

THE SURROGATE FATHER

Written for the Screen by:

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OVER DARK:

The sound of commotion. Glasses clinking. Typical bar sounds.

OPEN ON:

INT. BAR - NIGHT.

A BEARDED DORK fumbles with his beer, spills on himself.

BEARDED DORK  
Shit! Balls! Fuck!

He does his best to wipe it off him. It doesn't really work.

Our Bearded Dork's name is HECTOR (30s). He's a washed up athlete, more of a nerd with a dorky charm about him.

He spies a uniquely beautiful WOMAN from across the bar. We'll call her TALISA (30s). She's hiding a heart of gold beneath a terse mysteriousness.

HECTOR  
(under his breath)  
Damn it.

He wipes his beard of any beer foam and dusts himself off some more. His approach is cautious, but purposeful.

She sees him but acts like she didn't notice at first.

He props himself up next to her, notices her drink is light. His beer certainly could use a refill as well.

TALISA  
It's usually customary to say something when approaching a strange woman.

HECTOR  
I work in porn. How's your night?

TALISA  
Oh, really? I'm a professional dominatrix.

HECTOR  
Parallel industries.

TALISA  
I also post on Feet Fondler. Only Followers. You name it.

HECTOR

I knew there was some... connective tissue here. I could feel it in your... aura.

TALISA

Aura... how very Californian of you.

HECTOR

Yup. I'm a vegan crossfitter, too. Pilates. The works.

TALISA

Quite noble. I appeal to the male sensibility so I can't afford to be so spineless.

HECTOR

But wouldn't spinelessness appeal to the men you please?

TALISA

Not if I'm dominating them. Aren't you aware of how domination in the BDSM world works?

HECTOR

Why don't you womansplain it to me?

Talisa scoffs in a playfully offended way. She laughs and shakes her head. He finally got her.

TALISA

A submissive man needs a powerful woman in his life, but not in the way you would roll your eyes over.

HECTOR

You're assuming I'm not a feminist.

TALISA

Are you a feminist who actually believes in feminism or are you a feminist who's just trying to get laid?

HECTOR

I'm a feminist because I have common sense.

She raises a brow at that. Fair enough.

TALISA

Does this often work for you? Does the feminist act get women to want to have sex with you?

HECTOR

Does openly being a dominatrix work for you?

TALISA

How's it working for you now?  
(brief beat)  
What kind of *man* are you?

He looks deeply into her eyes. It's on.

SNAP TO:

INT. BACHELOR-ESQUE APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector holds her arms down as he lays into her. The bed shaking. Talisa moaning--

--but then he stops. Rolls off her.

TALISA

Did you just...?

HECTOR

Yep.

She lets out an exasperated sigh.

TALISA

Are you fucking kidding me?

Talisa sits up and snatches her clothes off the bed and floor. She fiddles with her phone, then leaves it UNLOCKED on his NIGHT STAND--

Hector spots it. He sees: RIDESHARE 3 MINUTES AWAY.

He also spies where she's going...

HECTOR

Sorry.

She dresses herself back up as quickly as her drunk self can.

TALISA

Did it really have to be inside me?

Once Talisa is satisfied with the amount of clothes back on her body, she scans the TRASH and LAUNDRY scattered about the room--

TALISA (CONT'D)  
Clean yourself up you fucking loser.

Hector pulls a BOTTLE of TEQUILA off his nightstand and presses it to his lips--

HECTOR  
Are you my mom?

Talisa spies it--

TALISA  
Are you an alcoholic?

--and rips it from his hands--

TALISA (CONT'D)  
Gimme that.

She very nearly waterfalls it. He's shocked and amazed.

He snaps out of it and grabs after it--

HECTOR  
Okay, okay.

He snatches it away and puts it back on the nightstand.

She catches her breath--

TALISA  
I can't believe you nutted in me.

HECTOR  
Occupational hazard, I'm afraid!

TALISA  
You're certainly no client of mine!

Talisa storms off and SLAMS the door behind her.

HECTOR  
(shouting at the door)  
Can you find your way out?!

TALISA (O.S.)  
Can't be that hard! It's not rocket surgery!

HECTOR  
I'll text you!

He lets out a long sigh. Whew!  
He looks back at the bottle, reaches after it--  
But listens close... footsteps. Coming back up the stairs.  
He pulls his hand away from the bottle.  
The door slowly swings open--  
He looks up at her defeated puppy eyes.

TALISA  
Can you help me?

He can't help but smile and swings his butt ass naked body  
out of bed--

EXT. APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER.

Hector escorts Talisa out of his apartment complex.

TALISA  
You have a bottle of tequila on  
your nightstand.

He smiles, shrugs--

HECTOR  
I practically brush my teeth with  
it.

She huffs and smiles at that. He's actually kinda funny...  
They share in a glance. He matches her smile.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Will I see you again?

She hangs on that a beat.

TALISA  
I really should go.

She turns to leave--

He stops her in her tracks, turns her back around--

HECTOR  
But-- no, wait, *can* I see you  
again?

TALISA  
Probably not.

On his defeated look--

TALISA (CONT'D)  
C'mon, you know what this was.

HECTOR  
I actually don't...

Talisa sees her RIDESHARE DRIVER pull up--

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Will you text me?

She contemplates...

TALISA  
I have to go. Goodbye, Hector.

They share one last kiss. For now.

HECTOR  
Bye.

She lets go of his hands and slips herself in the car.

We hang on Hector's face of longing until we--

SLAM TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: THE SURROGATE FATHER.

OPEN ON:

PHONE FACE POV: PROFILE ONLY SAYS: "INSTAGRAM USER." HE TRIES  
TO TEXT HER, UNABLE TO SEND.

HECTOR  
Shit! She fuckin' blocked me!

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY.

Hector sits with REGINALD (late 30s). Reginald is a happy go  
lucky man who hides his darkness. An absolute gem.

REGINALD

You gotta let it go, Hector. Not worth it. It was just one night.

HECTOR

Yeah, well, best night of my life. She's an angel cast down from the heavens. I gotta get ahold of her.

REGINALD

Yeah, and now this angel is gonna send you into hell if you don't contain yourself. You're just gonna drive yourself insane.

HECTOR

Maybe she has an ad for her freaky stuff.

REGINALD

That's even worse. Not to mention, she was probably just joking with you. Just like your pornstar bit.

HECTOR

How do I reach out to her, then?

REGINALD

You don't. Get over it. Move on to the next. Take it from me, it's better to just shoot your shot elsewhere.

HECTOR

I already shot it in her--

REGINALD

I know, I know. You told me. How could it be the best night of your life if it was only ten seconds?

HECTOR

I'm telling you Reg, she's the best I ever had.

REGINALD

I can only imagine how long you lasted with your other one nighters.

Hector raises a brow to that. Smiles to him. Reginald laughs.

INT. HECTOR'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector scans over:

-his pile of laundry in the corner.

-Trash scattered about his room.

-completely unkempt bed.

-stained and scummy bathroom.

HECTOR

Ho boy.

He looks down at a HALF-FULL OPEN TEQUILA BOTTLE. He lifts it to his mouth and takes a healthy PULL.

He looks in the mirror. Swishes it around his mouth. Gulp.

His eyes shift back to THE MESS. He sighs.

Hector looks as if he's about to clean when--

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Hector lays on his bed and cradles his TACO DELIVERY on the other side of his bed.

He messily eats them and some gets on his pillow and bed-sheet.

Hector, now finished, tosses a ball of trash into a corner along with MORE TRASH.

He sighs. Looks around him. A moment of contemplation.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Hector is kicked back watching TV on his 14-inch screen.

Still laying on the bed. Still in a shit-pile of a room.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hector, now asleep, TV still on, lightly illuminating him.  
He's knocked out, dead to the world, until--

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING.

Hector snaps awake. He looks around at the still dirty room.  
He deeply sighs. Pulls out his phone.  
PHONE FACE POV: Bank Account: \$37.83.

HECTOR  
Fucking shit balls.

He ambles to the common area of his apartment, checks his mail.

MAIL SAYS: UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE. He rips it open to find--  
A check! He's rich! Sort of.

He snaps a photo of it for a mobile deposit.

Hector feels his stomach grumble. He switches over to a meal delivery app--

PHONE FACE POV: He orders a BREAKFAST BURRITO.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Same thing. He demolishes said burrito. Tosses the trash in the corner. Adds to the filth.

He looks around. Gets up. Looks at himself in the mirror.

Hector can't possibly like what he sees. Right?

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Hector lazily rots away on his bed.

His phone's ALARM BLASTS through the silence.

He frantically checks his phone.

PHONE FACE: ALARM FOR PRACTICE!

HECTOR  
Fuck! Shit! Balls!

Hector throws himself from bed and into action.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - SUNSET.

Hector coaches HIGH SCHOOLERS on a TRACK.

Begin MONTAGE:

- Hector positions a RUNNER correctly in starting blocks.
- Hector demonstrates a proper start and drive phase.
- Hector pushes against a RUNNER for resistance, strength.
- Hector times them with a STOPWATCH as they run.
- Hector jogs backwards, outrunning all of them, laughing as he leaves them in the dust.
- Hector gives high fives to the TRACK ATHLETES for a job well done.
- Hector waves by to kids as they're picked up by parents.
- Hector cleans up the track of all EQUIPMENT left behind.
- Hector admires his 100m, 200m and 400m DASH RECORDS on a LARGE RECORD BOARD. It reads: HOME OF THE COUGARS atop.
- Hector waits for the BUS to pick him up at a lonely BUS STOP.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT.

Hector tosses and turns in his bed, sleep escaping him.

SNAP TO:

INT. BED - MORNING.

Hector SNAPS AWAKE from his annoying PHONE ALARM disturbing the peace.

He checks his phone: 12:00PM. Another wasted day.

Hector face-palms and moans as he slinks out of bed.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Hector mopes to the FRIDGE. Checks it as if anything's changed.

Spoiler alert: nothing's changed.

FRIDGE POV: Completely empty. A disgrace for a Fridge.

He shakes his head as he knows what he must do.

HECTOR

Ugh.

JUMP TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - LATER.

Hector slinks around in the store wearing pajama pants, slippers, a robe, and an inappropriate T-shirt.

He's carrying a basket with bachelor essentials: hot sauce, cheese, meat, eggs and milk.

Hector makes his way to the ALCOHOL section. He lifts a \$4 BOTTLE OF WINE. He conspicuously scans his surroundings...

Flips off the cap, and takes a pull right from the bottle.

As the bottle hits his mouth, he spies--

TALISA from afar.

HECTOR

(whispers)

Shit, fuck!

He rips the bottle from his mouth, spins the cap on, and shoves it back on the shelf.

Hector wants to hide from her, but he wants to see her.

Amid his conflict, he trails off, using aisles as cover.

He makes his way to self-checkout when--

She appears right in front of him.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Oh, hey there.

TALISA  
Hey yourself.

HECTOR  
You remember me?

TALISA  
Yes, I... remember.

HECTOR  
How could you forget, right?

TALISA  
Yeah, right...

HECTOR  
How have you been?

TALISA  
Better than you, it looks like.

HECTOR  
Yeah...

TALISA  
I'd say it's good to see you,  
but...

HECTOR  
Sight for sore eyes, huh?

TALISA  
Sure.

Hector looks down at her hand, something catches his eye:

A HUGE RING.

HECTOR  
What is that monstrosity on your  
finger?

TALISA  
Oh, that thing. Umm, right.

HECTOR  
You never told me... did you have  
that on the night we...?

TALISA  
No, I don't normally wear it. I--  
don't wanna lose it.

HECTOR  
 Yeah, no, yeah-- that makes sense.  
 (beat)  
 I suppose I should say,  
 congratulations--?

TALISA  
 I'm pregnant.

Hector cocks his head in confusion.

HECTOR  
 What...?

An awkward beat.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 So-- are you happy about it or are  
 you--

TALISA  
 No. I'm pregnant and it's yours.

Hector is taken aback.

HECTOR  
 How do you know? Couldn't it be  
 with...?

She shakes her head.

Hector's eyes widen.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 I know it's none of my business,  
 but you two haven't been...?

She folds her arms. Nothing from her.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 Is that why you went to the bar  
 that night?

She looks around for anything that can help her now. Nothing  
 can.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 So, what are you gonna do?

TALISA  
 What do you mean what am I gonna  
 do? Isn't it obvious?

Hector leans in, lowers his voice--

HECTOR

You know, you don't need to terminate the pregnancy on account of me. You can, you know-- figure it out with him if you want--

TALISA

Are you so self absorbed you can't see anything besides yourself outside of this situation? You're unbelievable!

HECTOR

Keep it down...

TALISA

I'm marrying him so obviously I'm keeping it.

HECTOR

That's not so obvious to me.

TALISA

Clearly.

HECTOR

Well, I'm happy for you.

TALISA

Shut up. No, you're not.

Hector doesn't know what to say. Clearly she knows better than he would at this point.

TALISA (CONT'D)

I just wanted to tell you as a courtesy. I thought you should know, so--

HECTOR

You're only telling me since you ran into me. You blocked me on everything. I would've been none the wiser had you not so serendipitously bumped into me.

TALISA

Well, now you know, so.

Beat.

HECTOR

Do you know if it's a boy or a girl?

TALISA

I hope it's a boy so I can teach him not to be like his father. We need some more respectful ones in this already fucked up species.

HECTOR

You'll be a good mother, I just know it.

TALISA

Well, you'll never know what it is to be a father. I'm not letting my child anywhere near you, so stay the fuck away.

HECTOR

If that's the case, then why tell me?

TALISA

You deserved to know the truth. And now, you know you won't be in their life. So, toodle-fucking-oo, you fucking deadbeat.

Ouch. That one hurt.

Talisa scoots right on by him. He's so shocked he has no idea what to say.

REGINALD (O.S.)

My guy, do you have any shred of self-respect?

Hector shakes his head as he makes his way to the self-checkout.

INT. BAR - LATER.

Reginald looks deep into Hector's soul as he looks completely crushed and drained.

HECTOR

I think that's a loaded question.

REGINALD

I think that's the only question right now, my friend.

Hector nurses his beer as Reginald neglects his.

HECTOR

Well... as my friend, this is where you tell me what to do.

REGINALD

I know what you need to do. It's a matter of, do you have the strength, the will-power, the wherewithal to do what you have to do.

HECTOR

Are you gonna be a vague ass social media life coach right now or are you going to tell me what the fuck it is I gotta do right now--

REGINALD

Alright, alright, alright. Fine, lookit-- here's what you do: you listen to her. This is a get out of jail free card. You fuck off and go and live your life! This is a blessing, my dude! Run free! Bask in the sunshine and count your stars. Smell the fresh air of a new start.

HECTOR

You don't understand how much I--

REGINALD

No. YOU don't understand. You don't know how lucky you have it. Most dudes gotta pay child support out the ass and live miserably for the rest of their pathetic days. You, my privileged man, get to blow off dad duties scot-free! You get to swoop in and be the cool dad after they do all the hard parenting stuff. This is ideal father shit!

HECTOR

But, maybe I want to be a dad. Haven't you ever considered that?

REGINALD

My delusional friend-- are you even ready for a fraction of that commitment? Do you know all of the responsibilities that go along with that? AND complicate that with a jealous cuck of a husband of hers?!

Hector looks like his dog just died. Harrowing eyes...

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Take the W and sprint away. Most men would be jumping for joy if they were in your position.

Beat.

HECTOR

I don't know if I'm ready to be a dad, but I'm about to be. And it could be what I didn't know I've always wanted until now. Who knows.

Reginald looks like a disappointed father, but accepts defeat.

REGINALD

Then I've got nothing more to offer you, my poor brain-dead confidant.

Reginald pats him on the back and massages his shoulder.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

I, on the other hand, am gonna go hire a hooker.

Reg laughs at his own joke.

Hector's face looks like a traumatized soldier. He goes in for a healthy gulp of his beer.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

I'm just kidding... maybe.

Reginald tosses several dollars down on the bar and waltzes out.

INT. HECTOR'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector looks around dejected at his mess of an apartment.

He sighs, defeated.

INT. CAFE - LATER.

Hector wears rough rags into a boujee cafe. He plops down and starts scanning ONLINE JOB SITES.

He approaches the counter to order when--

BARISTA

Excuse me, sorry-- we don't allow  
homeless in here.

HECTOR

I'm not-- I live in a--

BARISTA

Sir, I'm so sorry, but I am going  
to have to ask you to leave.

HECTOR

So what-- do you need proof of  
residence or something?

BARISTA

If you are residentially  
challenged, you cannot loiter on  
the premises.

HECTOR

Lady, I'm not-- homeless. I have an  
apartment, I live on--

BARISTA

Security!

Hector surrenders.

HECTOR

Okay...

Hector spins on his heel and fast walks out.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - CONT.

Hector turns the corner, his pace picking up.

BG: The SECURITY GUARD pokes his head out the door to ensure  
he's gone. Satisfied, he slips back in, lets the door slam.

Hector disappears past us.

EXT. APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector gathers his keys and slips it into the lock.

Jam. Nothing. Only jiggling.

He contorts his face in confusion. He only tries harder.

To no avail.

Hector aggressively shoves his keys back in his pocket and thrusts out his phone. He dials: LANDLORD.

HECTOR

Jeff. My key doesn't work on the lock. What gives?

JEFF (O.S.)

Oh, yeah, I changed the locks.

HECTOR

Why did you do that? Why didn't you tell me? Wouldn't I be getting another key?

JEFF

Not until you pay your rent on time.

HECTOR

Jeff, I told you. I had to get my unemployment check in, which I did.

JEFF

You will get your key once your balance has been fully paid. You didn't pay it before the 1st. You're lucky I didn't toss all your belongings out on the curb.

HECTOR

You can't do this to me. I need a place to live.

JEFF

Yeah? And I need payment for services rendered. I have that, and you'll have access. Plain and simple. Good day, Hector.

The line beeps, end of call.

HECTOR

Jeff-- Jeff! Fuck!

Hector paces back and forth in front of the door. He raises his arms over his head. He could lose it.

EXT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector knocks. A beat passes before Reginald swings the door open. He gives a solemn pity smile. He allows him in.

He shuts the door on us.

INT. CAFE - THE NEXT DAY.

Hector JOB HUNTS on his laptop. Sending out applications and resumes like Oprah.

Our BARISTA takes his order--

BARISTA  
You're looking especially cleaner  
today.

HECTOR  
Yeah, because I'm not--

He stops himself. She looks eager to take his order.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
I'll have a--

A SCREAMING and CRYING BABY BLASTS through the tranquility--

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
(barely audible, trying to  
talk over the baby)  
I'll take a-- just a-- a... black  
coffee!

The Barista fake smiles over her ears bleeding. She nods and turns to pace back behind the counter.

Hector turns and looks over at the BABY--

The BABY is completely red in the face and just letting loose.

Hector shudders and cringes. He tries to refocus but simply can't through the blood curdling screams and cries.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector sits perfectly still on the couch, eyes wide.

He looks to Reginald who is Zen. Sharing in his silence.

HECTOR  
(matter of factly)  
How much did you pay in child  
support?

REGINALD

You really wanna know the answer to that question--?

HECTOR

Yes.

REGINALD

I was payin' lose to five hundred a month. I was supposed to get just the average or maybe less, but she convinced the court that I was such a shithole father.

HECTOR

But... you're not a shithole father.

REGINALD

Well...

Hector leans in, as if there's more--

HECTOR

Oh, c'mon-- give yourself some credit!

REGINALD

I think if I was a good father, we might still be together as a family.

HECTOR

Would you?

A moment of contemplation.

REGINALD

Truthfully, I don't know.

HECTOR

Would you even want to be? That could be the answer to your question right there.

REGINALD

You may not want the answer.

HECTOR

I think I already know.

Beat.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I'm not sure how ready I am for that screaming and crying baby just yet.

REGINALD

Eh, you learn to tune that stuff out.

HECTOR

Now that doesn't sound like very good parenting.

REGINALD

No, that, my friend-- that's just keeping your sanity.

HECTOR

Again, I go back to-- maybe I don't wanna be a parent to preserve my sanity.

REGINALD

And that right there's the eternal struggle of soon to be parents, my guy. Therein lies the rub, as they say.

HECTOR

So, what's the genius solution to all this chaos?

Reginald takes a drink.

REGINALD

Ya get a dog.

Hector looks at him, inquisitive.

Reginald just cheers him from afar and presses it to his lips.

We're left with Hector thinking on it.

EXT. CITY STREETS - MORNING.

Hector aimlessly wanders the sidewalks, people watching as he struts, carrying a stack of RESUMES.

He comes upon a BUSINESS of INTEREST, he reaches for the door, but something possesses him to look across the street--

HECTOR POV: we spy a TALISA sporting workout clothes, meandering into a GYM. She swings the door open and slips in.

He stares with his mouth wide open, hand still on the door.

A BUSINESSMAN tries to gain entry, but Hector blocks his path.

BUSINESSMAN

Um, 'scuse me, sir. I gotta--

Hector snaps out of it.

HECTOR

Ah, mierda! Lo siento. Sorry, sorry. Agh...

Hector steps back and allows him in.

He swings open the door and steps in ahead of him.

Hector looks back to the gym, then sneaks in behind him.

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - CONT.

Reginald watches Hector as he plops himself on his couch. He doesn't look like he's had an ounce of sleep.

REGINALD

Wanna beer?

HECTOR

Are you asking me a real question?

A beer goes flying through the air. Hector tips it off his hand and into his own face.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Agh, fuck!

REGINALD

It's a good thing you're not in the NFL.

HECTOR

I played futbol. Not the American stuff.

REGINALD

That explains everything.

Reginald cracks open his own and sits across from him in a recliner.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

You okay?

He sits in silence and lets Hector ruminate.

HECTOR

Yeah, it'll be fine.

REGINALD

No, I meant...

Hector gives him the only facial expression he needs.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

You're right, dumb question.

HECTOR

You ever had your life fall apart?

REGINALD

Of course I have. I know where you're at.

HECTOR

What should I do?

REGINALD

You know what you have to do. You can't let all this beat you. This'll send you spiraling if you let it.

HECTOR

Yeah, but-- how do I...not let it?

REGINALD

There are so many steps you have to take. But, as the overwrought cliched adage says...

HECTOR

One at a time.

REGINALD

Let's not overwhelm ourselves here. We'll drink, and then we'll worry about it.

HECTOR

I'd rather not do any worrying at all.

REGINALD

Oh, too late. You're already worrying. But that's why we're gonna go the route of the step de bebe. Take it slow. As the infant does.

Hector glares him down for the bad dad joke.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Okay, that pun was not intended. I'm serious.

Once again laughing at his own joke, he slams the beer home.

Hector shakes his head as he performs a chug of his own.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

First thing's first. You need a hefty makeover. You look homeless, which is probably why you are homeless now. Appearances are everything. As you should know.

HECTOR

Did I tell you I got kicked out of a cafe for--?

REGINALD

Appearing homeless? Yeah, case in point. You look the part, you got the part. Congratulations, you played yourself.

HECTOR

Thanks, amigo.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. OFFICES - LATER.

MONTAGE: FILLING OUT APPLICATIONS, PUTTING ON A NEW SUIT, SHAKING HANDS, TEMP AGENCY, JOB INTERVIEW TYPE SHIT.

REGINALD (V.O.)

Secondly, let's land you a job.

INT. OFFICE - LATER.

Hector smiles and shakes hands with an INTERVIEWER.

REGINALD (V.O.)  
 But, it has to be a good job. No  
 service industry type shit.

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

They slam another beer. Write out a plan.

REGINALD  
 It has to be something that she can  
 be proud of.

INT. OFFICES - LATER.

Another BOSS interviewing Hector looks forlorn as he shakes  
 his head but gives him a firm shake, nonetheless.

Hector shares the poignant look as well.

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector looks Reginald deep in his eyes.

HECTOR  
 Impress who? My daughter?

Reginald shakes his head.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY.

BACK TO MONTAGE: Hector receives a beard trim and a haircut.

REGINALD (V.O.)  
 No, you need to impress Talisa.  
 That's the only way you can see  
 your daughter. She is the  
 gatekeeper.

Hector admires his new FADE CUT and his more manageable, less  
 scraggly beard. It's close to his face, organized, clean.

REGINALD (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 You gotta worry about the legaleese  
 shit, y'know? Custody battles and  
 the like. Real life shit.

Hector does some pushups and situps. He grabs the excess fat  
 of his dad bod. This only pushes him to do more.

HECTOR (V.O.)  
 But the fiance or husband or  
 whatever doesn't know. And she  
 wants to keep it that way.

Hector goes for a run but barely makes it a block. He's out  
 of breath and sits back on the curb. Lays down in the grass.

REGINALD  
 You coming back into the picture is  
 gonna raise all these questions.  
 You risk this coming out. His life  
 will come crashing down, too. Not  
 to mention what she can do to you,  
 not just this cucked up prick.

Hector nods his head taking in the realization. Sips his  
 beer.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
 But, I wouldn't recommend it.  
 That's the stuff of nightmares.  
 Restraining order type shit.

INTERCUT WITH:

HECTOR LOOKING AT HIMSELF IN THE MIRROR IN A SHARP NEW SUIT.

HECTOR (V.O.)  
 Then, why am I doing this?

Reginald looking confused at the obvious.

REGINALD  
 For your own betterment, my  
 dimwitted friend! We gotta get your  
 life back on track! Regardless of  
 all this becoming a biological  
 father nonsense! Use your noggin,  
 my dense comrade.

Hector shrugs, nods.

HECTOR  
 Right, right.

Hector downs his beer.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 So, what's next?

Reginald gives him a sly look.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY.

Hector shakes hands with a MANAGER looking type.

MANAGER

Nice to meet you, Hector.

HECTOR

Likewise.

MANAGER

So, I'm just gonna get right to it.  
We'd like to offer you the  
position.

HECTOR

Great! That's-- great. Thank you so  
much. When would I start?

MANAGER

What does your schedule look like?

HECTOR

I'm wide open.

MANAGER

You... you don't do anything?

HECTOR

Yeah-- I mean-- no. I mean, I'm  
sorry-- what?

MANAGER

You mean to tell me your schedule  
is entirely empty. You have nothing  
but free time. You don't have any  
hobbies?

HECTOR

I--

MANAGER

You have nothing to fill your spare  
time.

HECTOR

I-- I mean-- I--

MANAGER

Hector. I'm fucking with you!

The Manager bursts into uproarious laughter.

HECTOR

Oh!

Hector forces laughter.

MANAGER

No, yeah-- when can you start?

HECTOR

I mean, I can start immediately!

The Manager leads Hector deeper into the warehouse.

MANAGER

Great to hear. So, as you probably already know, your responsibilities will be to degauss hard drives. Wipe everything clean, then reboot the software and reconnect everything so that it can be reused for... and we'll stack the ones ready for redistribution on these pallets...

They trail away as we pull away from the expansive warehouse.

REGINALD (O.S.)

This is perfect.

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Reginald leans back and cracks open a cold one.

HECTOR

How so?

Hector leans in, interested--

REGINALD

My guy. Ladies love to hear that you're in tech. Instant turn-on. Lady boner city, chico!

HECTOR

But... I'm not in tech.

REGINALD

She doesn't need to know! Don't tell her that you work in a warehouse. Don't tell her that it's technically not an IT job or whatever the fuck.

(MORE)

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Just say you work with computers and no need to elaborate any further. She'll think you're a fuckin' rockstar and that you be makin' hella money and shit again.

HECTOR

But, what if she finds out the truth?

REGINALD

This is on YOU not to slip up. She's not gonna follow you to work or anything crazy like that. Just keep your mouth shut about the fine print, and you're golden.

HECTOR

Yeah, I can handle that.

REGINALD

You got this.

They do a bro hug and a bro handshake. Hector waits until Reginald turns around before he wears a nervous face.

EXT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - LATER.

Hector swings open the door and struts in.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - CONT.

Hector strides with purpose towards his CASE OFFICER.

CASE OFFICER

The usual?

HECTOR

No, I just got a job...well-- an internship, really. But--

CASE OFFICER

It's paid?

HECTOR

Yeah, but you know how it is. I won't get a paycheck for another like--

CASE OFFICER

Three weeks.

HECTOR  
Yeah... something like that.

CASE OFFICER  
We'll keep you on in the interim,  
but-- you're on your own when--

HECTOR  
Yeah, I know.

CASE OFFICER  
Just-- you know. I get it. But,  
also... my hands are tied after  
that. I hope you understand.

HECTOR  
Thank you.

Case Officer nods knowingly.

Hector gives him a genuine look of appreciation.

He then turns on his heel to leave. The Case Officer watches him out.

EXT. APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector attempts to break into his old apartment, to no avail.

He eventually gives up and mopes away.

EXT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector bangs on the door and eagerly awaits Reg's arrival.

Reg swings the door open and allows him entry.

REGINALD  
What'd they say?

HECTOR  
What would you expect?

REGINALD  
Yeah. I get it.

They both plop on the couch. Reg has beers ready for them.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
Well, what's the dealio?

HECTOR

I'm just thriving, you know.

REGINALD

Oh, Don't I know it.

Beat.

HECTOR

What did you do after...  
everything... with yours?

Reginald deeply sighs. Mentally prepares to enter into it.

REGINALD

Well, as you can imagine-- it's not  
easy to leave a family behind. I'm  
all talk when it comes to that. I  
know what I said to you, believe  
me.

Hector looks at him as if to say, "Go on..."

REGINALD (CONT'D)

I had to part ways, as a necessity.  
I was in a negative headspace. So  
much so that I would lash out at my  
wife, my kid. There was no  
splitting my money in the divorce.  
There was no money to give. I knew  
I was holding them back. And maybe  
I knew I wasn't ready to be a  
father, either.

HECTOR

I'm sorry, but-- couldn't you work  
it out together?

REGINALD

I had lost myself completely. And  
together, we were worse as people.  
And we knew it, too. The toxicity  
was at an all-time high and that's  
no place for a child to thrive. I  
would not have given all of myself  
as a father out of some kind of  
indifference I can't explain. Maybe  
it's a sort of selfishness. I just  
hope that I made the right choice,  
and I hope that my son knows that  
I'm sorry for it. I don't know if  
it's right what I did. And it would  
take another life to know if the  
opposite would be true.

He hangs on that a beat.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Is it worse that I left her on her own to be a mother to him, by herself, without my help? Or would it be worse to be there, but to not be present?

HECTOR

You made the decision you thought was right in the moment.

REGINALD

It's not always our job to reflect on the decisions we've made. It's our job, as fathers, as men, to say 'fuck indecision' and live with it.

HECTOR

I think, my good friend, in the long-term, your son will want you to tell him the why. Because that why might eat him up for the rest of his years if he doesn't know.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

When the time is right.

Reginald wraps him up in a tight hug. Hector revels in it.

REGINALD

(fighting back tears)

When the time is right.

Hector only holds him tighter.

INT. GYM - MORNING.

Hector inspects some weights, as if it's something foreign.

He scans the room to see-- BIGGER, STRONGER MEN.

He also spies LEAN, TONED, SEXY WOMEN in YOGA PANTS and SPORTS BRAS.

Hector once again grabs the blubber around his dad bod.

He picks up the weights and half-assedly lifts them.

After a few pumps of listlessly raising weights, he spots--

TALISA.

He tries to hide himself--

Nowhere to hide.

He turns around and searches for a WEIGHT CAGE to surround himself in.

A GARGANTUAN MAN lumbers into the WEIGHT CAGE just before he can.

Hector spins right back around to find--

TALISA right in his face.

TALISA

Am I gonna have to find another gym?

HECTOR

Lovely seeing you, too.

Talisa places her hand on her stomach.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

How are you feeling?

TALISA

I feel sick, all the time.

HECTOR

No, I mean, just-- how are you feeling about it... in general?

TALISA

I don't need my feelings validated by you.

HECTOR

So, in place of that, you go to the gym... whilst pregnant... to have your feelings validated by other--

TALISA

No, I take that back, YOU need to find another place to workout.

HECTOR

I honestly didn't mean for this to happen. This is pure happenstan--

TALISA

Uh huh.

HECTOR

No, seriously-- my work gave this gym as an option to be covered under my benefits.

TALISA

Oh, so you actually have a job now.

HECTOR

Technically a paid internship, but yes.

TALISA

You're a 30 year-old paid intern.

HECTOR

Let's focus on the paid part.

TALISA

Listen to me, ass-wipe. I'm not coming to this gym every day worried that you--

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Oh, every day, huh?

TALISA (CONT'D)

--might be here to interrupt my inner-peace and--

HECTOR (CONT'D)

You know, you don't have to impress me...

TALISA (CONT'D)

--my daily routine. I have a good thing going here and I don't need you to ruin my happiness and overall well-being.

Hector's initially taken aback, but then--

HECTOR

It's always good to see you. My hope for a better future is increased tenfold and my faith in humanity is always restored with every interaction.

Talisa rolls her eyes and looks away, while stifling a smile.

TALISA

I mean it. Take a second look at that benefits package. Find another gym. I'd better not see you here tomorrow.

HECTOR

Oh, tomorrow? That's such short notice.

(MORE)

HECTOR (CONT'D)

At least give me until the end of my trial period. This gym is so nice.

TALISA

Which is why you shouldn't be in it.

Talisa moves right past him. Hector scoffs, aghast.

INT. GYM - THE NEXT DAY.

Hector indifferently uses the LEG PRESS MACHINE.

Talisa towers over him.

HECTOR

May I help you, miss?

TALISA

Not for long.

HECTOR

I can't help you for very long?

Hector lets out a nice GRUNT as he locks it in place.

TALISA

I won't be a miss for much longer.

HECTOR

Isn't that so precious for you?

TALISA

You don't need to be using this machine, there are plenty of others.

HECTOR

I could say the same for you.

TALISA

There aren't too many machines that are safe for pregnancy, y'know.

HECTOR

Oh, and this one is?

TALISA

As a matter of fact, it is. That's called science, maybe put your nose in a book for once.

HECTOR

I don't have much use for pregnancy books, as you might imagine.

TALISA

Hmm, funny. You may have missed your calling.

HECTOR

I've been getting that a lot. What calling do you think is best suited to me? Which one *hasn't* passed me by, in your expert opinion?

TALISA

I'm not an expert on deadbeat dads, I'm afraid.

HECTOR

Ouch, thankfully my muscles are too sore to feel my pride.

TALISA

What muscles?

HECTOR

Fucking shitballs, girl! Damn!  
 (touches her womb)  
 You hear that? Mama's got the zingers today! Hopefully you'll inherit her wit, and not mine.

Talisa gives him an eyebrow raise in place of a retort.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Okay, Mrs. Mom. You win this round. But tomorrow, I'm stealing the Stairmaster.

TALISA

Tomorrow's not my day for that one. Lucky me.

Hector climbs out and allows her to slip in his place.

HECTOR

Row machine it is. Have a safe workout, don't exert yourself too much.

She shakes her head at that.

TALISA

No need to worry about me.

HECTOR

Oh, no, I wasn't talking about you.

Talisa starts her workout.

TALISA

(straining)

Of course you were.

HECTOR

Oh, now who's all self-absorbed?

She shakes her head as she muscles the rack up.

Hector trudges away, but looking back at her as she soldiers on.

INT. GYM - THE NEXT DAY.

Hector sits on a GYM MAT, other WORKOUT NERDS next to him do SITUPS and PUSHUPS.

He watches GYM GOERS walk by but then pulls out a BOOK from his GYM BAG.

He very obviously sticks his nose in it--

The BOOK TITLE reads: **FATHERING A SON FOR DUMMIES**

Hector is in deep thought as he scans the pages.

Talisa struts on by offhandedly, glances over, but doesn't break a stride--

TALISA

It's a girl.

She passes on by. Hector looks up in amazement from his book.

He lets that revelation ruminate a long beat.

REGINALD (V.O.)

Daughters are nightmares, you know.

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector's harrowing, traumatized eyes. He lifts a beer to his lips.

REGINALD

Well, actually, sons are catastrophes, too. So--

Reginald sits with his thoughts.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
Eh, you're fucked either way.

He shrugs and takes a healthy chug of his beer, too.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
What else did you talk about?

HECTOR  
I told her I'm an intern.

REGINALD  
Hector. My guy-- you were supposed to maintain the illusion that you're--

HECTOR  
I know, *I know*. You don't have to take me down memory lane of my fuck-ups. I got it.

Beat.

REGINALD  
Well, it's okay. We can still recover. It's not the end-all, be-all of catastrophic failures. Although she still probably thinks you're a loser who knows no bounds.

Hector sends a glare his way. Message received.

He sips his beer, shakes his head. Careful deliberation.

HECTOR  
Man. How do I raise a daughter?

REGINALD  
You don't. I mean, you won't, really.

HECTOR  
Thanks, Reg.

Hector turns to his beer for help.

REGINALD  
Well, regardless-- congratulations, buddy! You're a girl dad.

HECTOR  
Cheers, man.

They clink their beers and drink together.

REGINALD

I can't believe she was actually willing to tell you that.

HECTOR

She's teasing me.

REG

Of course she is. That's always been her MO, yeah?

HECTOR

Yeah, for as long as I've known her.

REG

Which is for how long, exactly?

HECTOR

Fuck you, Reg.

REG

No, I'm serious. This is a huge step for you. She's letting you in on a big part of her life. Your lives. Before, she would've put you in cuffs. Now, she's making you aware of the sex of your baby.

HECTOR

I would've found out eventually.

REGINALD

Easy there, Creeping Tom. Let's not go there. Take this dub and get ready for the next step.

HECTOR

Which is?

Reg gives him a side-eye and a smirk.

Hector eagerly awaits what he'll say next.

EXT. TRACK - DAY.

Hector coaches the TRACK ATHLETES at the 200m start, into the curve.

HECTOR

I want you guys so laser focused on your form in practice so that it comes naturally for you in the race. It's important that your pumping your arms doesn't fall apart, so will your knee drive. Your form falls apart, so do you.

The KIDS hit the curve, emphasizing their form as they sprint.

Hector watches as they do--

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Really lean into the curve, guys. Use it to your advantage.

He watches them back up top of the curve--

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I want your head cleared of everything on the track. Don't think about your math test, who's going to prom, or what your parents will say when they've found out you had detention today. Your mind should be free of all that so you can run your race with everything coming together. I want you Zen as hell out there.

JAKE (17, 18) the team captain, approaches him, hands on his hips, gasping for breath.

JAKE

What do you think about when you run, Coach Ruiz?

HECTOR

Nothing. I told you, clear mind. Full heart, can't lose, right?

JAKE

C'mon, you gotta have problems too, Coach.

HECTOR

Adult problems are a little more complicated than yours. And I don't really run like that anymore.

MAISY (18) clearly the most athletic female, steps up. Imposing, intimidating, but surprisingly soft spoken.

MAISY  
Why don't you run anymore?

HECTOR  
I don't run from my problems,  
kiddo.

Hector clicks his tongue and sends a wink her way.

MAISY  
No, I mean, like-- you don't run  
track anymore.

HECTOR  
So literal. I knew what you meant,  
silly. It's not really practical to  
sprint on a regular basis when you  
get to be my age.

MAISY  
That sounds like an excuse.

That one hurt.

JAKE  
So, there just comes a time in life  
when you just stop running?

HECTOR  
Eh, you either convert to being a  
distance runner or you become like  
me. Not a lot of in-between.

MAISY  
Or you coach track.

JAKE  
Yeah, or you become a dad.

All the KIDS gasp at that.

HECTOR  
Hey, how'd you know that?

MAISY  
You're a dad?

Hector shrugs.

JAKE  
You're not married though, are you?

HECTOR  
No, Jake, I'm not married.

MAISY

Did you get divorced?

HECTOR

No, we, ah-- we didn't get married or divorced. Like I said, adult problems are a bit more complicated than high school problems.

JAKE

I wanna be an adult.

HECTOR

Just bob where I weaved and you'll be okay, sport.

MAISY

You're not all that bad, Coach Ruiz.

HECTOR

Thanks, Maisy. I appreciate that.

JAKE

Yeah, you just didn't wear protection. It happens.

HECTOR

Okay, this conversation is over. Let's hit the curve again, Track Stars!

They all let out a collective groan and obey.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

You guys ever run backwards 400s? They're hell on Earth, but they make the ones at the meets a breeze.

We pull away to find Hector waltzing towards them and the RUNNERS silhouetted by the sun setting.

REGINALD (V.O.)

How come you don't just get a job at the school?

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - DAY.

Reginald cracks open two cold ones at once and hands one to Hector.

REGINALD

You're already a coach anyway,  
seems like an easy transition.

HECTOR

I don't have a teaching degree.

REGINALD

You're such a perfect fit. There's  
gotta be something else you can do.

HECTOR

I dunno man, I don't think I've got  
the education for anything  
worthwhile there.

REGINALD

Just a thought. How is that going,  
anyway?

HECTOR

The kids don't need me. They're so  
good on their own.

REGINALD

They love you, man. They adore you.  
You're cougar royalty, Hec.

HECTOR

That could be an interesting one  
heard out of context.

REGINALD

I'm serious, man.

HECTOR

I know you are. I'm just saying,  
they're so talented-- they barely  
need me there, only to be a  
supervisor, essentially. I know  
that it's good that I'm there, but  
I could see them thriving without  
me. I know that I still have much  
to offer the future of the sport. I  
want to help them realize their  
full potential. I hope they know I  
see it even if they don't. I want  
them to unlock their best selves.  
They can use that in life, not just  
in Track. I can help them find  
their truest inner runner. The  
sport is incredibly mental. People  
don't really realize that.

REGINALD

Man, you shoulda made it big. Like, Olympics big. It's too bad life wanted you to be a washed up has-been with a baby momma who hates your guts instead.

HECTOR

You really didn't have to come after my life like that.

They both laugh as they drink.

REGINALD

Nah, I gotta go to a meet sometime.

HECTOR

You really don't. A thirty something guy with no offspring is bound to catch a case being at a high school track meet.

REGINALD

That's racist.

HECTOR

No, that's being cautious.

REGINALD

Whatever. It sounded racially charged.

HECTOR

I'm just lookin' out for the homie.

REGINALD

My guy.

They raise their beers and drink.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

You truly are passionate. Just maybe not always about the right things.

HECTOR

I wish I coulda been professional, but man it ain't that easy. It's so competitive.

REGINALD

But you have that edge, that competitive spirit. You just let life get in the way.

(MORE)

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
And then it passed you by. We  
always look for the right time  
whenever it's too late.

Hector has no words for that. He drinks instead.

HECTOR (O.S.)  
When did you find out our little  
lump is a girl?

INT. GYM - THE NEXT DAY.

Talisa does squats while Hector spots for her.

TALISA  
(straining)  
When I saw that there's no penis.

HECTOR  
I guess that would do it.

Hector creeps up closer, hovers his hands beneath the bar--

TALISA  
I don't need a spot.

He steps back.

HECTOR  
Fine.

She racks up the bar and turns to him--

TALISA  
What do you want, Hector?

HECTOR  
I want our baby to come out right.  
Our daughter had better be cleverly  
devastating.

TALISA  
If she comes out of my vag  
screaming 'fucking shit balls' then  
we'll know she got the wrong genes.

Hector can't help but let out a laugh with that one.

HECTOR  
We can do away with the paternity  
test if that happens.

TALISA

A paternity test is the worst of my nightmares. Let's not even toy with that idea. If the Stork shines his pretty little light upon my womb, then she will come out okay. We can only hope.

HECTOR

Let's not tell her that the stork fucked you in a one night stand, okay?

Talisa actually lets a laugh slip through.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I'm fine with her thinking the wrong dad is her dad.

TALISA

What makes you think he's the wrong dad? Maybe the real dad is the wrong dad.

Hector lets that one slide.

HECTOR

What do you think he'll do if he finds out?

TALISA

He's going to find out. It's our job to make sure it isn't one of us that slips up.

HECTOR

If he finds out eventually, then what's the point of hiding it?

TALISA

I need him to go on thinking that she's his. It'll wreck my marriage, and far be it from me to let...whatever the fuck THIS was come in the way of what good we have in our lives.

HECTOR

So, the rest of it isn't good?

Talisa stares daggers. Hector backs off.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

If this family is based on a lie,  
how could it ever not crumble?

TALISA

Oh, you'd get off on that, wouldn't  
you?

(beat)

I'm not letting you be the reason  
that my marriage could fall apart.

HECTOR

I do want you to be happy, contrary  
to your already very *high* opinion  
of me.

TALISA

I don't think very highly of  
you, actually--

HECTOR (CONT'D)

That was the-- you know--

TALISA (CONT'D)

I just need her to come out more  
like me. That's all I care about.

HECTOR

Most importantly-- She just needs  
to come out healthy. And for mister  
father figure to not fuck up as a  
pseudo dad in her life.

Talisa has fire in her eyes.

TALISA

You've already fucked up as a dad,  
for starters. She's already ***fucked***  
before she even comes out of my  
body. We all have you to thank.

(right in his face)

I will make it my life to un-fuck  
what you've already fucked for her.

Hector chooses his words very carefully--

HECTOR

If the deck is already so stacked  
against her, then she's gonna be  
the strongest girl I've ever known.

Talisa is so taken aback, she has nothing to say for once.

A drawn out beat.

She backs away, wants to leave, starts, but has to have the  
final word--

TALISA

I'm pretty sure this could be considered stalking in 37 states.

Hector hesitates--

HECTOR

So, this isn't one of those 13?

Talisa shakes her head and marches off before she can let her smile show.

Hector watches her strut away.

HECTOR (O.C.) (CONT'D)

The shitty part about it is that he's probably a good guy.

EXT. CITY STREETS - LATER.

We follow Hector and Reginald as they walk down the street.

REGINALD

No. He's a limp-dick vanilla latte of a human, you always have to believe that. No matter what.

HECTOR

That's not helping.

REGINALD

It should be. What wouldn't be helping is him actually being a good man, as you say. Everybody knows that Hector Ruiz is the man she should be with. I need to give you the confidence to defeat this soggy sock of a man.

HECTOR

Defeat? What am I gonna do? Challenge him to a duel in the coliseum? What the fuck do you mean, defeat him?

Reginald holds the door open to a BAR, Hector nods, leads the way.

INT. BAR - CONT.

Hector shuffles over to a couple open spots at the bar--

REGINALD

I'm telling you, you can win her back over. You just gotta show that you can be the better baby daddy.

They grab a seat. Settle in.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Well, and the better daddy in the sack, too.

Hector looks down the bar at the bartender--

REGINALD (CONT'D)

You gotta tell me-- I've never seen you like this with a woman before. What makes her so different?

He gives up momentarily on getting the bartender's attention.

HECTOR

It's difficult to describe.

REGINALD

Well, please try.

HECTOR

She can meet me on my level.

REGINALD

Try again, but be less arrogant this time.

HECTOR

It's not arrogance. I only meant... she can match my energy.

REGINALD

That's so Californian of you.

HECTOR

Shut up. She said that, too, actually. I mean, you know, banter.

Hector tries for the bartender again when--

REGINALD

Yeah, thanks for explaining that to me. I sincerely hope you weren't ever mansplaining the meaning of banter to her, too...

He spots her. TALISA. In the flesh. No way.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
 Yo, you gonna grab us a drink now,  
 moneybags? You know I always been  
 spottin' you.

Reginald notices he just saw a ghost.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
 You alright, dawg?

Reginald leans in, forcing eye contact.

HECTOR  
 I just saw her.

We can no longer see her from Hector's POV.

REGINALD  
 Who?

The realization hits.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
 Oh.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
 You wanna...? I can...

Now we see her. Talisa's already come over. She stands over him.

REGINALD (CONT'D)  
 Okay, I'm just gonna...

Reginald scoops his beer, takes a sip, and makes for the end of the bar, leaving them be.

TALISA  
 What are you doing here?

HECTOR  
 This is my bar.

TALISA  
 You're a bar owner, now?

HECTOR  
 I come here all the time.

TALISA  
**I** come here all the time.

HECTOR

So I can't come here now? You can't take the gym AND the bar away from me.

TALISA

Well, I'm certainly not gonna stop coming here.

HECTOR

We're at a bit of an impasse here, then.

TALISA

Sure seems that way.

Talisa waits a beat before parking herself by his side.

HECTOR

You just gonna leave your friends like that?

TALISA

They can wait.

HECTOR

How else did you want to police my life?

TALISA

I didn't come over here to give you a lecture. I came to say hi.

HECTOR

So you actually didn't want to lay into me for once.

TALISA

That actually doesn't sound all that bad, when put that way.

Hector looks at what she's drinking. Tequila soda, presumably.

HECTOR

You sure are feistier with a bit of tequila in your system.

Talisa throws him the one-eyebrow move. He flags down the bartender--

JUMP FADE TO:

INT. BAR - SOME TIME LATER.

We peek around from the side of the bar at them. They're now the only ones there. Reginald still at the end, but the rest of the bar has cleared out.

HECTOR (O.C.)

I just feel like a surrogate father  
in this situation.

We return to them--

TALISA

Well, you're not, so...

HECTOR

I'm just saying, that's what it  
feels like. We all know your stance  
on validating and invalidating  
feelings.

TALISA

Well, the difference is, I don't  
care when they're your feelings.

She gives a light chuckle to soften the blow. He gives her a smirk. She touches his arm.

HECTOR

I know we've said things to hurt  
each other, but I know that's not  
who we are, as people.

TALISA

If we're saying them, then maybe we  
are.

(beat)

We're just hurt. People say things  
when they're hurt.

HECTOR

Why do we keep hurting each other?

TALISA

Well, I'm passionate. I know that  
about myself. And I know, there's  
something in there.

(points to his heart)

And maybe, we care enough to say  
hurtful things. It's how we get to  
each other.

HECTOR

But, how can people who care for one another hurt each other so badly? There's something between us. I know there is. But we're too afraid to admit it.

TALISA

People who do this are either harmful, or broken.

HECTOR

Which do you think I am?

TALISA

I think we both know what we are.

Beat.

TALISA (CONT'D)

We could've worked in another version of our lives.

HECTOR

But, you're going your way, and I have to go mine. You chose a path that forces us apart, but you chose another that brought us back together.

Talisa hangs on that a beat before--

TALISA

I don't know that I chose this.

HECTOR

You chose him.

TALISA

This isn't Love Island, Hector. I didn't choose him over you. You know we met before you. Life chose us and we chose each other. I didn't expect to meet and connect with you so fast that night. And you were a disaster then. I know you've made strides since that night...and the grocery store.

They both can't help but snicker at that.

TALISA (CONT'D)

But... You told me even then you brushed your teeth with tequila and ate tacos off your bed-sheets. And while that's fun and all, I needed someone with stability. And you represented--

HECTOR

Instability.

TALISA

Yes.

Talisa looks on with pity. Hector pities himself and his beer.

TALISA (CONT'D)

Listen, Hector-- I know you're a good guy. Or at least, you have the potential to be. But, I saw that you were spiraling. I didn't want to be sucked into a vicious cycle, and no amount of fun sex or laughter that you can give me could change the fact that ultimately you would be a toxic black hole of dead-end loving. That's the nature of our relationship and what our lives would be together. You're also just a reminder of the falsehood of whatever fantasy you project onto us.

Hector is shocked, but holds back impulse.

HECTOR

The baby is the truest thing we ever could've done.

TALISA

Which is why we don't work and why it couldn't ever work. Our dynamic is dependent on the crutch of a kid together. That's no healthy foundation for a solid and working relationship.

HECTOR

You really think you're gonna be happy with this boring, vanilla latte of a man?

Before she becomes mad, she stops herself.

TALISA

First off, you don't even know him.

Hector shrugs that off.

TALISA (CONT'D)

You just think of us in terms of  
this fun banter we had in one  
night--

HECTOR

Oh, so like we were nothing at the  
gym.

TALISA

Okay, and a few days at the gym.  
Whatever.

HECTOR

You're telling me you have what we  
have, but with him?

TALISA

What we have is stronger. What you  
and I have was a fun little fling.  
And that doesn't translate to a  
life of happiness. Ours was just an  
unrealistic honeymoon.

HECTOR

And he can give you that. He can  
give you a lifetime of happiness.

TALISA

He's already given me that.

HECTOR

Because he's an accountant.

TALISA

Don't even start.

HECTOR

You said money wasn't important to  
you.

TALISA

It's not what's tangible. It's what  
it represents. Your words are not  
actions.

HECTOR

I can give you that. I can give you  
action.

TALISA

Those are just words. You've never shown me anything. A few flowers and a couple nice gestures don't go nearly as far as what he does for me. And you don't see our side of things.

HECTOR

So I'm just left in the dust. And what does he get? He gets to swoop in, play hero, and be the dad. I bend over backwards and I get--

TALISA

It's not a transaction. This is exactly your problem, you don't understand what it is to love at all.

HECTOR

I may not understand it, but I sure know the feel of it.

Talisa holds back tears.

TALISA

That's so surface level and you know it.

Beat.

HECTOR

Well, I hope you two are happy together.

TALISA

We are, and that's the point.

HECTOR

I'm going to be the best dad to her.

TALISA

That's all you can ever be to us, and she'll be grateful.

HECTOR

And what about you?

Talisa remains silent. She finishes her drink.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I just realized, you're...

He points at her drink.

TALISA

It's just soda water with lime.

She slides the glass on down the bar, like a boss.

Hector looks on with surprised eyes.

TALISA (CONT'D)

I like to keep up appearances.

She slips a TIP to the bartender and struts away.

Hector watches her as she goes.

Reginald looks over with clenched teeth. Yikes?

HECTOR (V.O.)

She told me I have a very selfish  
approach to love.

Hector raises his glass to him and chugs the rest.

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

They now have new beers to kill. Hector kicks back on the couch. Reginald reclines.

REGINALD

Maybe she's right, maybe she's not.  
But, you can learn from this. So  
your next love's better.

HECTOR

So we're already moving on to the  
next, huh?

REGINALD

Don't wreck this home, my guy.  
That's not the move. Show your  
home-girl you can live and let  
live. And more importantly, show  
your daughter that you are the  
bigger person. Be that shining  
beacon of hope in her life.

HECTOR

I feel like our golden boy will  
show her the practical employment  
of a balanced portfolio, or some  
shit.

Reginald scoffs, chuckles, shakes his head. Takes a sip.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I feel like she only loves me when she's drunk and hates me when she's sober.

REGINALD

Well, she's pregnant now so she's been--

HECTOR

--sober all the time, I know.

REGINALD

That's rough, buddy. I'm sorry.

Contemplative beat.

HECTOR

She told me I can only be a good dad to my girl.

REGINALD

She is definitely right about that.

They drink to that.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

I maybe wasn't the best dad. The best husband, or lover. But maybe love is about learning. You learn who you are, and who you can be to that person in your life.

Hector takes it all in.

HECTOR

How are you so wise?

REGINALD

I've lived so many more lives than you.

They both laugh and drink at that.

Hector raises his beer to him.

HECTOR

Cheers to that, my friend.

Hector drinks until--

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - MORNING.

Hector is passed out, dead to the world. Mouth open, the works.

Birds chirping, signaling a new dawn.

Hector snaps awake.

He desperately looks at his phone.

HECTOR  
Fuck! Shitballs!

Hector's anxiety jumps to action. He scrapes for his work clothes.

INT. WAREHOUSE - LATER.

Hector rushes into work. His MANAGER awaits his late arrival.

HECTOR  
Boss, I'm sorry I'm late, I--

MANAGER  
It's okay, you won't be late again.

HECTOR  
Right, I won't. This was just a one-off, I--

MANAGER  
No, you won't be late again because you won't have the opportunity to be late again.

HECTOR  
What are you...?

The Manager gives him a knowing look.

Hector looks delusional, but deep down, he knows.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONT.

Hector stomps off and rips his shirt off.

He then slings his WORK POLO off to the side.

The harrowing realization encompasses him...

He looks down at his PHONE: TRACK MEET later today, 6PM.

HECTOR  
Shit! Fuck Balls!

Hector takes off running--

REGINALD (V.O.)  
I'mma be at this one! I told you  
I'm coming to see you coach.

HECTOR (V.O.)  
And I told you that's a terrible  
idea!

He runs back after his shirt on the ground, scoops it up,  
runs back toward us--

SNAP TO:

EXT. TRACK MEET - LATER.

Hector, sweaty, disheveled, wears a stopwatch, sports a  
clipboard, stands panting, frantically looking around--

Jake walks on up to him, stands silently by his side until--

JAKE  
You okay coach? You look a little  
stressed out.

Hector finally comes back down to earth.

HECTOR  
Yeah, I'm fine. What's your deal?

JAKE  
Nothin'...

Jake looks at him like an annoying little brother, then looks  
to the STANDS with purpose.

Hector searches around him then his eyes dart to the  
clipboard.

Jake smiles, then looks to coach mischievously.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
What's that older black guy doing  
alone in the stands?

Hector stops breathing heavily, looks incredulous to him--

JAKE (CONT'D)  
Is he jacking off?

Hector's head snaps to the BLEACHERS--

He can't find him. Glances to Jake--

JAKE (CONT'D)  
He's your friend, isn't he?

HECTOR  
Hey, don't be racist. It could just as easily be some white guy jerking off in the stands.

Hector scans the crowd and finally finds him--

Reginald waves to him, all silly-like.

ANNOUNCER  
(over PA system)  
Final call for the 200 meter dash.  
Final call, 200 meter dash. Please report...

Hector smiles, scoffs, shakes his head.

JAKE  
Or Latino, in your case.

Hector looks to him with fire in his eyes--

HECTOR  
Hey, you got three backwards 400s on Monday now, bud.

Jake groans, throws his arms up in the air, and turns around.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Don't you have to check in for your race? They called final call for the 200 already.

Hector lightly slaps him upside the head.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Get your ass outta here.

Jake trots off.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
(scoffs)  
Psh. Jesus.

Hector shakes his head as he marches away.

Maisy catches up with Hector.

MAISY

Coach, are you alright?

Hector stands in place. Maisy stops with him.

HECTOR

Yeah. Why's everybody so worried about me? Don't you got a race to worry about?

She sits down, fiddles with her TRACK SPIKES, her compression sleeves.

MAISY

You said not to worry about the race. Worry about our form.

HECTOR

I said not to worry at all.

MAISY

Which I think you should do. Take your own advice, coach.

She ties her shoes. Hector crouches down to meet her eye-level.

HECTOR

Maisy. How about you keep your mind on your race, and less about me.

MAISY

What's gotten into you, coach?

HECTOR

No, what's gotten into you guys? You and Jake are all up in my business when you've got bigger fish to fry. Don't concern yourself with me. Remember, adult problems are not your problems, yet. So, enjoy that while you can. For the love of all that is sacred. Is nothing sacred anymore? No, evidently not. Let's drop it, and please PR out of your shoes today. Got it?

MAISY

Okay. I just-- we care about you, coach. That's all.

HECTOR

I just don't know what this is about, and I don't know where this came from. Run your race. Free your mind. Please. Can you do that for me?

Maisy is taken aback, but catches herself--

MAISY

Okay. Yeah. Got it. Thanks.

Before Maisy is even done fiddling with her gear, she just gathers it all up and marches off.

Hector scoffs, grunts, groans as he spins on his heel and storms off. Stifling a breakdown, best he can.

Maisy turns around briefly to check on him, then struts off.

INT/EXT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector barges in the door. Startles an already drinking Reginald--

HECTOR

I need a drink. Or ten.

Reginald looks at him as if it's obvious.

INT. BAR - LATER.

Hector and Reginald stumble into the bar.

This could get ugly. (It already is?)

ZOOM TO:

INT. BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Hector furiously swiping on his phone. Reginald places SHOTS on the table before them--

HECTOR

The apps are driving me insane. Hinge has made me unhinged.

REGINALD

Don't let this destroy you. You can't let them win.

HECTOR

They've already done their number.  
I'm now in my villain era.

REGINALD

Slay away, my demon brother.

Hector gets up, ready to fuck shit up.

INITIATE SLOW-MOTION SEQUENCE: Hector strutting up to the bar

He signals the BARTENDER to pour up some shots.

SLOW MOTION OF: The BARTENDER sloppily pouring up shots,  
TEQUILA splashing up all over--

Hector pressing the SHOT to his lips--

--and then...

SLAM TO BLACK.

SOUNDS OF BANGING ON A DOOR OVER BLACK.

OPEN ON:

EXT. HOUSE - DEAD OF NIGHT.

Hector drunkenly BANGING on a door of a nice HOUSE.

The door swings open to--

TALISA, horrified, rubs her eyes to ensure--

Yup, it's him.

TALISA

What the fuck is wrong with you?  
What are you doing here, what do  
you want?

HECTOR

I need you. I'm miserable. My life  
is falling apart. You're the only  
thing--

TALISA

You cannot show up like this.  
Fucking drunk. How do you even know  
where I live?

HECTOR  
You told me on the night we met.

TALISA  
No, I didn't.

HECTOR  
At the gym.

TALISA  
Still didn't.

HECTOR  
Well, I'm just very... resourceful.

She folds her arms, looks deeper into him--

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
You're not gonna like it.

TALISA  
You know what, don't tell me. I  
don't even wanna know.

She tosses her arms up in disgust--

TALISA (CONT'D)  
I'm through with you. You'll never  
see her. Ever. Don't come back  
around here or you're done. I'll  
make sure she never sees you even  
for a second. Now, fuck off. I'll  
call you an Uber or some shit. And  
please actually get in it. Bye  
forever. I hope.

Talisa slams the door in his face.

HECTOR  
For your sake, or mine?

He staggers backwards. Stumbles off into the night...

JUMP TO:

EXT. FAMILIAR NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER THAT NIGHT.

Hector stumbles out of the Uber towards a FAMILIAR APARTMENT.  
It's not Reginald's...

...it's his. He fumbles with his keys. Drops them.

He scrapes them off the ground and attempts to fit it in the keyhole.

He battles with it, until--

--it fits in, he turns it, to no avail.

HECTOR  
Fuuuuck. Shit, balls....

He stumbles off, pulls out his phone--

DEAD.

He lays down on the BENCH just outside his apartment building.

SNAP TO:

EXT. APARTMENT - MORNING.

Hector wakes up on the bench, next to a HOMELESS MAN. While dilapidated, he has it more together than Hector.

He comes to, snaps up straight.

The Homeless Man stares him up and down.

Hector sizes him up, too.

A staring contest until--

Saved by the BUS. Hector looks at it as if to say, "fuck it."

Hector steps on the bus, looking back at the Homeless Man who wears a face that says, "yeah, I thought so..."

The Bus doors close to end this dick measuring contest.

EXT. CITY STREETS - LATER.

Hector mopes and mopes down the street all the way to--

EXT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Hector swings the door open and lets himself in.

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - CONT.

Hector's hungover ass barely makes it to the couch before he plops down face first.

Reginald doesn't say a word until breaking the silence--

REGINALD

Where in the unholy fuck did you end up last night?

HECTOR

I don't wanna talk about it.

REGINALD

We are talking about it.

HECTOR

I feel like you already know.

REGINALD

Unfortunately, I do. Why the in the ever living fuck did you go there?

HECTOR

Why do you think?

REGINALD

You're desperate. Or insane. Desperately insane.

HECTOR

I gotta stop drinking, bro.

REGINALD

Yeah, that'd be a start.

Reginald cracks open another beer.

HECTOR

Don't do that to me.

REGINALD

I ain't doin' shit to you.

HECTOR

Where do I go from here, man?

REGINALD

Only one way to go. But, I'll tell ya one place you're not goin'

HECTOR

I know, I know. I got it.

REGINALD

Do you though? I warned you about this restraining order type shit. This shit is gonna get you to the point of no return. I mean, shit-- I think we're there already.

HECTOR

I'm never gonna see her, am I?

REGINALD

At this rate, no. But, you really gotta do everything right from here on if you ever have hopes of visitation rights.

HECTOR

We might be well past that.

REGINALD

Yeah, thanks to your antics last night.

HECTOR

There must be something we can do.

REGINALD

I don't know, I ain't a lawyer.

Reginald turns to his beer for help. He'll find none.

HECTOR

I may have to go the legal route now.

REGINALD

You don't wanna go there. You're in a sorry state and last night argues completely against your case.

HECTOR

So, what do I do?

REGINALD

We hope and pray she's challenging you. And that she's not serious about any sorta legal action. The best news is, homeboy still doesn't know.

HECTOR

I don't know how.

REGINALD

Me neither. Keep it that way.

HECTOR

Now's probably not the best time to tell you I gotta find a new job.

REGINALD

Oh, great. You fucked that up. Nicely done, muchacho.

HECTOR

Thanks for cheering me up.

REGINALD

Don't mention it.

HECTOR

Believe me, I won't.

REGINALD

Can you remain on unemployment if you were fired?

HECTOR

Probably gotta lie about it.

REGINALD

Man, you are scoring points everywhere.

HECTOR

I really appreciate the support.

A contemplative beat.

REGINALD

I got an idea. But, you may not like it.

HECTOR

I'm up for anything at this point.

Reginald gives him a knowing smile. Hector looks through barely alive eyes.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. GYM - DAY.

-Hector working out on ROWING MACHINE.

Another day passes...

-Hector, with his head turned around, PUSHING up the LEG PRESS.

Another day passes...

-Hector SQUATTING, re-racking, but searching for her...

-Hector doing push-ups, but looking up for signs of her.

-Hector BENCHING, racking the bar, sits up, doesn't see her.

DISSOLVE FROM MONTAGE:

INT. CAFE - MORNING.

Hector sits alone with a coffee, looks up and around.

He fiddles with a spoon, mindlessly stirs his coffee...

Someone STANDS OVER HIM.

His head snaps up to--

TALISA. She's sporting a bigger bump now.

He's so taken aback, no words come out of his already open mouth.

She invites herself to sit.

HECTOR

Yeah, please.

He studies her a moment. Unsure how to begin--

HECTOR (CONT'D)

How've you been? Do you want a coffee?

TALISA

You know caffeine's not good for the baby.

HECTOR

Of course. More science. Haven't you ever considered that our daughter might be craving it for the both of you?

TALISA

Oh, yeah. She tells me all the time.

He chuckles at that. She smiles.

HECTOR

So, I thought the next time you see me you were gonna call the cops.

TALISA

I talked to my husband about it and he recommended to take legal action if it came to that.

HECTOR

Oh, yeah, since he's a lawyer, right?

TALISA

His dad's a lawyer.

HECTOR

Of course he is.

Talisa does her patented one-eyebrow raise to him.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

So, wait-- he's your husband now?

TALISA

No, I just keep saying that-- since I know he's going to be.

HECTOR

Right.

Beat.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

So, why am I graced with your presence today?

TALISA

This was actually pure happenstance, as you so put it.

HECTOR

No fucking way. The same bar, the same gym, and now--

TALISA

The same cafe.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

--the same cafe.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

As I live and breathe.

She playfully rolls her eyes and flips her hair back.

TALISA

Well, I saw you and I had to come over.

HECTOR

And just say hi, right?

TALISA

Yeah, hi.

A somewhat awkward beat.

HECTOR

Can I persuade you to reconsider the whole...?

TALISA

The whole...what.

HECTOR

Never seeing me thing?

TALISA

Well, clearly I'm going to see you. Whether we like it or not.

HECTOR

Not that it isn't nice to see me.

TALISA

It's probably not the best idea.

HECTOR

What about what she wants?

TALISA

We can't really know what she wants yet. All I know for sure is she's gonna want her mouth on my tits for a good minute.

Hector smiles, shakes his head.

TALISA (CONT'D)

Depends, are ya still drinking?

HECTOR

Aren't you still drinking?

TALISA

I drink red wine, yeah. I heard that it's healthy and I'll cling to that.

HECTOR

That sounds like it'd be good for our baby. I bet you read that on the internet. Or another science book, huh?

TALISA

How would you know what's good for our baby? You're probably drunk now. Is that coffee Irish, by chance?

HECTOR

Yeah, I stopped drinking.

(beat)

I drink a lot less.

TALISA

Good. I don't believe you.

HECTOR

Well, it's true. I'm completely reformed now.

TALISA

So you're back to lying now, that's great.

HECTOR

Back to ly-- I never lied to you!

TALISA

Oh. That's rich.

HECTOR

You can't keep me from her.

TALISA

I'll do what she wants.

HECTOR

(scoffs)

Yeah, but how about when she KNOWS what she actually wants? Haven't you ever considered what OUR DAUGHTER wants?!

TALISA

Of course I've thought about what she MIGHT want, but you aren't going to be around because you can't be around.

HECTOR

This is something that you're going to need to tell her when the time is right.

TALISA

And when is the right time?

HECTOR

When she's at the age when she can make a decision.

TALISA

When do you think you actually knew what you wanted? Did you know what you wanted growing up? I don't think you even know what you want right now, in this moment!

HECTOR

I know she's going to want her dad.

TALISA

She'll have a dad.

HECTOR

Not her actual father, who can be better to her than he can.

TALISA

How can you possibly fucking know that?! And don't you dare think you know what she wants better than she can, before she's even fucking born!

HECTOR

Don't you have a shred of empathy?

TALISA

I'm just about as empathetic as you are considerate.

HECTOR

When she's able to make a decision, you have to go with what she chooses. It should be her decision, and hers alone.

TALISA

Oh, hers alone? That's rich. We're just gonna skip over her MOTHER. That's certainly a perspective that doesn't fuckin' matter to you, huh?

HECTOR

We already know what you want. It'll be mighty convenient for you if you come back to me already deciding for her. If she wants to see me, then you have to grant that. When it's time, it's gotta be her, and you know it. You're just dismissing fact. Don't be delusional.

TALISA

You're the delusional one sticking fake facts in her face. You can't cram what you think to be fact down her throat. I won't allow you to manipulate my daughter.

HECTOR

She's mine too. If anyone, you're the manipulator by omitting key details from her. She needs to be aware of the truth. And when she's able, she'll let US know. You're the one in control, so if anyone, it's you who's twisting the manipulation. You need to sit back and let go. You need to accept that it's up to her. We can't make this about ourselves.

Talisa actually sits back and lets him drive.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

She can go her whole life without knowing, which would be so nice for you and for your-- man! But deep down, if you have a conscience in there somewhere, you'll know that what you're doing is detrimental. There's always gonna be a longing from her, and it could torture your soul for the rest of your days. What an unfulfilling life for her to never know. It could destroy her.

Talisa takes a pensive beat before a retort--

TALISA

You don't need to be so dramatic. It's not that deep.

(MORE)

TALISA (CONT'D)

She'll have a father figure in her life and that's all she needs. It's not so profound as you make it out to be.

HECTOR

A daughter without a true father is disconcerting.

TALISA

She won't be without one. Why are you so self absorbed to think that she needs YOU when she has him? Is your perception of reality so warped by you being the center of your own universe? Come back to reality where we all live!

HECTOR

It's like having a twin. She's going to have these phantom senses, almost telepathic feelings, longings to see her biological father. She'll feel it and not know exactly what it is, but she's going to feel it within her as she grows up and it'll be stronger still the older she becomes. And to deny those feelings, to disregard that longing-- is treacherous. You will be an enemy to her if you deny her this and contribute to this emptiness that she will inevitably feel.

She ruminates on that a beat.

TALISA

You actually sound like an insane person right now.

(gathers her purse and stands up)

I won't entertain this any longer.

She grabs her belly and wobbles away from the table and waddles off.

Hector watches her leave, shakes his head, looks away.

He bites his finger nail in some deep thought...

EXT. TRACK - LATER.

Hector barely keeps it together as he trembles, clipboard pressed against him and stopwatch in the other hand.

Maisy softly approaches him...

MAISY  
Coach, what's up?

She studies him. He pays her no mind.

MAISY (CONT'D)  
Are you okay?

He finally acknowledges her.

HECTOR  
Yeah, I'm fine. Why do you ask?

Maisy looks to him inquisitively.

MAISY  
Do you even like coaching?

HECTOR  
Maisy. Where is this coming from?  
It's my life, you know that.

MAISY  
Do you like coaching me?

Hector leans down to her.

HECTOR  
Maisy, this is your insecurity talking. You're better than this. You are my favorite, but not when you ask me questions like that.

MAISY  
I thought you liked coaching Jake better.

HECTOR  
Maisy-- he doesn't take this shit seriously like you do. Sorry, french. But, anyway, you have this drive about you. You take care of business. I'm only along for the ride. It's all within you. I only want to help unlock that for you.

This changes her demeanor. Hector is seemingly satisfied. Then-- he taps his pen nervously. Her eyes go to it.

Hector looks about him frantically, tries to calm himself.

He hasn't chilled out. She notices this.

MAISY

Coach, what's wrong?

HECTOR

Nothing's wrong, what's the matter with you?

MAISY

Nothing's the matter with me. I'm worried about you.

HECTOR

Maisy, what have I told you before? If you go into your race worried about your silly little coach whose life may or may not be collapsing all around him, you're not gonna run a good race, are ya?

Maisy timidly crumples back into her own body.

Hector leans down, closer to her.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Can you do that for me? Please? Can you not worry about your stupid fuck-up of a coach who can't seem to do anything right except this one thing in his life?

She sees it. The desperation on his face. The pleading.

Maisy battles tears in her eyes. The words fight through--

MAISY

Coach... I don't know what's wrong, but I hope you get the help that you need.

She turns and lunges away before he can see her cry.

Hector's face immediately turns to horror and pang.

He takes off his stopwatch and slams it into the ground, nervously pacing back and forth.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
 Please report, 800 meter runners.  
 Please report to the staging area,  
 all...

HECTOR  
 Fuck...

He regathers himself, picks up the stopwatch, and becomes human again. He sniffs and walks with composure.

EXT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - LATER.

Hector marches up to the apartment building, checks his mail-  
 NOTHING.

He storms on up to the apartment--  
 --BARGES IN--

INT. REGINALD'S APARTMENT - CONT.

HECTOR  
 Did I get a check in today?

REG  
 Hello to you, too.

HECTOR  
 My unemployment-- did I get  
 anything??

REGINALD  
 You haven't gotten any mail, my  
 man. It'd be on the counter right  
 there if you did.

HECTOR  
 Fucking SHIT BALLS!

He storms back out.

Reginald just sits frightened on the couch.

REGINALD  
 Damn.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - MORNING.

Hector paces in front of the door before the UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICER unlocks the door.

Hector swings on in.

UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICER

You can't continue to collect unemployment if you were terminated from your previous position.

HECTOR

But, I need this money. I'm dying over here. I need to be able to afford food, at least.

UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICER

Yeah, we're all dying...

HECTOR

Please, just keep me on just a bit longer. I have to pay rent, too. Just have a shred of empathy, please.

UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICER

This was something that was entirely within your control and entirely your fault. I can't abide paying your claim if you were involuntarily terminated from that last job you had. If you were laid off or were put in a financial hardship not of your own accord, we'd be talking about a different situation here.

HECTOR

So, there's nothing you can do.

UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICER

You can apply for different programs, but not under my purview. You are no longer eligible for unemployment benefits.

HECTOR

Ugh, okay fine. Thanks for your help.

Hector storms off--

UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICER  
Yup, have a good one.

Hector barges out the door.

EXT. SCHOOL - LATER.

Hector stands at MID-FIELD of the FOOTBALL FIELD.

He looks around him and pictures the STANDS FILLED. The CROWD ROARING fills our ears.

GHOSTLY SILHOUETTES of RUNNERS sprint on the track, rounding the CURVE, and into the HOMESTRETCH--

Hector almost smiles a moment, before it quickly fades.

VOICE (O.S.)  
(from behind)  
You're a little early.

Hector spins around to find--

FOSTER HARRIS (40s) the SCHOOL PRINCIPAL. He wears a button-down and slacks. Typical business formal, but laid back.

HECTOR  
Mister Harris, what are you doing here?

FOSTER  
Oh, c'mon, Hector, we're beyond that.

HECTOR  
Sorry, Foster. What's up?

FOSTER  
It's funny you ask me what I'm doing here, you know I practically live here.

HECTOR  
Silly of me. How ya doin'?

FOSTER  
Oh, you know. Kids driving me crazy, per usual.

HECTOR  
Yeah, I feel ya. They've been gettin' to me, too.

FOSTER

No kiddin'? How they running,  
anyway? Thought they were doin'  
pretty good.

HECTOR

You know, always got potential.  
They run fine, but they're not...

FOSTER

I get it. What are ya gonna do? How  
do you get 'em to the next level?

HECTOR

They're not letting go. There's  
always somethin' on their minds.

Foster nods his head. He thinks he understands.

FOSTER

Hard to get into the mind of a  
runner.

HECTOR

Yeah, exactly. In sprinting,  
there's not enough time. That 400,  
though...

FOSTER

Heh, that's a doozy. Or, so I'm  
told.

HECTOR

Yeah, that's a race. Gutsy. Leave  
it all out on the track. There's  
nothing like it.

Foster nods, lets that marinate a beat.

FOSTER

You know, we have a vacancy.

HECTOR

Yeah? What's that?

FOSTER

English. Vicky, she's retiring.

HECTOR

You don't say.

FOSTER

Yeah, you've got a degree, right?

HECTOR

Yeah, but... not in education. You guys started--

FOSTER

Requiring that, I know. Why don't you get one?

HECTOR

I can't afford it right now. I'm kinda goin' through some hard times.

FOSTER

Heard it's only gonna get harder.

Hector cocks his head to him.

Foster shrugs, looks knowingly--

HECTOR

How'd you know that?

FOSTER

Word travels fast in a school, you must know that.

HECTOR

Jeez. A man can get no privacy.

Foster lets out an uproarious laugh.

FOSTER

Listen, Hec-- I wanna help out.

HECTOR

There's no help for me, Foster.

Foster didn't realize it was like that. He stops, thinks.

FOSTER

It can't be that bad, is it? Do we really not pay you that much as a coach? Heh. Heh.

He laughs but Hector isn't laughing with him. He stops.

FOSTER (CONT'D)

Let me help you find a program. We can get you that degree. There's help out there, I know there is.

HECTOR

I'll look into it.

FOSTER

Let me know, alright?

Hector nods, looks off in the distance.

Foster pats him on the shoulder as he walks off.

Hector looks lost in thought, distraught.

REGINALD (V.O.)

Hey, maybe you could be a used car salesman.

EXT. CAFE - MORNING.

Reginald sits across from Hector outside at the CAFE as they babysit their COFFEE.

HECTOR

There's no hope for me, man.

REG

You have a college degree, though, right?

HECTOR

Yeah, but it's worthless.

REGINALD

Well, damn, maybe you are hopeless.

Hector glares him down.

Reg shrugs.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

I tried.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

So, what are you gonna do?

HECTOR

What *can* we do?

REGINALD

I don't know, man. Maybe when the chips are down, it's time to be all jaded and cynical and give in to nihilism completely.

HECTOR

Yeah, you're probably right.

REGINALD

No, what? Damn, man. Stop it! Are you shitting me right now? Can you imagine your daughter seeing your ass like this? You know what she might think? That giving into the darkness is normal and you should just always take the easy route and let depression envelop you, and that's it! Pull yourself together, lift yourself up out of the shit and be the man you want your daughter to see you as.

Hector gives Reginald a revelatory look dead in his eyes.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

What, did I *finally* get through to you?

Hector looks off in the distance as if life was renewed.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Jesus man, I feel like I'm preachin' into the void, or somethin'

That's when he sees it--

TALISA.

She waddles herself into the CAFE.

Hector hasn't taken his eyes off her.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Are you okay there, Mr. Mom?

Hector finally brings his attention back to him.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

God damn, I really am talkin' to a brick wall. Are you back with me?

Hector stands up, scoots his chair out, and practically sleepwalks into the CAFE.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Okay, I believe it now. All hope is lost. I'll embrace the nihilism now, too.

INT. CAFE - CONT.

Hector glides on over to Talisa who orders her drink.

TALISA  
...yeah, decaf, please.

Talisa finally notices him.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
What? I ordered decaf. It's fine.

Hector is in a trance.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
You okay?

HECTOR  
Are you okay?

TALISA  
Yeah, I'm fine. Why?

Hector looks at what she should be looking at. And what he can't believe she hasn't noticed...

Talisa finally realizes. She's left--

A TRAIL OF WATER...

She looks down at the near PUDDLE beneath her.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
Oh god.

She clutches at her belly.

Hector GUIDES her out of the Cafe.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
Take my keys.

EXT. CAFE - CONT.

He leads her out towards where she seemingly parked her car.

HECTOR  
What?

TALISA  
Take my fucking keys and drive my fucking car, you heard me!

Reginald stands up, takes off his sunglasses.

REGINALD  
Okay, it's happening!

HECTOR  
What are you gonna do?

TALISA  
Obviously get in the back, try not  
to die and have this fucking baby!

Hector fumbles with the keys--

HECTOR  
Well, don't have it yet!

He opens the back door for Talisa to get in--

TALISA  
Clearly I'm gonna have my baby at  
the hospital!

She climbs in. He slams the door.

He swings around to the driver's side and slips in--

INT. CAR - CONT.

Hector starts the car but hesitates--

TALISA  
What the fuck are you waiting for?  
Drive!

HECTOR  
I don't have a driver's license!

TALISA  
What?!

HECTOR  
I don't drive a car! I don't even  
own a car!

TALISA  
Oh shit, of course you don't!  
You're so fucking worthless, what  
the fuck is wrong with you?!

HECTOR  
Ahh! I don't know! I don't know!

TALISA  
Just drive! We have no choice! Go!

HECTOR  
Okay, okay!

TALISA  
We gotta get there! Go!

Hector takes off. Talisa clutches at her belly. Hangs on for dear life.

A moment of frantic driving passes before--

HECTOR  
What if I can't find parking?

TALISA  
Fuck parking! Drop me off! Front door, emergency!

Talisa starts wailing. Hector's anxiety already through the roof, this isn't helping...

Hector's practically flooring it. But somewhat obeying the traffic laws.

RED LIGHT.

He jams the brakes at the intersection--

Talisa clutches both handles.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
What the fuck is the matter with you? Have you ever driven before?!

HECTOR  
Not really! Not since I was a kid!

TALISA  
Oh, fucking great. We're dead before this kid comes out. Perfect.

He floors it at the sign of GREEN. We're off again.

Talisa hangs on to the handle and her baby.

A moment of BLUR as we go into another YELLOW LIGHT--

The engine REVS as Hector furiously clutches the wheel--

Pedal to the metal just before we--

CUT AWAY TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER.

No commotion outside the Hospital until--

HECTOR (O.C.)  
What if I get towed? I don't want  
your car to--

TALISA (O.C.)  
Fuck it, I don't give a shit! Fuck  
the car! Baby, priority!

Talisa's car comes into view--

Hector dodges a NURSE--

--then an AMBULANCE--

Before finally coming to a stop, a HARD STOP. Right in front  
of the EMERGENCY SIGN.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
Holy fucking shit. Oh my god. I'm  
alive.

She feels for the baby.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
Baby's definitely alive. Never  
stopped feeling her. Ugh.

She lets out an exasperated sigh.

Hector runs around the car and fiddles with the door--

TALISA (CONT'D)  
Jesus H Christ. Oh.

He swings it open. He reaches in and helps her out--

HECTOR  
The H stands for Hector.

He carefully pulls her out of the car.

TALISA  
Shut your fucking mouth!

EXT. CAR/HOSPITAL - CONT.

Hector guides her into the Hospital. Arm around her, marching with her every step.

INT. HOSPITAL - CONT.

NURSES spot Talisa and Hector and scramble to their side--

AN URGENT NURSE wheels a WHEELCHAIR out and carefully places her in it.

NURSE  
We'll take her from here.

HECTOR  
Where are you taking her?

NURSE  
Just-- follow us!

HECTOR  
Okay!

They wheel her to an ELEVATOR with purpose--

Hector jogs in alongside them.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - CONT.

They wheel her from the elevator and down the hall.

Hector keeping up alongside them.

Talisa groaning all the way.

They reach the end of the hall and wheel her into a DELIVERY ROOM.

End of the line for Hector. They disallow him entry.

HECTOR  
What are you doing? I'm the father!

TALISA  
No, he's not. Don't tell my husband that.

NURSE  
Wait out here.

The NURSES shut him out.

HECTOR  
What the...? What?

Hector throws his arms up in disgust. He paces back and forth.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
I AM her dad, her father should be able to be-- ugh. Fucking mierda.

He finds a seat next to the door.

TIME LAPSE: We go from day to DUSK.

INT/EXT. DELIVERY ROOM - LATER.

Hector looks bored and anxious next to the Delivery Room door.

We follow the side of a MAN marching down the hallway.

He sports BUSINESS FORMAL GARB. Nice DRESS SHOES.

We only see the CLOP CLOP of his shoes as he marches...

We look up to find Hector rise up out of his chair from the BUSINESSMAN's POV.

The MAN wants to BURST through the door, but looks over at a CLERICAL WORKER sitting off to the side of them--

CLERICAL  
You can't go in there, there's a procedure in progress--

BUSINESSMAN  
That's my fiance in there! I have to be able to go in, I need to see her--

CLERICAL  
Sir, please just have a seat and wait, you can't go in just yet--

BUSINESSMAN  
I need you to let me in, right now--  
-

Hector looks on in awe. This is it. It's him. In the flesh.

CLERICAL

Sir, please-- find a seat and be patient. You'll be able to see her after they've finished the--

BUSINESSMAN

No, no-- you have to, you gotta--

HECTOR

Sir, why don't you calm down and just let them--

BUSINESSMAN

Nobody asked you, fuckwad. I need to see my wife and my child!

Hector, taken aback, softly approaches.

HECTOR

Your child... heh--

BUSINESSMAN

Yes, my child. And who the fuck are you? Stay out of my business.

HECTOR

She says you're not going in there, so don't go in there. You can wait, can you?

BUSINESSMAN

I said mind your own fuckin' business! What are you doing poking your nose where you ought not to be? Huh? Fucking prick.

The Clerical Worker dials on a phone--

HECTOR

It's plenty my business, that's my kid she's having in there.

CLERICAL

Somebody please send security to the Labor and Delivery floor--

BUSINESSMAN

You think you're funny or somethin'? Fuck off, you lowlife.

HECTOR

Yeah, that's Talisa in there. With my daughter.

(MORE)

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I drove her to the hospital. Where were you, DAD? At the office? You're clueless.

A realization washes over his face.

BUSINESSMAN

How do you--? You fuckin' creep, are you stalking us?

Businessman SNAPS at the Clerical Worker--

BUSINESSMAN (CONT'D)

Hey, lady-- can you get security for this guy who is clearly spying on my wife and is trying to insert himself into our family? This guy needs to be arrested!

HECTOR

Oh, yeah. Go ahead, buddy-- you know I'm right. You know this is not your kid. Yeah, how would I know Talisa is having a daughter? How else would she have gotten to the hospital? Huh? she drove herself? Called herself a rideshare? Did you drive the ambulance?

BUSINESSMAN

Shut the fuck up!

The businessman tries to PLOW past Hector to the Delivery Room door--

HECTOR

That's right, go on ahead! Ask her yourself!

The Clerical Worker tries to get in between--

BG: SECURITY pressing up the hallway--

Businessman SMACKS the Clerical Worker off to the side--

He pushes past Hector and BLASTS into--

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - CONT.

Time almost sits still a moment.

Talisa holds the BABY in her arms. It's somehow quiet.

How is it so peaceful?

Hector's DAUGHTER is not crying.

Businessman looks on in awe--

Hector barges in behind him, he does the same--

Talisa's happiness is wiped away from her face as she sees--

Both MEN before her.

The Businessman's happiness and awe disappears from his face.

Hector now looks on in terror as the Businessman turns on him--

TALISA  
Hubby, please, don't--

Businessman backs him down--

TALISA (CONT'D)  
It's not--

BUSINESSMAN  
Is it true?

He turns around to her--

BG: SECURITY catches up to the Clerical Worker who points inside the room...

Talisa looks on, tears welling up her eyes. She crumbles.

She fatefully nods.

TALISA  
Hun, please don't--!

The Businessman snaps back around and throws a MIGHTY PUNCH--

SMACK!

Hector goes down.

LIGHTS OUT.

SLAM TO BLACK.

ON-SCREEN TIME CARD: 7 YEARS LATER.

The sound of a CROWD CHEERING fills our ears until--

EXT. OLYMPIC QUALIFYING TRACK MEET - DAY.

RUNNERS cross the finish line in a close one.

ANNOUNCER

Heat two of the women's 400 meter  
dash...

Hector marches over to Maisy who sits, stretching.

He sports a TRACK JACKET which states: Hector Ruiz - COUGARS  
ATHLETIC DIRECTOR.

And wears a BADGE around his neck stating: SPRINTS COACH -  
2028 OLYMPIC TRIALS.

He's finally made his way to her, stands over her a moment-

Maisy swaps out her RUNNING SHOES for SPIKES.

Hector leans down and meets her at eye-level. She doesn't  
look.

HECTOR

Maisy. Look at me.

She's only still looking at her SPIKES as she ties them.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Maisy. Please.

She finally does.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

You're a strong runner. You don't  
need me to tell you that. You know  
that.

She looks away.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

You're the strongest runner I've  
ever had the privilege of coaching.

Now she looks back to meet his eyes.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

You don't need my help to be a  
strong runner. Okay? Now, run your  
race. Knowing that you have the  
strongest legs beneath you and the  
strongest mentality to carry you  
through. You just need to put it  
all together.

(MORE)

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 You're not just talented, you work  
 hard. I see that in practice every  
 day.

This unlocks something within her. You can see it.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 Now, PR outta your shoes today.  
 This is the time to do it.  
 Can you do that for me?

She nods to him wearing determined eyes.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
 Show 'em how we run a 400.

Maisy jumps up and shakes her legs out. She ensures her  
 ponytail is in place.

STARTER (O.C.)  
 Give me the next heat of runners,  
 please! Are you in heat two? Step  
 up to the line, ladies...

Hector watches her in her pre-race ritual.

STARTER (CONT'D)  
 ...to your marks.

She climbs into her blocks.

A moment of tranquility washes over a moment...

STARTER (CONT'D)  
 Set.

She slowly lifts herself into set position--  
 --for what seems like an eternity...

BAM!

They're off. Maisy jets out.

HECTOR  
 Let's go, Maisy. Let's go. Use it  
 or lose it. C'mon. You got this.

Maisy is out into an early lead.

She eases into the curve after the first 200.

Maisy builds up around the corner, still nursing a lead.

She starts to break down a bit...

OTHER RUNNERS creep up behind her...

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Maisy, you can't lose your form  
now. Stay strong...

She loses the lead at the 80 meter mark.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
C'mon, Maisy. This is the time.

Her COMPETITORS keep their lead over her by the 50 meter  
mark...

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
C'mon Maisy, get back up there!

She closes the gap...

She catches back up.

It's too close.

30 meters...

20 meters...

10...

They're all neck and neck by the 5...

She LEANS at the FINISH LINE--

TOO CLOSE TO CALL.

They finish! From Hector's perspective, he can't see. It's  
impossible to tell.

Maisy staggers and regains her balance.

No signal yet...

Hector looks up at the SCOREBOARD for help.

No results.

He looks on eagerly...

Maisy, hands on her hips, sways back and forth nervously...

Hector watching the scoreboard... in anticipation...

SCOREBOARD FACE: 1. MAISY JONES, 50.64 He doesn't even look at the rest...

Hector jumps up, gives a FISTPUMP!

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Yeah!!! Maisy!!!

He sprints over to the SCORES TABLE, just by the FINISH.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
You did it!!!

Maisy, in disbelief, HUGS Hector tight.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
I told you, you're strong. You always had it in you. I did nothing, that was all you! I'm so proud of you.

MAISY  
Thank you so much, coach! We did it.

HECTOR  
You know the next stop, don't you?

MAISY  
I don't even know where they are this time.

They share in a laugh.

HECTOR  
It doesn't matter! You're going to the Olympics!

They embrace again.

FADE OUT.

THE CROWD NOISE SUBSIDES. SOFT COMMOTION. CALM.

OPEN ON:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL TRACK - SUNSET.

Hector struts about, searching for someone--

He finds--

REGINALD and a WOMAN with him. He runs up and they BRO HUG.

REGINALD  
My man.

HECTOR  
Pendejo!

The WOMAN looks to him, taken aback.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Just kidding. Who's this lovely  
lady?

REGINALD  
Hector, meet Marlene. My  
girlfriend.

MARLENE  
Pleasure.

They shake hands.

HECTOR  
Likewise.

REGINALD  
I guess the apps aren't all so bad.

HECTOR  
I still beg to differ.

They share in a laugh.

REGINALD  
Well, you're here, so it must not  
have been an issue. Or maybe I'll  
see the cops flood the track soon!

Hector laughs.

HECTOR  
All I had to do was hold the threat  
of assault over him and now I get  
to see her run! Best part is, we  
don't even have to see each other.  
He doesn't wanna go to her track  
meets anyway, supposedly he'd  
rather be at the office.

REGINALD  
My man, somehow, some way, I knew  
it would work out.

HECTOR

Thank you for being with me in the trenches. I know I wasn't always the easiest to deal with.

REGINALD

You would've done the same for me, I know it.

They embrace again. Marlene looks on with puppy eyes.

EXT. TRACK - LATER.

Hector leans on a chain-link fence outside the track.

His head resting on his folded arms.

A light cheer from the small CROWD as a RACE finishes.

Someone stands next to him, he barely notices at first--

He finally looks over--

It's Talisa.

He smiles.

HECTOR

Hey you.

TALISA

Hey yourself.

HECTOR

She's running today, right? Or jumping?

TALISA

Yeah, running your silly little 400.

HECTOR

Proud dad over here.

TALISA

Ah. I knew you would be.

HECTOR

Hey, I'd be proud regardless. Even if she was a distance runner. I'm just glad she likes it.

TALISA  
Of course you are.

Beat.

TALISA (CONT'D)  
I never did thank you for driving  
me to the hospital.

HECTOR  
Oh, it was no thang. I was glad I  
could help out.

TALISA  
Um, I recall it was definitely a  
'thang' as you so put it. You  
risked everything. You broke so  
many traffic laws that day.

They share in a laugh together.

HECTOR  
I was just happy I could be  
involved in some way. And also that  
there were no police on our route.

She laughs at that as well.

TALISA  
Well, it didn't go without notice.  
And I appreciated it. Even if he  
didn't.

HECTOR  
Well, don't mention it. Seriously,  
please don't.

TALISA  
Too late, I already did.

He puts his arm around her. She leans her head on his  
shoulder.

BANG! The gun breaks through their moment.

They're off. His DAUGHTER runs with purpose.

Hector looks on, tears filling his eyes.

HECTOR  
I hope she got my athleticism.

TALISA

You just wanted her to get that from you? That's it?

HECTOR

Well, I wanted her to get everything else from you. Your looks, your charm, your intellect. Your wit, your humor--

TALISA

Okay, okay, I got it. I don't need you gassin' me up all the time.

HECTOR

Well, if he doesn't-- somebody's gotta do it.

She pulls away, studies him a moment.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

We'll be the best fake couple and real parents for her.

TALISA

I know we will.

Beat.

They're coming down the HOMESTRETCH now.

Hector watches her all the way through. Tears fill his eyes again...

TALISA (CONT'D)

You okay?

HECTOR

She's more beautiful than I could've ever imagined.

Talisa smiles at that. She almost pities him.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Except that running form is hideous. Who in the good fuck is coaching her?

The pity is gone. He's back. She can't help but let a laugh escape.

TALISA

I just somehow knew you were gonna take issue with that.

HECTOR

Ya gotta let me coach her. This coaching squad must be a travesty.

Talisa smirks as she puts her arm back around him.

TALISA

This was the best thing our crazy, fucked up relationship could've ever created.

HECTOR

I can't lie, it was a dope collaboration and I enjoyed every second of it. Immensely.

She takes a step back a moment, looking to him intently.

TALISA

Hey.

He turns to her--

TALISA (CONT'D)

I'm glad you've done well for yourself. She can be proud to know you're her dad.

Hector smiles as he shakes his head. He tears up again.

He goes in for the hug. She accepts.

HECTOR

(laughs through a cry)  
It was quite the journey, huh?

Hector does his level best not to ugly cry.

TALISA

Something like that.

He watches her step off the track and gather her things.

Talisa watches him watch her.

TALISA (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

HECTOR

What?

Talisa nods her head towards her.

TALISA

Go on.

Hector looks on in amazement. The green light.

He apprehensively approaches his DAUGHTER (7). Tiny, cute as can be.

He looks both ways before crossing the track and trots onto the FOOTBALL FIELD.

Hector finds HER and leans down to her.

HECTOR

Great race there, kiddo.

His DAUGHTER says nothing as she unties her shoes.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

We gotta work on your form, but otherwise you did so good. I'm really so unbelievably proud of you.

She still focuses on her shoes.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Bailey, honey... you can say thanks. Or something. Anything.

BAILEY

Mommy says you're my daddy. But you're not living in our home. Mommy says it's better that way. Home daddy said that, too.

Hector wants to be offended, but takes it on the chin--

HECTOR

You're right, mi amor. I think what hurts the most is that we should be together, but we can't. It's impossible.

Bailey plays with the grass a beat.

BAILEY

You're gonna come to my track meets, though, right?

HECTOR

Of course, darling. I need to coach you better than those other guys are doing.

BAILEY

I like my coaches, they're nice.  
They tell me 'good job' a lot.

HECTOR

It's true, you really do a good job  
out there. But I hope you know that  
I can make you even better.

Bailey lets that ruminate.

BAILEY

My dad at home said you would try  
to take me away. Is that true?

HECTOR

No, honey. I wouldn't do that. I  
promise. I'm going to do everything  
I can to ensure that your life is  
uncomplicated by this. You deserve  
to live the best life that you can,  
in spite of us. Despite all this,  
silly adult stuff. It's just noise.

BAILEY

You can be my track daddy. Daddy at  
home is house daddy. He wears a  
suit. You can wear the track suit.  
Mommy told me sometimes girls can  
have two daddies.

HECTOR

Heh, heh. That's right sweetheart.  
That sounds like a good plan to me.

Beat.

BAILEY

House daddy doesn't like that you  
get to see me.

HECTOR

I figured he might say that. Well,  
Babycakes, He's gonna have to deal  
with it. I already had to convince  
mommy. That was a long and  
strenuous journey. I'm afraid we're  
all just gonna have to get along.

Hector goes in for the kill--

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Besides, track papi is bette--

Bailey's bored, shifts her attention to the blades of grass.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

I mean, house dad is worthy of  
love, too.

BAILEY

You're worthy of love, track daddy.

Hector's eyes well up.

HECTOR

Oh, my sweet. You're my everything.  
I love you so so much, it hurts.

She still plays with grass. He yearns for her attention--

BAILEY

Then, why aren't you around more?

HECTOR

I can't be around, you know that.  
You said it yourself. I can't be  
house dad, but I can be this dad to  
you.

Bailey looks forlorn for a second. Playing with the grass.  
Ripping some out.

HECTOR (CONT'D)

Hey. All that matters is-- The one  
connection we have is you, and  
that's the most beautiful of all.  
Silly adults, parents, they should  
put all the rest to the side. It's  
all I care about, and it's all we  
should care about. I love you. I  
love you so much, mi corazon.

She hesitates a moment--

BAILEY

I do love you too, daddy.

Hector could cry. He hugs her instead. He hugs her tight.

He embraces her--

Over his shoulder: Talisa stifles a good, ugly cry as she  
watches. Hands in an almost prayer position in front of her  
face.

Hector smiles through a happy cry as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: THE SURROGATE FATHER.

CREDITS.