

SCRIPT TITLE

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EXT.- MARKET SQUARE. DAY.

The stone face of a serpent with a thousand-year-old snarl is carved into a wall. Red hits its left cheek in a splash and drips down.

A fruit-seller at his table picks up a knife and hacks in to a large green and yellow fruit as more red juice sprays. He works at a table under a brightly painted canopy, one of a hundred tables lined up in rows beside each other.

Aztec citizens walk in the sun between the rows wearing a bright fabrics and coloured glass jewelry that catches and reflects the sun. Shopkeepers yell spiritedly, cajole and gesture.

Loin-clothed boys dart and weave past the browsing adults. One of them ducks past an old lady, knocking her arm and ears of maize on to the dusty ground.

OLD LADY

Some respect for your elder, young monkey!

The boy stops and returns, crouching down to gather the maize, handing them back one by one.

YOUNG BOY #1

My apologies, dear elder!

Her wrinkled face relaxes. He bows slightly and backs away slowly until he's out of sight and in a full-on run.

He comes out the end of the market row and into a large square that is in the centre of Tenochtitlan. It has many hundreds of people milling about but there is room for thousands more. The sun is in full force and blazing down. He slows his stride to a walk and looks around.

YOUNG BOY #2

(off-screen)

Atl! Atl!

Atl turns to see COATL, his cousin. He raises an arm to him by the wall of a large stone structure.

Adults congregate in groups by the entrance but Coatl and some other younger ones are just around the corner. He walks to meet Atl and they embrace, slapping each other on the back. He greets the other youths similarly.

ATL

Good to see you, cousin!

COATL

And you as well, cousin. Where does your day take you?

ATL

I am hoping to play and nothing more!

COATL

Well, we were thinking of the same!

ATL

Such fortune!

COATL

Do you feel eyes on you, cousin?

ATL

Why? I do not understand...

Coatl grins widely.

COATL

The sisters are here. As you said, it must be fortune.

There are two dark and pretty girls sitting on a bench by the building. They are wrapped modestly in brightly coloured and woven shawls. They watch the boys and exchange telepathic glances.

Atl looks at his feet and kicks some dust up.

ATL

Perhaps we can find somewhere else to play?

COATL

(laughing)

How quickly you changed in their gaze!

ATL

That's enough! Who has the ball!

COATL

We are just waiting for CUAUHTEMOC to come. He has the ball.

Atl looks to the girls again and the one on the right is holding his gaze. He turns away and squints in the sun.

A heftier youth approaches with a strut and a dark ball in one hand.

His eyebrows have a harsh angle to them and his mouth is drawn in to a thin line. Five other youths walk behind him.

COATL (CONT'D)  
Finally! We have been waiting for you!

The large boy slaps his bare chest.

CUAUHTEMOC  
Well, I am here!

Suddenly, a murmur comes over the assembled youths. They are impressed by two brilliantly coloured feathers sticking out of Cuauhtemoc's hair. One is blue and one is green.

YOUNG BOY #3  
What have we here? Steal those from your brother?

The youths laugh. Atl holds on to Coatl for support. Cuauhtemoc beams.

CUAUHTEMOC  
There was no need. I plucked them from a great bird myself on a hunt.

ATL  
Oh really? How long had it been dead and rotting?

More laughter.

CUAUHTEMOC  
Barely seconds seeing as my bow slew it.

Cuauhtemoc puffs out his chest and bounces the ball on the hard ground. He rubs his freshly-shorn neck.

CUAUHTEMOC (CONT'D)  
I seem to be getting more sun on my neck since I lost my child's knot. We should get this over with. I don't have much time to play with children now that I have left childhood.

The youths frown and murmur to each other. Cuauhtemoc's friends join the group and Cuauhtemoc bounces the ball to Coatl who catches it in one hand.

CUAUHTEMOC (CONT'D)  
 Would you like to be the other  
 captain?

COATL  
 Yes, then take your pick, Cua!

CUAUHTEMOC  
 Tlaloc!

Cuauhtemoc points to a tall boy who showed up with him. He walks across the dust to stand next to his captain, who slaps his arm with appreciation. They look to Coatl who looks at the nine boys in loincloths, standing straight, puffing out their chests and making themselves as tall as they can. Atl, looks to his friend. Coatl makes a gesture.

COATL  
 Itzili! Here to my side!

Itzili relaxes and walks over to his captain's side. Atl's face darkens slightly but he keeps his shoulders up and puts his chest back out.

CUAUHTEMOC  
 Nochehuatl!

Nochehuatl joins his team. Coatl takes a moment of consideration. Atl juts his chin out.

COATL  
 Chimalli!

Atl watches a Chimalli takes his place on Coatl's team. The naming to teams goes on with everyone chosen except for Atl and a shorter, fat friend. The boys on the teams whisper to each other and laugh. Atl holds his chest high and ignores them. The choice is Cuauhtemoc's; he has a smirk on his face.

CUAUHTEMOC  
 Acalan!

The fat friend relaxes and smiles, joining the team as the rest of the boys laugh. Coatl does not say Atl's name but rather waves him over and he joins the team with head down and Itzili pats him on the back.

ITZILI  
 It's okay, Atl. Acalan cannot run,  
 but you can!

CUAUHTEMOC  
 Well? Shall we play tlachtli?

The boys all cheer and run off in the same direction.

EXT. BALL FIELD.

The boys are in ready positions, kicking up dust with their shuffling feet. The ball is thrown by Cuauhtemoc to one boy who kicks it up sharply. The ball is kicked from boy to boy.

One boy hits it with his hips and it bounces off another boy's chest and hits the ground kicking up a dust-cloud. The boys all yell, some throw their hands up in exasperation and some taunt.

COATL

Chimalli! You've lost your head!

Chimalli picks up the ball with a flick of the foot and passes it over to Atl who keeps it up with his knees and juggles for a bit, getting faster. Some of the boys whoop and holler. He hits it from knee to foot, foot to knee finally passing it off.

ACALAN

That's the way, Atl!

The ball is kept up for a while and passed to Cuauhtemoc. Cuauhtemoc keeps it up and looks over at Tlaloc who nods slightly.

Cuauhtemoc passes it to Tlaloc who juggles it twice then passes it back to Cuauhtemoc who does not juggle it but rather hits it with a hip square in to Atl's face, who crumples to the ground, a hand on his mouth. There is a hush among the youths and they back away.

A drop of blood squeezes out and drops into the dust. Atl checks his mouth with bloody fingers. He pulls out a tooth and looks at it in his hand. The boys murmur. One yells obscenities at Cuauhtemoc. A shadow falls on him.

CUAUHTEMOC

It was an accident! You saw it!  
He should have--

WARRIOR

Should have what?!

A large man stands behind with long dark hair, braided on both sides. His nose is hooked with his eyes dark and almond-shaped. The boys quiet down suddenly.

Atl looks up at the adult and squints, grimaces. He gets off his hand and sits on his haunches. His hand closes around the tooth.

WARRIOR (CONT'D)  
He should have known that you carry  
the same blood as your older  
brother, the traitor?

Cuauhtemoc looks down at his feet.

WARRIOR (CONT'D)  
Pretty feathers. How much did they  
cost your father?

The boys laugh. The warrior's face does not lose any of it's intensity.

WARRIOR (CONT'D)  
Get up, Atl.

Atl gets up at the man's command. He squints up at him. The man makes a gesture and they walk away from the crowd of boys. The walk together for a moment in silence. Atl puts the tooth in the folds of his loincloth.

WARRIOR (CONT'D)  
Why did you step back?

ATL  
What do you mean?! He hit me in  
the face on purpose!

WARRIOR  
That was his choice. You made  
yours and it was the wrong one.  
That was a perfect opportunity to  
strike; think of how good you would  
feel now.

ATL  
But I didn't--

WARRIOR  
There is no excuse. When you are  
on the battlefield, you cannot take  
a single step back. You will die.  
If not by an enemy's hand then by  
another Aztec.

They walk past two laughing old ladies carrying slings of fruit over their backs.

ATL

I do not understand why you are  
being unfair to me.

WARRIOR

What you call unfair, I call love.  
Father is gone. Only I am left to  
teach you the ways of men now.  
What will happen if I go off to  
battle and you are left alone with  
mother and the twins? Who will  
protect them? Only a man.

Atl looks up. His brother slows then stops to face his  
little brother.

WARRIOR (CONT'D)

You are an Aztec. We are warriors  
and no matter what enemy we face,  
we will vanquish them whether we  
perish or not. All Aztecs are  
warriors. You are born to courage.  
You have no choice. I know you  
will make me proud.

ATL

I will, brother.

WARRIOR

Good. Now I must leave. Tell  
mother I will not be home for  
dinner.

ATL

What's wrong? Where are you going?

WARRIOR

I'm sure it is nothing but there is  
strange talk. Best to see than  
not.

He clasps Atl's shoulder for a moment and joins the crowd in  
the square. Atl looks on for a moment, then turns away  
walking back down the market rows, past the sellers and goods  
laid out.

He walks under the shade for a while then turns a corner on  
to a causeway over a canal. The water is blue and shining.  
Canoes glide noiselessly in the water. Atl leans over the  
side for a while, arms folded on the edge.

A boat with many bunches of flowers in pile by colour is steered by a man who quietly dips the paddle and pulls his boat forward, silently gliding. He then starts to sing.

BOATMAN

(singing)

My heart says I am not coming again, I will not come again to be born on the well-sheltered earth, but I am already going, already going.

Atl listens, lowering his chin to rest on his arms. The singing boatman continues his slow song with a pleading tone, one filled with sadness but beautiful to the ear. A few people walking on the causeway stop and listen, watch the boat glide away. Atl does not move, does not notice the other listeners joining him.

BOATMAN (CONT'D)

Yehua ohuaya! Yehua ohuaya!

Atl watches the boat as it slides down a canal, past other slowly-moving boats in the distance. The sun now touching the horizon and the magic hour approaches, painting the large stone buildings of the Aztec capitol with pink and gold hues.

The crowd disperses and people go about their early evening business. Atl straightens up and stands. He digs a hand in his loincloth, pulling out his tooth and gives it a quick glance before tossing it over the side of the bridge into the canal, continuing on his way.