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There's a knock on the door of Ted's office.

NAEEMA

Professor Freedman?

Before TED can respond, NAEEMA hurries in. She's 21, Indian. She wears a Muslim headscarf.

NAEEMA (Continued)

(seeing RICHARD beside TED)

Oh, I'm interrupting...

TED

That's okay. What do you need?

NAEEMA

I'd like to talk to you about my senior honors thesis.

TED

You don't have an advisor?

NAEEMA

I do, but—

TED

Who?

NAEEMA

Dr. Goyal. But I'm not happy with her. I'd like you to be my advisor because you were in India this summer.

TED

What does that have to do with—

NAEEMA

I'm writing my thesis on democracy and the humanities. India is the centerpiece.

TED

You're a Classics major?

NAEEMA

Philosophy and Education. I'm tackling the eternal question: is education about knowledge or just getting a job? You know, some of the poorest places in the world are happier than we are—and why? Because the things that make us happy—education, social equality—have no correlation to economic growth.

TED

Well, this sounds more like an economics paper. I don't think I'm the best person for—

NAEEMA

Are you kidding? You're perfect! Why do you think they call you the Socialist?

TED

Who calls me the Socialist?

NAEEMA

Your students. Because you're always attacking capitalism.

TED looks self-consciously at
RICHARD.

TED

Well, I don't think of it as—and I wouldn't classify myself as a *socialist*.

NAEEMA

They think it's cool. You're a rebel.

TED

Ha, yeah, uh, Richard? Will you excuse us for a minute?

RICHARD

Sure. I'll visit Mount Olympus.

He laughs and exits.

NAEEMA

What's he talking about?

TED

Nothing, he's—old college buddy.

NAEEMA

Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to barge in.

TED

(laughs)
Really?

NAEEMA

I know, I can be overbearing. But I need a new advisor.

TED

Dr. Goyal is chair of the department.

NAEEMA

I know that.

TED

And her focus is India. I was only there for six weeks.

NAEEMA

You cared enough to go in the first place. You didn't have to. Your focus is Greece and Rome. But you went to Gujarat to teach middle school.

TED

It was a paid vacation.

NAEEMA

In Gujarat? The smelly armpit of India?

TED

So you've been there.

NAEEMA

I'm *from* there. It's one of the most industrial—and polluted—states in India.

TED

So what do you need *me* for? Dr. Goyal has published several books. I've published none.

NAEEMA

You wrote a play.

TED

(deflated)

You mean *The Murder of Socrates*...

NAEEMA

It was performed by the Drama Department.

TED

Did you see it?

NAEEMA

Well, no, but—

TED

Exactly. It was a resounding failure. It closed early, as a matter of fact.

NAEEMA

How long was it supposed to run?

TED

Three performances.

(shrugs)

That's okay, in Ancient Greece they only got *one*.

NAEEMA

Well, you're also working on a book.

TED

I am?

NAEEMA

(grabbing at some notes on his desk)
"The Roots of Socialism in Ancient Greece"...

TED

Okay, okay. Those are just *ideas*—for—for—

NAEEMA

For a book.

TED

But they're just ideas.

NAEEMA

Isn't that how books start?

TED

Yeah, they're just not supposed to *end* that way.

NAEEMA

You'll finish it. If I can write an honors thesis, then you can—

TED

If you can write an honors thesis. You haven't written it yet.

NAEEMA

Okay, fine, but I don't care whether you've published, I just want to write a good thesis. Dr. Goyal doesn't like me anyway. She thinks I'm pushy.

TED laughs.

TED

Okay, okay. Have a seat.

She sits in front of his desk.

TED (Continued)

So, you're faced with two questions. First, why do the humanities matter? Second, how should we pay for them?

NAEEMA

I believe the humanities are essential to democracy.

TED

And why is that?

NAEEMA

Well, the Growth-Oriented model of economics measures GNP per capita. It looks at the total wealth of a country while completely ignoring distribution...

TED

Meaning?

NAEEMA

Meaning: we can be the richest country in the world and have alarming inequalities. On the other hand, there's the Human Development model, which emphasizes opportunity across the board.

TED

And this relates to education *how*?

NAEEMA

The Growth-Oriented model favors single-subject technical schooling. Learn a trade, then go to work. The Human Development model favors a broad liberal arts education.

TED

But it won't get you a job.

NAEEMA

It got *you* a job.

TED

Do you want to be a teacher?

NAEEMA

I want to know how best to *live*. The Founding Fathers didn't forge America out of thin air. They read Locke, they read Rousseau, they read Aristotle...

TED

Okay, but why do you need to go to school for that? Benjamin Franklin had two years of formal education. The rest, he did on his own. The humanities are here to give us pleasure. If they make us think, great. If they make us better people, even *better*—though I could introduce you to a number of my colleagues who are amazing contradictions of that. So. Pleasure should be the main objective.

NAEEMA

So you're just—*what*. Academic hedonists?

TED

Remember Plato's dialogues. In *Meno*, what did he say? That excellence cannot be taught.

NAEEMA

But what do you mean by *excellence*?

TED

Courage, nobility, intelligence—who knows? It's what students of propaganda call a glittering generality. It *sounds* nice but means nothing out of context. The humanities aren't going to save the world—even the Nazis were cultured—and expecting them to serve a greater purpose, in order to give them value, only diminishes them.

NAEEMA

But then my whole argument falls apart.

TED

You're welcome.

NAEEMA

So you're saying I should choose a different topic?

TED

I'm saying you'll need to work a little harder to defend it.

NAEEMA

Well, what's the point of valuing great art and literature if you're not going to *live up* to their values?

TED

Which are?

NAEEMA

Truth. Beauty. Moral courage. What you call "excellence." As the Existentialists said: we're only the sum of our actions.

TED

Well, *my* job is to expose you to new ideas.

NAEEMA

But what's the point of having good beliefs if you don't act on them?

TED

I'm an academic. I fight my battles in the classroom.

NAEEMA

Howard Zinn took his students *out* of the classroom to march for Civil Rights.

TED

Howard Zinn had an FBI file thicker than *The Odyssey*.

NAEEMA

Is *that* what you're worried about?

TED

In *this* economy.