EMMANUEL (Working Title)
Screenplay For A Short Film

Mary Jane Doherty March 2021

Note: In this short film, all of the locations and some of the characters are the same as in the feature length version. But, since this film has to work on its own - as a complete story - the central plot has been modified.

The story is also much simpler in terms of production logistics, in order to accommodate its short shooting schedule.

However, this short film demonstrates all the critical skills that apply to the feature length version:

- Directing
- Screenwriting
- Storytelling
- Filmmaking approach

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST RAVINE - EVENING

Red, glistening wet muddy rocks. Loud SUCKING and SCRAPING sounds as a horse's hooves scramble for purchase up a nearly vertical ravine. Sneakered young feet pound the horse's sides.

Dense shrubs line a curve of a narrow dirt lane, carved into a steep hillside.

A young boy, EMMANUEL (13), covered in mud, bursts through the shrubs, canters off down the lane. His black shiny hair flies in the wind. He has dark flashing eyes; he's radiant with joy.

CARD: It's 2010 in Salento, Colombia.

A quiet pause in the FARC guerilla war.

Or so it seems...

INT. EDITH FAMILY HOME, KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

SIZZLE SPLAT. Fat sausages drop into a massive cast iron pan. EDITH (40s) black-haired, sparkly eyed, slightly plump, expertly tosses the sausages. She wears a light cotton house dress. Her kitchen: White stucco walls, a massive polished pine table with seating for a dozen. Catholic iconography covers the walls.

Two spritely pre-schoolers, LUCIA (7) and DANIELA(7,) dash through the kitchen, shrieking with laughter.

EDITH Lucia, we need three more eggs!

The kitchen fills with a dozen people of three generations: they CHATTER, assemble chairs, some check Edith's progress. The men and boys wear brightly colored nylon T shirts emblazoned with sports logos. The girls wear tight, raggedy blue jeans and sleeveless flowery cotton tops.

Amidst the swirl a lovely young girl, MARIELLA (13) stands stock still, gripping the straps of an enormous backpack. She's quietly stunned. She wears a white polo shirt with a prep school ensign, crisp new jeans.

CLAUDIA (VO of Mature Woman) We had to get Mariella to a safe place.

Edith spins, trying to snatch one youngster flying by, then sees Mariella. Edith covers her sizzling pan, wipes her hands on her apron, approaches Mariella.

EDITH
Let me help you...

Edith takes Mariella's backpack off, almost drops it with its weight.

CLAUDIA (VO) Edith has an enormous family. They're spread all over the valley. We knew we could trust them to keep Mariella safe.

Edith drapes her arm around Mariella's shoulder, guides her to a seat at the table.

EDITH (whispers warmly)
You're going to be Ok.

The family, now seated passes around platters of eggs, sausages. Incessant CHATTER, CLINKING tableware.

CLAUDIA (VO)
They took Mariella's father.
Could be the revolutionaries.
Could be the government.
These days, we can't know for sure...

EXT. EDITH FAMILY HOME, STREET - EARLY MORNING

Lucia tiptoes quietly up to a kitty, sitting forlornly in the middle of the concrete street, directly in front of a single storied home: water-stained stucco, faded peach paint, crumbling mortar, thick tiled roof. A chicken pecks nearby, ignored by Lucia. It's intensely quiet.

Emmanuel, muddy, glistening with sweat, careens around the corner; he stops, scoots down, to pat Lucia on her head, dashes into the house.

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Din of animated family CHATTER. All sit in front of their mostly empty plates. All largely ignore Mariella, sitting shyly at the center of the table. Daniela jumps up, drapes herself lovingly onto Mariella, peers deep into her eyes.

Emmanuel, bursts into the room. The conversation abruptly stops for a moment, as all look at him.

EMMANUEL (shouting out) When's breakfast?

(Sees the empty plates.)

Oh.

Lucia skips into the kitchen, joins Daniela - they both hang all over Mariella.

LUCIA and DANIELA
Where did you get your jeans?
Do you have a Mom and a Dad?
Do you have a kitty? We have a kitty.
You are so pretty.
Will you stay with us all the time.

Mariella, tiny smile, can't get a response in edgewise. Emmanuel notices Mariella's plate, filled to the brim with sausages and eggs. The youngsters, suddenly bored, SHRIEK and dash off.

Emmanuel and Mariella lock eyes. He sits down slowly across from her. Edith notices, but continues chattering with the elderly woman to her right.

MARTA (80s) wrinkled, kindly, short and plump, sits at the head of the table. She forks a lone sausage off a plate

several places further down from hers. Edith and Marta, heads bent close, whisper beneath the general din.

MARTA

Who is she? She came in on the Cali bus this morning?

EDITH

Yes! I found her outside, standing in the middle of the street. I called Humberto. He called Silvio who called Edgardo who, of course, called Sister Armeda.

And she found out from Padre.

(Leans in conspiratorially)

Seems her Aunt, Rosa somebody, called the church to say her niece is coming in by bus.

And to deliver her to us, since we are her relatives.

MARTA

Are we then. In what sense?

EDITH

No idea. But no matter.

Amabilidad. Her name is Mariella.

Marta and Edith hover over their tiny espressos, while the big kids clear the table. Emmanuel slips out the back entrance.

Mariella watches him leave. She brings her plate over to the sink, hesitates - what to do with all this food? Marta shuffles up behind her.

MARTA

Go on. I'll take care of it.

EXT. EDITH FAMILY HOME, BACKYARD PADDOCK - MORNING

Mariella, standing on the verandah, stares at the backyard with barely concealed dismay. She sees a distressing sea of mud, rough boards make up a haphazard path. A cluster of tumble-down shacks line the far edge, made of weathered

boards tacked up any which way. Enormous sacks of grain, tools, plastic jugs - a tableaux of grim squalor.

CLOP CLOP. From a narrow gap between two tiny shacks Emmanuel suddenly emerges into the sunlight leading a magnificent pure white Paso (high-stepping quarter horse) - arched neck, gleaming hide, lustrous eyes, Arabian grandeur.

Mariella drops her jaw. She jumps down, tiptoes from board to board to avoid the mud. Emmanuel lovingly grooms his white horse. He's pleased that Mariella is so enchanted.

EMMANUEL

Grandpa helped me train him. His name is Blanco.

Mariella hesitatingly strokes Blanco. She's adoring, but a little afraid; jumps back when Blanco SNORTS and shimmies.

INT. BAR (DONDE MI APÁ) - Day

The bartender, SILVIO (36), crew cut, wire rims, fastidiously dressed in button-down and chinos, plunks a straw into an orange soda in front of EDGARDO, (70s) hunched over on his bar stool opposite. Edgardo, wears a dapper driving cap, a vest over a linen shirt: a country gentleman. Edgardo, deeply worried, leans in.

EDGARDO

(sotto voce)

They took her father last week. You know her Mom died when she was young. Imagine - her Aunt sent her here for safekeeping.

Silvio wipes down his bar. Behind him, in a shallow alcove, are floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with thousands of vinyl records, all encased in identical beige sleeves, each with a numbered tab sticking out.

Silvio rolls his eyes slightly. He is stoic, withdrawn, intensely thoughtful; wears a permanent frown.

SILVIO

Safe. Sure...

Silvio looks hard at Edgardo, indicating with his eyes, the woman seated to his left. Edgardo surreptitiously checks her out.

CLAUDIA (50s) large, big-boned, decked out in brand new trail hiking gear: fanny pack, neck bandana, multi-pocketed shirt. She slowly swivels, making a SQUEAKING sound, on her bar stool. She stares up at the ceiling and all around.

Dripping from the ceiling, hanging on the walls, are ancient brass instruments, Colombian guitars, cooking pots, stuffed fish, snow shoes. The tiny room, with two cafe tables, is filled to the brim with a flea market's bounty.

CLAUDIA

(Whispering in English)
This place is fucking awesome.

She twists back to Silvio and Edgardo, watches Silvio pull out a record.

CLAUDIA (Cont.)
(In terrible Spanish)
I the like cooking pots.

(She notices Silvio's record collection.)

(Now In English)
Holy fuck how many records do you
have back there? I mean it's gotta
be like thousands.

Silvio, quietly proud, pulls out a giant leather-bound ledger book from below the bar. Selects several pages.

SILVIO

(In English)

Every record, you see, is here. So I know the artist, the year, the musicians, the genre...

CLAUDIA

So, you mean, ALL Colombian music or just some kinds? I know there're gillions of different kinds of music in this country...

Silvio frowns, can't quite understand her English. Claudia checks her watch.

CLAUDIA

(In terrible Spanish)
Could you me tell how to
get the jeep to seeing the
volcano? Or the horse?

Edgardo and Silvio share a bemused smile.

SILVIO

(English)

No problem, I will show you.

EXT. 300 STEPS - DAY

Mariella's feet, elegant sandaled, followed by Emmanuel's in beat-up sneakers, step carefully up a long, steep concrete staircase, the steps painted rich blue and yellow.

They reach the top, both breathing hard. Nothing but a couple of scraggly trees. Mariella's perplexed. Emmanuel turns her around. She gasps; there below she sees the entire town, laid out like a quilt, organized around a bustling town plaza. Behind the town she sees, in the far distance, verdant rolling hills and snowy volcanoes.

EMMANUEL

So, are you my cousin or what?

MARIELLA

I have no idea.

I've never even heard of your town.

EMMANUEL

You will like it here though. I will make sure of this.

They exchange small but warm smiles on their slow walk down.

EXT. TOWN PLAZA, IN FRONT OF THE DONDE MI APÁ BAR - DAY

Two cowboys saunter by. Claudia awkwardly bursts through the bar's door, balancing a beer, bags of chips, newspaper. At the same moment a herd of Pasos thunder past, flattening Claudia against the door.

Shaken, she plops down onto one of two cafe tables, snaps open her newspaper, starts to read. Furtively, she checks out the hustle-bustle of the plaza.

Claudia watches Mariella, in her prim school uniform, as she examines the tchotchkes in a nearby pushcart. Mariella smiles a tiny bit at the woven dolls then wanders slowly past other pushcart vendors. *Cumbia* music pours out of the corner bars, jeeps race past, motorbikes circle the plaza, avoiding stray goats and chickens. A camouflaged solder, each shouldering an AK47s, perches on each corner of the plaza. Mariella approaches one soldier a little nervously.

MARIELLA

Excuse me.

(She tries to break his glazed stare.)

Can you tell me where the bathroom is?

The SOLDIER, without moving a muscle, ever so slightly slides his eyes to his left. Mariella follows his look. Sees a blue painted wooden door, a couple yards away. An elderly woman with shopping bags eases out the door.

The blue door is immediately adjacent to the Donde Mi Apá bar and its outdoor cafe tables. Claudia, absorbed in her paper, SLURPS her beer.

Mariella hesitates in front of the blue door, KNOCKS gently. No Answer. Just as she CREAKS open the door she hears a CLATTERING sound, feels something big land on her shoulder. She slowly slides her eyes over - it's a giant glistening beetle, the size and shape of an egg. She freezes.

Claudia sees the bug, leaps up, aghast. Knocks her chair over.

CLAUDIA

Hang on, hang on. I'll get it. Well, wait a sec, ah, somebody, anybody?

Claudia dances around uselessly. Edgardo peers out the bar door, bemused, steps over to Mariella, flicks the bug off her shoulder, leans down to her eye level.

EDGARDO

It is only our *Chucarra*. He is very friendly.

Mariella un-tenses slightly, for a tiny moment. Stares at Edgardo gratefully.

EDGARDO (Cont.)
You are Mariella.
My name is Edgardo.

(Mariella is taken aback.)

Don't worry. I am a friend of your family here in our lovely town. We know why you are here. Now I want you to come with me.

Claudia, while listening to Edgardo and Mariella, scrutinizes the sidewalk carefully, then picks up her chair. She watches Edgardo and Mariella walk off into the plaza.

EXT. LUZ FOUNDATION, VERANDAH - DAY

A polished wide-planked floor covers a generous verandah, masses of trailing flowers line the railing. Edgardo and Mariella tiptoe quietly past Lucia, SAWING AWAY on her violin as GRETEL (18) her teacher paces, listening.

INT. LUZ FOUNDATION, STUDIO - DAY CONT.

A table full of seven year olds sit, eyes clenched shut. Behind them, PEDRO (22) walks slowly, shaking a can, making RATTLING noises, close to each child's ear.

Mariella, holding Edgardo's hand, watches from the doorway.

EDGARDO
(whispering)
They took our music program
away from us, you see.
So we had to start our own.

He smiles, leaves her in the doorway.

CHILDREN
 (shouting)
Money! Peanuts! Bottle caps!

The children are convulsed with laughter as Pedro smiles, shakes his head - nope, nope, nope.

Mariella, watched by Edgardo, wanders through light-filled music studios. She picks up a flute, puts it down, then a guitar then finally settles in behind a set of *Tambora* (Colombian) drums. She fondles the drumsticks.

EXT. TOWN PLAZA, GELATO SHOP - DAY

Edgardo and Silvio sit like sentries on either side of the Gelato Shop doorway facing the Town Plaza. The gelato shop, like most shops, is wood-trimmed in bright saturated colors, arranged in geometric patterns. They see:

MONTAGE Mariella wanders through the plaza. As she passes each town resident, we hear interweaving snatches of her story: the village priest to his church warden 'she had already lost her mother you know;' a mandarin orange seller to his customer, 'her father was a famous scientist, some kind of nuclear physicist;' two teenage slovenly youths draped over their motorcycles, 'he was a bird watcher, some kind of super birdwatcher I think;' a row of Grandmas, lined up on a park bench embroidering ponchos, 'I heard Edith took her in, no questions asked;' two men pushing handcarts stacked with eggs, 'FARC got him, for sure.'

Mariella passes Claudia, whose trail pants are stuffed into the tops of her cowboy boots, trying to mount a big fat swayback horse. Claudia guides the horse over to a park bench, steps onto the bench. Behind her, Edgardo enters the Donde Mi Apá bar. Claudia notices this, then heaves herself proudly up and onto her horse.

EXT. EDITH'S STREET - EARLY MORNING

A cat emerges from a crumbling hole in the concrete side of house, a horse munches on a tiny patch of verdant green grass between two homes, a wooden shutter CREAKS open, a

housewife props herself in the window, crosses her arms, looks in both directions up and down her street.

EXT. EDITH FAMILY HOME, BACKYARD VERANDA - DAY

SPLATCH. Marta plunges her arms elbow deep into a ten gallon green bucket filled with bloody red guts, making loud SUCKING GLOPPY sounds as she stuffs intestines. Her attention though is on Mariella, trotting slowly in a circle on a small brown pony. Emmanuel, centered in the circle, gently flicks a whip.

EMMANUEL

(Clucks and tsks)

That's it. Tell him what you want through your back, not with your hands or your feet. Straighten your back!

Mariella bounces awkwardly, gripping the horses mane, her legs swinging loosely. Around and around she goes; grimly determined, but a glow of joy slowly emerges.

Marta, carrying her big bloody tub, steps gingerly down off the verandah, and over to a water spout. She WHISTLES a strange, but lovely tune as she goes.

Mariella, mid-trot, suddenly hears this. Stops her horse abruptly. Slowly turns and stares at Marta.

EMMANUEL

What? What're you doing?

Mariella almost falls off her pony in her zeal to jump down. She leaps along the boards until she's next to Marta.

MARIELLA

What are you whistling Great Auntie? How do you know that song?

Marta stops rinsing her tub, smiles conspiratorially. Emmanuel rushes up to join them.

EMMANUEL

What is going on?

MARTA

I believe our friend here knows the song of the *Tapaculo*.

MARIELLA

(breathless with excitement)
My father said, the night before he left, I should learn the Tapaculo song. If I ever need to find him, he will be where the Tapaculo lives.

Emmanuel stares at her for an intense moment. Then, to Mariella's astonishment, he abruptly dashes off towards the stables at the rear of the paddock. Marta, alarmed too, heads back inside, as fast as her ancient legs allow.

EXT. TOWN STREET - DAY

An empty narrow concrete street lined with brightly painted wooden homes. Suddenly, the percussive sound of RAPIDLY CLATTERING hooves.

Bursting around the corner, Emmanuel, leaning forward, kicks Blanco into a canter down the steep hill.

EXT. VIA PALESTINA - DAY

A narrow winding dirt lane, pocked with washouts, bordered by lush forest. Emmanuel flies down this road, SCATTERING dirt and gravel as goes.

INT. DONDE MI APÁ BAR - DAY

Silvio CRACKS opens his giant ledger book. With his cell phone in one hand, he runs a finger of his other hand down an endless list of numbers. Glances back and forth between cell and ledger book.

SILVIO (chanting, drone-like) A7839 Z19045 J89993... Edgardo, seated across the bar from him, copies numbers as Silvio reads them off into a notebook. Then, with a ruler and pencil, draws vectors onto a topo map spread out on the bar. The vectors cross at a bridge over a skinny wiggly blue line.

EDGARDO Got it.

They both look up and stare at each other for a moment.

EXT. VIA PALESTINA - DAY

The dirt lane winds through open verdant pastures. Emmanuel trots rapidly around a washout. He suddenly pulls Blanco into a halt. Listens. Looks back. Sees Mariella - her legs akimbo, reins flapping around, a hundred yards up the road. Emmanuel grimaces. Mariella pulls up next to him.

EMMANUEL

You cannot come with me.

MARIELLA

Where are you going?

EMMANUEL

I am going, by myself, to get your father home.

MARIELLA

And I am going with you.

Emmanuel's a little taken aback at this sudden show of defiance.

MARIELLA (Cont.)

And how, exactly do you happen to know where he is?

Emmanuel clicks his horse into a walk. He whistles the Tapaculo song. Then halts, twists to look at Mariella.

EMMANUEL

The *Tapaculo* lives near the Palestina bridge. Over the Rio Verde. So. Like I say.

EMMANUEL (Cont.) Way too dangerous for you. See you later.

He gathers his reins, but then double takes. He sees, far up the hill behind Mariella, a figure on horseback, silhouetted sharply in the sunlight. Something dawns on him. Something not good. He whacks Blanco's ribs sharply.

EMMANUEL (sharp urgency) C'mon. NOW.

He's about to race off. But Mariella, pounding her horse's sides with her heels, can't get her horse to move. Emmanuel reaches back, grabs her reins, they dash for a hundred yards. Suddenly Emmanuel stops, turns sharply right, plunges down a sheer rocky muddy narrow ravine, dragging Mariella after him. Mariella closes her eyes in terror.

A sandy curve in the road. Emmanuel bursts out of the dense foliage and onto the lane and stops dead, craning to see back up the ravine.

He hears rapid, brisk CLIP-CLOPs crunching the gravel. Turns and sees Claudia, expertly riding a regal Bay stallion in the Paso gait, (high knees, hooves pointed down.) She reaches Emmanuel, stops her horse abruptly, pirouettes him on a dime. Like a Lipizzaner. She wears no nonsense drab, faded khakis.

Emmanuel, thunderstruck, watches Claudia angle her horse diagonally, so as to block the lane. She smiles quietly.

EXT. TOWN PLAZA - DAY

Six jeeps lined up in the center of the plaza. Marta, hobbling ever so slowly across the plaza, sees Edith up ahead frantically negotiating with one jeep driver. Marta joins her; they climb into the jeep, slam the door.

Behind them Edgardo and Silvio burst through the door of the Donde Mi Apá bar. They hesitate, Silvio dashes off followed by Edgardo struggling to keep up. EXT. VIA PALESTINA - DAY

Emmanuel, frozen with uncertainty, hears Mariella's horse SCRAMBLING over rocks. He gathers his reins, ready to fly.

CLAUDIA

(In perfect Spanish)
Emmanuel. Stop.
I mean it. In fact, I...

Mariella bursts out of the shrubs onto the road. She's a muddy wreck. She gapes at Claudia confronting Emmanuel, sees a gleaming AK 47 strapped over Claudia's shoulder.

MARIELLA

(Intensely)

Emmanuel, go go!

CLAUDIA

Wait! Both of you.

(Slightest of smiles, her eyes cold as ice.)

Look. I know where your father is Mariella.

And I know how to get him back. Which is what I plan to do.

(The kids, now stunned.)

BUT. I can only do this if I know you two are safe.

LOUD SKIDDING GRAVEL sound as a jeep careers around the corner behind Claudia. Claudia, doesn't turn, keeps her eyes locked on the kids.

CLAUDIA (Cont.)

You want to find your father? You will,

(She leans forward, her voice low, vicious.)

If you let me do my job.

Mariella and Emmanuel look at each other. Quiet panic.

The jeep SCREECHES to a halt in a smattering of gravel directly behind Claudia. Edith scrambles out, turns back to help ease Marta out. Marta hobbles slowly up the lane toward Claudia.

A second jeep SCREECHES up behind the first. Marta and Edith stop, turn, see Silvio jump out, followed slowly by Edgardo.

SILVIO

Marta - wait!

Claudia turns in her saddle to look back at the jeeps. Marta works her way up to Claudia, plants her feet, crosses her arms.

MARTA

Claudia!

What in the name of Our Lord are you doing here?

CLAUDIA

Oh hello Dear.

Edith, Silvio and Edgardo all look at each other. Utterly perplexed. Edith hustles over to the kids.

EDITH

(scathingly)
Get yourselves home this
very instant.

EMMANUEL

But...

EDITH

Now.

Mariella sees Claudia reaching back for her AK47. Claudia pulls out a giant bandana, wipes the back of her neck.

Emmanuel grabs Mariella's reins, starts ever so slowly backing and turning. As does so, he hears Claudia whistling the *Tapaculo* song.

Emmanuel and Mariella stop dead. They both turn to look back at Claudia. Claudia gestures a tiny salute.

CARD: 3 WEEKS LATER

EXT. 300 STEPS, TOP STEP - DAY

Stunning view of town and vast countryside. Mariella and Emmanuel sit hunched closely together on the top step, gazing outward. Mariella wears raggedy jeans, scuffed sneakers and a bright nylon sports shirt.

CLAUDIA (VO)
Took us months to
get her father back.

The kids walk down the steps, hand in hand, slowly.

CLAUDIA (VO Cont.)
But we kept Mariella
safe the whole time.

EMMANUEL (to Mariella)
Come ride with me today!
I can show you the old mill down by the river.

Mariella smiles sweetly back at him. They part ways at the bottom of the steps.

INT. DONDE MI APÁ - NIGHT

Silvio CRACKS open his huge ledger book, checks a listing, turns back to run his thumb along a row of records, selects one, drops it on the turntable. Soft *Cumbia* PERCUSSION.

Claudia, back at one of the small cafe tables, balances a dented tuba on her lap, trying to make a sound. BLAT BLAT

Edgardo, seated at the bar, SQUEAKS on his stool as he turns to watch her.

CLAUDIA (VO)
I couldn't tell them who
I really was - until I knew
who they really were.

Claudia gives up, sets her tuba down, joins Edgardo at the bar. Silvio drops a can of Colombian Gold beer and a glass in front of her.

CLAUDIA

Silvio, show me your code system here. I promise not to tell anyone.

Silvio slams the ledger book closed, smiles.

STLVTO

Um. Yep. But no.

The three huddle at the bar, listening to the music for a moment.

CLAUDIA (VO)

Thing is, FARC, like all revolutionary movements, has its good guys and bad guys.

EDGARDO

We truly thought you were Norte Americana. Your bad Spanish is VERY good.

CLAUDIA

Let's just say I've had lots of practice.

Claudia takes a couple SLURPS of her beer, slides off the stool, dusts off a trombone.

CLAUDIA (VO)

But at some point, you have to trust *somebody*.

INT. LUZ FOUNDATION, KIDS' PLAYROOM - DAY

A gaggle of pre-schoolers shriek and dash about. Mariella chases one of them back to the room, gets the child absorbed with maracas.

Gretel enters the room, takes over. Mariella bows out, waving gaily to the kids.

Mariella checks to see no one is watching, then slips into a light filled studio, empty except for a tambora drum set.

CLAUDIA (VO)
Mariella and her father
eventually moved here. For good.

Mariella seats herself carefully, looks up at the sky, closes her eyes, starts patting out a rhythm on her tambora drums.

CLAUDIA (VO Cont.)

But I keep my eye on her and Emmanuel too - all the same.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

A wide luscious valley, emerald green grass. Mariella's TAMBORA RHYTHM continues. A single dirt road, tracing a glinting bubbling stream, scores the center line of the valley.

A small figure, flying black hair, on a pure white horse races up the center of the road.

FADE OUT.