

"CARNIVAL/THE MAGIC HORSE"

OVER A BLACK SCREEN CALLIOPE MUSIC PLAYS

EXT. CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOOD - CIRCUS BACKYARD - DAY

A hot overcast afternoon. THUNDER RUMBLES.

The site contains a colorful maze of trailers and vans. Sound of CALLIOPPE MUSIC mixes with VOICES.

A sword-swallower plunges steel down his throat. Fire dancers with painted faces light their torches.

SUPERIMPOSE: CHICAGO, AUGUST

EXT. SANCHEZ TRAILER - DAY

Gilt letters on the trailer's side read: "SANCHEZ HIGH-WIRE ARTISTS"

INT. SANCHEZ TRAILER - DAY - SAME

A BOY dressed in a tank top and jeans lies on a narrow bed.

CARLOS SANCHEZ, 17, has a great face and a muscular body that shows years of physical training.

He studies a Sanchez High-wire POSTER on the wall above his head. Images of Carlos, his mother, Anna, grandfather Luis, and younger brother, Manuel smile down at Carlos.

Sound of an ELEPHANT'S TRUMPET O.S. jolts Carlos out of bed.

INT. SANCHEZ TRAILER BATHROOM - DAY

Carlos stands at the sink. He twists on the cold; a quick splash on his face makes him shiver. He combs his hair.

He stretches his arms and tries to push the narrow walls wider apart.

EXT. COSTINELLI CIRCUS BACKYARD - CHICAGO - DAY

A sweating CROWD strains with anticipation behind ropes.

Carlos, in full costume, follows his mother -- the proud, beautiful, ANNA, 43, in her matching costume and glittering cape.

Behind dark sunglasses, Carlos and Anna seem unaware of the people who fall back with awe-struck faces.

A SMALL BOY waves a Circus PROGRAM and PENCIL at Carlos. But Carlos shakes his head and moves on. The disappointed child turns to his MOTHER for comfort.

ANNA

And what did you learn from me today,
my son?

Carlos hurries to keep up.

CARLOS

Keep my eye always on the target.

ANNA

And...

CARLOS

Never look down.

ANNA

Good. Remember this: the earth bound
people --

Anna gestures to her adoring fans.

ANNA

(continuing)
-- like these, live all their days
rooted to the ground.

EXT. DRESSING TENT ENTRANCE - DAY

Carlos and Anna stop at the entrance.

ANNA

(continuing)
We cannot go for long without
visiting the sky. No?

Carlos smiles a secret smile.

CARLOS

Whatever you say, I do it.

INT. ANNA SANCHEZ'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Carlos and Anna stop to admire their images in the life-size poster on the wall.

ANNA

Like it?

CARLOS

It's great. Mr. Costinelli will like
it.

Anna moves an open PHOTO ALBUM on the dressing table.

Sepia family PICTURES of high-wire ancestors spill from the book. Carlos hands them back to Anna.

ANNA

Gracias.

She tucks the pictures inside the album.

ANNA

(continuing)

Now I want to give you something.

Anna unlocks a small door in her dressing table.

Carlos shows surprise when Anna lifts out an ancient hand-carved wooden MUSIC BOX.

A small jewel-encrusted CAROUSEL HORSE crowns the box.

Carlos kneels to get a better look.

ANNA

(continuing)

Ah, see you like? Have I captured your interest? Mmm?

CARLOS

Where did you find it?

ANNA

Where indeed!

CARLOS

Did your papa carve it?

ANNA

No, no. Your grandfather brought this treasure from the old country. When he died, he left it to me.

Carlos touches the horse's eye. He examines the other eye.

ANNA

(continuing)

Ah. You noticed. One eye is a bullseye.

CARLOS

Si.

ANNA

That makes this horse special like you.

Carlos lowers his head.

CARLOS
What about Manuel?

ANNA
He is my baby. Of course I love him,
but I'm especially proud of you,
Carlos.

He smiles.

ANNA
(continuing)
You've learned many of my high-wire
secrets, not so easy to do.

Anna turns. She takes his hand.

ANNA
(continuing)
Your Mr. Johnny reports high marks
for your studies.

Carlos takes a deep breath.

ANNA
(continuing)
Tonight, I must reward such good work
by giving you this, my most prized
treasure.

Anna winds a golden key at the side of the box.

The Carousel horse turns slowly to a CIRCUS TUNE.

ANNA
(continuing)
The family will try to claim it. Keep
it safe, my Carlos. No matter what
happens.

CARLOS
What do you mean?

ANNA
I have said all I can. Now you must
discover the rest for yourself.

Suddenly Anna leans close to the horse's tiny ear.

ANNA
(continuing)
You belong to Carlos now. Take good
care of him as you have done for me.

Carlos looks puzzled.

Anna locks the music box behind the small door.

Rising, she gives the KEY to Carlos.

ANNA
 (continuing)
 And now, I tell you another secret!

Carlos pockets the key.

Anna's eyes glow with emotion.

ANNA
 (continuing)
 Today, your Uncle Hernando told me
 of... a once-in-a-life-time chance!

Anna pulls her dazzling cape from a hanger. Carlos helps her with it.

ANNA
 (continuing)
 Tonight! A scout from the big circus
 attends our performance!

CARLOS
 A scout?

ANNA
 He must notice our act!

INT. CENTER RING - NIGHT

Show time. A 1500-seat tent and it's jammed with KIDS and ADULTS of all ages.

A BAND PLAYS O.S.

RINGMASTER AL leads Carlos, Anna, LUIS SANCHEZ, 60's, and MANUEL, 15, into the ring.

Anna steps forward and waves the NET away.

Carlos gasps. Manuel shakes his head, no.

M.O.S. Luis argues with Anna and RINGMASTER AL.

The CROWD APPLAUDS.

Al bows to Anna. He signals TWO ROADIES to take down the net. It falls to the sawdust. SIX CLOWNS stow the net.

Carlos and Manuel take Anna's hands. She smiles.

Al crosses to his MICROPHONE.

RINGMASTER AL (V.O.)
 Ladies and gentlemen! Boys and
 girls, children of all ages!

DRUM ROLL.

RINGMASTER AL (V.O.)
(continuing)
Please turn your attention to the
center ring --

The audience CHEERS.

RINGMASTER AL (V.O.)
(continuing)
-- see the world-renowned Sanchez
Family starring the great Anna.

Anna salutes the crowd. They ROAR.

ANOTHER DRUM ROLL.

INT. HIGHWIRE PERCH - NIGHT

Carlos stands with his mother on the perch. They take turns
stepping into the resin box.

Manuel waits one step below on the ladder.

Carlos looks down.

Anna draws his chin up with her hand. She gives him a
reassuring smile. Anna points to Luis at the other end of the
wire.

The audience APPLAUDS.

Carlos follows Anna onto the wire. He takes a deep breath,
shifting for balance.

Anna signals for silence. Suddenly, Anna does a backward
sommarsalt.

Carlos, stunned.

She falls.

SCREAMS from the audience.

Carlos wobbles as he leans toward his mother's hand.

Their hands brush past each other.

INT. BIG TOP CENTER RING - NIGHT

THREE PARAMEDICS rush by the Sanchez Family.

Carlos, lost in his grandfather's Luis' arms.

Anna's brother, UNCLE HERNANDO, 50, comforts Manuel.

Ringmaster Al speaks M.O.S. into his microphone.

Shaken CHILDREN SOB in their PARENT'S arms.

Sirens WAIL.

EXT. OUTSIDE CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

BAND MUSIC PLAYS O.S. throughout the scene.

Carlos and Luis watch the performance through a tent flap.

Superimpose TWO WEEKS LATER

Carlos feels a hand on his shoulder. He turns to see TRAPEZE ARTIST, SHANDEL, 20, in a brilliant costume and heavy makeup.

Shandel shakes her elaborately arranged tinted red curls at Carlos.

SHANDEL

There you are. Gee, you look awful,
like you haven't slept in weeks.

CARLOS

I haven't.

Shandel softens her voice.

SHANDEL

I... I'm sorry about your mother. You
should've come over to my trailer.

Carlos looks down.

SHANDEL

(continuing)
Look at me, Carlos.

Carlos obeys.

SHANDEL

(continuing)
You know, I get real tired of waiting
for you to get done practicing all
the time.

CARLOS

You practice too.

SHANDEL

Not every minute.

CARLOS

I've got my school lessons with Mr.
Johnny.

She takes a step forward.

SHANDEL

Besides, you're too young for me. All we do is argue. I don't want your ring anymore!

Shandel flings a GOLD RING and CHAIN at Carlos.

He raises his hand in defense.

Luis finds the jewelry in the dark.

SHANDEL

(continuing)

That's it. You're too serious! You're no fun. I want fun!

Shandel runs into the darkness.

Luis helps Carlos put on the chain.

Carlos glares through the tent flap.

Luis pats him on the back.

LUIS

Carlos, you're a special breed. You stand in the sky, and you walk the wire alone. There is no room for anyone else in your life.

Carlos bites his lip in silence.

INT. ANNA SANCHEZ' DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Carlos sits staring at the closed album before Anna's mirror.

Her music box glitters under the mirror lights.

Carlos winds the golden key. The music box PLAYS.

A flood of remembering. He holds his head in his hands.

A KNOCK at the door.

HERNANDO (O.S.)

Carlos, it's Uncle Hernando. May I come in?

Carlos opens the door. Uncle Hernando enters. He's dressed in black coat with a fur collar. He pats Carlos on the shoulder. Carlos pulls away.

HERNANDO

Carlos, have you seen Martina? She's gone missing I'm afraid.

CARLOS

No.

Hernando's collar awakens. MARTINA, a sable raccoon-faced ferret, lifts her head from the back of Hernando's collar.

HERNANDO

Ah. Here you are, you little devil.

Hernando draws the ferret gently into his hands. He strokes her back.

CARLOS

Did you talk to Mr. Costinelli?

HERNANDO

Doesn't Uncle always try to solve the family's problems?

CARLOS

What did he say?

Hernando holds Martina high above his head.

HERNANDO

Costinelli will give us one more week to get the act together.

He swings Martina down and places her on the dressing table. She burrows under a towel.

CARLOS

One week?

HERNANDO

Another high-wire act named Rivas practiced today. They want to take our place.

Hernando touches the horse. Carlos moves it out of Hernando's reach.

HERNANDO

(continuing)

So beautiful. And that sweet little song! Play the song for your Uncle.

Carlos turns the golden key.

They watch the horse turn to the MUSIC. Martina peeks out from the towel to listen.

HERNANDO

(continuing)

Papa should have left this little horse to me, his only son.

The music WINDS DOWN. The horse STOPS. Carlos gently pulls the horse from it's stand.

HERNANDO
 (continuing)
 Clever!

KNOCKING is heard at the door.

INT. DRESSING ROOM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

TIM BURKE, stage manager, listens at the door.

INT. ANNA SANCHEZ' DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Carlos stares at the horse. He replaces it on its stand.

STAGE MANAGER'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Five minutes, Carlos.

Hernando goes to the door.

HERNANDO
 Carlos is here. Thank you.

Carlos watches Hernando.

HERNANDO
 (continuing)
 You've decided to perform tonight?

The boy looks deep into the mirror at his own haggard face.

Hernando picks up Martina.

HERNANDO
 (continuing)
 Luis has asked me to sell Anna's
 music box.

Carlos stands.

CARLOS
 It's mine now! She left it to me.

HERNANDO
 The family needs funds, and I've
 found a buyer. We all must sacrifice.

Carlos paces the room.

HERNANDO
 (continuing)
 I'll pick it up after the show.

CARLOS
 No! You'll never sell Mama's horse!

HERNANDO

What is it Luis always says? "FAMILY first."

Carlos backs up against the dressing table.

HERNANDO

(continuing)

I feel sorry for you. No Mama. A runaway Papa. Only old Luis and Uncle Hernando left to care for you and brother.

Hernando exits with Martina.

Carlos buries his face in the folds of Anna's cape.

INT. BIG TOP CENTER RING - NIGHT

SPOTLIGHTS swing to Carlos and Manuel. Luis joins his grandsons. He wears Anna's cape. The Sanchez family smiles and salutes.

Luis hooks Anna's cape around Carlos' neck. Manuel grimaces.

CARLOS

I can't wear Mama's cape! I can't even remember the act.

LUIS

Once you're up there again, I know you will find your courage.

MANUEL

Man, you give her cape to him. What do I get?

Luis glances at Manuel.

LUIS

Not now. Show respect for your elders.

MANUEL

Prop-holder, cape-catcher, that's Manuel's job. Pick up after "Mr. Great One" here.

LUIS

Quiet, Manuel.

Manuel sulks.

Half-way up the ladder, Carlos sees endless rungs towering above.

AUDIENCE

CAR-LOS! CAR-LOS!

Carlos' eyes circle the tent. He waves one hand for quiet.

People misread the wave. APPLAUSE.

The boy signals Luis.

Luis raises his arm.

SILENCE.

Luis points toward the wire another 50 feet above.

Carlos draws a deep breath. Again, he drags his body up.

His right foot slips. He misses a rung.

Panic crosses Carlos' face. He clings to the ladder.

The riled audience begins FOOT-POUNDING.

AUDIENCE
(continuing)
CAR-LOS! CAR-LOS!

Carlos watches Luis and Manuel scramble down.

He sees Hernando say something to Ringmaster Al M.O.S.

Ringmaster Al dashes into the Center Ring.

RINGMASTER AL (V.O.)
Ladies and Gentlemen! Carlos is all
right. Please be seated. We'll get on
with the show!

The BAND PLAYS.

SPOTLIGHTS twist away from Carlos to Shandel, waving from her trapeze.

A ROAR from the crowd. A few WHISTLES.

Carlos reaches the base of the ladder.

INT. ANNA SANCHEZ' DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

BAND MUSIC continues O.S. under the entire scene.

LOUD THUNDER CLAP

Carlos winds Anna's music box with shaking hands.

While the MUSIC PLAYS, the boy pulls a canvas duffel bag from the closet.

Carlos hears O.S. SHOUTING VOICES. A DOOR SLAMS.

He tosses the PHOTO ALBUM into his bag.

The MUSIC BOX SONG ENDS.

INT. ANNA SANCHEZ'DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Luis leans in at the open door.

Mirror LIGHTS GLOW leaving the rest of the room in darkness.
Luis draws the door shut.

Behind the closing door stands Carlos wearing his mother's cape and the golden key on the chain around his neck. Sequins spark.

Carlos folds the cape into his duffel. He pauses at the dressing table.

With a resolved, determined face, he pulls the little horse from its stand and drops the horse into his bag.

EXT. BIG TOP SIDE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

O.S. BAND MUSIC continues.

LIGHTNING chases STORM CLOUDS across the sky.

Carlos, in his jeans and a tank shirt, exits through a tent flap.

Hugging his duffel bag, he runs west down the sidewalk.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

RAIN begins to fall.

Carlos walks along an empty street. Off Madison, he sees poverty and decay. Turning away, he notices a woman asleep in a doorway.

EXT. CHICAGO RAILROAD YARD - NIGHT

RAINING harder now as Carlos runs along the tracks.

A freight creeps toward Carlos.

The boy notices he's being followed.

Carlos escapes BOB MURPHY, 30's, by leaping and sliding over cars from track to track.

BOB

Hey, stop!

Carlos loses Bob. The boy runs beside a moving train. He hoists himself into an open boxcar.

Bob running.

BOB
(continuing)
Wait!
(running faster)
Who are you?

Wheels CLICK along the tracks.

INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

Bob appears in the car. Carlos has nowhere to go. Bob leaps at Carlos and grabs him from behind around the throat. Bob draws a knife.

Carlos grabs his duffel bag. He swings it at Bob.

Wobbling at the doorway, Bob loses his balance; he must jump from the train.

Carlos' breaths come in quick gasps as he leans out to see Bob slow then stop running after the moving freight.

EXT. BOXCAR - SOUTHERN ILLINOIS - NIGHT

The freight rolls through silent pasturelands.

The MOON ILLUMINES a wild growth of weeds and tangled grasses.

INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

Wrapped in Anna's cape, Carlos watches the passing scene.

Another train SHRILLS past.

EXT. BOXCAR - DAWN

Tracks rush by below.

INT. BOXCAR - MORNING

No longer wearing the cape, Carlos leans against the open door.

He watches an abandoned farm disappear. A dying cornfield flies by. A BOY, 8, walks along a low fence railing like a wire-walker.

Carlos leans out to see if the boy made it to the end.

Ahead on a high bluff, Carlos spots a FERRIS-WHEEL surrounded by dry corn.

The wheel SPARKLES in the morning sun. It acts as a beacon, snapping Carlos' eyes to decision.

He tosses his bag from the moving freight; Carlos follows tumbling easily into tall grass.

EXT. GRASS NEAR TRACKS - MORNING

The caboose passes; Carlos watches the freight vanish around a curve.

With a puzzled look, he studies the glowing Ferris Wheel. Then he remembers and checks the horse in his bag. It's okay.

Tears run down Carlos' face. The boy wraps the horse in Anna's cape and repacks it.

EXT. PATH ALONG TRACKS - MORNING

With his bag strapped over one shoulder, Carlos walks along the railroad siding on a gravel path.

Heat SHIMMERS before Carlos. Crickets HUM.

The path broadens to a dirt road. A SIGN looms before Carlos. It reads: "WELCOME TO EDGEMONT. Population 1050."

He walks on.

EXT. BLUFF ABOVE TRACKS - DAY

WARREN STONER, 17, watches Carlos through BINOCULARS.

EXT. MAIN STREET CORNER - MORNING

Carlos brushes the dust from his jeans and shirt. He combs his hair in the reflection of a shop window.

A DOG BARKS and whimpers O.S. This sound FADES as Carlos moves away.

Carlos looks past the LIBRARY/COURTHOUSE along the three-block stretch called downtown Edgemont.

Carlos smiles at a THEATRE MARQUEE featuring "VIVA ZAPATA" and "WAR OF THE WORLDS."

EXT. SIDEWALK/DRUGSTORE - MORNING

Two doors down, past a FEED STORE and a DRYGOODS SHOP, Carlos stops at a DRUGSTORE window.

Above hangs an old neon sign that says "HARTZELL'S WITH A HEART DRUGS."

The boy reads a "HELP WANTED" SIGN in the window.

Through the window, AVERY HARTZEL gives Carlos a menacing stare; he stops his dusting to remove the sign.

Carlos recoils.

INT. PERKINS' NEWS AGENCY - MORNING

The screen door SNAPS shut behind Carlos as he steps into the dimly-lit shop.

Waist-high stacks of magazines and newspapers block the aisles.

Shop owner, 60-year-old MR. FRED PERKINS, a thin grasshopper of a man, perches on a tall stool behind the cash register.

Carlos and Perkins exchange wary glances.

The boy walks toward the back wall. He stops at a stack of papers.

Carlos reads the front page CHICAGO SUNDAY SENTINEL HEADLINE: "HIGH-WIRE PERFORMER MISSING!"

He flips the paper over.

Carlos notices a GIRL reading a magazine.

GIRL
(reading aloud)
"Neil looked down at her beautiful face. He held her young body closer, closer."

Carlos smiles, thinking about this. He notices Brenda's shoulder-length red hair.

MR. PERKINS' VOICE (O.S.)
Brenda? You finding everything you need back there?

BRENDA ELAINE HAUER, 15, blushes.

No makeup, dressed in a plain summer dress, and that red hair.

BRENDA
Yes, Mr. Perkins. Thanks.

Brenda remembers the story.

BRENDA
(continuing)
Where was I?

MR. PERKINS' VOICE (O.S.)
You talking to someone, Brenda?

She grimaces.

BRENDA
No. I'm getting a paper, Mr. Perkins.
I'll be right there.

BRENDA
(continuing; reading
aloud)
"His warm lips met hers for a soft
kiss. Feelings she had never
experienced raced through her
trembling body."

Carlos touches her hair. She brushes his hand away.

Brenda turns to face Carlos.

	CARLOS	BRENDA
Hola!		Oh!

She drops the magazine.

They stoop to pick it up and bump their heads.

He retrieves the magazine and offers her his hand. She
reluctantly allows him to help her up.

BRENDA
I didn't see anyone. I was checking
something for a friend.

Carlos smiles. He picks up his bag.

CARLOS
What's your name?

BRENDA
I'm not allowed to talk to strangers.

Brenda backs away knocking over a pile of magazines. Carlos
steps around these. Brenda edges toward the front door.

MR. PERKINS' VOICE O.S.
That noise you, Brenda?

BRENDA
Some magazines fell down.

Carlos stops in shadow.

PERKINS' VOICE O.S.
Pick 'em up for me?

Brenda turns back to the magazines.

Carlos waits. She kneels to restack the pile. He adds a few to the pile. She hands more to him without looking up.

Carlos and Brenda look into each other's eyes.

Brenda snatches the Chicago paper.

Carlos holds his breath, but she doesn't notice his picture and headline.

Perkins rings up the sale.

Brenda pays for the paper.

PERKINS

Wait now, Brenda. Don't be running off so fast. It's too hot.

Brenda looks at her WATCH.

PERKINS

(continuing)

Late for something?

Brenda folds the paper. Perkins takes it to read the front page.

Carlos waits.

Brenda takes back the paper with her left hand.

Carlos looks relieved.

PERKINS

(continuing)

That your graduation watch?

BRENDA

Yes.

PERKINS

You ready to start the big high school next week?

Nervous, Brenda edges to the door.

PERKINS

(continuing)

How many in your graduation class?

BRENDA

Three.

PERKINS

I heard there were five boys last year. Whatever happened to them?

Perkins leans to check on Carlos.

The PHONE rings.

Brenda runs out.

The screen door SNAPS SHUT behind her.

Carlos follows fast. The door BANGS behind Carlos.

Perkins waves after him.

The old man reaches for a wall phone near the register.

PERKINS

(continuing; into the
phone)

Wait! Dang it. I'm an old man. I
can't do all this at once. Hello. Who?

PERKINS

(continuing)

Not you, Tom. Sure thing, I'll try to
catch her.

EXT. PERKINS' NEWS AGENCY - MORNING

Deep in thought, Carlos watches Brenda on her bike.

Perkins stumbles by Carlos. The door SLAMS. Perkins jumps.

PERKINS

(calling after Brenda)

Brenda! Wait up!

Brenda stops, fishtailing her bike on loose gravel.

PERKINS

(continuing)

Your pa called. He says to come home
right away.

BRENDA

I'm going home now.

PERKINS

Your pa says not to ride through the
woods. He says it's not safe.

BRENDA

Okay, Mr. Perkins.

Brenda rides on.

PERKINS

(calling after Brenda)

He says take the main road.

BRENDA
 (calling back)
 I will.

Perkins glares at Carlos, then catching the door before it closes, he enters his store.

Perkins stops on the other side of the screen door.

PERKINS
 Stay there. I'll call someone to help
 you out.

Carlos peeks in through the front window. He sees Perkins pick up the phone.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TOBACCO SHOP - MORNING

Carlos looks around for a place to hide. He notices a display of colorful life-size WOODEN FIGURES on the sidewalk.

A COWBOY with crossed arms stares sullenly at another COWBOY holding a lasso.

Between these figures poses a saddled HORSE.

Carlos sees an EDMONTON HIGHWAY PATROL CAR cruise by, LIGHTS ON and TURNING.

Deputy, BUD OLSON, stops at the News Agency.

Bud talks to Perkins through the door M.O.S.

Mr. Perkins, looking puzzled, peers out.

EXT. TOBACCO SHOP - DAY

Carlos leaps onto the horse's back. He points his finger at the wooden cowboy with the folded arms. Carlos freezes.

BUD'S VOICE (O.S.)
 I'll drive around and see if I can
 find him.

LIGHTS FLASHING, the squad car stops and at the curb.

With a confused expression, Bud studies the display. He shakes his head and drives around the corner.

Carlos risks a smile and a pat for the horse.

EXT. PERKINS NEW AGENCY/ROOF - DAY

ROG FLETCHER, 16, and RAMON RIVAS, 17, wearing SUMMIT HIGH tee-shirts and worn jeans, smile at each other.

EXT. BEHIND RAILROAD STATION - DAY

Carlos steps into a PHONE BOOTH. He picks up the phone, changes his mind, hangs up, and exits the booth.

A DOG MOANS. Carlos hesitates. He turns back toward the sound.

A small mixed-breed DOG lies panting on its side; he's chained to an OUT HOUSE.

Carlos runs to the dog. He sees the dog's wearing a tattered little jacket.

BLOOD stains the coat collar. Carlos finds a bruise on the dog's neck. He unhooks the chain and hurls it away.

CARLOS

Hold still. Let me see your tag.

He reads the tag.

CARLOS

(continuing)

Okay, Topsy. Good boy.

He gently removes the coat. The dog wags his tail.

The boy finds a tin cup next to a pump.

Topsy waits patiently while Carlos pumps for a long time. Water fills the cup.

The dog drinks the cup dry. He WHINES for more. Carlos pumps more. Topsy and Carlos take turns with the water.

Carlos splashes water on his own face.

He dampens the jacket's sleeve at the pump and dabs the neck wound. The dog YELPS.

CARLOS

(continuing)

Sorry.

Carlos gently ties his handkerchief around the dog's neck.

Topsy licks Carlos' hand.

Carlos, picks up Topsy and his bag and moves on.

EXT. SANCHEZ TRAILER - CHICAGO - DAY

Luis reads a PAPER.

He sees Hernando coming toward him. Martina squirms in Herando's hands.

HERNANDO

I'm certain Carlos stole that small horse on Anna's music box.

LUIS

Never mind that now.

Luis waves the paper at Hernando.

LUIS

(continuing)

The police say he's way south of here. They give me this list of small towns along the train tracks.

Hernando takes the list.

HERNANDO

Trust me, Luis. I'll find our boy.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Hernando drives his old pick-up truck south.

INT. CAB/HERNANDO'S TRUCK - DAY

Hernando speeds along, a ROAD MAP spread next to him.

On a shelf behind his head, sits Martina's cage. The ferret peeks over the edge of her red hammock.

From under her tiny sombrero, she watches the receding highway through the back window.

HERNANDO

No worry, my pet. I will find Carlos.

Martina stretches.

HERNANDO

(continuing)

And Carlos will have our little horse. No?

EXT. APPLE WOODS PATH - DAY

Carlos enters the woods down a worn path. Topsy WHIMPERS.

Trees bend and move above Carlos. Vines bind his feet. The path disappears in a thick undergrowth of ferns and weeds.

Carlos tears his way along.

BB GUN SHOTS startle Carlos. He and Topsy dive behind a bush at the base of a tree.

CARLOS
Quiet, now. Shhhh.

MORE BB SHOTS.

Carlos gasps. A trickle of BLOOD appears on his forehead.

He stuffs Topsy into his shirt and quickly climbs to a lower branch.

Carlos looks down to see BILLIE STOKES, 12, under the tree. Billie's big for his age. He wears faded jeans and has bare feet.

BILLIE STOKES
I see you up there.

Billie LAUGHS a strange laugh.

Dizzy, Carlos closes his eyes. His head falls against the tree trunk.

He shakes off his dizziness.

CARLOS
What do you want?

BILLIE STOKES
Nothing. I'm hunting is all.

Billie throws down the gun. He picks up Carlos' bag.

BILLIE STOKES
Let's see what's in this here bag.

With his free hand, Carlos wipes the sweat and blood from his forehead. Topsy squirms inside Carlos' shirt.

Billie finds Anna's cape. He swings it around his shoulders.

CARLOS
That's mine!

BILLIE STOKES
Well now, look at me, ugly old Billie Stokes, dressed up so fine.

Carlos slips down the tree a few feet.

CARLOS
Give me that cape.

Topsy BARKS.

Billie hears something. He looks afraid. He tears off the cape, grabs the gun, and races into the woods.

With a look of relief, he slides to the ground.

He pulls Topsy from his shirt.

CARLOS
(continuing)
Man, you need your nails cut.

Carlos kneels to fold the cape.

CARLOS
(continuing)
Look at this.

Topsy peeks inside the duffle bag. Carlos shows him the horse.

CARLOS
(continuing)
Watch.

CARLOS
(continuing;
whispering into the
horse's ear)
Take good care of Carlos as you have
done for Anna.

Topsy barks.

The horse vanishes from Carlos' hands.

CARLOS
(continuing)
Oh no! What have I done?

Sweating, in a panic, he searches the area under the tree, the bushes, the tangled vines. Carlos fails to find the little horse.

A NOISE behind him.

Carlos swings around. FIVE BOYS, 16 and 17 surround him.

EXT. APPLE WOODS - DAY

Carlos realizes that his rope has moved much higher. Carlos gasps at the change. He climbs the tree to the new height.

The Magic Horse hides in the foliage. Carlos takes a few frightened steps. He keeps going all the way across.

Carlos smiles to himself.

Carlos slides to the ground.

EXT. CORNFIELD - NOON

Carlos walks slowly through tall cornstalks. He stops to rest. He drinks the last of his water. The sun burns into the field.

A deserted barn looms at the edge of the cornfield. He hurries toward an open door.

INT. BARN - DAY

Dark. Cool. Cobwebs, dirty windows. DOVES COO in the rafters.

On a long table he finds a half loaf of BREAD and tears off a hunk. He drinks WATER from a pitcher.

While eating the bread, Carlos roams the main floor of the barn.

He pushes on the sliding door. Locked. He notices the windows are boarded from the outside.

A rickety ladder leads 40 feet to the loft. Carlos stands at the bottom of the ladder.

An OWL HOOTS down at him. He climbs three feet. He climbs down. He closes his eyes and bangs his head on the ladder.

INT. BARN - DAY

Carlos awakens at the center of his web. He's frightened by the ropes. He stretches and starts to unwind the ropes. He's shocked to find a Carousel Horse leaning against the wall on the main level. It was not there the night before.

He hears sound of VOICES nearing the barn. He ties the rope from one post to another across the barn floor. A MOUSE dances across the floor.

The EDGEMONT BOYS enter through the sliding door.

TODD

Sleep well?

CARLOS

I need food and water.

CARLOS

(continuing)

If you keep me prisoner, you must feed me. Even in wartime they take care of prisoners.

CARLOS

(continuing)

YEAH. We'll get em!

Todd looks up. All silent.

TODD

You've met our Brenda. A small
sacrificial lamb for this year.
They'll tear her to shreads.

CARLOS

I don't want to be found.

TODD

We won't turn you in. Max has
breakfast for you. And later you can
hide out at the Carnival.

RAMON

They're gonna move on in a day or so.
Just blend.

They turn and follow Todd, locking the barn again leaving the
breakfast.

Carlos eats. He discovers and open window He takes the rope
and his bag through the window.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Carlos tries to slide the big door open. His face reddens
with anger and he KICKS the door.

Limping a bit, he piles clean straw in a nearby horse stall.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

An oil lamp flickers on the table. Carlos' shadow hovers on
the wall.

EXT. BARN - MORNING

Carlos leaves the barn. He carries the coil of rope and his
bag. He finds a path into the woods.

EXT. APPLE WOODS - DAY

Carlos strings his rope between two trees. He mounts the low
slung rope, walks several feet.

He falls off. Leaps on again.

Someone watches from behind tall bushes. Hidden by dense
foliage stands the Magic Horse.

Carlos realizes that his rope has moved much higher. Carlos
gasps at the change. He climbs the tree to the new height.

The Magic Horse hides in the foliage. Carlso takes a few frighened steps. He keeps going all the way across.

Carlos smiles to himself.

INT. BARN - DAY

Carlos sits on a bale of hay with his hands tied behind him.

CARLOS
I don't have time for this.

RAMON
You ate our bread.

ROG
And drank our water.

TODD
Boys, meet the great Carlos Sanchez.

Carlos' head comes up fast.

TODD
(continuing)
They're looking for you. We've been
in touch.

Carlos stares at Todd.

ROG
He's proud, ain't he?

Todd steps closer to Carlos.

TODD
You have you got problems.

Carlos blinks.

ROG
What problems can he have?

BERNARDO
He looks good.

TODD
And he's wondering where his comb is.

The boys laugh.

TODD
(continuing)
We've got problems too.

BERNARDO
We figure you owe us something for
our hospitality.

Todd takes out Carlos' wallet. He removes Carlos' student I.D.
 Carlos turns his face away.

CARLOS
 Who are you?

ROG
 The five dwarfs.

TODD
 Enough cat and mouse. I'll make a
 deal with you. We'll let you go if
 you can climb that ladder and give us
 a little show.

ROG
 Yeah. Great idea.

Carlos looks up 40 feet to loft above. A rope stretches
 across the length of the barn. He swallows hard.

TODD
 He's sweating now, Guys.

Todd takes out a KNIFE and cuts the ropes on Carlos' wrists
 and feet.

Carlos eyes the door. But the circle closes in around him.

He goes to the ladder. Climbs 20 feet. The ladder wobbles. A
 few rungs are broken and rotted. Carlos' face shows agony of
 fatigue and fear.

He looks down at the fascinated boys.

Carlos climbs to the top. He steps onto the rope, then back
 again to the loft.

TODD
 (continuing)
 That's enough. You can come down.

Humiliation and disgust on his face, Carlos climbs down with
 shaking hands.

TODD
 (continuing)
 The great Carlos Sanchez, a mass of
 quivering jello.

Carlos stands at the ladder.

TODD
 (continuing)
 Rest now.
 (to Ramon)
 Tie a rope around his neck.

RAMON

Like a dog.

Ramon reties Carlos' hands and feet. He loops the rope around Carlos' neck.

TODD

To win your freedom, you must work with us for awhile. It'll take your mind off your mess.

RAMON

We're heading into enemy territory.

TODD

You've met Miss Hauer, this year's sacrificial lamb?

CARLOS

Yes.

TODD

You like her?

CARLOS

Maybe.

Rog looks at Todd

ROG

I told you this wouldn't work.

TODD

You do this for us. We'll help you find your missing little horse.

Carlos stares in disbellief.

TODD

(continuing)

Deal?

CARLOS

Deal!

Todd puts Carlos' ID CARD into his own wallet.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Carlos finds a rope coiled on a hook. He lifts it off and ties one end to one side of a horse's stall. he wraps the rope back and forth across the stall making a huge spider web.

He lies down on straw beneath the web.

Sleepless, Carlos stares into the dark corners of the silent barn.

EXT. CARNIVAL ENTRANCE - DAY

Carlos enters the Carnival grounds through an arched paper mache SIGN: "MUNSON'S MIDLANDS CARNIVAL SHOW."

A small-time Carnival, stands on a grassy bluff overlooking the tracks.

In the b.g., Carnival ROUGHIES, Mexican, Chinese, blacks Italians work at setting up various concession booths, tents and rides.

The Ferris Wheel glows in sunlight.

A semi-trailer truck remains to be unloaded.

JOHN MELADO, twenty-five, and SKIP MENDEZ, twenty, hook up a the Ferris Wheel.

In the f.g., at the center of the Midway, TONY SKELLY, and FRANK VICELLI, off-load a smaller truck near the half-assembled Merry-go-round.

They carry out a wooden horse with a wild stare and set it down with the other horses.

WILLIE MUNSON, 50, exits his nearby trailer. Unshaven, wearing baggy pants, suspenders, and a tee-shirt.

WILLIE

Hola!

Carlos looks down.

WILLIE

(continuing)

Don't worry, Son. I'm not anyone to ask questions about a fella. I can tell by looking at him if he's okay.

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

In the b.g., the sounds of SCREAMS, CHILDREN'S VOICES SHOUTING, MUSIC, RUMBLING rides.

Whizzing lights surround Carlos. A line of CHILDREN wait for a turn.

Carlos wanders past rumbling attractions. He observes games of chance. HAWKERS call out to him.

He lounges near the Ferris Wheel, drinking a coke. All a blurred backdrop to Carlos with certain scenes coming to him in sharp focus:

He watches a FATHER with a small SON. The Ferris Wheel stops to let on two little GIRLS.

Brenda walks by. She's eating cotton candy. She sees him.
 He arches one eyebrow. Brenda supresses a smile.
 She turns red.

EXT. INTERSECTION CARTER ROAD - DAY

After crossing at the light, Brenda stops to read a large
 Colonial SIGN: "YOU ARE NOW ENTERING SUMMIT POPULATION 4,500."

Carlos catches up with her.

BRENDA

Hello. My name is Brenda Elaine
 Hauer. You may call me "Miss Hauer."

CARLOS

Miss Hauer?

BRENDA

Yes.

CARLOS

You're riding fast. Could you and I
 walk to where you're going?

BRENDA

I'm not supposed to speak to
 strangers.

CARLOS

I'm not a stranger. We met in the
 newspaper store.

EXT. SUMMIT HIGH SCHOOL CORNER - DAY

Brenda appears tiny against the state-of-the-art high school
 building.

EXT. SUMMIT SIDE STREET - DAY

Pinpoints of sunlight pierce the thick leaf-cover here.

Carlos and Brenda ride her bike double along the tree-lined
 street.

She points out large homes with fine cars in their driveways.

A gardener hoses a flower garden.

EXT. SUMMIT COUNTRY CLUB GATE - DAY

Carlos, with Brenda's arms around his waist rides slowly by the Club's locked iron gate.

A large swimming pool sparkles through breaks in thick foilage.

In b.g., TEENS apply sun-tan lotion. Others dive.

SCREAMS, TALK, LAUGHTER, the SOUND of a diving board BANGING, water SPLASHING.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

FOOTBALL TEAM practices in b.g.

In f.g., a Cheerleaders' Workshop is in progress.

Carlos and Brenda watch unseen through the chain-link fence.

He notices tears in Brenda's eyes.

CARLOS

What's wrong?

BRENDA

I want to be one of them!

FIVE GIRLS, dressed in shorts Summit t-shirts, learn cheers from CHEERLEADERS in blue and gold uniforms.

Their ADVISER takes notes in her notebook.

MELANIE DAVIS, 15, JUNIOR CHEERLEADER, leads a cheer. Melanie's center of attention is herself.

MELANIE

Give me an S!

The other girls follow Melanie's movements.

MELANIE

(continuing)

Girls, yell louder than that.

(stopping, hands on hips)

I couldn't hear you.

GIRLS AND MELANIE

(louder)

Give me an S!

Brenda repeats the words along with the girls. Carlos watches her. They ride on.

EXT. COSTINELLI CIRCUS BACKYARD - CHICAGO - DAY

Luis and Manuel jump into their trailer.

INT. SANCHEZ TRAILER - CHICAGO - DAY

Luis starts the engine.

LUIS

I can't wait for Hernando any longer.
We must find Carlos ourselves.

MANUEL

Let me stay here.

LUIS

Your place is with your family.
That's me.

Manuel stares out his window. Luis drives into traffic.

EXT. ACROSS STREET OF SUMMIT YOUTH CENTER - DAY

Carlos and Brenda park her bike on a stand. Carlos takes his bag from the basket.

Two Summit HIGH BOYS enter the Youth Center.

When the door opens, DANCE MUSIC attracts Brenda.

She crosses. Carlos waits at the bike stand.

Holding the door open, Brenda enjoys the cool air and the music for a several beats.

INT. SUMMIT YOUTH CENTER - DAY

Large "COCA-COLA" POSTERS featuring wholesome teens drinking green bottles cover the walls.

A lighted Juke box continues playing while FIVE teen COUPLES dance.

Brenda watches, mesmerized. Carlos follows. They stand near the entrance.

Melanie and 15-year-old MARK WILSON in a SUMMIT BASKETBALL shirt enter. Mark acts like a teen idol.

Carlos turns to leave, then stays to overhear Melanie and Mark's conversation.

Carlos puts on an apron. He grabs a tray and starts busing tables.

MELANIE

Your parents won't be home?

MARK

No, would I lead you astray?

MELANIE

Any special entertainment?

Mark smiles.

No one notices Carlos. Brenda sees only Mark.

INT. YOUTH CENTER - DAY

Brenda moves to a table in a dark corner.

Shafts of sunlight through high windows focus on the dance floor like spotlights.

A BOY takes orders from TEENS seated at tables around the dance floor.

INT. YOUTH CENTER - DAY

Sits nursing another Coke at a different table. "CHERRY PINK AND APPLE BLOSSOM WHITE" by PEREZ PRADO plays.

As Mark and Melanie dance, they spin into Brenda's table. Brenda's Coke spills.

MARK AND MELANIE LOOKING DOWN AT BRENDA FROM A SEEMING GREAT HEIGHT - BRENDA'S POV

Brenda sees that Melanie wears a boy's class ring on a gold chain.

GOLD RING GLEAMS IN THE LIGHT FROM THE WINDOW ABOVE BRENDA'S TABLE.

Melanie gives Mark a knowing glance. They sit. Brenda tries to wipe the spilled drink with a napkin. She appears embarrassed and flustered.

BRENDA

(rising to leave)

You want this table?

MELANIE

No. Don't go. Sit down.

Another DANCE SONG plays.

Brenda sits on the edge of her chair.

Although Mark is seated, his attention wanders; his eyes are on his friends throughout the room. He waves and nods as others dance by.

MELANIE
 (continuing; taking
 a deep breath)
 What's your name?

BRENDA
 (looking down at her
 hands)
 Brenda Hauer.

MELANIE
 I'm Melanie Davis. This is my steady,
 Mark Wilson.

BRENDA
 Hi.

Melanie nudges Mark, who turns and smiles. Brenda can't meet his gaze. She looks down at the floor.

MELANIE
 Where do you live?

BRENDA
 On the edge of Summit.

MELANIE
 You'll be a new sophomore soon?

Brenda nervously glances at her watch.

BRENDA
 I'd better get going.

MELANIE
 You can't go until you've danced with
 someone.

BRENDA
 I can't?

Melanie gives Mark a look. He understands Melanie's plan.

MARK
 (rising to his feet)
 Dance?

Stunned, Brenda rises stiffly.

Mark trips when Brenda steps on his toe.

MARK
 (continuing; to TODD)
 Hey, Todd. Great practice last night.

TODD
 (flattered)
 See you tonight.

Mark turns Brenda to stay close to Todd.

MARK
 See you.

Mark doesn't notice Brenda's smile.

As the SONG ENDS, Mark checks to see if Melanie's watching them, then he holds Brenda close for a beat.

Brenda notices this.

Mark steers her to the table, where Melanie sits sipping a Coke. They join her.

MELANIE
 We like you, Brenda.
 (giving Mark a look)
 When you start school you'll need
 some good friends.

BRENDA
 Yes ... I guess so.

Melanie plays with Mark's ring on the chain.

MELANIE
 Mark's going to have a party tonight
 at his house. And we'd like you to
 come.

BRENDA
 I guess I couldn't do that.

MELANIE
 (patience thinning)
 Well, why not?

BRENDA
 (to Mark)
 My pa won't let me date til I'm 16.

Mark takes one of Brenda's hands on his.

MARK
 Your Dad doesn't need to know.

MELANIE
 We'll meet you at the Carnival on
 Miller's Hill at 7:30 tonight.
 (squeezing her arm)
 Why you might even become a
 cheerleader like me some day.

Brenda removes her hand from Mark's

BRENDA

Maybe I could find someone to go with me.

MELANIE

We'll see you tonight at the Carnival.

Brenda smiles wanly at Mark and Melanie as they rise to dance.

EXT. YOUTH CENTER/ENTRANCE - DAY

Brenda, dazed, stumbles out. With a glance at her watch, she runs across the street to her bike. Traffic halts, horns blow.

INT. HAUER KITCHEN - NIGHT

KITCHEN CLOCK reads 6:50 P.M.

Brenda enters, a faint smile on her face.

She's dressed in a skirt and peasant blouse. Her hair's done in tight braids around her head.

A bowl of overripe peaches sits in the middle of the table.

Brenda's portion warms on the stove. Tom stands cooking at the stove.

TOM

I told you to stay home tonight.

EXT. CARNIVAL/FERRIS WHEEL - NIGHT

A shaken Brenda rides Ferris Wheel.

John Mellado, operating the Wheel, snaps the bar into place in front of Brenda.

The ride jerks and stops to let on the next two little girls.

Carlos looks up at Brenda. He sees her startle at the sounds of cars GUNNING ENGINES and doors SLAMMING below.

Carlos sees Melanie, Mark, ROG, 16, VINCE, 15, Mark's cousins, and the Highwood crowd approach the Wheel.

They gather laughing and talking at the Wheel base.

Carlos watches Brenda's reaction.

Gerry Weiner stops to give Carlos some pop.

Brenda looks down from the top.

BRENDA

(calling)

I want to get off!

The Wheel turns steadily. A wild-eyed Brenda grips the seat bar.

Carlos calls Jackie over.

CARLOS

Can you take over for a few minutes?

Jackie nods and slips over to take tickets for the next ride.

Carlos walks to the Ferris Wheel.

As the Wheel turns, he sees that Brenda is crying.

John notices too. He lets Brenda off next.

In the crowd in line for tickets, Brenda manages to slip past Mark and Melanie.

Carlos starts after them.

Rog and Vince realize that there's a chase on.

ROG

(pulling Vince along)

Mark! A chase!

Rog and Vince follow

Brenda.

They shove and push their way through families and bystanders.

Carlos follows at a distance.

EXT. END OF MIDWAY - NIGHT

Brenda realizes she's trapped.

The way is blocked by tents, trailers, and equipment.

Rog and Vince corner Brenda up against a tent.

Rog takes one hand, Vince the other. They pull Brenda in opposite directions.

BRENDA

(shouting in pain)

Stop pulling me!

Rog and Vince drag Brenda into the crowded Midway.

EXT. CARNIVAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Carlos runs forward a short distance in time to see Mark and Melanie drive Brenda away. Rog and Vince hold Brenda captive between them.

BRENDA
(calling back)

Help!

Carlos stands in the parking area as the last of the Highwood cars speeds away.

Carlos walks through the dust toward the Back-End.

EXT. CARNIVAL/MONIQUE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

In b.g., a BABY cries.

Sound of guitar STRUMMING.

Carlos knocks on the trailer door.

Willie comes out onto the top step, Monique at his shoulder.

WILLIE
What's going on, my friend?

CARLOS
I want to take one of the trucks.

WILLIE
Going for a ride?

WILLIE
(continuing)
Better not take a truck. Big trouble
if you do that.

EXT. OAK ROAD - NIGHT

Mark's convertible ROARS down the road. Others in the party wave from their passing cars.

EXT. CARNIVAL MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

Carlos stands next to the Magic Horse. He takes a deep breath.

CARLOS
Please. I need your help.

INT. HAUER BARN - NIGHT

The barn interior remains dark except for the circle of flashlight beams, which play on Brenda. She sits on a wooden box.

Brenda sobs.

Melanie prepares a mixture of white paint with a broken stick.

The circle draws tighter. Melanie readies the brush.

A gust of wind BLOWS open the double doors in the loft. The sound of doors BANGING.

MELANIE

What's that banging?

Brenda hides her face in her hands.

The sound of RUSTLING above.

Flashlights turn upward. They see the head of a Carousel Horse leering at them from the edge of the loft.

The Horse's face remains fixed. The mouth is open, tongue to one side over white teeth. A mad stare from red bull's eye.

MARK

What's going on here? How?

TODD

Look at it. It's as if it can see us.
Spooky, that's what it is.

Brenda stares too.

She moves to the barn door.

Mark swings his torch back to Brenda.

MARK

Don't go.

The Horse's head draws back.

Hay from the loft begins to fall as if pitched down in great amounts. Heavier bales follow. The boys holding Brenda let go.

Todd runs outside. Others follow.

Carlos, in his mother's gleaming cape, now stands above at the loft's edge. He stretches his arms forward above his head.

The hay continues to rain down.

ROG

Forget about her. Come on this is
strange.

Brenda leans against a wall. Carlos looks down at her.

MELANIE

I want to go home, Mark.

Mark nods. With some dignity, he ushers Melanie outside. Others push past them and run for cars. The sound of o.s. engines FIRING.

Carlos climbs down to Brenda.

CARLOS
What a bunch of clowns.

He touches her arm.

CARLOS
(continuing)
You're shaking.

He moves closer and wraps Brenda in the gleaming folds of Anna's cape.

Carlos kisses Brenda on the forehead. She steps back.

BRENDA
I don't know what to say.

EXT. HAUER BARN LOFT - NIGHT

The doors in motion a bit in the moonlight.

EXT. HAUER BARN - NIGHT

Carlos and Brenda talk at a picnic table. Carlos sits on the table edge.

Carlos still wears the cape.

CARLOS
You okay?

BRENDA
I guess so.

CARLOS
Still cold?

BRENDA
No. I should go. My pa's going to kill me.

CARLOS
Don't go.

Carlos stands.

BRENDA
I... I was wondering why you came after me. I mean how did you know where I was?

CARLOS
I saw them chasing you. I followed.

Brenda sits on the bench.

CARLOS
 (continuing)
 How old are you?

Brenda blushes.

BRENDA
 Fifteen.

CARLOS
 Really? Got a boyfriend?

BRENDA
 Not yet. Maybe I'll get one when I go
 to high school.

EXT. HAUER FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Carlos and Brenda stand under the porch light.

The sound of gnats and moths THUDDING and SNAPPING at the
 light.

CARLOS
 Well, good night.

Carlos turns to leave. Brenda doesn't move to go in. After
 several steps away, he returns and kisses her gently. He
 leaves.

Brenda turns to enter. Sailor barks O.S. from inside the
 house.

EXT. BARN/DOOR - DAY

Carlos, surprised and embarrassed to see Brenda at the barn
 door, nearly spills the water bucket he carries.

CARLOS
 Thanks for letting me sleep in your
 barn last night.

BRENDA
 Pa doesn't know. I better go.

Carlos looks so sad that Brenda stays. Carlos gives her a
 quick hug.

Carlos takes her arm and leads her out toward a large tree
 nearby.

CARLOS
 Wait here.

She sits on the grass and he returns to the barn.

Carlos runs from the barn with the scrapbook. He sits close beside her on the grass.

Carlos hunches over a PHOTO ALBUM. He turns the page.

Carlos discovers a SNAPSHOT SHOWING:

A SMILING ANNA WITH HER ARM AROUND HER CAROUSEL HORSE'S NECK.

He turns to the ILLUSTRATION of The Magic Horse. He compares the PHOTO to the Illustration.

His face shows surprise when he sees that The Magic Horse in the BOOK and Anna's Carousel Horse each has an identical RED BULLSEYE.

CARLOS
(continuing; opening
the book)
Promise me you won't tell anyone.

BRENDA
What is it?

Carlos hands her his album. Brenda turns the pages. They read the headlines together.

HEADLINES read:

CHICAGO SENTINEL:

"CIRCUS HIGH-WIRE TRAGEDY"

CHICAGO CHRONICLE:

"SANCHEZ FAMILY MOURNS MOTHER'S DEATH"

Carlos pulls Brenda to her feet. They embrace, then watch the sunrise over the field.

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

A STORM rolls in. Light starter drops fall.

The wind picks up as Roughies struggle to lash canvas down on concession stands.

An empty ticket booth blows over. Rain llike a solid wall of water like a water fall.

SOUNDS of canvas flapping in the violent winds.

SKY FILLS WITH BLACK CLOUDS

People gather children and head for home.

A TERRIFIC THUNDERCLAP

ON FERRIS WHEEL - BRENDA

LIGHTNING STRIKES THE FERRIS WHEEL ENGINE

SOUNDS of loud buzzing and hissing.

All lights go out on the Wheel.

Fire leaps up.

Carlos grabs fire extinguisher and sprays the fire.

John Melado races for the Kiddie Rides.

Heavy rain continues.

INT. HAUER FARMHOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

STORM WHIPS INTO INCREASED FRENZY AS IF IT MIGHT BLOW THE HOUSE AWAY

Mike, soaked through, stands in a mud puddle before Tom.

MIKE
 (shouting over storm
 SOUNDS)
 Brenda's in trouble!
 (breathless)
 Carnival now. She's trapped!

Tom grabs his rain slicker. They exit.

EXT. CARNIVAL/FERRIS-WHEEL - NIGHT

The fire's out now. Rain continues with gale force.

Carnival Roughies fight to tie down the rides.

Monique and Natalie run by with several small crying children.

Gerry Weiner carries Topsy.

Willie meets them and they head toward the Back-End.

Brenda shivers in her seat.

Children in other seats scream and reach out for their parents.

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

Chaos reigns as the storm blows down tents. Carnival Roughies work to dismantle the rides. Others attempt to lash down snapping canvas covers.

EXT. FERRIS WHEEL SEAT - NIGHT

Brenda's face looks transfixed by the sight below her.

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

BILLIE STOKES watches Carlos, with his BB GUN cradled in his arms. An odd smile plays across his dripping face.

The fire is out. The Ferris-wheel towers dark and motionless.

Rain drenched CHILDREN SCREAM to their PARENTS from the seats above.

Carlos' face shows great concern.

Skip Mendez swings himself up the rigging. He attempts to rescue a little GIRL.

Carlos studies Skip's maneuvers on the slippery Wheel struts. He sees Skip reach the child's seat -- about half-way up.

The sobbing girl climbs onto Skip's back.

Skip climbs down, the child clinging to his neck.

The child's parents take her from Skip when he reaches the Wheel base.

Skip notices Carlos and Brenda. He mop's his streaming face with a wet handkerchief.

SKIP
(breathing hard)
Take over. I'm bushed.

CARLOS
Wait.

Carlos looks up at Brenda. She forms the words.

Carlos backs away. He runs to the Merry-Go-Round.

Billie Stokes trails behind.

No one but Billie sees Carlos mount the Magic Horse.

The Horse's eyes glow to flame red. Carlos whispers in its ear. The Horse's head is in a tucked position.

Carlos hears the tingling bell. He grabs the reins.

The pssst SOUND of a BB SHOT FIRES from Billie's GUN.

The Magic Horse jerks in pain.

Horse's back right leg CRACKS and SPLINTERS.

Carlos stares into the crowd.

He sees Billie run right into his FATHER.

BOBBIE STOKES wrests the gun from his son. Billie disappears into the darkness.

Carlos starts after Billie, but Skip stops him.

SKIP
Go up, Kid.

Luis and Manuel come forward.

LUIS
Try.

EXT. CARNIVAL/FERRIS WHEEL - NIGHT

Carlos keeps his eye on Brenda and begins to climb the rigging to the top.

INT. CENTER RING/CIRCUS - NIGHT - FANTASY

Carlos stands on his perch. He sees Louis speak to Anna. They argue below. Louis shakes his head and walks to the Ringmaster.

Carlos reacts as the net comes down.

EXT. CARNIVAL/FERRIS WHEEL - SAME

Carlos shakes his head. He stops to wipe the rain from his eyes with one hand.

He continues to climb up the Ferris-wheel struts. One by one,

Carlos rescues Brenda and the children. Parents crowd around the boy, hugging and kissing him, patting him on the back if they can reach him. Carlos smiles his freedom.

Tom shakes his hand when the parents return home with the children. Manuel and Luis hug Carlos.

EXT. CARNIVAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

In the confusion, Hernando loads the Carousel Horse into the rear of his pickup. He covers the horse with a tarp.

Hernando drives out of the Carnival parking lot.

INT. TRUCK CAB - FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD - NIGHT

Hernando drives his head forward as close to the windshield as possible. He studies an upsidedown MAP with a penlight.

He turns to Martina who clings to the side of her cage.

HERNANDO

No worry.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

The truck crawls through the STORM.

EXT. RIVER BEND - NIGHT

STRONG WIND destroys a SIGN reading: "DETOUR AHEAD. DANGER ROAD CLOSED."

A WIND GUST BLOWS THREE ROAD BLOCKS OVER.

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

Hernando drives through onto a rickety bridge. The BRIDGE COLLAPSES into the rushing river.

EXT. UNDERWATER - NIGHT

The truck SINKS sending millions of bubbles to the surface.

Down it goes passing an old car-wreck, the hulk of a fishing-boat.

The truck drifts by discarded junk half-buried in mud.

INT. TRUCK CAB - UNDER WATER - NIGHT

Panic. Hernando BEATS his bleeding hands against the truck windows.

Martina's cage falls off the seat. She crawls around Hernando's neck.

He screams at iridescent fish swimming by the windshield.

EXT. TRUCK BED - UNDER WATER - NIGHT

The tarp UNFURLS revealing the Carousel horse. The horse FLOATS on its side.

The right EYE GLOWS RED. WOOD TURNS TO MUSCLE. The EARS TWITCH. The horse's gleaming white COAT RIPPLES. The SADDLE BECOMES burnished LEATHER. Behind the saddle, the CARVED BLANKET BECOMES blue WOOL.

The Horse's BODY TREMBLES in the cold water. With great speed, it RISES to the surface.

EXT. RIVER BENEATH BRIDGE - NIGHT

No longer disguised as a Carousel Horse, THE MAGIC HORSE BURSTS from the surface SENDING SPRAYS of WATER SPEWING like mighty FOUNTAINS.

The Horse hovers in mid-air, RED EYE ROLLING. THROUGH ITS EYE, the Magic Horse UNLEASHES A SCARLET RAY OF ENCHANTED POWER. The RAY PIERCES THE WATER surrounding the truck.

The truck EXPLODES from the surface.

Like a toy tossed away by a willful child, the truck CLEARS TREE TOPS and LANDS back on the road with a CRASH and BOUNCE.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

Seeing Hernando and Martina in a deep sleep, the Magic Horse arches his neck before the truck. Its EYE GLOWS RED. It NEIGHS in wild excitement.

ENGINE AND HEADLIGHTS START UP.

The Magic Horse BREATHES on Martina and Hernando through Hernando's open window. They revive.

The Magic Horse enters a MIST.

INT. TRUCK CAB - NIGHT

Hernando awakens. He reaches for Martina. Her eyes open.

HERNANDO
Who? The lights... the engine?

Hernando flings his door wide; WATER POURS onto the road.

Through the MIST, Hernando sees the Magic Horse trotting toward them.

He leans out to wave it away. Nothing stops that forward motion.

HERNANDO
(continuing)
I'll give it back, I promise. I'm
sorry. Whoa!

Hernando SLAMS his door.

He floors the gas pedal. The truck slides away on loose gravel. Martina looks back.

INT. TRUCK CAB - FURTHER UP THE ROAD - NIGHT

Hernando parks the pickup at roadside. He stares at Martina. She's dry. Her Sombrero, dry. He touches his hair. That's dry too. He turns over his hands. No injuries remain visible. Martina sleeps in her hammock.

EXT. SKY ABOVE TRACKS - NIGHT

Over barns of neighboring farms, the Magic Horse circles and drifts until it sees Brenda's barn below.

EXT. HAUER BARN - NIGHT

The Magic Horse lands carefully. It limps inside and lies on a pile of hay. It's back leg, severely injured.

INT. HAUER BARN - DAY

Carlos with glue and sandpaper and paint repairs the Carousel Horse's shattered leg.

Nearby, Todd, Ramon, Rog, Bernardo, and Warren listen to Mr. Johnny tutor them. Piles of books and papers litter a long picnic table.

EXT. BRIDGE AT RIVER BANK - DAY

Dawn. Several trucks line the road.

SIGN on the side of a small truck reads: "BOYD'S DIVING".

Hernando parks his pickup.

Hernando and Martina watch TWO DIVERS in wet suits crawl onto the riverbank.

One DIVER hands Hernando a rusted license plate.

DIVER

This yours?

Hernando shakes his head. He pays the divers.

HERNANDO

(to Martina)

I can't even return it. Gone!

EXT. CARNIVAL/FERRIS WHEEL - DAY

Carnival rides, packed in trucks.

A semi-trailer being backed closer for loading nearby.

Roughies eat lunch as they sit on the ground.

Brenda looks up at the Wheel lost in thought.

Carlos comes from behind, he touches her shoulder.

They kiss.

Carlos places Brenda gently in a seat. He starts the ride and climbs the rigging up to her.

Brenda and Carlos talking.

CARLOS

I tried to call, but no one answered your phone. Many times, I called. I've decided to go back to the Circus and my family. I leave on the train soon.

BRENDA

That's wonderful.

CARLOS

Willie and Gerry are coming back with me.

BRENDA

Good.

CARLOS

Willie's going to frame a clown act with Gerry and Topsy.

BRENDA

And you?

CARLOS

I'll be performing in our high-wire act with my family again.

They embrace.

CARLOS

(continuing)

I want to leave my Horse in your barn as payment for my lodging there.

BRENDA

I'll take care of it.

CARLOS

I glued his leg back together. It's okay now.

Brenda smiles as the huge Wheel reaches the top. he places his ring on a chain, and with a lingering kiss, fastens the chain around Brenda's neck. She's overwhelmed and pleased.

Brenda looks down at the gold ring. Carlos continues talking, making wonderful promises, as the Wheel turns. Brenda smiles; she looks off into the distance.

EXT. ABOVE CARNIVAL GROUNDS - DAY

CARLOS (V.O.)
And I'll write letters to you from
all over the country.

The sun glows upon the Wheel until it seems a ring of gold.

INT. CIRCUS BIGTOP - DAY

Luis watches Carlos teach Manuel Anna's secrets of the wire. They work on a low wire 6 feet off the ground.

Luis and Stage Manager' Tim Burke, examine a new POSTER for the act. It pictures: Carlos, Manuel, and Luis.

INT. CIRCUS CENTER RING HIGH WIRE - DAY

Carlos sleeps on his back on the wire 100 feet up.

Martina, in her sombrero, creeps along the wire toward Carlos.

HERNANDO O.S.
(calling)
Martina. Martina, where are you, my
little treasure?

FADE OUT.

The end