

# The Button: Thoreau Edition | MAMS

## Characters:

- Sharvi as Thoreau
- Anthe and Grace as The Button
- Medhansh as Trump
- Grace as Taylor Swift
- Anthea as the CS Major
- Medhansh as CEO/Therien

## Script:

### Scene 1 (1:54)

*We begin with a confused Thoreau sitting impatiently at a table with a large, white button placed in the middle. Thoreau looms over the button, bemused, poking at it with an annoyed curiosity. The director walks in Stage Left, walking across the stage while flipping through a script.*

THOREAU: Director, I was under the impression that we would commence in five minutes, yet I have counted ten.

DIRECTOR: One moment please, we will begin recording shortly.

*The director gestures a thumbs up to his off-stage crew, then turns to the audience.*

DIRECTOR: Henry David Thoreau? Okay great! We're ready to shoot – oh wait. I need to ask the audience. Are YOU guys ready? (*pause*) You can do better than that! Great. Three, two, one, ACTION.

DIRECTOR: Welcome to The Button, a speed dating show. When the button lights up white, either player may press it and swap out their date for a new person. If two people can last on a date for 10 minutes, they win an all-expenses-paid second date. This is the Button.

*Thoreau shifts uncomfortably in his seat, adjusting his tie absentmindedly yet with some determination. A man enters. Thoreau immediately sits up straighter, eyeing the stranger quizzically. The two sit face to face.*

*RANDOM attempts to shake hands with Thoreau, who returns it rather distractedly. RANDOM opens his mouth to speak, eager.*

THOREAU (interrupting): After a still winter night I awoke with the impression that some question had been put to me, which I had been endeavoring in vain to answer in my sleep, as to what—how—when—where?

RANDOM: Uh, this is a date, ri—

THOREAU: Many have believed that Walden reached quite through to the other side of the globe. However! The bubbles showed contorting light rays, proving that the reflection from the Sun is creating heat to melt the ice! How fascinating!

BUTTON: Henry, why don't we introduce—

THOREAU: However, nature is not all beautiful. There is a savage species, the woodchuck, who nibbled the tenderest leaves of my beans! My precious beans!

RANDOM (turning to director): What the f-

THOREAU (with great indignation): I FORBID YOU TO INTERRUPT ME!

RANDOM: Okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! God. Go ahead, please.

THOREAU (jumping forward): IT WAS A WOODCHUCK WHO STOLE ACROSS MY PATH, MY LAKE IN WINTER, AND JOSTLED ME INTO THE LAKE!

*The man looks somewhere in between at a loss for words and fighting an uncontrollable urge to laugh.*

THOREAU (cont.): He sent me across some unnatural tunnel of space and light! I awaken in a world where the sun seems to have given up on the earth, the very air reeks of such foulness, I cannot tell you—and dear God, these people—these *people*—must we still call them people? (*slams both hands on the table ruefully*) They are tethered to glowing screens as though enthralled by the Devil himself! Oh, and the clothing (*shaking his head in utter disbelief*), where are the civilized coats, hats, breeches—must you future humans wear such hideous clothing? The Lord must have sent me here to restore humanity as it once was. Not to worry, I shall put everything in order—

*Thoreau takes in a sharp breath, and as luck would have it, the Button lights up white. In dramatic Thoreau fashion, he stands up to press the button and the buzzer rings. The stranger gives the director an incredulous look, stands up to take his poster, gestures a pointed “he’s crazy” to the audience, and exits Stage Left.*

## Scene 2 (2:42 existing text)

*We now see a disgruntled-looking Donald Trump emerge with two earpiece-clad Secret Service agents by his side. His expression shifts at the sound of the national anthem and the audience clapping, at which point he suddenly has a confident strut in his step, fist in the air, motioning for the audience to rise. Makes a show of ripping off the previous poster. Thoreau watches intently, unsure what to make of him.*

TRUMP (to audience): Thank you, thank you. Thank you.

BUTTON: Welcome, Mr. Trump.

TRUMP: It's Mr. President to you, thank you very much.

THOREAU: President? Mr. Fillmore? You have traveled here as well? You have trumped the peculiar institution?

TRUMP: You liberals, I swear.

*There's a long pause. Thoreau looks Trump up and down. Trump chuckles, pleased with himself.*

BUTTON (attempting to fill the silence): So...Mr. Tru – Mr. President, sorry, what would you say is your favorite *Mexican food*?

TRUMP: Huh? What? Mexican food? (*waves his hand dismissively*) I don't care about that. Now the *Mexicans* I care about. *Illegal immigration* I care about. Let me tell you, folks, illegal immigration will be the death of America. It's a disaster. The worst. They're taking our money, our jobs, taking our...well, just about everything besides bad hair days, because nobody does bad hair like Hilary. (*Looks at audience, waits for a response, chuckles*) And I get it, you know? Everyone wants to come to the greatest country in the world – Trump's America – but we can't have all of them gatecrashing our party. Well, ladies and gentlemen, that is exactly why my great wall between the United States and Mexico WILL succeed, to protect the pure American Spirit And Economy™ and to prove that I am superior. Thank you, thank you.

*He sits back, pleased with himself. Thoreau is not amused.*

THOREAU (leaning forward): A wall? Between The United States and Mexico? Don't you think the people should be kept together? For you are separating aspects of God as God lives within us all more than any church.

TRUMP: The wall just got ten feet higher.

*Awkward silence ensues. Extra long pause. Trump eyes Thoreau judgmentally. Thoreau eyes Trump back.*

BUTTON: Shall we...talk about something else? Henry, you were telling us backstage that you went to jail? Is that a dealbreaker for you, Mr. Trump?

THOREAU: *All* I did was not pay a tax to, or recognize the authority of, the state which buys and sells men, women, and children like cattle at the door of its senate-house. Of course I must act against the unethical!

TRUMP: It's alright Henry, I was "found guilty" on what, 30? 40? Counts of... what was it again? (*snaps to motion Secret Service towards him*)

SECRET SERVICE 1: It was 34 charges, sir. Falsifying business records and uh, tax evasion, sir.

TRUMP: Yeah whatever, 34 charges, falsifying business records – and as for the tax evasion, look me in the eye and tell me the average American doesn't evade taxes. That's why I'm lowering the corporate tax rate! Point is, jail is for losers, and I don't lose.

THOREAU: I must admit, I also run "amok" within society, for wherever a man goes the ugliest of society follows. It *is* rather refreshing to see someone share the same principles.

BUTTON: I see we are...bonding over tax evasion? If it works it works, I guess.

*The button lights up white and Thoreau and Trump lock eyes for a moment before both reach forward, scrambling for the button. We watch as the two engage in an awkwardly intense fight for it.*

BUTTON: I'm afraid Thoreau had it first, Mr. President.

THOREAU: I must say I do not quite see eye to eye on your views on taxpayer duty. You are the President, after all.

BUTTON: Did you not just agree with him a second ago –

TRUMP (with over-exuberant hand motions, getting up roughly, moving towards exit): I didn't lose! I never lose! They faked it, like the election! I always tri-ump! *PAUSE FOR EFFECT BECAUSE THAT LINE IS FUNNY.* You are watching CNN.

THOREAU: You know, perhaps he isn't President Fillmore after all.

*Trump exits.*

### Scene 3 (2:04)

*Enter a jittery, skittish, gangly young student with a computer tightly secured under one arm and a pair of glasses in the other. Thoreau eyes him skeptically but keeps silent.*

BUTTON: So why don't we introduce our-

CS MAJOR (rambling): So I made this spreadsheet that details *exactly* why you and I are compatible. Isn't that right Maurice?

*BOTH make a point to look at the computer. The computer, to no one's surprise, doesn't respond.*

THOREAU (reaching for the laptop): What is this...dark magic? How could you possibly make it sentient like that? Who is Maurice?

CS MAJOR (quickly): Oh, you mean my beautiful little queen here? Well I mean *Anges* is state of the art – fifteen terabytes of RAM, fifty terabytes storage, 5.4 terahertz single core performance, 200 cores (*sighs dreamily*) if anything, she's my one true love. Besides you, of course.

THOREAU: I do not understand a word of your speech. I thought I was well-versed in Latin and French?

CS MAJOR: It's okay, Henry. I can enlighten you, like you enlightened me all those years ago in high school lit. See, this cell in G38 shows that we're both INTP so we're *obviously* compatible. Thoreau (becoming increasingly agitated): G38?

CS MAJOR: Of course, G38 shows our personality types! Just like how C99 shows how my online pheromones attract yours. I asked every person on the street I saw to add a line of code to this spreadsheet! None of them are responding to me now though...

THOREAU (slowly and quietly): I see. I see it now. I see *all* of it now. I see a world where we've traded the serene tranquility of nature for the chaos of technology. (*His voice raises*) You are meant to believe that *this* (pointing at the computer with disgust) is your one true meaningful

relation? Where we once sought truth and wisdom in the woods, now we chase after fleeting distractions! You have all become prisoners of your own inventions, just as I had predicted you would!

CS MAJOR: How DARE - (*stands, slamming table*) - you insult Sheryl! We will not STAND for this!

*Thoreau sits down abruptly, alarmed.*

CS MAJOR (cont.): Sorry, Charles!

THOREAU: Charles? How many names do you have for your revolting creature? Do you sorcerers alter your designs with such fluidity? (*lean in with intensity*) Such an attachment to an inanimate object...it is wrong!

CS MAJOR: You are OBVIOUSLY not who I thought you were. There must be a bug in my =LOVE function in D7. Florence and I are LEAVING! Wait no, *you* leave!

*Yet another fight ensues for possession of the button. Thoreau pushes the computer science major backwards, and he falls flat on his back.*

BUTTON (*in between restrained laughter*): And Thoreau's still in the game! I'm sorry sir, are you alright?

*Computer science major exits, shooting Thoreau a scathing glare while whispering reassurances to his computer.*

## Scene 4 (2:20)

Swift: Hi, I'm enchanted to meet you, I am Taylor Swift. Three words to describe me would be gorgeous, fearless, and your wildest dreams.

Thoreau: Audacious assumptions...

The Button: Let's talk about your professions.

Swift: Ready for it? I'm a singer and songwriter, that means I make music (*exaggerated wink at Thoreau*). I was watching you backstage, I know you all too well. **(Start song)** You're a foolish one, the man who just ran out of the woods safe and sound trying to begin again in this cruel summer.

Thoreau: Blasphemy! But, music is of utmost importance, the very essence of life itself. I must observe a tune from you.

Swift: (2 bars of instrumental)

Hypocrisy,  
Switching stances there's no honesty  
(your) Full of lies  
We'd end in burning flames or paradise  
Simplicity, oh  
It's something that's been kept throughout humanity

Thoreau: "no it HAS been lost"

(Medhansh come in)  
And I live my life in planes though I  
Know the world is up in flames, but I (Anthea comes in)  
Go on a private jet each time

*Anthea (R) and Medhansh (L) enter, and begin dancing.*

You've got that lone wolf mindset, astray in the trees  
And I've got the modern world industrialized dream  
When your plans come crashing down, you just hide by a pond  
Cause you're just a man in the past, but I never go out of style

Thoreau: STOP. I am not a hypocrite. I need not compare myself to you, for it is evident that my life, rooted in simplicity and truth, stands in contrast to your filthy obsession with material wealth and social status – trivial pursuits that conceal the true human desires. I choose solitude, not as a path of escape, but as a way to uncover my true desires and beliefs, free of contamination from this hideous world.

Swift: This is it. You speak in riddles. I've had enough, cause like we will never ever ever get together. I knew you were trouble when I walked in. I should've said no, should've gone home, I should've thought twice before coming on this show.

*Thoreau presses the button immediately after it flashes white, earning an offended, over-dramatic gasp from Taylor.*

Swift: I'm telling Taylor Nation.

*Taylor storms off in a fit of rage.*

## Scene 5 (2:33)

The Button: Henry, you haven't been finding any luck in the love department so far. Do you have any thoughts to share?

Thoreau: I'd appreciate it if you would refer to me in a more respectful manner or I *will* "press charges".

*Thoreau says "press charges" as if he isn't quite sure if the words are right. Because he's stubborn, he continues.*

Thoreau (cont.): I'm tired of this constant disrespect and malarkey!

The Button: Okay... wait, do you know what that even means? You know what, maybe our next contestant can tell you!

*(simultaneously as next line) CEO (Medhansh) walks in confidently, looking very official. He carries loose papers (can be script) and sets them down on the table before sitting down.*

The Button (cont.): And give you a few pointers on loveeee!

CEO: Hello. It's great to meet you, Mr. Thoreau.

*They shake hands.*

Thoreau: Finally! An intellectual of my caliber! What are those papers you have there? Great literary poems? Excerpts from *The Iliad*? An article to cite in your logbook for your STEM project? *Thoreau looks to the audience, breaking the 4th wall.*

CEO: They're papers for my start-up Therien Inc! Would you like to get involved?

*CEO hands business card to Thoreau, Thoreau's eyes fall to the paper, and he snatches it immediately.*

Thoreau: Therien? I knew a Therien! He was barely literate, coarse, stout, and sluggishly molded. "I occasionally observed that he was thinking for himself and expressing his own opinion, a phenomenon so rare that I would any day walk ten miles to observe it." Eons could pass before he conceives any form of higher-level thinking of all, if I must be candid.

CEO (smugly): I'm assuming you two aren't friendly?

Thoreau: On the contrary! He was so humble that humility was not a word in his dictionary! He found the purest joy in the arms of nature and she rewarded him thoroughly with his gifted endurance and steadfast lifestyle. I admire him deeply, for his persistence to his trade and his love for the natural world is inspiring.

CEO: I'm sorry, I don't follow?

Thoreau (smugly): But you see! Wisdom can come from all forms, as unlikely and as uneducated as they are.

CEO: Isn't that a bit hypocritical though? You criticize him for not thinking deeply to the point of elitist mockery, then you praise him for his simplicity. Are those not contradictions?

Thoreau (flustered? Shocked? One of the two): Hypocrisy? No! Of course not! It is not hypocrisy, it's complexity! A man of my profound intellect is bound to see both sides of the same coin.

The Button (sing-song): Thoreau...it sounds like you're making excuses!

CEO (smiling): Maybe you should worry about your own flaws rather than the flaws of others. Sometimes the greatest hypocrisy we have is internal, the "blind spot".

*Thoreau looks at audience. The Button turns white. Thoreau looks deep in thought, not even aware it changed color. CEO presses button.*

Thoreau: What? (*stumbling for the Button*) How did I find myself in the position of loss? How could I let such a thing occur?

*A. Therien ( GO TO POSTER AND RIP BUTTON PART)*

Thoreau (sputtering): Unfathomable! You were but a simple man!

A. Therien: The truth, Thoreau, is that true intellect is not always seen on the outside or through trivial pursuits like formal education. It is often the most "simple" (*air quotes*) people who know the most. It's nice to see you again. Au revoir, old friend.

Secret Service (hurriedly): Mr. Thoreau! We'll escort you out.

Thoreau: What? No, I will not allow this! (*through muffled yells*) I am Henry David Thoreau! You cannot - you *will* not -

*Thoreau gets dragged out by Secret Service as the Button speaks.*

The Button: And that concludes the show. Thank you for watching and tune back in the next episode!