

PRINCESA!

FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE/LOS ANGELES NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A small gray KITTEN climbs into an open window.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM

FRISKIE, the kitten leaps from the window sill, lands next to a bamboo dog bed, and makes a mewling SOUND.

PRINCESA, a small brown dog of mixed breed opens her eyes. Princessa stands in her bed. She watches Friskie settle himself into a soft chair next to the bed.

Princessa springs onto the bed. She licks RICARDO'S sleeping face. He wakens.

RICARDO

What? Hi, Princessa.

Ricardo rubs Princessa's ear

A PHONE RINGS in another room.

RICARDO

(continuing)

Go back in your bed, Princessa. Go on. It's too early to get up.

Princessa lies down next to Ricardo.

A KNOCK o.s. at the door.

AUNT ELENA

Ricardo?

RICARDO

What is it?

ELENA appears in the doorway.

AUNT ELENA

Your mama. She's on the phone. Something is wrong.

RICARDO
Is she calling from the airport?

ELENA
No, no, she's still in Puerto Rico.

Ricardo picks up his baseball mit and follows Princesa into the hallway.

Early dawn visible. Elena, Ricardo, Princesa, and Friskie sit on the couch.

Ricardo grabs the phone.

RICARDO
Mama, Hola.

Princesa leaps into Ricardo's lap.

He strokes her back. She listens to mama too.

RICARDO
(continuing)
She says a hurricane is forcast.
No planes can take off.

Elena takes the receiver.

ELENA
Don't worry. He'll still have his party.

Ricardo takes the receiver back.

RICARDO
I want to be with you for my birthday. Let me come home.

Ricardo hangs up the phone.

RICARDO
(continuing)
She had to hang up. The Chef called her.

Princesa climbs into Ricardo's lap. She WHIMPERS.

Even Friskie looks sad.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD/LOS ANGELES - DAY

Early morning. Mid-summer heat shimmers on the deserted street and sidewalk.

PRINCESA, a small brown and white DOG, smudged with dirt, sits tied to the end of a baseball bench.

Next to Princessa lies Ricardo's back pack. Some old baseball books slide out.

Princessa watches the game. Ricardo strikes out. They lose.

JEFF
Happy Birthday.

Ricardo grimaces. Jeff shrugs.

RICARDO
Thanks for letting me borrow these.

Ricardo unties Princessa and places Jeff's books in his back pack with his mit. They sit on the curb and wait.

Princessa sees a Chihuahua.

Princessa races after a WOMAN carrying her Chihuahua in a carrying case over her shoulder.

Princessa BARKS and BARKS. Ricardo holds her back.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Sorry. She thinks your dog is her
mama.

The woman shakes her head and gets into her parked car. The CHIHUAHUA looks worried.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Princessa. No. No. Shhh.

Princessa continues BARKING.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Aunt Elena makes a u-turn and screeches to a stop next to Ricardo and Princessa. They politely refuse the ride. They want to walk.

Elena, car full of groceries, reenters traffic cars have to stop to avoid disaster.

EXT. RICARDO'S STREET - DAY

Princesa pulls the leash to greet best friend Friskie. They enter through kitchen side door.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Princesa and Ricardo start to help put away groceries. Princesa drags her bag of cookies to the cupboard. Elena praises Princesa.

ELENA

Good girl, Princesa.

Ricardo sits, head down.

He takes off his baseball cap.

ELENA

(continuing)

What's the matter?

RICARDO

I'm worried about mama. I want us to go there.

Elena opens the refrigerator.

ELENA

How can we go there if she can't fly here? What about the storm?

She puts away some eggs.

RICARDO

I called the airport. They're flying in tomorrow. Something else is wrong.

ELENA

You think she didn't tell the real reason.

RICARDO

She sounded scared.

ELENA

About the hurricane. She was afraid of that.

RICARDO

No. Something's wrong. I can tell.

Princesa leaves the kitchen.

INT. HALLWAY

Princesa drags Ricardo's overnight bag out of the hall closet. She drags it down the hall to the kitchen doorway.

Princesa sits on the bag. Elena and Ricardo stare at Princesa in surprise.

RICARDO

That's it. We're going.

Ricardo decides to go anyway to Puerto Rico. He empties out his bank. He takes down a valuable map.

He removes the map from its frame. He rolls it up.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Ricardo writes a note to Elena. He takes his back pack with Princesa peeking out.

EXT. USED BOOK SHOP - DAY

Ricardo knows Mr. PAUL. He sells the map. Mr. Paul buys the ticket to Puerto Rico with his mileage.

EXT. AIRPORT LAX

Princesa and Ricardo get through inspection. Princesa hides in Ricardo's back pack.

INT. PLANE - DAY

Ricardo sits next to Tito Ruiz. Tito has a snake in his bag.

Princesa's frightened.

EXT. AIRPORT - PUERTO RICO

Tito and Ricardo say their goodbyes. Ricardo and Princesa eat something from a street vendor. They jump on back of a truck to get to Ricardo's Mama's apartment.

Ricardo has a little sister. Mama shocked that he's there.

They call Aunt Elena.

EXT. HOTEL KITCHEN - DAY

Mama cooks here. She gets Ricardo a job in the kitchen. Princesa hides, but seems anxious to find her Papa.

EXT. STREET/OLD SAN JUAN - DAY

Ricardo plays ball with a broom handle and a wad of paper with some other boys.

Mama calls him in to watch his little sister.

Tito Ruiz and partner Miguelito cruise by in a fancy car. Tito talks to Ricardo's friends. Miguelito entertains the boys with his acrobatic tricks. Princesa looks worried.

He asks Ricardo if he wants to sell Princesa for a lot of money. Money that Ricardo can use to buy equipment for his friends to play real baseball. Enough for his mother to start up the factory again.

Ricardo refuses to sell Princesa. His friends don't understand why. They would love to have the real baseball equipment. They could help other boys and have a league.

Mama invites Ricardo and friends to a large party at the hotel that night.

EXT. HOTEL MIRRADA GARDENS

Boys admire gardens. A family walks through dressed in white. Princesa amazed by the water in the pool, the flowers, etc.

EXT. BEACH/LA MIRRADA HOTEL - NIGHT

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - NIGHT

EXT. FENCE/VACANT LOT SIDE

Princesa squeezes through the hole.

A jungle of weeds blocks her path.

She looks right and sees a broken cup and dented coffee-pot. Left, Princessa sniffs at a rusted tin can.

She pushes the can over with her paw. A trickle of water flows out. She laps the water.

Her ears prick up at the O.S. sound of a car's ENGINE. Princessa freezes against the fence.

INT. HOTEL TENT - NIGHT

Princessa limps past a chain of shuttered stores and stops before a tall fence.

A sign on the fence flaps in the wind. Princessa barks at it.

At the base of the fence, Princessa sees a hole as big as herself. She peers through the hole.

EXT. FENCE/SIDEWALK - SAME

A big black car stops at the curb opposite the hole.

A rear door opens and TITO RUIZ, ANIMAL THIEF, eases out like a deadly Python.

TITO

Hah! Smell that fresh air.
Wonderful!

Tito's 39, slender, and not unhandsome -- except for a scar running from his right eyebrow to his chin.

Tito's ASSISTANT, MIGUELITO, 50, short, overweight, climbs out.

MIGUELITO

I smell only smog and sour garbage.

While the little man watches, Tito executes several quick knee bends, then claps his hands.

TITO

And, one, two, three, and up!

Tito does a brief handstand, then leaps to his feet.

Tito's eyes snap shut. His head quivers.

EXT. FENCE/VACANT LOT SIDE

Ears straining, Princesa whimpers.

EXT. FENCE/SIDEWALK

Tito glances over his shoulder.

TITO

Did you hear something?

MIGUELITO

I hear nothing but the wind. But, now that you mention it, --

TITO

Sounded like the whimper of a helpless puppy to me.

MIGUELITO

Momentito, I take a look. Make a basket of your fingers. I need a boost up to see over the fence.

Tito gives him a dismissive wave.

TITO

Probably my imagination. I hear animals crying in my mind all the time.

The corners of Miguelito's mouth turn down. His eyes go to slits; he looks at Tito narrowly.

TITO

(continuing)

Don't make those clown faces at me!

Miguelito withdraws a monogrammed handkerchief from his pocket. He spits on the letter "M" and then polishes the hood of the car.

EXT. FENCE/VACANT LOT SIDE

Princesa forces her way in among crowded roots.

EXT. SIDEWALK/FENCE

Tito runs in place with tiny steps.

Miguelito paces. He looks up and down the empty street.

MIGUELITO
Is it time?

TITO
Almost.

Tito lounges against the car.

TITO
(continuing)
Beats our old life in the circus,
eh mi amigo? You clowning around
for peanuts, and me training the
big cats.

Miguelito nods.

EXT. VACANT LOT - SAME

Princesa crawls further under the weeds.

EXT. SIDEWALK/FENCE

A Chauffeur parks a limousine at the curb. A rear tinted window glides open.

Tito looks inside.

TITO
Senora, un momento, por favor.

Tito opens the backdoor to his car. ANGEL, a SIAMESE CAT, stands uncertain on the leather seat. The diamonds on her collar spark in the hot sun.

Angel mews.

TITO
(continuing)
Ahh, my Angel, here you are. Ready
for your lovely new home?
(whispering)
You'll forget all about that
little girl in time.

Tito presents Angel through the limo's open window.

Miguelito joins Tito.

A WOMAN'S HAND -- a jeweled ring on every finger and thumb -- passes a thick money-packet to Tito.

MIGUELITO
Muchas gracias.

The thieves bow.

The window closes. The limo drives on.

Tito quick counts the money. He hands the packet to Miguelito.

With a flourish, Miguelito pockets the cash.

EXT. FENCE/VACANT LOT SIDE

Princesa listens, tense, quiet.

EXT. SIDEWALK/FENCE

EXT. FENCE/VACANT LOT SIDE

Startled, Princesa shivers wide-eyed.

EXT. SIDEWALK/FENCE

Tito's head in his hands.

MIGUELITO
I sense when animals are near.
Trust me.

TITO
Only a fool would trust you.

MIGUELITO
I'm no fool. Remember, I saved
your life.

Tito turns his back on Miguelito. With his finger, Tito traces the line of his facial scar.

MIGUELITO
(continuing)
Who was it, danced up behind just
in time, and tapped that lion on
the shoulder?

Tito rubs his right shoulder and arm. He grimaces.

MIGUELITO
(continuing)
Me! Miguelito saved you.

TITO
Never speak of that again.

MIGUELITO
You always say that.

There's a long pause.

MIGUELITO
(continuing)
Let me prove my powers. Boost me
up so I can see over the top.

Tito looks down at Miguelito.

TITO
First things first. We go now to
the zoo for our next pickup --
Gupta! It's all arranged.

MIGUELITO
I don't care about Gupta. I want
to see over the fence.

TITO
You don't care that Gupta's the
last Birdwing Butterfly in the
entire world?

MIGUELITO
No.

Miguelito leaps at the fence.

His fingers grab the sharp pickets. Miguelito pulls his body
up.

Tito drags him down. Miguelito screams.

MIGUELITO
(continuing)
My hands! My hands! Don't pull me.
You'll injure my hands!

Tito's evil eyes. Like a naughty boy, he continues to pull on
Miguelito's flapping feet.

TITO
Let go of the fence, Clown! Let go!

MIGUELITO
Oww! Oh, my hands!

Miguelito falls to the sidewalk.

Head down, rubbing his hands, he crawls to the car, opens the car door, and drags himself up behind the wheel.

Tito hops in the back smiling to himself.

Miguelito and Tito drive off.

EXT. FENCE/VACANT LOT SIDE

Tiny pause.

Princesa hears the sound of a dog BARKING in high-pitched YIPS.

PRINCESA

Mama?

Princesa dares a look through the hole. She turns from the fence and plunges into the thicket.

EXT. MARSHALL FAMILY'S BACKYARD - DAY

Later that afternoon, Princesa examines a patch of Marigolds in the well-kept backyard. She lies down under a nearby bush and closes her eyes.

EXT. MARSHALL'S BACKYARD - DAY

Princesa wakes.

She sees CHARLIE MARSHALL, 4, and his BROTHER, MAX, 7, kneeling before her.

CHARLIE

Look! A puppy in our yard!

Princesa crawls away from the boys.

MAX

Shhh. Don't talk so loud. You'll scare it.

CHARLIE

Is it a boy or a girl dog?

Max looks at Princesa.

MAX

A girl, I think.

Charlie takes a step toward Princessa.

MAX

(continuing)

Wait. Look, the collar has a tag.
And see the end of the leash, how
it's chewed. She's a runaway.

CHARLIE

If this puppy ran away, maybe we
can keep her and give her a bath.
And maybe she can sleep on my bed.

Princessa moans and whimpers.

MAX

Probably, we can't keep her.

CHARLIE

Here, Puppy. Come!

Princessa sits.

CHARLIE

(continuing)

Why doesn't she come when I call?

MAX

Mmmmm. I think, she's a little bit
shy.

Panting, Princessa lies down.

MAX

(continuing)

Go get Mom.

CHARLIE

Wow!

Charlie runs toward the back steps.

MAX

And bring some water in a dish.

Charlie enters the house through the back screen door.

Max crawls toward Princessa. She edges away.

MAX
 (continuing)
 Don't be afraid. Good dog. Nice
 Puppy.

Princesa barks at Max.

EXT. PAVEMENT/FRONT OF MARSHALL'S HOUSE - DAY

An hour later an old car misfires, swerves from the line of TRAFFIC, bypasses the driveway, and skids into a no-parking zone in front of the Marshall's house.

INT. CAR

Princesa's OWNER, RICARDO BONILLA, 14, looks tense-faced at the Marshall's house.

He's an appealing athlete in jeans and a T-shirt and a swivelled baseball cap.

With shaking hands, Ricardo's AUNT, ELENA COSTA, 60, stops the engine.

ELENA
 She said it was third house from
 the corner.

A plump Elena rests her curler-covered head on the steering wheel. Her face, childlike and uneasy.

ELENA
 (continuing)
 I hate this driving.

Ricardo, taking it in, shifts in his seat.

ELENA
 (continuing)
 I hope Princesa's here. I can't
 keep looking for her like this.

Ricardo stares back.

ELENA
 (continuing)
 Si, I know, I lost her. But I put
 up 50 signs to find her again.
 Basta. Enough.

RICARDO
 Aunt Elena, you go in and get her.

ELENA
 I'm not dressed. Look at my hair.
 (beat)
 Princesa's your dog.

RICARDO
 But you take care of her when I'm
 away at school.

An almost imperceptible reaction by Ricardo.

ELENA
 You still blame me?

RICARDO
 Forget it.

Ricardo opens the car door.

ELENA
 It wasn't my fault. She chewed
 through her leash. I came out of
 the market. She's gone. I look one
 way, nada. I look the other way --

Ricardo pushes the door all the way open. He closes his eyes.

ELENA
 (continuing)
 -- then way down the block, I see
 she's running behind this man and
 his Chihuahua. I couldn't leave my
 bags.

The boy lingers a moment, then climbs out and slams the car door.

Ricardo walks up the sidewalk to the Marshall's front door.

Max opens the door before Ricardo can ring the bell.

EXT. MARSHALL'S FRONT DOOR

Ten minutes later. Princesa and Ricardo stand on the front steps. He speaks MOS to Max, Charlie, and their MOTHER, JENNY, in the open doorway. Ricardo turns and waves.

Princesa's head bounces on Ricardo's shoulder as he runs to the car.

EXT. ELENA'S CAR

Ricardo opens the door. Princesa stumbles onto the front seat, with Ricardo following.

INT. CAR

Princesa licks Elena's damp cheek.

ELENA

We got you back, Princesa!

Princesa curls up on the front seat between them.

RICARDO

She's so thin.

CARLEE

You gotta fatten her up.

Ricardo leans close to Princesa's ear.

RICARDO

Don't ever run away again,
comprende?

Princesa looks up with sleepy eyes.

RICARDO

(continuing)
Let's go.

INT. ELENA'S PARLOR - DAY

SUPER LEGEND: TWO WEEKS LATER.

Princesa and Friskie, the kitten, peer into Elena's fish tank on a low table.

The FISH swim about looking unhappy at this special attention.

Two look-alike GOLDFISH named SUZY, and GOLDIE and PEPITO dart to their house at the tank bottom.

Through the glass, Princesa sees Friskie's watery image on the opposite side.

Friskie washes his face.

Princesa stands on her hind feet and reaches into the tank with her paw. She tries to catch a fish. Friskie waves her paws in the air.

EXT. ELENA'S GARDEN - DAY

That same morning, sunshine makes the roses glow in deep reds and pinks.

Princesa and Friskie stand chin-deep in roses. They smell the fragrance drifting around them.

Princesa closes her eyes tightly.

Princesa's IMAGINARY MAMA, MARIA, a black CHIHUAHUA, materializes slowly on top of a high wall.

MARIA

Princesa, it's I, your make-believe mama, Maria. I must speak for you, because you know too little of life to speak for yourself.

Princesa cocks one ear.

Unaware of Maria, Friskie plays with a leaf.

Maria becomes fully visible.

MARIA

(continuing)

I am up here under these purple flowers. Mira-mira, peek-a-boo.

Princesa wags her tail and sits before Maria.

MARIA

(continuing)

Princesa, why does Ricardo not come to the Garden anymore?

Princesa lowers her head. Disappointment shows in her eyes.

O.S. ROAR of electric hedge trimmer.

MARIA

(continuing)

Danger is near. Hide, Princesa!

Bits of leaves and flower heads spray the air.

Princesa and Friskie huddle in a dark corner under Palm fronds.

Princesa peeks out at Maria's image.

The image fades.

EXT. GARDEN WALL/NEIGHBOR'S YARD - SAME

Dressed in poorly-fitting landscaper's uniforms, Miguelito and Tito stand at the wall. They gun their automatic hedge clippers.

Miguelito cups his hands like a basket. Tito steps on Miguelito's hands for a boost up.

A silent scream from Miguelito.

Tito peeks over the wall into Elena's Garden.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Two real LANDSCAPE WORKERS, in their underwear, lie bound and gagged behind garbage cans.

They kick their bare feet against the cans.

EXT. ELENA'S GARDEN - DAY

Princesa and Friskie remain hidden. Princesa watches Tito's head bob up and down on top of the wall.

TITO
(to Miguelito)
Hold still, Clown face!

ELENA'S VOICE (O.S.)
Princesa, Princesa!

Tito's head disappears. O.S. sound of SNAPPING twigs and a heavy THUD.

Princesa and Friskie race on.

EXT. DOG PARK - DAY

A late morning sun burns through ozone to earth.

The peculiar O.S. sound of BARKING and snatches of BOOM BOX MUZAK drifts across the park to continue throughout the scene.

DOGS of many breeds play alone or in packs while OWNERS stand talking MOS in loose knots.

At a far corner, a DOG-TRAINING CLASS practices: TWO INSTRUCTORS, THREE WOMEN, TWO MEN, AND THEIR FIVE DOGS.

EXT. FENCE/GATE

A chain-link fence surrounds the park.

ON FENCE SIGN

which reads

DOGS MAY RUN FREE UNDER OWNERS' SUPERVISION.

Outside the fence, Princesa sits at Ricardo's feet.

She whines as Ricardo's hands lift her high in the air. He brings her down again.

RICARDO

Don't worry. I have you. You're safe now.

Ricardo opens the gate and enters. It CLANGS shut behind them.

EXT. INSIDE FENCE/DOG PARK

Ricardo snaps off Princesa's new leash.

Princesa leans her head against Ricardo's ankle. The boy kneels in the dust.

RICARDO

Go, Princesa, play like the other dogs.

O.S. sound of the gate CLANGING open behind them.

Two huge MASTIFFS pass through with their OWNER.

Princesa quakes with fear.

Ricardo takes a sharp breath. He staggers back to let the Mastiffs by. Ricardo freezes in fright. He can't move.

The Mastiffs' giant heads come closer.

The Mastiffs smell Princesa. She screams, rolls on her back, and tucks her tail in terror and humiliation.

At the click of their master's tongue, the pair wheel in tandem to follow at his heel.

Ricardo scoops up a bewildered Princesa.

EXT. UNDER BENCH

Moments later. O.S. sound of FLIES BUZZING.

Princesa settles down with a glad thump. Her nostrils move over the dirt. She flexes her toes.

She hears the O.S. JINGLE of a dog's collar.

JEFF SWANSON and SPARKIE, Jeff's SCHNAUZER PUP, jog over. Jeff's a well-groomed fresh-faced young man in his early 20's.

JEFF
(extending his hand)
Hey, Ricardo!

Ricardo shakes Jeff's hand.

RICARDO
Hi, Jeff.

JEFF
What's Spanish for "Happy
Birthday?"

RICARDO
"Feliz Cumpleanos."

JEFF
Same back. Wish I could be at your
party tonight.

RICARDO
You can't come?

JEFF
My parents are flying in as we
speak.

Ricardo stares into the distance.

RICARDO
That's okay.

JEFF
Who's coming?

RICARDO
My Aunt and her family, my
cousins. No big deal.

Princesa scratches at Ricardo's shoes. He picks her up.

JEFF

Your mom? Will she be there?

Ricardo's shoulders sag. A thick silence.

RICARDO

No. I don't know.

JEFF

Okay if we sit for a minute?

A shrug from Ricardo.

Princesa watches Sparkie sit nearby.

JEFF

(continuing)

Princesa looks much better this week.

RICARDO

She's stronger I think.

JEFF

Will she let me pet her?

Ricardo places Princesa on the ground.

RICARDO

I doubt it.

Princesa inches back from Jeff.

Jeff stands; he takes a tennis ball from his pocket. He tosses and catches the ball above his head.

JEFF

I'm not as good as you. Mind throwing one for Sparkie?

Jeff tosses the ball to Ricardo.

Ricardo's hand catches it in a blur.

Ricardo, caught in the moment, rises from the bench as if called to play ball. He throws the tennis ball the distance from "Home Plate" to "Center Field."

Princesa follows the ball with her eyes. The ball floats, floats -- it falls.

JEFF
 (continuing)
 Get the ball, Sparkie! Go!

Sparkie takes off.

In b.g., Princesa dances in place. She watches Sparkie track and spring for it. He misses a midair jump-catch.

The ball drops to the ground and a POODLE runs off with it.

Sparkie races back to Jeff.

Jeff gives his dog water from a plastic bottle. He offers some to Princesa. She takes a little.

JEFF
 (continuing)
 Sparkie, sit.

Sparkie sits.

RICARDO
 I wish Princesa would do that.

JEFF
 See? Over there?
 (pointing to the Dog-
 training class)
 Sparkie's in that class.

A distant O.S. WHISTLE BLAST.

Jeff beckons to Princesa and Ricardo.

JEFF
 (continuing)
 Class time.

EXT. FAR CORNER OF PARK

TRAINER, CURTIS SWANN, watches the class. ASSISTANT, DAVID HOLDEN, writes on his clipboard.

MARCELLA and her pink POODLE practice "staying" on command. HILARY and her KING CHARLES work on "heel."

CARMEL runs in circles with her COLLIE. BILL and his PUG play catch with a frisbee. SALVADOR teaches his GERMAN SHEPHERD to jump over a stick.

Princesa stares at David and Curtis. She quivers in Ricardo's arms.

Hilary and Salvador suppress a laugh.

Carmel snickers.

The class dogs bark at Princesa.

She hides her face in Ricardo's shoulder.

DAVID

Oh.

Ricardo takes a deep breath.

RICARDO

Can I sign up my dog for your class?

Princesa licks Ricardo's cheek.

RICARDO

(continuing)

We live at --

Curtis whispers in David's ear.

DAVID

You don't understand. No comprende?

RICARDO

Understand?

Sweat beads Ricardo's forehead.

DAVID

You have a cross-breed there.
Curtis only trains purebred dogs.
I'm sorry. Is that clear, amigo?

Reacting, Ricardo stumbles backwards a few steps.

RICARDO

Sorry for your time.

Jeff and Sparkie take a few steps toward Ricardo.

Ricardo waves Jeff off.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Forget it.

Ricardo turns his cap's visor to hide his face. He lets Princesa down and walks toward the gate across the park.

She follows jumping and scratching at Ricardo's legs.

Ricardo picks her up again.

Princesa looks back over his shoulder at the class.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Ricardo holds Princesa close. Suddenly, he shifts her to his other arm and kicks the fence.

A WOMAN stares at Ricardo as she walks by with her CHIHUAHUA on a leash.

Ricardo blushes.

Big reaction from Princesa. Whining and barking, she struggles to follow the Chihuahua.

RICARDO
Hey, stop. That's not your mama.

Ricardo shakes Princesa a little.

The woman and her dog hurry through the gate.

Ricardo and Princesa hear the O.S. sound of a SPATTERING engine.

Elena's car tears into the parking lot. She skids to a stop in a spray of gravel.

Ricardo and Princesa climb in the back of the car.

INT. ELENA'S CAR

Ricardo shoves aside four overflowing grocery bags for a place to sit. Princesa settles on his lap.

ELENA
Things are melting.

RICARDO
Why all this?

ELENA
For your birthday supper.

RICARDO
Jeff can't come.

ELENA
You never know who might stop by
unexpected.

Princesa licks Ricardo's perspiring face.

ELENA
(continuing)
I'm making Carnitas and many other
dishes.

Elena guns the engine.

RICARDO
Open the window por favor.

With a sigh, Elena rolls down the window.

ELENA
Did Princesa play this time?

Elena looks in the rearview mirror for her answer.

Ricardo shakes his head.

ELENA
(continuing)
I don't understand.

RICARDO
I think Princesa misses her mama.

ELENA
She's young. Give her time.

EXT. PARKING LOT ENTRANCE

Elena's car exits too far over in the opposite lane. She narrowly misses a big black car.

Tito's car crests the hill to enter the parking lot. Tito drives, Miguelito next to him.

Tito's eyes spark with rage.

He swings the black car around in the middle of the lot and floors it down the center of the mountain road after Elena.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD

Tito stops the car suddenly.

The car door facing the street pops open and Miguelito tumbles out.

Tito lowers his side window.

MIGUELITO

Did you see that? My heart leapt
from my throat.

Miguelito runs down the road a few yards waving his arms like a parrot flapping its wings.

MIGUELITO

(continuing)

Menace! You're a menace to us law-
abiding drivers!

Tito shakes his head.

TITO

Princesa passed us just now.

MIGUELITO

Princesa? The real Princesa?

TITO

Si, Princesa was in that old car.

Miguelito jumps back inside. Tito speeds after Elena's car.

EXT. STREET

Elena drives over the center line and back again.

Tito follows two cars behind.

EXT. ELENA'S DRIVEWAY

Elena swerves up the steep driveway leading to her modest adobe-style house and garage.

Her car stops inches from the garage door.

INT. ELENA'S CAR

Ricardo and Princesa look relieved. The boy hides a smile. He shakes his head.

Elena takes a deep breath and opens the car door.

Princesa scrambles over the seat and out.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF ELENA'S HOUSE

Unable to make the lane change in time, Tito and Miguelito drive on. Their faces mirror building frustration.

INT. ELENA'S KITCHEN

The small kitchen brims with Puerto Rican knickknacks. Family snapshots cover the refrigerator door.

Princesa drinks from her water dish. She jumps when Ricardo drops two grocery bags on the kitchen table.

Elena searches the bags.

ELENA

Where's my ice-cream?

EXT. ELENA'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

A half hour later, RICARDO waits holding Princesa.

A pickup truck parks behind Elena's car. Sign on the truck door reads DWYER'S MANAGEMENT CO.

Elena's SON, APARTMENT BUILDING MANAGER, ALFONSO COSTA, 30, waves to Ricardo.

Princesa barks at Alfonso.

ALFONSO

You working on your birthday?

RICARDO

Si.

ALFONSO

Then chain Princesa up in the back and get in.

EXT. TRUCK BED

Princesa whines as Ricardo lifts her over the side. She watches Ricardo hoist himself up.

He hooks her collar to a short chain.

The truck backs down the driveway. It turns into TRAFFIC and moves on.

The motion of the bouncing truck knocks Princesa down again and again. Ricardo steadies her.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Alfonso drives in TRAFFIC.

EXT. TRUCK BED

Ricardo hangs on to the squirming Princesa.

PRINCESA'S POV

She sees Tito and Miguelito following in a Landscapers' truck.

BACK TO SCENE

Princesa barks at the pursuing pair. Ricardo fails to see them; he reassures Princesa MOS.

EXT. BANK DRIVE-THROUGH - NIGHT

Clock on Bank reads 5:15. Alfonso pulls up to the TELLER'S window. Ricardo sits next to him. They're the only ones in line.

EXT. TRUCK BED

Still chained, Princesa barks at shadows behind the building.

EXT. TELLER'S WINDOW

Alfonso places the locked pouch in the Teller's drawer. She processes the deposit.

EXT. BANK PARKING LOT

Tito and Miguelito tiptoe toward Princesa.

EXT. TRUCK BED

Tito pets Princesa. She shrinks from his touch.

Miguelito measures her with a tape measure.

Growling, baring her teeth, Princesa snaps at Miguelito's hands. The little man pulls away.

Princesa runs toward the cab window -- her short chain yanks her back.

EXT. TELLER'S WINDOW

The Teller pushes a button. Alfonso takes the pouch and receipt from the drawer.

ALFONSO

Gracias.

Alfonso pulls away from the window.

EXT. TRUCK BED

Princesa watches Tito and Miguelito scamper after the moving truck.

Alfonso's truck stops to let another car pass.

Princesa's yelps turn to snarls as Tito reaches to unhook her from the chain.

The truck lurches.

Miguelito bangs his hands on the moving truck.

Princesa barks and barks at Tito and Miguelito. The truck leaves them standing empty-handed in the lot.

INT. FRONT HALL/ELENA'S HOUSE

The hall clock reads 6:00. Ricardo carries Princesa inside. Princesa sniffs the air.

RICARDO

Tia Elena?... Princesa needs a bath.

INT. KITCHEN

Elena stirs a pot at the stove.

e.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM

Ricardo opens his clown bank. He throws himself on the bed. Coins fly out.

EXT. BANK - DAY

Later that morning, Ricardo enters carrying a brown paper sack.

INT. BANK

Ricardo stands before a TELLER.

RICARDO

I want to close out my account.

She takes his bankbook.

TELLER

All of it?

RICARDO

Si. I won't need the account anymore.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

That night, through open curtains, a full moon lights the room. Still dressed, Ricardo tosses in his bed. He smashes his pillow into shape.

EXT. TITOO RUIZ' WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The rundown warehouse stands alone on a deserted street. A few lights gleam through windows on the main floor.

Pinpoints of light pierce darkness through large upper windows.

INT. TITO'S LOFT/OFFICE - NIGHT

Halogen floor lamps illuminate small islands of light across the vast office space. They spotlight work tables and a tiger-skin rug.

In the dim light, fur-covered couches and chairs seem like wild animals ready to pounce.

Tito sits at his huge black lacquer desk.

He holds a small wire cage. Inside the cage, GUPTA, BIRDWING BUTTERFLY, shudders slightly. She has wide velvety black wings with yellow feather-shaped markings on them. Her body is black with a scarlet area under her bulging eyes.

TITO

Tell me, oh wise Gupta, last of your kind, what secrets do you possess?

Gupta's feelers twitch.

The phone rings. Tito drops Gupta's cage on the desk and picks up the receiver. He presses a blinking button.

TITO (ON PHONE)

Bobolink! Si. Buenas noches. Que es? What's new?

Tito hits his intercom button. Miguelito glides through a sliding door.

Tito points to the phone. Miguelito drops into the leather chair opposite Tito's desk.

TITO (ON PHONE)

(continuing)

Princesa left with the boy's mother on yesterday's flight? Hah!

Miguelito leans forward listening with deep interest.

TITO (ON PHONE)

(continuing)

Contact the others on the island. Si. We'll be aboard the next flight. Adios. Que? No. No lions, ever.

Tito stands.

TITO (ON PHONE)

(continuing)

Tell them no deal. You know I used to train lions. I uh uh fear the lion. That's the only animal I uh fear.

He hangs up. He thinks a moment, then hits his intercom button.

TITO
to intercom)

Hey, Clown Nose, Miguelito, re-schedule delivery on the two Clouded Leopard cubs. We have a slight change of plans. Get in here pronto!

MIGUELITO
I'm in here.

Tito looks up, startled.

A sarcastic chuckle from Miguelito. Tito furrows his brow.

TITO
Don't get too cute.

Tito motions Miguelito closer.

TITO
(continuing)
Bobolink called from the airport.
The scene shifts to "center ring"
for us.

MIGUELITO
Piece of cake.

Tito removes a bottle of hand lotion from a bottom desk drawer. He pours some out and rubs it well into his tanned hands.

TITO
On our own Puerto Rican turf,
Princesa will be mine pronto!

Miguelito nods his head and smiles.

EXT. AIRPORT LAX - DAY

Dawn, next morning.

Ricardo's cab parks at the curb. The boy pays. And with his backpack in one hand, he enters the terminal.

INT. AIRPORT LAX

Ricardo cuts through the jumble of TRAVELERS. He stops to read a computer flight list.

Confused, he heads for the airline ticket counter.

RICARDO
How much to Puerto Rico?

TICKET AGENT
For today or are you ordering in
advance?

RICARDO
Today.

She checks her computer.

TICKET AGENT
You're looking at \$660 for next
flight out.

RICARDO
\$660?

The Agent nods yes.

TICKET AGENT
Leave 7:00 A.M. arrive San Juan at
6:15 at night... an hour stop-over
in Dallas-Fort Worth... same plane
takes you on.

Ricardo' face, wet with sweat.

TICKET AGENT
(continuing)
Cash or charge?

TWO MEN and a WOMAN fidget in the line behind Ricardo.

RICARDO
Is that First Class or two ways?

TICKET AGENT
One way, Tourist Class. You didn't
say you wanted First Class.

RICARDO
One way? All that money for one
way? Oh... no, no... not First
Class. I want the cheapest way.

MAN behind Ricardo fumes.

MAN
Decide, will you.

Ricardo. Glazed. He rakes his hair with his fingers.

RICARDO

Go ahead.

Ricardo sits down on a bench. He slides out of his backpack, opens it, and grabs Mama's ticket.

RICARDO

(continuing)

No!

Ricardo tears Mama's ticket in half.

A beat.

Stricken at what he's done, he tries to fit the pieces together.

He throws the ticket halves into his bag.

Ricardo returns to the ticket line.

Pale and scared, Ricardo waits for an OLD LADY to put her ticket in her purse.

TICKET AGENT

Next?

RICARDO

One to Puerto Rico.

He pulls out his wallet. With shaking hands, Ricardo counts the bills.

Tito Ruiz stands in line behind Ricardo. He fixes his eyes on Ricardo's money.

Ricardo collects his ticket and what's left of his money. He nervously counts his cash.

Ricardo opens his backpack and drops the new ticket inside.

In b.g., Tito purchases his ticket.

TITO

Next flight to Puerto Rico, please.

The Ticket Agent smiles at Tito. Her computer prints the ticket.

INT. PLANE - DAY

One hour later.

The plane fills with PASSENGERS. With Tito and Miguelito following, Ricardo finds his window seat over the left wing.

Ricardo shoves his pack under the seat in front.

Tito sits next to Ricardo, then stows his bag under the forward seat.

TITO

Fasten your seat belt.

The boy fastens his seat belt. And so does Tito.

Miguelito smiles from his spot across the aisle.

PILOT (V.O.)

Flight Attendants, prepare for
take off.

EXT. PLANE FLYING - DAY

Airplane flies over ocean.

INT. PLANE

O.S. sound of ENGINES HUM during the flight.

In b.g., shades are drawn throughout the darkened cabin. PASSENGERS wear headsets for an ongoing film such as, "TO CATCH A THIEF."

Ricardo dozes on a pillow in the dark. Tito's overhead light shines on his crossword puzzle.

Ricardo wakes suddenly. He reaches for his backpack. Tito's soft-sided bag BUMPS Ricardo's backpack.

From the corner of his eye, Ricardo sees that Tito's bag has become unzipped eight inches.

Tito's BAG moves itself to the left.

Ricardo turns to see if Tito noticed.

A SNAKE'S HEAD suddenly pops through the unzipped space.

Ricardo looks up, startled. The SNAKE locks eyes with him and emits it's forked tongue.

TITO
Lose something?

Ricardo sits up slowly. He points at the SNAKE'S swaying head.
Tito pats Ricardo's arm.

TITO
(continuing)
My Pet, TOMAS; he's harmless.

RICARDO
You sure?

TITO
I hate to put him in the baggage
compartment. One hears such horror
stories about animals dying in
those places.

Ricardo watches Tomas pull his head back inside the bag.
The bag WIGGLES.
Tito and Ricardo smile.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Ricardo and Tito sit with tray tables down. They drink
glasses of ice water.

TWO FLIGHT ATTENDANTS serve drinks from a heavy serving cart.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
(to Ricardo)
Coffee?

She pauses with a coffee pot and paper cup.
Ricardo shudders at the sight and smell of coffee.
Tito notices.

TITO
We'll pass on coffee.

Ricardo turns his face to the window.
The attendants shove the cart to the next row and continue.
Tito studies Ricardo. Tito remembers.

TITO
(continuing)
What did you say your name was?

RICARDO
Ricardo Bonilla.

TITO
That name, Bonilla. Bonilla
Coffee. No?

Ricardo nods and swallows.

TITO
(continuing)
I recall a Roberto Bonilla, your
father? That car accident outside
Guaynabo. Two? No, three years ago.

Ricardo focuses on torn clouds below his window.

INT. PLANE

An hour later. Ricardo wakes from a nap. Tito stretches his
arms.

TITO
So, what brings you to Puerto Rico?

RICARDO
My dog.

TITO
Dog. Si. Now what kind of dog is
he?

Ricardo seems totally relaxed.

RICARDO
Princesa... she is a "she."

They laugh.

TITO
If her name is Princesa... we
could expect a "she."

Tito throws his head back and laughs too loudly.

Miguelito awakens. A beat. He nods off to sleep again.

TITO
(continuing)
What does Princesa look like? Is
she large like a Great Dane?

Ricardo appears pleased to talk about Princesa.

RICARDO
Not large. Small. Very small.

TITO
In my work, I deal with dogs quite
often. I might say, I have seen
every kind of dog in the world.

RICARDO
I bet you've never seen a dog like
Princesa.

Tito locks away his tray table. He leans quite close to
Ricardo's ear.

TITO
How... is she different?

RICARDO
Her mother, Maria, is a Chihuahua.

TITO
Si, go on.

RICARDO
And her father's named Butch.

Tito smiles.

RICARDO
(continuing)
He is a Dachshund.

Tito rubs his chin.

TITO
Princesa... you might say... would
be a Chihund, no?

Ricardo, Tito, and Miguelito laugh. Tito makes a "SHUSH" sign
at Miguelito.

RICARDO
I never thought of her that way.

Tito adjusts his pillow.

Ricardo unbuckles his seat belt and rises, taking care not to disturb Tito's bag.

Tito stands to let Ricardo out.

Ricardo moves down the aisle.

Tito buckles his seat belt.

TITO
Miguelito!

Miguelito turns slowly to Tito.

TITO
(continuing)
Did you hear what the boy said?

Miguelito nods and smiles.

Tito pats Tomas on the head.

Tomas' head rises above the bag opening. The snake oozes from the bag. It's mouth opens wide. Tito shoves Tomas back inside the bag.

TITOO
Stop that, Tomas. You want a riot
in here?

Glancing toward the rear, Tito speaks to Miguelito between clenched teeth.

TITO
When the plane lands, I'll offer
him a ride home to his mama and
Princesa! Later, we'll meet at the
shack to celebrate.

Miguelito nods. He picks up his newspaper and punches on his light.

HEADLINES read

RARE BUTTERFLY STOLEN FROM L.A. ZOO

Miguelito swallows. He rolls the paper and stuffs it into his bag.

EXT. LUIS MUNOZ MARIN AIRPORT - NIGHT - PUERTO RICO

TOURISTS and NATIVES -- Spanish and Afro-Rican -- cross paths on the sidewalk.

SUPER LEGEND: PUERTO RICO LUIS MUNOZ MARIN AIRPORT

Clock on the building reads 6:30.

Ricardo and Tito exit the terminal doors. The boy takes a deep breath and looks around.

TITO

May I give you a ride anywhere?

RICARDO

I can take a publico. I'm used to them.

TITO

Let me drive you. Save some money.

Ricardo considers this.

RICARDO

Gracias, but I'll take the publico.

Tito turns his back and speaks in rapid Spanish MOS into his cellular phone. He ends the call and holds the phone.

TITO

Change your mind?

Ricardo shakes his head, no.

Ricardo signals the lead PUBLICO in a line of three.

The boy gets in.

RICARDO

(to driver)

Hola. Por favor, I go to Guaynabo.

The DRIVER nods. Ricardo waves at Tito.

The publico drives on.

EXT. OLD SAN JUAN STREET - NIGHT

Later same evening. The publico drives Ricardo down a narrow blue cobblestone street. It's still light enough to see PEOPLE strolling by houses and shops.

INT. PUBLICO

Ricardo leans forward. His face shows his struggle to conceal his emotions as he points to different landmark buildings along the way.

EXT. MAMA'S HOUSE/GUAYNABO - NIGHT

The old house stands in ruin and neglect. Boards cover most of the windows. Vines and untended dying flowers hang from window boxes on iron balconies across the front of the house.

The publico parks at the curb.

INT. MAMA'S BEDROOM

The drapes are drawn, leaving the room in half-darkness with the crackle and dancing light of a large fireplace the only live spot in the Spanish style room.

Dressed in a black silk robe, Mama sits on her king-size four-poster bed with Princesa in her lap. Her back rests on piles of brocade and silk pillows of pale colors.

Princesa's ears prick. She scatters several of her dolls as she races to the window.

INT. MAMA'S BEDROOM - WINDOW - NIGHT

Pushing the drape aside, Princesa sees Ricardo getting out of the publico.

With a happy whimper, she runs from window to door and back again.

Mama shows no surprise.

INT. FOYER/MAMA'S HOUSE

ROSITA, 12, a HOUSEMAID, opens the front door for Ricardo.

Rosita seems mature for her age. She blushes under Ricardo's slow small nod.

Ricardo walks hesitantly into Mama's foyer.

RICARDO

Por favor, tell my mother I am here.

Rosita smiles and runs upstairs.

Ricardo slips out of his backpack. He passes through the foyer to the parlor.

Furniture, covered with white sheets, looms before him. A layer of dust and gloom shrouds the room.

The boy shivers and turns back to the tall carpeted staircase.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Princesa will sleep in my room.

Ricardo charges up the stairs. Half-way up he stops.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Mama?

MAMA'S VOICE (O.S.)
Come up.

He continues up the stairs.

INT. MAMA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moments later, Ricardo pounds on the open door. In b.g., Rosita runs down the hall.

MAMA'S VOICE (O.S.)
Come in.

Ricardo storms into the room. He drops his backpack on a chair.

Princesa leaps into Ricardo's arms and licks his strained face again and again.

Ricardo pets Princesa.

INT. MAMA'S BATHROOM

Ricardo stops at the open bathroom door. Mama combs her long black hair before an ornate mirror over the sink.

MAMA
How was your trip? No. Don't tell me. It's much too late.

She sweeps by Ricardo into her bedroom.

INT. MAMA'S BEDROOM

Ricardo lets Princesa down. The dog sits in Mama's hat box near the bed.

He pulls the torn ticket halves from his backpack and hurls them on the bed in defiance.

Mama flutters her fan. She studies him for a long moment.

RICARDO
You stole my dog!

MAMA
I borrowed her.

Ricardo looks down.

MAMA
(continuing)
Don't you look up when someone
talks to you?

RICARDO
Depends on who's talking.

Ricardo takes off his cap. He pulls out a comb and runs it through his hair.

MAMA
Will Alfonso need you at the
building?

RICARDO
Not really. What if he does?

Mama picks up the torn ticket halves. She looks at Ricardo. She places the halves in the top drawer of her bedside table. She reaches for the phone.

MAMA (ON PHONE)
Rosita, heat some soup, por favor.
Si.

She hangs up.

MAMA
How long can you stay?

No response from Ricardo. He bends to rub Princesa's tummy.

MAMA
 (continuing)
 Answer me! Don't shut me out!

Ricardo's so mad he can't speak for a moment.

RICARDO
 Why did you leave?

MAMA
 The party was over.

Princesa yawns.

RICARDO
 I want Princesa in my room
 tonight. She's my dog.

MAMA
 Sure. Sure. Take the hat box.
 There's the water dish.

Ricardo picks up the hat box. He reaches shakily for the porcelain dish.

MAMA
 (continuing)
 Let me help you carry --

RICARDO
 I can do it myself!

He spills the water on the carpet.

Ricardo exits carrying box and bowl.

Princesa trots after him with a snappy pace, dragging her bunny.

EXT. MAMA'S GARDEN - DAY

Next morning. Sun dapples the large sweeping veranda where Ricardo and Mama eat breakfast in silence.

Beyond the veranda lies a once formal garden. A fountain, dry with age, stands near an overgrown hedge and two weed-infested flowerbeds.

Princesa noses about in the weeds. She pushes through to an iron mesh fence. Turning, she hears O.S. VOICES. She trots back to Ricardo.

Rosita appears with a pitcher of orange juice. She refills Ricardo's glass, then Mama's.

MAMA

Gracias.

Ricardo looks up. Rosita turns to hide a smile.

Mama waves Rosita back inside with her fan. The maid leaves looking back over her shoulder twice.

Ricardo slaps his thighs for Princesa to jump on his lap. She backs away for a running start.

Up, and Princesa lands slipping a bit.

Princesa gives Ricardo a lick on the nose.

Mama looks at her son.

MAMA

(continuing)

Shall we talk about the past?

Ricardo shakes his head, no.

MAMA

(continuing)

Have I changed?

RICARDO

Thinner, I guess.

MAMA

"You can never be too thin or too rich." A friend told me that once. I don't believe it anymore.

Mama puts on her dark glasses.

Ricardo gazes out at the overgrown yard.

RICARDO

What happened to the garden?

Ricardo cups his hand over his eyes.

MAMA

I have not been home much.

She stares at the boy and his dog.

MAMA

(continuing)

You may not realize, but you carry that dog around like you carried "Toboro" when you were a small boy.

Ricardo's eyes flash in anger.

RICARDO

I do not!

He turns to face Mama.

RICARDO

(continuing)

I carry Princesa like I carried my Teddy Bear, "Toboro?"

MAMA

How can Princesa learn something of life if Ricardo always carries her? Si, like "Toboro."

He holds Princesa closer.

Mama takes an old photo from under her napkin. She hands it to Ricardo.

ON RICARDO'S HAND

which holds a photo of himself at age six. There little Ricardo carries his Teddy bear under the same arm.

He hands back the picture.

Mama snaps her fan open.

Ricardo grabs his cap from the table.

MAMA

Where are you going?

RICARDO

Out.

MAMA

What about supper?

He carries Princesa OUT OF THE FRAME.

EXT. BALLPARK/GUAYNABO - DAY

Later that same morning, Ricardo carries Princesa to the wooden fence that encloses the field.

Princesa rests her head on Ricardo's shoulder.

RICARDO
(to Princesa)
You are not like Toboro.

TWO BOYS, Ricardo's age, hit fly balls to each other. Ricardo watches, a longing look on his face. MARTIN DELEON runs over.

MARTIN
Holo, Ricardo? Remember me, Martin?

RICARDO
Buenos dias! I remember.

MARTIN
Bernardo, it is Ricardo Bonilla
the kid from beautiful Guaynabo.
(to Ricardo)
You still live on the mainland?

Ricardo nods, yes. BERNARDO MORALES, drops his bat. He flashes a grin.

BERNARDO
Ricardo who?

RICARDO
Bonilla.

Bernardo laughs.

BERNARDO
Want to catch a few for us?

RICARDO
I got my dog today.

MARTIN
Put her down. She can watch.

Ricardo shakes his head.

RICARDO
I forgot her leash. She might
wander off.

BERNARDO

Tell her, "Stay." What's her name?

Ricardo sets Princesa down. She shakes herself.

RICARDO

Princesa.

BERNARDO

Princesa, stay.

Princesa wags her tail. She goes to Bernardo.

RICARDO

See. She won't do it.

Bernardo looks at Martin.

BERNARDO

Teach her. Say over and over,
"Princesa, stay." When she does,
give her a treat.

Ricardo picks up Princesa. Martin shakes his head.

MARTIN

It takes much time and patience,
Amigo.

(thinking a beat)

Ricardo, what you doing tonight?

RICARDO

Nada.

MARTIN

My sister, Teresa, she is a cook
at La Mirrada Hotel on the beach.

RICARDO

Donde esta... I never heard of La
Mirrada. Is it new?

BERNARDO

Si. Route 693 east of Dorado Beach
and west of Luquillo. Can't miss
it.

Bernardo winks at Martin. Princesa whimpers, uneasy now.

BERNARDO
 (continuing)
 They're having a Le Lo Lai
 Festival outside under a big tent
 tonight. Come on over at 8 and
 bring Princesa.

RICARDO
 Ahhh.

BERNARDO
 Some of the old team will be
 there. They will like to see you
 again. Come round to the kitchen.
 Teresa can get you in. Okay?

Ricardo whips off his cap. After a moment, he puts it back on.

RICARDO
 All right. I come.

Princesa watches with interest as Martin hurls the ball to
 Bernardo.

Bernardo skips backward under the rising ball. He leaps high.
 He stretches to catch the ball.

It pops in and out of his outstretched glove. The boys laugh.

EXT. STREET/OLD SAN JUAN - DAY

Lunchtime. HAWKERS' cries selling T-shirts and glass bangles,
 the SPUTTER of moving TRAFFIC, and the GROWL of TRUCKS.

A barrage of colorful sights, an ethnic mix, swirl round
 Ricardo and Princesa.

Ricardo carries Princesa through the press of SHOPPERS.
 Princesa sniffs as Ricardo stops to buy a corn stick from a
 VENDOR. He shares it with Princesa on a low wall.

Princesa eats her share of the surullito. She cocks her ear
 at the O.S. sound of a Juke Box BLARING Afro-Rican MUSIC from
 the open door of a restaurant.

Smiling, Ricardo holds Princesa's front paws up and claps
 them to the MUSIC beat.

Princesa pulls away; she bares her teeth and Ricardo stops
 the game.

A WOMAN sells an orchid to Ricardo. He laughs and tucks the stem under Princesa's collar.

It rains. Ricardo notices a rain-soaked sign on a billboard. It shows a Puerto Rican man holding a can of Bonilla Coffee.

Ricardo wipes his eyes with his hand.

EXT. BONILLA COFFEE FACTORY - DAY

A long brick building with five tall smoke stacks. Deserted. Windows boarded up.

A huge sign reads

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT OPENING SOON. JOBS AVAILABLE CALL

216) 555-1525. Ricardo and Princesa hop off the back of an old delivery truck. Ricardo waves at the Driver, who smiles and nods. The truck drives on. Ricardo picks up Princesa and heads for the door to the front office.

INT. BONILLA COFFEE FACTORY OFFICE - DAY

Princesa makes a low growl and sets off to investigate the office. Dust thick, cobwebs on filing cabinets and across boarded windows.

Ricardo sits at what was once his father's desk. Three small pictures stand covered in dust. He rubs each one on his pants.

ON RICARDO'S HANDS

which hold a picture of himself hitting a baseball, one of his mother waving from the front seat of a convertible, and one of the three of them sailing. Ricardo's 11.

Ricardo wipes his hands on his pants. He shakes his head. He swivels around to read the HEADLINES of Puerto Rican Tribune tacked to the wall:

BONILLA KILLED IN CAR ACCIDENT

INT. BONILLA COFFEE WAREHOUSE - DAY

Ricardo opens the door to the warehouse. He carries Princesa inside the vast store room. Gunny sacks, filled with coffee beans, tower like brick walls around him and Princesa.

Princesa sneezes in the dust.

EXT. BONILLA COFFEE FACTORY PARKING LOT - SAME

Tito Ruiz parks his rusted-out delivery truck at a back loading dock. He and Miguelito jump out and open the sliding door to the building.

Tito hurries to the backdoor of the truck. He slides it open. A half grown TIGER paces back and forth in the straw.

The big cat draws its ears back and swishes its tail.

TITO

"Tyger, Tyger, burning bright. In
the forest of the night." Immortal
lines, Miguelito. William Blake
wrote them.

Miguelito takes the chain and hooks it to the TIGER'S collar.

MIGUELITO

I never heard of William Blake.

They pull the tiger to the sliding door and release it into the building.

TITO

Go, my clawed amigo. Take care of
the boy. Spare the little dog.

The tiger roars. He disappears inside the warehouse.

TITO

(continuing)

Quick back to the truck. We'll mop
up later and collect Princesa.

Tito flip-flops off the loading dock. Miguelito climbs down the steep stairs holding on to the rail. He does one somersault with a sheepish grin.

They leap into the truck and exit the parking lot.

INT. WAREHOUSE

Ricardo studies a coffee bean sorter. Princesa listens. Her ears fly out as she turns her head to hear something.

Princesa struggles to get down. Ricardo puts her down. She runs into a back room.

INT. BACKROOM

The tiger walks calmly between the crates of coffee cans. Princesa runs along the same aisle.

Princesa snarls from behind a box. Startled, the tiger stops in its tracks. Princesa climbs the stack of crates. She crouches and lets out a low growl.

Confused and nervous, the tiger turns and runs back to the outer door. It claws and scratches to get out.

On top of the crates, Princesa barks and barks until the tiger pushes the door open and exits.

INT. WAREHOUSE

Ricardo runs through the crates.

RICARDO

Princesa, where are you?

Princesa's BARKS can be heard O.S.

INT. BACKROOM

Princesa wags her tail. Ricardo looks way up to see her.

RICARDO

What are you doing up there? Time still for a ferry ride.

Princesa scrambles down to Ricardo.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The tiger races away as fast as it can down the wet road.

EXT. FERRY WHARF - DAY

Same day, still raining. TOURISTS and NATIVES wait for the next ferry.

Ricardo appears restless. Wet through, he holds Princesa under the open-sided roof.

Princesa recognizes Tito standing a few feet away. She growls low. Her growl rises, falls, and turns to a snarl. Ricardo stares in disbelief at Princesa.

RICARDO

Princesa, no.

Tito carries RONALDO, the FIGHTING COCK. Ronaldo glares at Princesa from under Tito's arm. Ronaldo's talons gleam.

Tito rivets his eyes on Princesa as he picks LICE from Ronaldo's white feathers.

Ricardo locks eyes with Tito.

TITO

You!

Ricardo realizes Tito means danger.

RICARDO

Is he following us?

The doubledecker FERRY arrives. Ricardo glances nervously at Tito. The crowd surges forward to board. Suddenly, Ricardo pushes through the crowd out of the line into the rain.

Tito turns to follow. TWO elderly ENGLISH TOURISTS notice Ronaldo. In the b.g., they point and whisper. LADY OVERLAND and her HUSBAND, LORD OVERLAND wave at Ronaldo.

LADY OVERLAND

There you are again, you devlish rooster. Look Harvey, it's he.

Tito and Ronaldo are trapped between the Overlands.

LORD OVERLAND

El Grande Ronaldo! I say, Winnie - right again, your good luck contender. And Mr. Ruiz.

TITO

Por favor, don't get too close to Ronaldo. He doesn't like crowds. Let go of my arm, Lord Overland.

LADY OVERLAND

Nonsense, Mr. Ruiz. Roosters love attention. Ronaldo, my pet, we saw you fight last night. Nothing like it.

LORD OVERLAND

Unbeatable in all Puerto Rico! Numero uno! El Grande Ronaldo! Good grief what a bird.

LADY OVERLAND
(chanting)
Ronaldo! El Grande Ronaldo!

The TOURISTS crowd the OVERLANDS onto the FERRY. Tito and Ronaldo ride forward on their shoulders.

Tito's wet face shows his fury. He waves his fist above his head in frustration. Ronaldo squawks as he flaps his wings.

Ricardo and Princesa disappear into the rain.

EXT. LA MIRRADA HOTEL ENTRANCE - NIGHT

ILLUMINATED sign on low stone wall reads LA MIRRADA. Palm trees stand like bending sentinels at intervals across the lush grounds leading to the hotel.

Ricardo carries Princesa through iron gates and down the curving driveway.

Princesa appears greatly excited. She looks in all directions. Her ears twitch and turn.

EXT. HOTEL MIRRADA GARDENS

Ricardo stands on a hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. He holds Princesa. Her orchid still ornaments her collar. A faint breeze blows off the water. Waves rise and fall.

BELOW

A huge lighted tent waits. Near the tent, FLAMING TORCHES stab the earth. From within the tent, come O.S. sounds of CLINKING silverware and dishes.

In the b.g., GUESTS in garish horned headdresses and masks made of coconuts peer at Princesa.

Guests peek at each other and scream when they discover who's behind the mask.

Ricardo's face shows surprise when he realizes his casual dress and baseball cap look out of place at this costume party.

Ricardo carries Princesa to the tent entrance.

EXT. TENT ENTRANCE

STILT MAN guards the door. He wears striped pants, lace collared shirt, and a cape.

Twice the height of the tent, a thin wooden leg on either side of the tent door, STILT MAN frightens and unnerves the guests.

To enter, all must pass between his legs.

STILT MAN
Walk between my legs. It will
bring good fortune to you.

Ricardo hesitates. Princesa looks up and up to the man's masked face. Stilt Man bends and points a finger directly at Princesa.

STILT MAN
(continuing)
Be careful tonight.

Princesa twists in Ricardo's grasp. Ricardo darts a quick glance up at Stilt Man. He carries Princesa into the tent.

O.S., STILT MAN ROARS his cackling LAUGH.

INT. TENT

Ricardo and Princesa enter. Sound of a CALYPSO BAND playing MUSIC at opposite end of the long tent.

CHILDREN dance with each other in smaller masks and costumes. OLD COUPLES dancing, doing the Cha Cha Cha to Afro-American music.

WIDER VIEW

Tent lit by hundreds of flickering candles. Costumed GUESTS line up for plates at long tables. They point questioningly at the Puerto Rican dishes.

The line continues past steaming Puerto Rican cuisine in heated chafing dishes.

WAITERS in white coats serve with plastic gloved hands.

WAITER
More?

MALE GUEST
No thank you.

Beyond serving lines, Guests eat at long tables. B.g. action, waiters serving from wine bottles. A roast pig, Princesa-size, turns on a spit. Princesa shudders.

She buries her head under Ricardo's arm. Princesa's collar, fastened one notch tighter than usual; she coughs.

Too tight. Ricardo doesn't notice her discomfort. He scans the costumed crowd for his teammates.

INT. TENT

A half-hour later, Ricardo's friends, dressed in their own "style" casual, sit with Ricardo. He eats at the end of the long table.

Bernardo, Martin, and BOBO CONSTANZA, 15, sit next to Ricardo.

Bobo lights a cigarette. He stubs it out when others show their displeasure.

RICARDO

So Jose was the only one of us to get signed to a major league club?

Bernardo tips back in his chair. He drinks a cola.

BERNARDO

Only Jose.

Bernardo drains the last of his soda.

RICARDO

Is he happy? Anyone talk to him?

Ballplayers exchange glances.

MARTIN

Happy? Is anyone really happy?

BERNARDO

I heard they sent Jose back down to the minors. He had a couple of bad years.

Ricardo takes this in.

BERNARDO

(continuing)

You, Ricardo. We think you are the big success.

RICARDO

Me?

Embarrassed, Ricardo looks away, then shakes his head "no".

BERNARDO

You made it on the mainland. You go to a fine school. You live in a good house. You got a good job.

Ricardo leans forward, half out of his chair.

RICARDO

Baseball. It was about Puerto Rico and baseball... and getting signed right? That was all we wanted to do.

MARTIN

No, No. You got it all wrong.

Bernardo winks.

BERNARDO

There's other careers here.

The boys suppress their laughter.

MARTIN

Quiet. Baseball's all we had then. None of us made it. We got stuck here. See?

RICARDO

What about Legion Ball?

Bobo stands.

BOBO

None of us are good enough for that either, comprende?

MARTIN

We dropped out of school.

Bernardo gathers his paper plate and cup. He balls them up and sticks a plastic knife in the center.

Princesa coughs and pants under Ricardo's folding chair. Ricardo leans down. He sees her collar is too tight and loosens it. He turns back to his teammates.

Princesa hears a dog BARKING O.S. She pulls away from her empty collar, the wilted orchid, and tangled leash.

PRINCESA

Papa? Papa?

She creeps to the tent's border. She crawls under the tent.

EXT. TENT/BACK ENTRANCE

Moments later. Bobo rises. He walks behind a serving booth out of sight. Bobo talks into his cellular phone.

BOBO (ON PHONE)

Bobolink here. Si. She's on her own. Si. She heard your barking and crawled under the tent just as you planned.

Bobo listens.

BOBO (ON PHONE)

(continuing)

We'll take care of Ricardo. No worries... Bernardo and Martin. Si. Adios.

EXT. TENT - SAME

Princesa peeks out from under the tent. She squeezes through. The grass feels damp. She listens to the O.S. sound of RUSTLING undergrowth. Princesa smells the east wind and realizes she's totally free. She rolls down the grassy hill.

Over and over and over again. Until, she comes to a thumping stop against the root of a palm tree.

All dark. Princesa sniffs the scent of orchids and bougainvillea blossoms.

O.S., sound of dog BARKING again. Princesa places her foot on a wet rock. She feels her body slip and slither faster and faster down down down, a steep water slide into a shallow pool. Princesa's head bobs to the surface as she moves her legs. The water feels cool. Gaining confidence, Princesa swims in circles like the fishes in Ricardo's tank.

EXT. HILL/OVERLOOKING OCEAN

Later. Princesa lies on her side. She looks up. Tiny lights glisten in the night sky. The great Hotel stretches into darkness. O.S. sound of the COQUIS TREE FROG, a rising two-note SONG (co-kee, co-kee) continues.

Fireworks begin in sync with sound of O.S. CLASSICAL MUSIC. Princesa looks down the other side of the hill. Guests pour from the tent to view the show. They sit on rows of white folding lounge chairs.

People seem like many strange shadows to Princesa. Princesa rolls onto her back. She stands and shakes the water from her coat.

Princesa watches the FIREWORKS. The sky explodes in great light-flowers in wondrous colors.

EXT. HOTEL/KITCHEN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Sound of O.S. FIREWORKS BOOMING to CLASSICAL MUSIC. Princesa peers into the open kitchen door. The smell of cooking meat attracts her.

She creeps in unseen.

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN

Later the same night, Kitchen WORKERS busily prepare food. TERESA, Bernardo's SISTER, cuts celery and carrots. She wears a white uniform and hair net.

Perched on some boxes, Martin, Bernardo, and Bobo watch her work.

Martin speaks on cellular phone in hushed voice.

MARTIN (ON PHONE)

Si. She's still out there
somewhere. We haven't seen
Princesa. No. You want us to cover
the hotel?

Martin hands the phone to Bobo.

MARTIN

Tito wants to speak to you,
Bobolink.

Bobo takes the phone.

BOBO (ON PHONE)

No, he never guessed anything.
She'll run right into you in the
parking lot. Next week? Okay.

Princesa awakens behind a box of bananas in a corner.

TERESA'S VOICE (O.S.)

One of the festival guests lost
his dog.

BERNARDO'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Si. They search the hotel floor by
 floor. And the pool as well.

TERESA'S VOICE (O.S.)
 They will not find it.

Princesa yawns and stretches still concealed.

BERNARDO'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Why do you say that?

TERESA'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Someone must have taken it.

BERNARDO'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Too bad. A kid I know owned the
 dog.

IDS run in and out of scene with flashlights. SECURITY GUARDS
 shine lights into parked cars. Princesa watches from under a
 fern leaf. O.S., sound of Coquis SONG louder now.

EXT. KITCHEN DOOR

Ricardo, silhouetted in the lighted doorway. His face shows
 desperate concern. His hair, disheveled; he's lost his cap.

RICARDO
 Princesa! Princesa!

The corner of the parking lot GLOWS. An IMAGE gradually takes
 form. Maria, Princesa's imaginary Chihuahua mother,
 materializes. A MAID runs past Maria's image. The Maid cannot
 see Maria.

MARIA
 I speak for you, Princesa. I am
 your mama, Maria.

Maria steps forward.

MARIA
 (continuing)
 Princesa, do you not hear Ricardo
 calling you?

Princesa sees her mother's glowing image.

MARIA
 (continuing)
 What's the matter with you? Why
 don't you go to Ricardo now?

Maria's Image marches over to the fern where Princesa hides.
 With her paw Maria shoves the large leaves aside.

Princesa sits up straight. Her eyes grow big.

MARIA
 (continuing)
 Look at Ricardo. How can you play
 mira-mira -- peek-a-boo like this.

Princesa stands.

MARIA
 (continuing)
 I hear you. You want your Papa.
 That barking was not Papa. Listen
 to your mama. You are in in
 danger. Princesa --

Princesa runs OUT OF THE FRAME.

EXT. FAR CORNER/PARKING LOT

Tito's delivery truck waits, motor idling, headlights off.
 O.S. sound of a dog BARKING comes from truck.

INT. TRUCK

Tito barks on microphone.

TITO
 Bark. Bark, bark.

EXT. LA MIRRADA GROUNDS

Princesa races through lush grounds to the road of both ways.

EXT. ENTRANCE GATE

Princesa pauses to catch her breath before the LA MIRRADA
 sign.

She looks one way. She looks the other. All in darkness.
 Princesa sits. A beat. She tilts her head to the right. She
 runs down the side of the the road to her left.

EXT. ROUTE 693

It's an hour later. Coquis SONG O.S., constant through the night. Totally alone, Princesa limps along the dark roadside. She stops to lick her front paws. O.S. sound of a car SPEEDING stops the celebration.

HEADLIGHTS

strobe the road. Car races by.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH/LA MIRRADA HOTEL - NIGHT

In b.g., great BONFIRES spark across the beach. Guests dance in snake chains to O.S. CALYPSO MUSIC.

A SECURITY GUARD stands over Ricardo who kneels in the sand. A flashlight illumines Ricardo's face.

GUARD

Her name is Princesa?

Ricardo shows him Princesa's collar and leash.

RICARDO

It's my fault. I loosened her collar. I forgot about her under my chair.

GUARD

Someone took her away?

RICARDO

I forgot to give her water.

Ricardo buries his face in his hands. The Guard checks his watch.

GUARD

The police say they can't spare their men to look for a dog. A child... this is different.

RICARDO

Por favor, tell me where to look.

In b.g., Guests continue their dance. Towering over all, the Stilt Man dances alone.

INT. MAMA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mama talks on the phone from her bed.

MAMA (ON PHONE)

Ricardo. I can't hear you. Say it again. Princesa is lost? Do you want me to come to you?

Mama stares at the phone. Her face expresses great sadness.

EXT. RTE. 693 - FURTHER ALONG ROAD - NIGHT

Princesa rests at the side of the road. Headlights approach. A Delivery Truck stops. Bright headlights frame a MAN'S body. A man's hands take hold of the frightened little dog. Princesa can't see where she's being carried. She whimpers. O.S. sound of a truck door SQUEAKING open.

INT. DELIVERY TRUCK

Sound of a cage RATTLING O.S.. Princesa sees a cage door opening. She's locked inside the cage. Truck door SLAMS O.S.

EXT. RTE. 693

The delivery truck turns on to the highway.

INT. BACK OF TRUCK

Lit now by dim light over rear door. Princesa looks around. Other cages line built-in shelves. Inside some cages, silent ANIMALS and BIRDS observe Princesa with sad eyes.

Princesa's eyes blink when she sees Ronaldo, the fighting cock. Ronaldo waits in his cage on a shelf opposite Princesa.

Princesa moves about her cage. She tries to open the door with her paw.

Giving up, she looks through the mesh to her right. The round eyes of a black and white Maltese PUPPY stare back. The puppy howls.

Shelves under Ronaldo hold cages filled with SNAKES and BIRDS. Tomas occupies one of these cages.

Another contains TWO green PARROTS. Gupta, Birdwing Butterfly, flutters helplessly in her small cage.

Princesa turns completely around. Trapped!

CUT TO:

INT. MAMA'S HOUSE - DAY

Ricardo enters the front door. He's exhausted. An overcast sky and steady rain darkens the foyer. He studies Princesa's collar and leash a beat. He drops them on the hall table.

Ricardo climbs the stairs by pulling himself, hand over hand, up the railing.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS LANDING

Mama opens her bedroom door a little. He sees her in the doorway. He's soaked to the skin.

MAMA

Ricardo?

RICARDO

I couldn't find her, Mama. Too many places to look.

Mama reaches out to hold his outstretched hand. Ricardo stops at her door.

RICARDO

(continuing)

I begged and begged for someone to help me. Nobody cares. Know what they said? Bernardo and the others?

Mama waits to hear.

RICARDO

(continuing)

They said. "Buy a new dog." And they said... I would never find her... not in time ... I lost my cap, too.

A beat.

MAMA

Get some rest. Wash. Eat.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM

Ricardo enters. Dim light reveals photos covering the walls: Ricardo in baseball uniforms of differing ages and sizes, action pictures of games, all-team portraits, Banner: LIGA DEL COQUIS.

Ricardo lies on his bed. TOBORO, his old Teddy Bear, sits on the second pillow.

Mama stands in the doorway. Ricardo looks at the worn bear.

RICARDO

You were right about me and Toboro.

He buries his head in Toboro's chest. Mama pulls down the window shade. Ricardo sits up. He opens his dresser drawer to get pajamas. He grabs his robe and heads for the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM

Ricardo washes in a hot shower.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM

Later, Ricardo wears pajamas; he's in bed. Mama sits in a chair by the bed.

MAMA

She will be all right. She will find a way to let us know where she is.

Ricardo, nearly asleep.

RICARDO

You believe that?

Ricardo drifts off to sleep.

MAMA'S BEDROOM WINDOW

Mama stares out lost in thought. Rosita taps on the open door with a tray of breakfast.

MAMA

Any eggs this morning?

ROSITA

No. A mongoose got the rooster.

Mama clears the bedside table.

MAMA

We shall buy some eggs today.
Leave the tray.

ROSITA

Should I make a tray for Mr.
Ricardo?

MAMA

Later, gracias.

ft over the mountain and forest.

Tito Ruiz emerges from a crudely built shack set back off the road.

He stretches, then stumbles down the steps and heads for his truck.

INT. TRUCK - SAME

Princesa listens alert in her cage. Light through back window shows the sad condition of the imprisoned creatures.

Gupta lies motionless in her cage. Two Parrots look dazed and hopeless. Maltese wakes suddenly. He crawls as close as possible to Princesa's cage. He paws the mesh. He looks for water. There is none.

Ronaldo, awake and watchful. Snake, Tomas, sleeps coiled on a lower shelf. The back door squeaks open suddenly. Princesa growls. Tito enters and removes Tomas and Gupta's cages.

TITO

I have you, Princesa. You eluded
me for awhile, but look at you now.

Princesa barks at Tito. She leans forward. She sees that her cage tips back and forth.

EXT. TRUCK

Later, Tito carries two more cages into the shack.

INT. TRUCK - SAME

Only Ronaldo and Princesa remain. O.S. sound, back door of truck SLAMS shut. Princesa listens. She looks across at Ronaldo. He looks back.

INT. PRINCESA'S CAGE

Princesa throws her weight forward, then back, then forward. Her cage tips over the shelf edge and falls. Floor comes up fast. With a crash, the cage lands. Unhurt, Princesa pushes open her cage door and crawls out. Princesa searches for a way out. Panting, she notices the cracked plastic window leading to the front seat. She climbs to the window on some boxes.

A seam rips in the fabric around the window and Princesa's paws tear more of it. She squeezes through to the front seat.

Driver's sliding door stands open. Princesa leaps out.

EXT. TRUCK - SAME

Princesa exits truck and runs toward the road. EXT. ROUTE 191 Princesa stops roadside. She turns to look back at the truck. A beat.

INT. FRONT SEAT

Princesa reenters the truck. Through the door opening, she glances at the silent shack.

INT. REAR OF TRUCK

Princesa pushes through the torn window. She climbs down the boxes on Ronaldo's side until she reaches his shelf.

Ronaldo turns his head to see Princesa walking along his shelf.

Princesa pushes Ronaldo's cage off the shelf. Jumping down, she paws at the bent cage door. It opens. Ronaldo escapes. Princesa climbs the pile of boxes and pushes through to the front seat.

EXT. TRUCK

Princesa races toward the highway. She turns to see Ronaldo flapping his wings on the top of the truck.

Ronaldo crows to greet the rising sun.

ROUTE 191 - FURTHER ALONG

A newlywed COUPLE on HORSEBACK trots by Princesa. They notice her panting roadside.

JILL and HARRY MASON, 20'S, Maine TOURISTS, stop to help Princesa.

JILL
Poor little thing. She's exhausted.

Harry gets out his canteen and some beef jerky.

HARRY
She must have walked a long way.
Her feet are torn up.

Harry kneels beside Princesa. She tries to stand, too weak. Jill dismounts and comes quietly to Princesa. The dog drinks the water in a small pan Harry offers.

JILL
We can't leave her out here.

Princesa nibbles at the meat.

HARRY
We should report this.

Harry waits while Princesa drinks again. Jill remounts her horse. Harry hands Princesa up to her. Jill pets Princesa gently. Princesa licks Jill's arm.

JILL
Harry, she's not wearing a collar.
Could we --

Harry mounts his horse.

HARRY
Don't even think about it. You're
always bringing home strays.

JILL
Let's take her to the Visitor
Center.

The two ride east toward El Yunque. A gray-green MIST shrouds the mysterious El Yunque rain forest before them.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIERRA PALM VISITOR CENTER - MORNING

Princesa awakens as Harry and Jill reach the center.

INT. VISITOR CENTER OFFICE

A detailed MAP of El Yunque covers one wall. At his desk, uniformed PARK RANGER, LUIS MILLAN, stops his paper work when Jill and Harry enter with Princesa.

Princesa looks tired in Jill's arms.

LUIS

We will hold her here until an owner comes.

HARRY

Has anyone called in?

LUIS

None that I know.

Princesa finds herself being carried by Luis into a back room.

INT. BUNK ROOM

Princesa curls up on a pillow near two bunk beds. She closes her eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIERRA PALM VISITOR CENTER - AFTERNOON

Tito and Miguelito park the delivery truck in front of the center.

Miguelito's dressed like a woman in a garish Spanish costume, black wig, and earrings. Miguelito follows Tito inside.

INT. VISITOR CENTER OFFICE

Luis waters a plant on his desk. He looks surprised to see Tito and Miguelito.

Tito practices his best smile.

TITO

My dear Senor, we, my dear wife and I, are looking for our lost dog.

LUIS

Can you describe your dog for me?

Luis stows the watering can in a desk drawer.

TITO
 She's of mixed lineage. Quite unusual. A Chihuahua and Dachshund combined. You might say a Chihund.

Miguelito winks at Luis. He smiles. Luis looks out the window.

LUIS
 Is she wearing a collar?

TITO
 No. I was giving her a bath, and she slipped from my hands like a greased pig, if you will... jumped right out the window into the wild.

Luis shakes his head in disbelief.

LUIS
 Can you supply her name?

INT. BUNK ROOM - SAME

Princesa overhears Tito.

TITO'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Princesa is her name!

Princesa searches for a place to hide.

INT. VISITOR CENTER OFFICE

Luis rises from his chair.

LUIS
 Good news, Senor y Senora. A young couple found your dog a few hours ago.

Tito conceals his glee.

TITO
 (to Miguelito)
 A miracle, my dear.

MIGUELITO
 (in falsetto)
 May we see her?

LUIS
 Come with me, Senor, Senora. She is sleeping in the next room.

INT. BUNK ROOM

Luis, Tito, and Miguelito enter. Tito touches the empty pillow.

TITO

She's been sleeping here all right.

They search the room.

LUIS

Your dog vanished!

TITO

If you can assure us that there're no lions in your forest, we'll pick up her trail. She can't have gone far with her little legs.

LUIS

No lions in El Yunque. A Mongoose, a few poisonous centipedes, no lions.

Tito nods. The three exit to the office.

INT. OFFICE

Miguelito sways his hips in his dress. He opens a purse and touches up his lipstick in small mirror.

Tito looks disappointed.

LUIS

Stop back in an hour.

MIGUELITO

(falsetto)

Si. Muchas gracias, Senor.

Luis smiles.

LUIS

Senora. Oh one thing, be careful the road is washed out in a few places.

Miguelito and Tito nod and exit.

INT. BUNK ROOM

Luis stands in the doorway. Princesa looks down at him from a top bunk.

LUIS
There you are. How did you get up there?

Princesa yawns. Luis lifts her down.

LUIS
(continuing)
Did you climb this ladder?

She licks his hand.

LUIS
(continuing)
I see now. They weren't your owners.

He lets Princesa out the front door.

LUIS
(continuing)
Princesa, stay. I get my car keys and take you into town.

Luis reenters the office. Princesa does not stay. She smells the gravel path near the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. VISITOR CENTER

Moments later, Luis rattles his keys.

LUIS
Now I am ready --

He looks around.

LUIS
(continuing)
Princesa?

CUT TO:

EXT. EL YUNQUE RAIN FOREST

Princesa disappears into thick undergrowth where sunlight fails to penetrate.

Sounds of many bird CALLS echo O.S. through the huge forest. Princesa listens to SONG BIRDS that roost on branches. Some stay where they land, others flap their wings and fly from tree to tree.

She looks up at giant ferns. Princesa feels the spongy damp earth under her feet. She races over ground cover of a thin layer of fallen leaves.

She stops to look at tiny COQUI TREE FROGS clinging with their toes to the underside of leaves. Princesa smells the Tree Frogs.

She hears their never ending O.S. SONG.

WIDER VIEW

Trees form a green canopy over Princesa's head. Dazzling orchids cling to the branches of palm, ebony, and sandalwood trees.

Lianas and other mosses hang from the trees dripping moisture on rotting logs.

BACK TO SCENE

A POISONOUS CENTIPEDE lifts itself to sense Princesa's presence.

EXT. CLIFF

Princesa wanders higher and higher to the top of a low cliff. She lies down in the opening of a small cave on the cliff.

Nearby, a waterfall cascades in crashing spray far below her.

PRINCESA'S POV

She sees rain on one side of the spring below and not on the other side.

BACK TO SCENE

In the b.g., behind a tangle of vines, a MONGOOSE tracks Princesa.

CUT TO:

EXT. TITO'S SHACK - DAY

Tito and Miguelito mount the back steps. Miguelito still wears his disguise.

O.S. sounds OVERLAPPING of BARKING, bird CRIES, and CHIRPING.

TITO

You can take off that ridiculous costume now.

INT. SHACK

Assorted chairs, tables, two cots, refrigerator, TV, and a hotplate with a few pots complete furnishings.

A filthy lair fitting for this pair. Chaos of suffering ANIMALS of many species fill cages.

A Lion-tailed macaque sits in a bare cage. Rare TAHITIAN LORIE, a tiny violet-blue parrot with a bright orange beak and white bib clings to the wire mesh of her cage.

Ronaldo, watches Tito from his cage. Tito pours water for the Maltese pup. He places the dish in the cage. The dog drinks all in a beat.

Gupta lies still at the bottom of her cage. Tito holds her cage high to see Gupta.

TITO

Bad news. It looks like our Birdwing, Gupta, didn't make it this trip.

MIGUELITO

She was too wise for her own good.

Miguelito removes his wig. He pulls his dress over his head. Underneath, he wears his usual pants and shirt.

Tito exits with the cage.

EXT. SHACK

Tito runs down the front steps of the shack. He holds Gupta's cage above his head.

TITO

Ahh, Gupta. A sad day. You're gone without telling me your wise secrets. And now no one will know them.

Tito shakes his head.

TITO

(continuing)

Gone. Gone. You have flown on now to a spiritual forest, unseen by us mere mortals.

Tito opens cage. He reaches for the motionless Gupta. With a shocked look, Tito watches Gupta soar arrow-straight into the forest.

Tito hurls the cage to the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. SHACK

Moments later. Tito appears in the open door. Miguelito looks up from his reading.

Tito's eyes, slits against the sun. He clutches the empty cage in one hand.

TITO

Alive! Gupta fooled me.

Tito staggers to a chair.

TITO

(continuing)

I feel sorry for these creatures... I do... they're trapped... I try to help them out, to find a better home for them. Think what they're going through here. It tears me up inside.

Miguelito's mouth drops open.

TITO

(continuing)

Come on. Come with me. We'll find that Princessa if we have to cover El Yunque's 26,000 acres inch by inch.

They exit.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFF/RAIN FOREST - NIGHT

Five o'clock. Princesa stands outside her cave. She sees a Butterfly swoop down to her.

Princesa stands on her back legs and waves her paws at the Butterfly, which flies just out of Princesa's reach.

Gupta dips and waves her black and yellow birdlike wings at Princesa. Then she flies higher out of Princesa's sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD INTO EL YUNQUE - NIGHT

About 5:30. Tito drives the delivery truck down the slippery winding road. Miguelito watches out the passenger side window.

MIGUELITO

There. Up on that cliff. I saw Princesa.

TITO

Que? Donde?

MIGUELITO

To your left. See? Way up at the top of the falls. That's her. She's watching us.

Tito stops the truck. It idles.

TITO'S POV

He sees Princesa above the road next to the falls.

TITO

How can we drive up there?

Miguelito

There's a dirt road up ahead a little, but it might be washed out. It climbs up behind the falls.

Tito puts the truck in low gear and lurches back on the narrow road.

MIGUELITO

Careful. Don't go so fast.

TITO

She's seen us. She could run far away by the time we get up there.

Gupta flies past Miguelito's face.

MIGUELITO

Gupta!

TITO

Que? What did you say?

MIGUELITO

That Gupta. She flew by my face. I can see her circling above the truck.

Tito looks up and nearly goes off the road.

TITO

We'll get her back too. We'll get them both!

MIGUELITO

Princesa's moving along the cliff.

Tito's eyes stay on the twisting road.

TITO

Which way's she moving? This way or toward the falls?

Gupta flies by Miguelito's ear.

GUPTA

ROARrrrrrr!

Miguelito jumps in his seat. He stares at the swooping butterfly.

TITO

I heard a lion roar! The ranger said there were no lions in this forest!

Tito swerves the truck crazily back and forth on the road.

MIGUELITO
 (shouting)
 There's no lion. It was Gupta that
 roared.

Gupta swoops down next to Tito's ear, out of his side vision.

GUPTA
 ROARrrrrrrrr!

Tito's eyes widen in terror. His hand goes to his facial
 scar, to his shoulder and arm.

TITO
 I heard a lion roar right in my
 ear! It must be on top of the
 truck... dropped down from some
 tree! Oh my! Oh no!

Miguelito leans toward Tito.

MIGUELITO
 Trust me. It's no lion! It's that
 Gupta. She can roar! You asked her
 for her secrets. This was her
 secret!

TITO
 Butterflies can't roar!

MIGUELITO
 You barked to fool Princesa at the
 hotel. Gupta roared in my ear too!

TITO
 I'll never trust you. You are a
 clown, a fool --

The truck skids and lurches off the road down a gully to
 crash and burn.

Gupta circles the wreck then rises to Princesa who watches
 from above on her cliff.

EXT. TITO'S SHACK/DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE - SAME

Luis, Park Ranger, turns his jeep into the driveway. He stops.

The driveway shows fresh tire marks leading to the shack.
 Luis gets out of his jeep.

LUIS
Who has been in here?

INT. SHACK

Luis bursts through the front door. Those animals still able, stir with hope in their cages. Luis' face registers surprise at what he sees. He gathers two cages and exits to jeep.

EXT. JEEP

Luis calls MOS on his portable phone.

INT. MAMA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mama rests in her chair by the window. O.S. THUDDING sound on window catches her attention. Through the window, Mama sees Gupta. She watches the Butterfly fly against the window again and again.

Mama unlatches the window. Gupta flies into the room. Mama holds out her fan. Gupta lands on the tip. Mama slowly rises. Gupta clings to the fan. Mama exits with Gupta.

INT. MAMA'S KITCHEN

Moments later. Ricardo sits at the table. He studies a map of Puerto Rico.

He looks up. Mama presents Gupta on the fan.

RICARDO
What does this mean?

MAMA
This is our messenger from
Princesa!

RICARDO
How did it get in?

Mama gently lifts the closed fan up and down.

MAMA
Through my bedroom window. See how
tame.

Gupta flies from the fan to the ceiling, then to the back door, and back to the fan.

MAMA
 (continuing)
 Hurry. We must go with it!

RICARDO
 Go with a butterfly?

MAMA
 Look.

Gupta flies out of the kitchen into the front hall.

INT. FRONT HALL/MAMA'S HOUSE

Ricardo and Mama follow. Gupta lands on Princesa's collar.

MAMA
 It's true!

Ricardo grabs Princesa's collar and leash. He and Mama leave by the front door.

EXT. ROUTE 191 - EVENING

One hour later. Mama's small sport's car speeds along the highway. Gupta flies next to Ricardo's open window. Mama points to the Butterfly.

INT. MAMA'S CAR

MAMA
 She leads to El Yunque.

RICARDO
 Look at her!

Gupta rests on the rearview mirror. Her beautiful wings half spread.

She flies again before Ricardo's window.

EXT. VISITOR'S CENTER/OFFICE - LATE

Ricardo takes Mama's arm. Gupta hovers near the car.

MAMA
 Follow. Go! Go!

Gupta flies toward the trees. Ricardo runs after her.

EXT. RAIN FOREST

Ricardo climbs through tangles of vines and moss. Gupta leads.

The light fades. Gupta flies ahead. Ricardo smells burning rubber. He sees tire marks deep in mud along the flooded road near his path.

Tito's delivery truck lies smashed and burning at the bottom of the gully.

RICARDO
I will come back.

Gupta suddenly flies before Ricardo's face. She leads him away from the gully.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Princesa! Princesa!

Gupta flies on before him.

EXT. PRINCESA'S WATERFALL

Later. Ricardo comes to a clearing. He stands at the base of the powerful waterfall. The spray hits his face.

Gupta rises above Ricardo, higher and higher to Princesa's cliff.

EXT. CLIFF

Princesa sleeps before her cave. A MONGOOSE tenses to spring on Princesa. Gupta brushes Princesa's face with her wing. Princesa awakens. She snarls at the mongoose. The Mongoose scuttles away.

EXT. STREAM - SAME

Ricardo hears the O.S. BARK.

WIDER VIEW

Ricardo looks up to the cave ledge. He sees Princesa. He falls to his knees.

BACK TO SCENE

Ricardo wipes his eyes. He's soaked from the waterfall.

RICARDO
Princesa, stay!

EXT. CLIFF

Princesa moves to the edge to see. She sees Ricardo below. She wags her tail. Princesa tries to climb down to Ricardo.

She can't find footing on the steep rocks.

EXT. STREAM

Ricardo waves her back.

RICARDO
Princesa, stay! For once, please,
stay there. Por favor.

EXT. CLIFF

Princesa looks at Gupta and then down at Ricardo. She lies down. She obeys.

EXT. STREAM

Ricardo climbs the rocks. He laughs; he cries. He slips and climbs.

ON RICARDO'S HANDS

cut and bruised, appear over the edge of the rock. Princesa continues to stay. Ricardo pulls himself the rest of the way up. He crawls over to Princesa. Princesa continues to stay.

RICARDO
Good girl. You did it! You learned
to stay.

He holds out his arms for Princesa.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Princesa, okay. Come now.

Princesa flies into Ricardo's arms. She licks his wet face. He pets her and hugs her. She yelps with joy.

RICARDO
(continuing)
Ricardo
(continuing)

You want to walk. I see.

He walks along the ledge. Princesa follows at his heel. Gupta leads the way out of the forest.

EXT. VISITOR CENTER

Later. Ricardo, Princesa, Mama, and Luis talk on the steps. Gupta circles and swoops above their heads; she flies into the rain forest. Ricardo and Mama wave good-bye. Princesa whines. Luis looks after Gupta with a puzzled expression.

RICARDO

(to Luis)

Mr. Ruiz, I can see. After awhile I thought he was following us. But I can't believe my friends worked with Ruiz to trap Princesa.

LUIS

They've all confessed. Tito Ruiz and Miguelito are inside under guard. Will you press charges on the young boys in Tito's gang?

RICARDO

No. I feel bad for them. Let them go.

Ricardo hugs Mama. She kneels to pet Princesa. Tito and Miguelito, heads down, cut, bruised, and handcuffed appear with TWO PARK RANGERS. Mama rises. She and Ricardo step back. Princesa stands still and growls at the villains.

TITO

Princesa, you lion, King of the beasts.

(to Luis)

I'll need my hand lotion. You'll see that I get plenty of hand lotion. So dry in prison.

LUIS

Don't worry. You'll have many years to keep your hands soft.

MIGUELITO

(to Tito)

You never trust me. I told you it was not a lion. Only a butterfly. You were a fool! Now we are the caged ones.

Luis opens the door to the jeep. The guards jump in.

TITO

A fool? Perhaps. I meant no real
harm to any of

them. Never trust lions, Miguelito. Lions will get you in the
end.

Tito and Miguelito climb into the jeep. The guards follow.
Luis slams the door behind them.

EXT. MAMA'S GARDEN - DAWN

Ronaldo chases five HENS into the hen house.

SUPER LEGEND: TWO WEEKS LATER

The Maltese pup, and other of Ruiz' and Miguelito's prisoners
enjoy Mama's yard.

Tomas suns himself on the veranda. The two parrots sit on a
branch above.

The garden glows in restored beauty. Ricardo weeds one of the
flower beds with Princesa's help.

EXT. MAMA'S FRONT DOOR - DAWN

Ricardo and Princesa stand with Mama and Rosita. Ricardo
holds his backpack. Princesa's bunny peeks out the top of the
pack.

RICARDO

Gracias.

MAMA

No more surprises. I'll let you
know when I'm coming to visit next
time.

RICARDO

I want you to buy a house in L.A.
for me and you and Princesa. And
bring Rosita too.

Rosita smiles. Mama fans herself. She's deeply moved.

MAMA

Then, I must sell this house first
and find homes for all Tito's
captives. I'll come to you soon.

Ricardo hugs Mama. Mama kneels to say good-bye to Princesa. She shakes Princesa's paw. The dog looks hard into Mama's eyes. Princesa sheds two big tears.

MAMA
 (continuing)
 Don't worry. I understand you now.
 Remember my promise to you. I keep
 my promises now.

Princesa licks Mama's hand. Ricardo walks to the waiting TAXI with Princesa at his heel. Princesa looks back at Mama one last time.

EXT. L.A. STREET - DAY

SUPER THE LEGEND: LOS ANGELES

A weak sun burns off morning smog. Elena drives through rush hour TRAFFIC. She speeds on the wrong side of the street and two-wheels a corner.

She changes lanes without signaling. She spins around in the opposite direction facing oncoming TRAFFIC.

Elena zooms around approaching cars. STREET SIGN reads

DEAD END

EXT. ELENA'S STREET

Elena's car skids sideways.

EXT. ELENA'S DRIVEWAY

Friskie scampers by the screen-door.

INT. KITCHEN

Princesa pounces on the screen-door. A small rip in the screen widens. She watches through the screen, a worried look on her face.

She sees Friskie standing in the driveway. Her face shows great alarm.

Princesa barks and barks. Friskie licks his front paw.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SAME

Friskie sits with his eyes closed. He does not hear or see Princesa.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Princesa sees Elena turn her car into the driveway. She pounces against the screen-door. The small rip widens. Princesa tears through the screen. Scratching her sides, Princesa squeezes her body through the hole in the screening.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Princesa flies to Friskie. Elena's car comes closer and closer.

ON TIRE

almost over the startled kitten! Princesa grabs Friskie in her mouth and springs away from the tire.

The tire runs over one of Princesa's toes. Princesa drops the frightened kitten. She cries tears of joy. Friskie is safe! Princesa licks the injured toe. Ricardo tosses aside his garden tools; he runs to Princesa. O.S. sound of engine SHUTTING OFF. Elena struggles out of her car. She stares at Ricardo.

INT. KITCHEN

A little later. Ricardo bandages Princesa's foot.

RICARDO

You saved Friskie's life.

Princesa beams with pride. She lies still watching the bandage being wound around her back foot.

Ricardo wipes Princesa's scratches with a cotton ball and some alcohol.

Elena wrings her hands. Tears fill her eyes.

ELENA

So sorry. Please forgive me.

She pets Friskie.

RICARDO

They're okay. I'll help you with supper. It's okay.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ricardo and Elena eat Carnitas and steaming bowls of Pozole at the kitchen table.

Princesa and Friskie eat in special dishes on the

INT. KITCHEN - LATE

Princesa and Friskie grow drowsy.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM

Princesa dozes in her bed. Friskie sleeps in the chair nearby.

INT. PARLOR

Ricardo brings in his guitar. He sits on the sofa and sings a PUERTO RICAN FOLK SONG.

Elena listens with tears in her eyes.

INT. RICARDO'S BEDROOM

SOUND of Ricardo singing O.S. Princesa dreams her dream.

EXT. PRINCESA'S DREAM GARDEN - DAY

Sun brightens a garden bursting with yellow Marigolds.

Princesa runs on through soft grasses. She turns to see her best FRIEND, FRISKIE, a smiling gray and white KITTEN, jogging at her side.

Ahead, Princesa's CHIHUAHUA MAMA, MARIA, and her DACHSHUND, PAPA, BUTCH, lead the way. Princesa leaps for joy!

EXT. DOG PARK - DAY

It is the next day. Princesa, Friskie, and Ricardo enter the park. Princesa follows Ricardo at his heel.

Ricardo wears a Tiger's baseball uniform. Friskie leaps ahead to scramble up a tree. He creeps out on an overhanging branch.

WIDER VIEW

Owners and dogs play as usual over the park area. Dog training class goes on in far corner of park: Curtis Swann, David Holden, Marcella, pink poodle, Hilary, King Charles, Carmel, collie, Bill, pug, Salvador, and his German Shepherd. Jeff leaves the class and runs over with Sparkie.

Sparkie lies down, his eyes on Princesa. Princesa stands her ground.

Two Mastiffs and their owner walk by. Princesa growls and bares her teeth.

RICARDO

Stay, Princesa. Let them go.

Princesa stays. She lies down like a lion studying her "prey." Her tail moves slowly back and forth.

The Mastiffs' owner and his dogs turn and run in the opposite direction.

Ricardo smiles and pats Princesa. He gives her a treat and pours her a cup of water from a thermos.

Princesa drinks the water. As she drinks from the cup, Sparkie edges over to Princesa. He drops his tennis ball nearby.

Princesa picks up the tennis ball in her mouth. She trots over to Ricardo and drops the ball at his feet.

RICARDO

(continuing)

Another contest?

Ricardo throws the ball higher and farther than ever before. Princesa and Friskie race each other. Sparkie runs hard, but falls behind.

Princesa runs faster and faster, her eye on the ball.

ON BALL

arcing against blue sky. Princesa leaps high in the air. She catches the ball in her mouth!

Sound of O.S. CHEERS and APPLAUSE throughout the park.

WIDER VIEW

David, Curtis, and dog training class members applaud Princesa's spectacular catch.

The dogs bark. Jeff gives Ricardo a DOUBLE high five. Sparkie yips. Friskie watches from the tree branch overhead. Elena jogs over to Ricardo. Breathing hard, she stops, gasping for breath.

ELENA

Ricardo, look a surprise!

Ricardo turns to see Mama walking with Princesa's mama, Maria and papa, Butch.

Ricardo embraces her. He looks at her quizzically.

MAMA

I've managed to persuade
Princesa's parents to become part
of our family.

Princesa runs in circles round Maria and Butch. The dogs nearly knock Mama down. Elena beckons Alfonso, Rose, Enrique, and Julio to join them. The little boys laugh and try to pet all the dogs at once.

Ricardo runs on ahead and throws another long ball. All the dogs and Friskie run after it. But Princesa catches the ball again.

Gupta flies into the park with a larger MALE PARTNER, JUN and TWO BABY BUTTERFLIES in tow. She swoops toward Princesa.

Princesa rises on her back legs and waves at Gupta.

GUPTA

Roarrrrr!

Leaping and barking happily, Princesa leads her family toward the gate.

MARIA (V.O.)

I speak for Princesa. I am her
imaginary Mama, Maria --

PRINCESA (V.O.)

No, no more make-believe. I can
speak for myself. Now, at last, I
have my family, my real mama and
papa. My dream wish came true. And
I am not afraid of anything. For
I am PRINCESA!

FADE OUT.

The end

I thought... I would never see you. You will never run away again?

Princesa looks thoughtful. A beat. She licks his hand.

RICARDO

I know you will never, never run
away.

Ricardo gets to his feet. He bends to pick Princesa up. She
steps out of reach.

Surprised, Ricardo understands.