

Prompt: “He ate a what?”

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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)