

## **Synopsis of 'Dancing with a Chameleon' – Book to Film**

### **A story based on true events, by Peter Russell**

***Depicts events in the past, i.e. black and white images/washed out colours.***  
*1960 & 70s Los Angeles, predominantly migrant neighbourhood, little affluence.*

*Setting: outside of run down school, late afternoon, primary school aged children milling around passing the time together.*

An overweight 8-10 year old Jose Batista is waiting to be picked up at the school gate with the other children. He holds onto the school fence for reassurance, looking hopefully at both the other boys kicking around a ball, and out across the road for any sign his sister has arrived to pick him up. His older sister Juanita meets Batista at the gate, having come from her high school to pick up her brother on the way home. She kneels down, gives her little brother a hug. The other boys laugh and jeer at Batista as he walks away, Juanita admonishes their taunts. Batista turns to scowl as menacingly as an eight year old can, at the other boys.

*Setting: run down local high school, old wooden outdoor benches and tables outside of cafeteria.*

A tall, stocky and still slightly awkward 15-16 year old Batista has perfected his menacing scowl and is beginning to realise how intimidating his bulk can be to others. He sits alone eating his lunch. Group of girls walk past and giggle and roll their eyes at his attempt to smile and wave at them. A group of boys follow and chat to the girls, the girls respond with flirtatious laughter. We see the switch in Batista's attitude as his violence is fuelled by his humiliation and rejection; Batista gets up to leave, passes the group and shoulders one of the girls, knocking her to the ground. The largest boy confronts Batista, Batista pushes the boy to the ground, kicking and punching him until he stops moving. The other students scatter.

*Setting: same day, outside the school office, after school hours, sterile school office interior.*

Batista is weeping on Juanita's shoulder, apologising, crying and bemoaning his actions. Inside the office Batista's parents meet with the principal. Principal tells Batista's parents of other similar incidents, the increasingly violent nature of Batista's behaviour and suggests they seek urgent treatment before their son kills someone. Batista's parents come out of the office, Batista runs to his mother's arms, still weeping, for comfort. Over her shoulder Batista again uses his menacing glare on his father, never taking his eyes from the man.

*Setting: a montage of scenes showing Batista growing up, now 18 and turning to a life of crime.*

Batista shown breaking into a car, committing petty crimes; after which Batista returns home to his mother's care, she makes his dinner, cleans his clothes.

Batista savagely attacks his father who he believes is plotting to kill him. His mother sends him to be committed for psychiatric assessment, Batista returns home – he cannot be treated. Juanita attempts to reason with him, she stands up for him when their mother deplores him for his attack.

Batista shown threatening and intimidating others, exercising his control. A violent assault lands him in Central Juvenile Hall. Here his sentence is increased after he assaults a prison guard. He is released.

*Setting: Batista as an adult, montage of inside prison showing his time spent there.*

Jailed for burglary and aggravated assault in Mira Loma Detention Centre, he is mostly a loner but meets fellow prisoner Sonny Johnson, offers him protection. Batista places himself on a treatment program, which he is able to manipulate for early release.

### **Present day – March 1999**

*Setting: poorly lit and sparsely furnished hotel room, rainy London streets at night.*

A black African man is lured into an uncompromising position by a female escort and photographed. The man is later revealed as Sali Madu. The escort leaves hotel room, walks two blocks to catch a cab. Unknown to her, she is being followed. The escort takes photos to the man who commissioned them, Antonio Galatolo who is working for the man's business rival. The escort, Perley Lee, is identified by a code name. Galatolo treats her with disdain, attempts to underpay her. The escort leaves Galatolo's home. She is still followed.