

Prompt: "I read it for the articles"

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**Stage left, the break room at the mall is lit.  
Stage right is unlit.**

*Ryan, Cleo, and Quinn are in the break room, hunched over a tablet, which is showing the latest rat footage from the Mark 4. There is a door upstage.*

CLEO

Why so dark?

RYAN

The lights are off, dipwit.

QUINN

If I may be so bold to ask, **why** are the lights off?

RYAN

So I could hide the camera. You guys have no sense of this, do you?

CLEO

But...

RYAN AND QUINN

Shut up, Cleo.

RYAN

I had to return it this morning, so I couldn't chance putting it on a rat.

Once I set the camera up –

CLEO

The lights are on – I can see now. That's the steakhouse!

QUINN

Brilliant, as usual.

RYAN

Well, he **is** right.

CLEO

*(to Quinn)*

See, I'm not as dumb as you look.

*(noticing something)*

Who's that walking away from the camera?

RYAN

Me. I had to watch the camera from afar. Just in case.

*(They hunker down to watch the video.)*

QUINN

So... when does something happen?

RYAN

I don't know. I heard noises after a while, but couldn't see anything because I was guarding the camera.

CLEO

So, fast forward.

QUINN

Finally, a good idea!

RYAN

*(Ryan fast-forwards for a bit)*

Here's something.

QUINN

What...

CLEO

It's so far away.

RYAN

So's the moon, but we still study it.

QUINN

What's that? Looks like... I don't know. Too far away.

RYAN

I can tell you. When I picked the camera back up, I also did a little look-see. At the end, there was a bowl of... Cocoa Puffs or something, with three M&Ms in it. I left it there, but now we'll know how it got there.

QUINN

Maybe.

CLEO

It does sort of look like a bowl is being pushed along the floor.

QUINN

Yeah, but not by rats. Too small. Something else.

RYAN

Mice! Like... what was it – the Pompey thing.

QUINN

Are you daft?

CLEO

No – it makes sense. We already saw the tiny pawprints. And remember Rizzo's funeral? That was mice.

QUINN

Mice. Mice are serving cereal. Why? Fast forward – what else happened?

RYAN

Fast forwarding... Nothing... nothing... Wait – somebody's approaching the camera.

CLEO

That's you.

RYAN

Yeah. So it is. So, that's all the footage.

QUINN

So, the bowl is still there?

RYAN

Unless somebody picked it up. And who's gonna do that? Us?

CLEO

Let's check it out.

*(They exit through the door upstage, lights go down stage left, and up stage right, revealing the entrance to the steakhouse. There is a bowl on the floor.)*

QUINN

There it is.

RYAN

Yeah, but somebody messed with it. It was all neat when I left.

CLEO

*(Cleo picks up the bowl, which still has some "cereal" in it. There is more scattered on the floor.)*

This ain't CocoaPuffs. Look.

QUINN

That's... **Angie!**

CLEO

That's not Angie. Unless she's been cremated.

RYAN

We can only hope.

QUINN

Those are rat pellets.

CLEO

How did rat pellets get here?

QUINN

Shit. Better check the pepper grinders.

*(blackout)*

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

*There are a lot of dead and dying rats. Ratbert enters, looking very pale and weak.*

RATBERT

I can't believe we ate the whole thing.

*(Ratbert sits, uncomfortably. Pettigrew strides in boldly.)*

PETTIGREW

You too? I picked you for smarter.

RATBERT

Smart? We're rats. You know that – what did you expect?

PETTIGREW

To aspire to something greater. That's why I'm working with The Mac. She knows greatness. She knows art. She knows how to get people to work for us **through** that art. And you gotta go and mess it all up.

RATBERT

It smelled good – like food.

PETTIGREW

I never knew you were so weak. Everyone here is weak. Losers. Don't deserve the greatness the Mac and I are bringing you.

RATBERT

I'd prefer you stop bringing me greatness, and bring me food instead.

PETTIGREW

Where you all are going, you won't need food. And where I'm going, I don't need weaklings. If I had a black cape, I'd whip it around over your pathetic head as I exit. But this will have to do.  
*(Pettigrew snorts, then exits.)*

RATBERT

"Et tu" ...  
*(Ratbert rolls over, dead. Kylie and Remy rush in.)*

REMY

I think we're too late.

KYLIE

How could they be so **stupid**? You're not supposed to eat the art!

REMY

Who's the one who ran off with a piece of Macaroni's studio work last week?

KYLIE

That's different.

*(blackout)*

## The break room at the mall

*Angie is alone at a table, perusing a magazine. Cleo enters.*

CLEO

Hi Angie.

ANGIE

Hi Cleo.

CLEO

What brings **you** here? I thought you'd be... you know – at the

steakhouse or somethin'.

ANGIE

Cleo, my life isn't the steakhouse.

CLEO

It ain't here either, I hope.

ANGIE

C'mere Cleo. Sit.

*(Cleo tentatively approaches, and sits down.)*

I've been thinkin'. About art.

CLEO

Really?

ANGIE

Yeah. And I think you'd really appreciate it too, if you got into it. Ever thought much about it?

CLEO

*(not knowing where this is going)*

Uh... some? I used to finger paint when I was a kid.

ANGIE

No shit!

CLEO

Well, everybody did in kindergarten. I found it sort of... you know, soothing.

ANGIE

Whatever happened to those paintings?

CLEO

My mom threw them out... But I think she was wrong. Art has meaning. It's like a secret code.

ANGIE

Yeah. A secret code. That's a good way of putting it. Ever seen this?

*(Angie slides the magazine over to Cleo, who picks it up tentatively)*

It's a set of paintings by... well never mind who it's by. What do you think?

CLEO

*(after looking for a bit)*

It's nice. It makes me feel like... I dunno, like... like I could just put

myself there. Just looking at it. And then, when I'm there, I'd know what to do. It's hard to describe. I know nothing about sheep, but I'd be a good farmer. And now I want to move to the hillsides.

ANGIE

You know what it means to me?

CLEO

No.

ANGIE

Fifty sheep, all the same. One shepherd. One prairie dog. Which way do the sheep go?

CLEO

Deep.

ANGIE

And the article says that there's a tension between the shepherd and the prairie dog. But I think it's between the sheep.

CLEO

So... if it says different things to you and me, how can it be a language?

ANGIE

I dunno. Why don't you take it home, read it, and let me know what you think next time?

CLEO

Ok. I'll do that.

ANGIE

I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

*(Angie gets up and leaves. Cleo picks up the magazine as Ryan and Quinn enter.)*

RYAN

Cleo! Whatcha reading?

QUINN

Cleo's reading?

CLEO

Yeah, I read.

QUINN

*(Quinn picks up the magazine and reads a headline.)*

**“Farm Animals – The Art Form”?**

RYAN

I guess everyone has their kink.

CLEO

I read it for the articles!

QUINN

Oh yeah? What do they say?

CLEO

I haven't read them yet. Angie gave it to me.

QUINN

Kill me now.

CLEO

It's **art**.

QUINN

What do you know about art?

RYAN

Well, we've all been studying art for the last few months, haven't we?

CLEO

*(Cleo snatches the magazine back.)*

Yeah.

QUINN

Something's not right, but I don't quite know what it is.

CLEO

I'll let you read the articles when I'm done with them.

RYAN

Yeah. But we got a bigger problem. Dweezel wants in.

***(blackout)***