

NO DAWN WILL BREAK US

– A SCREENPLAY WRITING SAMPLE –

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THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM A FILM, *NO DAWN WILL BREAK US*, THAT TAKES PLACE DURING THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION. IN THESE SCENES, EMILIANO ZAPATA AND HIS BROTHER, EUPHEMIO, HELP ACHIEVE VICTORY FOR GUSTAVO MADERO, THERE STAUNCH ALLY, WHO BECOMES THE NEW PRESIDENT OF MEXICO. BUT WITH HIS VICTORY, COMES TRAGEDY AND BETRAYAL AS PRESIDENT MADERO ALLOWA GENERAL HUERTA TO WREAK DEATH AND DESTRUCTION OF THE MEXICAN PEOPLE IN FURTHERANCE OF HIS OWN DEADLY AGENDA.

EXT. PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. MEXICO CITY-- LATE AFTERNOON

An AIDE hands President Diaz a TORN, BLOODSTAINED SHIRT.

AIDE

It's one of dozens sent by the outlaws who ambushed us in Chihuahua. They call them wrappers. They say they need more tamales to fill them.

PORFIRIO DIAZ
I'll give them tamales all right.
Our so-called General Orozco will
soon have a bad case of indigestion!

EXT. CASAS GRANDES, CHIHUAHUA-- EARLY MORNING

Madero, flanked by his brother, GUSTAVO, is at the front of the TROOPS preparing to attack A CONCLAVE OF FEDERAL TROOPS.

GUSTAVO MADERO
You're foolish, my brother. Leave
this to professional military
people.

MADERO
I need the people's confidence,
Gustavo. They need to know I'm
willing to take personal risks.

GUSTAVO MADERO
You haven't been to jail? You
aren't now targeted for execution?
Isn't that enough?

Madero signals men, pulls out SWORD and begins charge down a long slope leading to the enemy. GUNSHOT. Madero topples off horse. Soldiers pass him, as brother dismounts. Gustavo looks at his brother's BLOOD-DRENCHED SLEEVE.

GUSTAVO MADERO (CONT'D)
Will you ever listen to reason?

MADERO
Our next target will be Ciudad
Juarez. Tell Villa and Orozco I
won't stand in their way. Help me
up. I want to see how we did.

EXT. CASAS GRANDES, CHIHUAHUA-- EARLY MORNING

Madero walks through CONCLAVE, which has fallen to the REVOLUTIONARIES. He is met by GENERAL PANCHO VILLA.

VILLA
What took you so long, Madero?

MADERO

I have a slight wound. I'm not as used to battle as you are, Pancho.

VILLA

(looking at wound)

You've got guts, Madero. For myself, I can't read, but I've been killing men my whole life. But even there, there's room to learn.

They walk to old TREE. SIX BODIES hang off different LIMBS OF THE TREE. ONE twitches in final throes of death.

VILLA (CONT'D)

See. I call this my hanging tree. One tree does the work of five. We break less branches.

Madero looks at the TREE and walks off alone. CLOSE-UP on a look of horror and disdain on his face.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF JOJUTLA. AFTERNOON

TITLE: "JOJUTLA, MEXICO. MARCH 24TH, 1911."

Zapata and RAPHAEL, a rebel soldier, ride on outskirts of the village.

ZAPATA

Soon we join Madero's army. But, now, we must be content with Jojutla.

Eufemio rides up to them.

EUFEMIO

We'll have a hard time fighting them. All that's left is a strong smell.

ZAPATA

Where'd did they go, Eufemio?

EUFEMIO

Cuernavaca. I could guess.

They approach VILLAGE. There, their own men are breaking into stores, starting fires, loading SUPPLIES on wagons.

INT. HOUSE. JOJUTLA. AFTERNOON

CAMERA FOLLOWS LOOTER into one house, where child clutches a BLANKET and a STUFFED ANIMAL. LOOTER takes BREAD off table and grabs STUFFED ANIMAL and runs out.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF JOJUTLA. AFTERNOON

LOOTER runs outside, with bread and stuffed animal. Zapata and RAPHAEL, watch, disgustedly.

RAPHAEL

Not much of an army we have. Just banditos, more or less.

Zapata comes fitfully to life when he hears this. Zapata fires PISTOLS in air. A LOOTER angrily comes over. He is carrying THE LOAF OF BREAD and the STUFFED ANIMAL.

LOOTER

Hey, we risked our lives to save this Village? A few loaves of bread-

Knocks STUFFED ANIMAL out of his hands. Runs his hand through the man's hair, affectionately. Takes his loaf of bread.

ZAPATA

Bring the kid back her animal, will you. Don't you think we'll feed you? You're a hero, aren't you?

EXT. YAUTEPEC. SOUTHERN MEXICO. ARMY GUARDHOUSE. MORNING.

Boys play- tossing SACK back and forth. They reach in SACK and throw DYNAMITE STICKS through windows of guardhouse. SOLDIERS are blown out, SOME run out of building, collapsing in bloody pile. Zapata's men charge VILLAGE SQUARE, taking CITY HALL, STORES and SMALL HOTELS in Square.

EXT. CUAUTLA-- EARLY MORNING,

Titles: "CUAUTLA, A LARGE TOWN IN MORELOS, A FEW MILES FROM
S ANENECUILCO. MAY 13, 1911"

Zapata's men attack on horseback, but as soon as they get
in town, they are ambushed. The fighting is furious.

EXT. CUAUTLA. A FEW DAYS LATER. AROUND DUSK.

BODIES everywhere. Cuautla in complete ruins, with small
groups of Zapata's rebels, picking at the RUBBLE.

EUFEMIO

Not so pretty.

ZAPATA

We lost one third of our men.

Eufemio points to small group of PRISONER SOLDIERS.

EUFEMIO

There's something to smile about.
They're still alive. Let's kill
them.

Zapata walks towards them. He recognizes injured SOLDIER
as David De La Torre y Mier, his former patron's son.

DE LA TORRE Y MIER

My father isn't going to like you
too much today-

ZAPATA

Oh, my God? David, if I had known-

Zapata kneels over David.

DAVID DE LA TORRE Y MIER

I better cancel my riding lessons
today.

David is dead. Zapata picks up his BODY. Stands before
prisoners, downcast and alone.

ZAPATA

(calling to
prisoners))

Sixteen years old! I taught him to ride. This is the fodder for Diaz' army. I'm angry at Porfirio today, but, still, I give you our choice-- stay here and be hung or go home. If you go home, God help you if we catch you in a Federal uniform.

EXT. CIUDAD JUAREZ-- MID-AFTERNOON

TITLES: "CIUDAD JUAREZ, MAY 10, 1911."

Orozco and Villa enter city. People line streets, giving them BOUQUETS, BOTTLES OF WINE. Women grab Villa's BRIDLE, almost pulling him off his HORSE. Orozco frowns at Villa.

CROWD
MADERO! MADERO!

Villa turns to Orozco.

VILLA
It's Madero they love. Not us.

CROWD continues to chant, "MADERO!"

EXT. MADERO'S HEADQUARTERS. RURAL AREA -- AFTERNOON

LOUD CHEERS. Madero gets out of TENT. Gustavo greets him.

GUSTAVO MADERO
You've done it, my brother.

MADERO
Done what? Got out of a tent?

GUSTAVO MADERO
We've won! Diaz surrendered. He's will leave in return for his life.
(embracing him)
We've won, my brother!

EXT. MEXICAN PORT. STEAMSHIP -- AFTERNOON

Orozco and Villa on horseback, overlook as SOLDIERS, guarding President Diaz, approach STEAMSHIP RAMP. FAR SHOT- lone MAN in sombrero, with guns drawn, creeps towards

boat. VILLA canters towards HIM, dismounts and runs towards figure.

VILLA
Put your guns down, hombre. Hey,
you're Zapata's brother!

EUFEMIO
Please- let me kill the bastard
before it's too late.

VILLA
Does your brother know you're here?

EUFEMIO
No. He wouldn't have let me come.

VILLA
They tortured you, eh?

Eufemio nods. Diaz takes one last look at his homeland and then goes up RAMP.

VILLA (CONT'D)
I know. I'd like to cut the bastard
up and feed him to the buzzards
piece by piece. But I can't,
Eufemio.

EUFEMIO
For God's sakes, Pancho- why not?

VILLA
Because I'm the goddamn government
now. And so are you. Your
brother's right. We have to keep
our agreement and let the son of a
bitch go.

EXT. STREET SCENE. MEXICO CITY -- AFTERNOON

TITLE: "MEXICO CITY. JUNE 7, 1911."

THOUSANDS greet Madero, in open car, smiling and waving.

INT. MANSION IN MEXICO CITY. -- MOMENTS LATER

Eufemio and Zapata arrive at dinner party. SERVANTS unsuccessfully attempt to take Eufemio and Zapata's WEAPONS.

LEWIN (V.O.)

Zapata was different than the other leaders, who profited from the Revolution. Many found it was fine to read about Robin Hood, but not so much fun to actually meet him.

EUFEMIO

Relax, Emiliano. This is a dinner party, not a funeral.

They see Madero.

ZAPATA

He doesn't look the same, surrounded by all these rich landowners.

They walk over to Madero.

MADERO

Emiliano, let me introduce my friends. -

Madero begins introductions, but Zapata waves them off.

ZAPATA

I know your friends.

(loudly)

I come here because I have to go back to Morelos. I need to tell my people about the new laws- that we have the deeds to our land.

MADERO

Calm down, Emiliano. Do you think I've forgotten you? Do you think you'll leave this Revolution without a deed for yourself, without a new ranch of your very own-

Zapata slams down BUTT OF RIFLE on floor. Everyone is silent.

ZAPATA

Is that what you think I am in it
for, Madero. A ranch of my own-?

MADERO

No, but-

ZAPATA

I represent the campesinos of
Mexico, whose land was stolen by
Diaz.

(angrily)

We won the Revolution- but I warn
you, the vultures are already
circling Mexico City.

MADERO

Don't worry, Emiliano. You'll get
everything you want. I'll come to
Morelos- to make sure of it.

Zapata walks to door. He stands there for a few minutes.
The room is totally still, all eyes on Zapata and Madero.

ZAPATA

I'll count on it.

(emphatically)

The vultures are circling.

EXT. TRAIN STATION. MORELOS. JUNE 12, 1911 -- MORNING

Hundreds of ZAPATA'S ARMY greets Madero, who is met by
Zapata as he gets off the TRAIN.

MADERO

I'm pleased to see you, Emiliano.

ZAPATA

We wish you to make your
proclamation for land reform in
Mexico. Please, Madero, do it now!

MADERO

I see you have brought your army to
greet me. After the ceremonies, we
can talk peacefully. Later, I'll
see to it that you can be my new
Chief of Police here, in Morelos.

TITLES: JUNE 13, 1911 -- EARLY MORNING

Zapata walks with Madero over to TABLE. They are seated. A slow rumble from the troops turns into a loud cheer. Eufemio and Raphael stand near them. The troops, gleaming in their white garments and sombreros, are everywhere.

ZAPATA

Senores, I think I can say I've fought beside the bravest fighting force in the world.

DOZENS OF MEN raise their GUNS in salute.

ZAPATA (CONT'D)

We couldn't afford to train you, but- oh, how you learned! We couldn't afford to pay you, but that didn't matter. And, now, as we take your guns, throw a few pesos at you for your trip home, our pockets may not be overflowing, but our hearts are!

Madero smiles at Zapata in a very friendly way.

EXT. ANENECUILCO. OUTSIDE SMALL FARM-- SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Zapata and Eufemio are watching COCKFIGHT.

LEWIN (V.O.)

So, Zapata went home, again, hopefully to breed horses. Time stood very still-like it was before-

EUFEMIO

You're wrong, as usual. Ten pesos on the speckled-

Presses MONEY in Zapata's hand. Zapata stuffs it underneath a GUN BELT. BOY runs up to Zapata with TELEGRAM.

ZAPATA

It denies my commission- as Police Chief. It says, "You have made too many enemies, Zapata. You have endangered all of us."

EUFEMIO

I think he may have a few enemies.

ZAPATA

He says- "Go back to your little village, play with your children, breed your horses, cheat your brother at cock fights." Does he think that's a problem for me?

EUFEMIO

Yeah, that's what you were just doing.

EXT. ANENECUILCO. ARBOR OUTSIDE CHURCH-- MORNING

Wedding ceremony. A PRIEST is presiding. Zapata kisses Josefa. Dr. Atl comes up to Zapata.

DR. ATL

I've two gifts for you, Emiliano.

Dr. Atl presents a perfect PORTRAIT OF ZAPATA, his shirt criss-crossed with bullet-laden cartridge belts.

EMILIANO ZAPATA

This lacks the relaxed look of a propertied gentleman-

DR.ATL

I think we both know it's a little late to harbor those illusions.

ZAPATA

Here, kiss her. Once- on the cheek.

Dr. Atl kisses Josefa on the mouth. Zapata sneers at him. Atl hands him PAPER BOX.

DR. ATL

Your second present!

Zapata takes out BALLAD SHEET and stares at it. CLOSE-UP OF BALLAD SHEET. Takes a hand full OF SHEETS and passes it to band. Laughing, singing continues. Zapata kisses Josefa beneath outside ARBOR, surrounded by his FRIENDS,

RELATIVES, with HUNDREDS of his men. ARTIST sketches the scene.

ZAPATA

Kiss me again!

JOSEFA

That last kiss was big enough- in front of dozens of people. It should last you.

ZAPATA

No- not enough.

She concedes.

ZAPATA (CONT'D)

Will you do something for me?

He does. She takes BALLAD SHEET from BAND MEMBER. Begins to sing "WEDDING SONG." Meanwhile, YOUNG SOLDIER, fifteen, tries to get through crowd to reach Zapata. Music stops.

BOY

General, I'm so sorry. But Huerta's men are riding through the borders. They sent me- because I'm the fastest.

Zapata looks at boy, then at his bride. He whispers in her ear. Zapata removes HAT with broad flourish, upwards in victory salute. Then, kisses his overwhelmed bride passionately. He smiles, puts his HAT back on, looks at men and starts to trot off through their lines. She looks at BALLAD SHEET and with tears in her eyes, continues her song. WEDDING SONG continues. Eufemio puts down huge, ornate CAKE, trots after Zapata. Men grab their BELONGINGS and run after them. Zapata and Eufemio run to HORSES, leap on them and gallop off together. Others jump on their HORSES, riding furiously to catch up.

EXT. ABOUT FIVE MILES FROM ANENECUILCO-- MINUTES LATER

Zapata and Eufemio ride furiously at head of galloping ARMY.

EXT. CUAUTLA RIVER VALLEY-- AFTERNOON.

As Zapata's army rides through Valley, CAMPESINOS come out to salute them, offering FOOD or to join them.

OLDER FARMER

You heard the news, General?
Madero's been elected President.

A rider approaches them.

GABRIEL DOMINGUEZ

I'm Gabriel Dominguez. I've been riding for two days without stop. I represent Francisco Madero.

ZAPATA

Tell Madero to call off his dog, Huerta. I must speak to him now!

DOMINGUEZ

We understand your frustration. Huerta is a loose cannon, which we are handling. Nonetheless, Madero wants you away from Mexico City.

ZAPATA

I will, Dominguez, but now even I'm skeptical.

EXT. ZAPATA'S TENT- OUTSKIRTS OF FARM IN MORELOS -- NIGHT

Eufemio comes in. Zapata is angrily pacing.

EUFEMIO

The note-

ZAPATA

Yes, the note! No, we'll not surrender to Huerta. Take this down. Tell Madero he'd better take a freight train to Havana- fast.

Eufemio is scribbling fast.

ZAPATA (CONT'D)

I'm counting the days. In one month, I'll be in Mexico City with

20,000 men. Then I'll drag him from
Chapultepec Castle and hang him from
the highest tree in the Park.