

FEDORA

original screenplay by

KENNY KEMP

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SUPER OVER BLACK: BASED ON A TRUE STORY

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAWN

It's a cold, early spring morning. Trees are mostly bare, frost limns the grass. Sodium lights flicker, pooling the street at regular intervals.

A garbage truck rounds the corner and stops. JULIO ESPERANZA, mid-30's, jumps out and starts toward a group of trash cans. He moves briskly in the cold, tossing off lids.

Inside the truck cab, "CRASH" PEVNEY, 35, sits scowling at the wheel, his cap pulled down tight, his eyes slits. He steals a glance at Julio outside, muttering.

CRASH

C'mon. C'mon. Vam-a-nos.

He cranes his neck to get a better look.

Julio struggles with a lid, unable to get it off. He stops, perplexed, looking at the intransigent trashcan.

Crash shakes his head, standing.

CRASH (CONT'D)

Need a hand, paisán?

Julio waves over his shoulder and finally manages to get the lid off. Garbage flies.

SPLAT! A large, ripe, sodden diaper hits Julio square in the face.

Crash howls.

Julio arms the goop off his face. He doesn't know who he's more angry with: the trashcan or Crash.

He turns slowly toward Crash, his anger mounting.

JULIO

I'm Latin, not Italian, Crash. Get it straight.

CRASH

No kiddin! I thought you were purto-reecan, paisán.

(beat; sniffing)

Kinda smells like menudo, don't it, Jew-li-o?

CUT TO:

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

CRACK! A bat smacks one into center field.

A FIELDER (MIKEY) races back, back, back--then trips. The ball sails overhead.

A collective GROAN as the other players kick the dirt and toss down mitts, disgusted.

They turn to home plate, where Julio stands, bat in hand, smiling cheerfully.

JULIO

It's okay, Mikey. Next time.

He hands a baseball to the CATCHER, who tosses it to the PITCHER.

Julio approaches LARRY, one of the parents, who stands behind the chain link backstop.

LARRY

Jefe, they're never gonna be ready.

Julio scans the team. Mostly inner city kids, black and Latino, in ragtag uniforms, sporting baseball caps identical to Julio's.

The Pitcher pitches, the BATTER swings, and the ball lines to the SHORTSTOP--who misses it by a mile.

Everyone GROANS.

Julio smiles at Larry.

JULIO

Hey. We're ready now.

He claps Larry on the shoulder and trots onto the field toward the Shortstop, who stands, head down, kicking dirt.

Julio waves the other players off, who are also coming forward. He kneels down, saying nothing, but looking intently at him.

Finally, the Shortstop looks up, disappointment turning to anger in his eyes. He has a real short fuse, this one. He musters up his toughest street attitude.

Julio says nothing, just looks at him.

Finally the kid can't take the suspense.

SHORTSTOP

What? What is it?

Julio cocks his head, drinking in the anger--way too much anger for a little kid. He points toward the boy.

JULIO
You're my shortstop.

He touches the kid lightly on the shoulder and turns.

As he goes, the anger in the kid melts and once more he's just a 10 year-old in little league. He finally manages a smile.

The other kids are perplexed, noticing the change in the Shortstop, but they didn't hear the exchange.

As Julio returns to the backstop, Larry approaches.

LARRY
What'd you say?

Julio looks toward the Shortstop, who's determined stance indicates he's not going to let another one by. He steals a look at Julio, who acts as if he doesn't notice him.

JULIO
(to the team)
C'mon, guys. Batter up!

The team settles in place as a BATTER cocks the bat.

The Pitcher lets one go, and it's another line drive to short.

This time the Shortstop snags it easily and rifles it to first base, but this time it's the FIRST BASEMAN who misses the easy catch. It rolls over toward the first baseline fence.

As Julio trots over to retrieve it, Larry calls, laughing:

LARRY
You oughta give him the same speech.

Julio reaches to pick up the ball, but something catches in his side as he straightens up. Pain registers on his face as he lobs the ball to first. Swallowing the pain, he walks slowly back to Larry, who doesn't entirely miss the moment.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Julio? You okay?

JULIO
Yeah.
(to the team)
Okay! Look alive. First game on Saturday! Next batter!

He walks away, gently rubbing his side, shaking his head.

CUT TO:

EXT. ESPERANZA HOME - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

A working class neighborhood of small houses and overgrown trees. Kids play ball in the street, people enjoy a spring evening. Feels like a safe place; home.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Julio eases down at the table, where his four year-old daughter MARÍA sits, her dark curls hiding her face as she colors. She looks up and smiles, showing him her work.

Julio nods back. In a moment, NOISE in the kitchen.

JULIO

Carmelita?

More NOISE, as pots and pans bang.

CARMELITA (O.S.)

I got it.

She appears, beautiful CARMELITA, late 20s, long dark hair framing liquid brown eyes and full lips, smiling and open, carrying a steaming plate of mofongo, a Puerto Rican delicacy.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)

Look! Your favorite!

She sets it down, proud.

Julio looks at it, his brow furrowed.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

JULIO

Not hungry--upset stomach.

CARMELITA

You shouldn't eat so much hot sauce.

JULIO

I like pique. Besides, it makes my stomach laugh.

As he says this, he tickles little María, who shrieks with delight.

Carmelita shakes her head, smiling.

CARMELITA

Laugh now, cry later. You wanna lie
down?

Julio stops tickling María, shakes his head, stands and rounds the table, gently stroking Carmelita's beautiful hair, lost in its sheen and thickness.

JULIO

I've got a Neighborhood Watch meeting.

Carmelita stands and faces him, touching his face, running her hands through his thick hair.

CARMELITA

I'll go. You rest.

JULIO

No. I have to go.

CARMELITA

Why?

Julio gives his wife a squeeze and lets her go, turning.

JULIO

Because I said I would.

He walks slowly out of the dining room. Carmelita turns and begins dishing up the casserole.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - PRE-DAWN

Julio is washing his face in the bathroom basin. He doesn't look so good, his color is off. He rubs his eyes, and drags a comb through his unruly hair.

HONK! HONK!

Crash is outside, leaning on the horn.

Julio closes his eyes, tired. He takes a deep breath, then turns.

Suddenly, he is racked by a coughing spell, violent and intense. His knuckles whiten as he grabs the basin, his body stiffening as he succumbs to the coughing fit.

As it passes, he looks up into the mirror, tears streaming from his bloodshot eyes.

He reacts as he sees bloody spittle on his chin. He looks into the basin. A bloody pool of phlegm.

Julio looks at the mirror, horrified.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Crash angrily pounds on the door.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Carmelita, wakened by the pounding, throws on her housecoat and starts toward the front door.

CARMELITA

Julio?

She stops as she passes the bathroom.

Inside, Julio sits on the edge of the tub, ashen-faced.

She quickly kneels in front of him. The POUNDING continues.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)

Dios mío! Qué pasa, Julito?

Julio shakes his head weakly, motioning toward the sink.

Carmelita looks, aghast. The door pounding continues.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Crash bangs angrily away.

CRASH

Julio, where the hell are you? Let's go! Vámanos!

Suddenly the door is thrown open. Crash looks up, surprised.

Carmelita stands there in her housecoat, outraged and scared at the same time.

Barely in control, she hisses.

CARMELITA

Quit it! We heard you!

CRASH

Then tell Jew-li-o to get his lazy butt goin'. We're late.

Carmelita can barely contain herself.

CARMELITA

He's sick! He can't work today!

The door slams in Crash's face.

He turns and stomps away, muttering and shaking his head.

CRASH

Figures.

CUT TO:

EXT. V.A. HOSPITAL - ESTABLISHING - DAY

ANGLE on sign. TILT UP to include the new tower addition.

INT. WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

VOICES on the intercom as gurneys wheel past. The waiting room is full of sick children, accident victims with bloody compresses, scurrying nurses and doctors.

Julio sits with Carmelita, who seems more shaken than he is-- or at least appears to be.

A female RESIDENT approaches.

RESIDENT

Julio Esperanza?

Julio stands. Carmelita jumps up, cutting in.

CARMELITA

What's the matter?

RESIDENT

I'm ordering a hematocrit...

Julio and Carmelita exchange scared looks.

RESIDENT (CONT'D)

A blood test. You've probably got an ulcer... Are you stressed out, Mr. Esperanza?

Julio nods his head, anxious.

The Resident smiles.

RESIDENT (CONT'D)

I mean generally. Is your job... or home life especially stressful or troubling?

Julio shakes his head vigorously. He instinctively pulls Carmelita closer to him.

The Resident continues.

RESIDENT (CONT'D)

Fine. So, if it's okay with you, I'd like start now.

CARMELITA

So soon? Why?

The Resident puts a hand on her arm, trying to calm her.

RESIDENT

Let's just see what's bothering your husband's stomach.

She turns and walks away, leaving Julio and Carmelita as the activity and noise swirls around them.

INT. HOSPITAL / VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) WAITING ROOM: Julio fills out reams of forms, overwhelmed at the information required. A large, printed caption reads "Legal Liability Release."

B) LAB: Julio emerges from a restroom with a urine and stool sample, which he gives a PHLEBOTOMIST, not without embarrassment.

C) LAB: TECH #1 draws blood from Julio's forearm.

D) LAB: TECH #2 peers through a microscope.

E) G.I. CLINIC: DOCTOR #1 inserts fiber optic wand down Julio's throat, then quietly confers with DOCTOR #2 at the video monitor. Doctor #1 removes a wire from the wand and places a small piece of tissue in a jar of formalin.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WAITING ROOM - LATER

Julio appears, heading toward Carmelita.

She sees him and rises.

CARMELITA

How was it?

Julio manages a bleak smile but says nothing.

Carmelita picks up her purse and starts to help him, but he shakes her off.

JULIO
I don't need any help.

Carmelita's face registers empathy and concern.

Julio softens.

JULIO (CONT'D)
I'll be fine. You'll see.

CARMELITA
What did she say?

Julio takes her arm and guides her out the door.

JULIO
She said "now we wait."

CUT TO:

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

The team breaks from a huddle surrounding an adult, but as the boys clear WE SEE it's not Julio but Larry.

He shouts encouragement to the team, then turns and nods toward the stands.

Seated on the bleachers behind the backstop, Julio nods back gravely, then turns his attention to the Shortstop, who has stopped and is watching him.

Julio points his finger at the boy and mouths: "You're my shortstop."

The Kid grins widely and trots out into the field with renewed energy.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY

Julio and Carmelita sit in the sunshine on a bench outside the large glass doors.

The Resident emerges from inside with DR. BERMAN.

RESIDENT
Oh, there you are. I thought you'd gone. Julio, Carmelita, this is Dr. Berman...

(MORE)

RESIDENT (CONT'D)

(a breath)

He's an oncologist.

Berman reaches out his hand. Julio shakes hands, perplexed, but Carmelita has gone ashen.

Julio notices and looks back at Berman, who sees the problem.

He nods at the Resident.

BERMAN

Didn't she tell you? I'm a cancer specialist.

Carmelita's knuckles whiten on Julio's arm.

Julio looks from her to the Resident to Berman.

JULIO

Cancer?

Carmelita is dazed.

Julio looks like he's gonna pass out.

BERMAN

That's a good sign. Lots of people can't even say it.

Carmelita blinks back a tear.

JULIO

I have cancer?

BERMAN

Stomach cancer, Mr. Esperanza. I'll be working with you now. We'll start a regimen of chemotherapy and radiation.

JULIO

Can't you... cut it out?

Berman leans back, surveying Julio intently.

BERMAN

I'm afraid not, sir. I won't lie to you: you've got a hard road ahead, but you can make it, God willing--many others have. But I have one question: Do you believe?

This has shaken Carmelita out of her trance.

CARMELITA

Believe in what?

BERMAN

Do you believe you can beat this?
Because if you don't, then you won't.

Julio looks at Carmelita, overwhelmed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AUTOMOBILE - TRAVELING - LATER

Julio drives in stony silence.

Carmelita is anxious and worried. The tangible silence is tearing her apart. Finally:

CARMELITA

Please, Julio, say something.

JULIO

Like what?

CARMELITA

I don't know. How do you feel?

Julio erupts in terrible, angry laughter that breaks her heart.

JULIO

I feel great! Never better!

CARMELITA

Julio... please...

JULIO

Like I've been robbed--no, not robbed,
mugged. Beaten. Cheated. Violated.

CARMELITA

I know--

JULIO

No, you don't. You can't know how I
feel.

EXT. ESPERANZA HOME - MOMENTS LATER

The car stops at the curb. Inside, Julio and Carmelita are arguing but the windows are up, so we can't hear, but it appears that Julio is taking his anger out on Carmelita, who sobs.

A small pair of feet step INTO FRAME.

CRANE UP and DOLLY as a child slowly walks along the sidewalk until she is even with the passenger window.

Inside, Julio and Carmelita continue to fight, oblivious.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, Carmelita sees María and goes ashen. She says something to Julio, who cranes his neck to see.

JULIO'S P.O.V. - CLOSE ON MARÍA

The child is a picture of anguish, seeing but not hearing her parents fight. She is on the verge of tears.

CARMELITA

bolts from the car, scooping María up in her arms as the child bursts into tears.

Julio rounds the corner of the car, his anger spent uselessly, regret on his face. He puts his arms around Carmelita and María.

JULIO

I forgot for a moment why my life is
worth living. I'm sorry. I'll try
hard to believe... please help me.

Carmelita cries fresh tears as she hugs Julio and María.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL / VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) CHEMOTHERAPY ROOM: The CHEMO NURSE taps the I.V. PULL BACK to include Julio.

B) JULIO'S ROOM: Julio vomits into the sink as the Chemo Nurse places a cold compress on his neck. Carmelita rubs his back as he shudders with the vomiting.

C) JULIO'S ROOM: Seated in his hospital bed, Julio picks at his food, his appetite gone. A few flowers stand on the nightstand, a few cards nearby.

D) JULIO'S ROOM: Julio stares at his reflection in the mirror as he brushes his thin hair. The brush has clumps of hair in it. Julio reaches up and withdraws another handful of hair. He looks sadly at the hair with red-rimmed eyes.

E) RADIATION THERAPY ROOM: Julio, his hair nearly gone, visibly thinner, is wheeled by the Chemo Nurse into a room marked "Nuclear Medicine." The door shuts ominously behind him.

F) JULIO'S ROOM: Julio sits quietly in the darkness of night in his room, his eyes dead and defeated, his thin hands lying limply at his sides. He has lost all of his hair.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JULIO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Carmelita bends toward María, who has her best dress on.

She is scared; she hasn't seen her dad in a while.

MARÍA

Is Daddy still sick?

CARMELITA

Yes. You tell him you want him to come home soon, okay?

She nods and takes Carmelita's hand.

INT. JULIO'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Julio stands at the basin, looking at himself in the mirror. He runs his hand across his bare head and shrugs. A KNOCK at the door.

He closes his eyes briefly, takes a deep breath, then turns.

JULIO

Come in.

The door opens and in spills María. She sees Julio and stops in her tracks, wondering: who is this strange man?

Julio bends and beckons her.

She looks at Carmelita, who sets a box down, then nods at Julio.

CARMELITA

It's Daddy, Honey.

María looks doubtfully at Julio, who continues to beckon her, but the joy is gone from his face.

JULIO

Ven a Papá, María.

Finally convinced, María rushes forward, reaching for him.

MARÍA

Up! Pick me up, Daddy!

Carmelita restrains the child as Julio gives a pained look; he can't pick up his own daughter anymore.

Carmelita picks María up and places her on the bed.

Julio sits next to her, hugging her.

She looks up into his eyes, registering his baldness and sunken cheeks.

MARÍA (CONT'D)

Daddy, are you getting better?

Julio nods.

Carmelita sits down and puts her arm around him.

For a moment, nothing is said.

Then suddenly the door flies open, and in bursts the little league team: ten rowdy kids, full of vim and vigor. They seem little concerned with Julio's condition, with all the other sights a visit to the hospital yields.

They surround Julio, all chattering at once.

Behind them, Larry enters with a cake, which he sets on the dresser.

INSERT - CAKE

It says "Get Well, Coach."

BACK TO SCENE

Larry shakes Julio's hand. Julio seems uncomfortable, but brightens when someone yells:

KID

Let's eat!

Everyone CHEERS as the cake is devoured.

In concert, the kids tell Julio about their win on the diamond last Saturday.

Julio sees the Shortstop, who hangs back, looking uncomfortable and a little scared.

With Julio occupied, Larry motions to Carmelita, and they step outside.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JULIO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LARRY

He looks... good.

It's a lie. Carmelita looks in the door window.

Inside, Julio is outmanned as the kids cram cake and all talk at once. But at least he's smiling.

She turns to Larry.

CARMELITA

He'll never quit. But I don't know how much more I can take. All I can do is stand by and wring my hands while they radiate him and stick needles in him and he gets weaker and weaker...

LARRY

I wish there was something I could do...

CARMELITA

There is. Talk to Crash. He hasn't come to see Julio.

LARRY

He hasn't?

CARMELITA

Not once. Julio keeps asking when he's coming. I don't get it--the guy has never said a kind word to Julio, so why does he care if the jerk comes to visit him or not?

Larry shrugs and looks in the window at the melee inside.

LARRY

We'd better rescue him... I'll tell Crash Julio's been asking for him. Maybe then he'll come.

He opens the door. Carmelita is doubtful, and angry.

CARMELITA

And maybe pigs will fly.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JULIO'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT

The room is dark, the LIGHTS DIMMED. Maria lies on the bed, cake icing on her cheeks, sleeping soundly as Julio gently strokes her long curly hair.

Carmelita rises and goes over to the dresser and brings back a large box, which she gives to Julio.

He shakes it gently.

JULIO
A new stomach?

Carmelita shakes her head.

Julio opens the box.

ANGLE ON BOX - HANDS

reach in and withdraw a dark felt fedora, the kind Indiana Jones wears.

Thin fingers trace the curve of the brim and touch the silky band.

JULIO

smiles at Carmelita, but doesn't put the hat on.

JULIO (CONT'D)
It's nice.

CARMELITA
It's the most expensive one they
had.

Julio looks at her, a question in his dark eyes. Carmelita struggles to maintain control and be positive.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)
(joking)
I know how vain you are... it's
beautiful, isn't it?

Julio nods and looks at her. She has aged through this ordeal. So much beauty, so much pain.

He holds the hat gingerly, as if it might tear, like rice paper.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)
You will wear this hat for many,
many years...

Julio places the hat on his head, embarrassed.

Carmelita wipes a tear away and adjusts the hat, finally getting it right.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)
There. You look wonderful.

JULIO
I look foolish. But I'll wear it...
for you, Querida. Te amo.

Carmelita collapses in his arms, crying.

CARMELITA
Te amo. Te amo.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. CHEMOTHERAPY ROOM - DAY

The CHEMO NURSE readies an I.V. drip needle. She dabs rubbing alcohol on Julio's arm where a dozen other puncture holes are seen.

As she moves to insert the needle, he shies.

CHEMO NURSE
Pretty tender, huh?

He nods. His color is bad, his cheeks sunken. Eyes peer out of hollowed sockets. He smiles weakly.

JULIO
Like a pin cushion.

The Nurse smiles. Julio bites his lip as the needle goes in.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JULIO'S ROOM - NIGHT

The fedora hangs on a hook on the closet door, unworn.

PAN TO FIND Julio in the dark, looking out the window at the night outside.

The door opens and in walks Carmelita.

CARMELITA
Julio? Why are the lights...

When Julio doesn't acknowledge her, she lets the door close behind her and darkness returns.

She makes her way to the bed and sits down.

Julio groans at the movement.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)
Does it hurt?

Julio nods. An I.V. drips quietly.

Carmelita sees his needle-tracked arm and looks up.

Julio's eyes are large and empty. For a long moment they look at each other.

CARMELITA (CONT'D)

Oh, Julito, I wish there was something I could do...

JULIO

I know.

CARMELITA

If I could change places--

Julio puts his hand on hers, shaking his head.

JULIO

There's nothing you can do. This... this is my test.

Carmelita rejects this logic, shaking her head.

CARMELITA

But there must be something...

SWOOSH! The door to the room flies open and a large shadow fills the doorway.

Dr. Berman stands, hands on his hips, feet spread authoritatively.

DR. BERMAN

Okay, no necking in here!

He flicks on the light and strides in, his usual cheerful self.

Carmelita dries her eyes and stands, embarrassed.

Julio watches her, ignoring Berman, who stands at the foot of the bed, examining the patient record.

Presently, Berman looks up and his smile fades. He fetches a chair for Carmelita.

DR. BERMAN (CONT'D)

Please. Sit.

Carmelita sits, but the concern is visible on her face.

DR. BERMAN (CONT'D)

There are many things I love about my job. The people, the courage and heroism I see every day... heroism of people like you, Julio. And the goodness it brings out in others... but there are parts of my job I hate...

Carmelita looks at Julio, then turns to Dr. Berman, who is looking evenly at Julio.

A long moment passes.

Finally, the silence has said it all. Berman sits on the edge of the bed, placing his large hand on Julio's.

DR. BERMAN (CONT'D)
We've done all we can. I'm sorry.

Carmelita is too shocked to react.

But Julio slowly nods at Dr. Berman, their eyes never wavering. Julio raises his hand weakly, shaking Berman's hand.

JULIO
Thank you, Doctor.

Berman is moved at the simple sincerity. He rises, touches Carmelita's shoulder and turns.

DR. BERMAN
A little privacy.

About to open the door, Berman stops and turns.

DR. BERMAN (CONT'D)
It has been an honor to know you,
sir. Thank you.

Julio nods and Berman excuses himself, DIMMING THE LIGHT once more.

Carmelita falls on Julio, sobbing.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. JULIO'S ROOM - DAY

Clothes are being packed by a NURSE. Julio sits on the bed in his street clothes, staring out the window, the fedora on his lap.

The PHONE rings. The Nurse brings it to him.

JULIO
Yes? Hello, Querida. I'm almost
ready... you can come anytime...
(long beat)
Oh. Okay, I guess. Sure, I can make
it. Fine. See you soon.

He hangs up, dismayed.

The Nurse takes the phone from him, but catches his expression.

NURSE

Is there something wrong?

Perplexed, Julio rises slowly, shaking his head.

JULIO

My wife can't come get me... the car
is acting up.

(long beat)

Would you get me a taxi?

She nods and scurries out of the room.

Julio drops the hat on the bed and sits again. He can't believe this.

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI - TRAVELING - DAY

Julio sits limply in the back. The fedora is on his lap and his thin fingers trace the brim.

Up front, the CABBIE is agitated.

CABBIE'S REAR VIEW MIRROR P.O.V. - JULIO'S BALD HEAD

THE CABBIE

CABBIE

You one of them Krishnas?

Julio looks from the window to the rearview mirror.

He takes a deep breath and says evenly:

JULIO

I have cancer.

The Cabbie is stunned. He feels the fool.

CABBIE

Oh. Oh, man, I'm sorry.

He trails off, giving the road more attention than it needs.

Julio turns to look out the window again, watching the evening deepen as people go about their business outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. JULIO'S STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The taxi turns the corner and heads toward Julio's home.

INT. TAXI - TRAVELING - CONTINUOUS

Julio looks out the window. Usually there are kids playing hopscotch or shooting hoops, people strolling or teenagers hanging around their cars.

But not tonight.

EXT. ESPERANZA HOME - MOMENTS LATER

The taxi rolls to a stop and the Cabbie jumps out, opening Julio's door.

Julio gets gingerly out and the Cabbie opens the trunk and retrieves Julio's bag.

Julio dons the fedora and reaches into his pocket for his wallet.

The Cabbie waves it off.

CABBIE

It's on me. Good luck.

Before Julio can respond, he turns and jumps into the cab. The engine ROARS and he speeds off.

Julio watches him go.

JULIO

At least cabs are gonna be cheaper.

Julio turns to face his house.

JULIO'S P.O.V. - THE HOUSE

is dark.

JULIO

trudges slowly up the walk, stopping on the porch, tired. He sets down the bag and straightens, looking at himself in the front door window. The lace window curtain is a backdrop for his reflection.

He adjusts the fedora and sighs, smiling wanly, trying to put a good face on this, the saddest day of his life.

He opens the door and steps inside.

INT. ESPERANZA HOME - CONTINUOUS

The door opens and Julio stands in the doorway, silhouetted by the setting sun.

The door closes as he gropes for the light switch.

JULIO

Carmelita?

Suddenly the LIGHTS burst on and a CHORUS shouts:

CHORUS

SURPRISE!

Julio scans the room. A smile flickers and grows.

HIS P.O.V. - THE ROOM

is full of people: friends, neighbors, the kids on the baseball team--all smiling, shouting, kids jumping up and down with excitement.

And every one of them is BALD.

Kids sport mohawks and punk haircuts, older men have nothing but moustaches, even the women have short haircuts.

The Shortstop stands awkwardly, his baseball cap askew on his head. He smiles up at Julio as he slowly removes it.

His head is bald and his eyes are full of tears, but he's smiling his biggest, proudest smile.

Julio bends to him.

SHORTSTOP

You're my coach.

JULIO

reaches out and pulls the kid to him. After a moment, he looks up, spotting somebody at the rear of the crowd.

CRASH

stands out in his usual baseball cap and full beard. Julio pushes his way through the throng to stand face to face with him.

Julio gestures to the others.

JULIO

Too much for you, huh?

Crash pulls thoughtfully on his beard.

Everyone is silent, a bit apprehensive at this volatile character.

CRASH

You don't think I'd actually shave my head for you, do ya?

JULIO

I guess not.

CRASH

Shows how much you know.

With a flourish, Crash whips off his cap, exposing an exquisitely bare and shiny pate, shaved right to the top of his sideburns.

He laughs as Julio's mouth drops open.

When the laughter subsides, Crash turns serious.

CRASH (CONT'D)

I wanted to come see you in the hospital, Julio. I really did, but I just couldn't... my dad died of cancer and... I just couldn't go through it again... I'm sorry, compañero.

Surprisingly, he correctly pronounces the Spanish word.

He reaches out and hugs Julio, whispering in his ear.

CRASH (CONT'D)

Qué Diós te bendiga, amigo.

Julio is overcome, but more is on the way.

A SOUND from the kitchen and the crowd parts.

IN THE KITCHEN DOORWAY,

holding her recently shorn locks in her tiny hands, stands María, tear tracks on her cheeks, not quite sure she wanted to do this. She walks tentatively toward Julio.

The people form a corridor and Julio kneels down, receiving her with a great hug as she collapses, crying on his shoulder.

JULIO

hugs his daughter.

Something catches his attention and he looks up toward the kitchen, his eyes wide with surprise.

HIS P.O.V. - CARMELITA

stands in the doorway, backlit by the kitchen light which forms a halo around what little hair remains on her head.

Her long dark tresses are gone. She stands, nervous and expectant, knotting a hankie.

JULIO

straightens, shocked.

Carmelita walks to him and everyone quiets. She reaches out toward the fedora which is still on his head, the only covered one in the room.

JULIO

How'd you come up with this?

CARMELITA

Oh, we just kind of... put our heads together.

This gets a laugh from everyone.

Julio can't take his eyes off her, she looks so different. He reaches out, touching her short hair.

Carmelita removes the hat, gently running her hand over his bald head. He bows his head, overcome, and she kisses his smooth forehead.

AT THE BACK OF THE CROWD,

Crash begins to CLAP, tears welling.

Someone joins him, then another, until the entire room rings with applause.

People fight back tears, press closer, reaching out toward Julio and Carmelita.

MARÍA

stands between her parents, clutching Carmelita's hem with one hand and Julio's pant leg with another, looking up hopefully, her concern over her hair forgotten.

HIGH ANGLE ARTSY SHOT

as hands reach toward Julio, touching his head, their own heads, and others.

Julio hugs Carmelita, then turns, smiling through tears, shaking hands, rubbing heads, laughing and crying.

INT/EXT. ESPERANZA HOME - NIGHT

Julio and Carmelita are enveloped by the crowd.

PULL BACK, DOLLYING out the front door, past the porch and down the walk. CRANE UP.

Passers by stop and look. A couple goes up the walk with plates of food.

PULL BACK until the entire house is visible, a sanctuary of love in a harsh world.

A car pulls up and people get out with flowers and cookies.

It's going to be a wonderful party.

FADE OUT.

THE END