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EXT. TWO GREEK BROTHERS DINER - NIGHT

ON VIDEO: FLASHING RED AND BLUE LIGHTS reflect off the rain-slick asphalt and the faces of a RESTLESS CROWD. POLICE push through throngs of spectators, clearing a perimeter.

SUPERIMPOSE: BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY, 1989

REPORTER (V.O.)

Tragedy struck at Bloomfield's own
Two Greek Brothers Diner tonight
when the family restaurant became
the site of a deadly shoot-out.

At the center of it all stands THE DINER. A hulking monolith of neon and chrome, it looks like an alien spaceship from the 1950s crash-landed in a New Jersey parking lot.

Our REPORTER stands a safe distance from the commotion, next to ED NISSIRIOS (30s). Bone-thin and fidgety, Ed's the sort of guy coworkers smile at in case he's planning a shooting spree. He stares unblinkingly into the camera lens.

REPORTER

With us now is a man who witnessed
tonight's bloodshed, former night
manager Ed Nissirios. Ed, tell us
what you saw.

Ed starts to speak when the diner lights behind him FLICKER OUT. The crowd, thrown into darkness, BUZZES with confusion. The reporter gestures for her CAMERAMAN to 'get this now.'

ED

Do you still want me to talk?

The reporter throws a hand up to shush him--

A MASSIVE FIREBALL ERUPTS FROM WITHIN THE DINER.

GLASS EXPLODES ACROSS THE PAVEMENT... A VOICE SCREAMS IN AGONY... ONLOOKERS SCATTER INTO THE STREET.

Plumes of BLACK SMOKE billow upwards above the chaos, where an unlit NEON SIGN looms over the crowd:

TWO GREEK BROTHERS DINER
OPEN 24 HOURS

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. TWO GREEK BROTHERS DINER - MORNING

The same diner, but with an OLDER, GRUNGIER SIGN out front. The parking lot crowd is gone, with only a few salt-streaked minivans and a muddy snow pile in its place.

SUPERIMPOSE: SIX MONTHS EARLIER

PAULIE (PRE-LAP)

When I was ten years old, I watched the governor of New Jersey enjoy the best burger of his life. He gave my dad a big hug afterwards, and then he called Two Greek Brothers a "Jersey treasure."

INT. DINER OFFICE - SAME TIME

On the wall hangs a FADED B&W PHOTO OF TWO BROTHERS (20s) posing proudly with the GOVERNOR in front of their diner.

PAULIE (O.S.)

When was the last time somebody said that about us?

PAULIE sits in a leather office chair facing away from us. He struggles with a plastic grip strengthener as he talks.

PAULIE (CONT'D)

I got a dream. A dream... nah, that's too much.

He tugs the lever on his chair extending it to max height.

PAULIE (CONT'D)

We can be great again. It won't be easy, but like my dad used to say, "No greatness without sacrifice."

FOOTSTEPS approach behind the door. The chair WHIPS AROUND...

...revealing PAULIE POULOS (30s), a stocky Greek man with the boundless energy of a hyperactive kindergartner. He jumps out of the chair like he's been caught playing in dad's study.

A buff waiter with a ponytail, NICO (20s) barges in.

NICO

(thick Greek accent)

Yo P! You tell Ed he could take over staff training?

Paulie's eyes narrow...

INT. TWO GREEK BROTHERS DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Paulie scans the diner's main floor. It's run-down and near-empty, not much of treasure, even for Jersey. SOMEONE across the room catches Paulie's attention--

It's KOURTNEY DESILVA (20s), the girl-next-door, if you happen to own property on the Jersey Shore. Big hair, blue eye shadow, a fuck-you expression she wears like armor...

And she's just Paulie's type. His eyes are locked on her, not once glancing at the two men standing at her side-- TIMMY RAMIREZ (17), an obese busboy-in-training, and Ed Nissirios.

PAULIE

(jogging up)

Hey how's it going?

(to Ed)

Thanks man. I got it from here.

ED

I was just about to give these two the grand tour, actually.

PAULIE

It's not your job, though. Your shift's over.

ED

Your uncle doesn't mind--

PAULIE

(touching Ed's elbow)

It's not your job.

ED

He appreciates my work ethic-- why are you touching me?

PAULIE

I'm not... I'm not touching you.

(whispering)

Don't, Ed. Don't make me call him.

Ed bristles. He pulls a colorful CHUPA CHUPS LOLLIPOP from his pocket and chomps down on it, hard.

ED

What a big man you are.

Ed struts back toward the office. Paulie turns back to Kourtney and Timmy, straining to keep his smile.