

Prompt: “I may have a little PTSD from it”

by: José F Helú Jr.

04/13/25 07:48 PM

The break room at the mall

Ryan, Cleo, and Quinn continue their discussion as Dweezel walks in.

DWEEZEL

So, this is where you guys do all your secret plotting, huh?

RYAN

Dweezel! What timing!

CLEO

This the guy you were talking about?

DWEEZEL

Hey Ryan – loose lips...

QUINN

I understand that you... have similar interests as Ryan.

DWEEZEL

I've been helping him with some of his... research. Let's say I'm intrigued by what you all are doing.

QUINN

And what exactly do you think we're doing?

DWEEZEL

I'm not sure exactly. But it's probably on a need-to-know basis, right? Well, I need to know. I've been supplying some crucial technology and expertise to your escapades, which is putting me at risk. I can't keep doing this blind.

RYAN

It's the only way you can keep doing this, Dweezel. As long as you're blind, you're clean.

CLEO

It's like being a secret agent. Once you know, it's not a secret.

DWEEZEL

That's not how these things work. It's **other people** that have to be kept in the dark. Not me.

RYAN

Suppose you knew. Then what?

DWEEZEL

Then I'd know. I could give you better equipment, better advice.

RYAN

Right. And every time you see us, you'd know what we were up to. You'd be able to make connections. You'd see how it relates to... I don't know... the clothing store across the way, or maybe the pizza shop.

DWEEZEL

The big picture. I'd know what I was into, and could help you out.

RYAN

Yeah, but every time you go get a pizza, you'd **know** you know the big picture. You'd act differently around there. Subtle, but visible.

QUINN

...and that would paint a big target on your back. Because **they'd** know you knew... something.

RYAN

One day you'd order a pepperoni pizza instead of your usual mushroom and olives, and they'd think you're sending a secret message.

CLEO

Or they might try sending **you** a secret message in the number of pepperonis the put on.

QUINN AND RYAN

Shut up, Cleo.

DWEEZEL

But I might order a pepperoni pizza anyway.

QUINN

But if they don't know you know, because you don't know, then they can't suspect anything.

RYAN

What was it that Groucho Marx used to say? "Sometimes a pepperoni is just a pepperoni."

CLEO

I don't think anybody ever said that.

QUINN

Besides, it was Freud.

CLEO

Freud didn't say it either.

QUINN AND RYAN

Shut up, Cleo.

QUINN

Point is, you can't be a suspect. Once you're a suspect, you can't be a spy.

DWEEZEL

Look guys, I'm just trying to be useful, but it's really hard to do if I don't know the score.

CLEO

What do you know about art?

QUINN AND RYAN

Shut up, Cleo

RYAN

No, wait. Go ahead, Cleo.

CLEO

(Cleo pulls the magazine out and turns to the sheep page.)

What do you think of this?

DWEEZEL

(Dweezel considers the image.)

Hmmm. Forty-seven sheep in a pasture. Hills in the background. Three hills. Green, with a nice blue sky in the background. Very calming. Shepherd keeping watch, but he has to be alert, because you never know: prairie dogs. And there's one right there. But I don't think he sees it. What would he be doing if he did?

(Dweezel hands the magazine back.)

CLEO

Interesting. Which one is you?

DWEEZEL

Well, I'm not one of the sheep. I'm not the shepherd. Maybe I'm the prairie dog?

CLEO

Or maybe you're the artist. You see, if you're the prairie dog, then whatever action you take is going to change the picture. But if you're the artist, you're invisible. The perfect spy.

DWEEZEL

I never thought about that.

CLEO

And that's the way it's supposed to be. You can't be invisible if you already know the score.

RYAN

You see, Dweezel, we need the painter, not the prairie dog. And in return, you get the painting. But you gotta wait 'till the paint is dry.

DWEEZEL

That's brilliant!

QUINN

So, you're in?

DWEEZEL

Yeah, I'm in.

QUINN

Good. Glad to have you on board. Now remember – this conversation never happened.

RYAN

Not only don't you know the score, you don't even know there's a game on.

DWEEZEL

Got it.

(Dweezel looks at his watch.)

I gotta get back to the shop. Good not talking to you!

QUINN

Likewise.

(Dweezel leaves)

Ryan – is this guy an idiot, or are we brilliant?

RYAN

Are we brilliant?

QUINN

No. Well, maybe.

CLEO

You talk to rats...

QUINN

Yeah, well, I may have a little PTSD from it.

RYAN

But does that make us brilliant?

ANGIE

(Angie enters)

Who's the dweeb that said you weren't here?

RYAN

(aside, to Quinn)

I think I know where your PTSD comes from.

QUINN

I dunno. Are we here?

ANGIE

It sure looks like it.

QUINN

Then he's an idiot. Ignore him or send him to the White House.

Your choice.

CLEO

Angie – about that painting you showed me. Without looking at it, did the shepherd see the prairie dog?

ANGIE

No. If he did, he'd be doing something. Right?

CLEO

Right. And the sheep would run amok. Now suppose that dweeb is the prairie dog. Maybe it's best you didn't see him. From an artistic sense.

ANGIE

I see where you're coming from.

CLEO

The world is full of idiots. It's best not to get them too excited. I think that's the message of the painting. If you don't see it, it can't affect you.

ANGIE

That sounds like a really good philosophy. But if I **did** see it...

CLEO

Well, if it bothers you, then maybe you really **didn't** see it.

Because that would have been best. And if it doesn't bother you, then it doesn't matter if you saw it or not.

ANGIE

I like that. Cleo – you're brilliant.

(Angie exits.)

QUINN

(after a beat)

What did I just see?

RYAN

I think it's best you didn't see anything.

QUINN

(after another beat)

I think you're right.

(blackout)