks to the photo, touches the image of baby Coco, and he becomes saddened.

HÉCTOR
I always hoped I'd see her again.
That she'd miss me... maybe put up
my photo. But it never happened.
(beat)
You know the worst part?
(beat)
Even if I never got to see Coco in
the living world... I thought at
least one day I'd see her here.
Give her the biggest hug...
(beat)
But she's the last person who
remembers me. The moment she's
gone from the living world...

MIGUEL
You disappear... from this one.
You'll never get to see her...

HÉCTOR
...Ever again.

Héctor is quiet for a moment.

HÉCTOR
You know, I wrote her a song once.
We used to sing it every night at
the same time, no matter how far
apart we were. What I wouldn't
give to sing it to her... one last
time.

Héctor sings softly, plaintively.

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK:

INT. YOUNG COCO'S BEDROOM - DAY

HÉCTOR

(singing)

REMEMBER ME
THOUGH I HAVE TO SAY GOODBYE
REMEMBER ME
DON'T LET IT MAKE YOU CRY
FOR EVEN IF I'M FAR AWAY
I HOLD YOU IN MY HEART
I SING A SECRET SONG TO YOU
EACH NIGHT WE ARE APART
REMEMBER ME

YOUNG COCO

(giggling)

Papá!

HÉCTOR

(singing)

THOUGH I HAVE TO TRAVEL FAR
REMEMBER ME
EACH TIME YOU HEAR A SAD GUITAR

Father and daughter sing the song together.

HÉCTOR

(singing)

KNOW THAT I'M WITH YOU
THE ONLY WAY THAT I CAN BE
UNTIL YOU'RE IN MY ARMS AGAIN
REMEMBER ME

YOUNG COCO

(singing)

KNOW THAT I'M WITH YOU
THE ONLY WAY THAT I CAN BE
UNTIL YOU'RE IN MY ARMS AGAIN
REMEMBER ME

FADE TO:

INT. CENOTE

The echo of Héctor's song fades to silence.

MIGUEL

He stole your guitar... He stole
your songs...

(beat)

(MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
 You should be the one the world
 remembers, not de la Cruz!

HÉCTOR
 I didn't write "Remember Me" for
 the world... I wrote it for Coco.
 I'm a pretty sorry excuse for a
 great-great grandpa.

MIGUEL
 Are you kidding? A minute ago I
 thought I was related to a
 murderer. You're a total upgrade!

Héctor doesn't smile. Miguel kneels close.

MIGUEL
 My whole life, there's been
 something that made me different...
 and I never knew where it came
 from.
 (beat)
 But now I know. It comes from you.
 (beat)
 I'm proud we're family!

Miguel looks up defiantly at the hole in the cenote.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
 I'm proud to be his family!
 TRRRRRAI-HAY-HAY-HAY-HAAAY!

Héctor perks up.

HÉCTOR
 TRRRRRRAAAAAI-HAAAI-HAAAAAY!
 I'm proud to be HIS family!

They trade off their gritos until the cenote echoes with the
 sound. Soon though, the echoes fade. They're still stuck.
 Suddenly they hear a distant howling.

DANTE (O.S)
 Rooo-rooo-roooooooooo!

Miguel and Héctor look up.

MIGUEL
 Dante?

DANTE (O.S.)
 (louder)
 Roooooo-roo-roo-rooo!

Up at the top of the cenote, Dante pokes his head in the opening.

MIGUEL

Dante! It's Dante!

Dante pants and wags his tail happily. Behind him Pepita peeks down through the hole and gives a powerful roar. Pepita's call shakes the cavern. She lowers her head to reveal Mamá Imelda riding atop her. Miguel and Mamá Imelda laugh with joy. Until her gaze falls upon Héctor.

HÉCTOR

Imelda!

MAMÁ IMELDA

(icy)

Héctor.

HÉCTOR

You look good...

EXT. CENOTE - MOMENTS LATER

Pepita flies out of the cenote; Imelda, Héctor, Miguel, and Dante ride on her back. She ascends above the clouds.

EXT. NIGHT SKY

Miguel, wind in his hair, hugs Dante fiercely.

MIGUEL

Dante, you knew he was my Papá
Héctor the whole time! You ARE a
real spirit guide!

(doggy-praise)

Who's a good spirit guide? You
are!

Dante smiles at Miguel dumbly. Suddenly, before Miguel's eyes, neon patterns spread outward from the dog's paws. Dante begins to freak out.

MIGUEL

Whoa...

A pair of little wings sprout on the dog's back. He spreads them. He jumps up to fly... and plummets beneath the clouds!

MIGUEL

Dante!

But then he's back up, flapping goofily and barking his head off, a full-blown spirit guide!

EXT. SMALL PLAZA

Pepita flies in, landing in a small plaza where the other Riveras wait.

PAPÁ JULIO
Look, there they are!

The Dead Riveras come rushing up.

FAMILY
Miguel! / Miguelito! / Ay, gracias
a Dios! / It's Miguel! / He's all
right! / Oh thank goodness! /
Gracias, Dios mío!

They dismount from Pepita. Héctor falls off first but gets up and raises his arm to help Imelda. She gives him a withering stare and dismounts without his help. Miguel pets Dante and Pepita gives Miguel a big lick.

Imelda rounds Pepita's shoulder and folds Miguel into a tight hug.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Mijo, I was so worried! Thank
goodness we found you in time!

Imelda's eyes fall on Héctor, who holds his hat in his hands sheepishly.

MAMÁ IMELDA
And you! How many times must I
turn you away?

HÉCTOR
Imelda--

MAMÁ IMELDA
I want nothing to do with you. Not
in life, not in death!
(beat)
I spent decades protecting my
family from your mistakes. He
spends five minutes with you and I
have to fish him out of a sinkhole!

Miguel steps between Imelda and Héctor.

MIGUEL

I wasn't in there 'cause of Héctor.
He was in there 'cause of me.

(beat)

He was just trying to get me
home... I didn't wanna listen, but
he was right... nothing is more
important than family.

Mamá Imelda looks at Héctor, shocked to hear the sentiment.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I'm ready to accept your
blessing... and your conditions.
But first, I need to find de la
Cruz. To get Héctor's photo.

MAMÁ IMELDA

What?

MIGUEL

So he can see Coco again. Héctor
should be on our ofrenda. He's
part of our family--

MAMÁ IMELDA

He left this family!

MIGUEL

He tried to go home to you and
Coco... but de la Cruz murdered
him!

Startled, she looks to Héctor for confirmation.

HÉCTOR

It's true, Imelda.

Imelda wrestles with her emotions.

MAMÁ IMELDA

And so what if it's true? You
leave me alone with a child to
raise and I'm just supposed to
forgive you?

HÉCTOR

Imelda, I--

Héctor's body suddenly shimmers, leaving him winded. Imelda
gasps.

MIGUEL

Héctor?

HÉCTOR

I'm running out of time. It's
Coco...

MAMÁ IMELDA

She's forgetting you...

MIGUEL

You don't have to forgive him...
But we shouldn't forget him.

MAMÁ IMELDA

(to Héctor)

I wanted to forget you. I wanted
Coco to forget you too, but--

HÉCTOR

This is my fault, not yours.
(beat)
I'm sorry, Imelda.

Mamá Imelda, holding in her emotions, turns to Miguel.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Miguel, if we help you get his
photo... you will return home? No
more music?

MIGUEL

Family comes first.

Mamá Imelda considers. She turns to Héctor.

MAMÁ IMELDA

I -- I can't forgive you. But I
will help you.

Miguel smiles.

MAMÁ IMELDA

(to Miguel)

So how do we get to de la Cruz?

Miguel furrows his brow.

MIGUEL

I might know a way...

EXT. SUNRISE SPECTACULAR AMPHITHEATER - BEFORE DAWN

Crowds are congregated at de la Cruz's Sunrise Spectacular which takes place in an open air amphitheater. They hurry to their seats as the lights begin to dim.

ON STAGE

Frida's performance piece begins. Dramatic symphonic music plays as a giant papaya appears to ignite on stage. The "seeds" in the body of the papaya unfurl to reveal that they are dancers, each dressed like Frida Kahlo, right down to the painted on unibrow.

The dancers roll out of the "flaming" papaya and gyrate their bodies nonsensically.

A giant cactus that resembles Frida is illuminated, and all the dancers slink to it.

In the midst of this, eight familiar looking dancers (the Dead Riveras and Miguel) inch their way out of the spotlights and to the wings of the stage.

STAGE WING

FRIDA
Good luck, muchacho.

MIGUEL
Gracias Frida!

INT. BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

The Dead Riveras congregate in a hidden backstage corridor, shedding their Frida outfits. Miguel rips off his unibrow.

MIGUEL
Ow!

Dante has snuck in under Tío Oscar's skirt. Héctor sees that Imelda is tangled up in her outfit.

HÉCTOR
Here, let me help you with--

MAMÁ IMELDA
Don't touch me.

The family joins together in a huddle.

MIGUEL
Everyone clear on the plan?

TÍA VICTORIA
Find Héctor's photo.

PAPÁ JULIO
Give it to Miguel.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Send Miguel home.

HÉCTOR
Got your petals?

Each family member raises a marigold petal. Imelda leads the way out of the corridor.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Now, we just have to find de la Cruz--

Right around the corner is de la Cruz who turns with a smile.

DE LA CRUZ
Yes?

MAMÁ IMELDA
Ah!

The family stops in their tracks, still hidden from de la Cruz's view. It's just him and Imelda. His smile drops.

DE LA CRUZ
Don't I know you?

Imelda pulls off her shoe and slaps de la Cruz across the face with it.

MAMÁ IMELDA
That's for murdering the love of my life!

DE LA CRUZ
(disoriented)
Who the?

Héctor leaps out from around the corner.

HÉCTOR
She's talking about me!
(to Imelda)
I'm the love of your life?

MAMÁ IMELDA
I don't know! I'm still angry at
you.

DE LA CRUZ
Héctor?! How did you--

Imelda slaps de la Cruz again.

MAMÁ IMELDA
And that's for trying to murder my
grandson!

DE LA CRUZ
Grandson?

Now Miguel leaps out of the corridor.

MIGUEL
She's talking about me!

De la Cruz sees the three of them and puts the pieces
together.

DE LA CRUZ
You! Wait, you're related to
Héctor?

Miguel sees the photo in de la Cruz's pocket.

MIGUEL
The photo!

The rest of the Riveras emerge from the corridor.
Outnumbered, de la Cruz turns and runs.

MAMÁ IMELDA
After him!

INT. BELOW STAGE

De la Cruz knocks over a group of giant sugar skull dancers.
He emerges at a full sprint to where his rising platform is
set up.

DE LA CRUZ
Security! Ayúdenme!

The Riveras flood out after him. Héctor jogs next to Imelda.

HÉCTOR
You said "love of your life..."

MAMÁ IMELDA
I don't know WHAT I said!

MIGUEL
That's what I heard...

A brawl ensues between the family and the guards.

De la Cruz runs to a stage door.

STAGEHAND
Places, señor, you're on in 30
seconds!

De la Cruz shoves the stagehand out of the way.

As security guards try to wrangle the Riveras, Imelda reaches de la Cruz and gets her hands on Héctor's photo. De la Cruz scuffles with her to get it back, when Miguel tackles de la Cruz to the ground. De la Cruz loses his grip; Imelda tumbles backward, photo in hand.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Miguel! I have it!

Miguel turns toward Imelda but is chased by guards.

Suddenly, Imelda rises into the air. She is on de la Cruz's rising platform! She is lifted through the ceiling and up to the stage.

De la Cruz hurries up the stairs after her.

Miguel is detained by a security guard when Dante flies in and knocks the guard's head clean off. Miguel, Héctor, Tía Victoria, and Tía Rosita hurry up the stairs after de la Cruz.

MIGUEL
Hurry, come on!

Papá Julio, Tío Oscar, and Tío Felipe block the guards from following the others.

ON STAGE

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Ladies and gentlemen... the one,
the only... ERNESTO DE LA CRUZ!

The platform rises onto the stage and the spotlight falls on Imelda. Neon letters blast brightly behind her, spelling "ERNESTO!" The audience bursts into applause!

CROWD MEMBER

Nesto!

Imelda appears onscreen for all to see.

STAGE WING RIGHT

De la Cruz rushes up a staircase and arrives in the wings. He gets the attention of his guards and points to Imelda.

DE LA CRUZ

Get her off the stage!

His guards hustle onto the stage, scaling the set to get to her.

STAGE WING LEFT

Miguel, Héctor, Victoria, and Rosita emerge to see Imelda spotlit above them.

ON STAGE

De la Cruz's guards begin to approach Imelda. She is frozen, unable to move.

MIGUEL (O.S.)

Sing!

Mamá Imelda looks down and sees Miguel in the wing.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

SING!

Imelda, seeing that the guards are approaching, closes her eyes, grasps the mic, and follows Miguel's instructions.

MAMÁ IMELDA

(singing)

AY DE MÍ, LLORONA

LLORONA DE AZUL CELESTE...

STAGE WING LEFT

Héctor's mouth gapes open. Tía Victoria and Tía Rosita go wide-eyed.

Miguel sets Héctor up with a guitar, then adjusts a mic stand in front of him. Héctor plays the guitar, its sound amplified through the stage speakers.

ON STAGE

MAMÁ IMELDA
AY DE MÍ, LLORONA
LLORONA DE AZUL CELESTE...

The guards reach the edge of her spotlight but stop short, not wanting to interrupt the performance.

Imelda takes the spotlight with her as she descends the on stage staircase. As she comes down, she makes eye contact with her husband in the wing. He smiles as he accompanies her. Imelda's eyes glint, touched to see him supporting her.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Y AUNQUE LA VIDA ME CUESTE, LLORONA,
NO DEJARÉ DE QUERERTE.
NO DEJARÉ DE QUERERTE!

As Héctor accompanies Imelda, she becomes more confident. The audience begins to clap.

De la Cruz grunts in frustration.

Soon, the stage conductor joins with more instrumentation, which kicks into high gear.

MAMÁ IMELDA
ME SUBÍ AL PINO MÁS ALTO, LLORONA,
A VER SI TE DIVISABA.

She doubles down on her performance, taking the spotlight with her as she moves to put distance between her and the guards.

Imelda continues to vamp, trying to navigate away from the guards and toward her family. One guard blocks her way, but she grabs him and forces him to dance. Scared of the spotlight, he runs away.

MAMÁ IMELDA
COMO EL PINO ERA TIERNO, LLORONA
AL VERME LLORAR, LLORABA.
(MORE)

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)
 AY DE MÍ, LLORONA, LLORONA,
 LLORONA DE AZUL CELESTE...

She heads to leave the stage when she is stopped by a hand on her wrist. A voice joins her in harmony, the spotlight widens to reveal Ernesto de la Cruz singing too. The crowd goes wild.

DE LA CRUZ/MAMÁ IMELDA
 AY DE MÍ, LLORONA, LLORONA
 LLORONA DE AZUL CELESTE...

He dances Imelda around the stage, all the while trying to get to Héctor's photo.

DE LA CRUZ/MAMÁ IMELDA
 Y AUNQUE LA VIDA ME CUESTE, LLORONA,
 NO DEJARÉ DE QUERERTE.

DE LA CRUZ
 Y AUNQUE LA VIDA ME CUESTE, LLORONA,
 NO DEJARÉ DE QUERERTE.
 NO DEJARÉ DE QUERERTE!

MAMÁ IMELDA
 Let go of me!

DE LA CRUZ
 NO DEJARÉ DE QUERERTE!
 ...AY, AY, AY!

At the finale of the song, Imelda stomps her heel into de la Cruz's foot on his high note, causing him to let her go. She runs off stage with the photo.

BACKSTAGE

Imelda arrives off stage and, somewhat high on adrenaline, she embraces Héctor.

MAMÁ IMELDA
 I forgot what that felt like.

Héctor is taken by surprise. Imelda, realizing the impropriety, pulls away from him awkwardly.

HÉCTOR
 You... still got it.

They smile at each other, softening. Miguel, off to the side, clears his throat.

MIGUEL

Ahem.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Oh!

Imelda, now reminded, gives Miguel the photo. She pulls out her petal.

MAMÁ IMELDA

Miguel, I give you my blessing.

The petal glows.

MAMÁ IMELDA (CONT'D)

To go home... to put up our photos...

(beat)

And to never...

Miguel looks slightly saddened, anticipating the condition.

MIGUEL

Never play music again...

Imelda smiles.

MAMÁ IMELDA

To never... forget how much your family loves you.

The petal surges. Miguel brightens, touched.

HÉCTOR

You're going home.

DE LA CRUZ

You're not going anywhere!

Suddenly Miguel is yanked away from his great-great grandparents by de la Cruz. De la Cruz has grabbed Miguel by the scruff of his hoodie.

Imelda lunges at de la Cruz, but he pushes her to the floor.

HÉCTOR

Imelda--

De la Cruz drags Miguel away as his family encroaches.

DE LA CRUZ

Stay back! Stay back. All of you!

De la Cruz drags Miguel further and further back on the stage.

DE LA CRUZ
Stay back! Not one more step.

Dante growls and tries to grab Miguel.

MIGUEL
Dante!

De la Cruz pulls Miguel away, closer to the ledge of the building.

Héctor struggles but continues pursuing de la Cruz.

HÉCTOR
(winded)
Ernesto, stop! Leave the boy
alone!

Héctor stumbles, shimmering like before. He falls to the ground.

DE LA CRUZ
I've worked too hard, Héctor...
Too hard to let him destroy
everything...

In the stage wings, Tía Rosita commandeers one of the cameras and points it toward de la Cruz. Tía Victoria sidles up to a control board and pushes a volume dial up.

HÉCTOR
He's a living child, Ernesto!

DE LA CRUZ
He's a threat!

CUT TO:

STADIUM

The image of de la Cruz holding Miguel hostage is projected on the stadium screens, the audience falls to a hush as they watch.

BACK TO:

BACKSTAGE

Miguel struggles against de la Cruz.

DE LA CRUZ

You think I'd let him go back to
the land of the living with your
photo? To keep your memory alive?

(beat)

No.

MIGUEL

You're a coward!

DE LA CRUZ

I am Ernesto de la Cruz, the
greatest musician of all time!

MIGUEL

Héctor's the real musician, you're
just the guy who murdered him and
stole his songs!

CUT TO:

STADIUM

The crowd is gobsmacked by what they are hearing.

CROWD

Murder?

BACK TO:

BACKSTAGE

DE LA CRUZ

I am the one who is willing to do
what it takes to seize my moment...

(darkening)

Whatever it takes.

Suddenly, de la Cruz throws Miguel off of the structure.

MIGUEL

AHHH!

HÉCTOR

NO!

The family runs to the ledge, horrified.

TÍO OSCAR/TÍO FELIPE
Miguel!

MAMÁ IMELDA
Miguel!

CUT TO:

STADIUM

The audience gasps. Some shrieks.

BACK TO:

BACKSTAGE

De la Cruz crosses from the ledge, past Héctor, who remains collapsed on the floor, breathless.

DE LA CRUZ
Apologies old friend, but the show
must go on...

CUT TO:

Miguel is in free fall, the photo still in his hand. As the wind whips against his face, he hears a faint howling.

Dante slices downward through the air, catches Miguel's shirt in his teeth, and opens his wings. He and Miguel jerk upward, but the photo falls from Miguel's hands and is gone from sight.

Miguel and Dante twist in the air, Dante trying to slow their decent but the two of them are too heavy. Miguel's shirt rips and Dante loses him.

Miguel plummets toward the base of the tower. Suddenly Pepita flies in and scoops up Miguel. Dante follows close behind. Miguel looks over the side of Pepita down towards the water.

The photo is lost.

BACK TO:

BACKSTAGE

De la Cruz steps up to the curtain, slicks back his hair, and emerges to his audience.

ON STAGE

De la Cruz is found by a spotlight.

DE LA CRUZ

Ha ha!

He is met with boos. He looks confused.

CROWD

Boo! Murderer!

DE LA CRUZ

Please, please, mi familia...

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Get off the stage!

More booing. De la Cruz tries to kick up the orchestra.

DE LA CRUZ

Orchestra! A-one-A-two-A-one--

The conductor snaps his baton. More booing.

DE LA CRUZ

(singing)

REMEMBER ME, THOUGH I HAVE TO--

(beat)

Hey!--

The crowd pelts de la Cruz with fruit and offerings.

CROWD MEMBER

Look!

Crowd members point up to the screen. Pepita rises above the ledge with Miguel on her back. Miguel slides off her wing and runs to his family.

CROWD MEMBER

He's alright!

The crowd cheers. There are sighs of relief.

De la Cruz, seeing this play out on screen, realizes his backstage treachery has been projected to the whole world. He watches horrified as the image of Pepita grows larger and larger on the screen as she prowls past the camera.

De la Cruz begins to back up just as Pepita emerges through the curtain, eyes locked on him.

DE LA CRUZ
Nice kitty...

Suddenly Pepita head-butts de la Cruz and lifts him into the sky, flinging the singer in the air like a kitten playing with a ball of yarn.

DE LA CRUZ
AAAHHHH! Put me down! No, please!
I beg of you, stop! Stop! NO!

She swings him around to gain momentum, then throws him over the audience.

DE LA CRUZ
NO! AAAHHH!

He flies out of the stadium, hitting a giant church bell in the distance. The stadium erupts in cheers.

In the midst of the cheering, an unsuspecting crowd member returns from concessions.

CROWD MEMBER
What did I miss?

BACK TO:

BACK STAGE

Miguel is surrounded by family, safe. He hugs Dante.

MIGUEL
Good boy, Dante.

Imelda runs to Miguel and embraces him.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Miguel!

Behind them, Héctor struggles to get to his feet but stumbles with a flicker. Miguel runs to support him.

MIGUEL
Héctor! The photo, I lost it...

HÉCTOR
It's okay, mijo. It's--

Suddenly Héctor suffers his most violent flickering yet. He collapses. Miguel kneels by him.

MIGUEL
Héctor! Héctor?!

Héctor can barely move his limbs.

HÉCTOR
Coco...

MIGUEL
No! We can still find the photo...

Mamá Imelda looks to the horizon, the first rays of sunlight peeking over.

MAMÁ IMELDA
Miguel, it's almost sunrise!

MIGUEL
No, no, no, I can't leave you. I
promised I'd put your photo up. I
promised you'd see Coco!

Héctor looks at Miguel. The skeletal transformation is creeping in on the edges of Miguel's face. He's almost full skeleton now.

HÉCTOR
We're both out of time, mijo.

The shimmering of Héctor's bones advances.

MIGUEL
No, no... she can't forget you!

HÉCTOR
I just wanted her to know that I
loved her.

Héctor musters the strength to grab the marigold petal.

MIGUEL
Héctor--

HÉCTOR
You have our blessing, Miguel.

MAMÁ IMELDA
No conditions.

The petal glows.

Héctor struggles to lift the petal to Miguel. Mamá Imelda takes his hand in hers.

MIGUEL
No, Papá Héctor, please!

Imelda and Héctor move their joined hands toward Miguel's chest.

MIGUEL
No...

Héctor's eyelids begin to close.

HÉCTOR
Go home...

MIGUEL
I promise I won't let Coco forget
you! Aaahh!--

WHOOOOSH! A whirlwind of marigold petals, and everything goes white.

FADE IN:

INT. DE LA CRUZ'S MAUSOLEUM - SUNRISE

Miguel finds himself back in de la Cruz's tomb.

Dazed, he looks through the windows; day has broken.

On the floor is the skull guitar. Miguel grabs it. He exits the tomb and takes off out of the cemetery.

EXT. PLAZA

Miguel races through the plaza, past the statue of de la Cruz.

Miguel races through the streets towards home. He blows right past his Tío Berto snoring and Primo Abel sleeping on a bench.

TÍO BERTO
(jolting awake)
There he is!

Abel falls off the bench.

Papá comes from around a corner as Miguel is running.

PAPÁ
Miguel!? Stop!

EXT. RIVERA COMPOUND

Miguel rounds the corner and follows the trail of marigolds through the front gate.

He runs for Mamá Coco's bedroom. Just as he makes it to the doorway, Abuelita steps up and blocks him.

ABUELITA

Where have you been?!

MIGUEL

Ah! I need to see Mamá Coco,
please--

Abuelita spies the guitar in Miguel's hand.

ABUELITA

What are you doing with that? Give
it to me!

Miguel pushes past Abuelita, and slams the door shut.

ABUELITA

Miguel! Stop! Miguel! Miguel!
Miguel! MIGUEL!

INT. MAMÁ COCO'S ROOM

Miguel locks the door and goes up to Mamá Coco. She stares into space, eyes completely vacant.

MIGUEL

Mamá Coco? Can you hear me? It's
Miguel.

Miguel looks into her eyes.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

I saw your papá. Remember? Papá?
Please -- if you forget him, he'll
be gone... forever!

She doesn't respond. Miguel's father bangs on the door.

PAPÁ (O.S.)

Miguel, open this door!

Miguel shows her the guitar.

MIGUEL

Here -- this was his guitar, right?
He used to play it to you? See,
there he is.

Still nothing. Her eyes are glazed.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Papá, remember? Papá?

Mamá Coco stares forward, as if Miguel isn't even there.

PAPÁ (O.S.)

Miguel!

MIGUEL

Mamá Coco, please, don't forget
him.

With a rattle of keys, the door flies open. The family pours
in.

ABUELITA

What are you doing to that poor
woman?

Abuelita brushes Miguel aside to comfort her mother.

ABUELITA

It's okay, Mamita, it's okay.

PAPÁ

What's gotten into you?

Miguel looks down, defeated. Tears drip off his nose.
Papá's anger gives way to relief. He embraces his son.

PAPÁ

I thought I'd lost you, Migue...

MIGUEL

I'm sorry, Papá.

Mamá steps forward.

MAMÁ

We're all together now, that's what
matters.

MIGUEL

Not all of us...

Abuelita returns from consoling Mamá Coco.

ABUELITA
 It's okay, mamita.
 (beat)
 Miguel, you apologize to your Mamá
 Coco!

Miguel looks at Mamá Coco and approaches her.

MIGUEL
 Mamá Coco...

His toe accidentally taps against Héctor's skull guitar, a soft hollow ringing resonates.

ABUELITA
 Well? Apologize.

He comes to a realization.

MIGUEL
 Mamá Coco? Your papá -- he wanted
 you to have this.

He picks up the guitar. Abuelita steps forward to intervene but Papá places a hand on her shoulder.

PAPÁ
 Mamá, wait--

Miguel starts to sing "Remember Me" the way Héctor sang it... softly, from the heart.

MIGUEL
 (singing)
 REMEMBER ME
 THOUGH I HAVE TO SAY GOODBYE
 REMEMBER ME
 DON'T LET IT MAKE YOU CRY

MAMÁ
 Look...

The glimmer in the Mamá Coco's eyes grows brighter with every note. Memories flood in, filling the vacancy of her expression with life. Her cheeks soften and plump. Her lips arc into a smile.

MIGUEL
 FOR EVEN IF I'M FAR AWAY,
 I HOLD YOU IN MY HEART
 I SING A SECRET SONG TO YOU
 EACH NIGHT WE ARE APART
 (MORE)

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
REMEMBER ME
THOUGH I HAVE TO TRAVEL FAR

Miguel sings gently, with love.

Mamá Coco's brows slope up, delighted. The song seems to bring her back to life.

Abuelita can't speak. None of them can.

Brimming, Mamá Coco joins Miguel in song -- her voice scratchy with age, his clear with youth.

<p>MAMA COCO REMEMBER ME EACH TIME YOU HEAR A SAD GUITAR KNOW THAT I'M WITH YOU THE ONLY WAY THAT I CAN BE UNTIL YOU'RE IN MY ARMS AGAIN REMEMBER ME.</p>	<p>MIGUEL REMEMBER ME EACH TIME YOU HEAR A SAD GUITAR KNOW THAT I'M WITH YOU THE ONLY WAY THAT I CAN BE UNTIL YOU'RE IN MY ARMS AGAIN REMEMBER ME.</p>
---	--

Tears stream down Abuelita's face; she's witnessing a miracle.

Mamá Coco looks to her daughter, and is troubled by her tears.

MAMÁ COCO
Elena? What's wrong, miija?

ABUELITA
Nothing Mamá. Nothing at all.

Mamá Coco turns to Miguel.

MAMÁ COCO
My papá used to sing me that song.

MIGUEL
He loved you, Mamá Coco. Your papá
loved you so much.

A smile spreads across Mamá Coco's face. She's waited a long time to hear those words.

She turns to her nightstand, hand shaking. She opens a drawer and pulls out a notebook.

MAMÁ COCO
I kept... his letters... poems he
wrote me... and...

Mamá Coco leafs through the book to reveal a torn scrap of paper. She hands it to Miguel. It's the missing face from the photo -- Héctor's face.

Miguel pieces the picture back together, finally seeing Héctor as he was in life, a young, handsome man.

Mamá Coco smiles. She finds the words slowly, but she speaks with fondness and love.

MAMÁ COCO

Papá was a musician. When I was a little girl, he and Mamá would sing such beautiful songs...

The family gathers close to listen.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

TITLE CARD: ONE YEAR LATER

The cemetery is once again filled with families cleaning off head stones and laying flowers.

EXT. DE LA CRUZ'S MAUSOLEUM

Not as many offerings this year, not as many fans. No mariachi band. Someone has hung a sign "FORGET YOU" on the bust of de la Cruz.

TOUR GUIDE (O.S.)

And right over here, one of Santa Cecilia's greatest treasures...

EXT. RIVERA WORKSHOP

The tour guide stands in front of the Rivera shoe shop. Tourists crowd in, taking pictures of the skull guitar and framed letters Héctor wrote to Coco.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

The home of the esteemed songwriter Héctor Rivera! The letters Héctor wrote home for his daughter Coco contain the lyrics for all of your favorite songs, not just "Remember Me".

EXT. COURTYARD

We travel through the courtyard catching glimpses of holiday preparation. Prima Rosa and primo Abel hang papel picado. Papá and Mamá work on tamales. Tío Berto sweeps the cobblestones as the little cousins play.

MIGUEL (O.S.)

And that man is your Papá Julio...

INT. OFRENDA ROOM

Miguel holds his baby sister SOCORRO (10 months) in his arms and points out all of the family members.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

...And there's Tía Rosita... and your Tía Victoria... and those two are Oscar and Felipe. These aren't just old pictures -- they're our family -- and they're counting on us to remember them.

Abuelita approaches and smiles to see her grandson passing on the tradition. Then she places a picture frame on the ofrenda, a photo of Mamá Coco. She looks to Miguel who puts his arm around her.

Next to Mamá Coco's picture sits the photo of Mamá Imelda and Héctor, taped back together. Restored.

CROSS FADE TO:

EXT. MARIGOLD GRAND CENTRAL STATION

Héctor waits in the departures line nervously.

MIGUEL (O.S.)

(singing)

SAY THAT I'M CRAZY
OR CALL ME A FOOL

DEPARTURES AGENT

Next!

Héctor steps up to the monitor. The agent recognizes him. Héctor chuckles nervously. The monitor scans him. DING!

DEPARTURES AGENT

Enjoy your visit, Héctor!

MIGUEL (O.S.)
 (singing)
 BUT LAST NIGHT IT SEEMED
 THAT I DREAMED ABOUT YOU

Héctor's chest swells.

EXT. FOOT OF THE BRIDGE

Héctor exits from the Marigold Grand Central Station. Mamá Imelda waits on the cobblestones to greet him. They kiss. Then he hears a familiar voice.

MAMÁ COCO
 Papá!

Héctor turns to see his daughter approaching. He opens his arms to give Coco the biggest hug.

HÉCTOR
 Coco!

MIGUEL (O.S.)
 (singing)
 WHEN I OPENED MY MOUTH
 WHAT CAME OUT WAS A SONG
 AND YOU KNEW EVERY WORD
 AND WE ALL SANG ALONG

Every moment together is a miracle and he holds Coco like he knows it. Soon Coco, Héctor, and Imelda join hands. The petals of the bridge glow as they step forward. The family crosses together.

MIGUEL (O.S.)
 (singing)
 TO A MELODY PLAYED
 ON THE STRINGS OF OUR SOULS
 AND A RHYTHM THAT RATTLED US
 DOWN TO THE BONE
 OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER
 WILL LIVE ON FOREVER
 IN EVERY BEAT
 OF MY PROUD CORAZÓN

Dante and Pepita fly through the night sky in the Land of the Dead. They alight on the marigold path and bound across into the Land of the Living.

EXT. STREETS OF SANTA CECILIA

Dante's shadow is cast against a wall. When he rounds the corner, he is just a normal xolo dog, no wings or vibrant colors. Pepita's shadow looms large, but as she rounds the corner it shrinks to reveal that she is a little alley cat in the Land of the Living.

EXT. RIVERA COURTYARD

They enter the Rivera compound. Abuelita greets Dante and tosses him a sweet treat. In the courtyard, the family is gathered as Miguel plays his guitar and sings. Dante hops up to give him a lick on the cheek.

MIGUEL
 (singing)
 OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER
 WILL LIVE ON FOREVER
 IN EVERY BEAT
 OF MY PROUD CORAZÓN

Amongst the living Riveras are the spirits of their loved ones, Tía Rosita, Tía Victoria, Papá Julio, Tío Oscar and Tío Felipe, all present and enjoying the reunion.

MIGUEL
 (singing)
 AY MI FAMILIA!
 OIGA MI GENTE!
 CANTEN A CORO!
 LET IT BE KNOWN...
 OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER
 WILL LIVE ON FOREVER
 IN EVERY BEAT
 OF MY PROUD CORAZÓN

Abel and Rosa accompany Miguel with instruments of their own. Papá cradles Miguel's new baby sister as Mamá leans on his shoulder. Abuelita listens proudly to her grandchildren while the spirit of Mamá Coco stands beside, arm around her shoulder.

MIGUEL
 (singing)
 AY MI FAMILIA!
 OIGA ME GENTE!
 CANTEN A CORO!
 LET IT BE KNOWN...
 OUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER
 WILL LIVE ON FOREVER
 IN EVERY BEAT
 OF MY PROUD CORAZÓN

The courtyard is full of Riveras, living and dead. Héctor and Imelda stand arm in arm, listening to Miguel play. As Miguel sings, the whole family, living and dead, all sing, play and enjoy the music.

The whole family, brought together by a song.