

M.A.D
My American Dream

Story by Daniel Pujalt & Claudia Luque
Screenplay by Daniel Pujalt & Adam Bertocci

MyAmericanDream©2023

Daniel Pujalt
(561)843-5271
danpujalt@gmail.com

EXT. NYC - SKYLINE - SUNRISE

New York wakes up as the sun rises. Our drone shot follows a Staten Island ferry as it makes its way through the Hudson River towards downtown. The city pulses with energy and we ride along, taking it all in from above.

EXT. JFK - SUNRISE

A plane lands.

PILOT (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to New York. JFK Airport. Local time is 6:45 and the temperature is 72 degrees. We're so glad you made the journey with us.

INT. PLANE - FIRST CLASS - SUNRISE

CLARA ROMÁN, 40, elegant, clever, Colombian, rises to get her bag from the overhead compartment. A Latina FLIGHT ATTENDANT sidles up to her.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Welcome to New York, Ms. Román. Can I help you with your luggage?

CLARA

I can manage. Thank you.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

... I don't usually do this, but... I actually got into this business 'cause of you.

Clara raises an eyebrow, decides to endure this.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

When I saw you in "Quest Beyond Saturn", I thought, wow, this strong, tough Latin woman is an astronaut... well, what's to stop ME from flying? We've all got a dream, right?

CLARA

Mm. You know I didn't really go to Saturn.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

That's all right. Neither does this

airline.

Clara smirks in spite of herself.

CLARA
That's a good one.

INT. PLANE - ECONOMY CLASS - SAME TIME

ALICIA MENDOZA, a nervous nerd with a pretty Peruvian face, stands alone with her luggage. No one offers to help her as she waits patiently behind a HEAVYSET MAN and a WOMAN with a SCREAMING BABY, watching as they retrieve their bags from the compartment first. The weight of their luggage swats against her head as it comes down, but Alicia pretends not to mind. At last, it's her turn and she reaches for her beat-up carry-on and an excessive amount of duty-free bags.

HEAVY SET MAN
(apologetically)
Sorry 'bout the mess, lady.

ALICIA
It's all right. I'm here now.

HEAVY SET MAN
That's the spirit. Business or personal.

ALICIA
Both. All of it. Everything.

She tries to peer out of one of the windows, excited.

INT. JFK - CUSTOMS LINE - LATER

Clara stands in line, checking her watch and growing increasingly annoyed, though she keeps her cool. Meanwhile, Alicia stands farther back in the line, nervously fidgeting with her documents, hair, and accessories, including a hat and glasses. She spills her anxious thoughts to an Asian man standing beside her, pouring out her heart as they wait.

ALICIA
You know, you try to do everything right, but it's all so confusing. All these documents. "Yes, Officer." "No, Officer." Do you use your middle name or initial on this form or that form. Do you go up wearing glasses if you're not wearing glasses in your picture.

Are they even gonna care. Because I look white.

ALICIA

I mean, not that that's important to ME, personally. I'm just saying, that's what I keep telling it's all set up to--I'm not saying that's the way it SHOULD be, I'm just saying, probability is they're not dragging you or me out of this line.

ASIAN MAN

Yeah. Pity.

INT. JFK - CUSTOMS CHECKPOINT - LATER

Clara steps up, presents her passport, etc. She removes her sunglasses and smiles.

ENRIQUE

Good afternoon.

She is being served by ENRIQUE GUZMÁN, 55, Puerto Rican. She notes his name on his name tag.

He works. All business. Then, as he hands her form back:

ENRIQUE

Of course, I didn't exactly need to verify who YOU were, Ms. Román.

She makes the oh-go-on face and gesture.

ENRIQUE

You're lucky I've got to be a professional or I'd be making you take a picture, I'd be FaceTiming my wife, it'd be a real scene.

CLARA

Well. Sometimes we get lucky.

He hands her back her passport.

ENRIQUE

You're all clear. Welcome to the United States... Ms. Román.

She steps through, serene.

Enrique turns to the next person in his line, snapping his fingers, amused, as if to say, boy, can you believe that.

ENRIQUE

All right, who we got.

INT. JFK - CUSTOMS LINE - SAME TIME

Alicia is still babbling to her line companion as she shifts through various messages on her phone.

ALICIA

Oh my God. I'm on the ground two minutes and everyone's asking all these questions. This is a really big deal for me. It's not just my dream. It's my mother's and my grandmother's too. And they're asking me all these questions--oh, but I'm sure YOU must understand, sir, are you an immigrant too?

ASIAN MAN

... I was born in Chicago.

ALICIA

Okay. Well, nevertheless. It's, like, I'm two minutes into my new life and every single person in Peru is asking me if I'm all right, what it's like, what I'm doing. Why's my phone blowing up? This is ALL BLOWING UP!

SHOCKED NOISES from a few people around. Alicia cringes. Too late--

EXT. JFK - SAME TIME

Clara steps out, grandly, with a SKYCAP beside her pushing her luggage on a cart.

She looks around. But no one is there to meet her.

Odd. Still, nothing for it. She grabs a cab...

Close by, we see COPS swarming into the terminal.

INT. JFK - INTERROGATION ROOM

Alicia is surrounded by very serious men.

ALICIA

Hi! Okay. I THINK we got off on the wrong foot here.

BLACK

MUSIC and CREDITS kick in, and we begin a MONTAGE of New York waking up...

EXT. JACKSON HEIGHTS - SUNRISE

Meet JEANCARLO ALVARADO, 42, Colombian. Handsome. He grabs a coffee at a stand from a WOMAN he is friendly with.

He heads towards the subway station, running just a tad late, but greeting every character he passes along the way. This is the heart of Latin-American New York, and he knows everyone in the neighborhood.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - SUNRISE

As the train rolls towards Manhattan, sleepy IMMIGRANTS nod off in their seats. Among them are housekeepers, construction workers, and nurses, all trying to catch some rest before their day begins. The only white BUSINESSMAN on the train stands tall in his suit, engrossed in his newspaper, pretending not to notice anything or anyone around him.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY - SUNRISE

NEW JERSEY COMMUTERS pour out the doors in a tsunami.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - SUNRISE

MORNING PEOPLE exercise, do yoga, tai chi, hug trees. A PRETTY GIRL jogs by; a MAN turns his head to watch her pass and trips over a little dog on a SOCIETY LADY'S leash.

INT. FISH MARKET - SUNRISE

LATINO and ASIAN WORKERS unload packs of fish, joking around and smoking up a storm.

EXT. JACKSON HEIGHTS - SUNRISE

A SHOPKEEPER brings some booty mannequins out of the store and places them in front of the shop.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK - SUNRISE

VERONICA LARCO, 35, struts through the park like she owns it,

exuding confidence and beauty. However, her tiny but vicious dog has a habit of attacking unsuspecting strangers.

A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN turns his head to look at her. The dog unceremoniously attacks him. A brief scuffle. The dog doesn't successfully bite him, but, boy, does he try.

VERONICA

Hey. Down, boy. Down.

DOG GUY

You could exercise a little more discipline with your dog.

VERONICA

Who said I was talking to the dog?

She gives him a sneer.

VERONICA

Down, boy.

DOG GUY

You know, you all act like you hate it, but you're addicted.

He looks her up and down. Shrugs. Then jogs off, waiting till the last possible moment to take his eyes off her.

VERONICA

(muttering)

Asshole.

She sits down next to a no-smoking sign and lights up. No one stops her.

A LATINA NANNY pushes some WHITE BABIES in a stroller while yelling something into a phone. Veronica just sighs.

EXT. CHINATOWN - SUNRISE

Two CHINATOWN SHOPKEEPERS open their metal shutters, arguing the whole time. WORKERS unload a nearby truck.

EXT. WALL STREET - SUNRISE

BUSINESS PEOPLE walk through the financial district. A food truck sells Hispanic food to a couple of COPS of various races.

EXT. LATIN CAVE - SUNRISE

CREDITS wind down. We PAN UP the side of a Williamsburg apartment building.

INT. LATIN CAVE - MAURICIO'S BEDROOM - DAY

The MUSIC we've been hearing is coming out of MAURICIO GUZMÁN's (23, smart, Dominican) alarm clock. He wakes up, startled.

MAURICIO

Whaaa--

He slaps the clock. The MUSIC continues. He bats it again. Success. Sweet silence.

MAURICIO

That was weird.

JUSTIN REYNOLDS, 21, African-American, friendly, rises.

JUSTIN

Don't I know it.

MAURICIO

I was having this crazy dream--

JUSTIN

(pawing at Mauricio)

Mm. Tell me about it.

MAURICIO

No. We gotta--I gotta get up. Justin, we got roommate applicants coming soon.

He starts putting on his clothes, which have been lazily scattered all over the room.

MAURICIO

We gotta clean this dump before anyone shows up.

JUSTIN

What are you so worried about? For this kind of rent in Williamsburg I don't think they're expecting the Hilton.

MAURICIO

Gotta keep up appearances, man.

JUSTIN

When I first moved up from Atlanta, I paid six hundred a month to live in a glorified closet.

(beat)

You'll excuse the unfortunate term.

EXT. BROADWAY THEATER - MORNING

Clara emerges from her taxi, proceeds to the stage door. Rings the bell.

HOMELESS GUY

Can you help me out?

Clara tries not to look at him.

HOMELESS GUY

Anything. A dollar.--If you got six dollars I can go for Starbucks.

Clara tries the bell again, waits.

INT. LATIN CAVE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Mauricio swoops into the living room, which is a disaster. Kay, their dog, barks for attention.

MAURICIO

What do you want, Kay? You got food over--

He looks into Kay's bowl. Kay does not have food.

MAURICIO

Aw, Sammy! You were supposed to feed her!

SAMANTHA DA SILVA, 24, Brazilian, stirs. We hadn't even noticed her sleeping on the couch among all the mess.

SAMMY

(groggy)

You'll have to speak up. I can't hear you over the band.

MAURICIO

We got roommates coming in today. Come

on. Clean up. Make yourself useful.

Sammy is clearly hung over. Based on her tattoos and punk-rock look, this is not unusual for her. She brushes off the newspaper she's been using as a blanket to reveal that she's slept in her underwear and a fetching pair of boots.

SAMMY

Chill, Mauricio. Who are you, my boss, now?

MAURICIO

Like you ever had a job.

Mauricio is tearing around, hiding alcohol bottles, tossing trash. Justin comes in, still in his boxers, lazily buttoning a shirt.

JUSTIN

Morning, Sammy.--I got you, Kay. Good girl.

MAURICIO

Come onnnnn. We gotta hide our bad habits.

Justin tends to Kay. Sammy reluctantly pitches in with the cleanup.

SAMMY

I thought living with gay guys would be fun, like "Will & Grace". Instead, it's just really, really annoying.

(beat)

Like "Will & Grace".

EXT. BROADWAY THEATER - MORNING

SARAH GREEN, 35, white, bespectacled, holding a clipboard, gets the door for a relieved Clara.

SARAH

Hi, Clara! Sorry... just a hectic first day.

Clara makes her way in. The homeless guy waves goodbye,

HOMELESS GUY

Call me?

The door slams shut.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CORRIDOR

Sarah leads Clara along.

SARAH

I'm Sarah Green. The assistant director. We spoke on the phone.

CLARA

Of course.

SARAH

Did you have a good flight?

CLARA

Fine, thank you.

SARAH

We're all so excited to have you as part of this production.

They pass a Latina CLEANING LADY and a Latino HANDYMAN. Neither says anything, but their expressions are clear: they are starstruck by Clara.

Sarah continues polite chitchat:

SARAH

Everyone's spoken very highly of you. I confess I don't know your career very well, Ms. Román; did you do much live theatre in Mexico?

CLARA

Colombia.--And yes. Though I'm probably known better for novelas.

SARAH

Ohhh! I didn't know you wrote.

Clara decides not to comment.

They pass Jeancarlo, tinkering with some electrical equipment. He raises an eyebrow as Clara passes, but makes no comment. He recognizes her, he just doesn't care.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Sarah leads Clara onto the stage. Their footsteps echo.

SARAH

Now you're a little early. Prompt!
Punctual. We like that.

CLARA

Mm. Well, there really are so few
professionals these days.--I'll just
wait in my dressing room for Edu.

SARAH

For who?

CLARA

... Your director. Eduardo Villalobos.

SARAH

Oh!--He lets you call him that?

CLARA

(thin smile)

I've called him worse.

SARAH

(nervous laugh)

Well, the dressing rooms are--

CLARA

I can find them, thank you. Send in a
venti latte, non-fat.

As she starts off:

SARAH

Will do!--I'll let you know when our
lead shows up!

Clara stops short. Turns.

CLARA

... Lead?

EXT. SOUTH SIXTH ST - MORNING

Alicia hops out of an Uber not far from the Williamsburg
Bridge, carrying all her bags.

The UBER DRIVER, Middle Eastern, helps her, grumbling.

ALICIA

Sorry. Thank you. Thank you. Sorry.
I'll be giving you five stars.

She looks at her phone.

ALICIA
Ooh--you know, where I'm going is
actually over
(points)

THERE...
The Uber driver is not amused.

EXT. LATIN CAVE - DAY

Alicia deposits her pile of bags by the door.

She checks her agenda--"Apartment Interview 9:00 am"--then
the time. She's fifty-seven minutes early.

She opens Google Maps.

ALICIA
All right. What's goin' on around
here.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - CLARA'S DRESSING ROOM - SAME TIME
Clara storms into her dressing room, where OLIVIER BISSET,
38, French, a slick businessman, is waiting.

CLARA
WHAT'S going on around here?!

Olivier puts up his hands.

OLIVIER
I agree! It's a travesty. Outrageous.
It's MADNESS!--What's the problem,
honey?

CLARA
Don't pretend you don't know. You're
my manager, for Christ's sake.

OLIVIER
AND your husband.

CLARA
One problem at a time.

Olivier shrugs, backs off.

CLARA
Who's the lead in this show?-- Because

the gringa with the glasses just said we're still waiting on her.

OLIVIER

It's really more of a two-hander.

CLARA

Clara Román does not uproot her life for a two-hander.

OLIVIER

Baby, it's your Broadway debut! I'm sorry it's not perfect. But in case you haven't noticed, they don't write loads of parts for Latina women of a certain age. I don't even think there's one in "Hamilton". But just in case, tell me, can you rap?

CLARA

You're a bullshit artist, Olivier.

OLIVIER

I love you too honey.

CLARA

You manipulated me.

OLIVIER

And you can thank me at the Tonys.

EXT. WILLIAMSBURG BISTRO - DAY - ESTABLISHING SHOT

INT. WILLIAMSBURG BISTRO - DAY

A hip little place. Alicia sits, surrounded by her mountain of bags, scrolling through her phone. She's texting with someone named Francisco.

Francisco: "I got the first deposit - are we doing this?"

Francisco: "when and where do we meet?"

Alicia starts to reply, then deletes it.

She starts another reply--"I need more time"--then deletes it as well, and sighs.

NACHO

Do you need some more time?