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The Semi-Monthly Meeting of the Great Thinkers Society

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The Semi-Monthly Meeting of the Great Thinkers Society

by Jeffery G. Rockey

Dedicated in loving memory to Nathan Colby.

SETTING:
The International Diner

TIME:
The present

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

**SIMON FRENCH:** A man in his late twenties who longs for the love of one woman.

**KRISTEN SPRINGER:** The woman he longs for.

**JAMES GALLAGHER:** Simon’s friend and co-worker.

**WAITRESS:** at the diner.

**FREDERICK DOUGLASS:** A great orator and writer, a leading figure in the abolitionist movement.

**PLATO:** The father of Western philosophy.
SIDDARTHAGAUTAMA: The founder of Buddhism. Also known as the Buddha.

SAMUELCLEMENS: American humorist and author who published under the name Mark Twain.


ARISTOTLE: Student of Plato. One of the greatest philosophers in history.

ALBERTEINSTEIN: Twentieth-century physicist who was believed to have one of the greatest minds of all time.

FRANKLIND. ROOSEVELT: Thirty-second president of the United States.

ELLENWHITE: A leading figure in the advancement of the Seventh Day Adventist religion.

SUSAN B. ANTHONY: Woman who fought for equal rights for women and women’s suffrage.

Scene 1

(Setting: An office in the city. SIMON FRENCH is sitting behind a desk, busily filling out paperwork. JAMES GALLAGHER is sitting at the desk next to him, also filling out paperwork, but not as quickly. He looks at SIMON and shakes his head as if to say, “Why are you working so hard?”)

JAMES: Why are you working so hard?

SIMON: I want to get this paperwork done before the day’s over.
JAMES: It's Friday! You know that stuff isn’t going to get processed until Tuesday! Enjoy yourself.

SIMON: Can I help it that I’m more work conscious than you?

JAMES: I’m work conscious. I had to fight to get this job from Mr. Anderson.

SIMON: Yeah, whatever. He’s your uncle! *(A bell rings.)* Great! The day’s over and I’m not finished.

JAMES: Stop worrying. It’ll be here on Monday. Just relax. *(Looks offstage.)* Kristen will be here soon.

SIMON: Oh, no. I turn into a bowl of gelatin when she’s around.

JAMES: Just keep your cool. She’s just another woman.

SIMON: I wish that were true. She’s better than any other woman. She’s smart, and fun to be with, and, and...

JAMES: Pretty?

SIMON: Beautiful! I only wish I could say something to her.

JAMES: Well, here’s your chance. *(KRISTEN SPRINGER walks in, carrying a briefcase in one hand and a stack of books in the other.)*


JAMES: Hi, Kristen. *(SIMON stares at her with a dumb grin.)*

KRISTEN: Are you okay? *(He continues to stare.)*

JAMES: He’s just a little tired after this long week. *(To SIMON.)* Aren’t you?
(No response. JAMES elbows him in the ribs.)

SIMON: (startled) Yeah!... (Nervous) Just... a little tired... I’ll be fine.

KRISTEN: I know how that goes. It gets so busy here sometimes.

SIMON: Yeah...busy.

JAMES: Those books look really heavy, Kristen.

KRISTEN: They are. I hate lugging them to and from work every day.

JAMES: Well, I’d offer to carry them, but I’ve got a horrible back. However, I bet Simon could help.

KRISTEN: Oh, could you, Simon? It would be so much relief.

SIMON: (Still nervous) Sure. (He takes a drink of his coffee and walks to her.) It’s no problem. (While taking the books, he accidentally spills his coffee down her blouse. He then drops the books.)

KRISTEN: My dress!

SIMON: Oh, my gosh! I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to. (He grabs some tissues from the box on his desk and offers them to her.)

KRISTEN: It’s all right. I’m sure I can get the stain out. I’ll just take my books and go. (She starts picking up the stack of books. SIMON bends down to try to help her.)

KRISTEN: No, don’t.

SIMON: I only want to help.
KRISTEN: You’ve helped enough. (She gathers the rest of her books and leaves.)

SIMON: I don’t believe that just happened!

JAMES: It was an accident! She knew that.

SIMON: Did you see the way she stormed out of here? She thinks I’m a klutz!

JAMES: I’m sure she doesn’t think that.

SIMON: I need to get away and clear my head. See you on Monday. (He leaves, not bothering to take his work. Blackout. End Scene 1.)

Scene 2

(Setting: The semi-monthly meeting of the Great Thinkers Club at the International Diner. FREDERICK DOUGLASS is speaking upstage from the rest of the club, which is sitting at tables or in booths. SAMUEL CLEMENS is sitting at the counter, alternately sipping on a cup of coffee and puffing on a cigar. The WAITRESS is wiping down the counter and paying slight attention to what is going on at the meeting.

FREDERICK: Seeing as Mr. Churchill couldn’t be here, we will not have a secretary’s report from the last meeting. So we will go on to old business. (He continues incoherently as Simon enters and goes to the WAITRESS.)

SIMON: Excuse me, ma’am.

WAITRESS: (bored) Welcome to the International Diner. Can I help you?

SIMON: My car died outside. Do you have a phone? (The WAITRESS points to
a phone in the corner, and SIMON goes to it. THE WAITRESS leans over to SAMUEL CLEMENS.)

WAITRESS: What’s he doing here?

SAMUEL: I really don’t know, miss, but I’m sure that there is some reason he was chosen. No one ends up here out of chance. I’ll go find out. (He rises from his seat, with his cigar, and walks to SIMON, who hangs up the phone and turns to SAMUEL. He doesn’t realize who SAMUEL is.)

SIMON: I don’t get it. I couldn’t get through to Triple A. It’s open twenty-four hours a day.

SAMUEL: Excuse me, sir...

SIMON: I’ll be done in a minute. I just need to call my friend.

SAMUEL: That phone will not get you through to your friend. (SIMON turns to him.)

SIMON: And why not?

SAMUEL: That phone is not connected to anywhere. No one will answer.

SIMON: Why would the waitress send me to a phone that won’t work?

SAMUEL: I honestly can’t tell you. People are some of the strangest creatures on the planet. I once wrote a story...

SIMON: You’re an author?

SAMUEL: You might say so.

SIMON: Did you ever write anything big?
SAMUEL: (Hesitantly joking) Nothing that major, but about my story. This boy was set with the task of whitewashing his aunt’s fence. To make a long story short, he managed to convince the neighborhood children that the job was one of great hilarity, and he got the boys to pay him to whitewash the fence.

SIMON: Well, I hate to ruin your story, but it’s been done already.

SAMUEL: Really? By whom?

SIMON: It’s chapter two of *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain.

SAMUEL: I know that.

SIMON: Then why did you say you wrote it?

SAMUEL: Don’t you know who I am?

SIMON: Who?

SAMUEL: My name is Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain.

SIMON: Whatever. (Goes to the WAITRESS. SAMUEL follows him.) That phone doesn’t work. Do you know where the nearest gas station is?

WAITRESS: About half a mile down the road, but you can’t get there.

SIMON: Why not?

WAITRESS: (points to door) That door doesn’t open again until the meeting is over.

SIMON: What are you talking about? (He walks to the door and tries to exit, but cannot. He turns back to the WAITRESS.) Unlock this door!
SAMUEL: Yelling won’t get you anything. You’re stuck here until our meeting is over.

SIMON: Look...you...

SAMUEL: (calmly) Samuel Clemens.

SIMON: Samuel Clemens is dead!

SAMUEL: I know I am, but I’m here too. Everyone here is dead, except for you, I assume.

SIMON: I’m very alive, and you’re crazy!

SAMUEL: I assure you I am perfectly sane. Allow me to introduce you to the club.

SIMON: What is this club? Everyone keeps talking about this club!

SAMUEL: Why, The Great Thinkers Club. This is our semi-monthly meeting. (They walk to the group. SAMUEL talks to FREDERICK, who has been leading the meeting.) Mr. Chairperson?

FREDERICK: The chair recognizes Mr. Samuel Clemens. Yes, Mr. Clemens?

SAMUEL: We have a visitor tonight. This is Mr.... (to SIMON) I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name.


SAMUEL: Very well. (To FREDERICK) This is Mr. Simon French.

FREDERICK: Welcome to the semi-monthly meeting of The Great Thinkers Club. I am Frederick Douglass, club president. (To group) If we will all
introduce ourselves to Mr. French. *(ARISTOTLE stands.)*

ARISTOTLE: I am Aristotle, club VP. Welcome. *(FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT stands, putting great support on the table.)*

FRANKLIN: My name is Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I am the Treasurer. *(MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. stands.)*

MARTIN: I am Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Thank you for joining us tonight. *(ELLEN WHITE stands.)*

ELLEN: My name is Ellen White. You may call me Ellen. *(SIDDARTHAGAUTAMA stands.)*

SIDDARTHAGAUTAMA: My name is Siddartha Gautama; I am also called Buddha by my followers. *(ALBERT EINSTEIN stands.)*

ALBERT: I am Albert Einstein, guten Morgen. *(PLATO stands.)*

PLATO: I am Plato. Enjoy our meeting. *(SUSAN B. ANTHONY stands.)*

SUSAN: My name is Susan B. Anthony. Welcome.

FREDERICK: Our secretary, Mr. Churchill, could not be here tonight, and I believe you have already met Mr. Clemens.

SIMON: I’m surrounded by wackos! I’m trapped in a cafe with a group of wackos!

SUSAN: Wackos? We’re not wackos. We happen to be the greatest thinkers of all time.

SIMON: Maybe, but has anyone told you that you’re all dead?
FRANKLIN: We all know we’re dead, Simon. We were all there when it happened.

PLATO: How can we prove to you that we are who we are?

SIMON: You can’t, because this is impossible.

ARISTOTLE: It’s not impossible. You’re seeing it now. Don’t you trust your own eyes?

SIMON: I must be dreaming. (SIDDARTHHA pinches him on the arm.) Ow! What was that for?

SIDDARTHHA: To show you you’re not dreaming.

SIMON: It hurt!

SIDDARTHHA: That means you’re not dreaming.

SIMON: Okay. I get it. (Yells) James! Come out! This is really funny! (Everyone looks around strangely.)

MARTIN: Who’s James?

SIMON: As if you don’t know. (Yells again.) This is a great practical joke, James. How much did you have to pay for this one?

ALBERT: I assure you, sir, that this is no joke. If there were only some way we could prove it to you.

SAMUEL: Don’t bother, Albert. He’s not going to believe us, no matter what we do.

SIMON: Finally, someone is speaking logically.
SAMUEL: (to ALBERT) What do we lose if he doesn’t believe us? (To SIMON) We have been telling you the truth, the one hundred percent, absolute truth. Whether you care to believe us or not is up to you. Just remember, you don’t lose anything by believing us, and you can’t get out that door until the meeting’s over. So make your decision.

SIMON: (hesitantly) Okay. I’ll stay calm, and listen to your meeting.

FRANKLIN: Good choice, Simon. Remember, you’re welcome to participate in our discussions. (To all) Now, can we get on to our first discussion? (He goes back to the front of the group, and the members sit back in their seats. SIMON sits at the counter, next to SAMUEL.)

SAMUEL: (whispering to SIMON) By the way, Mr. French, if I weren’t dead, and all of this weren’t true, could I do this and keep a straight face? (He takes a knife from the counter and stabs himself in the arm, looking SIMON directly in the face the entire time.)

SIMON: Oh, my... (He faints. Blackout. End Scene 2.)

Scene 3

(Setting: In the diner. SIMON has been stretched out on the floor, and ARISTOTLE and SIDDARTHA are sitting in chairs next to him. FREDERICK continues to lead the meeting. The WAITRESS is carrying a tray of food to the members. She sets a salad in front of ELLEN, a plate of chicken and biscuits in front of SAMUEL, and a burger in front of PLATO. SAMUEL picks up his fork and digs in.)

ELLEN: You should not eat that.

SAMUEL: And why not, madam?
ELLEN: God did not intend for us to feast on the flesh of his creatures.

SAMUEL: If your God did not intend for us to eat these lesser creatures, why did he put them here and why did he make them so tasty?

ELLEN: It says in Genesis I, Verse 30, "I have given every green plant for food." He did not give us the animals for gorging ourselves.

SAMUEL: As I've said before, if there were an all-powerful God, he would have made all good, and no bad. Look around you, Ms. White. Do you see all good? *(The Waitress gives a glass of cola to Frederick.)*

FREDERICK: Thank you ma'am. *(To Aristotle and Siddartha)* How is Mr. French?

SIDDARtha: He's doing well.

ARISTOTLE: Still out cold though.

SUSAN: You really shouldn't have done that, Samuel.

FRANKLIN: Yes, he said he believed us.

SAMUEL: He may have said so, but he didn't. He thought we were a bunch of loons.

PLATO: *(standing)* I must agree with Mr. Clemens. He knew only of the world of the living, so naturally when he met us, he could not make the transition to our world. He would not have believed us. *(Simon stirs.)*

ARISTOTLE: He's waking. *(All stare at Simon.)*

ALBERT: Are you alright, Mr. French?
SIMON: (Waking) I had the weirdest dream. I dreamed I was in this diner, and there were all of these weird people around me, and Mark Twain stabbed himself, and... (opens eyes) Oh, my God! It wasn’t a dream! (Jumps up and goes to the far wall. Points to ALBERT.) You’re... (points to FREDERICK) And you’re!... (Points to SAMUEL) and you just!...Oh, my God! (Starts to collapse again, but MARTIN catches him, and throws a glass of water in his face.)

MARTIN: Get a hold of yourself, man! (SIMON regains consciousness.) We are who we say we are.

PLATO: You have no choice but to believe us now.

SIMON: (Pacing) This is all too much for one day. First I spill coffee on Kristen, then my car breaks down, now I’m trapped in a restaurant with ten dead people, who are telling me to join their meeting. (Yelling) Am I the only one who is having problems with this? (SUSAN walks up to him and slaps him across the face.)

SUSAN: Calm down! You do believe us, right?

SIMON: I have to believe what I see, and what I saw couldn’t have been done by a living person. Therefore, I have no choice but to believe you.

FREDERICK: Very well. Now, let’s get on with our meeting. (FREDERICK goes to the head of the group again. SIMON sits in a booth with PLATO, SAMUEL, and ELLEN. THE WAITRESS brings him a cup of coffee.)

SIMON: Thank you. (She goes back behind the counter.)

FREDERICK: Our next topic for discussion is reincarnation. Mr. French, since you are our guest, would you like to start our discussion?

SIMON: What do you mean?
FREDERICK: You simply need to give your opinion on reincarnation, then you need to say why you believe so.

SIMON: I don’t know what to say. I never really thought about it before. I guess it’s possible.

MARTIN: Very good, now tell us why.

SIMON: I don’t know. Why wouldn’t it be possible?

FRANKLIN: I’ll tell you why it isn’t possible. It defies all logic. Plato, I ask of you, how long have you been dead?

PLATO: Over two thousand years.

FRANKLIN: Have you been reincarnated yet?

PLATO: No...

FRANKLIN: I rest my case.

ARISTOTLE: (Rises and crosses to FRANKLIN) Mr. Roosevelt, consider, for a moment, that life is a journey.

FRANKLIN: Yes.

ARISTOTLE: Life is a journey to acquire as much information as one can. If a man does not acquire enough information, he is reincarnated as another person, for the purpose of acquiring more.

FRANKLIN: That still doesn’t explain why none of us have been reincarnated.

MARTIN: (Stands) I think I understand what Mr. Aristotle is trying to say. A person’s soul is reincarnated until he acquires adequate information,
correct?

ARISTOTLE: Yes.

MARTIN: When that person acquires enough information, he is reincarnated one last time, as a great thinker. We are all great thinkers; therefore, we will never be reincarnated again, but our souls will live as the great thinkers for eternity.

ARISTOTLE: Exactly.

SAMUEL: That's preposterous. Tell me, sir, if reincarnation does exist, then what is the use of living life to its fullest? Can’t we just make up for ourselves next time around?

MARTIN: No. Our conscious minds don’t remember previous lives. If we waste our lives, we won’t remember it next time around, and we won’t know to gather twice as much information.

ELLEN: But when we die, we meet God, who has been waiting for us with open arms. If He is ready to accept us, why would He turn us away?

SUSAN: What if it was for the purpose of doing more good on Earth?

SAMUEL: It sounds like a good theory, but it’s not. The entire idea of second lives is one held by the ignorant. People who believe in second lives are cowards who are afraid of dying.

ALBERT: Mr. Clemens, I assure you that reincarnation does exist.

FRANKLIN: Albert! A man of logic such as yourself can’t possibly believe in something as foolish as reincarnation.

ALBERT: Mr. Roosevelt, it does not defy logic. The idea of reincarnation can
be explained by scientific fact.

FRANKLIN: Scientific Fact! That's preposterous!

ALBERT: You listened to me when I proposed the bomb, you can listen now. The law of conservation of energy states that energy is neither created nor destroyed. When a person dies, the energy from their body must go somewhere. Also, how does the energy get into a newborn infant? I theorize that the energy, or the soul, of a dead individual is reincarnated into an infant.

SIDDARTHA: (To FREDERICK) Mr. Chairperson, I move that we end this discussion and take the official vote.

PLATO: I second the motion.

FREDERICK: Very well, all in favor of ending the discussion and casting vote, say "Aye."

ALL: Aye.

FREDERICK: All opposed to the motion say "Nay." (Silence.) Motion carried. (Bangs gavel on table.) We will now have the official vote. Ms. Anthony, will you hand out the ballots in place of Mr. Churchill? (She goes to the table where FRANKLIN is standing and gets a pile of papers. She hands one to each member. When she hands one to SIMON, he leans over to SAMUEL.)

SIMON: What are we doing?

SAMUEL: Voting on whether we believe in reincarnation or not. (He marks his paper and folds the ballot. SIMON does the same. They hand them back to SUSAN, who is collecting from the rest of the club as well.)
SIMON: What do we do now?

SAMUEL: We go on to the next topic.

SIMON: Is that it?

SAMUEL: What do you mean, is that it?

SIMON: Is discussing topics all you do here?

SAMUEL: Yes.

SIMON: Don’t you ever take breaks?

SAMUEL: Not really.

FREDERICK: Now, on to the next topic... *(SIMON stands.)*

SIMON: Mr. Chairperson, I move that we depart from the normal schedule.

FREDERICK: What?

SAMUEL: *(Standing)* I second the motion.

FREDERICK: What exactly did you have in mind, Mr. French?

*(Blackout. End Scene 3.)*

Scene 4

*(Setting: Still in the diner. Lights come up and FREDERICK is standing in front of the group. The club is divided down the middle for a game of charades. Half are sitting on each side. SIDDARTHA, ELLEN, ARISTOTLE,
and ALBERT are sitting left. SAMUEL, FRANKLIN, SUSAN, MARTIN, PLATO, and SIMON are sitting right.)

FREDERICK: This was a wonderful idea, Mr. French.

SIMON: Thank you.

FREDERICK: We are seated correctly, I assume.

SIMON: Yes, Mr. Douglass.

FREDERICK: Very well, (to MARTIN) I believe you are first, Dr. King.
(FREDERICK sits with the group left and MARTIN stands in front of the group.)

MARTIN: Is everyone ready? (All nod and mumble yes.) Very well. (He holds his hands together and then opens them like a book.)

SIMON: It's a book! (MARTIN points at him and nods his head. He holds up two fingers.)

SAMUEL: Two words! (MARTIN gestures that he is right. He holds up two fingers and slaps them on his forearm.)

SUSAN: Second word, two syllables. (MARTIN points and nods. He draws a cross in the air.)

SAMUEL: It's an X. (MARTIN shakes his head no.)

SIMON: It's a cross! (MARTIN nods and gestures to keep going.) Christ... holy...

FRANKLIN: Monty Python and the Holy Grail! (MARTIN shakes his head no.)
PLATO: The Bible!

MARTIN: That’s it! (to FRANKLIN) Monty Python? What were you thinking?

FRANKLIN: That’s an excellent movie. We should watch it here some time.

FREDERICK: That took forty-five seconds, Dr. King. Mr. Gautama, you are next. (SIDDARTH walks to the front of the group. FREDERICK checks his pocket watch.) Ready?... Go! (SIDDARTH holds his hands together and pulls them apart like curtains opening.)

ALBERT: It’s a play. (SIDDARTH nods and holds up four fingers.)

ELLEN: Four words. (SIDDARTH touches his nose and points to her. He holds up one finger and motions "little").

FREDERICK: First word "the"! (SIDDARTH nods and points to FREDERICK. He holds up two fingers and slaps one on his forearm.)

ALL ON TEAM: Second word, one syllable. (He nods and struts around the stage in a regal manner.)

ARISTOTLE: You’re a peacock! (SIDDARTH looks at him with a look of disgust. He shakes his head "no").

ALBERT: Royalty! (SIDDARTH nods and points at ALBERT. He motions to keep going.) A duke... (SIDDARTH motions to keep going.) A king! (SIDDARTH nods frantically and points at ALBERT.)

ARISTOTLE: (Thinking out loud.) The King... The King... (yells) The King and I!

SIDDARTH: Yes! The King and I!
FREDERICK: That took one minute. You are currently ahead.

ALBERT: Not for long, though. (PLATO goes to the head of the group.)

PLATO: I’m next, right?

SIMON: Yes, Mr. Plato. (PLATO goes to the head of the group.)

PLATO: Are you ready?

FRANKLIN: Whenever you are.

FREDERICK: (Looking at watch) Ready... Set... Go! (PLATO makes a star in the air.)

SAMUEL: It’s a celebrity. (PLATO nods. He puts his hands on his belly and laughs silently, but wholeheartedly.)

MARTIN: A person having convulsions. (PLATO shakes his head "no". He slaps his knee and continues to laugh.)

SUSAN: (to SIMON) I don’t get it. Who is he supposed to be?

SIMON: I’m not sure. Maybe Santa Claus. (To PLATO) Are you Santa Claus? (PLATO shakes "no". He holds up one finger and slaps his forearm with it.)

MARTIN: First word, one syllable. (PLATO nods. He pantomimes writing something, then stabbing himself in the chest and dying.)

SIMON: Suicide note? (PLATO shakes "no." He acts out reading his paper, then handing a box to someone.)

FRANKLIN: I know it! He’s reading a will! (PLATO points at him.) The first
name is Will! *(PLATO nods.)*

**SAMUEL:** Will who? Do that thing you were doing earlier. *(PLATO starts laughing again.)*

**SUSAN:** I still don’t get it. *(In desperation, PLATO looks around and sees a cream pie on the counter of the diner. He picks it up and smashes it in FREDERICK’S face. Everyone starts laughing.)*

**SIMON:** Now that’s funny! *(PLATO points at him.)* Funny? *(PLATO nods.)*

**MARTIN:** He’s a funny man! A comedian! *(PLATO nods and jumps up and down.)*

**SAMUEL:** Will Abernathy. *(PLATO motions "no.")*

**SUSAN:** Will Smith. *("No.")*

**FRANKLIN:** Will Rogers.

**PLATO:** Yes! Will Rogers.

**FREDERICK:** *(Still wiping pie out of his face.)* Was that really necessary, Mr. Plato?

**PLATO:** I wanted to win.

**FREDERICK:** *(Looking at his watch.)* Even so, I’m afraid it won’t be so easy. You took two minutes. As long as my team takes under a minute and forty-five seconds, we win.

**ALBERT:** And it’s my turn. *(He stands and walks to the head of the group.)*

**PLATO:** Our winning depends on one of the greatest minds of the twentieth-
century messing up. Exactly how much of a chance do we have of winning?

SIMON: One hundred percent. I've never lost at charades, and I don't intend to start now, great thinkers or not.

PLATO: They have almost two minutes to guess.

SAMUEL: Mr. Plato, you will never hear me say this again, but have faith. Simon hasn't steered us wrong so far. (To FREDERICK.) Mr. Douglass, because of the intensity of the situation, may I be timekeeper for this round?

FREDERICK: I have no objections to that. (He hands him his watch.)

SAMUEL: Ready?

ALBERT: Yes.

SAMUEL: Go!

ELLEN: A violin! (ALBERT shakes "no." He mimics playing a trumpet, a trombone, and a kettle drum.)

ARISTOTLE: A symphony. (ALBERT motions to be more general by pulling his hands away from each other.)

SIDDARTHA: More general... More general. Music. (ALBERT points to him.) It's a song! (ALBERT nods. He walks left and motions putting something on his head. Then he walks right and motions aiming an arrow.)

FREDERICK: The Ballad of Hiawatha. (ALBERT shakes his head "no." He shoots the arrow and runs to the first position. He acts like a person who was hit by the arrow.)
ELLEN: The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald? *(ALBERT shakes "no.")*

ARISTOTLE: Are you acting out the words? *(ALBERT shakes "no.")* Is it an instrumental? *(Nods "yes.")*

SAMUEL: You’ve used thirty seconds. *(ALBERT shoots the arrow again. He runs to his original position and mimics getting hit again.)*

FREDERICK: What was that thing on your head? *(ALBERT pretends to grab an apple. He holds it and takes a bite. He pretends to chew and makes a big swallow.)*

ARISTOTLE: Fruit! *(ALBERT points to him and nods.)*

ELLEN: A pear? *(ALBERT shakes his head "no.")*

SIDDARTHA: An apple? *(ALBERT nods and points at him. He pretends to put it on his head as he stands in his original position.)*

SAMUEL: One minute. *(ALBERT goes to his second position and shoots the arrow again.)*

ELLEN: Shooting and an apple on the head? *(Thinks.)* I know! It’s the story of William Tell! *(ALBERT nods and points at her.)*

FREDERICK: Oh! What was that piece called about William Tell?

ARISTOTLE: I believe it was an overture, but I can’t remember the name. Do you know, Mr. Gautama?

SIDDARTHA: I’m not really into classical.

ELLEN: It’s... um... um... The William Tell Overture!
ALBERT: That’s it! *(He goes back to his seat, breathing very heavily.)* It was very simple.

FREDERICK: So, Mr. Clemens, by how much did we beat your team?

SAMUEL: Well, let’s see. *(He looks at the watch.)* Now you needed to do it in one minute and forty-five seconds, correct?

ELLEN: Yes.

SAMUEL: Okay. Your time was... one minute and forty-six seconds! We win. *(His team cheers.)*

FREDERICK: That’s impossible! Let me see that watch! *(SAMUEL hands him the watch.)*

SAMUEL: I believe you’ll see that the time is exactly one minute and forty-six seconds.

SIDDARTHA: I don’t believe this!

FREDERICK: It’s true. *(Puts watch in his pocket.)* We can only be good sports about it.

MARTIN: But wait. I seem to recall a little wager being placed.

FRANKLIN: Yes, Frederick, I believe that the losing team had to perform a certain task.

ARISTOTLE: Do we really have to go through with this?

SIMON: You shouldn’t make wagers if you aren’t prepared to lose.

ALBERT: He’s correct. Let’s do it. *(Reluctantly, the losing team kneels before*
the winning team, whose members are all smiling. They raise their arms to the sky and then bow down at the feet of the winning team.

**ALL ON TEAM:** We bow down to you, oh great ones. you are truly the smartest people of all time. We don’t deserve to be in your presence. *(They start to rise.)*

**SUSAN:** Wait. I believe there is one more part to the wager.

**ELLEN:** You’re really going to make us do that?

**SIMON:** *(Holds out one foot.)* Yes. *(The losing teammates crawl to the feet of the winners, who are all holding out one foot. The losers kiss the feet of the winners. Blackout. End Scene 4.)*

**Scene 5**

*(Setting: The diner. The meeting has returned to usual, with FREDERICK at the head of the group. The WAITRESS walks around with another tray of food. She sets a cup of coffee for SIMON, and another cola for FREDERICK. SAMUEL, SIMON, ELLEN, and PLATO are sitting in a booth on the left. FRANKLIN is sitting at a table closer to the middle of the stage with MARTIN and ARISTOTLE. SUSAN and SIDDARTHA are both sitting at the counter, turned towards FREDERICK. ALBERT is sitting at a table by himself, surrounded by papers and various mathematical tools. The WAITRESS walks to him with a milk shake. She sets it down next to him.)*

**ALBERT:** Be careful not to spill that on my papers.

**WAITRESS:** Don’t worry, Mr. Einstein, I’ll be careful. What is that, anyway?

**ALBERT:** I’m still trying to figure out the grand unified theory. I feel that I am getting closer every day, but I don’t know what I’m doing wrong.
(Shuffles through the papers.)

WAITRESS:  *Looking at papers* Well, if you don’t mind my pointing this out.

ALBERT: Go ahead.

WAITRESS: Sixty-two and forty-four is one hundred and six, not one sixteen.

ALBERT: Blast this simple math! Thank you. *(The WAITRESS goes back behind the counter.)*

FREDERICK: Once again I would like to thank you, Mr. Paris. That certainly was enjoyable. *(Ad libs of agreement.)*

SIMON: I just thought you could all use some levity.

SAMUEL: We appreciate it.

FRANKLIN: The meeting hasn’t been this much fun since Winston and I started that discussion on farm life.

FREDERICK: But we really need to get on with the meeting. Our next topic will be bias. It is a topic that is rather close to me, and I am sure it is close to many of you. Who would like to start the discussion?

SUSAN: *Stands* I would. I fought for many years with Elizabeth to remove some of the bias about women. The classic view of women was that of homemaker. Everywhere I went, I heard of men who kept their wives barefoot and pregnant. It was sickening! Women should not be kept in the shadows. They belong side by side with men. In fact, in many primitive cultures the woman was the head of the family! She kept order. The man was only used for hunting.

SAMUEL: But, Ms. Anthony, do you argue that men are physically stronger than
women? *Puffs his cigar.*

SUSAN: Physically, no. Men are built stronger than women.

SAMUEL: Then why shouldn’t men be the dominant gender?

SUSAN: Because of their lack of reason. Hundreds of wars have been started by men. Women know how to discuss things and rationally solve a problem.

SIMON: *(Stands)* I hate to argue, because I do think women are equal, but many wars have been started by women.

SUSAN: Such as?

SIMON: The Trojan War was started when Helen of Troy ran off to Sparta to be with her boyfriend.

FREDERICK: That’s correct.

SUSAN: *(Crosses to him)* But the men did all the fighting. They are genetically more violent.

ARISTOTLE: Have you ever seen a mother animal defend her young? Watch one and then tell me that males are more violent.

PLATO: I don’t think that Susan is saying that women are better than men. I think she’s trying to say that they are equal, however.

SUSAN: Right. Women should be allowed the same privileges that men have.

SAMUEL: If you think women should be treated equally, why don’t you fight for your right to be drafted? I don’t remember any women fighting to free the slaves during the Civil War.
MARTIN: Since you mention the slaves, why don't we talk about bias towards Negroes? It has existed since the first black man was brought over on a boat from Africa.

ELLEN: I think that bias has been shown against every possible race at one time or another since the dawn of time. Everyone except Caucasian males, that is.

FRANKLIN: That's not necessarily true. When I was president I tried to end the bias against the poor man. Those who had enough to live a comfortable life would sneer at him. Many refused to help because they thought that he could find employment if he wanted to. That wasn't always true either. During the Depression, many employers couldn't afford to keep many jobs, therefore there wasn't opportunity for many workers. When I started my plans of government intervention, many didn't approve. They wanted to forget the problems of the common man. I told them that when the forefathers of this country set up our democratic system, they intended for the government to provide for all. A person is no less of a person because of poor financial status or a lack of education.

SIMON: Unfortunately, bias against the poor does still exist, as does bias against everyone else we mentioned. I have an idea. If you are all the smartest people from history, why can't you try to find a way to stop bias? (Silence.)

SIDDARThA: Try to find a way to stop bias?

ALBERT: That's an interesting idea. All that we ever do is talk about problems, not try to solve them.

SIMON: Why not start now?

FREDERICK: Mr. French, you have come up with a brilliant idea. Who wants to start the ball rolling?
SAMUEL: I’ll start. When a mule won’t move, you have to poke him in the back with a stick. Sometimes, the best thing to do is get a little violent.

MARTIN: No! African-Americans have tried violence before! It doesn’t work. Aggression solves nothing. It only does two things: First, it makes those who look down on you look even farther down, and second, it makes those who look up to you think it is the only way to solve a problem. People will never respect your cause if they believe you are nothing but hoodlums and troublemakers. Peaceful demonstration is the best way to solve a problem.

SUSAN: I agree. If you cast the first spark of violence, a fire is sure to be lit. Riots can break out. People can be killed. When you’re dead, you can’t help your cause anymore.

FREDERICK: So we have the first element: peaceful demonstration.

SIDDARTHA: We should write these down.

FREDERICK: Good idea, Mr. Gautama. (To WAITRESS.) Can you bring me a piece of paper and a pen?

WAITRESS: Certainly, Mr. Douglass. (She gets a piece of paper and a pen from under the counter and gives them to FREDERICK.) Here you go.

FREDERICK: Thank you, ma’am. (Writes.) Number one: Peaceful demonstrations. (Looks up.) What’s next.

PLATO: What about non-superiority?

ARISTOTLE: What do you mean?

PLATO: Instead of trying to make yourself out to be better than others, why don’t you try to look equal?
SIDDARTHQA: That’s an excellent idea. If people feel that they are being lessened, they will only dig their heels in the ground further.

FREDERICK: Good. (Writes.) Number two: Equal, not better. (Looks up.) What else?

SIMON: What about education?

SAMUEL: The only problem with education is that people don’t listen. The surest way to get people to stop listening to you is to try to be a teacher, or a minister. No, the best way is to let them discover what you want them to know. Provide little hints in things that they do. Have you ever read my book *Huckleberry Finn*?

SIMON: Yes.

SAMUEL: Good. Now judging just by the writing, would you say that I am for or against slavery?

SIMON: Well, Huckleberry constantly said that he knew that what he was doing at the time was wrong, so I would say that you were for it.

SAMUEL: Okay. The truth is that I am very opposed to the ownership of another person. If you examine the text of my story, you’ll remember that even though Huck knew that he was breaking the law, he still helped Jim. That was because he couldn’t quite understand the reasoning behind slavery. However, he had been brought up in a community where slavery had been condoned, so he was taught that it was a good thing.

SIMON: So you made him torn between law and conscience.

SAMUEL: Precisely. What is condoned by the law is not always right.

ALBERT: So we need to let people who are biased discover for themselves that
it is wrong.

SAMUEL: Yes.

FRANKLIN: I have to say, Samuel, that is the best idea you’ve had all night.

SAMUEL: Why, thank you, Mr. Roosevelt.

FREDERICK: Very good. *(Writes.)* Subtle hints. *(Looks up.)* Anything else?

ELLEN: I think that alone will do a world of good.

PLATO: I agree. I think we should send it out like that.

FREDERICK: Okay. All in favor of sending out the anti-bias papers as they are, say "Aye."

ALL: Aye.

FREDERICK: All opposed, say "Nay." *(Silence.)* Motion carried. Now, how do we send this out?

SUSAN: We could find a soul who will be reincarnated soon and let him spread the word.

SIDDARTHA: No, that would take too long. People don’t listen to children.

SAMUEL: Besides, reincarnation doesn’t exist.

FREDERICK: We’re finished with that topic, Mr. Clemens.

SAMUEL: My apologies.

FRANKLIN: Why don’t we just send it out with Simon?
SIMON: Me?

ARISTOTLE: Yes. You’re a grown person. You have the type of attitude that commands respect. You’d be perfect.

SIMON: Who would listen to me? I’m just a single man who works in an office. I’m not anyone great like you guys. (He starts walking away from the group. MARTIN goes up to him and brings him back.)

MARTIN: Don’t torture yourself. You’re just as smart as any of us. The only difference is that we made ourselves known.

SIMON: I couldn’t do it. I have no way of reaching mass audiences.

SUSAN: Even if you only educate one man, this entire project will be worth it. He will educate others.

SAMUEL: Don’t be a coward. Grab your period of fame. (Takes a small bottle from his coat.) Drink some of this. (SIMON takes a gulp from the bottle, and looks as if he is about to spontaneously combust.) There, how do you feel?

SIMON: (Gasping) Okay! I’ll do it!

FREDERICK: Good. Here is our official plan. (Hands him the paper.) Tell everyone!

SIMON: I’ll do my best. (He takes the paper, folds it and puts it in his pocket. He sits at a table with ARISTOTLE, SAMUEL, and ELLEN.)

FREDERICK: Very well, on to our next topic: surrealism.

(Lights stay full for next scene. End Scene 5.)
Scene 6

(Setting: The diner. No time has elapsed since the end of the previous scene. Simon leans in to ask the group a question.)

SIMON: (Whispering) What’s surrealism?

ARISTOTLE: It’s an artist thing.

ELLEN: It’s where the artist makes the shapes of his subjects different than expected.

SIMON: Why?

ELLEN: To try to explain how the subconscious mind sees everything.

SIMON: How did this get to be a topic of discussion?

SAMUEL: Funny you should ask. No one here is an artist.

ARISTOTLE: I understood that we would be discussing the results of the surrealistic movement in the twentieth century.

SAMUEL: Do you know anything about that?

ARISTOTLE: Only what I could learn before the meeting.

SAMUEL: My point exactly. The topic is of no interest to anyone here.

SIMON: I don’t even understand it. I can’t even spell it. (Samuel rises.)

SAMUEL: Mr. Chairperson.

FREDERICK: The chair recognizes Mr. Clemens. What say you?
SAMUEL: I say that this topic is of no interest or value to anyone.

FREDERICK: Why do you say that?

SAMUEL: No one at my table cares much for it. (To everyone) Are we alone in this? (General ad libs of hesitation.)

FREDERICK: (Looking around.) If no one wants to discuss the next topic, I would like to hear so.

FRANKLIN: I have very little interest in this.

SIDDARThA: I don’t either.

SAMUEL: Mr. French has no knowledge of surrealism at all. He can’t even spell it.

FREDERICK: Really? (SIMON stands.)

SIMON: (Hesitating) Well, it just seems that surrealism is a little bit over my head. In fact, so are some of the other topics you’ve discussed. I have trouble participating.

FREDERICK: (Understanding) Very well. I understand how tough some things can be. (To everyone) Does anyone have any objections to Mr. Paris choosing the next topic? (Ad libs no) All right. Mr. Paris, you may choose.

SIMON: Gee. I don’t know. I never really thought about what I would discuss with the world’s greatest thinkers.

SIDDARThA: Just name a topic.

SUSAN: We’ll discuss practically anything.
SIMON: Okay. How about television?

FREDERICK: Good. *(To everyone)* What are the physiological and mental aspects of watching television in the current age? Who will go first?

SIMON: No, no, no! You’re doing it again. I wanted to discuss television, not the aspects of it on your psyche. I was talking about things like your favorite show, or what snacks you like to eat during prime time. You took a simple topic and complicated it. This is tougher than talking to Kristen.

SAMUEL: Kristen? Who’s Kristen?

SIMON: Oh, she’s this girl I work with. She’s absolutely fabulous, but I can never get up the nerve to ask her out. *(ALBERT stands.)*

ALBERT: Mr. Chairperson, I move that the next topic of discussion be Mr. Paris’s problem with Kristen.

PLATO: I second the motion.

FREDERICK: Very well, all in favor state by saying "aye."

ALL EXCEPT SIMON: Aye.

SIMON: Wait! You’re going to discuss me?

ALBERT: We’re going to try to solve your problem.

ELLEN: Admit it, you need the help.

SIMON: Well, maybe, but...

FREDERICK: All opposed to the motion state "nay." *(Silence.)* Motion carried.
We will discuss Mr. French and Kristen.

ALBERT: So tell us all about her.

SIMON: Do I have to?

SAMUEL: The motion has been carried. You don’t have much of a choice.

SIMON: Okay. Kristen is a girl I work with. Every day she passes by my desk, and every day I turn into gelatin when she comes.

SUSAN: That sounds like love, alright.

SIMON: I wish I could say something to her.

MARTIN: Why can’t you?

SIMON: I don’t know. I always trip over my tongue. I feel like there’s a tennis ball in my throat.

PLATO: Could you have someone tell her how you feel?

ELLEN: I wouldn’t do that. It could be interpreted as juvenile and cowardly. You don’t want her to think you’re a cowardly child, do you?

SIMON: No.

ELLEN: Besides, it might backfire. Kristen may fall in love with your messenger.

ALBERT: You could woo her secretly. You know, send her messages, little trinkets...

SUSAN: That would give you a chance to see if she’s interested.
ARISTOTLE: That can be too complicated. *(To SIMON)* You need to do something simple, yet spectacular.

SIMON: She thinks I'm a klutz. Before I came here I spilled my coffee on her and dropped her books.

ELLEN: *(Trying to think positively)* Well... girls sometimes like guys like that. They feel sorry for them.

SIMON: I don't want her to feel sorry for me. I want her to fall in love with me. Maybe I should give up.

FRANKLIN: Never. Quitting is not an option. A man's true love only comes once in his life. If you miss that chance you will be sorry forever. I had a chance, when I married Eleanor. I was sure she was my one and only. Then I messed up... *(pause)* I never meant to hurt her. *(Looks down at his feet.)* As I look back now, I realize that the only person I ever loved was Eleanor, and I ruined it. *(Looks SIMON in the face.)* Don't ruin your chance.

SUSAN: If you really love Kristen you need to tell her.

SIMON: But what about the tennis ball in my throat?

SIDDARThA: Swallow it. The only way you will be happy is to get over your fears and tell Kristen outright that you are in love with her.

SIMON: I don’t know. *(SAMUEL hands him his bottle again.)*

SAMUEL: Drink some of this.

SIMON: No, thank you! *(SAMUEL takes his bottle back and SIMON paces around the stage in deep thought. He looks at everyone else.)* I'll do it!
ALBERT: Good for you!

FREDERICK: You’ll be successful, I’m sure.

SIMON: As soon as I get back.

SAMUEL: In that case I move that we adjourn this meeting.

SIMON: I second the motion.

FREDERICK: All in favor, say "Aye."

ALL: Aye.

FREDERICK: All opposed, say "Nay." (Silence.) Motion carried. Our next meeting will be... (thinks) in a couple of months. Meeting adjourned. (Everyone stands and walks toward the door.)

SIMON: Wait! My car! It’s still broken. How will I get home?

MARTIN: Not a problem. I studied auto mechanics in high school.

SIMON: One more problem. It’s only Friday night. How am I going to remember all this for Monday?

FREDERICK: I think that if you check, you’ll see that it is really Monday morning. This meeting lasted all weekend.

SIDDARThA: If you leave now you should be able to get to work on time.

SIMON: It’s really amazing.

ARISTOTLE: What’s so amazing?
SIMON: I solved all my problems here, and it just so happened that my car broke down outside.

ALBERT: Nothing just happens.

SIMON: What do you mean?

FREDERICK: You were chosen to come here.

SIMON: (Confused) I was?

FRANKLIN: Yes. Remember that piece of paper in your pocket? (SIMON takes out the bias paper.)

PLATO: We called you here to spread the word. You will be a great leader to the people.

FREDERICK: You’re going to be the leader of a new movement of racial harmony. You will cause all nations to unite.

SIMON: I will?

MARTIN: Yes. You will be a savior, but first you need to talk to Kristen.

SIMON: Agreed. Let’s go. (Everyone goes out the door. The WAITRESS, still behind the counter, waves to them.)

WAITRESS: Good-bye, everyone. See you in a couple of months.

FREDERICK: Or whenever. Good-bye, ma’am. (He exits. Blackout. End Scene 6.)
Scene 7

(Setting: SIMON'S office. Monday morning. SIMON is nervously pacing back and forth on the stage. He goes to his desk, gets his cup of coffee, and drinks some. He then looks off right to see if anyone is coming. When he sees no one he goes back to pacing. JAMES enters left.)

JAMES: You're here early.

SIMON: I've been here for half an hour.

JAMES: Why?

SIMON: I'm finally going to tell her.

JAMES: Tell who what?

SIMON: I'm going to tell Kristen how I feel about her.

JAMES: Really?

SIMON: Yeah. I'm going to swallow my fears and tell her straight out.

JAMES: Where did you go this weekend to experience this enlightenment?

SIMON: You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

JAMES: (Looks off right) Here's your chance. She's here. (SIMON looks off right and starts pacing again.)

SIMON: I wish I had some of Samuel's rotgut now.

JAMES: Who? (KRISTEN enters right carrying a pile of books.)
KRISTEN: Hello, James. Hello, Simon. (SIMON takes in a deep breath and turns to face her. He picks up his coffee, then, thinking better, he puts it down.)

SIMON: Hello, Kristen. How are you?

KRISTEN: I’m fine.

SIMON: I need to talk to you.

KRISTEN: Okay. (SIMON glares at JAMES, who is drinking a cup of coffee. In the middle of a sip he looks at SIMON.)

JAMES: Uh... I have to go to...somewhere else. (He exits left. SIMON turns to KRISTEN.)

SIMON: There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you for a long time.

KRISTEN: What?

SIMON: Kristen...I love you.

KRISTEN: What?

SIMON: I love you. I’ve loved you since the first day you started here, but I could never get up the nerve to tell you.

KRISTEN: I don’t know what to say...

SIMON: Don’t say anything. (He kisses her. When they part, KRISTEN stares at him and drops her pile of books.) Now say something.

KRISTEN: I love you too, Simon.
SIMON: Really?

KRISTEN: Really. *(They kiss again.)*

SIMON: Let's go out for breakfast. I feel like I've hardly eaten all weekend.

KRISTEN: Let's go. *(They exit left. The lights dim. SAMUEL's voice is heard offstage.)*

SAMUEL: To conclude this lecture, let me tell you about a man I knew named Simon. He loved a woman, but couldn't find the nerve to tell her...

*(Complete blackout. Curtain. End Scene 7.)*

*The End*