

ALWAYS

Written by

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INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Rocking gray dreads, iced up and elegant, the OLDER DESIREE DAWKINS (60's) ushers another younger Hispanic woman, DR. PEREZ (30's) into her elegant work space.

By their clothes, it's easy to see who is the wealthy artist and who's not. Desiree moves with grace, but there is a coldness to her. Massive jewelry and make-up can't hide it.

Dr. Perez, possesses penetrating eyes but an easy smile. A business card is handed to Desiree. It's put in a pocket.

OLDER DESIREE

Greetings Dr Perez. I've heard good things about your work. You sit here, I'll do my thing from the couch.

Perez has a seat in a plushy chair. A pink Stetson hat hangs near the desk in a place of prominence.

PEREZ

Shall I call you Desiree or Ms. Dawkins?

OLDER DESIREE

My first name is fine. Didn't matter what the other therapists called me. Shit didn't work.

Dr. Perez looks concerned and sad.

PEREZ

I'm sorry to hear that.

OLDER DESIREE

Wasted my damn money. I still have those ... Episodes that I mentioned. Don't know if you can help either.

PEREZ

I'll try my best. So it says here that I'm the ninth doctor you've seen?

OLDER DESIREE

Yup. Let's get started, if you don't mind. What do you know about me?

The doctor leans in with a comforting voice.

PEREZ

You are a powerhouse in the music industry now. One of the wealthiest. I loved your music when you were a performer. Such great songs.

OLDER DESIREE

Uh-huh. What else?

PEREZ

That's all I know. Why don't we start at the beginning?

A hefty breath is let out by the patient.

OLDER DESIREE

My life ain't no fairy tale. You ready?

PEREZ

Yes ma'am.

OLDER DESIREE

It was a pure hell of a childhood. I'm from Chicago. I sang to escape my circumstances. My step-father, that disgusting pig.

Her voice breaks a little after that statement.

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)

When I turned 18-years-old I left home and never looked back. He took advantage of me physically, sexually, and emotionally.

She pounds the side of the couch.

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)

I hated him. But it's okay. Funny how life works.

FADE TO BLACK.

INSERT - SOUNDS OF THE CITY (SIRENS, YELLING, BABIES, DOGS BARKING, BUSES RUMBLING, ETC.)

SUPER - SOUTH-SIDE CHICAGO 1978

INSERT - INTRO TO **[DIM LIT CITY]**, BEGINS.

FADE IN:

INSERT - SERIES OF SHOTS

Run down buildings, some boarded up.

Drug dealers on the corners.

Pollution from nearby factories.

Cops give dirty looks from patrol cars.

Garbage in front of cramped dwellings, piled high.

Black man getting arrested by police.

Long unemployment lines.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INSERT - INTRO ENDS AND THE MAIN PART OF THE [**DIM LIT CITY**]
SONG STARTS ...

EXT. OLD HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

Dilapidated and falling apart ... This is the facility used to build the future leaders. Potholes in parking lot, basketball court cracked, graffiti on walls, etc.

The song continues ...

INT. OLD HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

People of color, mostly African Americans, dressed for something special, try to find seats. Pride and hope is on the faces of parents. The lights dim and eyes turn towards the stage.

The song continues ...

INT. GRADUATION STAGE - DAY

Decorated in the school's colors, balloons, streamers and banners hang, celebrating the end of public education and introduction to adulthood.

YOUNG DESIREE (18) observes it all under her cap and gown. Her smile, bright with excitement. Her eyes hide a sadness few can see.

Younger Desiree seems more naïve and sensitive than her current gray-haired self.

Desiree watches a few classmates get their diplomas as family cheers them on.

She looks for her 'iffy' support system in the audience. Her STEP-DAD (50's). He is mean looking and balding. Seemingly drunk and absolutely disheveled. She turns away and looks embarrassed.

The principal calls her forward. On stage in her gown, she is heavily applauded by classmates and staff.

She's handed her diploma with a smile. Then two trophies are bestowed upon her she jumps for joy.

Desiree looks for her Step-dad. He's weaving in his chair, more interested in skirts that pass by.

The school photographer takes a pic with her in her glory as she hold the trophies. FLASH FROM CAMERA.

We see a blown up image of the pic. One trophy is for the **BEST VOCALIST**. The other is for the **BEST COMPOSER**. The name, DESIREE DAWKINS is etched onto the plate in front.

After the ceremony, friends hug her, heap sincere congratulations on her, but Step-dad seems angry about her praise and notoriety.

The song continues ...

INT. DANGEROUS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Still in grad robe, Desiree stands impatiently as her drunk Step-dad fumbles around to open the door.

Thuggish types cruise through the rundown hallway and look her up and down. Kids down the hall scream, couples argue and police sirens are heard outside.

Finally the locks are opened. He pushes Desiree through the door and she almost falls.

The song continues ...

INT. STEP DAD'S PROJECT APARTMENT - DAY

He angrily points around the squalor filled room. A mop is thrown to her.

STEP-DAD

Clean up this nasty kitchen, then
cook some food while I take a nap.
Tired of your foolishness.

He flops on a raggedy couch in the next room, surrounded by empty beer cans and general filth. From couch, he threatens menacingly ...

STEP-DAD (CONT'D)

And I mean ... Hurry up. Don't
make get the belt again.

With tears in her eyes, still in her grad robes, Desiree starts mopping the floor and tossing beer cans in the trash. She then starts into the mountain of dishes.

The words of the song speak of yearning for independence and not giving up, no matter how bleak it seems.

CHORUS

*So much going on ...
In this dim lit city ...
No more, I'm moving on ...
From this dim light city ...
So long ...
So long ...*

She looks into the refrigerator. Almost empty except for beer. Desiree takes out the last two eggs, a half eaten Spam can and puts bread in the toaster. As she cooks, her eyes lock onto her trophies. She smiles, proud of herself.

Moans and growls are heard from the couch as Step-dad rises from his Coors induced coma.

STEP-DAD

Stop stroking that ego and get
quicker with them pots and pans. I
mean now. I'm hungry.

So drunk, he hangs onto walls to get to the worn down table. He wobbles as he sits there, hammered. As she fixes his plate, Desiree feels his eyes on her.

She serves the plate of food to him and watches as he eats.

DESIREE

Enjoy that. It's that last food
you'll ever get from me. I said I
was leaving and I meant it.

Desiree whips off her graduation robe and slams it to the floor. Her limit - reached.

STEP-DAD
(mouth full)
The hell you are.

DESIREE
After what you've done to me?
Watch me.

She grabs her jacket and suitcase, hidden by the door. Seated, Step-dad finds it hard to get up from the chair. By the time he does, she's out the door.

As he tries to run after her, but he trips on her robe. BOOM. He falls hard to the floor.

His head crashes against a six pack of beer cans in the corner. Frothy beer spews into the air, mixed with blood, as a puddle of both form around his body.

The song ends.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Older Desiree shows no remorse on the couch.

PEREZ
How traumatizing to live with that.
Drastic measures. I understand.
And how did that make you feel?

OLDER DESIREE
Incredibly good. Freedom. Such
confidence now. I spit on his
grave and took off.

PEREZ
I see. And where did you go?

OLDER DESIREE
I had, about \$200 and moved my ass
to New York City. If something was
gonna happen for me as a singer, it
would happen there.

SUPER - SUMMER, 1978, NYC

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Bright lights, fancy cars and tall buildings mesmerize Desiree as she strolls down the sidewalk.

She spots the latest fashions and a diverse crowd that includes punkers, disco queens and drug dealers.

DESIREE (V.O.)

Wow. Look at all this. If you are gonna make it, you gotta be tough. Show 'em that you ain't scared.

Desiree is in awe as she strolls up to the legendary STUDIO 54. Fancy dressers go inside. Her clothes are not on that level, so she stands outside, listening to the music.

She hums to a melody. A handsome young man, CALVIN MORA, (20's), pencil moustache, stands near her and listens to her hum. His aura projects that he's connected to the scene.

CALVIN

(slight Dominican accent)
If you can sing anything like you hum -- girl, you are going places.
Hi, my name is Calvin.

DESIREE

What do you know about singing,
pretty boy?

He lights a cigarette. Tries a seductive glare.

CALVIN

I'm one of the DJs here. I think I know what I'm talking about. Open up them pipes, Mami. Let's see what you got. If you ain't scared.

DESIREE

Folks that been through hell ain't scared of shit. Blow that stink smoke somewhere else so I don't gag, senor.

He laughs but follows her directions. Desiree starts singing to a popular song that plays from inside the club.

Calvin seems skeptical at first, but her voice is strong and soulful. His jaw drops. A crowd starts to gather around her. He studies her as she sings. When done, he applauds, as do others on the street.

CALVIN

So you're the real thing, huh?

DESIREE

You bet your ass I am. All I need is a chance to prove it.

CALVIN

You got a name?

DESIREE

Naw. I been living all these years
without a name.

That cracks him up.

CALVIN

Feisty huh? You from Bronx? Bed
Stuy?

DESIREE

Chi town. We eat feisty for
breakfast. And my name is
Desiree.

He smiles. They two walk away together.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Perez takes down notes, then looks up.

PEREZ

Did he become a love interest?

OLDER DESIREE

Yeah, I fell for his bullshit, and
hard. Promised to help me and gave
me a place to stay.

INT. CALVIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Calvin in bed, shirtless and Desiree is in a nighty, standing
nearby, admiring him as he smiles back. They romantically
kiss, then she sings [**THINGS YOU DO TO ME**].

Desiree oozes with sensuality for the first man she gave
herself to, willingly.

The small bedroom, slightly unkept, cannot contain her
expressions of love as she spins and twirls. Overcome.

ANIMATION

Bright red hearts seem to emit from her chest as she glows.

They flow like a river towards Calvin who grins and enjoys
the moment fully.

On his side, watching her, he blows a kiss. It turns into a huge heart that floats to her like a balloon.

END OF ANIMATION

Desiree opens the curtain and the bright morning light floods the room with sunshine.

Calvin rubs the pillow next to him as she watches.

FLASHBACK

Under the sheets at night. Hot kissing.

END OF FLASHBACK

She slips behind a dressing partition with Asian designs on the front.

Desiree, still singing, peeks around the decorative partition as she changes clothes.

Finally fully changed, she comes into full view to Calvin in a modest dress.

She grabs his clothes from a closet and tosses them to him. He winks back to her.

Desiree prances over to the bedroom door and opens it. A bright light shines back. The music continues to ...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LATE 70'S RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

... A sound booth. Huge headphones are handed to Desiree and she sings into the mic like she's recording this track.

The booth is a glass enclosure. Desiree sings her heart out as others look on amazed.

She looks over to the control room. Calvin is there, in business clothes.

Back-up singers in street clothes are in the sound booth next to Desiree.

Their combined voices bring power to this song that celebrates love.

Calvin hovers over the sound board. He rocks to the captivating beat.

As the piece winds down, Calvin gives her a thumbs-up and a hi-five to the engineers who worked on it.

The song ends.

Desiree puts down her headphones runs into Calvin's arms. Her glow has a look that no camera could capture.

CALVIN

Now we got a demo to show around.
Know what that means, chica? Once
they here that voice, we're going
places, sugar.

DESIREE

Good places I hope. Seen enough
bad ones. Whatcha have in mind,
big boy?

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Older Desiree rolls her eyes and shakes head.

OLDER DESIREE

Damn, I remember that day like it
was last weekend. The first time,
in a real studio. I dunno. It
felt like I finally found my home.

PEREZ

Home? Expand on that.

A moment of silence follows.

OLDER DESIREE

Well. I guess I really don't know
what a real home is. What I grew
up in, was a death camp that I
escaped from.

PEREZ

Yeah, sounded horrible. Tell me
more about the studio experience.
How it felt.

With eyes closed, a grin appears on the older woman's face.

OLDER DESIREE

In the studio, I had that sense of
being fully alive. In the moment
and focused.

PEREZ

I see you glowing, just talking
about it.

OLDER DESIREE

The act of creation, sister.
Bringing something into existence
that were just thoughts and
vibrations.

PEREZ

And that gives you peace?

OLDER DESIREE

It's such an honor just to get that
song in your head. Then to record
it, so it is alive? Lasting long
after I'm gone to glory? So dope.

PEREZ

So you see it as a link to your
immortality?

See peers over at Perez and they lock eyes.

OLDER DESIREE

A link to God himself, baby girl.
That studio, that's MY church.
Ain't but one thing better than my
church.

PEREZ

What would that be?

OLDER DESIREE

Preaching to the flock, face to
face.

PEREZ

Tell me more.

OLDER DESIREE

Well ... It's like this ...

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

A Lavish Lounge comes into view. Customers in suits and
stylish gowns sip martinis in front of an elaborate stage.

Desiree struts with confidence to the mic but is taken back by the immediate applause.

From the side of the stage, Calvin smiles and winks at her. The lights dim. Desiree moves sensually as the intro plays. Then she launches into the love song [**ALWAYS**].

As her breathy vocals start, she turns her head and she is sporting a flower in her hair, ala Billie Holiday.

Desiree turns to the side as the passionate song unfolds and sees her man, Calvin, grinning back at her.

Dimly lit, several patrons smoke cigarettes. The smoke waifs through the colored lights.

Calvin's attention is drawn to a handsome waiter as he strolls by. They exchange smiles.

Cocktail waitresses maneuver through the well-dressed crowd with drinks on their trays. Desiree's eyes follow one to a far corner.

A mysterious woman is served as her entourage sits close by. The woman wears a large hat. Desiree can see her outline but not much else.

As Desiree continues her show, one could not believe that this was her first performance in such a venue.

She looks to the side to see Calvin's reaction as the rhythm of the song, picks up the pace to a more dance worthy tune.

He is not paying attention to her. She sees him whisper in the ear of a younger man, then they both giggle.

People at the bar are doing a little boogie to the bubbly beat. The bartender shakes a mixed drink filled with ice to the percussion in the song.

Desiree spots the woman in the hat, rocking side to side and clapping her hands with the beat.

She looks over at Calvin again. He is still giggling with the same young man. Now Desiree sees that his new friend is wearing painted nails.

More people are getting up to dance. The lady in the hat cannot be seen from stage any longer.

Calvin misses it all. He now stands so close to the young man that they could kiss.

In the front row is a couple who seem to be deeply in love. They toast to each other, then kiss.

Desiree sings the lyrics ...

DESIREE
(sung)
*I need you with me ...
Right now ...*

The vocalist turns to see the love of her life and inspiration for the song. She notices him leaving with the younger man.

Desiree turns away and puts her full essence into the vocals, totally giving the room her best energy.

Still slightly obscured, Desiree notices the lady in the hat slip a business card to a waitress and whisper to her.

Calvin returns to his position. He seems to wipe his nose often. White crystals don't come off easy. He seems distracted and fidgety.

The upscale patrons give her a standing ovation at the song's end. She bows graciously.

Calvin doesn't even look over in her direction. She looks hurt for second, then returns to the moment.

Now headed backstage, a waitress brings her a business card. The name, JOSEPHINE DIXON, is printed. Handwritten on the back are the words, COME SEE ME.

Desiree looks into the crowd. The audience is still standing at it's hard to see in the darkness, but a Black woman in a Fedora that matches her outfit waves to her.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Older Desiree sits up and sips water.

PEREZ
Your first live performance. What feelings did it generate?

OLDER DESIREE
One of the most important nights of my life and I appreciated every minute. The feedback aspect, wow. I knew this was my shit, for real.

PEREZ

Many people live their entire lives
without ever having that feeling.
Is this when you saw it as your
life work?

OLDER DESIREE

Absolutely.

PEREZ

So preaching to your flock brought
you peace?

Stretching back out on the couch, she closes her eyes.

OLDER DESIREE

Momentarily. Yeah, I did. I still
ain't found that long lasting peace
yet. That's why I'm up in your
face.

PEREZ

It's a process. But go ahead,
finish your thought.

OLDER DESIREE

The things I always wanted were
falling into place. At the same
time, I started to suspect that,
Calvin ... Who I truly loved ...

Hesitation causes Perez to take notice. Moisture forms in
corner of her patient's eyes.

PEREZ

Yes. Let it out.

OLDER DESIREE

The first man I respected. Truly
felt such gratitude to. He ... I
began to see things. Nothing
certain, but signs were there.

PEREZ

Signs of what?

OLDER DESIREE

That ... Well. It's silly, I still
feel embarrassed about it, but it
wasn't anything I did. He just
preferred to be with other men.

PEREZ

I see. That can be a shocker. No shame on your side, or his for that matter. How did you react?

She runs her fingers through gray dreads.

OLDER DESIREE

Roller coaster of emotions.
Especially when we got involved
with the New York club scene.

Sadness creeps onto her face.

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)

As we got deeper, I'd see him
flirting with guys more and more.
I brushed it off.

PEREZ

You ignored the reality you had
suspected?

OLDER DESIREE

I was a fine, sexy, young thing
back then. How could anyone turn
that sweet stuff down? And for
another man? Please.

PEREZ

One should always pay heed to the
inner voice. It comes from a place
that loves you.

OLDER DESIREE

Took me a while to learn that. I
guess I was naïve. But I sure got
educated quick.

PEREZ

What kind of education?

EXT. CALVIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Strolling towards a door, Desiree sports sexy dress and a big smile. Billboard magazine in her hand.

DESIREE

Billboard. I finally made it.
Starting the Eighties off in the
right way. Get ready to party,
pretty boy.

She stops outside the door and puts on lipstick.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
 Red Lobster, baby And since mamma
 got money now. I'm paying.

INT. CALVIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She unlocks the door and goes into a dark room, but she hears noises. Desiree flicks on the lights.

Calvin and another man cover themselves with sheets and look startled.

CALVIN
 Uh, it's not how it looks. He was
 just leaving.

Tears form in Desiree's eyes. Hurt, her lips tremble.

DESIREE
 No. Don't leave. I'll leave.
 I'll be back for my shit tomorrow.

CALVIN
 But ... But you don't understand.

DESIREE
 Baby, not only do I understand, I
 OVERSTAND. It's time to move on.
 Sorry to see it end.

They exchange a look that says it all.

CALVIN
 I'm sorry too.

The intro to, **[I JUST CAN'T TAKE IT]**, begins. The two stare at each other, knowing it's over and mourning the loss.

Desiree, both shocked and hurt, starts singing ...

DESIREE
 (sung)
*Here we are ...
 You and me ...
 It's been a long time ...
 We never even talk no more ...*

*Here we are ...
 Face to face ...
 Our feelings changed ...
 (MORE)*

DESIREE (CONT'D)
*It's not the same ...
Who we fooling?*

Sobbing, Desiree goes back out the door.

EXT. CALVIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The music continues. She stops and looks at the dark skies above. The moon and stars can barely be seen through the ominous clouds.

Deep heart-break can be heard in her voice as she sings to the heavens above.

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

Meeting him outside of STUDIO 54

Passionate kissing in his bedroom

Recording her demo

Performing at the luxury venue as he smile from the side of the stage.

END OF FLASHBACK

She walks farther away from the door and reaches the sidewalk.

Now dressed, Calvin comes outside the door and stands on the steps, looking sad.

Desiree spins around to face him, and sings ...

DESIREE
(sung)
*Here we are ...
It's a shame ...
We know it's wrong ...
Our love is gone ...
No more pretending ...*

*Here we are ...
Our love is through ...
No more you or me ...
Me and you ...
Lets go our own way.*

They both look as sad as sad can be. Calvin hangs his head, then turns and goes back inside.

As she continues the song, facing the door ... Rain starts to fall, lightly.

The foreboding sky and wet surroundings adds to the feeling of desolation and abandonment.

Pouring her heart out into the lyrics, she makes her way down the street, occasionally looking back to the apartment.

The song ends. She is standing in front of Red Lobster ... Alone and wounded. In the rain.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Perez hands her Kleenex to catch the tears. They are dabbed away.

PEREZ
That sounds like it a difficult time for you. Quite an indelible impression. How did you handle it?

OLDER DESIREE
He was the first man I gave my body willingly to. Talk about a feeling of rejection. I felt ugly.

PEREZ
Is that still a concern?

OLDER DESIREE
No, I understand the gender thing more now, but then, wow.

PEREZ
How did you cope?

A chuckle escapes from the patient.

OLDER DESIREE
I didn't trust men to begin with. This thing with Calvin didn't help. Screw romance. I was out for the green. Feel me?

PEREZ
Did you lose yourself in your work after that?

OLDER DESIREE
I did for a while, then the whole disco thing started to fizzle out.
(beat)
(MORE)

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)
In Chicago, they had that stupid
Disco Demolition where folks,
scared of Blacks and gays, burned
disco records at a stadium.

PEREZ
How horrible.

OLDER DESIREE
Except for the power of karma.
(beat)
Chicago later gave birth to House
music - which is dance music. It
attracted the same audience they
hated. Ha.
(slight chuckle)
I knew I had to keep up with the
shifting tide, but how?

INT. JOSEPHINE'S HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A door stands in front of Desiree. She takes a deep breath and enters.

Three women sit near each other in a office with colorful walls. Two are dressed ordinary, but the third rocks an extravagant outfit with matching, wide-brim hat.

JOSEPHINE DIXON, (30's), looks like she don't mess around. Never did, never will. She stands, turns and faces Desiree.

JOSEPHINE
Welcome to our headquarters. My
name is Josephine Dixon and I run
this record label.

DESIREE
Looks like you do good for
yourself.

JOSEPHINE
Wanna do better. Disco is dying but
good R&B singers like you will
always be in fashion. You rocked
the lounge last week.

DESIREE
Well thank you. It's what I do.

JOSEPHINE
Tell you what. I'll offer you a
contract, right now.

DESIREE
Seriously?

Excitement causes her to jump around, giddy.

JOSEPHINE
I'll warn you right now. I do not, in any way, take shit from anybody. I want to make that crystal clear. And likewise, never ever cross me.

DESIREE
I got ya.

JOSEPHINE
Can you handle that?

DESIREE
Miss Josephine, thank you so much. I need a new start. You won't be sorry. I promise.

JOSEPHINE
Be back here, noon tomorrow. Sign some papers, get to know each other, then work on getting you where your career needs to be.
Sound good?

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

A big smile shines forth as she relives the moment.

OLDER DESIREE
Sound good? That sounded great. Exactly what I needed. And to work with a powerful woman in an industry that is known for chewing women up. Hell yeah.

PEREZ
Like a mentor?

OLDER DESIREE
Yes. Her company was already big when I joined. Made me think that one day, I could do that too.

PEREZ
Do what, exactly?

OLDER DESIREE

Help make people's dreams come true. I saw that we had similar personalities. A little of that street-wise vibe. It comes in handy sometimes.

PEREZ

And dangerous sometimes.

OLDER DESIREE

As I later found out. But I started to hang around the office as much as possible. Learning as much as I could.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The brightly painted office is posh and stylish. The banner for, LA JEFE RECORDS, is displayed prominently. Desiree sits at a desk, typing away.

Making a grand entrance is Josephine and her assistants. Her Jordache designed clothes have matching kicks. She looks over to Desiree disapprovingly.

JOSEPHINE

Desi, what you doing here so early? And why you wasting your time typing? We got folks for that. But great singers? They're in short supply.

DESIREE

I love singing. Don't get me wrong. But since I met you and see your success at building careers for people, I thought I should learn all I can.

JOSEPHINE

Is that right? Look at you.

DESIREE

If that's typing for you, running errands or cleaning the studio. I'm down to learn.

The Boss strides over to her and looks her up and down.

JOSEPHINE

Little mama, you remind me of my younger self. Ha, yeah, okay. I'll teach you some things.

DESIREE

Excellent, what's the first thing you'd want to lay on a sister?

JOSEPHINE

Be yourself. I'm part Cuban, so I do things the Miami way. I don't adapt to New York, they adapt to me. Comprende?

MICHAEL POTTER, (mid 20's), wearing a tie, short afro and about the same age as Desiree speeds towards Josephine with papers in his hands. He wears glasses and seems a bit on the nerd-ish side.

MICHEAL

Miss Josephine, we need these papers signed, right away.

He looks to the side as Desiree smiles to him. His eyes get big, jaw goes slack - as does his grip on the papers as they slide onto the floor. He seems not to notice, still entranced. Josephine rolls her eyes.

JOSEPHINE

Earth to Michael, come in please.

Shocked back to his senses, he looks at his boss, then realizes he's dropped his papers. He immediately bends down and starts scooping them up.

MICHEAL

I'm so sorry. I got it. Didn't sleep much last night.

JOSEPHINE

Dios mios. Sleepy, eh? Poor baby. Just put the papers on my desk. I'll sign them in a minute.

The papers are now gathered and he puts the stack on the desk. Embarrassed, he barely looks at either of them as he backs away and leaves the room.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

(strong Cuban accent))

I tink he liked-ed you.

She smiles at Desiree and her new employee tries to grin the compliment away.

DESIREE

Well, he is cute. What's he do around here?

JOSEPHINE

He's our attorney. Don't get excited and waste your time on him. He got disbarred in Ohio and is working on losing his New York license.

DESIREE

Damn, that's sad.

JOSEPHINE

I pay him less than other lawyers, so it works out for me. Lesson one in boss school, ... Always look for the bargains.

Desiree lets the words sink in.

DESIREE

What did he do? He looks so young.

Boss lady takes out a mirror and checks her make-up.

JOSEPHINE

Cooked the books and lied to the Feds about it. Lucky he's not doing time. Being sloppy, just like a minute ago.

DESIREE

Broken dreams. I know that road.

JOSEPHINE

Pay him no mind, I got more to teach you, little one.

Into the room struts TERRANCE, (20's). Lanky and athletic, he heads right towards Josephine.

TERRANCE

No more choreography for heavy metal bands for me. Too rude..

An overly dramatic finger snap follows.

JOSEPHINE

Sorry they treated you badly. I won't stand for it. I'll dump them, as soon as we get paid.

TERRANCE

Get that money first, sister. Yep, boot 'em. I'm done wasting my talents on them Neanderthals.

He turns to see Desiree smiling.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

Oh my, a new girl? Who dis?

She stands to her feet and extends a handshake.

DESIREE

I'm Desiree, a singer. Glad to meet you. Hope to work with you soon.

They shake, Terrance smiles.

TERRANCE

Oh, I like this one. I'm kinda new here too.

JOSEPHINE

You both joined us just in time. We're gonna relocate the whole operation - to Los Angeles.

Desiree leans in like she didn't hear that straight.

DESIREE

You, me ... Hollywood? You serious?

JOSEPHINE

Tired of this snow, mijia. At least the kind that falls from the sky.

TERRANCE

Cal-Califor--

He faints away, dramatically, ... Like an actress from the 1930s. The ladies laugh.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Perez watches her as she toys with her necklace, nervously.

OLDER DESIREE
I should've just stayed in New
York, I guess.

PEREZ
Why? Sounds like you were excited
to see California.

OLDER DESIREE
That was before I lived through
mudslides, wildfires, gang wars -
and them earthquakes. Scared me so
much I actually pissed myself.

PEREZ
Oh no. How embarrassing.

OLDER DESIREE
Walked around with a jacket around
my waist till I could go change.

PEREZ
Oh, I see. Uh. Alright. Mostly
the natural disasters that freaked
you out?

OLDER DESIREE
No, not really. It all was fun at
first. Then ... Shit happened.

EXT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The bright California sun illuminates the pastel colored door. Desiree, Terrance, Michael along with Josephine and her crew of assistants congregate at the entrance of the building.

Josephine takes time to look each individual in the eye, as she says ...

JOSEPHINE
Alright. You ready?

They all nod back smiling, the excitement of seeing the new digs is tangible.

The keys are taken out and fumbled with until Josephine finds the right one. She turns the knob and they saunter inside.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

After just a few steps, her tribe comes to a halt to look around. Eyes wide, they see an opulent version of the Havana-Miami atmosphere from inside their boss's head. It's hot.

TERRANCE

Well, girlfriend, look at you.

JOSEPHINE

Whatcha think?

DESIREE

I think you set yourself up to kick ass all up and down the boulevard.

The others nod in agreement as a bad case of 'the grins' overtakes them.

TERRANCE

After we get set up, let's have an open house. Let them see what we got going on here, baby.

JOSEPHINE

Yeah, put them on notice.

EXT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Luxury cars park outside in front of the building. The shindig lights up the industrial park it's situated in.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

The open house is in full swing. Several colorful banners announcing LA JEFE RECORDS are seen, as are lots of celeb types. The home-team is dressed to kill.

Desiree is pulled to the side by Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

Follow me.

INT. BACK OFFICE - NIGHT

They go to a side room. At first Desiree sees discarded fast food wrappers, then her eyes land on four African American young men who seem under 21, but not teens.

They smile back at her but she looks confused. Josephine grins as she herds them together.

JOSEPHINE

Desi, I want to introduce you to
... THE JULY KNIGHTS. I just felt
the need for a male vocalist band
and these young men are that, plus
some.

Desiree looks over the attractive young men and grins.

DESIREE

I'm impressed already. Very
photogenic.

JOSEPHINE

Damn straight. Hot like July,
right? We need to generate some
songs for these fellas that really
showcase their talents.

DESIREE

I agree. What can I do?

Josephine puts her arm over her disciple's shoulder and
directs her attention to the up and comers.

JOSEPHINE

They made a demo. I want you to
produce it.

DESIREE

You what?

JOSEPHINE

The demo is kinda raw. Need you
help pull the music side together
and Terrance will do the stage
stuff. You interested?

Desiree beams and almost cries.

DESIREE

Very.

JOSEPHINE

Excellent. We'll get started this
week. I'll call our driver to take
you future stars home before this
party gets wilder.

DESIREE

You guys can call me, Desiree.
Believe me, you'll be in good
hands. Hope you are as excited as
I am.

They smile and nod back pleasantly.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS, FOYER - NIGHT

The guests who are dressed to impress, sip champagne and cordially chit-chat as Josephine and Desiree mingle. Some appear to be rappers, but respect the decorum.

Desiree is concerned when she spots Josephine go into a side room with a guy who looks like a street thug. She follows.

She peeks into the room and sees her exchange large envelopes with him.

Just then, VICTOR PERRI (50's), salt and pepper hair, impeccably dressed, approaches Desiree.

VICTOR

I know you. I'm making you a star.

DESIREE

Excuse me?

At the same time, Josephine and MACK JOHNS (20's), her most troublesome client, exit the room. His outfit boarders on Sci-Fi as he tries to project a street-tough aura.

Josephine goes to Desiree but Mack keeps walking. Big grin.

JOSEPHINE

I've seen you've met our super promo guy, Victor. He's the reason your shit will dominate on Billboard again.

Desiree brightens up, shakes his hand.

DESIREE

Glad to meet you. I'm thought you were trying to hit on me.

VICTOR

I like my wine to mature a little bit more. Miss Boss Lady here is more in my range.

JOSEPHINE

Stop fishing for a hand-job and step in here a minute.

(to Desiree)

I'll be right back.

A nod frees Josephine to do her business. They enter, but as Desiree shifts position, she can see their reflection in another window.

Josephine dumps the contents of the large envelope out. Small bags and vials of white powder are seen.

Desiree seems heart broken at the sight. Josephine and Victor split up the pile.

DESIREE
I hate cocaine. Damn.

A commotion diverts her eyes to the catered food table. Mack Johns acts menacing to guests. Desiree even spots him try to sell drugs to other party-goers. She goes to Terrance.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
Who is this fool near the food table?

TERRANCE
That's Mack Johns. That guy's out of control. Josephine was thinking of dropping him from the label.

Terrance happens to make eye contact with Mack as he talks to Desiree and the hot-headed pop star takes offense.

Short but imposing, the tough guy makes a beeline towards Terrance.

MACK
Did I give your bitch ass permission to look at me?

Terrance looks away and backs up. Mack is already in his face.

MACK (CONT'D)
I asked you a question, sissy.

Loud and threatening, all eyes turn in their direction. Desiree burns with rage. She steps in between them, in her friend's defense.

DESIREE
Stop it! Enough. We don't put up with that kinda talk here.

MACK
Who you? This queer's momma?

DESIREE

At least he acts like he got a momma. That tough guy shit don't play here. Get right, or get out.

The small gangster sizes her up with a threatening stare.

MACK

You best find your place, bitch. I'll pimp slap your ass up and have you hoeing for me before the sun comes up.

DESIREE

Ain't nobody scared of you, half pint.

MACK

Well, I guess it's time I teach you to be scared.

Mack takes a swing. Just before contact, his hand is grabbed and twisted in back of him.

Josephine is fierce as she detains the bully, effortlessly.

JOSEPHINE

Pull that shit, in my house? You better back the fuck up.

In her other hand, a small pistol points at Mack strategically so only the intruder see it. The security detail of big bruisers arrives, ready to crush.

TERRANCE

Oh look. A girl is whupping a big bully. Maybe deep down, he's just a big sissy.

JOSEPHINE

I should have known better than to bring your uncivilized ass in here.

MACK

You done fucked up now, bitch.

In a threatening, deep, low tone - she expresses what he already knows to be true. Inches from his ear.

JOSEPHINE

I can and will deep-six your ass. You won't be the first. Are we understood?

MACK
Get your hands off me.

She slams him against the nearest wall then twists his arm harder and makes him stand tippy-toed so the bones don't go beyond the breaking point.

JOSEPHINE
I been a real gangster while you
were still in the nut-sack, loco.
I'll send you away, Cubano style.
No trace. No charges.

Sweating and humiliated, Mack Johns relents.

MACK
Fine. I understand. Shit.

She surrenders him to the security detail and they escort him away. All guests clap for the 'Killa Queen' as the thug is taken out of sight.

EXT. JOSEPHINE'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Already seated, Desiree watches Josephine stumble into the car, inebriated.

DESIREE
Sure you can drive, Jo? Looking
tipsy there.

JOSEPHINE
Right, good idea. I could use a
bump.

She digs in her purse and pulls out two vials. One is handed to Desiree.

DESIREE
I really don't--

JOSEPHINE
Compliments of the house. Join me?

Josephine pours out a little on the side of her hand. Snorts it up.

DESIREE
That stuff was all over STUDIO 54.
Never interested me.

JOSEPHINE
Right, but this is Hollywood.

DESIREE
Okay, maybe a little.

After Desiree snorts it, she pinches her nostrils.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
Yaa, it burns.

Josephine takes the top down on the convertible.

JOSEPHINE
Top of the line stuff. Now enjoy.

They take off, Desiree is wide eyed as they pull away.

SERIES OF SHOTS

1. Sight seeing Los Angeles landmarks in Josephine's convertible.
2. Lunch at fancy cafe, Followed by white lines in the car
3. Get nails done at spa, more white lines.
4. Shopping at the classiest stores.

INT. SAKS FIFTH AVENUE - DAY

The women come out of the dressing room at the same time. They wear tight, pink leather - matching outfits that are pants and jacket.

JOSEPHINE
That's what I'm talking about.
Let's buy 'em. And wear it home.

DESIREE
No argument here.

They slowly stroll to the counter as they look at the latest 80's fashions.

JOSEPHINE
I bought a pink holster the other day. Talk about accessories.
Wonder where I can find pink bullets.

DESIREE
You comfortable to carry?

JOSEPHINE
In this town of cut-throats? That
was a joke right?

DESIREE
After the thing with Mini Mack last
night, let's just say I'm more
curious about it.

Josephine puts a comforting hand on her shoulder.

JOSEPHINE
No-no. No apologies about looking
into something that might save your
own damn life.

DESIREE
I guess you're right.

JOSEPHINE
You guess? Shit. There's a
serious need for a girl to be ready
to defend herself at any moment.
Be ready for anything.

DESIREE
That's how I wanna roll.

Josephine hands her a Stetson style pink hat and she puts it on. Her boss gives a thumbs up.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
Women, with all these perverts
around, should get a shotgun in
high school.

Desiree nods in agreement.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
I sure could have used one back
then. Step-dad. He abused me.
Fucking pig, I felt so helpless.

This news hits Josephine to the core and is seen on her face. Anger sweeps her.

JOSEPHINE
Where is his bitch ass? We'll
drive to any city and lift any rock
that snake is under.

DESIREE
Jo--

JOSEPHINE

Just bought a shiny new shotgun
especially for sick fuckers like
that. Light his nasty ass up.

Other shoppers glance over at the irate pink flamingo.

DESIREE

Stand down, big sister.

(whispers)

He somehow, mysteriously died just
before I left Chicago. Just ...
One of them things.

Josephine reads her eyes, then cocks her head to the side for
a deeper study. A smile slowly forms.

JOSEPHINE

Yeah, you the one, sweetness. I
was ready to put a hot rock in his
skull and shit on his grave.

Now at the counter, the clerk looks horrified at the
conversation. Josephine snatches a pink cowboy hat and puts
it on the pile of other items.

DESIREE

I don't know what you are talking
about.

Desiree winks back and looks away in a half smile.

JOSEPHINE

Hope you are up for one more stop.

EXT. REYNALDO'S ROUNDS AND MORE - DAY

The convertible parks in front of the stand alone building.
Situated in the rural desert foothills, it seems isolated but
the parking lot is almost full.

Draped in pink, they emerge from their car and mosey towards
the entrance as they rub white powder from their nose.

DESIREE

I guess lots of people had a run-in
with Mack Johns last night.

JOSEPHINE

Could be. Thugs like him are
becoming a pandemic. But you saw
how the cure worked last night.

DESIREE
Yes ma'am. And just in time.

INT. REYNALDO'S ROUNDS AND MORE - DAY

Blacks and Latinos customers mill around looking at the hardware. They represent all levels of the social strata.

Desiree is captivated by the various versions of cold steel. The larger caliber guns draw her attention.

JOSEPHINE
So yeah, we're here to strap you up, girl. You ready?

DESIREE
Been too long without one already. How old were you when you got your first gun?

She ponders it for a moment.

JOSEPHINE
Legally?

The answer catches Desiree off guard.

DESIREE
Damn. Okay. Either way.

JOSEPHINE
About fifteen? Around there. In the countryside, we had a doctor who was like your step-dad.

DESIREE
Oh no.

JOSEPHINE
Once the adults finally believed the kids, they pulled him out of bed one night. The children he touched, got to shoot him first.

DESIREE
Wow. Cuban justice. At least you got some payback. Settled the score. Helped you heal.

JOSEPHINE
Did it? Not sure if you can ever quite heal.

Desiree gives a comforting hug.

DESIREE
I know what you mean.

EXT. SHOOTING RANGE - DAY

Decked out in pink outfits and wearing western hats, in contrast to the bright western skies, is a powerful imagery.

JOSEPHINE
See those cans over there? Line up the sights on top of the gun. Then squeeze.

Boom. A can that has been through this before goes flying. They both grin.

DESIREE
You got it.

She tries to mimic what her boss just did.

JOSEPHINE
Use both hands and exhale as you pull the trigger.

Desiree's hand shakes a little but it's not too far off the target. Josephine smiles like a boxing coach.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)
Again.

The next shot lands just in front of the can.

DESIREE
So close.

JOSEPHINE
Mira, focus your energy at the target. Block the world out and make sure the technique is the only thing in your head.

Desiree nods back. The trigger is squeezed during the exhale. The can spins and falls to the side. Desiree's eyes celebrate first.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)
Good, before you get all happy, do it again. Remember technique.

Two cans scatter as two more rounds are launched.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Now you can celebrate. Hey, watch this and learn.

On her belly, she cocks her head to the side and blasts round after round, hitting targets at various angles and distances. The gun runs out of ammo.

Desiree turns to see the empty gun. Horror spreads across her face as she sees another sight. A rattlesnake is approaching the ankle of the unsuspecting Josephine.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Shit, I got to reload.

DESIREE

Don't move. Please. Oh, Jesus.

Josephine obeys but studies the expression of her friend.

JOSEPHINE

You look shook. Talk to me.

DESIREE

Ra-rattlesnake. Right ankle.

Josephine closes her eyes and exhales deeply.

JOSEPHINE

Stay calm. Deep breaths. They sense fear. My life depends on it.

DESIREE

Okay, okay.

JOSEPHINE

He'd get me before I can reload.
You gotta take the shot.

A new level of horror erupts though Desiree's eyes.

DESIREE

No, I can't.

JOSEPHINE

You can and you will. Remember what I told you and stay calm, focused.

DESIREE

No, please. I'll get Reynaldo and--

JOSEPHINE

No time for that. How far away?

DESIREE
About 9 inches.

JOSEPHINE
Striking range. Count it down so I
can roll away. Technique, focus,
breathing. Let's go!

DESIREE
But I--

JOSEPHINE
You gonna let me die in this bitch?
I thought Chicago bitches was rock
solid warriors. Represent!

Desiree looks to the heavens for help. Sweat is swiped away from Desiree's forehead. She takes a bead at the viper.

DESIREE
Ready. Three ...

Josephine closes her eyes.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
Two ...

Desiree clenches her jaw.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
One.

Boom, boom. Josephine rolls towards her like a log in an avalanche. They glance at her ankle, no snake, no fang marks, no blood.

JOSEPHINE
Dig you get him?

DESIREE
Not sure.

Josephine springs to her feet and they both look around.

JOSEPHINE
Thank you by the way. Knew you
could do it. I'd go to battle with
you any time, any day.

She points near a tumbleweed. The bleeding serpent is spotted, injured but alive. With lightning quick speed, Josephine reloads, then points the barrel at its head.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)
That?

BOOM BOOM BOOM.

Gunsmoke clears to show a mangled rattler.

EXT. REYNALDO'S ROUNDS AND MORE - DAY

Now near the car, Josephine gently grabs her and administers a massive hug.

JOSEPHINE
Saved my life today. I owe you.

DESIREE
You don't owe me any--

JOSEPHINE
Look. That's the way it is. Now get in. I need a drink. How about you?

Desiree tips her Stetson at her.

DESIREE
Let's ride, hombre.

Josephine looks at her funny. Desiree slips on her shades, oblivious.

JOSEPHINE
You need to work on your Spanish, senorita. Buckle up.

They back out of the parking spot and zoom down the desert highway.

EXT. POOLSIDE - DAY

Desiree, Terrance and Josephine sit, sipping drinks, in the sun. They wear summer clothes and shades.

JOSEPHINE
I heard the demo of the new song you wrote. Love it, Desi.

Slightly surprised.

DESIREE
Oh. Thank you.

JOSEPHINE

I want you and Terrance to rehearse
and create a routine for it. I
already booked you for a live debut
of it.

DESIREE

A debut? Already? Where?

JOSEPHINE

The JULY GUYS will open for you.
Venice Beach, baby.

Shock is on Desiree's face as Terrance applauds lightly and smiles.

Michael walks up carrying papers. Again, when he lays eyes on Desiree, he drops the documents on the ground.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Loco, I swear. Bring it in a
wheelbarrow next time.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

The doctor tries to hold back a laugh.

PEREZ

Was this your first outdoor gig?

OLDER DESIREE

Also my first time performing in
swim wear. Got to make sure your
'who-ha' ain't showing.

Perez and the patient have girl laugh together.

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)

Yep. Shaved that bad boy just in
case it did. Wanted it looking
delicious.

PEREZ

Delicious? Okay.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

Desiree and Terrance's three dancers take their places and look ready to go. They all wear sweat-suits. Terrance sports a pink top and camo shorts and stands on the side.

TERRANCE
From the top, ladies. Cue the
music ...

Desiree joins the dancers to work out the steps for the song,
[SO REAL].

All four dance in unison under Terrance's watchful eye.
Desiree looks comfortable with exposing this new talent.

He instructs his dancers with hand motions as they perform to
the beat.

Desiree steps to the mic and lets loose. She has a big smile
as she belts it out.

The moves she does as she sings are also choreographed to
match the dancers.

Terrance has his eye on the footwork and occasionally shadows
their movements, coaching them non-verbally.

The full-length, wall mirror shows their reflection and
Desiree looks over to see herself now and then.

With an imaginary audience in front of her, Desiree flirts
with the invisible fans.

The happy lyrics bring a natural smile to Desiree's face.

Josephine, semi-hidden in the corner, nods approving of the
rehearsal efforts.

As Desiree hits the stanza ...

DESIREE
(sung)
And my feelings are real.

... She holds the note and points to a bright spotlight
overhead.

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

Under a bright sun that makes the spotlight, look like a
speck, Desiree and the dancers continue the song.

They are now in beachwear. Desiree rocks a pink and red,
two-piece with a thin sash around her waist.

New to the act - a full band. Back-up singers join in the chorus and add depth to Desiree's impact.

The Venice Beach concert stage is surrounded by onlookers - soon to be fans. Some are dressed for swimming, others not.

Terrance? Definitely not. He wears a yachtsman's outfit complete with ascot and captain's hat. He looks on proudly as his choreography is executed perfectly.

They do the song and the dance moves with grace, in front of the local beach crowd.

The steady ocean breeze flutters outfits and tosses hair.

Sandy toes on the beach bounce to the catchy tune. Colorful beach balls bounce through the air.

No longer an imaginary audience, Desiree flirts with the cute guys in the front row and they flirt back.

Josephine is in the crowd and the pride overwhelms her as she wipes away a tear of happiness.

Desiree gets the entertained crowd to sing the chorus with her ...

CROWD

So Real ... So Real ... So Real ...

After the song concludes, the beach goers applaud enthusiastically for their special treat.

Josephine goes to her. They greet and hug.

JOSEPHINE

Girl, I'm so proud of you. You're a star and you proved it just now.

Josephine directs them to a large parasol umbrella she has set up for her crew. After they sit, a tiny spoon with white powder is shared with Desiree.

DESIREE

Thank you. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you both.

JOSEPHINE

Stop.

DESIREE

No I mean it. My mom died when I was young.

(MORE)

DESIREE (CONT'D)

Never had that female energy before, but you gave it to me. I truly love you. Even more than a mom.

They hug, then Desiree is kissed on the lips by Josephine. She's a bit shocked.

JOSEPHINE

What? You never kissed a girl before?

DESIREE

Naw. Never.

TERRANCE

Did you like it?

She pauses before answering.

DESIREE

Well, you know, it was kinda quick.

They share a passionate kiss. Then separate slowly.

JOSEPHINE

Let's celebrate ... Everything. You all did great today.

Josephine smacks her butt and they head out.

DESIREE

Hey.

JOSEPHINE

You loved it.

Desiree hesitates for a moment to watch Josephine from behind. She seems deep in thought, perhaps admiration.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Perez seems happy for Desiree.

PEREZ

So was she your L.A love connection?

Desiree looks up with sad eyes.

OLDER DESIREE

No. But yes. I know she loved me. Probably too much.

PEREZ

So what happened?

OLDER DESIREE

Broke my heart. But I should have seen it coming.

PEREZ

Get it off your chest. Let's talk about it.

INT. GLITZY NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Desiree and Josephine enter the neon lit establishment in their best gowns and iced up. All heads turn towards them as they parade to a reserved table with elegance.

DESIREE

Wow, what a place. Reminds me of Studio 54.

JOSEPHINE

This is way better than that rat-hole.

Taking a look around, several other guests smile at her. Then a curious look crosses her face.

DESIREE

Why ain't no men in here?

JOSEPHINE

We ladies need a place to hang without a swinging dick in our faces, right?

DESIREE

Oh, okay. Hey, they're playing the JULY GUYS song. Wow. You arranged this, huh?

JOSEPHINE

Your little, boy band is climbing the charts. A photo shoot next week with one of those teen heart-throb magazines too. Let's dance.

They go to the floor with champagne glasses full. As they feel the groove, the eye contact shows they also feel something else. Something primal. They tease each other as they dance.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clearly loopy, the two enter the bizarrely decorated place where Josephine ... SLEEPS?

Wildly adorned with red satin walls that match the bed, the sight makes Desiree raise her eyebrows.

JOSEPHINE

Some people have bedrooms. I have a BAD-room.

DESIREE

Uh yeah. No truer words.

Desiree scans the over-the-top bedroom and sees various toys and S&M stuff. She points to the dominatrix outfit on a mannequin and smiles in a way that asks for an explanation.

JOSEPHINE

I mostly just uses that on men and spoiled bitches that need direction. Let me change into some French shit. You'll love it.

After Josephine leaves, Desiree looks around more. She picks up a whip and gives it a test drive. SNAP. She giggles to herself, then puts it back.

Josephine comes out sparkling in a very sexy outfit. She does the runway moves as Desiree smiles.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Well?

DESIREE

Look good. Smell good.

JOSEPHINE

Taste good too. No pressure.

DESIREE

Ain't nobody holding a gun on me.

The host pours two drinks from the mini-bar. Plenty of ice. She gives one to Desiree and sits next to her. They do white lines off of a mirror till their noses hurt.

JOSEPHINE

I found a paradox that I haven't figured out yet.

DESIREE

Okay doctor Einstein, a new theory
of relativity?

Josephine rolls an ice cube in her mouth, then holds it in
her fingers.

JOSEPHINE

How can something so cold ... Be so
hot? Strange ain't it?

DESIREE

Hot? I don't get it.

Desiree studies her as she leans back on the couch. She
takes the ice and rubs down her neck. Her body shudders.
Soon it makes its way near the breast, leaving a trail.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

No shit. Hot, yeah, I follow.

The evening guest slowly takes the cold, 'cleavage-cube' and
puts it in her own mouth. Desiree slurps the melting chunk
as her juicy lips and tongue do a dance.

JOSEPHINE

You sure do. I think I want my ice
cube back.

Desiree winks at her.

DESIREE

Come and get it.

She sensually crawls up on Desiree and they enjoy a a blazing
hot kiss with frozen lips.

LATER

INT. JOSEPHINE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Desiree stumbles in with hair disheveled and now in a
borrowed red robe. She looks at herself in the mirror and
inspects her face. A white nose. She doesn't seem happy.

DESIREE

What am I doing to myself? Is this
really what I wanted?

She goes into the song, [**CHANGES**], as she reflects on her
struggles in life.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*Ever had a feeling ...
That you lost yourself?
Giving all that you have ...
And no return? ...
I'm so tired of the usage ...
I'm so tired of the games ...
They play ...
No respect ...
No love ...
No return ...*

She peers into the outlandish bedroom. Josephine is out cold. The mirror with white dust is nearby.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*I am going through some changes ...
I am going through some changes ...
I am going through some changes ...
I am going through some changes ...*

She returns her focus to the bathroom. Looking into the mirror, she inspects her face.

Spots a few gray hairs. Looks surprised.

She hangs her head. A tear falls as she continues her song.

When she looks up, 18 year old Desiree stares back at her in the mirror. She wears her graduation gown and cap.

She looks disappointed in the present day Desiree.

The younger version of Desiree scolds the older through her lyrics. Present day Desiree, is quiet and listens.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*I'm so tired ...
Of the fake-ness ...
I'm so tired ...
Of who you think you are ...
No more using of my kindness ...
No more using of my soul ...*

FLASHBACK

Now back on the stage at graduation. There is only one person in the audience. Her drunken Step-dad. She sings directly to him with fire in her eyes.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*Audacity is your philosophy ...
When your selfish ...
No care at all ...
Ever returned ...*

*I'm so tired ...
Of the rudeness ...
I'm so tired ...
Of a heartless heart ...*

*No more using ...
Of my precious time ...
No more walking ...
All over me ...
You'll get no respect ...
No love ...
Bye, bye - Your done!*

The Step-dad rapidly dissolves into nothingness.

END OF FLASHBACK

The image of Desiree the grad looks even more stressed out as she sings to her older self in the mirror. This time, they sing of their pain, - together.

DESIREE

(sung)

*I am going through some changes ...
I am going through some changes ...
I am going through some changes ...
I am going through some changes ...*

The song concludes. The mirror returns to normal. With sad eyes, Desiree turns out the light and returns to the bedroom.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

The next morning, Josephine struggles to open one eye as the morning sun brazenly floods the room with brightness. The bed is empty except for her.

To the side, she finds a fully dressed Desiree. Josephine throws a pillow at her.

JOSEPHINE

It's Saturday girl. Why you up so early?

DESIREE

Going in to work on a new song I
thought of last night. I call it,
WHEN I HIT THE CLUB.

JOSEPHINE

But it's Saturday.

DESIREE

I FEEL IT, right now. Write it
down while it's fresh.

Josephine scans her up and down.

JOSEPHINE

Sexy and smart. It just ain't fair
to other bitches. Have you no
shame, young lady?

DESIREE

Not a drop.

JOSEPHINE

Right. Dumb question. Okay, go.
I was planning to go in later.
I'll bring breakfast. Deal?

INT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The office of LA JEFE RECORDS is uncommonly quiet. Desiree
jots down ideas as she hums a melody to herself. A small
mirror with white lines on it is nearby.

Loud knocks at the door are heard. She looks over at the
door, annoyed.

DESIREE

It's Saturday. We're closed.

More pounding. She goes to the door.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

I said, we're closed. Come back
Monday.

Now it sounds like a shoulder is hitting the door. Hinges
rattle. Desiree backs up. Fear in her voice.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

Go away. I'll call the cops!

The door gives way. A big man, ZIPPO, (20's), steps through
what's left of the door. His sweat drips, his eyes red.

ZIPPO
Where is she?

DESIREE
No one's here. Please leave.

ZIPPO
That bitch owes me coke. I want it now.

DESIREE
You have the wrong place. No dealers here. Please get out.

ZIPPO
You're lying. Give me my shit or it's gonna get ugly. I mean it.

He huffs and puffs as he stares her down. She recoils.

ZIPPO (CONT'D)
Fine. You want to play rough huh?

Desiree sprints to the phone but he grabs her before she can dial. He throws her on the ground behind a desk.

DESIREE (O.C.)
No. Please.

ZIPPO
Guess I'll have to beat it outta you.

His huge fists are seen coming down, but the impact is hidden by the desk. She screams as punch after punch lands on her.

EXT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Just then, Josephine, Terrance and her girls arrive. Josephine hears a commotion inside. She points to the door and motions for the others to be silent. She pulls out her handgun.

INT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

She enters, swings around and points the gun at Zippo. He stops the abuse.

JOSEPHINE
You piece of shit. Back up. Now.

ZIPPO
There she is.

JOSEPHINE
And I might be the last thing you
ever see. Hands up.

She hears Desiree moaning.

ZIPPO
You ain't gonna shoot me, bitch.
Gimme the coke, and I mean now.

JOSEPHINE
Ain't gonna shoot you? Guess you
don't know me. Ever been to Miami?

She reaches in a drawer and screws a silencer on the handgun.
He starts to advance on her.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)
You best chill and get away from
the girl.
(to Desiree)
Hey baby, you okay? Come here by
momma.

Desiree crawls from behind the desk, bloodied. Terrance and
the others enter.

TERRANCE
Oh my God, oh my God. You poor
thing.

The muffled pop of the gun is heard. Zippo goes to one knee.
Blood drips from his leg.

ZIPPO
Bitch. I'll kill you.

JOSEPHINE
Zippo, I told you, you don't know
me. Ladies, paper up the floor.
Easier to clean up.

The women put plastic garbage bags on the floor near Zippo as
he swings at them and grunts.

ZIPPO
You don't scare me. I'll come back
and burn this place to the ground.

JOSEPHINE

Don't worry player, this is a one way ticket. Terrance take her to the hospital. Get her looked at.

TERRANCE

Will do.

He helps Desiree to her feet and half carries her towards the door. As they do that, Josephine goes to a cabinet and trades the handgun for a shiny shotgun.

JOSEPHINE

I'm so silly. I forgot it's Saturday. These buildings are empty. No need for the silent treatment, huh loco?

ZIPPO

Look, let me go. I won't come back.

JOSEPHINE

Yeah, that's right. You beat my girl like that? Only way you come back is with Casper the Friendly Ghost, you piece of shit.

Josephine points to the door.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Terrance, get going.

TERRANCE

Yes ma'am.

He hauls Desiree outside.

EXT. JOSEPHINE'S L.A. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Now in a courtyard next to a parking lot, Desiree leans against a tree.

TERRANCE

The cab will be here shortly. Hang in there, girlfriend. You'll be back in the studio in no time.

DESIREE

I don't think I'm going to come back here. Ever.

She sings, [**YOU FAILED**], as she steadies herself against the sturdy tree. The sunlight illuminates her injuries.

A cut near her eye bleeds and mixes with the tears from her heart. Now starting to swell, her lips, nose and right eye look puffy.

The song is directed at the building and the woman she had come to love.

Unintelligible screaming comes from the office as Josephine and Zippo have it out. Desiree's sadness deepens.

Terrance gently comforts her with a hand on her shoulder.

Desiree finds herself next to Josephine's convertible. She studies her reflection in the tinted window. Bloodied up and bruised, she touches her face in horror.

She looks up and down the car she had so much fun in and caresses the vehicle fondly as her vocals touch deep.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*The way we feel ...
Is not the same, ...
As the path we were going ...
It's changed ...
It's changed, it's changed ...
It's changed ...*

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

Josephine drives down the avenue with Desiree at her side, smiling, with the car's top down. The California moon looms overhead in the distance.

Desiree and crew see the inside of the LA headquarters for the first time.

At the Venice Beach concert. Desiree performs on stage. She locks eyes with Josephine. The boss winks at her. She kicks the energy level up as the whole beach becomes a party zone.

At the shooting range, the pink-clad cowgirls laugh and have fun as Josephine teaches her how to shoot.

Kissing Josephine under the bright Hollywood Sun as Terrance smiles from the side. Time slows down during the embrace.

After the loving moment, a red haze covers everything.

At the House-Warming, Desiree sees Josephine distribute cocaine to Victor. Her reaction shows it hurts her.

In the convertible, Desiree agrees to doing a bump. After she does, her eyes get wide and glaze over.

Memories of line after line in different places come one after another.

Desiree stands in front of Josephine's mirror in the bathroom. Hair crazy, crystals in her nose with red eyes and bags underneath them. A tear falls.

DESIREE

(sung)

*Have you ever ...
Looked into a mirror ...
To find yourself? ...
Have you ever ...
Felt ashamed ...
Of what you see? ...
Pride as you lead yourself to
believe ...
But you know deep inside you could
never ever achieve ...*

Her shotgun, shiny and almost seductive. Josephine, still sexy as ever, draws a bead on a begging Zippo. Desiree has never seen this look on her. It scares her.

END OF FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

The song, [**YOU FAILED**], ends with tears streaming down, brown cheeks. She turns back towards the place where she was almost beaten to death.

BOOM BOOM! She cringes at the blasts from inside the office as the flash of the shot is seen outside. Desiree hangs her head, heart broken. Terrance hugs her.

DESIREE

I didn't want this. Now,
everything is a nightmare. She
failed me.

BOOM! The next round from the shotgun makes them both jump. Seconds later, the cab arrives.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

I hate Los Angeles. Get me out of
here. Now.

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The morning sun tries to burn through the fog as the park below comes into view, bustling with people. Meditation music is heard.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

It's soothing tones lead to Desiree, seen from the back, Terrance next to her. A group of others meditate along side them. The chanting of 'OM' enhances the atmosphere.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)

After Los Angeles, Terrance took me
back to the Apple to stay and heal.

The song, **[OPEN YOUR MIND]**, starts to play as it blends in with the meditation music, then becomes the dominant sound.

The song continues ...

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - DAY

Desiree walks out of a door with 'REHAB UNIT' written on it.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)

I kicked cocaine, thank God.

The song continues ...

INT. TERRANCE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Desiree sits at a keyboard. She hits a few keys, then writes it down on paper. The phone rings.

She looks over at the answering machine. The name, JOSEPHINE, is displayed. She almost picks it up, then pulls back.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)

Although I still loved, Josephine
... I just felt it best to steer
clear of her. At least she sent my
checks on time.

The song continues to ...

INT. YOGA CENTER - DAY

With Terrance next to her, they both do power poses with the others in class. Desiree is wobbly at first but gets the hang of it. Sweat pours from her.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)
Then I tried yoga. Good for the
mind and the body.

The song continues to ...

INT. FOOD COURT - DAY

Desiree sits down with a greasy burger and fries. Terrance joins her at the table with a tray of food.

He takes her junk food and dumps it into a nearby garbage can. She is shocked, then furious.

TERRANCE
Open your mind, girl.

He slides a plate of sushi and veggies in front of her. She tries some, still looking angry at him. Desiree begins to smile after her 'taste test'.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)
I even started eating better. It
was rough at first.

They smile at each other.

The song gets more of a dance friendly tone and then continues to ...

EXT. NYC HOT-SPOT - NIGHT

A line of people waits outside of a fancy night club. Desiree and Terrance are let out of a luxury vehicle in front of the doorway.

She wears a sparkled gown ... And her hair is perfect. Terrance wears a tight fitting plaid suit that is pink and yellow. Those in line look excited to see them.

The security at the door look surprised. They hold back regular patrons and let the couple enter first.

The song continues to ...

INT. NYC HOT-SPOT - NIGHT

As soon as Terrance gets through the doors of the exclusive club, he signals to get the DJ's attention. The DJ (30's) nods to him and smiles.

DJ

Ladies and gentlemen. Behold, the Queen of Dance Music ... Desiree Dawkins.

Desiree looks taken back. Then cuts her eyes at Terrance, grinning. The entire packed house turns to face the incoming celebrity and applaud.

DJ (CONT'D)

We're dancing to her latest hit, **[OPEN YOUR MIND]**. She doesn't know it yet, but it just broke into Billboard. Let's hear it for her.

Totally caught off guard, she seems nervous at first, fighting back joyful tears. Desiree pulls it together and then waves to her admirers and blows kisses.

The song is turned up louder and the laser light-show starts up, which takes the experience to a higher level. It's no longer just a song ... It's a happening.

DESIREE

(through the sound system)

*Enter thoughts ...
So deep in your mind ...
With passion ...
Hard to hide ...
Open your mind ...*

Two cocktail waitresses approach them. One has a dozen roses. The other has a tray the holds a bottle of champagne in between to glasses.

The roses are handed to Desiree who receives the gift, humbly. Terrance and Desiree are led to a table. She peers over at him.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

You're crazy. Why did you do all of this?

TERRANCE

Because ... Because I love you, sister. And you deserve it.

She gives him a hug that almost knocks him backwards.

The song concludes.

EXT. MANICURED LAWN - DAY

Desiree carries flowers as another foggy day descends on the Big Apple. It looks peaceful but eerie.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)
A few months in, Victor got busted
for payola.

She continues to walk as she caresses the flowers.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)
Then it got even worse. Terrance
got sick. It was AIDS.

She places the flowers down and hangs her head. When she moves to the side, ... It's revealed that she's actually at a cemetery. The huge headstone in front of her reads, TERRANCE JONES 1957 - 1986.

PEREZ (V.O.)
How horrible. And still so young.
How did you cope?

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)
I never had to take care of someone
I loved, ... Much less, knowing
that ... That there is no cure.
And that death ... Is certain.

Desiree rises to her feet. Sadness in her eyes. With a shaky voice and watery eyes, she tries to sing, [AMAZING GRACE], to her dearly departed friend.

DESIREE
(sung as voice cracks)
*Amazing grace ...
How sweet the sound ...
That saved a wretch ...
Like me ...
I once was lost ...
But now I'm found ...
Was blind ...
But now I see.*

She gently rubs the headstone.

PEREZ (V.O.)
Did that experience change you?

She hangs her head and weeps as she shuffles away, overwhelmed in grief.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)
For the first time, I realized that
I was all alone in this world ...
And it terrified me. Not sure why.
Had always kept to myself.

Walking aimlessly and a bit disoriented, she arrives at a Zen Garden. There she sits with Asian designs around her.

PEREZ (V.O.)
What do you think made this time
different?

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)
It was so weird. I had no
direction. Music was on the back
burner while I helped Terrance.
Then as soon as he passed, I heard
that Calvin went down with the same
disease.
(beat)
I had to reach deep, just to
survive those times.

Still looking at the intricate artwork in the Zen garden, she closes her eyes. Desiree tries to meditate, but tears roll down her face.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Perez looks on with concern as Desiree's tears flow.

PEREZ
That's a heavy burden.

OLDER DESIREE
What made it worse is because I
really didn't know anyone there,
but I sure wasn't going back to
Josephine.

PEREZ
Did she try to contact you?

OLDER DESIREE
Yep, but I wasn't hearing that. I
was lost, but did what I could to
keep mind and body healthy. That's
why I got involved with the church.

PEREZ
Did that help?

Desiree kicks back and looks to the heavens.

OLDER DESIREE
The Black church, wow. I never had
an experience like that before.
The energy.

She inhales deep and shakes her head side to side.

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)
Hits you right in the heart. I
joined choir to keep my vocals
sharp. That's where I met Ty.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A gospel choir in full robes swings and sways to the rhythm of a shortened version of, [**WADE IN THE WATER**]. Desiree, in the center, sings lead vocals.

The bald, choir director, TY (30's), smiles as they bring the full force of their spirits together for this powerful moment. His head, shiny with sweat.

The parishioners shout, wave arms and clap in response. After the song ends, the PREACHER (50's), gives the flock a moment to recover.

PREACHER
In the name of Jesus, may you all
reach home safely and find comfort
in the message you heard tonight.
Go in peace. See you next Sunday.

The church-goers and choir departs but Desiree and Ty drift towards each other. They smile awkwardly. When Ty speaks, he has a light, African accent.

TY
Ah, such a voice. Many thanks for
joining us.

DESIREE
I'm thankful for the opportunity,
brother. Where's that accent from?

TY
I was born in Ghana. Ever been
there?

DESIREE

No, but I'd rather go there than back to Los Angeles.

TY

Interesting. Most of the world, it is just the opposite.

DESIREE

As the old song goes, Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen. Hey, I'd like to hear more about Africa. How about coffee sometime?

TY

I'm free now.

They smile at each other and exit in a happy mood.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Perez notices the sadness of moments ago has vanished. She motions for her to continue.

OLDER DESIREE

Overall, he wasn't a bad guy. He was real 'churchy', so we didn't live together but saw each other everyday. He owned a used car lot and money was never a problem.

PEREZ

Happy to hear he didn't mistreat you. Did he teach you more about Africa?

OLDER DESIREE

Better than that, he took me there. To Ghana. I loved it, but talk about a culture shock, wow. Unfortunately, he changed when we were there.

She rolls her eyes.

PEREZ

Really? How so?

OLDER DESIREE

I guess his relatives got in his ear about tradition. The role of women and all that bullshit.

INT. FILIPINO RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A waiter cleans the dirty plates from the table Desiree and Ty occupy.

DESIREE

That was delicious. I never had Filipino food before.

TY

I heard about this place at work. I'm glad we went.

DESIREE

For next Sunday, I was thinking that we could do, AMAZING GRACE, but with African drums and instruments. Give it some Motherland flavor.

TY

I'll think about it. I'm the one who decides on the songs. Your job is to sing.

An awkward silence follows. She quickly glances at him, turns away and rolls her eyes. In the corner is a neon sign advertising karaoke. She points to it.

DESIREE

I heard about those places. People sing along to pop songs.

TY

Huh? I'm not really interested.

DESIREE

Wait here, I'll be back in a few.

He seems about to protest, but she's gone. Desiree goes to the emcee who picks songs. She points to one and he enthusiastically grins back to her.

Now, marching onto the stage, comes Desiree. The crowd is excited to see a celebrity and claps for her. Ty can't believe his eyes. He sits forward in his seat as she takes the mic.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

I want to dedicate this song to the greatest guy in the world and hopefully my future husband.

She waves to Ty. The patrons turn to face him. He seems embarrassed but ekes out a smile and waves back. The music starts for, [**GIVING HIM**].

A funky guitar riff at the beginning already has the patrons grooving.

Desiree croons and scats soulfully ... Perhaps sensually, as she seems to wave to every person in the restaurant. Her smile, gratefulness.

Now with all eyes on her, she drops a little spoken-word spice - on the lucky diners.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
 You ever had that type of love ...
 The kind that makes you want to
 slap somebody ... And got you all
 mess up? ... Well girl ... I'm
 messed up.

Desiree dives into singing the lyrics now. A little 'spice' is saved for her floor act. She bounces and shimmies to the over-riding beat.

The signature House rhythms that made her the Queen of Dance Music, gets the small but growing crowd, rocking in their seats. Some just plain stop eating.

Smiling, mostly Asian faces, send positive energy, as Desiree gets the whole house jumping.

Ty seems to have mixed emotions, from the facial expression he projects. He smiles, but he does not bop to the beat or show pride in his woman.

He seems uneasy about how the audience reacts so adoringly to her. No longer in the contained, church environment, this is how the public reacts to her. Is the look in his eyes, fear of her power?

Now, even the restaurant staff claps along to the infectious rhythm.

Desiree locks eyes with Ty as she sings the lyrics that state her intense love and devotion to the man from Ghana.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
 (sung)
*We're in the moment ...
 And it's getting kinda hot.
 Now getting closer ...
 And its really hard to stop.*

The same smile is painted on his face. He waves back, but it lacks the enthusiasm that most would feel at a moment like this one.

A large picture window for the establishment is covered by passers-by who hear the music. Now the line waiting to be seated leads out of the entry door.

Some diners have stood up from the table and dance to Desiree's unexpected show.

Ty sees one spectator so entranced with her performance, that he somewhat misses his mouth when sipping his cocktail. It dribbles down the front of his shirt.

As the chorus of the song repeats, - Desiree scats a little. She then goes into more spoken-word, as some still groove to the catchy instrumentation in the background.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

I mean ... It's that kind of
addictive love ... The kind you
just can't get enough of ... Non
stop - sweat shop type of love ...
Ou-Whee ... I need it ... Got to
have it ... Can't get enough of it
... You know, what I'm talking
about ...

The karaoke version starts to fade out as Desiree gets a few last improvised vocals on the end of it. The song concludes.

All in the crowd erupt with a standing ovation as she graciously gives them several bows. Ty joins them. She blows him a kiss from the tiny stage.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)

Moot point now, but I wanted a
family with him. But that's
alright. I'm at peace with it.
Although ... Ah, nothing.

Even the people outside, watching from the picture window applaud for her. She heads towards her man, smiling.

PEREZ (V.O.)

Although, what? Don't hold it in.
That's what you're paying me for.
To hear the things that are
difficult to talk about.

As Desiree and Ty leave the restaurant, she sees a table of kids eating and having fun with their parents.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)

I dunno. Sometimes I wish I had someone to pass my talent onto. You know?

(deep exhale)

Someone to coach up, so they avoid the pitfalls. Enjoy their gift, the way God wants them to.

(beat)

It just didn't turn out to be in the picture for me.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Desiree dashes into the room in a fancy dress. Ty looks at her curiously.

DESIREE

It's Friday. The singing contest I've been talking about all month? Remember? I'm a judge. Could get me in a position to get back in the business.

TY

You have church and that stupid karaoke. Is that not enough?

DESIREE

No. It's not enough. I have a gift. It should be shared and used to make a better life.

TY

Your gift is tiny compared to that big ego. Know how many women in my homeland would kill for this life? Stay home. Hear? Obey my wishes.

Tears form in her eyes. Her head droops. Awkward silence follows. Then she takes a dramatic, deep breath.

DESIREE

Darling, if you want obedience, you better get one of them nappy head Ghana bitches or a puppy.

Shocked, Ty twirls around. Eyes bugged.

TY

How dare you.

She flippantly responds, with a dash of Chicago attitude.

DESIREE

I'm a grown ass woman. It's my life. I live it the way I want to.

The song, **[NOTHING LIKE IT WAS BEFORE]**, begins.

Her voice comes from the depth of her soul. Pain and heart break add additional layers.

Ty tries to avoid eye contact, but she places herself directly in front of his face so she can't be avoided.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

Somewhere love changed ...

It's nothing ...

Like it was before ...

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

Desiree sings in the church choir as Ty conducts them.

Entering a room, Desiree wears a native outfit from Ghana. Ty shows surprise and then admiration as he gives her a hug.

Karaoke singing in the Filipino restaurant, oozing with love for her man.

END OF FLASHBACK

And now, ... This argument. His scowling and angry face. Cruelty in his stare.

Desiree's eyes show sorrow, but also determination. The next set of lyrics speak to where her heart is ...

DESIREE

(sung)

The pressure that I face ...

I don't want it ... No more ...

It's gone away, ...

The love and affection ...

We both don't feel the same ...

It's nothing like it was ...

Before ...

They lock eyes for what seems to be forever. She takes off her ring and leaves it on the table.

Finally he spins away from her in his chair. It's over.

The song concludes.

Desiree marches out the door with determination on her face.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Perez takes off her glasses and wipes the lens.

PEREZ

How dramatic. The days of
obedience to men's demands are
over. How did it make you feel?

OLDER DESIREE

I put hurtful shit into a box in my
brain and deal with what's in front
of me at the time.

PEREZ

That's called,
compartmentalization. A common
mechanism for people to deal with
stress. The problem is that the
wound begins to fester. If not
treated, it can metastasize
throughout the body and cause
physical problems.

OLDER DESIREE

Like the blinding headaches I get
and the insomnia?

PEREZ

Exactly.

The thought sinks in. She finds a compartment in her mind to
store it for later. As is her practice.

OLDER DESIREE

Anyway, I put Ty's nonsense in a,
'compartment' and went on to the
contest. It was an eye-opener.

INT. SINGING CONTEST - NIGHT

Four judges sit at banquet tables, none of them over 25 years
old, except Desiree. A banner reading, 1991 BROOKLYN AREA
SONG CONTEST, is prominent across the top of the stage.

The act on stage is a late teen with a hi-top fade. His B-
Boy style is more rap than singing. His topic, how big and
bad he is.

When his song ends, two judges, about the same age, stand to their feet in applause. Desiree is not impressed.

Another judge, looks disinterested too. B-STYLES (mid 20's), in short dreads, NY RANGERS'S jersey and a truckload of gold, smiles at her.

B-STYLES

Well, another rapper at a singing contest. You should show them how it's done. My name is, B-Styles, by the way. I own my own label.

DESIREE

B-Styles, huh? You got good taste. Actually, I'm up next. They're paying me to sing a song from my last album. Your label in the Apple or a hockey rink?

B-STYLES

Funny. New York. Are you looking to get back to recording? You had hits on both coasts.

DESIREE

Sure did, huh? We'll talk more after I get back.

Desiree strolls to the stage. The unseen emcee announces her to the audience.

EMCEE (O.C.)

And now, one of the judges for tonight's event. The Queen of Dance Music. Desiree Dawkins. Let's hear it for her everybody.

Applause follows her as she goes to the mic and gets set.

Her music starts. Lights go down. Desiree flows into, **[WHEN I HIT THE CLUB]**.

The arena is certainly no old warehouse. It looks more like a huge ballroom.

A fascinating back-drop of hundreds of colorful disco lights ignites the audience.

Desiree brings the intensity to match the bouncy beat of the dance tune.

Her voice seems to punch holes into the dreariness of the previous performances.

DESIREE

(sung)

*When I hit the club ...
 Music got me buzzed ...
 I couldn't help but move ...
 I'm hanging with the groove ...
 When I hit the club ...
 I start to feel the vibe ...
 My body loosens up ...
 You can see it in my eyes ...*

B-Styles gives her a 'thumbs-up' sign and she acknowledges the compliment with a wink.

Musically upbeat, the lyrics speak of the night club life ... And the thrill of it all.

The back up singers wear matching glittery outfits and by their cheery smiles, enjoy performing for the public.

An unrelenting, pulsating beat, gets into the soul of all attending, even if they are dressed like they never danced in their lives.

Bikers, business men and everyone in between - hits the dance floor with gusto.

Desiree and the background singers repeat the chorus of ...

DESIREE AND SINGERS

(sung)

*I like the way you dance with me
 ...
 I like the way you step with me ...
 I like the way you move with me ...
 I like the way you ...
 Dance ...*

As Desiree turns back from facing her singers, her eyes are drawn to the dancing mass of humanity in front of her.

When the lyrics get more flirtatious, so does Desiree. She shows a little leg as she whips the audience into a frenzy.

B-Styles sits on the edge of his chair, elbows resting on the table in front of him. Digging it.

The back-up singers do a small dance step as they deliver the powerful chorus ... While Desiree scats.

The song ends. She gets, big-time applause.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Desiree looks energized as she ambles towards the exit. She looks over at the celebrating rappers who won and rolls her eyes. About to leave, she is called ...

B-STYLES

Hey, Ms. Dawkins. Hold up a minute. Can we talk?

DESIREE

Sure. What's up?

B-STYLES

You're just the type of act I'm looking for. A real singer/songwriter that can belt it out with power and with soul.

DESIREE

I'll think about it.

B-STYLES

Cool. I'll walk you out, okay?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Clothes scattered on the floor. Desiree and B-Styles huff and puff in bed after an 'adult' celebration. She now wears his Ranger's jersey.

PEREZ (V.O.)

So you think he took advantage of you? Sounds like a Harvey Weinstein move from here.

OLDER DESIREE (V.O.)

Naw, I took advantage of his youthful ass that night. But soon, he found a way to screw me in a whole new way.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

She meets B-Styles in the booth.

B-STYLES

Glad you came. That demo you made is hot, love it. I want you to record it again, More upbeat and dance friendly.

DESIREE

Fresh, like what's on the radio.

B-STYLES

Exactly. Also I want a younger woman that already has a following to be up front. It's the 90s. Fresh look to go with the sound.

DESIREE

So I'm old and ugly?

The look in her face shows she might walk out right now.

B-STYLES

No, just this one time. Shea X, is a PLAYERS magazine centerfold. She just needs a start.

He has the folded magazine in his hand. He shows Desiree the cover with Shea X in a Brazilian bikini in the tropics. Desiree backs up so B-Styles's saliva does splash on her.

DESIREE

Well, I see she won your heart.

B-STYLES

You'll love her too. Check it out.

He hits a switch and the booth nearby is lit up. SHEA X (early 20'S) is in that room with headphones on as photographers wait to get started clicking.

Shea X waves and winks to B-Styles. She discards the mink she's wearing and underneath ... a skimpy two-piece bikini.

DESIREE

That's her? Why she almost naked?

B-STYLES

See, didn't think you'd be okay like that, but you gotta admit, ... It fits the song. Alright, let's record in three, two, one.

The red light comes on. In split screen, they both sing, [**DO YOU WANT ME?**].

Desiree watches Shea X, the photographer and a video guy in the cramped booth and smiles at the madness.

Shea X lip-synchs to the song as she does modeling poses. Desiree closes her eyes and sings her heart out.

B-Styles eyes are all over the young, chocolate-brown beauty as she plays with her hair and bludgeons the cameras with her hefty bosom. He slinks over to her booth.

Desiree frowns as Shea X mouths the lyrics, as she sings ...

DESIREE

(sung)

*And I'm reaching for the stars ...
I hope I don't get burned ...
Sex can go so far ...*

The models over-acting is deplorable. As the song goes on, it only gets worse. In spite of that, B-Styles is loving the hell out of it. Soon they get up to the part ...

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*I can make it good ...
Make it understood ...
But in order to give in ...
The backbone ...
Got to be as good ...*

Desiree must turn away for fear of laughing as Shea X punctuates the last line with a pelvic thrust.

B-Styles leafs through the PLAYERS Magazine as he watches his new star try to fake true artistry. If he is trying to get an image of what she looks like naked, it shouldn't take much visualization based on what she wears now. But ...

B-STYLES FANTASY

EXT. TROPICS - DAY

Surrounded by thick brush, B-Styles looks confused. He tips through the exotic plants, then sees a camera on the ground. He picks it up.

Up ahead is a small clearing. As he brushes some foliage to the side, his eye bug. Standing there eating a juicy orange in a bikini that matches ... Is Shea X.

She smiles and beckons him forward with her painted fingernails. He stumbles in her direction.

Shea X mouths words, but it's Desiree's voice that is heard.

DESIREE (V.O.)

(sung)

*I know you want it ...
(MORE)*

DESIREE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*Do you want me? ...
I know you want it ...
Do you want me?*

B-Styles nods back with eyes that look like he just had a lobotomy - in an alley.

She points to the camera and then to herself. It takes him a moment, but he gets it. He starts snapping photos of her in various positions.

Now seen from the back, with B-Styles facing her, she arches her back. Shea X unhooks the fasteners on her top ...

Still with a back-view of the centerfold ... Only B-Styles sees the spectacle. His jaw goes slack. Losing control of his limbs, he drops the camera on the forest floor.

He song continues to ...

END B-STYLES FANTASY

Back at the studio, Shea X is loving the attention and thinks she is 'killing it' with the lip-synche.

As more flashbulbs go off, she finds herself ...

SHEA X FANTASY

... Stepping out of a limo. Thousand dollar shoes hit the ground first. Then as she fully emerges, it's seen that she's dressed like a queen. Diamond tiara included.

As the limo pulls away, the street is lined with people cheering for her. She blows the kisses as paparazzi takes her photos.

Now on the 'Red Carpet', she sleeks her way down it in her designer dress, as fans on the side lose their minds about being so close to their idol.

Shea X reaches in her purse and pulls out a Kleenex. She wipes her nose with it and flings it over her shoulder. A dozen fans dive on it and fight over who gets to keep it.

Fans that line the red carpet scream with excitement, some bow to her like royalty, some plain pass out.

She continues to smile and wave to them as she jiggles herself farther away.

The song continues ...

END OF SHEA X FANTASY

Now back in the booth, Shea X shoots a smile over to Desiree. The smile that Desiree returns to her is sprinkled with a touch of venom.

The song continues ...

DESIREE'S FANTASY

Smoke shoots up from an ancient looking alter. Rising from the haze is a female figure ... Arms outstretched.

As the smoke dissipates, Desiree is revealed ... But she looks a whole lot different. The headdress she wears is made of feathers, colorful fabric and even a few bones.

Tribal paint decorates her face and body. The Wakanda-inspired outfit shows plenty of skin and her tone body compliments the look.

Desiree looks forward. Her eyes seem to be a different, more frightening color. Outrageously long fingernails point through the drifting smoke to the booth where Shea X is putting on her show.

A charge that looks like a laser beam shoots from Desiree's fingers and hits the booth.

Lights flicker on and off. The area around the booth is darker than before, with a green haze around it.

Shea X is not hurt, but confused. B-Styles, the video guy and photographers are missing.

BAM! A rotted hand hits the glass and stays there. Scared, Shea X peeks over the side.

B-Styles, now a zombie, hurls his rotting flesh at the centerfold in the booth. She screams.

The photographer and video guy are also zombies and try to break into the booth with B-Styles. The look of terror is in her eyes as more screams penetrate the air.

B-Styles finally breaks the glass. Shea X tries to back away but he grabs her arm. He smiles through rotted teeth.

DESIREE (V.O.)
(sung)
Do you want me?

The eyes of Shea X bulge out of her head. B-Styles takes a huge bite into her arm. Blood gushes around his mouth. Her screams are cut off by a half decomposed hand that goes over her mouth. She is pulled downward as she struggles.

The song continues ...

END OF DESIREE'S FANTASY

As Desiree sings, she glances over to see Shea X's booth back to normal. Still overacting and still pretending to be the hottest thing since Marilyn Monroe.

DESIREE'S FANTASY #2

The African witch version of Desiree, opens her eyes near the alter. She shoots the booth that Shea X is in with another blast from her fingers.

The lights flicker again. When the area can be seen clearly again, it has changed.

It is an old time, grungy bathroom that looks like it was from, ONE FELL OUT OF THE CUCKOO NEST. In the middle is the nastiest toilet ever seen by man.

A figure makes it's way through the shadows to the commode. It seems to be a ragged woman, with a hunchback. Upon closer inspection, the woman is ... Shea X.

Now at the toilet, she takes out her scrub brush and begins to swirl it around in the scum. Putrid green and brown slime drips from it as she tries to wipe around the bowl.

Shea X now uses the puke worthy toilet brush as a microphone. She smiles through missing and brown teeth as she sings ...

DESIREE (V.O.)
(sung)
Do you want me?

END OF DESIREE'S FANTASY #2

Looking tired of the whole affair, Desiree continues to sing. One of the hotter lyrics ...

DESIREE
(sung)
Your touch ...
Is burning hot ...
(MORE)

DESIREE (CONT'D)
*Such a sweet sensation ...
To my tender spot ...*

Is performed by Desiree as Shea X fakes it. B-Styles sticks his tongue out like he wants to lick that, ... 'tender spot'. Shea X returns some tongue work of her own, then blows a sultry kiss.

Like a professional, Desiree swallows the baby vomit in her throat and continues sing the song. But in her mind ...

DESIREE'S FANTASY #3

The African witch walks into the smoke on the altar. When she returns from it, Desiree is back to normal. She walks through a tropical forest.

Somehow she stumbles into the fantasy that B-Styles had. He is facing Shea X, mesmerized, as the back-view presumes that she is still giving the twins some air.

Desiree scoots up next to him and nudges him with her elbow, then winks at him. She mimics the big boobs they both see and gives a thumbs up.

She picks up the camera from the ground and motions for them to stand together so she can take their picture. He jumps at the chance.

The view of them both from the back, arms around each other and Desiree facing them is almost perfect.

Desiree motions for them to step back a little. Then a little more ... a little more. Then ...

GULP! The couple step into a patch of quicksand. They scream and struggle to get out, but they sink faster.

In the meantime, Desiree still clicks away on the camera, numb to their pleas. She comically shoots photos from different positions as they sink.

Now up to their necks, one more pic is taken, then Desiree tosses the camera into the quicksand. She marches away.

DESIREE (V.O.)
(sung)
Do you want me?

The song concludes.

INT. FLAT APARTMENT - DAY

Desiree reads Billboard. She angrily slams it down and grabs the phone, dials.

DESIREE
Hey, we need to talk.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

B-Styles is surrounded by Shea X and other centerfolds at an outdoor restaurant.

B-STYLES
What's so important?

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

DESIREE
Dude, I need my money. That joint I did for your floozy is a big hit now, but I see I get no credit for singing it and only \$250 for far. And what about royalties?

B-STYLES
Woman, don't sweat me. You're lucky to work with B-Styles the great. Look, be at the studio in an hour, I'll throw you a C-note.

DESIREE
Fine, and the rest?

B-STYLES
Shit, you're lucky to get that. Stop complaining. I'm reinvesting as we speak.

The centerfolds giggle. He hangs up on her. Pissed off, she hangs up on her end, eyes burning.

DESIREE
Stop complaining? You right. I'm done talking to your stupid ass. If I fail at this, I die. But you'll go first.

She grabs her pink 9mm from a drawer and heads out the door.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY - DAY

As Desiree leaves the apartment, She turns to see an older, more dignified, Michael Potter standing there.

DESIREE
Michael is that you?

They hug. Desiree seems to get comfort from the embrace.

MICHEAL
I was looking all over for you.
Josephine has been shot. She
wants you there.

Her face ... Shocked. They walk back to her place. B-
Styles, saved.

INT. AIRLINER - NIGHT

They fly to Cali, seated together.

DESIREE
Glad you came. I was about to do a
stupid thing. That Shea X song.
That's my creation, my voice, and
the producer won't pay me.

MICHEAL
I see that way too much. Need some
help? We can sue that ass, get you
what you deserve.

DESIREE
Yes, Yes. Oh Michael, you rescued
me twice in one day. God bless
you. What a relief.

She cuddles up on him and falls asleep on his shoulder. He
smiles as romance sparks.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

They enter to see Josephine bandaged and in bed. Victor is
there already. They all embrace each other.

DESIREE
Oh my God. You poor thing.

Desiree and her old boss hug as the others take a seat.

JOSEPHINE

Happy to see you baby. I'm healing well. Remember Mack Johns? Fool tried to jack me. I got hit once but him and two others got to meet the coroner in person.

DESIREE

Still shooting snakes, huh?

They laugh then Josephine takes her hand.

JOSEPHINE

I'm apologizing for scaring you away. I lost it when Zippo beat you. Forgiveness, please.

DESIREE

Absolutely. I may have done the same, actually.

JOSEPHINE

The JULY KNIGHTS and a few others want you to manage and produce them.

DESIREE

Really? Producing again? That could be interesting.

JOSEPHINE

You should do it. Especially since you graduated from Boss Bitch University.

DESIREE

Oh yeah? Where's my diploma?

JOSEPHINE

Right here!

She flips the bird. They all laugh, even Michael.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

But seriously, I may retire soon. Bullets can do that to a bitch. Oh, almost forgot. Last time I was in Chicago I got something for you.

She digs in her purse and pulls out a photo. It's Josephine smiling, next to the tombstone of Desiree's step-dad ... With dog poop piled high. They laugh so hard, Josephine's stitches loosen.

SUPER - A FEW YEARS LATER

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Desiree, dressed to the nines, joins Michael at a table near the stage. They kiss. The lavish lounge still attracts the elite of the metro area.

DESIREE

Hey baby. Wow, this place hasn't changed much. My first performance was here.

MICHEAL

Since that settlement from B-Styles was paid a few days ago, we need to celebrate somewhere with meaning.

DESIREE

Good choice. So smart and loving.

She squeezes his hand. He melts.

MICHEAL

I can really help make your dreams come true. We can start your own label now, since I negotiated that music publishing deal.

DESIREE

Michael, I still can't believe you made me a millionaire. There's no way to thank you enough.

Michael motions to the guy in the booth. A spotlight shines on Desiree. The crowd there applauds.

MICHEAL

You can thank us all by singing your newest song.

DESIREE

And I guess you planned this out?

As the music starts, he nods and smiles. She takes the stage with applause as her escort. She turns back to see the smiling face of the joker she married.

Now on stage she absorbs the love embedded in the ovation. Desiree takes her time to look around and breath-in the moment.

She looks to the side of the stage where Calvin used to stand. It is empty, devoid of life.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
 Thank you, all. Be seated, please
 ... I wrote this song recently, as
 I reflected on my life's journey.
 I started in Chicago ...

CROWD
 Me too ... Go Bears ...

DESIREE
 Homies? ... Anyway, as a kid I had
 less than nothing and was forced to
 survive some brutal experiences.

She shakes off that thought and moves closer to the edge of the stage. Faces up front are welcoming.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
 I thank everyone who had a hand in
 getting me - here. Especially that
 handsome guy, my husband.

Clapping surprises Michael, as does being pointed out. He half stands and waves to those who 'give it up' for him.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
 Rags to riches ... It ain't no
 fairy tale, my friends. It can
 actually happen.

The crowd responds to the inspiration with applause.

DESIREE (CONT'D)
 I might want to testify about that
 ... No. I might have to HAVE TO
 Testify! God is good ... And baby,
 I am living proof.
 (beat)
 Because now ... I'm happy to say
 ... I'm on top of the world

The opening music starts for ... [ON TOP OF THE WORLD].

The microphone she grips is encrusted with stones that look like diamonds. Desiree starts to sing the inspirational song with moist eyes.

Looking out into the venue, she sees it is much more packed than it was the last time. More gray hair on heads too.

The Dance Queen's music hasn't changed it's effect on people. Heads bop and toes tap along to the upbeat tune.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*Here I go ...
Stepping out again ...
This time ...
I'm the spotlight ...*

From his seat, Michael beams with pride as the groove moves him in his seat.

This time a dance floor is cleared out near the bar. It becomes packed just a few stanzas into the song.

Among the party people, fashions have changed since last time, but whatever this crowd wears, is designer made.

Desiree works the crowd. Her high-level eye contact with them, brings the audience into her realm of joy, gratitude and hope for the future.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

(sung)

*Feeling I'm top of the world ...
And going strong ...
Feeling I'm top of the world ...
And going strong ...*

The song continues to ...

SERIES OF SHOTS

Desiree and Michael hike the Grand Canyon. They stop at a high peak and enjoy the panoramic view that spreads all around them.

An empty table. Magazine after magazine is tossed onto it. All of the have Desiree gracing the cover. EBONY, PEOPLE, BLACK ENTERPRISE, VARIETY, TIME.

Michael joins Desiree house hunting. The agents is with them at a Tudor style house. The couple shakes their head, no. Then a ranch house. No again. Fancy condo? No.

Commencement speech at her old high school. She gives a speech at the lectern as the keynote speaker, while students and faculty look on proudly.

The realtor takes the couple to a large 'A' frame, chalet type home. Inside, the high ceiling makes Desiree smile. So does the backyard pool. They shake hands with the agent.

At casino, Desiree is glittery. Michael is next her at the roulette wheel, looking more suave than 007. Desiree lays down a huge stack of chips. The wheel is spun. She wins! Lots of screaming and jumping for joy.

In their new home, she fills the trophy case with award after award, including Grammys.

Poolside, the couple relax on fancy patio furniture. Wearing shades, they toast each other with chilled champagne.

The song continues ...

END SERIES OF SHOTS

The dance floor by the bar is crammed with people dancing their stress away. Desiree's eyes catch a woman in the back with a fancy hat on. Could it be Josephine?

While singing and putting on her show, she watches the woman intently. The woman walks into the light. It's not her old friend, but that doesn't dampen her performance.

As Desiree gets the audience to clap with her, she looks to the side of the stage.

Her late boyfriend, Calvin is seen, but he seems translucent. He smiles back at her, the pride he feels, is seen on his face. He gives her a thumbs-up. Her joy rises exponentially.

The song winds up. Thunderous applause follows. The spotlight is trained on Desiree as she bows then goes back to her seat.

Michael stands as she gets there. He has a small box in his hand. He opens it so she can see the contents. Taken back is an understatement. Tears stream.

Michael takes a huge necklace, covered with diamonds, out of the box. He puts it around her neck gently as the crowd roars their approval. She turns around and gives him a kiss that his great-grand daddy must've felt.

EXT. DESIREE'S COMPANY - DAY

The huge neon sign across the front of the building reads, PINK STETSON STUDIOS. The logo is a black lady with dreads and a pink hat pulled down to cover the eyes. Tilted, gangster style.

Looking up at it is Josephine and her crew. A smile the size of a ocean liner spreads across her face. They enter the front doors.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Josephine is escorted through a door with the logo on it. Desiree, with beaming smile sits at her executive desk. She waves her old boss over.

DESIREE

There she is. Have a seat.

JOSEPHINE

Girl, you need to get off that beefy ass and give me a hug before I jump over that fancy desk.

DESIREE

You're still terrible.

She goes over and gives her guest a tight hug. Now they have a seat in peace. Josephine looks around the office. The pink Stetson from California has a prominent place on the wall. Tears well up.

JOSEPHINE

Desi, I'm very, very proud of you.

Now the tear stained cheeks shine with joy and accomplishment.

DESIREE

It's part yours. You taught me.

JOSEPHINE

At least I did one thing right.
That's why I'm okay with my
decision to retire and sell my
company to you.

DESIREE

Forever grateful for that and won't
let you down. Your label is still
large. You're going out on top.

JOSEPHINE

Yep. Take them pesos and live like
a queen in Cuba. Drama free.
Momma deserves that. Glad to see
you two finally together too.

Michael stands closer to Desiree, they both grin.

DESIREE

My life is finally going in a positive direction. Better than I ever dreamed. You'll be staying for the grand opening, right?

JOSEPHINE

Of course I'll stay for that. Then I got to split. Will catch the plane to Havana tonight. And one more stop to make.

EXT. DESIREE'S COMPANY - DAY

A huge crowd that covers the parking lot and into the street is marked off with police barricades. Cops divert traffic.

People in nearby buildings, peer out of their windows. Eager to see the show.

Food and drink stands are set up. One table gives away free T-Shirts with the PINK STETSON logo on them.

The intro to, [**OWN SPECIAL WAY**], starts, just as the large screen above the stage flashes the logo of the pink hat in gigantic dimension.

A captivating drum beat begins the tune. Dancers come out on stage from the wings. They are bouncy and get the crowd to clap to the beat.

Now Desiree comes out, adorn in a flowing pink gown and her signature Stetson that matches.

Pink balloons fall from the rafters as the star also urges the fans to clap. And they do, with enthusiasm.

Desiree starts to belt out the vibrant song as the live band and singers behind her, give the song a powerful impact.

Cheers resound as the excited people in the crowd, jockey for the best view.

Near the front of the stage are Josephine and Michael. They watch intently.

Desiree looks directly at Michael. He smiles back.

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

They meet for the first time at the NY office and he drops the files.

And he does it again in California. Desiree sees the attraction in his eyes.

She puts gun in her purse, then goes outside and sees older Michael. The go back to her place.

Putting the diamond necklace on her at the lounge.

END OF FLASHBACK

As she delivers the lyrics, they are directed at the handsome face of Michael.

DESIREE
(sung)
*I really like you ...
More every day ...
In our own little ...
Special way ...
I like your style ...
It's impressing me ...
In your own little ...
Special way ...*

The dancers behind Desiree are diverse and youthful. They do moves that would make other choreographers jealous.

Desiree joins them for a few steps as the audience cheers her on - under the sun, in the Apple.

With sweat on her forehead, she now moves in front of Josephine and points to her. Desiree's old boss tips her hat to her best student of the game.

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

Seeing Josephine at a distance while singing at the lounge.

After shopping, coming out in matching pink outfits.

Looking around her exotic, freak show of a bedroom as Josephine comes out in sexy French lingerie.

Comforting Josephine in the hospital.

END OF FLASHBACK

Desiree tips her hat, back to Josephine with a big smile.

DESIREE

(sung)

*There's so much joy ...
When we're together ...
Positive energy ...
You know what I like ...
It's really a pleasure ...
A treasure you are to me ...*

Josephine pumps her fists in joy and appreciation. Those cold, hard eyes seem to show a little moisture.

The song starts to wind down. Over the instrumental part, Desiree ad libs ...

DESIREE (CONT'D)

I dedicate this song to my best friend and mentor, Josephine Dixon. I wouldn't be the businesswoman and performer I am, without her.

Josephine is taken back. Not only the compliment, but the crowd's applause. She graciously bows.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

And I especially dedicate this to my new husband, Michael. The love of my life. I would not be the woman and powerhouse I am, without him. My man!

He rolls his eyes humourously as the crowd claps for him. He blows his talented wife a kiss.

Wild applause as the song concludes. The throng of fans are still excited and urge her to continue entertaining.

CROWD

More ... More ... More ...

She looks over to the band and singers. They nod back.

DESIREE

Okay, one more song. Get your water so you dehydrate out here.

Desiree looks over the huge gathering that came out for the grand opening. She says a silent prayer of thanks, as her face is turned to the blue sky overhead.

INT. UPSCALE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Desiree puts her jewelry away and then sets her hat on a mannequin head and smiles. Suddenly Michael dashes in and turns on the TV. She looks at him curiously.

The screen flickers on. Police lights and crime tape are set-up around a brownstone.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Breaking news. The rap music producer, B-Styles, has been gunned down in a drive-by shooting, just hours ago.

Michael raises his eyebrows as Desiree glance towards him. A photo of B-Styles is shown on the screen.

DESIREE
I think we know how that happened.

FLASHBACK - FANTASY

As B-Styles walks out of his door, a dark rental car eases up on him. Before he hits the last step on the stairs, a pink cowboy hat pops out of the backseat, as does an Uzi.

JOSEPHINE
This is for my girl.

B-Styles looks over a split second before his body is jerked around by a spray of bullets. Riddled with holes, he crumbles to the ground. The car peels away.

END OF FLASHBACK

SUPER - A YEAR LATER

INT. AWARD SHOW - NIGHT

The curtain pulls back and Desiree sits at the piano in an elegant gown, on the elaborately decorated stage. TV cameras focuses on her at various angles as, **[GONNA BE A GOOD NIGHT}**, is performed.

Photographer's camera flashes create a strobe effect as she sits graciously at the Baby Grand - in the moment.

A spectacular back-drop worthy of a top Broadway show, dazzles with colors and light.

Back-up singers come into the spotlight as they sway and add texture to the upbeat song.

Michael grins proudly as those around him seem to enjoy the performance of his wife.

Desiree rises from the piano and sings the rest of the song from a mic, out front. She's still in great shape, the dress accentuates her curves.

The stage veteran plays to the front row and keeps them attentive as she belts out the lyrics.

Dancers come out and gyrate to the music and to make the performance even more memorable.

At the instrumental portion of the song, Desiree joins the dancers in a spirited, choreographed routine.

Audience members rock to the beat as the positive vibe of the words and driving beat, moves them.

Back at the mic, She points right at Michael, we hear ...

DESIREE
(sung)
*I'm feeling high on life ...
Ooh baby ...
With you ...
Right here, by my side ...*

Her soulful runs and heart touching expressions of the exuberance of life throughout the song, brings a joy that can be seen in her face - but comes from her very soul.

The song concludes. Grand applause worthy of a diva, rains down. She bows to her loving audience.

Desiree joins Michael seated up front, in his tuxedo. She's nervous and he tries to calm her.

The PRESENTER strides onto the stage and is handed an envelope. She opens it and smiles.

PRESENTER
And the winner of the 1993
singer/songwriter of the year is
... DESIREE DAWKINS.

Desiree goes up to the stage again on wobbly legs. She wipes tears as the standing ovation, makes it even more emotional.

EXT. HAVANA MANSION - DAY

A servant pours Josephine a fruity drink as she lounges in luxury. She takes the glass and does an imaginary toast to her past pupil.

JOSEPHINE
That's my girl.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Perez kicks back in her chair, puts her pen down.

PEREZ
Sounds like a happy ending. Many people would kill to end up where you are. Why did you feel you needed to see me?

OLDER DESIREE
Getting older, I still feel ... Unsatisfied. Plus these headaches I get. I feel one coming on now.

PEREZ
I've been told I have a heavenly touch, mind if I work on your neck?

Holding her head in pain, Desiree nods yes. Dr. Perez goes over and starts to massage the neck and upper spine.

PEREZ (CONT'D)
If you never attain your goal thru hard work, that is sad. If you attain your dreams and are still unhappy, that's a tragedy.

OLDER DESIREE
I don't want to be a tragedy. I want my life to have meaning.

PEREZ
I understand. Relax, I think I found the spot.

Desiree moans from the pain relief from the massage.

OLDER DESIREE
Yeah girl, wow, you sure do have a magic touch. Feels like, well ... It's hard to describe. It's like--

PEREZ

Like all the pain is leaving your body never to return? That's my intent. You are special in the eyes of the universe. Please never lose sight of that.

OLDER DESIREE

Seems like the universe hates me sometimes. Nothing but hard times.

PEREZ

Ms. Dawkins. Do you not remember the times that could have turned out even worse. The universe intervened to protect you.

Her body suddenly shudders and her eyes go blank.

FLASHBACK - ALTERNATIVE REALITIES - SERIES OF SHOTS

Desiree misses the snake and it bites Josephine. Poison can be seen surging through her body as she convulses and dies in Desiree's arms.

Zippo arrested by police. Desiree is in a body bag. It is zipped up by the coroner.

She walks up to B-Styles at the cafe with the centerfolds. She pulls out the pink pistol. The girls scatter as Desiree empties a clip into him. Blood splatters on her clothes.

At Zen garden and the fog is thick. The voice of Perez is heard but she can't locate the source.

PEREZ (V.O.)

You can't take any of these material things with you to the other side. Charity will help bring the peace you seek.

The fog gets thicker.

PEREZ (V.O.)

And what about adoption? When you die, a library of knowledge, talent and wisdom will just vanish. There is time to avoid that ending.

At this point the fog is blinding.

PEREZ (V.O.)
You may not believe in a higher
power, but it believes in you. And
loves you, always.

END OF FLASHBACK

Desiree blinks her eyes a few times, the blankness is gone and she's back to normal.

OLDER DESIREE
I feel better than ever. Oh my
god. Hey doc, it worked.

No response. She looks and no one is there. Her eyes grow wide as she looks around. Panic in her movements. She takes out the business card given to her earlier. The name reads, DR. ANGELICA PEREZ.

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)
Angelica? Uh-Uh, no way. Nope.

She flips it over. On the other side, handwritten in old time font it reads, FEAR NOT. THE UNIVERSE WILL LOVE YOU, ... ALWAYS.

A second later the card disintegrates in her hand. She passes out on the couch.

INT. DESIREE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The phone rings. It startles Desiree awake. She looks around herself, then answers.

OLDER DESIREE
Hi Michael, ... Yes, yes we can
talk contracts later. I just had a
mind blowing experience. ... Yes,
I'm okay.
(she chuckles)
You remember your friend who's an
adoption attorney. What you say we
give him a call and chat. ... Yes,
I'm serious ... Love you too.

She hangs up and looks to the chair the mysterious Dr. Angelica Perez sat in. She lovingly puts on her lucky pink hat and goes to her window overlooking the city. She pulls the curtains back all the way.

Moonlight floods the room. Desiree, looks to the heavens as a tear falls, and then blows a kiss.

OLDER DESIREE (CONT'D)
You love ... Me? Wow.... Me? I
love you too. Thank you.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Three young black girls walk into Desiree's home. They are amazed as they look around, then hug her.

Desiree plays with them in the park, beaming from the love as Michael looks on.

The three girls hold trophies. A banner for a singing contest hangs in the background. Tears of joy flow from Desiree as she hugs and kisses them.

THE END