

The Regular
by
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FADE IN ON:

INT. NICKY'S DINER - EVENING - DAY ONE

As hole-in-the-wall as hang-outs come. Greasy spoon, fork, knife and more.

A NEON SIGN blinks in the window. Based on the layers of dust, it hasn't been cleaned since being installed.

CARL (50s) sits at his usual table. A nametag yells his identity to the world. Breadcrumbs give his uniform its only pizzaz.

He pokes his OMELET with a finger. Like Carl, it's grown set in its ways, and doesn't yield at all.

Carl grabs a knife, pokes again. A shadow falls across the lumpy eggs. Carl looks up at:

Waitress RHONDA (30s). Seen-it-all look. As red-as-the-sign neon hair.

RHONDA

If you're trying to kill it, Carl, you're way too late. Those eggs are long-past dead.

Carl raises a skeptical brow.

CARL

Eggs are *potential* chickens. They were never really alive.

RHONDA

Potential is important, ain't it?

CARL

Speak for yourself. These are past their prime.

RHONDA

'Sause you're not eating 'em fast enough.

She points at Carl's coffee cup.

RHONDA

Even that's gotten cold. You gonna sit and mope all day, take up valuable *Nicky's* space?

Carl flashes a quasi-charming smile at Rhonda. This sort of banter makes his day.

CARL
It's not like it's standing room only
here.

Rhonda looks around. Carl is right. Only one *other*
patron's here tonight.

A slim, sober man half-hidden in a booth. One who clearly
doesn't belong: black hair, glasses and a perfect suit.

The stranger seems unmoved by his cuisine. COLE SLAW and
LENTILS fill his plate, untouched. He plays randomly with
a knife, hockey-pucks a squashed bean across his plate.

CARL
Guess the cooking's not his style?

RHONDA
Shhhh! Don't say that out loud. You know
how pissed off Mac can get!

CARL
That customer looks a little... off.

RHONDA
(dry)
Looks to me like he's nuts.

Carl eyes the new patron more.

CARL
How long's he been sitting there?

RHONDA
An hour?

CARL
How come I haven't noticed until now?

RHONDA
That's 'cause you've been fondling your
eggs for forty-five minutes.

CARL
(chuckles)
"My eggs"? Rhonda, why do you hand me
such easy lines?

RHONDA
Just don't go bitching to the cook. It's
all *your* fault they're cold.

She points a pencil at the stranger in the booth.

RHONDA

But watch out for that one over there.
This is the *third* time he's sat his ass
down in that seat.

CARL

So?

RHONDA

So? He keeps it up, he's gonna take your
place as "Number One Nicky's Regular".

CARL

Which means?

RHONDA

Which means: no more free pie.

Carl grabs his cup of Joe - makes a beeline for the
stranger's booth.

RHONDA

(yells after him)

What in blazes are you doing now?

CARL

Defending my territory. I've been coming
here eight whole years. No-one's stealing
that title from me!

Rhonda heads back for the kitchen, shashay in her step.

RHONDA

Suit yourself. Just don't forget my tip.

Carl approaches the booth.

The stranger's so focused on his food, he doesn't look up
when Carl sits down.

Instead, the stranger bats more lentils around, a mini-
foosball game on his plate.

Carl watches for awhile. Eventually he leans forward and
waves a napkin in the stranger's face.

CARL

I surrender. I'll introduce myself first.

The man glances at Carl, startled.

MAN

Who are you?

CARL
No-one special. Just a friend.

MAN
(confused)
You sure? I've never seen you before in
my life. At least this one...

Carl looks the stranger over carefully. Clearly, he's
unhinged. But dangerous? Carl's not sure.

CARL
I mean you no harm. My name is Carl.

Carl reaches over fries. The stranger shakes his hand.

MAN
I'm Jose.

Carl sits back. Notices a fresh KETCHUP SMEAR on his
cuff.

CARL
Dammit. I gotta go to work from here...

JOSE
(chuckles)
So, throw it in the wash afterwards.

CARL
I got this dry-cleaned yesterday!

Jose shrugs, and hunkers over his plate. He lifts up Cole
Slaw; positions it between two lentils. The process seems
painstakingly slow - Jose's concerned about getting it
just right.

Carl groans. This guy's nuts.

CARL
So... Where do you hail from, Jose?

JOSE
San Diego. The last few years.

CARL
What facility?

Jose looks up sharply.

JOSE
How'd you know?

Jose clutches a butter knife with a shaking hand. Grabbing Carl's collar, Jose yanks him over the plate. Carl fumbles for a menu; uses it as a futile shield.

CARL

Like I said; I mean no harm. But someone should be told you're here.

JOSE

Who sent you?!?

Carl squirms. This situation escalated fast.

CARL

No-one sent me. I'm just concerned. Do you need a doctor?

JOSE

A doctor? Heavens no. I *am* one.

CARL

You? I doubt that. What field of study?

JOSE

Quantum Physics. Ph.D.

CARL

Maybe... you just need your meds.

Jose lets go of Carl. Chuckles.

JOSE

You think I'm insane?

CARL

(gasps)

Your actions make that crystal clear.

JOSE

You don't know me at all. Yet you come over and start asking questions. What sort of *action* did you expect?

Carl glances at his cell phone, checks the time.

JOSE

Are you going to call the cops on me?

CARL

I'm not calling anyone. I'm... shit.

JOSE

Shit? No kidding?

CARL

It's ten PM. I'm late for work!

Carl jumps up and signals for Rhonda. He slips her cash for the tab, pulls her close and whispers in her ear.

CARL

You're right. That one's looney tunes. If he gets violent, call for Mac. And whatever he says, watch your back.

Rhonda points towards Carl's table, still covered with eggs.

RHONDA

I don't care if he thinks he's the King of Siam. "Dr." Jose cleans up after himself, like an grown-up adult. And he tips better, by the way.

Carl heads towards the door. Rhonda pouts after him.

RHONDA

You're the one who should watch out, Carl. For your title of "Best Regular". Jose's here every day!

INT. NICKY'S DINER - EVENING - DAY TWO

The door chime RINGS. Carl walks inside.

And spots Jose in the self-same booth.

Carl sits down across from him without a word.

Jose acknowledges his presence with a nod; attention glued to his latest meal.

This time, it's HOME FRIES and more LENTILS - spread in bizarre spirals across Jose's plate.

CARL

I guess you're into carbs with fiber?

JOSE

I just like experimenting with my food.

CARL

Playing with your food's more like it.

JOSE

And you apparently like... to pry.

Rhonda wanders over with coffee. Winks.

RHONDA

Good to see you two getting along!

(to Carl)

You better visit me more often, Stud. Dr. Jose's beating your record. He's been here *twice* since Mac cleaned up your egg disaster yesterday.

CARL

He's here - every meal?

JOSE

What's wrong with that? I get hungry.

RHONDA

Lay it on me, Carl. Whatcha want?

CARL

Toast and coffee. Black. No milk.

RHONDA

That's it?

Carl pats his soft n' squishy stomach.

CARL

Don't guilt me into dessert. I gotta get back on the dating scene, so I'm trying to lose a few pounds.

Rhonda pours coffee, and wanders off. Carl openly ogles her butt.

JOSE

Don't objectify women like that.

CARL

Rhonda didn't even see me look.

JOSE

That's irrelevant. And it's not polite.

Carl sits back.

CARL

Forget me. Let's discuss *you*. You claim to work in "Quantum Physics."

JOSE

Particle spin dynamics, to be exact.

Carl rolls his eyes, *that again?* Jose points at Carl's uniform, and turns the question around.

JOSE

I see the ketchup came out. Where do you work?

CARL

With the MTA.

JOSE

Doing what?

CARL

(beat)
Cleaning floors.

JOSE

That's it? And you're grilling *me*?

CARL

Don't condescend. Sanitation is respectable work. The union gives me a solid pension, enough to retire in high style. How 'bout you, "Mr. Scientist"?

Jose stares morosely at his plate.

JOSE

I doubt I'll survive long enough to retire. Not the direction things are heading now.

Carl opens his mouth to ask the obvious. Jose points out the clock on the wall.

JOSE

It's 9:45 PM. Isn't it time for you to go?

CARL

But my coffee -

JOSE

Don't worry. I'll get your tab.

Jose's right - Carl's late. Carl gets up and wanders out the door. Jose swivels around to face Rhonda, next.

JOSE

Carl tells me Nicky's makes great pie?

INT. NICKY'S DINER - EVENING - DAY THREE

Carl sits across from Jose again.

This time, Jose's ordered PEAS and SPAGHETTI. The little orbs lined up in a neat, green row.

CARL

I guess you're a picky eater?

Jose lowers a strand of pasta along his plate.

CARL

Or you're into "String Theory"?

Jose looks up, surprised.

JOSE

You know what that is?

CARL

I told you before, don't condescend. I watch the Science Channel - every morning after my shift. You think I'm too dense to understand quantum physics, *Doctor*?

JOSE

Not... *if* you conceptualize it right.

CARL

Then lay it on me.

JOSE

What?

CARL

Go to town.

JOSE

Go where?

CARL

I mean, explain what you're doing. Besides playin' like a toddler with food.

Jose rolls a spaghetti strand between his fingers. He contemplates Carl, expels a sigh. Then waves to Rhonda across the room. She trots over with her order pad.

JOSE

Please - bring us soup?

RHONDA

Sure thing, Honey. What kind?

JOSE
Whatever's available. You decide. Though,
discrete particles would be nice.

Rhonda raises a neon red eyebrow.

RHONDA
Particles?

JOSE
Yes. Chunks of... spherical things.
Vegetables or peas will do. Perhaps rice.

RHONDA
Whatever you say, honey buns.
(yells to the kitchen)
Mac - fire up the microwave! An order of
Barley Soup. Booth One!

Rhonda heads for the back room. Carl focuses on Jose.

CARL
You were saying?

JOSE
I was?

CARL
String theory...

JOSE
Yes! Well, quantum entanglement's my
specialty at the lab.

CARL
Quantum entanglement? Sounds like Star
Trek bullshit to me.

JOSE
Not if you comprehend the theory right.

Jose lays a spaghetti strand on his plate, alongside
peas. He points to one loose, sauce covered end.

JOSE
Imagine this chord acts like a wave.

He re-arranges the spaghetti - "draws" a repeating
pattern of troughs and peaks...

JOSE
And this pea is a quark.

Jose flicks the pea with two fingers, shoving it into the next one. The peas roll along the spaghetti "wave"; a tiny, green chain reaction results.

CARL

I get it. You're simulating sound or light waves.

JOSE

(grins)

Right! Where did you learn that?

CARL

Don't con-

JOSE

Condescend?

CARL

Don't assume I'm dumb. I watched *School House Rock* as a kid.

Carl and Jose exchange grins. A moment of bonding between the men.

Rhonda arrives with soup, and puts it down by Jose.

RHONDA

Mac's all out of Barley. I hope Chicken Broth'll work?

JOSE

I'm a Vegetarian, but.. it'll do.

Rhonda nods, walks off. Jose grabs a handful of food, and sprinkles corn into the soup.

CARL

You gonna eat that with your hands?

JOSE

No - just being innovative with my materials, and demonstrating new.

Jose plunges a twisty-straw into his bowl and blows. Corn kernels bob and spiral away.

CARL

So: a *water* wave. What's the point?

Jose points at the diner clock. 9:50 PM.

JOSE

That you're out of time. Speaking of which - that'll be our lesson tomorrow. If I make it here, that is.

CARL

What lesson?

JOSE

The cyclical wave nature of time.

CARL

Time? You're shittin' me?

Jose ignores the curse. Slurps soup through his straw.

INT. NICKY'S DINER - EVENING - DAY TWO

Jose cowers behind a menu. Carl sits down suddenly. The slim physicist hears him last second. JUMPS.

CARL

What the hell? It's me, Jose. Haven't we passed the point of fear and loathing yet?

Jose peeks over the menu; confirming it is - in fact - Carl in the seat.

JOSE

What are you doing here?

CARL

We scheduled a "lesson". Didn't we?

Jose parts window curtains near the booth, and peers out at the street. It's strangely deserted. Very dark.

CARL

You hiding from someone?

JOSE

A few - ex-colleagues. You haven't told anyone about our conversations, have you?

CARL

At *my* work? Nah. They'd think I'm as nuts as you.

Rhonda wanders over. Jose jumps again.

She hands Jose his latest order: SPAGHETTI and BOILED PEAS. Rhonda sidles up to Carl, gives him the eye.

RHONDA

What's your pleasure tonight?

CARL

Um, I'm not hungry.

He glances over at a Jose. Rhonda looks Carl up and down.

RHONDA

You haven't eaten the last *three times* you were here. Big guy, are you losing weight?

Rhonda pats Carl's stomach. He grabs her hand.

CARL

I'll be fine. Just been a bit - preoccupied is all.

Rhonda shrugs and walks away. Carl glances at Jose:

The physicist has already recreated his spaghetti art, peas lined up along one golden strand.

CARL

What lesson's on your "menu" today?

JOSE

How Time and Quantum Entanglements overlap. Just imagine this pasta symbolizes the linear nature of time.

CARL

What do the peas represent?

JOSE

Discrete units: smaller than a micro-second. As granular as one can get. Normally, they run in only one direction: forward.

Jose flicks a pea to demonstrate. Then curls a spaghetti strand in a circle, end to end.

JOSE

But if you apply force in the right place, it can be teased to run backwards. A little bit.

Carl watches Jose flick another pea. This one does a pasta loop de loop.

CARL

Dammnnnn. *Terminator* meets *Quantum Leap*?

Jose darts frightened eyes around. Fortunately, they're the only patrons in the room.

JOSE

I wouldn't put it that way, but -
We've been researching this for years.
Last month, we had a break through.

CARL

People can time travel now?!

JOSE

Not people. Just particles.

Carl droops, disappointed.

CARL

So - we ain't talking *Looper*, yet?

Jose thrusts a finger into his coffee, doesn't flinch. Either he's immune, or it's grown cold. WAVES roll out from the cup's center - rippling as they grow.

JOSE

Don't underestimate the danger. Minute particles can create huge ripples - depending how far back one goes...

Rhonda wanders towards their table.

RHONDA

Any a' you big boys need some Joe?

CARL

Time travel? Tell me more!

Jose presses an anxious finger to his lips.

JOSE

Shhhh! No-one must hear!

On that cue - the door entrance RINGS. A rough looking MAN WITH TATTOOS barges in. Jose clams up. Practically freaks.

The man looks straight at Jose, but keeps moving. Carl reads his nametag: Mac.

CARL

Ah, the perpetrator of the chicken pot pie fiasco! The infamous "Mac" n' Cheese -

Mac hears, and turns around. Carl forces a quick smile.

CARL

Glad to put a face to the name?

Mac storms towards the kitchen, and almost collides with Rhonda. The waitress limbos past him, coffee in hand.

Mac plops down at the counter, scowls.

Jose slithers down in his seat, almost chin level with the table. Carl mirrors the movement, voice low.

CARL

Come on, Jose. It's only Mac. I came here tonight to chew gum and talk about time travel. I'm all out of gum. So grow a set of peas - and lay some "science" facts on me. Straight.

JOSE

(whispers)

Some of my coworkers have been manipulating time. Nothing much when we first started. But it's had some - alarming effects.

Mac SNEERS at Jose. The physicist jumps up, horrified.

JOSE

Oh my. Now I'm late for work myself.

CARL

I thought you had a morning shift?

JOSE

Later, my friend. I must go. Now!

Jose darts out the door, yells over his shoulder.

JOSE

I'll buy the next round!

INT. NICKY'S DINER - EVENING - DAY FIVE

Jose and Carl huddle at the table. Intricate "Spaghetti Designs" everywhere. Peas run up and down golden strands.

Jose grabs a bundle of pasta, smooshes one side into a lump.

The strings on the other end spread out like limp tentacles. It's like a model of *Flying Spaghetti Monster* - in real life!

JOSE
Imagine each noodle is a different
corridor of time...

CARL
Parallel universes; seriously?

JOSE
A crude way to phrase it, but it works.

He breaks one noodle in half, stuffs it in his mouth.

JOSE
(slurps)
The problem becomes - you change *even one*
small factor, and if your calculation's
off, the results can be... bad.

Jose rips off another noodle, and hands it to Carl. And
he rolls a pea down the newly created gap.

The vegetable ping-pongs back and forth. It's impossible
to predict where it goes.

JOSE
See? Ripples in the time continuum -
sometimes add up to no good.

CARL
What do you mean by "changing factors"?

Jose glances around, assures himself no-one will hear.

JOSE
For instance: removing the existence of
certain people in the time line.
Ostensibly, to improve history, of
course.

CARL
Lemme guess - killing off baby Hitler?

JOSE
Or preventing him from being conceived.
Other people too. But - make one innocent
mistake, and -

Jose flicks a pea toward Carl. Green "particles" slam
into each other, transfer energy. The last one flies off
the table... to the floor.

Rhonda walks past. Doesn't see it. SMOOSH.

JOSE
 (to Carl)
 I tried to warn my colleagues about the danger. But they won't listen at all. Some are too committed to stop now.

CARL
 (chuckles)
 "Committed"? That's a good word.

JOSE
 Even when it results in...

CARL
 Problems? For instance?

JOSE
 (shudders)
 The absolute end of the world.

Jose grabs a napkin and scribbles formulas. He moves shockingly fast; like he's written them many times before. Underneath, he jots: a PHONE NUMBER.

He crumples the napkin, and shoves into Carl's hand.

JOSE
 If anything happens to me -

CARL
 Did your "friends" put a hit on you?

JOSE
 Sometimes people get *erased*.

Footsteps TAP on tile. Jose looks up. Carl does, too.

It's Mac the cook again. Mac approaches their table - a hostile look in his eyes.

CARL
 (to Mac)
 Listen, if it's about this mess. I promise we'll clean up before we go.

Mac's face FLICKERS. *And Morphs to static a few times.*

Carl doesn't see. Jose SHRIEKS and jumps to his feet.

JOSE
 It's starting. I knew it!

He grabs his coffee and bolts it down. Makes a beeline for the exit.

CARL
Jose, what's wrong?

JOSE
What's not? The fabric of time's...
unraveling!

Jose flings open the door. Neon lights from the *Nicky's* sign flood inside.

JOSE
(to Carl)
Whatever happens, don't show that information to anyone. And call that number as soon as you can. But don't use a cell phone. Signals can be traced...

The physicist flees into the night. Carl stares after his frantic friend.

CARL
I thought you were gonna get the tab?

Mac scrunches up his face and stares Carl down.

MAC
Word on the street is you gotta beef with my pot pie.

INT. NICKY'S DINER - EVENING - DAY SIX

The clock TICKS loudly. The time: 9:26PM.

Rhonda ambles over to the table, and pours Carl a cup. Carl watches - sad, miserable and alone.

RHONDA
You really that tired, Hun?

CARL
What do you mean?

RHONDA
Darling, this here's cup #3...

Carl drums his fingers on the table. Rhonda pushes more.

RHONDA
Don't ya wanna eat anything?

CARL
I'm not hungry. It's just...

RHONDA
Just what, sweet cheeks?

CARL
I have to leave at ten for work. Have you
seen him tonight - at all?

RHONDA
Him, who?

CARL
Jose.

RHONDA
Doesn't ring a bell, Stud-Muffin. You got
a last name to go with that?

CARL
Come on, Rhonda. Our Doctor pal!

RHONDA
You of all people know a Doctor? Pray
tell, what kind?

Based on her poker face, Rhonda's not joking.

CARL
The guy I've talked to for the last five
days? Over there, in that booth!

Rhonda follows Carl's finger, shakes her head.

RHONDA
Hot Stuff, you've been the *only* night
customer in *Nicky's* all week. My Number
One Regular. Like always.

CARL
You don't remember Jose at all?

Rhonda shakes her head no.

RHONDA
That's it. No more caffeine for you,
Chipmunk. You're hallucinating. Take a
day off work. Get some sleep.

She grabs Carl's coffee and walks away. Carl scans the
diner for Jose, stunned.

Mac exits the kitchen, heads for the John. Carl yells.

CARL
You remember, don't you?

Mac stops in his tracks.

MAC

Remember what - your ugly face?

CARL

No. The spaghetti. The peas. The late night talks.

MAC

Weirdo. Don't talk to me. Ever.

Mac GRUNTS. And SLAM - locks himself in the restroom. Carl slumps in his seat, stares at the door.

CARL

Three whole cups of coffee. Maybe I should get outta here. After I pee.

He fumbles in his pocket for cash and -

- pulls out JOSE'S NAPKIN, and several dollar bills.

The scribbled formulas are there: proof (kind of) that Carl's not insane. He reads a bit, doesn't understand. Carl's eyes skim to the phone number at the bottom -

A QUARTER tumbles out of his hand. It hits the table and spins...

Carl drops money down. Eyes a PAYPHONE in the street, just outside.

Rhonda calls to Carl from the kitchen:

RHONDA

Honey? Don't you want some pie?

CARL

I don't feel hungry. Keep the change.

Carl slips the exit door open. Neon lights illuminate his face. And the re-appeared ketchup stain on his sleeve.

He cradles the quarter in his hand.

CARL

See you tomorrow, Rhonda. I hope. For now, I gotta make a call.

FINAL FADE-OUT: