

AUTHENTIC TORTILLA

Written by

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Nicolás (pronounced NEE-co-las), 19, Mexican, is the dishwasher -- dressed in a black oversized t-shirt, wrapped in a thick rubber apron.

He scrubs and sprays pans at the dish pit.

Title overlay: AUTHENTIC TORTILLA

Two cooks, BRANDON and RILEY, 20s, hip, eager to impress, prep their stations while Nicolás sprays down the dish pit.

CHEF LAWRENCE, late 30s, fit, smart, and direct, pushes through the swinging door, entering the room.

CHEF  
(to Brandon & Riley)  
Gather up.

He sets a metal container down on the table in the middle of the room.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
You too, Nicolás.

Nicolás looks up surprised, then hustles over, forming a tight circle with Brandon and Riley by the sauté station.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
Just to spice up our lives I've decided to add a fifth course to the prefix menu tonight. Riley--

Riley groans.

RILEY  
You're killing me, Chef.

CHEF  
Time to put on your big boy pants. We're being ambitious today.

The cooks chuckle.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
In honor of Cinco de Mayo, we're making a taco.

Chef hands the plastic container to Riley, who smells it then picks out a piece of meat and eats it.

CHEF (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I braised a beef tongue in aromats:  
herbs... citrus...

Riley chews without emotion, dissecting the flavors in her head. Brandon takes the container and follows suit, deadly serious.

CHEF (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
We'll sear in duck fat to give it a  
nice crunch.

Lastly Nicolás takes the container and does a bad imitation of the cooks, his eyes darting about.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
(to Riley)  
Thoughts on garnishes?

RILEY  
Chef, I think an avocado cream  
would go well with this.

CHEF  
Yeah. Do that. And use some of our  
pickled radishes.

Chef claps his hands.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
Let's get to work. One hour till  
service.

Riley and Brandon retreat to their stations. Chef puts a hand on Nicolás's shoulder.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
You live in Sunset Park, right?

Nicolás nods.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
I have a job for you. To make these  
tacos next level, we need some good  
tortillas. Do you think you can  
bike to Sunset Park and get back in  
time?

NICOLÁS  
Yes.

Chef bends down so he's eye to eye with Nicolás.

CHEF

Do you know what I mean by *good*? I want authentic tortillas. Not some mass produced McDonald's shit.

Nicolás listens carefully.

CHEF (CONT'D)

¿Entiende artesanal?

NICOLÁS

Yes. I understand. I can do it.

CHEF

Good.

Chef pulls a few bills from his wallet and hands it to Nicolás, then eyes the clock on the wall.

CHEF (CONT'D)

Ride fast. I need you back here. Remember at five o'clock, there'll be thirty people sitting down all at once, expecting a taco in front of them.

CUT TO:

2 EXT. BROOKLYN STREETS - LATE AFTERNOON - MONTAGE 2

Nicolás races south on his bike.

We transition from a neighborhood of upscale boutiques and cocktail bars to one of food trucks and Mexican families with children running around.

3 INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT KITCHEN - LATER 3

RICARDO, 50s, a burly Mexican man with a beer gut in a worn chef's coat, spots Nicolás, who stands in the center of the bustling kitchen.

RICARDO

¿Que onda, Nicolás?

He embraces Nicolás in a bear hug.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Are you still working for that celebrity chef?

Nicolás smiles as Ricardo continues to tease. They walk through the kitchen shoulder to shoulder.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Are you on TV yet? Is Nicolás the most famous dishwasher in New York, while I'm stuck in this shithole?

NICOLÁS

Yeah, yeah.

CUT TO:

4

INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

4

Ricardo stops to stack crates in a side room.

RICARDO

What's up?

NICOLÁS

I need a favor.

RICARDO

Tell me. Anything for my favorite dishwasher.

NICOLÁS

My chef needs handmade tortillas for his menu tonight. So he sent me to our neighborhood to find some.

Nicolás cracks wry smile.

RICARDO

What? Does he think we're hand grinding corn here? Hunched over with a metate between our knees like the Aztecs?

They both laugh.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

None of the restaurants around here make tortillas. You know that.

NICOLÁS

But you have plenty of masa for your tamales and sopes. And I don't need you to make that many. I thought if--

RICARDO

--That's a big favor.

(beat)

I'll tell you what. Come back in a couple hours. I'll figure something out once we get through the first rush.

NICOLÁS

I can't wait that long. They're expecting me.

RICARDO

Not gonna happen. Can't do it. It's Friday night. Every square inch of the kitchen is being used already.

Nicolás hesitates, flashing a look of growing concern.

Without warning, Ricardo turns for the pantry, waving for him to follow along.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Come here.

5 INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT PANTRY - MOMENTS LATER 5

Ricardo reaches into a box on a shelf filled with identical bags of tortillas.

RICARDO

This is the best Mexican restaurant in the neighborhood. And these are the tortillas I serve my customers. If your chef wants to have what we really eat, this is it.

Ricardo stuffs a bag into Nicolás's arms.

RICARDO (CONT'D)

Just take these. It's a long ride back. What does he expect from you? It's good enough.

6 INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - ALLEY DOOR - MOMENTS LATER 6

Nicolás stands by the door, a bright streak of light cutting across his face. His phone dings with a text.

CHEF: ETA?

Nicolás agonizes over his response. He thinks, then types.

NICOLÁS: First place I went was no good. But I have a plan.

CHEF: Plan? WTF! You're out of time.

NICOLÁS: It's ok. It'll be worth it. As good as my Grandma's.

Long pause. Nicolás anxiously awaits Chef's response.

CHEF: Will push taco back a course.

NICOLÁS: Thanks chef.

CHEF: Stop typing. Get moving.

Stuffing his phone in his pocket he rides off. He has left the packaged tortillas by the front door of the restaurant.

7 INT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT - ENTRYWAY - EVENING

7

A loud buzzer rings, then rings again.

Nicolás's grandmother, ABUELITA, late 60s, has a knit blanket pulled around her shoulders as she makes her way to the intercom.

ABUELITA  
(muttering to herself)  
¡Ay dios mío! ¡Espérate!

She presses the speaker button.

ABUELITA (CONT'D)  
Hello?

NICOLÁS (O.S.)  
(through the intercom)  
Hello, Abuelita. I was just  
in the neighborhood and  
wanted to see you.

ESPAÑOL  
*Hola Abuelita. Andaba por  
aquí y me dieron ganas de  
verte.*

CUT TO:

8 INT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

8

Abuelita sits at a small table by the window as Nicolás yanks ingredients he's bought from grocery bags.

NICOLÁS  
I had a great idea. I thought  
you could teach me how to  
make tortillas.

ESPAÑOL  
*Se me ocurrió una gran idea.  
Pensé que igual y me puedes  
enseñar a hacer tortillas.*

Abuelita eyes the brand new tortilla press, puzzled.

ABUELITA	ESPAÑOL
This is what you're spending your paycheck on?	<i>¿En esto te estás gastando tu cheque?</i>

9 INT. BROOKLYN RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - LATER

9

The kitchen is in warp drive. Chef hovers over the sauté station. Focused and moving fast, he barks out orders.

CHEF

Two beef, one lamb. One minute on  
the pass.  
(to waiters)  
Service, come on. Table six.

Chef looks with growing anxiety to the ticket machine as four new orders come in rapid fire: TACO, TACO, TACO, TACO.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
(distracted)  
Riley, I'm ready for the lamb--

CRASH! A handful of dirty dishes have been added to an already overflowing, unmanned dish pit.

It's too much, an avalanche of plates cascade over the edge of the sink, shattering across the floor.

CUT TO:

10 INT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

10

Working diligently, Abuelita expertly makes fresh tortillas using a box of instant corn flour.

ABUELITA	ESPAÑOL
I can't remember the last time I did this. Thank you for dragging an old woman like me away from the TV.	<i>No me acuerdo la ultima vez que hice esto. Gracias por arrastrar a una viejita como yo lejos de la tele.</i>

Nicolás's phone buzzes. The caller ID reads: "Chef Lawrence". He doesn't answer it.

He returns to helping Abuelita, making ping-pong sized balls of dough for her to press and cook on a hot skillet.

A stack of steaming tortillas grows taller and taller.

CUT TO:



11 INT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Nicolás hustles down the stairwell while listening to Chef's voice message.

CHEF (VOICE MESSAGE)  
 (with a forced calm)  
 Hello Nicolás, I'm checking in to see where you are. It's six-thirty. We're slammed. We were expecting you back by now.

CUT TO:

12 EXT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS 12

Nicolás listens with growing concern as he pushes through the exterior door.

CHEF  
 I don't know why you're not answering.

As Nicolás continues down the block he notices a FIGURE crouched on the corner.

Nicolás suddenly realizes what he is seeing -- a man with a hack saw is in the process of stealing his bike.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
 You'd better be walking through the door now, or rotting in a ditch somewhere...

Nicolás stops listening to the message, sprinting to save his bike.

NICOLÁS  
 Hey!

The figure realizes Nicolás is coming for him and sprints faster.

NICOLÁS (CONT'D)  
 Stop!

The figure finishes cutting and jumps on the bike just as Nicolás collides with him. They grab onto each other, quickly reaching a tense deadlock.

Nicolás grits his teeth, trying to pry the man free from his bike, the hacksaw waving dangerously about in the figure's clenched fist.

The figure shoves Nicolás who stumbles back a few steps, trips and falls flat into a mud filled pot hole.

As the figure tears off on the bike, Nicolás pulls himself up, dirty water dripping everywhere.

Loose tortillas bob and float in the muddy water. The package of fresh tortillas has busted open and are now ruined.

Nicolás looks at the destruction for a beat as despair morphs into a lust for revenge.

He scrounges the tortillas up in foil, turns and chucks the makeshift ball in the direction of the thief, letting out a tribal yell.

In an act of god, the tortilla missile arcs gracefully through air and strikes the figure perfectly in the head, knocking him off the bike and into a pile of garbage bags.

Nicolás has surprised himself.

Dazed, the figure picks himself up and runs off, leaving the bike behind.

13

INT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT - ENTRYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

13

There's a series of loud knocks. Abuelita sleepily opens the front door to reveal Nicolás standing in the hallway.

NICOLÁS  
We need to make more  
tortillas.

ESPAÑOL  
*Tenemos que hacer más  
tortillas.*

ABUELITA  
(rubbing her eyes)  
What? Why?

ESPAÑOL  
*¿Que? ¿Porque?*

NICOLÁS  
The others got ruined. I  
dropped them.

ESPAÑOL  
*Las otras se arruinaron. Se  
me cayeron al piso.*

ABUELITA  
Oh mijo, that's okay. They're  
only tortillas.

ESPAÑOL  
*Ay mijo, no pasa nada. Son  
solo tortillas.*

Nicolás still looks upset.

ABUELITA  
What's going on? What's the  
matter with you?

ESPAÑOL  
*¿Que pasa? ¿Que tienes?*

NICOLÁS  
I messed up. I needed them  
for work. My boss told me to  
find him fresh tortillas.

ESPAÑOL  
*La cague. Las necesito para  
el trabajo. Mi jefe me dijo  
que fuera a buscar tortillas  
frescas.*

ABUELITA  
Why didn't you just tell me  
that?

ESPAÑOL  
*¿Porque no me dijiste eso?*

NICOLÁS  
I'm sorry. I should have told  
you but you would have gone  
on and on about how my boss  
is taking advantage of me.

ESPAÑOL  
*Perdón. Te debí de haber  
dicho pero me ibas a regañar  
de que mi jefe se está  
aprovechando de mi.*

Abuelita's eyes widen with indignation.

ABUELITA  
He is taking advantage you.

ESPAÑOL  
*Pues si se está aprovechando  
de ti.*

NICOLÁS  
No, Abuelita. It's not what  
you think.

ESPAÑOL  
*No, Abue. No es así.*

ABUELITA  
"El burro trabaja doble."  
It's like my mother always  
said, only an idiot works  
twice as hard as he needs to!

ESPAÑOL  
*"El burro trabaja doble" es  
como mi mamá siempre decía,  
solo un pendejo trabaja dos  
veces más fuerte de lo que  
necesita.*

NICOLÁS  
Oh my god, please! Don't you  
think you're being a little  
dramatic? This is an  
opportunity to impress the  
chef. It's a good thing. I  
just need your help to make  
more tortillas.

ESPAÑOL  
*¡Ay dios mio, por favor! No  
crees que estás siendo medio  
dramática? Es una oportunidad  
para impresionar al chef.  
Esto es bueno. Solo necesito  
que me ayudes a hacer más  
tortillas.*

She shakes her head vehemently.

ABUELITA  
I didn't raise you to be so  
naive.

ESPAÑOL  
*Yo no te crié para que fueras  
tan ingenuo.*

NICOLÁS  
Abuelita...

ABUELITA

Listen to me. What do you think is going to change? When you go back there he's just going to tell you to wash more dishes.

ESPAÑOL

*Escuchame. ¿Qué crees que va a cambiar? Cuando regreses solo te va a decir que laves más platos.*

NICOLÁS (CONT'D)

Will you just let me try? That's all I'm asking for. Please, Abuelita?

ESPAÑOL

*¿Me puedes dejar intentarlo? Es lo único que te estoy pidiendo. Por fa abuelita.*

ABUELITA

Why are you killing yourself for this man?

ESPAÑOL

*¿Porque te estas matando por este tipo?*

NICOLÁS (CONT'D)

Because I want to be more than a dishwasher.

ESPAÑOL

*Porque quiero ser mas que un lavaplatos.*

Abuelita studies Nicolás for a moment.

ABUELITA

You think I don't understand but I do. Everything may seem possible to you right now, but what you'll learn is an opportunity is nothing more than a chance to be disappointed. Maybe that's a lesson you'll have to learn the hard way.

ESPAÑOL

*Crees que no, pero si te entiendo. Todo te va a parecer como una posibilidad, pero lo que vas a entender es que las oportunidades son solo posibilidades para quedar decepcionado. Quizá esa sea una lección qué vas a entender a las malas.*

Abuelita falls quiet for a beat.

ABUELITA

I'm worn out now. Please, go.

ESPAÑOL

*Estoy muerta. Por favor vete.*

She shuts the door, leaving Nicolás alone in the hallway.

14

INT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL - LATER

14

Nicolás sits in a dark stairwell alone, the dull thump of bass coming from an apartment down the hall.

His phone rings. He looks at the caller ID which reads: "Chef Lawrence". He clicks the red button to reject the call.

A PARTYGOER, 30s, walks up the stairs and passes him.

Nicolás pays no attention, looking at the phone with glazed eyes, defeated.

PARTYGOER 2  
 (to Nicolás)  
 Happy Cinco de Mayo!

Nicolás looks up to see a several more PARTYGOERS, 20s to 30s, mostly white hipsters. They smile at him, happy to share their festive cheer.

He watches them move up the stairs past him.

CUT TO:

15 INT. ABUELITA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Everything now is in SLOW-MOTION:

An old recording of *Yo Soy Mexicano* plays as diegetic sound fades out.

Nicolás, amongst the throng of partygoers, moves towards an open door to an apartment. There is a party inside.

CUT TO:

16 INT. PARTY APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS 16

Nicolás glides deeper and deeper into the party.

From off-screen he is handed a margarita.

He notices cheap decorations hung from the wall and a paper cut out sign that reads: "Happy Cinco de Mayo".

He continues to take in the unfamiliar scene.

People talk in circles wearing Cinco de Mayo accoutrements: bushy fake mustaches and chili pepper-themed jewelry.

They eat tacos and drink tequila.

From off-screen he is handed a small paper plate.

Nicolás looks down at it. Centered is a single soft taco. Simple and beautifully made.

BOOM! A piñata has been struck and a cloud of candy gracefully showers Nicolás in SLOW-MOTION.

CUT TO:

17

INT. PARTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

17

The hard cut jolts us back into NORMAL SPEED and the diegetic sound rushes back in place of music.

CHUCK and TODD, 30s, white, move about the cramped Brooklyn kitchen making fresh tortillas with great authenticity.

Chuck has a mortar and pestle between his thighs aggressively grinding the corn into masa.

Todd stands by the sink rapidly patting the masa into discs by hand, barking orders.

TODD

How long till the next batch is ready?

CHUCK

I don't know. Soon. This shit is tiring.

TODD

Well... should we trade jobs?

CHUCK

I'm making more masa.

NICOLÁS (O.S.)

Excuse me.

TODD

(annoyed)

Yeah?

Todd looks up, revealing Nicolás for the first time, fully decked out in cartoonish Mexican garb: a Chevy's sombrero, wool poncho, and plastic gun with holster.

Todd's demeanor immediately softens.

NICOLÁS

I'm NEE-co-lass.

Nicolás smiles and nods.

TODD

Are you from Mexico?

CHUCK

Don't ask him that.

TODD

Sorry.

NICOLÁS  
It's okay. Yes. I'm from Mexico.

Todd nods in awe.

NICOLÁS (CONT'D)  
(laying on a thick accent)  
I see you're making tortillas.

CUT TO:

18 INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - LATER

18

Nicolás busts inside. The kitchen is crazed.

Brandon, Riley and Chef all work fast, surrounded by flames, sizzling food, and the chatter of incoming orders.

Nicolás slips through the tight quarters, making his way towards Chef. The cooks give quick glances of concern as he passes by.

Nicolás places a stack of plastic wrapped tortillas on the counter in front of Chef.

CHEF  
(nodding towards the dish  
pit)  
Back to work.

Nicolás moves to the overrun dish pit and pulls on a rubber apron. He begins washing dishes.

Chef finishes plating a dish, sets it in the window, then turns to the tortillas.

Peeling back the plastic wrap, steams pours out from the still hot package.

He picks a tortilla up, smells it, then tastes it. A beat. Chef grins big, shaking his head as his anger melts away.

CHEF (CONT'D)  
Brandon... Riley...

The two cooks turn to face Chef.

He tosses each of them a hot tortilla. They eat quickly, continuing to work.

Nicolás keeps his head down, too afraid to look over.

RILEY  
Good job, Nicolás.

Riley slaps Nicolás playfully on the back. Nicolás can't help but smile. We hold on Nicolás.

CHEF (O.S.)  
Fire tacos table twelve, seven,  
fifteen.

The kitchen is running smoothly again.

Nicolás continues to wash dishes, scrubbing, spraying, and narrowly dodging incoming red hot pans.

THE END