

HERE BE DRAGONS

by

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Characters

JEROME KING	Lawyer and President of <i>The New Knowledge Institute</i> . Brilliant and charming. A great orator.
ROBERT BELL	Hosts a podcast on Skepticism. Engaging and acerbic. Jerome's half-brother, and an orator to match.
SHEILA FREMONT	School Board member. Dominionist.
GORDON SAYERS	School Board member. Irascible.
FRAN WALKER	School Board member. Sweet.
MILA YOUNG	Secretary. Wise beyond her years.
TEDDY LEE	Office Worker. Easily triggered.
AVA LEE	Book editor. Devout.

Time

October 25. Present day.

Place

A Rockland High School classroom, somewhere in America.

Scenes

ACT ONE	The Classroom, early morning.
ACT TWO	The Classroom, immediately after.

Synopsis

In this powerful new play a high school classroom becomes a courtroom battleground between two estranged brothers on opposing sides of the Evolution/Intelligent Design issue. They argue before three school board members who must decide on whether or not to accept the state's re-definition of science (allowing for the legal introduction of Creationism into their science classrooms). The decisions is being carefully watched by the country's media and may influence school systems across the country. Also watching are two parents of a child whose teacher was killed while teaching a Bible Literacy class, and a snarky but wise-for-her-years Board Secretary who is looking for a "lost cause" of her own to champion. As the brothers engage in their battle of wits the tension builds and it becomes increasingly unclear who will win. Will the School allow the teaching of Intelligent Design? A question being asked in actual school boards across the country right now. A harrowing (and occasionally hilarious) contemporary take on ***Inherit The Wind***.

ACT ONE

SCENE: A high school classroom somewhere in America. The room is decorated with Christian imagery, particularly with colorful student drawings taped over the windows that, when the sun shines through them, resemble stained glass. There is a teacher's desk, some card tables and folding chairs. The remains of some police tape frame the door, speaking to some recent violent incident. A white board reads "Bible Literacy. Miss Carson."

AT RISE: MILA, the school board secretary, enters the classroom with a variety of items: a thermos of coffee, her cell phone and several copies of an agenda for the day. She takes a moment to regard the room with a certain sadness, clearly related to whatever violence happened here. SHEILA, a school board member, carrying a textbook, is right behind her. SHEILA moves with a strong, determined energy.)

SHEILA

"Once more unto the breach."

MILA

Yes, Ma'am.

SHEILA

You know who wrote that?

MILA

Shakespeare wrote that, Ma'm.

SHEILA

Shakespeare. Right. And how did you know that, Mila?

MILA

Because I went to public school, Ma'am.

SHEILA

Good answer, my girl!

MILA

Woman. Yes, Ma'am.

(MILA begins moving furniture around, arranging the room for a meeting SHEILA doesn't help. She's too busy planning in her mind.)

SHEILA

Public school. This is the battlefield!

MILA

A horse, a horse, my campus for a horse!

SHEILA

Do you know what today is?

MILA

October twenty-fifth.

SHEILA

*"He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian."*
Saint Crispian's Day!

MILA

Ah! That's why the Shakespeare. Yes, Ma'am.

SHEILA

I don't like to be called "Ma'am", Mila.

MILA

How about "Yes, your Majesty, Henry of Monmouth, King of England and Regent of France"?

SHEILA

I like it.

MILA

Is this going to be an official school board meeting? Should I be recording today?

SHEILA

Yes and yes. What's with the card tables?

MILA

They took the school desks out to make room for the new ones you ordered.

SHEILA

Right! The iDesks! All digital, WiFi connected, school desks with table top touch screens! Kids can read lesson plans, write term papers, watch lectures...

MILA

Play games, download porn.

SHEILA

We'll keep control, don't you worry about that, my girl.

MILA

Woman. Until North Korea finds a way to hack in with their misinformation campaigns.

SHEILA

Don't be paranoid.

MILA

Tell me that when kids are writing term papers on how Kim Jong Un was the first man to walk on the moon.

SHEILA

We'll supply all the lesson plans right here in the classroom. No more need for libraries taking up space with books and information the kids don't need. Building minds! Keeping control!

MILA

Controlling minds. Mind Control.

SHEILA

Don't be sassy. Look at these pictures the kids drew. Oo, I like the Angel. So colorful.

MILA

Should I take them down?

SHEILA

No! Leave them up. For today. Do you need some help with the room?

MILA

Not anymore.

(Done setting up the room MILA consults a piece of paper and goes over to the bookcase, checking the books against titles on the paper.)

SHEILA

(Curious.)

Mila. What did you think of this class?

MILA

(Carefully.)

It was your idea.

SHEILA

It's okay. I'm curious.

(MILA chooses her words carefully.)

MILA

I understood it.

SHEILA

What do you mean?

(MILA grabs one of the books from the bookcase.)

MILA

You ever read this?

SHEILA

The Old Man and the Sea? Sure. We had to.

MILA

I read it in this classroom, when it was English 101. So we finish it and at first I thought, "Eh, okay, fishing story, old man in a boat. Whatever." Then Miss Carson, I loved Miss Carson, then she goes into this amazing breakdown about the imagery and the metaphors and how -- you know the wounds Santiago gets on his hands? How Hemmingway meant us to think of the wounds of Christ? And how Santiago dies? Remember how he dies with his arms spread out on the mast?

(MILA spreads her arms out wide.)

SHEILA

(Excited that MILA "gets it".)

Like Christ on the cross!

MILA

Exactly. When she explained it like that, when she opened our eyes to the more expansive ideas in the story — ! I didn't know books could do that.

SHEILA

I understand.

MILA

And it's not just that book. *Lord of the Flies*, *Don Quixote*--

SHEILA

Paradise Lost.

MILA

I don't know how anybody can read half the books in the library if they don't—

SHEILA

--if they don't have some sense of the Bible.

MILA

Right. Anyway, so, a Bible Literacy class, I understood it. It's not exactly religious, more--

Builds a social framework--

SHEILA

Exactly!

MILA

--a cultural lexicon.

SHEILA

That's it.

MILA

That was the point of the class. But?

SHEILA

But all that Christian stuff about Hemmingway, that was one day in an old English class. Bible Literacy was every day. It was bound to cause trouble. Poor Miss Carson.

MILA

You think the class was to blame?

SHEILA

Mental illness was to blame. But I understand the protestors. That's why we're meeting here instead of the office, right? Low profile?

MILA

I have a plan, a way to lower the temperature.

SHEILA

Like banning books?

MILA

We're not banning books. In the wake of the shooting we've just been asked by a parent group to remove certain distracting titles from the school.

SHEILA

I heard.

(MILA tosses *The Old Man and The Sea* into a nearby garbage can.)

SHEILA

(Shocked.)

What...?

MILA

On the list.

SHEILA

(A little disturbed.)

The Old Man and the Sea?

MILA

Too much violence.

SHEILA

What violence?

MILA

He kills fish. Seriously. That's the reason they gave.

(SHEILA is a little shocked at all this. GORDON SAYERS pops his head in.)

GORDON

Sheila! What are you doing in here? Come on! Let's meet in the Teacher's Lounge.

SHEILA

The point was to meet in here.

GORDON

This is a crime scene!

MILA

The Sheriff okayed it.

GORDON

But the Teacher's Lounge has a bathroom, and vending machines!

(MILA hands him a paper.)

MILA

Today's Agenda.

(MILA regards her list of banned books and starts pulling them off the shelf.)

SHEILA

You look terrible.

GORDON

I had a crank call last night. Some bastard. Woke me up. Oh! Is that coffee? Great! We getting donuts? No cups?

SHEILA

What did he say?

GORDON

The crank? You can't walk five feet in this country without somebody calling you a Nazi.

SHEILA

Me too.

MILA

And Fran.

GORDON

Somebody called Fran a Nazi? Fran's a Kewpie doll, who would call--? Why didn't she tell me?

SHEILA

She didn't want anybody to know.

GORDON

(Re MILA.)

She knows! How does she know?

MILA

Fran called me.

GORDON

Why?

SHEILA

Because there has to be a record!

GORDON

But who is she? She's a secretary! Nobody voted for her!

SHEILA

For God's sake, Gordon!

GORDON

(A little too angrily.)

And do NOT take the Lord's name in vain, please!

SHEILA

I'm sorry.

GORDON

It's the hundredth time this week someone has taken--

SHEILA

I know. And I'm sorry.

GORDON

If we're going to work together—!

SHEILA

(Conceding.)

Yes.

GORDON

Okay. Who's getting donuts?

MILA

The Kewpie doll.

(GORDON regards all the Bible pictures.)

GORDON

Is that Joan of Arc burning to death? What's with these all pictures?

MILA

They're a cultural lexicon of Judeo-Christian folkloric motifs.

GORDON

Say that three times fast.

SHEILA

Did you read through the new curriculum?

GORDON

Nah.

SHEILA

Why not?

GORDON

I knew you'd read it. And there's no milk! Why is there never any milk?

MILA

(Shrugging)

Nazis, probably.

SHEILA

We take turns buying the milk.

GORDON

(To MILA.)

That wasn't funny.

SHEILA

Every time it's your turn you forget. That's why there's no--

GORDON

The hell with it, I'll drink it black! Is everyone happy?

SHEILA

Bring it down a notch, would you?

GORDON

Sorry. This whole thing has got me on edge. You know, if we cut Bible Literacy most of the town is going to want something to take its place.

SHEILA

I know! God Almighty!

(GORDON shoots her a look.)

SHEILA (Continued)

Sorry. This is going to be a long day. I should have brought a pillow.

GORDON

Your ass hurt?

SHEILA

How come you get to say "ass" and I can't say "God"?

GORDON

Context. What are we going to say at the press conference? You know it's in three hours.

MILA

Two.

SHEILA

I have a plan.

(GORDON notices a book MILA is tossing away.)

GORDON

Whoa! What are you doing? *The Diary of Anne Frank*?

MILA

It's on the list.

GORDON

What list?

MILA

Your list.

GORDON

That list? That's not my list. I got it from Ava Lee. She said it was a list of offensive books.

MILA

That's the one!

GORDON

What's offensive about *Anne Frank*?

MILA

She talks about having sexual feelings for a teenage boy.

GORDON

(To MILA.)

So does my grand-daughter but I'm not throwing her in the garbage. Take it out.

(MILA doesn't take the book from the can. Instead she picks up another book.)

MILA

Huckleberry Finn! Too bad about calling out all that racism and making white people feel bad.

(She tosses it into the garbage.)

GORDON

Okay, stop!

(She grabs another book.)

MILA

Say farewell to *Farewell to Arms*.

(She throws it in the can.)

GORDON

Okay! You made your point! We have to convince the parents that these books are —! Oh, I give up! You know what Mark Twain said: "*No amount of evidence will ever persuade an idiot.*"

MILA

Mark Twain didn't say that.

GORDON

I saw it on Facebook.

MILA

Oh then it's got to be true.

GORDON
Can you prove he didn't say it?

MILA
I can't.

GORDON
Why not?

MILA
Because *no amount of evidence will ever persuade an idiot.*

SHEILA
Mila!

MILA
Too sassy?

GORDON
Watch yourself, my girl.

MILA
Woman.

(FRAN WALKER enters with a bakery box and two packs of plastic and styrofoam cups.)

FRAN
Donuts!

GORDON
Thank God Almighty!

(SHEILA shoots him a look.)

SHEILA
Really?

GORDON
(Explaining.)
Context.

(GORDON grabs the donuts and lays them out.)

MILA
Morning, Fran!

FRAN
I'm still catching my breath. There was a reporter at *Junior's Coffee* and he sees me buying all these donuts so he figures there's a secret school board meeting and he

follows me! I drive around a bit, checking the rear view, taking the alley behind Wa-Wa. I think I lost him.

GORDON

(Mock dramatic.)

You didn't come by way of Zürich, did you? They have people at the airports!

FRAN

Oh you! Anyway, that's why I'm a little late. We should hurry up though, the press conference is in...

MILA

An hour-fifty.

FRAN

I got cups! I couldn't remember which was worse for the environment, paper or plastic. So I got both.

(Beat)

I didn't really think that through.

(They help themselves to coffee and donuts.)

GORDON

Heard you got a phone call last night.

FRAN

What is going on with people?

GORDON

Protestors. The police should arrest them all.

MILA

The police can't arrest people who annoy you. You're thinking of Nazis.

GORDON

You are not a funny person.

FRAN

(To MILA.)

Oh you!

GORDON

You know who I think it is making the phone calls? Ava's husband, Teddy.

FRAN

Everybody is so cranky!

GORDON AND MILA

That's why they call them "crank calls".

(GORDON is annoyed that they both voiced the same joke.)

GORDON

(To MILA.)

Let's never do that again.

FRAN

Did you know that Starbucks will intentionally spell your name wrong so you'll take a picture of the cup and put it on Instagram? For free advertising!

MILA

No they don't.

FRAN

I saw a TikTok!

MILA

Oh then it must be true.

FRAN

Oh who cares if it's not true? It's a good story.

GORDON

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

FRAN

Where's the milk?

(MILA looks out the window.)

MILA

Car just pulled up.

GORDON

Man or woman?

(As a joke.)

Not that I'm assigning gender!

MILA

It's just kids showing up for band practice.

FRAN

(To SHEILA.)

So I have a plan. What's your plan? You always have a plan. You're so good at plans! Sometimes I can't plan breakfast. This morning, I thought oatmeal but then I remembered I hate oatmeal. Now lunch I'm good at—

SHEILA

We cut Bible Literacy, that's for one side, and create a new science curriculum, for the other, based on this.

(SHEILA holds up the textbook, *Total Science*.)

FRAN

Oh I read that one. A little. Ava was telling me about it!

SHEILA

She's the one who gave me the book.

GORDON

She's also the one who called *Anne Frank* a harlot. I don't know about Ava.

(Still looking out the window.)

There's a kid four foot tall and she's got a tuba. You'd think somebody would talk her into a flute.

(At the textbook.)

Total Science. How total is it?

SHEILA

It crackles.

GORDON

(Reading the Table of Contents.)

Biology. Good. What is "Teaching the Controversy"?

SHEILA

"Evolution – A Theory in Crisis".

FRAN

Oh that part I read! Very scientific.

GORDON

So the controversy is--?

FRAN

That Evolution is just a Theory, not fact, and there are lots of disagreements and things, and that Evolution is just, you know, completely flawed.

SHEILA

It acknowledges that Evolution is the most currently accepted theory.

GORDON

So we still teach Evolution.

SHEILA

Yes. Here's what it is, how it works—

GORDON
And no Creationism?

SHEILA
No, no.

GORDON
We can't teach that. The Supreme Court--

FRAN
There's no Creationism. Just the other thing.

SHEILA
Intelligent Design.

FRAN
That's the part I like!

GORDON
No, no, we can't teach that either.

SHEILA
We can! That's the beauty! There's some wiggle room in the new Standards.

GORDON
It's legal?

SHEILA
It's legal.

GORDON
And this is what we announce to the press? This new curriculum?

FRAN
Or we could go with my plan!

GORDON
What's your plan, Kewpie?

FRAN
White water rafting! You know, a camping retreat. We get people from both sides, do some team building, trust exercises, make s'mores. You know? S'mores!

(They stare at her a moment.)

GORDON
(To SHEILA.)
So we go with your plan.

FRAN

(Not hurt.)

Oh you two!

GORDON

I'll tell you who won't go for it — Teddy.

FRAN

He's an atheist and Ava's Christian. I wonder how they make that work?

GORDON

Your husband's Jewish. How does that work?

FRAN

He believes on Saturday, and I believe on Sunday. Our weekends are shot to hell but where are we going, on a cruise? We're not going on a cruise. I can't get Zeke to take me to Olive Garden. I love Olive Garden. It's so authentic!

GORDON

What are you, Sheila?

SHEILA

What?

FRAN

Gordon!

GORDON

You never actually mentioned it.

FRAN

Rude!

SHEILA

Is that really pertinent?

GORDON

It is in this town.

FRAN

No. It isn't. But it is. It shouldn't be. But it is.

GORDON

I'm just wondering. You're new in town, got onto the school board, really, because no one else wanted the job, so I was wondering —

FRAN

Leave her alone!

GORDON

I'm making a point about why it matters.

SHEILA

"God shall be my hope, my stay, my guide and lantern to my feet."

GORDON

Corinthians?

SHEILA

Henry the Sixth.

SHEILA AND MILA

(To each other.)

Shakespeare!

FRAN

(Joining in without knowing why.)

Shakespeare! What are we doing?

GORDON

It's just that in this town--

SHEILA

I'm a Christian, Gordon. Just different from you. We done?

GORDON

I don't care if you believe in turtles all the way down, Sheila. It's just that it's a Christian town and if we're going to get people behind us we have to cater to them.

SHEILA

You mean you. Cater to you.

GORDON

That, too.

SHEILA

So we agree on the plan? We're all voting for *Total Science*?

FRAN

I'm in!

(SHEILA picks up a chocolate donut.)

GORDON

Hey! The chocolate donuts are always mine!

(SHEILA eats the donut, defiantly.)

FRAN

It's a good plan. We're definitely responding to the concerns of the community.

SHEILA

Right.

GORDON

Right.

TEDDY

Crap!

(TEDDY LEE has entered, wearing a robe.)

MILA

Mr. Lee! I didn't know you were coming, in your robe and socks and I'm hoping underwear.

TEDDY

Morning, Mila.

(To the others.)

Nazis.

GORDON

I knew it. I knew it was him!

SHEILA

Did you sleep here, Teddy?

TEDDY

You're responding to part of the community, alright. The lunatic part. That coffee for anybody?

GORDON

No! How did you get in here?

(TEDDY fixes himself a cup of coffee.)

TEDDY

I have a key.

FRAN

That doesn't give you permission to enter school property after hours, Mr. Lee.

TEDDY

Ja wohl, mein Herr!

SHEILA

Are you living here?

TEDDY

In the Teacher's Lounge. It's great, they have a bathroom and vending machines.

GORDON

(To SHEILA.)

See?

TEDDY

Ava and I had a fight.

GORDON

You called me in the middle of the night, you agitator.

TEDDY

Coffee, donuts. You set up the room nice.

GORDON

Those are Board donuts!

TEDDY

A teacher was killed in here.

SHEILA

We got permission from the Sheriff.

TEDDY

I don't give a fuck. This is hallowed ground.

SHEILA

That's why we're in here! Out of respect.

TEDDY

My son was here!

SHEILA

I know.

TEDDY

(Stressed.)

My son. Payton. He was right here where I'm standing, next to Miss Carson when that Jesus freak with the gun came in and murdered her! Right here, in this stupid class, giving an oral report on "The Apocrypha", when Bang! Right here!

SHEILA

Is he okay?

TEDDY

He sleeps in the closet, Sheila. This Goddamn class was your idea, wasn't it?

GORDON

Back up, Teddy!

TEDDY

You brought Jesus into a public school and--!

GORDON

Back up I said!

TEDDY

(To SHEILA.)

You killed that woman! Enjoy your Goddamn donuts.

MILA

(Looking out the window.)

I think Mrs. Lee just showed up.

TEDDY

(Clutching at his scraggy robe.)

Ava's here? Already?

MILA

She's with somebody. A man.

SHEILA

Go put yourself together.

TEDDY

I will do whatever I—!

GORDON

Now I'm telling you! Get out, get dressed, and come back here with some respect.

TEDDY

Or what?

GORDON

Or I will have Mila throw your ass right out of here!

MILA

(Sarcastically)

I'm the muscle.

TEDDY

(Taking a sip.)

This coffee needs milk.

(TEDDY exits.)

SHEILA

For God's sake!
 (To GORDON.)
 I'm sorry! Jesus! God!

GORDON

Take a Xanax or something.

SHEILA

That man is fingernails on a blackboard.

FRAN

His poor son.

MILA

(Looking out the window.)
 They're coming in.

GORDON

(To MILA.)
 Get out there and let them know where we are.

MILA

And if they don't come quietly? Do I wrestle them to the ground or--?

GORDON

Chop, chop!

MILA

Ja wohl, mein Herr!

(MILA exits.)

FRAN

(Despondent.)
 Maybe it is our fault.

GORDON

We didn't kill anybody! The man was crazy, he had a gun, how were we supposed to--? What do people think our job is anyway?

SHEILA

(In a reverie.)
 Climbing mountains.

GORDON

What mountains?

(MILA shows in AVA LEE. SHEILA snaps out of her reverie.)

AVA

In here?

MILA
(Slyly to GORDON, maybe in a German accent.)

Here ve are, Commandant. Zey gave me no trouble.

GORDON
(To MILA)

File something, would you?

AVA

Good morning!

(SHEILA and AVA embrace. They're friends.)

FRAN

Good morning, Ava!
(To GORDON.)

Say "good morning".

GORDON

What's good about it?

(AVA can see SHEILA is shook.)

AVA

Are you okay, Sheila?

SHEILA

Argh. Your husband!

AVA

Oh. Him. Where is the maniac?

GORDON

Brushing his teeth, I hope.

AVA

Never mind him. I want to introduce you to someone.

(JEROME KING enters.)

JEROME

Good morning, Friends!

AVA

Mr. King, this is my friend Sheila Fremont, Francine Walker and Gordon Sayers; the Rockland County School Board.

Small Board. JEROME

Small town. FRAN

JEROME
But a good one I hear. Grace and peace to you all!

GORDON
Yeah, hello. Look, Ava, this is a private meeting.

AVA
About the curriculum I gave you, right? Mr. King wrote it!

GORDON
He did what now?

AVA
Mr. King is from the *The New Knowledge Institute*.

(Gordon holds up the copy of *Total Science*.)

GORDON
You mean this book?

FRAN
You wrote this?

JEROME
Every blessed word.

FRAN
You are such a good writer.

GORDON
You've read it?

FRAN
No. Just the part we were talking about. It's so good! I could never write myself. I do watercolors, mostly.

JEROME
How lovely.

SHEILA
I read it, last night. Every word. It's — "meritorious" is the only word I can think of!

AVA

It is good, isn't it?

SHEILA

Eye opening.

JEROME

Meritorious! Well, I'll come back with "obliged". Much obliged.

AVA

I knew Mr. King's editor from when I worked at that publishing company in Fairview; he put us together.

JEROME

Ava told me about this meeting, and your press conference later, I thought I could help.

GORDON

With what?

JEROME

Introducing the curriculum to the community.

AVA

We're to be a test school!

JEROME

First one. God willing.

GORDON

We haven't voted yet...

FRAN

(Excited without knowing why.)

A test school! Oh my goodness! What is that?

(AVA suddenly realizes where they are. She is immediately uncomfortable in an almost paralyzing way.)

AVA

Wait a minute. Sheila! Is this the classroom where—? Why are we in here?

SHEILA

We felt, out of respect for the situation —

(TEDDY enters, dressed and better put together.)

TEDDY

They shouldn't be.

(AVA's whole mood has changed. Something has been triggered.)

AVA

I can't be here!

(AVA is about to panic, but before TEDDY can comfort her JEROME steps in and holds her with his gaze.)

JEROME

(To AVA.)

Look at me. *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Do not fear for he is with you."*

AVA

(Finding strength.)

Thank you.

TEDDY

Who the hell are you?

AVA

(To JEROME.)

That's Teddy. The lunatic.

TEDDY

The lunatic would like to know how his son is.

AVA

(Cooly.)

He's fine.

(After an awkward moment...)

GORDON

Whatever. Let's start the meeting.

(MILA starts recording from a cell phone. Everyone sits, except AVA, who sort of stares around the room.)

MILA

And, we're recording. Weekly Rockland County School Board Meeting Fourteen.

SHEILA

This is an informal meeting. So we'll waive Old Business, New Business, yes?
(Noticing AVA staring.)

Ava?

TEDDY
(Concerned about AVA.)

She's not okay.

AVA
(AVA sits near JEROME, to TEDDY'S annoyance.)

I'm fine.

SHEILA
(Trying to adopt a professional tone.)

This is a private meeting to discuss certain controversies which are, hereto — Okay, look, we have a proposal that I think everyone can agree to. Since the incident...

TEDDY

The murder.

SHEILA

The murder of a teacher, the community has been split between the majority who want to keep the Bible Literacy class and a small but very vocal minority who want it gone. The case has gotten national attention and the media, well, everybody, is waiting to hear from us today in --

MILA

An hour forty.

SHEILA

— about what we're planning to do about it.

GORDON

We know all this.

SHEILA

It's for the record, Gordon.

FRAN
(To GORDON)

Shh!

SHEILA

So, my plan, in a nutshell — we cancel Bible Literacy, but we adopt a new class based on the *Total Science* curriculum, which will legally allow us to teach Intelligent Design. This gives something to both sides of the debate —

TEDDY
(Shocked.)

What? What the hell did you just say?

(AVA bristles at TEDDY'S vehemence. JEROME sees this and places a comforting hand on her shoulder.)

SHEILA

I feel that this will mollify both factions and allow things to simmer down.

TEDDY

(To JEROME.)

Excuse me, sir, but would you mind taking your fucking hand off my wife's shoulder?

AVA

That's Teddy, ever the sledgehammer.

TEDDY

Who the hell is this guy?

AVA

Don't yell at me.

TEDDY

(Yelling.)

I'm not yelling!

SHEILA

Teddy!

AVA

You called that Mr. Bell person!

TEDDY

Well he's not here! Besides, I was angry.

AVA

You were angry?

TEDDY

Just tell me what I did that was so wrong!

(AVA considers, then looks to JEROME for encouragement, who nods for her to continue; she tries to remember the rehearsed speech.)

AVA

Alright. Your philosophical scientific materialism has a destructive moral, cultural and political legacy that—

TEDDY

What the hell are you talking about?

AVA

— cultural and political legacy that —

TEDDY

Are you being coached by this guy?

AVA

(To JEROME.)

You see? He won't even let me speak.

TEDDY

(Exploding at JEROME.)

Who the *Hell* are you?

GORDON

(To SHEILA.)

We need to get control of this.

TEDDY

Who are you?

JEROME

Jerome King.

TEDDY

King? Ava told me about you. He's a Creationist! That's what you want to teach?

AVA

(To JEROME)

You see how he is?

JEROME

There is no Creationism in my book.

TEDDY

Intelligent Design, you said! It's the same thing!

SHEILA

It's a science textbook, with up-to-date biological theorems.

TEDDY

(To JEROME.)

Really? Give me one.

SHEILA

I've read the book!

TEDDY

You're not a scientist, Sheila!

SHEILA

Neither are you, Teddy.

TEDDY

(To JEROME.)

Just one. One up to date biological theorem!

(JEROME was waiting for this. He's been egging TEDDY on and knows how to push his buttons.)

JEROME

You work in the office here, is that right?

TEDDY

Vendor accounts, payroll, why?

JEROME

Numbers. Are you familiar with the mathematics of population increase?

TEDDY

Let's pretend I am.

JEROME

Perfect. You'll find equations for population growth rate on page 138 of my book, including rate of increase. The accompanying metadata will show you that the equations come from the U.S. Census Bureau--

TEDDY

Just the meat and potatoes. Come on.

(ROBERT BELL enters unseen in the back. No one notices him.)

JEROME

It's an extrapolation theory. If the math is correct, and you can check it, then humans have only been on this planet for six thousand years.

TEDDY

You're out of your mind!

JEROME

Which is not long enough for Evolution to adequately —

TEDDY

(To AVA.)

Are you seriously hearing this shit?

GORDON

Six thousand years?

FRAN

(Thumbing through book)

I must have missed that.

TEDDY

Try millions of years, Svengali. They got fossils and cave paintings and I'm pretty sure fingerprints!

JEROME

Check the math.

TEDDY

Am I on the only sane person left—?

AVA

He's a brick wall!

JEROME

If you use the population growth equations provided by the United States government, and extrapolate backwards, using the current rate of population growth--

TEDDY

And the Earth is flat, right?

JEROME

--you'll see there were only two people living in the year 4300 B.C.

(TEDDY can't believe his ears and moves like he might do something violent. His overreaction is exactly what JEROME wanted.)

TEDDY

Two people? TWO PEOPLE?!

AVA

Don't shout!

TEDDY

Adam and Eve! Holy Mother of God, are you listening to this?

AVA

We are! Are you?

GORDON

Two people? Is this really true?

JEROME

Check the math.

TEDDY

You're all insane!

AVA

Somebody get him out of here!

(TEDDY wheels around on her.)

TEDDY

Ava, would you please shut the fuck up!

AVA

Don't hit me!

(AVA turns away in the arms of JEROME and nearly crumbles. Everyone is shocked at this exchange, especially TEDDY.)

TEDDY

Oh my God. I'm so sorry! Ava, I would never hit — !

GORDON

Maybe just give her some air, there, Teddy.

TEDDY

I'm so sorry!

FRAN

Mr. Lee. If you can't control your temper--

TEDDY

I will. Ava, honey...

SHEILA

Leave her alone.

(AVA is clearly dealing with some trauma. But she rallies.)

AVA

It's alright. I panicked.

TEDDY

Honey, I would never hit —

AVA

I know. But you will never, never, speak to me like that again.

(TEDDY nods, contritely.)

AVA (Continued)

You don't know everything, Teddy. If he has proof—!

(TEDDY moves towards her.)

TEDDY

But, honey, it's not realistic.

(She backs away.)

AVA

Please!

GORDON

Teddy, sit down, or I'll have you removed.

(TEDDY doesn't move.)

GORDON (Continued)

Mila?

(MILA, ironically playing the "muscle", indicates that TEDDY should sit.)

AVA

Leave him alone. I'm fine. Sit down, Teddy. Please.

(TEDDY obeys, and sits.)

GORDON

Let's all calm down. Mr. King, your book teaches that humans have only been on this planet for six thousand years? You want us to teach that to children?

JEROME

This is a viable, modern theory based on accepted governmental projections of population increase. We've done the math very carefully. It's been checked.

GORDON

By who?

ROBERT

By me.

(Everyone swings around, surprised to find ROBERT standing there. JEROME is completely startled.)

GORDON

Are people just walking in? Are we selling tickets?

JEROME

Robby!

ROBERT

Jerry.

GORDON
Welcome to our secret meeting!

SHEILA
Who are you?

JEROME
Robert King. Or is it "Bell" now?

TEDDY
You're Mr. Bell? He's mine! I mean, I invited him to the meeting.

GORDON
(Tearing up the agenda.)
Well, this agenda is shit.

FRAN
(Lost.)
What's happening now?

MILA
Should I stop recording?

ROBERT
(Re AVA.)
Is that woman alright?

TEDDY
I didn't think you were coming. This is the School Board I was telling you about. Sheila Fremont. Gordon Sayers. Francine Walker.

GORDON
Yeah, hi. Unless you brought some milk this is a private meeting.

ROBERT
Sorry to interrupt. Mr. Lee asked if I would like to do a show about all this.

GORDON
Show?

JEROME
Mr. "Bell" has a podcast. *SkeptiZone. The Forum for Rational Congress and Critical Thought.*

ROBERT
You listen, Jerry?

JEROME

When I can't sleep.

(JEROME and ROBERT share a smile at that.)

GORDON

The whole point of meeting in the school, Teddy, was so the media couldn't find us!

ROBERT

I know about the shooting, and I know it was in a Bible Literacy class —

SHEILA

Academic. Non-devotional. And it's been cancelled.

GORDON

Why are we explaining this to him? To either of you? You two are not members of this community. We're here today to vote on a new curriculum.

(TEDDY hands the *Total Science* book to ROBERT, who recognizes it immediately.)

TEDDY

This! They want to teach this!

ROBERT

Ah! *Total Science!* Jerry! You finally got yourself a test school!

JEROME

"Upon this Rock I shall build!"

ROBERT

It won't work.

JEROME

Pray tell?

ROBERT

Pray all you want. The State School Board is re-voting on the Standards and when they do your book won't be legal anymore. You all knew that, right? The State is holding Science Hearings in two months.

JEROME

I know. I've been invited to speak. I'm on a Panel.

ROBERT

Are you?

JEROME

Yes.

Me too. ROBERT

Really? JEROME

Really. ROBERT

Want to split an Uber? JEROME

Do you two know each other? TEDDY

This smug mug is my brother. JEROME

Adopted. ROBERT

(To MILA.) SHEILA
Alright, turn off the recording.

(MILA stops recording.)

How are you? JEROME

The struggle is real. How are you? ROBERT

Alive. How's Angie? JEROME

Divorced from me, so, jubilant, if that's a word. ROBERT

You okay? JEROME

I eat alone over the sink. ROBERT

We soldier on. JEROME

ROBERT

I've taken up scrapbooking for some reason.

GORDON

Can we go back to the yelling?

FRAN

Can we go back to the thing about the math? I wasn't following any of that.

ROBERT

I was saying that I have checked his arithmetic about humans only being around for six thousand years.

TEDDY

And?

ROBERT

And it's correct. Can I put my things down?

(ROBERT settles his satchel and things on a chair.)

TEDDY

That's impossible! That's Goddamn ridiculous!

ROBERT

(To JEROME.)

Did he start at this fever pitch or did you wind him up?

JEROME

Just speaking truth and setting minds free.

ROBERT

You wound him up.

GORDON

What about the math?

ROBERT

(To TEDDY.)

He's winder-upper.

TEDDY

This is insane!

ROBERT

Like a water heater about to burst! He knew the Adam and Eve thing would make you "Argh!"

GORDON

I'm talking here!

ROBERT

Undermines your credibility. It's a tactic.

JEROME

Hubris doesn't need my help.

GORDON

Boys! I was a CPA for 20 years, I'm still waiting to hear how we've only been on the planet since the invention of broccoli. You said his math was correct.

ROBERT

If it is, Mr. Sayers, that means the Great Pyramids were built by about ninety-three people.

TEDDY

That's crazy!

ROBERT

And no help from Aliens.

JEROME

More hubris.

FRAN

I'm so lost.

TEDDY

Then how is the math right?

ROBERT

It isn't. It is only if you assume population growth has been constant through the ages, which it hasn't.

JEROME

This from a kid who flunked Algebra, twice.

ROBERT

Once. Like most Creationist arguments the math is right, but the numbers they start with are wrong.

JEROME

You mean you *believe* the numbers are wrong because, like all Naturalists, it doesn't fit your narrow narrative.

(Teasing.)

And it was two times. You got summer school, remember?

ROBERT

Oh yeah. You're right.

JEROME

The man can't distinguish between the numbers one and two, and *he's* the one checking my math.

(Suddenly the room explodes with the sound of a high school orchestra down the hall.)

FRAN

What in the world is that?

ROBERT

Probably that big, giant band I saw down the hall.

GORDON

If they start up we're not going to be able to--

SHEILA

I know. Let's talk to them. Okay. We're taking a break.

GORDON

(Warning everybody.)

Those are not community donuts!

FRAN

(Playfully scolding.)

Stop it, you!

MILA

The Catcher in the Rye!

(MILA tosses a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* into the garbage can. GORDON rolls his eyes at her as he SHEILA and FRAN all walk out the door to talk to the Band. AVA follows, not wanting to be left behind in the room. TEDDY moves to follow AVA but she stops him with a look.)

AVA

Space, Teddy! Please!

(TEDDY backs off, devastated. AVA exits.)

JEROME

(To TEDDY.)

May I give you some advice?

ROBERT
(Not wanting JEROME to keep winding him up)

Jerry...

TEDDY
(To JEROME)

You I don't need to hear from.

JEROME
You should take a walk. Have a think.

(TEDDY'S demeanor has changed. He's more introspective.)

TEDDY
Think! All I do is think. You know what I think about? I think about the day I came to pick my son up after the murder. He was comatose! His eyes like black holes! They put him in the Principal's office like he blew up a toilet or something. Not the Nurse's office, no, because our legislature passed a bill saying school nurses could no longer offer any kind of medical care. He still had blood on his glasses! The boy was shaking! In the Principal's office. Somehow, I don't know how, he thought he was in trouble! He needs therapy! Counseling! Trauma group! Something! Instead she takes him to church. A Jesus freak shoots my boy's teacher in front of his eyes and she takes him to a Goddamn Church!

(The outburst has left him spent, and he more or less collapses into himself.)

JEROME
Talk to her.

TEDDY
How? You've wound her up. Played us against each other.

JEROME
(Confessing.)
Yes. I had to get in the room. I'm sorry about that. But you do make it easy.

TEDDY
I'm afraid of the things I might do.

JEROME
You're in shock. All three of you.

TEDDY
I have an impulse to take a bulldozer to the world.

(For some reason this admission hits both ROBERT and JEROME. They relate. JEROME'S next speech is for all three of them.)

JEROME

It's unnerving when we lose control, to find we're governed by the upheaval in our lives. We covet sure-footing. We seek guidance, some from disparate places. But it's only in coming together that we heal from our shared experiences, with compassion and love, and a commonality of purpose.

ROBERT

Band of brothers.

JEROME

Husband and wife.

ROBERT

(Can't help himself.)

Sacco and Vanzetti.

(JEROME gives him a chiding look and ROBERT apologizes with a sardonic gesture.)

JEROME

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

(Against his better judgement TEDDY finds himself moved by JEROME'S attempt to comfort and advise.)

TEDDY

(Simply.)

I just want to go home. All that's left in those vending machines are Funyons. God, I hate Funyons.

JEROME

Be with her.

TEDDY

I hate you.

(His way of saying "thanks".)

I'm going for a walk. Have a think.

(TEDDY exits.)

JEROME

Sacco and Vanzetti?

ROBERT

I'm sorry! I was thrown. I'm just not used to seeing you like that.

JEROME

Like what?

ROBERT

Like that. That was nice, what you said.

JEROME

He was due some empathy.

ROBERT

Not your usual art of war.

JEROME

So. Robby. You look older.

ROBERT

And wiser?

JEROME

No, just older.

(ROBERT regards that with amusement. They're a little uncomfortable together, not sure how to connect.)

ROBERT

These pictures are amazing. Is that Moby Dick? The kids do these?

MILA

I like that one, up top.

JEROME

St. George and the Dragon.

ROBERT

That's a lot of blood.

JEROME

Death of a gangster.

MILA

Gangster?

JEROME

The Golden Legend. In the story the Dragon was squeezing the villagers for trinkets of gold and human sacrifice, a sort of serpentine extortionist. Until St. George came along with the might and right of God and defeated the beast with his sword Ascalon and saved the Princess. "To battle, fair Ascalon!" he cried. "To battle!"

ROBERT

It's a rip-off of Perseus, Andromeda and the sea monster.

JEROME

(To MILA.)

What I do is I just ignore him.

ROBERT

Half of Christian culture is stolen from the Egyptians, Greeks and Pagans.

JEROME

Iconography is not faith and every culture stands on those before it.

ROBERT

(To MILA.)

There it is. What he's normally like, a non-answer for everything.

MILA

How long has it been since you've seen each other?

ROBERT

Fifteen years?

MILA

Why so long? Why don't you know about each other's lives? Why am I still talking? I should shut up and mind my own business.

JEROME

"Bell"? You took your birth mother's name?

ROBERT

I did.

JEROME

You didn't even know her. Sorry! That was rude.

(ROBERT makes an effort.)

ROBERT

I heard you had a surgery. Colon.

JEROME

Yes.

ROBERT

How'd that go?

JEROME

"How'd that go?"

ROBERT

I mean, shit, you know what I mean.

JEROME
They took out my colon, Robert.

ROBERT
But you're okay.

JEROME
Three years now, cancer free. Power of prayer.

ROBERT
Power of surgery, Jerry.

JEROME
You can't even allow for the possibility?

ROBERT
Of the impossible? No.

JEROME
Here we go.

ROBERT
Occam's Razor, baby.

JEROME
The way you think--!

ROBERT
We've argued this.

JEROME
So dark.

ROBERT
And now you're fine.

JEROME
I should be six feet under, Robert.

ROBERT
You'll get there, what's the rush?

JEROME
You should have come to see me. Asshole.

ROBERT
I wanted to, but I --

JEROME
— had to, what? Wash your hair?

ROBERT
You had the thing done at Trinity.

JEROME
Where Mom died? Robert—-!

ROBERT
Let it go.

JEROME
She asked for you, you know.

ROBERT
She did not.

JEROME
She wanted you to have her cross.

ROBERT
Mom did not ask for me on her deathbed, she didn't even know who I was.

JEROME
She had moments.

ROBERT
She was gone months before...

JEROME
You can't say it, can you?
(To MILA.)
"I apologize." He can't say it.

ROBERT
(To MILA.)
You got a brother?

MILA
One.

ROBERT
There were three of us.

JEROME
Two! What "three"?

ROBERT

Me, you and Jesus. Jesus was the favorite.

JEROME

That's not the reason you left.

ROBERT

Why are you in this fight?

JEROME

You nervous?

ROBERT

You can't win. These are Science Hearings.

JEROME

I won a year ago.

ROBERT

Oh, when you got the State to change the Science Standards. Well of course you won, you spent five years stacking the State Board with Creationists. But most of them have been voted out now so you're going to have to come up with some actual arguments this time.

JEROME

I have them.

ROBERT

I've read your book. You don't. I've got you!

JEROME

"In his overweening pride he has broken himself by endeavoring to control rather than submit."

ROBERT

Proverbs?

JEROME

Gandalf.

(ROBERT is amused.)

ROBERT

You can't goad me into shouting, like you did with Teddy back there.

JEROME

I'll win.

ROBERT

I'm going to make mincemeat out of you.

JEROME

Is that so?

MILA

What is mincemeat?

ROBERT

Nobody knows.

JEROME

Fruit and sugar! Some big brain.

ROBERT

It's science! Why are you even playing in this ballpark?

JEROME

It's what you've left us! You've bled God out of government, schools, even churches! You know Our Lady of Mercy has gone non-denominational?

ROBERT

Really?

(They keep directing some of their complaints and barbs towards MILA, as if they're looking for someone to be on their side. MILA regards all this with some humor. They fascinate her.)

JEROME

The church we grew up in. Barely a word about Christ, anymore. God forbid we should offend anyone by mentioning Jesus. They promote a willful ignorance of scripture, reduced the Revealed Word of God to trite platitudes about positivity, and cancelled the Folk Mass for Hot Yoga.

ROBERT

Poor Jehovah. You've got to pity him, Mila. He used to be this all-powerful Creator of the Universe and we've whittled him down to an inconsequential cog in the gears of Spacetime.

JEROME

That's God in your image. You've shrunk him. Every time we try to raise him up he uses another law to knock him down. And we have to change our strategy again.

ROBERT

(To MILA.)

Hot Yoga?

MILA

It's a lot of sweating.

JEROME

This is what you've left us! Not the invigorating, soul-saving, spirit-lifting body and blood of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, but the stale, brittle day old bread of Secularism. This is the ballpark you've left for me to work in — Science. We've had to adapt!

ROBERT

You mean evolve?

JEROME

Yes. We've had to evolve. Happy?

ROBERT

I'm getting there.

JEROME

No you're not. You won't get there until you've cleansed the world of theology.

ROBERT

And Influencers. Two things that gotta' go! I am so going to beat you.

JEROME

You have no empirical evidence to support that supposition. You must be operating on Faith.

(They both share a wry smile at that.)

MILA

I wish I were still recording.

JEROME

And jealousy of Jesus wasn't the reason you didn't come to see Mom. Like any atheist you're afraid of death. The nothingness, the black void you think awaits you.

ROBERT

Jerome, the only void I'm afraid of is the one between the covers of your book.

JEROME

Your own mother. You couldn't say goodbye?

ROBERT

It was a long goodbye, Jerry. A very long goodbye.

JEROME

Say you're sorry. You can at least do that.

ROBERT

She didn't have to die, Jerry. She wouldn't have if weren't for people who think like you! I'm going win.

JEROME

Says you!

MILA

Win what?

ROBERT

At the Science Hearings in December.

MILA

Really? Against the same kind of cretins who came up with this list of banned books?

ROBERT

Mostly.

MILA

What's the point?

ROBERT

Point?

MILA

These people, they've won. It's a lost cause.

ROBERT

"Lost causes are the only ones worth fighting for." Clarence Darrow. Or Jimmy Stewart. I forget who.

JEROME

Mr. Smith Goes To Washington.

ROBERT

That's it!

JEROME

Immolation of an entire faith is not a cause, Robby — it's a Pogrom.

ROBERT

(Shocked.)

That's an outrageous thing to —

JEROME

I'm going to see what's keeping them.

(JEROME exits into the hallway.)

ROBERT

(To MILA.)

Mr. Smith Goes To Washington!

MILA

To do what?

ROBERT

(Astonished.)

Are you kidding ..? I'm getting old. Who are you?

MILA

Mila Young. Secretary.

ROBERT

Pleasure. Robert. It's a movie.

MILA

I think a lost cause is a lost cause. It's right there in the name. Look at this!

(She shows him the garbage can full of books, and the list of banned books from which she's working.)

ROBERT

What is this?

MILA

They're banning books! They're actually banning books! I'm doing this in front of them to, I don't know, make it real. Look at this! *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

(She hands him the banned book list.)

ROBERT

Yes, I've seen this list.

MILA

A biography of Sojourner Truth. They're literally throwing away the truth.

ROBERT

What happened here, exactly? I mean, it's in the news. But what exactly..?

MILA

The teacher, Miss Carson, was in here discussing the Christ story as a literary example of the myth of the dying God and the next day a parent, Mr. McKinney, comes in here with a gun and..!

(It's too much for MILA to go on. ROBERT gestures that it's okay, to "let it go", that there is no need to describe the violent act.)

MILA (Continued)

They asked him why he did it and he said, "Because she told my kid God is dead!" Some people are blaming the Bible Literacy class. The thing is, God had nothing to do with this. The man had mental issues. Now we're all over the news. Social media is more dystopian than usual. You picked one hell of a lost cause.

(MILA crumples the list and tosses it into the can, giving up.)

ROBERT

I know what you're going through. I grew up during Watergate, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, cities burning, four dead in Ohio, disco and the breakup of the Beatles, so, yeah, I know what it is to say "What's the point? Fuck all!" Recently, in fact. I was actually about to cancel my appearance at the upcoming Science Hearings because — I'm tired. Tired of fighting against people's darker angels. But I got Teddy's email about your teacher and I thought, well, small town, small board, maybe if I can convince them of something. I had a teacher, ran the debate team in high school, who believed in the power of a well reasoned argument, that it could change minds. So, here I am.

(Beat)

"In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart."

MILA

Mr. Smith?

ROBERT

Anne Frank. And don't kid yourself, Mila, you're a Lost Causer, too.

MILA

No.

ROBERT

Every lost cause is about preserving the truth, and isn't that what you're trying to do here? You're throwing these books away in front of the Board to shame them into action, aren't you? Why else are doing it?

MILA

I'm sassy.

ROBERT

Face it, you're a Lost Causer.

MILA

Am I?

ROBERT

Afraid so.

MILA

Shit.

(JEROME, FRAN, GORDON, SHEILA and AVA re-enter.)

SHEILA

We've convinced the band to hold off practicing for about an hour.

GORDON

Let's vote.

(TEDDY enters.)

TEDDY

Ava—?

JEROME

(To AVA.)

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

(AVA shows some mercy and faces TEDDY.)

TEDDY

Ava, I apologize. My heart breaks for Payton. I understand your praying over him, I do. I'll go to Church, with you both. I'm with you. But, I'd also like to think about a doctor of some kind. Is that something we can talk about?

(Everyone is surprised to hear TEDDY apologize so sincerely. AVA is moved, but cautious.)

AVA

Be open.

TEDDY

I'll try. And therapy?

AVA

We can talk. No sledgehammers.

TEDDY

Deal.

AVA

Deal.

(AVA and TEDDY have come to some sort of rapprochement. AVA indicates that he should say something to SHEILA.)

TEDDY

What about you, you fucking Nazi?

AVA

Teddy...

TEDDY

Right! Sorry, Gordon. I was out of line. I apologize. Can we start over?

FRAN

Alright. But watch your language, fresh mouth.

SHEILA

Gordon?

GORDON

What?

SHEILA

Kiss and make up.

GORDON

Don't be gross.

SHEILA

Just do it.

GORDON

Okay, fine, you're forgiven. We're pals. Let's get together for some avocado toast. Okay? We're good.

TEDDY

Okay. So. Then. Let's share. Why this curriculum? Cards on the table. Really. Fran?

FRAN

I like the part that lets us teach more of our beliefs. Without restriction. They shouldn't be able to tell us—! You all know my daughter, Judith. Judy. She's looking at Stanford. So proud. A freshman, but she's looking ahead. She's so smart, so beautiful. Ten years ago Zeke, my husband, you know Zeke, the life of the party! He got a little — he drank more than he should and there was an incident. Judy was five and she, this is so silly, she slipped on the patio and went into the pool, and he grabbed her out, like you're supposed to! Like you should! And he dislocated her shoulder. Anyway somebody from the State did an assessment, this woman, and she--! They took her away. We got her back! But for a month--! It was an accident! He saved her life! And they took her! They oughtn't have been able to do that. They oughtn't be able to tell people what to do with their children. It's not right! If we want to raise them with our values--! They're our children, not theirs! I'm fine. I'm fine. Nothing to see here!

TEDDY

I'm sorry. I didn't know.

(FRAN retreats a bit. TEDDY looks to SHEILA, who decides to be frank.)

SHEILA

If we're being honest. I have long believed that we are a Christian nation founded on Christian principles. I joined the local School Board to make sure that those principles are respected.

TEDDY

What about Church and State?

SHEILA

Mosaic Law is older than The Constitution.

TEDDY

Mosaic—?

SHEILA

The Laws of Moses. I'm trying to be open here. I believe--! God says in Genesis, "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it--*"

ROBERT

You're a Dominionist!

TEDDY

A what?

ROBERT

Be fruitful, multiply, subdue the Earth and have Dominion over everything, right?

SHEILA

We are stewards of the Earth--!

ROBERT

Oh I should just go home, now! A Dominionist! I can understand that woman, Mrs. Walker. Government overreach! I understand that! But Dominion Theology?

TEDDY

But, wait, all that stuff in Genesis about dominion, that was, if I remember this right, wasn't that, honey, wasn't that about giving names to things—?

AVA

Dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air—

TEDDY

Animals! Naming animals and herding them.

AVA

--and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

TEDDY

Dominion over animals! Not running for the Garden of Eden School Board.

JEROME

And climbing Mountains.

GORDON

Mountains?

ROBERT

There are seven Mountains to control before Christ's return. Is that right?

GORDON

What mountains?

JEROME

Peaks of government, media, art, religion, family, business, and...

SHEILA

Education.

ROBERT

Christian domination.

JEROME

(Correcting)

Christian *values*, over all.

GORDON

Look I'm as Christian as the next person--!

(Looking to SHEILA.)

Well, apparently not. But I've read my Bible and I don't remember God saying, "*Go forth and administrate.*"

SHEILA

This is why I don't talk about it. Ridicule like that!

GORDON

I'm sorry!

SHEILA

That's why I'm voting.

GORDON

But the way you take the Lord's name in vain!

SHEILA

The Lord's a big boy. He has bigger fish to fry for the multitude.

ROBERT

(To JEROME.)

You should move here.

TEDDY

(To AVA.)

Did you know about her?

AVA

Be open.

TEDDY

Okay, so, I'm just going to shut up about all that because I want to stay married. Thank you for that, Sheila, and good luck with world domination. So? Gordon?

GORDON

I'm voting because of the political issue, plain and simple. If ID is legal, if that's what they say and that's what's in this book, then that's the law of the land! And if at the same time it gets these media muckrakers off our backs then I'm voting for it. Is that clear enough?

(Just then a Police siren is heard outside, and the rising roar of a gathering crowd. MILA looks out the window.)

GORDON (Continued)

What is it?

MILA

They found us.

GORDON

The protestors?

MILA

And the media. CNN's out there. Fox. Channel 9. Everybody!

GORDON

Lock the door!

MILA

Hold the barbed wire, the police are setting up a perimeter.

GORDON

How did they find us?

MILA

Someone must have spotted your cars.

GORDON

Let's announce! Get it over with.

FRAN

Are we ready?

SHEILA

We just said why we're voting.

(GORDON, SHEILA and FRAN move to leave.)

ROBERT

Hold on! You can't vote yet.

GORDON

You don't have a voice here.

JEROME

You've lost this round, Robert.

ROBERT

I didn't hear a bell. You all say you're for voting for this class because the new State Standards make it legal. But in two months it might not be. Have you thought about that?

GORDON

That's true. Mr. King, at the Science Hearings in December, if the State Board changes the Standards back..? What then? Will this book hold water?

ROBERT

It won't.

JEROME

It may.

SHEILA

Gordon, let's go!

GORDON

Wait a minute! If we vote in this curriculum now and in two months it's illegal we'll look like idiots.

ROBERT

You have to wait!

FRAN
Until December?

SHEILA
They want answers now!

GORDON
I wish I knew which way the State was thinking.

SHEILA
We can't possibly know what's going to happen in two months.

(TEDDY has a brilliant idea.)

TEDDY
So have the Hearings now!

SHEILA
What?

TEDDY
Don't wait for December. I don't mean the real Hearings, but our own Hearings. You've got the two heavy hitters right here. Why wait 'til December?

(MILA and AVA jump on this.)

AVA
Yes! Have the Hearings now!

(TEDDY and AVA realize they're on the same page about something.)

GORDON
Hold on! You mean -- ?

MILA
You need to vote on the curriculum —

TEDDY
You're not sure how the wind will blow in December —

AVA
(Gesturing to ROBERT and JEROME.)
But they do! You could have your own Hearings.

MILA
Today!

AVA
 What do you think, Sheila?

SHEILA
 The media is out there!

GORDON
 I don't really have a clear idea of what's happening at the State level, do you? If they can explain it — !

ROBERT
 We can!

JEROME
 Robert, let them go!

SHEILA
 So we have a trial?

MILA
 Not a trial.

TEDDY
 A Hearing.

MILA
 A mock Hearing.

FRAN
 I think we should do it! Oh! We could be the Judges!

AVA
 I think it's a brilliant idea.

TEDDY
 (To ROBERT.)
 Would you do it?

ROBERT
 Hell yes.

AVA
 Mr. King?

JEROME
 We don't have our witnesses, our experts --

ROBERT
 You know everything your people are going to say, don't you?

MILA

We can set up a bench, a witness chair, Defense here, Prosecution there --

(MILA starts arranging the room's chairs and table for a Hearing.
TEDDY and AVA help.)

SHEILA

Wait! Wait! Who's Prosecuting what?

GORDON

Defending, what?

MILA

Wrong terms! Advocates! They're advocates. For and against.

SHEILA

For and against what?

GORDON

And then we vote on what, exactly?

ROBERT

On whether or not the State School Board should redefine Science.

GORDON

Is that what they're doing?

MILA

See? You don't know the whole story!

FRAN

What does it matter? We're such a small school.

ROBERT

But you're not, Fran. You've got reporters from all over the country here! However you vote they'll report it!

GORDON

This is true.

ROBERT

You're the tip of the spear. You three people. What you do here, this is what the rest of the State will be looking at.

JEROME

Then the country.

ROBERT

Butterfly effect!

JEROME

He's right. How you three vote could change science in this country.

GORDON

(To SHEILA)

What do you think?

ROBERT

As you go, so goes the nation!

SHEILA

(Realizing)

It could, couldn't it?

FRAN

Yay, fellow Judges!

ROBERT

But I want a fair shake, Miss Fremont! You've got to put aside the Dominion stuff.

SHEILA

I'll keep an open mind.

GORDON

Alright, let's have a trial.

MILA

Not a trial.

TEDDY

Yes!

AVA

Judges over there!

(SHEILA, GORDON and FRAN take their places behind a desk.
The room is now set up like a court of law. MILA acts as "Bailiff".)

ROBERT

(To JEROME.)

May the best man win.

JEROME

I will, thanks. Where do we go?

ROBERT

(To JEROME.)

You're defending, you're over there.

(JEROME takes his place as “Defense Attorney”. ROBERT moves to the “Prosecutor’s” side of the room.)

GORDON

Okay. Everybody ready?

TEDDY

Court is in session!

MILA

Not a court. All rise!

(Everyone stands.)

GORDON

I declare the Rockland County School Board Science Hearings that may forever change the direction of education in this country — open! Let’s begin!

(Blackout.)

(End of Act One.)

ACT TWO

AT RISE: Immediately after the end of Act One. Everyone is still standing in the same places, ready for the mock hearing to begin.

MILA

And be seated!

(Everyone sits.)

GORDON

Mr. King, would you like to tell us what *Total Science* is all about?

JEROME

Certainly.

ROBERT

I object.

GORDON

We just started!

ROBERT

Your honors, if I may call you that?

FRAN

Because we're judges!

ROBERT

Everything hinges on the Science Standards, the old ones versus the new ones. So before we get into the glories of my esteemed colleague's book *Total --*

(ROBERT acts like he's forgotten there rest of the title.)

JEROME

Science.

ROBERT

-- *Science*, right, we should look at them. Has anyone here actually read the Standards?

FRAN

Those things are always so wordy.

GORDON

Same word soup every year.

ROBERT
Has anybody read them?

AVA
(Reluctantly.)
I have.

ROBERT
Then I humbly ask that I be allowed to question Mrs. Lee.

JEROME
Objection. Ava is not a scientific expert.

ROBERT
What do you do for a living, Mrs. Lee?

AVA
I'm a book editor.

ROBERT
She's an expert on language! Take the stand, Mrs. Lee!

(JEROME nods his assent. AVA is nervous.)

TEDDY
(To AVA.)
Go ahead. I support you.

(AVA takes a seat before the group in the "Witness Chair" they created.)

GORDON
Alright, Mr. Bell, your witness, I guess.

(ROBERT pulls out some papers from a bag.)

ROBERT
Thank you. I have a copy of the State Science Standards here...

GORDON
Why do you have those?

ROBERT
Research for the Hearings in December. These are the new Science Standards put in place one year ago. Would you read them please? Out loud?

AVA
All of it?

ROBERT

The first sentence.

AVA

(Reading)

“Science is a systematic method of continuing investigation that uses observations, hypothesis, testing, measurement, experimentation, logical argument and theory building to lead to more adequate explanations of phenomena.”

ROBERT

Thank you.

FRAN

Is that it?

GORDON

That’s science right there. That’s the ball game.

ROBERT

Mrs. Lee, How did you come to the conclusion that this definition now allows for the teaching of Intelligent Design?

AVA

Well, Mr. King reached out to some of the parents and he said it was okay now.

ROBERT

Well, he probably worked on the Standards.

GORDON

They sound fine to me!

ROBERT

Do you see anything unusual about the wording in these new Standards?

AVA

No.

ROBERT

Nothing occurs to you?

AVA

Should something occur to me?

ROBERT

Would it surprise you to learn that the new Standards you’re holding in your hand are exactly the same as the old Standards?

AVA

Are they?

ROBERT

It's true. These Standards are exactly the same, except for one word.

AVA

Which one?

ROBERT

Oh it's not there.

GORDON

Mr. Bell -- !

ROBERT

I'm almost at it, your Honor! You see the different word isn't something that was placed there in the new Standards. No. It's just a word that was removed from the old Standards. I have a copy of the old Standards right here. Would you read the first sentence, please?

(ROBERT hands her another piece of paper, which she reads.)

AVA

"Science is a systematic method of continuing investigation that uses observations, hypothesis, testing, measurement, experimentation, logical argument and theory building to lead to more adequate explanations of *natural* phenomena."

ROBERT

Do you see the difference now?

AVA

In the new Standards the word "natural" has been removed.

TEDDY

Ah-hah!

(Catching himself.)

I'm shutting up.

AVA

The point is there's nothing here that doesn't allow Intelligent Design.

ROBERT

That's just the point.

AVA

I don't mean to be rude, but, you're very cryptic.

ROBERT

Don't you think the removal of the word "natural" changes what science is?

AVA

It broadens it.

ROBERT

(To the “Judges”)

You see what’s happening? In the 1980s the Supreme Court ruled that Intelligent Design didn’t meet the definition of science. So what are school boards doing? They’re changing the definition of science. They’ve “broadened” it. You understand? You remove the word “natural” and now science can examine phenomena beyond what is natural.

(To AVA)

Correct?

AVA

Yes.

ROBERT

Other than natural? Apart from natural? Above and beyond natural?

AVA

Yes.

ROBERT

I understand Latin isn’t taught much these days but isn’t there a word, in Latin, that means all those things? Apart from? More than? Above and beyond?

AVA

Yes.

ROBERT

And what is that Latin word?

AVA

“Super.”

(Everyone sees where this is going.)

ROBERT

So, *Super* natural.

GORDON

Are you saying that science classrooms can now teach about — what?

ROBERT

Intelligent Design. But also, Numerology, Phrenology, Astrology, Telekinesis, a pop quiz on your grandmother’s tea leaves — all fair game now. Just by leaving out this one little word teachers in your state can now lecture, test and grade a child’s understanding of the supernatural. Not in a Humanities class, like Bible Literacy, but in a Science classroom.

FRAN

But teachers wouldn't do that, would they?

GORDON

(To SHEILA.)

Did you know about this?

SHEILA

Not exactly.

ROBERT

But in December, they're thinking of putting the word back. If they do that, Ava, could this book, could *Total Science*, still be used in schools?

AVA

Probably not. But it should!

ROBERT

Your witness!

JEROME

Thank you, Mr. Bell.

ROBERT

You're welcome, Mr. King.

JEROME

Mila, do we have a dictionary?

MILA

We do.

(MILA takes a dictionary off the classroom library shelf and hands it to JEROME.)

JEROME

Thank you, my girl.

MILA

Woman.

JEROME

Ava, would you kindly read to the court—

MILA

Not a court.

JEROME

Would you kindly read to us the definition of the word "Supernatural". There are several, but the one I'm looking for is usually the last.

AVA

"Supernatural. Noun. Definition 2B. Attributed to an invisible agent."

JEROME

An invisible agent. I understand my opponent's prejudice of the word, "Supernatural" and its connotation of the occult, but it is this definition, that of invisible agents, that applies to my curriculum.

TEDDY

How do you examine something invisible?

JEROME

Microbes are invisible. Electrons. Radio waves. Do you deny existence of radio?

TEDDY

Most people do.

FRAN

Mr. King, I'm so sorry to interrupt, but what is the difference between the occult or God and an invisible agent? Could you explain that to me? I'm fascinated.

JEROME

Let's say a science teacher plants some seeds in a petri dish hoping they'll grow. Now, suppose they hypothesize that the seeds are made to grow, not by water or soil or minerals, but by an invisible agent.

FRAN

Like what?

ROBERT

Like angels?

JEROME

Something, unknown, something beyond nature.

FRAN

How do you test for Angels? Sounds like one of those TV shows where they look for ghosts in old houses! We love those shows.

ROBERT

You can't. That's the point, the supernatural is untestable.

JEROME

Of course it is!

FRAN

In those TV shows they have cameras and recording equipment.

JEROME

Exactly!

ROBERT

That's ridiculous!

JEROME

Are you saying you can't set up cameras?

ROBERT

You can. But they're only going to see natural phenomena.

JEROME

The point is that you can set up experiments, which is science. But let's make something clear. Ava, as an expert in language, would you interpret these new Standards to say that Science teachers *must* allow for the examination of the supernatural?

AVA

No, it doesn't require it.

JEROME

It is not required.

ROBERT

But it is likely.

JEROME

Thank you, Ava. You are excused.

ROBERT

Follow up!

AVA

(Getting nervous.)

I didn't know I'd be getting this much attention.

ROBERT

Ava, can you think of any reason why the word "natural" was removed from the old Standards?

JEROME

Objection. How can the witness possibly know what was in the minds of the State School Board over a year ago?

ROBERT

Mrs. Lee is called as an expert on parsing language, I think her opinion is valid, vital and verbose.

JEROME

Verbose?

ROBERT

I was trying to think of another "V" word.

JEROME

Your honors--

ROBERT

Aliteration.

JEROME

Your honors--

GORDON

Let's hear where he's going.

FRAN

She is the expert.

GORDON

So. Right. Objection overruled.

FRAN

This is fun! You're doing so well, Ava!

(AVA is feeling stressed.)

AVA

I feel like I'm the one being experimented on.

ROBERT

Ava?

AVA

Could you repeat the question?

TEDDY

Go easy on her, Bell.

ROBERT

Let me be clear. Can you think of any reason why the word "natural" was removed from the old Standards other than it was because of the direct intention of the six

Creationist members of last year's State School Board to find a legal way to introduce Intelligent Design into the science curriculums of the State?

AVA

I can't think.

JEROME

And what if that was their intention?

ROBERT

It's prejudicial towards Intelligent Design! It shows intent.

(To AVA)

Am I right?

AVA

I don't know.

ROBERT

Take out the word "natural" it's not science anymore, it's philosophy!

(TEDDY is getting worried for AVA)

TEDDY

Is she done?

FRAN

(Having fun being a Judge.)

Order! Order!

ROBERT

This change was about forcing upon the public the personal religious convictions of six people on the State Board. Isn't that right, Ava?

AVA

Yes. But..!

JEROME

This isn't about religion!

ROBERT

Oh for crying —! A teacher was shot in the face because of religion!

TEDDY

(Worried for AVA's nerves.)

Mr. Bell —

ROBERT

Her blood spilling out all over children!

Mr. Bell! TEDDY

JEROME
This is about updating archaic definitions of our institutions. It's not about religion!

ROBERT
Yes it!
(To AVA.)
Isn't it? Isn't it?

AVA
Yes it is! But I don't think — !

ROBERT
There you go!

AVA
Wait!

ROBERT
No more questions!

SHEILA
Hold on!

FRAN
Order in the Court!

MILA
Not a Court.

AVA
Wait a minute!

ROBERT
You're done! Sit down!

TEDDY
BELL!

AVA
Of course it's about religion! What's wrong with that? Am I supposed to be ashamed? What else is me faith for, but to guide me? You're led by your convictions, aren't you, Mr. Bell? Why not the school board? Why not me? Why not everybody? Yes, a woman was shot. I know a woman was shot! Don't you think I know that? Right next to my son! But that man wasn't moved by God, he was sent by the Devil! The more Godless we become the more evil! That's what happened! That's what's happening

everywhere! And we have to do something! No one is doing anything! Why aren't you doing anything?

(TEDDY rises and holds AVA in his arms.)

TEDDY

I'm taking her home.

AVA

(To the room.)

Be careful what you do in here.

(TEDDY and AVA exit, together. ROBERT is a little ashamed that he got so worked up, but he shakes it off.)

JEROME

Maybe we should end this..?

GORDON

Let's finish this. Mr. Bell, call your next witness.

FRAN

Who's left?

(ROBERT seems willing to let it all go. But one look to MILA, who gives him a reassuring glances, convinces him to go on.)

ROBERT

I call to the stand an expert on the *Total Science* curriculum, Mr. Jerome King.

JEROME

Thank you, Robby, but when it's my turn to talk I'll explain myself just fine.

ROBERT

I don't really want you, I want all your witnesses. All the people you're going to call at the Science Hearings in December up at the State Capital. I want to hear from them.

JEROME

You want me to pretend to be all—?

ROBERT

You know what they're all going to say. Come on. We're out of side quests, let's go right to the Boss Battle.

(JEROME takes the stand.)

JEROME

Mila, do we have a Bible?

(MILA checks a shelf.)

MILA

We have thirty-three Bibles. You've got your got English Standard, King James, New International, Baby's First Bible...

JEROME

Any one will do. Swear me in.

(MILA brings over a Bible from the library shelf. JEROME puts his left hand on the Bible and holds up his right hand to swear.)

JEROME (Continued)

I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me, God.

ROBERT

Nicely done.

JEROME

Thank you.

ROBERT

Would you all please provide your credentials to the Board?

JEROME

I'm pretending to be everybody on my witness list, is that it?

ROBERT

That's right. Rogues Gallery. Just the salient points.

JEROME

Let's see, one of me has a Ph.D. in nutritional biochemistry. Another me has a Ph.D in chemistry with a post doctoral degree in history from Brandeis. Another me is --

GORDON

Hold on! Mr. Bell, we don't have the expertise or the time for this! You've got to keep this simple, please. If you start bringing out microscopes and--

ROBERT

The book you've voting on is called *Total Science*. You've got to look at a couple of slides.

FRAN

I was never good at Science. Or trigonometry, but who needs trigonometry? Rocket scientists? Do they use that?

GORDON

Just a couple of examples. We'll get the idea.

JEROME

Wouldn't this be easier if I were just myself?

ROBERT

Fine.

JEROME

You already have a mocking tone in your voice.

ROBERT

I'm having that looked at.

(ROBERT opens the *Total Science* textbook.)

ROBERT (Continued)

Let's look at your book. Page three. In the introduction, you mention that students will be studying something called Theistic Science.

JEROME

And on page two you'll see that students will first be covering Materialistic Science, including Evolution. The curriculum looks at all options, not just one like the current curriculum.

ROBERT

Could you tell us, what is Theistic Science?

GORDON

Just the bullet points, please.

FRAN

(Aside.)

Don't say "bullet"!

JEROME

It's a lot to go into.

ROBERT

You break it down here.

(Reading.)

"Supposition: Designer."

JEROME

Simple, existence contains elements that are only explainable by a Designer, of some sort, who works beyond the physical laws we can see.

ROBERT

Okay, so we assume there's a Designer, because a platypus didn't just evolve, it's too weird. That's what you're saying. Somebody with a sense of humor, apparently, had to make that. Right?

JEROME

Close enough.

ROBERT

Okay. Now you have here a descriptive list of what this Designer must be like. He's benevolent—

MILA

Or she.

ROBERT

Or they. Let's use "they". They are benevolent, they can alter physical laws and they reward or punish us, depending on our behavior. That's your Designer.

JEROME

That is a simplified —

ROBERT

Yeah, but basically we have a friendly magical person who's very judgey. You know what that sounds like?

JEROME

What?

ROBERT

Santa Claus.

JEROME

(Bemused.)

Robby, Robby, Robby...

ROBERT

What? He's benevolent, all those presents, right? He flies around the world in one night, that's definitely bending physical laws. And he's very judgey with that list he's checking twice, going to find out who's naughty and nice.

FRAN

Oh this is silly.

ROBERT

By your own definition, the Intelligent Designer of Heaven and Earth and all the galaxies and stars in the Universe, could be a fat man in boots climbing down my chimney.

JEROME

How droll.

GORDON

Mr. Bell..!

ROBERT

You've introduced the possibility of a whole new religion.

JEROME

I object!

ROBERT

The Elves are the Apostles. The Reindeer Saints!

GORDON

On what grounds?

JEROME

Mockery.

ROBERT

Our Father, who art in the North Pole, jolly be Thy name! Ho-Ho-Hosanna!

SHEILA

Mr. Bell, if you're not going to take this seriously--!

GORDON

Objection sustained!

JEROME

I could do the same thing with Evolution, twist things around and prove that humans descended from the Tooth Fairy.

ROBERT

Except you can't, Jerome, because Evolution has actual science to back it up.

JEROME

So does this, you just ignore it so you can workshop your streaming comedy special. If you look at the actual science--!

ROBERT

You have no peer reviewed studies anywhere to support — !

JEROME

The science is new. A peer review is ongoing.

ROBERT

It's not new, it's the same old desert sky king mythology dressed up as new. You're putting lipstick on Jehovah.

GORDON

The objection is sustained. And I didn't appreciate that last comment, Mr. Bell.

ROBERT

Alright!

(Changing tack.)

In your book, on page ten, you say that, wait a minute, I want to get the wording right, here it is--

(Reading.)

"Limiting science to only finding natural causes implies Naturalism itself."

JEROME

That's correct.

GORDON

We covered this, didn't we?

ROBERT

Not exactly. We're talking about Naturalism now, not nature.

GORDON

What's the difference?

JEROME

Naturalism is science that specifically rejects a deity.

ROBERT

Science doesn't say you can't believe in God or think that God made the little green apples. It's a methodology for examining the natural world. Natural!

JEROME

When you limit that method to examining only natural causes you are, in fact, adopting a philosophy of Naturalism, of Godlessness. It's a prejudicial position, and it's unfair.

FRAN

So a Naturalist is--

JEROME

(Re ROBERT.)

This reprobate. He doesn't just advocate for rationality, he rejects God outright.

SHEILA

Is that true?

ROBERT

My personal philosophy is not on trial here--!

MILA

Not a trial.

ROBERT

You can't just change the definition of science.

JEROME

Science, the way you define it, has taken us far, but is stymied by the most essential questions of man.

MILA

(Aside.)

And women.

JEROME

Is there any inquiry *more* essential than the intrinsic wonder of existence? Is there any venture more profound than the contemplation of the mysterious?

ROBERT

No.

JEROME

Then we agree!

ROBERT

I agree that we want to know who we are — !

JEROME

And that science, as you define it, cannot answer these most important questions?

ROBERT

Expecting science to examine the un-examinable is like trying to train a telescope at wisdom. Where do you point it? How do you experiment upon a notion? How do you test an apprehension? How do you model felicity? You're asking science to quantify the unquantifiable. To systemize an abstraction. It's not possible.

JEROME

Not only is it possible, it's necessary. Sacred truths about existence are essential for salvation. For the sake of our souls we must scientifically examine the question of a Designer.

ROBERT

With what methodology, exactly? No more Invisible Agents now! And use the language of Science, not the Conclave. I dare you.

JEROME

Physics and Cosmology.

ROBERT
Okay...

JEROME
These are sciences that examine whether or not the Universe has a beginning.

ROBERT
True.

JEROME
And if the Universe has a beginning that implies a causative power.

ROBERT
(Seeing where he's going.)
The Prime Mover argument.

JEROME
Aristotle!

ROBERT
That's where you lose me.

GORDON
Aristotle now!

JEROME
The universe is in a constant state of movement and change, implying that someone had to set it all in motion. An Unmoved Mover.

ROBERT
Debunked! If you permit an Unmoved Mover then you falsify your premise that everything needs a Mover!

JEROME
But St. Thomas Aquinas argues that —

GORDON
Gentlemen! It's too much Inside Baseball.

FRAN
I'm getting lost.

GORDON
Keep it simple, please.

(ROBERT is getting frustrated, trying to land on a persuasive argument.)

ROBERT

Let's examine your theistic science. Um, I'm trying to find something easy.

(ROBERT starts flipping through the textbook.)

JEROME

Let's talk Irreducible Complexity.

ROBERT

That's all we ever talk about anymore. Never our feelings.

JEROME

Alright, we can try--

ROBERT

Okay, okay. I remember this, Irreducible Complexity.

FRAN

That sounds very science-y.

ROBERT

We'll keep it simple. One of the objections to Intelligent Design is that it isn't falsifiable. But you say it is because you can test for--

JEROME

Irreducible complexity.

GORDON

I'm going to kick myself for asking but what is, whatever it is you just said?

JEROME

Evolution says that things like wings and eyes are all the product of changes over time. But they all had to start somewhere. There's the example of the bacterium flagellum.

FRAN

A bacteria, what?

JEROME

Flagellum.

MILA

Oh I know what that it is! It's the little strings, or little flipper-things that bacteria use to swim around, right?

SHEILA

Very good, Mila. And where did you learn that?

MILA

In public school, your Majesty.

GORDON

What the hell?

SHEILA

Private joke. Go on, Mr. King.

JEROME

A Professor Behe posits that if you take a bacterium without a flagellum, without flipper-things, and grow it for ten thousand generations and it develops a flagellum, well, then, there is your disproof of ID. Clearly Evolution was at work on what ID thought was something that was irreducibly complex. ID is therefore falsifiable, is it not?

ROBERT

No, because if I say, "Ah-hah! Look Evolution produced a flipper-thingy" you could still just as easily say, "No, no! God did it!" So it's not falsifiable, according to your assertion that a Designer can anything he wants at any time he wants. And if ID is not falsifiable--

GORDON

Hold on! Flag on the field! Falsi-what?

ROBERT

A Theory isn't scientific unless you can come up with an experiment to test whether it's true or false.

(ROBERT picks up a book.)

ROBERT (Continued)

Let's say I have a Theory of Gravity that says that says things fall up. to the sky. I can test if that Theory is false by letting go of this book.

(He lets go. The book falls.)

ROBERT (Continued)

Look at that, the Theory is false. It went down not up. I just falsified the Theory. That's science.

MILA

What book is that?

ROBERT

The Grapes of Wrath.

(Another one on the list. MILA takes the book and tosses it in the trash. SHEILA sighs.)

ROBERT (Continued)

But if you can claim that an Intelligent Designer can do anything magical, if he can, say, make a book fall up, then nothing that Designer does can ever be falsifiable. Therefore anything involving an Intelligent Designer is not science.

JEROME

But you agree that the flagellum is irreducibly complex?

ROBERT

No, I don't.

JEROME

Then explain how it evolved.

ROBERT

I don't know, Jerome. I'm not a biologist.

JEROME

Science doesn't know!

ROBERT

I'm sure Science knows—!

JEROME

Is this going the way you thought it would?

ROBERT

(In a mocking voice)

"Is this going the way you thought it would?"

(There is the sound of an approaching helicopter. MILA checks out the scene through the window. FRAN joins her.)

MILA

Oh my God, there's a helicopter.

ROBERT

Have I made my point?

SHEILA

We have to move this along.

ROBERT

Have I made my point?

GORDON

You've made your point.

SHEILA

(Objecting.)

Gordon..!

GORDON

Well, he has.

SHEILA

Fran?

FRAN

(Unsure of where she stands.)

It's so much to take in. I've never even seen a helicopter.

(JEROME retakes his seat in the Witness Chair.)

JEROME

Wait a minute! When do I get to throw darts at you?

ROBERT

I'm not testifying. I'm Counsel!

JEROME

So am I!

ROBERT

Not right now. Right now you're a bunch of cherry-picked Creationists in Spirit Halloween scientist costumes.

JEROME

I object!

ROBERT

Witnesses cannot object.

(JEROME steps out of the witness chair.)

JEROME

I'm back to being a lawyer now! I object, your honors!

SHEILA

On what grounds? Fran!

(SHEILA waves FRAN away from the windows and back over to her seat with the "Judges".)

JEROME

How come he doesn't have to play ventriloquist for all the atheistic superior Evolutionists he'll be calling in December?

ROBERT

Because there won't be any witnesses.

JEROME

What?

ROBERT

I won't be calling any.

GORDON

What?

ROBERT

I won't be calling any Scientists at the Science Hearings in December.

JEROME

What kind of Kangaroo Court do you think—?

ROBERT

This is your marsupial, not mine.

MILA

Not a marsupial.

ROBERT

No reputable scientist in the world will testify—! They don't recognize Intelligent Design as a science and won't dignify it by entering into debate.

JEROME

There it is. The snobbery of the old Guard. Take the stand as yourself.

ROBERT

No.

JEROME

Chicken shit.

ROBERT

My personal philosophy is not on trial here.

MILA

Not a trial.

GORDON

This is a hearing.

MILA

A pretend hearing.

GORDON
A pretend hearing.

JEROME
Take the stand, what are you afraid of?

ROBERT
I'm not--

JEROME
Chicken.

ROBERT
I don't have to take the stand.

(JEROME starts making chicken noise.)

ROBERT (Continued)
Oh the wheels are coming off now.

JEROME
You've have made my personal philosophy a salient issue. Why not yours?

ROBERT
Nope!

JEROME
Chicken. You were always chicken.

ROBERT
Liar, liar!

JEROME
You know he could never swim. Chicken.

ROBERT
I was scared of sharks.

JEROME
In the pool?

ROBERT
Sharks are crafty! They'd find a way!

GORDON
He makes a valid point. If his personal views are fair game--?

ROBERT
Okay, fine! Fine! Get the hell out of the chair!

JEROME

Yes!

(ROBERT takes the Witness Chair. JEROME stands as Defense.)

ROBERT

This is ridiculous.

(JEROME holds out the Bible.)

JEROME

Do you swear to tell —

ROBERT

Hey! Not with that, come on.

MILA

Hold on! I got something!

(MILA gets another book from the library shelf.)

ROBERT

I can swim, by the way.

JEROME

He holds his breath in a car wash.

(MILA hands ROBERT the book.)

ROBERT

What's this?

MILA

Darwin. They've got everything in here. You want to swear in on *Chicken Soup for the Soul*?

ROBERT

I pinky promise to tell the truth. How about that?

JEROME

I accept your oath.

ROBERT

Ask your questions, for God's--
(Catching himself.)
--for crying out loud!

JEROME

Mr. Bell, thank you for being here today. What have you done with the Holy Grail?

ROBERT

Very funny.

JEROME

You're not the only one with material.

ROBERT

Less Groucho, more Perry Mason.

JEROME

Shut-up.

ROBERT

No, you shut-up.

GORDON

(Losing patience with them.)

Gentlemen..!

FRAN

I have two brothers, this is exactly how they behave. I call them Beavis and Other Beavis. I don't like the word "Butt".

JEROME

I'm reminded of an old joke. A little girl asks her mother, "Mommy, where do people come from?" "Well," she says, "God made Adam and Eve and so we are all blessed children of our Almighty Father in Heaven." She asks her Dad he says, "We evolved some nine million years ago from a common primate ancestor like the European Miocene Apes." Confused now the girl said, "Mom, how come you said people are all blessed children of God and Dad says we're monkeys?" Mom said, "Well, your father told you about his side of the family and I told you about mine."

ROBERT

Family insults aside, that's a pretty good joke. I think it's also a pretty good analogy of the divide in this country.

JEROME

Robert, you have spent a great deal of time tearing apart Intelligent Design science so —

ROBERT

Intelligent Design is not a science! It's — "a Camel's Nose".

(JEROME smiles knowingly at that remark, but moves on.)

JEROME

Why don't we examine the problems of evolution?

ROBERT

No. Your honors -- let me step out of the box--!

(ROBERT leaves the witness chair.)

ROBERT (Continued)

I'm Counsel now. Your Honors, I object.

SHEILA

Grounds?

ROBERT

This hearing is about whether or not to reject the new Standards. Evolution is not mentioned in those standards, so where is the relevance of hearing arguments against it?

JEROME

Evolution is not without its detractors. It's just a theory.

ROBERT

First of all you keep confusing the word "theory" for the word "hypothesis". A Scientific Theory is model. Look!

(ROBERT grabs some books from the bookcase and begins creating a structure on the "judges" table to illustrate his point.)

ROBERT (Continued)

Let's say you have a theory. You have to carefully build that theory with a cornucopia of evidence derived at through Observation and Experimentation. If a piece of that theory doesn't hold up, you take it away. But you keep what you can prove, building and building and building your theory until it is so strong, and so unshakeable...

(ROBERT has stacked the books strongly and shakes the "Judges" table to show how strong.)

ROBERT (Continued)

...that it now acquires a new name — "Fact". As a matter of fact, there is more evidence for the scientific Theory of Evolution than there is for the Theory of Gravity. So enough with "Evolution is just a theory!"

(The "Judges" are impressed. As ROBERT moves away from the table MILA comes by with the garbage can and throws them all away. GORDON tries to stop her, grabbing one of the books.)

GORDON

Will you knock if off? All these books can't be on the list!

MILA

How do you know?

(GORDON holds up the book he saved.)

GORDON

Because this is a Dictionary!

JEROME

Everything my brother just said is disputed. The model is not that strong. I wish to show to the court —

MILA

Not a court.

JEROME

— to the classroom, to the Board, that there are many, many serious faults with the theory of Evolution!

ROBERT

It is not disputed.

JEROME

What about gene flow and genetic drift?

ROBERT

They're working on it. Scientific models are never finished. But the evidence for its factuality are overwhelming. The Theory of Evolution, the process of change in the inherited traits of a group of organisms over many generations, driven by natural selection, where animals with environmentally favorable traits are more likely to survive and reproduce, passing those traits on, over time leading to adaptation and diversification of species, is an accepted scientific fact. It happens! And it's been happening, your honors, since the first matrix of life formed near a hypothermic vent in some warm puddle of primordial acidic gloop some three point seven billion years ago!

FRAN

(Impressed.)

Did you memorize all that?

GORDON

Objection sustained.

SHEILA

I'm not sure I agree.

GORDON

This morning you said that Evolution would still be taught. Is he right or wrong? Is it the current fact or not?

SHEILA

(Begrudgingly.)

Sustained.

FRAN

Me too. Sustained. I sustain.
 (To ROBERT.)
 That was very good!

JEROME

Alright. We'll try something else. Back in the box.

(ROBERT sits back in the witness chair.)

ROBERT

This is like when you locked me in the confessional until I admitted I broke your Big Wheel. Next question.

JEROME

When?

ROBERT

When, what?

JEROME

When did you ever swim?

GORDON

Mr. King...

JEROME

Excuse me, your Honor. Let's talk Science in general. Let's talk about spontaneous generation.

ROBERT

You're kidding.

GORDON

What is that?

JEROME

It is the scientific theory—

ROBERT

Was.

JEROME

-- was, the scientific theory that living creatures could arise from nonliving matter. Fleas from dust, maggots from dead flesh, etc.

ROBERT

It's Frankenstein stuff, literally. Frankenstein sewed up dead body parts and then, somehow, it isn't explained in the book, somehow it all spontaneously comes to life. Mary Shelley was using an old theory—

JEROME

It's wrong, isn't it?

ROBERT

Of course it's wrong.

JEROME

But it was a scientific theory so supported in its day that it was considered a fact, wasn't it?

ROBERT

Kind of.

JEROME

For how long?

ROBERT

I don't really know.

JEROME

Would you be surprised to know that the scientific theory of spontaneous generation was an accepted fact of science from Aristotle until Louis Pasteur?

ROBERT

Okay.

JEROME

This incorrect theory, codified by philosophers and the greatest thinkers of the ages, even immortalized in the works of great literature, was regarded as fact and accepted by science for over two millennia before it was finally thrown into the junk heap. Yet you have the temerity to claim that the Theory of Evolution, which has only been around a fraction of that time will never be, can never be, must never be, challenged? The ego! The intractability! My friends--!

ROBERT

Alright, don't get all Elmer Gantry on me. First of all I would argue that spontaneous generation, as a scientific theory, wasn't all that codified...

JEROME

The point is long accepted science can be wrong.

GORDON

Point taken. Let's move on. Our press conference is in...

MILA

Thirty minutes.

ROBERT

(To JEROME)

Is this going the way you thought it would?

(JEROME is struggling to come up with an effective attack. He comes upon an idea, a way to shake ROBERT up.)

JEROME

Since you brought him up, how do you really feel about God?

ROBERT

What does that have to do--?

JEROME

Do you hate Him?

MILA

Or Her.

ROBERT

My personal philosophy has no bearing on —

JEROME

You demand respect for rationality. And you know what, Robert, I agree with you, I've always agreed with you.

ROBERT

Sure.

JEROME

But what about Faith? Doesn't that deserve respect, too? If we agree that our personal convictions are at play here then--

ROBERT

I don't agree with that.

JEROME

I respect you. Why don't you respect me?

ROBERT

Tell me what I don't respect? Your faith?

JEROME

You don't.

ROBERT
I don't. Because it's--

JEROME
Because it's irrational, I know.

ROBERT
Because it's irrational.

JEROME
That's fine. You don't have faith. But why do you care if others do? Why is it so important that you block it out of our lives, legislate it away, take it of schools, out of our government buildings--

ROBERT
The Constitution—

JEROME
Church and State, I know. But the Founders were men of faith.

ROBERT
Not all, some were--

JEROME
Some were Desists, I know!

ROBERT
That's right. And actually the First Amendment—

JEROME
Protects religion as much as it restricts it, yes, I know.

ROBERT
If you're going to answer your own questions I could do a Starbucks run.

JEROME
Come on, Robert. Let your hair down.

ROBERT
Let my hair down?

JEROME
Let's tell the truth here.

ROBERT
What hair am I not--?

JEROME
You hate God.

ROBERT

Oh come on.

JEROME

You know the omnipotence of faith, the power to do good in the world, to un-harden hearts, to weather all slings and arrows. Put aside the issues of this day and just agree with me. Doesn't faith deserve your greatest, highest respect?

(ROBERT struggles with his response.)

ROBERT

No.

GORDON

No?

FRAN

No?

SHEILA

Mr. Bell, are you saying that you don't respect my faith?

JEROME

"There is no authority except that which God has established."

ROBERT

(Losing it.)

Why does religion get a pass? Why does this particular brand of insanity demand respect? *"Please don't poke holes in my delusion!"*

JEROME

So I'm delusional?

ROBERT

Yes.

JEROME

You're insufferable!

ROBERT

Fine!

JEROME

My faith saved me!

ROBERT

Fine!

JEROME

When I had cancer--! You didn't come to see me. I had God! I had my faith! Faith saw me through.

ROBERT

Who gave it to you in the first place?

GORDON

That's enough!

JEROME

And if the cancer comes back I can -- !

ROBERT

You can blame God for killing you, just like he tortured and murdered your Mother!

(JEROME slaps ROBERT across the face. Everyone is shocked into a short silence.)

JEROME

Our Mother. No more questions. The witness is — forgiven.

GORDON

Step down. Please.

(ROBERT leaves the witness chair, shocked into quietude. Outside we hear another police car. MILA looks out the window.)

MILA

The Mayor has arrived!

SHEILA

End this.

GORDON

Alright. Closing statements.

FRAN

I'm sorry, I have to say something.

(To ROBERT.)

Why does it matter to you? Why do you even care? It's one word in the Science Standards. One word that has nothing to do with your children! This is about our children! You know, what? I'm sorry, I'm fine, closing statements, go ahead. Nobody listen to me.

GORDON

Mr. King?

(Feeling victory is at hand JEROME addresses the Board members with more religious fervor than he has yet shown.)

JEROME

My brother is right about some things. Genesis is prose, and prose is not science. But it is instructive. Look around this classroom. Look at these pictures. The parting of the Red Sea! The story of Exodus teaches us about mercy and justice. St. George and his sword Ascalon fighting the Dragon teaches about good versus evil. These poetic allegories of faith contain pearls of wisdom. Without them the world dies. This secular, digitized, pecuniary world of his dies. You have to let in the prose. Everywhere. Including the schools. You have to make room for Mystery. After decades of secular attacks against the very fabric of our humanity, finally, once again, the law embraces this truth. You have this opportunity. Wield this power. Finally! Before we are lost forever to the venal hell of impiety. Wield it, like the sword of St. George, against the Dragon, and cry out, "To battle, fair Ascalon!", and rail against the lies of the Deceiver, for your children, for your souls, and for the Republic, just as our Founders did, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence!

(JEROME sits. After a moment ROBERT rises to speak.)

ROBERT

(To the room.)

Today it's a lecture on Creationism tomorrow it's a test on the Holy Trinity, 'or "Write a term paper on the Ecclesiastical Mechanics Behind Walking on Water.

SHEILA

I think we're done.

ROBERT

You think I'm exaggerating? You think it can't happen? It is happening!

SHEILA

You're insufferable.

ROBERT

This isn't about your faith anymore, Sheila, or my disrespect. It's no longer about God versus Science. This is about Dragons!

FRAN

What is he talking about?

ROBERT

Once you turn on the Spigot of Prevarication there's no stopping it. And right now it's gushing!

SHEILA

If you've finished —

ROBERT

One word is everything! Next they're making little tweaks and changes in our legislatures, our courts. Give the Constitution a haircut. Just a trim, just a word or two and quicker than you can say "Dominionism" there's going to be a religious litmus test for everything.

SHEILA

That's a personal attack!

ROBERT

You won't be able to buy a gallon milk without genuflecting. Turn the FBI in the Ministry of Faith!

SHEILA

You over-talk everybody!

ROBERT

The Dragons are back and they're breathing fire.

SHEILA

What the hell — ?

ROBERT

How do I explain — ? If the country really is looking to you, and it is, what you say out there in a few minutes will spark a conflagration that will burn down everything sagacious in our life.

GORDON

Things aren't that apocalyptic. We're not at war.

ROBERT

You've already allowed shots to be fired!

SHEILA

Mr. Bell!

FRAN

(A bit guiltily.)

Don't say that!

GORDON

Please don't put that on us!

ROBERT

Some wars are declared, Gordon, and some are accorded.

SHEILA

Are you accusing us of inciting violence?

GORDON

We're following the law!

ROBERT

The law says you're allowed to monkey around with Evolution. That's the law. Got it. But it doesn't say you have to, does it? Does it, Fran?

GORDON

I don't think so.

ROBERT

The curriculum is still up to you. All you have to do is say, "No thank you! We'll dance with the Science we came in with." You can do that, can't you?

(GORDON has really thinks about his answer.)

GORDON

We can.

ROBERT

Thank you! A glimmer of hope!

GORDON

But this isn't a black and white battle between good and evil.

ROBERT

Isn't it? My brother mentions St. George and I'm sure that's how he sees himself, as the pious knight, with a righteous heart, swinging Ascalon, defeating the Dragon.

FRAN

What's with the Dragon?

ROBERT

The question, Fran, is what is the Dragon?

JEROME

Moral turpitude.

ROBERT

I disagree.

SHEILA

Dragons? Really?

ROBERT

Dragons are thieves! Dragons steal treasure, don't they? In this case the treasure of knowledge. Science! History! Even Religion! It's being poached! Right in front of you!

FRAN

I'm getting lost...

ROBERT

What did they used to do, the Ancient Kings afraid of the unknown? They created globes with the unexplored far regions emblazoned with pictures of dragons, didn't they?

SHEILA

Mr. Bell — !

GORDON

(Cutting her off.)

Let him go.

ROBERT

A warning to explorers to timidly hug the shallow coastlines and huddle in harbors, safe in the familiar mythologies and faiths of their own countries. Safe and ignorant.

SHEILA

Insufferable!

ROBERT

But some people sailed out past those monsters, didn't they? Explorers. People like Darwin. Sailed past those portents of doom. All the way to the Galápagos and beyond! And little by little, we followed, rounding out those globes, exploring the horizon beyond our ken, expanding our philosophies, fighting back the benighted Beasts of Obfuscation!

JEROME

Is this a summation or a Poetry Slam?

ROBERT

But now they're back poisoning us with their skewed realities and alternative facts about crisis actors, ANTIFA, and how slavery was good on-the-job-training.

JEROME

Your intolerance to faith has blinded you — !

ROBERT

It's not about faith, it's about theft! They've stolen reality! My brother and those like him sees themselves as St. George, but don't be fooled. "Here be Dragons!"

(ROBERT sits.)

FRAN

What do we do now?

SHEILA

We vote.

GORDON

Alright. Let's vote. Could we please clear the room?

(No one moves. GORDON senses the tension.)

GORDON (Continued)

Or, maybe, you know what, you stay, we'll just go out into the hallway.

(GORDON, FRAN and SHEILA exit to the hallway. ROBERT and JEROME sit silently for a few moments.)

ROBERT

(re the slap)

Ow.

JEROME

I'm sorry...

ROBERT

No, no. I'm sorry. I apologize.

JEROME

Glory be. Thank you.

ROBERT

I should have come to see you. And Mom. The way she died, I was just so --

JEROME

Upset.

ROBERT

I was outraged, Jerome. Alzheimers might have been cured years ago if it weren't for religious opposition to stem cell research and — !

JEROME

(Cutting him off.)

Robert! I'm tired.

ROBERT

Yeah.

MILA

(This has been bothering her.)

"A Camel's Nose"?

JEROME

It's an Arabian proverb my father used to say. If you let a camel stick his nose under the tent the rest is sure to follow. He' was trying to say that if you let in a little Intelligent Design — actually I don't know what the hell he was trying to say.

(They sit quietly, exhausted. JEROME looks to the door, then steals a donut, rips it in half, hands a piece to ROBERT, who also looks to the door. Then they both eat the donut quickly, like two teenagers who just snuck a beer.)

ROBERT

You really did it, man. You got me to blow it all up. You could always just pull it out of me.

JEROME

The Devil?

ROBERT

You goad me and--! It doesn't matter how old I get, I see you and, sooner or later, I'm fifteen again, an egotistical know-it-all punk.

JEROME

I didn't pull it out of you. You *are* a fifteen year old egotistical know-it-all punk.

(MILA gives JEROME a wan look.)

JEROME (Continued)

Well, he called me a Dragon.

ROBERT

I don't really believe your faith is that unshakeable. You're just happier. You are the intelligent designer of your own fantasy.

JEROME

I don't really believe you're all that radically opposed to faith. You can't be. All humans crave it. After all, isn't it how we evolved?

ROBERT

I think you won.

JEROME

Would that be so terrible? Whoever wins let's not let it be another wedge between us. Remember what it says in Proverbs 11:29?

ROBERT

"He that troubleth his own house--"

JEROME

"—shall inherit the wind."

ROBERT

So, what, I'm Spencer Tracy, you're Frederic March?

JEROME

In the movie Spencer Tracy loses.

ROBERT

Frederick March dies.

JEROME

Sorry to disappoint.

MILA

What movie?

JEROME

Man, we're getting old.

ROBERT

Way too old.

(JEROME takes off the cross he wears around his neck.)

JEROME

You don't have to wear it, but she did want you to have it.

ROBERT

Yeah. Okay.

(ROBERT takes the necklace with great solemnity. GORDON, SHEILA and FRAN return.)

GORDON

We've come to a decision. We have voted to adopt the *Total Science* curriculum. This hearing is now closed.

(ROBERT is crushed, even though he expected this.)

JEROME

Thank you. And God bless you all.

ROBERT

Thank you for the invitation to speak here today and I wish you and your school and your town the very best.

(SHEILA moves to exit out to the press conference.)

SHEILA

Let's get out there. Mila, with me. Mr. King..?

JEROME

I'll be right out.

ROBERT

(To SHEILA)

Congratulations.

SHEILA

"For he that holds his kingdom holds the law." Shakespeare.

ROBERT

Sex, violence, language, cross-dressing, occult references and frequent depictions of mortal sin.

(SHEILA looks confused by this strange laundry list.)

ROBERT (Continued)

(Explaining.)

Shakespeare. He's on the list, too.

(SHEILA is somewhat shook by this, but says nothing. MILA looks over the list of banned books to see if ROBERT is right. He is.)

SHEILA

Mila. Are you with me?

MILA

No.

(Pointedly using this word.)

Ma'am.

(SHEILA is hurt, but resolute. She exits.)

ROBERT

(To GORDON.)

Was it unanimous?

GORDON

You're a rude man. I can relate. Yes it was unanimous. You understand, we have a responsibility not just to law but also to order. But you've given me a lot to think about.

(Beat.)

Context.

(GORDON exits. FRAN approaches ROBERT, wanting to ask a thousand things. All she can come up with is..)

FRAN

(To ROBERT.)

Do you think it was really our fault?

(ROBERT doesn't know what to say.)

JEROME

Of course it wasn't. God knows what's in your heart.

(FRAN exits, not so sure. Sunlight begins to shine through the windows, and through the colorful drawings, beautifully illuminating them like stained glass in a chapel. We find ourselves in a transformed space of shadows and light.)

MILA

Sun's coming out.

(ROBERT picks up the copy of Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* and tosses it into the garbage can with the other discarded books.)

ROBERT

Sorry, Charlie.

MILA

Darwin's not on the list.

ROBERT

Give it a minute.

MILA

So you're what, giving up?

ROBERT

Some slopes are too slippery.

MILA

What about the Science Hearings in December? What about the press conference outside? What about the power of a well reasoned argument? You almost got Gordon!

ROBERT

(Shrugging.)

I'm out of arguments.

MILA

So you're just going to let it happen?

(To JEROME.)

This is the start, isn't it?

JEROME

Of a glorious new age.

MILA

The two of you! There was a lot of brilliant talk today about what kids should be learning, but not one person in the room was a teacher. Why does no one ever ask the teachers?

(ROBERT and JEROME contemplate that as MILA pouts.)

JEROME

Dinner?

ROBERT

What?

JEROME

I hate to think of you eating alone.

ROBERT

What are you serving? I just want to know what I'll be eating.

JEROME

Crow.

ROBERT

(Yummy sound.)

Mmm.

JEROME

You had no hope of winning, didn't you know that?

ROBERT

It's not like there was a sign from God.

(The school orchestra begins to play *Amazing Grace*.)

JEROME

I totally planned that.

ROBERT

I think I'll go home, eat mac and cheese and watch old movies Mila's never heard of.

JEROME

You're not giving up, you're facing reality. The country is self-correcting, coming back to what it was. Face it, yes science has eradicated smallpox, chased comets, and put the libraries of the world in our pockets, but for meaning, for guidance, for the why of

it all, for *truth*, people turn to God, and they always will. I have to go talk to the press. You should stay in here. You're right to quit the fight, Robby. It was a lost cause.

(JEROME exits, but ROBERT is stirred by the phrase "lost cause". So is MILA. MILA suddenly pours all of the books out of the garbage can, holds out the copy of Darwin to ROBERT, like a Squire offering a sword to a Knight. ROBERT grabs *Darwin*, and with a wild, new determination, wields it like a sword.)

ROBERT

To battle, fair Darwin!

(ROBERT exits towards the press conference, but first gestures to MIA to proceed him. She runs off gladly. But before he leaves himself he looks directly at the audience and says...)

ROBERT (Continued)

To battle!

(Blackout.)

(End of Play.)