

# LIVING POOR<sup>©</sup>

Screenplay by Ken Luber

Based on the novel "Living Poor"  
By Moritz Thomsen

Reg:WGA

EXT. CALIFORNIA VALLEY FARM - DAY

(Super Over: "CALIFORNIA - 1965") A dry wind raps against loose boards on an empty barn. Blazing sun beats down on the parched earth. Nothing on the land stirs. A beat-up truck sits near a weather-beaten shed.

A MAIL TRUCK winds down the dusty road, past the shingled farmhouse, heading towards the shed.

INT. SHED - LATER

A farmer in his fifties sits at a small worktable. Round glasses on his tanned face, gray hair in a buzz-cut, he peers down at a loose packet of papers. A large envelope stamped PEACE CORPS rests near his thumb.

FARMER

You gonna sign the papers?

He looks towards the tall figure leaning in the doorway. The man's back is to the farmer. All he sees is the blue patched work shirt, rumpled jeans and smoke curling from a cigarette.

FARMER

Moritz?

NEW ANGLE - ON MORITZ THOMSEN

Standing in the doorway, draws the cigarette to his lips, peering out at the last flames of sun dropping below the foothills. He's a man close to fifty. Everything in his face, his hands, the bend of his shoulders, speaks of a hard life and broken spirit.

CLOSE ON FACE

Deeply lined, sunken cheeks, eyes burning with light. He drags on his cigarette.

FLASHBACK: (WORLD WAR II - STOCK FOOTAGE)

B-17 flying over Germany.

CLOSEUP - BOMBARDIER'S CAPSULE

(Insert) We recognize a younger Moritz, late twenties, hunched in a leather jacket and flight cap, in front of his instruments. A voice crackles through the engine noise: "Drop the load, Moritz, drop the damn load!"

STOCK FOOTAGE: BOMBS FALLING THROUGH THE SKY

Explosions scatter across the railroad tracks and storage tanks.

BACK TO REAL TIME: MORITZ'S FACE

He drags on his cigarette.

ANGLE ON FARMER AT TABLE

FARMER

The farm's bankrupt. Your dad ain't putting no more money in. Your ex-wife's just a memory. You can't keep living in this shed.

Moritz slowly turns back, his eyes staring at his friend, then to the rumpled cot in the corner, to old farm tools, and the propane stove on a work bench.

FLASHBACK: THOMSEN ESTATE - SEATTLE - NIGHT 1945

A large, handsome two-story home. Lights shine in the leaded windows. A booming VOICE rolls across the landscaped lawns.

FATHER (V.O.)

In all your life you've had just one success, made captain! Why? Because you volunteered for something you couldn't get out of, couldn't give up on...

INT. MANSION STUDY - SAME

Moritz's father, Charlie Thomsen, sits in a fat leather chair. His hand rests on the arm with a drink in it. He's about fifty, stocky, dressed in a white shirt, the tie loosened at the collar, suit pants. His face reddens with his rage.

FATHER (CONT.)

First it was journalism. Then it was the movies. You were going to be an artiste. But you failed at that like you've failed at everything...

## NEW ANGLE

Moritz, dressed in his Air Force Captain's uniform, sits across from his father. His face shows no emotion, absently staring into the blazing fire in the fireplace.

## FATHER

(continuing)

But we went along with you, shelling out money year after year for a first rate university education. Oregon, Columbia. I thought the war would make a man of you, knock some of that foolishness out. But, no, everything's just the same. What in hell's name are you going to do buying a farm in California?

BACK TO SCENE: INT. FARM SHED - SAME

## FARMER

Bank ain't gonna wait no more.

(thumbs the papers)

Maybe what you learned here could help someone someplace else.

Moritz shifts his eyes to the papers on the table.

EXT. FARM - NIGHT

A full moon shines over the desolate farm.

INT. SHED - SAME

Moritz, alone, hunched over the table, scrawls his SIGNATURE across the Peace Corps papers.

CLOSE ON SIGNATURE

A kerosene lamp throws light on the signature: Moritz Thomsen.

EXT. QUITO AIRPORT - BRIGHT SUNNY DAY (SIX MONTHS LATER)

Crowd assembled on the tarmac. Officials from the Peace Corps and Department of Agriculture stand on a makeshift platform, festooned with bouquets of flowers and flags of the Peace Corps and Ecuador. On another platform, children in white shirts, blouses, and dark blue trousers and skirts stand at attention under the blazing sun.

## ECUADORIAN OFFICIAL

We welcome you to Ecuador. We extend our hands to accept your expertise, we open our arms to accept your spirit of helpfulness. We lift our hearts with love for your great nation.

Peace Corps volunteers stand in a half circle, listening, as the heavy Spanish accent flows past. With the speaker's final words, the CHILDREN'S VOICES rise in a spirited rendition of the Ecuadorian national anthem.

The Peace Corps volunteers join in singing. Moritz sings along, stumbling through the flood of Spanish words...

DISSOLVE INTO:

EXT. JUNGLE BORDER TOWN - MONTHS LATER

Moritz is unloading bags of coffee from the back end of a beat-up truck. Working with him is Byron, a 23 years, blond hair, corn-fed kid from Iowa. He's been in the Corps a couple of years and is mentoring Moritz. A Jeep is parked next to the truck.

BYRON

You don't give the villagers anything. If it's a packet of seeds from CARE, they pay for it. If it's a baby chick, they've got to pay. Otherwise..

MORITZ

Otherwise they think we're giving out gifts. And that's how jealousies start.

BYRON

You're getting the hang of it. You've spent enough time with me. Have the boys in Quito figured out where you're going yet?

A short, stocky Priest, dressed in his black habit, accompanied by a dark-skinned peasant, starts to get in his Jeep.

MORITZ

I saw this place called Río Verde.

The Priest stops, looks sharply at Moritz. His face darkens.

PRIEST

Excuse me, did you say you were going to Río Verde? ..You're with the Peace Corps?

MORITZ

Yea.

He eyes Moritz as if he's just encountered a lunatic.

PRIEST

You must have enemies for friends. I tried to save the people of that village. They listen to no one. They don't want to be helped. They want to sit in the salóns and drink augardiente and puro. I will tell you, Mr. Peace Corps, for your own good: Take your chickens or whatever you have and go south. Those people in Río Verde will nod their heads no matter what you say and go on doing what they have been doing for one hundred and fifty years.. Nothing!

PEASANT

The Father is right, señor. My worthless cousin lives in Rio Verde.

The Priest nods triumphantly. He and peasant get in the Jeep and pull away. Byron turns from the cloud of dust back to Moritz.

BYRON

Sounds like you've got an invitation to Paradise.

The grin on his face sharpens against Moritz's dumbfounded look.

EXT. RÍO VERDE - DAYS LATER

A sleepy village clustered at the edge of the jungle that meets the Pacific shore. Blue skies. Blue Ocean. Green hills. Still, the sun beats down like a red hot hammer. The thirty houses, except for three built of cement, are made of bamboo and most sit on stilts. A tidal wave would wipe out the village. A rutted, dirt road winds into the dense hilly land. A rickety wooden dock juts into the River Río Verde that opens into the sea. Up from the shabby square sits a drab cement-walled, two story building.

INT. CEMENT BUILDING - DAY

Crates of baby CHICKS fill the bare-walled front room that MORITZ and two dark-skinned men are standing in. The two men are engaged in an rapid conversation in Spanish.

Finally, one of the men (ALEXANDRO), middle-aged, with black shiny curls and a pencil-thin moustache, looks over to Moritz.

ALEXANDRO

He says one hundred and fifty sucres a month is his best offer. In Americano dollars that's about..

MORITZ

Seven dollars.

ALEXANDRO

And fifty cents.

LANDLORD

Y el paga por cualquier reparacion.

ALEXANDRO

He says, you pay for any repairs. But he lives in Esmeraldas; he won't bother you.

MORITZ

It's a deal.

Moritz thrusts out his hand with a big smile.

LANDLORD

Bien venido a Río Verde.

ALEXANDRO

Welcome to Río Verde.

MORITZ

I understand a few words, Alexandro.

ALEXANDRO

And, Don Martín, you will take your meals at my house. My wife is a wonderful cook. You and your chickens will be happy here.

His smile is unctuous, almost overbearing. Moritz's eyes shift from the crates of squeaking chicks to the open window.

ANGLE ON WINDOW

The bright, curious eyes of Río Verde children peek over the sill. One boy with an intense, earnest gaze stands out. This is RICARDO.

INT. MORITZ'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Moritz pecks away on his typewriter, set on a plank supported on either end with cardboard cartons. A kerosene lamp lights the dark room. M's VOICE carries over the clatter of keys.

MORITZ (V.O.)

I finally found my paradise. No lights, no running water, no decent roads to anywhere. You either take a ferry or drive twenty-five miles across the beach at low tide to get to Esmeraldas, the nearest town. Is this where I'll finally find the place and characters to write about..?

Moritz looks up.

MORITZ'S POV: OPEN DOORWAY

A few of the Río Verde kids peek in and quickly pull their faces back. Again, we see RICARDO among them.

Moritz goes back to typing.

MORITZ (V.O.)

(typing)

The people living here are descendants of African slaves whose heritage has been mixed with Indian and Spanish blood...

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - MORNING

Moritz and Alexandro are standing in the dusty plaza, in front of a monument to the slave rebellion.

ALEXANDRO

It was one hundred and fifty years ago.  
The ship went aground and the slaves  
killed the crew and won their freedom.  
These are my ancestors, Don Martín. We  
are a proud, independent people.

Moritz stares at the monument, a ten foot cement column, painted pink and blue and inscribed with dates. His gaze drifts to the wooden posts connected by wires that circumscribe the dingy plaza. A lonely unlit light bulb hangs above the monument.

Finally, his eyes settle on a handsome, young man leaning in the doorway of his thatched roof, bamboo *salón*, across the plaza. Alexandro follows Moritz's gaze.

ALEXANDRO

That's Ramón Prado. He's as poor as the dirt we're standing on, so he foolishly opens a *salón* to serve drinks to people who ask him for credit.

MORITZ

Maybe he needs some chickens.

ALEXANDRO

(dismissively)

He's a fisherman. He knows nothing about farming.

They start to walk across the plaza, Moritz more enthusiastic and earnest.

MORITZ

How about if we made walk-paths here and planted coconut palms along them and put up some benches for people to sit in the evenings? That would bring the people more together.

ALEXANDRO

The land belongs to the municipality. The people can own the trees but if we planted coco palms in the public square, who would they belong to? I'm afraid we're not accustomed to doing things that way.

He shrugs, with a pride that comes from a history of resignation.

They pass a thatched *tienda*, where the villagers buy their staples. A man in his sixties, dressed in a cleanly pressed white shirt, white pants, and black leather boots (DON JULIO), is talking to the store owner (ALVARO), whose folded arms rest across his well-fed stomach.

Don Julio looks over to Alexandro and the gringo stranger.

ALEXANDRO

Good morning, Don Julio.

Alexandro raises a friendly hand, and Don Julio, whose regal bearing underscores his importance, extends a silent greeting.

ALEXANDRO

(in a whisper)

He's the richest man in Río Verde! He owns most of the land surrounding the village and won't sell an inch of it. And Alvaro, the store owner, the fat pig he's talking to, gouges the people for every sucre he can get. But what can we do? We need to live.

MORITZ

Can't people buy what they need in Esmeraldas?

ALEXANDRO

Who will give us credit in a town so far away? There, you have to pay cash.

(shrugs)

Besides, we are not accustomed to doing things like that.

He gives Moritz his customary, resigned smile.

DISSOLVE INTO:

EXT. UPSTREAM ON THE RÍO VERDE RIVER - DAY

Alexandro smoothly plies the canoe upstream. Moritz sits on a middle bench. Sunlight streams through the huge fronds and jungle vines, like thick green curtains, on both sides of the river.

ALEXANDRO

Mr. Swanson ran the sawmill and everyone in Río Verde worked for him. Every Saturday we got paid. Then, everyone had money. But the war ended and so did our jobs. He never drinks water, only beer. Imagine being so rich you don't have to drink water.

He laughs, as they glide up the river.

EXT. SWANSON HOME VERANDA - DAY

An old white man pours beer into two glasses. He wears a tattered straw-boss hat, round, dark glasses, and his mouth is sunken in with the loss of teeth.

SWANSON

The living's too easy here. A piece of fish, a dish of rice, a platano. That and a hammock is all they need. They're just a lazy bunch, the worst in the whole country, maybe in the world.

(hands Moritz a glass of beer)

I thought all them Peace Corps hippies was college kids. What did you do before this?

The two men sit in rattan chairs under the shade of the veranda.

MORITZ

I had a farm in California.

SWANSON

You're not CIA?

MORITZ

No. Just a dumb pig farmer who didn't get to the bank quick enough. I probably should have gone to business school after the War.

SWANSON

I worked for the government during the War, buying up bananas and rubber, plus I was running the sawmill. You see any action yourself?

MORITZ

Europe. Flying in those big B-17's with a load of bombs.

SWANSON

You're going to wish you were back in the sky compared to here. You're not going to change these people. The day after you leave Río Verde, they'll take everyone of them nice chickens you've brought and they'll have a big party and eat'em all.

ALEXANDRO

Don Martín!

Moritz looks over to Alexandro, waving from the path to the river.

ALEXANDRO

We're losing the light. We must go.

Moritz turns back to the old man, who offers a final word.

SWANSON

You're not going to change anything, Mr. Peace Corps.

INT. MORITZ'S BEDROOM (RÍO VERDE) - NIGHT

The back room of his living quarters. Moritz sleeps on a bed tucked in a narrow aisle between the cages of chickens stacked against the walls, along with bins of ground corn. A kerosene lamp glows in the darkness.

A scratching NOISE is followed by his sudden awakening. He sits straight up, FLASHLIGHT in one hand and a STONE in the other. A giant RAT is caught in the flashlight's beam. Moritz flings the stone at the rat. In rapid succession he scoops up more stones from the pile beside his bed and flings them at the inundation of rats that threaten his baby chickens and their precious food supply. The rats scurry into the darkness.

Moritz leans back, angry, frustrated; he tosses the last stone to the ground.

EXT. ALEXANDRO'S HOUSE - DAY

He's in his scruffy yard, knocking back weeds with a machete.

ALEXANDRO

I'm afraid that's impossible, Don Martín. I could never afford the bamboo to build the cages. I prefer to plant a garden with the CARE package seeds.

He looks up at Moritz, standing across from him, hanging onto a portable cage filled with baby chicks.

MORITZ

I'm not talking about you taking all the chickens, Alexandro. You'd start with six. Your children need protein and the eggs will give them that. They're not getting it from a quarter size piece of fish once a week!

Alexandro stops working. He wipes the sweat from his forehead.

ALEXANDRO

That is not the way we do things here. I must feed my family before I can feed your chickens.

EXT. WILFREDO'S HOUSE - DAY

The house on stilts is open on one end with a wall torn away that Wilfredo has never replaced. He's lashing one of the stilts with vines, not paying too much attention to Moritz.

WILFREDO

What God wants is what Wilfredo is going to do.

He's a man in his fifties who could as easily be imagined thumping a Bible and wailing prophecies on some city street corner. His tight wiry hair has turned gray and crowns a bony face, more striking because of the fierce eyes that glare from its rigid features.

MORITZ

I'm not going to stand here and tell you God wants you to have chickens, Wilfredo, but I don't think he wants you to starve to death either!

WILFREDO

If I took your chickens, I'd have to go into debt just to build houses and feed them. God doesn't want debtors anymore than he wants sinners.

MORITZ

I'd help you build the houses.

WILFREDO

I don't ask for no man to help me in this village, or in this world, for that matter.

Moritz heaves a frustrated sigh, shaking his head.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Moritz is talking to tall, muscular WAI, the strongest man in Río Verde. His dignified, silent face looks as if it were carved from a block of polished ebony.

WAI

I'm a fisherman, Don Martín. I know nothing about raising chickens.

He wears nothing but tattered shorts, and the ocean sun glistens on his skin, as he rolls up his huge net across the sand.

MORITZ

That's why I'm here, Wai; to teach you. To help you get started. That's my job.

WAI

And where would I get money for the nails, and the bamboo, and thatching for the roof?

He glances back from the portable cage to Moritz.

MORITZ

You don't have to quit fishing to raise chickens!

WAI

But this is my profession. This is how people know me. Wai, the fisherman, they say; and they expect me to have fish, not chickens.

Moritz runs his hands through his hair, trying not to scream.

EXT. BEACH - TOWARDS SUNSET

Moritz walks along the beach with the teenage boy, RICARDO, who we've seen before peeking in windows and doors at Moritz's home. Ricardo is a ragged teenager, happy, barefoot, skipping along the sand.

RICARDO

I'm a very serious type, very dependable. I could help you on your farm and drive you around and take care of you.

ALEXANDRO'S WIFE

Don Martín!

Moritz looks over to Alexandro's wife, a stern, compact woman, in her forties, coming up the beach towards them. A small, older lady is with her.

ALEXANDRO'S WIFE

This is my mother, Don Martín.

MOTHER

(the toothless woman smiles)  
Es un placer conocerlo.

MORITZ

Es un placer conocerla.

ALEXANDRO'S WIFE

(raising her voice to her mother)  
I cook his food. He's got an Americano appetite. He doesn't like yucca and he drinks three cups of coffee every meal.  
(turns to Moritz)  
And you smoke too many cigarettes, Don Martín. If you wanted to help the village, you would open a store and sell things cheaper than the shopkeeper, Alvaro, who gouges us with high prices. And then I could charge you less for your meals. Come, mamma.  
(she takes her mother's arm)  
Her legs need to walk.

Moritz nods and watches them continue up the beach, but Ricardo doesn't stop talking.

RICARDO

So I'm thinking that, if I get a job and get lucky, I could save fifty dollars over the year. Would that be enough to ride with you in an airplane to California, Don Martín? Of course, I'd like to sit next to you. I've never been on an airplane before. I've only seen pictures of an airplane.

(his voice trails off)

Don Martín?

Moritz's attention has been drawn away. He's looking across the beach to the young man, RAMÓN PRADO, knee deep in the waves, pulling his canoe to shore.

RICARDO

Poor Ramón Prado. He left Rio Verde a few years ago to find his fortune but now he's back. Beside Señor Wai, he's the poorest man in the village. They call him a zambo.

(Moritz raises a brow)

It's a person who's black and Indian blood.

Moritz's gaze lingers on the *zambo*, pulling his canoe onto the beach.

RICARDO

I'm sad you have no wife but I can cook too.

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

Moritz drags on a cigarette. He stands alone on another part of the beach, looking out at the fiery sunset, sending a sheet of flames across the blue waters.

FLASHBACK: SAN FRANCISCO HOTEL - 1945

The returning soldier, Moritz, knocks on the hotel room door. The door opens and the face of the young WOMAN (his wife) suddenly glows with relief and joy. They embrace.

DISSOLVE INTO:

A wind off the Bay gently blows the curtains. A soldier's uniform lies on the floor beside the woman's lingerie. Moritz and his wife make love on the hotel bed.

INT. MORITZ'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Moritz sits at his typewriter, smoking a cigarette, a cup of coffee closeby, beneath the glow of the kerosene lamp.

A table has been added to the front room and in the corner is a "guest" bed, wooden slats covered with a pallet of woven vines. A few pictures hang on the plaster walls along with some clothes on hooks and shelves of books.

MORITZ (V.O.)

(typing)

"I've got one hundred chickens living in my bedroom and, so far, not a single chicken coop in the village. No one wants chickens. All I hear, over and over, is "I'm sorry but that's not the way we're accustomed to doing things". I can't believe these people's stubbornness and blind resistance...

He looks up, as if sensing eyes are staring at him.

MORITZ'S POV - RICARDO

Peeking in the open doorway.

RICARDO

Good evening, Don Martín. I was thinking you might be lonely tonight.

(a smaller face sneaks under his arm)

I brought my brother Jesús with me.

(another face appears)

And my brother, Jorge. We've never slept in a bed.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Moritz's gaze shifts to the narrow guest bed in the corner.

RICARDO

My brothers promise we will be very quiet. I know you're a very serious man, and this typing is very important to you.

The look in his dark, shiny eyes is enough to open the gates of Bastille.

EXT. RÍO VERDE - EARLY MORNING

The sun rises over the hills, casting a pale rosy light across the village. The morning breeze rustles through the palm trees.

INT. MORITZ'S HOUSE - MORNING

Moritz opens the bamboo shutters. A flood of light streams through the window. He looks over to the corner bed.

ANGLE ON BED

Ricardo and his brothers are curled up asleep under a thin blanket.

Moritz smiles. He turns back to the open window, looks out.

MORITZ'S POV - THE SALÓN ACROSS THE WAY

The door opens. Ramón Prado steps out. His eyes meet Moritz's steady gaze. There is a small, curious nod of recognition.

INT. ALEXANDRO'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Moritz is staring at a pile of dark fried "stuff" on his plate. Alexandro sits across from him.

ALEXANDRO

(urging him)

It's tripe, Don Martín; it's very healthy for you.

MORITZ

I raised hogs, Alexandro. I've eaten every part of the pig.

(with a weak, sickly smile)

But I can't eat pig guts. I just can't.

NEW ANGLE ON ALEXANDRO

Glancing over to his wife, half-hidden behind the kitchen doorway, with a child on her arm and a frown on her face.

MORITZ

Why don't you grow oranges? You could make marmalade. It's got lots of vitamin C. It would be good for your baby.

Alexandro answers with a stony expression. Moritz throws down his napkin.

MORITZ

(gets up)

Excuse me.

ALEXANDRO

We are not accustomed to giving a baby marm...

Before he can finish the thought, Moritz is out the front door. Alexandro turns back to his wife, with a disappointed look.

EXT. RAMÓN PRADO RUNNING DOWN THE STREET - EVENING

RAMÓN

Don Martín! Don Martín!

Moritz stops in front of his house. The young man races frantically towards him.

RAMÓN

Wait for me! Wait for me!

INT. MORITZ'S HOUSE - NIGHT

RAMÓN

What I really wanted all my life was that my father love me and to help him on his farm. But he was so ambitious, Don Martín. Whenever something went wrong he was like a crazy man.

Transformed from a shadowy background figure, Ramón paces the small room, propelled by his emotions, by his need to reveal his heart. Moritz sits at the wooden table, mesmerized by the passion in the poor man's voice.

RAMÓN

(continuing)

One morning I spilled half a bucket of milk, walking on the beach to sell it here, in Río Verde, so I filled the bucket with sea water. But then the people complained to my father. He was so angry, he tied me down to the floor with four ropes, like a hog, and he beat me with bamboo! I was only fourteen years old. Can you believe it?

MORITZ

Sit down, Ramón.

RAMÓN

No. So I stole twenty pounds of tobacco and went to Esmeraldas. I worked for a month with a machete clearing a banana plantation and then the farmer told me he had no money to pay me. When one is poor in Ecuador, he goes to work on the plantations.

(he pauses, his voice lowers)

And I don't understand why I needed my father's love so badly. I would leave him again, but now I must think about my wife, Ester, and I have no money to leave. I've tried fishing and I opened my salón across from you but nothing I do brings me money. Can you believe a father like that?

MORITZ

We all have fathers. They don't come perfect or without problems.

RAMÓN

But not in a rich country like America.  
A sad, ironic smile flickers briefly in the American's eyes.

MORITZ

What can I do for you? You didn't come here to talk about fathers.

RAMÓN

I want you to help me.  
 (a pause; searching for the  
 words)  
 I want to change my destiny.

Then Ramón's gaze turns to the back room.

MORITZ

Chickens?

RAMÓN

(bursting with a smile)  
 Yes! Chickens.

MORITZ

That's wonderful! That's fantastic!  
 I'll help you build the coops. I'll  
 even donate the nails.

He throws up his hands and leaps to his feet. Words rush from  
 his lips. He can hardly believe what he's heard.

RAMÓN

Thank you.

MORITZ

Now you have to have money for a  
 balanced ration; you understand that.  
 The chickens need milled corn,  
 fishmeal, a vitamin supplement.

RAMÓN

I understand.

MORITZ

The coops have to be two and a half  
 square feet for each chicken.  
 (Ramón nods)  
 How many chickens do you think you can  
 handle?

RAMÓN

I think.. I can handle six chickens.  
 Three for meat and three for eggs.

MORITZ

That's a good start. That's very wise.

RAMÓN

We are friends, Don Martín. We are brothers.

Moritz takes his hand, warmly.

MORITZ

We are brothers.

RAMÓN

I won't disappoint you. Good night.

(he starts to leave; stops,  
looks back, smiles)

I want to do everything just right.

Ramón leaves. Moritz stares into the darkness that fills the doorway. His smile turns bittersweet and gradually fades.

FLASHBACK: INT. THOMSEN ESTATE - NIGHT (1945)

FATHER

You calling me a thief?

Charles Thomsen sets down the whiskey. He has just poured himself a drink, and it is clear that this was not the first one.

MORITZ

You sold the truck. It was in my name. Why couldn't you wait till I got back? Because you thought I was going to die over there, didn't you?

FATHER

That's a hell of a thing to say. There wasn't a day I didn't pray for your return, not a day I didn't sit here dreading that telegram from the War Department. So what do you do first thing, when I haven't seen you in years? You head to California to see that woman.

MORITZ

That woman is my mother! But you're wrong. I drove down to San Francisco to see my wife! I'm thirty years old in three months. I don't need your permission.

FATHER

All the cars, all the clothes, a trip around the world, a college education! Make no demands on me; I'll give you nothing!

EXT. MORITZ'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The morning sun has just poked through the clouds. A young, shirtless man, in tattered pants, is pounding on Moritz's door.

INT. MORITZ'S BEDROOM - SAME

Moritz squints open his eyes. He hears the pounding. The chickens start their high-pitched squabble.

INT./EXT. MORITZ'S FRONT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Moritz has thrown on a pair of pants. He's standing in the half open doorway, face to face with a thin, intense black man, a few years younger than Ramón.

ORESTES

You gave my brother, Ramón, six chickens. I want the same.

MORITZ

I didn't just give him the chickens, Orestes. Each chicken costs twenty seven cents; that's almost six sucres. That covers my cost and the vaccine. He's got to supply the corn, the fishmeal and build the coops.

ORESTES

But he said you'd help him. I want the same deal, too.

He looks stubbornly at Moritz, but his anticipation shows through.

MORITZ

(hesitates)

Okay.

ORESTES

And he said you'd give him the nails, Don Martín.

MORITZ

Come on in.

One deal's better than no deal. Half amused, M. leads Orestes to the back room.

DISSOLVE INTO:

EXT. THE BACKYARD OF MORITZ'S HOUSE - DAY

From the back door of his house, Moritz carries out two cages of chickens to VICENTA, a short, trim woman in her fifties. She greets Moritz with a friendly smile.

DISSOLVE INTO:

EXT. PANCHO'S HOUSE - DAY

Moritz and Pancho, a wiry, bearded man in his thirties, carry chicken cages around his rickety house to the back.

DISSOLVE INTO:

EXT. MORITZ'S BACKYARD - HOT, SUNNY DAY

Moritz is hoeing his garden, setting up rows for planting. Following his every step is SEGUNDO, a husky, fortyish, man, dressed in a white shirt and store bought pants. He's the Political Chief of the town, loud, bombastic, self-important.

SEGUNDO

Everyone is taking your chickens, but do you seriously believe that you, a complete stranger to this country, can come walking in here and teach us how to raise chickens better?

MORITZ

That's what I'm going to do, Don Segundo.

SEGUNDO

Don't you know that chickens raised without mothers to teach them how to scratch will grow up weak and die quickly?

(fans himself with his hat)

But just in case they do live, save me two roosters to put in with my flock.

Moritz wipes the sweat from his forehead and stares in disbelief.

SEGUNDO

(sticks his finger up)

And, by the way, no one plants during  
the dry season!

DISSOLVE INTO:

EXT. OUTSIDE RAMÓN'S RAMSHACKLE HOUSE - DAY

Moritz and Ramón are busy sawing and pounding, building the coops. Nearby, a beautiful young woman is hanging clothes on a line.

RAMÓN

Ester!

(the woman turns)

The chickens have a new home!

Ramón proudly shows off the coops. Then he turns earnestly to Moritz. His smile sparkles.

RAMÓN

When I get rich, I'm going to buy a  
pair of shoes!

DISSOLVE INTO:

EXT. MORITZ ON HORSEBACK - MORNING

Riding through high pasture grass towards Chungillo, an elementary SCHOOL located in the foothills. Supplies are strapped to the back of his horse.

EXT. CHUNGILLO SCHOOL - DAY

Surrounded by forest and a few rickety houses. Schoolchildren scurry about, planting a vegetable garden. Moritz walks around the garden, observing, supervising. With him is the schoolteacher, OSWALDO, a bright, enthusiastic man in his twenties.

A barefoot boy, holding a spade, runs up to Oswaldo.

BOY

Maestro, sin zapatos no puedo hacer el  
trabajo.

OSWALDO

(turns to Moritz)

He says that without shoes, it's too hard to dig the spade into the ground.

EXT. GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON: A SCRAWNY CHILD'S LEG

Swamped in a leather boot, stamping the spade into the sun-baked ground.

NEW ANGLE

As the boy spades the ground, a girl comes up and taps him on the back. The boy takes off the boot and hands it to the girl who promptly slips her tiny foot into the boot and hobbles away.

Moritz watches, grinning. The Camera pans down to his right, SHOELESS foot.

EXT. SCHOOL HOUSE VERANDA - RAINING

The cloudburst comes down hard. The stormy sky is streaked with light. Rain drips off the palm fronds and runs down the school's tin roof.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Moritz stands at the edge of the veranda, watching the downpour. Oswaldo sits further back, at a table with cups of coffee.

MORITZ

Do the children go on to a secondary school, Oswaldo?

OSWALDO

They go to work, most of them, if they can find any work. If the family has some money, they send them on to school so they can get a job in the city.

Oswaldo takes his cup of coffee and walks over to Moritz.

OSWALDO

If I lived in Río Verde, I'd dress in black. I'd be in perpetual mourning. In Esmeraldas there are women to visit. You can go to a show and buy an ice