

LATE AT NIGHT, CLEVER MEN APPEAR IN YOUR LIVING ROOM

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Very tired after a long drive, which fortunately didn't include highway clogging but did include one AM station melding into another, causing quite a case of radio rage, you step into your living room, fumble for the light switch and find four philosophers waiting in the dark.

Not feeling very philosophical, or even witty, you remain silent. Exhausted from the evening's events, including an argument with the Dim Sum restaurant manager after you complained about the thin waiter removing plates before you finished, you face the philosophers, who study you with their extra-deep probing eyes, and you ponder what to say.

Luckily for you, because to be caught unthoughtful in the presence of great thinkers is one of the gravest humiliations, the red-plaid-shirted philosopher starts the dialogue.

'I would say you are late, but what is late?'

'Late for what?' the balding one in the green golf shirt adds. 'Our thinking? It will go on before and after any designated time; there is no need for commitment to a frozen moment.'

'Surely,' Red points, 'you don't insinuate the non-existence of lateness.'

Not knowing what you're late for, yet experiencing slight panic (I'm late!) you search for excuses.

The man in a yellow robe nods. 'No justification necessary. Time is inconsequential.'

'Perhaps to you.' The man in black smiles.

Ignoring your tardiness, your explanations and your presence, the men talk quickly, ping-ponging their phrases. It is difficult to keep track of who speaks.

'Who is to say my perception of time is yours?'

'Mine could be in an instant; yours could be in an eon.'

'What is an eon?' They laugh.

You take advantage of the laughter to confidently and casually put away your coat, hat and umbrella, as if you planned your overdue entrance. It is sometimes better to act as if your blunder is not a blunder after all. But they pay no attention as you sit on the hearth.

The green-shirted man bounces in his seat. 'How long is *Right back?*'

'How long is *See you later?*'

'How would you measure *Until then?*'

'Until when!'

'That's what I mean. It's all irrelevant.'

Your weary vision struggles to keep up with their conversation, so you close your eyes and speak. 'Philosophers always use the word irrelevant.'

You believe the red man answers. 'We could use immaterial.'

Someone adds, 'Extraneous.'

Another, 'Superfluous.'

You recognise the yellow man's voice. 'Superfluous. I don't use that word enough.'

'What is enough!' Someone pounds on the table. Your eyes flutter wide for just a moment and then you return to listening.

'Much more than insufficient.'

'Enough is adequate.'

'Oh no. Enough could be *Stop hitting me. Enough!*'

'I could hit you and we could see how long it takes until enough.'

'I would join in.'

'I also could assist.'

'I wouldn't. I'd say, *This is all irrelevant.*' And they laugh again, the laugh of men who know they are clever, and enjoy the spar.

(end of excerpt)