

HURRICANE NENA

original screenplay by
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FADE IN:

SHADES OF BROWN DANCE to CELIA CRUZ power-housing "SABROSO GUAGUANCO"... TITLES BEGIN.

It seems that giant flakes of brown chocolate glide down from the heavens. Are these fried, sweet plantains? Are they dried autumn leaves? These shavings come crashing onto a dark, textured surface.

DISSOLVE TO:

A SEPIA TONE OVER DUSTY, GRAINY FILM.

INT. WEALTHY LIVING ROOM - DAY - CUBA 1959

TITLE: CUBA, 1959

THE SONG ENDS, as a LITTLE GIRL'S HUGE HANDS appear and amass these brown leaves with unusual savvy. A little gold bracelet dangles delicately from her deft right hand.

BIG EBONY eyes look up -- pink barrettes in her shiny black hair. This is NENA when she was 8... IN SPANISH, WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES:

LITTLE GIRL

Mom doesn't like it when I do this with you.

Her FATHER, (60's) a man whose classic looks and tenor could melt the most cold hearted woman, faces her. He wears a white *guayabera*, and brown dress pants:

FATHER

But I do.

LITTLE GIRL

My hands get dirty.

She looks at his shiny black shoes.

FATHER

But I like it when you do it. Go ahead -
- with feeling.

LITTLE GIRL

But, father...

FATHER

Nena, I order you!

(CONTINUED)

Their wealthy living room walls REVERBERATE with his voice. Hunched over a table laden with tobacco leaves, he holds Nena by her arm.

FATHER (cont'd)

When this eternal night falls from our country -- when you're older, Nena. The day Castro dies -- make yourself a cigar, and think of me.

NENA

(giggles)

Yes, Father.

FATHER

If the business falls, the family falls, Nena.

The black maid, CACHITA is ironing clothes, disapproving.

Nena reluctantly rolls the cigar. Her small hands packing, rolling, and closing it with dexterous agility, topped with a generous lick to seal.

FATHER (cont'd)

I don't have male children, and you're the oldest -- so the responsibility is yours.

Finished, Nena crunches the cigar stiff between her teeth, and smiles broadly. With the panache of Fidel Castro himself, she winks. Her father smiles.

The RED BULB OF A MATCH FLICKS AFLAME.

Nena stands in its glow, holding the match and her other arm akimbo. He APPLAUDS, but CACHITA coughs, knocking Nena's father out of his proud daze, and back to his cordial self. He takes the lit cigar from Nena, and holds her close.

FATHER (cont'd)

Nena, help your mother, and your sisters. I'm going to die... I have cancer.

Nena hugs her father.

NENA

No, Papi, no!

He hugs her gingerly. She takes the cigar from him, and runs to another room.

(CONTINUED)

NENA OPENS A LARGE WHITE DOOR - her mother HORTENSE, a grave looking woman (late 50's) is on her knees, chanting in "tongues", letting a lit candle drip its candle wax into a black cauldron. A rooster is tied by the legs next to her.

HORTENSE
Disgraceful girl!

Hortense picks up a small machete.

INT. VERY SMALL, DARKENED ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nena walks in. She WHACKS Nena on the arm.

HORTENSE
Didn't I tell you not to open the door
without knocking?

She takes the cigar from Nena's mouth and BURNS her arm with it. Nena SCREAMS! Her father appears at the door.

HORTENSE (cont'd)
Ochun tells me if you don't want the
communists to take away the business,
there will have to be a sacrifice!

FATHER
I told you I don't believe in those
things, witch!

WHACK - a blade decapitates the ROOSTER on a cutting board!

Nena's father looks on in horror as Hortense pours the blood into an iron cauldron. She MUMBLES magic African words and dumps the blood over his head! She shakes a bouquet of white flowers, and enters a trance.

Nena and her father stand there frozen at the sight of this behavior! He suddenly kneels, grabs Nena by the arms and begs her:

FATHER (cont'd)
Promise me that you'll take care of her
Nena. If they steal my business -- you
take it back! Promise me!

NENA
Yes, Father, I promise!

INT. WEALTHY LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nena runs to the living room, livid, and takes a seat on the couch. The maid, still ironing, wears a sly smile.

(CONTINUED)

CACHITA
What happened to *you*?

NENA
None of your business. Keep on ironing,
you stupid maid.

CACHITA
Don't speak like that to Cachita,
because I put a hex on you.

NENA
I don't believe in that!

The maid, looks at Nena and shakes her head.

CACHITA
One day, the gods will laugh at you,
Nena.

Steam comes off of the hot iron...

DISSOLVE TO:

THE LIVING COLOR OF THE PRESENT:

INT. HIALEAH APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Ironing... Nena startles herself awake to bitter reality. This is Nena now -- in her late 50's, with an irritating sunburn. Tough as nails, and overly made up to appear as if she mugs mortified tears in a Spanish soap opera, she is a woman of wealthy airs stuck in a poor one's life.

She's in an economical, yet richly kitsch furnished apartment in Hialeah, Florida -- the Cuban ghetto area of Northwest Miami.

She saunters over to an old record player, and turns it on. The NEEDLE falls. SHIRLEY BASSEY and The Propellerheads sing their classic 60's song: "HISTORY REPEATING".

Nena smiles, dancing spasmodically to the beat. She stops momentarily, scratching the scar left by the cigar her mother used to burn her. It's peeling.

NENA
I'm so sick of this shit.

NENA'S FINGER peels a long flake of sunburnt skin. It looks like it might break off, but it hangs in there -- finally, it tapers off at the end -- her finger holding it up. It waves gently in the air...

(CONTINUED)

Nena pauses in front of her old family pictures on the wall and surveys them:

AN OLD PICTURE OF NENA – With her mother and father in 1950's Cuba, in front of a "Hand Made Cigars" business sign. The father holds a huge pair of scissors, signifying the opening of the business. A BULB FLASH.

WEDDING PICTURE – Nena's veil waving in the air, tossing her bouquet. A young Italian man, tough yet elegant, stands close by with his eyes set on a beautiful BLONDE smiling simply. This was AL, her husband, in his heyday.

NENA'S HANDS stuff and roll a CIGAR. She looks up at:

A SEARS "FAMILY PICTURE" – Nena and Al in the 1970's with a baby.

PICTURE: NENA & AL, in the '80's with two kids, a boy (8), and a girl wearing braces (13) at Disney World with Mickey Mouse, holding up Coca Colas.

PICTURE: NENA & HER FAMILY – in '83, when Nena proudly cut the ribbon before an establishment called "HAND MADE CIGARS" at a warehouse-mall district in Hialeah, Florida.

The tip of the CIGAR is lit. PULLING AWAY from the CIGAR, Nena sits examining her rolled up masterpiece, wearing dark, cat-like sunglasses and a large round hat with a chin strap, like a Hollywood movie star of the 50's. She puffs...
SPANISH, WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES:

NENA (cont'd)

Aren't you proud of me, Papá? Just like the ones you used to make in Cuba.

Nena enjoys a celebratory puff. She sees something out of the corner of her eye. Beside her face stands the tall, brown suited ghost of her father, who removes his Fedora for her.

She shivers. Puts out the cigar. Sprays on some fragrance, grabs keys, and adds her spectacular fluorescent green gloves. She sighs, scratches her arm, and exits through the front door.

EXT. WEST 37TH STREET, HIALEAH – MORNING

She drives her mustard colored convertible for all of two blocks in the Spanish ghetto suburb of Miami where she lives, at mercilessly slow speeds.

She pulls into the local grocery store, called SEDANO'S. The parking lot's packed.

(CONTINUED)

Doris Day-style, she finds a spot open just for her, just in the nick of time. Nena's gloved hand turns the radio off. The MUSIC AND TITLES END.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HIALEAH GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Nena and her sister shopping. IRENE (late 30's) wears a white sundress like she's floating in it. By sharp contrast to Nena, there's something "morning dew fresh" about her.

NENA

Irene, just because I write our childhood friend Reynaldo love letters does not mean I'm cheating.

IRENE

Nena, I was too young. I don't remember him anyway. Look, I painted my nails with that polish that changes color depending on your mood, and so far I've only detected one on me - pink, which I think means happy!

(Spanish w/English subtitles)

I've put my hand into some Santeria, and I feel better.

NENA

A lot of good it's doing you. *Mujer*, you're delusional. You know what Papá used to say about that witchcraft.

IRENE

Fuck Papá.

Nena SLAPS her.

NENA

Don't you *dare* say anything about that man. He was a saint!

IRENE

I barely even knew him.

NENA

Have some respect.

IRENE

I can't believe you smacked me!

NENA

I'm sorry. I'm bitchy and I'm peeling all over.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NENA (cont'd)

I just got back from Key Biscayne with Al and everything's a mess. My kids just lounge around all day, and do nothing. And I'm so tired of all this shit! *Yo vine aquí*, for the American dream. And you know what I have? *Mierda*. My kids turn out to be ingrates and my husband a limp *hijo de puta*.

IRENE

Ay, Nena, don't say that --

Nena stops wheeling the cart.

NENA

Irene, I've started to have symptoms for the menopause.

IRENE

You? So young for menopause.

NENA

I shaved my *chacha* three days ago for the beach, and now it's all growing back -- plus the sunburn, the menopause!

IRENE

Ay, that's horrible.

NENA

No, what's horrible are the trembles of your skin at night, the insomnia, the fear of not seeing one's self bleed once a month. *AY, I'M ON FIRE!* I just wanna -- bleed! I don't know, throw myself into this ice --

She dunks her head into a bin holding soft drinks and ice. From below, in the water, Nena's wide eyed face blows air bubbles.

IRENE

Nena, you're crazy! What are you doing?

Nena surfaces, wetting her shirt almost completely.

NENA

What? -- *AYYYY...*

Nena rubs her thighs together -- then scratches her cooch outright. Off the curious look of the YOUNG MAN mopping up aisle 6 --

(CONTINUED)

IRENE

Nena, you need medication -- especially with what's going on.

NENA

I don't need anything but a cigar in my mouth.

IRENE

Nena, I don't want you to be the cuckold *tarrúa* of Hialeah, *pero* I've heard this "*rum-rum*", you know, this "*chisme*", that -- Al is cheating on you.

Nena shoots her a double take.

NENA

Please, Al hasn't been able to get it up since 1989. Besides my lawyer friend, Marcia Goldberg, who got Jenny's ex-boyfriend out of jail that one time -- she's put the business under my name.

IRENE

That Jenny is crazy, just like you. Everything with you is business. Getting your way. Changing people.

NENA

Irene, nothing changes. Irene, in Cuba, Papá had money. And these United States are just poverty and torture. I had to put Mima in an old folks home --

IRENE

Nena, Mima had to go. That's the American way. You're old? Nursing home... You kept the business, Nena, what more do you want? One day this struggle will all pay off.

NENA

Yeah -- the day Castro...

Nena sighs -- then smiles, momentarily adoring Irene's positivity.

Suddenly an OLD LADY (80's) listening to a small, cheap radio with a single earphone inserted in her right ear looks like they're pumping her full of Ritalin!

(CONTINUED)

She SCREAMS, drops her walker, and out of her maddened face comes another screech SPANISH W/ENGLISH SUBTITLES:

OLD LADY

Oh my God! He's *dead!*

Nena and Irene tense up and hold each other.

SOUNDS OF SIRENS and GUNSHOTS come from outside startling everyone. Nena grabs Irene and rushes with her basket to the CASHIER. A SECURITY GUARD and a POLICEMAN appear.

SECURITY GUARD

All right everyone! We want everyone to maintain calm!

Nena & Irene stand petrified with their purses held tight.

NENA

(sotto, Spanish with English subtitles)

I'll wager a goose that someone stole something.

IRENE

Don't look at me.

A solemn air of tense silence. The cash register goes CHI-CHING! Nena pays to the sound of PEOPLE CHANTING something unintelligible outside in SPANISH. More CHEAP SECURITY GUARDS arrive -- FOUR CUBAN GUYS in their 60's, wearing SEDANO's uniforms.

EXT. HIALEAH GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Nena and Irene walk out of the SEDANO's front door to DISCOVER: THE ENTIRE PARKING LOT WITH PEOPLE CELEBRATING!

Is it Fourth of July?! WHISTLES and HORNS and SIGNS SAYING: "VIVA LA LIBERTAD!" and "VIVA LA DEMOCRACIA!". The two women absorb this, stunned.

NENA

What happened?

IRENE

Oh, look, it's Rosie!

NENA

You're gonna talk to *her*?

IRENE

ROSIE! ... Hi. How are you?

(CONTINUED)

ROSIE
It's incredible isn't it?!

NENA
(Spanish w/English subtitles)
What, girl, what?

ROSIE, a transplanted Newyorican chick (20's), informs them of something that is inaudible over the ever increasing NOISE, but the information is potent enough to make Nena grin like the Cheshire cat, drop her bags, and EMBRACE her!

NENA (cont'd)
(In Spanish)
OH THANK YOU, GOD!

Observing this glee, Rosie's two BOYS: PAQUITO (3), and JOHNNIE JUNIOR (10), and her girl, EVA (8), hug each other, jumping up and down!

From a distance, the entire parking lot looks like CARNIVAL in Rio! A Channel 4 News helicopter races past in the sky above them.

EXT. MIAMI - CALLE OCHO - DAY

A YOUNG MAN runs down the middle of the street gripping a rod. He runs past, it's revealed to be a huge CUBAN FLAG waving.

About three seconds behind him runs a YOUNG BLACK MAN holding an impressive AMERICAN FLAG. PEOPLE stop traffic and come out of their establishments CHEERING.

EXT. MIAMI'S CALLE OCHO - DAY

PEOPLE run randomly through the streets of MIAMI, FLORIDA, CHEERING and waving AMERICAN AND CUBAN FLAGS.

Cars drive down the streets HONKING their horns. PEOPLE dancing salsa next to small cafeterias.

A mob of ONE HUNDRED dancing and partying, completely closing off a Hialeah street. Huddled in balconies cheering like it's New Years Day or Mardi Gras!

INT. HIALEAH APARTMENT - JENNY'S ROOM - MORNING

A small room, wallpapered with pictures of a handsome young man named RICKY. His face has been plastered in every crevice of this little slice of Miami. It includes a small mobile, from which Ricky's Photoshopped mug dangles, plastered over the faces of A&F models and rock stars.

(CONTINUED)

Various scented candles melting on it, the television set plays more images of the celebrations going on in the streets. It switches channels. On CNN, Larry King is Live:

LARRY

What are your thoughts on the potential reconciliation between exiled Cubans and the new Cuba?

There's a MIDDLE AGED CUBAN MAN (54), hair dyed pitch black, wearing a hat that says "MARLINS #1", and thick glasses.

MIDDLE AGED MAN

When you say reconciliation, who are you talking about? EH? You talkin' about the so-called "doctors" that applied electroshock to political prisoners?

THE CHANNEL CHANGES to CNBC, where a YOUNG WHITE MAN (20's) in suit and tie speaks on "HARDBALL".

YOUNG WHITE MAN

He's saying that given the Elián Gonzalez saga, a growing number of exiles are considering reconciliation, not confrontation.

Watching this is JENNY (23), a dizzy knockout in baggy pants and a sports bra. To her, the bed's a trampoline. She jumps on it wide eyed, absentmindedly munching on a *pastelito de coco* (coconut pastry).

ANOTHER CHANNEL:

A reporter, ROCK ALLEN (45), a young Al Roker, appears on the screen. The helicopter flies above his head in the distance. JENNY's eyes intensify and concentrate.

EXT. OKEECHOBEE METRORAIL STATION - MORNING

MOBS on the platforms and stairwells behind the reporter celebrating. The REPORTER is having trouble with the absolute pandemonium. His live feed goes out, and then resurges. The Channel 4 van behind him is being rocked from side to side:

ROCK

Oh, Bob, Cindy -- we're very sorry about that -- we're trying to come to you LIVE from the Okeechobee Metrorail station.

PEOPLE standing and bouncing on his CHANNEL 4 van!

(CONTINUED)

ROCK (cont'd)
 Will you *please* -- GET OFF THE DAMN
 VAN!

He loosens his collar and comes to his senses, remembering he's on the air. Clears his throat:

ROCK (cont'd)
 I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, all
 Hialeah's broken loose.

He deftly evades a left hook thrown at him from the crowd. SECURITY GUARDS nab the LOONY GUY trying to punch him, and hold the CROWD back.

ROCK (cont'd)
 If you're a citizen of the world today,
 you know that FIDEL CASTRO IS DEAD!

PEOPLE cheer behind him.

ROCK (cont'd)
 By contrast to the ruckus around me --

A YOUNG CUBAN GIRL taps him on the shoulder.

YOUNG CUBAN GIRL
 This is what we call a tremendous
 "REBAMBARAMBA!"

CHEERS!

ROCK
 A recent *Miami Herald* poll shows that most Cuban-Americans support a peaceful and gradual transition to democracy in Cuba, including possible amnesty for Cuban government officials.

USMAIL (*pronounced "Oosmaeel"*, late 20's, nerdy) grabs the mike from the reporter.

USMAIL
 We just wanna the most easiest way for democracy in Cuba. Wanna have elections, like, fair -- like here in Florida.

Rock can't help but do an incredulous, comedic "take" to the CAMERA.

INT. HIALEAH APARTMENT - JENNY'S ROOM - MORNING - CONTINUOUS

JENNY spots her brother Usmail, acting like an idiot, waving at the camera behind Rock.

JENNY

Oh, my god, that's Usmail!

She points and laughs hysterically!

EXT. OKEECHOBEE METRORAIL STATION - MORNING

Usmail then "mime walks" behind the reporter, and mocks everything he's saying. He mimes lifting a heavy box. Somehow it engulfs him and he makes a sad face tapping at a window.

ROCK

Huge amounts of money flooded into the Miami-Dade County Metrorail system today, as revelers were encouraged to ride it to Miami's Bayside Mall.

Usmail mimes throwing money out of his pockets.

ROCK (cont'd)

In three weeks, travel to Cuba will be shut down as the United States government aids its transition towards democracy.

People CHEER! Usmail goes into a FIT of MIME LAUGHTER and clownish excitement, jumping up and down, scaring the people around him.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

CUBA LIBRE!

ROCK

Whether that proclamation of liberty you just heard behind me will realize itself is yet to be determined.

The reporter notices USMAIL, who suddenly breaks off and runs off at full gallop.

ROCK (cont'd)

This is Rock Allen reporting LIVE from the Okeechobee Metrorail station in Hialeah, Florida. Bob, Cindy -- back to you in the studio.