

Pizza Boyz

written by

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FADE IN:

**EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT**

SUPER: WEDNESDAY, 12:48 AM

A dingy gas station with flickering lights. JOEL (28), skinny and exhausted in his Tuscany's Pizza uniform, pumps gas into his beat-up Honda Civic with a mismatched door.

He checks his watch, yawns, and leans against the car. The gas station is nearly deserted except for a police cruiser parked by the convenience store.

JOEL (V.O.)

Fourteen hours on shift. Five deliveries stiffed me on tips. And I still have to be back at 8 AM tomorrow. This is what four years of philosophy gets you.

(beat)

Mom called again asking about grad school applications. What am I supposed to tell her? "Sorry, I'm too busy driving in circles delivering mediocre pizza to people who can't remember my name"?

A dark van suddenly screeches into the station, pulling alongside Joel's car. The side door slides open to reveal two MASKED FIGURES.

Before Joel can react, they leap out and grab him.

JOEL

What the-Hey! HEY!

Joel struggles as the figures wrestle him to the ground. One slaps a pair of handcuffs on him while the other wraps a blindfold around his eyes.

JOEL

Help! Someone help!

The POLICE OFFICER inside the store briefly looks up from his lottery scratch card, shrugs, and goes back to scratching.

JOEL (V.O.)

Perfect. Even the cops in this town are too apathetic to care.

The masked figures drag Joel into the van. The door slams shut and the van peels out of the station.

**INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS**

Joel is on the floor of the van, blindfolded and handcuffed. The masked figures sit across from him.

JOEL  
(panicking)  
Who are you? What do you want? I  
don't have any money!

MASKED FIGURE #1  
(muffled voice)  
Shut up!

There's something familiar about the voice, but Joel is too terrified to place it.

JOEL  
Please, I'm just a pizza guy! I  
don't-

JOEL (V.O.)  
This is it. This is how I die. Not achieving anything. Not finishing anything. Just another statistic. Mom's going to find my philosophy books while cleaning out my apartment and wonder why I even bothered.

MASKED FIGURE #2  
(whispering to Figure #1)  
Is it recording?

A phone light illuminates the dark van interior, revealing RICHIE behind one of the masks, filming everything.

RICHIE  
(whispering)  
Yep, live-streaming now!  
(to phone)  
What's up, Pizza Freaks! It's ya boy Richie-Rich with a special kidnapping edition of "Humiliate The Philosophy Major!" We're already at three hundred viewers and climbing!

Joel freezes at the sound of Richie's voice, fear transforming into mortification.

JOEL  
Richie? Is that you? What the hell?!

JOEL (V.O.)

Not death. Something worse. Public  
humiliation. Again.

RICHIE

(to phone)

Oh no! He's onto us!

Richie pulls off his mask, laughing hysterically. The second figure, revealed to be HECTOR the bouncer, removes his mask as well.

RICHIE

You should see your face right  
now!

JOEL

(struggling against the  
handcuffs)

Are you insane? I thought I was  
being kidnapped! I thought I was  
going to die!

RICHIE

(to phone, zooming in on  
Joel's face)

And that's why it's epic content,  
folks! The genuine terror! You  
can't fake that! Oh man, check out  
the comments pouring in! "Chair  
Boy returns!" "Richie-Rich strikes  
again!" We're trending, baby!

JOEL

Get these off me!

RICHIE

No can do, Crayon. The night is  
young, and we've got somewhere  
special to take you.

JOEL

(recognizing the vehicle)

Wait... is this Debbie's catering  
van?

RICHIE

Borrowed without permission. What  
she doesn't know won't hurt her.

JOEL (V.O.)

Four years of this. Four years of  
being his content, his joke, his  
punching bag. And I just take it.  
Every. Single. Time.

The van takes a sharp turn, throwing Joel against the wall as Richie continues filming, narrating every moment of Joel's humiliation to an ever-growing online audience.

RICHIE  
(to phone)  
Pizza Freaks, get ready for the main event! Chair Boy is about to have a night he'll never forget!

JOEL (V.O.)  
Someday, Richie. Someday.

The van speeds through the night, Richie's laughter mixing with the sound of notifications from his phone as more viewers join the livestream.

FADE TO:

**EXT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - LATER**

The van pulls into the nearly empty parking lot of a dingy strip club.

**INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS**

Richie leans in close to Joel, still filming.

RICHIE  
(to phone)  
Alright, Pizza Freaks! We've arrived at our destination. Joel here has never experienced the wonder that is Male Revue Night at the Velvet Rope!

JOEL  
Male what? Richie, no!

JOEL (V.O.)  
Not again. Not in front of thousands of strangers online.

RICHIE  
Richie, yes!

RICHIE  
(to phone)  
Over forty thousand viewers disagree! This is internet gold!

**EXT. STRIP CLUB - CONTINUOUS**

Hector and Richie drag the still-blindfolded, handcuffed Joel from the van toward the club entrance. Joel fights against them, but it's useless.

JOEL

(desperate)

Richie, I swear to God, if you  
don't let me go—

RICHIE

(to phone)

He's excited, folks! Can't you  
tell?

JOEL (V.O.)

I'm not just a joke to him. I'm a  
commodity. Views. Likes.  
Followers. My humiliation has  
value, just not to me.

**INT. STRIP CLUB - MOMENTS LATER**

The club is nearly empty except for a few sad regulars. Richie and Hector guide the blindfolded, handcuffed Joel through the sparse crowd.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and the three gentlemen in  
the back... for our special  
Wednesday night performance,  
please welcome our Village All-  
Stars!

Two SECURITY GUYS help get Joel onto the stage. They strap him into a VIP chair bolted to the center of the platform, finally removing his handcuffs only to secure him to the chair.

JOEL

(panicking)

What's happening? Where am I?

RICHIE

(dramatically)

Time for the big reveal!

Richie pulls off Joel's blindfold. Joel blinks in the spotlight, disoriented. As his eyes adjust, pure horror dawns on his face.

The opening notes of "Y.M.C.A." begin to play.

JOEL  
Oh God. No. NO!

FIVE MALE DANCERS burst onto the stage, each wearing partial costumes resembling the Village People.

RICHIE  
(filming from below the stage)  
Pizza Freaks, the moment you've all been waiting for! Chair Boy meets the Village People! We're breaking viewing records here!

The COWBOY drops to his knees in front of Joel. The CONSTRUCTION WORKER circles behind him. The LEATHER-CLAD BIKER approaches from the left, while the NATIVE AMERICAN and POLICE OFFICER take positions on the right.

ANGLE ON: AMBER (31), BRITTANY (26), and SHAY (28), three female dancers, watching from the bar with a mixture of pity and amusement.

BRITTANY  
Is that Richie's doing?

AMBER  
Who else? Poor guy looks terrified.

SHAY  
I'd feel sorry for him if it wasn't so damn funny.

BACK TO SCENE: The CONSTRUCTION WORKER straddles Joel as the others dance around them. Joel's expression cycles through shock, horror, and finally, a thousand-yard stare of dissociation.

JOEL (V.O.)  
(inner monologue)  
Eighty-seven thousand dollars in student loans. Four years studying Kant and Hegel. And here I am, kidnapped, strapped to a chair while a man in a hard hat uses my shoulders as a stripper pole. And thousands of people I'll never meet are watching it happen in real-time.

The POLICE OFFICER removes his shirt directly in Joel's face.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Mom was right. I should have been  
a dentist.

WIDER: The dancers form a semicircle around Joel, performing synchronized arm movements from the famous dance. The audience half-heartedly joins in.

ANGLE ON: Richie, now standing on a chair, conducting the crowd, completely oblivious to the change in Joel's expression.

RICHIE  
This is gonna break the internet!

CLOSE ON: Joel's eyes as a dancer's hips gyrate inches from his face. Through the humiliation, we see something new: cold, calculating fury.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Four years of being Richie's  
punching bag. Four years of pranks  
and humiliation for his social  
media followers. This isn't  
friendship. This is exploitation.  
And I've reached my limit.

SMASH CUT TO:

**INT. TUSCANY'S PIZZA KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING**

**INT. TUSCANY'S PIZZA KITCHEN - MORNING**

SUPER: THURSDAY, 8:17 AM

A cramped, worn kitchen with equipment from the early 2000s. Fluorescent lights flicker in a pattern that the staff has long memorized. Faded photos of local minor celebrities line one wall, their signatures barely visible.

JOEL stands at the prep station, methodically arranging delivery orders, dark circles under his eyes. He moves with precision that borders on obsessive, organizing receipts by delivery zone rather than time ordered.

OMAR (42), weathered with an unexplained scar across his eyebrow, kneads dough at his station. His movements are precise, almost elegant - betraying professional training that seems incongruous with his current position. He scratches his arm, then returns to the dough without washing his hands.

JOEL  
(quietly)  
Gloves, Omar.

Omar glances at Joel, then at the box of plastic gloves on the wall. He considers it for a moment, then continues kneading barehanded.

The back door opens. DEBBIE (58), prematurely gray hair in a perfect bob, enters. Her professional attire is slightly outdated but meticulously maintained. She carries a coffee cup that smells faintly of something stronger than coffee.

DEBBIE  
(checking watch)  
Where's Richie?

JOEL  
(not looking up)  
Late. Again.

DEBBIE  
(sighing)  
Third time this week.

She moves toward her office, but pauses to inspect a stack of mail on the counter. She discreetly slides an official-looking envelope marked "FINAL NOTICE" beneath the others.

Joel notices but pretends not to.

JOEL (V.O.)  
She thinks we don't see the bills piling up. The suppliers demanding payment up front. The dining room that's half-empty most nights. This place is a sinking ship, and we're all rearranging deck chairs.

The front bell JINGLES as NICO (24) enters, androgynous with electric blue hair and vintage band t-shirt under their uniform. They carry a backpack that seems suspiciously heavy.

NICO  
(surveying the tension)  
Good morning to you too, sunshine brigade.

DEBBIE  
(heading to office)  
Staff meeting at four. Everyone needs to be here.  
(pointedly)  
Including Richie.

JOEL  
I'll text him.

DEBBIE  
(pausing at office door)  
Don't bother. I already tried.

As Debbie disappears into her office, Nico begins chopping vegetables with impressive speed.

NICO  
(to Joel, quietly)  
Heard about last night. Trending  
on three platforms.

JOEL  
(jaw tightening)  
Don't.

NICO  
I'm just saying, you could  
probably sue for kidnapping.

JOEL  
And who would deliver the court  
summons? Me?

Nico smirks and continues chopping. Omar watches their exchange while meticulously forming perfectly identical dough balls.

NICO  
(to Omar)  
How's the sauce today, Chef?

Omar glances up at the word "Chef," a brief flicker of pride crossing his otherwise impassive face.

OMAR  
(minimally)  
Good.

JOEL  
(surprised)  
You never call him Chef.

NICO  
(lowering voice)  
Did you know he worked at Le Petit  
Jardin before it closed? Executive  
sous chef. Had a write-up in Food  
& Wine.

JOEL  
(re-evaluating Omar)  
No way.

NICO

The 2008 crash wiped him out. Lost his restaurant, his house, his marriage. Debbie hired him when no one else would.

JOEL

How do you know all this?

NICO

(shrugging)

I listen. Unlike some people who are too busy being Richie's content farm.

The back door BANGS open as RICHIE bursts in, sunglasses on despite being indoors, exuding forced energy that barely masks his hangover.

RICHIE

Good morning, wage slaves!

JOEL

(coldly)

You're late.

RICHIE

(checking nonexistent watch)

Am I? Or is everyone else early?

He slides behind Joel, grabbing an apron off the hook.

RICHIE

(leaning in, whispering)

Eighty thousand views, Crayon.

We're viral!

JOEL

(not looking at him)

Don't call me Crayon.

RICHIE

(ignoring him)

Omar! My man! High five!

He holds up his hand. Omar stares at it, then returns to his dough.

RICHIE

(unfazed)

Still working on our social skills, I see.

(MORE)

RICHIE (CONT'D)

(to everyone)

Prepare yourselves for increased business, folks. I mentioned our 'authentic Italian cuisine' in the video tags.

JOEL

There's nothing authentic about this place.

RICHIE

(mock gasping)

Blasphemy! Omar uses real oregano, don't you, buddy?

Omar says nothing, but we notice his hands moving slightly faster, his knuckles whitening.

Debbie emerges from her office, expression grim as she reads a letter.

DEBBIE

Richie. My office. Now.

RICHIE

(theatrical)

Whatever it was, I have an alibi.

(to Joel)

Back me up, Crayon?

Joel deliberately turns away as Richie follows Debbie into her office. The door closes.

NICO

(to Joel)

You know why she hired him back after the health inspector incident last year?

JOEL

His sparkling personality?

NICO

He's Anthony's godson.

JOEL

Anthony?

NICO

(gesturing around)

Tuscany. The founder. Debbie's husband. Died ten years ago.

Joel looks around the kitchen with new understanding - noting the faded photo behind the register of a robust Italian man with his arm around a younger Debbie.

JOEL

So we're not just a failing pizza joint. We're a memorial.

**INT. DEBBIE'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS**

Through the frosted glass, we see Debbie gesturing angrily at Richie, pointing at something on her computer screen - presumably the viral video.

NICO

(continuing)

Richie's been working here since high school. He used to help Anthony with deliveries.

JOEL

That explains why she keeps him around despite...everything.

In the background, Omar methodically forms dough balls, precisely the same size, in his own world. A sharp contrast to the chaos around him.

NICO

(thoughtfully)

Everyone here is stuck in something. Debbie's stuck in the past. Omar's stuck in his fall from grace. Richie's stuck in adolescence.

JOEL

And we're stuck delivering mediocre pizza to people who can't remember our names.

NICO

(smiling slightly)

Speak for yourself. I'm just passing through.

The front bell JINGLES as their first customer of the day enters. Joel sighs, straightens his name tag, and heads to the counter.

JOEL (V.O.)

Another day at Tuscany's.

(MORE)

JOEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Where dreams come to die and pizza  
sauce stains never come out of  
your clothes.

Richie emerges from Debbie's office, unusually subdued. He silently takes his place at the register.

Omar continues kneading dough, scratching his arm occasionally without washing his hands after. A subtle reminder of the health violations that constantly threaten the restaurant's existence.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PIZZA & PASTA - DAY**

SUPER: THURSDAY, 11:23 AM

The lunch rush. Delivery cars come and go from the cramped parking lot. Steam rises from the kitchen vents.

Joel's Civic and Richie's Mustang are parked side by side, both with magnetic "Tuscany's Pizza" signs - Joel's perfectly straight, Richie's crooked and peeling at one corner.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

DEBBIE stands at the counter, phone to ear, taking an order while simultaneously glaring at OMAR, who's arranging toppings with his bare hands despite the box of gloves prominently displayed nearby.

DEBBIE  
(into phone)  
Yes, sir. Large pepperoni, extra  
cheese. Twenty-five minutes.  
(covering mouthpiece, to  
Omar)  
Gloves! For Christ's sake, GLOVES!

Omar looks at the box of plastic gloves on the wall, considers it for a moment, then deliberately puts on a single glove - only on his left hand. He continues working with his right hand bare.

NICO slices pizzas at lightning speed, headphones in, bobbing to music only they can hear.

DEBBIE  
(hanging up)  
Two more deliveries!  
(MORE)

DEBBIE (CONT'D)  
Where are tweedle-dumb and  
tweedle-dumber?

On cue, JOEL and RICHIE enter from opposite ends - Joel from the bathroom, hands still damp from thorough washing, and Richie from outside, checking his phone without looking up.

DEBBIE  
Finally!  
(checking delivery slips)  
Joel, you've got the Westridge  
neighborhood route. Richie, you're  
taking downtown.

JOEL  
(checking order slips)  
That's five deliveries in opposite  
directions. We'd be more efficient  
if we split the territory by-

DEBBIE  
(cutting him off)  
Did I ask for a logistics seminar?  
Just take the damn pizzas!

RICHIE  
(saluting mockingly)  
Yes, ma'am! Captain Crayon and his  
delivery boy reporting for duty!

JOEL  
(under breath)  
I hate you.

RICHIE  
(grabbing pizza bags)  
Love you too, buddy.

Joel meticulously checks each order slip against the pizzas, ensuring temperatures and toppings are correct. Richie grabs his stack without looking and bolts for the door.

DEBBIE  
(to Joel)  
Today, philosophy boy!

JOEL  
(checking one last detail)  
The Robinson order has a peanut  
allergy note. I'm making sure-

DEBBIE  
(softening slightly)  
Fine. Check it. But hurry up.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS**

Richie tosses his pizzas onto the back seat of his Mustang haphazardly, cranks the music to deafening levels, and peels out of the lot, narrowly missing a pedestrian.

Joel carefully arranges his delivery bags on a specialized rack he's installed in his passenger seat. He pulls up his GPS app, which displays a carefully optimized route connecting all five deliveries in the most efficient path.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

SPLIT SCREEN: Joel on the left, Richie on the right. Two delivery drivers, two completely different approaches.

-- Joel drives precisely at the speed limit, both hands on the wheel. Richie speeds, one hand on the wheel, the other texting and occasionally taking selfies with the caption "Working hard or hardly working?!"

-- Joel parks legally at the curb, carefully retrieves a pizza, double-checks the address on his phone. Richie stops in the middle of the street, hazards on, grabs a pizza while honking at a car behind him.

-- Joel walks briskly to the first house, posture stiff, rehearsing his customer greeting under his breath. Richie jogs across a lawn to save time, practicing different smiles in a car window reflection.

**EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY**

Joel approaches a well-kept house with a "Welcome" mat. He straightens his cap, checks his appearance in a window reflection, then rings the doorbell.

MRS. DANIELS (70s), a regular customer, opens the door.

MRS. DANIELS  
Joel! Right on time, as always.

JOEL  
(genuine smile)  
Good morning, Mrs. Daniels. Medium mushroom, light cheese.

MRS. DANIELS  
How's your mother doing? I saw her at the church fundraiser.

JOEL  
(uncomfortable with personal  
questions)  
She's good. Still hoping I'll go  
back to school.

MRS. DANIELS  
(handing him cash)  
Smart woman. You're too bright for  
delivery work.

Joel's smile stiffens slightly.

JOEL  
That's \$15.75.

MRS. DANIELS  
Keep the change.  
(pointed)  
Put it toward that graduate  
degree!

After she closes the door, Joel's facade drops. He stares at  
the \$20 bill, then at his reflection in the car window.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Four years of delivering pizzas to  
people who think my life is just  
on pause. Just a temporary  
setback. Just a phase.

**INT./EXT. RICHIE'S MUSTANG - OFFICE BUILDING -  
SIMULTANEOUS**

Richie swaggered through a lobby, nodding at the SECURITY GUARD  
like they're old friends. The guard clearly doesn't recognize  
him.

At the reception desk, an ATTRACTIVE RECEPTIONIST (30s) looks  
up, sees Richie, and immediately rolls her eyes.

RECEPTIONIST  
(deadpan)  
Not you again.

RICHIE  
(leaning on counter)  
The one and only! Your favorite  
pizza guy!

RECEPTIONIST  
(checking computer)  
I've literally asked for a  
different driver three times.

RICHIE  
(unfazed, setting down pizza)  
Playing hard to get. I respect  
that.

He slides the receipt across the desk, subtly angling for her phone number.

RICHIE  
Twenty-two fifty.

RECEPTIONIST  
(checking receipt)  
It says nineteen ninety-five.

RICHIE  
(without missing a beat)  
Delivery fee. Gotta pay for this  
sweet cologne. You like it? It's  
called "Evening in Paris."

RECEPTIONIST  
It's called "Too Much."

She hands him exact change-\$19.95-and gives him a pointed look.

RICHIE  
(pocketing the money)  
You know what? Special discount  
just for you. Because we have  
chemistry.

RECEPTIONIST  
We have the opposite of chemistry.  
We have... whatever makes things  
not react.

RICHIE  
(walking backward)  
So... dinner sometime?

RECEPTIONIST  
(pointing to exit)  
Goodbye, pizza guy.

RICHIE  
(to himself as he leaves)  
She's totally into me.

**EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - LATER**

Joel knocks on a dingy apartment door. A STONED COLLEGE KID (20) opens it, looking confused.

STONED KID  
Whoa. Pizza's here.

JOEL  
(maintaining professional  
distance)  
That'll be twenty-two seventeen.

STONED KID  
(digging through pockets)  
Yeah, about that... I'm like, so  
broke. But I can totally tip you  
with this.

He holds up a small bag of weed.

JOEL  
(uncomfortable but tempted)  
I need actual money.

STONED KID  
Dude, this is premium stuff. Way  
more than twenty bucks.

JOEL  
(swallowing hard)  
Company policy. Cash or card.

JOEL (V.O.)  
The sad part is, I considered it.  
For about three seconds. The sad  
part is knowing exactly how many  
delivery fees it would take to  
make my minimum loan payment this  
month.

STONED KID  
(disappointed)  
Oh man. Let me see if my  
roommate...

He shuffles inside, leaving Joel standing there, checking his watch.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Seventeen minutes behind schedule  
now. Debbie's going to kill me.

**INT./EXT. RICHIE'S MUSTANG - MOVING - LATER**

Richie speeds through a yellow light, singing along to the radio. His phone PINGS with another delivery notification.

RICHIE  
(checking phone while  
driving)  
43 Maple Lane? That's not even  
remotely on my route!

He swerves, nearly hitting a parked car, then makes an illegal U-turn.

RICHIE  
(to himself)  
Screw it. I'm calling in a family  
emergency after this one. Still  
got three hundred comments to  
respond to on last night's video.

**INT./EXT. JOEL'S CIVIC - MOVING - SAME TIME**

Joel's phone BUZZES. Text from Debbie: "WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?  
SEVEN DELIVERIES WAITING!"

JOEL  
(to himself)  
Crap.

He puts the phone down, focuses on driving. The traffic light turns yellow. He speeds up to make it, but a TRUCK cuts him off. The light turns red. Joel slams his palm against the steering wheel.

JOEL  
Come on!

His phone BUZZES again. Another text from Debbie: "RICHIE  
ALREADY BACK ON HIS SECOND RUN!"

Joel's jaw tightens. The light turns green. He accelerates too hard, tires squealing.

**EXT. GAS STATION - SIMULTANEOUS**

Richie's Mustang sits at the gas station. Inside, he's chatting with STEVE (30), the dead-eyed cashier. A pizza delivery bag sits on the counter, getting cold.

RICHIE

(eating a hot dog)

So I told her, "Ma'am, I deliver  
sausage both on and off the  
clock."

STEVE

(monotone)

Fascinating.

RICHIE

Didn't get a tip, but got her  
number.

He flashes a receipt with a phone number that he clearly wrote  
himself.

STEVE

Wasn't your last delivery to the  
retirement home?

RICHIE

(grinning)

Mrs. Peterson still knows what she  
wants.

STEVE

(deadpan)

You should be fired.

RICHIE

(checking phone)

Probably.

(proudly)

But I just hit a hundred thousand  
followers, so who's really  
winning?

Richie's phone RINGS. He checks it.

RICHIE

Gotta go. Debbie's losing her  
mind.

He grabs the delivery bag and heads out, leaving his food trash  
on the counter. Steve doesn't even blink.

**EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - LATER**

Both Joel and Richie's cars approach the same house from  
opposite directions. They spot each other. Narrow eyes. It's a  
delivery race.

Richie accelerates, cutting across a lawn. Joel takes a shortcut through a driveway.

They screech to a halt simultaneously in front of the house, leaping out with identical pizza bags.

JOEL  
(furious)  
This is my delivery! 42 Oak  
Street!

RICHIE  
(checking receipt)  
No way, man. I've got 42 Oak!

They look at each other, then at the house number: 24 OAK STREET.

JOEL & RICHIE  
(simultaneously)  
Damn it!

From inside the house, a CONFUSED RESIDENT peers through the blinds at the two pizza guys arguing on his lawn.

JOEL  
This is your fault! I was  
following my assigned route!

RICHIE  
Well, clearly Debbie messed up the  
distribution!

JOEL  
No, YOU messed up the reading! As  
usual!

RICHIE  
(checking receipt more  
carefully)  
Wait... this says 42 Elm Street.

JOEL  
(checking his)  
24 Oak Street.

They stare at each other, then at their respective delivery slips.

RICHIE  
(slowly)  
So... neither of us is supposed to  
be here?

JOEL  
(face in hands)  
We're both at the wrong address.

RICHIE  
(suddenly laughing)  
That's hilarious!

JOEL  
No, it's not! It's unprofessional  
and wasteful and—

RICHIE  
(interrupting)  
Look!

Richie points at the CONFUSED RESIDENT, who's now standing on his porch in a bathrobe.

CONFUSED RESIDENT  
Did... did I accidentally order  
two pizzas?

RICHIE  
(quickly)  
Yes! Special two-for-one Thursday!  
Your lucky day!

JOEL  
What? No, we don't—

RICHIE  
(elbowing Joel, whispering)  
Play along! We can split the cost!

CONFUSED RESIDENT  
But I didn't order any pizza...

RICHIE  
(not missing a beat)  
Even better! First-time customer  
special! One pizza free, second  
half-price!

JOEL  
(pulling Richie aside)  
What are you doing?

RICHIE  
(whispering)  
Saving our asses! We're already  
late for our actual deliveries!

JOEL  
(internal struggle visible)  
This is insane.

CONFUSED RESIDENT  
(tempted)  
Well... I was just about to make  
lunch...

RICHIE  
Perfect timing! That'll be fifteen  
bucks for both. Deal of the  
century!

The resident considers, then shrugs and pulls out his wallet.

JOEL  
(under breath)  
We're going to get fired.

RICHIE  
(under breath)  
We're going to be heroes. Watch  
and learn.

As the confused resident pays, Joel's expression shifts from frustration to resignation, and then - almost imperceptibly - to a hint of amusement at the absurdity of the situation.

SMASH CUT TO:

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - LATER**

Joel and Richie stand before Debbie, who is absolutely fuming. Nico and Omar watch from the background, Nico amused, Omar indifferent.

DEBBIE  
(voice dangerously  
controlled)  
So let me get this straight. You  
delivered pizza to a RANDOM PERSON  
who DIDN'T ORDER IT, while your  
ACTUAL customers called FOUR TIMES  
wondering where their food was?

RICHIE  
(optimistically)  
But we made fifteen bucks profit!  
And a new customer!

DEBBIE  
(to Joel)  
And you went along with this?

JOEL  
(sighs)  
Yes.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Because for one brief moment, the  
chaos made sense. For one brief  
moment, Richie's insanity was  
actually the most logical  
solution.

DEBBIE  
(massaging her temples)  
Both of you, doubles tomorrow. And  
someone call the ACTUAL customers  
and apologize.

She walks away. Omar glances up from dough preparation, gives  
an almost imperceptible head shake - not in judgment, but in  
solidarity with their shared misery.

Richie leans against the counter, already over it. Joel stares  
at nothing, an unreadable expression on his face - part  
frustration, part revelation.

RICHIE  
(grinning)  
Wanna grab a beer at the gas  
station?

Joel glares at him.

JOEL  
I hate you.

RICHIE  
(completely unfazed)  
That's the spirit! I'm buying.

As Richie saunters away, Joel looks at the pizza cutter on the  
counter, considering possibilities.

JOEL (V.O.)  
One of these days, I'm going to be  
the one organizing the pranks. And  
then we'll see who's laughing.

FADE OUT.

INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

SUPER: FRIDAY, 8:04 AM

The kitchen buzzes with unusual activity. JOEL arranges a fundraiser planning board while RICHIE hangs a hand-painted "SAVE TUSCANY'S" banner. NICO and OMAR work diligently on prep for the day. There's a new energy in the air.

JOEL  
(examining to-do list)  
We need permits for the  
anniversary festival. Live music,  
outdoor seating, street closure...

RICHIE  
(cutting in)  
And a dunk tank! I already called  
the rental place.

JOEL  
(exasperated)  
We don't need a dunk tank.

RICHIE  
Everyone loves dunk tanks! Picture  
this: Debbie in a bathing suit-

JOEL  
(horrified)  
Stop. Please stop.

RICHIE  
Fine. Omar in a bathing suit.

OMAR briefly looks up from his station, expressionless.

OMAR  
No.

NICO  
(intervening)  
Let's focus on the basics first.  
Permits, promotion, sponsors.

JOEL  
Exactly. We need to show Debbie  
we're serious.

RICHIE  
(mock offended)  
I'm very serious about the dunk  
tank.

The front bell JINGLES. DEBBIE enters, looking unusually drawn. Her normal professional appearance is slightly disheveled - a button missed on her blouse, hair less perfectly styled. She surveys the activity with quiet approval, but her eyes reveal exhaustion.

DEBBIE  
(surprised)  
What's all this?

JOEL  
Fundraiser planning. We've mapped  
out a 30th Anniversary Festival.

He gestures to the board, which displays a surprisingly  
organized plan.

DEBBIE  
(impressed)  
This actually looks... competent.

RICHIE  
(proudly)  
Joel stayed up all night working  
on it. I contributed the fun  
stuff.  
(whispering loudly)  
Dunk tank.

DEBBIE examines the board, nodding slightly.

DEBBIE  
Live music?

JOEL  
My cousin's band. They'll play for  
free pizza.

DEBBIE  
Street permits?

NICO  
Application's already in.

DEBBIE  
(skeptical)  
And this is supposed to raise  
twenty-seven thousand dollars how  
exactly?

JOEL  
(confident)  
Entrance fees, food sales,  
sponsorships from local  
businesses, merchandise...

RICHIE  
(interrupting)  
And the Death Wing Challenge!  
Entry fee fifty bucks per person!

DEBBIE  
(sighing)  
Not this again.

JOEL  
(surprising everyone)  
Actually, the spicy wing challenge  
might work. With waivers, of  
course.

DEBBIE looks shocked that Joel is siding with Richie.

DEBBIE  
(suspicious)  
You two agreeing? That's a first.

OMAR  
(without looking up)  
Like eclipse. Rare. Ominous.

The kitchen phone RINGS. Nico answers.

NICO  
Tuscany's... Yes, we're open...  
Pickup or delivery?

As Nico takes the order, Debbie motions for Joel to follow her.  
They move to a quieter corner.

DEBBIE  
(lowering voice)  
Why are you really doing this?

JOEL  
(confused)  
Doing what?

DEBBIE  
This.  
(gesturing to the fundraiser  
board)  
You hate it here. You make that  
abundantly clear every shift.

JOEL  
(defensive)  
I don't hate it here.

DEBBIE gives him a skeptical look.

JOEL  
(truthful)  
Look, four years ago, this was  
supposed to be temporary.  
(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)

Just until I got into grad school  
or found something "worthy" of my  
philosophy degree.

(beat)

But it's been four years. And  
maybe... maybe I need this place  
more than I want to admit.

DEBBIE

(softening)

It's still just a pizza joint.

JOEL

It's not, though. It's...  
community. Structure. It's the  
only thing in my life that hasn't  
changed since college. Even if  
most days I want to stab Richie  
with a pizza cutter.

Debbie almost laughs at that.

DEBBIE

(serious again)

Well, it might not be here much  
longer.

She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a crumpled letter,  
handing it to Joel.

JOEL

(reading)

"Final Notice of Foreclosure...  
Payment of \$27,432.18 due within  
30 days..."

DEBBIE

(bitter)

That's just the bank loan. There's  
also vendors, utilities,  
payroll...

JOEL

(realizing)

You haven't been paying yourself,  
have you?

DEBBIE

(avoiding eye contact)

Owner's prerogative.

JOEL

How long?

DEBBIE  
(shrugging)  
Six months. Maybe eight.

JOEL  
(stunned)  
Why didn't you tell us?

DEBBIE  
(defensive)  
And what would that have  
accomplished? You all complaining  
about your paychecks while I lose  
the only thing I have left of  
Anthony?

JOEL  
We could have helped sooner.

DEBBIE  
(vulnerable moment)  
I've never asked for help. Thirty  
years in the restaurant business,  
and I've never—

She stops herself, composure slipping. Joel sees a flicker of  
the woman behind the boss for the first time.

DEBBIE  
(recovering)  
Anyway. Your little festival.  
It's... nice. But we need a  
miracle, not a block party.

JOEL  
Let us try. What's the worst that  
happens? We raise a few thousand  
and delay the inevitable?

DEBBIE  
(considering)  
I'm meeting with Pizza Planet next  
week. They're offering eighty  
grand for the location.

JOEL  
(shocked)  
Pizza Planet? The cartoon alien  
mascot place?

DEBBIE

(resigned)

Thirty years of authentic Italian  
cuisine replaced by glow-in-the-  
dark pepperoni and alien-shaped  
chicken nuggets.

The bitter irony isn't lost on either of them.

RICHIE approaches, oblivious to the serious conversation.

RICHIE

(excited)

Joel! Great news! I got Marty from  
the radio station to MC the wing  
challenge! He's bringing their  
promotional prize wheel too!

DEBBIE exchanges a look with Joel, then addresses them all.

DEBBIE

(louder, to everyone)

Listen up. There's something you  
all need to know.

The kitchen quiets as Nico and Omar turn their attention to Debbie.

DEBBIE

Tuscany's is thirty days from  
foreclosure.

NICO

(surprised)

Foreclosure? Like, bank taking the  
building foreclosure?

DEBBIE

(nodding)

Twenty-seven thousand plus change.  
And that's just to keep the doors  
open, not fix any of the actual  
problems.

OMAR stops kneading dough, his hands pausing mid-motion. For  
once, his stoic facade cracks slightly.

RICHIE

(stunned)

But... we've always been here. I  
mean, I've been delivering pizzas  
here since high school.

DEBBIE  
(brutally honest)  
And now you might need to find  
somewhere else to deliver pizzas.

NICO  
(practical)  
What's the plan, then?

DEBBIE  
(gesturing to Joel's board)  
This is apparently the plan.  
Unless anyone has a better idea.

Silence falls over the kitchen.

OMAR  
(suddenly)  
I do.

Everyone turns to stare at him, shocked that he's volunteered information.

OMAR  
(continuing)  
Original recipes. Anthony's  
recipes. Not the cheap versions.

DEBBIE  
(confused)  
What are you talking about?

OMAR  
(simply)  
Real ingredients. Real techniques.  
Like before.

RICHIE  
(incredulous)  
You mean make the food... good?

OMAR  
(nodding)  
Quality brings customers.  
Nostalgia brings loyalty.

JOEL  
(connecting dots)  
This could actually work. A  
throwback menu for the festival -  
"Tuscany's Greatest Hits" -  
featuring the original recipes  
from when the place opened.

NICO  
(jumping in)  
We could do a social media  
campaign - old photos, customer  
memories.

RICHIE  
(excited)  
I could livestream the whole  
transformation! "Save the Sauce!"  
Pizza Freaks would be all over  
that!

Debbie watches them, a complex mixture of emotions crossing her face - hope, skepticism, and something deeper: pride.

DEBBIE  
(cautious)  
The original recipes would cost  
more. We'd need better  
ingredients.

OMAR  
(matter-of-fact)  
I know suppliers. From before.

He means from his executive chef days, and everyone understands without him saying it.

JOEL  
(taking charge)  
If we each take responsibility for  
one aspect, we could make this  
happen. Nico on social media,  
Richie on publicity stunts, Omar  
on menu development, me on  
logistics.

RICHIE  
(to Joel)  
Look at you, Assistant Manager  
Material!

For once, there's no mockery in Richie's voice - just genuine admiration.

DEBBIE  
(decision made)  
Alright. You have two weeks to  
show me this has a chance. That  
means a solid plan, initial  
sponsors locked in, and permits  
filed.

JOEL  
(confident)  
We can do that.

DEBBIE  
If it doesn't look promising by  
then, I'm calling Pizza Planet.

She turns to go, then pauses.

DEBBIE  
(softly)  
Anthony would have loved this.

As she walks to her office, the team exchanges determined looks.

NICO  
(to Joel)  
So, fearless leader, where do we  
start?

JOEL  
(suddenly uncomfortable with  
leadership)  
I'm not-

RICHIE  
(interrupting)  
Come on, Crayon, embrace your  
destiny! General of the Pizza  
Revolution!

JOEL  
(resigned but committed)  
Fine. First, we need a budget.  
Nico, inventory what supplies we  
already have. Richie, work up a  
list of potential sponsors.  
Omar...

OMAR  
(already ahead of him)  
Recipe book. Getting it now.

As Omar disappears into the back storage, Joel stands at the center of the kitchen, suddenly aware that everyone is looking to him for direction - something entirely new. Richie gives him an encouraging nod, perhaps the first genuinely supportive gesture in their complicated friendship.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Yesterday, I was just a delivery  
guy with a useless degree.  
(MORE)

JOEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Today, I'm trying to save the  
restaurant that's been slowly  
killing my soul for four years.  
Funny how life works.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT**

SUPER: FRIDAY, 11:37 PM

The "LAST STOP" gas station glows under harsh fluorescent lights, an island of activity in the otherwise dark strip mall. Tuscany's Pizza is visible across the street, now closed, its sign partially burned out so it reads "TUS NY'S P ZZA."

Joel's Civic and Richie's Mustang are parked side by side near the air pump. A few other cars are scattered around: a police cruiser, a minivan, and a beat-up sedan with strip club bumper stickers.

**INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS**

The convenience store section is surprisingly busy for this hour. STEVE (30) stands behind the counter with his thousand-yard stare, mechanically scanning items while reading a worn paperback of Camus' "The Myth of Sisyphus."

Joel and Richie enter, still in their sauce-stained Tuscany's uniforms. They move with the practiced rhythm of people who've done this hundreds of times.

Richie heads straight for the beer cooler. Joel goes to the coffee station, which looks like it hasn't been cleaned since breakfast.

Two LOCAL COPS stand near the hot dog roller, scratching lottery tickets and comparing numbers. They barely acknowledge the pizza guys.

COP #1  
(scratching ticket)  
Come on, baby. Daddy needs a new  
transmission.

COP #2  
(snorting)  
Your piece of shit car needs more  
than a transmission.

At the counter, AMBER, BRITTANY, and SHAY (the strip club employees) are buying energy drinks and cigarettes, still in their work clothes under jackets.

AMBER  
(to Steve)  
And a pack of Parliaments.

STEVE  
(monotone)  
ID.

AMBER  
(offended)  
Steve, I've been coming here for  
three years.

STEVE  
(pointing to ceiling camera)  
New manager. Cameras. I need to  
see ID or my soul-crushing job  
becomes even more soul-crushing.

Amber sighs, digs out her ID. The other girls do the same.

Joel approaches with his coffee, waiting his turn. Amber spots him.

AMBER  
Chair Boy! How're the  
psychological scars healing?

BRITTANY  
(to Amber)  
Cut it out. He looks traumatized  
enough.

JOEL  
(deadpan)  
Just doing my part to support  
local entertainment.

SHAY  
(finishing transaction)  
If you wanna ask someone to wear  
pants next time, maybe don't get  
abducted to a strip club.

JOEL  
(uncomfortable)  
I didn't get "abducted." I was...  
involuntarily relocated.

Richie arrives with an armful of beer, chips, and beef jerky.

RICHIE

Ladies! Leaving already? Night's  
still young.

AMBER

(unimpressed)

Some of us have actual jobs in the  
morning.

BRITTANY

(to Joel)

By the way, that was Mike's first  
time performing the Village People  
routine. He doesn't usually go  
that hard on new customers.

JOEL

(mortified)

Good to know.

The girls pay and head toward the door.

SHAY

(to Joel, quietly)

For what it's worth, you took it  
better than the last guy Richie  
brought in. He cried.

They exit. Richie dumps his items on the counter.

RICHIE

Steve-o! My man. How's the night  
shift treating you?

STEVE

(scanning items, noticing  
book)

I exist in a purgatorial state  
between life and death.

RICHIE

(laughing)

That good, huh?

JOEL

(genuinely interested)

How's night school?

STEVE

(shrugging)

Professor says my essay on Kafka  
was "a cry for help."

JOEL

Was it?

STEVE  
(deadpan)  
More like a cry for someone to  
burn this place down for the  
insurance money.

The cops look over.

STEVE  
(to officers, monotone)  
That was a joke, officers.

The cops return to their scratchers.

Joel pays for his coffee while Richie pays for everything else. They've clearly established this pattern long ago.

**EXT. GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER**

Joel and Richie sit on the hood of Joel's car, drinking beer from paper bags. Richie's already opened the chips and is eating loudly. The air is filled with a strange intimacy - two people comfortable in their shared dissatisfaction.

RICHIE  
(checking phone)  
So, ninety thousand views now. We  
should make merch. "Chair Guy: He  
Can Take a Lap Dance."

JOEL  
(snatching Richie's phone)  
Give me that.

He scrolls through comments, each one making him sink lower.

JOEL  
Jesus, Richie. People from high  
school are seeing this.

RICHIE  
(proud)  
I know! Isn't it great? Remember  
Kevin Matthews? The quarterback  
who used to stuff you in lockers?  
He commented: "Didn't know  
Steinman had it in him."

JOEL  
(bitter)  
Yeah, well, he didn't. Someone put  
it in him. Against his will.

RICHIE

(grabbing his phone back)

Don't be so dramatic. It's content, baby!

JOEL

It's humiliation.

RICHIE

(with surprising insight)

Same thing these days.

Embarrassment is the new currency.

Across the lot, the cops get into their cruiser and pull away. Through the store windows, Steve watches them go, then immediately puts on headphones.

JOEL

(after a long moment)

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if you actually shut up for ten seconds.

RICHIE

(immediately)

I'd probably die. My mouth generates the oxygen my brain needs.

JOEL

That explains so much.

Another beat of silence. Joel stares across at Tuscany's dark storefront.

JOEL

Four years, Richie.

RICHIE

(suddenly serious)

I know, man.

JOEL

Four years of the same shit, every day. Deliver pizzas. Get yelled at by Debbie. Watch Omar violate health codes. Come here. Drink beer. Go home. Do it again.

RICHIE

(defensive)

It's not so bad.

JOEL

It's a dead end. We're going to die in this town, and the saddest part is, you think that's winning.

RICHIE

(after a moment, with unexpected depth)

At least I'm having fun on the way down.

The unexpected sincerity catches Joel off guard. Before he can respond, Debbie's old Lexus pulls into the gas station. She parks and approaches them, still in her work clothes, looking drawn and tired.

RICHIE

(shifting back to joker mode)

Boss lady! Coming to join the party?

DEBBIE

(ignoring him)

Need to talk to you two.

JOEL

(concerned)

What's wrong?

DEBBIE

(glancing around)

Not here.

She heads into the store. Joel and Richie exchange looks.

RICHIE

(subdued)

That can't be good.

**INT. GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER**

Debbie stands by the coffee machine, fixing herself a cup. Joel and Richie wait expectantly. Steve pretends not to listen from behind the counter.

DEBBIE

(after a long sip)

The bank called today.

JOEL

About the letter? The one marked "final notice"?

DEBBIE  
(surprised)  
You saw that?

JOEL  
You weren't exactly subtle about  
hiding it.

DEBBIE  
(sighs)  
It's bad. We're thirty days from  
foreclosure.

RICHIE  
(not understanding)  
Fore... what now?

JOEL  
(to Richie)  
They're taking the restaurant.

RICHIE  
(shocked)  
What? They can't do that!

DEBBIE  
They can when you're three months  
behind on payments.

JOEL  
How much are we talking?

DEBBIE  
(grimly)  
Twenty-seven thousand. Plus late  
fees.

A stunned silence falls.

RICHIE  
(trying to grasp the scale)  
That's like... a million pizzas!

JOEL  
(calculating)  
More like three thousand,  
actually.

RICHIE  
(genuine distress)  
Not helping, Crayon.

JOEL  
(to Debbie)  
What's the plan?

DEBBIE

(bitter laugh)

Plan? The plan is I'm selling to  
Pizza Planet. They offered eighty  
grand for the location.

RICHIE

Pizza Planet? The cartoon alien  
mascot place?

JOEL

You'd sell Tuscany's?

DEBBIE

(defensive)

It's not like any of you have a  
stake in this place.

An uncomfortable silence as they all realize she's right.

RICHIE

(uncharacteristically  
serious)

What about us?

DEBBIE

Pizza Planet said they'd  
"consider" keeping current staff.

JOEL

(realistic)

They won't.

DEBBIE

(looking him in the eye)

Probably not.

RICHIE

(panicking)

But what am I supposed to do? I'm  
not qualified for anything else!

JOEL

(automatic sarcasm)

You're barely qualified for this.

RICHIE

(defensive)

I am excellent at delivery! I have  
the highest customer satisfaction  
rate!

JOEL

Because you give away free food to  
attractive women.

RICHIE

(sincere)

It's called marketing!

DEBBIE

(cutting them off)

Enough! This isn't about you two  
and your endless pissing contest.

She stirs her coffee, face illuminated by the harsh fluorescent lights. For the first time, they see genuine emotion in Debbie's usually stoic face.

DEBBIE

(vulnerable)

Anthony built that place from  
nothing. Thirty years of our  
lives. And I'm about to sign it  
away to some corporate chain  
that'll turn it into a cartoon  
spaceship.

In the background, Steve quietly places his philosophy book on  
the counter, observing the scene with academic interest.

JOEL

(hesitant)

Is there... anything we can do?

DEBBIE

(looking up, surprised)

Why would you care?

JOEL

(searching for words)

I don't know. Because...

(realizing it as he says it)

It's our dump too.

RICHIE

(nodding)

Yeah. Our moral landfill.

A small smile tugs at Debbie's lips.

DEBBIE

(straightening up)

Unless you two geniuses can come up with twenty-seven grand in thirty days, there's nothing to do.

RICHIE

(suddenly excited)

What about a fundraiser?

JOEL

(surprised)

A what?

RICHIE

You know, like a big event! Get the whole town involved!

DEBBIE

(skeptical)

In this economy?

JOEL

(considering)

Actually... that's not the worst idea Richie's ever had.

RICHIE

(proud)

Thank you! Wait...

DEBBIE

(standing up)

Look, do whatever you want. But I'm not turning down Pizza Planet's offer on a wing and a prayer.

She tosses her empty coffee cup in the trash.

DEBBIE

You have two weeks to show me this has a chance. Otherwise, I'm calling their lawyer.

JOEL

Two weeks?

DEBBIE

That's my offer. Take it or leave it.

She exits, leaving Joel and Richie staring at each other.

RICHIE  
(after a beat)  
So... we're saving the pizza  
place?

JOEL  
(resigned)  
I guess we are.

STEVE  
(from behind counter,  
philosophical)  
Camus says the only true  
philosophical question is whether  
life is worth living. I guess for  
you two, the question is whether  
pizza is worth saving.

RICHIE  
(confused)  
Did that make sense?

JOEL  
(surprisingly)  
Actually, yes.

STEVE  
(returning to book)  
Four years of night school hasn't  
been a complete waste.

RICHIE  
(enthusiastic)  
Epic! I've got so many ideas!  
Death Wing Challenge! Pizza Eating  
Contest! Dough Tossing  
Competition!

JOEL  
(with newfound determination)  
Let's just... sleep on it. And  
maybe come up with something that  
won't send people to the hospital.

RICHIE  
(deflating slightly)  
Fine. But the Death Wing Challenge  
stays on the table!

As they exit, Steve watches them go, then flips the page of his  
community college philosophy textbook. The chapter heading  
reads: "Sisyphus and the Absurdity of Existence."

STEVE  
(to himself)  
Sucks to be them.

FADE OUT.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - MORNING**

SUPER: SATURDAY, 8:17 AM

A gray, drizzly morning. Joel's Civic pulls into the lot, wipers squeaking across the windshield. He parks next to Richie's Mustang, which is already there—unusually early for Richie.

Joel sits in his car for a moment, steeling himself. On his phone screen: another notification showing last night's strip club video has passed 100,000 views. He closes it with a grimace and exits the car.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Joel enters, shaking rain from his jacket. The kitchen is unusually quiet. DEBBIE sits at a makeshift desk near the register, surrounded by bills and paperwork, a calculator displaying a grim sum. NICO preps vegetables at their station with practiced precision. OMAR is nowhere to be seen.

JOEL  
(hanging up jacket)  
Morning.

DEBBIE  
(not looking up)  
Fundraiser meeting in ten minutes.  
Need coffee first.

NICO  
(nodding toward back)  
Richie's in the storage room. Said  
he's "brainstorming."

JOEL  
(concerned)  
That's never good.

Joel grabs an apron and ties it on. As he does, he notices something odd: Richie's car keys sitting on the counter.

JOEL  
(picking them up)  
Richie never leaves his keys.

NICO  
(shrugging)  
Said something about installing  
"improvements."

Joel narrows his eyes, immediately suspicious. Just then, RICHIE emerges from the storage room, carrying a large whiteboard with "OPERATION: SAVE TUSCANY'S" scrawled across the top in messy handwriting.

RICHIE  
(enthusiastically)  
The think tank has produced gold!

JOEL  
(skeptical)  
Think tank? You were in there alone.

RICHIE  
(tapping temple)  
The best brainstorming sessions are always solo, Crayon. Too many cooks, too many ideas, too much thinking. Analysis paralysis!

Debbie looks up at this, her expression a perfect blend of exhaustion and disbelief.

RICHIE  
(setting up whiteboard)  
Feast your eyes on the future of Tuscany's!

The whiteboard is a chaotic mess of ideas, arrows, and exclamation points. Written in red marker: "ULTIMATE DEATH WING CHALLENGE!!!"

JOEL  
(reading)  
Death Wing Challenge? Again with this?

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
It's a proven concept!

DEBBIE  
(joining the conversation)  
The last time we did that, some guy threatened to sue us because his tongue swelled up.

RICHIE  
(dismissive)  
Weak genetics. Not our fault.

JOEL  
(scanning board)  
Pizza eating contest... dough  
tossing competition... "Omar Vs.  
Food"? What's that?

RICHIE  
Omar eats progressively spicier  
dishes until he either cries or  
passes out. People bet on how far  
he gets.

JOEL  
(incredulous)  
That's cruel and unusual  
punishment!

RICHIE  
He'll do it! I already asked him!

JOEL  
And he agreed?

RICHIE  
(hedging)  
Well, he didn't say no...

NICO  
(joining them)  
He doesn't say anything. That's  
not consent.

DEBBIE  
(standing up)  
Enough. I appreciate the  
enthusiasm, Richie, but we need  
realistic ideas.

RICHIE  
(earnest)  
These are realistic! People love  
watching other people suffer! It's  
basic human nature!

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
We need something broader.  
Community-based. Something that  
gets the whole town involved.

RICHIE  
(lighting up)  
Town-wide scavenger hunt! First  
prize is Omar cleaning your house  
in the nude!

Everyone stares at him.

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
What? It's memorable!

DEBBIE  
(pinching bridge of nose)  
God help me.

She takes a deep breath, then addresses everyone.

DEBBIE  
Listen up. This isn't just about  
money. Pizza Planet isn't just  
offering cash—they're offering  
certainty. I'm fifty-eight. The  
restaurant business is killing me.  
Maybe it's time to let go.

A somber silence falls over the kitchen. Even Richie looks  
momentarily subdued.

JOEL  
(quietly)  
What about Anthony?

DEBBIE  
(surprised by the question)  
What about him?

JOEL  
Would he want you to sell?

DEBBIE  
(softening)  
Anthony was a dreamer. He would  
have set the place on fire for the  
insurance money before selling to  
a chain.

RICHIE  
(perking up)  
That's not a bad idea—

DEBBIE  
(sharply)  
No.

NICO  
(diplomatically)  
What if we did a community  
fundraiser? Something that  
celebrates what Tuscany's means to  
this town?

JOEL  
(building on this)  
Like an anniversary event?

DEBBIE  
(considering)  
The thirtieth anniversary is next  
month.

RICHIE  
(excited again)  
Perfect! We could do an all-day  
festival! Food, games, music!

JOEL  
(surprising himself)  
That's... actually a good idea.

RICHIE  
(smug)  
See? I contain multitudes.

DEBBIE  
(calculating)  
It would take a lot of planning.  
Permits, vendors, advertising...

JOEL  
(determined)  
We can do it. All of us.

DEBBIE studies each of them, seeing their genuine commitment.

DEBBIE  
(decisive)  
Fine. Let's make a real plan.  
Joel, you're in charge of  
organization.

JOEL  
(surprised)  
Me?

DEBBIE  
Richie has the ideas, but you have  
the follow-through.

RICHIE

(mock hurt)

I have follow-through! Remember  
last week's prank with the-

JOEL

(interrupting)

We remember.

DEBBIE

Nico, you handle social media  
promotion. Richie, you... try not  
to set anything on fire.

RICHIE

(saluting)

No promises, boss lady!

DEBBIE

(to everyone)

I'll give you until Monday to show  
me a real plan with real numbers.  
If it looks viable, we postpone  
the Pizza Planet deal. If not... I  
sign the papers.

The stakes now clear, everyone nods in understanding.

DEBBIE

Now back to work. We've still got  
a restaurant to run.

She returns to her paperwork. Nico heads back to prep. Richie moves close to Joel.

RICHIE

(whispered)

Meet me in the parking lot in five  
minutes. Got something to show  
you.

JOEL

(suspicious)

What?

RICHIE

(cryptic)

An investment opportunity. For the  
fundraiser.

Before Joel can respond, Richie grabs his car keys from the counter and heads outside. Joel watches him go, debating whether to follow.

NICO  
(from prep station)  
I wouldn't if I were you.

JOEL  
I know. But curiosity is my fatal  
flaw.

NICO  
(sagely)  
Cats, philosophers, and pizza guys  
—all killed by curiosity.

Joel sighs, then follows Richie outside.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

Joel joins Richie, who stands proudly beside his Mustang.

RICHIE  
Behold! The Super-Speed Delivery  
Mobile!

JOEL  
It's your same car.

RICHIE  
(offended)  
Not the same! Upgraded! New  
speakers, racing stripes, and...  
(dramatic pause)  
Nitrous!

JOEL  
(alarmed)  
You put nitrous in your delivery  
car? That can't be legal.

RICHIE  
Legal, illegal... it's a spectrum.

JOEL  
No, it's really not.

RICHIE  
(dismissive)  
Anyway, I figure we can use it for  
the fundraiser! Speed delivery  
challenge! People bet on how fast  
we can get pizzas to them!

JOEL

That's not a fundraiser, that's a  
lawsuit waiting to happen.

Richie's phone PINGS. He checks it, then grins mischievously.

RICHIE

(changing subject)

Want to take her for a spin?

JOEL

Absolutely not.

RICHIE

(dangling keys)

Come on! One quick ride. For  
research purposes.

JOEL

(firmly)

No.

RICHIE

(disappointed)

Fine. Be boring.

(brightening)

Speaking of boring, I've got  
delivery duty. Got three orders  
headed to the college dorms.

Joel studies Richie suspiciously—something doesn't feel right.

JOEL

Why are you so eager to take  
deliveries? You hate the college  
route.

RICHIE

(too casual)

Turning over a new leaf. Community  
spirit. Restaurant in crisis and  
all that.

JOEL

(not buying it)

Uh-huh.

RICHIE

(checking watch)

Gotta jet! Those pizzas won't  
deliver themselves!

As Richie opens his car door, Joel spots something on the passenger seat: a cordless drill and what looks like a tube of adhesive.

JOEL  
(suddenly alert)  
Richie, what's that?

RICHIE  
(quickly blocking view)  
What's what?

JOEL  
On your seat. Is that super glue?

RICHIE  
(unconvincingly)  
No idea what you're talking about,  
buddy.

He hops into his Mustang, starts the engine, and roars out of the parking lot, music blasting.

Joel stands there, processing what he just saw. He rushes back inside.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Joel bursts through the door.

JOEL  
(urgently)  
Whose deliveries did Richie just take?

NICO  
(checking orders)  
Yours, I think. The Medical Center route.

JOEL  
(panicking)  
I need your car keys. Now.

NICO  
(confused)  
Why?

JOEL  
Because Richie just set me up.

NICO  
(understanding)  
Ah. The glue?

JOEL  
You knew?

NICO  
(apologetic)  
I saw him with the tube earlier.  
Thought he was fixing the menu  
board.

JOEL  
(frantic)  
Keys. Please.

Nico hesitates, then tosses Joel their scooter keys.

NICO  
Take my scooter. It's faster in  
traffic.

JOEL  
I owe you.

NICO  
(calling after him)  
Just remember this when you're  
planning your revenge!

Joel freezes in the doorway, turning slowly.

JOEL  
Revenge?

NICO  
(with meaningful look)  
Four years is a long time to be  
someone's punching bag.

This lands heavily on Joel. He nods, a new idea forming, then rushes out.

**EXT. MEDICAL CENTER PARKING LOT - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER**

Joel arrives on Nico's electric scooter, but he's too late. He spots his Civic parked in the delivery zone.

**INT./EXT. JOEL'S CIVIC - CONTINUOUS**

Joel cautiously approaches his car. Through the window, he sees what he feared: his steering wheel is covered in a thin, clear sheen of super glue.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Four years of philosophy, and I  
fall for the oldest trick in the  
book.

He tries the driver's door. It's unlocked. Taking a deep breath, he slides in, careful not to touch the steering wheel.

He sees a note on the passenger seat: "LIVE ON PIZZA FREAKS @ 12:15! DON'T MISS IT!"

Joel checks the time: 12:13. Looking around the parking lot, he spots Richie's Mustang partially hidden behind an ambulance. Inside, Richie is filming with his phone.

JOEL  
(to himself)  
Not this time.

With careful precision, Joel reaches into his delivery bag and pulls out a pair of disposable food-service gloves. He puts them on, then hunts through his glove compartment, finding a small bottle of hand sanitizer.

**EXT. MEDICAL CENTER PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS**

Richie, filming from his car, narrates the scene.

RICHIE  
(to phone)  
Pizza Freaks! Super glue prank  
coming up in T-minus one minute!  
Chair Boy is about to find himself  
in a sticky situation!

**INT. JOEL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS**

Joel methodically applies hand sanitizer to the steering wheel, knowing the alcohol content will break down the adhesive. He works quickly, wiping away the dissolving glue with napkins from his delivery bag.

**EXT. MEDICAL CENTER PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS**

Richie continues filming, oblivious to Joel's countermeasures.

RICHIE  
(to phone)  
Here we go! He's in the car!  
Three... two... one...

To Richie's shock, Joel starts the car normally and begins to back out. No struggle, no panic, no entertainment value whatsoever.

RICHIE  
(confused)  
What the hell?

Joel drives directly to where Richie is hiding and stops. He rolls down his window.

JOEL  
(calmly)  
Looking for this?

He holds up the empty tube of super glue.

RICHIE  
(stunned)  
How did you...?

JOEL  
Alcohol dissolves cyanoacrylate adhesive. Basic chemistry.

RICHIE  
(disappointed)  
You ruined the prank!

JOEL  
No, I solved the problem. There's a difference.

RICHIE  
(whining)  
The Pizza Freaks were expecting content!

JOEL  
(with unusual confidence)  
Tell them to stay tuned. Content's coming.

There's something in Joel's tone that makes Richie uneasy.

JOEL  
I believe you have my deliveries?

RICHIE  
(sheepish)  
Yeah. Three orders for the doctors' offices.

JOEL  
(holding out hand)  
Keys.

RICHIE  
What?

JOEL

I'm taking your car for these deliveries. You can drive mine back to Tuscany's.

RICHIE

(protective)

No one drives my car!

JOEL

(firmly)

Today someone does. Unless you want me telling Debbie about the nitrous oxide installation.

Richie stares, taken aback by this new assertiveness from Joel.

RICHIE

(reluctantly handing over  
keys)

Be careful with her.

JOEL

Be careful with my steering wheel.  
Any more surprises I should know about?

RICHIE

(too quickly)

No.

JOEL

(not believing him)

Right.

As Joel takes the keys and walks toward Richie's Mustang, Richie calls after him.

RICHIE

This isn't over, Crayon!

JOEL

(without turning around)

No. It's just beginning.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - LATER**

Joel finishes his shift, looking satisfied with himself. Nico approaches.

NICO

(curious)

How'd it go?

JOEL  
I foiled the prank. Took his car  
as compensation.

NICO  
(impressed)  
Didn't know you had it in you.

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
Neither did I.

NICO  
(cautious)  
You know he'll retaliate, right?

JOEL  
(with new determination)  
I'm counting on it.

Richie enters, looking uncharacteristically sullen.

RICHIE  
(tossing Joel's keys back)  
Your suspension's shot.

JOEL  
(catching keys)  
Your fuel gauge is wrong. You're  
not on full, you're on empty.

RICHIE  
(challenging)  
Truce?

JOEL  
(considering)  
For now. We have a restaurant to  
save.

RICHIE  
(relieved)  
Good. Because I have a new idea  
for the fundraiser. Involves the  
walk-in freezer-

JOEL  
(suddenly alert)  
The freezer?

RICHIE  
Yeah! We could-

The phone RINGS, interrupting them. Nico answers.

NICO  
(into phone)  
Tuscany's... Yes... He's right  
here.

Nico holds out the phone to Joel.

NICO  
It's the Medical Center. One of  
the doctors wants to compliment  
your service.

JOEL  
(surprised)  
Me?

NICO  
(with a small smile)  
Apparently, you made quite an  
impression. Unlike some people.

Joel takes the phone, with a small, satisfied smile spreading across his face. Richie watches, a mixture of jealousy and respect in his expression.

RICHIE  
(to himself)  
Well played, Crayon. Well played.

But as Joel takes the complimentary call, Richie's eyes drift toward the walk-in freezer, a new plan already forming.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - NIGHT**

SUPER: FRIDAY, 1:22 AM

The neon sign flickers pathetically above the same dingy building we saw in the cold open. The parking lot is nearly empty except for Joel's Civic, Richie's Mustang, and a rusty bicycle chained to a lamp post.

**INT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - CONTINUOUS**

Unlike the male revue night, tonight is regular strip club hours. A DANCER unenthusiastically works the pole for a sparse crowd of sad regulars.

The music is too loud, the lighting too dim, creating an atmosphere of forced excitement that only emphasizes the emptiness underneath.

At a front table, JOEL, RICHIE, and NICO sit with beers, watching as DEBBIE argues with the BOUNCER at the entrance.

NICO  
(bemused)  
I can't believe we're actually here. Voluntarily.

JOEL  
(miserable)  
I can't believe Debbie came with us.

RICHIE  
(genuinely surprised)  
I can't believe Omar agreed to this.

They all look toward the back wall, where OMAR stands stoically, staring straight ahead like a man awaiting execution. His perfectly pressed clothes and rigid posture are starkly out of place in the club's chaotic environment.

JOEL  
Where did you find him anyway? He wasn't at the restaurant when we left.

RICHIE  
(casually)  
Caught him riding his bike past the gas station. Practically had to kidnap him.

JOEL  
(alarmed)  
You didn't actually kidnap him, did you?

RICHIE  
(dismissive wave)  
Nah. Just bribed him. Told him I'd cover his shifts next weekend.

JOEL  
(suspicious)  
And he believed you?

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
I can be reliable.

JOEL and NICO exchange skeptical glances.

Debbie returns to the table, looking irritated.

DEBBIE  
(indignant)  
Twenty bucks cover charge. Highway  
robbery.

RICHIE  
(surprised)  
You actually paid? I thought you'd  
just threaten him like you do with  
the health inspector.

DEBBIE  
(sitting down)  
That only works on people who eat  
at Tuscany's. This guy's smarter  
than that.

She takes a long swig of beer, then looks around, taking in the  
club with a critical eye.

DEBBIE  
So this is the famous Velvet Rope.  
Less impressive with the lights  
on.

JOEL  
(embarrassed)  
You've... never been here before?

DEBBIE  
(snorting)  
What, you think I spend my nights  
watching men take their clothes  
off?

RICHIE  
(grinning)  
I mean, we all have hobbies...

DEBBIE shoots him a look that could curdle milk.

AMBER approaches their table, now in her dancer outfit. She  
smirks when she sees Joel.

AMBER  
Chair Boy! Came back for round  
two?

JOEL  
(sinking into his seat)  
I'm just here as a witness.

AMBER

(noticing Omar)

Is that your friend by the wall?  
The one who looks like he's  
contemplating murder-suicide?

RICHIE

(cheerfully)

That's our Omar! Tonight's VIP  
guest!

AMBER

(studying Omar with  
professional interest)

He doesn't look very...  
enthusiastic.

RICHIE

(dismissive)

Oh, he's dying for this. Trust me.  
Man's been alone with pizza dough  
too long.

AMBER

(to Debbie)

And you are...?

DEBBIE

(straightforward)

The one paying his salary.  
Unfortunately.

AMBER

(connecting dots)

You're the pizza place owner?  
Debbie, right?

DEBBIE

(surprised)

You know me?

AMBER

(with a hint of respect)

You banned us from ordering  
delivery after Brittany answered  
the door in her work outfit.

DEBBIE

(remembering)

The "no pants, no pizza" incident.  
That was you?

AMBER

(proudly)

I was the one who tried to tip the delivery guy with body glitter.

DEBBIE

(to Richie)

That was you?

RICHIE

(fondly)

Best tip I ever got.

The DJ's voice comes over the speakers.

DJ (V.O.)

Alright, gentlemen! Coming to the main stage, give it up for Destiny!

A new DANCER takes the stage as Debbie checks her watch.

DEBBIE

(practical)

It's nearly closing time. Let's get this over with. Where's the manager?

RICHIE

(enthusiastically)

I'll go find him!

Richie bounds off. Joel looks increasingly uncomfortable.

JOEL

(to Nico)

Is this really the best use of our time? We're supposed to be saving the restaurant.

NICO

(amused)

Team bonding. Very important for morale.

JOEL

(skeptical)

How is watching Omar get a lap dance going to improve morale?

NICO

(nodding toward Omar)

Have you seen Omar's face? That alone is worth the cover charge.

They look over at Omar, who stands perfectly still, his expression a mixture of resignation and dignity. Despite the club's chaos, he maintains an aura of formality that seems almost deliberately incongruous.

Richie returns with TONY, the club manager.

TONY  
(all business)  
VIP dance is three hundred.

DEBBIE  
(choking on her beer)  
Three hundred dollars?!

TONY  
Premium experience. Private room.  
Two dancers.

RICHIE  
(smoothly)  
We've got a budget situation here,  
Tony. How about one dancer, no  
room, right here at the table?

TONY  
(considering)  
One-fifty.

DEBBIE  
(incredulous)  
That's ridiculous! I could hire an  
actual chef for that!

JOEL  
(under breath)  
Please do.

RICHIE  
(negotiating)  
One hundred, and we'll throw in  
free pizza for a month.

TONY  
(making face)  
Your pizza?  
(decisive)  
Seventy-five. Cash.

RICHIE  
Deal!

They shake on it. Richie turns to the group triumphantly.

RICHIE

Time to make a dishwasher's dreams  
come true!

JOEL

(sardonic)

Or nightmares.

Richie goes to collect Omar, who hasn't moved a muscle.

RICHIE

(to Omar)

Your chariot awaits, good sir!

OMAR

(speaking for the first time  
all night)

No.

RICHIE

(taken aback)

What do you mean, no? This is your  
big moment!

OMAR

(with quiet dignity)

No room. No private. Too...

(searching for the word)

...intimate.

RICHIE

(dismissive)

It's just at the table. Right  
here.

OMAR remains immovable, like a statue. There's something in his posture that suggests not fear, but a stubborn maintenance of dignity.

RICHIE

(desperate)

Come on, man! We already paid!

JOEL

(with unexpected  
understanding)

You can't force him, Richie.

RICHIE

(to Joel)

This isn't helping!

DEBBIE

(standing up)

For God's sake.

She marches over to Omar.

DEBBIE  
(direct but not unkind)  
Listen up. We just spent seventy-five dollars we don't have for this stupid stunt. Now you're going to sit in that chair, and you're going to enjoy it, or I'm docking your pay. Understood?

Omar and Debbie engage in a brief staring contest. Finally, Omar gives an almost imperceptible nod. But it's not submission - it's an agreement between equals.

DEBBIE  
(returning to table)  
He's all yours.

RICHIE  
(impressed)  
Boss lady's got game!

Richie leads a reluctant Omar to a chair placed in the center of their table area. The DJ notices and changes the music.

DJ (V.O.)  
Looks like we've got a special guest tonight! Tiffany, our birthday girl needs some attention!

TIFFANY, a tall dancer with expert moves, approaches their table. Upon seeing Omar, she hesitates momentarily, taking in his immaculate appearance and dignified demeanor.

TIFFANY  
(professional smile)  
This the guy?

RICHIE  
(proudly)  
The man, the myth, the legend himself!

Tiffany assesses Omar, who sits ramrod straight, hands on knees, staring straight ahead.

TIFFANY  
(to Omar, with unexpected respect)  
Happy birthday, honey. Ready for your dance?

Omar says nothing, but makes brief eye contact with her. Something passes between them - a mutual recognition of people performing roles they didn't choose.

RICHIE  
(to Tiffany)  
He's shy. But very excited.

JOEL  
(to Nico)  
This feels wrong on so many levels.

NICO  
(observing closely)  
And yet, you can't look away.

The music changes to a sultry beat. Tiffany begins dancing around Omar, who remains perfectly still, not even blinking. But unlike Joel's panicked reaction in the opening scene, Omar's stillness feels deliberate, almost meditative.

RICHIE  
(encouraging)  
You can touch her shoulders, man!  
It's allowed!

Omar doesn't move. Tiffany continues her routine professionally, though increasingly perplexed by his complete lack of reaction. There's something almost artistic about the contrast between her movement and his stillness.

JOEL  
(to Debbie)  
I think he's having a stroke.

DEBBIE  
(sipping beer)  
If only we could all be so lucky.

As Tiffany moves to sit on Omar's lap, disaster strikes. Omar's hand, which has been resting on his knee, suddenly TWITCHES. He automatically REACHES to scratch himself, his ingrained kitchen habit kicking in at the worst possible moment.

His hand grazes Tiffany's leg, leaving a visible FLOURY HANDPRINT on her skin.

TIFFANY  
(jumping back)  
What the hell?!

RICHIE  
(panicking)  
No no no! He's a chef! It's just  
flour!

TIFFANY  
(disgusted)  
That is NOT flour!

OMAR  
(finally speaking)  
Pizza dough. Under nails. Sorry.

There's no embarrassment in his voice - only a factual statement delivered with professional precision.

TONY swoops in immediately.

TONY  
Is there a problem here?

TIFFANY  
(showing leg)  
He left... residue on me!

The entire group looks mortified--except for Richie, who is trying desperately not to laugh, and Omar, whose expression hasn't changed at all.

DEBBIE  
(standing, taking charge)  
We apologize for the  
misunderstanding. Omar works with  
food all day. His hands are...  
(searching for words)  
...occupationally dirty.

TONY  
(to Tiffany)  
Go clean up.  
(to Debbie)  
You folks should leave.

DEBBIE  
(with unexpected dignity)  
Gladly.

As they gather their things, Richie finally loses it, bursting into uncontrollable laughter.

RICHIE  
(between gasps)  
Oh my God! Did you see her face?  
"That is NOT flour!"

JOEL  
(mortified)  
This is a new low. Even for us.

NICO  
(putting phone away)  
I got the whole thing.

RICHIE  
(eagerly)  
Send it to me! Send it to me!

They shuffle toward the exit, Omar moving robotically, expression unchanged. As they reach the door, Omar turns back to look at the stage one last time.

To everyone's surprise, he gives a small, respectful nod to Tiffany, who is wiping her leg with a towel. She returns the nod, recognizing one professional acknowledging another.

Omar exits, his dignity perfectly intact.

**EXT. VELVET ROPE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

The group stands in the parking lot, Richie still laughing, Joel looking exhausted, Debbie checking her phone.

DEBBIE  
(resigned)  
I'm going home. This was a  
colossal waste of time.

RICHIE  
(incredulous)  
Are you kidding? This was team  
building gold!

DEBBIE  
(deadpan)  
Yes. Nothing brings people  
together like watching Omar  
accidentally dust a stripper with  
pizza flour.

RICHIE  
(to Omar)  
You're a legend now, my friend! A  
legend!

Omar says nothing, just unlocks his bicycle and pedals away with surprising grace.

JOEL  
(watching him go)  
Do you ever wonder what goes on  
inside his head?

NICO  
(thoughtfully)  
Nothing but recipes and regret.

DEBBIE  
(to everyone)  
Eight AM tomorrow. Fundraiser  
planning. Don't be late.

She gets in her car and drives off.

RICHIE  
(to Joel)  
See? I told you this would be  
epic!

JOEL  
(tired)  
Epic isn't the word I'd use.

RICHIE  
(curious)  
What would you use?

JOEL  
(after consideration)  
Catalyzing.

RICHIE  
(confused)  
Cata-what?

JOEL  
(mysterious)  
It means this changes things.

RICHIE  
(still confused)  
Changes what?

JOEL  
(with newfound resolve)  
Everything.

As Joel walks to his car, we see a new determination in his eyes. For the first time, he's not just reacting to Richie's chaos—he's planning his own.

RICHIE  
(calling after him)  
You want to grab breakfast at the  
diner?

JOEL  
(over shoulder)  
Can't. I've got some... research  
to do.

RICHIE  
(to himself)  
Research? Who are you and what  
have you done with my Crayon?

He watches Joel drive away, then checks his phone, replaying  
the Omar lap dance video with childish glee.

RICHIE  
(to himself)  
This is definitely breaking the  
internet.

Behind him, a janitor turns off the strip club's lights,  
leaving Richie illuminated only by his phone screen, laughing  
alone in the dark parking lot.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

FADE IN:

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - MORNING**

SUPER: SATURDAY, 10:22 AM

The morning prep is in full swing. OMAR silently kneads dough  
while NICOLE chops vegetables. DEBBIE examines the walk-in  
freezer, making notes about inventory. There's a focused energy  
in the air - the restaurant may be failing, but the routine  
continues.

The back door opens and JOEL enters, carrying a stack of papers  
- printouts of fundraiser ideas, permit applications, and  
budget spreadsheets. He looks tired but determined, like he's  
been up all night working.

DEBBIE  
(noticing Joel)  
Those the permit applications?

JOEL

(nodding)

And vendor contracts. We'll need signatures from at least ten local businesses to make this work.

DEBBIE

(impressed)

You've been busy.

JOEL

(modest)

Just doing my part.

He sets the papers on the counter and puts on his apron. Debbie examines his work with growing respect.

DEBBIE

This is... surprisingly thorough.

JOEL

I stayed up researching successful fundraisers. Turns out there's a whole science to community events.

The front bell JINGLES. RICHIE bursts in, carrying a suspicious-looking cardboard box and wearing his trademark grin.

RICHIE

Good morning, salvation squad!

Joel immediately tenses, eyeing the box warily.

JOEL

What's in the box, Richie?

RICHIE

(innocently)

Promotional materials! For the fundraiser!

He sets the box down and pulls out homemade flyers with comic-sans text reading "SAVE TUSCANY'S: WING CHALLENGE EXTRAVAGANZA!"

RICHIE

(proud)

Made them myself last night!

Already put fifty up around town!

Joel examines one of the flyers.

JOEL  
(reading)  
"Watch Pizza Guys Suffer For Your  
Entertainment"?

RICHIE  
(enthusiastic)  
Catchy, right?

JOEL  
(skeptical)  
That's not exactly the message we  
discussed.

RICHIE  
(dismissive)  
Trust me, suffering sells. People  
are sadistic by nature.

Nico approaches, examining the flyers.

NICO  
(pointing)  
You spelled "Tuscany's" wrong.

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
What? No I didn't.

NICO  
(showing him)  
It says "Tuscaney's."

RICHIE  
(unfazed)  
It's called creative spelling.  
Grabs attention.

Joel and Nico exchange looks. Debbie sighs audibly from across the kitchen.

Richie sets down the flyers and begins arranging ingredients at his station with unusual enthusiasm. Joel watches him suspiciously.

JOEL  
(cautious)  
You're in a good mood.

RICHIE  
(cryptic)  
Big day. Lots to do. Preparation  
is key.

JOEL  
(increasingly suspicious)  
Preparation for what?

RICHIE  
(innocently)  
The fundraiser, of course!

Joel clearly doesn't believe him but returns to his work. As he reaches for a clipboard, his hand brushes against a bottle of hot sauce that wasn't there before. He pulls back just in time to notice the cap has been loosened.

JOEL  
(examining bottle)  
Really? Hot sauce on the  
clipboard? That's amateur hour.

RICHIE  
(feigning innocence)  
I have no idea what you're talking  
about.

JOEL  
(knowing)  
You're going to have to try harder  
than that.

The exchange is interrupted by the arrival of the FIRST CUSTOMER of the day. Joel moves to the register, carefully stepping over a nearly invisible tripwire stretched across the floor.

JOEL  
(to Richie, not looking back)  
And remove that before someone  
breaks their neck.

Richie looks genuinely surprised that Joel spotted the tripwire. He quickly dismantles it while Joel handles the customer.

TIME CUT TO:

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - LATER THAT DAY**

The lunch rush is in full swing. The kitchen is chaotic but functioning. Joel expertly manages three different orders while Nico preps toppings and Omar works the oven.

Richie enters from a delivery run, looking suspiciously cheerful.

RICHIE  
(announcing)  
Special delivery for Crayon!

JOEL  
(not looking up)  
Not now, Richie. We're slammed.

RICHIE  
(insistent)  
Trust me, you want this one.

He holds out a small package wrapped in brown paper. Joel glances at it warily.

JOEL  
Whatever's in there, I'm not touching it.

RICHIE  
(offended)  
It's from the print shop! For the fundraiser!

Joel hesitates, then carefully accepts the package, examining it from all angles before cautiously unwrapping it. To his surprise, it actually contains professionally printed flyers for the fundraiser.

JOEL  
(genuinely shocked)  
These are... good. Really good.

RICHIE  
(proud)  
Told you!

The flyers are well-designed, with a tasteful logo and proper information about the event. Joel looks up, confused by this uncharacteristic competence.

JOEL  
How did you...?

RICHIE  
(shrugging)  
Called in a favor. My cousin works at the print shop.

Joel studies Richie, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

RICHIE

(continuing)

So I figured I'd take these around town this afternoon. Hit up some sponsors.

JOEL

(cautious)

Really?

RICHIE

(offended)

Yes, really. I can be responsible.

JOEL

(skeptical)

Since when?

RICHIE

(surprisingly serious)

Since the place that's given me a job for the past decade is about to become an alien-themed pizza nightmare.

Joel is taken aback by Richie's sincerity. For a moment, they connect over their shared concern for the restaurant.

RICHIE

(back to joking)

Plus, I figure saving the restaurant earns me enough karma to cancel out any future pranks.

JOEL

(half-smiling)

Of course.

RICHIE

Speaking of which, the Roberts delivery is up. Five pizzas to the law firm.

JOEL

That's on Brighton. My route.

RICHIE

(casual)

Yeah, but I figured I'd take it. Already got the pizzas in my car.

Joel's suspicion immediately returns.

JOEL  
(alert)  
Why?

RICHIE  
(too innocent)  
Just helping out. Team player and  
all that.

JOEL  
(not buying it)  
You never volunteer for  
deliveries. Especially not  
corporate ones where the tip is  
predetermined.

RICHIE  
(wounded)  
Can't a guy just help his buddy  
out?

JOEL  
(firmly)  
Those are my deliveries, Richie.

RICHIE  
(giving up)  
Fine. Whatever. They're in my car  
though.

JOEL  
I'll get them.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

Joel approaches Richie's Mustang with caution, examining it for any signs of tampering. He circles the car once before trying the passenger door.

It's unlocked. He peers inside, looking for trip wires, glue, or other booby traps. Everything seems normal.

Joel carefully reaches in and retrieves the pizza warmer bag from the passenger seat, checking it thoroughly before picking it up.

**INT. JOEL'S CIVIC - MOMENTS LATER**

Joel places the pizzas on his passenger seat and starts the car. Everything seems normal. He pulls out of the parking lot, constantly checking his surroundings for anything unusual.

As he approaches the first stop light, he turns on the AC. Nothing happens. Puzzled, he adjusts the fan settings.

Suddenly, a cloud of FLOUR explodes from the air vents, filling the car with white powder. Joel is instantly covered, the fine flour getting in his eyes, nose, and mouth.

JOEL  
(coughing)  
Son of a-!

He pulls over, frantically trying to clear his vision as flour continues to pump through the vents.

**EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS**

Joel stumbles out of the car, completely covered in white flour, coughing and sputtering. Passing PEDESTRIANS stare and laugh.

PEDESTRIAN #1  
(pointing)  
That's the Chair Guy from the video!

PEDESTRIAN #2  
(taking phone out)  
Oh my God, it's happening again!

Joel realizes people are filming him. His humiliation is compounded by recognition - Richie's previous videos have made him identifiable.

JOEL (V.O.)  
This isn't just a prank anymore.  
It's my identity now. "Chair Guy."  
The perpetual victim.

He tries to dust himself off, but the flour has gotten everywhere - in his hair, his clothes, his delivery bag. He looks down at the pizzas, which are now contaminated.

JOEL  
(to himself)  
The Roberts order...

JOEL (V.O.)  
Five pizzas for a law firm.  
Corporate account. Regular customers.

He checks his watch - he's already running late. There's no time to go back for new pizzas.

JOEL  
(to himself)  
Not today, Richie. Not again.

**INT./EXT. JOEL'S CIVIC - LATER**

Joel drives with grim determination, still covered in flour but having cleaned his face enough to see. His uniform is ruined, the pizzas are questionable, and he's now fifteen minutes late.

He pulls up to ROBERTS LAW FIRM, a sleek, professional building in the business district. Taking a deep breath, he grabs the pizza bag and heads inside.

**INT. ROBERTS LAW FIRM - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS**

Joel steps off the elevator, drawing immediate stares from everyone in the reception area. He's a disaster - head to toe in white flour, looking like a ghost.

The RECEPTIONIST (40s, professionally dressed) looks up and her eyes widen.

RECEPTIONIST  
(shocked)  
What happened to you?

JOEL  
(with surprising composure)  
Your pizza delivery.

RECEPTIONIST  
(concerned)  
Are the pizzas...?

JOEL  
(opening bag)  
The pizzas are fine. They were  
protected.

This is mostly true - the outer boxes have flour on them, but the pizzas inside seem intact.

JOEL  
I need to speak with Mr. Roberts.

RECEPTIONIST  
(uncertain)  
He's in a meeting...

JOEL  
(with newfound authority)  
It's important.

Something in Joel's demeanor convinces her. She makes a call.

**INT. ROBERTS LAW FIRM - CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

ROBERT ROBERTS (60s, senior partner) sits at the head of a conference table surrounded by ASSOCIATES and CLIENTS. Joel enters, still covered in flour, carrying the pizza bags.

Everyone stares, conversation stopping mid-sentence.

ROBERTS  
(confused)  
What the hell?

JOEL  
(with remarkable poise)  
Mr. Roberts. I'm Joel from  
Tuscany's Pizza. I want to  
personally apologize for my  
appearance and the delay in your  
delivery.

ROBERTS  
(incredulous)  
What happened to you?

JOEL  
(direct)  
A prank by a colleague.  
Unfortunately, it affected your  
order.  
(setting down pizzas)  
The pizzas themselves are fine,  
but I understand if you'd prefer  
to reject the delivery.

Roberts studies Joel, seemingly impressed by his professionalism despite his appearance.

ROBERTS  
(unexpected humor)  
Well, I've heard of white-glove  
service, but this is taking it to  
another level.

Nervous laughter from around the table.

ROBERTS  
(to Joel)  
You look familiar. Aren't you the  
guy from that viral video? The  
strip club chair thing?

Joel's stomach drops. His humiliation is now complete.

JOEL  
(maintaining dignity)  
Yes, sir. That was also a prank by  
the same colleague.

Roberts considers this, then makes a decision.

ROBERTS  
(to associates)  
Give the man a proper tip. Double  
the usual.  
(to Joel)  
Kid, you've got guts showing up  
like this. That counts for  
something in my book.

JOEL  
(surprised)  
Thank you, sir.

ROBERTS  
(curious)  
This colleague of yours - you ever  
consider getting even?

JOEL  
(with new resolve)  
I'm working on it.

ROBERTS  
(approving)  
Good. No one respects a man who  
doesn't stand up for himself.  
(handing him a business card)  
Here. If you need legal advice,  
first consultation's free.

Joel takes the card, a plan forming in his mind.

#### EXT. TUSCANY'S PIZZA - LATER

Joel's flour-covered Civic pulls into the parking lot. Through the front windows, we can see Richie watching eagerly, phone in hand, clearly waiting to film Joel's reaction.

Joel sits in his car for a moment, covered in flour but with a new expression on his face - not anger, but determination. He takes Roberts' business card from his pocket, looking at it thoughtfully.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Four years of being Richie's  
content.  
(MORE)

JOEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Four years of humiliation. Four  
years of taking it.

He looks up at Richie waiting inside, then at his phone where notifications about "Flour Guy" videos are already appearing.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Not anymore.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Joel enters, still covered in flour. Richie immediately starts filming.

RICHIE  
(gleeful)  
Ladies and gentlemen, the Flour  
Monster returns! How was the  
delivery, Casper?

Instead of the angry reaction Richie expects, Joel calmly walks past him to the register where Debbie is working.

JOEL  
(professionally)  
Debbie, I need to take the rest of  
the day off. My uniform is  
contaminated, and I can't make  
deliveries like this.

DEBBIE  
(seeing his condition)  
Jesus, what happened?

Joel doesn't answer, just looks pointedly at Richie, who's still filming with a confused expression.

DEBBIE  
(understanding)  
(to Richie)  
You. Delivery duty. Rest of the  
day.

RICHIE  
(protesting)  
But I—

DEBBIE  
(deadly serious)  
Now.

Richie lowers his phone, disappointed by Joel's lack of reaction.

Joel turns to leave, but pauses next to Richie.

JOEL  
(quiet, for Richie's ears  
only)  
You know what the difference is  
between us, Richie?

RICHIE  
(confused)  
What?

JOEL  
You think this is all a game. I'm  
starting to see it's actually a  
war.

There's something in Joel's tone that makes Richie uneasy.

JOEL  
(continuing)  
And in war, it's not about who  
strikes first.  
(beat)  
It's about who strikes last.

Joel walks out, leaving Richie staring after him, the laughter  
dying on his face.

NICO observes this exchange from the prep station, a small  
smile playing on their lips.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PIZZA - CONTINUOUS**

Joel walks to his car, pulls out his phone, and dials a number.

JOEL  
(into phone)  
Amber? It's Joel. Chair Boy. I  
need a favor.

He looks back at the restaurant where Richie has been cornered  
by Debbie for a lecture.

JOEL  
(into phone)  
Actually, I need several favors.  
And I'm willing to pay.

FADE OUT.

**INT. TUSCANY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

SUPER: SATURDAY, 10:42 PM

The restaurant is closed. Chairs are upturned on tables. The kitchen is dark except for a single light in the back office.

**INT. DEBBIE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

DEBBIE sits alone at her cluttered desk, a half-empty bottle of vodka beside her. She's staring at an old photograph: a younger version of herself with a robust, smiling man (ANTHONY) standing proudly in front of a brand new "TUSCANY'S PIZZA & PASTA" sign.

The contrast between the hopeful faces in the photo and the current state of the restaurant is stark. Where they once stood is now a faded, peeling sign with one letter burned out.

Debbie takes a swig directly from the bottle, then opens a drawer and pulls out a stack of bills marked "OVERDUE" in red. Next to them is the Pizza Planet contract, just waiting for her signature.

DEBBIE  
(to photo)  
What would you do, Anthony?

She runs her finger over his face in the photo, then looks up at the wall where a chef's coat hangs in a frame. "ANTHONY TUSCANY - HEAD CHEF" is embroidered on the pocket.

DEBBIE  
(with bitter humor)  
You'd probably set the place on fire for the insurance money.

She laughs softly, then her face crumples. For a moment, we see behind the tough exterior to the exhausted, grieving woman beneath.

DEBBIE  
(voice breaking)  
Thirty years, Tony. Thirty years we built this place.  
(gesturing to bills)  
And what do I have to show for it?  
Debt. Unpaid suppliers. Equipment falling apart.  
(takes another drink)  
You were supposed to be here for this. You promised me forever, you lying bastard.

Her grief turns momentarily to anger, then back to sorrow. She pulls out a faded menu from the drawer - an original from when they first opened.

DEBBIE

(reading aloud)

"Tuscany's Special Marinara -  
Prepared tableside by Chef  
Anthony."

(wistful smile)

You made such a show of it. All  
that flourish, tossing in the  
herbs at the last minute.

(beat)

It was just for show. The sauce  
was already made. But they ate it  
up.

The SOUND of the back door opening. Debbie quickly wipes her eyes and shoves the bottle in her drawer.

OMAR appears in the doorway, surprising her.

DEBBIE

(startled)

Jesus! What are you doing here?

Omar says nothing, just points to the clock on the wall.

DEBBIE

(realizing)

Night prep. Right.

Omar studies her face for a moment, then shuffles to his locker, retrieving his apron.

DEBBIE

(uncomfortable)

Don't mind me. Just catching up  
on... paperwork.

Omar nods, then hesitates. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small notebook. He opens it, tears out a page, and places it carefully on Debbie's desk before heading to the kitchen.

Debbie looks at the page: a handwritten recipe titled "Anthony's Original Sauce - The Real One."

DEBBIE

(calling after him)

Omar? How do you have this?

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Debbie follows Omar into the kitchen, where he's already setting up for the morning dough.

DEBBIE  
(confused but insistent)  
Anthony never shared this recipe  
with anyone. Not even me.

Omar continues working, not making eye contact.

DEBBIE  
(more forceful)  
How do you know this recipe?

Omar stops, looks up, and speaks more words at once than we've ever heard from him.

OMAR  
Worked for Anthony. Before.  
Different restaurant. Downtown. Le  
Petit Jardin. I was sous chef.

DEBBIE  
(stunned)  
You worked with Anthony at Le  
Petit Jardin? That was twenty  
years ago.

OMAR  
(nodding)  
Before he met you. Before  
Tuscany's.

Debbie leans against the counter, processing this revelation.

DEBBIE  
Why didn't you ever say anything?

OMAR  
(shrugging)  
Never asked.

DEBBIE  
(examining the recipe)  
And you've been making his sauce  
all this time? The original way?

OMAR  
(with a hint of professional  
pride)  
Secret ingredient. Red wine. Not  
cooking wine. Real wine.

DEBBIE

(laughing in disbelief)

That cheap bastard! He always told  
me cooking wine was fine!

A moment of shared understanding passes between them. Debbie looks at Omar with new eyes.

DEBBIE

Why did you stay, Omar? All these years? You were trained as a real chef.

OMAR

(after a long pause)

Promise. To Anthony. Watch over his place. His legacy.

Debbie is visibly moved but tries to hide it.

DEBBIE

(softly)

He's been gone ten years.

OMAR

Promise is promise.

A long silence as Debbie absorbs this. When she speaks again, her voice has lost its hardness.

DEBBIE

Why didn't Anthony tell me about you? About your history?

OMAR

(with unexpected insight)

Anthony was... complicated. Proud.  
Did not like to share credit.

DEBBIE

(nodding slowly)

That sounds like him.

She moves to a cabinet, pulls out a bottle of expensive red wine - clearly saved for a special occasion.

DEBBIE

So all these years, you've been changing his recipe? Going back to the cheap stuff?

OMAR

(shaking head)

No. Buy own wine. Use on special orders only.

DEBBIE

(incredulous)

You've been spending your own  
money on ingredients for this  
place?

OMAR

(simply)

Good food matters.

Debbie is speechless. She places the wine bottle on the counter.

DEBBIE

(decisive)

Make me his sauce. The real one.  
Tonight.

OMAR

(with the ghost of a smile)

Yes, Chef.

This title - Chef - clearly means something to both of them.

**INT. KITCHEN - LATER**

Debbie and Omar work side by side in comfortable silence. Omar expertly dices herbs while Debbie stirs the sauce. For the first time, we see her not as the harried manager but as someone who once loved cooking.

DEBBIE

(tasting the sauce)

It needs more basil.

OMAR

(shaking head)

No. Patience. Basil at end. Too  
early makes bitter.

Debbie defers to him, an acknowledgment of his expertise.

DEBBIE

(after a moment)

You know, Joel has good ideas for  
the fundraiser.

OMAR

(nodding)

Smart boy. Wastes potential.

DEBBIE  
(surprised by this  
assessment)  
You think so too?

OMAR  
Watches. Learns. Fixes problems.  
Good qualities.

DEBBIE  
Unlike Richie.

OMAR  
(unexpectedly)  
Richie different. Not bad. Energy.  
Ideas. No focus.

DEBBIE  
(laughing)  
That's putting it mildly.

They fall back into companionable silence. As Debbie watches Omar work, something occurs to her.

DEBBIE  
If the restaurant closes... what  
will you do?

OMAR  
(considering)  
Another kitchen. Another promise  
to keep.

DEBBIE  
But Anthony's promise will be  
done.

OMAR  
(looking at her directly)  
Promise was to you too. Not just  
building. People.

This lands heavily on Debbie. She turns away, overcome. When she turns back, her voice is steady again.

DEBBIE  
Omar? Do you think we can save  
this place?

Omar considers, then gives a single, definitive nod.

OMAR  
With real sauce. Yes.

For the first time, a genuine smile breaks across Debbie's face.

DEBBIE  
Then I guess we better get cooking.

She rolls up her sleeves and joins Omar at the prep station, following his instructions as he recreates Anthony's original recipe. There's a newfound respect between them, a connection that transcends their usual roles.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS**

Through the windows, we can see Debbie and Omar working together in the kitchen, two small figures in a pool of light amid darkness.

PAN UP to the Tuscany's sign, one letter still flickering, but somehow looking less sad than before.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. JOEL'S APARTMENT - MORNING**

SUPER: SUNDAY, 7:16 AM

A small studio apartment above the hardware store, accessed by a rickety external staircase. The sign below reads "MILLER'S HARDWARE - KEYS MADE."

**INT. JOEL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Joel's apartment is small but meticulously organized. Bookshelves made from milk crates and boards line one wall, filled with philosophy texts arranged by movement. A desk faces the wall rather than the window, covered in loan statements and half-finished job applications.

JOEL lies on his bed, staring at the ceiling, deep in thought. His hands are red and irritated from yesterday's super glue incident. His phone PINGS with a notification. He checks it.

INSERT: Text from Richie: "How r ur hands? Still STUCK on a solution? 😂 😂 😂 "

Joel sighs and tosses the phone aside. Then it PINGS again.

INSERT: Text from Nico: "Coffee? Gas station? Need to talk fundraiser."

Joel considers, then replies.

**EXT. GAS STATION - LATER**

The morning is quiet at the Last Stop gas station. Only a few cars in the lot, including Nico's ancient Toyota with bumper stickers for bands no one's heard of.

**INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS**

JOEL sits in a booth by the window, nursing a coffee. NICO approaches with their own cup and slides in across from him.

NICO  
(checking Joel's hands)  
How bad is it?

Joel holds them up, showing red, raw skin.

JOEL  
Three hours with acetone and a scrub brush. Had to cancel a job interview this morning.

NICO  
(wincing)  
That's more than just a prank, man. That's assault.

JOEL  
(dismissive)  
It's just Richie being Richie.

NICO  
(serious)  
Is it, though? There's a pattern here, and it's escalating.

JOEL  
(defensive)  
I can handle it.

NICO  
(leaning forward)  
Can you? Yesterday was your job. Tomorrow might be your car. Next week could be something worse.

JOEL  
(slumping)  
What can I do? Richie's been pranking me for four years.  
(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)  
It's basically a law of nature at  
this point.

NICO  
(firmly)  
Laws can be broken.

JOEL  
(suspicious)  
Why do you care?

NICO  
(considering their answer)  
Three reasons. One, I'm tired of  
being collateral damage in  
Richie's war against your dignity.  
Two, you're actually good at your  
job and I don't want to work with  
just Richie when you inevitably  
quit. And three...  
(with unusual sincerity)  
You don't deserve this, Joel.

This simple statement of support catches Joel off guard.

JOEL  
(after a moment)  
Do you remember the mousetraps?

NICO  
In the freezer? Hard to forget.

JOEL  
No, I mean the aftermath. The look  
on Richie's face when Debbie made  
him clean them up.

NICO  
(catching on)  
He didn't like it.

JOEL  
He hated it. For all his pranks,  
Richie can't stand being on the  
receiving end.

NICO  
(interested)  
So you're thinking... what  
exactly?

JOEL  
(hesitant)  
I'm thinking it's time for the  
student to become the master.

NICO leans back, a slow smile spreading.

NICO  
I was right about you.

JOEL  
What do you mean?

NICO  
You'd make a better assistant  
manager. You think long-term.

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
That's just it. Richie's pranks  
are all immediate gratification.  
No planning, no patience. Just  
chaos.

NICO  
And you're going to out-plan him?

JOEL  
I'm going to out-think him. But I  
need help.

At that moment, STEVE appears at their table, coffee pot in hand.

STEVE  
(monotone)  
Refill?

JOEL  
Thanks, Steve.

As Steve pours, he notices their conspiratorial posture.

STEVE  
(deadpan)  
Let me guess. Planning to  
overthrow the government? Or just  
plotting against Richie?

JOEL  
(surprised)  
How did you—

STEVE  
(shrugging)  
I've watched you two for four  
years. It was only a matter of  
time before you snapped.

NICO  
Any advice?

STEVE  
(considering)  
Richie's afraid of three things:  
commitment, growing up, and...  
(dramatic pause)  
Public humiliation.

JOEL  
(confused)  
Public humiliation? He films  
himself doing stupid stuff all the  
time!

STEVE  
(with unexpected insight)  
On his terms. With him in control.  
Big difference.

Steve walks away, leaving Joel and Nico to contemplate this insight.

JOEL  
(to Nico)  
What do you think?

NICO  
(genuinely impressed)  
I think Steve's smarter than he  
looks.

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
Public humiliation... on someone  
else's terms.

NICO  
(grinning)  
Are we really doing this?

JOEL  
(with new resolve)  
First, we need to save the  
restaurant. That's the priority.

NICO  
And then?

JOEL  
 (with quiet determination)  
 And then... we teach Richie a  
 lesson he'll never forget.

The door JINGLES as AMBER, BRITTANY, and SHAY enter, on their way home from their night shift.

AMBER  
 (spotting them)  
 Well, if it isn't Chair Boy and  
 Blue Hair!

JOEL  
 (wincing)  
 Can we please retire that  
 nickname?

BRITTANY  
 (with professional sympathy)  
 Sorry, sweetheart. Once you get a  
 strip club name, it sticks for  
 life.

SHAY  
 (noticing their huddled  
 posture)  
 What are you two plotting? You've  
 got that look.

JOEL and NICO exchange glances.

NICO  
 (cautious)  
 Fundraiser stuff.

SHAY  
 (not buying it)  
 Uh-huh.

AMBER  
 (perceptive)  
 Is this about Richie? Did he do  
 something else?

JOEL  
 (hesitant)  
 Maybe.

The three women exchange knowing looks, then slide into the booth, crowding in on either side of Joel and Nico.

BRITTANY  
 (leaning in)  
 We're in.

JOEL

(confused)

In what? I haven't even said anything.

AMBER

(direct)

Whatever you're planning for Richie, we want to help.

JOEL

Why would you help us?

SHAY

(counting on fingers)

One, Richie's been a thorn in our sides for years. Always filming without permission, making "hilarious" comments during dances, trying to bargain for freebies.

BRITTANY

(continuing)

Two, we've watched him humiliate you repeatedly, and it's getting old.

AMBER

(finishing)

And three, you're the only delivery guy who actually treats us like human beings instead of walking fantasies.

JOEL

(genuinely surprised)

I am?

The women all nod emphatically.

SHAY

Plus, you look like you could use some professional help. No offense.

JOEL

(considering)

We might need... specific expertise.

AMBER

Such as?

JOEL  
(carefully)  
Someone who can make a person  
feel... vulnerable.

The women exchange intrigued glances.

SHAY  
(to Joel)  
You're more interesting than you  
look, Chair Boy.

NICO  
(to Joel)  
Are you thinking what I think  
you're thinking?

JOEL  
(nodding slowly)  
Act Three from Richie's playbook.  
But with our own twist.

AMBER  
(excited)  
This sounds promising. Keep  
talking.

Joel hesitates, then pulls out his phone and shows them something - we don't see what it is, but their reactions range from shock to admiration.

BRITTANY  
(impressed)  
That's... diabolical.

JOEL  
(with unexpected confidence)  
Four years of philosophy teaches  
you one thing: everyone has a  
weakness. Richie's is his ego.

SHAY  
(practical)  
We'll need supplies. A location.  
Timing.

NICO  
(typing notes on phone)  
And plausible deniability.

AMBER  
(to Joel)  
You realize once you do this,  
there's no going back.  
(MORE)

AMBER (CONT'D)  
You and Richie - your friendship  
will change forever.

JOEL  
(with surprising clarity)  
It's not a friendship. It's a  
hostage situation.

This lands heavily on the group. For the first time, Joel is articulating something they've all seen but never named.

BRITTANY  
(gently)  
When did you figure that out?

JOEL  
Yesterday. When I was standing in front of a senior partner at a law firm, covered in flour, delivering cold pizzas, and he recognized me as "Chair Boy."

(beat)  
That's my identity now. Not philosophy graduate. Not future whatever. Just Richie's punching bag.

AMBER  
(with determination)  
Not anymore.

The group huddles closer as Joel begins to outline his plan in hushed tones. As they talk, the camera PULLS BACK, leaving their conspiratorial whispers inaudible.

Through the window, we see RICHIE's Mustang pull into the gas station. He's looking at his phone, laughing at his own text to Joel, completely oblivious to the alliance forming against him.

Steve watches from behind the counter, an almost imperceptible smile on his usually expressionless face.

STEVE  
(to himself)  
About damn time.

FADE OUT.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - MORNING**

SUPER: MONDAY, 9:04 AM

The kitchen buzzes with unusual activity. JOEL arranges a fundraiser planning board while RICHIE hangs a hand-painted "SAVE TUSCANY'S" banner. NICO and OMAR work diligently on prep for the day. There's a new energy in the air.

JOEL  
(examining to-do list)  
We need permits for the  
anniversary festival. Live music,  
outdoor seating, street closure...

RICHIE  
(cutting in)  
And a dunk tank! I already called  
the rental place.

JOEL  
(exasperated)  
We don't need a dunk tank.

RICHIE  
(whining)  
Everyone loves dunk tanks! Picture  
this: Debbie in a bathing suit-

JOEL  
(horrified)  
Stop. Please stop.

RICHIE  
Fine. Omar in a bathing suit.

OMAR briefly looks up from his station, expressionless.

OMAR  
No.

NICO  
(intervening)  
Let's focus on the basics first.  
Permits, promotion, sponsors.

JOEL  
Exactly. We need to show Debbie  
we're serious.

RICHIE  
(mock offended)  
I'm very serious about the dunk  
tank.

The front bell JINGLES. DEBBIE enters, looking unusually  
refreshed. She surveys the activity with quiet approval.

DEBBIE  
(impressed)  
What's all this?

JOEL  
Fundraiser planning. We've mapped  
out a 30th Anniversary Festival.

He gestures to the board, which displays a surprisingly  
organized plan.

DEBBIE  
(pleased)  
This actually looks... competent.

RICHIE  
(proudly)  
Joel stayed up all night working  
on it. I contributed the fun  
stuff.  
(whispering loudly)  
Dunk tank.

DEBBIE examines the board, nodding slightly.

DEBBIE  
Live music?

JOEL  
My cousin's band. They'll play for  
free pizza.

DEBBIE  
Street permits?

NICO  
Application's already in.

DEBBIE  
And this is supposed to raise  
twenty-seven thousand dollars how  
exactly?

JOEL  
Entrance fees, food sales,  
sponsorships from local  
businesses, merchandise...

RICHIE  
(interrupting)  
And the Death Wing Challenge!  
Entry fee fifty bucks per person!

DEBBIE  
(sighing)  
Not this again.

JOEL  
(surprising everyone)  
Actually, the spicy wing challenge  
might work. With waivers, of  
course.

DEBBIE looks shocked that Joel is siding with Richie.

DEBBIE  
You two agreeing? That's a first.

OMAR  
(without looking up)  
Like eclipse. Rare. Ominous.

The kitchen phone RINGS. Nico answers.

NICO  
(into phone)  
Tuscany's... Yes, we're open...  
Pickup or delivery?

As Nico takes the order, the front door JINGLES again.

A stern-looking man in a rumpled suit enters, holding a clipboard. This is BARTON, the health inspector they narrowly escaped last time.

BARTON  
(coldly)  
Surprise follow-up inspection.

The entire kitchen freezes. Debbie forces a smile.

DEBBIE  
(panicking but professional)  
Mr. Barton! What a... unexpected  
pleasure.

BARTON  
(checking notes)  
Anonymous complaint. Something  
about feet in food preparation  
equipment?

Everyone's eyes dart to Omar, who suddenly becomes intensely focused on his dough kneading.

BARTON  
(surveying kitchen)  
Let's start with the storage  
areas.

DEBBIE  
(anxious)  
But we're just about to open-

BARTON  
(unmoved)  
That's not my concern, Mrs.  
Tuscany.

DEBBIE shoots a desperate look at Joel, who steps forward.

JOEL  
(professionally)  
Of course, Mr. Barton. I'm Joel  
Steinman, Assistant Manager. I'd  
be happy to show you around.

BARTON  
(checking clipboard)  
You weren't listed as management  
in your file.

DEBBIE  
(quickly)  
Recent promotion. Very recent.

BARTON  
(suspicious)  
I see.

JOEL  
(smoothly)  
Why don't we start with the walk-  
in freezer?

RICHIE  
(alarmed)  
Wait, not the-

Too late. Joel leads Barton toward the freezer. Richie  
frantically motions, trying to catch Joel's attention.

**INT. WALK-IN FREEZER - CONTINUOUS**

Joel opens the door, allowing Barton to enter first. As Barton  
steps in, we see Richie appear in the doorway behind them,  
wide-eyed with panic.

JOEL  
 (professionally)  
 As you can see, Mr. Barton, all  
 products are properly stored and  
 labeled-

His presentation is cut short by a MECHANICAL CLICK. Barton  
 freezes mid-step. Joel notices a nearly invisible fishing line  
 at ankle height.

JOEL  
 (realizing)  
 Oh no.

ABOVE: A bucket rigged to the ceiling tips over, releasing a  
 cascade of FLOUR that rains down on both Joel and Barton,  
 coating them in white powder.

BARTON  
 (sputtering)  
 What in God's name-?!

RICHIE  
 (from doorway, horrified)  
 It was supposed to be for you! I  
 swear!

JOEL stands frozen, covered in flour, staring at the equally  
 white Barton with absolute terror.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Debbie, Nico, and Omar watch in horror as Joel and Barton  
 emerge from the freezer, completely covered in flour like two  
 ghosts.

BARTON  
 (coldly furious, wiping flour  
 from his glasses)  
 This... this is...

DEBBIE  
 (desperately)  
 A terrible accident-

BARTON  
 (interrupting)  
 UNACCEPTABLE!

He brushes flour from his clipboard, making dramatic notes.

BARTON  
 Booby traps in food storage areas!  
 (MORE)

BARTON (CONT'D)  
Contamination! Reckless  
endangerment!

RICHIE steps forward, face pale.

RICHIE  
(genuinely contrite)  
Sir, it was just a prank. For  
Joel, not for you.

BARTON  
(incredulous)  
You intentionally sabotage your  
own food storage areas for  
"pranks"?

RICHIE  
(realizing his mistake)  
I mean... not regularly...

BARTON continues furiously writing citations.

BARTON  
I'm issuing a temporary suspension  
of your food service license,  
effective immediately.

DEBBIE  
(panicking)  
You can't do that! We have orders  
to fill!

BARTON  
(unmoved)  
You can appeal the suspension at  
the health department hearing.  
(checking calendar)  
Next available date is... June  
15th.

DEBBIE  
(stunned)  
That's six weeks away!

BARTON  
(coolly)  
Perhaps you should have considered  
that before allowing such  
egregious violations of health  
code section 4.7, 8.2, and-  
(looking at Omar's bare  
hands)  
-apparently all of section 3.

OMAR quietly puts on gloves, two weeks too late.

JOEL  
(desperately)  
Mr. Barton, please. This  
restaurant is facing foreclosure.  
Six weeks of closure will kill us.

BARTON  
(unmoved)  
That's not my department.

He tears off the citation and hands it to Debbie, who takes it with trembling hands.

BARTON  
(adjusting glasses)  
I'll need to confiscate any  
prepared food items before I  
leave.

RICHIE  
(under breath)  
Of course you will.

BARTON glares at Richie, then turns back to Debbie.

BARTON  
You can reopen once you pass a  
complete inspection... in six  
weeks.

He brushes off more flour and heads for the door.

BARTON  
(pausing)  
Oh, and Mrs. Tuscany? I'll be  
having my coffee elsewhere from  
now on.

He exits, leaving the kitchen in stunned silence.

DEBBIE stands frozen, staring at the citation. Then, very  
deliberately, she turns to Richie.

DEBBIE  
(deadly calm)  
You. Outside. Now.

Richie, for once, has nothing to say. He follows Debbie out the  
back door.

Nico approaches Joel, who's still covered in flour, standing in  
shock.

NICO  
(softly)  
You okay?

JOEL  
(distant)  
Six weeks. The bank won't wait six weeks.

The phone RINGS again. No one moves to answer it.

OMAR slowly removes his apron and hangs it on its hook. The gesture has a terrible finality to it.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS**

Debbie stands facing Richie, her control visibly slipping.

DEBBIE  
(voice trembling with anger)  
Four years. Four years I've tolerated your antics. Your stunts. Your "pranks."

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
It wasn't supposed to—

DEBBIE  
(cutting him off)  
Do you have any idea what you've done? This restaurant is all I have left of Anthony. And you just killed it for a laugh.

RICHIE  
(genuinely upset)  
I didn't mean to—

DEBBIE  
(bitter laugh)  
You never mean to. That's your whole problem, Richie. You never think beyond the moment. Beyond the laugh. Beyond yourself.

She turns away, fighting tears.

DEBBIE  
(quietly)  
You're fired.

RICHIE  
(shocked)  
What?

DEBBIE  
(turning back)  
You're fired. Get your things and  
get out.

RICHIE  
(panicking)  
Debbie, please. I'll fix this.  
I'll talk to Barton-

DEBBIE  
(defeated)  
There's nothing to fix! The  
restaurant's done. We can't  
survive six weeks of closure.

She sags against the wall, suddenly looking every one of her fifty-eight years.

DEBBIE  
(broken)  
Just go, Richie. It's over.

She walks back inside, leaving Richie alone in the alley, the consequences of his actions finally sinking in.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - LATER**

Joel, now cleaned up but still with traces of flour in his hair, sits at a table with Nico and Omar. Debbie stands at the counter, phone to her ear.

DEBBIE  
(into phone)  
Yes, Mr. Samuels. I understand...  
Yes, I'll have the Pizza Planet  
paperwork signed today.

She hangs up, turning to the group.

DEBBIE  
(resigned)  
That was the bank. They won't  
extend the foreclosure. With the  
health department suspension,  
Pizza Planet is our only option.

NICO  
(desperate)  
What about the fundraiser?

DEBBIE

(bitter)

What fundraiser? We can't even  
open our doors.

JOEL

(determined)

We don't need the restaurant to  
have a fundraiser. We can still do  
the anniversary festival.

DEBBIE

(incredulous)

Without food? Without a venue?

JOEL

(thinking quickly)

We'll adapt. Food trucks. Outdoor  
venue. We'll make it work.

DEBBIE

(gesturing around)

Look around, Joel. It's over.

JOEL

(with unexpected conviction)

No. It's not over until you sign  
those papers.

DEBBIE studies Joel, surprised by his intensity.

DEBBIE

(softly)

Why do you care so much? It's just  
a job to you.

JOEL

(realizing the truth as he  
says it)

It started that way. But now...

(struggling for words)

Now it's our place. Our mess. Our  
family.

Omar nods in agreement. Nico gives Joel a supportive look.

DEBBIE

(after a long moment)

I have until Wednesday to sign the  
Pizza Planet deal.

JOEL

(hopeful)

So we have two days?

DEBBIE  
(resigned)  
Two days. Then I'm cutting my losses.

She picks up her purse and heads for the door.

DEBBIE  
(pausing)  
Lock up when you leave.

After she's gone, the three remaining staff members sit in silence.

NICO  
(finally)  
What now?

JOEL  
(determined)  
Now we get creative.  
(turning to Omar)  
You still have Anthony's original sauce recipe?

Omar nods.

JOEL  
And we know every customer in town.  
(to Nico)  
How's your social media following?

NICO  
(shrugging)  
Couple thousand. Why?

JOEL  
(standing)  
Because we're going to save this place. With or without Richie.  
(with newfound authority)  
With or without the building itself.

He moves to the fundraiser board, flips it over to the blank side, and picks up a marker.

JOEL  
If Tuscany's can't come to the people, we bring the people to Tuscany's.

As Joel begins sketching a new plan, we PULL BACK through the kitchen, past the empty pizza ovens, past the walked-in freezer still dusted with flour, to the front door where a hand-written sign now reads: "TEMPORARILY CLOSED BY ORDER OF HEALTH DEPARTMENT."

FADE OUT.

**INT. JOEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

SUPER: MONDAY, 11:38 PM

Joel sits at his desk, surrounded by papers-loan statements, job applications, and now, hastily sketched plans for saving Tuscany's. His laptop is open to a budget spreadsheet that doesn't add up no matter how he adjusts the numbers.

He rubs his eyes, exhausted. On his phone, a text from his mother: "Dinner tomorrow? Need to talk about your future."

JOEL  
(to empty room)  
My future. Right.

He opens a drawer and pulls out a worn folder labeled "FIVE-YEAR PLAN." Inside are graduate school rejection letters, job rejection emails, and a handwritten list titled "EXIT STRATEGY" with most items crossed out.

JOEL (V.O.)  
Twenty-eight years old. Philosophy degree. Eighty-seven thousand in student loans. And now unemployed, because a flour trap meant for me took out a health inspector instead.

He pulls out another folder-this one contains his undergraduate thesis with an A+ grade and a note from his professor: "Exceptional work. You have a promising academic future ahead."

JOEL  
(bitter laugh)  
Promising academic future. That aged well.

His phone RINGS. It's Nico.

JOEL  
(answering)  
Any luck with the permits?

NICO (V.O.)  
(through phone)  
City says we can't get a street  
permit without the restaurant  
being open. Some liability thing.

JOEL  
(discouraged)  
Perfect.

NICO (V.O.)  
How's the budget looking?

JOEL  
(sighing)  
Like a mathematical impossibility.  
Even if we get donations,  
sponsors, and a miracle, we're  
still short by at least fifteen  
thousand.

NICO (V.O.)  
What about Richie?

JOEL  
(bitter)  
What about him?

NICO (V.O.)  
Have you talked to him?

JOEL  
(standing up, agitated)  
Why would I talk to him? He's the  
reason we're in this mess!

NICO (V.O.)  
He's also the best promoter we  
have. People actually follow his  
stupid channel.

JOEL  
(reluctant)  
I don't even know where he is.

NICO (V.O.)  
Gas station. Where else?

Joel looks out his window. From his vantage point, he can see  
the gas station's neon lights in the distance.

JOEL  
I'll think about it.

NICO (V.O.)  
Don't think too long. Debbie signs  
those papers in less than 48  
hours.

They hang up. Joel stares at his reflection in the window, conflicted. Then, with sudden resolve, he grabs his jacket.

**EXT. GAS STATION - LATER**

Joel's Civic pulls into the nearly empty lot. RICHIE's Mustang is parked in its usual spot. Joel sits in his car for a moment, gathering himself.

**INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS**

Joel enters to find RICHIE sitting alone in their usual booth, staring into a cup of coffee. He looks uncharacteristically dejected.

STEVE watches from behind the counter, cleaning the same spot over and over.

Joel hesitates, then approaches Richie's booth.

JOEL  
This seat taken?

RICHIE  
(looking up, surprised)  
Crayon! You're talking to me?

JOEL  
(sitting down)  
Don't make me regret it.

He slides into the booth opposite Richie. An awkward silence falls between them.

RICHIE  
(finally)  
I really screwed up, didn't I?

JOEL  
(flatly)  
Yes. You did.

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
The flour trap wasn't meant for  
the inspector! It was for you!

JOEL  
(dryly)  
That doesn't make it better.

RICHIE  
(slumping)  
I know.

Another silence. Steve approaches with coffee.

STEVE  
(to Joel)  
The usual?

Joel nods. Steve pours, then lingers a moment longer than necessary.

STEVE  
(cryptic)  
Interesting night for  
reconciliation.

He walks away, leaving Joel and Richie looking confused.

RICHIE  
(gesturing after Steve)  
What's his deal?

JOEL  
(ignoring the question)  
We need your help.

RICHIE  
(perking up)  
"We"? You guys are still trying to  
save Tuscany's?

JOEL  
We have until Wednesday morning  
before Debbie signs the Pizza  
Planet papers.

RICHIE  
But the health department—

JOEL  
(cutting him off)  
We know. We're trying to work  
around it. Outdoor venue,  
alternative fundraising, social  
media campaign.

RICHIE

(enthusiastic)

I can help with social media! I've got almost a hundred thousand followers now!

JOEL

(bitterly)

Yeah, people really love watching me suffer.

RICHIE

(suddenly subdued)

Not just that. People like... the restaurant. The whole vibe. Us.

Joel raises an eyebrow at "us."

RICHIE

(continuing)

Look, I know I'm a screwup. But Tuscany's is the only place that ever kept me around. Debbie's fired me three times, but she always hired me back.

JOEL

(definitively)

Not this time.

RICHIE

(determined)

We'll see about that.

He pulls out his phone and starts typing rapidly.

JOEL

What are you doing?

RICHIE

Making a public apology video. Asking my followers to help save Tuscany's.

JOEL

(surprised)

That's... actually a good idea.

RICHIE

(grinning)

I have them occasionally.

As Richie records his message, Joel watches him thoughtfully. For all his faults, Richie's enthusiasm is undeniable.

RICHIE

(to camera)

What's up, Pizza Freaks! Richie here with a special emergency broadcast. The restaurant you've seen in all my videos? Tuscany's? It's about to be sold to a corporate chain. We need your help to save it!

Joel is momentarily impressed with Richie's sincerity. But as Richie continues, his true nature emerges.

RICHIE

(to camera)

And if we raise enough money, I promise to do the ultimate prank on Joel! Something that'll make the Chair Boy incident look like nothing!

JOEL

(alarmed)

Wait, what?

RICHIE

(ignoring him)

That's right! Donate to save Tuscany's and vote on how I should humiliate Crayon next!

JOEL

(grabbing for the phone)

Richie, no!

RICHIE

(keeping phone out of reach)

Trust me! This is marketing!

JOEL

This is exploitation!

RICHIE

(finishing video)

Swipe up to donate! Pizza Freaks forever!

He ends the recording and posts it before Joel can stop him.

RICHIE

(proudly)

There! Problem solved!

JOEL  
(furious)  
You just put a target on my back!  
Again!

RICHIE  
(dismissive)  
It's for the restaurant! You  
should be thanking me!

JOEL  
(standing up)  
Thanking you? THANKING YOU?!

The few other gas station patrons turn to look. Joel realizes he's shouting and sits back down, lowering his voice.

JOEL  
(intense)  
Four years, Richie. Four years of  
being your punching bag. Your  
content. Your stooge.

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
You make it sound so one-sided!  
We're a team!

JOEL  
(bitter laugh)  
A team? What have you ever done  
for me?

RICHIE  
(offended)  
I got you the job at Tuscany's!

JOEL  
(surprised)  
What?

RICHIE  
(matter-of-fact)  
When you came back from Chicago.  
No one would hire you. Debbie owed  
me a favor, so I asked her to give  
you a shot.

Joel is momentarily speechless, processing this new information.

JOEL  
Why... why didn't you ever tell  
me?

RICHIE  
(shrugging)  
Didn't seem important.

The revelation should soften Joel, but instead, it only fuels his frustration.

JOEL  
So even my job, the one thing I thought I earned on my own, was actually because of you?

RICHIE  
(not getting it)  
You're welcome?

JOEL  
(standing again)  
I'm done.

RICHIE  
(confused)  
Done with what?

JOEL  
This. Us. Being your sidekick.  
Your victim. Your charity case.

RICHIE  
(genuinely hurt)  
Whoa, Crayon. That's not what you are to me.

JOEL  
(cold)  
My name is Joel. Not Crayon. Not Chair Boy. Joel.

Joel throws a few dollars on the table for his coffee and turns to leave.

RICHIE  
(calling after him)  
Where are you going?

JOEL  
(without turning)  
To fix this. My way.

RICHIE  
What about the fundraiser?

JOEL  
(pausing at door)  
I'll handle it. Without your  
"help."

**EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS**

Joel storms to his car, fuming. As he reaches for his keys, he realizes his hands are shaking with anger.

STEVE appears beside him, seemingly out of nowhere.

STEVE  
(offering cigarette)  
Breath of air?

JOEL  
(startled)  
I don't smoke.

STEVE  
(philosophical)  
Neither do I. Just seemed like the  
moment.

He puts the cigarette away.

STEVE  
(observing)  
That went well.

JOEL  
(bitterly)  
Four years of my life wasted  
following that man-child around.

STEVE  
(thoughtful)  
You know what Nietzsche said about  
revenge?

JOEL  
"When you seek revenge, dig two  
graves"?

STEVE  
That's not Nietzsche. That's  
Fortune Cookie 101.

They share a small laugh, breaking Joel's tension slightly.

STEVE

He said, "If you gaze long enough  
into an abyss, the abyss gazes  
also into you."

Joel considers this, looking back at Richie still sitting in  
the booth, now frantically checking his phone for responses to  
his video.

JOEL

What if the abyss is wearing  
ridiculous sunglasses and has the  
emotional maturity of a twelve-  
year-old?

STEVE

(shrugging)

Then maybe it needs a wake-up  
call.

JOEL

(resolve hardening)

Maybe it does.

Joel gets into his car, a new determination in his eyes.

JOEL

(to himself)

No more Chair Boy. No more victim.

As he starts the engine, his phone PINGS with a text from Nico:  
"Strip club. Midnight. The girls have an idea."

CLOSE ON: Joel's face, illuminated by his phone screen. For the  
first time, we see a smile that mirrors Richie's mischievous  
grin.

JOEL

(to himself)

Time for Richie to sit in the  
chair for once.

FADE OUT.

**INT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - NIGHT**

**SUPER: MONDAY, 11:58 PM**

The strip club after hours is a different place. House lights  
up, revealing worn carpets and surfaces that look much better  
in the dark. A vacuum cleaner runs in the background as a  
JANITOR works methodically around the room.

AMBER sits at the bar counting tips. BRITTANY wipes down the pole with disinfectant spray. SHAY counts the register, making neat stacks of bills.

The back door opens, and NICO enters, followed by JOEL, who looks uncomfortable being back at the scene of his humiliation.

AMBER  
(noticing them)  
Chair Boy returns to the scene of  
the crime!

JOEL  
(sighing)  
Please stop calling me that.

BRITTANY  
(teasing)  
Would you prefer "Village People's  
Biggest Fan"?

JOEL  
I'd prefer Joel.

SHAY  
(gesturing to the bar)  
Drink? On the house.

JOEL  
I'm good. Let's just... get to the  
point.

The women exchange glances.

AMBER  
Business first. I like it.

NICO takes a seat at a table. The others gather around.

NICO  
(explaining)  
You all know what happened at  
Tuscany's today?

SHAY  
(nodding)  
Heard you got shut down by the  
health department.

BRITTANY  
(blunt)  
About time, honestly. We've been  
taking bets on which of Omar's  
germs would be the final straw.

JOEL  
(defensive)  
It wasn't Omar's fault. It was  
Richie's.

AMBER  
(rolling eyes)  
Of course it was.

JOEL  
He rigged a flour trap in the  
freezer. Caught me and the health  
inspector.

The women wince collectively.

BRITTANY  
Ouch.

SHAY  
And now you're out of a job?

JOEL  
The restaurant has until Wednesday  
before Debbie sells to Pizza  
Planet.

AMBER  
(surprised)  
Pizza Planet? With the creepy  
alien mascot?

JOEL  
That's the one.

BRITTANY  
(sympathetic)  
That's tragic. Tuscany's is a  
local institution.

SHAY  
(practical)  
An institution with health code  
violations, but still.

NICO  
We're trying to save it.  
Fundraiser, community campaign...

JOEL  
(serious)  
But we need more than money now.  
We need to fix this mess with the  
health department.

AMBER

(curious)

And that's why you're here? You  
think we can help with that?

JOEL

(hesitant)

Not exactly.

He exchanges a look with Nico.

NICO

(explaining)

We're here about Richie.

The atmosphere shifts. The women's expressions harden.

SHAY

(suddenly interested)

What about Richie?

JOEL

(carefully)

He's been making my life hell for  
four years. Tonight, he crossed a  
line. Again.

Joel pulls out his phone, showing them Richie's latest video  
requesting donations to humiliate him.

AMBER

(watching)

What an asshole.

BRITTANY

(to Joel)

And you want to... what exactly?

JOEL

(with new resolve)

I want to beat him at his own  
game. One time. Just once, I want  
Richie to know what it feels like  
to be on the other end of a prank.

SHAY

(intrigued)

You want revenge.

JOEL

I want justice.

AMBER

(laughing)

Same thing, honey.

BRITTANY

(to Joel)

So what's the plan? Flour trap?  
Super glue? Amateur hour stuff.

JOEL

That's why I'm here. I need  
something... bigger.

The women exchange knowing smiles.

SHAY

Define "bigger."

JOEL

Something that will make a lasting  
impression. Something he won't see  
coming.

AMBER

(thoughtful)

You know what gets Richie every  
time?

JOEL

What?

AMBER

His ego. The man thinks he's God's  
gift to women.

BRITTANY

And comedy.

NICO

And pizza delivery.

JOEL

(catching on)

So we hit him where it hurts. His  
pride.

SHAY

(leaning forward)

What's his worst fear?

JOEL considers this carefully.

JOEL

Vulnerability. Loss of control.  
Being made to look foolish on his  
own terms, not his.

BRITTANY  
(impressed)  
You've thought about this.

JOEL  
Four years gives you a lot of  
thinking time.

AMBER  
(decisively)  
What you need is a bait and  
switch. Something that starts as  
his idea but ends as yours.

JOEL  
(puzzled)  
Like what?

SHAY walks to the bar and returns with a bottle of vodka and glasses. She pours drinks for everyone.

SHAY  
Let me tell you about a little  
something we in the business call  
"The Reversal."

AMBER  
Oh, this is good.

BRITTANY  
It's what we do when customers get  
too handsy.

JOEL  
(uncertain)  
I'm listening.

SHAY  
Here's how it works...

She leans in to whisper. The others lean in too, forming a conspiratorial huddle. As they talk, the camera PULLS BACK, their voices becoming indistinct. We see their animated gestures, occasional laughter, and Joel's expression morphing from uncertainty to intrigue to a slow, dawning smile.

**INT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - LATER**

The planning session is in full swing. A whiteboard has appeared, with a crude timeline sketched out. Empty glasses litter the table.

JOEL

(excited)

That's brilliant, but how do we  
get him to the right location?

AMBER

Leave that to me. He'll show up  
anywhere if he thinks he's got a  
shot with a dancer.

BRITTANY

(to Nico)

Can you get the equipment we need?

NICO

(nodding)

Omar knows a guy.

JOEL

Omar's in?

NICO

He didn't say no.

SHAY

(to Joel)

The most important part is your  
performance. You can't hesitate.  
Not for a second.

JOEL

(nervous)

I don't know if I can pull that  
off.

AMBER

(encouraging)

Yes, you can. We've all seen you  
when you're pushed to the edge.  
There's steel under that  
philosophy major exterior.

JOEL

(modest)

It's just survival instinct.

SHAY

(serious)

No, it's more than that. You've  
put up with Richie's crap for four  
years without snapping. That takes  
strength.

JOEL  
(surprised)  
I never thought of it that way.

BRITTANY  
(analyzing)  
What you're really doing is holding up a mirror. That's what makes it perfect. He'll see himself through your eyes.

JOEL  
(worried)  
What if he hates me after?

AMBER  
(honest)  
He might. But he also might respect you. Either way, your relationship changes.

JOEL nods, his resolve hardening.

JOEL  
When do we do it?

SHAY  
(consulting timeline)  
Wednesday night.

JOEL  
(alarmed)  
Wednesday? That's after Debbie signs the papers!

SHAY  
Exactly. When Richie thinks it's all over. When his guard is down.

AMBER  
(slyly)  
Besides, we need time to prepare. You can't rush art.

JOEL hesitates, then nods in agreement.

JOEL  
Wednesday it is.

They clink glasses, sealing the pact.

JOEL (CONT'D)  
One more thing. I don't want to actually hurt him. Just... wake him up.

BRITTANY  
(surprised)  
After everything he's done to you?

JOEL  
He's still my friend. Sort of.

SHAY  
(impressed)  
That's more forgiveness than I'd have.

AMBER  
(patting Joel's hand)  
Don't worry. We'll break his ego, not his bones.

JOEL  
(taking a deep breath)  
Okay then. Let's do this.

The camera PULLS BACK as the unlikely alliance continues planning, the Janitor vacuuming around them, oblivious to the revenge plot being hatched.

**EXT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - LATER**

Joel and Nico exit the club, walking toward their cars.

NICO  
(impressed)  
You're full of surprises, Joel. I didn't think you had it in you.

JOEL  
Neither did I.

NICO  
Are you sure about this? Once we start-

JOEL  
(interrupting)  
I'm sure. Richie needs to learn that actions have consequences.

NICO  
(smiling)  
Listen to you. The student becomes the master.

JOEL  
(self-deprecating)  
Let's not get ahead of ourselves.  
I still have to pull this off.

NICO  
You will. We've got your back.

They reach their cars. As Joel unlocks his door, his phone PINGS. A text from Richie: "Dude! Fundraiser video already at 50K views! We're gonna save the restaurant! Talk tomorrow? Please?"

Joel stares at the message, conflicted.

NICO  
(noticing)  
Richie?

JOEL  
(nodding)  
Still thinks we're working  
together on the fundraiser.

NICO  
Are we?

JOEL  
(decisive)  
Yes. We save the restaurant first.  
Then we teach Richie a lesson.

NICO  
(approving)  
Priorities. I like it.

As they drive away, the camera PANS UP to the strip club sign, flickering in the night. The "V" in "VELVET" blinks out momentarily, leaving "ELVET ROPE" - almost like "REVENGE" if you squint just right.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PIZZA & PASTA - MORNING**

**SUPER: WEDNESDAY, 8:17 AM**

The restaurant's "TEMPORARILY CLOSED" sign is still displayed, but the parking lot is bustling with activity. Several folding tables have been set up, decorated with red and white checkered tablecloths. A handwritten banner reads "SAVE TUSCANY'S COMMUNITY FUNDRAISER."

JOEL arranges donation jars while NICO sets up a laptop displaying their online fundraiser page, which shows over \$17,000 in donations. OMAR meticulously arranges sample containers of his original sauce.

JOEL  
(checking watch)  
Two hours until Debbie meets with Pizza Planet. We're still ten thousand short.

NICO  
(optimistic)  
The morning rush hasn't even started yet. Plus, we've got Omar's secret weapon.

They both look at Omar, who's labeling each sauce container with careful handwriting.

OMAR  
(with rare pride)  
Anthony's recipe. Never fails.

A car pulls into the lot - Richie's Mustang. He emerges wearing a homemade sandwich board sign: "30 YEARS OF PIZZA MAGIC - HELP US STAY!"

JOEL  
(surprised)  
I didn't think you'd actually show up.

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
I told you I would. This place matters to me too, you know.

JOEL  
(skeptical)  
Since when?

RICHIE  
(serious for once)  
Since always. Four years of my life here. That's the longest I've stuck with anything.

Joel considers this, seeing a flash of sincerity in Richie for the first time.

RICHIE  
(returning to character)  
Plus, I'm livestreaming the whole  
thing! Already got a thousand  
viewers waiting!

He holds up his phone, which is indeed streaming live.

JOEL  
(resigned)  
Of course you are.

NICO  
(pragmatic)  
Hey, whatever works. We need all  
the exposure we can get.

Suddenly, more cars begin to arrive. To everyone's surprise, a small crowd is forming - regular customers, neighbors, even competitors from other restaurants.

RICHIE  
(to Joel)  
See? People care about this dump.

JOEL  
(genuinely moved)  
I didn't think anyone would show.

An ELDERLY COUPLE approaches, the man using a walker. They've been coming to Tuscany's for Sunday lunch every week for 25 years.

ELDERLY MAN  
(handing Joel an envelope)  
We saw that internet video your  
friend made. Can't let our place  
close down.

Joel opens the envelope - it contains \$500 in cash.

JOEL  
(stunned)  
Sir, this is too much...

ELDERLY MAN  
(waving him off)  
Anthony made our wedding  
anniversary dinner every year.  
This place is family.

More customers arrive, each with stories and donations. The crowd continues to grow.

**INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS**

DEBBIE sits across from two PIZZA PLANET EXECUTIVES and their LAWYER. Documents are spread on the table between them.

LAWYER

(impatient)

Mrs. Tuscany, we've prepared all the paperwork. Once you sign, you'll receive the full payment within 48 hours.

DEBBIE

(distracted, checking her phone)

I just need a moment.

On her phone screen: multiple text messages from Joel with photos of the growing crowd outside Tuscany's, and a live donation counter showing nearly \$20,000 raised.

PIZZA PLANET EXEC

(condescending)

I understand this is emotional, but your restaurant has been declining for years. This is the most sensible option.

DEBBIE

(looking up with new resolve)

Is it?

She stands up, gathering her purse.

DEBBIE

I need to see something with my own eyes before I make this decision.

LAWYER

(annoyed)

Mrs. Tuscany, we have other appointments...

DEBBIE

(heading for the door)

Then I suggest you reschedule them.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PARKING LOT - LATER**

The fundraiser has grown into an impromptu community festival.

AMBER, BRITTANY, and SHAY have arrived to help, serving Omar's sauce samples. STEVE from the gas station is there too, surprisingly animated as he collects donations.

RICHIE livestreams interviews with local customers sharing their Tuscany's memories. Even a few LOCAL REPORTERS have shown up, drawn by the unexpected gathering.

Joel stands to the side, overwhelmed by the response. Nico approaches, checking the online donation page.

NICO  
(excited)  
We just passed twenty-two thousand!

JOEL  
(disbelieving)  
How is this happening?

NICO  
(shrugging)  
Turns out people actually like this place. Who knew?

Richie runs over, phone in hand.

RICHIE  
(breathless)  
Crayon! We're trending!  
#SaveTuscanys is all over social media!

Before Joel can respond, another car pulls in - Debbie's Lexus. She steps out, staring in disbelief at the scene before her.

Joel, Richie, and Nico approach her cautiously.

JOEL  
(tentative)  
We thought we'd try one last push before you signed the papers.

DEBBIE  
(emotional)  
All these people...

RICHIE  
(enthusiastic)  
They love your crappy pizza, Debbie!

DEBBIE  
(unexpected laugh)  
It is pretty crappy, isn't it?

NICO  
(checking phone)  
Twenty-three thousand and  
counting.

DEBBIE  
(shocked)  
Twenty-three...? How much do we  
need?

JOEL  
Twenty-seven to clear the bank  
debt.

DEBBIE looks around at the community that's gathered, then back at the trio.

DEBBIE  
I didn't sign the papers.

JOEL, RICHIE, NICO  
(together)  
What?

DEBBIE  
Couldn't do it. Not without seeing  
this first.

She walks into the crowd, immediately surrounded by well-wishers and longtime customers. Omar approaches with a container of his special sauce. Debbie tastes it and her eyes widen in recognition.

DEBBIE  
(to Omar)  
Anthony's original recipe.

OMAR nods, a small smile on his usually stoic face.

As Debbie mingles with the crowd, Joel and Richie stand together, watching.

RICHIE  
(genuinely)  
We did it, Crayon.

JOEL  
(correcting him)  
Joel.

RICHIE  
(sincerely)  
We did it, Joel.

They share a moment of true connection. Then Joel notices something on Richie's phone - the comments on his livestream.

JOEL  
(tense)  
What's that about?

Richie quickly tries to hide his screen, but Joel grabs the phone. The livestream comments are filled with viewers demanding Richie follow through on his promised "ultimate prank" on Joel.

JOEL  
(anger returning)  
You're still using me for content?  
After all this?

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
It was just to get more viewers!  
More viewers means more donations!

JOEL  
(disgusted)  
You'll never change.

He walks away, leaving Richie calling after him. The brief moment of connection is shattered.

As Joel walks through the crowd, a NEWS REPORTER intercepts him.

REPORTER  
You're the one who organized this,  
right? What made you fight so hard  
for a struggling pizza place?

Joel considers the question, looking around at the community that's gathered, at Omar serving sauce with subtle pride, at Debbie reconnecting with customers, at Nico hustling donations.

JOEL  
It's not just a pizza place.  
It's... home. For all of us.

The reporter seems genuinely touched by this answer. As they continue talking, we see Richie in the background, watching Joel with a complex mix of emotions - admiration, jealousy, and something like regret.

RICHIE (V.O.)  
(whispered to himself)  
I really messed up this time,  
didn't I?

FADE OUT.

## INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

SUPER: WEDNESDAY, 3:14 PM

The fundraiser outside is still going strong. Inside the shuttered restaurant, JOEL, NICO, and OMAR sit around a prep table, surrounded by donation counts, permit applications, and half-finished plans.

JOEL

(tallying numbers)

Twenty-six thousand, four hundred  
and twelve dollars.

NICO

(amazed)

That's almost enough to clear the  
bank debt.

JOEL

(frustrated)

But it doesn't solve the health  
department suspension. Six weeks  
of closure will kill us, even with  
the debt paid.

OMAR meticulously arranges small containers of his special sauce, labeling each one with perfect handwriting.

OMAR

(matter-of-fact)

Need health inspector approval.

JOEL

(sarcastic)

Yeah, thanks for the insight,  
Omar.

The back door opens. DEBBIE enters, looking both excited and exhausted.

DEBBIE

(announcing)

The bank agreed to extend our  
loan. They were impressed by the  
community response.

JOEL

(cautiously optimistic)

That's great news.

DEBBIE

(tempering expectations)

It still doesn't solve our health department problem.

NICO

(checking phone)

We've got bigger problems. Pizza Planet's lawyers just sent a "final offer" email. Deadline in two hours.

DEBBIE

(defensive)

I told them I needed more time.

NICO

(reading email)

"Given the circumstances, we are reducing our offer to sixty thousand, firm. This offer expires at 5 PM today."

A tense silence falls over the kitchen.

JOEL

(desperate)

There has to be a way to expedite the health inspection.

OMAR

(suddenly determined)

There is.

Everyone turns to look at Omar in surprise. He rarely offers solutions.

OMAR

(continuing)

Director Johnson. Health Department head. Anthony's old friend.

DEBBIE

(confused)

How do you know this?

OMAR

(simply)

Worked with Anthony. Before.

JOEL  
(connecting dots)  
You think this Director Johnson  
might help us?

OMAR holds up one of his sauce containers.

OMAR  
He might. For the right sauce.

NICO  
(skeptical)  
We're going to bribe a health  
official with pasta sauce?

OMAR  
(serious)  
Not bribe. Remind. Of old  
friendship. Good food.

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
It's worth a shot. Where do we  
find this Director Johnson?

OMAR  
(checking watch)  
Health Department. Fifth floor.  
Until 5 PM.

DEBBIE  
(decisive)  
Let's go.

JOEL  
All of us?

DEBBIE  
(nodding)  
All of us. This is our last  
chance.

As they gather their things, the front door jingles. RICHIE enters, looking uncharacteristically serious.

RICHIE  
(determined)  
I heard everything. I'm coming  
too.

JOEL  
(cold)  
Haven't you done enough?

RICHIE

(sincere)

I got us into this mess. Let me help get us out.

DEBBIE

(pragmatic)

We need all the help we can get.

JOEL and Richie exchange a long look. Finally, Joel nods curtly.

JOEL

Fine. But stay in the background.  
Let us do the talking.

**EXT. HEALTH DEPARTMENT BUILDING - LATER**

The group parks haphazardly in the government building's lot. Debbie, Joel, Nico, and Omar rush toward the entrance with a small cooler of sauce samples. Richie follows, for once not filming or joking.

**INT. HEALTH DEPARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS**

A SECURITY GUARD stops them at the metal detector.

SECURITY GUARD

(suspicious)

What's in the cooler?

OMAR

(opening it)

Food samples. For Director Johnson.

SECURITY GUARD

(examining contents)

I'll need to confiscate this. No outside food allowed.

DEBBIE

(panicking)

But it's essential for our meeting!

The security guard remains unmoved. Richie steps forward.

RICHIE

(smoothly)

Sir, I completely understand your concern. Security protocol is critical.

He casually pulls out his phone, opening his social media profile.

RICHIE  
(continuing)  
I don't know if you're familiar with my channel, but I've got about a hundred thousand followers who'd love to see a video about how the health department confiscates small business owners' last hope to save their restaurant.

The security guard glances at Richie's follower count.

SECURITY GUARD  
(hesitant)  
I'm just doing my job...

RICHIE  
(friendly but firm)  
Of course you are. And you're doing it excellently. Maybe I could feature you in the video?  
Full name and badge number?

The security guard sighs.

SECURITY GUARD  
(relenting)  
Fifth floor. Make it quick.

As they hurry toward the elevator, Joel gives Richie a surprised look.

JOEL  
(reluctantly impressed)  
That was... effective.

RICHIE  
(modest shrug)  
Social media isn't just for pranks.

**INT. HEALTH DEPARTMENT - FIFTH FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER**

The group exits the elevator, looking around the sterile government office. A RECEPTIONIST guards the entrance to the director's suite.

RECEPTIONIST  
(bored)  
Can I help you?

DEBBIE  
(professional)  
We need to see Director Johnson.  
It's urgent.

RECEPTIONIST  
(checking calendar)  
He's booked solid until next  
month.

OMAR steps forward, placing one of his sauce containers on the desk.

OMAR  
Tell him Anthony Tuscany's sous  
chef is here. With the original  
sauce.

The receptionist looks skeptical but picks up the phone.

**INT. HEALTH DEPARTMENT - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS  
LATER**

DIRECTOR JOHNSON (60s, distinguished but with a passion for food evident in his ample waistline) sits behind a large desk. The group is arranged before him, Omar's sauce samples neatly presented on a tray.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON  
(examining paperwork)  
You understand this is highly  
irregular. Inspector Barton's  
report contains serious  
violations.

DEBBIE  
(respectful)  
We understand, Director. And we  
take full responsibility for those  
violations.

RICHIE steps forward.

RICHIE  
(unexpectedly humble)  
The flour trap was my doing, sir.  
A stupid prank that went wrong.  
The others shouldn't suffer for my  
mistake.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON raises an eyebrow, then turns his attention to Omar.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON  
You worked with Anthony? At Le  
Petit Jardin?

OMAR  
(nodding)  
Yes. Sous chef. Seven years.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON  
(nostalgic)  
Anthony's sauce was the best in  
the county. Nothing like it since.

OMAR  
(pushing forward a container)  
Try.

Director Johnson opens the container, inhales deeply, then  
tastes a small amount. His eyes widen.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON  
(amazed)  
This is... this is Anthony's  
original recipe.

OMAR  
(with quiet pride)  
Yes. Still make it. Every day.

JOEL  
(stepping in)  
Director Johnson, we're not asking  
for special treatment. Just an  
expedited re-inspection. We've  
already addressed all the  
violations.

NICO  
(adding)  
And the community has rallied  
behind us. We raised almost the  
full amount to clear our bank debt  
in just one day.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON studies them, particularly focusing on Omar.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON  
(thoughtfully)  
Anthony was a good friend. And a  
great chef.

He opens his desk drawer and pulls out a form.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON

(decisive)

I can authorize a provisional  
reopening pending a full re-  
inspection by someone other than  
Barton.

(to Omar)

On one condition.

OMAR

(attentive)

Yes?

DIRECTOR JOHNSON

(with a small smile)

You'll serve this sauce when I  
come for dinner.

OMAR

(solemn promise)

Yes, Chef.

Director Johnson completes the form, stamps it, and hands it to Debbie.

DIRECTOR JOHNSON

You can reopen tomorrow. Full  
inspection next week. Any  
violations—any at all—and you're  
shut down permanently.

DEBBIE

(relieved)

Thank you, Director. You won't  
regret this.

The group exits, barely containing their excitement until they're in the hallway.

**INT. HEALTH DEPARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Once the door closes behind them, the group erupts in hushed cheers. Debbie hugs Omar, who stands stiffly but doesn't pull away. Nico high-fives Joel.

Richie stands slightly apart, watching the celebration. Joel notices and approaches him.

JOEL

(genuine)

That thing with the security  
guard... and owning up to the  
prank... that actually helped.

RICHIE  
(sincere)  
I told you I wanted to fix this.

JOEL  
(conflicted)  
Look, about tomorrow night-

RICHIE  
(interrupting)  
I know, I know. No more pranks.  
Ever. I swear.

JOEL studies Richie, feeling a twinge of guilt about the revenge plan set for tomorrow night.

JOEL  
(changing subject)  
We should get back. Tell everyone  
the good news.

As the group heads toward the elevator, Richie's phone PINGS. He checks it, frowning slightly at a text from AMBER: "Still on for tomorrow night? Special private dance just for you. Don't tell the others."

RICHIE  
(to himself, confused)  
Weird timing...

He pockets his phone, hurrying to catch up with the others.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PARKING LOT - LATER**

The fundraiser has wound down, but a core group of supporters remains. The team emerges from their vehicles, Debbie holding the provisional reopening permit high like a trophy.

The crowd cheers. STEVE from the gas station gives a rare smile. The ELDERLY COUPLE who donated \$500 wipe away tears.

DEBBIE  
(addressing crowd)  
We reopen tomorrow at 11 AM! First  
pizza's on the house!

More cheers. As the celebration continues, Joel pulls Nico aside.

JOEL  
(low voice)  
Is everything set for tomorrow  
night?

NICO

(nodding)

All arranged. After closing. The girls are ready.

JOEL

(hesitant)

What if we've misjudged this? He actually came through today.

NICO

(reminding him)

And he'll prank you again next week. You saw his livestream. Nothing's changed.

RICHIE approaches, oblivious to their conversation.

RICHIE

(jubilant)

We did it, team! The Pizza Boyz saved the day!

JOEL

(forced smile)

Yeah. We did.

Over Richie's shoulder, Joel exchanges a look with Nico. The revenge plan is still on.

FADE OUT.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - MORNING**

SUPER: THURSDAY, 10:17 AM

The kitchen buzzes with renewed energy. OMAR meticulously preps dough while NICO arranges toppings with artistic precision. Even DEBBIE seems transformed, her clipboard replaced by hands-on management, tasting sauces and adjusting seasonings.

The provisional reopening permit is prominently displayed by the register, a reminder of yesterday's narrow escape.

JOEL enters through the back door, carrying a box of supplies. He's moving with new confidence, shoulders back, posture straight - subtle but noticeable changes in his demeanor.

DEBBIE

(looking up)

There he is. Our resident miracle worker.

JOEL  
(modest)  
It was a team effort.

DEBBIE  
(shaking head)  
You held us together when I was  
ready to give up. That counts for  
something.

JOEL  
(surprised by the  
recognition)  
Thank you.

DEBBIE returns to the prep line. NICO sidles up to Joel.

NICO  
(low voice)  
Everything good for tonight?

JOEL  
(nodding subtly)  
All set. Amber confirmed the  
location. Shay's got the props.

NICO  
(slightly concerned)  
You don't seem as excited as I  
expected.

JOEL  
(conflicted)  
Just focused on getting through  
reopening day first.

The front bell JINGLES and RICHIE bursts in, wearing a freshly  
laundered uniform and carrying a large banner that reads "GRAND  
REOPENING - THANK YOU FOR SAVING TUSCANY'S!"

RICHIE  
(exuberant)  
Morning, Team Tuscany's! The  
prodigal son returns!

DEBBIE  
(dry)  
You're not officially rehired yet.  
This is a probationary shift.

RICHIE  
(undeterred)  
I'll take it! Where do you want  
this banner?

DEBBIE  
(surprised)  
You made a banner?

RICHIE  
(proud)  
Stayed up all night. Got my follower count printed in the corner. For marketing purposes.

DEBBIE sighs but gestures toward the front window. Richie bounces away to hang his creation.

JOEL watches him go, face unreadable. He pulls out his phone, types a brief message, then puts it away. Almost immediately, Richie's phone PINGS from the dining room.

**INT. TUSCANY'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Richie stands on a chair, hanging the banner. He pauses to check his phone.

INSERT: Text message from UNKNOWN NUMBER: "Saw your livestream. Know everything about Chair Boy. Meet tonight at Velvet Rope. Private dance room. 11:30pm."

Richie looks confused, then intrigued. He quickly responds: "Who is this?"

The response comes instantly: "A fan with inside info. Very private. Come alone."

Richie grins, typing: "I'll be there."

He finishes hanging the banner, unaware that in the kitchen, Joel is watching him through the order window, a small, satisfied smile playing on his lips.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - LATER**

The lunch rush is in full swing. The kitchen operates with surprising efficiency - even OMAR seems energized, working faster than usual while maintaining his precise standards.

Joel expedites orders while Nico preps. Richie pops in from a delivery run, looking unusually cheerful.

RICHIE  
(to Joel)  
Three more deliveries done! All on time! No complaints!

JOEL  
(suspicious)  
You're being... efficient today.

RICHIE  
(with exaggerated innocence)  
Just trying to prove my worth to  
the team!

JOEL  
(not buying it)  
Right.

RICHIE leans in conspiratorially.

RICHIE  
(whispered)  
Plus, I might need to duck out a  
little early tonight. Got a...  
special meeting.

JOEL  
(feigning disinterest)  
Whatever. Just make sure your  
deliveries are covered.

RICHIE  
(surprised by Joel's lack of  
curiosity)  
That's it? No questions?

JOEL  
(shrugging)  
Your business is your business.

RICHIE seems almost disappointed by Joel's disinterest. He  
grabs the next delivery batch and heads out.

As soon as Richie's gone, Nico sidles up to Joel.

NICO  
(impressed)  
That was cold. I like it.

JOEL  
(quietly)  
Phase one: Keep him off balance.  
He's used to me reacting,  
questioning. When I don't, it  
makes him nervous.

NICO  
(admiring)  
The philosophy major strikes back.

JOEL  
Phase two coming up.

Joel pulls out his phone and types another message.

**INT./EXT. RICHIE'S MUSTANG - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS**

Richie sits in his car, about to pull out for deliveries. His phone PINGS.

INSERT: Text from UNKNOWN NUMBER: "Forgot to mention - wear something nice tonight. No Tuscany's uniform. This is special."

Richie grins, excited by the mysterious instructions. He types back: "Any hints about who you are?"

The response comes quickly: "Someone who knows what you really want."

Richie's expression shifts from excitement to confusion and back again. He starts the car, mind clearly racing with possibilities.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON**

The lunch rush has died down. Omar meticulously cleans his station while Nico preps for dinner. Joel updates the schedule board.

Debbie approaches Joel with a stack of receipts.

DEBBIE  
Best lunch numbers we've had in months. People really did miss this place.

JOEL  
(genuinely pleased)  
That's great news.

DEBBIE  
(lowering voice)  
I noticed something different about you today.

JOEL  
(cautious)  
Oh?

DEBBIE  
(approving)  
You're taking charge.  
(MORE)

DEBBIE (CONT'D)  
Making decisions. Not asking  
permission.

JOEL  
(surprised by her  
observation)  
I guess I am.

DEBBIE  
(thoughtful)  
This crisis changed things.  
Changed all of us.  
(beat)  
I'm making you Assistant Manager.  
Officially. With a raise.

JOEL  
(genuinely shocked)  
Really?

DEBBIE  
(nodding)  
Should have done it years ago.  
(with a sly smile)  
Maybe I was waiting for you to  
stop acting like Richie's  
sidekick.

JOEL absorbs this, a complex mix of emotions crossing his face.

DEBBIE  
(continuing)  
Speaking of Richie, he's been  
unusually... focused today. Any  
idea why?

JOEL  
(carefully neutral)  
No idea. Maybe yesterday's close  
call made an impression.

DEBBIE studies Joel for a moment, not entirely convinced.

DEBBIE  
Well, whatever it is, let's hope  
it lasts.  
(checking watch)  
I need to finish the bank  
paperwork. You okay handling the  
dinner shift?

JOEL  
(with new confidence)  
Absolutely.

Debbie leaves. Joel returns to the schedule board, but his mind is clearly elsewhere.

**INT. TUSCANY'S KITCHEN - EVENING**

The dinner service is winding down. Joel checks inventory while Nico counts the register. Omar is already gone, his station spotlessly clean.

Richie bursts through the back door, freshly showered and wearing a button-up shirt instead of his usual t-shirt. His hair is meticulously styled.

RICHIE  
(announcing)  
Final deliveries done! Kitchen  
clean! I am officially off duty!

NICO  
(looking him over)  
You look... different.

RICHIE  
(smugly)  
Got plans tonight.

JOEL  
(barely glancing up)  
Good for you.

RICHIE  
(disappointed by the lack of  
interest)  
That's it? "Good for you"? Not  
even going to ask where I'm going?

JOEL  
(looking up with calculated  
indifference)  
Would you tell me if I asked?

RICHIE  
(wrong-footed)  
Well... no. It's private.

JOEL  
(returning to inventory)  
Then why would I ask?

RICHIE stands there awkwardly, thrown off by Joel's lack of reaction.

NICO  
(enjoying this)  
Have fun with your "private"  
plans, Richie.

RICHIE  
(rallying)  
Oh, I will. Trust me. This is  
going to be... epic.

As Richie heads toward the door, Joel calls after him.

JOEL  
(casual)  
Hey, Richie?

RICHIE  
(turning eagerly)  
Yeah?

JOEL  
(looking him directly in the  
eyes)  
Be careful out there. You never  
know when someone might... turn  
the tables.

RICHIE  
(uncertain how to take this)  
Uh... sure. Thanks?

He exits, clearly confused by Joel's cryptic warning.

Once the door closes, Nico bursts into quiet laughter.

NICO  
(impressed)  
That was beautiful. "Be careful  
out there." The look on his face!

JOEL  
(checking his watch)  
Phase three begins in twenty  
minutes. We need to get to the  
club.

NICO  
(grabbing keys)  
You know, for someone who's been a  
doormat for four years, you've got  
a surprisingly devious mind.

JOEL

(with unexpected darkness)

I've had four years to think about this. Four years of watching how he works, how he thinks. Four years of being the butt of the joke.

(beat)

Tonight, the joke's on him.

Joel heads for the door, a new purpose in his stride. For the first time, we see that the student has not only learned from the master—he's surpassed him.

**EXT. TUSCANY'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

Joel locks up the restaurant. The neon sign glows in the darkness, all letters working for the first time in years.

Joel and Nico walk to their cars.

JOEL

(checking his phone)

Amber says he's already texted twice asking for more details.

NICO

(impressed)

He's hooked.

JOEL

(with grim satisfaction)

Like a fish on a line.

They get into separate cars and drive off, heading toward the Velvet Rope where the culmination of Joel's plan awaits.

FADE OUT.

**INT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - BACK ROOM - NIGHT**

SUPER: THURSDAY, 10:48 PM

The dressing room has been transformed into command central. AMBER, BRITTANY, and SHAY move with purpose, arranging props and checking equipment. NICO tests a small camera while JOEL paces nervously.

JOEL

(checking watch)

Forty minutes until showtime.

AMBER  
(adjusting a costume)  
Relax. Everything's in place.  
Richie's been texting non-stop.

She holds up her phone showing multiple messages from Richie asking for hints about the "special meeting."

BRITTANY  
(applying makeup)  
Men are so predictable. Dangle a mysterious invitation and they come running.

SHAY  
(checking a list)  
Let's review the plan one more time.

JOEL nods, taking a deep breath to center himself.

JOEL  
Richie arrives at 11:30. Amber meets him at the bar, introduces herself as his "special fan."

AMBER  
I get him comfortable, make him think this is about his online fame.

JOEL  
You bring him back to the VIP room, where...

SHAY  
(continuing)  
Where he finds a chair in the center of the room. The same exact chair used for your "Village People" adventure.

BRITTANY  
I'll have already explained to him that his "special fan" wants to see him experience what Chair Boy went through. For content purposes.

NICO  
And because Richie's ego won't let him back down from a challenge, he'll sit in the chair willingly.

JOEL

That's when I make my entrance.

Everyone turns to look at a garment bag hanging on a hook. Inside is a costume identical to the one Richie wore during the original kidnapping prank.

AMBER

(impressed)

The perfect psychological reversal. Making him experience exactly what he put you through.

JOEL

(determined)

But with one key difference. I'm not doing it for views or likes. I'm doing it so he finally understands what it feels like.

The door opens and OMAR enters, carrying a small bag.

JOEL

(surprised)

Omar? I didn't think you'd come.

OMAR says nothing, simply opens the bag to reveal professional-grade theatrical makeup.

SHAY

(impressed)

That's better than what we have.

OMAR

(simply)

Worked theater before restaurants. Special effects.

NICO

(to Joel)

Is there anything Omar can't do?

OMAR begins methodically arranging the makeup items.

JOEL

(suddenly anxious)

Are we going too far?

The room falls silent.

AMBER

(serious)

That's up to you, Joel. This is your show.

BRITTANY  
(psychological insight)  
It's not about humiliation. It's  
about empathy. Making him  
understand.

JOEL  
(processing)  
Four years of pranks, and I never  
once got him back. Not once.

SHAY  
(practical)  
The question is: what do you want  
out of this? Revenge or  
resolution?

Joel contemplates this as Omar begins applying base makeup to his face.

**INT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - MAIN FLOOR - LATER**

RICHIE enters the club, dressed nicer than we've ever seen him. He's wearing a button-up shirt, slacks, and has even applied cologne. His eyes scan the room nervously yet eagerly.

AMBER approaches, wearing a professional outfit rather than dance attire.

AMBER  
(professional tone)  
Richie, right? From the Pizza  
Freaks channel?

RICHIE  
(surprised)  
Yeah! Are you...?

AMBER  
(extending hand)  
I represent someone who's very  
interested in your content.  
Particularly your work with Chair  
Boy.

RICHIE  
(ego instantly inflated)  
Oh, yeah! My most popular series!  
The views are insane!

AMBER

(calculated flattery)

You have a natural talent for  
creating memorable moments. That's  
rare.

RICHIE

(preening)

I always say, it's about  
commitment to the bit. Going all  
the way, you know?

AMBER

(leading him toward the back)

That's exactly what my client  
appreciates. The commitment.

(gesturing to hallway)

They're waiting in the VIP room.  
Very private person. Big influence  
in the streaming world.

RICHIE

(instantly curious)

Like, an investor? Or a talent  
scout?

AMBER

(mysterious smile)

Let's just say they can take your  
career to the next level.

Richie follows eagerly as Amber leads him down the hallway.

**INT. VELVET ROPE - VIP ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Amber opens the door, revealing a dimly lit room with a single chair in the center - the same chair from Joel's humiliation. Rose petals are scattered on the floor, music plays softly, and there's an almost ceremonial quality to the setup.

RICHIE

(confused)

Is this... the Chair Boy room?

BRITTANY steps from the shadows, also professionally dressed.

BRITTANY

Mr. Lombardi. Thank you for  
coming.

RICHIE

(looking around)

Where's your client?

BRITTANY

(professionally)

They'll join us shortly. First, we  
need to discuss the opportunity.

RICHIE

(excited)

I'm all ears!

BRITTANY

(gesturing to chair)

Please, have a seat.

Richie hesitates, looking at the chair with sudden recognition.

RICHIE

(suspicious)

This is the same chair. From the  
Village People night.

BRITTANY

(smooth as silk)

Very observant. That's part of why  
you're here.

RICHIE

(confused)

I don't get it.

BRITTANY

(explaining)

Our client believes the most  
powerful content comes from  
authentic experiences. They want  
to see if you're willing to put  
yourself in Chair Boy's position.  
To truly understand the experience  
you created.

RICHIE

(catching on)

So this is like an audition? Sit  
in the chair, get a dance, prove I  
can take what I dish out?

BRITTANY

(nodding)

Exactly. Show you have the depth  
to see both sides of your content.

Richie considers this, ego battling with suspicion.

RICHIE  
And your client is watching...  
where?

BRITTANY gestures to a small camera in the corner.

BRITTANY  
Livestream. Very exclusive.

RICHIE's ego wins. He grins and sits in the chair.

RICHIE  
Let's do this. I'm no hypocrite.  
Whatever Chair Boy could take, I  
can take better!

BRITTANY smiles and nods to the camera. Music suddenly changes to "Y.M.C.A." - the exact song from Joel's humiliation.

RICHIE  
(laughing nervously)  
Nice touch with the music.

The door opens. SHAY enters with a pair of fuzzy handcuffs.

SHAY  
(professionally)  
For the full experience, we'll  
need these.

RICHIE  
(suddenly hesitant)  
Whoa, handcuffs weren't part of  
the deal.

BRITTANY  
(challenging)  
Chair Boy was restrained. Are you  
saying you can't handle what he  
handled?

RICHIE's ego can't back down from the challenge.

RICHIE  
(defiant)  
Fine. Whatever. I've been in worse  
situations.

He allows Shay to handcuff him to the chair. The music gets louder as the three women step back.

RICHIE  
(suddenly unsure)  
So what happens now? When does  
your client come in?

The lights dim completely, then a spotlight hits the chair. Richie blinks in the sudden brightness.

VOICE (O.S.)  
(disguised)  
They're already here.

A MASKED FIGURE steps into the light. It's JOEL in the exact same mask Richie wore during the kidnapping prank. Two more masked figures (NICO and OMAR) flank him.

RICHIE  
(nervous laugh)  
Okay, this is getting weird. What kind of audition is this?

MASKED JOEL  
(disguised voice)  
Not an audition, Richie. A lesson.

RICHIE  
(recognition dawning)  
Wait... Joel?

Joel removes the mask, revealing his face altered by Omar's expert makeup to appear more menacing, shadows accentuating his features.

JOEL  
(calm, controlled)  
Surprise.

RICHIE  
(trying to laugh it off)  
Good one, man! You got me! Real funny!

JOEL  
(deadly serious)  
Is it funny, Richie? Is it funny to be trapped? Helpless? On display?

RICHIE  
(struggling against handcuffs)  
Okay, joke's over. Let me go.

JOEL  
(circling the chair)  
That's exactly what I said. In this very room. But you didn't stop, did you?

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
That was different! That was content!

JOEL  
(quietly intense)  
That was humiliation. My humiliation. For your entertainment.

Joel nods to Nico, who hits a button on a laptop. The wall behind them lights up with a projection - Richie's channel homepage showing all the "Chair Boy" videos, view counts in the hundreds of thousands.

JOEL  
Four years, Richie. Four years of being your punching bag. Your content farm. Your stepping stone.

RICHIE  
(desperate)  
Come on, man! It was just jokes!  
People loved it!

JOEL  
(with sudden fury)  
PEOPLE LOVED WATCHING ME SUFFER!

The room goes silent, Joel's outburst hanging in the air. Even the dancers seem startled by his intensity.

JOEL  
(regaining composure)  
And you never once asked if I was okay with it. Not once.

RICHIE  
(subdued)  
I... I didn't think it bothered you that much.

JOEL  
(incredulous)  
How could it not bother me? You literally kidnapped me! You glued me to my own steering wheel! You cost me job interviews, relationships, dignity!

RICHIE has no response, finally beginning to understand.

JOEL

(quieter now)

Tonight, I could humiliate you. I could have dancers perform the exact same routine. Film it. Post it. Let you feel what I felt.

He steps closer to Richie.

JOEL

But I'm not going to do that.

RICHIE

(confused)

You're... not?

JOEL

(shaking head)

Because unlike you, I don't need to build myself up by tearing someone else down.

He nods to Shay, who steps forward and unlocks the handcuffs.

JOEL

I just needed you to understand. For one minute. How it feels to be powerless. Embarrassed. Used.

Richie rubs his wrists, unusually quiet.

RICHIE

(subdued)

So... what happens now?

JOEL

That's up to you.

Joel turns to leave.

RICHIE

(stopping him)

Wait.

(genuine)

I'm sorry.

Joel turns back, searching Richie's face for sincerity.

RICHIE

(struggling with words)

I never... I didn't think about how it felt for you. I just thought we were having fun.

JOEL  
Was I laughing, Richie? Ever?

RICHIE  
(realizing)  
No. I guess you weren't.

An uncomfortable silence falls between them.

RICHIE  
(with unusual seriousness)  
So that's it? We're done? Friends  
over?

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
I don't know. Maybe friends never  
really started.

Richie absorbs this, genuinely hurt.

RICHIE  
(quietly)  
I thought we were a team.

JOEL  
(honest)  
Teams have equal players, Richie.  
We were never equal.

Joel gestures to the others, who begin packing up their equipment.

JOEL  
We've got a restaurant to run  
tomorrow. Early shift.

RICHIE  
(uncertain)  
Am I still... can I still work  
there?

JOEL  
(with new authority)  
That's not my call. That's  
Debbie's. But if you do, things  
will be different.

RICHIE  
(nodding)  
I get it. No more pranks.

JOEL

(correcting)

No more pranks on people who don't want to be pranked. No more treating people like content. No more assuming everyone's having fun just because you are.

Richie stands from the chair, a physical representation of his shift in perspective.

RICHIE

(with surprising vulnerability)

I don't know how to be any other way.

JOEL

(softening slightly)

Then learn.

Joel turns to leave again, but Richie calls after him.

RICHIE

Are we still... I mean, can we still...?

JOEL

(understanding the unfinished question)

I don't know, Richie. That depends on what happens next.

Joel exits with Nico and Omar, leaving Richie alone in the room with the three dancers.

AMBER

(unexpectedly kind)

Need a ride home?

RICHIE

(lost in thought)

No. I think I'll walk. Need to clear my head.

As Richie moves to leave, he pauses by the chair, looking at it as if seeing it - and what it represents - for the first time.

**EXT. VELVET ROPE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

Joel, Nico, and Omar walk to their cars. Omar nods silently to them both, then pedals away on his bicycle.

NICO  
(impressed)  
That was intense. More restrained  
than I expected, but effective.

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
I realized something as soon as I  
saw his face. I didn't want  
revenge. I wanted recognition.

NICO  
Did you get it?

JOEL  
(considering)  
I think so. For the first time, he  
actually saw me.

NICO  
Think he'll change?

JOEL shrugs, uncertain.

JOEL  
People don't change overnight.

NICO  
But they do change.

JOEL  
(with a small smile)  
We'll see.

They get into their respective vehicles. As Joel starts his car, he notices Richie walking slowly across the parking lot, head down, deep in thought - so different from his usual bouncing energy.

For a moment, Joel considers offering him a ride, but decides against it. Some journeys need to be walked alone.

FADE OUT.

**INT. GAS STATION - NIGHT**

**SUPER: THURSDAY, 1:17 AM**

The Last Stop gas station is nearly deserted at this hour. A single fluorescent light flickers over the coffee station where STEVE mechanically wipes down the counter, reading Sartre's "No Exit" in his free moments.

The bell JINGLES as JOEL enters, looking emotionally drained but somehow lighter. He nods to Steve and heads straight for the coffee.

STEVE  
(not looking up from book)  
How'd it go?

JOEL  
(surprised)  
How did you know...?

STEVE  
(monotone)  
Small town. People talk.  
Especially women who dance at the  
Velvet Rope.

JOEL pours himself coffee and takes a seat at the window booth.

JOEL  
It went... not as planned.

STEVE  
(philosophical)  
Revenge rarely does.

JOEL  
(thoughtful)  
I had it all set up. The perfect  
reversal. And then when the moment  
came...

STEVE  
You couldn't go through with it.

JOEL  
(nodding)  
I just wanted him to understand.  
Not suffer.

STEVE  
(glancing up from book)  
Sartre said, "Hell is other  
people." But he missed something.

JOEL  
What's that?

STEVE  
Sometimes other people are also  
the way out of hell.

The bell JINGLES again. RICHIE enters, looking unusually subdued. He spots Joel but hesitates at the door.

STEVE  
(to Richie)  
Coffee's fresh. For once.

Richie nods thanks but doesn't move toward the counter. He and Joel maintain eye contact across the store, neither sure what to say.

STEVE  
(sighing)  
I'm going on break. Don't steal  
anything.

Steve disappears into the back room, leaving Joel and Richie alone.

After a long moment, Richie approaches Joel's table.

RICHIE  
(uncertain)  
Mind if I...?

JOEL  
(gesturing to opposite seat)  
It's a free country.

Richie sits down, hands fidgeting with a napkin.

RICHIE  
So...

JOEL  
So.

An uncomfortable silence stretches between them.

RICHIE  
(finally)  
That was... intense. Back there.

JOEL  
(neutral)  
It was meant to be.

RICHIE  
(genuine)  
I really never realized. How it  
felt for you.

JOEL  
I know.

RICHIE  
(searching for words)  
Why didn't you ever say anything?

JOEL

(bitter laugh)

I did. Every time. You just  
weren't listening.

RICHIE

(thinking)

I guess I thought... since I could  
take it, everyone could.

JOEL

(insightful)

Not everyone's like you, Richie.  
Some people don't bounce back from  
humiliation. Some people carry it.

RICHIE

(quietly)

Like you.

JOEL

Like me.

Another silence, but slightly less tense.

RICHIE

(hesitant)

When you said we were never  
friends... did you mean that?

JOEL

(considering)

I don't know. Maybe we were. Just  
a very dysfunctional version.

RICHIE

(with rare vulnerability)

You're the only person who's stuck  
around this long. Everyone else...  
they either leave town or leave  
me.

JOEL

(understanding)

So you keep people close by making  
them the butt of your jokes. If  
they're the target, they can't  
leave.

RICHIE looks stunned at this insight, as if Joel has  
articulated something he never could.

RICHIE  
(defensive)  
That's not... I don't...  
(trailing off, realizing)  
Shit.

JOEL  
(softening)  
Look, I'm not a therapist. I'm  
just a guy with a philosophy  
degree and too much student debt.

RICHIE  
(with unexpected sincerity)  
But you see things. You always  
have. It's why I...

JOEL  
Why you what?

RICHIE  
(struggling)  
Why I keep you around, I guess.  
You see the stuff I can't.

JOEL  
(with new confidence)  
I don't need to be "kept around"  
anymore, Richie. That's what  
tonight was about. I'm not your  
sidekick. Not your content. Not  
your punching bag.

RICHIE  
(realizing)  
So what are we then?

JOEL  
(after a thoughtful pause)  
Colleagues, for now. Maybe friends  
again someday. But only if things  
change.

RICHIE  
(trying to joke)  
So no more Village People  
surprises?

JOEL  
(not smiling)  
No more treating people like they  
exist for your entertainment.

RICHIE's smile fades. He nods, understanding the seriousness.

RICHIE  
(genuine)  
I am sorry, Joel. Really.

JOEL  
(studying him)  
I believe you. But apologies are  
just words. Real change is in  
actions.

RICHIE  
(determined)  
I can change.

JOEL  
(skeptical)  
Four years says otherwise.

RICHIE  
(with unexpected maturity)  
People grow up eventually. Even  
me.

Joel seems surprised by this moment of self-awareness.

JOEL  
We'll see.

Steve returns from the back, glancing between them.

STEVE  
(deadpan)  
Existential crisis averted?

RICHIE  
(with a shadow of his usual  
humor)  
Postponed, at least.

JOEL checks his watch and stands up.

JOEL  
Early shift tomorrow. Restaurant  
reopening, remember?

RICHIE  
(hesitant)  
Am I still on the schedule?

JOEL  
Like I said, that's Debbie's call.  
But I won't oppose it.

This small concession clearly means a lot to Richie.

RICHIE

Thanks. For that. And for...  
(gesturing vaguely)  
...not completely humiliating me  
tonight. You could have.

JOEL

(gathering his things)  
That's the difference between us,  
Richie. I don't need to see  
someone else fall to feel like I'm  
standing.

Joel heads for the door, then pauses.

JOEL

See you tomorrow?

RICHIE

(with cautious hope)  
Yeah. Tomorrow.

**EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS**

Joel walks to his car, exhaling deeply as if releasing years of tension. He looks up at the night sky, momentarily at peace.

His phone BUZZES. A text from NICO: "How'd it go? Did we break him?"

Joel considers, then types: "No. But maybe we fixed something."

He gets into his car and drives away, leaving Richie still sitting in the window booth, lost in thought.

As Joel's car disappears down the street, we see Richie pull out his phone, hesitate, then delete his "Chair Boy" playlist from his channel. A small gesture, but a starting point.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

**INT. TUSCANY'S PIZZA & PASTA - EVENING**

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

The restaurant is packed. Every table filled, every server in motion. A large banner hangs above the counter: "TUSCANY'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION - THANK YOU!"

The interior has been subtly refreshed - same classic look but cleaner, brighter. The once-flickering sign is now fully functioning, visible through the windows.

JOEL moves through the dining room with newfound confidence, clipboard in hand, "ASSISTANT MANAGER" name tag gleaming. He approaches a table where DIRECTOR JOHNSON from the Health Department dines with friends.

JOEL  
How's everything, Director  
Johnson?

DIRECTOR JOHNSON  
(patting stomach contentedly)  
Exceptional. Omar's sauce is even  
better than I remembered.

JOEL  
(smiling)  
I'll let him know. Enjoy your  
meal.

Joel moves to the kitchen, where organized chaos reigns. OMAR orchestrates preparations with subtle hand gestures, more commanding than we've ever seen him. NICO expedites orders with practiced efficiency.

DEBBIE stands at the pass, looking genuinely happy for the first time. She's wearing a special anniversary outfit - a subtle callback to how she dressed when the restaurant first opened.

DEBBIE  
(seeing Joel)  
Reservations still full?

JOEL  
(nodding)  
Booked solid all weekend. And  
Director Johnson just ordered a  
second helping.

DEBBIE  
(pleased)  
Good. We need the health  
department happy with his special  
monthly table.

RICHIE bursts through the door from a delivery run, his energy still high but somehow more focused than before. He's wearing his uniform properly, and his name tag reads "SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER."

RICHIE

(excited)

Another five-star review just posted! "Best comeback in local restaurant history!"

JOEL and Richie make brief eye contact - their relationship still complex, but evolving. A tentative respect has replaced the old dynamic.

DEBBIE

(checking watch)

Is everything set for the special event?

JOEL

Amber confirmed they're ready. Transportation arranged.

RICHIE

(curious)

What special event?

JOEL and Debbie exchange knowing looks.

DEBBIE

(mysterious)

You'll see.

**INT. VELVET ROPE STRIP CLUB - LATER THAT NIGHT**

The strip club has been transformed for a special event. Tables pushed back, the stage extended. A banner reads "TUSCANY'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY AFTERPARTY."

The club is filled with Tuscany's staff, regular customers, and community members who helped save the restaurant. AMBER, BRITTANY, and SHAY circulate in tasteful outfits, serving trays of Omar's special appetizers.

STEVE from the gas station leans against the bar, still reading philosophy but with something approaching a smile.

JOEL, NICO, DEBBIE, and OMAR stand together, drinks in hand, watching as RICHIE arrives, looking confused.

RICHIE

(suspicious)

What's going on? Why are we having the afterparty here?

JOEL  
(with new confidence)  
Because sometimes, Richie, you  
have to face your fears.

RICHIE  
(nervous)  
What fears? I'm not afraid of  
anything.

The lights dim, and a spotlight hits the stage. The MC steps to the microphone.

MC  
Ladies and gentlemen, for one  
night only, please welcome back to  
our stage... THE VILLAGE ALL-  
STARS!

The opening notes of "Y.M.C.A." begin to play as five MALE DANCERS in Village People costumes take the stage. Richie freezes, suddenly understanding.

RICHIE  
(panicking)  
No. No way. You are NOT getting me  
up there!

JOEL  
(smiling)  
Not just you, Richie.

To Richie's shock, Joel steps forward, removing his jacket to reveal a matching Tuscany's t-shirt underneath. Nico follows, then Omar (to everyone's surprise), and finally Debbie herself.

DEBBIE  
(to everyone's shock)  
Anthony would've loved this.

RICHIE  
(disbelieving)  
You're all going up there?  
Voluntarily?

JOEL  
(extending hand)  
It's not humiliation if everyone's  
in on the joke.

Richie stares at Joel's outstretched hand, understanding the deeper meaning.

RICHIE  
 (genuine smile)  
 You've changed, Crayon.

JOEL  
 (correcting gently)  
 Joel. And yes, I have.

RICHIE  
 (taking Joel's hand)  
 Lead the way... Joel.

**INT. VELVET ROPE - STAGE - CONTINUOUS**

The entire Tuscany's staff takes the stage alongside the Village People impersonators. The dancers show them simple choreography - the iconic arm movements from the song.

Joel and Richie stand side by side, both awkward but committed. Omar remains completely stoic even while dancing. Nico moves with unexpected rhythm. Debbie surprises everyone with her enthusiastic participation.

The crowd cheers them on, AMBER, BRITTANY, and SHAY leading the applause.

As they perform together, something shifts between Joel and Richie. The power dynamic that defined their relationship for years finally balances. They're no longer predator and prey, joker and victim - just two friends making fools of themselves together, by choice.

JOEL (V.O.)  
 Four years of philosophy taught me  
 a lot of theories about human  
 nature. But it took losing  
 everything and almost gaining it  
 back to teach me the most  
 important lesson.

The music builds to its famous chorus as the staff performs the arm movements with increasing confidence, the crowd joining in.

JOEL (V.O.)  
 We're all just trying to find our  
 place. Our community. Our chair,  
 so to speak.

CLOSE ON: Joel and Richie, side by side, laughing as they dance, no longer at each other's expense, but together.

JOEL (V.O.)

And sometimes, that place is right  
where you've been all along. Even  
if it's just a struggling pizza  
joint in a forgotten town with  
questionable health code  
practices.

WIDE SHOT: The entire Tuscany's family on stage, united in joyful ridiculousness, the restaurant's sign visible through the club's windows across the street - all letters illuminated, shining bright.

FADE TO BLACK.

END.