

No-Danish Zone
By Mark Bellusci

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CAST:

SIX-B - Consumption consultant, A.K.A. waiter. Disdainful, snobbish, sarcastic, superior.

LORI - Customer. Knowledgeable, obsessive, demanding.

LARRY - LORI's husband. Beaten down.

MACK - Customer and tourist. Loud and brash.

MABEL -- MACK'S wife and fellow tourist.

SCENE:

A restaurant that looks more like an antiseptic hospital ward -- it is immaculate, sparse and cold looking. Two tables are center stage. There are plastic covers over them.

AT RISE:

SIX-B enters, dressed in surgical fatigues. He removes the plastic cover from one of the tables. Then, even though the table is immaculate, HE cleans the table and chairs rigorously. LORI and LARRY enter, also dressed in surgical fatigues.

SIX-B

(Disdainfully throughout.)

Good evening, I am consumption consultant Six-B.

LORI

You're new.

SIX-B

I have just been transferred to this--

LORI

Great. Regular customers, and we're breaking in a new--

SIX-B

(Haughty.)

I am aseptically certified in healthful ingestion and sustenance serving. This table meets my cleanliness standards.

(LORI scrutinizes the area.)

LORI

The scale. Has it been calibrated?

SIX-B

To within a thousandth of an ounce.

LORI

You should get that fixed. Why should I risk --

(Suddenly noticing.)

Is that a particle on the floor?

(SIX-B drops to his knees to inspect it.)

SIX-B

It's a natural blemish of the oak wood.

LARRY

I'm sure it's--

(LORI drops to the floor to inspect it.)

LORI

You should inspect your building materials more carefully.

LARRY

It's just a natural blem--

(LORI glares at LARRY.)

SIX-B

I'll recommend that payments be withheld from the builder.

LORI

Is that sarcasm?

SIX-B

Of course not. Sarcasm is a deterrent to proper digestion.

LORI

Well, it sounded like--

SIX-B

Your sustenance is served.

(They sit, carefully arranging their silverware. SIX-B exits, then returns with a carefully wrapped serving tray. He places the tray on a stand, removes the wrapping, places each plate on the scale, then on the table.)

SIX-B

You may now ingest at a comfortable-yet-purposeful pace. Listen carefully for announcements on sudden changes in dietary cuisine.

(They nod. SIX-B leaves. They eat in careful, measured, joyless silence. LORI maintains a look of concentration while LARRY grimaces after each mouthful. Beat.)

LARRY

(Lowering his head and talking downward.)
How was work, hon?

LORI

(Lowering her head and talking downward.)
You're conversing during ingestion?

LARRY

(Looking directly at LORI for the first time.)
Sorry, I forgot--

LORI

(Looking downward.)
Larry! You looked directly at me.

LARRY

Oops--

LORI

You know how many airborne particles have just bombarded my sustenance?

LARRY

(Nervously, head down.)
Sorry.

(Beat.)

LORI

(Still looking downward.)
If you must know, work was productive and perfunctory.

LARRY

(Also looking downward.)
Ah. Good. That's ... boy this sanitized seaweed is, um ...
Well, I don't taste a thing.

LORI

Of course you don't. The impurities have been blanched out,
and since taste is an impurity, the--

P.A. SYSTEM

Attention, ingestors: new research suggests that seaweed
ingestion could lead to eyebrow hair loss after age 90.
Prepare for substitution.

LORI

Thought I noticed eyebrow hairs in the shower.

LARRY

(Sotto voce.)
Like I'll really miss sanitized seaweed.

LORI

Sarcasm?

LARRY

Won't happen again.

(SIX-B appears and uses surgical tongs to collect
seaweed.)

LORI

The recommended replacement?

SIX-B

Colandered kelp.

(SIX-B places the plates on the scale, checks their
weight, then serves to the couple.)

LARRY

Gee, that looks even more scrumptious--

LORI

(Exasperated.)
How can I ingest healthily with these misguided attempts at
sarcastic levity?

(Laughter from offstage, followed by the entrance SIX-B
leading MACK and MABEL, who laugh at their medical
scrub garb. SIX-B removes the plastic from their
table, then scrubs the table, chairs and surrounding
area -- to the amazement of the couple. MABEL takes
pictures of everything with her digital camera,
including MACK.)

MACK
Free clothes with a meal. Told you this was a funky place.

MABEL
You look good in green.

SIX-B
The clothes are loaners, to be returned immediately after
ingestion.

MABEL
Ingestion?

MACK
We going to eat or incubate?

SIX-B
Does the location meet your cleanliness approval?

MACK
More importantly, does it meet my hunger approval?

MABEL
Can we see a menu?

SIX-B

(Disdainfully.).
There are no *menus*. Your sustenance is based on the latest health information, then organized in a pristine preparation environment and served fresh by a consumption consultant, yours truly: Six-B.

(They both stare at him for a moment, then laugh.)

MABEL

Oh, this place is a hoot.

MACK

Gotta love theme restaurants.

SIX-B

This is not a *theme* restaurant--

MABEL

Sure, sure.

MACK

Look, how about you just bring us lunch, R2D2?

SIX-B

I am referred to by the section I am serving, Six-B. And the term "lunch" is frowned upon. It infers an artificial delineation among ingestion sessions.

(They look at him again in shocked silence, then laugh.)

MABEL

It's like those fifties theme restaurants, but in a warped future.

MACK

A Klingon comedy club.

MABEL

I love floor shows.

SIX-B

There is no floor show--

MACK

Oh, I get it. You have to stay in character.

MABEL

Like those murder mystery restaurants.

MACK

And them big I-talian wedding theme joints.

SIX-B

(Exasperated.)

I will now assemble your sanitized sustenance.

MACK

(Giggling.)

You do that, Mr. Clean.

(They sit, thoroughly enjoying "the show" by taking in all the sites, taking pictures, and so on.)

LORI

Look at them. Laughing and cavorting and germ distributing. Disgusting.

LARRY

(Still looking down.)

I thought we couldn't converse during--

LORI

Doesn't matter now. They've already disrupted my digestive concentration.

(MACK and MABEL look in their direction. LORI shields her eyes.)

They're looking this way. Do not engage.

MACK

Excuse me.

(LORI and LARRY ignore him.)

Hellllloo?

(LARRY turns to look at him, LORI glares at him.)

Hi, I'm Mack, and this is Mabel. We're traveling the country, touring all kinds of theme restaurants.

(Holding his hand out to shake.)

MABEL

Hello.

LARRY

Um, well, hi.

(LARRY keeps his head down and waves instead of shaking hands. Confused, MACK just drops his hand.)

MACK

My wife, she don't want me to ruin the surprise, but ...

LORI

What?

MACK

You're part of the floor show, right?

LORI

There is no--

MACK

I promise, I won't tell anyone.

LORI

I don't know what you're--

MACK

I've got it! Underneath the scrubs, you're wearing germ costumes, and you're going to do the forbidden food dance!

LORI

We are *trying* to ingest in peace.

MACK

Ohhhh, they're good, Mabel. Not giving anything away.

MABEL

What do you expect? They're professionals.

(Exasperated, LORI returns to her meal. LARRY obediently follows suit. SIX-B returns with food for MACK and MABEL. He carefully measures the food and serves each.)

MABEL

Think they were handling plutonium.

MACK

All part of the act. Go with it.

SIX-B

Sir, for the final time, there is no act.

MACK

Man, you guys are tight lipped. Can you at least tell us when you'll serve the real meal?

MABEL

We had a light breakfast.

SIX-B

The word, "breakfast" is also frowned upon.

MACK

How about chow, eats, grub, the big enchilada, the--

SIX-B

The ingestion solution is served.

(LORI signals for SIX-B.)

Excuse me.

(He goes to LORI's table.)

Yes?

LORI

(Sotto voce.)

I want that abhorrent couple removed.

SIX-B

Sorry, management policy is to provide healthy sustenance to all.

(Without waiting for a response, SIX-B exits.)

LORI

(Yelling after him, as LARRY, embarrassed, shields his head.)

There are plenty of other sanitary ingestion establishments, you know.

MABEL

Oooh, the floor show's starting.

LORI

There is no floor show!

MACK

We're over here.

LORI

I know exactly where you are.

MACK

Then why are you looking at the floor?

LORI

I am directing my airborne particles away from fellow ingestors. Which, if others had the courtesy to--

MACK

(Chuckling and looking around carefully.)
Ahhh, now I get it. It's the world's funniest hidden videos.

(LORI is exasperated.)

MABEL

(Pulling out a mirror and adjusting her hair.)
Oh, I'm a wreck.

MACK

Don't worry. With TV commissions, you can get a makeover every week!

(LORI again signals for SIX-B.)

LARRY

Hon, why don't we just eat and--

LORI

Quiet!

LARRY

Sorry.

(SIX-B enters approaches LORI.)

LORI

I will hold this ingestion center responsible for the irreparable intestinal harm they are causing me.

SIX-B

I can take no action unless they violate --

MACK

Excuse me--

SIX-B

Communal consumption policies.

MABEL

Helloooo?

SIX-B

(To LORI.)

Excuse me.

(He approaches MABEL.)

Yes?

MABEL

(Presenting one profile, then the other.)

Which side do you like better?

SIX-B

Side?

MABEL

You know.

(Conspiratorially.)

For the hidden video.

SIX-B

Why would we--

MACK

Don't worry, we'll act perfectly natural.

SIX-B

There are no hidden videos, no themes. Just sustenance, in its purest, cleanest form.

(Loudly, to all.)

Now if you would all excuse me. I do have other clients to attend.

LORI

Won't be clients for long, the way this place operates.

MABEL

Oooh, she seems angry--

MACK

Shhh. They're probably taping our reactions right now.

MABEL

How should I act?

MACK

Embarrassed. Uncomfortable. Nervous.

MABEL

(Looking at the food.)
Won't be hard.
(MABEL tastes it and makes a painful face.)

MACK

(Sotto voce.)
Great acting.

MABEL

Who's acting?
(MACK tastes the food, then grimaces.)

MACK

What the hell??
(He signals for the waiter.)
Yo, R2D2!

MABEL

Thought you wanted to play along.

MACK

Playing's one thing. Poison's another.
(SIX-B appears.)
Okay, fun's over. We're hungry.

SIX-B

What are--

MACK

Menus. So we can eat.

SIX-B

(Pointedly.)
This nutritious sustenance eliminates the need for menus.
(He leaves in a huff.)

MACK

(Turning to LARRY. LORI sighs loudly.)
There really is no floor show?

LARRY

Uh uh.

MACK

And you come here voluntarily?

LARRY

Seven days a week, 365 days a year.

MABEL

You poor souls.

LORI

Us? We're not the ones with unhealthy consumption habits.

MACK

And we're not the ones with sucked in faces that would shatter if a giggle slipped out.

MABEL

Mack!

LORI

(To LARRY.)

Are you going to let him insult me?

LARRY

Sorry.

(To MACK, while LORI signals for SIX-B.)

Would it be possible for you to refrain from--

(SIX-B enters.)

SIX-B

(Sarcastically.)

Hello yet again.

LORI

That man just insulted me!

MACK

Only after you--

SIX-B

If you cannot ingest harmoniously, I will have to ask you all to leave.

(He exits.)

LORI

How dare you threaten a regular customer!

MACK

Careful. You're puckering to the point of implosion.

LORI

Larry!

LARRY

Sorry.

(To MACK.)

Um, if you could please--

MABEL

Why don't we just go to another--

MACK

I am not leaving food I paid for. There's got to be something edible.

(He tries the various foods, grimacing until, finally, he tastes something and appears hopeful.)

Hmm.

MABEL

Something good?

MACK

Something not totally disgusting.

(He hands the plate to MABEL who tastes it.)

MABEL

It's ... like eating pureed paper.

MACK

A step up from everything else.

(He elbows LARRY.)

Hey, what's this?

(LORI sighs.)

LARRY

Aseptically sautéed soy.

MACK

Ain't half bad, once you get past the putrid taste and cardboard feel.

LARRY

Hmm.

P.A. SYSTEM

This just in: Botswanan witch doctors report a possible link between aseptically sautéed soy and an itching disease that has yet to be discovered. Prepare for substitution.

(SIX-B appears and collects a dish from LORI and LARRY, handing them a substitution plate. HE then goes to MACK and MABEL's table and reaches for the soy dish.)

MACK

(Stopping him.)

Whoa!

SIX-B

This sustenance selection is no longer acceptable.

MACK

That's the only thing I can hold down.

MABEL

Just give him the plate. He brought another.

MACK

(They switch plates. MACK tastes the new dish and grimaces.)

Ugh. Where do they come up with this crap?

(He holds it out for MABEL.)

MABEL

I'll take your word for it. Can we just get out of here?

MACK

Hell no. We paid for the table, I'm not giving it up so they can bilk some other suckers.

MABEL

I don't know if my stomach can hold out.

MACK

It doesn't have to.

(He reaches into his bag and pulls out two Danishes.)
Cherry or cheese?

LORI

(Seeing the Danishes.)
What the--

MABEL

Cheese. But I want a bite of your cherry.

LARRY

(Sniffing, then turning and seeing the Danishes.)
Daaaaaannnnnnnniiiiiiisssshhhhh.

LORI

(Signals for SIX-B.)
This is an outrage!

SIX-B

(SIX-B appears, exasperated.)
Gee, it was almost three minutes.

LORI

(Pointing.)
Danish.

SIX-B

(Shaken.)
What??

LARRY

(Still in a trance.)
It smells soooooo--

LORI

They have--

SIX-B

Shhh. Others will hear.

LARRY

(Louder.)
Daaaaannnniiiiishhhhhh.

MACK
(Turning to LARRY.)
You want a sliver?

LARRY
Ahhhh!

SIX-B
Sir! This is a no-Danish zone!

MACK
What?

SIX-B
A no-Danish zone. Unhealthy edible devices are expressly
forbidden.

MACK
It's just a Danish.

SIX-B
It does not meet our standards.

MACK
Course not. It has taste.

LARRY
Taste?? I want a taste!

LORI
Larry! Get a grip on--

LARRY
(Feral.)
Shut up!

LORI
Larry!

(From offstage come various groans as other clients
smell the Danish.)

MABEL
What's wrong with--

SIX-B

It's the Danish's secondhand fumes. They can cause riots in healthy consumption establishments.

MACK

This little--

LARRY

For the love of God, man. Don't you see the dangers of Danish flaunting?

MACK

Oh, I'm not flaunting; I'm flinging.

(He flings it into the moaning crowd offstage. LARRY bolts after it. There is the sound of a stampede as many others also go after it. LORI, MACK, MABEL and SIX-B stare at the offstage scene, occasionally wincing at a crashing sound or scream. Beat, then LARRY enters, tousled and scuffed up, but holding a piece of Danish. He yells back offstage at the other patrons.)

LARRY

You want a piece of this? Try and take it!

LORI

Larry--

LARRY

Shut up, I tells ya. No more sustenance for me -- I need food, see? Food I can sink my teeth into: a cheeseburger, fries and -- yes! -- a Danish.

LORI

(Timid.)

Larry?

LARRY

Oh, I'm onto your game now, sister. You'll bark till I put this Danish at your feet. Well it ain't happening, baby!

LORI

(To MACK and MABEL.)

You see what you've done to my Larry?

SIX-B

To this place?

MACK

Huh. Good thing we didn't bring in the beef jerky.

LARRY

Beef jerky??

(Grabs MACK by the shirt.)

Where is it?!

MACK

(Strained voice from being choked.)

In ... the car.

LARRY

(He runs offstage.)

Beef jerky! He's got beef jerky!

(From offstage, we hear him screaming with joy. We also hear the sounds of other clients stampeding to follow him.)

MACK

Holy-- I better get out there, before they tear the car apart. Mabel, you take care of this.

MABEL

Right.

(MACK leaves. MABEL reaches for her purse.)

R2D2? Check, please.

(SIX-B groans in response.)

And I'll take a doggie bag.

SIX-B

(Beat.)

A doggie bag??

MABEL

You know, for--

SIX-B

You complained about everything, you brandish a riot-inducing Danish and you destroy the business. Now you want a doggie bag?

MABEL

You never know. Nuke it up, mix it with Spam and --

SIX-B

Spam?? Out! Get out!

MABEL

But the check--

SIX-B

No charge. Just ... leave.

MABEL

(She starts to leave, then stops.)
Have any of those jellied mints? The little ones with--

(He reaches into his pocket and hands her a bunch of singles.)

SIX-B

There's a candy store up the block.

MABEL

Well ... Okay.
(Sotto voce.)
Maybe they have Ring Dings.

(SIX-B puts his head down on LORI's table and cries.
Beat, then LORI pushes a dish to him.)

LORI

They say that room temperature ratatouie can generate mood elevating endorphins.

SIX-B

Really? Where'd you hear that?

LORI

I made it up. But if we wait long enough, there's bound to be a study.

SIX-B

(He shrugs and eats. Then, with a new appreciation for the sustenance -- and for LORI.)
You know, I'm feeling jollier already.

LORI

That makes one of us.

SIX-B

(He pushes the food back to LORI.)
Oh, I'm sorry. You should--

LORI
Endorphins, I have. Larry, I don't.

SIX-B
You mean, that unhealthy ingestor who shared your table?

LORI
Well--

SIX-B
He doesn't deserve someone as pristine as you.

LORI
(Unexpectedly flattered.)
I -- hmm?

SIX-B
Here's a vital, healthy, nutritionally fulfilled female, and he's doing the dance of death with a Danish?

LORI
He was always weak.

SIX-B
Impurities pray on the weak. He's forever destined to be jerked around by jerky.

LORI
(Enamored and flirtatious.)
You ... You're so observant.

SIX-B
The clarity of clean living.

LORI
It shows.

SIX-B
Speaking of which, have you visited our anti-bacterial soap bar?

LORI
No, we -- I -- didn't even know you had one.

SIX-B
Only our purest clients are invited.

LORI

Wow, I --

SIX-B

May I escort you to a round of sensual hand washing and bacteria-free cocktails?

LORI

I ... I'd love it.

SIX-B

(They start walking off.)
Tonight, we're featuring hand pumice and Kales-mopolitans.

LORI

Oooh, what a tempting combination.

(They exit.)

END