

LUNCHTIME

by

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LUNCHTIME takes place over two days in a major American city. The locations include:

- A restaurant
- An office
- A delicatessen
- A public park
- An interrogation room
- A hospital room
- A street, outside a crime scene

The cast of characters, in order of appearance, are:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CHARLES McDANIELS..... | 50s/60s, a hard-drinking philanderer and businessman. |
| STUART FORBES..... | 30s/40s, a corrupt cop, plays by his own rules. |
| NICKY..... | Teens/20s, a waiter, also a bike messenger, wants to be a cop who plays by his own rules. |
| LOUISE..... | 20s, a lost soul, also a Power Point specialist, would play by the rules if she knew what they were. |
| NINA..... | 40s, an office manager, used to play by the rules, saw where that got her. |

SCENE 1

(A restaurant. Stuart Forbes, a plainclothes cop, looks on as Charles McDaniels, a middle-aged businessman, finishes up an early lunch. Forbes is cool, unshaven, hung over - a dirty cop, both physically and spiritually. McDaniels is tormented, fevered - he thinks he's in love.)

MCDANIELS

It doesn't happen often, Stu. But it happens.

FORBES

Yeah.

MCDANIELS

A girl walks into your life, out of nowhere, off the street. And then WHAM, like a two by four, right on the bridge of the nose.

FORBES

Yeah.

MCDANIELS

It's like I've been starving, Stu. Starving without knowing it. I felt pain, dull pain, but I didn't know where it was coming from.

FORBES

Now you know.

MCDANIELS

I thought I was eating all this time, spiritually, emotionally. I thought I had a balanced spiritual diet, spiritual fruits, all of it. But you know what I had?

FORBES

No sustenance.

MCDANIELS

Not from Nina.

FORBES

Your lover.

MCDANIELS

EX-lover.

FORBES

Soon-To-Be-Replaced-By-This-New-Girl-Ex-Lover.

McDANIELS

I'm skin and bones, Stu, my soul. My *heart*.

FORBES

I can see it.

McDANIELS

Nina. What is she? She's an employee.

FORBES

She works for you.

McDANIELS

She's a stone, is what she is. Dried meat. I can't sink my teeth into that anymore.

FORBES

Not healthy.

McDANIELS

I've been gnawing on shoe leather, Stu, like - - like Charlie Chaplin or something.

FORBES

You're not Charlie Chaplin.

McDANIELS

My teeth are worn down to nubs. It was me and Nina alone in that office, Stu, every day, after hours, for years. Working late, big projects.

FORBES

Kirby Memo.

McDANIELS

Exactly right. Pressure of the moment.

FORBES

Rife.

McDANIELS

Something was bound to happen. Particularly with her, you know, her ways.

FORBES

Her ways?

MCDANIELS

Her loneliness, the way she responds to loneliness.

FORBES

Tragedy of modern living.

MCDANIELS

And I'm a man, Stu, a male human being.

FORBES

Never said you weren't.

MCDANIELS

I've got my ways, too. I won't apologize for them.

FORBES

Right. Wait a minute. Something DID happen between you and this new girl?

MCDANIELS

No, that's what I'm saying! Something's BEEN happening between me and Nina!

FORBES

Right.

MCDANIELS

For years! And I'm sick of it! I just didn't KNOW I was sick of it!

FORBES

Got it. What about Marjorie?

MCDANIELS

What?

FORBES

Your - - oh.

MCDANIELS

I thought I told you never to bring her up to me.

FORBES

Right.

McDANIELS

Marjorie's my wife, Stu, that's it - and that's IT! She's got nothing to do with this.

FORBES

Nina. Marjorie. New Girl.

McDANIELS

Busy.

FORBES

Busy.

(As the two talk, Nicky, a waiter, emerges from the shadows to listen.)

McDANIELS

But this girl, Stu, this *new girl*. It's like - - a light has come into my life. A bright light, a *real* light. I don't want to live in the darkness anymore like, whatever, a cave man or something. Filthy. Alone. Lungs filled with smoke from the open fire that I have to maintain IN the actual cave that I'm ALSO living in all the time. That's life with Nina. No chimney. No ventilation system. Just me, alone, cold, filthy, starving, afraid.

FORBES

Chewing on the leather.

McDANIELS

Or hides or bones or - - whatever! That's life without the light, Stu. And I'm through with that life.

NICKY

And - - how was everything?

(Both jump, taken by surprise.)

FORBES & McDANIELS

Whaa- ?!

FORBES

Nicky, Jesus. Didn't see you over there.

(Nicky begins clearing the table.)

NICKY

How'd you like that liver?

McDANIELS
I could use some wine, actually.

FORBES
Wine?

McDANIELS
To wash down the liver.

FORBES
It isn't even noon.

McDANIELS
The French drink wine before noon.

FORBES
We'll take the check.

McDANIELS
And the wine.

NICKY
And - - who, may I ask, are you talking about?

McDANIELS
Huh?

NICKY
Someone involved in the - - Deli Wars, perhaps?

FORBES
Could we just get the check, please, Nicky!

McDANIELS
And the wine.

(Silence. Nicky exits, sullenly.)

McDANIELS
"Deli Wars"?

FORBES
It's nothing, something we were talking about before you got here.

McDANIELS
Yeah, but - - "Deli Wars"?

FORBES

It's NOTHING. Forget about it.

McDANIELS

Right. So...

FORBES

Three hundred dollars a day plus expenses. If the precinct needs me, I take the call, you still have to pay.

McDANIELS

Forget it.

(Forbes stands to go.)

FORBES

I'm done with you, then.

McDANIELS

OKAY! All right.

(Forbes sits back down. McDaniels reaches into his briefcase and pulls out a sheaf of paper.)

McDANIELS

That's an awful lot of money, you know.

FORBES

I'm an awful lot of cop.

(As McDaniels presents his materials, Nicky returns with two glasses of wine.)

McDANIELS

Okay, so, here's a copy of her job application, her driver's license, her birth certificate. Here's a photo I took of her with my phone, by the copy machine.

NICKY

(Placing the glasses before the men)
Fine looking woman.

FORBES

(To Nicky)
I thought I asked you for the check.

McDANIELS

Look how her eyes sparkle. I think she was copying with the cover open. Footlights.

(Nicky places a roll of film in front of Forbes.)

NICKY

Speaking of photos, the Sunshine Deli got hit this morning. Might be the start of something. I got a few pix. Old fashioned film, I know, but that's how I roll. Roll with the roll.

FORBES

(Trying to control his fury)

Nicky-

NICKY

Old fashioned film, quality pix. I always have my camera with me, never know when it'll help a case, especially now, what with a deli-war threatening and you with your extra-curriculars, like what you're doing right now - totally illegal, by the way, at least according to the Academy website - but hey, when did rules ever stop a working policeman, right? Anyway, there I am, walking up to the Sunshine's bar, *salad* bar, looking to put together a pre-shift snack, and what should I see smeared across the bar's sneeze-guard but about a bucket's worth of-

(Forbes, snapping, pulls his gun.)

FORBES

CHECK! PLEASE! NICKY!!

NICKY

(Stung, but defiant)

Okay. I'll just, whatever, get your bill together.

(Nicky exits. Forbes reholsters his gun.)

McDANIELS

Nice piece.

FORBES

Thanks.

McDANIELS

Wouldn't mind getting myself one or two of those little beauties.

FORBES

Join The Force. Then you can have every little thing you ever wanted in this life - at least according to the website.

McDANIELS

Every little thing I want is that girl.

FORBES

What do you need to know?

McDANIELS

How she brushes her teeth in the morning and what music she likes to listen to. I want to know what she's reading, where she really comes from, and whether she's got dirty secrets she doesn't want anyone to know about.

FORBES

There'll be expenses.

McDANIELS

Gotta slush fund, corporate monies. Already been dipping.

FORBES

As long as the monies're green.

McDANIELS

Just get me something. Something good.

FORBES

If there's something to find, I'll find it.

(Nicky enters, now wearing a bike helmet.)

McDANIELS

Get me inside her, Stu, inside her mind. Take me on a journey, into the center of her. I want to- What do I want to do? I want to drown in the everything that she is, the water of her consciousness. I want to die like that, inside her. Not the "little death" that the French speak of, although I do want to do that, too - like A LOT! But I'm after something deeper. Sustenance, Stu, fulfillment. I want to be full. Spiritually. Emotionally. Help me be full.

(Nicky places a bill before Forbes.)

FORBES

What the Hell is this?

NICKY

I gotta go to my other job, now, peddling, all that. so if you wouldn't mind.

McDANIELS

A diary, that would be good. REALLY good. I see her writing in one from time to time.

(Nicky exits back to the kitchen.)

FORBES

Excuse me.

(Forbes exits after Nicky.)

McDANIELS

(To himself)

Wouldn't mind getting a hold of THAT good book. Lots of stories in there, I bet.

(As Forbes and Nicky fight in the kitchen, McDaniels downs the two glasses of wine.)

FORBES(O.S.)

Are you out of your mind?!

NICKY(O.S.)

Pay your bill!

FORBES(O.S.)

Have you lost your *mind*?!

NICKY(O.S.)

Pay your bill or find another fool!

FORBES(O.S.)

You don't charge a cop money for food! You give me a bill, yeah, but you don't put a number on that bill!

NICKY(O.S.)

Now I do!

FORBES(O.S.)

HEY!! You want to spend the rest of your life behind bars or something like that?!

NICKY(O.S.)

Stop using me for free meals!

FORBES(O.S.)

You are under arrest RIGHT NOW!!

(We hear banging and clanging as the fight in the kitchen becomes violent.)

NICKY(O.S.)

The Sunshine got hit! It got hit and you don't even care that much about it!

FORBES(O.S.)

I care about CASH MONEY!!

NICKY(O.S.)

God damn it, I just want to help! I just want to be a part of something bigger than myself! I just want to fight crimes, you know, even crimes that don't hurt anybody! I want to be a professional!

FORBES(O.S.)

You want to be a professional?!

NICKY(O.S.)

Yeah, I want to be a professional!

FORBES(O.S.)

THEN DON'T TALK ABOUT THE DELI WARS IN FRONT OF CIVILIANS!!

(Forbes returns, winded, spent, and sits. Nicky, now wearing more bike messenger garb, follows him out, also winded.)

NICKY

You don't want to be my partner?! You think of me as a, what?! A *waiter*?! A BIKE messenger?! Well, I've got a message for you, my baby! I'm a crime fighter! And I'm gonna fight for my right to fight crimes! So listen up, 'cause here's our specials for today: The Sunshine got hit-BAD! And they'll hit back! Who'll they be hitting?! I'm busting this case WIDE!! OPEN!!

(Nicky exits, furious. Then)

McDANIELS

Everything okay?

FORBES

Yeah. Listen, about the bill-

McDANIELS

I got it.

FORBES

Huh?

McDANIELS

I'm just going to slush fund all this, anyway.

FORBES

Right.

McDANIELS

Business expenses.

FORBES

Corporate monies.

McDANIELS

A man can't function without love, Stu. How am I supposed to work if I can't function? I'd call maintaining functionality a legitimate business expense.

FORBES

Everyone's got to function.

(Still winded.)

God, I need to start working out or something.

McDANIELS

Me, too. I totally hate my body.

FORBES

You and me both. Meaning my body, not your body.

McDANIELS

Yeah.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(An office, later that day. Louise checks office supplies, clipboard in hand. She's young, quiet, a little sad. Nina, her supervisor, stands in the entrance, watching, unnoticed. Nina wears her coat and carries a to-go container. After a moment, Louise gives a startled yelp and turns, dropping the clipboard in the process.)

LOUISE

HWHA-?! Jesus, Nina. I didn't see you over there.

NINA

(Coolly, masking her contempt)
Sorry to startle you.

LOUISE

No, it's okay.

LOUISE

(Trying to catch her breath)
Wow. Adrenaline.

NINA

Yeah?

LOUISE

What a sensation. Like a freight train.

(Nina puts her things away as she speaks.)

NINA

Fight or flight.

LOUISE

Huh?

NINA

Tragedy of modern living. We get the fight or flight, can't fight or fly. Olden days, saber-tooth tiger? Fight or flight. Now? You feel a threat? You bottle it up, you thwart it until you, whatever, get cancer. Ten million thwarted fight or flights, that's cancer. And that's why the French never get cancer.

LOUISE

Yeah.

NINA
That and the wine.

LOUISE
Huh?

NINA
I hear they drink a lot of wine.

(Louise picks up her clipboard and gets back to inventory. Nina crosses to the coffee maker.)

NINA
Coffee?

LOUISE
Oh, no, thank you, though.

NINA
Did you make any, is what I'm asking.

LOUISE
I didn't. Was I supposed to?

NINA
(Making a pot)
I'll do it. Might as well, I like it strong.

LOUISE
Did, um... Did you get your salad?

NINA
Sandwich. Ate it by the fountain. Most of it, at least.
You want a half?

LOUISE
Me? No. Thanks, though.

NINA
Little birds kept dive bombing me, wouldn't let me eat. I think they've gone a little crazy today.

LOUISE
Yeah, could be.

NINA
How about you?

Me?
LOUISE

Did you eat?
LOUISE

I went but I - - I didn't get anything.
LOUISE

Not healthy.
NINA

I know.
LOUISE

Diet?
NINA

Oh, no, nothing like that.
LOUISE

Have a half.
NINA

Maybe later.
LOUISE

How about him, has he eaten?
NINA

I don't know. I don't think he's been in, yet.
LOUISE

He's been in.
NINA

I didn't see him.
LOUISE

He came in early. We both did. Probably took an early lunch.
NINA

Oh. I see.
LOUISE

NINA

He'd need it, considering how early we got in.

LOUISE

Right.

NINA

Kirby Time.

LOUISE

Huh?

NINA

Kirby Memo, big report, big client, BIG client. That's why you're here.

LOUISE

Right. Charl- Mr. McDaniels mentioned something about that.

NINA

"Charl"?

LOUISE

Um - - Mr. McDaniels.

NINA

God, I need coffee after a sandwich. Sandwich. It's all that bread, I suppose. That and the early mornings. Puts me right to sleep.

LOUISE

Bready food.

NINA

Probably goes back to cave man time, or whatever. The body needs to tend to things, you know, process the grains, so everything else just shuts down. Sshunk. Sshunk. Sshunk.

LOUISE

Cave man bread. I wonder what that tasted like.

NINA

Yeah. Me, too.

(Quietly, to herself)

"Charl...?"

LOUISE

I was going to have a salad. A garden salad, fresh vegetables. It actually energizes me, you know? Nice, crispy romaine, cherry tomatoes, Italian dressing. That was my plan. Then I just - - I didn't do that in the end.

NINA

You must have gone to The Sunshine.

LOUISE

I did, actually. How did you know that?

NINA

I saw you coming out, before I watched the birds, before I went in. I saw the salad bar, the condition of it, hence the sandwich.

LOUISE

Yeah, the, um, vinegar on the cottage cheese, and all that.

NINA

I was talking about the mashed potatoes.

LOUISE

Huh?

NINA

Smearred across the sneeze-guard, dolloped onto the floor. It was very disturbing.

LOUISE

Mashed potatoes?

NINA

It was very hostile. I mean, who would do a thing like that?

LOUISE

Maybe it was an accident.

NINA

Did you see the croutons, how one crouton had been jammed into every one of the California rolls, so that each crouton pushed out the original crab meat center?

LOUISE

Maybe it was a new stockboy, or something. Didn't know what he was doing and - - panicked.

NINA

Panicked?

(As Louise speaks, Nina picks a piece of paper off Louise's chair and inspects it.)

LOUISE

Or snapped. People snap, don't they? I know I do. And the stockboy, the new stockboy, an immigrant child from somewhere or another - Mexico, Malawi - living in an SRO, so far from home, having to listen to the same gibberish about stocking and stacking, until one day he passes the salad bar, the one you were talking about, and sees the icy perfection of a field of cottage cheese, and thinks back to the mottled mung of his humid, tropical home. And he's seeing the icy, and remembering the mung, the icy, the mung, icy, mung, until all he can do is- !

NINA

What the Hell is this?

LOUISE

I - - um - - Pardon?

NINA

What's this piece of paper doing on your chair?

LOUISE

I - - um - - a spreadsheet?

NINA

This is a hard copy of the Excel document I emailed you this morning, Louise, the updated "World-Wides". Am I right to assume you haven't even LOOKED at this?

LOUISE

I didn't know there was a spreadsheet on my chair.

NINA

What have you been doing all this time?

LOUISE

Inventory.

NINA

Inventory?!

LOUISE

Charlie- Mr. McDaniels-

(As Nina speaks, McDaniels enters, unseen.)

NINA

We've got a God damned Kirby Memo to pump out, Louise, a memo that depends on my data, "Charl"-EEZE's analysis, and YOUR visuals. Power Point! That's why you're here! And I was *hoping*- now that I'm fed, coffee'd - I was *hoping* to sit down and LOOK at your visuals before inter-office-ing them on over to Charlie - aka Mr. McDaniels!

MCDANIELS

Beautiful day.

(Nina and Louise turn, taken by surprise.)

NINA & LOUISE

HWAA- !

NINA

Charlie. Jesus. Didn't see you over there.

MCDANIELS

Sunlight on the fountain, little birds diving in, diving out. I've never seen them do that before. Little sparrow things, they're- What are they doing? They're actually diving from quite a bit of height, like a hundred feet, and just splooshing into the fountain, just like that, and then right out again. Like they're oceanic birds, or water birds, fishing for fish. You should see it.

NINA

I did see it, on my break.

MCDANIELS

And how about you, Louise, how was your lunch?

LOUISE

I - - um - - haven't eaten yet.

MCDANIELS

You better go do that, then.

LOUISE

Oh. No, I couldn't.

MCDANIELS

A human being can't function without sustenance, Louise. Trust me. It's something I know about.

NINA

She's all ready taken her break. That's what she's trying to tell you.

MCDANIELS

Get yourself fed, Louise, then come on back to me. We all need to be on our game this week.

LOUISE

Kirby time.

MCDANIELS

Exactly right. In the mean time, Nina, while we're waiting for the Kirby data, why don't you get Louise your updated world-wides so she has it to work with when she gets back.

(Louise begins gathering her things.)

NINA

I got the world-wides to her this morning.

MCDANIELS

Email them to her, too, as a spreadsheet, so she can cut and paste, do her magic, magic with the Power Point.

NINA

She's had the Updated World-Wide Market Data Spread Sheet as a hard copy AND as an attachment to an email since first light. She's been doing inventory.

MCDANIELS

I told her to do inventory.

(Beat.)

NINA

You did *what*?

MCDANIELS

I need to know what's going on in HERE, Nina, if I'm going to inform Kirby what's going on out THERE. You follow? In other words, I want to know that what's in this office belongs here, and what doesn't is flagged for removal.

NINA

Have you been drinking?

LOUISE

Anyone want anything? While I'm out?

(No response. Louise exits.)

NINA

You drank wine with lunch?

MCDANIELS

I need a little courage today, Nina, that's all.

NINA

And why do you have mashed potatoes on your shoes?

(McDaniels inspects his shoes.)

MCDANIELS

Huh. Must have stepped in something.

(Both look at his shoe for awhile. Finally)

NINA

Charlie-

MCDANIELS

Nina-

NINA

Baby-

MCDANIELS

DON'T!

NINA

Listen! I don't care what you did.

MCDANIELS

Huh?

NINA

You need to mess up a salad bar or something, then drink wine with lunch? Mess up me. Drink me.

MCDANIELS

Nina-