

"El Cantante"

PIECES OF MEMORIES...ARE SEEN. LIKE A DREAM.

CLOSE UP of a pair of hands beating on a CONGA. A TIMBALES roll...an *abanico*. A Furious rhythm starts. HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE KEEPING THE *clave* with their hand claps. THE VOICE OF THE SINGER...we dont' see.

SINGER

Puerto Rico...te quiero de gratis!

Fingers FLUTTER ON THE KEYS OF A TRUMPET...as more percussion and BASS cook up the SALSA. We hear thunder. And FRAGMENTS of the face of the singer as lightning strikes. EXTREME CLOSE UPS OF A FACE, DESPERATE EYES. THE DARK SKIES.

THE CHEER AND BOOS OF FANS...

THEN, A HORRIBLE NOISE: FEEDBACK SCREAMS...an electrical malfunction...and everything turns into A SLOW MOTION NIGHTMARE.

A BLACK SCREEN. COMPLETE SILENCE.

A PAIR OF BEAUTIFUL EYES OPEN UP AFTER THE BAD MEMORY ENDS.

A SCRATCHY CASSETTE. A VOICE IS HEARD.

It's the whiny unforgettable voice of HECTOR LAVOE. One of Salsa's biggest. El Cantante de Los Cantantes. The SINGER OF SINGERS...now coming out of an old cassette player.

HECTOR

...you see, I'm right here with you...okay?

INT. PUCHI'S 2002 APARTMENT -- DAY

A simple tenement somewhere in the Bronx. A picture of Hector in his glory days hangs on a wall. Next to him, a beautiful woman, holding on to his arm. He's her prize. She is PUCHI, the love of his life.

HECTOR

Never never leave you mami...it's not the same thing as being there with you...touching you, kissing you...bueno, I better stop...just wanted to tell you over and over I Love You...and I'm right here with you. See me? Happy birthday Puchi...
(singing)
Happy...

PUCHI

(to herself)
...never leave me? But you did.

She stops the machine. But the pain doesn't stop.

She walks into frame. Stands next to the stereo...turns the volume up. She listens to the music...and for a moment does a little sway, tries a couple of steps, but it hurts and she stops moving...that's all her broken heart can handle on her special day.

AN ABSTRACT BLUR FILLS THE SCREEN.

RED COLORS...BRIGHT AS BLOOD...and TROPICAL BLUE, as the most beautiful ocean. The colors move...slowly coming into FOCUS.

THE FLAG OF PUERTO RICO

bobs in the air. It's a CAP someone's wearing.

A DIFFERENT STYLE OF MUSIC PLAYS LOUDLY...

it rattles the street with bass and attitude. POUNDING RAP.

TITLES BEGIN.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET -- DAY

A young Nuyorican kid moves through a busy MIDTOWN sidewalk. It's 2002. His whole demeanor, rhythm and style is very much NOW. The walk is the Bronx-Swing thirty years later. A CITY ANIMAL in his street war uniform.

The hip-hop MUSIC screaming out of an appliance store tells a story of rough living and urban anarchy...and it makes the young man wearing the cap feel like he OWNS LIFE. His and everyone else. He stares back at US, knowing we are watching him. He knows THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING him. He winks at someone...at a woman observing him as he struts out of sight. It's Puchi.

EXT. STORE WINDOW -- DAY

Now we see her clearly, as she catches her own reflection in the store's mirrored panels...her face, lost amongst every ELECTRONIC gadget imaginable... and the usual array of NYC souvenirs. She stares at herself with the same curiosity as she did when she watched the YOUNG MAN.

She likes what she sees. She looks worn and beautifully damaged...someone whose life took as hard as she gave...the EYES you own when you've SURVIVED every war you've created.

SHE LOOKS ACROSS THE STREET:

Madison Square Garden...yeah there was a time. WE HEAR HER VOICE -- as she goes inside a much more unknown, forgotten and near condemned building on a side street.

PUCHI OS

He didn't know how much he had...never believed how much people loved him.

AN ON CAMERA INTERVIEW...

Puchi is looking straight through us now. A CLOSE UP ON HER FACE...a map of the whole doomed journey now finished.

PUCHI

He had it all...and he had me.

She laughs...we hear the laughter. Yes...through that laugh we can see there was a time when she had that walk and strut and she OWNED LIFE HERSELF...and nothing was going to knock her out of the ring.

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

Puchi looks around the forsaken recording studio, where hundreds of hits were once recorded, now waits silent and empty. She's been here before. A piano sits in a corner, crowned with empty cans of soda and dust. Congas in a corner...tipped sideways. A floor littered with maracas and musical instruments...and memories.

PUCHI OS

...for more than twenty years...

A room that has seen better days.

Puchi is facing a small crew of YOUNG Latin- music freaks...maybe french-hispanophiles. She smokes nervously, trying to glamorize her last fifteen minutes in the spotlight.

PUCHI

Was it love? What is? One thing I know; it was special...and when you looked at us, you saw something...so maybe it was. I thought so. I did.

(her eyes coming alive)

Our life was like a dream...

(to CAMERA)

Yeah...I know what you're thinking.

INT. BATHROOM -- DAY

An IVORY PRINCESS PHONE RINGING is off the hook. The light flickers from the candles on the edge of the marble sink and bathtub.

K.C.'s **"Get Down Tonight"** kicks in as two perfectly pedicured feet with fire red toenails stretch out of the bubbles. One foot clasps around the tub chain and pulls the plug.

The shadowy outline of the WOMAN steps out of the tub, grabs a towel, and raps it around her voluptuous body.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

A lavishly furnished BEDROOM. The wardrobe and accessories for the night are laid out on either side of the bed.

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Valentino dress, black silk panties, bra on one side. Gold Cartier lighter, monogrammed leather cigar case, her cigars in it, jewelry, fur, purse on the other.

THE WOMAN, now dressed to kill, stands in front of a full length mirror.

She puts on a GOLD I.D. NECKLACE, the name PUCHI is spelled in diamonds.

PUCHI OS
Was it good love? Well, that's
another story..

Puchi gives her devastating beauty a final look of approval then walks out, grabbing a MAN'S WHITE SUIT off the door hanger on the way.

A QUICK FLASH:

INT. FANIA RECORDS -- DAY (2002)

Puchi quickly walks down A DILAPIDATED HALLWAY. Yesterday's Gold records and artwork decorate the walls. She goes to another DOOR, opens it.

BACK TO SCENE (55 STREET APT)

Disco music blares out of the room. A handsome Puerto-Rican man in his late thirties, is startled by her. His name is COOKIE. A combination of many tasks and no specific job. He grabs a jacket, checks his watch and prepares for an ugly mission.

PUCHI
Let's go.

*

INT. 55TH ST. APT. LIVING ROOM -DAY

Posters of bands on the wall. A teen-ager stares her down, it's her son TITO. A handsome, defiant young man.

PUCHI
(to the kid)
I don't wanna go out looking for you
too when we come home, okay?

The man-kid ignores her as best as he can.

A FLASH OF PUCHI TODAY...(INTERVIEW)

*

as she closes her eyes, as if that one memory still BURNS.

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. HIGH RISE APT (55 ST). BUILDING - DAY

*

Puchi and Cookie walk out of the building up to a waiting LIMO.

EXT. 9TH STREET & AVE C -- NIGHT

ANOTHER WORLD. JUNKIES and PREDATORS move through the trash ridden streets of Loisaída. The place stinks of death and danger. *

PUCHI OS

Love is never perfect when it's real
love...

The Limo turns the corner off Ave. D onto 9th Street and stops in front of a squatters TENEMENT BUILDING.

EXT. TENEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Puchi walks right up the steps, to a scary, intimidating LOOKOUT GUY at the entrance. She stares him down. He moves.

INT. TENEMENT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Puchi passes by the JUNKIES waiting in line. Doesn't even see them.

PUCHI OS

We were meant for each other for
better or worse. We both knew that.

INT. TENEMENT - SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A very determined Puchi struts down the abandoned dirty halls. Another LOOKOUT GUY moves aside as his eyes register recognition when he hears the steady clicking of high heels approaching.

PUCHI OS

...and I don't mean it like today's
soulmate type of shit...nah.

INT. SHOOTING GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Three unshaven, stoned MEN, dressed in dirty sweat suits sit on a couch, one wearing SUNGLASSES. The table in front of them is covered with drug gear. *

PUCHI OS

It was old fashioned love. It was
good, it was bad, it was beautiful.

Puchi struts in. Everyone freezes except the guy wearing the sunglasses, who waves...and smiles, unable to disguise the absurdity of playing dead with so much to live for. It's Hector. Just a tad surprised. *

HECTOR

Hi, honey...

INT. LIMO -LATER

The Limo flies uptown. Puchi and Cookie get to work on Hector like a make over Pit Crew. Off comes the stinky running jacket. Out comes an electric shaver, hair brush, toothbrush...

HECTOR

You know I love you...

PUCHI

Yeah...you always love me when you're high.

HECTOR

Yeah...but I'm always high!

Puchi pulls out a coke vial...as the Limo takes a fast turns, she ends up on top of him...and so does the coke. White powder all over his face. Puchi looks at her Hector, licks his cheek and mouth jokingly...she smiles proudly at the craziness of it all. *

PUCHI

Look at you.

He smiles back...snorting up the rest of the powder spill. *

HECTOR

Look at you.

INT. BACK STAGE OFFICE - LATER

JERRY MASUCCI, a bearded Italian plays nervously with the gold chains around his neck...ready to strangle himself with them.

JERRY

It's not his fault...it's yours...and you're my fault. But this is the last time he does this. *

He points his finger at RALPH, a stocky mulatto skinned balding man. Rican and slick. Ralph's on the phone. He listens, hangs up.

RALPH

(grinning)

Elvis is in the building.

INT. ARENA HALLWAY -- NIGHT

People rush down a long corridor. The intro to "**El Cantante**" is heard from the stage as our man walks down the corridor, everyone slapping him on the back, like a boxer going into the ring. *

RALPH

Move! Move! Let the man through!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN STAGE -- NIGHT

Hector enter stage, as casual as stepping into his living room. As he turns, he sees what awaits him: 20,000 fans cheering. They stand up for him as he shuffles to center stage.

MAN

(singing)

Yo soy, Hector Lavoe and...

(with a grin)

I'm here!

Thunderous APPLAUSE follows. The BAND goes into second gear as he continues to sing. Hector made it.

HE TAKES A GLANCE OFF STAGE, TO THE WINGS, HE SEES PUCHI. He smiles at her. The world is his...tonight.

He kicks into the first verse of : **"El Cantante"**. *

HECTOR SINGING

"Yo, soy el cantante..."

THE FACES IN THE AUDIENCE: sheer adulation. (STOCK FOOTAGE from those days) HECTOR spreads his arms to his thousands of adoring fans. THE PUERTO RICAN FLAG spreads out in the balcony. The crowd CHEERS as the flag DANCES...a subtle, but defining political PARTY, live from New York City.

PUCHI OS

The more he grew as an artist, the deeper he sank as a person, as a human being...but they loved him. All his faults and trouble...only made him more like one of them...

THE MUSIC ECHOES AWAY...

as the FLASHBACK ENDS. A POSTER FROM THAT DATE, HANGS ON A WALL...the past is long gone, we're in...

INT. FANIA RECORDS -- DAY

INTERVIEW

No one is clapping now as she builds up the courage to tell the story in her mind. Whatever that is.

PUCHI

He was the singer for his father's band since he was a kid...they played all over the city of Ponce ...X-mas parties, weddings, etc. His father

(MORE) *

PUCHI (CONT'D)

loved him and was very supportive...his mother died when he was three...but he would talk about her as if she was still alive...he never accepted the fact that she was gone. Hector never had it hard...that was the problem. He made it hard for himself because it had all been too easy.

She smiles, as if there was only one reason for everything she does now days. Looks around room, seeing him everywhere.

INTERVIEWER OS

What are you thinking about?

Caught.

PUCHI

What do you think? Him...it's always him.

The room falls quiet. This is part of the story.

PUCHI OS

(a sigh)

He never goes away...maybe it's just my fucking guilt.

We see PUCHI peeking through the glass inside the SOUND BOOTH. It's like walking through the Titanic...death everywhere. No one will ever return to this musical tomb.

A LONELY MICROPHONE STANDS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM...WAITING FOR A SINGER, suddenly...

WE HEAR HECTOR'S VOICE...

HECTOR

"...recuerdas que, caminando por las calles de San Juan..."

EXT. OLD WORLD STYLE COURTYARD/SAN JUAN -- NIGHT

*

(a GIG with his father's band...)

Back home in Puerto Rico, Hector and his father are singing a duet. Hector plays guitar. A BOLERO PLAYS...angels singing. It's a family reunion.

A Spanish guitar and a beautiful song, Panchito Riset's "**Blancas Azucenas**". A love story of lovers splitting when one of them leaves the island and goes to New York. A classic San Juan/New York tale of immigration breaking love in two. Later to become sort of a love theme.

HECTOR/FATHER

(singing)

...aun guardo las dos blancas
azucenas, que me diste hasta
despedirte de mi..."

Family is watching the magic moment. As the song ends in beautiful harmony of the two men...Hector hugs the old man with a beautiful voice (CHEO FELICIANO)...with a smile on his face, as he sees Hector enjoying the cheers. The old man turns to Hector and without skipping a beat, whispers...totally unexpectedly.

FATHER

If you go to New York...just imagine
I died. I already lost one son...and
I am not going to lose another one.
It will be you who loses a father
...understood?

(to a woman nearby)

Awilda, how'bout a beer for a loving
man?

He walks away. Leaving Hector shattered.

No one around notices the exchange. Hector turns white. It's the nicest threat anyone ever said to him. Tonight, it's his father just telling him 'how serious' a felony it would be for Hector to go north. He gets up himself and walks away from the stage, only the sounds of the COQUIS are heard out there in the darkness...

A BLAST OF NEW YORK CITY...

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS -- DAY/NIGHT

*

The old days in all it's splendor. Tad's Steak, Tie City, The Metropole Cafe, Automats, Theater lights, Penny Arcades, etc. TIMES SQUARE in the sixties...a naive version of SIN.
(STOCK)

Hector's in heaven.

EXT. HUNT'S POINT CASINO - BACK STAGE DOOR -- NIGHT

Just as a BAND BOY carries a Trombone case from a VAN inside the stage door, Hector strolls up. Mister Casual. He sees one of them. A young man we know, a younger, confident Cookie, way before LIFE had turned him into a punchy boxer that never fought a fight.

HECTOR

Hey, man, you need some help?

COOKIE

(looking around)

Yeah...hurry up.

Cookie grabs a CONGA out of the back. Hector does the same. He follows the band boy in. Cookie winks an eye at Hector. In and free.

INT. CLUB -- NIGHT

A Tropical paradise in the asphalt jungle.

The dance floor packed with beautiful, young NUYORICANS dancing to live Salsa music. LARRY HARLOW, a hot new band, plays their asses off. Hector notices a stunningly beautiful woman dancing by herself on the dance floor...as if dancing with each member of the band and busy with every guy in the house. It's Puchi. Younger but never too innocent.

Hector sees her, like his dream...a vision he has to look away from, cause she can't be real. Puchi only sees a geeky looking guy drooling like he should.

HECTOR

I thought you were with the band?

COOKIE

So did I...aren't you?

They both laugh.

A hopped up cat wearing a silver shark skin suit spots Cookie. It's PAPO, he happens to be Puchi's hoodlum brother. He flashes a gold tooth smile of a warning at Hector...who is hypnotized by the Music and the Scene.

HECTOR

Salsa?

COOKIE

That's what they call it here in New York. Salsa...it's a mix of Mambo, Bomba, Son...Charanga. It's like a revolution cooking, bro. Everybody is into it. Welcome to New York Bro!

Hector nods...yes, this is better than what he always dreamed of.

HECTOR WAKES UP...as a woman screams:

WOMAN OS

Hector wake up!!!

INT. PRISCILLA'S APT. -- DAY

Linoleum, and plastic covered seats. He bolts out of his dream. His sister PRISCILLA, standing by the sofa where he sleeps.

PRISCILLA

I'm giving you two more weeks, you hear me?

Hector nods.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

Two weeks to get a job or you go back to Puerto Rico. You understand?

HECTOR

What did I do? Wha'happened?

PRISCILLA

I'm serious. I don't want dad to disown me too. Okay?

Hector sits up. Confronts her as much as you can when you're only wearing baggy shorts and a pajama top.

HECTOR

I'm here to be a singer Priscilla, not to prove my father wrong. I'll have a job so fast, you wont even know I have a job. You'll be asking 'where is he?...where is he...?'. And me...? You'll see.

A SUBWAY RATTLES BY...

EXT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

*

A seedy looking storefront underneath the train in a 125th Street. They walk inside the old nightclub.

COOKIE

Look, these are my friends.

The subways rattles by. Hector looks up, startled.

HECTOR

I better get a job or I'm flying back on Eastern Airlines...you told them about me?

Hector belts out a couple of lines from a song.

COOKIE

Shit, man...you gotta good voice. This is the best time for you to be in New York. But don't get any ideas. They already have a singer. Just enjoy the show, man.

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

*

The place is half-empty, a sextet is playing, vamping into a song and without a singer.

The musicians look a little nervous as they look around for their vocalist.

The band is playing "**Tus Ojos**". A fidgety Hector is standing nearby...singing the song to himself, but loud enough to be heard. The leader of the band sees Cookie, who points to Hector...implying 'he can do it...he can fill in'. The guy waves him over.

COOKIE

Hector...mira man...

HECTOR

I know that song better than anyone here tonight.

COOKIE

You better. It's now or never panita.

Hector does the sign of the cross as he makes his way through the crowd as the leader heats up the band and introduced Hector.

BAND LEADER

You're ready out there for a surprise?

Cookie wants to die, as Hector walks up to the stage to show the world. The band starts it up and all it takes is one minute for Hector to own the song.

HECTOR

Okay...okay.

(confident)

Como esta mi gente esta
noche...esperandome, right? I'm here.

*

Hector stays on the stage and steals the show.

INTERVIEW -

INT. FANIA RECORDS -- DAY

Puchi plays with a gold chain she's wearing. Tries not to look at the Camera in front of her.

PUCHI

...that's how we say in Spanish when you're blessed...you know...some people struggle for years...not him...it's like he always knew it was going to happen...that he'd make it...

(the gold cross in
between her fingers)

This is his... That first time I saw him, he was the most ridiculous guy in the place...but the only one

(MORE)

PUCHI (CONT'D)

who brought me a present...he didn't even know me...but he had manners, that old fashioned thing...I loved that.

(to camera)

You know, it's my birthday today?

*

INTERVIEWER OS

Happy birthday.

A JOE CUBA BOOGALOO blasts. The MUSIC is coming from...

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE. ROOFTOP -- DAY

*

Like a garden for Puerto-Ricans. The city lights in the back as the sun goes down. All the money in the world couldn't buy you this.

A Boogaloo line is on full swing. It's dirty dancing a lot dirtier. Hot Nuyorican beauties. Hector has stepped in the new West Side Story, dressed in a 100% polyester. He thinks he looks cool in his Bond's naguehyde leather jacket that you could make a sofa today with it...

Jibaro hick in the thick of the SIXTIES MEET THE LATIN THING. Joe Cuba playing on the STEREO "**Bang Bang**". His eyes go straight to a girl in the dancing line, it's Puchi, the girl from the nightclub. She sees him...and kind of laughs when their eyes meet. Little mockery in the way she throws her head back to the music. Hector takes it well. Laughing is a good thing.

She's easily the best dancer in the room and she lets Hector see for himself. It's a music video ahead of it's time.

The Latino hoodlum we've seen earlier is there...he's carrying a birthday cake with lit candles and moves all the way in front of Puchi...the music is lowered as the brother starts singing AND SO DOES HECTOR, with the best version of Happy Birthday in the Lower East Side.

LATER

Hector pretends he's not alone, when he sees Puchi walking towards him, like a vision. He's like a hunter who sees the big game coming to him, but can't shoot. He's going to let the animal eat him alive. Once at close range, he smiles at Puchi for the first time.

HECTOR

Hello there...happy happy birthday...sorry I didn't remember your name...

Puchi stares at Hector, the look you give a big square hick fresh off the island.

PUCHI
Are you in the right apartment?

HECTOR
I think so...

Handing her a present.

PUCHI
For me? Who invited you?

Hector looks around, maybe he's at the wrong place. She opens the present.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
(surprised)
Chocolates, how sweet.

Maybe he's at the wrong apartment.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
My brother told me about you.
...you're an actor? Not too famous,
right?

Hector grins sheepishly

PUCHI (CONT'D)
I know you ...you're Trini
Lopez...right?

HECTOR
(Mexican accent)
That's right...

He manages a little smile from her.

PUCHI
You're the singer, my brother said
you're a singer...right? Well, you
are...

Hector nods humbly. Cuts in.

HECTOR
Bueno...yeah....I am. Everyone's
always talking about Puchi this...and
Puchi that. And you...? What do
you do? You're the famous one.

PUCHI
Me? I listen.

HECTOR
That's all I need to sing my best...a
good pair of...
(eyeing her)
...ears.

*

PUCHI

You're funny...but your pants are
even funnier.

He checks himself out. He's the only hick in the room wearing
polyester plaid pants. She laughs.

HECTOR

(little surprised)
They're four dollar pants. Tu eres
mala!

PUCHI

Mala?
(flirting)
I'm just being me, not mean... honest.
Honesty is a virtue, right?

HECTOR

Look, lie to me, tell me these are
the most beautiful pants you've ever
seen...cause you know what...they're
the only ones I got...and unless is
okay to take them off...I'm gonna
have to wear them al night long.

*

PUCHI

You will?

She blushes. Hector bends in pain hearing the tease...

Papo joins them briefly. Lights a joint. Before Hector can
even say hello, he's been handed a joint.

PAPO

(to Hector)
Ladies First...

HECTOR

No...I don't...

Puchi goes for the joint, Papo gives the joint right to
Hector.

PAPO

(to Puchi)
You smoke in front of me and I'll
kill you. ..
(to Hector)
do you?

HECTOR

Okay.
(takes it)
Thank you.

Papo walks away.

Hector studies the joint. First joint in his life. He takes a drag and blows it right out. Puchi looks on.

PUCHI
Not like a cigarette, man...
(surprised)
you've never smoked have you...?

Hector fears what to say next, he'll do whatever he's got to do to keep her next to him.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
Mira...watch me...
(without a joint)
...look, you're supposed to hold it
inside.

She mimics a smoking lesson specially for Hector. It's almost a sexual act. Hector watches fascinated.

HECTOR
Wow! Here...let me try it again...I
think I got the rhythm of it...

He does it, like a good little student. In...and out...and in and out...a turbo-giant toke that he can't hold....GETS INTO A COUGHING FIT...HAS TO HOLD on to Puchi. Passes the joint to her, she doesn't want it.

LATER AT THE PARTY

The night is winding down. Puchi and Hector are Slow dancing to the Casino's great LOVE song "**Then You can Tell Me Good bye**".

INT. PAPO'S APT. - NIGHT

The two of them slow dance around them in the funky living room.

HECTOR
(eyes closed)
...far out, right?

Hector looks blitzed... 'arrebatao'. They're now alone in the once crowded room. Hector is only wearing his shorts. and shirt. Puchi is fully dressed. His plaid pants over the sofa. His head in THE SONG:

SONG
"...kiss me each morning for a million
years...hold me each evening, by
your side...and if it don't
work...then you can tell me
goodbye..."

But it'll work out...for the next 15 years of the tune.

It's all romantic and beautiful until Puchi notices Hector's romantic face is turning blue, green, ash and he's losing his balance and he leans closer and closer to her...almost falling over her. She pulls him back, to check him...he's about to pass out. She holds him up, to save him from going backwards and over the sofa.

PUCHI

Not in the sofa...!

INT. BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Hector is being revived by Puchi, as he struggles over the toilet, glancing at her...not sure of who she is or where he is or why? A comical but defining moment in their lives. Hector wasted, Puchi to the rescue.

PUCHI

Come on...are you Okay? What's your name papi...come on, I don't want you to die without knowing your name.

HECTOR

Hector Perezzz.....

PUCHI

Don't die on me baby...not on my birthday...promise?

HECTOR

I prom...
(he can't finish the
promise)

He manages a smile from the dead...staring at her...happy to be dying in the arms of the most beautiful woman human eyes ever laid whatever on. Happy dead.

She looks at him...smiling again, coming back to life, gesturing with his chin...something...what?

PUCHI

You need mouth to
mouth...resuscitation? Is that it...

He nods...yes. She just laughs.

He shakes his head...he'll die if he doesn't get it...or dies if he does. From the bottom of this bathroom floor tonight and as dizzy as he was, he was a happy man.

EXT. TUXEDO CITY -- DAY

Mannequins dressed in every imaginable bad suit in the world. Hector and Cookie land by the window of the place.

COOKIE

Look at that baby blue tux..

A badly hung over Hector explains to his friend Cookie.

HECTOR

I can't look...

Hector takes a glance at the wigged-mustachioed mannequin, has to look away...the L-train rattles above them.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I woke up in her arms, man.
Beautiful. She took care of
business...

COOKIE

What kind of business?

Coming up with a lie, an improvisation...an inspiration.

HECTOR

...the welfare of a man... dizzy
with desire... and passing out with
passion...she gave me life back.

COOKIE

That good?

HECTOR

No. That bad. I drank, I smoked, I
danced and then...I threw up all
over the poor girl...I doubt if she'll
ever see me again...I wouldn't.

They stop before going inside.

COOKIE

You threw up? She will. Puerto-
Rican girls love that savior shit
bro...you're in. Did you really
vomit?

Hector nods.

HECTOR

You deaf or something? I said I
vomited...I was so high and dizzy...I
don't wanna do that shit again!
(re: a suit he likes)
I want the green one.

COOKIE

Pliz!

HECTOR

One minute I was in floor with a
goddess...next thing, I was dying in
her arms! My luck...

COOKIE

That's good. That's the best impression you can make with Spanish girls...is being sick. Matrimonio brother! You vomit you marry. They're natural born nurses...

HECTOR

...I woke up in the subway...I rode from Manhattan to the Bronx four or five times, until a cop woke me up...the sun in my face...

FRIEND

That's love. It's in the marriage brochure for outside of the island romance! You've been rescued, man....

HECTOR

You high already?

Cookies nods a 'guilty with pleasure' 'yes'.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

How am I going to see her again?
She liked me!

COOKIE

You're almost famous, bro. She'll find you...find us.

INT. HUNTS POINT CASINO -- NIGHT

The show is wild. The energy is intense as Hector sings an upbeat Salsa tune...and old Tejedor classic: "**Escandalo**". His charisma with the now-packed-house is mesmerizing. A chorus line of beautiful GIRLS DANCE IN FRONT OF THE BAND...instant GROUPIES latino style.

But Puchi is the prettiest. Hector is dressed in the green suit we saw earlier. He sings to Puchi, who dances her way to the front of the stage with another girl, her sister ZAIDA, another stunner, both dressed in mini skirts and Go-go boots.

Puchi puts on a show. The other girls don't have a chance, as she elbows and bumps 'accidentally' at the others...to stake her claim... and drive Hector crazy.

He shakes his maracas at her...and she shakes back. It makes him laugh and it gets him down from the stage and wrapped himself around her...

AT ANOTHER TABLE

JOHNNY PACHECO, thirties, goateed and handsome and WILLIE COLON, eighteen, skinny and dangerous, SIT AT A TABLE watching Hector and the crowd with interest. Willie's yesterday's GANGSTA.

100% attitude, but his smile lets it know that he really likes this new guy Hector.

INT. CLUB - LATER

Hector steps down after his set and is immediately swarmed by GIRLS.

HECTOR
(yelling over music)
Buenas noches ladies! You mind if
we sit here with you?

Before any of them can answer, Cookie sits, Puchi turns around and sees Hector.

PUCHI
Hello there...Is this a coincidence?

Hector moves his chair closer to one to Puchi.

HECTOR
What do you think?

He wipes HIS GLASSES off on his shirt, puts them back on.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
How do I look to you? Like a
coincidence?

*

He's wearing the green tux.

PUCHI
You look...like you still need a
fashion consultant. You look like a
palm tree. Where do you get these
outfits?

HECTOR
Is a rental...from Radio City.

They both laugh.

EXT. EMPTY ROOF -- NIGHT

Hector climbs up from the fire escape onto the roof, guitar in hand. A few dogs barking. He sees Puchi's window lit...her silhouette walking by. He lets out a song...

HECTOR
(DISCUSS NEW SONG)
" The most beautiful sound I ever
heard...Puchi...Puchi...Puchi...I
just met a girl named Puchi..."

She comes out the window. Sees Hector playing Tony for her...it makes her so happy, he's such a fool in love and so is she. She waves at him...to wait, she'll come down.

INTERVIEW flash...Puchi 2002.

PUCHI

He was funny. Corny. No one I knew did any of that. Romantic...yeah he was very romantic...that first time together was pretty impressive...yeah...he went all out for me.

*

EXT. SIDE STREET -- NIGHT

Cookie's Chevy Impala's, parked under a broken street lamp, shakes like a subway car.

PUCHI OS

Only the best...

INT. CAR -- NIGHT

Hector is on top as they make love on the torn back seat.

PUCHI

(breathlessly)

Oh, it hurts...it hurts...

HECTOR

What?...What?...me?

PUCHI

No, the back seat...

Hector holds onto her as he FLIPS HER OVER ON TOP. She smiles with relief, grabs him with her right hand and starts giving him a hand job, winking at him, then starts to wildly ride him.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

(on fire)

I can't fuckin' believe this...

EXT. EAST SIDE HIGHWAY PARK -- NIGHT

Under The Brooklyn Bridge. They're sitting in a small park bench. Smoking the cigarette after.

*

PUCHI

I don't do this with anyone.

HECTOR

I hope not.

PUCHI

I don't. I bet when you become famous you won't even talk to me.

HECTOR

Are you kidding me? I'm in love with you already... and I don't even know you.

He stops her laughter with kisses. She purrs, kisses him back.

PUCHI
What's the first thing your gonna do?

HECTOR
When?

PUCHI
When you become famous, silly.

Hector thinks as he watches the lights reflecting in the river.

HECTOR
Why are so sure I'm gonna become famous?

PUCHI
I know about these things.

Hector decides to think about it.

HECTOR
Okay. Have a family...and buy a brand new Cadillac. Then we won't have to make love in that old piece of shit...you need a tetanus shot to ride that junk!

She laughs. He kisses her, tenderly...we hear music coming from somewhere...

HECTOR OS
(singing)
" ...ever since that night, we've been together...lovers at first sight..."

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE & 23RD STREET. FLAT IRON BUILDING -- NIGHT

The end of ANOTHER night...and not a bad night at all. The sun is coming up as Hector strolls down the empty street singing to the city...still singing. He's a man in love and in luck...and there's no better feeling.

HECTOR
"...Strangers in the night, two lonely people...we were strangers in the night..."

A taxi turns a corner from behind him...HEADLIGHTS spotting Hector on his 'street stage', he turns, opens his arms to the cab...his silhouette against the city lights. He's arrived.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
Dooby doo be dooo.....

The cab stops.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
Hey, brother...you spic'ingli? Si...?
'Panita', can you make it to the
Bronx for \$2.50? It's all I got.

A FULL BAND KICKS IN AND PLAYS...

INT. HUNTS POINT CASINO -- NIGHT

Frank Sinatra never sounded this hot. HECTOR FINISHES
SINGING...his *salsafied* version of "**Stranger's in the Night**".
The club is full, he's bringing in the crowds...and bringing
in other musicians and producers as well.

HECTOR SINGING
...in love forever, it turned so
right...for strangers in the night..."
(soneos)

Johnny Pacheco and Willie Colon are here again.

LATER

The good guy and the bad guy. Willie with his shades on, a
good guy living the thug life...and Pacheco, the teacher.
Their guide through the new sound everyone is calling Salsa.
Hector is surprised they keep coming back. He walks straight
to their table.

HECTOR
You guys gotta be lost or something?
Are you?

Willie make no effort to shake Hector's hand. Johnny does.

JOHNNY
(broad smile)
Not at all, man. Como esta, my name
is Johnny Pacheco from...

HECTOR
(amused)
...from Fania Records. I know.

JOHNNY
I've been hearing a lot about you,
we've checked you out. You're good
man, you're really good.

Willie studies Hector, sipping his drink, pretending to be
unimpressed.

HECTOR

Gracias, gracias.

(to Willie)

I know you too. Willie Colon. Un
placer.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Tremendo trombone...no saxophone...I
like that...me encanta...tu eres muy
bueno, 'men'...chevere.

Willie nods as he shakes Hector's hand.

WILLIE

Thanks. I don't speak Spanish. I
like you too, bro.

*

HECTOR

Pero tu eres Spanish?

Willie nods 'yes'.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Vaya!

Johnny smiles, seeing they're getting along.

AT THE TABLE LATER

Johnny holds court. Hector and Willie listen attentively.

JOHNNY

(dramatically)

Do you guys believe in destiny?

He leans into the table, motioning them to do the same.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

(almost whispering)

Well I do. I believe destiny has
brought us to this club, to this
very table tonight.

(beat)

I believe that you two guys have
been destined to perform together.
I believe that together, you will
take this town by storm.

He looks from Willie to Hector.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You both have what the other one
needs.

The younger ones shake their heads at that.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Sound good?

Hector smiles at the sound of that...

HECTOR

(to Johnny)

You're a psychic... Everybody seems to know something about my future I don't. You're that sure?

Willie smirks his bad boy smile. Hector picks it right up.

WILLIE

I am.

(to Johnny)

You have anymore grass? *

INT. PRISCILLA'S APT. -- NIGHT

A quiet dinner with big sister, who is checking Puchi out, protecting little brother.

HECTOR

This are the best 'habichuelas' in life baby...that's why I still live here...who wants to leave?

Priscilla serves Puchi, who tries to be noble and lady like...but suspects the line of questioning.

PRISCILLA

Where were you born in the island?

PUCHI

I was born in this island.

PRISCILLA

Here?

PUCHI

Yeah...never even visited Puerto Rico...never seen a real palm tree.

HECTOR

But now she's got me. Palm trees...beaches...mofongo in person. You eat this habichuelas and your Spanish starts coming back to you. It's like Berlitz dining.

They laugh...but still, it seems a point of contention that Puchi is a Nuyorican. She gets it.

PUCHI

Maybe one day I'll make it to Puerto Rico.

(MORE)

PUCHI (CONT'D)
 (looking at Hector)
 I'll get there.

Hector takes her hand.

HECTOR
 You're there, mami...next you meet
 my father.

Kisses her hand.

PRISCILLA
 We're from Ponce. All of our family
 still lives there. Me and Hector
 are the only ones here. How long
 have you guys known each other?

PUCHI
 Days...

HECTOR
 But we're destiny, sis.

It's his own joke. It's quiet for moment while they eat.

PUCHI
 This is delicious...are they Goya?

Priscilla smiles.

PRISCILLA
 All your family here?

Puchi nods.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)
 Oh...what does your family do?

Putting her fork down.

PUCHI
 Sell dope...what is this? You're
 with the FBI or something...I came
 here to eat, not to be grilled.

She gets up...ready to walk out. Hector bolts out of his
 chair...laughing, making light of it.

HECTOR
 No no...Priscilla is with the Ponce
 police...come on sweetie...it's
 cool...

PUCHI
 What do you mean 'it's cool'...whose
 side are you on?
 (MORE)

PUCHI (CONT'D)

(to Priscilla)

And you? What makes you
so...different than me...you British?
Gimme a break!

Priscilla backs off...even Hector's silent now.

PRISCILLA

Sorry...I wasn't trying to come on
that way...I'm just doing what a
mother, sister, father, has to
do...don't take it like that...sit
down let's eat...we'll fight later.

INT. SUBWAY STATION -- DAY

Hector looks pretty spruced up...checks himself. New bell-bottoms, paisley shirt, etc. Cookie is briefing Hector about someone he's about to meet. An express train goes by, spooks Hector as it roars through the station, but he's getting the hang of it.

COOKIE

Jerry used to be a cop, became a
lawyer and now he's a thief. Stealing
every Latin musician blind...but
he's all we got. That's all I gotta
say.

(finger on his right
eye)

Be careful.

INT. FANIA RECORDS -- DAY

(The same FANIA OFFICE we've seen before, but now in better days.)

JERRY MASUCCI, bearded Italian, forties, fiddles with his gold neck chains and looks at his watch repeatedly. A biz meeting, Hector is being signed etc.

JERRY

We have big plans for you and Willie.

But something else has to be decided on...he notices the seriousness of their faces. Like some crisis that has to be dealt with soon, before it gets any worst. Hector is a little lost right now.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Starting with a record followed by a
tour. Now, do you have a lawyer?

*

HECTOR

(nodding to Cookie)

Yeah, sure I do.

JOHNNY

Have him go over these contracts.

Johnny passes the contracts over to Hector.

They look on with intrigue as Hector appears to be carefully going over the documents himself.

HECTOR

They're good. Got a pen?

Johnny hands a pen to Hector who signs with a crazy grin.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

(as he signs)

Hectorrrr... Pe...rezzzz!

Jerry and Johnny look at him shocked but sure as hell don't try to stop him. They are very pleased.

JERRY

(keeping his
professional composure)

Now, there is one more thing, and we all gave this a lot of thought...

HECTOR

Something I did?

Pacheco nods 'no'.

MASUCCI

That name's gotta go...

Hector doesn't know who they're talking about.

HECTOR

Who's gotta go?

MASUCCI

You...your name. It doesn't mean a thing.

HECTOR

Perez?

MASUCCI

Yes, Perez. It's an unemployment line name...you gotta have a name that unemployment line looks up at.

Very politically incorrect.

HECTOR

Like what?

MASUCCI

Lavoe...

HECTOR

La...que?

PACHECO

(pipes in)

Lavoe... 'the voice'.

Hector thinks, looks around the table. This means a lot to all the money people...so, what the hell.

HECTOR

Lavoe. Won't the people think I'm French?

Masucci starts to explain, but notices Hector is putting all of them on. They all laugh.

THE MUSIC STARTS...

as the sounds and the voices in the scene FADE... a trombone solo RIPS UP IN New York somewhere...followed by congas and more drums and a band in full throttle...playing for their life. A new sound baptized as salsa is being born in the studio tonight. A mix of MAMBO, CUMBIA...RUMBA, JAZZ, BOMBA, CHA CHA...all of it together like a gumbo: A sauce...SALSA.

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- NIGHT

(THIS IS THE SAME STUDIO WE'VE SEEN BEFORE, ABANDONED AND DEAD...now prosperous and new)

Here, history is being made inside..Though they might not know it, the magic is in the air and each musician plays furiously and freely. It's a session that will change Latin Music.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Hector singing in the SOUND BOOTH at Fania Studios. The CORO OF SINGERS...like soldiers...firing up after the MONTUNO.

MIDTOWN ROOFTOP...

Hector and Puchi are MAKING LOVE ON THE ROOFTOP of the studio. Underneath the water tower, with the city watching...he tells her.

HECTOR

Do you know how much I love you?

She nods.

PUCHI

No...tell me.

HECTOR

Well, look out there...see everyone of those little lights...

PUCHI
 (teasing him)
 The windows...?

Hugging her.

HECTOR
 Baby, the stars...they're shining
 for you...saying: 'Puchi, I love you
 like no one's ever loved you...baby,
 I love you'...and every night you
 look at them, they'll be
 there...saying the same thing.

PUCHI
 Really? I heard that in the 'novela'
 the other night...

They laugh and kiss.

BACK TO SCENE

Willie tearing his heart out with a Trombone that speaks every language in life. Hands playing the Congas so fast, Timbales rolling up the dancing thunder...an electric bass pumping the 'new move'.

HECTOR SINGING... Puchi watching.

Willie and Hector singing harmony...a special moment as we see these two guys singing into one Microphone...their eyes connected, lit up with that special sync, like you're adoring an invisible God that stands between them.. so they don't electrify one another to death: it's the rapture of the Music. (if you've seen it, it's like watching two lover's making MAGIC)

THE TAPES ROLL...

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- NIGHT

SUDDENLY The studio looks empty. End of the session.

The song is PLAYING, but all the musicians are either lying on the floor or inside the booth listening. Willie sits close to the sound engineer...outside in the studio, we see Hector...like the crazy person he is, talking to himself.

HECTOR
 See what your son is doing mami...not
 bad, tell dad about it, okay...he
 listens to you.

Puchi sees him. Understand him.

MUSIC MONTAGE

He paces, sings to himself. Listens to the playback of his first songs ever recorded. His first to be a HIT. **"EL MALO"**. **"Que Lio"**, **"Che Che Cole"**, etc. He dances with Puchi inside the empty studio...lost in the moment. Salsa Heaven on Earth.

(A GIMME SHELTER ("Wild Horses") STYLE SCENE - In a way it's like a scene out of a Rolling Stones recording...same drive, same days, young people making music no one's heard before. Good drugs, beautiful women, YOUTH...and that feeling WHEN YOU KNOW YOU GOT SOMETHING RIGHTEOUS going. --A PEEK INTO THE LIFE OF A SONG...and being young and eternal)

THE MUSIC SEGUES OVER...

EXT. ABANDONED DOCKS -- DAY

(Under the Brooklyn Bridge or downtown Beach St ALLEY)

*

Hector and Willie are both dressed like old-fashioned GANGSTERS. WITH GUNS AND AN OLD HOODLUM CAR next to them.

They're shooting the album cover for the cover of "EL MALO". Living so much in this moment, with their guns and admiring women and FLASHING CAMERAS and a future...yes...the good times were never going to end.

HECTOR

Not bad...

Willie adjusts his Al Capone hat. Swaggers closer to the Rolls Royce. He's in a marijuana sixties latitude. Heavy and... heavy. Profound street justice talking.

WILLIE

(smoking)

Crime pays Hector...

(coughing)

this is 'nuestra cosa'...our Latin thing.

HECTOR

(confused)

I was just talking 'in character'...you know?

WILLIE

I wasn't.

CAMERA FLASHES...he sees a beautiful face in between the blinding lights: Puchi, arriving to the shoot, grinning happily when she sees Hector dressed like Zorro from Chicago. She brings a smile to his face...

PHOTOGRAPHER OS

Hector...come on, you gotta look bad, man...tough...come on!

They can't help to bring out their best in each other once in a while, like now. With a lust so strong, it's scares you blind. Willie keeps mumbling...

WILLIE
(in the background,
still waxing poetic)
It's gonna be good to be Nuyorican
holding up a trombone instead or a
tray or a hotel elevator...

A NEEDLE being place on a 33RPM ALBUM. **"Juana Pena"** plays over...BLACK.

"1969"

MONTAGE - CROSS CUT WITH CONCERT SHOTS...

8mm HOME MOVIES. TOUR FOOTAGE.

EXT. HOTEL POOL -- NIGHT

*

MIAMI. Hector, Willie and band having a drunken, rowdy pool party amongst normal guests. The manager comes, Willie tosses him in the pool.

Shots of life on the road. A collection of fun memories.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

*

A transistor radio plays Jose Feliciano's hit **"California Dreamin"**. The band members are all passed out in one of the rooms.

Hector walks down the hotel corridor. It's the end of a night on the road. Parties in every room. He finally reaches his own room. Inspects the key and room #. Opens the door. The place looks too quiet, too serene. He hears a faint noise coming from the bathroom...the fluorescent light spilling into the dark room.

He shuffles slowly to the bathroom. As he opens the door, he catches Cookie wrapping a belt around his arm, a SYRINGE between his teeth. He stares at Hector...who watches the DRUG RITUAL, disgusted, at first.

*

COOKIE
Get in or get out, man.

He closes the door behind him. The needle, a foot away from his face.

THIS WAS THE MOMENT HIS PAIN WAS WAITING FOR.

EXT. PAPO'S BUILDING. 9TH & D -- NIGHT

Small time drug dealing up and down the block. Hector, is wearing a semi superfly suit and hat.

They sit on Papo's stoop sharing a joint.

A RUNNER strolls over and hands a BROWN PAPER BAG to Papo.

Hector nods and grins widely. Papo turns into a reefer-street- corner philosopher and lays it out...as stoned and as real and believes it himself.

HECTOR

...once you leave the island you're not really attached to anything, right?

Papo doesn't really sees it like that.

PAPO

(stoned wise)

You are. To the other island...Riker's Island...where you'll go, even if you claim it was 'self defense'.

Now Hector is lost in the street philosophy jive...but slowly it becomes clear...and so does his predicament.

PAPO (CONT'D)

Puchi's a tough woman, man. I could'a killed her myself a couple of times...but, hey...I'm her brother'...so let me give a little advise; 'don't fuck with her unless you wanna fuck with her'. You wanna fuck with her, fuck with her. You got my blessing. Live for today, man, we're family.

Papo laughs. A staggered second later, Hector laughs. Fuck it.

INT. TROPICORO CLUB - LATER

The energy is intense. The packed dance floor is on fire.

Willie is in the middle of a smokin' Trombone solo with a flirtatious DANCER right in front. He sits on the edge of the stage and PUMPS THE TROMBONE SLIDE as the dancer literally STRADDLES IT.

Zaida, followed by A VERY PREGNANT PUCHI.

*

ZAIDA

Move outta the way! Lavoe party comin' through!

Puchi pats her stomach.

Hector sings "**Que Lio**" as a group of love- struck girls grab at his pants.

Hector gives a wink to Puchi, who's standing behind a side table with the Fania business guys. Priscilla, Ralph, Jerry...the entourage. Puchi smiles, blows a kiss.

Puchi pushes herself up. The music building, the congas: crazy. We see her belly...and so does Hector.

PUCHI
(to no one)
Excuse me.

She makes her way to the front of the stage...and just stands there. Puchi and future family. Hector knows what's up, opens his arms wide and yells into the Mic.

HECTOR
(singing/soneo)
Okay, would you marry me baby? I'll
marry you, if you put it that way...

Puchi nods her head.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
(still improvising)
...I am gonna married this
woman...because I love her and if I
don't...Ay Que lio!! Candanga con
Burundanga!! Te quiero de gratis!

INT. FANIA RECORDS -- DAY

The Interview CONTINUES....

PUCHI
He looked like an innocent choir boy
jibaro, but he wasn't.

BACK TO SCENE...

THE INTERVIEW.

Puchi shakes her head...as if listening to him...and agreeing with whatever he's saying. She's almost IN A TRANCE.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
We were both pregnant.
(she still has a memory)
The other 'woman in
question'...doesn't really matter at
this point...it wasn't meant to be,
right? I am the only woman.

Whether this is what the film crew came for, or not, this is what they're getting. The love story. The heartbreak story. Fuck Hector's music life...everybody knows that...this is Puchi's Confidential.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

I just put a little more pressure...
or he liked me better...the day Hector
was at the baptism for his other
son...he left the church and came
over to see me. He said: "I'll take
you to Puerto Rico and marry you
baby"...and he never left. Men we
still men then...

THE OCEAN WAVES BREAK AGAINST THE REEF... *

EXT. OLD SAN JUAN CHURCH -- DAY *

One of the oldest churches built by the Spaniards when they
discover America. Little did they know...

A CHURCH ALTAR...the music stops.

Another stage, different performance. Dead quiet.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The PRIEST and family stand at the altar waiting along with
all the FRIENDS and FAMILY who sit anxiously in the Chapel.
Zayda is holding little HECTOR, (Tito) only a couple of weeks
old. But someone is missing.

PUCHI IS BY THE DOOR...

as a look-out dressed in her wedding gown. She peeks her
head back in the door, slams it shut. Zaida and the
BRIDESMAIDS look at her blankly as she strolls down the
aisle...like a gunslinger.

PUCHI

Somebody give me a cigarette.

Zaida lights one, gives it to her. Puchi paces. Turns to
Ralph, who has just walked in. The Priest just chills, hoping
against hope, this is all a nightmare about to end.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

You're the new manager, right?

RALPH

(smiling)

You look beautiful Puchi, beautiful.

PUCHI

Hector ain't here yet.

RALPH

(stoned on weed)

You know Hector...he'll be here.

PUCHI

That's right...where the hell is he?
Were you at the bachelor party?

RALPH

Of course I was. Just calm down...

PUCHI

You calm down! I'm gettin' fuckin'
married here and he ain't showin'
up. What kind of managing is that?

She grabs his hand.

EXT. PUERTO RICO -- DAY

She marches down the LOBBY with Ralph and the Priest in tow.
Zaida picks up the long trail of wedding dress and follows.
THE IMAGE FREEZES ON HER FACE.

PUCHI OS

He was like...on a 'Pussy Safari'...I
used to hear everything. Everything.

SAME FACE... thirty years later. Still telling the tale.

EXT. PUERTO RICO HOTEL - LATER

Puchi, Zaida, Ralph the Priest and a WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER
huddle around the MOTEL MANAGER as he opens the doors to
suite 315.

INT. SUITE 315 - CONTINUOUS

Puchi marches in with the Priest to the Bachelor party
aftermath. Bottles, drug paraphernalia everywhere. Band
members with CHICKS passed out on a couch and floor...the
debris of a good Led Zeppelin party. The stillness of dead
ecstasy.

Puchi walks over to Willie, who's sleeping on another couch
in his BOXERS with a GIRL in her bra and panties.

PUCHI

(shaking him)
Where's the ring?

WILLIE

Oh, shit...
(sees the priest)
Good morning Father.

Willie searches his pants, as if looking for change, brings
out the RING BOX. Puchi drags him over to the BED where
Hector is PASSED OUT in his boxers.

PUCHI
 (top of her lungs)
 Hector!

Hector jolts up.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
 (sweet and loving)
 Stand up honey. We're getting
 married.

Hector, still loaded, can barely stand up or open his eyes.

HECTOR
 I thought we were already married?

A bed sheet wrapped around his shoulders like a cape. Puchi motions to the Priest.

PUCHI
 Marry us. Hurry up.

Puchi holds Hector's hand.

PRIEST
 (looking at the
 decadence)
 Dearly Beloved...we are gathered
 here...

PUCHI
 Forget that shit. Just do the "I
 do's part."

PRIEST
 (clearing his throat)
 Do you Hector...

PUCHI
 He does. Say I do, Hector.

HECTOR
 (eyes closed)
 I do.

PRIEST
 Do you Puchi...

PUCHI
 I do.

She looks at the passed out group.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
 Anybody object?

Silence.

HECTOR
 (hushed/sincere)
 Sorry Father. Is there any beer left?

PUCHI
 Give him the ring Willie.

Hector takes the ring but needs some help putting it on Puchi's finger. It's not a joke anymore.

PRIEST
 I now pronounce you man and wife.
 You may now kiss the bride.

But Hector stumbles with the moment of truth...his eyes kissing her. A cigarette lit in his hand, he takes a smoke.

HECTOR
 (blowing the smoke)
 Okay.

A camera FLASHES. A CLAVE starts a rhythm. Maracas join in.

EXT. EL BARRIO CORNER -- DAY

In between the Botanica and the Bodega, a quintet of barrio drunks, the usual gang of happy derelicts are singing along to the SONG coming out of the ghetto blaster. Hector is there with them, singing to the radio the song. Lip synching himself.

Beers, cheers, joints...as they sing and dance, as if on stage...suddenly, one of them spots a COP and elbows Hector...who happens to be taking a toke of the joint. His lungs about to explode, when he sees the cop coming straight at him. But no one stops or runs...the whole gang stays in place singing...going down with the ship.

HECTOR
 "Isla Linda y bonita de palmeras
 benditas...

The cop arrives as Hector exhales to a side...impossible to hide this much smoke...but before he can raise his hands to surrender, the COP TAKES THE MARACAS away from him and starts playing like a pro. The rag tag band is livid and close to heart attack conditions as Hector and the COP HARMONIZE in the chorus.

HECTOR/COP
 ...yo le canto a la isla del
 encanto...

No one is getting BUSTED TONIGHT. The MUSIC BLASTS:

BLOCK PARTY/ EARLY FANIA MAGIC...in Spanish Harlem. The audience shouts:

CHORUS
 ...Puerto Rico!!!!!"

EXT. EL BARRIO STREET (BLOCK PARTY)-- DAY

(ALT: SAN JUAN/PUERTO RICO STREETS)

The streets are filled with the magic of the music and all of the sudden the sidewalks are turned into pieces of San Juan, Mayaguez, Bayamon or wherever you came from...people dancing and cooking and laughing and feeling more together than they had...a Puerto Rican RENAISSANCE in Manhattan.

Dancing in the streets...and on the bandstand, some of the most handsome and fun young singers of the day; Ismael Miranda, Willie Colon and Hector...in his pink glasses and wide hats...and Johnny Pacheco, the band leader supreme.

The song Hector's singing is "**PUERTO RICO**". A gem of a song, almost an anthem to Puerto Rico.

If there was ever one moment that galvanized a broken up community, it was NOW. The after sixties- seventies. NOW you weren't afraid of being what you where...and you said it loud: Puerto Rican and Proud! The seeds of a NUROYICAN NATION, if there was ever one.

Puchi notices as Hector leaves the stage.

LATER...

Nighttime. Same neighborhood, different circumstances.

HECTOR SCORES. Ends up in some filthy little stairway with some of his FANS...and lots of dope. A post wedding concert celebration, riding the glorious first year of a secret heroin habit.

INT. TENEMENT STAIRWAY -- NIGHT

(ALT: LA PERLA -- PUERTO RICO)

We hear voices...someone walking up the stairs. A junkie peeks out the door to his apartment to see what's up.

VOICE OS
 (rushing up)
 Hector's here, man...

But they're not talking about music.

Around the landing on the last floor is Hector alright. His jacket is off and he's just finished shooting up. He's rolling down his sleeve...jiving happily, dope rushing and rapping.

HECTOR
 (sees more dope
 arriving)
 Vaya! This is where it's happening
 tonight, man...where the fuck are
 we?

JUNKIE
 Heaven bro, Here...another bundle...on
 the house.

Around him, three or four Lower East Side hard core dope
 fiends party with the man. Yes, Hector is theirs too.

TIME CUT

INT. HECTOR'S PLACE -- NIGHT

Puchi is sitting in the living room, pissed. It's one of
 many nights she's learning to live with. *

HECTOR
 I just bumped into some friends,
 men...and you know how it is...

PUCHI
 Yeah, It's okay. I know how it is.

HECTOR
 I was doing nothing...

She gets up and gets on his face, grabbing his arm.

PUCHI
 And what is this on you sleeve? A
 blood test you had done after the
 show...come on Hector...

HECTOR
 Baby...it's nothing, just having a
 little fun, experimenting and
 shit...it's nothing. Everybody doing
 it. Come on. Everything is
 good...let's not...

PUCHI
 Let's not what?

But Hector can't say it, not with any honesty, so he keeps
 quiet. If she's ever right, it's tonight.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
 Fuck it up? You think I don't know?
 You know how many friends I had who
 never got to take the fucking needle
 out of their arm...you think that
 growing up in the streets doesn't
 (MORE)

PUCHI (CONT'D)

teach you something? Please...you have family now...I don't wanna bury you on your son's third birthday.

HECTOR

Oh...come on. Now you're the school cop? You get high...you like this shit...

She stops him.

PUCHI

No. Not that shit.
(her back to him)
That's not getting high, man...in my book, that's killing yourself.

Silence.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Hector please...I don't wanna be the school cop. You make it, I make it. Let's make it.

He walks over to her.

HECTOR

I'll be careful...nothing's gonna happen...okay?

The song "MONEY, MONEY, MONEY" plays over...

INT. CLUB OFFICE - NIGHT

A MONEY COUNTING MACHINE counts bills.

Willie and Hector each take a stack. They look like the characters from the gangster album cover, they're living the life. Early Scarface.

A FLASH BULB goes off...MUSIC PLAYS.

INT. FANIA RECORDS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

MORE FLASHES. The room is filled with REPORTERS and PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS interviewing Hector, DRESSED IN A SHARP WHITE SUIT AND COOL PRESCRIPTION SHADES, and Willie, DRESSED IN ALL BLACK. Both hold GOLD RECORDS in their hands. Jerry, Johnny, and Ralph, big smiles, stand behind them.

SUDDENLY THEY FADE from the room...and we are in same room present time, with Puchi.

INT. FANIA CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Puchi is walking around, almost recognizing the 30 years old cigarette butts on the ashtray. Searching for a sign of life. Her old life.

PUCHI

...Hector never really left Puerto Rico, it was more like he brought Puerto Rico over here with him. He...showed us...but didn't know it.

LIVE MUSIC PLAYING...

PUCHI (CONT'D)

He was simple...and he had all the island we were missing...that was the thing with Hector. His English was bad, our Spanish was worse...and it clicked. He spoke like family...like someone you knew all your life...his problems were your problems.

She straightens one of the Gold records left on the cracked wall.

EXT. QUEENS HOUSE - DAY

Hector stands outside on the front lawn, holding a now FOUR YEAR OLD Tito's hand. Puchi opens the door to them. It's home. *

INT. QUEENS HOUSE -- DAY

A fire place is going in the living room. The little boy is standing in front of Hector...he looks sad.

HECTOR

If you also wanted the little train, you better go out the window and tell him, scream it...

(mock scream)

' my little train'...just say you forgot...

Little Tito doesn't really buy it....

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Go ahead...tell him before he travels away from Queens.

The boy runs to the window and begins hollering....

TITO
 (top of his lungs)
 I forgot to ask you for a little
 train Santa....please....I forgot....a
 little train...

Hector smiles as he watches his naive little son remind Santa of the forgotten toy. His turn to be a good father. The little voice is lost in the...

EXT. NEW YORK SKYLINE -- NIGHT (STOCK)

Snow falling. A WHITE X MAS...

EXT. QUEENS HOUSE - NIGHT

Santa Claus is outside Hector's house, smoking a joint. He picks up his Red Bag of presents and climbs up a small ladder, goes through a window.

INT. QUEENS HOUSE - NIGHT

The room is dark. A little toy train runs through the tracks in the living room...a tricycle next to it...along with many other toys. Little Tito appears at the end of the big room, cued by Puchi. The kid sees the train, wide eyed...and near fainting...he also sees the legendary white bearded man from the cards, the signs, now standing by the moonlight, right across from of him.

HECTOR
 (latino Santa)
 Ho Ho Ho! Are you little Tito...

The little boy can barely stand, nevertheless speak...he just stares...Puchi speaks for him.

PUCHI
 Tito...di que si...
 (like the boy)
 Si...I'm Tito.

The boy moves a little closer, seeing the train going around him.

HECTOR
 This is all for you little boy...a
 present from Santa Claus...bye bye!
 (to Puchi)
 Tell his father...he's a good boy.
 Ho Ho Ho...I'm a good boy too...Ho
 Ho Ho...

Santa disappears in the night...we hear a crash after he clears the window...and some grumbling in Spanish.

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE 'tres' playing softy somewhere...

INT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Puchi is asleep, alone in the bed. Right in front of her, is Hector, wearing his pajamas, admiring her, walking around his sleeping beauty, the baby is next to her, lying by her side. He cannot believe his luck...they're his.

We hear the sound of a 'cuatro' playing somewhere...a plena-lullaby. He slowly, not to wake anyone up and spoil the magic of the moment, gets himself in the bed next to her. Moving toys out of the way, he rests his head next to Puchi and a Firetruck.

The SOUND OF THE 'cuatro' continues...

YEARS LATER...ANOTHER CHRISTMAS...

"Asalto Navideno"

INT. QUEENS HOUSE -- NIGHT

FELIZ NAVIDAD! The whole room is filled with friends. Willie, Johnny Pacheco, Ralphy, Jerry, Priscilla, Papo, etc. Everyone richer; everyone slicker. A big Puerto-Rican feast on a long table, in the middle of a SUPERFLY fashion blast. On the walls: Leroy Neiman 'salsa' renditions of Hector and other Spanish icons. We peek. It's all candid. Real life.

Everyone is singing the same 'plena'.

Tonight, Famous Latin musician Yomo Toro does the honors of playing the little 'cuatro' guitar...bringing into snowy New York all the heart and soul Jibaro music. We see Tito, now a happy six years old boy singing along, helping mom out. We also notice a small little poodle wearing a jibaro country hat, a 'pava'...running around...into Hector's arms. Puchi savors every bit of it.

This was a great happy time, nothing would ever be the same

THE MUSIC FADES OUT.

THE IRIS CHACON SHOW IS ON TV...

the wild Puerto Rican vedette camping it up, during her famous TV days.

INT. QUEENS HOUSE -- NIGHT

Puchi dubs the song as Iris dances and shakes her made-her-famous- sculptural behind. She's doing an early Tongolele/Grace Jones in the tropics choreography. Leather and banana.

PUCHI

Te gusta?

Hector is sitting in the living room of their apt sipping a Schaefer beer. Glassy-eyed, mellow.

HECTOR

Mami...mira. Move your behind so I can see her behind...ces't vou pliz.

PUCHI

You're so funny...you can't handle an ass like that.

HECTOR

How much you wanna bet?

She turns to him. Mock-encabrona.

PUCHI

You know papi. This one you can touch...this one is yours...and that one...?

She does a little dance for Hector, imitating Iris, blocking the TV set. Hector pretends to be looking for the TV, then bolts out of his seat, grabbing Puchi from behind...kissing her neck, she laughs...he loves it too....these are two people madly in love with one another.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Leave me alone...

They fall on the floor, in the background, IRIS CHACON bumping and grinding, climbing on top of a Harley Davidson...as Puchi climbs on top of poor skinny little Hector, and starts removing her blouse.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

(with a wicked smile)

You wanna watch TV...do you papito?

You wanna change the channel?

She starts kissing Hector...considers...

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Do you think this will end?

Hector kisses her back...

HECTOR

What?

PUCHI

This...

She bites his lip...starts unbuttoning his shirt.

HECTOR

It's just starting...isn't it.

He looks at her, touching her face gently. She nods 'yes'.
He kisses her face over and over.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
You know... I always dreamed of having
someone like you.

Kisses her...she kisses him back...and then, he pulls away.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
I have an idea. Wanna do a little
coke?

PUCHI
Now? You nuts? I don't like that
stuff...

HECTOR
(getting up)
Yeah...but you like me...
(a little devil)
Right? Come on...

He takes a vial out of his pocket.

MARVIN GAYE PLAYS ON THE STEREO. **"Inner City Blues"**. IT'S
MUCH LATER...

YEARS LATER. *

INT. QUEENS HOUSE - NIGHT

...they're an experienced wasted couple...in their new house.
Still half-dressed. Wired and just realizing that it's almost
daylight, again. Hector's lying on the floor next to
Puchi...who is crawling around the expensive glass table. A
drugged predator. Another wasted couple (Willie & Wife)
parties around in another part of the living room. Pool water
shimmering in the walls...

Willie tries his best stoned playing the grand piano in the
living room, gives up and walks out into a patio: An electric
blue pool empty, waiting for a swimmer.

PUCHI
(in a bit of a panic)
Shit...we don't have anymore.

Hector smiles, smoking his cigarette, drinking his vodka. A
little something hidden up every sleeve. He moves to a sofa.

HECTOR
Says who?

Puchi turns to him. First mad, then glad...still on her
knees. He's dangling a little coke bottle in his hand.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 But you gotta do something for me
 first...

Like a dog...he parts his legs open.

PUCHI
 Anything.

HECTOR
 (looking at the other
 woman)
 Anything?

Puchi gets closer to him, to the coke.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 Baby...look at her...

The woman is dancing seductively with Marvin Gaye, unaware
 of the conversation. Maybe not.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 (softly)
 You always wanted to... make it with
 a girl...right? You said that....

Puchi looks at him, tempted, does a line before giving an
 answer.

PUCHI
 Yeah...maybe.

HECTOR
 I'd like that...

The woman joins her man in the patio, starts stripping to go
 for a swim, working the diving board like a runaway slut.

PUCHI
 How'bout you...

HECTOR
 I'll just watch...
 (does a line)

Cleaning up her nose...

PUCHI
 Yeah...but you go first with...him,
 with Julio...come on, I wanna watch
 too...come on papi...

He smiles.

HECTOR
 What?
 (MORE)

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Puchi...it's not supposed to be like that...you're fucking with me?

PUCHI

Why not? It'll turn me on...you like men? You said that one night...

Hector looks around the room.

HECTOR

Of course not!...That's Willie! I am a man...anyway, you'll be jealous baby...

PUCHI

No I won't...come on papi...go get him.

Willie jumps in the pool wearing his suit, let's out a holler...the woman laughs. Sits by the edge of the pool. She spreads her legs slowly... stylishly dirty.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Then I'll do her...

They both start laughing at the absurdity of it.

Hector...hears a noise, he looks. A seven- year old Hectito is watching his father and mother in some strange adult freak scene.

PUCHI OS

...we liked excess, yeah...we both shared that...that sickness...that crazy game...the whole insanity of the coke and having everything...

INTERVIEW --

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

Confessions, accusations...the 30 years later version of a lone survivor, when the truth goes in every direction.

PUCHI

...he went far, I went further...
There's no denying it.
(with a smile)
We were terrible for one another.
That was the whole basis of the
relationship...see who could bang
the other one harder in the head...

A FLASHBACK:

Hector SNEAKS THROUGH THE BACK DOOR OF SOME CLUB. Puchi is waiting for him and as soon as he hits the street, she smacks

the other woman on her head and then goes for Hector...beating the shit out of him.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

What? What....what the fuck you're gonna say... you bitch...eh? Who's that bitch...your aunt...?

Puchi punches him....as the other woman runs away and no one dares stop the fight. Only Hector who grabs her and shoves her inside her car, parked by the alley. Once inside the car, they look at each other....and start laughing.

BACK TO SCENE

To Puchi 2002. Getting a drink. A cigarette, acting like she was 'busy' backstage somewhere, in a big concert hall... where Hector is about to perform. She lets her hair down.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

I remember too much...

Very faintly, WE HEAR THE VOICE OF AN MC ANNOUNCING A SHOW...'Ladies and Gentlemen...would you...etc'. She drifts, gone for a second.

HECTOR OS

I never forget you.

*

HECTOR'S TALKING... it looks as if he was talking back to Puchi.

HECTOR

(ref:audience)

...I'm lucky I got you...well, I don't know how lucky...

RAPPING IN BETWEEN SONGS as he used to, just everyday talk...his special way of relating to his audience...from a flat tire to a broken heart...yesterday's news or tomorrow's doom or insults. An old black and white piece shot somewhere in the trail, nuggets from the top. Hector does his stand up between songs.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

...let me see...my mother died when I was three, my brother died when I was 15, my grandmother just died...Jesus, I'm gonna have to kill myself so I could have some company!! Don't go anywhere mi gente.

Laughter from the crowd. Someone shouts 'sing'. Hector flips them the 'bird'.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 (acting lost)
 Fuck you too. Now, what was your
 question? Oh...the next song we're
 gonna play?

MUSIC STARTS...

MUSIC PLAYS...

INT. CHEETAH -- NIGHT

(this COULD BE a PUERTO RICO show- OUTDOOR: LA PERLA, SAN
 JUAN PARK, ETC or THE FLOAT/PR day parade idea--check)

THE FANIA ALL STARS AT THEIR BEST. Raw and intense. Camera's
 rolling. But the band is totally unaware of HISTORY BEING
 MADE TONIGHT. **"Quitate Tu Pa'Ponerme Yo"** grooves on, six of
 the best singers in Salsa sharing a stage and a magic moment.

Puchi is on the side of the stage. A witness to the frenzy
 and part of it...as she dances again for him. Ecstatic.

HECTOR SINGING
 " Move out of the way...quitate tu!"

BACKSTAGE

The noise of the PRESS, the impressed, musicians, managers,
 groupies and the usual shatter and electricity of 'after a
 historical show'. A happy Hector is in the middle of this
 beautiful moment, as he realizes that Puchi is next to
 him...sharing the success and the feeling of HAVING IT
 ALL...of getting here together...and holding on to one
 another.

He gets to make himself invisible in front of everyone and
 hold her face close to him...the most important face to hold
 on to.

HECTOR
 Do you believe this?

She doesn't need to look around. She believes in him.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 I love you...and you're here with
 me.
 (taking the room)
 It's our time. I mean...you and me.

They stare at each, Puchi beaming, giving it all up for him
 and his dreams coming true.

PUCHI
 I love you.

*

The corniness and magic of the moment, is tainted by the little sly move that no one sees, but we all know, as she passes into his pocket a small little vial...it's a little moment that will be big and damaging in their lives.

INT. CLUB BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Disco music is heard in the b.g. The previous joy and peace is out the window. It's tense inside this room.

Puchi sits on a couch with a glass of CHAMPAGNE, smoking a large cigar very elegantly, dressed to kill in silky, rich looking black dress. Willie leans against the door holding on to his Trombone...anxious to get the show going...but Hector's MIA. Willie and the band stand around upset...silent, the before the show shatter all wasted. Ralph taps his watch, pretending it's not the 20th time he's done it in an hour.

PUCHI

I'm not a fuckin' baby-sitter...I'm his wife...in case you forgot.

RALPH

You don't know where he goes?
Everybody else does...wife.

*

PUCHI

Then go find him.

WILLIE

I don't care if he makes you wait...he's not gonna make me wait...I worked too hard to get to stand on that fucking stage.

Puchi gives Willie an amused fuck- you- smile.

PUCHI

Did you really?

It's tense and ugly and different, because it's a woman snarling in a man's world.

WILLIE

(to Ralph)
Why is she here?

Willie walks out.

RALPH

Willie is right. You shouldn't be defending Hector this time...he's fucking up.

PUCHI

Did anybody ask for their money back?

Ralph never gets to answer.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

(pushy)
Did they?

A moment later, Hector casually walks in...with Willie.

WILLIE

Everybody out! I gotta talk to
Hector.

Hector smiles, unaware of any problem, ready with a true-tale of Lavoe's life. After a brief stare down, Ralph walks out followed by the band...Puchi stays.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

(to Puchi)
You too....please.

She struts out.

HECTOR

Cono man, my dog ran away with my
car keys...ate them...I had to borrow
a neighbor's car to get here.

Hector gives Willie a sheepish smile.

WILLIE

You fuckin' happy with yourself?

HECTOR

I don't know...what did I do? That
was a true story.

Willie almost laughs, but holds on to playing the bad cop.

WILLIE

It's me Hector. Not the others. I
like to fuck around too, Hector but
I take this seriously.

HECTOR

So do I, bro...Willie, listen...

WILLIE

I wanted you in my band because I
saw you had a one in a million voice.
And we've gotten far. But if now
you wanna fuck yourself up, do it on
your own time, not on
mine...understand? You need help,
I'll help.

Off Screen we hear, the MC announcing the start of the show.

HECTOR

You know I love you, man.

WILLIE

If this is about love, try lovin'
yourself, I get plenty of love and
still get here on time.

He embraces Hector...with love, with care.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'm your brother. Come on, let's
kill them.

EXT. QUEENS HOUSE - NIGHT

The driveway is packed with cars, half parked on the front
lawn. A NEW MERCEDES pulls up, parks on the street. Puchi
jumps out of the car when she sees Tito skating.

PUCHI

Shit!

Tito rides up on his skates.

TITO

Hi, mommy...

PUCHI

What are you doing out here at this
time?

The boy stops, unsure he's doing anything wrong.

TITO

Playing...dad said it was okay.

PUCHI

Get inside! Now!

INT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Puchi flies into the living room, dragging Tito by the hand.

PUCHI

Where is he?

As Tito shrugs...GUN SHOTS ring out from under the living
room floor.

INT. BASEMENT -- NIGHT

The band is hangin' out in the Adult Play Room. BARRY WHITE
blasting from a JUKE BOX. **"Never Never Gonna Give You Up"**.
Hector mocks and lip-syncs Barry.

A few guys play pool on a NEW POOL TABLE. A couple of others
take pot shots with .45's at a DART BOARD riddled with bullet
holes, hanging on the wall, also riddled with holes.

*

A couple of others sit on a plush couch with Hector, who holds a TRAY FULL OF COCAINE in one hand, a GUN in the other. More shots are taken at the dart board. Just as a GUY leans in to take a snort off the tray.

Puchi FLIES down the stairs, races over and SLAPS the whole tray INTO THE AIR.

PUCHI
(crazy mad)
Everybody get the fuck out! Now!

Everyone scrambles to get out. As the guy attempts to snort some of the lost cocaine off the couch, Puchi kicks him in the ass.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
Hijo de Puta!

Hector is left alone, standing with the tray in his hand, gun in the other.

HECTOR
Puchi, that was some good shit...two grand worth of it! What got you crazy tonight?

Puchi grabs the tray and whacks him in the head with it. Hector is too stunned to do anything but back away.

PUCHI
You let our son out on the street at ten o'clock at night while you're down here with these fuckin' low life leeches...in my house, getting high and shooting off guns!!

HECTOR
Tito was fine until you came home.

All the time, the gun in Hector's hand. Puchi looks at it...it's implications and possibilities.

PUCHI
(calmly)
Put that fuckin' thing away.

Hector, belts the gun, shrugs and starts for the stairs.

HECTOR
I'm gonna pretend this didn't happen.

PUCHI
Yeah...like you always do....it's the story of your life. Nothing happened.

(MORE)

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Your mother didn't die, your father
doesn't hate you...and your brother's
still scoring dope in Harlem
somewhere.

She's crossed the line

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Where you goin'? To do more drugs?
To spend all our fucking money on
drugs?

She goes after him, tries smacking him in the back of the
head with the tray. He pushes her away.

HECTOR

You know the problem with you? You
should'd been born a man, not a woman.
You would've been a great tough guy.

Hector starts to run up the STAIRS. Blood running down his
face.

PUCHI

You motherfucker!

As she races after him, wildly swinging the tray...

She loses her balance, FALLS ON THE TRAY and SLIDES DOWN
THE STAIRS. HECTOR looks back at her. She's okay. He laughs
and keeps going.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Hector walks to his car. Puchi chases him after him.

PUCHI

Go ahead! Leave your wife and son!
You no good piece of shit junkie.

He turns around...making sure this is his wife screaming out
all this horror.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

You heard me, yeah, I said that...

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- NIGHT

The place is empty. Except for Willie. Hector has already
cleaned up a little bit.

WILLIE

You have two problems...and I don't
know which is harder to quit...

HECTOR

...neither, cause I'm used to both
of them...and learned to live with
both of them...

WILLIE

But one will kill you.

HECTOR

I think drugs are easier to quit
than that woman...

They remain silent...just the jukebox playing oldies. Hector
watches the traffic. Imagines all the happy people passing
by in their cars.

WILLIE

I cannot tell you what to
do...stubbornness runs in the
family...

Hector turns to him, smiles...trying to shift the
conversation. Or finally knowing what to say next.

HECTOR

You know, there's this cop, this
woman cop...comes to a lot of my
shows...says she loves me...I don't
know whether she wants to marry me
or bust me...should I just raise my
hands and walk out peacefully...?

They both laugh.

WILLIE

You'd be better off arrested...right
now any way...look at you...you're
like The Fugitive...remember how
much you used to like that show?
Well, you've become that man...running
away from something you haven't done.

HECTOR

Willie, I'm not that innocent
either...

Silence.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

...and I love her.

EXT. QUEENS STREET -- NIGHT

Hector comes to serenade her in the middle of the night. To
ask for forgiveness in the only way he knows how, or the way
he dopes it best. A guitar and maracas...like an old
fashioned trio from a time warp, in the sidewalks of Queens.

Hector singing the most romantic and heartbreaking bolero in life. Willie is with him...ragged trombone moans and all.

*

Puchi eventually comes out the window...nodding, hushing him first...then pretending to be forgiving...just in time for the neighbors to become a selected audience to a love trial - put to music, as Hector sings soulfully Tito Rodriguez's heart-breaking **"Inolvidable"**.

But this alone will not do the trick.

INSIDE THE HOUSE (different exterior LOCATION ?)

Puchi listens. Hector explains Hector.

HECTOR

...I'm sorry baby...what else do you want me to do?

She just lets him hang in that awful space a little bit longer.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

...I forget what I have... it's like that.

He opens his arms, in that classic and final gesture...finished with his defense and ready for sentencing.

PUCHI

You know, people tell me I should just dump you...you know how fuckin' pissed off that makes me?

(beat)

Because I love you... and I love Tito... and I want us to be together. It's that too much? Isn't that what you want?

But she doesn't even know what she wants to say or hear.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Hector...I just...I just want you to say 'you're gonna try to make things work'. I want you to say you're gonna spend more time with Tito. I want you to say you're gonna stop with all the drugs...I want you to say you love me.

HECTOR

Puchi, you want a lot. I do love you...but I can't make that many promises in one night...I'd be lying to you. Of course I love Tito...it's got nothing to with that...and I know how much to give to me...it's just...

And it comes out silent. His pain has always been private...maybe the one and only thing left all his.

Puchi's serious demeanor starts to crack after hearing those words.

PUCHI

Do you think we could try to love each other a little more...more carefully...maybe become a happy family...that's all I want Hector, is for us to be a happy family.

Tears are streaming down her face.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

I never had one...
(with a broken smile)
...I was hoping...

Hector leans over, wipes them off. He kisses her tears away...in love with trouble and the wrong lover. No better feeling.

INTERVIEW

CLOSE ON TODAY'S PUCHI.

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

She smiles at the memories, these wars were fun...and were all she ever had.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

Puchi wakes up alone. Hector is gone. She jumps up in a panic, races out of the room.

Down the stairs. Through the living room. Dining room.

Into KITCHEN where...

The table is set and Hector, in his underwear is busy cooking BREAKFAST over the hot stove which is a MESS. He comes out of the smoke...his son helping him.

HECTOR

(casually)
Buenos dias, sweetheart.

TITO

(excited)
We made fried eggs...and pork chops...

PUCHI

...and beer.

She tries to control herself...and enjoy the day.

PUCHI (CONT'D)
Oh...that's beautiful...

TITO
I'm joking...

HECTOR
(winking at Puchi)
Sit down, honey. It's all okay. I
have a crazy idea.

MONTAGE: THE HOME MOVIES

(FAMILY VACATION IN PUERTO RICO)

INT. COLONIAL HOUSE -- DAY

His father walks through the simply furnished LIVING ROOM
into the KITCHEN busies himself getting some coffee.

HECTOR
...how have you been?

PAPA
The same I've always been.

Hector realizes this ain't a happy reunion.

HECTOR
So...I'm here...

PAPA
I know. I read the papers.

Awkward silence. Father gets up, goes inside. After a
moment, Hector follows.

PAPA (CONT'D)
... a drug addict with many arrests
and scandals. Yes, I've read about
you.

His father stops abruptly, walks out. Goes back into the
living room, randomly starts cleaning. Hector follows
again...but now he wants some answers.

HECTOR
Everyday I do the wrong thing and
everyday I find out how to stop from
doing the wrong thing...and I'm
trying, but I don't stop...I thought
that coming here...was the right
thing.

PAPA
Why did you come here? I didn't
invite you here...

HECTOR

...I wanted to see my father, wanted to surprise you...and I was hoping he wanted to see his son.

His father just moves further away...as if Hector wasn't there.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

What's it gonna take, viejo? *

Hector starts looking at OLD FAMILY PHOTOS on the mantel, his brother, sister, grandmother. As he picks up one of his father and mother as a young, happy couple...

Hector walks closer to his father.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Maybe I don't know what it's like to lose your own son.

The old man knows, but still turns his back on Hector, looks out the window. As if he knows it too well and now only hears a ghost speaking behind him.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

But I know how it feels...not to care about living anymore because you grieve and you hurt.

PAPA

I lost a wife and a son...and you. How do you feel? *

HECTOR

I don't know. Maybe it's late but, yeah, I'm trying to be your son. Why can't you be my father?

PAPA

Please, I'm an old man. Leave me in peace.

HECTOR

I'll leave...but I'll go on with my life. I love my son...and I can say it! I have no problem with that.

Hector walks to the door.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

All I ever wanted was for you to tell me you loved me and you were proud of me...you can't do that? It's your problem, I've learned to live with it.

In his eyes, all the sorrow that gave him all the soul.

FADE OUT:

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Puchi is in the bed, watching Hector fix his tie in the mirror...dressing up for the show. A show in itself.

PUCHI
Goin' to work early?

HECTOR
Si, gonna surprise Willie.

EXT. LONG ISLAND EXPRESSWAY -- NIGHT

The Caddy is stuck in a HUGE TRAFFIC JAM. A sea of headlights. The MIDTOWN TUNNEL up ahead & Manhattan. *

INT. CADDY -- NIGHT

Stuck in traffic. Hector does a little blow, of course, as if getting higher would get him there faster, but nothing works. The traffic doesn't move. Hector POUNDS on the steering wheel. No cell phones in those days.

EXT. EL CORSO CLUB - LATER THAT NIGHT

Discouraged FANS leave the club. A disgusted Willie and The Band are leaving as well. They stand on the sidewalk as the band boy lines up the INSTRUMENT CASES.

Hector pulls up in his Caddy, double parks.

Hector gets out of the car, stoned, crazed. He walks over to Willie who doesn't even acknowledge him.

HECTOR
You're not gonna fuckin' believe it...

WILLIE
You're right, I won't.

Willie walks down the sidewalk. Hector follows.

HECTOR
Pero, Willie. Que pasa? Dejame explicarte. Lemme'splain, man.

Willie stops, faces Hector.

WILLIE
Hector, I can't deal with this shit anymore man...tu sabe? I quit. The band is yours. *

HECTOR

(bewildered)

Tu esta loco chico? You're gonna
break this up because of me...?
Come on...don't mind me. Man..not
now...we're at the top...

WILLIE

Good for you. It's your band.
Hector, I can't work with your crazy
shit anymore, man. I'm a musician
too, remember? I don't like being
the 'straight guy', cause I'm not...

*

HECTOR

You're joking right? Ta' jodiendo?
You're fucking with me?

Willie opens the door to his BUICK ELECTRA. As he puts his
Trombone case in, TWO PRETTY WOMEN walk up to Hector.
Hardcore fans.

WOMAN ONE

(nervously to Hector)

Excuse me...we waited three hours to
hear you sing...

*

Hector thinks she's gonna smack him. He backs up.

*

WOMAN TWO

We really did...

She pulls out one of Willie and Hector's RECORD ALBUMS...but
doesn't hit over the head with them.

WOMAN TWO (CONT'D)

Could you sign this? We just love
you.

Hector smiles and signs the album as Willie, looks and gets
in his car.

WOMAN ONE

Thank you...hey...

WOMAN TWO

Come on, Wanda.

Willie starts the engine. It makes Hector rush over to try
to uselessly stop him.

HECTOR

Why don't we go talk quietly you and
I?

The car window goes down.

WILLIE

I told Ralphy to cancel all our gigs.
I'm moving on. You do the same.
I'll work with you, but not on the
same stage. I'm around for you
anywhere else...

Willie smiles, understanding, but terminal.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

...we're family.

He drives off. Hector stands stunned, his whole world rocked
by his own disorder.

INT. HECTOR'S PLACE. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

He walks into the house. Puchi is no where in sight and
neither is his son.

HECTOR

Hello? Mami, where are you? Tito?

He looks around. It's too quiet. Goes and searches in the
kitchen. No one.

MUCH LATER...

Hector sees the headlights swing piercingly though the window
across the darkened living room...washing over his face,
then settling in the driveway.

INT. PUCHI'S CAR -- NIGHT

Puchi turns off the lights of the car. She sees that Hector's
car is there. She's all made up and dressed to kill...or to
fuck another man. She looks tense.

INT. HECTOR'S PLACE. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

She comes in shielding herself with Tito. Closes the door
behind her. Almost TV casual.

PUCHI

Hector?

Before she can hear a reply, Hector's on top of her, swinging
her across the living room...over a sofa.

HECTOR

Where the fuck were you...you fucking
whore, puta de mierda!

Puchi lands on the floor...ugly and violent.

PUCHI

Hector...you're crazy! What's gotten
into you?

HECTOR

Where the fuck...come on...you're stoned, right? Look at you...

She can only come up with a little smile.

PUCHI

Look at you...

The little boy starts crying and screaming.

TITO

Please stop it...

PUCHI

I was at my sister's! What's wrong with you.

HECTOR

(to the boy)

Was she?

PUCHI

You fucking bastard! Not the kid...!

She punches him back, but he doesn't hit back...he just backs away, to take a better look at her. To get back harder.

TITO

(screaming)

Papi stop...stop!

HECTOR

Dressed like that...como una puta.

PUCHI

Como una puta...and since when don't you like it?

He can't answer to that. Hector looks at Tito, who is once again alone or in the middle...looking at his family, as if looking at strangers.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

I wanted to surprise you...I went by the Club...where were you?

Hector is now puzzled, confused, guilty...even is she's not really innocent. He can't speak.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Where the fuck where you?

Hector crumbles down...his turn to cry like a kid himself. It's not about believing or not believing her tonight. No one wins.

HECTOR

I'm so sorry...I'm sorry Tito...

He tries to grab Tito...who refuses and stays alone. It's a horrible moment when your own son fears you.

PUCHI

Come on Tito...it's your dad...it's okay...he's just upset at something...not at you...he loves you.

She's talks to the boy, while she looks at Hector, playing it out...using the boy, their love, anything to stop him and make him believe her story...and find out his. It's lovers that can only feel through pain and can only exist hurting each other to make sure they're alive.

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Hector is sitting by the bed staring at the wall to wall mirror in front of him. He's numb.

HECTOR

I was late...again.

She sits down next to him.

PUCHI

That motherfucker! What happened?

Hector smiles at the absurdity of the end. Speechless.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

So what? People like you, late. He's nothing without you, fuck him!

HECTOR

Fuck me. I am the one that got fired...He was right, I'm fucking up my career...

PUCHI

He told you that?

He looks away from her, goes for a drink.

HECTOR

Not in those words.

PUCHI

You're the best. Everybody knows that, Hector. Let him go out there and sing with that squeaky little voice of his...it's his loss.

Puchi starts to take off her fancy dress, Hector notices the black lingerie. And then...it's back to the start.

HECTOR

Where were you?

She's been through this a hundred times. She knows it and so does he.

PUCHI

I went to my sister's and then I got some chicken...I thought you were coming in late. Baby...

Hector looks right up at her. Even if his worse suspicions are true, he can't let her go.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

(gently, motherly)

Okay, we're gonna take a couple of Quaaludes, get under the covers and hold on to each other, for a change. When we get up, everything is gonna be okay.

She finds the pills, undresses him, gets in the bed and cradles him. They're both feeling numb and peaceful.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Don't worry Papi, we'll figure it all out.

INT. A STAGE SOMEWHERE -- NIGHT

Hector and 'his' band are playing a slow Bolero. He looks alone on stage. Willie's is a confusing loss, another rejection, another brother gone.

Now he's a more 'sophisticated' Hector, with the sins and the fads of the moment. Cool, aloof, hardly moving, just the necessary sway for the song...and the mood. Less is more. And the people like him more. The more drama, the more they love him.

He has the money, the habit, a future and all the trouble success requires sometimes...but something is off tonight.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

Puchi finds him sitting alone in his room...he looks tired and worn, his smile crooked and turned off.

HECTOR

It was my father's birthday today...I called, but he didn't pick up the phone.

PUCHI

(like a bad psychiatrist)

Maybe he wasn't home.

HECTOR

I tried ten, fifteen times.

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The sound of NIGHT CRICKETS are heard coming through the open window. As Hector stares at the window and listens, his eyes flutter.

HECTOR

You ever tried looking at the Coqui singing?

He picks up a little statuette from the night table. It the classic little green frog native of Puerto Rico. *The Coqui*.

The little COQUI FROG sits on the bed now...

PUCHI

...in the Bronx...no no, never saw one, you're right? So?

She cuddles next to him, he puts her arm around her.

HECTOR

You see the Coqui? Their singing is a very special sound...but they only sing in two notes...one tune. That's it...over and over.

(imitates them)

That's all... They thrive everywhere in Puerto Rico but they cannot survive anywhere else.

PUCHI

(with affection)

You are very much like the Coqui, I guess Hector...fuck, you can be depressing, man. Look at me...am I in love with a frog? Tell me you're depressing...

She puts her arms around him and hugs him...

HECTOR

Watch out...I think you got the little frog right under your...

PUCHI

Ouch...you.....

(kissing him)

On the TV...news. 1974 Viet Nam. The FALL OF SAIGON...the helicopter shot ABOVE THE American embassy.

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY AM

Puchi blindly feels for Hector in her sleep. Instinct snaps her awake. She gets up and sees...a silhouette.

HECTOR sitting in a chair, HOLDING A 45 AUTOMATIC and staring at her with a glazed calm over him.

PUCHI

Hector....

He doesn't respond nor acknowledge her getting up.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Honey...? You okay?

Puchi slowly picks up the phone, dials.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

(hushed voice)

I need an ambulance, right away...

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAWN

Amongst other concerned families, Zayda sits patiently, attending to her own heartbeat...this is difficult on everybody. Puchi talks to a DOCTOR. WE DON'T HEAR THE CONVERSATION, but we know what they saying.

DOCTOR

... you're aware that your husband is like a walking drugstore? His arms...

She cuts in, with a 'please stop the bullshit' left arm gesture that almost hits the Doctor.

PUCHI

Tell me something' I don't fuckin' know. I wake up and I see my husband lookin' like a character in a horror movie, holding a gun! What the hell is that?

IN A WHITE CELL...

Hector sits alone, staring off into space. Peacefully turned off. No singing, no talking, no one to watch. Withdrawn and in a drug withdrawal.

PUCHI OS

...I would've loved checking myself in somewhere and taking a break too...but I couldn't do that.

He trembles, shakes, silently begging for a fix, to at least patch things up with himself and go through madness with some dignity.

Zayda is sitting next to her. Turns the music off. Showtime.

EXT. CREEDMORE STATE ASYLUM -- DAY

As Puchi is getting out of the car, she sees Priscilla, who heads directly for her. She notices Puchi's dress.

PRISCILLA

Going to a dance?

PUCHI

He's your brother...but he's my husband too. Give me a fucking break, would you?

PRISCILLA

I wish I could, but from the first day you met him and from the first day I met you...I had a bad feeling. His father never wanted him to come... so he'd never meet people like you. I always wanted to tell you that.

Puchi feels the punch, but it's just the wind. She walks away, leaving Priscilla talking to herself. *

PUCHI

You said it. I hope you're happy now. Ciao Priscilla...mind your own business...go get fucked and all of that. You may not like 'my kind', but he doesn't seem to mind it too much.

Priscilla stops to give it to her.

PRISCILLA

Look where he is.

INT. BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Lines of cocaine in the mirror. The face of Puchi appears in the reflection, made up for some kind of 'party', she gets closer to the mirror...hovering over it. Her face closer and closer to it. She looks as crazed as Hector, finally. One down, one to go.

AN OLDER PUCHI STARES AT US, AT CAMERA.

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY *

She nods silently, affirming some nightmare she remembers. But she doesn't say a word, maybe for the first during the interview, she can only stay quiet and let the shame stay out of the story. No questions no words...as the CAMERA rolls on and Puchi avoids any incrimination.

EXT. QUEENS HOUSE -- DAY

Cookie and Tito play catch in the front yard. The Mercedes pulls into the driveway. It's Hector coming home reception. As Hector and Puchi get out.

TITO

Dad!!!!

Tito runs over and hugs his daddy. Hector holds on to his son, closes his eyes, pressing the little kids body against his.

TITO (CONT'D)

Dad...I can't breathe! You're killing me!

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

They're eating dinner. Puchi eats quietly watching Hector devour his plate of home cooking 'habichuelas'. Tito is making dad catch up.

TITO

...her name is Geraldine...but we are only friends. She's ten.

HECTOR

Oh...she's an older woman...likes younger men...like your mom, right?

TITO

She likes Ivan...he plays football...and he's older. He hates me.

HECTOR

Have you asked her out?

TITO

No. Where?

HECTOR

Here...

TITO

(young cool)
Here? She'll think that I'm crazy too...

They all burst out laughing. Hector goes over to Tito.

HECTOR

(hugging and kissing)
Come here you little cabroncito...I missed you...missed tickling your little...
(grabs the kid)
...stomach like this...

Tito is laughing.

TITO

Dad...no...

HECTOR

Oh yes...I missed doing this so much... why don't you marry this chick? Come one...you're old enough?

The kid laughs.

TITO

You're crazy!

Yes, dad is crazy.

Hector looks at Puchi as he plays and kisses his happy little boy again. Yes, it's good to be home.

INT. BEDROOM/BATHROOM - NIGHT

Hector lays on the bed, watching Puchi get undressed to her bra and panties. A dozen PILL bottles sit on the night table. He's wearing a the same shirt and tie...ready for the a canceled show or something...backstage at home.

HECTOR

Look at this...it's like the night table of my grandfather...

PUCHI

(half sly)

Take your medication. I don't want you to go crazy on me tonight.

HECTOR

Okay.

As he takes a pill from each vial and swallows, she walks into the bathroom, cool and normal. But nothing is.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

PUCHI

(talking into mirror,
eyes closed)

Ralphy called...

HECTOR OS

What did he want?

PUCHI

What do you think...?

She opens her eyes, stares at herself now.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

He's got a bunch of stuff lined up,
show in Los Angeles, Chicago...

BACK TO SCENE

Hector doesn't want to know about work. He doesn't react to it. She hears that. He's silent and awkward, jumping out of his skin.

PUCHI OS

I told him that first you had to get
back to...spending time with your
son...making love to your wife...

THE WATER IS TURNED ON...

*

Hector LISTENS TO IT. But can't react to that either. He forces himself to take baby steps into the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM -- NIGHT

NEW :

Puchi is already naked and inside the bathtub....(almost like in the opening BATH scene...when her toe nails surface through the water...like love fins) Now it's all of her. Just there...waiting...like a shark in the water. One that will tear you apart with a smile in your face.

He stands outside, watching her body...a sexy blur. A face to die for. He's a stranger.

PUCHI

What?

Hector walks closer. Can't do a thing. He just stares her right in the face...re-discovering her. The sounds of water filling all the space...their silence.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

What is it baby? Nervous?

They both know. He smiles. He half buried in the water, just eyes on the surface.

HECTOR

Yeah... I'm straight.

She grabs him, feels her way around his crotch...her eyes always on him. Still trying to come honest.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

We've never been straight, you and I...and...

She slowly pull him to her and takes him into the shower with her. Hector gets inside the tub...FULLY DRESSED.

They stare at remember each other. Casually, like across the table on a first date. Yes, this is Hector.

PUCHI

I know. Come...Yeah...that's it.
I'm more scared than you are.

He holds on to her. (NEW: as she slowly undresses him from his soaked shirt and tie...)

PUCHI (CONT'D)

It's like... swimming...like riding a bicycle...it all comes back to you...I'm so fucking nervous too.

They kiss, the water falling over them...they hold on to each other...healing...drowning in each other.

MONTAGE

They make love in the shower, (TUB) they make love on the sink and she gives him a blow job as he's sitting on it, they fuck everywhere. Passionate and desperate fucking. It does come back to him.

AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR PLAYS

WE HEAR THE NOISE OF A NIGHTCLUB...

INT. EL CORSO NIGHTCLUB -- NIGHT

The place is packed and quiet for a change, as a young man with an acoustic guitar takes the stage. He sits in a chair. He is RUBEN BLADES, the charismatic SPRINGSTEEN OF Salsa. A handsome and smart Panamanian writer/singer in a black Pierre Cardin suit.

RUBEN BLADES

...Hello I'm Ruben Blades...and tonight I'm here to give someone a present. I wrote this song for Hector Lavoe, someone I really admire, since I was a kid who wanted to be a singer. After I sing it to you, it's his. It's called "El Cantante".

He begins...and the story of Hector Lavoe starts unfolding in song, in a beautiful auto-biographical tune that will once again, re-define the career and life of Hector, thus becoming his biggest hit ever...and his signature song for life.

RUBEN BLADES (CONT'D)

(singing)

Yo...soy el cantante...que hoy a venido a cantar...

In a corner of the club Hector listens to the song that will, once again, take him to a higher peak.

A STRING SECTION ROARS...

It's Hector's version of the song now...with it's sweeping violins bridge...and all the drama of his life rolled into a powerful song. A salsa symphony.

WE HEAR HECTOR SINGING....

he's in the studio at work. Alone in the booth. Like in the confessional. Wille is inside the booth, in charge.

HECTOR SINGING
 ...lo mejor del repertorio...que a
 ustedes voy a cantar...

INT. RECORDING STUDIO -- NIGHT

A seven minute masterpiece arranged and produced by his old friend Willie Colon. Hector sings his heart out in his most personal song ever.

HECTOR SINGING
 ...y canto a la vida de risas y
 penas... de momentos malos...

Hector is BACK. The more fucked up, the luckier, the bigger, the more people wants him. In the booth, we see Puchi, his Yoko, listening, hypnotized by the power of song. By Hector.

THE SONG PLAYS...

FIFTH AVENUE

We see Hector and Puchi on Fifth Avenue with Tito. Thousands of people crushed around them...the world is theirs.

CENTRAL PARK

A magic NYC moment..as the Lavoies play in Central Park. And even if it was only for days here and there, what you see today is a happy, successful family.

Once again, Hector has been given proof that his gift is his, if he wants it. Lots of people with their eyes on him. A perfect moment to fuck it all up soon.

HECTOR SINGING (CONT'D)
 ...y de cosas buenas.

THE SONG CONTINUES OVER THE NEXT SCENE...

telling us the story.

INT. HECTOR'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Puchi wakes up, feels bed next to her. Empty. She frantically scans the room. Empty.

HECTOR OS

(singing)

...y nadie pregunta si.....si sufro,
si lloro, si tengo una pena que llere
muy hondo...

INT. HALLWAY -- NIGHT

She races out, down the hall, looks into TITO'S ROOM. The kid is asleep. Alone.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Puchi enters. No sign of Hector.

HECTOR OS

(singing)

...vinieron a divertirse y pagaron
en la puerta...

She looks out the window and sees her Mercedes is GONE. She puts two and two together. Her eyes turn dead...the thrill is going, one disappointment at a time.

INT. MERCEDEZ -- NIGHT

Hector is driving. He looks at ease, determined, with that addict's drive of going to the end of the earth to get straight, to stop feeling the emptiness...and be selfishly normal.

THE SONG PLAYING IS THE ONLY COMPANY HE HAS...

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE. FOURTH STREET -- NIGHT

The Mercedes PULLS UP outside a burnt- out building. Only drug business and stranded Euro-trash give a little life to this cemetery. He gets out of the car briskly. He's home.

HECTOR OS

(singing)

...no hay tiempo para tristeza, vamos
cantante...comienza!

INT. SHOOTING GALLERY -- NIGHT

A very stoned Hector is SLAMMED against a wall by strong BLACK JUNKIE...and a short Puerto Rican woman, who are holding him up...robbing him for whatever he's carrying with him. She pulls out his watch.

JUNKIE WOMAN

...you got more of these papi...and
I need to know the time...very busy
lately too...tu sabe.

HECTOR

I know...but that's all I got...I'm
sorry.

The man searches around the table in front of him. It is covered with overflowed ashtrays, water glasses, burnt spoons, cotton balls, syringes and glassine bags of heroin and cocaine...but the black junkie is looking for something. Finds nothing except for a knife in his pocket.

BLACK JUNKIE

...you ain't got anymore cash? You're
the fucking shit now...and you go
around broke? What the fuck's wrong
with you? You know where you are?

Slaps Hector...nothing a broke junkie hates more than a broke junkie. Hector checks his mouth...there's blood.

HECTOR

Come on man...hit me somewhere
else...look, you want my shoes...

BLACK JUNKIE

What size you wear?

HECTOR

Nine and half...

The black junkie pushes him back.

BLACK JUNKIE

My dick is nine and a half...that
don't fit me...

He stares at Hector.

HECTOR

I'm sorry, man...really, next time I
know...yeah.

BLACK JUNKIE

You're funny eh?

The guy punches Hector, throws across the room, kicking him, venting out.

BLACK JUNKIE (CONT'D)

You wanna be funny now?

The woman stops him from stabbing Hector.

JUNKIE WOMAN

...easy Raymond...this guy...people
know him and...

But she starts nodding off and can't continue...the black man takes Hector's car keys from his hand.

Hector is scared to death now. Shooting galleries were sanctuary, not mugging grounds...not for him anyway.

BLACK JUNKIE

Your lucky day motherfucker...let's make a deal?

A CLOSE UP OF PUCHI today....

PUCHI OS

It scared the hell out of him...

INTERVIEW

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

PUCHI

...nigga never got wear that watch. My brother Papo saw the car parked outside...and stopped him. You know, he had his business there...so here we have some black dude strolling out of the competition dope house wearing Hector watch and coat...and heading straight for the Mercedes...

*

INT. PHOTO STUDIO -- DAY

The cover of Hector's album "La Comedia" is being shot. Hector is dressed up like Charlie Chaplin, hat, cane, ill fitting suit. The works...and it works. He looks like a dead ringer for the famous tragic-comic genius. The studio is filled with the usual dozen of hangers on, groupies, drinks, grass, loud disco playing.

Hector is doing the classic Chaplin poses against a white background...Puchi is there, sort of...in between Camera Flashes, Hector notices her by the phone and then she's gone.

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM TENEMENT -- NIGHT

It's pouring down rain. Hector spies on Puchi from inside his car. He's still wearing his Chaplin outfit. Catches her coming out of a building. He gets out and runs to her...

HECTOR

Hey Hello...excuse me, you living around here now?

She's speechless.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

What the fuck you're doing there...fucking the bass player or the drummer...?

PUCHI

You really wanna know who I'm
fucking...all of them. The bass
player, the drummer, the pianist...all
of them except the singer.
Yeah...because he's too fucking high
to get it up...so I have to get where
I can...you understand that?

Hector is the one now speechless.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

You've accused me of fucking so many
men that I'm finally going to fuck
as many men as I'm guilty of
screwing...

She looks for a cab...there's none.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

Uhhmm...

She turns around without waiting for a response, takes off
her shoes and starts walking in the rain...in the
street...through he traffic...

The rain soaking her dress, her hair and hiding the tears
running down her face. Traffic swerves away, stops...some
too afraid to even offer a ride to this beautiful woman
walking in the storm...as if she was walking down a deserted
street.

MUSIC PLAYS....WE HEAR HECTOR SINGING: **"Bandolera"**. *

Hector goes after her...the rain beating down on him too,
soaking him up fast...he takes his glasses off.

Suddenly, PUCHI stops one car, any car...and BEFORE HECTOR
can catch up to her, she gets inside and disappears from
sight. Hector can't do a thing, but feel the frustration of
loving a wild animal.

He stands in the rain, cars moving around him, honking horns,
screaming at the madman.

THE MUSIC PLAYS...it's a hooky sound of VALLENATO accordions
and CUMBIA that sticks to your skin and gets you up from
death. I comes from...

TITLE: CALI, COLOMBIA. 1983 *

MONTAGE: The lush Andean landscapes...the beauty of Colombia.

EXT. COLOMBIAN VILLA -- NIGHT

This is a major party. Opulent. Decadent. Dangerous.

A LAVISH VILLA sits in the middle of the jungle. Lights by the entrance, as if a Hollywood premiere was taking place somewhere in a forbidden druglords Vegas fantasy in Cali. Hector sees it. A mirage. The HOST, charming & dangerous. We've met before, He shows Hector around. A proof of his powers of persuasion. *

HOST
 ...this is home...and this is not
 work.
 (he touches his heart)

HECTOR
 (concerned)
 You okay?

He nods. It's just to emphasize his coke-dribble.

HOST
 You're here.

GUESTS that stink of dirty money, party on the marbled patios donned with fountains/statues and the spacious grounds...filled with crime spent dreams. Cartel Heaven. *

HOST (CONT'D)
 Here, people love you more than
 anywhere. You know that?

WAITERS in white Tuxedos carry trays of exotic live lobsters, hors d'oeuvres, etc. WAITRESSES in mini-dresses carry trays of Cristal and cocaine.

HECTOR
 That's a lot of love...

A state of the arts stage, set up for tonight...where the 'vanellato' band fills the night with Cumbia's infectious rhythm. Ticking the cocaine.

THE ACCORDION PLAYER jumps off the stage and climbs on top of a table...and then to another table, the guests holding him up...all the time playing his solo...a feverish squawking melody...the crowd is WILD and so is Hector, watching this Jimi Hendrix of the accordion.

The guy eventually PLAYS ON HIS BACK AS HE'S PASSED OVER THE CROWD like a human tray, landing back on the stage just in time for the chorus of the song and of course...the strobe lights to start making things more confusing and crazy.

LATER...bathed in blue....

All the guys in the band have their own bottles of Aguardiente next to them, as they prepare to play. Hector stands on stage, snorting cocaine off a silver tray held by a beautiful WAITRESS.

Hector looks up at a band member.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 (serious)
 I can't feel the back of my head.

Both crack up laughing. Hector grabs the Microphone.

SUBTITLES WHEN NEEDED

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 Estan todos gozando? I was telling
 my friend here that I can't feel the
 back of my head...any of you out
 there that can't feel the back of
 their heads...raise your hands...

The crowd raises their hands, hollers, etc.

GUESTS
 Si!

Hector laughs. Everybody laughs with him. This is
 unchartered stoned territory.

HECTOR
 I'm glad! I tell you, estoy muy
 contento de estar aqui.
 (taking it all in)
 Everybody is laughing, dancing... I
 may move here tomorrow. Where are
 we? This is Argentina, right?

More laughter. The people love him. The HOST beams.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 Okay...I'm joking...I love Cali!

AT A TABLE -- A drunk COLOMBIAN shouts out....becomes the
 local coke-fried heckler.

COLOMBIAN
 Cabron! Ponte a cantar y no hables
 tanta mierda!
 (Hey Asshole! Sing
 and don't talk so
 much shit!)

The song starts. ("El Dia de Mi Suerte")...but the heckler
 shouts it down.

COLOMBIAN (CONT'D)
 Not that one. Pendejo, canta otra
 cancion. The other song...

Hector stops the band...only the percussion cooks and Hector
 raps...like in a comedy club.

HECTOR

Que te pasa papi? Dime....

The crowd laughs. The man doesn't think it's funny to be humiliated in front of his hoodlum friends. The Colombian, explodes, whips out his REVOLVER, points it at Hector and walks UP TO THE STAGE.

The band stops. The guests stop dancing. The party stops.

COLOMBIAN

Hijo de Puta, who the fuck you think you are?

Two other COLOMBIANS walk up...the Host stares from a table near the stage.

COLOMBIAN BODYGUARD

Joaquin! Baja el arma. Put the gun down.

Joaquin keeps his eyes on Hector, who forces a smile. The gun still pointed straight between his eyes.

OVER AT A FRONT TABLE

A distinguished looking PATRON in his fifties gets up, to address the concerned guests. (We've seen him before, lurking...seducing Hector.)

HOST

Todo esta bien...it's okay.

He smiles casually as he walks over to Joaquin, with an understanding smile on his face.

JOAQUIN

(exasperated)
Patron...

HOST

(patiently)
Dame el arma, por favor...'Quiqui'?

Joaquin hands him the revolver. The Patron looks at Hector.

HOST (CONT'D)

Senor Lavoe, por favor,
disculpeme...tu sabes...

In one swift motion...HE SHOOTS JUAQUIN IN THE HEAD three times. Juaquin jumps and jerks as if plug into a wall and shocked, but Juaquin doesn't die.

It's a starter's GUN. A coke joke that scares the shit out of everyone in the place, specially Joaquin, who after peeing in his pants starts to laugh at the horror of staying alive...with point blank burns on face and chest...and then

MORE LAUGHTER...more MADNESS as a couple of tough Indian looking suits drag him away to go laugh somewhere else. Maybe dead in a ditch near by. And the party goes on.

Hector feels the back of his head, does a little more blow and kicks off with a song.

MONTAGE:

More music. More love. More madness.

More dysfunctional behavior between Puchi and Hector. The WAR OF LOVE is taking a toll on everything. *

ON TV...

HECTOR IS SPEAKING TO CAMERA..."El Cantante" in the background. It's an Anti-Drug public service spot.

HECTOR

Hello, my name is hector Lavoe, el cantante. But today I'm not here to sing, I am here to give you a sermon...

(laughs)

To tell you about drugs. Plain and simple : Drugs will kill you. Yeah...I know you're saying: 'Hey look who's saying it'. Well you know that I know what I'm talking about...think about it...we have enough problems in our communities to keep on going like it's not killing us. It is. Listen to Hector...on the record and off the record. Stay clean.

The Image FREEZES. A title card under Hector's earnest face:

Las Drogas Matan. Drugs kill.

The TV is shut off.

INT. FANIA RECORDS -- DAY

Jerry, Ralphy and a bunch of other suit and tie guys stop watching, turn to their unpleasant faces and start getting to public relation damage control...basically.

JERRY

They'll think it's a joke...people will continue doing drugs and we will stop selling records. He's the bad boy of salsa...the only one left...no one will believe this shit!

To Ralphy.

JERRY (CONT'D)

I say nix it...let's keep Hector as we know him, Okay? It's like those born again people..

Makes a 'who believes them or cares' face.

JERRY (CONT'D)

It'll hurt you and it'll hurt us.

Ralph turns to the suits. (could one of them be the druglord HOST...?)

RALPH

You can find another spokesman...'our' Spanish world doesn't buy into this confessional trip...I know Hector really wanted to do this...I'll talk to him.

EXT. HECTOR'S PLACE -- DAY

The family relaxes by poolside.

It almost looks like a normal Sunday afternoon barbecue. It isn't. Behind his shades, Hector idles by...just high enough to endure the lows that come with the highs. A spoiled-twelve year old Tito is trying to do some break dancing for his folks. *

TITO

Watch this...

He tries a spin, a jump, etc. Hector applauds.

HECTOR

Beautiful...that's good.
(to Puchi)

I don't want to see anymore doctors.

TITO

Look now...

Another little dance...

PUCHI

It's not a Doctor.

Hector lights a cigarette. Pisses, stalked by Puchi.

HECTOR

Can't I enjoy watching my son...he's better than seeing any doctor. I enjoy this...dame un break. Okay?

PUCHI

Yeah, you should enjoy it since you
only see him once every six
months...even when you're fuckin'
home...

Hector barely wants to acknowledge that.

*

PUCHI (CONT'D)

...and don't think I don't know you're
high, Hector.

HECTOR

Come on, don't start with that shit
again. I'm just relaxing here...maybe
I should find somewhere else to go
by myself and chill...

PUCHI

Yeah...do that...go with some of
those whores that keep calling...that
should relax you.

She gets up and starts walking away when Hector explodes,
grabs an ashtray and throws it at her. It misses her by
inches and crashes against a wall. It startles Puchi and
frightens Tito...who looks at his father and mother, tears
welling up in his eyes.

Hector doesn't know what to do.

HECTOR

I'm sorry...

The little boy starts picking up the pieces of the broken
ceramic ashtray he had so proudly made for his dad. Puchi
and Hector stare at their son as he picks up one piece at a
time...trying to put it back together, something too broken
to be fixed ever.

MUSIC STARTS.

BATA DRUMS PLAY FURIOUSLY...

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM ROOFTOPS -- NIGHT

A peaceful moment from 103 street. Just below, El
Barrio...and under a building in 104 street: HOPE.

A SONG IN YORUBA IS HEARD...

INT. SPANISH HARLEM BASEMENT -- NIGHT

A SANTERIA ritual. White robed dancers, chanting in the
ancient YORUBA, spinning, calling the deities on, shaking
off the evil eye. The white clad drummers, talking to the
Gods...playing their specific beat...eyes closed, in a trance.

We hear his voice singing the powerful song "AGUANILE".

The room is lit by candles, the place cluttered with Religious Santeria statues, dolls, artifacts...and believers.

A woman in her seventies walks in circles around Hector, who stand in the middle of the room. She smokes a cigar, blows the smoke at him...and circles...speaking in tongues.

LATER

INT. MADRINA'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

(SCENE PLAYS IN SPANISH)

A small little place. Santeria objects everywhere. She is talking to Hector and Puchi.

Hector's quiet, emotional.

MADRINA

(In Spanish)

Why don't you accept your gift?

HECTOR

What?

MADRINA

(In Spanish)

Your gift of singing. The Lord has given you the power to sing, the power to bring happiness to millions.

HECTOR

(In Spanish)

When my mother died I became a singer, I was five years old...pain gave me a voice...I can't throw away my pain.

Madrina smiles knowingly. He's trying to be funny. It's the fear.

MADRINA

(In Spanish)

You're walking with the Devil...he pretends he's your friend...actually makes you feel good. He's smart.

Hector listens.

MADRINA (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

Hector, the power of the Evil Eye can be very dangerous...he can disguise himself as your pain...stop suffering to make him go away.

She gets up, goes over to an ALTAR, takes a WHITE, BLUE AND RED BEADED NECKLACE off a STATUE OF SAINT BARBARA.

She returns to the tables, kisses the necklace, puts it around his neck.

MADRINA (CONT'D)

(In Spanish)

Wear these for protection. Santa Barbara will protect you...and be by your side. She will listen and speak to you. But you better listen. You don't play with the saints.

MC OS

Ladies and gentlemen...

1987

OFF SCREEN we Hector signals the band. They play the intro to "**EL TODOPODEROSO**". The crowd goes wild. People dancing in their seats. *

EXT. CONCERT STAGE -- NIGHT *

The MC, dressed cool, funky sunglasses, stands center stage.

MC

...the moment you've all been waiting for. El Cantante de Los Cantantes...Hector Lavoe!

The CROWD goes berserk. Hector is energized by the crowd.

Hector walks on stage to thunderous applause. As the MC gives him a hug...Hector looks good. Clean and happy. The MC walks off stage. Hector takes the microphone.

MONTAGE *

ABSTRACT SERIES OF CONCERT AND CROWDS. (MIX OF STOCK AND OUR STUFF) THINGS COULDN'T BE BETTER MOMENTS...BUT WEREN'T THAT WELL.

The CROWD cheers. Hector laughs. Looks a little mean, a little too sharp. Deviled.

HECTOR

Why do you like me so much...?
Something's gotta be wrong with you?

More cheers, whistles. As the CROWD waves their hands back and forth.

FADE singing...THE CONCERT BECOMES SLOW MO. Even at his happiest or saddest, he could sing...and whatever was going through his brain, made a stop at his face first...as those eyes, those eyes where everything showed.

PUCHI (V.O.)

...he was tired...it was like...it was like a religious experience between him and his fans... That was it. He hated it but depended on it.

*

INT. QUEENS HOUSE - NIGHT

Hector sits at the table eating dinner as Puchi sits across from him and eats him up with her eyes. Who's cheating who?

PUCHI OS (V.O.)

...anyway, I had sent Tito home with my sister...we wanted to be alone.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hector, cigarette in his mouth, sits watching the news.

He puts his hands in his pocket, comes out with a lighter and TWO GLASSINE BAGS of HEROIN.

PUCHI OS

..he was trying...my God...

He tosses the BAGS on the coffee table. He lights the cigarette, taking big drags as his eyes go back and forth from the TV to the BAGS.

He rests the cigarette on the table, TAKES OFF HIS SANTERIA NECKLACE, sets it down then picks up the BAGS and walks into the BATHROOM.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Puchi races into the living room. SMOKE EVERYWHERE. She searches through the smoke. Sees the bathroom door ajar, races over, rips it open to find Hector nodded out on the toilet. FLAMES all around him.

Puchi shakes him, grabs his hand, they run upstairs.

PUCHI (V.O.)

...he passed out on the couch and dropped his cigarette...So I woke him up. We couldn't get out the front so he grabbed me by the hand and raced up the stairs...all of the sudden he became Superman.

*

A FLASH: HECTOR ON STAGE...

TALKING TO HIS AUDIENCE SOMEWHERE ELSE...

HECTOR

...everybody's saying something different version of what happened
(MORE)

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 but me...someone said: 'Oh...he was
 free-basing'...he was so high he
 thought he was Superman' and flew
 out the window...Jesus...can a man
 just drop a cigarette butt in the
 wrong place and start a little
 fire...?

The looks at the cigarette in his hand.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
 Fuck them!

The crowd cackles, cheers. No matter what he did wrong, it
 made him more part of them.

PUCHI OS
 ...God knows...there were a million
 stories.

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

PUCHI TODAY -- INTERVIEW.

An old photo shows the wall of the 55 Street Apt.

PUCHI
 People like Hector lend themselves
 to fantasy and to be what everybody
 wanted his history to be...you know
 what I'm saying? A million stories...

Puchi looks at the picture.

INT. 55TH ST. APT. - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

GUCCI PUCHI. A beauty in designer everything. She takes a
 big drag on her cigar, inhales the smoke, blows out the smoke
 in her new living room. On the wall, we see... LEG CASTS
 ENCASED IN GLASS. She's like a caged animal walking around
 the empty apartment.

PUCHI OS
 ...and that's how we got those.
 Everybody who was anybody in the
 business came by and signed em' ya
 know. Like a church service. That
 was the at the last place we
 had...yeah.

The CAMERA scans the walls donned with artwork over to th,
 hall with all the gold records. A bored looking teenager
 Tito comes out of his room. Bumps into his crazed mother
 He looks like a very spoiled kid.

PUCHI
 Where are you going tonight?

TITO

Don't know...anywhere.

PUCHI

You're just gonna hit the sidewalk and decide what you're doing...don't talk to me like I'm your grandmother or something...if I ask where the fuck you're going, you tell me...and if you don't know where you're going, you make it up...but please don't say...you don't know...that's pretty lame. Come here.

The young man comes over....

TITO

Mom please...

She hugs him, as if he was still her little baby.

PUCHI

Please what...?

She holds on to him, giving him all the love she can. She knows what being this age was like. It's scary today.

TITO

Ok...I love you.

He hugs her even tighter.

ON THE HALLWAY...

Tito comes out, shows his waiting buddy a peek of the GUN IN HIS WAISTBAND...they slap five.

ON A TV...

HECTOR IS SINGING.

We see him on a TV monitor in the greenroom. His PIXILATED face, like A MAP OF ALL THE PAIN IN THE WORLD. He sings the slow blues bolero: "Taxi". At times looking straight at the CAMERA...as if straight at Puchi....straight at us.

INT. BACKSTAGE - GREEN ROOM - LATER

Nice, cushy VIP room. Buffet table. Full bar. Hector on TV. A drunk and hostile Puchi sits on the couch ranting to Zaida as other VIP's try to turn a deaf ear. This is the MONSTER she's turned into, by choice or by design.

She glances over to a WOMAN in a low cut dress.

PUCHI
 (loud whisper)
 Look at that bitch over there with
 her tits hangin' out. She's been
 wantin' to fuck Hector for years.

ZAIDA
 I hear ya baby, I hear ya. Did she?

Puchi doesn't listen, she's just ranting.

PUCHI
 (loudly)
 Nobody would have been here if it
 wasn't for me. There would have
 been NO concert if it wasn't for me.

ZAIDA
 Shit, Hector's lucky you don't sing
 'cause you'd be doin' that to.

They "slap five" together. Cookie sneaks his head in the
 room. Zayda gets up and leaves for a minute.

ZAIDA (CONT'D)
 Gotta pee.

Another WOMAN looks over at Puchi.

PUCHI
 (to the woman)
 That's right bitch. Who's dick did
 you suck to get in here?

The prudent 'bitch' ignores her. Ralph walks into the room,
 gives the woman a kiss.

The woman points to Ralph.

WOMAN
 His.

PUCHI
 (to Ralph)
 Hey, Baldy, where's my money?

Ralph ignores Puchi, takes the woman's hand and walks out.
 Puchi stays alone in a fog...no one left to insult. She
 looks bitter, worn and all alone.

EXT. AFTERHOURS -- NIGHT

Hector is walking through the nondescript door. Papo, sees
 him from inside his car. Doesn't say hello or call him.

INT. AFTERHOURS -- NIGHT

Can't see you hand in front of your face. A four piece BAND plays to beautiful people: drug dealers, musicians, gangsters. A tired Hector pretends to grin and act normal. Cookie is sitting next to him in a private booth, next to a bottle of Curvosier.

HECTOR

...maybe I rent a small apartment somewhere in Jersey...I gotta do something, man. I'm afraid to stay, but more afraid to go.

Hector looks at the band, as they play to the damaged crowd this late...or this early. Yes, he remembers those nights. Cookie breaks the spell with something imprudent to say.

COOKIE

You know...It's none of my business what she does, but it's my business that she doesn't get you arrested.

He nods to Hector, proud that 'he's said it'.

HECTOR

What are you talking about now?

COOKIE

Hector, something I heard...from a good source...it's not 'bochinche'.

HECTOR

What is it? Stop preparing me for it.

COOKIE

She's dealing coke...small time, a gram here and there...but that's the last thing you need, it's been going on for a while...

HECTOR

Puchi? She doesn't need the money...

Hector turns pale, as the spotlight hits his face, but has no time to digest it. They're spotted.

BAND LEADER

Hector...we see you. Come up and sing!...You're under arrest...you can't run. We need a singer.

It's almost a REPRISE of that night where it all started 20 something years ago. Him and his old friend...and a band without a singer.

Everyone looks at him and applauds as he gets up and walks on to the small stage. Cookie sits on the piano, bad hand and all. He starts to REPRISE the GONE OLD days. The old Tejedor classic " ESCANDALO". *

After a couple of heart felt verses, the trumpet player goes on a solo. He sees Puchi coming in. His face changes into fear...because he sees something in her eyes he's never seen before. *

She looks scary as she floats closer to the stage, walking like a zombie...VINTAGE MADNESS...with a twist. Heads turn. People laugh. But it's not funny. Hector imagines the worst.

Hector motions to a BOUNCER, who steps in and grabs her. It's another degrading moment.

PUCHI

Let go of me! Let go...

Hector looks at her as she falls on the floor...trying to pull the bouncer to spit him, to kiss her, to spit him again...taunting the man, like a sloppy drunk, nothing sexy about it. She is dragged off screaming and foaming at the mouth...but this time is different...it's difficult. *

PUCHI (CONT'D)

You motherfucker! Look what they're doing to your wife...do something you prick...you junkie little faggot...come on! *

But Hector does nothing as they take her away.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET -- NIGHT

An empty street. Puchi is stumbling and ranting in the sidewalk. It's the end of the night and New York feels empty, except for this crazed woman with a torn dress and a torn heart.

PUCHI

You coward...no wonder your own son fucking hates you!

She shoves him again. He stumbles for words.

HECTOR

Come on...st...stop...I can't...

PUCHI

(assassinating)

You can't raise your son. You can't even be a husband...You cant' even fucking sing anymore.

Hector starts to unravel himself, he puts his head in his hands. She rests for a second against a parked car.

HECTOR

What the hell are you talking about now? What is it with you? Why are you doing this...?

Then Puchi backs him into the wall...preps him for the killshot. Lowers her voice.

PUCHI

You don't have a son....

He starts to slump down against the wall. She grabs him.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

You hear me?!

As he looks up, eyes glazed over...EVERYTHING GETS SLOW AND HORRIFYING.

HECTOR

What the fuck are you saying?

She painfully tries to reach him, to hold on to something. She collapses into his arms, sobbing.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

What is it...?

Sees Puchi...knows something is wrong.

PUCHI

(choking on her words)

Tito's dead...he's dead...there was an accident...with a gun...and...he was shot...a friend shot him.

INTERVIEW - PUCHI SEARCHES THE ROOM FOR HIM...

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

Puchi is silent. Her eyes finally LAND on a corner of the room and stay there. The Camera rolls silently, until she returns to the Interview.

PUCHI

...I thought I'd die too...but you live through it...and it hurts much more. Hector? He died with him...

A COLOR PHOTO OF TITO FILLS THE SCREEN...

it's surrounded by flowers.

EXT. CEMETERY -DAY

Hector's eyes are filled with tears. He touches the microphone, it's almost like he's going to start a song.

He and Puchi stand by Tito's grave with a crowd of friends and family behind them.

HECTOR

...is not like you can bring him back, like he went to the store...it's something impossible to believe. You can believe in anything in life, you know... no matter how crazy it is...but not this...so...we're here, but we're not here...

Hector is unraveling emotionally, but he musters up a smile, not for him, not for the people there, but for Tito.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

See Tito...we're playing hide and seek...for the rest of our lives...but I'm gonna find you where you're hiding...

He walks away from the microphone. Puchi doesn't even touch him, he's stays alone. More alone than ever.

INTERVIEW...Puchi is crying too.

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

Very quiet...only distant traffic in the background. A firetruck in the distance.

PUCHI

...your son's smiling at you one day, you turn around and the next thing you know he's gone...no one prepares for that...all the death in the world doesn't get you ready for that...

(lights a cigarette)

...and I've seen a lot of dying around me...I grew up in streets where they would drop like flies...but for Hector it was very hard...it was something he never got over. Nothing was the same again...life changed and for the two of us...it was never the same again...he died, we died...that simple.

She touches her face with his hand...as if it was him caressing her...not letting her get so sad. A tear coming out her eyes.

INT. 55TH ST. APT. -- NIGHT

Puchi's eyes swollen with tears. Cookie comes over, hands her a plate of food, she can't have anything.

Puchi looks for him through the crowd in the apartment at the post funeral reception.

PUCHI

Thanks...where's my husband?

A flash of panic rushes over Cookie's face. He quickly scans the room...No Hector.

Cookie looks back at Puchi, knowing what's going through her head. Suddenly Hector comes out of the kitchen. Sees he's across the room.

EXT. 55TH STREET APT -- NIGHT

It's right after the funeral, He's still wearing the suit and tie...Puchi looks dead sitting in the red sofa...expressionless. Silence.

HECTOR

...you and I never talk, never been straight for more than three hours a day, that was when we first met maybe...twenty years ago? And we just go on with life like this...
(looking around)
like...this is our life and it's never gonna stop...or something like that....I love you...but it's impossible to...

She starts talking on her own, like two parallel conversations.

PUCHI

...impossible to...oh, I get it...

HECTOR

you know...see, like that...you..

...but he stops, fearful of what she'd do next.

PUCHI

Oh... now that our son is dead it all comes clear to you. I'm a bitch and you're a great guy...and that maybe the best thing for us to do, besides fucking other people...is to make it official, that you and I have all of the fucking sudden realized 'we ain't good' for each other, so we're breaking it up to try to fix it up...fix what up?

She paces around the room, like a bull before going into the ring. Gives him a hard, cold look.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

This?

She turns to one of the mirrored walls. We see on the fractured mirrored tiles the two of them. In broken love.

THEIR FACES DISSOLVING INTO...BUBBLES.

A LIGHTER FLICKS ON.

The dope bubbles, cooking in the filthy spoon. Hector lights a cigarette, now he's got all the time in the world. Nothing will stop him to wipe all the pain away. It's serene moment before communion.

QUICK CUTS...

He ties off his arm. Takes the syringe and slips the needle into his vein. RED BLOOD SHOOTS UP INSIDE THE DROPPER...LIKE A SERPENTINE...a deadly STREAMER spooling on CARNIVAL DAY.

SKELETAL SALSA music plays over. A BASS, A SCRATCH, A LONELY TRUMPET...ECHOES.

INT. SHOOTING GALLERY -- NIGHT

THIS SCENE WILL BE IN SPANISH.

LATER...

Hector stares at the TV, holding an ice cream bar that drips down his chest...watching the static on the TV.

He's filthy, unshaven, a burned down cigarette dangling from his mouth. As he points to an invisible person, the nodding junkies open their eyes and see nothing. He gets up to greet the INVISIBLE. Talks to the ghost.

HECTOR

Abuela?...What are you doing here?
How did you find me?

Doing a woman's voice...playing the GHOST.

HECTOR/ABUELA

They told me. I came to take you home.

It's chilling theater...the never ending tragic-comedy of his life.

HECTOR

(frightened)
No, no...I can't...I can't go home.

HECTOR/ABUELA

Don't talk like that...you are my favorite...my little one.

Goes over to the spot where 'she stands'.

HECTOR
No, no, you don't understand
Grandma...I killed my little boy.

HECTOR/ABUELA
Hector, you killed no one.

HECTOR
See...he needed me. That's all. I
should have given him more
attention...more love. I thought I
had...but I was too busy with...

He looks at his small junkie audience, half dead pieces of
men and women, staring at him, watching the surreal
performance.

JUNKIE WOMAN
Tito's happy, man. Your son's with
God.

Hector stares at her.

HECTOR
Who the fuck are you?

Hicks the table in front of her...works and dope and bottles
flying into the wall...

The dope fiends do nothing, it's all normal to them. Hector
sees what's left of him in a sliver of a mirror hanging from
the filthy wall...half a face. Half alive. All pain. He
closes his eyes and drops to the floor.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Hector is sitting alone. He sits up to look better as the
Doctor walks in with a folder in his hand.

HECTOR
So?

The Doctor sits across from him.

HECTOR (CONT'D)
It scares me when you sit down.

DOCTOR
It should.
(he opens the folder)
Cholesterol is okay...sugar is a
little off...prostate is fine...

HECTOR
But?

The Doctor stops the act. Closes his prop folder. Looks straight at him.

DOCTOR

The HIV test came back positive...

Hector shakes his head, as if he didn't hear well...as if he was spoken to in a foreign language he suddenly understands.

EXT. BROADWAY -- NIGHT

Hector walks alone, surrounded by the bright lights. But he looks pensive and distant, carrying bad news, one after another. A street musician blows on a saxophone in front of a store window...

HECTOR OS

I don't blame her...she's more scared than me.

INT. 55TH ST. APT. LIVING ROOM -DAY

The new place looks a mess. Hector, in a running suit, sits in a fog pretending to watch TV. He looks frail, sad and abandoned. Willie is sitting next to him. Hector keeps his eyes on the TV...where we see RUN DMC in some music show. It's the future in front of their eyes, but neither man sees it.

HECTOR

...she tested fine. She goes out, goes anywhere.

He shakes his head. Anyone could'a seen it coming.

WILLIE

Yeah...and we move on.

HECTOR

The phone doesn't ring except for the bill collectors...and fucking wrong numbers...I'm like 'hello, digame, hello...like, may I help you?' You know, whatever...hey, 'talk to me... Ok? Fuck you. Good-bye'.

He smiles.

Ralph sits, appeals to him.

WILLIE

Well, I am here...and there are people still waiting for you to... sing again...to see you. They feel for you, man, they've mourned with you...but they need you...these people love you Hector. No matter what.

(MORE)

WILLIE (CONT'D)

But they're not gonna wait forever.
You know how it is...

(beat)

You got a show in Puerto Rico. Take
it.

*

That bothers Hector, but he makes no big deal of it.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Let the people know you are alive.

Instead he looks at Willie as if he agrees with everything,
except for the being alive part.

HECTOR

You know me....I don't listen to
anybody.

WILLIE

Great. Biggest decisions ever in
life have been made without thinking
about them. Chevere.

(looking in the eye)

Your problem is, that you're a lucky
guy.

He thinks for a second. Looking straight back at Willie.

HECTOR

I deserve to be. Shit, I wish I was
the president...good luck didn't
want to do anything with me...

Willie smiles, listening to his old friend riffing, like
improvising in they're good old on stage.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I had more than good luck...and I
had you motherfucker.

The two old friends embrace one another. An embrace that's
been waiting for years.

PUERTO RICO...home again.

INT. LINCOLN MARK IV - MOVING - DAY

Hector looks out the window at the PUERTO RICAN COUNTRYSIDE,
mountains, valleys, panoramic view of the ocean. He closes
his eyes as he breathes in that wonderful island smell. It
gives him life.

HECTOR

(gently)

It's beautiful, right?

(singing)

Why do we leave?

*

Cookie looks straight at the road ahead of him...can't tell what's on Hector's mind.

EXT. COLISEO RUBEN RODRIGUEZ -- DAY

A crowd carrying Puerto Rican flags and "Hector Lavoe" banners files into the half empty stadium. A different excitement is happening backstage. A bad scene.

EXT. COLISEO RUBEN RODRIGUEZ - SIDE STAGE

The scattered crowd screams out his name. The band waits. Ralph puffs on a cigar, looking out at the anxious crowd as Hector and Cookie arrive. *

The Promoter comes over, appeals to Hector. *

PROMOTER

Hector, I'm sorry about the situation.
I didn't wanna cancel but Ralphy...but
there's no one here. They didn't
show up, it's not my fault!

It hits Hector. His people didn't show up? He stares as the others fight the wrong fight.

RALPH

(interrupting)

Hey! What the fuck you doin' talking
to the Artists? What you better do
is walk out on that fuckin' stage
and tell the crowd the show's
canceled!

(to the band)

Go back to the hotel, guys.

They all wait loyally by Hector.

PROMOTER

(panicked)

Are you crazy? I'll have a riot!

(to Hector)

Ralphy wants all the money up front.
I told him I'd have it...but look...no
one came. *

Hector's eyes are on the crowd, the flags, the banners. Even if it is just a few of his people, that made it more special.

HECTOR

It's cool. I just wanna sing. Forget
about the money, this one is on me.

Ralph turns. Foaming at Hector's suggestion...showing his power or rather, Hector's lack of it.

RALPH

Hector, are you crazy? What the fuck are you now; Saint Hector? I already sent all the other acts back to the hotel...this ain't a welfare concert.

HECTOR

Relax, I'll give you your commission anyway...I just want to sing.

RALPH

That's not the point! They're tearing down the stage...

Hector stops him with his hand.

HECTOR

(yelling)

Come on, vamos.

Hector walks ON STAGE with the band. The crowd stands cheering...but it's chaos out there. He grabs the mic. THUNDER IS HEARD...

The band plugs in...and tentatively takes their places.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

(yelling)

Que pasa mi gente! I'm here, all yours!

The band starts playing. Hector sings. A tropical storm breaks...heavy rain starts pouring, but the show goes on.

Until the sound starts going out instrument by instrument until only Hector's mic is on. He looks off stage to the SOUND MEN behind Ralph and Cookie.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Put the sound back on!

SIDE STAGE

Ralph throws his hands up.

RALPH

I fuckin' told him!

Cookie goes up to the sound board.

COOKIE

Put that shit back on...

Cookie looks around for the Promoter...gone.

ON STAGE

Hector motions his PERCUSSION section.

HECTOR

Give me some Congas...

The Conga starts a beat...steady and strong. Hector is soaking wet ready, as close to the audience as he can be. Hector starts singing again...but his mic is suddenly turned off...only the lonely Conga and a couple of horns try to fight it out. Hector keeps singing, but the audience can't hear him. The rain pouring down on him, like tears running down his face.

He tries to shouts the song out...but no one can listen as the thunder rolls and the rain drowns out the voice of a man alone on stage...crying out the lyrics to "Mi Gente"...but his people are now just about to start a RIOT. THING TURN INTO SLOW MOTION. A chair FLIES THROUGH THE RAIN...lands next to him.

SCREAMS CONTINUE...

mixed with the last dying conga sounds... audience echoes and hotel Muzak. A bad recipe cacophony.

INT. HOTEL BAR -- NIGHT

The horror has followed to the bar in lobby of the Sheraton, where Hector and Puchi are having it out in front of all the other band members, crew, strangers.

They fight, but we don't hear a sound...we've heard plenty of fighting and can only imagine. There is no truce ever with these two.

ALL THE SOUNDS FADE OUT...

and we only hear the sound of the ocean. Low, night waves...and the barely audible music from a bar blocks away.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

The door opens to the empty suite. Eerily quiet now. Hector walks in. At the end of the room, we see the empty balcony. (a REPRISE of once in the late 60's...) He walks through the room, opens the sliding door. Hector steps outside.

EXT. SUITE BALCONY -- NIGHT

It's finally PEACEFUL. Hector takes a look at the ocean beneath him, the palm trees. Listens to the waves...and feels the strange tranquility around him.

He smiles, with very sad look in his face. An emptiness in his eyes BEFORE THEY SHUT TIGHT.

A SIREN BLARES...

INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Hector's completely shattered and broken body is laid out on a stretcher, an oxygen mask over face. Paramedics frantically work to keep him alive as Puchi rocks back and forth, praying.

PUCHI

God, please help him...please help him...

INT. CENTRO MEDICO - EMERGENCY WAITING ROOM - LATER

*

Puchi sits all alone and silent in the waiting room. It's a sad lonely picture. The game is over. This is where the long road ends. What we hear is Puchi telling the tale.

PUCHI OS

...he jumped from the ninth floor...
Had multiple fractures, broken bones
and massive bruising to all his inner
organs, which... are already pretty
damaged from all the alcohol and
drug abuse. His Liver his Kidneys...

INT. FANIA RECORDS -- DAY

INTERVIEW--- Puchi's looking away from the CAMERA...A LITTLE RESTLESS. Too many memories stirred, too many questions that are answered now, years after the fact...too many 'I wish that I' moments...too much pain and regret.

PUCHI

He lived...yeah...five more years.

She thinks about what she says...putting together some sense into a tough past or coming up with final days wisdom.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

But it wasn't real life...

She looks straight at CAMERA, AT US...as we hear applause the intro to a song.

PUCHI (CONT'D)

...and I wasn't there for him. I
wanted to remember him like he wanted
me to.

She closes her eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

The HORNS announcing the closing words...the parting shot...and it'll be Hector's turn with his side of the story.

ON THE BLACK SCREEN

The sound of Salsa music and Arena crowd builds in volume.

The audience chanting: HECTOR! HECTOR! HECTOR!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN -- NIGHT

SIDE STAGE - Puchi stands next to Hector. She looks into his eyes...THE INTRO FOR "Todo Tiene su Final". The encore.

HECTOR

I just wanted to tell you that I
love you...

PUCHI

I love you too. Go ahead honey, go
tell them. I'll be here.

She kisses him. The band picks up the rhythm trying to pump Hector up.

HECTOR

(singing)
"...Todo tiene su final, nada dura
para siempre..."

Hector sings it as he knows it. "Everything must come to an end, nothing lasts forever..." A Prophetic salsa marker in his life. It hurts a bit.

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE follows as he stands walks ON STAGE, singing...every movement he makes: easy, poignant...giving. Hector spreads his arms to his fans...sheer adulation.

CLOSE ON PUCHI, HER FACE...as if watching him.

BUT WE'RE BACK TO THE INTERVIEW.

INTERVIEW OS

Do you miss him?

INT. FANIA RECORDS. STUDIO -- DAY

PUCHI

Everyday. Do you think that you can forget someone like that? they're all around you...wherever you go...he chases me...people like Hector you don't escape...you resign yourself to living your life with an invisible man...with a ghost...sometimes I'm cooking something, whatever...and I ask him 'hey Hector how do you want...?' You know...like he was there...it never goes away...people say, go ahead Puchi...there are a lot of better more normal men around...did I ever want that? you figure it out.

She looks around the room, more comfortable with the confession. Near the end. Out of words. Out of heart.

*

BACK TO SCENE...

Hector singing his heart out.

INTERVIEW OS

What would you tell him if he was here today ?

She is caught by surprise with this question. She shakes her head with a wishful smile...

PUCHI

...you don't wanna know what I'd tell him.

She laughs, making light of something so heartbreaking.

But the lyrics of the song we hear say for her. 'Everything must come to an end'... and this love story definitely did. Just listen to him. (SONG WILL BE SUBTITLED)

A CU FLASH OF PUCHI 2002: Outside MSG...staring at THE PAST.

BACK TO...

Hector singing, his inimitable style, ease in front of thousands...

THE LAST CONCERT

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN -- NIGHT

*

The show goes on. "TODO TIENE SU FINAL" continues.

Title Cards over concert shots:

*

Hector Lavoe died of AIDS complications on June 23, 1993. He was 43 years old. He is considered to be the greatest Salsa singer of his time and always remembered as a folk hero because he was "Of the people for the people."

HECTOR SINGING ON STAGE, waving....

ANOTHER TITLE CARD....

Nilda 'Puchi' Roman Perez, died in 2002 of mysterious circumstances.

HECTOR

Mi gente...te quiero de gratis!

*

A fan throws a PUERTO RICAN FLAG on stage. Johnny rushes over picks up the flag, drapes it over Hector. Twenty thousand fans strong cheering. Hector gives the POWER SIGN to his people. THE MUSIC PLAYS ON...

Puchi blows him a kiss, he smiles...and turns to his audience.
FOREVER.

ON STAGE

THE CROWDS CHEER...he dances, lost in himself. This is how
we all want to remember him. He looks around at the audience.
No big deal. Life gave him everything...and he never knew
it.

A cheer brings a smile to his face.

DISSOLVE TO:

END MONTAGE

...but now we see the STOCK FOOTAGE of thousands of his fans
in the streets of the Bronx paying tribute to another gone
Hero...mixed in with "**Our Latin Thing**" SNIPPETS of an
UNFORGETTABLE TIME.

The people, the music, the singer...the images all SLOWING
DOWN, transcending the magic and the spell now put on us.

*

