

THIS IS THE FIRST 10 PAGES OF THE PLAY. FOR A (FREE) FULL  
COPY IN PDF FORM E-MAIL ME. THIS PLAY IS CURRENTLY  
AVAILABLE FOR PRODUCTION WITHOUT CHARGE, AS LONG AS  
AUTHORSHIP IS ACKNOWLEDGED

Good Answer

A Comedy in Two Acts

By

Mark Montgomery  
1303 Main St.  
Grinnell, IA 50112  
641-236-8519  
[montgome@grinnell.edu](mailto:montgome@grinnell.edu)

## CHARACTERS

MICHAEL	Professor of Mathematics, Acting President of the College, between 40 and 50 years old.
JO ANN	Administrative Assistant to the President of the College, between 40 and 50 years old.
PHILLIP	Professor of French, between 40 and 50 years old.
MARGARET	A college student.
BUTCHIE	A college student.
DAVID	An alumnus of the college, between 30 and 40 years of age.
Marty Pembroke	A wealthy business man and alumnus of the college.

## SETTING

All scenes take place in the Office of the President at a small college in Iowa. One door exits offstage to the administrative assistant's office, another door exits offstage into the president's private bathroom. On the wall hangs a portrait of a man in a business suit.

## TIME

A weekday morning during the spring semester.

## ACT I

## SCENE I

(Michael enters. He wears a suit and carries a briefcase. He pauses before the portrait.)

MICHAEL

(To the door to the Administrative assistant's office)

Have you noticed a strange man in my office this morning?

(Jo Ann enters holding a watering can. She moves down to water some plants.)

JO ANN

First of all, this is not your office. And, yes, I have noticed a strange man here for almost three weeks now.

MICHAEL

I'll rephrase my question.

(Points at the painting)

Who the hell is this guy, and why is he hanging in the office that I have been asked to occupy, even if you don't approve?

JO ANN

That is Mr. Pembroke's father. He was a trustee of the college in the 1970's and that's his official portrait.

MICHAEL

That explains a great deal, except why he's suddenly hanging here this morning.

JO ANN

The Development Office believes that Mr. Pembroke will be pleased to find the College prominently displaying a portrait of his father.

MICHAEL

I see. So our reasoning is that Pembroke is smart enough to be the youngest CEO in the Fortune 500, yet too stupid to realize that we put this up just to impress him?

JO ANN

I, as you can easily observe, do not work in the Development Office. You'll need to take it up with them.

MICHAEL

But for future reference, you agree, do you not, that the President decides what pictures hang in the President's Office?

JO ANN

I certainly do agree. But the President is dead.

MICHAEL

And I am acting as President.

JO ANN

I'll say.

(Jo Ann Exits)

MICHAEL

(Talks to the painting.)

Don't get comfortable.

(Michael goes to sit behind desk, starts to look at his e-mail. Phone on desk buzzes, he picks it up.)

Hello ... Hi, Ellie ... Oh, Jeez, what does he want? ... I don't really have time right now, how about if I call him ... No, Ellie ... I don't want to ... Ellie!

(very brief pause)

Mr. Donaldson, nice to hear from you, how are you, sir? ... Well, rumors are just that, aren't they, rumors. ... Athletics is going to suffer some budget cuts like everyone else, but ... No, of

course we're not eliminating football; we're not planning to eliminate any sports. Not yet, anyway. ... We are talking to the Alumni Association, I'm meeting with a group next week ... yes ... I realize that ... I plan to keep the Alumni Association very well apprised of ... Listen, actually, Mr. Donaldson, I'm late for a meeting, is there a number where I could call you back? Hold on, let me get a pencil.

(Picks up a can of pencils from the desktop and rattles it next to the phone.)

Go ahead.

(He writes nothing.)

OK, I've got it ... yes, good, we'll talk some more then.

(Jo Ann appears at the doorway with a young woman, obviously a student, looking very sullen.)

JO ANN

Margaret is here, as requested.

(Margaret enters. She is incongruously dressed: a loose skirt and a tee shirt with an environmental slogan, covered by a jean jacket. She wears heavy, beat up, hiking boots with the laces untied. She carries what looks like a shirt box. She sits down on the sofa, places the shirt box on the floor and stares straight ahead, arms folded across her chest.)

MICHAEL

Thank you for coming.

MARGARET

Why did you call me in here?

MICHAEL

Because I wanted to see you. You know, Margaret, since you started college here, you've been almost like a daughter to me.

MARGARET

That's very funny, Dad. You know, it's stupid jokes like that that get you in trouble.

MICHAEL

Yeah, who says I'm in trouble?

MARGARET

Well, let's see, how about ... everybody on campus, to name two thousand.

MICHAEL

Well my troubles would partly be due to you, now, wouldn't they?

MARGARET

Oh, you're going to blame, me, huh? That's why you made me come here at the crack of dawn.

MICHAEL

It's nine o'clock, Margaret.

MARGARET

It is?

(Stands up.)

Then I've got to go, I've got a nine o'clock class.

MICHAEL

No you don't, I checked.

(She sits down sullenly. He reaches behind his desk to extract a poster on which is a fuzzy picture of him holding a hatchet. Emblazoned on the poster are the words THE AXEMAN, NO BUDGET OR RAINFOREST IS SAFE FROM HIM.)

MICHAEL

Perhaps you can explain this.

MARGARET

(Smiles for the first time.)

Yeah, I found that in an album of old Pine Ridge pictures.

MICHAEL

I recognize the photograph.

MARGARET

See, the axe thing ties into both budget cuts and deforestation.

MICHAEL

I get it. My question is how my picture got on this poster.

MARGARET

How it got there? There's a digital scanner in Smith Hall; I just downloaded the jpeg file to my laptop. Easy.

MICHAEL

(Stares at her for a beat.)

Do you honestly think you can shorten this interview by pretending to be stupid?

MARGARET

So what do you want me to say, Dad?

MICHAEL

I want you to say why you would deliberately humiliate me by putting this picture on a poster? I wouldn't have done that to my father.

MARGARET

It isn't personal, Dad.

MICHAEL

(Holds up the poster.)

Not personal? Then why does this person looks so much like me? Would you take it personally if I hung up a picture of you like this?

MARGARET

Well, I have sense enough not to be photographed in flannel.

MICHAEL

Lady, I've got baby pictures that would make you beg for flannel. Would you like me to post those around campus?

MARGARET

Look, Dad, how was I not going to publicize our rally? I'm Vice President for Publicity of S.O.P. What can't you understand about that?

MICHAEL

Two things, actually: One, what the hell "S.O.P" is, and two, why S.O.P. is protesting against me?

MARGARET

You don't know what S.O.P. is? The biggest environmental group on campus: Save Our Planet?

MICHAEL

I thought it was Save the Planet?

MARGARET

We changed it. It turns out that "S.T.P." is the name of a petroleum product.

MICHAEL

Why would S.O.P. be protesting anything I did?

MARGARET

According to the Rainforest Action Network we lose 60 hectares of rainforest every minute.

MICHAEL

Do they calculate how many hectares are destroyed by guys professing mathematics in Iowa?

MARGARET

Well ... your effect is ... indirect.

MICHAEL

I would guess so.

MARGARET

But you're inviting Marty Pembroke here and he's destroying rainforest.

MICHAEL

How? His company is in Cleveland, they make machinery.

MARGARET

Including bulldozers, which are used to build roads, which are built in the Amazon, which leads to mass peasant migration, which leads to wholesale destruction of precious rainforest. Not only that, did you know that Pembroke was in China last month trying to sell cranes for the Three Gorges Dam Project?

MICHAEL

So?

MARGARET

So? SO? That dam that will flood the Three Gorges region of the Yangtze River, one of China's most important ecological, not to mention cultural -

MICHAEL

OK, OK, I withdraw my "so?". But there's something you don't seem to be considering here Margaret. Mr. Pembroke is potentially a substantial benefactor of this institution, which, as you may have heard, is up to its eyebrows in financial doo doo. How would S.O.P. feel about a big tuition hike?

MARGARET

We don't want lower tuition if it's soaked in the blood of indigenous people.

MICHAEL

Blood? Indigenous people can't outrun a bulldozer in the jungle?

MARGARET

This is serious, Dad. The rainforest is their livelihood, their culture, their whole way of life. When you fell a forest, you fell a people!

MICHAEL

(Pause)

I can see why they made you Vice President for Publicity.

MARGARET

(Smiling)

Yeah, I beat out Audrey Hayes for that position. Look Dad, last year members of S.O.P. chained themselves to the front door of Home Depot stores to raise consciousness about deforestation. All I'm doing is publicizing an event.

(Stands up.)

And I really do have to go, the rally starts in half an hour.

MICHAEL

A rally in which you accuse your own father, who has never been south of the Equator, of destroying the Brazilian rainforest.

MARGARET

Jeez, you are soooooo dramatic! Gotta go.

(She starts to leave. Then turns back to him.)

You know, you always tell me that when you're arguing with someone you should say at least one nice thing. You haven't said one nice thing since I've been here.

MICHAEL

(Points at her untied hiking boots.)

I like your shoes.

MARGARET

Toodles.

(Starts to leave.)

MICHAEL

Hey, you haven't said one nice thing to me, either.

MARGARET

OK. Let's see ... Dad, you're a big doofus.

(Exits)

MICHAEL

(Calls after her.)

Oh, yeah? So's your old man.

MICHAEL

(To Painting)

Did you have any daughters? I mean, that would certainly help explain why you're dead.

(Michael goes behind his desk and, sits down, picks up the telephone and dials.)

Anna, this is Michael Kaminski. What? ... No, Anna, you're not being laid off, I'm calling because there's something I would like removed from my office. ... No, the office I'm in now, the President's Office. ... It's a painting.

(To the picture.)

Don't be offended, it isn't anything you did.

(Into phone.)

Yes, I know that you just put it in here, but I'd like it removed right away. It isn't worth explaining now, Anna, could you just send someone over, please? I need it out of here by 11:30 at the latest.

(To the picture.)

You're son will thank me. I wouldn't want my father hanging on the wall while I was in meeting.

(Jo Ann enters, closing the door behind her.)

JO ANN

Butchie is here.

MICHAEL

Butchie? Butchie Wright?

JO ANN

How many Butchies do you know?

MICHAEL

Butchie Wright has an appointment?

JO ANN

It's on your calendar. Everything to do with this office is written on your calendar, which is not the least bit useful unless you occasionally look at the calendar.

MICHAEL

(Looks at the desk calendar)

It doesn't say what he wants to see me about. You gave him an appointment without asking what he wants?

JO ANN

Students often saw President Higby without having to give me a reason. I don't see why it should be different for the Acting President.

MICHAEL

Well, you stay for the meeting too, then. That's the least you can do for me.

JO ANN

As committed as I am to doing the least I can do for you, he's here to see you, not me.

(Jo Ann exits. A young man enters. He is large and athletic looking, wearing in jeans and an un-tucked rugby shirt. He is awkward and ill at ease.)

MICHAEL

(Gets up from his desk and walks forward to greet the young man)

Good Morning, Butchie.

(Shakes his hand)

BUTCHIE

Hi, Professor.

MICHAEL

(Ushers Butchie over to a chair by the coffee table)

Please sit down. What can I do for you this morning?