The Taco Cart

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FADE IN:

EXT. STATE STREET - DAY

Downtown WORKERS line up to buy lunch at various food carts.

MAX, a young professional in a stiff shirt and tie, scans the crowd as he waits to order from Diego’s Taco Cart.

KRISPIN, a surly young man with long, unrestrained hair, puffs on a cigarette and dishes up a meal for a BLIND WOMAN.

BLIND WOMAN
Not so much sauce this time.

Krispin eyes the burrito plate, pulls it back and drenches it with sauce until it spills over, then hands it to her.

KRISPIN
There you go. See how ya like that.

The blind woman’s guide dog licks the sauce in midair as it drips from her plate. Krispin glares at his next customer.

MAX
Hi, I’m Max.

Krispin stares blankly, unimpressed.

MAX
Two dog meat tacos, please.

Krispin pulls out a special container from the bottom shelf of the cart and drops some strange-looking meat between two taco shells. Max pays him, takes a bite and CHOKES on it.

MAX
My God. This is... real dog meat.

KRISPIN
(irritated)
That’s what you asked for.

Max looks around, leans over the counter and half-whispers.

MAX
It’s me. Max. From the Health Department. You’re not supposed to serve me dog meat. You’re supposed to say you don’t have any.

KRISPIN
It’s our best seller. Why should we be bashful about it?
MAX
Well, for one thing, I might have to shut you down.

KRISPIN
(sarcastic)
Oh no. Then I wouldn’t be able to stand in the blazing sun for 10 hours straight for minimum wage, with no breaks, forced to piss in this container.

Krispin holds up a large yellow, squeezable mustard bottle.
A MAN WITH A HAMBURGER comes over from one of the other carts, borrows the mustard bottle and SQUIRTS it on his bun.

MAX
Look...
(checking name tag)
Krispin, Diego and I have this little deal. Didn’t he tell you about it?

KRISPIN
Only deal I know about is the one I get from the unemployment office after you shut down this stupid taco cart.

MAX
Don’t worry, I’m not gonna close you down, but you’ll have to...

KRISPIN
Next! Get your fresh dog meat tacos!

PEOPLE on the street overhear, including A COUPLE walking a dog. All of them excitedly run over and stand in line. An ELDERLY WOMAN with white hair steps up and pays Krispin cash.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Two please. What is it today, labrador or shepherd?

MAX
(to Krispin)
You can’t do this. This is highly illegal, not to mention unethical.

KRISPIN
Then shut me down, big man. Come on.

MAX
You don’t understand, I have a deal with Diego. I let some things go unnoticed and he takes care of me. But you can’t blatantly sell dog meat to the public.
More CITIZENS overhear Max’s comments and get in line. Must be fifteen people now. Krispin hands a serving spoon to Max.

KRISPIN
Okay, then you do it. I’m outa here.

Krispin yanks off his apron and sticks his name tag, pin first, into Max. Max grimaces and pulls the pin out like an arrow. The customers stare at Max expectantly.

LATER

The line grows thin, finally. An OLDER MAN with wild gray hair looks behind and to the side while waiting at the cart. Max re-emerges from under the stand with a plate of tacos...

MAX
Two dog meat tacos.

And then he recognizes the older man, who seems very nervous.

MAX
Mr. Sheltie, I can’t believe it! You’re ordering an illegal meal.

OLD MAN/MR. SHELTIE
Max? I am not... Wait a minute, what are you doing serving dog meat at a taco stand? I’d say that’s a fire-able offense.

Mr. Sheltie takes a big bite and really seems to enjoy it.

MAX
I, I, I...

MR. SHELTIE
Sweet Maria, these are good.

MAX
(thinking fast)
I’m conducting an undercover sting operation. There’s cameras everywhere. The gig is up, Mr. Sheltie.

MR. SHELTIE
Okay, okay. You got me. I resign as chief of the Food Inspection Division. Just don’t try to take this away from me!

Mr. Sheltie devours the first taco, cradles the second one to his chest and runs off into the crowd like a demented elf.

DIEGO, the bald owner of the cart, pats Max on the shoulder.
DIEGO
Max, where is Krispin? That boy has been nothing but trouble since he married his sister.

MAX
He quit. I had to take over, to keep your business alive.

DIEGO
Ah, Max, you’re a good man. How can I repay you? Just increase the number of pigeon enchiladas I feed you under the table, huh?

MAX
Yes, but remember, don’t tell anyone.

Diego LAUGHS for a while, then pats Max on the back.

DIEGO
Max, this has been a good joke, but I cannot do this to you any longer, my friend. I do not sell illegal meat.

MAX
What? But I heard you myself, that first day when I discovered your activity. You said, ‘Would you like a dog meat taco?’

DIEGO

MAX
And the pigeon enchiladas?

DIEGO
 Didn’t they taste like chicken?

MAX
You mean, all this time...

DIEGO
I should have said something long ago, but it’s been good for business, all the rumors. People think they’re getting something they’re not supposed to have and suddenly processed beef becomes a forbidden delicacy.

MAX
So I haven’t been on the take? I’m an honest food inspector after all?
DIEGO
So it would seem. Now, be a good honest food inspector and shut down my competitor over there. Reliable sources tell me he is serving rat fajitas.

INT. HEALTH DEPARTMENT - DAY

Max, one hand on a bible and the other held upright, recites an oath in front of a COURT CLERK.

MAX
...to seek and destroy spoiled food products wherever they may exist, to protect the public from animal flesh unfit for human consumption, to go where no man has eaten before...

COURT CLERK
So help me God.

MAX
So help me dog. ... Oops.

EXT. STATE STREET - DAY   ONE WEEK LATER

Max stands at Sheltie’s Taco Cart, dollars in hand. Mr. Sheltie, the former food inspection chief, wears a white chef’s coat and sterile gloves as he prepares two fajitas. He hands them to Max, recognizing him after it’s too late.

MR. SHELTIE
Here you go, two rat fajitas. ... Max?

MAX
Mr. Sheltie, I can’t believe you’ve sunk this low.

MR. SHELTIE
Hey, you know how expensive beef is? I got a great deal on these rats from some guy with a flute.

MAX
Mr. Sheltie, you do realize I am now chief of the Food Inspection Division.

MR. SHELTIE
I pity you, Max. You know, I never realized how restrictive our regulations were until I found myself on this side of the inadequately refrigerated perishables. I have to break the law just to make a living.
MAX
I’m afraid I have to shut you down.

MR. SHELTIE
Okay, big shot. But if you do it to me, you’ve got to red tag the others, too.

Mr. Sheltie points to all the other food carts.

MR. SHELTIE
That egg roll stand over there? Run by the same people under contract to scrape road kill off the highway. You put two and two together.

MAX
Aargh. I used to eat there all the time.

MR. SHELTIE
And over there. That’s not really pork barbecue.

MAX
What is it?

MR. SHELTIE
You noticed they’ve cleaned all the hookers off the street?

MAX
No!

MR. SHELTIE
And your buddy Diego. He give you that line about hot dogs? Take another look.

Max and Mr. Sheltie watch as Diego accepts a St. Bernard from a THIN WOMAN. He pays her in cash and leads the horse-sized dog into a trailer in the parking lot behind the taco cart.

SIDEWALK
An angry Max talks on his cell phone, approaches the trailer.

MAX (ON PHONE)
I’ve called the other stations, too. Believe me, your viewers are going to be appalled by what you’re going to find. Now, get a camera crew down here fast.

PARKING LOT
Max gives Thin Woman a mean look as he passes her. He hustles up to the trailer and POUNDS on the door.
INT. DIEGO’S TRAILER – DAY

Diego invites Max into his surprisingly posh pad.

DIEGO
Welcome, Max. Did you eat a rat?

MAX
No, but I smell one. You lied to me, Diego. I saw what just happened. You paid that woman for this dog.

DIEGO
Yes, I did.

MAX
So, you don’t deny it? You’re about to serve this fella with a little Mexican seasoning, some diced onions, sliced tomatoes, chili peppers, a dash of...

Max catches himself drooling at the thought.

MAX
Snap out of it, Max. ... This is wrong, Diego. I can’t let you continue to offer members of the Westside Kennel Club on your menu.

DIEGO
Relax. This is my dog, Andy. That woman is his veterinarian. Now that’s the business we should be in. Four hundred bucks to stick a thermometer up my dog’s ass. Coulda paid one of these hookers around here twenty bucks to do it. Although, come to think of it, I haven’t seen many of those girls around lately.

Max reflects on Diego’s words as he pats Andy’s head.

MAX
So, this is your pet? You’re not going to turn him into a taco?

DIEGO
Hey, that’s not a bad idea. ... For Halloween. I always dress him up.

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN in an evening gown and a BUSINESSMAN enter the trailer, wave hello, and disappear into the back.

ANOTHER GORGEOUS GIRL in hot pants, drinking a large soda, brings in a MAN WEARING A HAT. They undress as they hurry through another door in the back. Her bra flies out the door and wraps around the dog’s head.
Ah, you have never met my daughters? They are good girls. They bring me such joy. ... Thank you, Max, for your concern about my Andy.

Diego pushes Max toward the door.

Max exits and bumps into a BUSTY BLONDE, who GIGGLES and gives him a knowing look.

MAX
You must be one of Diego’s daughters. I’m Max.

BUSTY BLONDE
Max? I thought he said Hank. Whatever. Come on, the rubber sheets are in my car.

Busty Blonde drags Max around the other side of the trailer, where THREE TV NEWS CREWS are set up, ready to film. THREE FEMALE REPORTERS simultaneously begin live broadcasts.

FIRST REPORTER
Behind me you see Max Farley who was recently appointed as the city’s food inspection chief but will now certainly be fired after hiring this prostitute.

A TEAM OF COPS rush in, arrest Max and drag him away.

MAX
Wait, I didn’t do anything. I didn’t even taste any dog meat, I swear.

A cop pulls Andy the St. Bernard out of the trailer. The sexy bra still hangs around the dog’s neck.

FIRST COP
(to Max)
You are one sick bastard.

First Cop KICKS Max several times.

SECOND REPORTER
Police say Farley is also the alleged mastermind of an exotic food ring...

Cops pull a handcuffed Diego out of the trailer. The two women Max saw, and their Johns, are led away, too, followed by EIGHT OTHER PROSTITUTES and their CUSTOMERS.
THIRD REPORTER
...and will surely be questioned about last week’s Metropolitan Zoo disappearance of two Indian elephants.

INT. PRISON - CAFETERIA - DAY
WEEKS LATER

Max, wearing prison garb, scoops up some meat and plops it onto a tortilla. Diego, now Max’s fellow inmate, takes the plate and places it on his tray.

DIEGO
So, what kind of meat you got today?

Max slowly raises his eyes, spots Diego and becomes enraged. He reaches across the food bay and strangles Diego.

INT./EXT. PRISON - SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CELL - DAY

Max, sweating like a pig, lies on the floor inside. A window opens. A GUARD stuffs a plate of two tacos into the cell.

GUARD
Eat up, boy. ... Heh, heh. It’s probably dog meat.

The guard LAUGHS. Max eyes the food and screams...

MAX
No!!!!!!!!!!!

EXT. STATE STREET - DAY
BACK TO REALITY

Max huddles on the ground next to Diego’s Taco Cart. Krispin, his serving apron still on, hovers over Max with a half-eaten plate of tacos in his hand.

MAX
No!!!!!!

Krispin returns the plate to Max’s outstretched hands.

KRISPIN
Sorry, you can have them back. Jeez.

Max, shivering like a junkie, devours another taco.

MAX
They’re so good. I don’t know what it is about them. They’re so addictive.

Krispin reaches into one of Max’s tacos and pulls out a slimy gray...
KRISPIN
You were so worried about the meat when you should have been paying attention to the mushrooms!

From Max’s perspective, Krispin appears to spin around in circles. Krispin LAUGHS as he watches Max rise and stagger.

KRISPIN
Now, come on, inspector dude, are you gonna shut this place down so I can collect my unemployment or what?

Max studies Krispin’s distorted face, scratches his chin and thinks long and hard about what action to take.

MAX
No. But I’ll have six more to go. Make that two dozen. Do they freeze well? I’m throwing a party this weekend... to celebrate my resignation from the Health Department.

Krispin throws down his spoon in disgust and walks off. Max chows down.

FADE OUT