

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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# PEPE AND FIFI (1983)

DAN PIȚA

## Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

### OVERVIEW

*Auteur* Born in 1938 in Dorohoi, Romania, Dan Pița is one of the most gifted directors of the Romanian golden age of cinematography. He is the director of an impressive number of films, such as *Paso Doble* (1985), *November, the Last Ball* (1989), *Top Hotel* (1992), *Pepe and Fifi* (1994) and *Second Hand* (2005), to name just a few. In 1986, he was awarded Honorable Mention for *Paso Doble* at The Berlin Film Festival.

*Film* *Pepe and Fifi* premiered on September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1994. In 1995 it was proposed for the Oscars for the best foreign movie. It is a production of Romania Film and Solaris. In 1994, it received the Best Actress Award in Geneva (Irina Movilă). It also received the 'Opera Prima' Award for Image, Montage, debut special Mention (Mihai Călin) and Special Mention (Cristian Iacob). The movie is a portrayal of the sordid conditions young people lived in during post-Communist Romania.

*Background* The film chronicles the reality of Romania in transition from communism to capitalism. It is a country where crime is rampant, with gangs of mobsters in the streets, with criminals who rig boxing matches, with pimps, prostitutes and drug dealing. This is the world Pepe and Fifi fall victim to. They are two young people coming from a good, but poor family; they each feel the need to help. This is why they take on the jobs given to them by the American, jobs that represent their complete destitution.

### SYNOPSIS

Pepe and Fifi are brother and sister. Carol, their friend, Carol is disabled and Pepe pushes him around in a wheelchair. Together, they take to the streets of Bucharest, while Carol shouts through his megaphone to the people, warning and threatening them. Pepe is a boxer, who gets beaten in the match the movie begins with because the match is rigged. Fifi is a naïve young woman, who gets duped into prostitution by a pimp and drug dealer called 'The American'. Fifi brings her brother into the American's business and he gets caught by the police while transporting drugs. In jail, Pepe gets beaten to death by a band of mobsters whom he and Carol had been picking on in the streets.

### MAIN CHARACTERS

Pepe – a boxer  
Fifi – a prostitute  
Carol – their friend  
The American – a pimp and drug dealer

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

#### Pepe

Pepe is one of the protagonists in the movie. He is a boxer, Fifi's brother and Carol's friend. He is energetic, beaming with life. He is helpful towards his friend, Carol.

*Lively* Pepe is lively and energetic. He pushes Carol around everywhere, with a swing and a song. They are almost always joyous and filled with energy. Pepe is a boxer and he fights until the last drop of blood. Although he gets harshly beaten, he does not give in easily. Together with Carol, they make a very lively pair.

*Helpful* Pepe is also helpful towards his friend, Carol. He pushes Carol around everywhere and is there whenever his friend calls out to him. He tolerates his little foibles such as screaming out at the

people in the street threatening them. Pepe also brings the money he makes boxing and gives it to his mother.

*Determined* Pepe is the type of determined sportsperson who will go any length to reach his ideal. And Pepe's ideal is to win the next boxing match. He is determined to do so, even if he knows that the mobsters in the city rig matches. Unfortunately, his dream is shattered when he is killed in jail.

### **Fifi**

Fifi is another protagonist in the movie; she is Pepe's sister and Carol's friend. Because she is very poor and naïve, she becomes a prostitute for The American. She is adventurous, trusting and insecure.

*Adventurous* Fifi is quite adventurous. When The American proposes that she spend the next few days with him, she accepts, although she hardly knows him. She calls her mother to tell her she is going to the mountains with her friend, Clari. Thus, Fifi becomes a prostitute for The American.

*Naïve* Fifi is also naïve. Knowing that the American is a pimp and a criminal and that he is gay, she falls in love with him nevertheless. She begs him to make love to her but he refuses. She is devastated but continues her work as a hooker.

*Insecure* Fifi is insecure after she has fallen out with her former boyfriend. She meets him at the disco as he is dancing with another girl and she asks for the ring back. After that, she becomes acquainted with The American and dances with him. She drinks a few glasses of champagne and wakes up the next morning in bed with a stranger.

### **Carol**

Carol is Pepe and Fifi's friend. He cannot walk and moves about in a wheelchair. He is very vocal and criticizing because he seems aware of the problems of the country. He is adventurous and helpful.

*Aware* Carol is aware of the problems in Romania and he screams them out through his megaphone to the people in the street while Pepe pushes him around in his wheelchair. In this way, he manages to make enemies, but Carol does not relent. He is aware of all the ugliness and corruption of post-1989 Romania.

*Brave* Carol does not care if he upsets people with his behaviour and remarks. He goes out bravely in the streets, not caring that he is disabled and cannot defend himself. For defence, he counts on Pepe, who gets into fights because of him.

*Helpful* Carol is also helpful. He says he will help Fifi with money and give her his house once the law for house property is passed. He tries to help as much as he can and even offers to marry Fifi, but she refuses him brutally. He is desperate when Fifi goes to work as a hooker and wants to prevent this at all costs.

### **Pepe and Fifi's mother**

Pepe and Fifi's mother is the type of mother who is tolerant, yet anxious. She lives in poverty, together with her family.

*Anxious* When she sees Pepe's swollen eye after the boxing match, she makes a scene and starts screaming at Carol, saying that he is to blame for her son's misfortunes. She is anxious and angry and does not want any harm to come to her children.

*Tolerant* Despite being anxious, Pepe and Fifi's mother is quite tolerant. When her daughter tells her she will be absent for a few days, she agrees without questioning whether she is telling the truth or not. Her tolerance is also to blame for Pepe and Fifi's tragic destinies.

### **Pepe and Fifi's father**

He is the type of disengaged, disinterested father, who only watches TV all day long. He represents the type of Romanian who reads the press and criticizes the power but does nothing about it.

*Dissatisfied* He is dissatisfied with the politicians in power and criticizes them as he is watching TV. His wife accompanies him in this enterprise but does not listen to him and falls asleep. He is the type of man who criticizes a lot but does not do anything to effect change.

*Disinterested* He does not seem to care much about the life and whereabouts of his children. When Pepe comes back home with a swollen eye, he does not even notice. The same happens when Fifi is away for a few days and then shows up in expensive cars.

### **The American**

The American is a middle-aged man who is a mobster and owns many illicit businesses in Bucharest. He is cold-blooded, controlling and determined to achieve wealth and notoriety.

*Insensitive* The American is the type of cold-blooded mobster who is a pimp, rigs box matches and conducts drug traffic. He does not care that he is playing with and putting at risk the lives of young people. For him, they are just currency in exchange for the money he can make out of them.

*Calm* When he meets Fifi, The American is very calm and manages to cool her down too. He serves her champagne and dances with her and tells her nice words. Fifi becomes entranced with him because all along he keeps his cool, no matter how tense the situation. When Fifi begs him to make love to her, he refuses her, saying that they had an agreement.

### **THEMES**

#### **SOCIETY**

**Gender** The question of gender appears in the movie in the use of young women for prostitution. Fifi, one of the movie's protagonists, falls prey to this trap. Through the eyes of the pimp (The American) and his acolytes, we witness a perception of women that is biased, rudimentary and discriminating. The women are perceived as sexual objects, who are taught how to dress and behave well so as to please their clients. They are objectified and used as sexual currency for the rich foreign visitors in the country. Fifi is drawn to this life because she is poor and has no other way to get out of poverty. Moreover, she falls in love with The American, who treats her well and teaches her how to behave. Thus, women are nothing but mere sexual objects and men the ones who get rich through their prostitution. Dan Pița criticizes the growing wave of prostitution in Romania immediately after the Revolution, when the borders were open and foreign men entered who were interested in sexual affairs with the women who lived in poverty.

**Culture** The director also dramatises the future of a country transitioning from communism to capitalism. The film is set right after the Revolution, and we still see traces of communism – the buildings and constructions, the poverty, the alienated bourgeois and intellectuals – but also signs of capitalism such as The American and his acolytes, discos, (rigged) boxing matches and foreigners. Thus, it is a mixed society, which is in a hurry to escape all communist vestiges and to embrace whatever it is that comes from the West. As it is, not everything coming from the West is good, and the director focuses on prostitution and drug traffic in his movie. Pepe and Fifi, the movie's protagonists, are both victims of this phenomenon. Fifi becomes a prostitute and Pepe is caught carrying drugs and sent to jail. The young people seem to be the easiest victims of these changes in the society. They fall prey to those ready to capitalize on the people's naivete and poverty.

#### **JUSTICE**

**Crime** Romania after the Revolution has become the scene of crime and corruption. People such as The American and all sorts of other criminals own the streets, the people and the police. They dictate the law and everybody tries to please them. Fifi is seduced by The American and his way of living. He offers her luxurious clothes and perfumes, drives in expensive cars; all in exchange of her having sexual intercourse with foreigners who pay well. Fifi draws Pepe into this world and he becomes an intermediary for transporting drugs. Pepe is caught by the police and sent to jail. In jail, he meets some of Carol's enemies, who corner him and beat him to death. This crime bespeaks the gratuitous violence rampant at the time in Romania, when there were gangs of hooligans who beat one another to death. The death of Pepe is a premonition of the future of Romania, whose youth is the victim of criminals and hooligans.

#### **POLITICS**

**Power** The director shows how power is handled by the nouveaux-riche in his movie through the character of The American. He is a pimp and a drug dealer and in charge of all sorts of illicit dealings in Bucharest. He has reached a certain notoriety and is feared and respected. He uses his power to dominate Fifi, whose lack of experience makes her an easy prey. Fifi falls in love with this man and

begs him to make love to her, but he refuses. The director shows how power has become the trait of criminals in post-Revolutionary Romania. He criticizes their abuse of power and its use in criminal activity.

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Friendship** The movie is also a beautiful depiction of the friendship among Pepe, Fifi and Carol. Pepe and Fifi are brother and sister and Carol is their friend, who lives next-door. Carol cannot walk, Pepe moves him about in his wheelchair. Pepe always takes care of his friend, is there when he needs him, even when he takes him in risky situations, such as boxing and criticizing the criminals on the streets. Carol equally is there for his two friends, especially for Fifi, whom he warns not to become a prostitute. He also tells Pepe about it, but Pepe rebukes him, saying that she needs to make money somehow. At the end of the movie, when Fifi and Carol identify Pepe's corpse, Carol starts crying that it is his fault, that the ones who killed him were the ones he had upset. We can see the pain of both Carol and Fifi in their crazy running through the corridors.

## PSYCHOLOGY

**Isolation** Carol lives isolated from the world ever since he has been unable to walk. He stays in his room from which he screams out to his friends, who always respond to his calls. When Pepe takes him out, he cries, through his megaphone, to the people in the street, criticizing and warning them. In this way, he echoes the old man who appears recurrently in the movie and is a beggar and something of a prophet. Carol's isolation from the world expresses the outside world becoming ugly, immoral and corrupt.

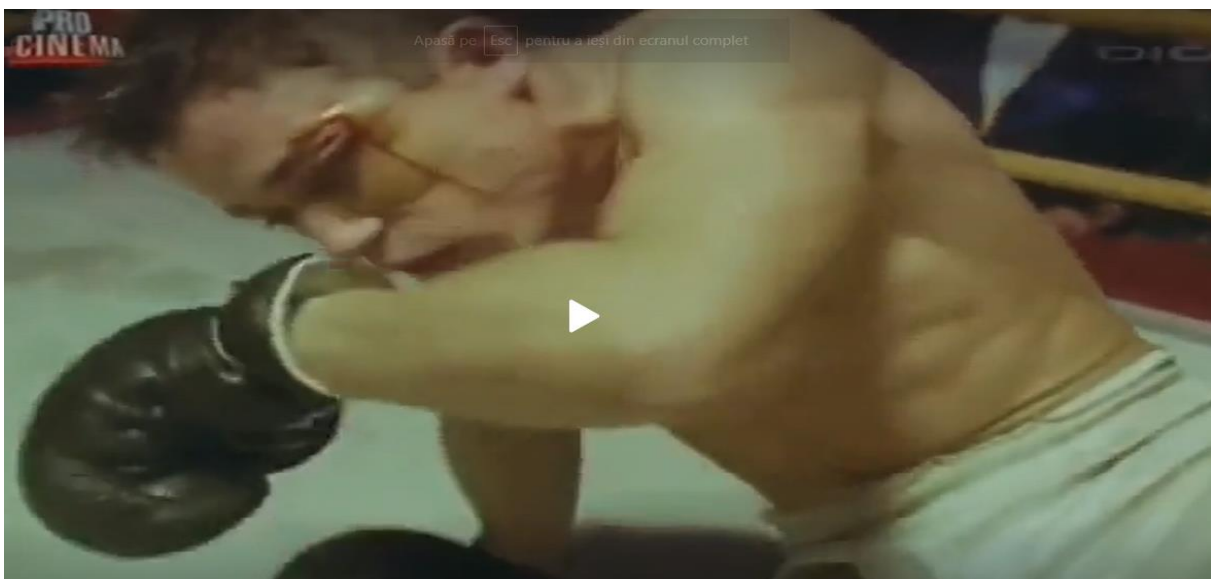
## CHANGE

**Transience** The theme of transience is expressed in the movie through the death of Pepe. The idea of transience also appears in the scene where the three friends fly a kite that eventually gets entangled in a transmission tower. This symbolizes the impossibility of freedom, a transient dream the three friends were after. The death of Pepe annuls all that was beautiful in the movie, his youth and his strength, his friendship with Carol and his brotherly love for Fifi, his beauty and his future. It is really a tragic ending, which foreshadows a tragic future for the youth of post-Revolutionary Romania. The director is clearly pessimistic about the future of Romania and about the lives of people living in that time.

## SCENES

**A BEGGAR MAKES PROPHECIES** In what looks like a post-apocalyptic Bucharest, a beggar is screaming about corruption and bad politicians. Nobody seems to pay attention to him.

**PEPE GETS BEATEN IN A BOXING MATCH** We see Pepe in a boxing rink, fighting with an adversary. Pepe is hit really hard but does not give in. He realizes that the match was rigged and he tells this to his friend, Carol.



**CAROL AND PEPE GO BACK HOME** After his defeat, Pepe goes back home with his friend, Carol. Carol is crippled and goes about in a wheelchair.



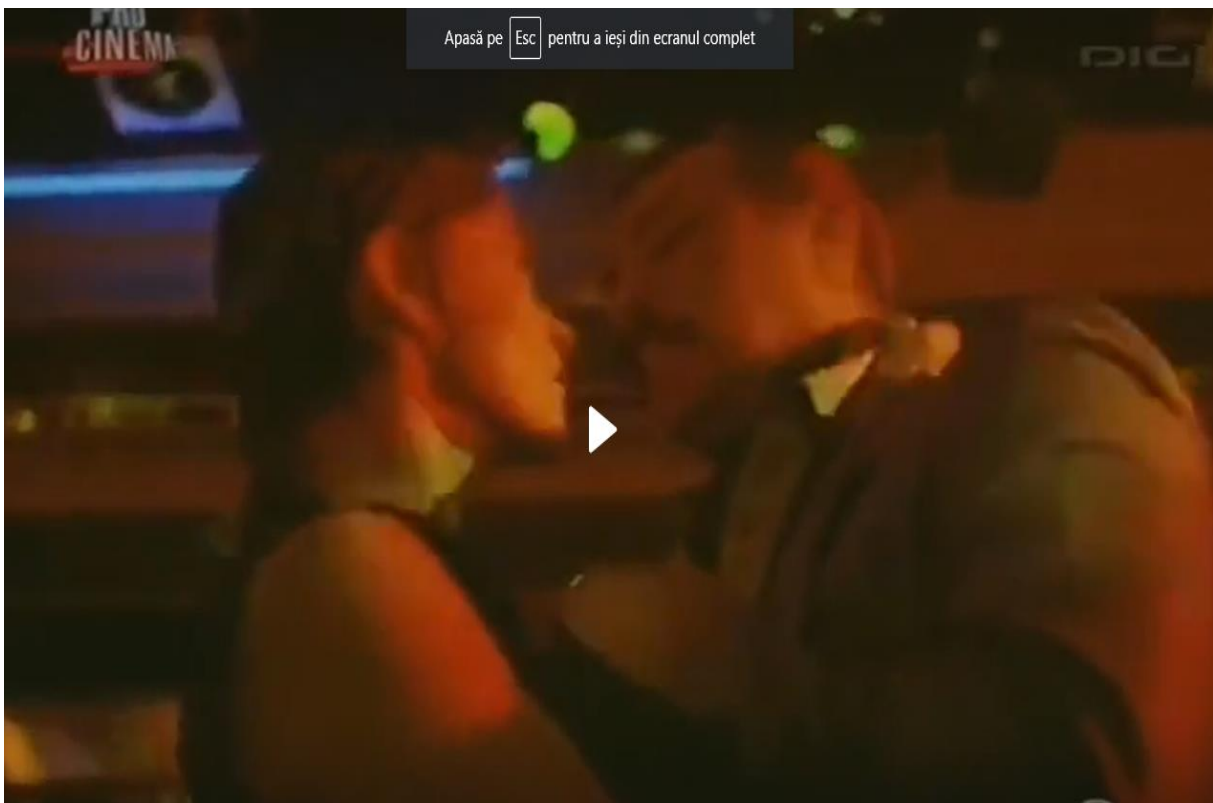
**PEPE ARRIVES HOME** After the match, Pepe meets his sister in their home. He asks for a piece of beef which he can place on his swollen eye. His sister gives him a chunk of beef. In the meantime, his mother appears and sees his injuries. She starts screaming and shouting at Carol for taking her son to boxing matches.



**FIFI PREPARES FOR A NIGHT OUT** In her bedroom, Fifi prepares for going out on the town. She wears a leather outfit and she smokes. There is a Marilyn Monroe picture on her mirror in which we see the same outfit Fifi is wearing.



**FIFI MEETS THE AMERICAN** One night at the disco with her friend, Clari, Fifi meets The American, who shows a lot of interest in her. He invites her to dinner and to dance and uses nice words.



*FIFI IS INVITED TO DINE WITH THE AMERICAN* After dancing with The American, Fifi is invited to join him at his table. They have a conversation and Fifi drinks a bit too much champagne. The American takes Fifi to his home.



*FIFI WAKES UP IN THE AMERICAN'S HOUSE* Next morning, Fifi wakes up in The American's house, with a long-haired man sleeping in her bed. She is shocked and does not seem to remember how she has gotten into this situation. She leaves the bedroom and goes in the living room.



**FIFI ACCEPTS THE AMERICAN'S PROPOSAL** In the living room, Fifi finds The American, who is having breakfast. He invites her to join him. She joins him but tells him she has to call her mother to tell her about where she is. The American asks Fifi to tell her mother she will be away for a few days. Fifi obeys.



**CAROL MAKES A SCENE** In his room in the attic, Carol makes a scene starting to scream in his loudspeaker. His neighbours, Fifi and Pepe's parents, hear him and become alarmed. Pepe goes to see what has happened.





*FIFI BECOMES A PROSTITUTE* Attracted by the luxury and riches The American promises her, Fifi becomes an escort/prostitute for rich foreigners. She tells her mother that she is away with her friend Clari in the mountains, when in fact she is beginning her life as a prostitute. We can tell that she enjoys the expensive clothes and jewellery she is now wearing.



*PEPE AND CAROL GO OUT ON THE TOWN* In a recurrent scene in the movie, Pepe and Carol take the streets so that Carol can shout through his megaphone, his warnings, condemnations and threats to the criminals populating Bucharest. They gain the antipathy of a group of mobsters who try to beat them, but Pepe is stronger than they are.



*THE THREE FRIENDS CELEBRATE CAROL'S BIRTHDAY* At home, Pepe and Fifi hear Carol scream for help. Scared, they rush to his room, and he laughs at them and tells them it is his birthday. He takes a bottle of liquor out of the fridge and the three friends drink. Carol promises to help them.



*THE THREE FRIENDS FLY A KITE* The three friends fly a kite. Pepe is the one who manipulates it to the joy of Fifi and Carol. Eventually, the kite gets entangled in a power pole. They are all disappointed.



**FIFI'S FRIEND GETS BEATEN** Fifi receives a phone call from her friend, who asks her to pay her a visit. Fifi goes to see her and finds her in a terrible state, beaten and crying. She tells Fifi she was beaten by her lover.



**PEPE GETS INVOLVED IN THE AMERICAN'S BUSINESS** With Fifi's intervention, Pepe is hired by The American to transport 'goods' (drugs). Pepe goes to get paid for his work and meets 'the secretary', a woman who hits on him. They go out to have sexual intercourse but the bodyguard is present and Pepe abandons the affair.



*THE AMERICAN WATCHES PEPE AS HE TAKES A SHOWER* In one of his breaks, Pepe goes to take a shower in the men's washing room. The American goes there to watch the scene and he looks intently at Pepe's naked body.



*PEPE AND THE SECRETARY MAKE OUT* Back in the office room, Pepe meets the secretary who hits on him again. He seems to like her, too, so the two go in the changing room and make out. They are caught by one of The American's bodyguards and have to stop.



***FIFI GETS PREPARED FOR PROSTITUTION*** Back in The American's house, Fifi is given expensive clothes and jewellery. She tries them on and seems pleased with her apparel. In reality, she is getting prepped for her role as a prostitute.



***CAROL HAS A CHAT WITH FIFI*** In his room in the attic, Carol has a chat with Fifi, while he is shaving his beard. He tells Fifi that he knows that she has become a prostitute. He begs her to stop having sex for money.



*PEPE GOES TO HIS NEW JOB* Pepe is contracted by The American to serve as an intermediary in his drug traffic dealings. Like Fifi, Pepe has a new outfit, he looks rich and business-like. Like Fifi, he seems to fit this role very well.



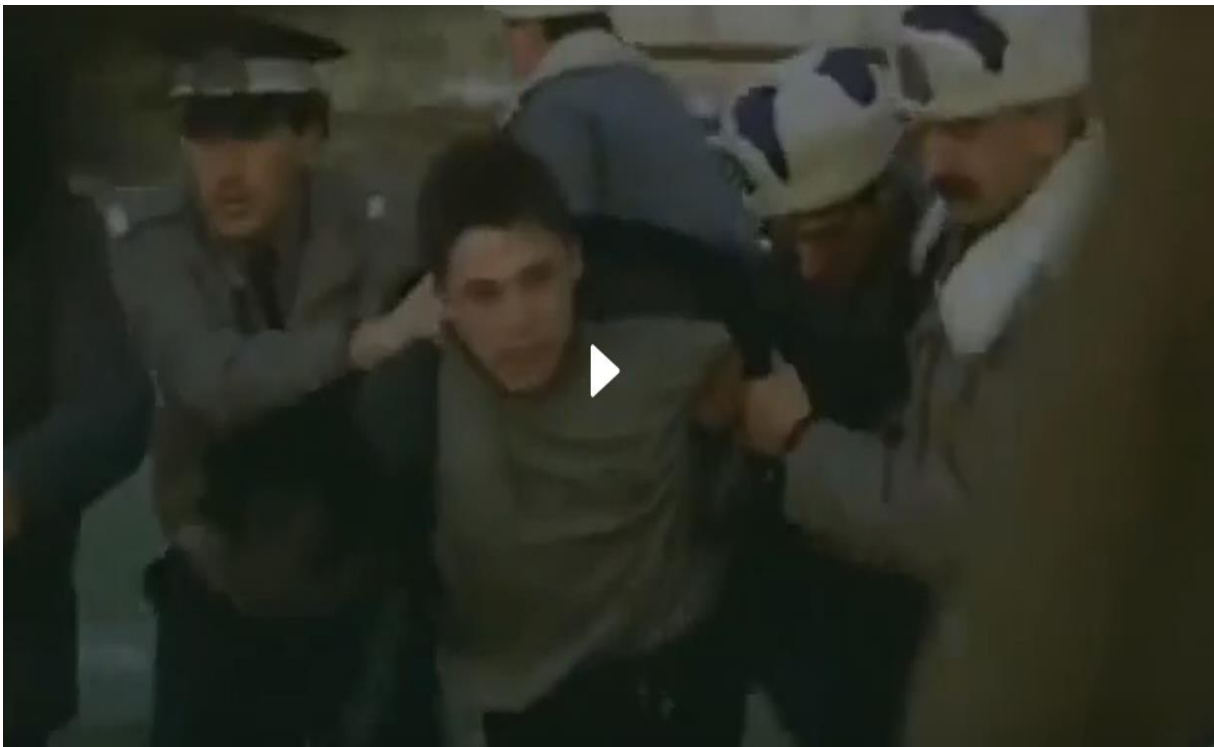
*THE AMERICAN ORGANIZES A CHARITY EVENT* Fifi is invited to a charity concert organized by The American for orphaned kids. There, all sorts of officials are invited. Fifi notices the hypocrisy of The American.



***FIFI BEGS FOR SEX*** In this scene, Fifi provokes The American by making out with one of his lovers. The American asks her to go to the bathroom and wait for him there. When he gets there, Fifi begs him to make love to her but he refuses. Fifi goes under the shower all dressed up.



***THE POLICE CATCH PEPE*** While he was out with Carol transporting drugs, Pepe is caught by the police. He is taken to the police station where he is interrogated about his employers. He asks for an old acquaintance of his who has become a policeman to come and help him, but there is nothing he can do.



**PEPE THREATENS TO KILL HIMSELF** In the police station, Pepe is interrogated in an aggressive manner. At one point, he cannot take it anymore. He takes a blade out of his pocket and presses it to his neck.



**PEPE TRIES TO DEFEND A GIRL** While in jail, Pepe sits next to a girl who has a very angelic and innocent look. She starts reciting a poem and Pepe listens attentively. Then a man picks on the girl.





**PEPE GETS BEATEN TO DEATH** When Pepe takes the girl's defence, a group of mobsters start a fight with him. They are then ones Carol was picking on in the streets. They provoke him and beat him to death. Nobody intervenes, not even the guards.



**FIFI AND CAROL GO TO IDENTIFY PEPE** Fifi and Carol go to identify Pepe's body. Pepe is lying dead on a hospital bed. Both Fifi and Carol are mortified by the sight. They get out of the room crying. Fifi is running while pushing Carol's wheelchair.

