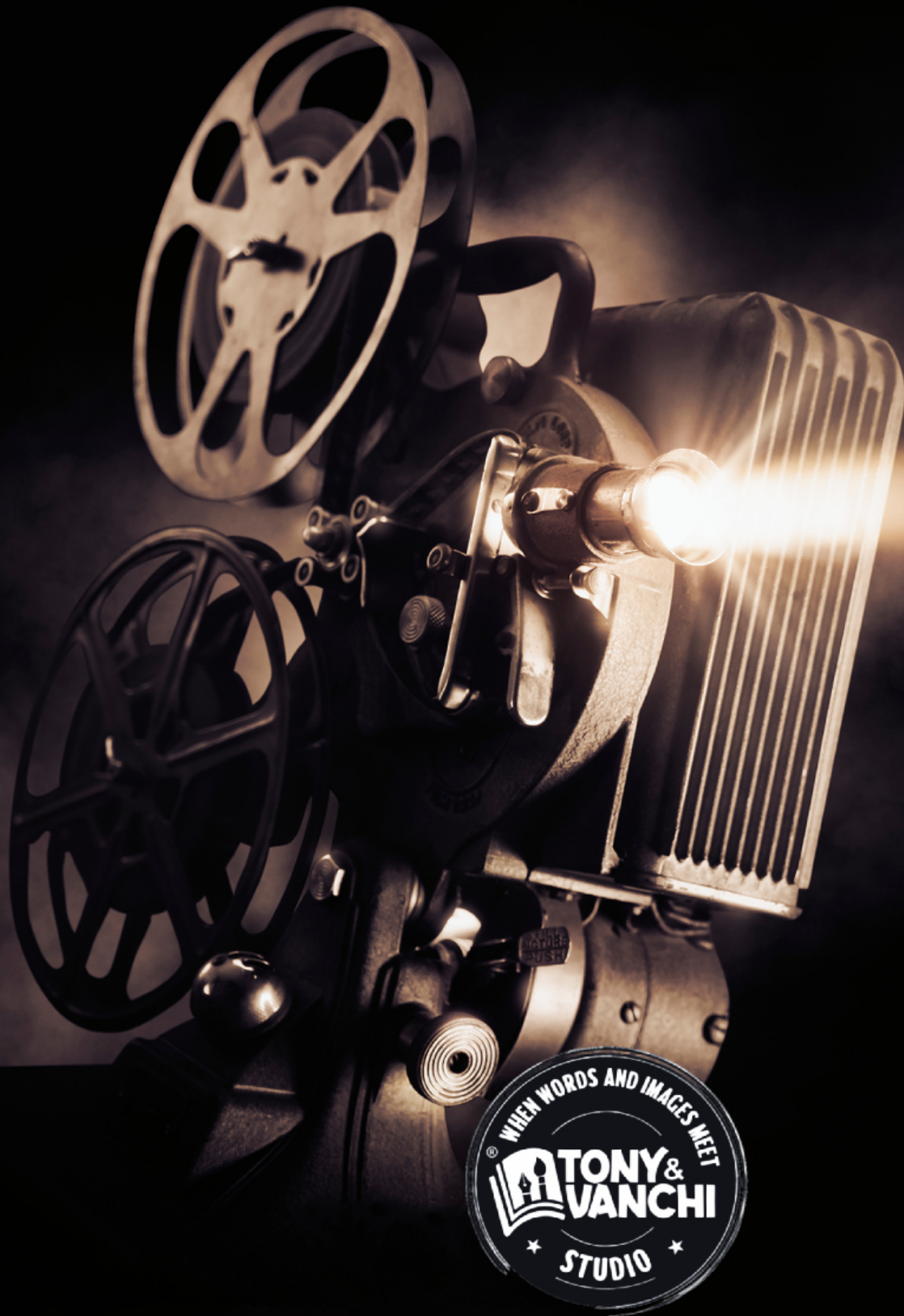


A 35mm *adventure*



A 35 mm adventure

IVAN BOLANOS

A 35 MM ADVENTURE

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First printed edition by Editorial Bruno (Peru), 2019

Edited by Tony & Vanchi

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CHAPTER 1

I got out of bed pleased that morning. I was excited. Finally, the day had come, and nothing would prevent me from attending my special screening with the magic movie exhibitor. That's what I like to call my friend, and soon you will know why. We had a meeting at ten. Knowing that I was about to experience something that very few had lived in the world had me more than happy, and I must confess I was a little nervous.

I bathed faster than usual and hadn't finished dressing when I heard my mother's voice, "Miguel, come down for breakfast."

I could smell the delicious aroma of scrambled eggs with bacon, my favorites. She didn't make them daily, maybe several times a week. Toast, strawberry jam, and freshly squeezed orange juice completed the table. Occasionally, we would spoil ourselves with a tamale or a humita.

"I'm coming, Mom," I replied, finishing adjusting the laces on my new shoes. It had been my birthday the week before. That day, my mother's sister and her two sons, Ricardo and Gonzalo, visited us. Even though my cousins are a little younger than me, we always had a good time.

As you may recall, I have a fondness for cinema, specifically Seventh Art. I like movies of almost all genres. However, I must confess that I am not particularly fond of romantic movies. My mom says that one day I will like them. Well, at sixteen, that hasn't happened yet, and I doubt I'd like them for much longer.

I don't have a clear memory of my dad. He left this world when I was young, so it has always been my mother and me. She is a museologist, passionate about art and history. Coincidentally, she was on vacation around those days, recharging energy to start an ambitious cataloging

project at the Lima Art Museum soon. By the way, her name is Ines, and she is the most beautiful woman in the world.

Our two-story apartment is very spacious and modern. My mother inherited the building, which is in an advanced state of disrepair. Still, thanks to the convenient agreement she reached with the investor who bought the property, the entire place was renovated, and as part of the payment, we could keep one of the beautiful duplexes.

There are three rooms on the upper floor: my mother's bedroom, mine, and a slightly smaller one we use as a living room. There stands out a tall piece of furniture full of books, and to one side, a table on which a television rests.

The kitchen, the living room, and the dining room are good and very well distributed on the first floor. The flowers were never lacking, which my mother arranged in beautiful, delicate porcelain vases inherited from her grandmother.

As usual, I went down the stairs two at a time, and when I got to the kitchen, there she was, with her hair tied back and wearing a delicate cotton dress. My mom looked pretty since she got up. I always told her that she didn't need makeup to look good.

"Good morning, Mom."

"Good morning, son. You got off just in time. Breakfast was getting cold."

"I lingered on my new shoes."

"Don't forget to thank your aunt Sofia the next time you see her. Or better yet, call her to tell her how much you like them."

"I will do that. You don't eat anything, Mom?"

“My stomach hurts a little; my gastritis. I just prepared for you.”

Through the kitchen window, the bright rays of the sun entered. Everything indicated that it would be a typical summer day.

I was finishing my third toast when my mother asked me, after caressing my head affectionately, “Where did you tell me you were going? To the movies?”

“Yes, I'm going to my friend Luis's projection room. Do you remember the man who helped us make the screenings at my school?”

“I didn't get to know him, but everyone was delighted with his contribution to making the film festival a success. They commented that he is a very gentle and courteous man.”

“He invited me to a special screening this morning. Do you want to come?”

“I'd love to, son. But I must do some paperwork at the notary. I can pick you up later when the movie ends.”

“Luis told me it would last until noon.”

“Perfect, so we do. Don't forget to brush your teeth before going out.”

I ran upstairs to the second floor, and after combing my hair and using toothpaste, I stopped by the living room to pick up a book. I wanted to ask Luis what he thought of Tom Sawyer's Adventures, my favorite Mark Twain book. It had almost no dust on the cover. My mother taught me as a child to always keep everything clean and tidy. Books were no exception and deserved special care.

I went down to the first floor again, and although I did it more slowly this time, I must confess that the emotion grew and grew within me as I remembered the magic I witnessed the first time I visited the movie

theater above Luis's office. It was a few blocks from home, inside some galleries a few meters from San Martin Square.

It was almost nine. We were still an hour away from our meeting, but I could hardly wait. I said goodbye to my mother with a kiss and hurried out in the direction of the square. I would spend some time there when it was time to look for my friend.

The imposing monument to General San Martin looked particularly majestic that morning. I enjoyed the view of the facades of the always elegant Bolivar Hotel and the National Club. The square was inaugurated in 1921 to celebrate the centenary of the independence of Peru. In 2019, there were barely two years left to reach the bicentennial.

As I anticipated during breakfast, the day was sunny, and caramel apples and cotton candy vendors offered their sweet products to passers-by of all ages. I checked my pocket and pulled out a bill. I had enough to indulge myself and still had some money left over.

Comfortably seated on the marble exedras, people of various ages fed the pigeons, throwing canary food or breadcrumbs on the granite floor. They rarely took flight, even when some mischievous child tried to catch them, running after them with more enthusiasm than agility.

You could see a simple sign of the multiplex cinema that stood just a few meters from Union Street's corner with Ocoña Street from the square. The colorful marquees from the time of the old Metro or Colon Cinemas could not be used by municipal ordinance, but I knew perfectly well which

films were shown in the complex of modern theaters. I did not have to consult my smartphone.

Among the options on the billboard was the marathon of a successful science fiction movie. During the 1980s, the saga had started a great legion of fans, and now I was no exception. I had been eagerly anticipating the viewing of these movies.

Lost in my thoughts, I imagined for a moment that I was piloting a fighter of the Resistance when I heard a soft voice, "Looks delicious! What does it taste like?"

Those words immediately brought me back to reality. I met a little boy, dirty and barefoot, who was looking at me with bright, lively eyes.

"Have you ever had a caramel apple?"

"Never!" he replied, smiling.

"Well, we must solve that immediately. What's your name?"

"Jorge."

Accompanied by my new friend, I looked for the apple seller at the opposite end of the square. We caught up with him, and I bought one for little Jorge.

"Your change, young man," the man gave me back some coins. I thanked him and immediately offered that crimson treasure to my vivacious companion.

The boy took an even bigger bite than I did. You could tell he was more than happy.

"It is delicious!" he said in his small voice.

“Thank you for the opportunity to do something for you and give me that smile.”

At that moment, I noticed the clock that adorned one of the buildings in the square, and I remembered that it was almost time to look for Luis.

“Now I must go on my way, Jorge. I hope we see each other again.”

The boy smiled again and walked away, interested in some pigeons hopping nearby.

CHAPTER 2

I entered the shopping galleries and hurriedly headed for the stairs. They were the first escalators to arrive in Peru, and they still worked inside that old building that stood between Carabaya and Union streets. They were deep red, with golden edges. With their mere appearance, they seemed to invite you to enjoy a colorful spectacle as you climbed their metal steps.

I went up to the second floor and approached a recently varnished door, where it hung a sign that read Films of the World. The first time I read it, it seemed like the best name for a company to distribute and exhibit motion pictures. On the wall on the other side of the door, a beautiful and shiny flat sculpture of a movie projector made of bronze, no bigger than a memorial plaque, invited me to imagine countless stories and adventures.

I knocked twice, firmly. The door was soon open, and a voice greeted me enthusiastically:

“Welcome, Miguel!”

“Hi, Luis. Thanks for the invitation.”

He was a man in his sixties with strong features and thick gray hair. His eyes allowed one to guess his intelligence, and his kind manners made one feel comfortable from the first moment.

“You have nothing to thank. I appreciate your punctuality. An essential detail if one day you want to become a magical exhibitor.”

“Me!? A magical exhibitor?”

“Why not? You may have what it takes to continue this important legacy. You should know that magic exhibitors don't usually stay for more than twenty or thirty years. The time to pass the torch is not far off.”

Luis must have noticed my astonished expression because, after a moment, he added, "But maybe I'm getting ahead of myself. You must first experience your first visit."

"Visit?" I asked, intrigued.

"That's what we usually call trips into movies," he explained.

"Right! I'm going in for the first time today. Will Boris join us?"

"He's about to come."

"What movie are we going to visit?" I could barely hide my excitement knowing I would also enter this time.

"A wonderful one, released about thirty years ago," Luis's eyes seemed to take on a unique brightness.

"Will you give me a clue?"

"It's Italian, from one of my favorite filmmakers. You're going to like it a lot, Miguel. What do you have there?"

"I had forgotten. Do you like the books of Mark Twain? Look, this is a hardcover edition." I proudly displayed the magnificent copy.

"Of course!" Luis exclaimed. "Two of my favorite characters are Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. One of these days, we should get together to talk at length about our favorite books."

Luis's office looked very neat and clean. Posters of various genres of films from Europe and the United States hung on the walls.

One that I liked very much was E.T., The Extraterrestrial. The image of the flying bicycle against the magnificent, bright moon was very captivating. Luis told me it was one of the highest-grossing films of the early 1980s.

Another poster that always caught my attention was Jaws. The figure of that giant shark emerging from the depths of the sea just below the defenseless body of a woman was an image that, as a child, had given me more than one nightmare. Now, it no longer scared me, but I must confess that even now, it was very shocking.

“Come on, Miguel, let's go up to the projection room.”

“Get me out of doubt. Why previously were some shows called matinees or vermouth?”

“They are words of French origin,” Luis replied, “and in Peru, we adopt them to mark the first and second screenings of the day. Around three and six in the afternoon.”

“How interesting!” I exclaimed.

“Nobody calls them like that anymore, and with modern multiplex cinemas' many shows, it wouldn't make sense.”

At that moment, we heard Boris's voice. He spoke with a peculiar accent, greeting us as he closed the office door. He was a short man in his early seventies, his gray hair adorning only the sides of his head. He was always clean-shaven and sharp-eyed, in a perfectly pressed shirt and tie.

“Thank you for your patience. I lingered in the square for a moment because of a caramel apple. They are delicious!”

I couldn't help but smile. The image of little Jorge enjoying his food for the first time came to me.

We climbed the stairs that led from the office to the next floor. There was the projection room, or microcinema, as Luis also liked to call it. Thick and impeccable red velvet curtains served as the entrance door. They blocked out light from outside, as in the days when cinemas had capacity

for more than a thousand spectators and were distributed in stalls, mezzanines, and even balconies.

Inside, six rows of seats, with eight spots each, allowed forty-eight people to be comfortably installed. The seats were also finely upholstered, giving their occupants great comfort. In the background, an ecran, or screen, sized according to the room's dimensions, always seemed ready to show us all the magic of cinema.

"What is the ecran made of, Luis?" I asked with my usual curiosity. "I don't remember the word well."

"Vinyl."

"That, vinyl! Like the antennas of the Mexican hero: the Red Grasshopper."

"Something like that," Luis chuckled softly.

"Sit where you want, Miguel," Boris invited me to make myself comfortable. "The show is about to begin. It will only take Luis a moment to operate the Century."

Seconds later, I heard the projector's characteristic sound when it started to work, and the 35mm film began its journey from one reel to another.

"We just changed the electrodes. We will have the brightest projection!" Luis told me after sitting beside Boris behind my seat.

Although modern equipment used xenon lamps to produce the beam of light necessary to project films, Luis still maintained the tradition of using carbon electrodes, not as powerful but sufficient for a room of small proportions.

"What is the name of the movie?" I was curious and impatient.