The Bradbury Diner
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Synopsis: A girl stuck running her family’s diner in memory of her deceased father meets a customer who isn’t what he seems and is convinced to leave the diner for college.

Setting: A tiny family diner, somewhere outside of Boston

Time Period: Looks modern, but could be another time

Cast of Characters:

Maggie Bradbury: Running the family diner instead of going to college

Joey: Mysterious and handsome diner customer

Audrey Taylor: Newscaster for Channel 7

Susie: Another waitress

Officer Barry Brandon: Police officer

A few people to be diner customers and college students

Rod Serling’s opening *Twilight Zone* narration is used in the script. This should ideally be an actual recording of the monologue, but the narration can be delivered by an actor if another actor needs a role.
Scene 1

(Scene up on an empty diner. The diner has a counter. Behind the counter is a doorway through which there is a kitchen (visible to the audience) and a bathroom (obviously not). There is also a back door from the kitchen that leads outside. There is a window to one side of the counter. There might also be a few booths in the diner, but there is definitely a front door. The only modern thing in it is a flatscreen television. It’s definitely been a while since it’s been busy in here. A young woman, Maggie, walks to the back of the counter through the kitchen. She looks freezing. She turns up the thermostat next to the counter before putting her hair up and tying an apron to her waist. She looks at a picture of a man propped up on the end of the counter, presumably her father, and blows him a kiss. Then she makes her way over to flip the open sign. She walks back to the counter and picks up a tv remote. She starts to flip through channels. After a few, she lands on a re-run of The Twilight Zone. The opening monologue from the TV show begins to play in the background.)

TV/Rod Serling: There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity.

(A man comes on stage and starts moving towards the door. Maggie looks away from the tv, incredulous that she has a customer this early, then gets sucked back into the show.)

TV/Rod Serling: It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man’s fears and the summit of his knowledge.

(The man is pretty much at the door now. He seems to be about the same age as Maggie.)

TV/Rod Serling: This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call…

(The sound of the bell over the door ringing as the man opens it interrupts the television.)

TV/Rod Serling: The Twilight Zone.

(Maggie switches the channel to the news as the man sits down at the counter. She walks over to him with a plastic-coated menu.)

Maggie: Hi, I’m Maggie. (She gives a genuine smile.) Welcome to the Bradbury Diner. Our breakfast specials include pancakes and sausage, French toast and bacon, and cheese Danish.

(He takes the menu, opens it.)

Joey: I’m Joey. (He smiles back.) I’ll have…

(He is interrupted by a loud “Breaking News” style beep. Both Maggie and Joey look up at the television, where they see Audrey Taylor, anchorwoman.)

Audrey Taylor: This is Audrey Taylor reporting live with Channel 7 News. Breaking news: According to our source at a government press conference today, a highly realistic robot has been manufactured in a government laboratory in Boston and is being tested on the public for the first time today…

(Joey winces.)

Joey: I’m sorry, but I have a headache. Could you turn that off? The noise is making it worse.
Maggie: Sure. *(She picks up the remote and clicks it off.)* Would you like some coffee? Caffeine might help.

Joey: Coffee would be great.

*(Maggie picks up a carafe from behind her and a mug from under the counter and does a fancy pouring maneuver to impress him. She hands the cup to him and then recoils in pain.)*

Maggie: Damn!

Joey: What?!

Maggie: *(shaking her hand)* Nothing major… I think you just shocked me.

Joey: *(laughs)* Oh, sorry. *(He sips his coffee.)* Thanks. I needed this. *(He closes his menu.)* Could I have the French toast with bacon and extra syrup?

Maggie: Coming right up!

*(She walks through the door into the kitchen and starts to make the food.)*
Scene 2

(In the same diner. Enough time has passed for the food to be finished. There are one or two other parties in the diner now being served by another waitress (Susie). Joey has moved down a few seats to look out the window. Maggie comes out from the kitchen with a plate of food for him and places it in front of him, but he doesn’t notice.)

Maggie: It’s pretty out there, isn’t it?

(Joey finally notices and turns away from the window.)


(Maggie grabs a jug of maple syrup from under the counter and places it next to his plate.)

Joey: Thanks (He starts to eat.)

(One of the customers raises their hand. Maggie goes to help them.)

Susie: Maggie, I got this one.

Maggie: Thanks.

(Maggie then realizes this means she has nothing to do.)

Maggie: (to Joey) So what brings you to the Bradbury Diner?

Joey: It just looked like a cute little place. Nice and out of the way. What brings you here?

Maggie: What do you mean? I work here.

Joey: I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but you have so few customers that even during the breakfast rush on a Saturday, the place is over-staffed. You don’t have to work here. What keeps you around?

Maggie: (sighs, exasperated. She has heard this before.) I’ll admit, I’m not big on working at the diner. Nothing ever really happens around here. But it was my dad’s dream. (gestures towards his picture) So I’m trying to keep it alive for him.

Joey: Don’t you ever want to move on? You can’t be earning enough money to survive.

Maggie: (Really starting to get upset.) My mom owns the bar you had to walk by to get here. You know--

Joey: Listen, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to get you so worked up. It’s just… I know about feeling trapped. You probably have a better opportunity of getting free and moving on with your life than I do.

Maggie: I mean, I want to go to college. I just can’t right now. I’m in charge of this place and I’m not letting it die.

Joey: Then go to college. Don’t get stuck here if you don’t have to.

Maggie: (Changing the subject) Wait, how are you trapped?

Joey: (Changing the subject back) Could I have some more coffee?
(She picks up the carafe and pours him more coffee.)

Maggie: Are you going to answer me?

(He just smirks and eats a piece of bacon.)

Maggie: (sighs, slight pause) How’s your head?

Joey: (genuine confusion) Hunh?

Maggie: Didn’t you have a headache?

Joey: Oh. Yeah. It’s fine now. Thanks.

(He finishes his meal. She picks up the plate and brings it back to the kitchen. Right as she turns back around the enter the diner again, he vaults the counter and comes right up to her.)

Joey: (in a rush) Do you have a bathroom?

Maggie: Yeah it’s right back there—

(Meanwhile: A police officer, Officer Barry Brandon, has entered the diner and started to talk to Susie)

Joey: Thanks!

Maggie: (yelled behind her) But it’s for employees only!

Joey: Gotta go!!

(Maggie lets it slide because at this point he has literally walked in and locked the door. She proceeds all the way into the diner, where Susie waves her over.)

Susie: Mags, this is Officer Barry Brandon. He wants to speak to the owner.

Maggie: That’s me. How can I help you, officer?

Officer Brandon: I’m here because there is an escaped fugitive in your area and we have reason to believe he may have come here. Have you seen this man today?

(Officer Brandon shows Maggie a mugshot-style picture of Joey.)

Maggie: (Like she’s seen a ghost) Damn. Yeah. He’s in the back room.

Officer Brandon: I would retrieve him, but I think it’s better if you get him out here. I don’t believe he’d be a danger to you, but if he sees me, he may try to flee.

Maggie: (anxiously) Oh… Okay.

(She slowly exits through the door to the kitchen on her way to the bathroom.)

Maggie: Joey? Joey, there’s someone out here who—

(As she says this, Joey lunges out of the darkness and grabs her. As she goes to scream, he puts his hand over her mouth.)

Joey: (stage whisper) Don’t scream. I can explain.
Maggie: *(whirls out of his grip, takes on a defensive stance)* Explain what? You’re a criminal!

Joey: Maggie, I may be a fugitive, but I’m not a criminal. Think back. You know what I am.

*(He takes her hand and she coils back in pain—she has been shocked again.)*

Maggie: *(Realization. Everything... the newscast, the ‘headache’, the shocks... add up.)* You’re the android they talked about in the newscast.

Joey: Yes. They’re testing me in civilization to see if I can pass as a human. They let me walk out into the world and do whatever I wanted this morning, on the stipulation that when my time was up, they would activate my homing beacon and I would be compelled to go back. They don’t know that I disabled the homing beacon and the tracking capabilities the second they set me free. You can’t bring me back out there, Maggie. I’m practically human and they treat me like a toy. I need to keep running.

*(She steps back and looks at him again. Pause. She takes a key out of her pocket.)*

Maggie: Take this and go out the back door. My apartment is on the ground floor of the second building on the left. I have a spare key under the counter I can use to get in later.

Susie: *(From the diner proper)* Maggie?! Are you alright back there?!

Maggie: *(Yelling into the diner)* I’ll be out in a second!

*(to Joey)* You need to go.

Joey: Maggie?

Maggie: Yes?

Joey: Thank you.

*(He kisses her on the cheek. There is no shock this time, but a bit of a metaphorical spark. He runs off immediately afterward. Maggie gives him a slight pause to get a head start, then walks back into the diner proper.)*

Maggie: *(Worried, almost panicky. She is a very good actor.)* I can’t find him anywhere. The bathroom door was open and he isn’t anywhere else.

Officer Brandon: Mind if I take a look?

Maggie: Please, go right ahead.

*(Maggie, Susie, and Officer Brandon go into the back room. Officer Brandon looks around a bit then notices the back door.)*

Officer Brandon: He probably got out this way. Where does it lead?

Maggie: Just a little alleyway with back doors to a few apartment buildings.

Officer Brandon: Well, thank you for your help, ladies. We’ll keep you posted on the progress of the search for this dangerous criminal.

*(He leaves.)*
Susie: You know, I think there’s something fishy going on. That man didn’t have a police badge, just an ID card for this fancy lab in town.

Maggie: I’m going to go clean up.
Scene 3

(We are now in the living room of a tiny apartment. There is a loveseat and a coffee table. Enough time has passed that it is now dusk. Maggie enters and throws her keys and purse on the table. She sits on the loveseat and picks up a pillow to adjust her posture. Taped to the back, she finds a note and a key. She puts the key in her pocket and opens the note to read.)

Joey’s voice: Maggie, thank you for your help today. You know my story now, and you know how awful being trapped can be. Do yourself a favor and go to college. Your father wouldn’t want to be holding you back from living your life just for his diner. Thanks again for your help. You’re a great girl. I hope to see you again one day, Joey.

(She smooths her hands over her face and looks out the window, just as Joey had earlier.)
Scene 4

(Scene up on Maggie and a friend walking back from class.)

Maggie: Yeah, like, I’m a robotics major but like, I haven’t taken a class in robotics yet, so, I’m not sure if I could help you.

(Joey, now wearing glasses, walks onstage, headed towards Maggie and her friend.)

Maggie: Oh, there’s my date! Thanks for walking with me, Julie!

(Maggie walks over to Joey.)

Maggie: How was calculus?

Joey: Easy, as usual.

(He takes her hand. She jerks back.)

Maggie: Would you stop that?!

(Joey chuckles as they walk off together.)