

## The Mall Rats Collection

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### A room where Ratbert has gathered a bunch of rats together for a meeting.

*(There are many rats, but for the purposes of this skit the roles are overlapped.)*

RATBERT

Although times are tight, a great opportunity lies ahead. But sadly there aren't many of us left, and so we need to agree *together* on which road to take. Our very survival depends on it.

PETTIGREW

Enough with the exposition – couldn't this have been a title crawl like in Star Wars?

RIZZO

Don't be a dingus! We're rats. How many rats can read?

PETTIGREW

What about the ones on Twitter?

RIZZO

I rest my case.

RATBERT

In short, we have a choice: Main street vs. the shopping mall. I call the first presenter.

*(Kylie comes up to the dais and sets up a slide projector.)*

KYLIE

It is my carefully considered opinion that Main Street holds far greater promise for the future of Rat-dom. Slide one please. Oh, that's me.

*(He starts the projector.)*

Behold, the back of the café. Nobody sees it, so nobody cleans it. It's all ours. And here, on slide two...

RIZZO

*(loudly interrupting)*

Show us wintertime!

*(sotto voce, to the neighbor)*

It's like a real estate scam – they only show the pretty seasons.

RATBERT

Quiet Rizzo. You mall rats will have their chance.

RIZZO

Mall rat? You have no concept of the modern world. Central heating. Central feeding. Free wifi.

PETTIGREW

Look you – stay inside like you always do and you'll get soft. You'll get friendly with cats. And you'll starve if the power goes out.

RATBERT

Can we *please* stick to the presentation?

KYLIE

Thank you. Now on slide two is a street grate – the one at 38 Main Street. I doubt you softies have ever seen the underside of a grate, let alone know the good ones from the... uh... great ones. But strong, independent rats know how to live in the wild world.

RIZZO

Smart rats know not to.

PETTIGREW

Do you see any smart rats here?

RIZZO

There's one coming to the floor right now.

*(Rizzo goes up to the dais and pushes Kylie off the stand.)*

I say we take over the mall. It's warm all year, there's a smorgasboard right in the middle of it, and best of all, there's no people after midnight.

PETTIGREW

What's wrong with people, scaredy cat? They're the ones that bring us the trash!

RIZZO

They're fine as long as they come around on schedule, like any orderly society. You could learn something from that.

*(Kylie belches)*

Well, maybe not you.

RATBERT

Have all the arguments been made, and all the cases rested?

PETTIGREW

We ain't **begun** to argue!

KYLIE

My presentation is up on Parler – you can read it there.

RIZZO

What did I say earlier about reading?

PETTIGREW

Nothing intelligent.

RIZZO

Maybe that's why it's all pictures.

RATBERT

Look... we have to decide this – we have to attack this with a unified front or we'll be extinct.

KYLIE

Hah! Rats, extinct?

RIZZO

Conquered by cockroaches.

KYLIE

Bring it on.

RATBERT

I'd really rather not. So... all in favor of the mall?

*(Ratbert and Rizzo raise their hands. Kylie and Pettigrew attack them and forcibly put their hands down. A melee ensues, and a cat appears, causing Pettigrew and Kylie to flee. The cat takes off his cat-mask, revealing it to be a rat: Remy)*

RATBERT

Perfect timing Remy! I knew you'd come through!

REMY

*(speaking with a French accent...)*

Ze is like fleeing from a sinking ship!

RATBERT

All in favor of the mall, raise your paws!

*(All remaining rats – Ratbert, Rizzo, and Remy, raise their paws.)*

It's unanimous – the mall it is!

*(The lights go down. Somebody comes in from offstage, and there is a melee in the dark. The lights come up and Ratbert, Rizzo, and Remy are dead on the ground. Pettigrew and Kylie stand triumphant.)*

PETTIGREW

Softies. If they'd'a had street smarts...

KYLIE

...they'd'a been one of us!

*(Raucous laughter as the lights go down. **Blackout.**)*

## The food court of a shopping mall, after hours.

*Two janitors, Quinn and Ryan, are cleaning the floor and tables. Quinn picks something up off the floor, looks at it, and tosses it.*

QUINN

Looks like it's started.

RYAN

What's started?

QUINN

The war. Every year, about this time. Look at this.

*(Quinn reaches into the trash can and pulls out the thing he picked up off the floor.)*

What do you make of it?

RYAN

It's... trash?

QUINN

*(sarcastic)*

Sounds like you went to one of them fancy colleges!

RYAN

Actually I went to –

QUINN

Actually smactually. Just **look** at it!

RYAN

They don't pay us to **examine** the trash, they pay us to clean it up.

QUINN

No. They pay us to **keep** it clean. How you gonna do that if you don't know what's going down? Look at these marks.

RYAN

Oh...kay.

*(Ryan examines the item. It's part of a styrofoam serving container.)*

Yeah... so? It's scratched, dirty, has some ketchup on it. It's trash, not a museum piece.

QUINN

How does a serving container get scratched?

RYAN

**I dunno.** Somebody scratched it. Or a fork. Or a knife. Or a very hard French fry.

QUINN

Good. Which is it?

RYAN

*(Ryan becomes interested, and looks again.)*

Well, it's not a fork. Too sharp. A knife could do it, but why so small, and so close together?

QUINN

Now you're thinkin'.

RYAN

Fingernails!

QUINN

Maybe, but look closer. They're scratches, not indentations.

RYAN

Yeah... right. You notice all that right away?

QUINN

Every year, about this time. Always the same. Look at the ketchup. Right here – see this pattern?

RYAN

Uh... if you call it that.

QUINN

Let's say I've developed a discerning eye over all theses years.

Those are paw tracks. You don't see that in the summer. And right here, I'm pretty sure that's a nose print. But not 100%.

RYAN

*(Ryan is suitably impressed, takes the item and goes over to Cleo, cleaning nearby.)*

Hey Cleo! Take a look at this. What do you make of it?

CLEO

*(Cleo takes it and examines it. After some consideration, he replies...)*

Somebody left it on the table after eating some, but not all, of the onion rings. See this stain here? That's onion juice. Whoever ordered it has no taste 'cause they ate 'em with ketchup. No wonder they didn't eat 'em all. Okay, so it's late, not much call for tables, and nobody else sits there. The place closes, it's like... oh, eleven, eleven thirty. **We** don't start until one, so plenty of time. **That**, right there, scratch marks from a rat's claw. A little one, could be Kylie.

*(beat)*

I hope it's not Kylie. I like him.

RYAN

Wait – you got all **that**?

QUINN

He's wrong. It's not Kylie. Kylie don't like onions. Besides, you won't find him at the mall.

CLEO

Unless...

QUINN

Unless what?

CLEO

Mr. Fox sends him out on some mission. He'll do whatever Mr. Fox wants.

QUINN

Mr. Fox won't send him out to eat onions, and whatever reason he'd be here, he wouldn't be eating onions on his own. It's not him.

RYAN

Wait a minute. You have names for... rats?

QUINN

Of course not. Rats have names for themselves. We're just using them. It's courteous. And Cleo here sometimes goes a bit overboard. Why do you do that Cleo? Why?

CLEO

Well...

QUINN

Tell me.

CLEO

*(meekly)*

It makes me sound smarter than I am.

QUINN

Yeah. You keep that in mind.

CLEO

*(strongly)*

But I'm not as dumb as you paint me, Quinn. Most the time I get it right.

RYAN

Why does it matter?

QUINN

'Cause there's gonna be a war. Some of the rats here at the mall, some on Main Street. And then the ones from the swamp out back. And we gotta clean it all up by quitting time.

CLEO

If we know who's made the first move, we can get a jump on the

situation. How can you not know this after working here all these years?

RYAN

I guess I just don't hang around with the crowd that knows all the rats.

QUINN

You work here long enough, you can't help it.

CLEO

You learn to think like a rat.

QUINN

If you don't, you spend all day cleaning things that don't need to be cleaned, and then wondering why things smell bad.

RYAN

I get it. And then management...

CLEO

Management don't give a rat's ass. But I take pride in my work.

QUINN

When we're done here, you can eat off the floor.

CLEO

After all, Kylie does.

*(they both laugh. They both then continue their work.)*

RYAN

Wait a minute. Quinn was talking about a war.

CLEO

It's not a war, it's an invasion.

QUINN

It's a **war**.

RYAN

What's the difference?

CLEO

In an invasion, the rats come in and take over. In a war, the rats come in and fight among themselves.

RYAN

So a war is worse.

QUINN

Damn straight.

CLEO

No. In a war, they kill each other off. Saves us the trouble. You see, we don't have to fight them if they are fighting themselves.

QUINN

Cleo, you're doing it again.

CLEO

No I'm not.

QUINN

You're making yourself sound smarter than you are.

RYAN

Cleo has a point though.

CLEO

See. Sometimes I'm smarter than I sound.

QUINN

If you were smarter than you sounded, would you be picking up garbage at the mall?

CLEO

**You're** picking up garbage at the mall.

QUINN

No, I'm being a detective. I'm figuring out what they're up to. I'm staying one step ahead of the rats. It's like I'm a general, but like the ones in Washington that never actually have to go to war themselves.

RYAN

Are you getting paid like a general?

QUINN

No. It's like a secret agent. Do secret agents get paid?

RYAN AND CLEO

Yes.

*(Quinn thinks for a moment.)*

QUINN

Well, it's like I'm a **secret** secret agent.

RYAN

But... you're telling everyone.

QUINN

I'm telling **you**. You gonna rat me out? You're part of this thing now.

RYAN

I didn't even know there was a thing to be a part of.

QUINN

'Cause it's secret.

*(Quinn goes off to "gather more evidence". Cleo waits until he is out of earshot.)*

CLEO

You know he's crazy, right?

RYAN

I'm getting the picture.

CLEO

But he's also right.

RYAN

Now I'm getting a different picture.

CLEO

Those scratches **are** rat prints. They do start up every year, around this time. There is a pattern to all this. But it's not what he thinks it is.

RYAN

And....?

CLEO

Yes?

RYAN

You gonna keep me in suspense?

CLEO

You gonna believe me?

RYAN

I dunno.

CLEO

Then I won't tell you. But I'll ask you. Do you know how small

tape recorders are?

RYAN

Like... a walkman?

CLEO

Smaller. They make tape recorders that don't use tape. And that record video. And they are **small!**

RYAN

What are you getting at?

CLEO

You won't believe it unless you figure it out yourself. But let's just say... they are smaller than a rat's nose.

RYAN

Smaller than.... wait... you mean... a rat can carry an entire video studio on its back?

CLEO

I'm not saying that. But you know how big a rat is, and you can go right over there into Sears and see how big some of those little spy cameras are. And you can go on youtube and see videos of “dog's eye view” and “cat's eye view” of the neighborhood.

RYAN

So... the rats are planning an invasion, and they are strapping cameras to their backs to scope the joint?

CLEO

**Now** you're thinking. But you're not thinking the right things. How do you think a rat is going to buy a video camera?

RYAN

The same way it buys onion rings?

CLEO

**They need help**, you numbskull! Gee – **you** make me sound smarter than I am. **Somebody** is putting the cameras on their backs. Or maybe not. It's hard to tell.

*(beat)*

RYAN

*(Ryan leans in)*

Cleo – who's the crazy one here? 'Cause I'm not sure any more.

CLEO

Your paychecks still clear?

RYAN

Yeah.

CLEO

Mine too. So none of us is crazy.

RYAN

Yeah.

*(beat)*

None of us is crazy.

CLEO

*(Cleo walks away and continues working.)*

Keep that in mind, Ryan. None of us is crazy.

RYAN

*(Ryan waits until Cleo is offstage.)*

Maybe **I** should put some cameras on these damn rats. See what's **really** going on.

*(blackout)*

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## The food court of a shopping mall, after hours.

*Two janitors, Quinn and Ryan, are cleaning the floor and tables.*

RYAN

You and Cleo got me thinking last night

QUINN

Don't bust your brain kiddo.

RYAN

I'll try not to. But I think you're on to something with that rat war.

QUINN

Every year, the same thing.

RYAN  
Have you ever **seen** these rats?

QUINN  
Don't have to see 'em. Just look around and you'll see the results.

RYAN  
Yeah, but that's the people. I'm talking about the rats. It's hard to tell the difference, isn't it?

QUINN  
For a new guy, sure. But I've been around. C'm'ere.  
*(Quinn beckons Ryan to look at something near the toekick of one of the shops.)*  
See that? Just big enough for a rat to get through.

RYAN  
Yeah... so?

QUINN  
You'd think "Now why would a rat go through that when he could just go around?" Right?

RYAN  
That thought did occur to me.

QUINN  
Yeah, 'cause you're "college educated".

RYAN  
It occurred to **you**.

QUINN  
Yeah, 'cause I'm **observant**. People can't go through there. So... if you see a dropped French fry there – it's from a rat.

RYAN  
Makes sense. But still, wouldn't you like to see it happen?

CLEO  
*(Cleo enters with what looks like a cage under wraps.)*  
I got 'em. They're a little bigger than you said, but I think it'll work.

QUINN  
What's that?

CLEO  
W. R. A. T. Studios!

QUINN  
What's that?

RYAN  
It's what I'm trying to tell you.

CLEO  
We can see the rats! On TV!

QUINN  
Cleo, what do I keep tellin' you about trying to sound smarter than you are?

RYAN  
No, it's cool. This'll work.  
*(Ryan lifts the wrap off of the cage, revealing a rat with a contraption on its back. He pulls out a smartphone, punches a few icons, and shows the result to Quinn who waves at the rat and sees himself on the smartphone.)*

CLEO  
Cost me a fortune, but it'll be worth it!

QUINN  
You're tellin' me – that this... this... This is the most batshit crazy thing I've ever seen.

CLEO  
Yeah. One of us is batshit crazy. We're trying to figure out which one it is.

RYAN  
C'mon Remy – stay still for a minute!

QUINN  
Remy?

CLEO  
So... we let him loose, and we follow on video.

QUINN  
Hmmm...we'll get to see their battle plans!

RYAN  
What's the range on this thing?

CLEO  
The guy told me about thirty feet. You have to be on top of it.

RYAN  
Or underneath it.

CLEO  
See... that's why I like you. You're smarter than you look.

QUINN  
Don't get any ideas Cleo.

CLEO  
Well, he is. Would you have thought'a sneaking in the basement?

QUINN  
Food court's on the second level. You're in the basement you're gonna hafta go twenty feet **and** two floors full of metal beams. And that's not countin' the angles and such. Stop tryin' to sound smarter than you are Cleo. Here's what we're gonna do...

RYAN  
Lay offa him Quinn. Cleo's right.

QUINN  
Cleo didn't say nuthin'

RYAN  
'cause Cleo knows. When does shift end?

QUINN  
Three thirty. You know that. Don't you?

CLEO  
He just wants to see if **you** know it.

QUINN  
Shut up Cleo.

RYAN  
Mall don't open 'till ten. Staff don't get here 'till eight. We stay in the stockroom at that...uh... what shop is under us?

CLEO  
Some used clothing outlet.

RYAN  
**Used** clothing?

QUINN  
It's the end of civilization. I keep sayin' that and nobody listens.

CLEO  
Shut up Quinn.

RYAN  
Ease off you two. Three thirty. Four, five, six, seven, eight. Over four hours for them rats to show themselves. We'll be right there waiting. Ain't this better than examining garbage for clues?

QUINN  
If it weren't for the clues, you wouldn't even be **doing** this.

RYAN  
If it weren't for this, those clues wouldn't be worth dingle poop. You're on to something – are you afraid to find out what it is?

QUINN  
Them's fightin' words.

RYAN  
Then you're in?  
*(beat)*

QUINN  
Yes. I'm in. But it better be good.

CLEO  
You mean “Quinn better be right!”

QUINN  
Shut up Cleo.

CLEO  
Pressure's on!

QUINN  
Not like the war that them rats are planning. This thing record audio too?

RYAN  
Yeah. Do you understand rat-speak?

QUINN  
*(beat)*  
No.

RYAN  
Ok. M. O. S. it is.



CLEO

I know what that means!

QUINN

Stop trying to sound...

CLEO AND RYAN

Smarter than you are.

RYAN

Cleo **is** smarter than he is.

CLEO

Now where's that rat?

RYAN

You're holding it.

QUINN

Well, maybe not.

RYAN

Commence "Project..." what shall we call this?

QUINN

How about project idiocy.

RYAN

Commence "Project Italian Cooking"!

QUINN

What?

RYAN

Ratatouille.

*(Ryan takes the cage, opens the door, and lets the rat out. The rat scampers through the hole in the toekick indicated earlier.)*

QUINN

Right where I said he would go.

RYAN

Now... we don't know if he'll be accepted into the brigade, but we'll get to see something. Battlestations!

QUINN

Who's the crazy one?

CLEO

We'll let you know when we figure it out.

*(blackout)*

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**A nondescript room where a bunch of rats are meeting. One of the walls has a hole in it and a giant shoe is visible behind the opening.**

*(A rat comes through the opening, with a large backpack of some sort on its back.)*

PETTIGREW

Remy! I thought you were killed in that... unfortunate event the other night.

REMY

*(In an overdone French accent)*

Ze is mistaken – we're rats. Eeen-destructable. But now I know you tried.

KYLIE

Tried what?

PETTIGREW

...and will you stop that stupid French accent!

RATBERT

Leave him alone – he was undercover.

RIZZO

Yeah, as a cat.

PETTIGREW

Cats don't speak French.

RATBERT

French cats do.

PETTIGREW

Cats speak cat.

RATBERT

Do you speak cat?

PETTIGREW

Of course not.

RATBERT

Then how do you know what a cat speaks?

RIZZO

He **was** crossdressing.

PETTIGREW

That's typical French.

RATBERT

Then leave him alone. He had to speak the part.

KYLIE

Tried what?

REMY

What tried what?

KYLIE

You said you know he tried.

REMY

To kill me. But he can't. We're rats.

PETTIGREW

I can't believe I actually made the effort.

RIZZO

Look – let's stop arguing over who killed who, and get back to business. We have a war to mount.

KYLIE

Nobody killed anybody. We're all friends here, right?

RIZZO

Right.

KYLIE

Ok. So what's the plan?

PETTIGREW

Besides feasting on the corpses of our enemies?

RATBERT

Yeah. I have a plan. An actual plan. With strategies, tactics, circles and arrows, and a paragraph on the back of each one.

RIZZO

Remember what I said about rats and reading?

RATBERT

Yeah. That's why I'm making a live presentation. I can't believe I actually made the effort. But here it is. Kylie – you like to be the tough one – you take the Mexican stand.

KYLIE

Mexicans ain't any tougher than any of the other wusses in this mall.

RATBERT

Yeah, well you try their hot sauce and get back to me. Pettigrew, you're the one with all the laziness. You attack the garbage cans.

RIZZO

Right up his alley.

REMY

Do you think he's up to it?

RATBERT

Yeah. They gather all the food for him, he just has to recognize what a garbage can **is**. Remy, you hit up Sbarro's. It's the closest thing to French Cuisine in the mall.

REMY

A pizza place?

RATBERT

Think of it as Italian Fusion. Rizzo gets Red Lobster, and I'll take on... oh, I don't know. None of us can read the signs anyway, so just go for it.

*(Most of the rats scatter. Kylie stays behind.)*

KYLIE

What you got against Rizzo?

RATBERT

What do you mean?

KYLIE

Red Lobster? There's no food there!

RATBERT

Since when do rats care?

KYLIE

You have a point.

*(Kylie doesn't leave.)*

RATBERT

Anything else Kylie?

KYLIE

Yeah. I have an idea. You'll probably think it's dumb.

RATBERT

I don't think ideas are dumb. **People** are dumb, but not ideas.

KYLIE

Ok. Well, you know how Pettigrew likes to just have his meals delivered to him? It's why he chose the mall to begin with. I think he's soft, but he's not dumb. What if we could **encourage** people to leave food for us? We wouldn't have these yearly wars.

RATBERT

So... how are you going to do this? Dress up like a cat?

KYLIE

No. Art. I know a mouse that's good at it, and she thinks that we can influence people using art.

RATBERT

Art?

KYLIE

Yeah. Like the stuff that people put around the house, that isn't food. Art.

RATBERT

Art. You're going to use a mouse to create art?

KYLIE

I knew you'd think it was dumb.

RATBERT

*(beat)*

Either dumb, or brilliant. I'm not sure which.

KYLIE

You think?

RATBERT

Gave that up years ago. But in any case, let's keep this between us.

KYLIE

Done.

*(blackout)*

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**Stage right (lit): The small and low-end office of mall security. Stage left (unlit): The mall.**

*Quinn has been summoned to the Boss' office. He motions to his laptop.*

BOSS

What's this?

QUINN

What's what?

BOSS

It's all over the Internet, that's what.

QUINN

**What's** all over the Internet?

BOSS

Quinn, you really are dumber than you look.

*Quinn turns the laptop around so we can see a video is playing on the screen. It resembles a rat cage.*

Do you recognize this? At all?

QUINN

*(Quinn looks at the screen)*

It looks a little like... wait a minute – that's the food court!

BOSS

Yes. The food court. **Our** food court. The one I hired you to clean every night.

QUINN

*(still studying the video)*

That's... that's the gap under the toekick. They gotta fix that.

BOSS

Never mind the toekick. Do you see the rats?

QUINN

Oh yeah.

BOSS

Somehow it got on twitter not ten minutes after the timestamp, and in the morning, channel two news was in my face about it. Every one of the “fine restaurants” that grace our “ambience-centered dining court” has been making not-so-discreet suggestions about how they intend to fix the problem, and they all involve me in unspeakable acts. Which means they all involve you.

QUINN

How did... I mean – that is pretty fast.

BOSS

Somebody knows something, and **you** are going to find out who it is and what they know. **And** you are going to clean this thing up before we both lose our jobs.

QUINN

Yes sir. I am hereby declaring war on the rats!

BOSS

I like your style. I like your enthusiasm. I like your determination.

QUINN

Thank you, sir.

BOSS

But I don't like your approach. This is not a war. It has to be secret.

QUINN

Of course, sir. A special sanitary operation. But how are we going to deal with this video?

BOSS

I'll think of something. No – **you'll** think of something. You noticed how shaky it looked, didn't you?

QUINN

Uh... yes?

BOSS

It's like somebody strapped a camera to a rat.

QUINN

Uh... maybe?

BOSS

And that's ridiculous. We'll say it's a fake video. In fact, it **is** a fake video. Make sure the public knows the truth.

QUINN

The truth...

BOSS

The truth.

QUINN

You do know that there are rats, right?

BOSS

Not here. There are no rats in this mall. There never were.

QUINN

Yes, Sir!

*(Quinn exits into the mall, where lights come up as the lights dim in the office. Ryan and Cleo are there waiting for him.)*

RYAN

What'd he say?

QUINN

*(Quinn moves them discretely away from the office.)*

You know that little project you had? Well, it went viral.

RYAN

How could it? I never sent it anywhere.

CLEO

It's wifi, right?

QUINN

Cleo...

RYAN

Between the camera and the smartphone, yes. What else is it gonna be? Co-ax?

CLEO

So, who else can pick up the signal?

*(They all look at each other, with dawning realization.)*

Somebody else with a smartphone picks up a video like this, it's goin' up on youtube before you can say...

RYAN

It's a problem.

QUINN

Yeah, but not the problem you think it is. You see, I'm a secret agent...

RYAN

...and your job now is to figure out who did this.

CLEO

But you **know** who did this!

QUINN

But my boss don't know I know. Besides, that's not what my mission is.

RYAN

So what's your mission?

QUINN

It's a secret war on the rats. Nobody's gotta know.

CLEO

But we're cleaning people. We're **supposed to** have a war on the rats!

QUINN

The rats are having a war on themselves, remember?

CLEO

Oh yeah.

QUINN

So, our mission is the same as it was. Only that's a secret. A secret from the very guy that gave us the mission!

RYAN

Now **that's** devious.

QUINN

It's how we do things here. Now, let's see the recording. We gotta do some analysis.

*(Ryan pulls out his cell phone and taps some icons.)*

RYAN

Here's where he goes in. Man there are a lot of rats there!

QUINN

You expected zebras?

RYAN

No, but...

QUINN

It's a food court. In the middle of a rat war, remember?

CLEO

What's with the food?

RYAN AND QUINN

It's a food court.

CLEO

I know. But look.

RYAN

That's odd. They're just playing with their food, not eating it.

QUINN

Taking turns, even.

CLEO

It's a huddle. Like football.

QUINN

Don't be stupid, Cleo. This is a war, not a game. Must be their central command.

RYAN

Now they've scattered. Remy's off to... looks like Sbarro's.

CLEO

That explains their bad teeth.

QUINN

Hey – what's wrong with Sbarro's?

CLEO

... Everything?

RYAN

Remember, we're not rats. We have different tastes in food.

CLEO

Doesn't look like it to me.

QUINN

Shut up, Cleo. We're lookin' for clues. This could be a breakthrough.

*(Quinn bobs his head erratically as they continue watching the video.)*

RYAN

Maybe we should put it on the Internet. Do some crowd funding.

CLEO

It's called "crowd sourcing".

RYAN

I like crowd funding better.

QUINN

First of all, it's **already** on the Internet. Second of all, the boss **don't like it** on the Internet. And third of all, this is a **secret** mission. So no crowd nothing. Pay attention.

CLEO

What's all that jumping around?

RYAN

Looks like Remy is trying to jump.

CLEO

That's not gonna be easy with a TV studio on his back.

*(Quinn, watching the screen, suddenly cocks his head all the way to one side. Cleo takes the smartphone and rotates it 90 degrees as Quinn un-cocks his head in sync.)*

RYAN

Looks like that problem is solved.

QUINN

At least the picture is steadier now. Let's take notes.

CLEO

Will you look at that! I think those two are humping.

RYAN

*(Ryan looks closer)*

Wait a minute – that's Remy!

*(shouting to the smartphone)*

Stop that Remy! Shame on you – you're on TV for chrissakes!

CLEO

Ratings just went up. How we gonna keep it secret if this stuff ends up on PornTube.

RYAN

There's a porn tube for rats?

CLEO

Rule 34.

*(Ryan and Quinn just look at Cleo. Beat.)*

RYAN

Maybe I should rescue that microcam.

*(Ryan exits in the direction of Sbarro's.)*

QUINN

You know, Cleo, you know a lot about some pretty weird stuff.

CLEO

It's just that...

QUINN

Never mind what "it's just that". I don't wanna know.

*(They return their attention to the smartphone.)*

CLEO

What happened to the picture?

QUINN

Dunno. Is that all there is?

CLEO

*(Cleo swipes the slider a few times.)*

Looks like it. Maybe the lights went out. Or the battery died.

RYAN

*(Ryan returns with his microcam covered in sauce.)*

Or a pizza fell on it. That's a wrap for today.

QUINN

Ok guys. Good work. Let's get cleaning. But don't destroy any evidence. Anything looks funny, put it in a box to preserve it.

*(Quinn and Ryan exit, Cleo remains thoughtful, saying to himself:)*

CLEO

Now who would be listening in on the Rat-cam?

*(blackout)*

---

**An open area on the floor of the food court. Chair and table legs are visible, as are various pieces of trash.**

RIZZO

A mouse?

KYLIE

She's really good at what she does.

RIZZO

Yeah, but I didn't know you meant a **mouse** mouse.

KYLIE

What other kind of mouse is there?

RATBERT

What's her name?

KYLIE

Macaroni.

PETTIGREW

Of course. What else would it be?

RATBERT

Let's not get petty.

KYLIE

Her friends call her "Mac". Anyway, she's really good at art.

REMY

*(in a phony affected French accent)*

Zere is no "art" beyond ze art of ze food.

KYLIE

She knows the art of the food. But she also knows the art of the presentation. Food says something even when you don't eat it.

REMY

Zat is heresy.

RIZZO

I saw you at Sbarro's

REMY

Yeah, even a French rat has to eat.

PETTIGREW

You're about as French as a taco.

REMY

You wouldn't recognize a taco if it swallowed you whole.

RATBERT

Can we get back to this mouse thing?

RIZZO

Rats asking mice for help... that's just not a thing.

KYLIE

...which is what makes it so brilliant.

PETTIGREW

So, when do we meet this... Macaroni mouse?

*(Mac enters. She is a very sexily attired mouse.)*

MAC

Right now. If you can handle it.

RIZZO

Va va voom!

PETTIGREW

And so another rat finds his ideology disposable in the heat of passion.

RIZZO

Pettigrew, let's just say I had my eyes opened.

MAC

Oh, I doubt it, kid. Not yet.

KYLIE

Everyone, this is Macaroni.

MAC

Just call me Mac.

RIZZO  
I don't think "Mac" suits you.

MAC  
Listen bud – you "Rizzo". I "Mac".

RIZZO  
Ok, ok.

PETTIGREW  
So, what is it that you can do for us?

MAC  
I can communicate with a higher plane. I can unleash the unseen forces of the world around you. I can control your destiny, if you let me.

RATBERT  
With what?

MAC  
Art.

PETTIGREW  
Art schmart. What is art?

MAC  
*(Mac maneuvers herself in front of a particularly interesting piece of human-sized garbage.)*  
Art is the language of our innermost desires. Art is what tells you the stuff you don't know you want to know. Art is how you get what you want, without asking for it.

RIZZO  
You're cute, but that's a bunch of hooley.

MAC  
Just look over me.

RIZZO  
Lord – what is that?

MAC  
You tell me.

RATBERT  
It's a sandwich that somebody bit into and threw away.

REMY  
It's a croissant, made of pizza, hinting at peace between countries in the Old World, despite their culinary differences and cultural rivalries.  
*(beat)*

KYLIE  
Is that what it really is?

MAC  
That's kind of the point, isn't it?

RATBERT  
I don't know. I'm kind of new at this "art" stuff. Come to think of it, what **is** the point?

MAC  
Everyone gets their own answer. There are no wrong answers. It's not about answers – it's about effect. This thing - I made it when you weren't here.

RIZZO  
So?

MAC  
So... it gives a new appreciation for the world – it gives meaning to life – it...

RIZZO  
...is a waste of time when you could have eaten the thing instead.

REMY  
No wait - the mouse makes a good point.

MAC  
Look Rizzo – your eyes popped out when I walked onto the scene.  
Why?

RIZZO  
Um...

MAC  
Not because you liked me – you never seen me in your life. It's because I **look** good. And why do I look good?

RIZZO  
Um...



PETTIGREW

Articulate, as usual.

MAC

*(Mac gestures to her attire.)*

It's because "Art". You see me, you want me. Because when you see me, you see my art. Art is what gets the job done. Now... what job do you need done?

RIZZO

Uh... I dunno.

REMY

Well, we know art can completely shut down Rizzo. That's worth something.

RATBERT

We want to take over the mall. Or the street.

MAC

No, you don't.

RATBERT

What do you mean, no we don't? You asked us what we wanted. I told you.

MAC

**Why** do you want to take over the mall? You wanna sell stuff? You wanna advertise? You wanna speak corporate jargon? If you had the mall, what would you do with it?

KYLIE

We'd walk around like we owned the place. Broad daylight, eat what we want, dance in the street.

PETTIGREW

This from somebody who don't know what a dance **is!**

REMY

If we took over the mall, who would cook?

RIZZO

Not me.

PETTIGREW

Certainly not me.

KYLIE

Rizzo – I thought you was tough. You getting' soft?

RIZZO

**You** gonna cook?

KYLIE

Nope.

MAC

So, you get the picture. You like the **idea** of taking over the mall, but you don't **really** want to take over the mall.

RATBERT

I hate to say it, being a rat and all, but I think the mouse knows more than we do.

KYLIE

That's why I brought her here.

RIZZO

So, if she's so smart, why is she with you?

KYLIE

Look me over.

RIZZO

Lord no!

MAC

I tell you what – you tell me what you want to do, and I will create the art that will get it done.

RATBERT

And what do you get out of it?

MAC

I'm not sure yet. But don't worry about that. When the time comes, you'll know.

PETTIGREW

I have a bad feeling about this.

RATBERT

I don't. All in favor, raise your paws.

*(Everyone but Pettigrew raises their paws.)*

Duly enacted. Mac The Mouse is on our team. Kylie, figure out what it is we want to do.

PETTIGREW

I don't think that's how this is supposed to work.

RATBERT

It's time for new thinking. If we have to learn to use a mouse, we'll use a mouse. Dismissed!

*(blackout)*

## The tech store where Cleo bought the minicam.

*Ryan is talking to Dweezel, a classic nerd who runs the store and shows him a video on his smartphone.*

RYAN

Do you know anything this video? Looks like it was shot here in the mall.

DWEEZEL

Yeah – that video is **gold** man! My channel just blew up!

RYAN

Blew up?

DWEEZEL

I put that thing up; next thing you know I got sixty thousand hits. In thirty minutes. You know what that means?

RYAN

It means a lot of things...

DWEEZEL

Do the math! It's probably close to a million now. You know how long it takes to get a million hits on a channel?

RYAN

That's probably happened to me twenty times.

DWEEZEL

Really? What's your channel?

RYAN

Actually, it's a secret channel. That's why it gets all the hits. Keep it secret; people want to see it.

DWEEZEL

Makes sense to me. Wait – no it doesn't. What about the algorithm?

RYAN

I don't know nothin' about the algorithm. I just know what works. But about this video...

DWEEZEL

Yeah. A guy came in yesterday and wanted to put a camera on a rat.

RYAN

On a rat?

DWEEZEL

Crazy, but who knows, right? Whatever they need, I help them out. The loopier the better. So I set him up with this teeny wireless nanny-cam.

RYAN

And he just gave you the video?

DWEEZEL

It's in the contract. Who reads them, right? Even though the camera's very short range, I could still pick up the signal... with this:

*Dweezel reaches behind the counter and pulls up a complicated looking antenna.*

My own design. It's a circular yagi with log periodic elements for digital filtering. Has a gain of 200 Dee Bee, so I could just sit out in the parking lot.

RYAN

Yeah – but you see... it's causing a bit of a problem here. People think there are rats at the mall.

DWEEZEL

Anyone who's eaten at the food court knows that.

RYAN

Yeah, but now everyone who **hasn't** eaten there knows it too. Look

– I know a little bit about the algorithm too. And the first thing is you're not gonna collect for any of this.

DWEEZEL

I thought you said you didn't know anything about the algorithm.

RYAN

I know a little. And I got a proposition for you. If you leave it on your channel, Youtube – I mean Google – I mean Alphabet – they're the ones who are makin' the bucks. You make bubkus. Maybe. Because anyone can see it. It's out there. You wanna make real money? Let me put it on my secret channel.

DWEEZEL

What channel was that again?

RYAN

I said, it's secret – that's why I get all the hits. And I make bank on it. You want bank? Take the video down and make them **really** want it.

DWEEZEL

I dunno.

RYAN

*(Ryan checks Dweezel's nametag.)*

Dweezel, look at your antenna again. If it weren't secret, what good would it be? Everyone would have one, right? But no – you're the only one. So, you get to be a secret agent, right?

DWEEZEL

I never looked at it that way.

RYAN

Listen to me. I am, myself, on a secret mission. I can't tell you about it, because secret, but if everyone knew about it, I couldn't do it at all.

DWEEZEL

Makes sense.

RYAN

So trust me. A million hits means nothing if you can't do anything with them. On my channel, you can parlay that million hits into a million bucks.

DWEEZEL

Really?

RYAN

Almost. Let's say up to a million bucks, or more, even. And you'll be a part of my secret network. Crazy, right? And that's the way you like them.

DWEEZEL

You know, I like your style.

RYAN

Great.

*(they shake hands)*

DWEEZEL

So how do we start?

RYAN

First send the video to my email: mumble mumble at protonmail dot com.

DWEEZEL

Protonmail. I like that. I need the real username.

RYAN

Mumble mumble. Just like that. It's the address I use for secret stuff.

*(Dweezel takes out his smartphone and taps a few keys.)*

Next, delete the video from your channel. Completely so no hacker can get it back. That's important.

DWEEZEL

*(Dweezel taps a few more keys.)*

Done.

RYAN

And last – this is most important. Don't tell anybody about this. This meeting never happened. This whole deal is secret, or it's blown.

DWEEZEL

Understood.

*(beat. Dweezel then addresses Ryan as if he just walked in.)*

Good evening sir; welcome to The Tech Corner. Can I help you?

RYAN

*(with a knowing look)*

No thanks – I'm just browsing.

*(Ryan exits the store, but just before leaving gives a wink.)*

*(Lights down. Lights up on:)*

## The small and low-end office of mall security.

*The boss is on the phone; Quinn is waiting.*

BOSS

It can wait – we have a situation here.

*(beat)*

No, I can't just come out there – the press will have a field day. “Mall boss leaves post as rats take over.” Except they'll spell it “Mob boss” and a week later print one of those tiny corrections nobody sees.

*(beat)*

I don't trust those machines. Who knows what they're thinking?

*(beat)*

Tomorrow, 2pm. Your office.

*(Boss hangs up the phone and addresses Quinn)*

Quinn – remember that secret mission you're on?

QUINN

What secret mission?

BOSS

Good. I like that. You're going to Toledo tomorrow morning.

QUINN

What's in Toledo?

BOSS

Nothing worthwhile. You'll be meeting somebody who is trying to let computers handle all the food ordering. The computers analyze the food court garbage, figure out what people are eating, and then

place the appropriate orders. You know what that means?

QUINN

I hope it doesn't mean I'm going to Toledo.

BOSS

It means I'm going to Toledo. Except that you're going instead. As me. They have no idea what I look like, and I have to stay here to keep the press from making a mockery of our fine dining establishments. So, it's you.

QUINN

With all due respect, sir...

BOSS

There's a 6 am flight out of Westchester, gets into Toledo at twelve noon.

QUINN

Six hours to get to Toledo?

BOSS

*(Boss hands Quinn a business card)*

You change planes twice. Get a taxi to this address, be there at two pm. You'll be meeting a Ms. Capellini. She can be very convincing, but under no circumstances are you to agree to her system. I don't trust those computers, and you know it.

QUINN

Right boss. So... I just call in sick?

BOSS

I already did that for you.

QUINN

You're so efficient.

BOSS

That's why I'm the boss. Back to work – you know what to do.

QUINN

Yes, sir!

*(Quinn starts to exit, is stopped by the Boss who hands Quinn a suit on a hanger)*

One other thing – you'll need this. Looks like it'll fit well enough.

*(Quinn exits the office; lights go down on the office and up on*

*the mall food court, where Cleo and Ryan are working.)*

CLEO  
What's with the suit?

QUINN  
I'm going to take the rest of the day off and go to the doctor.

CLEO  
Now? What about our secret mission?

QUINN  
For somebody who acts so smart, you sure can be dumb. My doctor's in Toledo.

CLEO  
I didn't know **anything** was in Toledo.

QUINN  
Nothing worthwhile. But right now I have to get ready for a six o'clock flight.

CLEO  
Have a nice trip, I guess.

QUINN  
Thanks.  
*(Quinn exits. Ryan comes up to Cleo.)*

RYAN  
What was that about? Quinn didn't seem too pleased.

CLEO  
He has to go to Toledo.

RYAN  
Oh. Totally explains it.

CLEO  
His doctor is in Toledo.

RYAN  
That explains a lot of other things.

CLEO  
He'd have to be pretty sick to go to Toledo to see a doctor.

RYAN  
That's probably why he's not so pleased.

CLEO  
You're not getting it. Does he look sick to you?

RYAN  
No... but that doesn't mean anything. He'll probably feel better soon.

CLEO  
Soon? When?

RYAN  
He's going to Toledo, right? So probably at the airport on the way back, but who knows?

CLEO  
Ryan – **this is** the secret mission. This is the key to the rat war.

RYAN  
How?

CLEO  
I have no idea, but I'm gonna find out.

RYAN  
How?

CLEO  
I'm going to Toledo.

RYAN  
That's nuts! Even **you** should know that's nuts. What are you going to do in Toledo?

CLEO  
What does anybody do in Toledo?

RYAN  
I don't want to find out.  
*(Cleo exits. After a beat, Ryan pulls out his cell phone and dials)*  
When is the next flight to Toledo?  
**(blackout)**

---

**A messy art studio, where Macaroni is creating her latest artwork, which is based on a giant dog paw mounted on a styrofoam plate.**

*Pettigrew enters*

MAC

Pettigrew – what are you doing here?

PETTIGREW

Just checkin' out the... “art”.

MAC

I thought you didn't approve.

PETTIGREW

Don't matter. You're doin' it. I want to see what you're doin'.

MAC

“What I'm doin' ” is creating subtle suggestion on the part of the viewer, that will capture their imagination and catapult them into a new way of acting.

PETTIGREW

Looks like a dog leg to me.

MAC

Pettigrew, you are so... petty. Tell me – what is man's best friend?

PETTIGREW

Besides a good taco?

MAC

I see you're not very literate.

PETTIGREW

I'm a rat – what do I know about the friends of those giant creatures that drop food all over the floor for us? As far as I know, rats are their best friends.

MAC

You have a point. But the answer is: a dog.

PETTIGREW

What do you know about dogs?

MAC

I read. And I'm not afraid of other cultures, like people are. I have cat friends, I have dog friends.

PETTIGREW

Dog friends?

MAC

Pretty bohemian, no? Such a life artists lead!

PETTIGREW

Pretty “out there”. Not worth it though.

MAC

Dogs can be pretty nice people. Expand your horizons and you'll have a much better perspective on life. I hear Remy has some interesting social contacts.

PETTIGREW

If that's the word you'd use.

MAC

Come, make yourself useful. Bring that pile of ice cream over.  
*(Pettigrew looks around, and Macaroni points to a large cylindrical tub on its side.)*

Just roll it over here.

*(Pettigrew grabs a shovel, and when the cylinder is in place, shovels a huge amount of pink goo onto the huge plate that holds the dog's paw.)*

PETTIGREW

Nice colors.

MAC

The irony of warm colors for cold ice cream. It makes people want to do things.

PETTIGREW

Like what?

MAC

Set the scene. You're walking along, and you see a little kid eating an ice cream cone. Bess, for instance. She's not that coordinated, and the ice cream falls off the cone. Her little dog instantly starts eating it off the ground, because that's what dogs do. Bess of course starts crying, because that's what kids do when they lose their ice cream.

PETTIGREW

Yeah, so?

MAC

So, what would a person do in that situation?

PETTIGREW

No idea. I don't pay much attention to people.

MAC

Which is why, like it or not, **I'm** here. I do. People love mice, and mice love people. So, I get a lot of insight into this. The grownup is going to get the kid a new ice cream cone. Probably for free, because the ice cream should be better anchored.

PETTIGREW

“Anchored”? Where's you learn words like that?

MAC

Like I said, I read.

PETTIGREW

So this... what do you call it?

MAC

I call it “Corgy and Bess”. We leave it out tonight, and people who see it will be reminded of their own childhood. They'll become just a little more sympathetic. Sympathetic to us. But they won't know it's happening. This is the power of art.

PETTIGREW

It'll never work.

MAC

It will. Just give it time.

*(blackout)*

---

## The food court of a shopping mall, after hours.

*Two custodians we have not seen before, Angie and Biff, are cleaning up. Angie reaches down to pick up a discarded dish of food from the floor.*

ANGIE

People got no taste in food no more. Fried chicken and ice cream?

BIFF

Maybe that's why they threw it on the floor.

ANGIE

You ain't kiddin'!. But don't laugh – Quinn'd have a field day with this!

BIFF

Should we save it for him?

ANGIE

Nah.

*(Angie dumps it in the trash bin. **Blackout.** Lights up on...)*

## The aisle of a commuter airline.

*Quinn enters and takes the window seat, stowing his bag in the overhead bin. Cleo enters, stows a bag in the overhead bin, and sits next to Quinn in the middle seat.*

QUINN

Cleo! What are you doing here?

CLEO

I have some important business in Toledo, so I took the day off.

QUINN  
No you don't. Nobody has important business in Toledo.

CLEO  
Didn't you say something about a doctor out here?

QUINN  
If a doctor has to come to Toledo to practice, I ain't seein' him.

CLEO  
Yeah. I figured. So why'd you tell me you were seeing a doctor in Toledo.

QUINN  
Oh.... **that** doctor!

CLEO  
Come clean.

QUINN  
Look. First of all, I'm not who you think I am.

CLEO  
We all know that.

QUINN  
No, you don't get it. I'm the boss.  
*(Ryan arrives, stows a bag in the overhead bin, and sits down next to the other two. Cleo notices, Quinn does not.)*

CLEO  
Ryan?

QUINN  
No, the **boss**. Ryan's just a smart-ass who thinks he knows too much.

RYAN  
I know enough to know I don't know enough.

QUINN  
Ryan?

RYAN  
Fancy meeting you here.  
*(A flight attendant comes by.)*

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
Please buckle your seat belts for takeoff – we'll be leaving in just

two minutes.

QUINN  
The plane seems pretty empty – aren't there any more passengers?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
Nah. Nobody flies to Toledo.

CLEO  
Except people who aren't who they say they are.

QUINN  
You're gonna blow my cover!

RYAN  
In an empty plane?

QUINN  
Can I trust you?

CLEO  
Look – we just followed you onto a plane going to Toledo. Either we're totally empty in the cabesa, or there's something fishy going on that we're going to get to the bottom of.

RYAN  
So, what's your cover?

QUINN  
**I don't even know!** The boss wants me to meet somebody, – **as** him. So I'm him.

RYAN  
And how do you know he's not a dishonest crook instead?

QUINN  
What other kinds of crooks are there?

CLEO  
The kind that says they have a doctor's appointment in Toledo.

QUINN  
That's not fair.

CLEO  
It's about the rats, isn't it?

RYAN  
We **know** it's about the rats.



CLEO

You've discovered something and you're keeping it from us.

QUINN

Cleo – have I ever told you that you keep making yourself sound smarter than you are?

CLEO AND RYAN

All the time.

QUINN

I'll tell you this: You blow this and we're all out of a job. So everything on the Q-T. Sub rosa. Escondido. Under the hat. Get it?

PILOT (ON INTERCOM)

Welcome to flight three seven seven to Toledo Ohio. We will be making two stops, and changing planes each time. Please put your seats upright for takeoff, and good luck.

*(blackout)*

---

## A nondescript corner of the floor of the food court at the mall.

PETTIGREW

So, what do you think of Macaroni?

RIZZO

Not as good as pizza, but I take what I can get.

PETTIGREW

I mean the **mouse**.

RIZZO

Oh, Mac! She's a sight for sore eyes, don't you agree?

PETTIGREW

If you're into playing with a mouse, I'm not going to judge you –

RIZZO

You're the one that asked the question. I like her; is that ok?

PETTIGREW

I'm talking about the art thing. Corgi and... something. I don't know. We put it out there and nothing happened.

RIZZO

Give it time.

PETTIGREW

Time? That was a perfectly good chicken leg – Remy risked a lot getting one in such good condition.

RIZZO

Mainly keeping Ratbert from eating it.

PETTIGREW

Ratbert had a point. This is food – we shouldn't be playing fun and games with it when we could be –

RIZZO

Tell me about Macaroni.

PETTIGREW

This a trick question?

RIZZO

No. What do **you** think of our little mouse? Never mind the art stuff – what do you think of **her**?

PETTIGREW

*(Pettigrew thinks a moment.)*

She's... pretentious. Egotistical. Cocky. Fanciful.

RIZZO

...but you like her.

PETTIGREW

Stop it! She's a **mouse**!

RIZZO

It's just you and me. I'm not judging.

PETTIGREW

Look – I like her fine. I just don't think she's doing anything.

RIZZO

Ok, so you **do** like her. Why?

PETTIGREW

*I dunno. Why do I like anything?*

RIZZO

Exactly. But still, she gets you to **feel** something. To **want** something. And you don't know why. Look – this is gonna work. Those people out there – they're gonna do stuff for us, and **they** won't know why.

PETTIGREW

When?

RIZZO

Patience. We just gotta find the right approach – the right algorithm, as it were.

*(blackout)*

**A conference room in the Toledo office of Total Panopticon, Ltd., with a video projection screen at the head. The walls are glass and we can see beyond them the reception area, where displayed on the back wall is their logo – a cross between an eyeball and a target.**

*(Ms. Capellini, Quinn, Cleo, and Ryan enter from the reception area. Ms. Capellini is very sexily attired and looks remarkably like Macaroni.)*

QUINN

These are my associates, Cleo and Ryan.

MS. CAPELLINI

Nice to meet you all. Did you have a nice flight?

CLEO

Yes. Three of them.

RYAN

We had two stops.

QUINN

...and changed planes each time.

MS. CAPELLINI

Why? There's a nonstop at eleven thirty out of Westchester. It gets in at a quarter to one.

QUINN

*(beat)*

I guess our travel department doesn't know about that one.

MS. CAPELLINI

Toledo is a very popular destination.

RYAN

*(to Cleo)*

Are we in the Twilight Zone?

MS. CAPELLINI

A lot goes on here, and I'm going to show you some of it. As per our proposal, we'd like to –

QUINN

That's not going to be possible.

MS. CAPELLINI

You actually **read** the proposal?

QUINN

It involves computers, right?

MS. CAPELLINI

Well... yes.

QUINN

Then we already know it won't work, and we're not interested.

MS. CAPELLINI

What won't work?

QUINN

The system. I'm not going to let a computer tell me what to buy, especially since it doesn't even know what we have and what we do. Our people are extremely competent and we'd prefer to continue doing everything manually.

CLEO

By hand.

RYAN

Not automatically.

CLEO

It's more organic, more real.

RYAN

Food service is very hands-on. We don't know whose hands these computers have been with.

*(beat)*

MS. CAPELLINI

*(Ms. Capellini addresses Quinn)*

You say the computer doesn't know what you have and what you do, right?

QUINN

Right. And we're not going to tell it.

MS. CAPELLINI

You don't have to.

*(Ms. Capellini uses a remote control to light up a display screen on the wall showing spreadsheet pages and graphs.)*

There are thirteen food establishments in the food court alone.

Three are Mexican, two are Italian, three are Chinese, one Thai, three are standard American fare, and one is in a class by itself. On a typical night, they serve sixty-eight pounds of beef, seventy one pounds of chicken, five hundred peppers, forty-four ears of corn, two hundred twelve taco shells –

QUINN

So? Where are you going with this?

MS. CAPELLINI

Do you know how much of this gets thrown out?

QUINN

Actually, I'm pretty much an expert in that.

MS. CAPELLINI

We all have our hobbies, I guess. Twenty pounds of bone, thirty-three pounds of vegetables...

QUINN

Wait – How do you know all this?

MS. CAPELLINI

Fairly standard. EasyTable and Grab-a-Bite reservations, customer cell phone capture, grocery store data linked to these customers... it doesn't matter really. Point is, we're already doing this. We're not asking for anything. We're offering a service that costs you nothing.

RYAN

You mean, like “free”?

MS. CAPELLINI

Yes. Free. Gratis. No cost. On the house. Complementary.

CLEO

Why?

QUINN

Shut up, Cleo.

RYAN

No, keep going. Why?

MS. CAPELLINI

Why what?

RYAN

Why are you doing this?

MS. CAPELLINI

With all due respect, you don't know yet what it is we are doing.

QUINN

*(to Ryan)*

Ryan, let me handle this.

*(to Ms. Capellini)*

Why are you doing this, and what is the “this” you are doing?

MS. CAPELLINI

It's all explained in these documents.

*(Ms. Capellini hands Quinn some papers.)*

But in short, we're already collecting this information for... research, information, and security purposes. It turns out that it can be helpful for the important people like you who are in charge of making big decisions. And that's what we're offering. By letting the machines handle all the unimportant details we can provide you with advanced research summaries like these...

*(Ms. Capellini clicks the remote and other graphs and spreadsheet pages appear on the conference room projection screen.)*

...and not only will business be better, just think about your reputation as a purveyor of fine dining.

QUINN

You're telling me that I can –

RYAN

Let me handle this Quinn. Ms. Capellini, doesn't this remove us from the loop completely?

MS. CAPELLINI

*(puzzled, to nobody)*

Quinn?

QUINN

*(Quinn nods to Ryan)*

Listen to him. Does it?

MS. CAPELLINI

He called you Quinn. I thought you were Mister... uh...

*(Ms. Capellini leafs through a folder. There is an awkward moment until Cleo pipes in.)*

CLEO

We all call him Quinn. It's a university nickname from when he was on the advanced management team.

RYAN

Only certain people get to call him Quinn.

QUINN

You can be one of those people if you like.

MS. CAPELLINI

*(Ms. Capellini easing up)*

Ok. ... Yes. ... Quinn.

QUINN

Does this remove us from the loop?

MS. CAPELLINI

Calling you Quinn?

QUINN

No. This computer thing you're giving us. Free.

MS. CAPELLINI

Only if you want. Once you see the results, you see. Every mall owner in the country will want to know your secret.

RYAN

*(to Quinn)*

That can be worth something. On the side.

MS. CAPELLINI

Ryan is quite perceptive.

QUINN

*(Quinn stops a moment to consider)*

I think, maybe, perhaps we could do business.

CLEO

Wait – there's something missing here.

QUINN AND RYAN

Shut up Cleo.

MS. CAPELLINI

Just sign on the bottom here. You'll see just above, right here, it says “free”.

QUINN

*(Quinn picks up the pen and is about to sign, then hesitates.)*

I guess I shouldn't sign it “Quinn”, right?

MS. CAPELLINI

Probably not.

*(Quinn signs the documents and keeps a copy.)*

It's a pleasure doing business with you all.

*(Ms. Capellini leaves, and the three are alone in the conference*

room.)

CLEO  
Are you sure about this, Quinn?

QUINN  
What's there to lose?

RYAN  
They already have the data. Why shouldn't we wet our beak?

CLEO  
I think we're gonna find out.

RYAN  
How are you going to deal with the Boss?

QUINN  
I **am** the boss.

CLEO  
*(unconvinced)*  
Right.

RYAN  
What if they're right?

QUINN  
About what?

RYAN  
About all this computer stuff. Everything's automatic, optimized, and all those buzzwords. There's less waste, right?

QUINN  
Right. Profits go up. Customers are happier.

CLEO  
Doesn't that make our jobs harder?

RYAN  
Doing less work makes it harder?

CLEO  
There's less... evidence. To analyze. For our little project.

RYAN  
I think Cleo's on to something.

QUINN  
*(It slowly dawns on Quinn)*

You know Cleo, maybe you're not as dumb as you are.

CLEO  
Thanks... I think.

QUINN  
Now don't go getting a swelled head. Maybe they're wrong. This whole computer thing could be a bust.

CLEO  
You signed it. That don't look good for you either.

QUINN AND RYAN  
Shut up, Cleo.

RYAN  
What are we gonna do?

QUINN  
First thing, we go back to work. Act like everything's normal. Angie's covering for us; if there was something even slightly odd, she'd let me know.

RYAN  
If anything's moved, out of place, sure. But can she read paw prints?

CLEO  
Wait – I thought this whole thing was secret.

QUINN  
Secret yeah, but it can't be secret without secret agents, right? She's a secret agent. And now, she's the key to this whole mystery.

RYAN  
Yeah, fine, ok. But there's a difference between a table that's on the wrong side of the room, and pepperoni that's on the wrong side of a pizza slice. We'd better get back.

QUINN  
Right. Let's go.  
*(Quinn and Ryan exit, Cleo lags behind.)*

CLEO  
*(musing to himself)*  
I wonder how many other secret agents there are.  
*(Cleo follows Quinn and Ryan out. **Blackout.**)*

---

**The food court of a mall is illuminated;  
there are other areas of the stage that are  
in darkness.**

*Angie is rolling a trash cart and picking up.*

QUINN

Anything happen while I was gone?

ANGIE

You were gone?

QUINN

Ouch!

ANGIE

Look Quinn. You ain't the King of the Hill here. There's no hill, there's no king. There's just trash, and we pick it up.

QUINN

There's more than just trash. Things. Are. Happening. And they're happening **here**.

ANGIE

Quinn, I like you, but really. You belong in Florida.

QUINN

The boss thinks I belong in Toledo.

ANGIE

If you went to Toledo, Florida would annex it.

QUINN

Angie –

ANGIE

Nothing happened. There was trash, we picked it up.

QUINN

Yes, but was there anything **special** about that trash?

ANGIE

When you're not here, trash is trash.

*Angie is about to pick some trash off the floor when Quinn stops her.*

QUINN

**Wait!**

ANGIE

Wait **what?**

QUINN

*Quinn points it out:*

See what I mean? A hamburger bun – just the bun – and on each side a chicken bone. That's not a coincidence.

ANGIE

What else is it?

QUINN

A message. It's a bed! Headboard, footboard, soft mattress... what else can it be?

ANGIE

It's **trash!** Even moreso, it's **garbage!**

QUINN

Look – how many people eat chicken and hamburger at the same time. And then arrange their... leftovers so artistically?

ANGIE

Maybe some kid is just playing with its food?

QUINN

Yeah – now you're getting it. Only it's not a kid...

*(Lights gradually shift to illuminate the rats and darken the food court. In doing so, the scale and perspective change; we are still in the food court, but now from the POV of the rats. Human dialog continues OS; rats dialog is in focus.)*

QUINN

*(continuous)*

... it's a **rat**. They're talking to us!

ANGIE

Oh – so now you speak Rat? That explains a lot.

QUINN

Angie – Don't you realize...

ANGIE

The only thing I realize is that I'm tired. I'm turning in early. This shift is yours.

*(Angie leaves. Light change is complete. Rizzo, Kylie, and Mac are watching from their corner of the stage.)*

KYLIE

It really **is** working!

RIZZO

I knew it would.

MAC

Ok – phase two. What exactly do you want to say? And to whom?

KYLIE

I didn't think it would work so fast.

MAC

It won't work every time. But over time, it works.

RIZZO

Great. So now what?

KYLIE

I don't know. It's like we have the script but we can't read it.

RIZZO

Is that a surprise? Rats can't read.

KYLIE

Wait – we have a mouse. Doesn't that mean we have a computer?

MAC

Are you daft?

KYLIE

Are you sure you don't have Final Draft on it? I hear that program can read anything.

PETTIGREW

*(Pettigrew has materialized without them being aware.)*

Final Draft? That can't even read a box of corn flakes, and when it does, it makes it look like a nineteen thirty's typewriter pecked it

out.

REMY

*(Remy has also appeared without being noticed.)*

Ze software is no match for ze wetware. Eef you know what to zay, you can zay eet sans zees – how you zay – crutches.

KYLIE

Now wait – Final draft is great – it does all sorts of things.

MAC

Let's not get off the point. First, tell me what “sorts of things” you are actually trying to **do**? Because if they are good things, you can do them with hamburger buns and chicken bones. And if they are not, then you might as well use hamburger buns and chicken bones!

RIZZO.

Again the mouse has a point.

PETTIGREW

Rizzo and the mouse. I think I see a pattern.

KYLIE

If it's working...

PETTIGREW

I don't care **what's** working. We're not working with a mouse.

*(Pettigrew leaves in a huff. Those remaining are dumbfounded. Finally...)*

KYLIE

Do you smell trouble?

RIZZO

*(beat)*

No. I smell pepperoni.

*(Rizzo scurries out, followed soon by Remy. Mac and Kylie remain.)*

MAC

Ok... if you're not telling me what to say, I'll say what I want.

***(blackout)***

**On one side of the stage, the food court of a shopping mall, after hours, is lit. On the other side of the stage, dark, is the office of the Boss. There is a door between.**

*...where Quinn, Cleo, and Ryan are busy cleaning up. Ryan beckons Quinn to a table, where there is a bit of a food mess.*

RYAN

Okay Quinn, you're so into analysis – what do you make of this?

QUINN

Wow! Where did you find this?

RYAN

*(wondering if Quinn is all there)*

Right here.

QUINN

This is incredible! The rats are talking to us! I **knew** it!

RYAN

Angie said you were daft, I think I believe it.

QUINN

Who was the one that put a TV studio on a rat?

RYAN

Ok, well, maybe I'm daft too. But it's your fault. Anyway, what's it say?

QUINN

*(Quinn examines the... garbage on the table)*

Hard to say.

RYAN

Was it hard for the rats to say?

QUINN

You know.... I think it was. Look at the detail. Rats can't do such detailed work – their paws are too big.

RYAN

So maybe... what?

QUINN

I don't know. Cleo – what does this look like to you?

CLEO

I dunno. Are you sure you want me to answer? You'll just insult me.

QUINN

Cleo – when have I ever insulted you?

RYAN AND CLEO

All the time.

QUINN

Well, ok. But not this time. What's it look like?

*(Cleo comes to look at the mess in question, and ponders for a while.)*

CLEO

It reminds me of the Curio of Pompey.

QUINN

The what?

CLEO

In Rome. A lot of people don't know this, but it was where Julius Caesar was murdered. The senate used to meet...

QUINN AND RYAN

Shut up Cleo.

QUINN

You think the rats really know the history of Rome?

CLEO

I don't know what the rats know, but the resemblance is striking.

QUINN

*(Quinn leans into the mess on the table.)*

Hey... If I lean in and listen closely I can hear them saying “Beware the Ides of March”!

CLEO

Actually that would be “Et tu, Brute”.



RYAN

He's right. The ides thing is from the soothsayer.

QUINN

And there's no such thing as a soothsayer.

RYAN

We **are** reading coded messages from rats.

QUINN

Or mice. The irony doesn't escape me.

ANGIE

*(Angie has entered unnoticed.)*

Everything escapes you, Quinn. This is a food court, not a crime lab.

*(Angie picks up the garbage and dumps it into her bin.)*

It's **you** that should beware the Ides of March.

QUINN

Angie – that was **important!**

ANGIE

Not to the boss....who's on his way.

BOSS

*(The boss has also entered, unnoticed.)*

Do you know what yesterday was?

CLEO

Pi day!

BOSS

Pie in the face day. Yesterday I got a notice that I have agreed to certain terms and conditions that under no condition were you to agree to let me agree to.

QUINN

What are you talking about?

BOSS

Does Toledo, Ohio mean anything to you?

QUINN

Does flight twenty-seven mean anything to you?

BOSS

What's flight twenty-seven?

QUINN

Nonstop to Toledo. An hour and forty-five minutes. Leaves during the sane part of the day.

BOSS

Yeah. We saved twenty dollars.

QUINN

Do you know what today is?

BOSS

What are you getting at?

QUINN

It's a day you ought to beware of. You're about to make a big mistake, and I can stop you from it. Let's go to your office.

*(Quinn exits the mall with the boss, entering the office. There's a "what just happened" moment. Then...)*

RYAN

Maybe the rats know more than we thought they did.

ANGIE

The rats sure know more than the people do!

*(Angie, Ryan, and Cleo go back to work.)*

***(Lights out on the mall, and up on the office.)***

---

**(continuous)**

QUINN

It just fell in our laps.

BOSS

I don't care if it fell from the sky – I told you specifically not to sign us up for anything, especially computer things.

QUINN

I know how you feel about computers, but I also know how you feel about "free". And this stuff is free.

BOSS  
So?

QUINN  
So, you don't have to pay for it. You were happy to put me through hell to save twenty bucks. Here I'm saving you more money than I even make, and guess what – **you** get the credit for it. Because it was you that signed up for the deal.

BOSS  
No, I was never in Toledo.

QUINN  
Yes you were. I was there, remember? **As** you. Now, you can go public, or you can play along.

BOSS  
*(beat)*  
I'm listening.

QUINN  
There's this company called “Total Panopticon” – they will be monitoring all of the garbage –

BOSS  
See, that's the part I don't like.

QUINN  
They are doing it anyway.

BOSS  
They're watching our garbage?  
*(The boss looks around and closes the blinds on the window frame.)*

QUINN  
Not you – the food. They know what gets thrown out – so they can order the stuff that people actually eat. Restaurants make more money, you get a raise, and guess what happens to the rats.

BOSS  
They become waiters?

QUINN  
Not enough garbage, so they go away. Like magic. You get another raise. Lookin' good, right?

BOSS  
I'm beginning to catch on.

QUINN  
I thought you would.

BOSS  
But I don't trust it.

QUINN  
You don't trust money?

BOSS  
That computery stuff. If they're doing everything, what am I here for?

QUINN  
The same thing you're always here for. Only now it's easier – you don't have to do anything.

BOSS  
I'm already doing that.

QUINN  
Yeah, but nobody knows it. Trust me – we've got you covered.

BOSS  
Last time I trusted you –

QUINN  
...you sent me to Toledo on a six hour flight that changed planes twice. You owe me one.  
*(Quinn exits into the mall.*  
***Lights out in the office, up on the mall.***  
*Angie, Ryan, and Cleo are waiting for him.)*

QUINN (CONTINUOUS)  
Angie – that Pompey thing – we need it back.

ANGIE  
Say **what?**

CLEO  
The **curio** of Pompey. If that's what it really is – we don't know yet.

QUINN  
...and we need to find out. We may be running out of time.

RYAN

That's not the thing you're out of.

QUINN AND CLEO

Shut up, Ryan

RYAN

Say **what?**

ANGIE

*(to Ryan)*

Looks like we're in the same boat.

RYAN

Yeah, and it's sinking.

QUINN

*(to Ryan)*

You know what happens when there's less garbage?

RYAN

Yeah. Two things. One – there's less evidence to analyze. And two – there will be fewer of us to analyze it.

ANGIE

Ain't none of that happenin' here. What's happening is that there's garbage in the food court. If we pick it up, we keep our jobs. If we don't, we are on the street. I don't want to hear no analysis shit.

*(Angie picks something else up, throws it in her trash bin, and exits.)*

QUINN

You know what that is, right? That's war.

CLEO

Careful Quinn. Don't be like the rats.

RYAN

Too late, I think.

QUINN

**War!**

*(blackout)*

---

**An open area on the floor of the food court, from a rat and mouse POV. Chair and table legs are visible, as are various pieces of trash. But most evident is a large (in scale to rats) human body laid out on the floor holding a bottle, next to a slice of pizza.**

*The rats come upon this body and begin exploring.*

RATBERT

Looks like somebody doesn't know the mall is closed!

RIZZO

Is he dead?

RATBERT

*(Ratbert pokes around)*

Nah. He's sleeping.

KYLIE

Maybe that pizza didn't agree with him.

*(Ratbert takes a bit of the crust.)*

RATBERT

I dunno. It agrees with me.

RIZZO

All food agrees with you, Ratbert.

KYLIE

So, what are we going to do?

RATBERT

Ignore it? We have food to eat, why waste time on this?

PETTIGREW

I'm not sure it's really a waste of time.

RATBERT

Don't tell me. You want to use a mouse.

PETTIGREW

How crude of you. But yes, I think the Mac could give us some great insight.

RIZZO

Oh... it's "The Mac" now?

REMY

Eez ze romance, no? Eez a love affair between you and zees "mouse".

PETTIGREW

I just think Macaroni would have some good ideas.

MACARONI

*(Macaroni shows up, as if on cue.)*

Did I just hear the call of the wild?

RATBERT

It looks like some "art" was left on our doorstep. Pettigrew wants to know what you make of it.

MACARONI

*(Macaroni scampers over to the prone body and pokes around)*

Let's see... Italian spices, polysoberic oleofins, red dye number two, gluten, and a glass container. Clearly a message. If I created it, I'd call it "Thyme in a Bottle".

KYLIE

What about all the other stuff?

MACARONI

They're in the background. Thyme will tell.

REMY

Zee other spices are ze spice of life – you can't leave zat out!

MACARONI

*(to Remy)*

Art is a lie that reveals the truth.

*(to all)*

We've got to send a message back. But what?

RATBERT

Tell them "more pizza".

RIZZO

Be careful what you wish for.

REMY

Ze pizza eez ze food of love.

KYLIE

I thought you were French.

REMY

Even zee French get hungry zometimes, no?

MACARONI

I've got it!

I'll just nibble a bit here, and a bit there...

*(Macaroni nibbles part of the crust of the pizza)*

RATBERT

Why does she get to eat the pizza?

PETTIGREW

Because she knows what she's doing?

KYLIE

Yeah, but do **we** know what she's doing?

REMY

Do you even know what **you** are doing?

MACARONI

Done!

RATBERT

What done? You hardly did anything.

MACARONI

Art is knowing when to stop.

KYLIE

Art is a lot of things, it seems.

MACARONI

It is. Now off – all of you. Let this thing be discovered.

RATBERT

Are we going to take orders from a **mouse**?

MACARONI

Think of it as a suggestion. One you agree with. In fact, one you thought of first.

KYLIE

Makes sense to me.

*(The rats disperse. **blackout.**)*

**The same open area of the food court, but to human scale. Quinn is asleep on the floor, with a bottle in his hands and a pizza slice next to him.**

*Angie, Cleo, and Ryan discover him.*

ANGIE

Well, will you look at that!

CLEO

*(Cleo rushes up to him)*

I hope he's all right. Quinn! Wake up!

ANGIE

Looks like he's been drinking.

RYAN

I'd be drinking too if I had to eat that pizza.

CLEO

Wait a minute. Take a look at that pizza. Who eats the middle of the crust first?

ANGIE

Well I'll be.

RYAN

Looks like a heart.

*(Ryan picks up the pizza and holds it up. With the way it was nibbled, it does look like a heart.)*

CLEO

...and this bottle... Absinthe. Where did he get this?

RYAN

Not at the mall.

CLEO

He's sending a message.

ANGIE

Message my ass! The boss is going to send us all a message if we don't get this cleaned up.

RYAN

No really. Who eats a heart-shaped pizza?

CLEO

...with absinthe, no less. Maybe that's what the computers are shipping us now. Some sort of high class thing.

ANGIE

Are you guys **daft**?

CLEO

This has to mean **something**.

ANGIE

OK, fine.

“Here's a mystery to ponder while you're out consuming lunch: Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder while it lands a mighty punch.”

RYAN

Angie, that's **brilliant**!

ANGIE

Great. Now let's clean this shit up.

CLEO

Don't you think we ought to... say... wake Quinn up?

ANGIE AND RYAN

*(after a beat)*

Nah.

RYAN

Yeah, probably right.

*(They toss the pizza and bottle in the trash bin and move on.)*

*blackout***The break room at the mall...***...where Cleo and Ryan are talking.*

CLEO  
Maybe she's a drunk?

RYAN  
Angie? I'm pretty sure she never touches the stuff.

CLEO  
Then where did she learn about absinthe?

RYAN  
Everybody knows about absinthe. And knows to stay away from it.

CLEO  
She was pretty quick and poetical when she saw the bottle.

RYAN  
*(beat)*  
I see why you might think that. But wasn't it Quinn that was found with the bottle?

CLEO  
Yeah. By Angie. So where'd Angie get the absinthe?

RYAN  
From Quinn?

CLEO  
That's not his style.

RYAN  
And just what **is** his style?

CLEO  
Beer. Cheap beer. The kind of beer that doesn't go with anything, so you drink it with everything.

RYAN  
I don't know. Quinn was pretty upset about that Pompey thing.

CLEO  
Yeah... it's almost like... I hate to say it, but...

RYAN  
He's on the Rats' side.

CLEO  
Whoa! I mean, right, but I never thought I'd hear you sayin' it.

RYAN  
You know Quinn's off the deep end, don't you?

CLEO  
I dunno. You saw the video. It's unmistakable.

RYAN  
Unmistakable **what**? There are rats in the mall. Everyone already knows this. Rats building the Colosseum? That's not on tape.

CLEO  
You want me to get another camera? Those things **cost**, man!

RYAN  
You wanna build a case, you need evidence, not the ramblings of a lunatic.

CLEO  
It works for Fox.

RYAN  
Fox is a rat.

CLEO  
Wait – really?

RYAN  
It's... never mind. Quinn's gonna do something rash.

CLEO  
Not until he wakes up.

RYAN  
But when he does, we gotta be out in front of it. **IF** there's rats painting the Mona Lisa, we gotta see it happen. If Quinn is just an absinthe-addled aardvark, we gotta stop him.

CLEO  
Ok, but which is it?

RYAN

That's the question. I have thoughts, but we need data.

CLEO

Then I need another camera. That pizza wasn't very nice to its innards.

*(Angie enters, unnoticed)*

RYAN

I still have the Boss' credit card. Let's go.

ANGIE

Where are we going?

CLEO

*(beat)*

I hear Toledo's nice this time of year?

ANGIE

Toledo my ass!

RYAN

Angie, why do you always show up at the most... appropriate times?

ANGIE

Dunno. I guess I have a nose for trouble.

*(Angie realizes...)*

You're going off to get more absinthe!

RYAN

Uh...

ANGIE

Drinkin' on the job's not allowed. You wanna end up like Quinn?

CLEO

How is Quinn anyway?

ANGIE

Shut up, Cleo.

RYAN

No, we weren't going to get absinthe but I'll change my mind if you keep showing up like this.

ANGIE

I **work** here. And you're supposed to too.

RYAN

Ok, fine. I remember that ode of yours. What **is** with you and absinthe?

ANGIE

Oh, I know a few things.

RYAN

Yeah, we're still trying to figure out what they are. Back to work!  
*(Angie and Ryan exit the break room.)*

CLEO

Maybe she **is** a drunk.

*(blackout)*

---

## The Boss' office in the mall.

*The boss is standing behind his desk, while Quinn is seated in front of it.*

BOSS

Give me **one** reason I don't fire you right here and now.

QUINN

Because I was the one that made it possible for you to do so.

BOSS

That makes no sense at all.

QUINN

But it **is** a reason.

BOSS

I pay you to **clean up** the garbage, not to nap with a bottle of whatever-that-stuff-was in your arms.

QUINN

Absinthe, if you must know. And I know where it came from, too.

BOSS

What you know is that there's no drinking on the job.

QUINN

I wasn't drinking.

BOSS

Of course not – you were snockered out on the floor.

QUINN

*(more to himself)*

Angie. It has to be Angie.

BOSS

You have a problem with Angie?

QUINN

I was having a pizza. Before work. Angie shows up with a bottle. She makes a toast. I can't say no; that would be rude. And I'm not at work yet. So, I had one sip. Stuff is vile. Next thing I know, it's Thursday.

BOSS

Look Quinn, I'm trying to be understanding. But Angie tells me –

QUINN

...stories. I'm tellin' you the real deal. It's been a week, how has business been?

BOSS

What does that have to do with it?

QUINN

How's business? You know – the rats, the restaurants, the garbage?

BOSS

Business is fine. No thanks to you.

QUINN

So you can fire me? And not notice?

BOSS

That's right.

QUINN

But four weeks ago you were begging me to do overtime, and I know that's against your religion.

BOSS

Four weeks ago the garbage was up to here. Restaurants didn't care, patrons didn't care, the only one who cared was me.

QUINN

And me.

BOSS

And you.

QUINN

And Ryan. And, I hate to say it, Cleo.

BOSS

If you care so much, whyja get drunk.

QUINN

Angie – I told you. But it don't matter. Point is, something happened in Toledo that you didn't like at first, but tell me how it's playing out. You can sit back and fire me – your most senior...

*(beat)*

organic removal engineer – and not lose a beat. And *I* made that possible.

BOSS

And if word gets out that I am letting you sleep drunk on the job, I *will* lose a beat.

QUINN

And if word gets out that it wasn't you in Toledo, you will lose more than a beat. Remember all that free stuff Panopticon is giving you?

BOSS

I do. I admit – you were right about the computery stuff. I play with the mouse, and the rats go away.

QUINN

What you don't realize is that that's my mouse you're playing with. You can fire me, but I won't be gone. We'll end up trading places. If you're lucky.

BOSS

Don't threaten me.

QUINN

I wouldn't dream of it. But you need me. Here. To keep you from making other mistakes.

*(Quinn leaves.)*



BOSS

Quinn – you're a bastard.

*blackout*

---

## A nondescript corner of the floor of the food court at the mall...

*...where Pettigrew, Kylie, Rizzo, and Ratbert are having a huddle.*

PETTIGREW

It's working.

RIZZO

Hmmm.

PETTIGREW

I hate to admit it, but the Mac is amazing.

KYLIE

So... she's “the Mac” now?

RATBERT

I'd be careful here.

RIZZO

Because affairs of the heart are fraught?

MACARONI

*(Macaroni enters, as if on cue)*

Where'd you learn the word “fraught”?

RIZZO

Hey – I listen to things, yanno.

RATBERT

No – because even though it works, you don't know **why** it works.

Which means you can't control it.

MACARONI

I can control it – after all, I'm the one who did it, right?

KYLIE

Can't argue with that.

RIZZO

*(to Kylie)*

Sure you can.

*(To Macaroni)*

So, little Miss Mousie... how is it that when you did what you did, you got them to do what they did?

MACARONI

I already told you, Mister Rat-who-just-saw-a-dictionary. Art. A-R-T. Only three letters, and it's right in the front of the book. If you know which end is the front.

RATBERT

Go easy on him, Macaroni. The jury's still out on this “art” thing.

MACARONI

Is it? Ask Pettigrew.

RATBERT

Ok. Pettigrew – what exactly is it that is working so amazingly well?

PETTIGREW

Well...

RIZZO

Deep thought.

PETTIGREW

Have you noticed that since we started our... how do I say... “gallery events”... that things have been rather nicer around here?

RATBERT

No.

KYLIE

Have you noticed **anything** Ratbert?

REMY

*(Remy had entered unnoticed)*

Zee cuisine is... “beaucoup more magnifique”.

RATBERT

Ok, I'll give you that.

REMY  
Clearly ze chefs appreciate ze arts.

RATBERT  
Or ze mouse.

RIZZO  
Come to think of it, the place is... cleaner.

RATBERT  
Which means less food for us.

REMY  
But still... zere is plenty, and eez zo much tastier.

KYLIE  
And that's just the food.

RATBERT  
What else is there?

KYLIE  
Good point.

MACARONI  
For my next masterpiece...

PETTIGREW  
Whoa... hold on there!

MACARONI  
I thought you liked my stuff?

PETTIGREW  
I do. Well, more than before anyway. Not to argue with results, but don't you think we're going a little too fast here?

RATBERT  
I'm with Pettigrew. We don't know what's going to happen next.

MACARONI  
I do.

KYLIE  
What's going to happen next?

MACARONI  
That depends on you. To pull it off, I will need something long and colorful, some small green things, a backdrop of some sort, something rough and bulbous, and a red sauce.

RIZZO  
“Sauce” is the only word that makes sense to me.

PETTIGREW  
Yeah. We're rats. Stop talking art and start talking food.

KYLIE  
No – I think I get it. Carrots. Long and colorful.

MACARONI  
Now you're thinking! We'll make a mouse out of you yet!

RATBERT  
Don't scare me.

MACARONI  
Now I also need...

PETTIGREW  
I don't care what that girl needs.

RIZZO  
A potato! Bulbous, rough, tasty.

REMY  
Ze haricot verts! Petit, green, délicieux.

RATBERT  
Or you could just use peas.

PETTIGREW  
This is getting out of hand! Is the mouse working for us, or are we working for the mouse?

RATBERT  
Wasn't it just a minute ago you were saying the Mac was amazing, and that it's all working so well?

PETTIGREW  
Yes, but that doesn't mean...

MACARONI  
First one back gets to lick the spoon!  
*(All the rats except Pettigrew scurry off in search of art supplies. Pettigrew is at a loss.)*  
Trust me - it'll be just fine.

***(blackout)***

---

**Half the stage is lit as the break room in the mall custodian area. The other half is in darkness. There is a door upstage.**

*...where Quinn, Ryan, and Cleo are huddled over a smartphone watching video of the rats.*

RYAN

Where'd they get a freaking chafing dish?

QUINN

This **is** a restaurant.

CLEO

Yeah... I'm not used to thinking of these... fine food establishments as "restaurants".

RYAN

Still... what do rats know about cooking?

QUINN

Yanno Ryan, sometimes I think you're remedial.

CLEO

Cooking means food... and aromas... and –

QUINN

The rats have had the run of the place for years. You think they don't know where the food is?

RYAN

Yeah, but get this. They actually are putting the food in the chafing dishes themselves. Not taking it out. That Pompey thing was **real!**

QUINN

But why? Don't tell me the rats are getting religion.

CLEO

It's not just rats. Look.

RYAN

It's.... a **mouse!** Will you **look. At. That.**

QUINN

*(peers in)*

Ok, maybe the rats **are** getting religion. This must be some sort of ritual.

RYAN

They are praying. To us. Imagine that!

QUINN

But we still have no idea what they are saying.

CLEO

Yanno what's interesting? Look who's in charge.

RYAN

How can you tell who's in charge?

CLEO

Just look.

*(They watch intently.)*

QUINN

Well... it looks like the rats are doing most of the work.

RYAN

Makes sense. Rats are bigger, stronger. That's why they carry the camera.

CLEO

Then what's the mouse for?

QUINN

Mouse isn't doing anything.

*(beat, drawn out)*

Just like a boss.

CLEO

You're getting' it. Mouse is in charge.

RYAN

*(beat)*

Whoa – freeze that!

*(Cleo taps an icon)*

QUINN

Where are they going?

RYAN

Dunno, but I think they left the mouse there. **Doing** something.

QUINN

So... keep playing it. Let's see what the mouse is doing?

CLEO

Can't see – the rats took the camera with them.

RYAN

What time was this taken?

CLEO

*(looks at the smartphone)*

An hour ago.

RYAN

And that restaurant opens in...

QUINN

Two hours. The employees will be getting there... about now.

RYAN

We've got to get there first! The chef finds this, we're going to be in the chafing dish ourselves!

*(All three exit in a hurry through the upstage door. The lights come down on this area and up on the adjacent area, revealing a small restaurant kitchen, with an island that has a chafing dish on it. There is a door upstage and a door on the opposite side from the break room area. Two chefs, Alfredo and Giuseppi enter through that side door and begin setting up. They notice the chafing dish has something in it just as Quinn, Ryan, and Cleo enter hurriedly from the upstage door. Seeing the chefs, they know they are too late.)*

ALFREDO

*(Alfredo looks at the trio, looks at the chafing dish, and looks back at the trio, expectantly.)*

Your handiwork?

QUINN

*(hesitantly)*

No.

CLEO

No.

RYAN

Yes.

CLEO

Yes.

QUINN

Yes.

GIUSEPPI

Yes? No? Which is it?

RYAN

It was something I was doing for my kids birthday party. I was going to remove it but I got called away. A massive garbage accident we had to attend to.

ALFREDO

You know... this is supposed to be a closed-off area. Once we clean up, nobody is supposed to come in.

GIUSEPPI

That way we know it's still clean.

ALFREDO

Sanitized, for your protection.

GIUSEPPI

We don't want the same... reputation as the rest of the mall.

RYAN

Yes, that's why we put booties over our shoes.

*(Giuseppi and Alfredo look down at Ryan's feet. There are no booties.)*

We took them off when we were called to the emergency cleanup.

Everything's spotless – I swear.

GIUSEPPI

What about the food in the chafing dish. How can things be spotless if that happened?

RYAN

I can assure you everything is perfectly clean. We'll just take this away, and then I'll come back and personally help you prepare for

today.

ALFREDO

Who **are** you?

RYAN

Ok.

*(beat)*

I'm Deputy Inspector Erich Kohley. And I'm happy to say you just passed inspection. Most restaurants would let something like this go, but you caught on right away. I'll be sure to let the Boss know you folks are top notch. What are your names?

GIUSEPPI

I'm Giuseppi, and this is my boss Alfredo.

RYAN

Splendid! A+. Now we'll just get this out of your way, and I'll go write that report.

ALFREDO

Thank you. We just opened, and I wouldn't want to get closed down in the first month!

RYAN

We'll make sure that doesn't happen.

*(Ryan takes the tray from the chafing dish and all three exit through the upstage door. Lights go down in the kitchen and up in the break area as the trio rushes in through the upstage door with the chafing dish.)*

CLEO

Brilliant!

QUINN

Damn near gave me a heart attack.

RYAN

Them too, probably.

CLEO

"Deputy Inspector Erich Kohley"

QUINN

Booties? Really?

RYAN

Let's hope they don't ponder it too much.

QUINN

Say, I didn't know you had kids.

RYAN

I don't.

CLEO

Ryan's not as dumb as I look.

QUINN

*(takes a glance at Cleo)*

I'll say.

*(They put the chafing tray down on a table and begin to examine it.)*

RYAN

Well, I'll be darned.

CLEO

Look at all these little handprints! That mouse was busy!

QUINN

Nobody's going to believe this.

CLEO

We have the video to prove it.

RYAN

We have half the video. Nothing with the mouse.

QUINN

You don't know that. We haven't watched the whole thing.

RYAN

I'll leave that to you. But we're definitely onto something.

*(Angie enters unnoticed)*

RYAN

Never mind the video. We have the actual thing right in front of us.

What does it look like to you?

QUINN

*(Quinn notices Angie)*

Shit!

CLEO  
It's not Michaelangelo, but I think that's a bit extreme.

QUINN  
Angie, what are **you** doing here?

ANGIE  
Takin' a break. That your lunch?

QUINN  
Very funny.

ANGIE  
Wait a minute... what's it doing in a chafing dish?

RYAN  
We thought we'd, you know, chafe it a little before eating it.

ANGIE  
Oh yeah? Well, where's the rest of it?

RYAN  
We forgot it.

ANGIE  
Forgot my ass. That belongs to that new restaurant – the fancy French-Italian one. They know you have it?

QUINN  
Of course they do.

ANGIE  
Well, what if I just checked...

QUINN  
Angie, why you gotta stick your nose into everything?

ANGIE  
Funny thing for a rolling-down drunk to say.

RYAN  
Lay offa him Angie. This is actually a special treat for my son, and I don't want any messing around with it. Just stick it back in your hat, ok?

ANGIE  
I didn't know you had a son.

CLEO  
He doesn't –

*(Cleo stops himself but it's too late.)*

ANGIE  
He what?

QUINN  
He doesn't usually talk about him. Sad story, just let it go Angie.

ANGIE  
Ok, but I still smell fish.  
*(Angie leaves)*

RYAN  
... on her breath.

QUINN  
Another close shave like that and I'll be bald.

RYAN  
It's quitting time. I'll take this home. To my son. We'll do more research tomorrow.

QUINN  
Sounds good to me.

CLEO  
I'm gonna stick around and try to get the camera back.

RYAN  
Good luck!  
*(Ryan and Quinn exit.)*

*(blackout)*

---

## **Macaroni's studio, which keeps getting more elaborate each time we see it.**

*Macaroni is working on another project, along with another mouse (Andy). They continue working during the scene. Rizzo is wheeled in on a roller skate by Kylie and Ratbert.*

MACARONI  
Well, what brings **you** here?

RIZZO  
Kylie and Ratbert.  
MACARONI  
I can see that – but what I meant was why?  
RIZZO  
Well, I'm not feelin' too well. Not up to walkin' much.  
MACARONI  
I'm sorry to hear that, but what I was asking was... never mind.  
KYLIE  
He wanted to see what you were up to.  
MACARONI  
That's not like him.  
RATBERT  
Well, he's not feeling too well.  
MACARONI  
Yeah, he said that.  
KYLIE  
So, what **are** you up to?  
RATBERT  
...and who's your helper?  
MACARONI  
Oh, that's Andy.  
ANDY  
The name is **Android**.  
MACARONI  
Oh, that's so cute, Andy.  
ANDY  
**Android**.  
MACARONI  
Yeah, whatever. He's helping me put together your latest project.  
It's a big one.  
RIZZO  
I didn't even know we had a project.  
KYLIE  
Yeah, the thing with the carrots and haircut things.

RATBERT  
That already happened. Even Remy was impressed, and he's hard to impress.  
MACARONI  
So this one's going to... well, just look at it!  
ANDY  
It's not even done yet, what's there to see?  
MACARONI  
Over here is the head. It doesn't have horns yet, but you'll see. This is the foreleg  
KYLIE  
Very clever. You only need one to have all four legs.  
ANDY  
There are two forelegs, you idiot rat.  
MACARONI  
Be nice, Andy.  
ANDY  
Call me by my proper name and I'll be a lot nicer.  
MACARONI  
This will be the tail. A string of little hotdogs – perfect.  
RIZZO  
What will we be getting out of all this?  
MACARONI  
I'm thinking a steakhouse. A real one – with steaks as thick as you are.  
ANDY  
Be nice, Mac  
MACARONI  
Can you believe what I have to put up with?  
ANDY  
He's not even feeling well.  
MACARONI  
Bet it's something you ate.  
KYLIE  
We're rats. It's always something we ate. What else do we do?

RIZZO  
It's those little pellets, I'm sure of it.

KYLIE  
What little pellets?

RIZZO  
All over the place. Little boxes with pellets.

KYLIE  
How did I not notice that?

RIZZO  
Maybe you're dwindling.

RATBERT  
You're the one in the roller skate.

RIZZO  
You're the one that didn't notice food.

KYLIE  
No, **I'm** the one that didn't notice food.

ANDY  
Maybe it's not food.

RATBERT  
Everything is food.

RIZZO  
Remy would disagree.

KYLIE  
Remy's French.

RATBERT  
In his own mind, he is.

ANDY  
Yanno, I'm working my tail off on this project so that you folk can have Sirloin and Porterhouse steaks, and for what? You guys can't tell the difference between steak and sausage!

KYLIE  
Remy can. But he doesn't like steakhouses – they don't do any fancy French shit to it first.

RATBERT  
**He's not French!**

MACARONI  
How would you know? Ever been to France?

RIZZO  
All this arguing... I'm getting tired. I seen what I want to see.

RATBERT  
Maybe you're the one that's dwindling.

RIZZO  
I'm not dwindling. I just want to go to sleep. You know who's dwindling – all the rest of you.

KYLIE  
Us? Us that are pulling you around like a pair of oxes?

ANDY  
Oxen.

RIZZO  
Whatever. You know you're dwindling when you can be here with Andy – uh, excuse me - “Android”, this whole time, and have not noticed that he's **another mouse!**

KYLIE  
Ratbert noticed. Right away.

RIZZO  
He asked his name but he was fine with him being another mouse.

MACARONI  
What's wrong with mice?

KYLIE  
Nothing. We brought you into this remember? We like mice.

MACARONI  
You like what mice can do for you.

RATBERT  
Well... that helps.

MACARONI  
But you don't care about our feelings, do you? To you, we're just tools. Ways of getting food. Ways of doing things you can't figure out. You know who's dwindling? **All of you!** But you don't know it yet.  
*(Nobody says anything for a moment. Then...)*



ANDY  
 Feel better?  
 MACARONI  
 Yeah.  
 ANDY  
 Does it make a difference?  
 MACARONI  
*(beat)*  
 No.  
 KYLIE  
 Rizzo's not feeling himself right now. Maybe we'd better go.  
 RIZZO  
 Yeah. I'm tired. Stay away from those pellets.  
 RATBERT  
 Right.  
*(they wheel Rizzo out on the roller skate.)*

ANDY  
 Is that us? In the future?  
 MACARONI  
 I sure hope not, Andy. I mean, Android.  
 ANDY  
 Andy's fine.

*(blackout)*

---

## The break room at the mall.

*Cleo is sitting at a table, a bit morose. He has recovered the camera and it is in front of him on the table. Ryan walks in.*

RYAN  
 Cleo – you look like shit. You find the camera?  
*(Cleo holds it up)*  
 It still work?

*(Cleo nods)*  
 You been here the whole time?  
 CLEO  
 I found Rizzo.  
 RYAN  
*(Ryan indicates the camera)*  
 And...?  
 CLEO  
 No, he's not on the video. I found Rizzo. Himself.  
 RYAN  
 Did you ask him about the Pompey thing?  
*(Cleo looks up in disbelief)*  
 CLEO  
 You think I speak rat?  
 RYAN  
 Well, no...  
 CLEO  
 Or maybe Rizzo speaks the Queen's English?  
 RYAN  
 Rats are pretty smart, you know.  
 CLEO  
 Yeah, I know. Smarter than some people, I'm led to understand.  
 RYAN  
 Now what's that supposed to mean?  
 CLEO  
 Think of the people you know. Head to head against a rat, who wins?  
 RYAN  
 The people – always. Well, sometimes, anyway. Not against squirrels though. Squirrels win every time.  
 CLEO  
 Rizzo's dead.  
 RYAN  
 Rizzo's.... how do you know?

CLEO

I saw him.

RYAN

What – when you were getting the camera?

CLEO

Yeah.

RYAN

Oh, I'm so sorry.

CLEO

He wasn't my boyfriend you dimwit! He wasn't even my pet. He's just a rat.

RYAN

He wasn't “just a rat”, Cleo. We've been watching him and his clan for quite a while now. It's understandable you could get attached to him.

CLEO

Really? We have a few days of video, he appears for an hour or so, tops. We've been analyzing footprints and mashed potatoes. That's it.

RYAN

I kinda liked him.

CLEO

Yeah, but he's just a rat. Thing is, he was buried.

RYAN

Buried?

CLEO

Yeah, like people.

RYAN

In the dirt? In the middle of winter?

CLEO

No. In mashed potatoes.

*(beat)*

RYAN

You ok?

*(Quinn enters)*

QUINN

Another night, another garbage pail.

CLEO

Quinn – ever wonder about your place in the universe?

QUINN

What?

RYAN

He's had a hard day.

CLEO

What it all means... why we are here?

QUINN

No, and I don't hafta. Angie will tell me, whether I like it or not.

RYAN

Angie ain't even here, why bring that up?

QUINN

Angie's always here – haven't you noticed?

CLEO

Rizzo's dead.

QUINN

Really...? Couldn't it've been Angie?

CLEO

And buried. Like people.

QUINN

Really...

CLEO

You know... elephants, when they die, they go off to a secluded location to pass on. Some elephants even bury their dead.

QUINN

Cleo... stop making yourself sound smarter than you are.

CLEO

It's true though. Ants, bees, they do too.

RYAN

He's right.

QUINN

So what?

CLEO

Rizzo was buried. In mashed potatoes. By mice.

QUINN

Nah. Rizzo was just hungry and made a pig of himself again.

RYAN

Wait a minute... by mice?

CLEO

Explain the mouse footprints. And tombstone.

QUINN

Woah – tombstone?

CLEO

My camera – standing up right there. That's how I found it. Then I noticed the footprints. Mouse, not rat. Tiny. Two of them. A him and a her, if I'm analyzing correctly. Then I dug into the mashed potatoes and there he was.

RYAN

You took pictures...

CLEO

I didn't think of it 'till it was too late. And the battery was dead anyway. So I just put him back. Out of respect, you know.

QUINN

Cleo... I never know what to make of you.

RYAN

Sometimes he runs a TV station, and sometimes he does some grave digging.

QUINN

But not both at once, apparently.

*(Angie enters, unnoticed.)*

RYAN

At least you got your camera back. There will be more rats.

ANGIE

Not on my watch.

QUINN

Angie, why do you always **do** that?

ANGIE

Because I work here. And I don't like rats. And neither does the boss.

RYAN

The boss don't care about rats, he just cares people know about rats.

ANGIE

Good enough for me. Grey pellets – no more rats. Easy peasy!  
*(Angie leaves)*

QUINN

I'm going to have to have a talk with the boss, who will then have a talk with Angie.

CLEO

What are you going to tell him? “We need more rats!”?

RYAN

I wanna be a fly on the wall when the boss tells Angie!

QUINN

I'll think of something.

*(Quinn exits.)*

CLEO

I actually liked Rizzo.

RYAN

I know.

*(blackout)*

---

## The Boss' office in the mall: a small, low-end office of mall security.

*Quinn enters*

QUINN

Hey Boss – got a minute?

BOSS

Rather informal today, are we?

QUINN

Sorry, Boss.

BOSS

No matter. I'm rather informal too. I'm leaving.

QUINN

Going to Toledo?

BOSS

Funny you should mention that. Toledo is putting in two new restaurants.

QUINN

You're going to Toledo for dinner? It'll take six hours just to get there. You change planes twice.

BOSS

No, you ass. The restaurants are coming here.

QUINN

For dinner?

BOSS

Sometimes I wonder why I hired you. Then I remember and I get heartburn. Read this.

*(The Boss hands Quinn a letter, which he scans through.)*

QUINN

Panopticon, Limited... to inform you... ***fine dining establishments***... "Pommes and Aubergines"... "Samurai Season"... looks good – congratulations! You're going out there to coordinate things?

BOSS

No. Things are already coordinated. The trucks are on their way. The restaurants will open in a week and a half. Coupons are already in the mail. It's this damned computer thing you hooked me up with.

QUINN

Now wait a minute, computers don't build restaurants.

BOSS

No, but they send letters to people who do.

QUINN

So, why are you going to Toledo?

BOSS

I'm not ***going*** to Toledo.

*(Quinn points to himself, questioningly.)*

No, ***you're*** not either.

*(relief!)*

I'm superfluous. You know what "superfluous" means, right? I'm leaving the job. I'm putting Angie in charge.

QUINN

They ***fired*** you? Wait – ***Angie?***

BOSS

No, they actually gave me a raise.

QUINN

Angie – you can't – Angie's gonna... You're leaving a job where you get paid to do nothing, got a raise, and can take all the credit for turning the food court around?

BOSS

I wanted a ***steakhouse***. Just the other day I was passing by the food court, and, I don't know, looking at the food left around, it was just like a vision. There was this... cow... a male cow, you know. With horns and everything. I don't know what they call it.

QUINN

You know "superfluous" and you don't know "steer".

BOSS

Anyway, it looked lonely, and it got me to thinking.

QUINN

Did you start thinking "what the ***hell*** is cattle doing in a mall?"

BOSS

It wasn't real.

QUINN

I'll say.

BOSS

It was in the food. Like... I don't know. You know those bagels that look like the Madonna? It was like that. And then I really wanted a steak. And then I realized we have no steakhouses at the mall.

Closest is a second rate burger joint called "Americana".

QUINN

You can't leave Angie to run the place.

BOSS

Who's gonna run it? You? You're the one what got me into this mess!

QUINN

What kind of mess is it where you get paid to sit on your ass?

BOSS

Steakhouse, Quinn.

QUINN

Run your own steakhouse!

BOSS

I know nothing about running a restaurant.

QUINN

Then let Panopticon run it.

BOSS

How? Do you like, write a letter saying "I have an idea that I know nothing about, and I want you to do it for me?"

QUINN

That's what everybody else does.

BOSS

...and it works?

QUINN

Look around you. How else do you explain it?

BOSS

*(The Boss ponders.)*

You may have a point there, Quinn. A letter. Will you help me write it?

QUINN

Sure, Boss. I'll take good care of you. Just one request.

BOSS

Sure – anything.

QUINN

About Angie. She's been leaving poisoned pellets around the food court. She's going to claim it's for the rats, but it's not a good look.

And you wouldn't want the chefs at your new steakhouse to mistake it for peppercorns, would you?

BOSS

No. She's *doing* that?

QUINN

Yeah. All on her own. She thinks she's doing good, but you gotta stop her.

BOSS

I'll talk to her. And Quinn – thanks. I owe you one.

*(blackout)*

---

**Macaroni's art studio, where many rats are lying motionless on the floor, and a few roller skates are lying around.**

*(In the background, other rats are tending to them as best they can, including Pettigrew, Ratbert, and Kylie. Macaroni is absent.)*

PETTIGREW

It's the softies. All of them.

RATBERT

What about the pellets?

PETTIGREW

Nothing about the pellets. We should have stayed on Main Street where we belong.

KYLIE

Rizzo said –

PETTIGREW

Whose side are you on?

RATBERT

This isn't about sides, this is about –

PETTIGREW

It's about survival. We can't survive if we get soft. Kylie knows it, don't you Kylie.

KYLIE

Main Street does have its points. But that doesn't make the mall a bad place.

PETTIGREW

A bad place? We are working with mice in order to survive.

RATBERT

You were on board with it.

PETTIGREW

I was never "on board" with using a mouse. Kylie brought one in and now we're doing whatever The Mac says.

KYLIE

So, now this whole thing is my fault?

PETTIGREW

You were once a real rat. Hardened, mean, a survivor. I don't know what happened to you.

RATBERT

Look Pettigrew, we have a situation here and fighting amongst ourselves doesn't do any of us any favors.

KYLIE

We have to get to the bottom of this. Why is everyone dying?

PETTIGREW

**Because they're softies.** I don't see why we even need them.

Toughen up – if you stay soft, you'll be next.

KYLIE

Rizzo was my friend, you know.

PETTIGREW

Voted for the mall. Got us into this mess. Still your friend?

*(Remy, Macaroni, and Andy enter.)*

MACARONI

How are things?

KYLIE

Getting worse. We have no idea what is going on.

RATBERT

Never seen anything like it.

PETTIGREW

You never see this out on the streets.

RATBERT

*(to Pettigrew)*

That's not helping.

MACARONI

Android and Remy had an idea, and I think it will work.

PETTIGREW

Nixed.

KYLIE

What do you mean, nixed?

PETTIGREW

Vetoed. Declined. Overruled. Negated. Deep sixed. Not gonna happen.

RATBERT

You're not in charge.

PETTIGREW

I am now. Ain't doin' it. And neither are you.

KYLIE

Well, I'm listening. Go ahead Macaroni.

PETTIGREW

At least get it from a rat.

KYLIE

Ok. Remy, what's this idea?

REMY

Ze issue eez zat –

PETTIGREW

**And stop with that stupid accent!**

REMY

It would do you good to learn a foreign language, you know.

PETTIGREW

Yeah, I'm not gonna be speaking with foreigners.

RATBERT

If this thing hits you, you won't be speaking with anybody.

ANDY

Look around you. It started with Rizzo. One. How many are there now?

RATBERT

Looks like thirty.

PETTIGREW

How do **you** know? You're a rat. You can't count.

RATBERT

I'm not counting, I'm doing statistics. It's a rat specialty. I say thirty.

KYLIE

I don't think it went up **that** much.

ANDY

I do.

PETTIGREW

I'm not listening to a mouse.

MACARONI

You listened before. What happened?

PETTIGREW

Rats are dying. Because they got weak. Because they live at the mall and listen to mice. That stops here.

RATBERT

You don't get to decide. We vote on it, like we vote on everything.

PETTIGREW

Ok, vote. Kylie – you're with me. Main Street tough.

KYLIE

I'm not so sure about that.

PETTIGREW

With me or against me. You don't want to be against me.

RATBERT

Those who follow Pettigrew, raise your paws.

*(Pettigrew raises his paw. He glares at Kylie. Kylie meekly and slowly raises his paw.)*

Those who want to listen to the mouse, raise your paws.

*(Remy, Ratbert, Macaroni, and Andy raise their paws.)*

PETTIGREW

The mice don't count. And neither does Remy – he came in with them. Two to one. Follow me.

RATBERT

I don't think that's the way this works.

PETTIGREW

*(Pettigrew heads for the exit, Kylie follows.)*

We'll see about that.

*(Ratbert looks at Remy.)*

RATBERT

Where have I seen this before?

***(blackout)***

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## The new steakhouse at the mall.

*It's the grand opening. Ryan, and Cleo are waiting for their table. Cleo picks up a menu from the podium at the front and begins perusing.*

CLEO

Man, this place is all fancy-like. I don't even know I'm at the mall!

RYAN

Seems to be a trend. You think maybe this is what the Boss was meant for?

CLEO

Dunno... it's not like him. He knows nothing about wine; this thing has two pages of wines. And not bad picks, either.

RYAN

So... what... he's got a partner?

QUINN

*(Quinn arrives, overhearing this.)*

Panopticon. That's what. I set him up.

RYAN  
You....set him up?

QUINN  
It saves the rats, and keeps Angie out of our hair.

CLEO  
Back up a minute. I may be slow, but –  
*(The Matre d' arrives, shows them to their table.)*

MATRE D'  
Your table is ready. If you come this way...

QUINN  
Angie's the new boss. And as you know, she had declared war on...  
our experimental subjects. I got him to get her to stop.

RYAN  
Angie's not the new boss any more.

CLEO  
Back up a minute.

QUINN AND RYAN  
Shut up, Cleo.

QUINN  
Wait a minute – Angie's not the boss? Who's the boss?

RYAN  
What difference does it make? We don't listen anyway.  
*(The waitress arrives and hands them menus. It's Angie. She speaks in her waitress voice, but only when speaking as a waitress.)*

ANGIE  
Hi, I'm Angie, and I'll be your waitress for today. Can I start you off  
with anything to drink?

QUINN  
Back up a minute. Angie? You're offering me something to drink?

ANGIE  
Yeah, it's whatcha do as a waitress. Ever been in a restaurant?

QUINN  
In Toledo. But I didn't get heartburn.

ANGIE  
The Boss needed some help on opening night. Gal's gotta make  
some coin, no?

CLEO  
How about we start with the 2015 Alexander Valley Petit Verdot?

RYAN  
Cleo, what do you know about wine?

CLEO  
I think you'll like this one. Petit Verdot tends to be deep and  
velvety, and the Alexander Valley is an ideal area for it. It'll go with  
eggplant, beef, *ratatouille*, even chili. You can't go wrong.

RYAN  
I don't mean “regale me with your extensive oenological expertise”,  
I mean how did you... never mind. Sure, the Petit Verdot.

ANGIE  
An excellent choice. I'll be back in a moment to take your orders.

QUINN  
That'll be the day.

CLEO  
Say, where is the Boss? We should say hi to him on his opening  
day.

ANGIE  
He's... well, he won't be in for a while. He had a hotdog before he  
came in this morning, and it didn't agree with him.

CLEO  
Back up a minute. He's opening a steakhouse, and he ate a what?

ANGIE  
He never liked steak. You knew that.  
*(Angie leaves.)*

CLEO  
I'm not getting a good feeling about this.

RYAN  
Maybe we **can** go wrong.

QUINN  
Don't worry. The Boss has nothing to do with the restaurant.



RYAN  
I thought you said this was his restaurant.

QUINN  
Yeah, but Panopticon's doing it all. Their computers send out letters and checks, workers show up, things happen, and the Boss just sits back.

CLEO  
Back up a minute.

QUINN AND RYAN  
Shut up, Cleo.

CLEO  
You always say that. But this isn't making sense. Why is the boss getting paid?

QUINN  
Panopticon. Dunno why, but as long as they keep doing it, things are good.

RYAN  
Actually, Cleo has a point.

QUINN  
Look – the Boss was feeling depressed because he got a raise while the computers were running the food court. He was going to quit because he wasn't doing anything. Then he had a vision of a steakhouse, I helped him write a letter, and now he's doing nothing for even more money while –

CLEO  
...while Angie takes orders from us, and we pick up the trash afterwards. Do you see where this is going?

QUINN AND RYAN  
No.

CLEO  
Exactly. Neither do I. But it's going **somewhere**. And I'm not sure we want to be there when it gets there.

ANGIE  
*(Angie arrives with the wine, shows Cleo the bottle, opens it, and pours him a taste. He approves, and she pours all around.)*

Have you decided what you would like for your entree?

QUINN  
I'll have the 8 ounce tenderloin, rare, mashed potatoes, baby vegetables.

ANGIE  
Grilled or sautéed?

QUINN  
Grilled.

RYAN  
The strip, also rare, asparagus and baked potato with sour cream and chives.

CLEO  
I'll have the tri-tip, madiera sauce, mushrooms, and baby red potatoes.

ANGIE  
Rare, medium, or dead?

CLEO  
Rare. I'm not an animal.

ANGIE  
Tell me about it.  
*(Angie leaves with the order.)*

CLEO  
Something's...off.

QUINN  
Just don't use the pepper grinder. Unless you are **absolutely sure** that what's in it is pepper.

RYAN  
Angie wouldn't...

CLEO  
She's being awful nice.

QUINN  
Mistakes can happen. Just sayin'.

RYAN  
I'm getting an urge for a hot dog.

CLEO

Why is Panopticon doing this? Paying the Boss, I mean.

RYAN

What happens if Panopticon doesn't pay him?

QUINN

Nothing? After all, the computers are doing all the work. He does nothing.

RYAN

No, you're the boss, and you're "running" the restaurant. If Panopticon cuts you off, what do you do?

CLEO

Look for another job?

RYAN

There's an opening at the mall. Remember, Angie's not the Boss any more.

CLEO

So, he becomes the Boss again, and things are like they were before.

QUINN

Except now he's got a vendetta.

RYAN

And movies of rats.

CLEO

And an insider at the restaurant. Maybe Panopticon's smarter than all of us put together.

*(Angie returns with the food.)*

Angie – why'd you quit?

ANGIE

Who said I quit?

QUINN

The Boss put you in charge while he was doing the restaurant thing. But you're not the new Boss. I'd've thought you'd jump at it.

ANGIE

Let's just say the Boss had a more interesting proposition. Would you like fresh pepper?

*(She proffers a huge pepper grinder.)*

RYAN

I think we're good. Thanks.

ANGIE

Ok, enjoy your meal!

*(Angie leaves.)*

QUINN

I think the wine's going to help. A lot.

*(blackout)*

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### Prompts used:

- Main Street vs. the shopping mall
- It makes me sound smarter than I am
- I guess I just don't hang around with the crowd that knows all the rats
- You have to be on top of it
- I cant believe I actually made the effort
- Somebody knows something

- That explains their bad teeth
- Look over me, Lord
- That's probably happened to me 20 times
- Probably at the airport on the way back, but who knows?
- Corgi & Bess
- What other kinds of crooks are there?
- She's a sight for sore eyes
- Let me know if anything's moved.
- Are you sure you don't have Final Draft?
- The Ides of March
- It just fell into our laps
- Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder
- Maybe she's a drunk
- Give me one
- That girl needs a potato
- Get a freaking chafing dish
- You know you're dwindling when
- Sometimes he does a little grave digging
- How do you like...write?
- I don't think it went up that much

- He ate a what?