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There's a knock on the open door, and without waiting for an answer, NAEEMA hurries in. She's twenty-one, Indian, and pretty in an intellectual way. She wears a Muslim headscarf.

NAEEMA
Professor Freedman?

TED
Yes? Oh. Hi.

They don't shake hands.

NAEEMA
Naeema Hashmi. I took your Plato course last semester.

TED
Yes, Naeema, what can I do for you?

NAEEMA
(sees RICHARD)
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
I'm not your thesis advisor——*Am* I?

NAEEMA
I'd *like* you to be.

TED
You don't have an advisor yet?

NAEEMA
I do, but——

TED
Who?

NAEEMA
Dr. Goyal.

TED
Well.

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

TED

(laughs)
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, who has started emailing on his smartphone.

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
Come on, you weren't just there for the temples and wildlife sanctuaries.

TED
Have you *been* to Gujarat?

NAEEMA
I'm *from* there.

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 and notices the wall print.

NAEEMA
What's that?

TED
The School of Athens. By Raphael.

NAEEMA
Is that Socrates?

TED
Plato. And Aristotle to his left. The others are debatable. Could be Socrates, Euclid, Epicurus——

NAEEMA
(no longer interested in the painting)
So do you think it's a good thesis topic? Can you help me?

TED
Well, 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.

NAEEMA
But you're such a good teacher.

TED
Some of my evaluations would suggest otherwise.

NAEEMA
That's because half the class doesn't want to do their work. They don't do the reading, they hate writing; they think because they're paying tuition they deserve a degree. They don't want to *earn* it.

TED
With how much they're paying, I can see why.