

THE NATURE OF MUTATION

by
John Walch

Represented by:

Susan Gurman
The Susan Gurman Agency
245 W. 99th St.
NYC, NY 10025
212.749.4618

Draft # 4.2

© 2011, John Walch

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.”

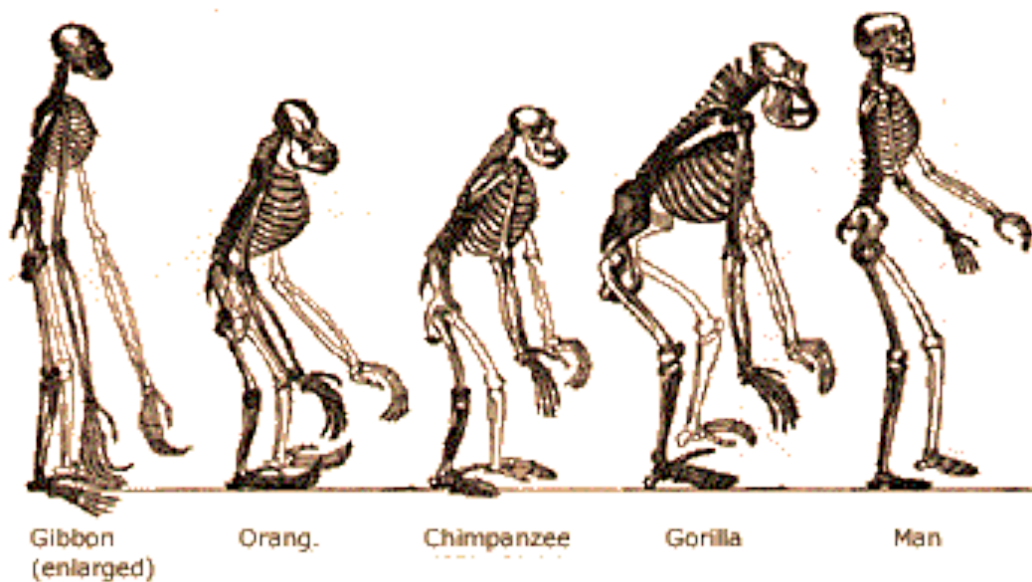
—Saint Matthew

“Me and you will get revenge and kick natural selection up a few notches...all the fat, ugly, retarded, crippled, stupid in the world would die and, oh well, if a few of the good guys die, too.”

—from the journal of Eric Harris, Columbine shooter

“True science and true religion are twin-sisters and the separation of either from the other is sure to prove the death of both.”

—Thomas Henry Huxley, from 1858 Lecture: *Objects of Interest*



—The frontispiece of *Man's Place in Nature*, by Thomas Henry Huxley, 1863

CHARACTERS

CLAUDE DAVIS Science teacher, admirer of Thomas Henry Huxley; fortyish
CLANCY GIBBENS Recent transfer student, black backpack

An enthusiastic ensemble of six actors play the following roles*:

Faculty, administrators, and concerned parents:

OWEN WATKINS Dean of Upper School, no gift for metaphor; fifty +
MELANIE HENSLOW English teacher, admirer of Aldous Huxley; late thirties
BARBARA GIBBENS Clancy's mother, Head of the Gibbens Foundation; fortyish
MRS. LE Sally's grandmother, wants what's best for her; 65+

Carlyle Students:

DREW HUTCHENSON Clancy's dorm mate, purple backpack
SALLY LE New scholarship student, white backpack
JOSIE BLAIR Carlyle student, green backpack
ADAM RENDELMAN Carlyle student, red backpack
EDDIE EDWARDS Carlyle student, orange backpack
FLORINDA HERNANDEZ Carlyle student, blue backpack

Other Characters:

FIGURE an image in Clancy's mind, male
HUXLEY Claude's tricky bulldog; timeless
WHIZMO the voice of the future, electronic

*In some cases, when doubling, it may be necessary for an actor to play a student and then later an adult, first a male and later a female; this is just fine. The ideal cast would include a mixture of adult-aged and student-aged actors. For issues of overlap, the following doubling of actors is recommended, but other combinations surely can be dreamt up.

Adult-aged actors:

OWEN/EDDIE/HUXLEY
 MELANIE/MRS. LE
 BARBARA/FLORINDA

Student-aged actors:

JOSIE/WHIZMO
 DREW/FIGURE
 SALLY/ADAM

SETTING

The Carlyle School, somewhere in New Jersey.

TIME

Now.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

The writing of the play was made possible by a commission from the Manhattan Theatre Club and a fellowship through the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. It was further developed with assistance from Urban Stages (NYC), Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, Shenandoah International Playwrights, High Desert Play Development/New Mexico State University, and Austin Script Works. My thanks to all for their support during the writing of this play.

ACT ONE**Prologue: Chalkboard cha-cha (or sketchy exposition)**

Darkness. Tap, tap, scratch. Tap, tap, scratch. The sound of chalk writing chaotically across eight chalkboards. Sound evolves into a kind of rhythmic beat and then morphs into a full-blown dance number.

Lights up to reveal: eight chalkboards on swiveling casters lined up in a single-file, dutiful line. What proceeds is a dance of chalkboards.

On Chalkboard One is written:

PROLOGUE: CHALKBOARD CHA-CHA (or sketchy exposition)

(Chalkboard One moves to reveal Chalkboard Two on which is written:)

TIME – NOW.

(Chalkboard Two moves to reveal Chalkboard Three:)

PLACE – THE CARLYLE SCHOOL, somewhere in New Jersey.
SCHOOL STATS (from the annual report):

- *Private College Prep School*
- *Enrollment 316 (capacity 600)*
- *Founded 1878*
- *Motto: “The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.” —Thomas Carlyle*
- *Annual endowment = 0; current debt = 2.7 million*

(Chalkboard Three moves to reveal Chalkboard Four:)

CHARACTERS –

- *Claude Davis*
- *Science Teacher*
- *Taught at Carlyle for 19 years*

(CLAUDE DAVIS enters. He wears a Carlyle sweatshirt, a small earring, and holds a leash, which trails off. He whistles and gives the leash a tug.)

CLAUDE

Come on, boy. Come on, Huxley.

(Sound of a dog barking. CLAUDE yanks on the leash again and a smaller chalkboard—knee high?—with a red dog collar rolls on. Drawn on this chalkboard is a crude picture of a dog. Under the picture reads:)

Huxley: Claude’s Bulldog

(CLAUDE pulls the chalkboard to him and begins patting and petting it. The chalkboard is the dog.)

CLAUDE (*cont'd.*)

Who's my best boy? Who is it?

(*An appreciative bark.*)

That's right. That's my Huxley. Who wants a snicky-snack?

(*CLAUDE rattles a box of treats, the dog goes bonkers. CLAUDE holds box above HUXLEY, who springs at it.*)

No, first: play dead. Huxley, play dead. . . . PLAY DEAD.

(*Chalkboard Four moves to reveal Chalkboard Five:*)

CHARACTERS – (continued)

- *Clancy Gibbens: Recent transfer student.*
- *Grade point: 2.085*
- *SAT score: 1530*

(*CLANCY GIBBENS enters. He has his backpack and sketch-pad; he does a U-Turn when he sees CLAUDE. HUXLEY barks.*)

CLAUDE (*cont'd*)

Clancy? Clancy?

CLANCY

Hey, Mr. D.

(*HUXLEY barks.*)

Hey, Huxley.

CLAUDE

You're up early for a Sunday.

CLANCY

My new meds are— Couldn't sleep.

CLAUDE

That why you weren't in class on Friday? (. . .)You know if you keep missing, I'm going to—

CLANCY

Expel me, fine.

CLAUDE

I was going to say: tutor you.

CLANCY

Oh god, you're not one of those, are you?

CLAUDE

One of what's— ?

CLANCY

Forget it.

(HUXLEY barks and jumps up on CLANCY.)

What's his problem?

CLAUDE

He won't do his trick.

CLANCY

What's the trick?

CLAUDE

Playing dead.

CLANCY

Nothing hard about that.

(HUXLEY barks.)

CLAUDE

Why don't you try? Come on, he seems to like you.

(CLAUDE hands CLANCY a snicky-snack.)

CLANCY

Chalk?

CLAUDE

I ran out of biscuits.

CLANCY

Sucky treat is why he won't do his trick.

CLAUDE

Practically pure calcium. Good for his old bones, and he loves that crunchy texture.

(HUXLEY barks.)

Now you try—the trick.

CLANCY

Ummm . . . Huxley: play dead.

(The slate of the small chalkboard pivots. On the back is the same picture, this time upside down with the caption:)

Huxley: Claude's Tricky Bulldog

CLAUDE

You did it.

CLANCY

Hard part is getting back up.

CLAUDE

Easy. Just say: “Who wants a treat?”

(HUXLEY barks and rights himself, CLANCY gives him the treat.)

That’s my best boy—my best Huxley.

(HUXLEY barks again.)

Huxley, that’s enough.

(HUXLEY barks and growls as Chalkboard Five moves to reveal Chalkboard Six:)

CHARACTERS – (continued)

- Drew Hutchenson
- GPA – 2.58
- SAT score: 1020

(DREW HUTCHENSON shuffles on. He listens to tunes and stares intently at the screen of a hand-held computer (or WhizMo), as if it were a compass. He seems a little lost and oblivious to his surroundings; the device speaks to him. As it does, HUXLEY’s hair bristles and he growls. DREW appears to be walking in circles, HUXLEY gets more agitated.)

WHIZMO

Caution: you are moving off course, away from dining hall. Correct by turning south—

CLAUDE

What’s he doing?

CLANCY

The Whizmo has a built-in global positioning device.

WHIZMO

You are now facing west. Turn east—

CLAUDE

Drew. DREW!

DREW

What-up, Mr. D. ? Yo-yo, bro.

CLANCY

Hey Drew, don't call me bro, okay?

DREW

No prob, roomie.

(Removes the earbuds, music leaks from them. HUXLEY growls.)

Chill out, Huxley.

(HUXLEY snarls and snaps knocking WhizMo from DREW's hand.)

Shit, my WhizMo!

CLAUDE

Huxley, behave.

DREW *(reaching cautiously for WhizMo)*

Nice poochy, nice pooch—

(Another snap, HUXLEY has a hold of DREW's sleeve.)

Uh, Mr. D., Mr. D.!

CLAUDE

Huxley, let go! LET GO!

DREW

Mr. D.! I'm about to lose it!

CLAUDE

Calm down, he preys on fear.

DREW

I'm too afraid to pray! Just get him off!

CLANCY

HUXLEY! HUXLEY! LET GO!

(HUXLEY lets go of DREW, DREW picks up his WhizMo.)

CLAUDE

Sorry, Drew, as he gets older he gets more excitable.

DREW

Couple other choice words I can think of, but I'll save 'em for the debate. Hope you been prepping, roomie, cause I'm coming at you full on WWE with costumes and shit.

CLANCY

What are you talking about?

DREW

The smack-down debate: Evolutioooooon! In this corner—wearing purple and white—is Bishop “Soapy Sam” Wilberforce! In that corner—Thomas “The Bulldog” *Huxley*.

(HUXLEY barks at DREW.)

We’re reenacting it this week, dude, and I’m taking you down for the count.

CLANCY

That’s this week?

CLAUDE

The debate’s Tuesday, Clancy—

DREW

Better step up, roomie, cause I *am* the Bishop. Holy crap, you think that’s why Huxley just went after me?

CLAUDE

Drew that was 150 years ago, I don’t think—

DREW

Yeah, but they say, like, dogs have this seventh sense, so *maybe* Huxley the dog remembers what Huxley the science dude did way back, and like saw me, smelled Bishop meat, and bam (!) was on me like Abercrombie on Fitch. (. . .) All right, time to grab some breakie. You want to come, bro? Sunday’s waffle day in these parts.

CLANCY

Drew, stop calling me bro!

(CLANCY crosses to a different part of stage and begins drawing.)

DREW

Well, he’s a big bag of sunshine. Catch you in class tomorrow, Mr. D.

(DREW speaks to WhizMo again.)

Lead me to the dining hall, master.

WHIZMO

Facing West, proceed 52 yards.

(DREW exits. CLAUDE remains, HUXLEY barks.)

CLAUDE

All right, who wants to fetch?

(CLAUDE produces a tennis-ball. HUXLEY strains at his leash. CLAUDE unclips the leash from the red collar, the dog spins around excitedly.)

CLAUDE *(cont’d)*

Okay . . . ready?

(CLAUDE tosses the ball offstage and releases the dog. HUXLEY bolts after the ball like a horse released from its gate.)

GO! Go get it.

(CLAUDE watches. A moment. The tennis-ball rolls on from offstage. HUXLEY barks from offstage.)

Good boy. Ready for another? Are you ready? Here you go! Go get it. GO!

(CLAUDE throws ball as Chalkboard Six moves to reveal Chalkboard Seven:)

<p><u>CHARACTERS – (continued)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Melanie Henslow</i> • <i>English Teacher</i> • <i>Taught at Carlyle for 6 months</i>
--

(MELANIE enters; she's dressed up a little. Huxley barks from off.)

CLAUDE *(cont'd)*

Hey, Mel.

MELANIE

Claude, I've been looking all over for you. You ready?

CLAUDE

Ready for what?

MELANIE *(feeding him clues)*

You promised . . . last week. You said you'd go with me to. . . On *Sunday* morning you said you'd go with me to . . .

CLAUDE

Right, church! Or services, or whatever they call it at Riverbend.

MELANIE

You're not even dressed.

CLAUDE

Sorry, I just— Give me 5—

MELANIE

I'm not going to drag you, Claude.

CLAUDE

Melanie, come on—

(CLAUDE reaches for her just as two students enter.)

JOSIE

Hope we're not interrupting.

MELANIE

Good morning, Josie, Florinda.

FLORINDA

And a *very* good morning to you *both*.

JOSIE

See you in class tomorrow!

(They pull out their WhizMo's and start instant messaging as they exit.)

CLAUDE

And the evolution of a rumor begins. By Monday morning, they'll be saying we were skinny-dipping in the gym pool.

MELANIE

Why do you care what they say?

CLAUDE

We live in a fishbowl, Melanie. We have to be discreet, or it will impact our teaching. To them, we're colleagues.

MELANIE

Who sleep together.

CLAUDE

Shh...they'll hear you.

MELANIE

So what? I promise, what they imagine we're doing is much wilder than anything we actually do, why shelter them from the truth?

CLAUDE

This is your first year here, trust me. It can get very messy if things don't work out.

MELANIE

Is that what you're hoping for?

CLAUDE

No, I didn't mean that— We just need to be careful, move bit by bit—

MELANIE

I need to go, Claude.

CLAUDE

I'll come with you—

MELANIE

I can't wait. We'll talk later.

(MELANIE exits leaving CLAUDE alone—holding the empty leash.)

CLAUDE

Huxley? Huxley? Huxley!!

(CLAUDE exits. CLANCY remains, drawing. As he draws, a FIGURE emerges. The FIGURE wears tennis shoes with no laces and a long lace dangles around his neck. The FIGURE imitates a monkey.)

CLANCY

Lance? Is that you?

(FIGURE continues to imitate a monkey. CLANCY laughs a bit.)

All right, all right. Umm . . . Chimpanzee.

(FIGURE indicates: "yes." Then imitates a slightly different monkey.)

. . . Gorilla—no—Orangutan.

(FIGURE indicates: "yes." Then imitates a slightly different monkey.)

That's the gorilla.

(FIGURE indicates: "yes." Then imitates a slightly different monkey.)

Gibbon.

(FIGURE indicates: "yes." Then modifies the imitation.)

And man.

(FIGURE indicates: "yes.")

Want to thumb-wrestle?

(FIGURE indicates "no.")

Fine, what do you want to do?

*(FIGURE retrieves a dog-eared copy of *The Origin of the Species* from CLANCY's backpack and then makes a "tisk-tisk" gesture.)*

I know, Mom would freak if she knew. I pulled it out of the trash.

(FIGURE holds book to his heart.)

You're welcome. (. . .) Lance, why did you do it?

(The FIGURE shrugs.)

You should have, could have, told me: *why*?

(Beat. The FIGURE speaks.)

FIGURE

I don't know, guess I was "depressed."

CLANCY

That's bullshit, not a reason.

FIGURE

Guess that's the question then.

CLANCY

Mom says it's cause of that book. Now she's on a crusade: "The Lance Gibbons Memorial Scholarship."

FIGURE

Don't let her turn me into the poster-child for Intelligent Design.

CLANCY

I can't stop her if you don't tell me *why*.

FIGURE

Or . . .

(FIGURE places the book at CLANCY's feet.)

CLANCY

What?

(FIGURE takes the shoelace from around his neck and places it around CLANCY's.)

Me?

(FIGURE remains still, a mirror reflecting back CLANCY's thoughts.)

That would stop her, wouldn't it?

(Amused by the idea.)

God, that's evil genius. (. . .) But I can't. (. . .) Could I? (. . .) Does it hurt?

FIGURE

For a snap second. But then – bliss. Total freedom.

(HUXLEY barks from off-stage, startling FIGURE, who starts to retreat.)

CLANCY

Wait, Lance.

(HUXLEY barks from off. FIGURE beats a retreat, motioning for CLANCY to follow him.)

Lance? Lance?

(The FIGURE vanishes as CLAUDE enters.)

CLAUDE

Huxley?! . . . Oh, Clancy. I thought I heard Huxley, have you seen him?

CLANCY

I don't know what I've seen, okay?

CLAUDE (*seeing shoelace around the his neck*)

Sorry, didn't mean to interrupt your. . . um...

CLANCY (*concealing shoelace*)

Drawing, I was drawing.

CLAUDE

You all right, Clancy? (. . .) Do you want to talk about anything? (. . .)

(*Spotting book on the ground.*)

So it looks like you *have* been doing some of the homework. *Origin of the Species*, little light reading in preparation for the debate?

CLANCY

It was my brother's. He was way into science. You know that picture of the monkey into man? He had a poster of it and would imitate the different postures and make stupid ape noises until I guessed which one he was.

CLAUDE

Sounds like a great brother.

CLANCY

Yeah, whatever.

CLAUDE

Hey, why don't you help me find Huxley, then we'll grab some waffles?

CLANCY

Not hungry.

CLAUDE

They got the best waffles in town.

CLANCY

Oh god, you really are one of them. The uber-teacher.

CLAUDE

Uber-teacher?

CLANCY

Every private school's got one. Single, male, no children. Pours everything he's got into his teaching. Sees every student as a potential friend and gets sick to his stomach when he can't make a connection. There's a touch of brilliance and idealism, worn down over the years, but

CLANCY (*cont'd.*)

still there's something alt or rad about him – like he teaches in Hawaiian shirts, wears shorts during the winter, or still sports his pony-tail or earring from his grad days.

(*CLAUDE self-consciously touches his earring.*)

But what really defines the uber-teacher is that he has no life outside the school. He eats the food, wears the clothes, sleeps with another teacher—

CLAUDE

All right, Clancy.

CLANCY

—his entire universe has become the campus so much that he's actually convinced himself that the waffles at his school are the best in the world.

CLAUDE

I said “in town.” And that is enough.

CLANCY

But isn't this what you want? To bond with me? To swap earrings and be buddies? That's what all uber-teachers want, need.

CLAUDE

All I want is for you to get ready for this debate. So, I'll see you in class tomorrow.

(*CLANCY and CLAUDE exit in opposite directions. Chalkboard Seven moves to reveal Chalkboard Eight:*)

<p><i>LOST: HUXLEY!</i> <i>MR. DAVIS'S BULLDOG</i> <i>LAST SEEN IN GROVE</i> <i>SEE MR. DAVIS FOR REWARD!</i></p>

(*The chalkboards dance—twirling across the stage in a conspicuous display of choreographed exposition. A school bell rings, the dance ends, and the chalkboards bow to their partners. The ENSEMBLE emerges with freshly beaten erasers. They wipe the slates clean and reposition the chalkboards for the next scene. An ENSEMBLE member produces a piece of chalk and writes: “Scene One: D-Day.”*)

Morph to:

Scene One: D-Day

Lights rise on a classroom. Three chalkboards spread across the stage. The left board reads “Archbishop Samuel Wilberforce: leader of the high-church movement in the Anglican Church”; the center board is blank; the right reads: “Thomas Henry Huxley: a.k.a. Darwin’s Bulldog.” Huddled around the Wilberforce board are: DREW HUTCHENSON, FLORINDA HERNANDEZ, and EDDIE EDWARDS. Huddled around the Huxley board are: JOSIE BLAIR and ADAM RENDLEMAN. CLAUDE writes on the center board: “The British Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting. Oxford – 1860.” Both teams prep for the debate. The Huxley team argues over a beard.

JOSIE (*holding a shabby beard and a stove pipe-hat*)
I’m not wearing it, Clancy’s playing Huxley.

ADAM
But he’s a no show.

JOSIE (*throws beard to ADAM.*)
Fine. Then you be Huxley, Adam.

ADAM
I can’t wear it; I have a skin condition.

(ADAM throws beard back to JOSIE. The beard goes back and forth as DREW directs the Wilberforce team. He wears a construction paper hat with a cross on it and a make-shift purple cape.)

DREW
Okay—check it. Then I’m gonna finish with the Bishop’s major pile-driver:
(DREW reads from a note-card and speaks with a highly dubious English accent as Archbishop Samuel Wilberforce.)
—And finally, as to this belief in actually coming from a monkey, I put it to Professor Huxley and ask: Huxley, is it on your grandfather’s or your grandmother’s side that the ape ancestry comes in? (. . .) Then you guys go ape-shit. So, we solid on this?

EDDIE
But then Huxley crushes you with his come back: *With all due respect, Lord Bishop, I’d rather have grandparents as an ape, than be a man afraid to face the truth.*

DREW
Eddie, we’re just doing the assignment. I say my thing, you guys go ape-shit. Can I get a rock, for my solid?

EDDIE
Rock.

FLORINDA

What's up with your voice?

DREW

That's me English accent.

FLORINDA

Sounds like you're choking on a chipmunk.

DREW

I gotta chipmunk you can choke on.

EDDIE

Guys, guys, come on. We're running out of time!

DREW

Oh, my god, check out the bearded-lady!

*(JOSIE wears the fake beard. Team Wilberforce crack-up and taunt:
"You forget to shave this morning, Josie?!" etc.)*

CLAUDE *(turning from board)*

Okay, what's going on?

JOSIE

Mr. D., Adam and I did everything, all Clancy had to do was show-up, but he's totally blowing it off, and I'm not playing an old dude.

CLAUDE

Let me worry about Clancy, you worry about this debate. Somebody on your team has to play Huxley or your whole team will fail the assignment.

ADAM

That is so unfair.

(A chalkboard spins to reveal CLANCY on a different part of the stage. He draws in his sketch-pad.)

EDDIE

Why are we even wasting time with this debate, we just get crushed?

CLAUDE

Eddie, this isn't about winning and losing, we're reenacting it in order to—

EDDIE

Yeah, but it's not a fair fight. I mean, everybody knows we come from apes.

CLAUDE

Not everybody, especially back then. Huxley and his side were actually the underdogs.

DREW

I don't know. We can say we come from apes. Sure, whatever. But then, like: who made the apes?

CLAUDE

Well, they evolved from less complex forms.

DREW

But then who made those?

CLAUDE

It goes back to the big bang, which we studied—

DREW

But who made the big bang?

FLORINDA

Duh, Drew, Mr. God and Mrs. God made the big bang!

DREW

I'm being serious, Mr. D., like, who made us—I mean—for real?

CLAUDE

That's a question everyone has to answer for themselves.

ADAM

But what do you think, Mr. D.?

CLAUDE

I think we need to continue with *science* class. I suggest you all take some notes.

(Everybody pulls out their WhizMos.)

With pen and paper.

EDDIE

Come on Mr. D., every other teacher lets us—

CLAUDE

My class, my rules, Eddie. Put the Whizmo's away. I'll wait. (. . .)

(Everybody puts their WhizMos away ad-libbing things like: "What a drag"; "I don't even own a pen"; "Anybody got some paper?" Etc. When they're settled, CLAUDE spins chalkboard and continues.)

Now, as you can see from this illustration, what's important to understand about evolution is the concept of gradual change—or mutation— All right, what's so funny?

(CLAUDE turns and sees a sketch of a penis in different stages of evolution—flaccid, curved, half-mast, and full-on erectus. Written above the sketch is: “The evolution of Mr. D. when he sees Ms. H.”)

CLAUDE (*cont’d.*)

Oh, yes, I see. That is funny. Very funny ... and even a reasonably skillful parody, although I wish you’d left my personal life out of it. Ms. Henslow and I are not dating. We’re colleagues.

(CLAUDE erases the board. As he does this, across the stage, a chalkboard moves. On the board is written: “Melanie Henslow’s English Class.” MELANIE appears in a light and spins board:)

MELANIE (*repeating what is written on her board*)

“One believes things, because one has been conditioned to believe them.” Aldous Huxley. Brave New World. Paper topic: Think about your own life. What have you been conditioned to believe? Write about a time when that belief was tested and challenged. 750 words—max. Due Tues. Any Questions?

CLAUDE (*finishing erasing his board*)

The rumors about us skinny-dipping in the gym pool are just that—rumors. The only passion we share is for two men named Huxley—she for Aldous, the famous writer of *Brave New World*; me for his grandfather Thomas Henry. Now who can tell me what famous picture this drawing parodies? Anyone?

(Light on MELANIE fades. CLANCY throws sketch-pad.)

DREW

What I don’t get is: why didn’t Darwin fight his own fight? Why’d Huxley do his dirty work?

JOSIE

Cause Darwin was a wuss.

EDDIE

Should I be taking notes on this?

ADAM

So why didn’t Darwin stand up and fight for his own theory?

CLAUDE

Well, he was older, had some unknown illness and was often overcome by vomiting fits—

DREW

He hurled so much he couldn’t even go to his own debate?

JOSIE

What’d I say? Classic wuss.

EDDIE (*whispering to Florinda*)

Flora, how do you spell wus?

DREW

So Darwin didn't believe his own deal?

CLAUDE

No, he knew he was right, but he also knew how bitterly he would be opposed and how radically it would change the society he benefited from. See, Darwin was a gentleman, part of the aristocracy—his wife was a Wedgwood, as in china. You know: Wedgwood china.

EDDIE (*scribbling furiously*)

His wife was Chinese?

CLAUDE

The point is that Darwin had a lot to lose—

DREW

And Huxley didn't?

CLAUDE

Quite the contrary, Huxley had everything to gain. He was a total outsider, came from nowhere, and had to fight his way into Victorian society.

(A school bell—a scuffle of chairs and a whiz of zippers.)

I guess that's it. We'll see you tomorrow for the big debate. And Team Huxley, you should be prepared with or without Clancy. Okay, go.

(CLANCY curls into a ball. As he drifts off to sleep, he recites:)

CLANCY

Mom's Bad Meatball. Grandma's Thick Glasses. Lance's Tonsils. Inner-Tube Trip with Dad...

(Students exit as lights shift slightly. A chalkboard moves to reveal OWEN WATKINS. A PowerPoint presentation seems to follow OWEN around wherever he goes. Thus, a slide illuminates one of the chalkboards and reads: "Owen Watkins. Former chemistry teacher, interim Headmaster of Carlyle Prep. Known to the students as: The Great O.")

OWEN

Bravo, Claude, bravo.

CLAUDE

Thank you, Owen.

OWEN

How do you do it? Teach the same Life Science class year after year?

CLAUDE

I enjoy the routine.

OWEN

And I understand that, Claude, I do, but you should think about mixing things up. Take me. Loved teaching Chemistry—I did. But three months later, I feel like a new man.

CLAUDE

I'm glad headmaster's agreeing with you, Owen, but I'd appreciate a little advance notice when you're observing my class.

OWEN

I wasn't observing, officially, just wanted to collect my reward.

CLAUDE

You found Huxley?!

OWEN

More like caught him, he was tearing around the quad like a, well, like a mad dog. Fortunately, Security kept that tranq. gun from back when we had the raccoon uprising.

(OWEN exits, but talks from off-stage. We hear the sound of heavy chains being unlocked and a muffled growl.)

But not to worry, he's fine, hardly even knocked him out. Huxley's one tough old dog.

(OWEN reenters pulling HUXLEY on a chain. HUXLEY groggily resists. The dog remains a chalkboard, but there's something different. The chalkboard is maybe bigger, the picture fiercer, a wildness about the eyes. Also, physically around the board is a muzzle.)

CLAUDE *(taking off the muzzle)*

Owen, what the hell—!

OWEN

Hold up, Claude, the muzzle stays on at all times or else.

CLAUDE

Or else *what*?

OWEN

It's my job to protect the students and the school. Huxley's a threat and a lawsuit over rabies—

CLAUDE

He's had his shots, he doesn't have rabies.

OWEN

He has something, and we can't have that, especially not now. It's bad, Claude.

(Slides of various pie-charts and bar-graphs.)

Debt's sky-high, enrollment's hit a historic low, and the Board's had it. If I don't turn it around this semester, Carlyle goes the way of the dodo bird.

CLAUDE

But what about the Tech Initiative?

OWEN

It's the one bright spot, thanks to Barbara Gibbens. Everybody loves their new WhizMos....

(A sexy flash movie plays: "It's a phone! Video camera! MP3 player! Global-positioning device! Game-cube! Fully-loaded computer! It's the revolutionary WhizMo!™ revolutionizing the world one pocket at a time!" In fine print: "WhizMo™ a registered trademark of Gibbens Inc.")

... or at least just about everyone.

CLAUDE

You can't teach an old dog new tricks, Owen.

OWEN *(producing a WhizMo from an unopened box)*

But I can expect you to at least take it out of the box and try.

CLAUDE

Just give me a box of chalk and let me teach.

OWEN *(handing WhizMo to Claude)*

No can do, the Gibbens Foundation is *heavily* invested in us fully integrating the WhizMo, and are capital P, pleased that we're taking aggressive action steps to go completely chalkless.

CLAUDE

Did you say chalkless?

OWEN

Aren't you getting my mEmos?

CLAUDE

Your . . . ?

OWEN *(pronounced me-mo, rhymes with chemo)*

Email memo—mE-mo.

(Slide of Owen's email: To: Carlyle Faculty; From: Acting Headmaster Owen; mEmo #07 – Say so long to chalk!)

CLAUDE

Why don't you just call it a memo?

OWEN

Because it's a mEmo. This is why you have to get online, Claude. Time's against us. The only thing that's going to save Carlyle is immediate and sweeping change.

CLAUDE

But change happens one step at a time: "without haste, but without rest." Overnight change is the stuff of miracles.

OWEN

And that's what we're being offered. A miracle. By this time tomorrow, Carlyle will be heading into a brave new world.

CLAUDE

A chalkless brave new world?

OWEN

Oh, it's bigger than that. We're putting the Spirit back in school spirit! We have a pizza party, bonfire, a whole slate of fun-filled activities all to welcome Sally.

CLAUDE

Sally?

(Slide: mEmo #12 – Welcome Sally Le! The first recipient of the Lance Gibbens Memorial Scholarship.)

OWEN

If only you'd read your mEmos! Sally Le is the first of what we hope will be many recipients of the Lance Gibbens Scholarship. Sally's just a test case, but if all goes well, Carlyle's saved. Next semester, the Gibbens will fund up to 100 new scholarships in honor of their son.

(The FIGURE enters CLANCY's space.)

CLANCY *(slowly waking)*

Lance . . .

FIGURE

No more playing dead, Clancy, time to get serious. Mom's kicking it up.

CLAUDE

But Lance didn't even go here, why not give to the school where he went?

OWEN

Because they believe Carlyle's motto situates us to fill an emerging educational niche.

(Slide: “The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.”)

CLAUDE

Meaning?

OWEN

Couple minor curricular adjustments. For Life Science—for instance—we want you to expose them to evolution and to other scientific viewpoints, principally: Life by Intelligent Design.

(Slide: *Life by Intelligent Design or I.D. HUXLEY grows.*)

CLAUDE

I teach science, not science fiction, Owen!

OWEN

I. D. is promoted by some legitimate scientists—

CLAUDE

Funded by a conservative think-tank!

(HUXLEY lunges at OWEN and continues to growl and snap.)

OWEN

Control yourself and your dog! He’s mad I tell you!

CLAUDE

Calm down, Huxley, settle.

(HUXLEY pants.)

FIGURE

Don’t let her do this to me, Clance.

OWEN

Claude, I’m not saying: don’t teach Darwin, I’m only saying: *teach the controversy*. I heard it today: “it’s not a fair fight.” Make it a fair fight, and let the kids come to their own decision about the truth.

CLAUDE

I can’t believe what you—a science teacher—are asking me to do.

OWEN

I’m not a science teacher anymore; I’m acting Headmaster. And, I’m not asking; I’m telling you.

CLAUDE

Why don’t you just put a muzzle on me?

(CLANCY's cell-phone rings. The FIGURE disappears as CLANCY scrambles to find his phone/WhizMo.)

CLANCY *(re caller-ID)*

Shit.

(answers phone/WhizMo)

What do you want, Mom? (. . .) I'm at the library. (. . .) I'm not lying. (. . .) I don't care what your coordinates say, I say I'm at the library. (. . .)

CLAUDE

So if I don't do this? What, you'll fire me?

OWEN

That's up to you, Claude. Sally arrives in less than an hour, and I'll get someone who can teach this course in a way that's consistent with the school's new direction.

CLANCY

No, don't come get me, I'll meet you at the dorm. (. . .) Mom, if you come for me, I'll (. . .) Yeah, I took my meds. (. . .) and those. (. . .) See you at the dorm.

(CLANCY hangs up, removes the lace from around his neck, and exits.)

OWEN

Listen, Claude, I know this is all very sudden, but we have to adjust or . . . Claude, think of Carlyle. This is our home, we're like, well, family: you, me, and all the other teachers who have put our lives into this place. Ultimately, aren't people more important than principles?

CLAUDE

Sell ourselves to save ourselves?

OWEN

Think of it as an opportunity for change.

(A school bell rings. OWEN removes a tennis ball from his pocket.)

Oh, found this, guess he won't be chasing any more tennis balls across the quad. Sorry about Huxley, Claude, but this is the only way. . .

(Gives CLAUDE tennis ball.)

Now, we have a fun, but busy day; check your mEmo for a full schedule. And Claude, I hope you'll join us for all of them, I want you on my team. Let me know what you decide ASAP.

(OWEN exits as a slide appears: mEmo #17 – Let's Put the Spirit back in School Spirit! Festivities begin tonight!

- 6pm: Pizza Party in the Dining Hall
- 7:30pm: Assembly in Armstrong Hall
- 9pm: Bonfire on Soccer Field

CLAUDE ponders the tennis ball. HUXLEY growls.)

Morph to:

Scene 2: Unpacking the Issue.

A chalkboard reads: "BARBARA GIBBENS: CLANCY's mother, head of the Gibbens Family Foundation." A second chalkboard with a picture of a window reads: "CLANCY'S dorm room." A duffle-bag sits open on the floor. BARBARA holds a dresser drawer on her lap and unpacks the bag; CLANCY sketches.

BARBARA

—It's a miracle how much I fit in your dresser. I found these wonderful drawer organizers at the "Stow It" shop. Look, they're designed like large honeycombs and you roll your clothes instead of folding them.

CLANCY

That's great mom.

BARBARA

You're not even looking, Clance.

CLANCY (*not even a glance*)

I'm drawing.

BARBARA

What are you drawing?

CLANCY

Nothing.

BARBARA

Maybe you should draw one of these honeycombs. Truly miraculous. I mean all my life I've been folding clothes, because that's what I was taught to do: fold. But along come these honeycombs and they really change how you see the drawer and how you use it. Roll, not fold. And suddenly, you have twice the drawer space, and the clothes are even less wrinkled. See?
(*Shows him an astonishingly well organized drawer.*)

CLANCY (*not even a glance*)

Still drawing.

BARBARA

Well, I wish you would at least look. It's another example of a flawless design found in nature.

CLANCY

My sock drawer?

BARBARA

No, Clance, honeycombs. Things like this don't just happen by accident. The more you look, the more you'll see.

CLANCY

Whatever.

BARBARA

You're just being dismissive now.

CLANCY

What do you want me to say? That you found God in my sock drawer and now I see too?

BARBARA

I just want to see you happy again, Clance.

CLANCY

Then go, and I'll be happy.

(Pulling a shirt out of her bag and giving it to Clancy.)

BARBARA

I brought you a present.

CLANCY *(throwing shirt on his back-pack)*

I don't want a present, Mom.

BARBARA

It's one of the brand new Carlyle T-shirts, they turned out really great. Why don't you wear it to the assembly tonight, show a little school spirit.

CLANCY

I'm not going to your stupid assembly.

BARBARA

Clance, you have to, I scheduled a moment for you to give a speech.

CLANCY

You think I'm going to get up in front of a bunch of losers and say how great this is?

BARBARA

You don't have to say much, just a few words—it's a scholarship fund to honor your brother's—

CLANCY

It's a scholarship for every Jesus freak with passable SAT scores. Lance wanted to be a scientist, this would make him puke.

BARBARA

I can see you're very emotional about this—

CLANCY

I'll kill myself before I go to that assembly.

BARBARA

Clance, you promised you wouldn't talk like that anymore.

CLANCY

And you promised once the tech initiative was done, you wouldn't come back. And now a month later you're back. Just go, Mom.

BARBARA (*begins rolling more clothes*)

I'm not leaving until I know that everything's taken care of.

CLANCY

Fine, give it, I'll do it myself.

BARBARA

That's what you said at Beaumont and Excelsior and I left, because I was allowing you to "assert your independence". But this is the last time I'm unpacking you, and this time we're going to get it right. . . . You're just balling them up, not rolling them. Give them to me—

CLANCY

They're mine.

BARBARA

THEN ROLL THEM!

CLANCY

STOP TELLING ME WHAT TO DO!

BARBARA

I'M TRYING TO HELP YOU!

CLANCY

THEN LEAVE ME ALONE!

BARBARA

GIVE ME YOUR UNDERWEAR SO WE CAN GET THIS OVER WITH!

(A chalkboard moves to reveal DREW, holding his WhizMo. He begins to back out of the room, trying to exit unseen, but his WhizMo speaks and he is discovered.)

WHIZMO

Congratulations, Drew, you have arrived.

DREW

Oh, hey bro, my bad. Didn't mean to bust in—

CLANCY

It's cool, we were just—

DREW (*whispering to CLANCY*)

Dude, don't be shy – she's snap. She one of those Beaumont babes?

CLANCY

Drew, this is my *mom*. (. . .) Mom, this is my cellmate, Drew.

DREW

Oh, hey Mrs. Gibbens –uh– Clancy's mom.

BARBARA

Drew. . . Nice to finally meet you and sorry for the mess. A month, and he's barely unpacked. You're an angel for living in this sty for so long.

DREW

Uh, yeah, well, you gotta roll with the punches—adapt to your environment—that's the key, says Mr. D.

BARBARA

Yes, I understand you started your section on evolution.

CLANCY

Mom, don't even start.

(*Pause.*)

BARBARA

Drew, would you like a present?

DREW

I like presents.

BARBARA

It's nothing much, I brought Clancy one of the new T-shirts. In fact, I brought one for everyone, but we won't have those until the assembly, and I really want to see someone in it.

DREW

Ummm....I could always use a new T- but is that cool with you, roomie?

CLANCY

Whatever.

BARBARA

Thank you for sharing, Clancy.

(Goes to his backpack, pulls out T-shirt, but also finds a book.)

Here you go, Drew—

(She pulls out a dog-eared copy of “The Origin of the Species.”)

Clancy, what are you doing with this?

CLANCY

Mom, put that back.

BARBARA

Clancy, we threw all these books out.

CLANCY *(grabs book back)*

You can’t throw it all out, pretend it didn’t happen, Mom.

(Pause.)

DREW

Guess I’ll go try on that T, bro.

(DREW exits.)

BARBARA

Clancy, I don’t know what you’re thinking with that book, but there’s no use in holding onto it.
(. . .) It’s time to move on, it’s been a year. Your whole life is ahead of you.

CLANCY

So was Lance’s—

BARBARA

He was sick, clinically depressed.

CLANCY

That’s not a reason. There has to be a reason.

BARBARA

We may never know the reason, but we have to trust that God has a plan.

CLANCY

You make it sound like the most beautiful fucking thing in the world that Lance killed himself.

BARBARA

Clancy, how can you say that to me?

CLANCY

It's like you've been brainwashed, we never even used to go to church.

BARBARA

It's a mistake I made, never encouraging you boys to look beyond what was right in front of you.

CLANCY

You really believe this crap? That God designed the honeycomb, so I could find my tube-socks?

BARBARA

I don't know, Clancy, but I know I let him down; I let you down. Let me help you Clancy, please. Let's do this together. Why don't you just come help me set-up the assembly?

(DREW reenters in T-shirt with the school logo on it.)

Well, don't you look great. You like it?

DREW

Totally, but this on the back? We getting an upgrade?

*(DREW turns around, the back of the shirt reads:
"Intel[ligent Designer] Inside")*

BARBARA

That's what today's festivities are all about, I was just going to set-up the cookies—

DREW

Cookies? You need a hand, Mrs. G.?

BARBARA

Thank you, Drew. I hope your parents come tonight, so I can tell them what a fine young man—

DREW

Don't hold your breath. Pops works for a multi-national and they shipped him off to Dubai when I was five.

BARBARA

You grew up in Dubai?

DREW

Wild, huh? But Dubai's not what you think. It's totally mod, no crime, and like one of the big deals is camel races, they love them some camel races in Dubai. But the 'rents wanted me to get an American education, so I was Carlyle-bound when I was eleven.

BARBARA

Well, you'd be welcome at our house anytime.

CLANCY

Yeah, we even have a free bed now, Drew. It's all part of God's plan, right, Mom?

BARBARA

Clancy!

DREW

Come on, dude, let's go set-up some cookies. We'll use the deal. Check it out:

(to WHIZMO)

Armstrong Hall.

WHIZMO

Facing south: proceed, 74 yards.

BARBARA

I'm glad to see you're using the G.P.S.

DREW

It rules. I'm always heading the wrong way, but with this, it's like you're never lost. Like there's something up there, watching over, letting you know when you step outta line. It's like. . .

BARBARA

A little miracle.

CLANCY

It's just a way for them to keep tabs on you.

WHIZMO

Caution: you are moving away from *Armstrong Hall*.

DREW

How does it know?! Total miracle. Come on, dude, let's set-up some cookies.

BARBARA

Please come, Lance.

DREW

Your call, bro. (. . .) Okay, later. One, two, three...

WHIZMO

You are now on course.

(DREW exits, BARBARA waits. CLANCY stares at her, then puts the book back in his backpack. BARBARA exits.)

Morph to:

Scene Three: Cross Purposes.

Two chalkboards. On the first chalkboard is written: "SALLY LE – Grade 11. Scholarship student." On the second is written: "MRS. LE – Sally's grandmother and guardian." SALLY and MRS. LE position themselves as a third chalkboard with a picture of a door moves behind them and reads: "The Le's apartment." SALLY is dressed and ready to go, almost. Her grandmother, MRS. LE, tries to put the finishing touches on her.

MRS. LE

Just put it on, Sally.

SALLY

—Grammie, I already put on your dress—

MRS. LE

You don't like my dress?

SALLY

I didn't say that, I just don't want to put on—

MRS. LE

Sally, I have no time to fight, We leave in three, two, one minutes. Stop fussing and put it on.

SALLY

I'm not fussing, I just don't want to wear—

MRS. LE

You are fussing, you're always fussing. You fussed over the public school so I get you into private school; you fussed over your glasses, so I get you contact lenses, you fuss with hair, you fuss with your food, you fuss with your clothes, and now you fuss over your necklace.

SALLY

It's not my necklace, you just bought it.

MRS. LE

Where does this fussy child come from? I was never a fussy. I was—

SALLY

Bossy. That's what Aunt Kim says.

MRS. LE

I might be bossy, but she's boozy. No more words. Let's go.

SALLY

But what is this?

MRS. LE

And they say you're so smart. It's a cross!

SALLY

I know *what* it is, but why do I have to wear it?

MRS. LE

Because it looks nice, and I say so.

SALLY

But we're not religious.

MRS. LE

AH! Bite your tongue. WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS!

SALLY

But only because everyone else does, and we never go to church and we don't say grace. I'm more Buddhist than Christian.

MRS. LE

You're more argumentative than anything. Now you listen: you are a lucky girl. These very nice people, who believe very much in Jesus (and think you do), are giving us a lot of money so you can get a good education. More than what your blessed mother had, and more than what I had. But it's just a test, and you must pass the test. If you don't pass, they don't give the money; they don't give you the money, you go back to public school, get tattooed, and end up like your Aunt Kimmy. Now, they tell me you are good at tests, consider this the first question on the test: Does she believe in God? True or False?

SALLY

I don't know.

MRS. LE

ERR! Wrong, wrong. You missed the first question on the test. The answer is: TRUE.

SALLY

But I don't know if I—

MRS. LE

That is why you wear the cross! That way, it don't matter what you think, you don't say nothing. Cross answers for you: TRUE.

SALLY

But it's false advertising.

MRS. LE

No more false than the pads I seen you slip in under your bra—

SALLY

I do not!

MRS. LE

Let me see.

SALLY

That's private!

MRS. LE

And so is religion. And you should no more let them pry under this cross than you should let some boy pry under your dress. Now, let me see—open up!

SALLY

Fine. I'll wear the cross, give it.

(SALLY puts on cross. Elsewhere, OWEN appears, marching a line of students who carry firewood. MRS. LE. exits to find camera.)

MRS. LE *(exiting)*

Ah. My beautiful Sally Le Angel Food Cake. Let me get camera.

SALLY

No Grammie, we're going to be late.

MRS. LE *(offstage)*

One picture! You go all the way to boarding school, and I forget what my Sally Le Angel Food Cake looks like. Where is camera?

SALLY

It's not that far out of town—

MRS. LE *(offstage)*

Everything's far when you have a Chevy Nova. Why do they name a car after exploding star? Come on, you the girl genius, tell me.

JOSIE

How much longer, Headmaster Owen? These logs are way heavy.

DREW

Quit whining, and show a little spirit, Josie.

FLORINDA

Yeah, shut-up. Beats being in class.

DREW

I love burning shit.

MRS. LE *(offstage)*

WHERE IS THE CAMERA?!

SALLY

GRAMMIE, I'LL SEE YOU IN THE CAR.

((SALLY exits. OWEN blows his whistle.))

OWEN

Just a little further.

JOSIE

But this is the soccer field.

OWEN

We don't have a soccer team any more, Josie, might as well put it to use.

FLORINDA

Yeah Josie.

DREW

Can we burn like desks and chairs—

FLORINDA

And like use gas and a flame-thrower—

OWEN

Don't make me regret putting you on this. Now I want a regulation bonfire. Teepee structure, no more than six foot. This will be a safe and fun culminating event, understand?

DREW

Got you covered, Big O. This'll be one sweet fire.

FLORINDA

I like fire.

(Lights shift as the apartment chalkboards spin. On the back is written: Supply Closet. Two chalkboards position themselves to form a rectangle as a bare light-bulb flies in overhead.)

Scene 4: In a bind.

CLAUDE is in the supply closet, searching. HUXLEY, with muzzle, stands guard. MELANIE sits on an over-turned trashcan.

MELANIE

—Would you hold still for second? We really need to talk.

CLAUDE

Sorry, Melanie, but right now I got more on my plate than— I can't believe he threatened to fire me if I didn't start teaching the Bible!

MELANIE

It's not the Bible—

CLAUDE

What the hell!— Yesterday, there were boxes of chalk, neatly stacked one on top of the next. It was like the white cliffs of Dover in here, and today it's all gone.

MELANIE

Forget about the chalk. Owen's looking for you; he wants to know what you're going to do.

CLAUDE

I'm going to find a goddamn piece of chalk, and teach my class like I've always taught it!

MELANIE

That's not possible, Claude.

(HUXLEY lunges at something invisible, then spins in vicious circles.)

CLAUDE

Would you look at him. Yesterday he was fine, how could he change overnight?

MELANIE

He wasn't fine, he's been getting worse for months, but you couldn't or wouldn't see it.

(HUXLEY collapses, panting.)

Huxley's old Claude, and you need to start thinking about. . .

CLAUDE

You want me to put him down too?

MELANIE

I love him, Claude, I do, but there comes a point when you need to face reality. You can't just put your blinders on. It's the same thing with these scholarships, the chalk, the whole school.

CLAUDE

A perfect storm. Maybe it'll start raining Bibles, then we can just use that as our textbook.

MELANIE

Stop saying it's the Bible, it's a moderate, non-religious position.

CLAUDE

Its main tenet is that life, the universe, has been designed by something with INTELLIGENCE.

MELANIE

But it's not affiliated with any specific religion, and, like it or not, it's something more and more people want their children to learn about.

CLAUDE

Thankfully science isn't ruled by the laws of democracy. We can't vote in our favorite understanding of reality by a show of hands.

MELANIE

Why don't you at least come to this assembly, listen to what this is all about?

CLAUDE

Did Owen send you?

MELANIE

He's going to take your class away, find someone else, and then where will we be?

CLAUDE

Who's he going to find?

MELANIE

It doesn't matter, what matters is what you do.

CLAUDE

Is it Miller? . . . Noland? Murray, it's Murray isn't it? He still swears I stole his stapler and that was years ago. Of course, it's Murray.

MELANIE

It's not Murray, it's me. Claude. He wants me to do it.

CLAUDE

You? But you teach English! Aldous Huxley, not Thomas Henry.

MELANIE

I know, and I laughed, cause I thought he was joking. But he's not joking. He's serious, Claude.

CLAUDE

So you came to convince me to teach this, this, this...?

MELANIE

You could do it better than anyone else. All they want is for you to *teach the controversy*.

CLAUDE

But there is no controversy! I.D. has faked the controversy! EVOLUTION IS NOT WEAK!

MELANIE

You sound like a fundamentalist.

CLAUDE

Because I am right, and they are wrong.

MELANIE

I don't see what's wrong with asking questions, searching for answers.

CLAUDE

What's wrong is Barbara Gibbens is spending a lot of money to force it into *my* science class.

MELANIE

She lost a kid, Claude. Her son hung himself with his shoelaces. Think about that, can you imagine anything worse for a mother?

CLAUDE

He hung himself with his shoelaces?

MELANIE

You didn't know that?

CLAUDE

I did, yeah, but I guess I forgot. Clancy, yesterday morning. He had this shoelace around his neck, but I didn't make the connection...

MELANIE

Clancy's at risk. You know that paper I assigned about belief? His first draft had one word on it: *Nothing*. He fits the profile, Claude: withdrawn, confused, angry, erratic, and his mother's freaking out.

CLAUDE

But that's not evolution's fault!

MELANIE

What's it going to take to make you consider change? An overdose? Suicide?

CLAUDE

We won't lose this kid. I'll connect with him.

MELANIE

How? He won't even come to class.

(HUXLEY growls.)

CLAUDE

I don't know, but I'll find some way. (. . .) Are you really thinking about taking my class?

MELANIE

I wasn't, but—I don't know. I need to figure out where I stand.

CLAUDE

Well, don't let me stand in your way.

MELANIE

Just come to the assembly with me, Claude, listen to what this is all about. Please?

CLAUDE

I just don't see the point.

MELANIE

The point is: I'm asking you.

CLAUDE

Sorry, Melanie, but I just—I can't.

MELANIE

I can't either, Claude. I'm sorry too, I really am. (. . .) So, colleagues?

CLAUDE

Looks more like former colleagues to me.

(HUXLEY whimpers, MELANIE pets HUXLEY.)

MELANIE

Goodbye, Claude. . .

(MELANIE exits. CLAUDE shuts the closet door. Shutting the door limits the view of this world to the waist down. CLAUDE pats HUXLEY.)

CLAUDE

Looks like it's just me and you. What the hell are we going to do, Hux?

(HUXLEY growls fiercely.)

Fight, how can I fight? I'm totally alone on this. Totally alone.

(CLAUDE suddenly doubles over in pain, and begins vomiting in the trashcan.)

Huxley. Oh god—

(CLAUDE lunges against the door, it doesn't budge.)

CLAUDE *(cont'd.)*

Shit, we're locked in! Help! Melanie? Help!

(CLAUDE pulls the WhizMo from his pocket. He frantically turns it on. It beeps and plays it's beguiling theme song and then says:)

WHIZMO

Hello, and welcome to your new WhizMo—your wireless, interactive connection to the world. I'm Virgil, your personal guide.

CLAUDE *(barely holding on to it, to WHIZMO)*

How do you make a call?

WHIZMO

As a first time user, I'm here to guide you through the interactive, on-screen, real-time tutorials. To start, I'm going to ask you what we call: "20 Questions", so I can customize the Whizmo's robust technology platform to reflect your individual needs and interests. Ready?

(CLAUDE vomits.)

Good. Now, let's start with your first name, you can enter it or speak it out loud.

(CLAUDE vomits.)

Hhauughrrllluh, what a nice name, but I want to make sure I got it right. Repeat it now:

(CLAUDE vomits.)

Okay, Hhauughrrllluh, it's a pleasure to meet you. You're just 19 questions away—

CLAUDE

Shut-up!

(CLAUDE clicks-off the WHIZMO. HUXLEY whimpers. CLAUDE crawls to the dog, reaches him, unclips him from the chain and pulls him to him.)

Huxley, come here buddy, help— What's happening, Huxley? I need help. Help me, Huxley, please, help me.

(CLAUDE curls up around the trashcan and pulls the chalkboard dog in tight and holds him for dear life. HUXLEY lets out a sustained keen.)

Morph to:

Scene 5: Opposable thumbs.

DREW and CLANCY in front of a chalkboard with a sketch of a tree and the caption: "Somewhere in the Grove." DREW wears the t-shirt.

DREW

—Game over.

CLANCY

Double or nothing.

DREW

We already did double and you crashed and burned. Now cough up and let's roll, the night's festivities are about to begin.

CLANCY

I don't see anything to be festive about.

DREW (*displaying picture on WhizMo*)

You'll change your mind when you see the newbie. I snapped a quick pic of Sally Scholarship—check it. Tell me you wouldn't like to taste her steaming hot dumplings.

CLANCY

Drew, I'm not going. Come on, let's just play another game.

DREW

But it's like your mom, and for your brother, what's the prob, dude?

CLANCY

One more game, and let's up-the-stakes. You win, I'll give you—

(CLANCY reveals a bag of marijuana.)

DREW

That's like a full-on quarter. Where'd you score a quarter?

CLANCY

My grandmother gave it to me before she died.

DREW

Your grannie? I call: bulllllllshit.

CLANCY

She had glaucoma—full access. So it was like my inheritance. You win, I'll give you the bag.

DREW

I dunno. Your Grannie's dope probably burns like potpourri and if I did cop a buzz, I'd be wiggling about, like, knitting needles and doilies and crap.

CLANCY

Never know till you try it.

DREW

Have you tried it? (. . .) You haven't have you?

CLANCY

Are you going to take the bet or not?

DREW

Okay, but if we're gonna play, let's make it count, for real. I win, you come to the festivities.

CLANCY

Forget it.

DREW

(Clucks like a chicken.)

CLANCY

Oh, hardly.

DREW

(Clucks louder.)

CLANCY

Fine, but if I win, you change out of that idiotic t-shirt.

DREW *(they start an intense game of thumb-wrestling)*

You are totally on. One, two, three, four, I declare a thumb-war (...) Dude, you are one sick puppy. Carrying a bag, but never smoking out.

CLANCY

Millions and millions of years of evolution boil down to this moment— One! Two!—

DREW

Denied!

(They play more in silence.)

You know how far the "Great O" will boot your ass if they find you holding?

CLANCY

First, Owen can kiss my ass, then he can boot it.

DREW

Right, duh. They're not gonna boot you.

CLANCY

Beaumont booted me, Excelsior booted me even further.

DREW

Nowaynowaynoway. They boot you, your folks reboot them, take back their WhizMos, and it's game-over for Carlyle. You're boot proof, dude. Galoshes and shit. You'd have to—I dunno—take out somebody with a pipe-bomb to— One! Two! Three!

(DREW "pins" CLANCY.)

CLANCY

Crap!

DREW

Holy crap, are you making a pipe-bomb?

CLANCY

Violence in schools is *so* last season, man.

DREW

That's *sooo* unfunny. It's a real problem: school violence and teen suicide is one of the major indicators of America's eroding moral values.

(Beat.)

CLANCY

She sent you, didn't she? (. . .) Tracked me down on the WhizMo and sent you to drag me back.

DREW

It's not like she paid me cash. I almost volunteered. She just wants you there, man.

CLANCY

Man, I can't believe you. Bet's off.

DREW

Dude, there's no foul in going. And maybe she's on to something, Maybe it's high-time Mr. D. stops preaching evolution 24/7 and starts teaching us about the big man upstairs. Did you know the whole universe, including us, runs on this thing that's way better than Windows, it's like this monster version of DOS—a Divine Operating System.

CLANCY *(simultaneously)*

Divine Operating System. I've heard it a thousand times, and I'm not going listen to it again—ever. You tell my mom that.

DREW

If nothing else, you should do it for your brother. This whole deal's in his memory, yeah?

CLANCY

Don't talk about my brother.

DREW

Whatever. I just think it's gonna be fun, even though we're going to be talking about God, it's hip and cool, plus there's excellent snacks. For the assembly, she brought these giant chocolate chip cookies. Dude, you gotta check these cookies. They're huge, but the chips are wicked small. Like you can barely see any chips at all until you bite into them and then it's mad with chips, everywhere. Your mom calls them—

CLANCY

—Chocolate micro-chip cookies.

DREW

That's right!

CLANCY

I can't take any more of this. . .

(CLANCY stuffs his crap in his backpack; DREW goes right on talking.)

DREW

And while we were setting up, she was like way into talking about these cookies, about how, just like the cookie, inside each of us there's millions of chips and God has designed these chips and placed them in us. But just cause we have the chips, doesn't mean everything is gonna be la-di-da. Our DOS can get messed up, or worse: hacked, or worst: a virus can scramble our code and we can wreak havoc, but the key is knowing God designed the chips and that any virus or hacker can be wiped out and your system can be rebooted.

(CLANCY slips his WhizMo into Drew's backpack and then slips off.)

Then she wrapped a slice of cookie in a napkin, and told me to go find you while she got dressed and shit. And I took it, cause the students are going to be on those cookies like Procter on Gamble. Here, have some and then let's roll. (. . .) Clancy? Clancy, yo, where'd you go, bro? . . . Oh dude, you so don't know what you're missing.

(DREW breaks open cookie and looks at chips in wonder.)

A whole universe is inside us, millions and millions of righteously arranged chips.

Morph to:

Scene 6: One cookie gained is another cookie tossed.

CLAUDE in the supply closet. He remains curled around the trashcan, moaning. A few things have shifted, though. First, a hole has been dug and around the rim of the hole is a fine white dust. Second, the chalkboard dog is missing. In its stead, is the top of a stove-pipe hat peaking up from just above the hole. CLAUDE breathes deeply, trying to fight off the nausea.

CLAUDE

Huxley, I just don't understand what brought this on—

(A scoopful of white dust flies from the hole, landing on CLAUDE.

CLAUDE realizes HUXLEY has dug a hole.)

Huxley, what are you doing down there—

(HUXLEY growls. CLAUDE looks down in the hole.)

Huxley?

(HUXLEY growls twice. Pause. Growls again.)

What are you doing?

(HUXLEY growls once.)

Helping me out. Can I help?

(HUXLEY growls fiercely.)

You're right, I can't even keep my head up. How could I help?

(CLAUDE goes back to the trashcan. More vomiting, more white dust.

HUXLEY growls. CLAUDE hangs on the rim of the trashcan.)

Yes, I understand. I wait here, you go for help.

(HUXLEY growls, CLAUDE crawls over to the rim of the hole.)

It's amazing how quickly you're moving... What is all that?

(The white dust continues to erupt from the hole, like ash from a volcano.

CLAUDE wets his finger, runs it through the dust, and brings it to his lips:)

Chalk.

(The dust continues to rain down.)

Morph to: