

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 swaggers 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 NICO 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 Tuscan'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!
#SaveTuscany 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 Tuscan'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.