

A MILLION MILES AWAY

Written by

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BASED ON A TRUE STORY.

Original dialogue in Spanish translated to English on right column.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
This is Launch Operations Manager.
The launch team wishes you good
luck and godspeed.

FADE IN:

EXT. LA PIEDAD, MICHOACÁN, MÉXICO - DAY

TITLE CARD: La Piedad, Michoacán, México — 1968

A vast CORNFIELD, topped by the most beautiful sky you've ever seen. A decrepit DONKEY. Chickens and roosters roaming free. A mangy dog YAWNS. A beautiful MONARCH BUTTERFLY floats in the air.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
T-minus 15 seconds, second stage
tanks now pressurized... 12, 11,
10, 9...

A 7 year old boy, JOSÉ, walks through the furrows looking for something. He comes to an ear of corn, studies it. He grabs it with a strong grip, but it seems to resist being picked. He yanks it hard, hard, HARDER!

The cob SPRINGS FREE, making him fall on the ground.

He lays on his back, eyes WIDE, looking up: The sky, a deep blue. A few perfect cumulus clouds float softly away.

He picks up the cob from the ground and mouths the sounds of a take-off.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
Ignition sequence starts. 5, 4, 3,
2, 1... ZERO... All engines
running! Lift off! We have lift off
on Space Shuttle Discovery!

The cob-rocket is off the ground!

JULIA
¡Joseeeeé!

José leaps up in a second. He runs through the fields, holding the cob high in mock flight.

EXT. FAMILY SHACK, MEXICO - DAY

A RICKETY SHACK on the verge of collapse.

Lively mayhem as José comes out of the cornfield and RUNS towards his mother, JULIA.

The mangy DOG barks incessantly as GENERATIONS OF THE HERNÁNDEZ FAMILY say their goodbyes. There are tears and COUSINS and AUNTS and UNCLES doing Signs of the Cross on the KIDS, and long hugs happening all over.

SOMEONE takes the cob from his hand. This is SALVADOR (35), his father.

JOSÉ
(re: the cob)
Un recuerdo.

JOSÉ
(re: the cob)
A souvenir.

Salvador just stands there unfazed, smiles and then gives the cob back.

SALVADOR
No te apures, vamos a regresar...
(to the rest of his kids)
Despídanse, chamacos.

SALVADOR
Don't worry, we'll come back.
(to the rest of his kids)
Time to say good-bye, chamacos.

Another 7-year-old, his cousin BETO, approaches José.

BETO
See you on the other side, primo.

José smiles and nods. They exchange an adult-like hug.

José eyes Salvador holding on tight to his grandmother, he notices his eyes are watery: the pain of constant good-byes. Salvador quickly wipes his tears away and kisses his mother's cheek.

JOSÉ
¿Estás llorando, papá?
SALVADOR
Me entró tierra al ojo.

JOSÉ
Are you crying, Dad?
SALVADOR
Some dirt got into my eye.

Salvador gets into the car. José gets caught by Abuelita.

A HONK.

SALVADOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
¡Vámonos!

SALVADOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Let's go!

José, JULIA (30) and his his teen brothers and sister: CHAVA (13), GIL (11) and LETY (9) get in the car, an old Chevrolet Impala 64 PACKED TO THE RAFTERS.

Salvador looks around, melancholic. As he closes the door he notices a Monarch Butterfly landing on his forearm. He takes a moment.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
 ¿Saben que las mariposas
 Monarca vuelan desde el mero
 norte, más lejos que los
 Estados Unidos, hasta acá,
 hasta Michoacán? Vienen
 buscando mejor clima; cuando
 llega la primavera se
 regresan.

(he turns to his kids)
 Estos insectos que pesan un
 gramo hacen un viaje de 2,000
 millas... Da qué pensar ¿no?

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
 You know... Monarch
 butterflies migrate from up
 north to Michoacán. They come
 looking for a warmer weather;
 when spring comes, they go
 back.

(he turns to his kids)
 It is a journey of more than
 2,000 miles taken by insects
 that weight one gram. Food
 for thought, huh?

The butterfly flies away. He starts the car and smiles, the
 kids and Julia do too.

Everyone waves as the car drives off through a cloud of
 flying butterflies and we launch into a...

MONTAGE and CREDITS:

— José looks out the window as he leaves this town behind:
 the old colonial CHURCH; the town SQUARE; the soccer field
 with the BROKEN GOAL FRAME.

— They barrel fast through the DESERT.

— The kids now sleep in the back, tightly packed with
 pillows, bags, pots and pans. But José, wide awake, FLIES THE
 CORN COB out the window, at SUPERSONIC SPEED.

— A "Welcome to California" sign.

— Another one: "*CHINO, CALIFORNIA: Where everything grows!*"

— Salvador and Julia sit in a CLOUD OF MOVING DUST as they
 ride in the back of an old creaky TRUCK, packed like cattle
 with PICKERS.

— A NEW SCHOOL. José steps into a classroom. An old and
 tired TEACHER gives him a bored look.

— MASSIVE STRAWBERRY FIELDS; A sea of HUNCHED MEXICAN
 WORKERS move like an army of ants, unstoppable.

— The packed Chevy drives past another sign: "*SALINAS: Rich
 in Land, Rich in Values*"

— A SEA OF GREEN and the family bent at the waist, filling
 box after box of LETTUCE. Beto and his family do the same in
 the following furrow.

José looks at the sky, then at his mother.

JOSÉ
Mamá, ¿pa qué sirven las
estrellas?

JOSÉ
Mom, what are stars for?

JULIA
Esas preguntas se las
constestan en la escuela.

JULIA
That's a question for school.

JOSÉ
¿Por qué no se ven de día?

JOSÉ
*Why can't you see them during
the day?*

Julia stops and looks at him lovingly, she kisses him and continues with the tough work.

— HERNANDEZ TEMPORARY HOME: the family sits around a shabby table, as Julia styles José's hair with lemon juice. His siblings clear the table and get ready for school.

— YET ANOTHER NEW SCHOOL: José steps into a hostile classroom. New TEACHER, new CLASSMATES.

— UTTER FLATNESS. The Chevy bolts past this sign: "*STOCKTON: Someplace Special*".

EXT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME - DUSK

The family UNLOADS the car, finally parked in front of a humble... HOME in a rough BARRIO. José and Lety look at the place with and air of hope.

CHAVA
Don't get too excited. We won't be
here long.

Lety shrugs and follows her big brother.

— A child's hand finishes writing a sentence in a school notebook: **A MILLION MILES AWAY.**

INT. FILLMORE ELEMENTARY, CLASSROOM - MORNING

José steps in, interrupting MISS YOUNG's class. This is his teacher, a Chinese-American in her 20's.

She looks up, beaming.

MISS YOUNG
José! You're back!!

LATER —

José recites with his CLASS.

CLASS
Twelve, thirteen, fourteen...

Miss Young points at José.

MISS YOUNG
Now two times seventeen.

JOSÉ
Treinta y cuatro.

MISS YOUNG
Now in English, please.

He looks around, hesitant.

JOSÉ
Thirrrrr--ty foor.

The class laughs at his accent.

MISS YOUNG
Oh, you all think that's so funny?
José, how about two times thirty
four?

JOSÉ
Seex-ty eight.

MISS YOUNG
Guys, who can tell me what seven
times sixty is? No. Make it— seven
times sixty *three*.

Silence, of course.

MISS YOUNG (CONT'D)
Take it away, Mr. Hernández.

JOSÉ
Four hawndred fort-ey one.

MISS YOUNG
Gracias, José.
(To the class)
You see, math doesn't care if you
speak English or Spanish, because
math is its own language.

Miss Young winks at José. He smiles.

Beto opens the classroom door and comes in, a little dirty. He seems skinny and worn.

MISS YOUNG (CONT'D)

Well, hello, Beto! It's so nice to have you back as well.

José gives his cousin a big welcoming smile. Beto sits next to him.

JOSÉ

¿Por qué no habías venido a la escuela?

JOSÉ

Why didn't you come to school these past days?

BETO

Work.

He shrugs. José gets it.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, STOCKTON – NIGHT

An alarm clock shows: SATURDAY, 4:14 AM. José's eyes jerk open and he springs up. He gets dressed in a rush and goes to the dining room where he finds his whole family ready to leave for the fields.

JOSÉ

Perdón, es que no sonó el despertador.

JOSÉ

Sorry, alarm didn't go off.

SALVADOR

Ámonos.

SALVADOR

Let's go.

EXT. FIELDS, STOCKTON – DAY

THOUSANDS OF GRAPES fill a wooden crate.

And José's back at it in the fields with the whole family. This time, he's struggling: he's tired and worn out. He admires his father's and mother's skills, even his siblings'. He can't keep up.

He tries harder, but he steps on a bunch of rotten grapes, slips and inevitably lands in the mud.

He's FURIOUS. He drops his tools and screams. The meltdown makes his family, his cousin Beto and several WORKERS, stop to regard him with confusion.

JOSÉ

¡No puedo!

JOSÉ

I can't!

Salvador throws him a stern look.

José speaks directly to him, with that adult-like bravado that some Mexican children possess.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
 ¡Estoy lleno de lodo!
 ¡Apesto! Estoy cansado...
 todo quemado por el sol!
 ¡Ya no puedo!

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
*I'm covered in mud! I stink!
 I'm exhausted... sunburnt! I
 can't take it anymore!*

We hear childish laughter. It's Beto.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
 ¡Tú cállate, pinche Beto!

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
You shut up, Beto!

Salvador is not amused. He approaches José, who wonders if he has just signed his death sentence. He tones it down.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
 Estoy cansado.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
I'm tired.

The others get back to work.

SALVADOR
 Todos estamos cansados pero
 hay que seguirle. Sígueme.

SALVADOR
*We all are. But we have to
 push through. Keep working.*

José exchanges a look with Julia... then he complies.

Salvador kneels by his side.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
 A ver, mijo, ¿por qué estás
 aquí? ¿por qué estamos todos
 aquí?

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
*Alright, son, why are you
 here? Why are we all here?*

The faces of the workers, some exhausted, some smiling.

JOSÉ
 Para ganar 10 dólares.

JOSÉ
To make 10 dollars.

SALVADOR
 ¿Qué crees que pasa si no
 haces tu parte?

SALVADOR
*What do you think will happen
 if you don't do your part?*

José shrugs.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
 ¿Sabes en qué se va a
 convertir esta chinga? En los
 ladrillos pa' la casa que
 estamos levantando tu mamá y
 yo allá en Michoacán. Estamos
 trabajando todos juntos para
 poder vivir mejor.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
*Do you know what all this ass-
 busting will turn into? It
 will become the bricks for
 the house your mamma and I
 are building back in
 Michoacán. We're working
 together so that we can have
 a better life.*

José's eyes become teary.

JOSÉ
 ¿Tú cómo le haces? Dices que
 estás cansado pero yo no te
 veo cansado.

JOSÉ
*How do you do it? You say
 you're tired, but you don't
 seem tired to me.*

Salvador turns him around, making him face the length of the furrow.

SALVADOR
Lo que pasa es que yo tengo una receta... Mira, mijo, lo primero es que tienes que ponerte una meta.

SALVADOR
How do I do it? Look, mijo, I have a recipe... First step, you have to set a goal.

— The FOREMAN pays their day's work. José gets his money. The family puts it in a shared envelope. Julia keeps it.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
Luego, tienes que checar qué tan lejos estás de esa meta.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
Then you have to find out how far you are from the goal.

— The endless furrow unfolds towards the horizon. Many bunches of grapes remain unpicked.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
Tienes que pensar cómo vas a llegar. Eso te va a mantener concentrado.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
You have to draw yourself a roadmap. That's going to keep you focused.

— The picking routine: hands, muscles, grapes fall in a bucket, repeat; rhythmic mechanics.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
Cuando no le sabes, hay que aprender.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
If you don't know, you've got to learn.

— Salvador teaches him to use the tools more efficiently.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
Y al final, cuando creas que ya la libraste, quizás haya que esforzarse todavía más.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
And at the end, when you think you've made it, you'll probably have to try even harder.

— José picks grapes, exhausted. He looks at his fingers... they're hurting. Then he looks at Salvador, who's still moving, and gets back to work.

— Three buckets full of grapes, then four, five. Then six, seven, eight! José, proud, regards his work.

But it unavoidably fades to...

INT. FILLMORE ELEMENTARY, CLASSROOM - DAY

José, dark circles under his eyes and mid-yawn, elbows Beto to wake him up. But Beto NODS OFF.

Miss Young writes several adjectives on the chalkboard as the rest of the class drills their pronunciation.

MISS YOUNG
Ok, so, for homework you'll have to write a composition...
(MORE)

MISS YOUNG (CONT'D)
 "When I grow up..." I want to see
 how you come up with many beautiful
 and powerful ADJECTIVES, OK?

LATER —

Class is dismissed and José approaches his teacher's desk.
 His accent wrapping up his sentences.

JOSÉ
 Miss Young? I won't be able to do
 my homework. We're leaving.

She frowns.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
 It's *pepino* season. We're going
 back to Salinas.

Miss young makes an inquiring face.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
 Pepino. Cucumber.

MISS YOUNG
 Ah. *Huángguá*. Cucumber.

José smiles, she gets it.

JOSÉ
 Miss... what are stars for?

MISS YOUNG
 'What are stars for?' That is one
 tough question, sir. It's the type
 of question that raises many
 others.

She comes near him and puts her hand on his face.

MISS YOUNG (CONT'D)
 You know what? I think you're going
 to be one of those people who can
 actually come up with an answer for
 that kind of question.

José receives the kind words with the anxiety that comes with
 big responsibility.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, STOCKTON – DAY

The house is half-packed. Julia puts *sarapes* and kitchen utensils in cardboard boxes.

José is on the dining room table trying to work on his composition. He eyes his corncob, the one he brought from Mexico. Then he draws a field of corn. His fingers have bandaids.

Lety comes running and turns on the TV.

LETY

*It's about to happen! They just
said it on the radio. Pepito, come!*

Chava, Gil and Lety get settled on the couch. Chava makes room for Julia. Salvador approaches too. The TV has a magnetic aura.

José peeks from the table.

JOSÉ

¿Qué?

JOSÉ

What?

GIL

*The man on the moon, Pepe.
Hold the antenna!*

José takes his position as official makeshift-antenna holder.

The broadcast of the first moon walk starts. José watches from his oblique point of view. The voices of the people at ground control and the astronauts get into his head. The televised historic events unfolding are sharply reflected on his eyeballs.

Salvador stops watching the screen to LOOK AT HIS SON. He notices something DEEP inside of him. Something stirs within José and Salvador witnesses it.

The 1969 musical hit: "**Aquarius**" by The 5th Dimension starts playing.

EXT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME – NIGHT

José lays on the front porch, belly up.

ON THE SKY: stars shine in different ways, different colors. For a moment, everything is fine.

José closes one eye and then the other as he makes his corncob "ship" fly. *Aquarius* is still playing.

Julia peeks out of the main door. She sees her son and is about to say something, but decides to let him be.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, STOCKTON - DAY

The family packs their last belongings. José gets his corncob rocket. Chava and Lety babble and complain. Then there's a KNOCK.

Julia opens the door. Standing there is... Miss. Young!?

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Julia, Salvador, Gil, Lety and Chava sit across from Miss Young – reaching hard for her very best Spanish. José sits between both parties, like an arbiter.

MISS YOUNG

Mr. and Mrs. Hernández. Yo quisera... respectfully...

(Frustrated)

I'm a bit worried about your children's education.

JOSÉ

Dice que van a arruinar la educación de sus hijos.

JOSÉ

She says you're ruining your children's education.

MISS YOUNG

I really think you should reconsider traveling so much.

JOSÉ

Dice que estás tonto por hacernos viajar tanto.

JOSÉ

"You're stupid for making us travel so much."

Salvador frowns.

SALVADOR

Dile que tenemos que ir a donde esté el trabajo. No tenemos opción.

SALVADOR

Tell her we have to go where there's work. We don't have an option.

José looks at his father, fearful.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

(In his best English)

We need to work to build a house in Michoacán.

MISS YOUNG

Mr. Hernández, you work the land. You work it with your own bare hands...

(MORE)

MISS YOUNG (CONT'D)

What happens to a tree if you dig
it up year after year? Will it bear
good fruit?

Silence. Salvador thinks about this, still frowning.

EXT. SIDEWALK – MOMENTS LATER

Miss Young watches the Hernández's packed car, ready to go again. She walks down the sidewalk, crestfallen, when José comes running after her, carrying a piece of paper.

JOSÉ

Miss Young?! I did my homework.

He hands her his composition. The title on the cover: ASTRONAUT, then a drawing — the cornfield, a boy, a corn shaped spaceship and the stars.

She looks at it. Then she kneels and smiles.

MISS YOUNG

You are a force of nature. Nothing
will stop you. Remember that.

...and walks away, pursing her lips.

José stands there, looking tiny and defeated on the sidewalk.

I/E. SALVADOR'S CAR/FIELDS, STOCKTON – DAY

A dirty, sweating José, watches his father from the overpacked car where he waits with his mother and siblings:

Salvador seems very upset, he's in the line waiting for their pay, he counts the money, it's short. He moves his arms around and complains to the foreman who just shakes his head.

Salvador approaches, gets in the car, puts the keys in the ignition — but the car won't start. He tries again. Nothing. And again. Nothing. Then he HITS THE STEERING WHEEL HARD!

JULIA

¡Salvador!

José sits very still. Worried.

Salvador sees his children through the rear-view mirror. Their exhausted and muddled faces.

SALVADOR

¿Ya vieron, no?

SALVADOR

Do you see now?

JULIA

Salvador...

SALVADOR

Pa nosotros no hay chances,
ni atajos... No podemos
confiar en la suerte o en la
buena voluntad de nadie.

SALVADOR

*We don't get chances, no
shortcuts... We can't rely on
luck or anyone's good will.*

They all look down. Julia does too.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

*Actually, you're already very
lucky. You know why?*

The kids shake their heads.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

*You get to see your future.
(a beat)
Look, over there.*

He gestures at the muddy field. A terrible image.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

That's your future.

Julia looks at Salvador with sadness. He lowers his head, wishing his words weren't so full of truth. The vibe feels heavy.

A very long beat.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

She's right.

Salvador turns to his children.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

La maestra.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

The teacher.

They sit there... His beautiful and dirty children. We slowly pan to José, looking straight at us with those soulful eyes.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

¿Qué es eso, Pepe?

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

What's that, Pepe?

JOSÉ

Un field?

SALVADOR

What else?

JOSÉ

People working.

SALVADOR
*People working hard. Because they
 need to.*

A beat.

He sees a WORKER in the distance, an older man, bent over the fields, mindlessly picking like a tired machine.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
 I didn't mean what I said. This may
 not be your future, but this will
 always be your past. You understand
 that?
 (beat)
 Show me your hands.

José shows him his palms.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
 Nosotros sabemos cosechar
 nuestra comida, a mucha
 honra. ¿Entiendes?

SALVADOR (CONT'D)
*There's dignity in knowing
 how to harvest your own food.
 You understand that?*

Salvador looks at his own hands... He turns to Julia she nods lightly.

JOSÉ
 Sí, papá.

JOSÉ
 Yes, dad.

The Chevy just sits there... in the profoundly quiet emptiness of the surrounding fields as a now more relaxed Salvador hits the ignition and it finally works.

He makes a U-turn... and drives back.

SALVADOR (O.S.)
 The teacher is going to be happy.

INT. SALVADOR'S CAR, MOVING – CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON José, happy, as he rolls down the window, feeling the breeze on his face, breathing this triumph, and smiling as this moment sears itself into his mind.

— CLOSE ON THE CHEVY'S FRONT WHEEL, spinning and spinning...

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC – DAY

THE SPINNING WHEEL comes to a full stop. But now it's a SILVER RIM, parking.

Chyron: 1985

As we pull back: Is that Salvador's old Chevrolet Impala 64!? It's been turned into a LOWRIDER: BRIGHT GREEN paint job, CHROME moldings... a few dents here and there and some rust on the door - a work in progress but, wow. **José Alfredo Jiménez's 'El hijo del pueblo'** playing LOUD.

That's when the door opens, and 25 YEAR OLD JOSÉ steps out wearing a GRADUATION GOWN. He puts on his cap, and walks towards campus.

--A bunch of caps in the air.

We hear the graduates EXPLODE IN CHEERS and APPLAUSE.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC - DAY

CLOSE ON JOSÉ and an older SALVADOR and JULIA, beaming with pride taking a picture at the University's entrance.

José pulls his cap off, and shows the top of it. There's a sign. It reads: "HI MOM".

Julia walks a few steps, breaks into joyful tears... Salvador goes to her and holds her. She looks into his eyes.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, JOSÉ'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

José sits at his tiny desk, in his childhood room, his old cob rocket in front of him.

José opens a drawer revealing a precious secret: A NASA APPLICATION FORM. He examines it. The NASA logo. "Astronaut Selection Program", followed by a million questions.

JULIA (O.S.)	JULIA (O.S.)
¿Quieres cenar?	Dinner?

JOSÉ
No, mamá. I'm going out!

Julia opens the door. He tosses the application.

JULIA
Who's the girl? Do I know her?

JOSÉ
La muchacha no existe, se llama Beto and since we're cousins I guess neither you nor Tía Berta would approve.

EXT. STOCKTON, FIELDS – LATER

José and his cousin BETO (26), skin hardened by the sun, walk towards José's car. Beto's shift has just ended. The sun is setting.

BETO
Liver what?

JOSÉ
Lawrence Livermore Labs.

BETO
What the hell is that?

JOSÉ
It's a... A federal research facility. National security... they're running the world's most sophisticated X-ray laser, potentially the single-most important breakthrough for ICBM defense in decades.

BETO
So... guns.

JOSÉ
Defense lasers that we're going to put up in orbit. We'll save millions of lives if the Russians were to attack.

Beto just chuckles.

BETO
Wow, That's pretty crazy!

A beat.

BETO (CONT'D)
Remember that homework in school... we had to draw or write what we wanted to be when we grew up. I remember yours. The teacher hanged it in class.

José smiles with nostalgia.

JOSÉ
I remember.

BETO
I said I wanted to be a *ranchera*
singer.

José laughs.

BETO (CONT'D)
Dreams are heavy, right? Yo... This
Liverthing... It's not being an
astronaut but, still, you get to
throw stuff into space, right?

José is bothered. Isn't THIS enough?

JOSÉ
That... was just stupid.

BETO
Say we get a couple of *cheves* and
toast for lasers in space, dude.

The slight tension is relieved. They get into the car, but a
FOREMAN's voice stops them.

FOREMAN
Hey, Beto! You missed a couple of
rows!

BETO
I didn't.

FOREMAN
Finish it, man.

Beto is instantly irritated.

BETO
I guess I'll go back...
(a beat)
I just think it's great that I can
be so freaking proud, and still
have no idea what you're talking
about, cousin. I'm gonna miss you.

JOSÉ
It's not like I'm moving, I'm
staying right here.

BETO
That's not the point. You're moving
farther, don't you get it? You're
out of here. You moving to a place
with a job and a title and *respect*.
(MORE)

BETO (CONT'D)

And we're all gonna watch you from here.

(A solemn beat)

Ingeniero. Unbelievable.

José takes that in. The foreman screams again.

JOSÉ

Why don't you go back to school, man? Ditch the fields.

BETO

Ain't that easy.

JOSÉ

Ain't easy but it's possible.

BETO

Pepe, my mom is so sick she hasn't gotten out of bed since Christmas. My Dad, unlike yours, has not been around in 17 years. You got a scholarship, I didn't... I got two brothers, an ex-wife and one daughter to feed. There's no time to dream. Just time to pick...

A silent beat.

JOSÉ

C'mon, I'll help you with that couple of rows and we'll go for those *cheves*.

They both go into the field.

José notices a young Mexican woman in the fields, ADELA (25), she's carrying a basket filled with lettuce, a sweated *paliacate*, they eye each other. He blushes a little bit.

José Alfredo Jiménez's 'El hijo del pueblo' starts playing.

EXT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The song exploding massively from his extra powerful speakers.

José sings his lungs out as he parks his lowrider right next to a Mercedes... CLINT LOGAN's. Who is stepping out in that very moment and turns to see what the hell is the deal.

ON JOSÉ as he notices the impact of his big entrance, feeling Logan's eyes on him. Sweating as he tries to turn the music down. His nervous smile until finally...

SILENCE.

Logan eyes a NASA sticker on José's lowrider. He chuckles.

LOGAN

Right. We've all been there.

José fake smiles again, waits for him to be gone to get out.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

José walks quietly into a conference/screening room packed with SCIENTISTS and ENGINEERS —about 25 people— facing the director, none other than THE MERCEDES GUY, who lectures them from the blackboard.

José stands quietly by the door. Everyone seems so different from him, almost everyone is white and/or has a buzz cut. Their clothes are different. He's a total fish out of water.

LOGAN

Who can tell me what this is?

He draws a large circle on one side of the board.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Wild guess, anyone?

SCIENTIST 1

A circle?

LOGAN

Of course not, you numb nut. It's the Soviet Union.

He draws another circle on the opposite side of the board.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Anyone wanna guess what *this* is?

SCIENTIST 2

The United States?

LOGAN

The United States of America. Now, who wants to tell me what *this* is?

He begins drawing a line from circle to circle, slowly.

WEISSBERG

A rocket?

LOGAN

Be more specific.

WEISSBERG

A hostile rocket?

LOGAN

Be more specific, Weissberg!

WEISSBERG breaks a sweat.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Time is ticking, Weissberg, it's a matter of seconds now!

WEISSBERG

A hostile rocket... mid-flight?

Everyone CHUCKLES. Logan abandons the line mid flight.

LOGAN

"Mid-flight"? Wrong. This is a goddamn missile at a speed of 5 miles per *second*. It carries a nuclear warhead capable of destroying Manhattan. — Now, multiply that by two hundred, aimed towards sixty cities — all at the same time. Who is there to protect these 300 million people from such an attack?

Silence. José watches, fascinated and scared.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

It's not a rhetorical question!!

JOSÉ

We are.

LOGAN

What did you say?

JOSÉ

Um... I just said ah... That— we are the ones who can... hopefully... protect the... Sir.

LOGAN

Who the hell are you?

JOSÉ
I'm José Hernández. It's my first
day here.

LOGAN
In what capacity?

JOSÉ
Lab engineer, sir.

LOGAN
Wanna know what a great
contribution to the Defense Program
would be? Be here on time.

The crowd CHUCKLES.

JOSÉ
I got lost.

LOGAN
Oh, you think that's funny? As far
as I know nobody else had an
answer. And yesterday's was the
third X-ray laser test we've
failed, *spectacularly*. If you
people can't give me a successful
test, you can kiss the Strategic
Defense Initiative *and* your jobs
good bye...

As he heads out:

LOGAN (CONT'D)
(Re: José)
Weissberg! Get this guy an office
and get him to work now.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS - LATER

José walks a step behind Weissberg – not the nicest guy in
the world – as they head down a long hallway.

He opens the door to a tiny, dark, windowless room. There is
an old desk that barely fits, a chair and a lamp. That's it.

WEISSBERG
Here you go.

José tries the overhead lights. They're not working.

José walks in and tries the desk lamp. It's unplugged. He
looks for an outlet. There's none.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, RECEPTION - MOMENTS LATER

José at the reception desk. STACEY, the receptionist, types furiously.

JOSÉ

Excuse me... Hi, José Hernández. Do you know where I could find an extension cord?

STACEY

(Still typing...)

You're the new guy, right? Come, let me show you the supply room.

She opens up a drawer and grabs a HUGE SET OF 50 KEYS.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, SUPPLY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Stacey moves like a squirrel and talks FAST. She opens the door to a storage room packed with cleaning supplies.

STACEY

Here's everything you might need, bleach, mops, brooms, rags, Windex — there's another supply closet on the 6th floor, right next to the ladies room. Take the keys.

JOSÉ

Hey. I think you're confus—

STACEY

Also... The third floor men's room needs toilet paper.

(A beat)

When you get a chance. Welcome!

JOSÉ

I'm not the—

WOMAN

Stacey! Mrs. Logan's on the line for you!

STACEY

Coming!

(To José)

Let me know if you need anything else!

José watches her go, holding the biggest KEY RING imaginable. He walks into the supply room and whaddayaknow: There's an EXTENSION CORD right there on the shelf — HE GRABS IT.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, VARIOUS - NIGHT

A HALLWAY — CLOSE ON a POWER OUTLET WITH AN EXTENSION CORD PLUGGED INTO IT. We track down the CORD, past several doors, then around a corner, and into...

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, JOSÉ'S OFFICE - NIGHT

José's tiny little office. It's way more welcoming than before — his desk lamp now working; he types on a Compaq.

Weissberg comes in and drops a stack of papers on his desk.

WEISSBERG

Read these.

On José, frustrated. He looks at his dark reflection on the computer.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

José fishes around the kitchen for snacks while his mother chops some onions.

JULIA

What's with the long face?

JOSÉ

Nothing. Every day feels like the first day of school.

JULIA

Do you want to take some tacos to work tomorrow?

JOSÉ

No, gracias, mami.

JULIA

Your sister told me she met a nice girl for you.

JOSÉ

Here you go again.

JULIA

We're not gonna be around forever, eh! And then what are you gonna do? Grow old by yourself like some kind of mad scientist?

JOSÉ

Please, mami, not tonight. Today was... overwhelming.

JULIA

You try spending a day with that man en esta casa, *y luego me dices qué es 'overwhelming'*.

They hear a thump outside.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I can't believe it! He's back there again!

José grabs two cold MODELOS from the fridge.

JULIA (CONT'D)

JULIA (CONT'D)

Y le llevas su cheve de premio.

And you reward him with a beer.

Another THUMP — José laughs; gives her a big kiss.

JOSÉ

They're both for me.

EXT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

José emerges from the side of the house and into the garden.

JOSÉ

JOSÉ

Ya métase, le va a dar un aire.

You should go in. You're gonna get sick.

Salvador is on his knees working on his own orchard. Some fruit trees are starting to grow. He stands and starts digging with a shovel.

SALVADOR

There's a storm coming. I don't want my trees to get ruined. See how well they are doing?

José joins him and helps pull old roots.

JOSÉ

You spend all day driving that truck, coming and going from the fields to the 'canerías', and you come home to work some more.

SALVADOR

You can take the farmer out of the fields, but not the fields out of the farmer.

(MORE)

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

Press the earth there for me...

José follows his dad's instruction.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

So? How is it going?

José answers by cracking his beer open. Then they sit side by side, taking in the night.

JOSÉ

I don't know. I just want... Things could be easier.

SALVADOR

You know, it's hard work or nothing.

JOSÉ

You could be proud of me. I mean, I'm an engineer, not a janitor or something.

SALVADOR

What if you were? What's wrong with being a janitor?

José looks up to the sky.

JOSÉ

Nothing... It's not rocket science though.

Salvador shakes his head.

SALVADOR

You have a long way to go, Pepito.

José fashions a bittersweet smile.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

You know everything your mother and me did for...

JOSÉ

I know! I know everything! I know you lost the house in Michoacán because of me. You don't have to bring that up every single time I'm trying to have a nice, quiet beer with you.

Salvador looks at him a bit disappointed.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
It gets heavy, you know.

Beat.

Salvador gets up off the ground and heads to the house.
SALVADOR SALVADOR
Pues ponte fuerte. Well, get stronger.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

José is seated among the other engineers. Logan gives his daily angry briefing. Everyone takes notes. José seems behind, off pace.

LOGAN
We're about to detonate a nuclear goddamn bomb and hope that X-ray laser shoots off rays at the right energies, correct amount and... in the precise direction that we want. If that sounds insane to the press it's because it is. So I want this test to run *flawlessly*. Prove the skeptics wrong... And keep our funding while we're at it.

CLOSE ON JOSÉ as he listens...

LOGAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Today I want you to comb through every last piece of data we have. *Look for errors*. The miscalculations we don't spot today... will blow up our chances tomorrow. So *get... to work*.

The crowd gets up and exits room.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
Weissberg, are you keeping Hernández busy?

Weissberg nods - annoyed.

Everyone gets up and knows what to do, but José seems lost, clumsy.

He follows Weissberg and a couple of colleagues through one aisle but his attention is drawn to the melody coming out of a small radio in one of the desktops. It's The 5th Dimension's "**Aquarious**", bringing back memories.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT

José, in his pajamas, at his desk, the NASA application in front of him again, but this time every single question has been answered.

José sets it on his desk, grabs a pen, and proceeds to fill -
NAME AND LAST NAME: JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ. He folds it and puts in an envelope.

Lety opens the door.

LETY

Mom wants to know if you want tacos
for work tomorrow.

JOSÉ

I don't. Thank you.

LETY

What's that?

JOSÉ

Nothing.

Lety shrugs. José puts the application away, gets in bed. He has barely closed his eyes when...

INT. LAWRENCE LIVERMORE LABS, CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

José eats the saddest baloney sandwich. Just like everyone else. His hair and fashion have changed, his style now emulates the rest.

WEISSBERG

I believe the X-rays are being
diffused at the interfaces causing
a lower energy output and an out of
focus output beam.

SCIENTIST 1

We're aware of these small losses,
which is why we pump more energy
into the reaction, what's your
point?

José interrupts.

JOSÉ

Yes, they are small losses, but when you cascade your parts, these losses propagate over many interfaces and they become significant. What if we look at the man-made pad material, study their density homogeneity and select pads that have the best match at each interface thus minimizing disruption at the interfaces?

Weissberg shares a look with the scientist.

WEISSBERG

Sorry, I have to make a call.

He leaves, the scientist follows.

José takes a last bite wondering what being taken seriously would feel like.

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP, MAIN LOT - DAY

José stands by his beloved Chevy lowrider as a SALESMAN inspects it, taking detailed notes – Beto looks on.

BETO

Don't do this!

JOSÉ

It's a 30 year old car, Beto.

BETO

But it's El Impala! Think of the adventures we've lived together in this car. You know, I think you're trying to FORGET who you are!

JOSÉ

This is not who I am, it's a gas guzzler with more miles on it than The Enterprise.

BETO

I don't know. It feels like a betrayal, this hurts.

Just then, José sees Adela, the Mexican young woman he saw that time at the fields. She's walking by, holding a clipboard as she heads into the main office. José and Adela exchange quick glances. Something happened there! Did she remember him?

SALESMAN

It's in pretty good shape all things considered. Let me take this to my manager and see what she says. I think you can walk out of here with a really good deal.

JOSÉ

Inside?

SALESMAN

There's plenty of coffee and snacks.

BETO

That's how they get you, yo. You give up your soul for a bag of *pinches* Doritos.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP, MAIN OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

We see Beto in the distance, helping himself to snacks like it's an All You Can Eat Buffet.

Meanwhile, Adela, THE MANAGER! tries to close a deal with José, but our guy is too nervous.

ADELA

I think you're gonna be really happy with this vehicle. Great mileage, nice sporty ride... I think it's a good investment on every level.

JOSÉ

Thank you, yeah, let's do it, sure.

ADELA

Great!! I'll get working on this right away!... Sir?

JOSÉ

What? O.K. Hey, did I see you in the fields a while ago?

An awkward beat.

ADELA

Yeah, probably. I sometimes help my father.

JOSÉ

I do too!

He smiles, she's perfect.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
Wow. I just... bought a car.

ADELA
Congratulations.

JOSÉ
Sorry. I don't... My name is José.

ADELA
I'm Adela.

JOSÉ
What car did I get, again? I am...
Confused. Distracted. Sorry.

ADELA
(Amused, smiling)
So you don't know what kind of car
you just got?

JOSÉ
No idea. Could be a delivery truck
for all I know.

She laughs.

ADELA
Well, it's actually an old UPS
truck.

And she's funny? He's floored.

JOSÉ
Look, I know this is awkward, and
you're in the middle of work and
all, but... Uh... Would you— At
some point, maybe— It doesn't—
You know— Um... Forget it.

ADELA
Yeah, well, I wouldn't mind going
on a date on a UPS truck. But I
don't think it's gonna happen.

JOSÉ
Why not?

ADELA
Well... Because you'd have to meet
my father first.

JOSÉ
I'm really good with dads.

ADELA
Okay, then. At your own risk.
There's one more requirement,
though.

JOSÉ
Shoot.

ADELA
You have to get your friend off my
snack bar before I call the cops.

Beto's indeed on his third serving now.

José laughs – Adela smiles: It's on.

EXT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, PARKING LOT - DAY

A new, "americanized" José drives into the parking lot. American music blasting from his speakers, looking sharp and ready for work in his –maybe too in your face– American style.

He steps out of his car – BEEP-BEEP. Proud. Happy. A sporty MAZDA RX-7 parks next to Logan's Mercedes.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, JOSÉ'S OFFICE - LATER

José sits at his desk. Weissberg walks in carrying a large box filled with documents and a thin ENVELOPE.

WEISSBERG
You got mail.

He drops the envelope on his desk. A NASA logo on it.

WEISSBERG (CONT'D)
It's a waste of time. Even with
graduate studies, you know that,
right?
(beat)
I want you to Xerox these – two
copies of each page, then archive
them in the basement.

JOSÉ
That's... thousands of pages.

WEISSBERG

Yep.

JOSÉ

I mean, I thought— I think there might be a better way to use my time?

WEISSBERG

This is a good way to use your time.

And leaves. What a jerk.

José looks at the envelope, his heart racing, fearful, elated, all the feelings all at once. He reaches for it... opens it... and pulls out a single page:

"Dear Applicant. We regret to inform you..."

José stops reading right there. He would look out the window, disappointed, but there are none. He's CRUSHED. José looks at the box of documents.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ SHACK , STOCKTON – NIGHT

José comes out of his bedroom. Salvador is watching a noisy image on TV, Ricardo Montalván as Khan on Startrek.

SALVADOR

Mira, *Starrtrek*, would you mind holding the antenna for me?

JOSÉ

I'm going out.

Salvador takes a good look at his son, he has changed.

SALVADOR

Look at you. *Vas con Beto?*

JOSÉ

Nope. I've got a date.

Salvador grins surprised.

SALVADOR

Ah pues, mira, good luck. I'll tell your mom as soon as she gets back from Berta's. She's going to be happy.

Salvador turns back to the TV. José looks at his reflection in a mirror in his way out. Then he looks at his dad.

JOSÉ

Papá.

SALVADOR

Yes?

JOSÉ

Te quiero.

JOSÉ

I love you.

EXT. ADELA'S FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Adela opens the door. She speaks fast.

ADELA

I'm so sorry for what's about to happen. Please don't run.

JOSÉ

What?

INT. ADELA'S FAMILY HOME, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

TWO OLD MEN stare directly at us – gravely. They got craggy Mexican faces, leathered from years and years in the fields.

José sweats.

Adela enters with her MOM, all smiles, they bring a couple of glasses of water. José sips his right away.

MOM

¿De qué parte de Michoacán eres pues?

MOM

Where in Michoacán are you from?

JOSÉ

De la piedad.

A long judgmental beat. Then Adela's mother starts mumbling a song: "**El perro negro**".

MOM

"Al otro lado del puente de La Piedad, Michoacán..."

The uncles stand still.

MOM (CONT'D)

¿Y qué cultivaban en Michoacán?

MOM (CONT'D)

What did you grow in Michoacán?

JOSÉ

Maíz. Alfalfa.

JOSÉ

Corn. Alfalfa.

The Uncles nod. José has no idea if this was the right or wrong answer.

MOM

My husband will be home soon. He had a long shift today.

JOSÉ

No problem, I'm glad I get to meet the rest of the family.

MOM

Are you hungry?

We hear the front door. We reveal a burly MAN covered in dirt after hours spent working the fields. In a way, he is a version of Salvador.

ADELA

¡Papi! So good you're here. Este es José. José - mi papá.

They exchange a blunt handshake. José is worried again.

PAPÁ

Mucho gusto. Veo que ya están muy instalados.

DAD

Nice to meet you. I see you've got settled.

JOSÉ

Yeah, we were just starting to...

PAPÁ

(lo interumpe)

Me supongo que no han hablado de cuáles son tus intenciones con mi hija.

DAD

(interrupts)

I guess you haven't talked about your intentions with my daughter.

Adela wants to die.

ADELA

Papá...

PAPÁ

Adela no tiene permiso de salir en citas. ¿Ya le contaron eso?

ADELA

Dad...

DAD

Adela is not allowed to go out on dates. Have you told him?

José opens his mouth, but can't speak.

ADELA

¡Papá!

PAPÁ

Si quiere venir a visitarla aquí es bienvenido. Eso sí, siempre y cuando esté yo, así que ojalá que ya no se le vuelva a hacer temprano.

ADELA

Dad!

DAD

If you want to come visit her here, you're very welcome. I have to be here, of course, so I trust you won't be early again.

ADELA
Oh, my god!

EXT. ADELA'S FAMILY HOME - LATER

Adela comes out to say goodbye.

ADELA
I'm so sorry. Really. I didn't mean
to put you through the Spanish
inquisition.

JOSÉ
It's fine. It was... fun?

ADELA
They're actually nice deep down.
You probably just intimidate them.

JOSÉ
I intimidate them? Together they
have the body mass of a large bull.

ADELA
I don't mean it like that... It's
just... You're an engineer and
stuff.

JOSÉ
I thought nerds didn't intimidate
anybody.

PAPÁ (O.S.)
¡Ya métete, Adela!

PAPÁ (O.S.)
Get back in here, Adela!

ADELA
Ya voooooy.

ADELA
Coming!

Adela rolls her eyes.

ADELA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

JOSÉ
Don't worry. I'll come back.

The physics of their bodies resists movement. They could stretch this moment out forever. It's obvious for both of them, and it's not a problem. Love happening in silence.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, SUPPLY ROOM - LATER

Page... after page... after page... José diligently does the work, standing by the Xerox machine as it spits out documents, charts, calculations and reports.

He's bored out of his mind. Suddenly, though, one particular GRAPH catches his eye. He picks up the copy and studies it. His wheels are turning... He stops the machine. And looks more carefully at the paper.

Then he searches in the newly copied pile for the next page. And the next and the next, collecting them like a puzzle.

AN EPIPHANY of sorts - he mentally grinds the numbers, the pictures, the explosions and THEN—

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, RECEPTION - MOMENTS LATER

José darts through the hallways until he bumps into Logan and his ENTOURAGE OF GEEKS, marching out of the building.

JOSÉ

Sir. I think I may have found—

LOGAN

Not now, Hernández, not now.

They PLOW PAST HIM, and leave. Then, from the speakers:

STACEY (O.S.)

2-2-1 José Hernández, Room 542
needs cleaning. Just when you get a
chance.

We PUSH IN ON JOSÉ, furious: He's had enough.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, JOSÉ'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON THE MASSIVE KEYCHAIN as José GRABS it...

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, MAIN LAB - MOMENTS LATER

José peeks through the lab glass door. It's empty. Inside the WORKSTATION OF A SUPERCOMPUTER.

Then he starts trying the keys. One by one. Till he hits the jackpot: A KEY OPENS THE DOOR.

INSIDE THE LAB—

And walks in.

JOSÉ
Let's do this.

And he SWITCHES HER ON. He gleams, his instincts come alive.

José spreads his papers across a desk. He enters information. He checks the results on the screen. He takes notes – erases previous ones, comes up with new ones.

On the screen: "SIMULATION COMPLETE" — A printer spews out results.

José is now in a GROOVE. And the space around him has grown MESSIER: PAPER and PRINT-OUTS, CHARTS, DIAGRAMS. And then:

LOGAN (O.S.)
What the hell are you doing?

BUSTED! Logan and his entourage – including Weissberg – circle him like a squad.

JOSÉ
Sorry, sir, I was uh...

LOGAN
How did you get in here?

JOSÉ
I have... I have keys.

LOGAN
You have keys? How the hell do you have keys to the lab?

JOSÉ
I have keys to every room in the building, sir.

A beat.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
The receptionist thinks I'm the janitor.

LOGAN
This is very delicate equipment, you can't just—
(Re: the mess)
What's all this?

WEISSBERG

He's supposed to be making copies,
sir.

LOGAN

He's supposed to be making copies?
And instead you're...

He reads one of his heavily annotated print outs.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

What the hell are you even doing?

JOSÉ

I just wanted to put a concern
through some tests.

LOGAN

A concern?

JOSÉ

Yes, sir. My concern is the
instrument you're currently using
to measure the laser output is
subject to interactions with the
explosion itself.

Total skepticism; but he barrels on.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

You can see it here. And here. See,
the system works by measuring the
brightness of beryllium detectors
when they're lit up by lasers. But
the problem is these reflectors are
being heated by the explosion. So
unless they are separately
calibrated, there's no way to know
if the signal they're producing
comes from the laser or the bomb.

(A beat)

As shown by the tests I just ran.

The team looks on with distrust. Logan checks some more of
the papers... It all slowly starts to make sense.

LOGAN

You mean to tell me no one's caught
this before?

WEISSBERG

That is highly unlikely, sir—

LOGAN

Highly unlikely? I'm not in the business of *likelihood*, Weissberg. I'm into certainty. *Scientific goddamn certainty*. I want you all to stay here and confirm these numbers for me, is that clear?

WEISSBERG

Sir, I —

But he's speechless.

LOGAN

Is that clear?

WEISSBERG

Yes, sir.

LOGAN

Be here all night if that's what it takes.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, RECEPTION - MOMENTS LATER

BOOM — The massive KEYCHAIN LANDS HARSHLY ON STACEY'S DESK.

She looks up, José in front of her.

JOSÉ

Hey. So, I'm not the new guy. I mean, I am, but I'm not the new janitor. I'm an engineer...

(as he leaves)

Not that there's anything wrong with being the janitor.

Stacey just sits there, she nods.

INT. ADELA'S HOUSE/ KITCHEN - LATER

José and Adela sit at the table, drinking a glass of Coke. Her mother comes in.

MOM

Are you enjoying your chat?

JOSÉ

Yes, ma'am, thank you.

MOM

Well, you better say everything you want to say to each other because Ezequiel will be home in thirty.

She leaves, José toasts with the class of coke.

JOSÉ

Your mom is so cool.

ADELA

She likes you. I can tell...

JOSÉ

She likes the nerd.

ADELA

You're a different kind of nerd.

JOSÉ

Yeah? Well, you strike me as...
Hmmm... I don't know, you're eager.

ADELA

Eager? As a matter of fact I am.

JOSÉ

So? What's your big dream? Goal?

ADELA

Goal?

JOSÉ

My dad says you have to focus on something, a goal. Then you have to work see how far you are, draw a path...

Interrupting, direct.

ADELA

I want to have my own restaurant.

JOSÉ

Ok, no hesitation there.

ADELA

A real restaurant, *comida Michoacana*, not your next burrito joint.

JOSÉ

I would definitely go.

ADELA
I know you would.

JOSÉ
I'd put money on it too.

They smile.

ADELA
What's yours? Your big goal, dream,
whatever.

JOSÉ
Well...
(beat)
When I was a kid... Nah... It's
stupid.

He thinks about it. Decides against it.

ADELA
Oh, you can't do that! You
absolutely cannot do that!

JOSÉ
Do what?!

ADELA
You were about to say something!
Tell me, what's your big dream?

JOSÉ
Marry Salma Hayek.

ADELA
Ha!
(beat)
Tell me, I want to get to know you.

He wants to but it feels silly. He hesitates. And then:

JOSÉ
I think I wanna be an astronaut.

She laughs, hard this time. When she stops...

ADELA
Oh, my god, you're serious.

A beat. And then it lands...

ADELA (CONT'D)
Wow. You mean to— Like—

JOSÉ
It's stupid.

ADELA
No! No, I just— I wasn't expecting it to... be that. I don't think it's stupid at all. It's the exact opposite of stupid. It's amazing. I feel really unambitious, now.

She laughs.

JOSÉ
Hey, a dream is a dream.

ADELA
Well, you know, stop by my joint for *unos tamales* on your way back from Mars.

JOSÉ
Will do.

He sees her hand on the table, close to his. He has the impulse to touch it... Adela smiles. It's so on. He reaches for her hand.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
Can I ask you something?

ADELA
Shoot.

We hear the door. It's Dad. They pull back their hands.

JOSÉ
What does a nerd have to do to be alone with you someday?

ADELA
(Big, big smile)
Well for starters you have to dump Salma. Then...

EXT. LARGE PATIO, WEDDING - DAY

CLOSE ON A KISS. It's an outdoor WEDDING.

A CANOPY OF LIGHTS, **Juan Gabriel's 'Querida'**, colorful BANNERS, and a small army of GUESTS.

José's family CHEERS and APPLAUDS.

Adela's family just sits there. Her mom has a big smile on her face, her dad seems rather grumpy. Further back, Beto POPS THE TEQUILA.

We travel over a MEXICAN FEAST spread across a long table as FAMILY MEMBERS help themselves to the food, till we land on José and Adela, posing, happy. Someone snaps a photo of them: FLASH!

CUT TO:

- A Hi8 home video of their every day:
- The birth of baby Julio crying.
- The first bath.
- Julia and Salvador carry him during the christening.
- Archival - NEWSCLIP: The dissolution of the Soviet Union.
- More Hi8 footage of a Adela and José holding a NEW BABY GIRL.
- Archival - NEWSCLIP: The Berlin wall falling.
- On the NEWS: "The U.S. ends its X-ray Laser Program"
- Archival newsclip: U.S.-Russian Nuclear Conversion Program 1990 announcement.
- A headshot of José, a Livermore top engineer.
- Livemore Labs footage.

ANCHOR O.S.

Engineers at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory have commenced a new implementation for X-Ray technology. A digital wide spectrum mammogram for early cancer detection in affected women. This after their "Star Wars" program was ended after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

- José interviewed.

JOSÉ

We're so proud of this project. We didn't only have the chance but the responsibility of using our technology and knowledge to save women's lives.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME - DAY

Chyron: 1994

THE WEDDING PHOTO, now FRAMED. We PULL BACK as...

Little JULIO (3) grabs the frame and BANGS it on a table.

ADELA (O.S.)
 Julio, put it back. Put it back
 now!

MORNING CHAOS in José and a VERY PREGNANT Adela's domestic war zone. José CHASES Julio down the hallway, making menacing noises as the kid LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY —

ADELA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 It's not funny, guys. José, I want
 that frame back in one piece!

BABY KARINA (1) cries on her lap. She feeds her.

ADELA (CONT'D)
 Are you getting home on time? I
 have an appointment to go see an
 old shop for the restaurant.

JOSÉ
 Old shop?

ADELA
 It could work.

JOSÉ
 Have you decided on a name?

ADELA
 I'm thinking my mother's name.

JOSÉ
 That's nice.

José RUNS up the stairs and finally CATCHES Julio, lifting him up and "flying" him through the air. The kid LOVES this.

ADELA
 Don't forget the diapers on your
 way back.

JOSÉ	JULIO
Space Shuttle Julio now	(Laughing)
entering the atmosphere, oh,	No, papá, no, no, no!!
wait, what's that? Some	
turbulence?!	

He shakes him up and the kid drops the frame, which BREAKS. They freeze in place, QUIET. They're in trouble.

ADELA (O.S.)
What did I just hear???

EXT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, DRIVEWAY - MORNING

TIGHT CLOSE on José and Adela's KISS.

He checks the mail on his way out. It's empty.

Then Adela, Baby Karina and Julio wave goodbye to Jose as he backs out of the driveway and heads off to work. It's still chaotic, but heartfelt and beautiful.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

José leads a TEAM OF ENGINEERS, Weissberg among them.

Logan enters the room. He's proud. The engineers disperse and Logan approaches José.

JOSÉ
After many months of adjustments
and trials we got approved by the
FDA.

Everyone cheers and claps.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
I have enjoyed every second of
running this team.
(re: Weissberg)
Thank you for all of your work.

Weissberg nods.

WEISSBERG
Thank you.

JOSÉ
And of course, let's give a big
round of applause to our captain,
Clint Logan.

The two men share a kind look. The assembly breaks off.

LOGAN
Hey, I have something for you...

José nods, intrigued.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

The Highly Enriched Uranium Program. In a shell: The US is buying the Russians's nuclear material and bringing it to America's power plants. They're sending the very best, from all national labs...

JOSÉ

Where is that happening again?

LOGAN

Siberia. Do you have a suitcase and a good jacket?

José smiles, proud. But he's not sure.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

This project is... You would have a piece of history in your hands.

JOSÉ

I... I'm speechless. I just don't know. My wife, my kids...

Logan walks to the entrance and turns.

LOGAN

You know... A job like this would look pretty damn good in an application for the space program.

José sighs.

EXT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME - DUSK

We see José and Adela's modest but beautiful home as José steps out of his car and checks the mail, NOTHING.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, VARIOUS - NIGHT

José walks into the house. It's dark.

In the kids' bedroom, he pulls up the children's covers and kisses Julio's forehead.

We follow him into the bedroom.

JOSÉ

Adelita? I'm sorry I'm late. I promise I'll take you see that shop... Tomorrow.

...but it's empty.

The kitchen: Dark and empty. There's light coming from his studio.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, JOSÉ'S STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

José walks in and finds...

Adela sitting by his desk, looking down. Then he notices his desk: His six NASA REJECTION LETTERS, spread before her like forensic evidence.

She just turns and looks at him.

ADELA

What are these?

But he can't come up with a response.

ADELA (CONT'D)

Say something.

JOSÉ

I was going to tell you.

ADELA

I just want to make sure I'm getting this straight: You have *actually* applied six times to the Space Program... and you never once thought I'd like to know?

JOSÉ

It's— I thought I'd give it a shot.

ADELA

A shot? These are *six* shots — *Six shots*, José, over the course of *six years*.

JOSÉ

It's just a stupid dream.

ADELA

A stupid dream?! You wanna know what I think of as a stupid dream?

(MORE)

ADELA (CONT'D)

The dream of trusting your partner
if you're planning to go to space.

JOSÉ

I did tell you.

ADELA

You mentioned it once over a date.
*Years ago. AND I thought you were
joking.*

JOSÉ

Nobody's going anywhere, Adela, I
got *rejected* six times.

ADELA

And what if you hadn't?

JOSÉ

But I did! I was gonna tell you.

ADELA

When? Collect call from the moon!?

JOSÉ

Adela— I just want you to be proud
of me.

Beat.

ADELA

You were late.
(beat)
Did you bring the diapers?

JOSÉ

Let's not—

ADELA

Did you remember to bring the
diapers I asked you for *three times*
today?

JOSÉ

The FDA thing came out today.

Silence.

ADELA

(sad)
Congrats. Nice work. I'm actually
pretty proud of you.

She collects the letters, stands up, and shoves them in his hands. She leaves José holding his stack of rejection.

He looks at his old corn cob, still there in the shelf, a bit mummified, like an old memory...

EXT. STOCKTON – NIGHT

Laying on the hood of the car, José and Beto drink beer under the stars. José has a pack of diapers in his lap.

BETO

You know they put the diapers by the beer stall because it's depressed dads who go buy them in the middle of the night... Damn, you stupid.

JOSÉ

She's been so stressed out with the restaurant thing.

BETO

Maybe she just wants to be in the loop if you're planning to go to space?

JOSÉ

Well, not happening. I've been rejected six times.

José drinks up, feeling sorry for himself. Beto chuckles. A long silence. Then...

BETO

Gotta bolt, cousin.

JOSÉ

What's up?

BETO

What do you think is up? C'mon you're the smart one, no? A 5am shift, of course.

Beto gets ready to go... but then:

BETO (CONT'D)

Look at me, man. Look at you. You know, I never bought that bullshit about the American Dream.

A beat.

BETO (CONT'D)

But I see you. You've had love, you've had chances. People have believed in you. You got a beautiful family who loves you and puts up with your crap. What more do you want?! *You made it.* And that's not because you ditched El Impala...

JOSÉ

Oh my God, El Impala all over again...

BETO

What's the deal with space?

José shrugs.

JOSÉ

I don't know man.
(a heartfelt beat)
Maybe I just want to take my hands off the ground, you know?

Beto shakes his head. José lowers his sight.

BETO

Hey, tell me something, who would be better than a migrant, someone who knows what is like to dive into the unknown... who better than that to dare leave this planet?
(beat)
Be thankful. Go home.

Beto walks off as José sits on the hood of his car, thinking. But he turns.

BETO (CONT'D)

Promise me something. When you're up there. Because you ARE going to be up there. Have a nice look down on earth.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME - DAWN

José walks into the dark kitchen at dawn. José puts the diapers on the kitchen table... And just stands there, idly staring at it.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME – NIGHT

A tense family dinner is over. José remains sitting at the head of the table, alone. Adela just stares at him.

JOSÉ

I'm so, so sorry, Adelita. I...

A beat. They're both tired. She offers her hand. He takes it, relieved. Weirdly, though, her tone is all business:

ADELA

How big is this... Space idea?

JOSÉ

What? No. No, it's just a silly—

ADELA

José. How big is it?

It takes him a second to come clean.

JOSÉ

I think about it every single hour of every single day. Always been there. Can't make it go away.

A long pause.

ADELA

I refuse to be the oblivious... permanently annoyed, whining wife, so don't put me there... I need you to trust me. I take you seriously. And if we're going to do this we're going to do this right.

A beat.

ADELA (CONT'D)

I'm gonna ask you a question. And I want you to give me an honest answer, okay?

He nods.

ADELA (CONT'D)

The people that got into the Program the last six years... What do they have that you don't?

JOSÉ

Well, there's a lot of training, and it's money...

ADELA

Forget about that. We have savings.
What do they have that you don't?

PUSH IN on JOSÉ as a flame is suddenly **IGNNITED**—

EXT. AIR ACADEMY, RUNWAY - DAY

José steps into a sketchy air academy airstrip.

JOSÉ (V.O.)

The last batch of candidates were
 chosen from two thousand nine
 hundred sixty two applicants.

AN OLD CESSNA threatening to fall apart and a weird looking
 FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR welcome him. He hands him some cash.

JOSÉ (V.O.)

Some are military, some hold PhDs.
 There's engineers and scientists,
 there's even some teachers... and
 pilots.

INT. CESSNA, ON THE GROUND- LATER

INSTRUMENTS. AIRSPEED. HORIZON. José sits next to the
 instructor. He takes the yoke.

JOSÉ (V.O.)

Lots of pilots. Really good ones,
 too.

INSTRUCTOR

So... This is up, this is down...

JOSÉ (V.O.)

They also have extensive success in
 high performance hobbies.

EXT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, DRIVEWAY - DAWN

SNEAKERS. SHOE LACES - TIGHT! José, in running gear,
 stretches on the driveway.

JOSE (V.O.)

Running, swimming, triathlons,
 fishing, tennis, weight-lifting...
 I mean some of these guys are
 outright athletes.

EXT. STREET - LATER

José RUNS, determined. About to cross a street, so focused he misses the CAR THAT ALMOST HITS HIM - DRIVER HONKS. Sorry!

JOSÉ (V.O.)

One of them is a professional deep sea diver who has logged over 700 dives. Diving is key.

INT. POOL - DAY

MASK. TANK. REGULATOR. José, dips backwards into a pool.

UNDERWATER—

He adjusts the mouthpiece, but it loosens and falls out. He rises, panicking!

EXT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME - DAY

José takes an envelope from the mail box. He opens it, and reads the letter: It's from NASA, and it says:

"Dear Applicant - We regret to inform you..."

He stops reading, pissed.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, PARKING LOT - DAWN

Early morning. Logan parks his Mercedes. He grabs his things, looks out:

José SPRINTS down the parking lot.

LOGAN

Talk about a mid-life crisis.

JOSÉ (V.O.)

Oh, and of course there's the language thing. These guys speak Chinese, French, German... But the most important one is, of course...

-- José stops and looks at Logan.

JOSÉ

Hey about that Highly Enriched Uranium Program...

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, JOSÉ'S STUDIO - NIGHT

José holds a crying 12-MONTH-old BABY GIRL as he enters his studio, sits by his desk, and tries to OPEN an ENVELOPE with one hand. He pulls out a LETTER and reads:

"Dear Applicant. We regret to inform you..."

CUT TO:

-- José at a meeting with the all the engineers at Livermore.

-- Once again, a very PREGNANT Adela serves dinner with José's help. Their big family growing around them.

-- José runs a Marathon. Julio offers a cup of water as he passes in-front of their yard, José grabs it without stopping.

-- Adela GIVES BIRTH!

-- Another letter: *"WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU..."*

-- And another: *"IT IS WITH UTMOST REGRET..."*

-- And another: *"UNFORTUNATELY..."*

-- "JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ" on a brand new NASA application form. FOLDED. ENVELOPE. SEALED.

INT. JOSE AND ADELA'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAWN

Early morning breakfast. Kids are loud and they all ask:

KIDS
Where's papá???

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

José RUNS down the street, looks both ways, BOLTS PAST THE STREET CROSSING, and drops the application in a MAILBOX.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
It's probably taken them all years
to get to where they are.

EXT. POOL - DAY

FINS. PRESSURE GAUGE UP! A SPLASH UNDERWATER. José scuba dives in the pool.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
 And still, even if you get good at
 all these things, there's no
 guarantee.

INT. CESSNA, ON THE GROUND - DAY

José holds the control yoke once more.

INSTRUCTOR
 Turn right to course three one zero
 and descend to 5,000 feet.

José complies, he looks at the guy who seems on a trance...
 Is he ok?

JOSÉ
 You know we're on the ground,
 right?

INSTRUCTOR
 You'll be up when you're ready.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
 I could get good. And then get
 better... And then even better...

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, JOSÉ'S STUDIO - NIGHT

José enters his studio, sits by his desk, and OPENS an
 ENVELOPE. NASA LETTERHEAD, then:

"Dear Applicant. We regret to inform you..."

He stops reading and folds it back up. Then he opens up a
 desk drawer, pulls a stack of ten other NASA rejections, adds
 the new one to the pile... and closes the drawer. His cob
 rocket seems to be staring back at him with disappointment.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
 All upcoming space travel will be
 to the International Space Station.
 Russian is a must.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME - EVENING

José and Adela clear the table post-dinner. José takes one
 last stack of plates out of her hands... and DANCES WITH HER.

ADELA
 Everything okay?

JOSÉ

Yeah.

(A beat - sad)

All good.

ADELA

Sure?

Adela makes a face, kisses him. LOOKS at him.

ADELA (CONT'D)

You need to go to Russia.

He looks at her. Is she for real?

JOSÉ

I'm sorry.

ADELA

About what? Don't be silly.

JOSÉ

Por el restaurante.

ADELA

Are you saying that in Spanish to make it easier?

JOSÉ

We're spending the restaurant money.

ADELA

We're going to be fine... Please let me go, I feel like a drifting zeppelin.

José stops at her lack of romanticism. She laughs.

ADELA (CONT'D)

What? That is exactly how I feel.

She smiles and kisses him.

JOSÉ

I'm really sorry.

ADELA

Well now you have to do what you have to do to get this, right?

JOSÉ

I'd be traveling nonstop. I'd miss
all of you so much... the new
baby...

He kisses her enormous belly.

ADELA

We grew up watching our people make
sacrifices. Your parents, my
parents... Look at us, I mean. It's
on us now.

She's going to say something more but one of the kids starts
CRYING. Adela gets up. José stays there, eyes open...

Salvador, working on a field, touching the earth, looks back
at him from one of the family photos framed on the wall.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

-- An airplane flying through the sky.

-- A Russian stamp on José's American passport.

EXT. MOVING CAR, SIBERIA - DAY

José looks out a car window. SIBERIA - white *nothingness*.

RUSSIAN ENGINEER (V.O.)

(In Russian)

As the High Enriched Uranium
Transparency Program gets underway,
we welcome American volunteer José
Hernández.

INT. NUCLEAR CONTROL ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON JOSÉ as a small crowd of ENGINEERS applauds. Reveal
a CONTROL ROOM with wall to wall screens and NUCLEAR GAUGES.

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

*He'll be with us for the next
months, let's make him feel right
at home.*

People laugh.

JOSÉ

(Struggles in Russian)

I... thank... you... very... much.

ON JOSÉ'S look, lost, jet-lagged and confused.

EXT. SIBERIA - DAY

Dead silence. A vast, snow-covered Siberian field. José RUNS THROUGH it.

ADELA (ON THE PHONE)
I really like 'Yesenia'. My mother insists on 'Dolores'.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
I'm so sorry. I should have been there. I feel... I...

ADELA (ON THE PHONE)
I know. This sucks... But we agreed on this. Remember.

We just see José traversing the white, endless frame like a tiny little ant.

INT. NUCLEAR CONTROL ROOM, BACK ROOM - DAY

A telephone booth in a back room, depressing, greenish – José on the phone.

JOSÉ
I know, but it feels...

ADELA (V.O.)
It was quick. I started having contractions and called mom, I nearly didn't make it to the hospital.

JOSÉ
I feel horrible for not being there.

ADELA (V.O.)
Children are born when they are born. That's how it is.

José sighs.

ADELA (V.O.)
Hold on, Julio wants to talk to you.

JULIO (V.O.)
¿Papá?

José looks overwhelmed by the sound of his voice. He takes a second to compose himself...

JOSÉ
Julito... *¿Qué pasa, buddy?* How's your new baby sister?

JULIO (V.O.)
She's OK. But Karina wouldn't eat her dinner, papá.

We can hear a sweet family quarrel in the background. José listens to it like it's a gorgeous chant.

JOSÉ
Tell her she has to.

JULIO
I'm going to put the baby on.

José holds a tear back.

JOSÉ
Put her on.

Baby gagging on the other side of the line. José is crushed.

-- AN AMERICAN STAMP ON A PASSPORT.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

José holds the baby - he shows her a set of MATRYOSHKA DOLLS, while Julia corrals the rest of the kids around the kitchen.

Adela is sitting on the table.

Salvador admires the small creature, his youngest granddaughter.

SALVADOR
Did you know Monarch butterflies weigh 1 gram?

JOSÉ
I did not, papá.

Of course he does, this is a recurrent tale.

SALVADOR
They fly 2,000 miles every year and they weigh 1 gram.

On José, a bit lost, noticing a wet diaper.

SALVADOR (CONT'D)

They travel together, that's how they do it. That's how they can face danger, the cold, a *los depredadores*, that's how they survive and succeed.

José smiles looks at his father, he gets it. They share a moment. Then turns to Adela and his mother. It's been true all the time; he has it all. He sighs.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Adela is breastfeeding the new baby. José by her side fills in a new application, licks the envelope. He looks at her with tenderness, sadness even.

ADELA

I think you shouldn't mail this one in.

JOSÉ

What do you mean?

-- The NATIONAL MALL. WASHINGTON DC.

INT. NASA HEADQUARTERS, HALLWAY - LATER

BUREUCRACY. Fluorescents. José rolls a rickety carry-on bag down a hallway.

INT. NASA HEADQUARTERS, PROGRAM SELECTION LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

CJ STURCKOW - head of the program, stern, busy, no-nonsense - talks to the RECEPTIONIST. There's a small army of STAFF behind him.

José walks into the lobby. No one looks up. He comes close and stands in front of Sturckow. Then he unzips one of the compartments on his suitcase, and pulls out his application.

JOSÉ

Excuse me, Sir, CJ Sturckow, head of the Astronaut Candidates Selection Program. I'm José Hernández.

That does the trick. Sturckow looks up, surprised.

STURCKOW

José Hernández from...

JOSÉ
Yes, sir.

STURCKOW
What are you doing here?

JOSÉ
I decided to personally bring in my application this year.

STURCKOW
Where did you fly from?

JOSÉ
Stockton, California, sir.

STURCKOW
You could have just mailed it.

JOSÉ
I know. But I wanted to meet you and hand it to you personally.

A beat.

STURCKOW
Why do you keep trying after all this time?

JOSÉ
Sir, I'm determined to get into your program. And I believe this is my strongest application yet.

STURCKOW
Listen, Hernández, this would be your eleventh attempt. I admire your persistence and I thank you for coming all the way out here. I wish you'd saved the airfare—

JOSÉ
SIR.

The STAFF looks on — intrigued.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
This is my strongest application yet. And it's my *twelfth* attempt, not my eleventh.

It's a bit of a stand off.

STURCKOW

Let's hear it, then. What's changed?

Sturckow leans back and crosses his arms. *This* has changed:

JOSÉ

Sir, over the course of the last 10 years every single academic, professional and personal decision I've made, I've made with the Space Program in mind. I got a Masters in Electrical Engineering from Pacific University. I am now a pilot with over 100 hours under my belt. I got my scuba diving certificate. I am in the best shape of my life, I ran the San Francisco marathon not that long ago and I speak Russian. In fact, I volunteered to travel to Siberia as part of the Transparency Program of the US Department of Energy. I am the father of five perfect little children and the husband of the most incredible wife, who threatened to leave me if I didn't come see you.

(Beat)

I have applied twelve times and I have been on the verge of giving up after each rejection. But here I am. So you can turn me down again. But rest assured I will be standing here again in a year.

The staff want to applaud – they can't.

He sets the application on the receptionist's desk, zips up his suitcase, and moves toward the door.

José nods, and walks out.

EXT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, BACKYARD - DAY

An ASTRONAUT SHAPED PIÑATA gets RIPPED APART by VICIOUS HITS. It's a kid's party, and Julio – turning 8 – is giving it his all.

The family has gathered around the piñata. Loud CHEERING from José, Adela, Salvador, Julia, Lety, Chava, Beto, FAMILY FRIENDS and KIDS. The astronaut's head POPS RIGHT OFF, CANDY RAINS ON THE KIDS.

LATER —

A BUNCH of Kids play soccer with Beto — the goalie. Julio SCORES! Kids CHEER. Beto gets unreasonably upset!

BETO

¡No mames! I got my eye on you,
Julito! You keep playing off side,
that's not cool, man, NOT COOL!

ADELA (O.S.)

Oye! Beto! *¡No digas groserías!*
Your daughter is here!

Adela comes near MARISA (15), Beto's Daughter, and kisses her on the cheek.

ADELA (CONT'D)

José! Mail!

Salvador and Julia bicker as José makes eye contact with Adela, who was inside the house and now stands by the back door. She looks directly at José, a NASA envelope in her hand.

INT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, JOSÉ'S STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Quiet. José sits by his desk. The letter displayed in front of him — Adela stands by the door. Expectant. José looks straight at her... Then he looks down at the floor, trying to... understand?

She comes closer. Then, after a long beat, barely audible, he whispers...

JOSÉ

I got in.

Adela doesn't understand. Still very quietly:

ADELA

What?

Adela comes closer.

-- On the letter: "Dear Mr. Hernández".

A beat.

JOSÉ

I got in.

CLOSE ON ADELA as the news sinks in. Silence. She smiles.

ADELA

That's... That's not bad, right?

José bursts in laughter. She joins in.

And then they stay silent, looking into each other's eyes.

EXT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, BACKYARD - DAY

José hugs his father. Then his mother.

Beto stands by a smiling Marisa at the goal. Watching everything from afar.

José notices him, he grins. Beto does too.

Everyone is in tears, unbelieving.

INT. LAWRENCE LIVEREMORE LABS, RECEPTION - DAY

José carries a box with his belongings, nostalgic, walks into the reception area to find the entire Lab has gathered to bid him adieu. He stops, confused. Then ENGINEERS, Logan, Stacey and STAFF, even Weissberg, break into APPLAUSE.

And it doesn't stop. José stands there... overwhelmed.

EXT. SALVADOR AND JULIA'S HOUSE, DRIVEWAY - DAY

Typical Hernández family MAYHEM as Julia says goodbye to the kids. She helps Adela corral them into the car – which is now a MINIVAN! – PACKED TO THE RAFTERS.

José and Beto, argue.

BETO

I can't accept it.

JOSÉ

C'mon, take her for a spin. *Y dame un abrazo, cabrón.*

They hug like its a final goodbye. It's a bit sour but heartfelt. Then José walks away, down the poor barrio street.

BETO

Hey cousin! *Que Dios te acompañe.*

José smiles... and keeps walking. Beto just stands there. Then he looks at a SET OF KEYS in his hand, we PAN, and REVEAL JOSÉ'S MAZDA, shinier than ever, now Beto's.

José starts the minivan.

HONKING, YELLING, ANARCHY coming from the car.

Salvador and Julia wave them goodbye as the van drives off.

-- A sign: "ENTERING HOUSTON".

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

The CAMPUS OF JOHNSON SPACE CENTER. Hundreds of buildings over sixteen hundred acres. Clear Lake beyond. And a SIGN: "National Aeronautics & Space Administration" - NASA logo by its side.

STURCKOW (V.O.)

You should know the program will be especially taxing on your family. The sacrifices you're about to put them through are beyond anything you - or they - can imagine.

INT. MINIVAN, MOVING - DAY

José drives and looks out the window, in total AWE.

LAUNCHPADS, HANGARS, RUNWAYS... This place is amazing and it feels exciting and alive and POWERFUL.

STURCKOW (V.O.)

It's important you understand this does NOT in any way guarantee you'll be selected for a Space Mission. It's still a long shot and most candidates don't even make it through the full training.

EXT. HOUSTON HOME, DRIVEWAY - DAY

Adela supervises the MOVERS lugging their furniture into their new house, a two-story brick home with hedges and trees. A peaceful neighborhood. The kids run around and play.

INT. HOUSTON HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Adela opens the boxes marked "kitchen". Opens the faucet. No water comes out.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

José puts on the blue uniform. He looks at himself on the mirror, he smiles in disbelief.

STURCKOW (V.O.)

But at the same time, you can't lose sight of the fact that you have been chosen among *tens of thousands who share your dream.*

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Twelve ASTRONAUT CANDIDATES (ASCANS), including José, gather in this room. In front of the class is CJ STURCKOW himself.

STURCKOW

If we want you here it is because you are one of the very few, highly skilled, *extraordinary* people on the planet that we deem capable of flying to space in a rocket. Today begins a journey that will change you forever in ways you didn't even think possible. It won't be easy. You will push yourselves past your own limits. You will work as a team, and you will struggle alone. And these are your new brothers and sisters. Kalpana?

KALPANA CHAWLA, Indian American astronaut and instructor, takes over.

KALPANA

Hi guys. My name is Kalpana Chawla. I've been around here for a while and I'll be in charge of your mockup training. I say let's quit talking and get started!

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, MOTION BASE SIMULATOR - DAY

José is strapped into a simulator that PITCHES, ROLLS, YAWS and VIBRATES like a shuttle orbiter. He looks dizzy.

KALPANA (V.O.)

Keep'er steady, Hernández.

José moves the control stick with precision but it's no use. The ship seems to be out of control. AN ALARM SOUNDS — José SHAKES and ROCKS.

JOSÉ
It's not responding.

KALPANA (V.O.)
You're not responding — you control her, she doesn't control you.

The SIM jerks and pitches further, jostling José in his seat, now PULLING WITH BOTH HANDS! ANOTHER ALARM GOES OFF.

KALPANA (V.O.)
Level Three, Hernández — Go level three!!

ON THE SCREEN: The shuttle CRASHES. "FAIL" blinks. It stops moving. José just sits there, drenched in sweat.

OUTSIDE THE SIMULATOR —

From the outside the thing looks like, well, a high tech space machine. The candidates all stand around it, with Kalpana — wearing a headset. Sturckow observes.

The hatch opens and José steps out, embarrassed.

KALPANA
It's important to remember the shuttle is designed to a 'fail-ops/fail-safe' philosophy so—

Noticing a queasy José rejoining the group.

KALPANA (CONT'D)
Hernández, you okay?

JOSÉ
Yep.

KALPANA
The loss of one component can be tolerated without compromising the whole mission.

José BARFS. The group takes a step back.

KALPANA (CONT'D)
Yep, that happens. Who's next?

No one. They look terrified.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, BREAK ROOM - LATER

José sees THE ASCANS drink coffee and joke around – teasing about training, Sturckow and their upcoming quantum physics test.

José, tormented in a corner, makes a phone call.

ADELA (V.O.)
Some kids were mean to him.

JOSÉ
I'll talk to him once I get home.

ADELA (V.O.)
I'm just letting you know...

JOSÉ
I'm sorry I'll be late again.
(A beat)
Did the plumber go?

ADELA
What do you think?

José sighs.

INT. NASA - DAY

— RUNNING FEET. José is STRAPPED with CHAINS to a TREADMILL, barely moving. He TRIPS and FALLS.

— José STRUGGLES to swim laps in full ASTRONAUT GEAR. STURCKOW stands poolside:

STURCKOW
Is that moon rocks in your pockets?

— José STUDIES at home amid morning chaos. Adela makes breakfast; seven BINDERS spread out on the table. Next to José, Julio builds something with LEGOS.

— ASCANS take a test. ON JOSÉ's desk: GRAPHS and SCHEMATICS and an IMPOSSIBLE EQUATION. José, SWEATING, hesitates between answers A, B and C. And D. And F.

— José SHAKES and ROCKS in the MOTION BASE SIM; ALARMS BLARING, on his monitor: FAIL.

THE ROAR OF A JET ENGINE!

EXT. DESERT SKY - DAY

A wide and deep blue sky gets SPLIT IN HALF by a T-38 SUPERSONIC PLANE. Closer to the plane, we see it make a SHARP RIGHT TURN and DESCEND like a rock. Now the plane flies LOW NEAR THE DESERT FLOOR like a torpedo. Then it PITCHES and SHOOTS BACK UP INTO THE SKY.

INT. T-38 JET, FLYING - MOMENTS LATER

José in the co-pilot seat - queasy. Sturckow is up front.

STURCKOW

What are we gonna do about you, Hernández?

JOSÉ

What do you mean, sir.

STURCKOW

You know exactly what I mean. We need to step up your game!

He PULLS the SIDE STICK HARD - The plane goes UPSIDE DOWN.

STURCKOW (CONT'D)

Do you know where we are?

José looks on his screen - NUMBERS and more NUMBERS.

JOSÉ

Ah... currently 35 miles north of Houston... ah, 23,000 feet on course two one zero, except... up is down. And down is up.

STURCKOW

Good! Now show me what you got.

JOSÉ

What do you mean, sir?

STURCKOW

Tell me how to land this thing!

JOSÉ

Ah, okay.

Looking carefully into his navigational instruments.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

Houston clearance, this is NASA-959, ready to copy IFR Richmond.

GROUND CONTROL (V.O.)
 NASA 959, cleared to Richmond via
 radar vectors to Houston, fly
 runway heading, descend and
 maintain six thousand feet; expect
 one five thousand, approach 120.9.

He didn't get ANY of that.

JOSÉ
 Houston clearance, I didn't
 quite... copy, could you please
 come again?

STURCKOW
 C'mon, Hernández!!

GROUND CONTROL (V.O.)
 NASA-959, thought you said ready to
 copy? Descend and maintain six
 thousand feet, expect one five
 thousand - approach one, two, zero
 point nine. I can always email that
 to you.

Sturckow laughs. José writes all of this frantically. He
 grabs the side stick again and presses the radio button.

JOSÉ
 Cleared Richmond via vectors to
 Houston, fly runway heading, down
 six thousand feet, approach 120.9.
 Thank you.

We continue to hear José's MICROPHONE - his BREATHING.

STURCKOW
 Release your mic, Hernández. Your
 mic is hot.

José looks at his side stick. The button is STUCK.

STURCKOW (CONT'D)
 Hernández, turn off the mic!

JOSÉ
 It's stuck.

STURCKOW
 What do you mean it's stuck, let it
 go, you're tying up the tower!

GROUND CONTROL (V.O.)
 NASA-959 clear the line
 immediately.

JOSÉ
 I can't— the button is
 stuck!

GROUND CONTROL (V.O.)
 NASA-959 you got traffic on
 your right, you're holding up
 the frequency, we need to
 clear them NOW.

José tries frantically to dislodge the button!

STURCKOW
 Turn it off, Hernández, what the
 hell is wrong with you!?

JOSÉ
 I'm trying!

Suddenly José SEES another T-38 approaching beneath them:

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
 On your right, ON YOUR RIGHT, 3
 O'CLOCK, TRAFFIC NOW!!!

Sturckow PULLS UP and avoids a collision — the other NASA T-38 FLIES PAST THEM LIKE A MISSILE!

José breathes... Examines the radio button: Realizes he's activated a LOCK POSITION by mistake. He disengages it.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
 Houston, this is NASA-959, the line
 is clear. Sorry about that.

EXT. JOSÉ AND ADELA'S HOME, DRIVEWAY - DAY

A very silent street. Adela drags two large garbage bags across the driveway. As she dumps them in the bins, one of them BREAKS. She just stares at the mess, furious. She can hear the kids break into a fight inside the house.

She just sits on the curb.

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, TARMAC - LATER

The plane has landed. Sturckow strides ahead of José. Kalpana meets them mid-tarmac with her TEAM.

JOSÉ

I'm sorry, sir, it won't happen again.

STURCKOW

You're goddamn right it won't. This isn't flight school anymore, Hernández. You're lightyears behind the pack – get with it or step aside.

He walks away, angry. José and Kalpana exchange a look.

EXT. HOUSTON HOME, DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

A depleted José parks on the driveway.

He notices the pile of TRASH just sitting on the sidewalk.

INT. HOUSTON HOME, KIDS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

José enters the kids' bedroom. They sleep like angels. Except for one, who whispers:

JULIO

Papá?

JOSÉ

Hey, son. Go back to sleep.

JULIO

Can I show you my Earth?

JOSÉ

Sure, let's see it.

Julio sneaks out of bed, and plugs a cord into an outlet. Then flips on a switch... and his Earth Layer project LIGHTS UP... It's a large box painted black, featuring glowing stars, a big round GLOWING EARTH cut in half, all its layers in different warm colors.

José sits on the floor next to his son, admiring it.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

You made this yourself?

JULIO

Yeah. I used a 13 watt lightbulb and wired it from behind. Mamá helped. She's a good electrician.

JOSÉ

I think... I think it's beautiful.

JULIO

See, we are right here.

JOSÉ

Yes, we are, son. We sure are.

(A warm beat)

Now go back to sleep.

Julio jumps back into bed, José pulls up his covers.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

Hey son. I'm sorry that I missed the whole thing.

JULIO

That's okay.

José kisses him.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Hey, papá, why do you want to go to space so bad?

José stays there without an answer. until finally...

JOSÉ

I don't know, buddy.

Then he goes back to the Earth, takes one last look, moved: maybe it is not so bad to stay grounded... and he turns it off.

INT. JOSE AND ADELA'S HOME, BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

José gets in bed, and kisses Adela – who pretends to be asleep. We can see her eyes wide open, though.

JOSÉ

Everything ok?

Nothing.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

Look. I know this is hard for everyone. But I'm the one busting my ass, my body hurts, I can't sleep. And I know I can make it work, I just have to be my best. I'm lightyears behind the...

ADELA
I, I, I, I. Yo, yo, yo. Everything
is always about...

She stops.

JOSÉ
About me?

ADELA
I thought we were a team.

JOSÉ
We are a team.

She shrugs.

THE PHONE RINGS.

José reaches for it.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
Hello?

ON JOSÉ - something terrible has just happened.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
What?

INT. HERNANDEZ HOME, STOCKTON - DAY

A picture of Beto on a mantel piece surrounded by candles.

FAMILY and FRIENDS have gathered for this wake. The low murmur of people paying respects, making sense of things.

José and Adela sit quietly in a corner between Salvador and Julia. José is depleted and worried.

JULIA
He was coming home from a late shift. There was a shootout...

SALVADOR
Wrong place, wrong time.

JULIA
He was such a good boy.

JOSÉ
It's about time you leave.

SALVADOR
And go where?

JOSÉ
Somewhere safer.

SALVADOR
It was an accident.

José's heart aches.

JOSÉ
Too many accidents around here.

JULIA
This is our home. There are good
people here too.

José looks around, the faces of his people, his mother is right.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

José ambles slowly down a hallway, in a haze.

He walks into his old room. It's quiet.

He eyes a photo pinned on a board above his desk, it's of young José and Beto. The two of them laughing.

José sits on the bed...

Marisa, Beto's daughter stands by the door.

José wipes a tear, straightens himself up. Neither knows what to say.

JOSÉ
I should get back out there. If
there's anything you need. Anything
at all. Just— yeah. I'm so sorry.

MARISA
When are you going to space?

JOSÉ
Uhm... I'm not sure.

MARISA
He always told me, he was sure you
were going.

(beat)

(MORE)

MARISA (CONT'D)

He knew you felt bad for him,
because he didn't get what you got.

JOSÉ

That's not true...

MARISA

It's ok. Don't feel bad. But now
you have to honor him.

José's eyes fill with tears.

JOSÉ

Yo quería mucho a tu papá.

JOSÉ

I loved your dad very much.

She smiles.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

Very, very much.

PRELAP: A SOFT RANCHERA, José Alfredo Jiménez's '**Deja que salga la luna**' sang by the Marisa's beautiful voice.

INT. HERNANDEZ HOME, STOCKTON - LATER

Marisa sings and plays the guitar. It is a beautiful, deep, sad melody. The song's high notes transform into a collective cry that hurts and heals at the same time.

CLOSE ON JOSÉ, deeply moved as he sees each of the humble faces in front of him, grieving with dignity and resilience.

Adela takes his hand.

INT. PENSACOLA NAVAL AIR BASE - HELO DUNKER - DAY

A massive HYDRAULIC ARM lowers a HELICOPTER CARCASS into a huge pool. The previous song continues until it fades.

INSIDE THE CARCASS, LATER—

Three ASCANS and José get strapped in.

Safety DIVERS await in the water as the hydraulic arm begins to lower the helo. Sturckow and Kalpana watch.

We stay CLOSE TO JOSÉ as they enter the pool and the carcass begins to FLOOD. He sees water pouring in from every window, every door, every crease...

He holds on TIGHT to his chair, fighting every instinct to escape NOW. The carcass continues its descent. The water reaches José's chest...

The water reaches José's neck... and creeps further up, touching his chin – he tilts his head, and soon it's just INCHES FROM HIS MOUTH... then he takes the BIGGEST BREATH OF HIS LIFE... and holds it.

Sturckow, emergency divers, and Kalpana: ON HIGH ALERT.

BACK TO JOSÉ as the water covers his nose, his eyes...

The helo keeps sinking, very slowly... Still about 5 feet from the bottom.

ON JOSÉ— PETRIFIED. His hand GRIPS the strap buckle like a cowboy in a duel, ready to shoot.

POOLSIDE— Sturckow gives the hydraulic arm OPERATOR a slight NOD – the arm lets go.

UNDERWATER— The helo sinks all the way to the bottom...

The candidates unbuckle and release themselves, including José, who swims as fast as he can towards one of the doors. But just then, he notices one of his mates, struggling to get out of his seatbelt!

José lingers by the door – running out of oxygen.

The ASCAN struggles and struggles – he's STUCK!

POOLSIDE— Cassidy and Kimbraugh EMERGE – staff fish them out.

UNDERWATER— José swims back inside the carcass to help him, who's now panicking. Together, they struggle to undo the buckle, but it's completely stuck.

José looks around. He sees a loose METAL BAR – part of the carcass. He RIPS IT OFF and inserts the end on one of the holding plates of the strapping system.

POOLSIDE—

DIVER

Sir?

Sturckow signals the divers to stand by.

UNDERWATER— José uses the metal bar as a lever and PULLS WITH ALL HIS MIGHT. The holding plate gives, he rips it off the seat, and FREES the ASCAN.

José pulls him to a door and DESPERATELY TRIES TO FIT PAST THE DOOR – it's hard with someone else in his arms.

POOLSIDE— The diver tries again.

DIVER (CONT'D)
Sir, we think it's time.

Sturckow hesitates.

KALPANA
Yes, go!

All divers SUBMERGE... and just as they disappear...

JOSÉ and his companion EMERGE! JOSÉ GASPS FOR AIR

Kalpana helps José out and he sits on the ground, exhausted.

STURCKOW
Okay. Everyone good? We're gonna try that again... with a blindfold.

The helo emerges like a dripping nightmare.

EXT. NASA HEADQUARTERS, KALPANA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

José is carrying a pack of diapers. He could go to sleep NOW.

He walks by Kalpana's office, he leans on her door, they share a silent look.

KALPANA
(Re: the diapers)
How are they doing?

JOSÉ
I'd be lying if I told you I knew.

KALPANA
Yeah, that happens. You okay? You look like you just killed somebody.

JOSÉ
No, someone just tried to kill *me*.

KALPANA
You know we would never let anything happen to you, right?. It's an exercise in trust.

JOSÉ

I would trust you more if you just gave me milk and cookies.

KALPANA

Well, yeah. What we're trying to accomplish here is... scary stuff... On a good day I'm afraid we're all aiming to hop on a rocket with 2 million pounds of highly flammable fuel onboard.

JOSÉ

What about a bad day?

She sighs.

KALPANA

On a bad day I think about how we think we control everything. Our lives, our dreams. We get exhausted, we make sacrifices, and we think it is about wanting it hard enough. But life is mysterious, you know?

A charged beat.

KALPANA (CONT'D)

Here's the thing, though. Once that ignition sequence starts... We only have each other. That matters. I saw what you did today, as a member of this division... knowing that someone like you has my back is the most I can hope for.

José nods. He'll take that. She is about to go, but then:

Kalpana gets up, gets her stuff. Prepares to leave.

She nods, he smiles. A silent pact.

KALPANA (CONT'D)

(Re: diapers)

I saw those on sale at Costco. FYI.

And she walks away.

INT. HOUSTON HOME - DAY

"Tu cárcel" by Los Bukis. SMOKING HOT COMAL. WARM TORTILLAS. FRIJOLES ON A PAN. TOMATO GETS CHOPPED. Adela cooks up a storm! José assists her.

LATER—

A lively celebration over a delicious meal. Around the table: José, Adela, Kalpana, her husband JEAN-PIERRE, THREE ASCANS (one blond woman and two men). The banter is loud and friendly and messy.

KALPANA

He's meaner than he means to be.

FEMALE ASCAN

No way, Sturckow's a mean person all around.

KALPANA

Trust me, it takes time, you'll warm up to him.

JOSÉ

Not if you're his co-pilot.

EVERYONE

Oooooooooohhhhhh!!!!

ASCAN 1

Still messing with those comm buttons, Hernández!?

They all laugh.

JOSÉ

I'm telling you the thing was stuck!

ASCAN 2

You *made* it stuck!

ASCAN 1

You locked it into getting "stuck"

KALPANA

Has he always been this stubborn?

Adela nods, smiles and rolls her eyes.

ADELA

I think you guys are *all* stubborn, by the way.

José grabs and raises a beer. He clinks his fork on the glass to call for a toast.

JOSÉ

Here's to Kalpana, who broke all the molds, opened a path, and is the most stubborn of us all.

KALPANA

Well, I guess there will be no better time than this...

Kalpana gets up and spills it out.

KALPANA (CONT'D)

You're looking at a Mission Specialist on the upcoming STS-107 flight.

The ASCANS clap and whoo.

José looks at her with all his admiration.

KALPANA (CONT'D)

Yeah, just... Thanks!

ADELA

Congratulations!

KALPANA

Whoa. WHOA! I don't— I don't know what to say!

JOSÉ

How are you feeling?

KALPANA

Ah, let's see... Exhilarated? Ecstatic? Absolutely, *positively terrified*?

JOSÉ

Never thought I'd even have a beer with an astronaut. Ever.

KALPANA

How about you don't say anything and give me one.

JOSÉ

You can have all of them! ¡Salud!

He BEAMS. They drink.

A beat.

KALPANA
 (re: Adela)
 What about *YOU*?

ADELA
 What do you mean?

KALPANA
 I don't know.... Like in the few moments in life you're not helping this guy with his own obsessive career choice, what do you dream of... for you?

Adela has an audience now... she's not used to this. She looks at José.

ADELA
 Well I always dreamed of having a restaurant.

A beat.

KALPANA
 That explains it! I'm not joking, this is one of the best meals I've had *in my life*.

ADELA
 This? Nah! This is nothing. I'm guessing you've never tasted an *uchepo*.

Kalpana shakes her head.

ADELA (CONT'D)
Un uchepo is a soft tamal, from where our families are from, Michoacán. It's my childhood wrapped in a corn husk. It can be salty, but it can also be sweet. It can be a main course or a dessert. It is full of possibilities— It's soft, tender, perfectly heated corn that melts in your mouth...
 (she stops)
 I know it's not space travel but—

FEMALE ASCAN
 That sounds like it beats the hell out of space travel!

Banter as they all agree and compliment her.

José looks at her, feeling a little selfish.

EXT. STREET - DAY

José RUNS down a street. He STOPS in front of an empty store and gets fixated on a sign that says: FOR LEASE.

INT. HOUSTON HOME, KIDS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kids are asleep. José kisses them one by one. When he gets to Julio's bed, he lays beside him, face up, and sees:

His lighted Earth project.

Then he looks at Julio, peacefully sleeping beside him.

EXT. OUTER SPACE - NIGHT

The backdrop is PLANET EARTH, looking gorgeous and blue and cloudy. A perfect ball containing all of humanity. Orbiting around it is the International Space Station. We approach it slowly and precisely.

CHATTER is heard over the radio, offering coordinates, flight paths, speeds and instructions... Then we land on...

JOSÉ, in full astronaut gear, FOCUSED in the cockpit.

JOSÉ

Houston, ISS in sight, initiating
docking protocol.

He flips switches, he turns knobs, and he holds the tiny side stick with utter delicacy – two fingers – adding little bits of THRUST here and there.

The SOUNDS are otherworldly, high-tech, ominous and exciting. The ISS comes closer and closer. And closer.

GROUND CONTROL

José, you're coming in too hot,
reduce speed or abort docking if
necessary.

JOSÉ

Negative, Houston, no need to
abort.

GROUND CONTROL

José, your speed—

JOSÉ
I got it, Houston. Please trust
that I got it.

More thrust, less thrust, adjustments. The docking radar
RETRACTS. He's close now. He slows down to a riveting crawl.

JOSÉ'S EYES WIDEN as the Space Station floats right in front
of him... It looks like it's made of shiny gold.

He sweats. He pushes the shuttle in a little closer, INCHES
AWAY... ALARMS GO OFF. BEEPING. WARNINGS. AND HE DOCKS. All
lights turn GREEN. And he LOCKS IT.

Silence.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
Houston. We are now docked and
locked. Thank you for your
patience.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, SIMULATOR - MOMENTS LATER

A HATCH opens on a huge SIMULATOR sitting in NASA's Alpha
Dome. Everyone was watching on screens. José emerges.

JOSÉ
Sir, I am happy to report that I am
not dead.

Sturckow walks to the bottom of the stairs and meets him
privately.

STURCKOW
Great job, Hernández.

They shake hands.

EXT. STREET - LATER

José leads a BLINDFOLDED Adela down the sidewalk. The entire
family - JULIO, KIDS, follow right behind.

JOSÉ
Not yet, Julito.

ADELA
Where are you taking me???

They all make a formation around her.

JOSÉ
Okay. Ready?

ADELA
Yes, I'm ready! You're making me nervous!

JOSÉ
Okay, kids, give me a countdown.
Ten, nine, eight, seven, six,
five...

The kids take over: four, three, two, one – José takes the blindfold off!

The EMPTY STORE José saw earlier.

ADELA
I don't understand.

JOSÉ
Do you like it? Should we...?

José then walks to the door, takes the "For lease" sign down and replaces it with one – made by the kids – that reads "TIERRA LUNA RESTAURANT".

Adela is stunned.

TV FOOTAGE—

The launch site at Kennedy Space Center. PRESS has gathered to watch a major event. The SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA CREW – including KALPANA – walks out of a building, waving to the cameras.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
And here is the crew, coming out of their quarters and boarding the vehicle that will take them to the Space Shuttle. All of the astronauts are suited up. A day they will remember, that's for certain.

INT. ACCESS TUNNEL, SPACE SHUTTLE - DAY

A TEAM of MISSION SUPERVISORS waits for the crew to board the Space Shuttle. Among them is JOSÉ. It's a solemn and quiet moment of protocols and safety.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
 Anticipation is high at Kennedy
 Space Center this morning, as Space
 Shuttle Columbia prepares for its
 journey to the ISS.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - MOMENTS LATER

The crew takes their respective seats. It is José's job to secure their seat belts. RADIO COMM is heard in the background as final CHECKLISTS are corroborated.

Kalpána's turn to be STRAPPED IN. José secures her. He stares at his friend - and HOLDS HER HAND.

KALPANA
 It took me nine tries to get in.
 (beat)
 My skin was also an odd color for
 many. You know how important it is
 that someone like us jumps into
 this ride?
 (she smiles)
 We come from tenacious people.
 Tenacity IS a superpower.

He smiles and nods.

JOSÉ
 Tenacity is a superpower.

INT. ACCESS TUNNEL, SPACE SHUTTLE - MOMENTS LATER

José, aided by members of his team, SHUTS THE HATCH. It feels and sounds so... FINAL.

INT. TIERRA LUNA RESTAURANT, MAIN FLOOR - DAY

An out-of-this-world sauce boils inside a clay pot.

Adela teaches a COOK how to make tortillas, she comes out the kitchen:

The main floor has been TRANSFORMED into a REAL RESTAURANT now, with CUSTOMERS and EVEN A WAITRESS, there's MUSIC and CHATTER.

TWO ICE COLD MODELOS are served on a customer's table by José who is completely glued to the TV screen on the wall.

CUSTOMER

Hey José, when will it be you?

JOSÉ

As soon as I'm done with the onion
back there!

José grabs the remote, and TURNS THE VOLUME UP.

The customers look up and listen in. It's KALPANA – floating
inside the Space Station.

ON JOSÉ, watching with a yearning look.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Astronaut Kalpana Chawla just a few
days ago broadcasting from the ISS
– As you know this is a hugely
important day for NASA and the
Space Shuttle Columbia as they
prepare to make their re-entry into
the atmosphere 16 days after
departure.

The TV just shows an EMPTY SKY.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Launch and re-entry are the two
points we worry about most, as you
know.

ON THE TV: A map of the US and the expected trajectory over
Texas.

Julio barges into the restaurant.

JULIO

I don't see anything, Dad!

JOSÉ

Keep looking, son, you might just
catch it.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

If you happen to hear a BOOM today,
you may have gotten lucky and heard
the space shuttle as it re-enters.

ON THE TV: Shots of HOUSTON MISSION CONTROL.

Again, the sky, empty.

José frowns and sits down.

JULIO
What's the matter, dad?

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
Fourteen minutes to touchdown.
Flight controllers continue to
stand by to regain communication.

TECHNICIAN (V.O.)
Columbia Houston Comm Check...
Columbia Houston Comm Check...

CLOSE ON José, worried.

TECHNICIAN (V.O.)
Columbia Houston Comm Check, over.

JOSÉ
They should have communication by
now.

TECHNICIAN (V.O.)
Columbia Houston UHF Comm Check,
over.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
What we're hearing, as I'm told is
the flight controllers in Houston
as they seek tracking or
communication with Columbia. Last
contact was at 1pm Central Time...
Flight director Leroy Cain is now
instructing controllers to get out
their contingency procedures.

ON JOSÉ - total dread.

ON THE TV: A METEOR LIKE SHUTTLE STREAKS ACROSS THE SKY.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
And there it is! Let's look at this
picture from one of our affiliates
in Dallas, Texas, it looks like—
I see *multiple* trails coming down.
I see multiple— Let's hope to
God... We're waiting for a official
word...

José, white as a ghost, grabs the remote, and TURNS IT OFF.

JULIO
Dad?

ADELA
What's the matter?!

JOSÉ
I have to go.

JULIO
But I wanna see the landing!

JOSÉ
IT'S NOT GONNA LAND NOW!

Everyone in the restaurant is startled, confused.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
Keep that TV off!

And he RUNS out the door.

INT. CAR, MOVING - LATER

José drives FAST — His hands are shaking as he TURNS ON THE RADIO — music, he switches stations and lands on the NEWS:

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
Debris now covering an area of over 300 miles across Texas, search and rescue operation is currently underway. Based on eyewitness accounts and sources at NASA, we can now confirm there are unfortunately... no survivors.

José pulls over, distraught. He turns off the radio.

He sits there, trying to breathe. He looks disoriented, agitated. He steps out of the car.

CLOSE ON JOSÉ— He looks out at the space around him. In front of him: a big field, a few WORKERS in it.

TV FOOTAGE

— SEARCH AND RESCUE WORKERS comb through fields, forests and lakes, identifying and marking pieces of fuselage.

STURCKOW (V.O.)
Through countless hours of research we have concluded that during the launch of STS-107...

— POLICE CARS parked on the side of the road, cordoned off with YELLOW TAPE.

STURCKOW (V.O.)

... A piece of foam insulation
broke off from the external tank
and struck the left wing of the
orbiter.

— A MEMORIAL SERVICE. FLAG flies at half mast. MOURNERS wipe
tears. PICTURES OF THE COLUMBIA CREW are featured on the
stage.

STURCKOW (V.O.)

When Columbia re-entered the
atmosphere, the damage allowed hot
gases to penetrate the heat shield
and destroy internal wing
structure...

INT. NASA HANGAR - DAY

A HUGE HANGAR where shuttle pieces are arranged into an
outline of the Columbia.

José confused, in obvious pain, and other ENGINEERS sift
through the debris.

STURCKOW (V.O.)

This caused the spacecraft to
become unstable... and break apart.
I want to thank you all for your
tireless work and contributions to
the Investigation Board.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A very serious Sturckow, wrapping up this presentation for
NASA.

STURCKOW

I think it's safe to assume these
results will bring added scrutiny
from DC. I for one won't argue
against them. If we can't make
space flight safe, we shouldn't be
doing it at all.

Sturckow looks around the group. He locks eyes with José.

STURCKOW (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, guys.

A somber mood as he exits the room.

EXT. NASA HEADQUARTERS, KALPANA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

José stands in the door frame, remembering, observing the empty room. Kalpana's soul still there.

He walks out.

José walks the corridor, looking small.

INT. TIERRA LUNA RESTAURANT, MAIN FLOOR - NIGHT

José sits by himself, lost in thought. His father, Salvador, in front of him.

Adela looks at them, empathetic.

She lights a candle in a small and heartwarming arranged altar: Kalpana's picture, flowers and a Virgen de Guadalupe.

JOSÉ

She told me life was mysterious and I didn't quite understand what she was saying. This is when it gets scary, dad.

A long beat.

SALVADOR

The thing is, though... it's not just a stupid dream anymore, José. It's your life. This is the path you chose.

He looks at him, deeply. José looks at Adela a few feet away.

JOSÉ

I already won.
(beat)
I don't think I need anything else. I got you and mom. I got Adela. I won, right here. And I won five more times with the most beautiful children.

Salvador just stays quiet, looks at his son.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

You don't think this all means I should quit?

Salvador's watery eyes fixed on him.

He softly shakes his head.

EXT. HOUSTON HOME, DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

José looks at the stars playing with his corn rocket in his hands.

He takes a big breath and heads to the door, but when he's about to go in he comes back and throws the thing away, with all of his strength.

The improvised toy flies through the dark street until it gets lost.

Chyron: 2008

EXT. STREET - DAY

José runs fast. Concentrated.

INT. NASA HANGAR - DAY

José in a Nasa uniform, examines some turbine samples.

INT. TIERRA LUNA RESTAURANT, STOREFRONT - NIGHT

José carries a couple of bags out to the trash bins. He looks back. Adela smiles at him from inside.

INT. HOUSTON HOME, LIVING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON A SLICED BIRTHDAY CAKE - and a burned candle # 13 laying on the plate. A "Feliz cumpleaños, Julio" sign half-hanging.

THE PHONE RINGS in the distance. José sits and watches the party's aftermath... his sons unwrapped birthday presents. A TELESCOPE among them.

ADELA O.S.
José. Phone for you.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, HALLWAY - DAY

José, in a tie and suit, sits in a hallway next to four other MEN, and one WOMAN - all equally nervous.

JOSÉ
What time did you get the call?

ASCAN 1
Almost midnight.

OLIVAS
You think they're dismantling the program?

ASCAN 2
So kind of them to make us dress up for it. Fancy final good bye.

JOSÉ
Sturckow sounded concerned...

Sturckow himself opens an office door and pops his head out.

STURCKOW
Hernández.

José takes a deep breath, stands up... and walks in.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

José sits on one side of a long conference table, alone. On the other side, like a death squad, are Sturckow, Program Director Robert D. CABANA, and four more high ranking OFFICIALS. Tons of paperwork before them.

CABANA
Mr. Hernández, I don't believe we've met. I am Flight Crew Operations Director Colonel Cabana. Took you a while to get here, didn't it? You're a rare kind of bird.

José remains quiet.

CABANA (CONT'D)
You're here today because against our expectations, NASA has cleared a new shuttle launch, and we want to get things moving before Washington changes their mind.
(A beat)
After reviewing your file... I would like you to join the Space Shuttle Mission Discovery.

José is speechless. A blank face.

CABANA (CONT'D)

Hernández. We understand that the Columbia crew were your friends. Following a tragedy like that with further space flight is no small burden. So we need to know: *Are you up for the task?*

They look at him. He looks at them. What can he possibly say? His mind is racing at the speed of light.

CABANA (CONT'D)

Hernández?

STURCKOW

Hernández. We need to hear—

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

José washes his face. He looks at the mirror, breathing deeply. About to faint.

He looks down to his sweaty hands.

He takes a moment.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

José re-enters the room. His head up. Sturckow, Cabana and the rest of officials raise their gazes.

STURCKOW

Well?

JOSÉ

I'm sorry I kept you waiting, Sir. I had to take a moment. I've been waiting for this for almost 30 years.

Cabana clears his throat.

STURCKOW

And your answer?

JOSÉ

My answer, is...

(beat)

Yes. Of course is yes, but still... I'll have to ask my wife.

He laughs as a tear comes out from one of his eyes.

STURCKOW

I'm assigning you Mission Specialist Two. I want you right up front between me and the pilot. Congratulations.

They shake hands. Sturckow slides a clear plastic bag containing José's very own BLUE FLIGHT SUIT on the table. He looks at it.

Sturckow and Cabana share a look, José smiles.

INT. TIERRA LUNA RESTAURANT, MAIN FLOOR - DAY

Busy lunch at Tierra Luna. Adela emerges from the kitchen, carrying two plates of their hit *Uchepos* dish. She places the plates on a CUSTOMER'S table. She turns and moves toward the table, but SUDDENLY— SHE SEES SOMETHING OUT THE WINDOW AND FREEZES MID WALK:

JOSÉ, SMILING, STANDS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GLASS DOOR. WEARING HIS FULL BODY BLUE FLIGHT SUIT. Flag on his shoulder, NASA logo on his upper chest, and below it, his name sewn on:

"JOSÉ M. HERNÁNDEZ"

Adela DROPS THE PITCHER. It BREAKS, water SPILLS. Place is now SILENT. Customers mumble — what's going on?

Adela BOLTS out of the restaurant, and JUMPS into José's arms. Then she grabs his face, looks right into this eyes:

ADELA

How do you— Do you— I don't—
What? What are you doing dressed
like that? Is this a joke?

JOSÉ

What do you think? Should we do
this? I still can call the whole
thing off.

ADELA

Oh my god!

Adela starts crying.

JOSÉ

What's the matter?

A beat.

ADELA

The dishwasher didn't show.

They both burst into laughter in a fit of mixed and immeasurable emotion.

Their daughter Karina walks out the door and stares at him:

ADELA (CONT'D)

How do you like papi's new uniform, honey?

KARINA

He looks like PAPA SMURF.

INT. TIERRA LUNA RESTAURANT, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

José works the dishwashing station like nobody's business, in full NASA flight uniform!

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

José sits at a press conference with the other ASTRONAUTS as Program Director Cabana reads out their names.

CABANA

It's my honor to present to you the Space Shuttle Mission Discovery's crew: Commander Frederick Sturckow, Pilot Kevin Ford. Mission Specialists Patrick Forrester. Christer Fuglesang. John Olivas. Nicole Stott. And José Hernández.

CAMERAS FLASH!! It's intense. A room full of REPORTERS screaming over each other.

CABANA (CONT'D)

One at a time, please.

INT. HERNÁNDEZ HOME - DAY

PUSH INTO Julia and Salvador watching. Lety and Chava try to connect the antenna cord, but no luck. The image looks somewhat distorted, but that doesn't take Salvador's and Julia's attention off the screen. They are utterly proud.

JULIA

Me dijo que lo van a dejar llevarse tortillas al espacio.

JULIA

He said they're letting him bring tortillas to space.

A REPORTER on the TV:

REPORTER

Is it true that you grew up as a migrant farmworker in California?

JOSÉ

Yes, I did. And who better than a migrant to leave this planet, and dive into the unknown, right?

REPORTER # 2

Is it true you applied 12 times before you were accepted into the program?

REPORTER # 3

Do you have a message for the Mexican people?

REPORTER # 4

Did you always dream of this moment? Was this a childhood dream?

PRESS MAYHEM continues. The other astronauts look over and smile, as the spotlight seems to fall exclusively on José.

EXT. HOUSTON HOME, BACKYARD - SAME

PEACE. Out here it's just crickets... José watches his son looking through the telescope. He knows what he's doing now - focusing, shifting, panning. He's almost a teenager.

JULIO

Dad? Did you know that Halley's Comet will orbit past Earth again in 2061?

JOSÉ

I didn't.
(A beat)
How do you know?

JULIO

I researched it.

Ha. Crickets.

JULIO (CONT'D)

I need to ask you something.

Julio disengages from the telescope and sits next to his dad. His face worried.

JOSÉ

What?

JULIO
You know what.

Beat. He knows what.

JOSÉ
I'm gonna be in the hands of the
most capable, most brilliant
scientists and engineers in the
world...

JULIO
But— there's still a chance...

José just stares out into the sky.

JOSÉ
Space travel is... It's very, very
unlikely. But yes, it is extremely
dangerous.

JULIO
I... Should anything happen, I
promise I'll take care of mom, and
my sisters... and my brother.

José pulls him in very close and holds him tight.

JOSÉ
Should anything happen, if you
don't keep your promise I'll come
back to pull your legs in your
sleep!

They laugh.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)
Now, tell me more about Halley's
comet's return.

JULIO (O.S.)
It's gonna happen in July 2061.
That means I'll be 74 years old.

JOSÉ (O.S.)
Oh, well, I will come back a
jalarte las patas in your sleep by
then, for sure!

INT. HOUSTON HOME, BEDROOM - DAWN

Barely dusk. We see two silhouettes against a window: José and Adela cuddle together. They say nothing as the sun slowly comes up.

JOSÉ

I want your ring with me.

A beat.

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

I want your ring next to mine. Our rings should be together.

She nods, trying her best not to cry but it's no use... He slides the wedding band off her finger, and holds it. They hold on to each other tight, as if they would never, ever let go. For a long time. Finally, she gives him the ring.

ADELA

If you lose that ring I'll kill you. I mean it. I will kill you with my bare hands.

She holds his face as they look deep into each other's eyes.

EXT. HOUSTON HOME, DRIVEWAY - MORNING

A BLACK, unmarked NASA GOVERNMENT SUV awaits with the door open. A DRIVER closes the door behind him.

José hugs Adela, then comes close to his kids.

JOSÉ

Hey, kids. Did you know Monarch butterflies' journey is so long, it takes them several generations to get there? The butterfly that starts the journey in Canada won't be the one enjoying Mexico's warmth... but its descendants. You know who taught me that?

Salvador smiles.

José goes to his mother and father and gives them a big loving hug —

JOSÉ (CONT'D)

(to Salvador)

Are you crying, Dad?

SALVADOR

No, mijo, it's just some dirt got
into my eye.

José smiles and gets in the car.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, LAUNCH GROUNDS - DAY

Like an OTHERWORLDLY GIANT making an entrance, Space Shuttle Discovery and its ROCKETS roll out of a hangar on a mobile launch platform. This is José's ride.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, OPERATIONS BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

The astronauts are led by STAFF down a long hallway.

José can't help but notice the huge POSTERS of space travel LEGENDS: JOHN GLENN. NEIL ARMSTRONG. SALLY RIDE. FRANKLIN CHANG. ELLEN OCHOA. JOHN OLIVAS. SIDNEY GUTIERREZ. GEORGE ZAMKA. KALPANA CHAWLA.

ON JOSÉ — moved...

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - DAY

Adela, the kids, Salvador and Julia arrive. They step out of a large van, and boy is it a LOUD MESS as usual. Adela wrestles with the kids.

Salvador and Julio share a look. They walk away from the pack, take a few steps towards the gardens... and take in the view: The Space Shuttle.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, ASTRONAUT QUARTERS - DAY

José enters his bedroom. It's bland and simple: bare walls, a single bed, a wardrobe, a TV set and a tiny bathroom. He puts his duffle bag down... and sits on his bed.

A member of the STAFF knocks.

STAFF

Mr. Hernández, your wife is
waiting.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, VISITOR'S LOUNGE - DAY

A big room divided by a GLASS WALL. José enters and sees Adela sitting on the other side. He comes close. Their voices are amplified for each other through loudspeakers.

ADELA
How are you feeling?

JOSÉ
Good.

Silence. He smiles.

ADELA
Your parents brought you a surprise.

JOSÉ
Oh yeah?

Adela stands and walks towards the door. José sits patiently, watching through the glass.

Adela opens the door and exits the room for a moment. Then she peeks again.

ADELA
Ready?

Adela enters the room, followed by the most unexpected guest: MISS YOUNG! – José's school teacher, now in her 60's.

JOSÉ IS ABSOLUTELY STUNNED.

MISS YOUNG
Well, hello there, young man.

JOSÉ
I don't— I don't know what to say.

MISS YOUNG
Nice to see you, Miss Young. We could start there.

JOSÉ
How— How did you find me?

MISS YOUNG
I don't know, The New York Times? You're not exactly hard to find these days. But it was actually your parents who found *me*.

JOSÉ

Thank you. Thank you for being here.

José looks down.

MISS YOUNG

I've been waiting for this moment for more than 30 years. And I have proof.

Miss Young's shaky hands rummage through her purse... and she produces a piece of paper... and she unfolds it.

IT'S THE COMPOSITION JOSÉ ONCE GAVE HER OUTSIDE HIS HOME. A corn rocket standing upright. And inside it, at the very top, a little boy.

MISS YOUNG (CONT'D)

One of my most prized possessions.

She smiles. He's fighting back tears.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - SAME

Past open doors with FAMILIES watching the SAME NEWSCAST - a NAME ON EACH DOOR:

"STURCKOW" - Polite midwestern family quietly listens.

"FORD" - A gentle buzz in this CROWD, soft music playing.

"STOTT" - A MAN opens a bottle of champagne.

We begin to hear the HERNANDEZ RUMBLE as we approach the last door of the hallway, and we move INSIDE THE ROOM: LIVELY COMMOTION. The room is PACKED with FRIENDS and FAMILY - Kids jump on the beds.

We land on Salvador and Adela, TERRIFIED, watching the NEWSCAST.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Another historic day for NASA and the Nation, as Space Shuttle Discovery prepares for launch in a journey towards the ISS, currently orbiting 320 miles above Earth.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, MEDICAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

José sits in an undershirt as the STAFF DOCTOR checks his blood pressure.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER, CONTROL CENTER - CONTINUOUS

A million SCREENS, RADARS and STAFF in last minute prep mode for imminent launch.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, HERNANDEZ FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Salvador gives Julia a shot of tequila; she DOWNS it immediately. Adela is still glued to the screen.

SALVADOR	SALVADOR
¿Te sirvo uno a ti también, mija?	Can I pour one for you, dear?

Adela nods, unable to speak. She downs the tequila.

The kids are at the back. Marisa sits by Adela, they half hug.

Salvador looks at his hands.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, CHECKOUT BUILDING - LATER

José's hands covered by gloves.

SUIT TECHNICIANS finish dressing José in his orange launch suit.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, CHECKOUT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

The astronauts enter an ASTRONAUT TRANSFER VAN one by one.

INT. ASTROVAN, MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

José sits by a window, looking out. He sees a series of tarmacs, hangars and NASA STAFF.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, LAUNCH GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

TV FOOTAGE of the Astrovan moving as the NEWSCAST continues.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, HERNANDEZ FAMILY ROOM - SAME

EVERYONE huddled around the TV.

Adela stands up to loud PROTESTS. But she won't budge. She stands by the window. What she sees scares her even more:

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING in the distance - THUNDERSTORMS.

INT. ASTROVAN, MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

José, still looking out the window, when all of a sudden, the van stops. The launch pad is not even in sight.

The astronauts exchange looks of concern.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, HERNANDEZ FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A LOUD DISCUSSION - why did they stop? Salvador joins Adela by the window.

INT. ASTROVAN - MOMENTS LATER

The astronauts sit patiently. Over their loudspeakers:

FLIGHT DIRECTOR (V.O.)
Discovery Crew, Flight Director here, Houston has detected unforeseen, unfavorable weather conditions. We have determined that the current launch sequence is a no go. Repeat, launch is a no go until further notice. You will return to base - your quarantine is back in effect.

On José's look of DISAPPOINTMENT.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, ASTRONAUT QUARTERS - LATER

José and the astronauts play cards. Others kick a hacky-sack.

Sturckow comes into the room, he sits down, everyone gets close to him as he makes an announcement:

STURCKOW
Guys. Launch is pushed back till Friday now. The defective fuel control valve is being replaced as we speak.

Silence. Wow.

JOSÉ
Main or back up?

STURCKOW
Main.

Glances are exchanged...

JOSÉ
Wow... What if we'd gone up like
that?

A beat.

STURCKOW
Well... we didn't.

Sturckow leaves. They all share concerned looks.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, JOSÉ'S ROOM - NIGHT

José tosses and turns – can't sleep. Looks out the window.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
They detected it. We're safe.

ADELA (V.O.)
But it shouldn't have happened in
the first place.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
You have to trust them.

ADELA (V.O.)
I know. And I do. But...

JOSÉ (V.O.)
But what?

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Adela sitting in the bathroom floor, talking to her cell.
Locked in.

ADELA
I'm so scared.

JOSÉ (V.O.)
Don't be. You know I'm in the best
hands.

ADELA

I know... I know... Just— What are you doing right now?

JOSÉ (V.O.)

I'm staring at a picture of... Salma Hayek.

ADELA

What?!

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, JOSÉ'S ROOM - NIGHT

José, laughing on the phone, sits on the floor against his bed. He is staring at a picture of Salma.

JOSÉ

The guys slipped it under my door. They fake signed it and all. It says: "Thank you for going to space, my hero"... So dumb...

ADELA (V.O.)

That's stupid.

JOSÉ

You think she would want to meet an Astronaut?

ADELA (V.O.)

Salma? Totally.

A long beat.

ADELA (V.O.)

You go and come back to her safely, please.

He smiles.

JOSÉ

I want to ask for a favor.

ADELA

Anything, baby.

JOSÉ

Tell my dad I'm sorry they lost the house in Michoacán.

Adela wipes tears and snot. This is so hard.

José closes his eyes.

I/E. SALVADOR'S CAR - SUNSET

José and his brothers and sister dirty, tired. Salvador looking at them through the rearview.

INT. ADELA'S - NIGHT

Their first date. Her TWO UNCLES. José and Adela look into each other's eyes - their HANDS TOUCH.

EXT. STOCKTON - NIGHT

José and Beto share a beer on the hood of the lowrider.

José's bare childhood hands deep into the earth.

They pick a cob of corn. They feel its texture.

INT. HOUSTON HOME, KIDS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

José walks into the kids' room, and watches them sleep.

He sees Julio's GEOLOGICAL SYSTEM.

INT. HOUSTON HOME, BEDROOM - DAWN

José and Adela, cuddling in that armchair, after taking Adela's ring. Adela's eyes.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, JOSÉ'S ROOM - NIGHT

Back to José's quarters... CLUTCHING that ring in his hand.

ADELA

Please come home.

JOSÉ

I will.

He lays on the floor, still on the phone... and tries to go to sleep.

EXT. FIELDS, STOCKTON NIGHT

CLOSE ON JOSÉ as he opens his eyes. He still lays on the ground, but he notices it's DIRT. He looks up and sees:

Under a strange starry sky, the fields are brightly illuminated by the moonlight. SALVADOR, picking strawberries, his rugged hands moving swiftly like firing pistons. José turns and sees his mother, doing the same. He hears someone behind him and he discovers Adela, picking strawberries too. But then he sees someone else: Right beside her... his son JULIO, face dirty, is picking berry after berry. Then he sees his baby girls helping out too. And Beto. And his aunts and uncles. And his grandparents. And his great grandparents...

And as we GLIDE UP above him, we discover an endless field covered with Mexican workers – past, present and future. Monarch butterflies fly all around them.

Back on the horizon, a rocket is being prepared. The engines turn on, the fire propels it, and it shoots up into the starry sky.

THERE'S A KNOCK.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, JOSÉ'S ROOM - MORNING

José WAKES UP on the floor. The staff member speaks from the other side of the door.

STAFF (O.S.)
Mr. Hernández. It's time.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, LAUNCH GROUNDS - DAY

A caravan of vehicles with the Astrovan – moving closer to the launchpad.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, LAUNCH PAD - DAY

A slow, seemingly endless tilt from the bottom of the Space Shuttle Discovery and its huge steaming boosters, all the way to its imposing top, as it sits on the launchpad, waiting for José.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
After several delays, it's only one hour and seven minutes until NASA begins its next adventure. If all goes well, Discovery astronauts are to lift off from pad 28 at Kennedy Space Center, on the voyage mankind cannot cease to dream about.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, LAUNCH PAD, ELEVATOR - DAY

José stands in the elevator with the rest of the astronauts – in full gear – as they make their way to the shuttle.

REPORTERA MEXICANA (V.O.)
 Es ahora, antes de que José parta hacia el espacio, que les invitamos a pensar en la responsabilidad y esperanza que nuestro compatriota carga sobre sus hombros en nombre de todos los mexicanos, e incluso de todas las personas latinas en este país. Y de toda la humanidad.

MEXICAN NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
So it is now, before José flies into the sky in his gleaming vehicle, that we invite you to think of the burdens and the hopes that our compatriot carries on behalf of all Mexicans. Indeed, of all Latinos in this country. Of all mankind.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, ASSEMBLY HANGAR, ROOFTOP - DAY

José's family, the kids, Marisa, Salvador, Julia and Adela, stand together, watching in anxious anticipation. Adela is not feeling well, she's pale, about to faint.

INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY

José is helped into his GLOVES and HELMET by the SUIT TECHNICIANS. José's helmet fits nice and snug.

CLICK.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, ASSEMBLY HANGAR, ROOFTOP - DAY

Salvador and Julia are holding each other in silence.

Julio steps away from the crowd... he gazes over the launchpad, then to his mom.

JULIO
 Mom, are you ok?

Adela shakes her head.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, JOSÉ'S ROOM - DAY

A NASA OFFICER takes Adela to José's room. She looks terrible. She sits on the bed.

ADELA
 I'll be fine.

She breathes deeply.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - DAY

The astronauts take their places. RADIO CHATTER is intense. Status checks on boosters, flight dynamics, etc, etc.

ON JOSÉ - as he pins THREE PICTURES on the side of his control panel: Salvador and Julia... Adela and the kids... Beto and himself.

The CLOSE-OUT CHIEF buckles José. He gives José a thumbs up. José nods.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
Discovery, this is Launch
Operations Manager. The launch team
wishes you good luck and godspeed.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, JOSÉ'S ROOM - DAY

Adela continues breathing, her shaking eases a bit. She turns to see José's board: the picture of Salma and her fake autograph hanging there. She laughs a little.

Stands up and goes to the window. She can see the enormous shuttle from there.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - DAY

José's eyes. The MAIN HATCH is CLOSED... And LOCKED. The astronauts look at each other.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
We have completed power transfer,
we are still a go, 35 seconds and
counting. Astronauts report it
feels good, T-minus 25 seconds.

-- A room full of NASA techs and engineers sit nervously at Control Center.

-- CLOSE ON... ADELA. SALVADOR. JULIA. JULIO.

-- And... JOSÉ, inside the shuttle. Ready for take off.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
T-minus 15 seconds, second stage
tanks now pressurized... 12, 11,
10, 9... Ignition sequence starts.

BOOM! A BALL OF FIRE is spat into the camera as the engines IGNITE.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
5, 4, 3...

The base of the launch pad LIGHTS UP like a bomb, the rocket ROARS, FURIOUS!

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
2, 1, ZERO... All engines running!

JOSÉ's eyes WIDEN.

The ARMS of the platform LET GO, disengaging as the rocket RATTLES like a moving high-rise.

LAUNCH CONTROL (V.O.)
Lift off! We have lift off on Space Shuttle Discovery!

INSIDE— the shuttle RUMBLES, José and the astronauts SHAKE in their seats.

THEY RISE INTO THE SKY.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, JOSÉ'S ROOM - DAY

Adela covers her mouth in awe, as she admires the take off.

VARIOUS

The shuttle FLIES on a HUGE TV SCREEN. THOUSANDS IN MEXICO CHEER! We see WONDER on these faces: LOGAN. WEISSBERG. STACEY. MISS YOUNG. ADELA. SALVADOR. JULIA. JULIO.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - SAME

LOUD. The shuttle RATTLES as the G-forces kick in.

ON JOSÉ — his eyes wide, shaking as the roaring shuttle hurls into space. He looks out the window — the view suddenly dark and filled with STARS.

The shaking stops... They've made it past the atmosphere... It's QUIET. José sees an IMAGE:

A corn cob floats behind him and lingers before his face. José stares in amazement and, suddenly, YOUNG JOSÉ sits beside him, his beautiful face filled with AWE. And then... YOUNG JOSÉ gently floats towards the window.

FROM OUTSIDE THE SHUTTLE—

We see YOUNG JOSÉ'S FACE as the kid glues himself to the glass... and takes in the majestic view.

José's eyes look down on Earth. It's beautiful.

'El hijo del pueblo' starts playing.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.

A MONTAGE WITH THESE IMAGES UNDER TITLES:

Real footage of José floating in space, José eating a taco, José being interviewed from the orbiting shuttle. The shuttle landing in California. José's ACTUAL FAMILY celebrating. Footage of MEXICAN PEOPLE celebrating in Mexico City. Footage of José as HE AND THE CREW deplane and salute. A BEAUTIFUL PORTRAIT OF JOSE, ADELA AND THEIR KIDS...

Space Shuttle Discovery landed safely in California on September 11, 2009.

He also played José Alfredo Jiménez's ranchera: "El hijo del pueblo" up there.

After leaving NASA in 2011, José started his own aerospace engineering consulting firm: Tierra Luna Engineering.

José helped Mexico launch three Boeing communications satellites into space, opening internet access to remote parts of the country.

His son, Julio Hernández, is working on his PhD in aerospace engineering at Purdue. He wants to become an astronaut.

José still picks grapes with his father. Only this time they

own the vineyard.