

ROSIE'S DINER

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EXT. ROSIE'S DINER - NIGHT

A FULL MOON hangs overhead. Rain begins to fall.

A retro 1950s-style diner glows in neon. The bright ROSIE'S sign lights the front.

Across the road, SEMI TRUCKS idle on an oil-slicked lot.

Drivers climb down from their rigs, some hurrying toward the diner as the wind kicks up.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

A VINTAGE JUKEBOX hums. The mechanical arm clicks into place. The smooth electric piano of THE DOORS swells.

THE KITCHEN WINDOW - KARL (55), Cold eyes peer through the pass-through. Unkempt with thinning gray hair and a perpetual sneer on his crease-lined face.

AT THE COUNTER - MANDY (30), ties on her apron. She sweeps blond hair up into a messy bun, securing it with a clip.

LIZ (50s), kind and motherly, hands Mandy the order pad.

Mandy smiles and slips the pad into her apron pocket.

LIZ
Buckle up. Full moon tonight.

Mandy laughs, reaching for a stack of menus. Her smile fades when "Riders on the Storm" trickles from the JUKEBOX.

Her attention shifts to the machine. She exhales a quiet, shaky breath.

LIZ (cont'd)
You okay?

MANDY
Just thinking about how George loved
The Doors. I still can't believe he's
gone.

Liz looks sympathetic.

MANDY (cont'd)
Sometimes I half-expect him to walk
through that door and order his usual
meatloaf and pie.

LIZ
He sure did love his pie.

Liz tugs on her jacket.

LIZ (cont'd)
Suzy's in the back. Carolyn's
hosting, but she's running a bit
late.

The WALL CLOCK behind the counter reads 9:55.

Thunder roils outside.

MANDY
I'll seat folks 'til she gets here.
Who's cooking?

LIZ
Karl.

MANDY
Ugh. I don't like that man. Something
about him gives me the creeps.

LIZ
(nods)
I get it. But it's hard to get a good
cook on this shift, so we're stuck
for now.

Liz wiggles her eyebrows, buttoning her coat.

LIZ (cont'd)
If it helps, James is working
tonight. I saw his car at the truck
stop.

Mandy's cheeks flush as she turns toward the front window,
looking through the rainstorm to the truck stop across the
road.

EXT. TRUCK STOP GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Through the garage's open bay door, JAMES (35), wearing a
truck stop mechanic's shirt, wrestles a semi-truck tire onto
the rim.

JAMES
(to himself)
Come on, you bastard.

STEWART (30s), leans against a nearby trailer. A short, stocky thug with a cocky grin, he watches James with a calculating stare.

STEWART
Did that tire piss you off or something, man?

With a final shove of the pry bar -- SNAP -- the tire locks into place.

James stands. Wipes his hands on a greasy rag.

He hunches his shoulders and adopts a jittery, "strung-out" persona.

JAMES
Naw, just a little wired. You sure you can score me some smack?

STEWART
Said I could, didn't I?

Stewart snorts, dismissive. Saunters out through the garage doors.

James watches him disappear behind a tractor trailer. The strung-out twitch vanishes.

His eyes harden, and he murmurs into his collar.

JAMES
Stay sharp. Deal goes down tonight.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

The diner now half-full.

A regular drops a coin into the jukebox. The machine hums to life and a pop tune plays.

Pans clank as meat sizzles on the kitchen grill.

The door CHIMES as a group of truckers file in, stomping water from their boots.

SUZY (20s), dark pixie cut, nose piercings and tattoos, approaches with a tray of dirty dishes -- her face open and friendly.

SUZY
Watch out for table six. The parents are hopelessly outnumbered.

Mandy looks to table six. Laughs softly.

Table Six is a battleground. MOM (30s) tries to shove a bottle into the mouth of a TODDLER in a booster chair. The toddler bats it away, screaming "BOOBIE!" at the top of his lungs.

A LITTLE GIRL (4) ignores the noise, sprawled halfway across the sticky table as she methodically licks the top of a saltshaker.

In the aisle, TWO BOYS (8 or 9) duel with butter knives. Their DAD (30s) raises his voice to be heard over their rambunctiousness.

DAD

Guys, please. Just sit down.

The boys ignore him, the "clink" of stainless steel knives punctuating the screams from the booster chair.

MANDY

(chuckles)

Thanks for the tip.

Suzy heads toward a booth of teenagers.

Mandy scans the room, grabbing a water pitcher from the service station.

She crosses the diner floor, stopping at Table Four.

ARTHUR and ELMER (70s), in bright matching shirts, sit with their menus closed.

Mandy tops off their waters with a practiced tilt of the pitcher.

MANDY

You two look awfully cozy tonight.
Special occasion, or are you just
trying to flirt your way into a free
slice of pie?

Arthur puffs out his chest, eyes twinkling.

ARTHUR

Mandy, girl. Forty years ago tonight
I asked this man to marry me, right
here at Rosie's.

ELMER

(winks)

And Arthur got himself banned for a
(MORE)

ELMER (cont'd)
month for dancing on the counter.

MANDY
(laughing)
I've heard the stories.

She pulls her order pad from her apron.

MANDY
The usual?

ARTHUR
You know it.

Mandy scribbles on her pad.

MANDY
Pie's on the house. Rosie's rule -
anniversaries get pie.

The men smile, murmuring their thanks.

LATER

Mandy drops a new order at the service window when the JUKEBOX clicks and the same Doors song fills the room again.

She pauses to stare at the machine.

MANDY
(under her breath)
George? Is that you?

She gives her head a soft shake.

Moves to TABLE NINE.

HARRY and MABEL (mid-70s) sit across from each other. Harry watches his wife with an indulgent smile. Mabel is rigid, shooting a fierce glare over Harry's shoulder.

MABEL
That woman behind you is so rude!

He gently pats her hand.

HARRY
Ignore her and enjoy your pie, Mabel.

Mabel huffs and shoves a forkful into her mouth, still eyeing her own reflection in the mirror on the wall.

Mandy leans in to top off their glasses.

MANDY
Everything okay tonight, Harry?

HARRY
(smiles)
Always is.

Mandy returns to the service table.

SUZY
I hope I find a man like Harry
someday.

MANDY
We should be so lucky.

AT THE KITCHEN WINDOW:

KARL Slams a bell. DING!

KARL
Order up!

Mandy steps to the window.

Karl doesn't say a word, but his greasy gaze crawls over her.

With a frown, Mandy balances a tray of burgers and fries on one hand -- weaves her way to a corner booth.

A YOUNG COUPLE is locked in a heated, low-pitched argument.

Mandy sets the plates down.

The woman SLAPS her hands on the table and stands.

WOMAN
Did you think I wouldn't find out?

She rips a SPARKLING ENGAGEMENT RING off her finger. FLINGS it at him and storms for the door.

Silence. Then stifled laughter.

Red-faced, the man scoops the ring off the floor.

Throws cash on the table.

Rushes out after her.

Mandy lifts the tray of untouched food and turns toward the kitchen, careful to avoid the damp patches tracked in from the rain.

MANDY
 (to herself)
 Yep. It's gonna be one of those
 nights.

INT. SURVEILLANCE VAN - NIGHT

ALEX (30s), boyish, blond hair cut short, sits among glowing monitors. A can of Dr. Pepper and a half-eaten burger sit beside him.

Alex taps a key, pulling up a blueprint of the diner's security system.

ALEX
 Overdoses among high school kids
 doubled this quarter. We need to shut
 it down tonight.

JAMES (V.O.)
 Yeah. I've seen what this stuff does.

A beat.

ALEX
 (quiet)
 How's he doing?

JAMES (V.O.)
 ...Better.

Alex tilts his head, listening -- then speaks into his headset.

ALEX
 Stewart just pinged the meet. Rear
 cameras go dark before the hand-off.

JAMES (V.O.)
 I'll be ready.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Karl paces behind the grill.

Nervously wipes already clean hands on his chef's apron.

He checks the back door. Listens. Checks the clock.

His jaw tightens as distant diesel engines rumble outside.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - NIGHT

A CRANKY TRUCKER (50s), Peterbilt cap pulled low, shovels food beside an open greasy logbook.

Mandy refills his water.

MANDY
Anything else, sir?

He doesn't bother to look up.

TRUCKER
This meatloaf is raw, and the fries
are soggy.

She eyes his half-empty plate.

MANDY
Would you like something different?

TRUCKER
(snaps)
Just the bill.

With a forced smile, Mandy places his tab on the table.

MANDY
Have a good evening, sir.

Mandy returns to the service area at the same time Suzy drops a plate of dirty dishes on the kitchen window counter.

CAROLYN (30s) Dressed in business casual, is pouring herself a glass of water.

MANDY (cont'd)
Is it just me, or are the customers
more difficult tonight?

CAROLYN
I blame the full moon.

The CHIME above the door rings again. Their heads swivel toward the sound.

JAMES strolls in.

SUZY
Ooh, La La. Mandy's man is here.

MANDY
(blushing)
He's not mine.

CAROLYN
 (teasingly)
 If you say so.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - NIGHT

James crosses from the door to the counter, his expression tense as he assesses the room. When he spots Mandy, his demeanor softens.

He takes a stool facing the security monitor near the back of the kitchen, leaning forward. Sneaks a quick glance inside.

Sirens wail in the distance.

Karl freezes mid-task, listening. As the sound fades, his shoulders ease and he resumes working.

JAMES
 (softly into
 concealed mic)
 Stewart's small time. The cook's the
 pipeline, I'm certain of it.

James's attention shifts to Mandy as she approaches.

JAMES (cont'd)
 When we move, we do it quiet. I want
 Karl taken down before anyone here
 gets hurt. Especially not Mandy.

ALEX (V.O.)
 Copy that. Stay in character, James.
 And remember, no asking for her
 number until the cuffs are on.

James ends the comms as Mandy stops in front of him, a cute blush coloring her cheeks.

JAMES
 Hey, beautiful.

MANDY
 Hi, James. What can I get for you?

He glances at the menu.

JAMES
 Breakfast special.

MANDY
 Hash browns or American fries?

JAMES
(patting his
stomach)
Can I substitute fruit for that?

MANDY
Of course.

JAMES
And an iced tea, please.

Mandy pours James's tea.

JAMES (cont'd)
Busy night?

MANDY
A bit more than usual. Travelers
waiting out the storm, and a few
regulars.

Suzy approaches and slides a ticket onto the kitchen sill
for Karl.

SUZY
(calls out)
Two meatloaf dinners.

She turns back to James and Mandy with an amused smile.

SUZY (cont'd)
Evening, James. What brings you in
tonight?

She shoots Mandy a knowing look. Mandy blushes.

James plays it cool, though a grin tugs at his mouth.

JAMES
Couldn't pass up some of Rosie's
famous pie.

Suzy chuckles, grabs two sodas, and heads back to her
tables.

The JUKEBOX whirs, "Riders on the Storm" swells again.

Mandy's expression turns pensive as she stares at the
jukebox.

JAMES
Don't like The Doors?

MANDY
That song keeps playing.

JAMES
And that bothers you?

MANDY
(wry smile)
I'm overreacting, I know. It's
just... It was a favorite of one of
my customers who recently passed.

James offers a sympathetic smile.

Karl sets a plate on the sill -- slaps the bell. DING.

KARL
Order up.

Mandy retrieves the plate and sets it before James.

MANDY
One Harvest Skillet with fruit.
Enjoy.

James winks at her and digs in.

He watches Mandy deliver a large slice of pie to a
DISHEVELED VETERAN (40s) in a faded military jacket, seated
near the emergency exit -- back to the wall. Observant.

James tilts his head, subtly shielding his mouth with his
hand as if scratching his jaw.

JAMES
Alex, you see the Vet at the
emergency exit? Table Twelve.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SURVEILLANCE VAN - CONTINUOUS

Alex leans into the monitor, zooming a grainy feed onto the
man.

ALEX
I see him. Baggy jacket, back to the
wall.

BACK TO JAMES

JAMES

Don't believe he's here for the deal
but keep an eye on him if things go
south. He might react.

James drops his hand, his gaze settling on Mandy.

MANDY

It's on the house, Sarge. Happy early
birthday.

The Vet offers a grateful nod and picks up his fork.

James watches Mandy drift over to the Hostess station.

She doesn't make a production of it; just pulls two crumpled
bills from her apron pocket and slides them across the
counter.

In his ear, the tactical static crackles.

ALEX (V.O.)

(A low, appreciative
whistle)

Is she paying for that out of her own
tips? Man, James, she's a total
sweetheart.

James doesn't speak, but a small smile tugs at the corner of
his mouth.

ALEX (V.O.) (cont'd)

Okay, Romeo, head back in the game.
Karl's looking at the clock. It's
about go-time.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Karl glances toward the dining room.

He moves to a small bank of video equipment -- flips a
toggle switch.

The camera goes BLACK.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - DINING ROOM - LATER

Mandy stands at a booth occupied by a WOMAN (50s)—a mountain
of a woman in a bright floral shirt.

WOMAN

Can you slap some two-handed cheese
on that burger?

MANDY

Two-handed cheese?

WOMAN

Yeah. The kind you eat with one hand
and hold your nose with the other!

The trucker lets out a deep, window-rattling belly laugh.

Mandy smiles, despite the long night.

MANDY

Will smoked Gouda suffice?

WOMAN

(wiping tears of
mirth)

Sure, honey. That'll be fine.

Mandy heads to the counter to place the order before helping
Suzy roll utensils into napkins.

Suddenly, The JUKEBOX WHIRS, and George's song kicks in.

They both look at the machine -- no one's near it.

SUZY

(brows furrowed)

How on earth?

A small smile softens Mandy's face.

MANDY

(to Suzy)

I think it's George.

The neon lights flicker -- then glow a little brighter.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Karl fingers tap a nervous rhythm on the counter. He glances
toward the back security monitors.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - NIGHT

The rain has slowed, the diner now nearly empty. Only the
veteran and an older man remain.

MANDY
Hey, Suzy. I'll be in the back.

Suzy waves her off as she refills a coffee mug.

INT. KITCHEN / STOCKROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mandy enters the storeroom, grabs the clipboard to jot down some notes.

She turns to exit -- pauses in the doorway.

Karl stands at the back door, ear pressed against it.

He turns -- too quickly.

MANDY
Everything okay?

KARL
(snaps)
Not your business. Get back to work.

Mandy frowns. Hangs the clipboard back on the nail.

She moves toward the dining area.

MUFFLED BLAST.

Mandy freezes.

Karl swears and rushes toward the security equipment.

He flips a switch.

GUNFIRE -- POP! POP! POP!

SHOUTING.

MANDY
What is that?

Mandy gasps.

ON THE MONITOR: Grainy video shows police rushing a MAN on the ground she doesn't recognize.

KARL
Damn it!

Karl punches the wall.

In the chaos, another figure moves with the officers: JAMES.

James stares directly into the lens, then sprints out of frame.

Karl's furious glare lands on Mandy.

She edges away.

He LUNGES.

Mandy SCREAMS -- shoves past him -- bolts for the door.

Karl GRABS her.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James and Alex BURST through the front doors.

The diner stills, all eyes on Mandy.

Even the jukebox sits silent.

James's face goes pale -- then hardens.

Near the kitchen, Karl holds Mandy as a shield. A butcher knife pressed against her throat.

Suzy and Carolyn freeze near the hostess stand.

Alex grabs both women by the arms.

He hustles them toward the exit and the waiting police officers.

ALEX

Out. Now.

James ignores the chaos of the evacuation.

His gun trained on Karl.

JAMES

Don't do anything stupid, Karl. Let her go.

KARL

Don't come any closer!

Karl's gaze darts between James and Alex.

Mandy locks eyes with James. Her gaze steady.

Near the window, the older man ducks behind the booth.

The Vet remains perfectly still, his eyes locked on Karl.

Through the windows, blue and red lights strobe against the walls as sirens blare.

KARL (cont'd)
(demands)
Close the blinds.

James keeps his attention on Karl.

Alex lowers the blinds.

ALEX
(to the older man)
Go.

The man darts out.

Alex returns to James's side.

ALEX (cont'd)
(murmurs)
The Vet's on his feet.

The Vet stealthily sheds his jacket and boots.

In stockinged feet, he prepares to move.

The knife in Karl's hand trembles -- nicks Mandy's skin.

A DOT OF BLOOD appears on her neck.

James's jaw clenches.

JAMES
Put down the weapon, Karl. We can
work this out.

Karl's features harden. He tugs Mandy tighter.

KARL
I said stay back!

Karl's hand shakes, the blade digging deeper.

She flinches.

James's eyes narrow, tracking a thin streak of blood sliding down her neck.

The Vet moves silently behind Karl, closing the gap.

JAMES
You're surrounded. Don't make this worse.

Alex makes a shuffling noise, drawing Karl's focus toward him, away from the approaching Veteran.

Alex goes still.

The JUKEBOX CLICKS -- a sharp, deliberate sound.

Silence -- then it ERUPTS into a too-loud guitar riff.

The diner overhead lights FLICKER.

Karl startles at the sudden commotion. The knife lifts from Mandy's neck.

Her gaze flicks to the approaching VET -- shifts her weight, subtly pulling Karl off balance.

The Vet thrusts his forearm between the blade and her throat.

He KICKS Karl's knee. The cook CRASHES to the floor.

James rushes forward -- sweeps Mandy away from danger.

Alex rushes forward, drives a knee into the small of Karl's back, pinning him to the tile.

Karl struggles, but Alex wrenches his hands behind the cook's back and slams on the cuffs.

The metallic snap of metal echoes like a gunshot through the room.

EXT. ROSIE'S DINER - NIGHT

Police lights continue to sweep over the scene.

James waits as an EMT finishes bandaging ROBERT'S (the Vet) arm. A crimson stain seeps through the gauze where the knife caught him.

James hands Robert a business card.

JAMES
I mean it, Robert, get ahold of me. I have a couple strong job leads for you.

ROBERT
Appreciate it.

JAMES
Things could have gone sideways
without your help.

Robert glances toward Mandy as a PARAMEDIC tends to her.
She meets his gaze -- offers a small smile.
Robert's stoic expression softens. He gives a slight nod.

ROBERT
(back to James)
Didn't want Mandy hurt.

They shake hands -- a firm, soldier-to-soldier grip.

JAMES
If I don't hear from you, I'll find
you.

Robert almost smiles.

ROBERT
Understood.

With that, Robert walks into the night.

INT. ROSIE'S DINER - NIGHT

The diner is quiet now, except for the low murmur of police
radios outside.

Mandy sits at the counter, a small bandage on her neck.

She stands. Watches James approach.

He sweeps two fingers gently across the curve of her cheek.

JAMES
I'm sorry you were hurt.

MANDY
It's nothing.

JAMES
I'm still sorry.

Alex nears James and Mandy, holding a bag of evidence.

He stops, looks at James, then at his watch.

ALEX
 (smirks)
 Cuffs are on, James. You're
 officially cleared for that phone
 number.

James chuckles as Alex continues past them.

Mandy glances toward the now-silent jukebox, then back to James.

She crosses her arms, leaning back against the counter to study him with fresh curiosity.

MANDY
 So, you're a cop.

JAMES
 Does that bother you?

MANDY
 Not at all.

James lets out a breath as tension eases from his features. He offers her his hand.

JAMES
 C'mon. I'll walk you out.

EXT. ROSIE'S DINER - MOMENTS LATER

The rain has stopped, early dawn creeping into the sky. The truck stop is mostly quiet now.

Mandy heads toward her car, James at her side. He takes her hand.

JAMES
 (mock-seriously)
 Wouldn't want you to slip on the wet
 pavement.

She smiles. Entwines their fingers.

They reach Mandy's car and stop at the driver's side door.

They pause. Their gazes lock.

JAMES
 (simultaneously)
 Can I call you sometime?

MANDY
 (simultaneously)
 Would you like to go out?

James grins, the most genuine smile we've seen on him yet.

JAMES
I would love that.

Suddenly, Jim Morrison's voice drifts through the glass as the romantic strains of "Blue Sunday" spill into the quiet parking lot.

Mandy's gaze shifts toward the diner. A small smile touches her lips.

MANDY
I think George approves.

JAMES
Who's George?

MANDY
(laughs softly)
That's a story for another time.

FADE OUT.