

SCIENCE

A new full-length play

By Tom Attea

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CAST

PASTOR FREDERICK WILMONT.....A Christian Fundamentalist
PATRICIA WILMONT.....His Wife
BRET WILMONT.....Their son and a medical student
LYLE WILMONT.....Their younger son, appears only in a dream
MARTHA GRANGE.....Bret's long-time girlfriend
DR. ALEXANDER MORGAN.....Chemistry Professor and medical researcher
DR. EDWARD SIGNA.....Professor at Fundamentalist Divinity School
ANNE MORGAN.....Dr. Morgan's wife
MEGAN MORGAN.....His daughter and first-year medical student

Production Notes:

Time: The Present

Settings: Morton living room, Bret's bed and Lyle's bed, chemistry lab with alcove desk, Signa's office, porch, park bench, Morgan dining room, a walkway.

SCENE 1

Wilmont living room. Pastor Wilmont is reading the Bible. His wife is knitting. Pastor looks at watch.

PASTOR WILMONT

Our son is late getting home again.

PATRICIA

Sometimes I worry that the dear boy will exhaust himself.

PASTOR WILMONT

I'm not the one who decided he should go to medical school.

PATRICIA

I know, dear. But this is his last year, and he has not lost his faith.

PASTOR WILMONT

He seems to have resisted the un-Christian promptings of science, so far. But there is no guarantee that he will not succumb to them.

PATRICIA

Frederick, I'm not sure there are any guarantees in this life.

PASTOR WILMONT

There is but one -- the way to heaven is through faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Patricia, you know I would have paid for his education if he had chosen to attend to divinity school. But no. He had to choose science. How much science did Christ and the Apostles need to heal the sick and raise the dead?

PATRICIA

You have very fine principles, my dear. But I do wish you would finally accept our child for who he has decided to be.

PASTOR WILMONT

Regardless of what you see as his achievements, he has not turned out to be the son I had hoped for. My mistake is that I decided to remain in this damnable university town.

PATRICIA

At least, he has not turned out to be a drug addict or some such thing.

PASTOR WILMONT

Thank the Lord. Yet he would have made such a fine pastor.

PATRICIA

Yes, I'm sure he would have. But it's admirable that he kept his faith, and you should be proud of him.

PASTOR WILMONT

Proud of my son as a medical doctor? It goes against the very foundation of our religion. We have little need of medicine. We have the power of prayer. No other treatment accords with Scripture.

PATRICIA

Yes, we do, dear, but it has not always been as effective as we have prayed it would be, or Lyle would still be with us.

PASTOR WILMONT

He is with our divine Savior, who called him to heaven early.

PATRICIA

(with a hint of grief)

All too soon, I'm afraid.

PASTOR WILMONT

It is not for us to question the ways of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The wayward course of our older son's life all began with that damnable Ford Scholarship in Mathematics.

PATRICIA

Yes, I believe that played a part. But I also believe what happened to his younger brother inspired him to --

PASTOR WILMONT

-- It was the Ford Scholarship and nothing else, Patricia. It snatched him away from my influence at the all-too-impressionable age of 16.

PATRICIA

Whatever you say, Frederick.

Noise at door.

(excited)

Oh, there's Bret now.

Bret enters, books in bag on back.

BRET

Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad.

PATRICIA

Dear me, son. You look so tired. Come and give mother a hug.

Bret crosses to her and leans down. They hug.

PATRICIA

It's so good to have you home, dear. I wish you wouldn't work so many hours.

BRET

All I do is sit in the call center and answer tech questions.

PASTOR WILMONT

Your entire tuition would have been paid if you had followed the calling I recommended. It's still not too late.

BRET

You have your calling, Father, and I have mine. .

PASTOR WILMONT

A profane calling.

PATRICIA

Please, Frederick.

PASTOR WILMONT

Nothing can absolve him from following a profession that seeks to countermand the will of God, to which we all must submit.

BRET

The ability to treat disease is a God-given ability.

PASTOR WILMONT

Humans also have the ability to visit whorehouses. Do you call that a God-given ability? No! You must be able to distinguish between right and wrong. Did not Christ and the Apostles heal the sick? Did not Christ raise Lazarus from the dead?

And did they need modern medicine to perform these wonders? No, they did it with the power of faith -- and faith alone!

BRET

Faith did not work for Lyle.

PASTOR WILMONT

It most certainly did. It freed him from this sin-fraught vale of tears at a blessedly young age. He has found life everlasting, by the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. That is not a cause for sorrow but for joy. He is in heaven, and one day your mother and I will join him there. As for you, I tremble to think of the likely destiny of your immortal soul.

PATRICIA

I think that's enough, Frederick.

(to Bret)

Don't pay attention to him when he gets on his high horse. Tomorrow you and I will go to church and hear him preach an excellent sermon, perhaps on the topic of Christian forgiveness. Say something kind, Frederick. He is your son.

PASTOR WILMONT

It is difficult, Patricia, to behold a son who is very likely damned.

BRET

I will heal the sick and I will save lives. I believe Christ would approve. And who would Christ be if he wished us unnecessary suffering and death?

PASTOR WILMONT

You would question the authority of the Scriptures. Thou art surely damned, unless ye repent.

BRET

I believe, with John, that God is love.

PASTOR WILMONT

He is also a vengeful God.

BRET

Excuse me, Mom. I have to study. Exam tomorrow.

PATRICIA

Good night, Son.

BRET

Night, Dad.

PASTOR WILMONT
(disgruntled)

Good night.

Bret exits.

PASTOR WILMONT (CONT'D)

I am greatly troubled, Patricia. If I can't even influence the behavior of my own son, who I've superintended since birth, how can I hope to influence the behavior of my congregation? It is a daunting lesson, not only for me, but for all who hope, like Christ Jesus, to change the world.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 2

Lights come up on bedroom. Bret in bed alone, tossing. Dreams.

Soft spot comes up.

A bed. Lyle is in it. His father is kneeling beside it, praying. Reaches out his hands.

PASTOR WILMONT

I shall lay hands on you and pray once again for your recovery.
(touches his abdomen)

LYLE

(groans)

It hurts so much, Dad.

PASTOR WILMONT

Here, Son?

LYLE

The same place.

(points to right side of abdomen)

PASTOR WILMONT

Let me gently massage it from right to left. Maybe that will help.

LYLE

Thank you, Father.

Patricia enters.

PATRICIA

How are you feeling, Lyle?

LYLE

It hurts, Mom.

PATRICIA

(puts her hand on his forehead; to
Frederick)

He has a terrible temperature.

PASTOR WILMONT

He will sweat it out, won't you, Lyle?

Bret gets out of bed and crosses the room.

PATRICIA

I think we should call a doctor.

PASTOR WILMONT

We'll do no such thing. We shall do as our religion commands us and seek the remedy for his illness in the treatment power of prayer.

BRET

I agree with mother, Dad. We should call a doctor or get him to the hospital.

PASTOR WILMONT

We shall all trust in the Lord, knowing that Christ Jesus will save him from his illness or grant him eternal salvation.

Lyle seems to stop breathing. Reaction. All look toward him.

PATRICIA

Frederick, he --

PASTOR WILMONT

-- has been taken up into heaven, by the power of our Lord.

BRET

He's dead?

PASTOR WILMONT

Quite the opposite. The innocent child has no doubt been granted eternal life. May we all be so fortunate.

Patrica sobs. Bret consoles her.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 3

Come up on lab. Dr. Morgan is on the phone.

DR. MORGAN

I know he feels he deserved the Noble., Stan. But frankly he might be glad he didn't get it, at least, not yet. I know from experience, Stan. They hang the damn thing around your neck and you become a poster boy for the Nobel Prize. From then on, you're known as a Noble Laureate, instead of for the work you did that earned it. I've been fighting the battle since the morning I heard I won it... Well, remind him they didn't give it to Ray Damadian for the MRI, either. Do you know the whole story?... Well, the man had the original concept for a nuclear magnetic resonance body scanner and did the landmark experiments with mouse tumors that demonstrated the signals from cancer tissue and healthy tissue are different and the signals from different types of normal tissue differ, too. He went on to achieve the first magnetic resonance scan of a human body and the first scan of a human body with cancer.... Yeah, all that. Then a couple of NMR chemists look at his research, apply the gradient, in use by them since way back in the 50's, to the signals from tissue and improve the image. They get the Noble Prize, while our physician and friend, Raymond, is intentionally excluded. Why? I dread to think it's because he's an evangelical Christian.... Unfortunately, there's no other credible explanation. But what the hell does having stupid ideas in one area have to do with science -- and inventing a medical device that benefits thousands of people around the world every day? Once that shameful wrong happened, I've seen the toll.

I can't tell you how many physicians doing medical research or med students considering going into it have been discouraged by that asinine decision.

Bret enters. Dr. Morgan looks at his watch.
Waves him in and tells him to have a seat.

DR. MORGAN

Let me know if you want to get together with him and see if can cheer him up. We wouldn't want him to go off the deep end like Oldendorf,... Well, unlike Raymond, he just couldn't take it. Imagine if you were the physician who invented the CT scanner and you had to stand by and see other people win it whose contributions can't compare with yours.... OK. Bye now.

DR. MORGAN

(looks up)

Good morning, Bret.

BRET

Good morning, Dr. Morgan. You wanted to see me?

DR. MORGAN

Yes, I did. Have a seat.

BRET

Thanks.

(enters office and sits on chair across
from Dr. Morgan)

DR. MORGAN

As you know, when you were a student of mine, you got the highest grade in your class in biochemistry.

BRET

Yes, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Each year I invite one of our seniors to be my lab assistant. It's usually the one who achieves what you did. I'd like to offer you the position.

BRET

Thank you, sir. I'm really honored.

DR. MORGAN

Good. Unfortunately, honor is the main reward. There's no pay.

BRET

What would my duties be?

DR. MORGAN

Correct freshman chemistry exams, make up a variety of reagents, for example, the formaldehyde to preserve the cadavers for the anatomy department. On a lighter note, you'd make anisette for my friends.

BRET

Anisette?

DR. MORGAN

Don't worry. It's a simple formula. Water, ethyl alcohol, sugar, and anise flavoring. You just follow the formula. It's pretty easy. Then you pour it into reagent bottles, pop in a cork, and I give it away. It's one of the chemistry lab's most popular products.

BRET

I don't believe in alcoholic drinks, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

Oh. Well, you don't have to drink the damn stuff. Anyway, why not? In moderation, they're actually good for your health. When you dissect an alcoholic, do you know what you usually see? Clean blood vessels. The alcohol reams them out.

BRET

It's against my religion, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Oh. What are you?

BRET

Fundamentalist Christian.

DR. MORGAN

Ah, ha! This must be my day for such things. Well, maybe one day you'll get beyond it. I began as a Catholic.

BRET

May I ask how much of a time commitment is involved?

DR. MORGAN

Most students can handle it in an hour or two a day. Why do you ask?

BRET

Well, my scholarship only pays part of the cost of med school. So I work weekends and some nights.

DR. MORGAN

Doing what?

BRET

Tech support for Dell and Earthlink. Did it all through undergrad school, too, although I had a pretty good scholarship then, too.

DR. MORGAN

The Ford Foundation Grant? Remember, I'm on the admissions committee.

BRET

Yes, sir.

DR. MORGAN

You're a brilliant young man. You're able to work part-time and still rank at the top of your class.

BRET

Thanks. As the saying goes, you do what you gotta do.

DR. MORGAN

And it never stops. I won the Noble Prize, and some days I still have to mop the floor in here. Well, think it over. But get back to me by end of day tomorrow. I've got a pile of exams in there that need to be graded. It's on the Krebs Cycle, which you know backwards and forwards.

BRET

I'll get back to you by end of day tomorrow.

DR. MORGAN

Good. I'd like to have you here., Bret You've got extraordinary promise. What do you plan to do when you finish your internship?

BRET

Go into general practice. I want to save lives.

DR. MORGAN

A noble goal. But you might want to consider going into medical research. You might do some valuable work.

BRET

Do you think so?

DR. MORGAN

Ya never know. You learn your field and then you face the blue sky. Can you think of anything new that may have value? And can you devise an experiment to prove it to your ever-skeptical peers? Maybe, if you're gifted and lucky. Tell ya what. If you decide to go that way, I can suggest some post-doctoral fellowships for you to look into. Helped a brilliant young fellow like you get a post-doc fellowship at Harvard a few years ago in biophysics. Be an excellent choice for you, too. It would bring your talent for mathematics together with your scientific aptitude. I might even write you a stellar recommendation.

BRET

Thank you, Dr. Morgan. That's all really interesting.

DR. MORGAN

Of course, it is. And that's not a bribe just to get you become my assistant. I sense, despite our evident differences, that you're a kindred spirit with a wandering mind. As you know, my speciality is cancer research, particularly the genetic influences.

BRET

Well, you're world-famous for it.

DR. MORGAN

As Freud noted, fame doesn't come with as many rewards as people suppose. You finally learn that awards and such don't compare with having a family to go home to. Tell you what, though, if I had to it over again, I might choose to do research in another field.

BRET

After all the success you've had? What?

DR. MORGAN

The origin of life.

BRET

Why would you do that? We already know the answer. God created it.

DR. MORGAN

Oh, maybe way back what you want to call God did, as something beyond our experience. I'm talking about the chemistry behind the origin of life on the earth.

BRET

In Genesis it says --

DR. MORGAN

-- We all know what the Bible says. Let me give you another way to think about it. What if what we call matter and energy is really the fundamental form of body and life in the universe, inanimate, to be sure, but nevertheless life. Then the question becomes, how does it assemble itself into animate life. Lots of good people have worked on the problem, and they're still working on it. There are ideas such as RNA first, instead of DNA, and metabolism first, but metabolism probably needs a container, or cell membrane. Maybe rudimentary ones formed in oily substances. But they're all only partial concepts. The ability to form complex proteins and then living cells, etc., has to be inherent in atoms. Be interesting to understand the chemistry.

BRET

I don't know if I can think of the Creation as just chemistry.

DR. MORGAN

Young man, everything in the universe is chemistry -- chemistry and physics. That's a source of great hope. Once we understand the processes, we can work with them.

BRET

Well, as long as we're only discussing the natural world.

DR. MORGAN

Let me share another thought. It might inspire you to think that understanding the subject can be seen as looking into the mind of what initiated the original potential, or, in your case, peering into the mind of God, or, as the saying goes, reading the book of creation backward.

BRET

That requires a good deal of presumption, Dr. Morgan. As the Bible says, "Pride goeth before a fall."

DR. MORGAN

Pride has nothing to do with it, Bret. It's using your intelligence to understand what the hell is going on. As you know, the earth didn't come with an instruction manual, but we did evolve with the intelligence to discover what such a manual's contents might be. True, in fragments, but the more fragments we discover, the more we can assemble what we might call the revelation of science. Capish? Or is it a bit of an overload for you?

BRET

I need some time to digest it all, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Understood. Let me know your decision by first thing tomorrow morning.

BRET

Will do, sir. Do you really think I might do something important in medical research?

DR. MORGAN

Let me put it this way. Remember, even Einstein sought help with the mathematics of relativity. But I'm not sure you'd have to.

BRET

Thank you, Dr. Morgan. I'll get back to you tomorrow morning.

DR. MORGAN

Good. I'd like very much to have you as my assistant.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 4

Come up on Pastor Wilmont, preaching

PASTOR WILMONT

Yeah, I say unto you, ever since the Fall, ever since that fateful day that Eve tempted Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge, we have been stained with original sin, stained from birth, and, oh, what sinners we all become as we go through life and succumb to the temptations of Satan.

We would all surely be damned, if it were not that God, the Father, sent us his only begotten Son, the Lord, Jesus Christ, to redeem us, to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, so that we, weak and flawed as we all are, have the glorious hope that, through the supreme sacrifice and intercessions of Jesus Christ, we may find forgiveness, the forgiveness that alone can save us from eternal damnation and grant us entrance into heaven and eternal life with our holy Savior and God, the Father. Yes, despite our all-too-evident unworthiness, we may be saved forever through the redemptive sacrifice of Christ Jesus. And all that is required is absolute faith in our living Savior, as vouchsafed to us through every sacred word, as revealed in the New Testament. And let me especially caution you to beware of the promptings of all the hell-bent modern forms of secularism, whether its root be science, “philosophy,” ...

(mispronounces it derogatorily as “fee-
losophy”)

... or any other form of damnable modernism. Yeah, pluck it from your mind and cast it aside, as Christ cast out the Devil. And remember most of all, the word of God, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is absolute, final, and eternal. It shall hold sway until the Judgement Day, a day that we can tell, by the wickedness run rampant in the world, cannot be far away. Yes, End Times will soon be upon us, and may you, each and every one of you, be ready to face God and hear his eternal judgement, whether ye shall be damned to burn in hell forever or be saved, saved for eternity by the grace of our divine Savior, Jesus Christ. May God bless you and keep each and every one of you!

Lights fade down.

SCENE 5

Lights come up on sidewalk. Bret enters with Martha, holding her hand. She’s wearing a dress, and he’s wearing a suit.

MARTHA

Your father preached a fine sermon this morning.

BRET

Oh, when he’s on a roll, he’s in a class by himself.

MARTHA

He just wants us to save our immortal souls.

BRET

You're right, Martha. My mind just wandered for a moment. I was thinking about us.

MARTHA

What about?

BRET

Oh, such things as how much I love you.

MARTHA

I love you, too, Bret.

BRET

I hope someday your parents stop being upset that I decided to become a doctor.

MARTHA

Oh, what's it matter? We've been going together since high school. They'll finally get used to it.

BRET

Well, what about you, Martha? Aren't you concerned that you might lose your immortal soul by marrying a physician?

MARTHA

Oh, you know I'm not as conservative as my parents. I told you, I thought about it, and I decided it's good to see a doctor when you're ill.

BRET

Good for you.

MARTHA

Not only that, I think being a doctor is a praiseworthy calling.

BRET

I'm glad someone around here feels that way.

MARTHA

How could I think any other way, when I'm going to spend the rest of my life with you?

BRET

You're a sweetheart, Martha. As soon as I'm set up in practice, we'll tie the knot.

MARTHA

Oh, I can't wait. It gets awfully lonely on nights and weekends when you're working.

BRET

I miss you then, too, Martha.

MARTHA

Well, you'll be done with medical school soon. Then we just have to make it through your internship. You'll open your office and we'll have a family together. Dr. and Mrs. Wilmont. I just love it!

BRET

It's all wonderful, Martha.

MARTHA

We'll make it all come true, won't we?

BRET

Why would you even ask?

MARTHA

Oh, it's just that once in a while, I worry that we'll grow apart. I mean, here you are almost a medical doctor, and I'm just an administrative assistant at Carlson's Insurance.

BRET

Oh, come on, Martha. You're a very special woman and always will be.

MARTHA

I am?

BRET

How many times do I have to tell you? You're pretty as can be and you've got a really big heart. You're smart, too. I never met another woman with all that going for her, and I know I never will.

MARTHA

Thank you, Bret. I think we'll be together forever.

BRET

Of course, we will. Unless you find somebody you love more.

MARTHA

Are you kidding? There's absolutely no chance of that!

BRET

Good. I'm not looking, either.

MARTHA

You better never.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 6

Come up on Dr. Signa's office. He's at his desk,

DR. SIGNA

(on cell phone)

Sure, I'll put it on my calendar. Know what the agenda is? ... Kind of ambitious for one faculty meeting, isn't it? ... Well, I'll get my thoughts together. Assume you'll do the same. Let's see how much we can accomplish.

(knock at the door; looks at watch)

Oops, I have a meeting now. See you there.

(hangs up; goes to door and opens it. It's
Bret)

Hello, Bret. Come right in.

BRET

Thank you, Dr. Signa.

DR. SIGNA

Have a seat.

(motions to chair across from desk)

How's medical school going?

BRET

Great.

DR. SIGNA

Good. What did you want to talk about?

BRET

I could use some advice.

DR. SIGNA

What about?

BRET

Do you mind if I ask that we keep our conversation confidential?

DR. SIGNA

What's all the secrecy about?

BRET

Nothing really. I just don't want the discussion to get back to my father.

DR. SIGNA

You have my word. Here at the divinity school, we're a tad more liberal than your father. What's up?

BRET

I have an unusual opportunity, but I don't know whether to take it.

DR. SIGNA

Tell me about it.

BRET

I've been invited by my chemistry professor to be his lab assistant.

DR. SIGNA

Sounds like a significant honor.

BRET

Oh, it's a great opportunity. He's a Nobel Prize winning researcher in the genetic causes of cancer.

DR. SIGNA

That's impressive.

BRET

Yeah, a brilliant guy. Inspiring, too. Kind of makes me wonder if I might want to do a bit of medical research myself.

DR. SIGNA

I thought you were going into practice?

BRET

I probably still will. But that's not the immediate issue.

DR. SIGNA

Talk to me.

BRET

I don't know whether it's right to work for him.

DR. SIGNA

Why not? Sounds like a great fit to me.

BRET

Thank you. It is, except for one thing. He's not a practicing Christian.

DR. SIGNA

Oh. Well, there are a lot of good people of other faiths.

BRET

I know. But some people say he's an atheist.

DR. SIGNA

Hmm, I see.

BRET

So that's the question. Can you work for an atheist and still serve the Lord?

DR. SIGNA

Well, that's an interesting question. What do you think?

BRET

I'm not sure. That's why I'm here.

DR. SIGNA

Of course. Do you know for certain that he's an atheist?

BRET

No. Just what I've heard.

DR. SIGNA

Well, maybe you should share your concern with him and see what he says.

BRET

How do I ask him something like that?

DR. SIGNA

Just be honest with him about what you're thinking.

BRET

But what if he gets upset and withdraws the offer?

DR. SIGNA

I don't think he'd do that if you broach the subject politely.

BRET

But what if he did? I'd hate to miss out.

DR. SIGNA

I more concerned about another issue. If he is an atheist, what effect would working closely with him have on you? We don't want him attempting to undermine your faith.

BRET

Nothing could do that, Dr. Signa.

DR. SIGNA

Are you certain?

BRET

I think you know me better than that.

DR. SIGNA

Yes, I do, Bret. You're a fine young Christian. Probably owe some of that to your father's influence. On the other hand, I wouldn't want your faith to get in the way of your God-given potential. Maybe you should accept the job and see how it goes.

BRET

And if he turns out to be an atheist?

DR. SIGNA

Maybe the job offer is God's way for you to bring him to Jesus.

BRET

Oh. I hadn't thought of that.

DR. SIGNA

Well, God's hand is sometimes hard to detect, as if it sometimes acts behind a gossamer veil. We can't quite make it out. Or, as is often said, sometimes God works in mysterious ways. Why don't you give it a try and get back to me in a couple of weeks?

BRET

Then you think it's OK?

DR. SIGNA

I don't think working for him is inherently sinful. My advice is to trust in the Lord. And keep me posted.

BRET

Will do, Dr. Signa.

Lights go down.

SCENE 7

Lights come up in Dr. Morgan's office. He's reading a journal. Takes a yellow Post-It and attaches it to a page. Makes a note on it. Continues to read. Bret enters, hurriedly.

DR. MORGAN

(looks up)

You're late.

BRET

Sorry. I was at church and the sermon went on a bit longer than I expected.

DR. MORGAN

You go on weekdays, too?

BRET

Sometimes.

DR. MORGAN

I still did when I was your age, too. My mother made me. She was such a good Catholic I used to tell her the Pope should fly in to confess to her.

BRET

I know the drill. My father is a pastor and he still wishes I'd follow in his footsteps.

DR. MORGAN

You've got a lot of repair work to do. Sometimes it takes a while for all of us to transfer our evidence-based training to our other beliefs.

BRET

I expect to keep my faith, sir. I think faith and science are different kinds of mental activity.

DR. MORGAN

As you like. There do seem to be some people who can bridge the gap between the other-worldliness of Christianity or, for that matter, Islam, and a commitment to the care of this life.

BRET

Missionaries do, sir, and many others. I think I do. But I do it for Christ and hopes of the hereafter.

DR. MORGAN

Of course. But doesn't that leave you with one foot in this life and the other foot in the next life?

BRET

As a devout Christian, I think that's the right way to live.

DR. MORGAN

To each his own. What have you decided about becoming my assistant?

BRET

I feel very honored that you offered me the position and I would like very much to accept. But I'm not sure I can.

DR. MORGAN

Oh, well, too bad. What's troubling you?

BRET

I'm not sure I know how to talk about it with you. I respect you a great deal.

DR. MORGAN

All the more reason to spit it out. Come on, let's have it.

BRET

Well, sir, I'm not sure Christ would want me to work for an atheist.

DR. MORGAN

I see. What makes you think I'm an atheist?

BRET

Lots of people seem to think so.

DR. MORGAN

Actually, I'm not.

BRET

You aren't?

DR. MORGAN

No, that would be taking a position about which I have no information. As the philosopher William Clifford said, "... it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." And William James, attempting to justify belief without sufficient evidence, countered him, by saying that it takes as much evidence not to believe as it does to believe. Unfortunately, the argument is specious. We are allowed to disbelieve until we hear convincing evidence for belief.

BRET

Then may I ask what you are?

DR. MORGAN

I don't usually get into such discussions. I don't find them comfortable. But in your case I'll make an exception. The talk is just between us, OK? I want science to remain the central aspect of my life, not my beliefs.

BRET

OK.

DR. MORGAN

Good. Then let me ask you a question. You got an A in biochemistry. What do you think when you read about the multitudinous processes that support your life?

BRET

I thank God for them.

DR. MORGAN

You also studied microbiology. What do you think when you look in a microscope and see a living cell?

BRET

The greatness of God Almighty.

DR. MORGAN

Well, I think something else. I think of the wonder of it all, too. Or, as Einstein said, with a similar appreciation, "Every moment is a miracle." But I think of it as a sacred trust.

BRET

Life is sacred, sir. The great commandments tells us, "Thou shalt not kill."

DR. MORGAN

That's true. Frankly, I prefer a positive statement of it, for example, the simple cliché 'to live and let live.

BRET

What about God, sir?

DR. MORGAN

It's a long answer, Bret. But I believe that it is through the care of life and the intelligent fulfillment of its finest possibilities that we best express our reverence to whatever its ultimate source may be.

BRET

Excuse me, sir. But how can you believe in a "whatever"? How does that compare with belief in the one true God?

DR. MORGAN

I was, and I think most people are, initially saddened when they realize that they no longer believe in God as a father figure, perched on a proximate cloud.

Things improve when we realize the answer may be simpler, that is, if we decide that, after all, the universe itself is our creator, or more astoundingly, in the unlikely event that we discover that a Creator or Creators beyond our experience actually exist. But let me ask you a question? Do you believe that God is love?

BRET

Of course, sir.

DR. MORGAN

But isn't the idea of one true God who's apart but perhaps looking in on us rather a lonely concept?

BRET

He has his Son, the Apostles, the four Evangelists, St. Paul, Christ's mother and father, and all those who have been saved because they led lives that have earned them eternal life.

DR. MORGAN

Well, perhaps before we understood as much as we do about cosmology that vision has a more credible place in the clouds, although our ancestors apparently didn't realize they could see through them every clear night. You've seen the photo of the earth from space and the photos taken by the Hubble telescope?

BRET

Of course. Praise the Lord.

DR. MORGAN

Wouldn't you say the universe as we have come to understand it is really quite super? And maybe, just maybe, the whole idea of the supernatural came about because people didn't realize how super the natural world is.

BRET

I know where all this leads. Are you what they call a pantheist?

DR. MORGAN

Well, let's talk about the idea in modern terms. What if the universe is what we might call the grand molecular structure of our natural supreme being, which we're all at one with, in fact, from which we all arise and return to, body of its body, life of its life? Doesn't that relationship seem more consonant with love to you?

BRET

That's a nice thought, sir, but where does Christ come in?

DR. MORGAN

Anywhere you want him to. Let me tell you how I fit in what I have no information about. I call my own beliefs open pantheism. I accept that the universe may be our natural God, at the same time I remain open to the possibility of a Creator or Creators who may be beyond our experience.

BRET

Then you are open to the idea of Christ as our divine Savior?

DR. MORGAN

I'm open to anything that can be presented to me in a way that's worthy of the intelligence we've evolved with. Have you ever done a study of the historicity of Jesus?

BRET

His history is in the New Testament, sir. What more do we need to know?

DR. MORGAN

Do you know that not one of the four evangelists or St. Paul knew Christ?

BRET

I hadn't heard that.

DR. MORGAN

Well, look it up. The oldest book, Mark, was written some fifty or more years after the death of Christ. The others were written even later. They are the record of an oral tradition in the ancient Middle East. You can see even today that credible communication is hardly the guiding principle of many of its people.

BRET

But the books of the New Testament are divinely inspired.

DR. MORGAN

Well, I can't address that. Are you acquainted with the life of Dr. Albert Schweitzer?

BRET

I've heard of him. A jungle doctor. Very noble calling. Sort of an early version of Doctors Without Borders.

DR. MORGAN

Sort of. He established and ran a hospital at Lambarene', in the Congo, caring for the generally impoverished inhabitants. Do you know how he began?

BRET

No, sir.

DR. MORGAN

As a theologian, actually, as a professor and then the Principal of the Theological Seminary at Strassbourg. He decided to write a book, called *The Search for the Historical Jesus*. He didn't find much, because there isn't much. And the Romans were excellent historians. There's hardly more than a passing phrase in a civil record of the crucifixion of someone with a similar name, and a mention by the Jewish philosopher, Josephus, that many consider an interpolation. The Medieval Christians were quite concerned about the lack of a historical record. Be that as it may, not long afterward, Schweitzer decided to become a medical doctor and resigned from his teaching post. Thereafter, he devoted most of his life to the care of African natives. While he seemed to remain a Christian, one day, when he was floating down the Congo in a skiff being manned by natives, he saw a group of hippopotamuses, and at that instant, a thought came to him that became the foundation of his ethics. Do you know what it was?

BRET

No, sir, I do not.

DR. MORGAN

Apparently, you have a lot of company. I recently bought a book by him online for a quarter. The principle that came to him could make a better world, if enough people adhered to it. It was *Reverence for Life*.

BRET

You mean like the sanctity of life?

DR. MORGAN

They're similar. And in a world characterized by a great deal of behavior that we might call irreverence for life, I'll take either one as a guiding principle. But to go on. He explained his new ethic this way: what is good for life is good, and what is bad for life is bad. It's a fine ethical principal for a physician.

BRET

Yes, it is, Dr. Morgan. But how does it serve Christ? And what about our immortal souls?

DR. MORGAN

Well, let me ask you something. What if all we can truly know is what is within our experience of the natural world? Could we still have a religion?

BRET

I don't know what it would be, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Well, let's say we appreciated life for what it truly is. When you know modern science, you realize what a wondrous and rare existent it is. As far as our experience goes, life can readily be appreciated as the highest achievement of the universe. It's certainly more distinguished than the rubble we find on most planets. Imagine that. The highest achievement of the universe, yet many humans still think it not good enough for them. They want something more.

BRET

Eternal life.

DR. MORGAN

If such a thing exists, what do you think might be the best way to earn it?

BRET

By living according to the word of God, as revealed in the Scriptures.

DR. MORGAN

What if it's by taking good care of this life first?

BRET

Don't you think you can still take care of it while you believe in eternal life?

DR. MORGAN

I believe that you can., although whether or not you believe in eternal life probably doesn't have much influence over whether it actually exists. Be that as it may, what if we were conducting a clinical trial among a certain number of subjects. How long would it have to go on to show whether or not a set of beliefs is equal to our problems?

I believe if you look around the world, you see that such divided loyalty has not cured us of our self-destructive ways and made the world we would all like to live in -- in short, a world that is worthy of the promise of life.

BRET

Because the devil is afoot in the world, and it's up to us to fight his evil promptings.

DR. MORGAN

Well, let's imagine for a moment that the devil isn't to blame. How can we fix our problems? I'll tell you what I think. We can only fix it when we have faith in life.

BRET

Faith in life?

DR. MORGAN

Yes. Because it's smarter than we are -- and very likely always will be.

BRET

Smarter?

DR. MORGAN

Oh, very much so. Watch this.

(he raises his hand and puts it back
down)

What did I just do?

BRET

Raised your hand and put it back down.

DR. MORGAN

Easy, right. Can you explain how I was able to do that?

BRET

Well, your neurological system stimulated your musculoskeletal system --

DR. MORGAN

-- Yes, that's what gives me the ability to do it, but we don't really understand how I can even have a thought up here ...

(points to head)

... and have it make my arm move. What we can do is understand the wonder and promise of life enough to trust in its greatness and in the only way that has ever inspired billions of people -- as a religion. In short, life itself as a modern religion.

BRET

I think there has to be more than “wine, women, and song.”

DR. MORGAN

That, young man, is a medieval degradation of this life, which competes with belief in another life. I don't believe we can get where we have to when we still think of this life as just a stop over on the way to a better place. As a banishment and a punishment, if you will.

BRET

But that's due to original sin.

DR. MORGAN

What if the idea of original sin is based on not appreciating life as we have come to understand it biologically and cosmologically? What if, in fact, it's an expression that we can now see as irreverence for life? What if the idea that's worthy of what we have come to understand life is is not original sin, but an original blessing?

BRET

Wow, that's a pretty intense twist on things, Dr. Morgan. I'll say this much. You have a way of thinking that's hard to disparage, except it does still leave out Jesus and eternal life?

DR. MORGAN

Well, I don't need to disabuse you of your beliefs. My mother was a devout Catholic. In fact, she spent so much time on her knees, saying her rosary, that I used to tell her I was going to buy her kneepads. And guess what? Her faith turned out to be her saving hope. I don't like to discuss it, but my sister was killed in a car accident when she was just 16.

BRET

I'm very sorry to hear that.

DR. MORGAN

It was a complete disaster. If my family was a diamond, it was like it was hit the wrong way and shattered. I was eleven years old when it happened. I came down the stairs one morning and saw my father and mother sitting on the couch with a man who had a white 3-ring binder open. I noticed that my father's hair had seemed to turn yellowish gray and my mother was frighteningly pale. I asked what had happened. They told me, and it turned out that the man they were talking to was helping them pick out a tombstone.

BRET

That is so sad.

DR. MORGAN

Yep. The loss was profound. My sister was one of those almost magical people -- a beautiful girl, the Valedictorian of her class, the head cheerleader, and she used to play Chopin on the piano when classes at our parochial school had to march up to the stage for one kind of ceremony or another. My father, who was always careful to eat right, got Parkinson's from the trauma. My mother retreated to her bedroom and wouldn't come out for a year. Then she found some strength in her belief that she would be reunited with her daughter in heaven. That faith is pretty much all that kept her going. I knew how important her faith was to her, so I even pretended to go to mass long after I realized that I wanted to put myself completely in the service of life. The challenge was to find something interesting to do for an hour on Sunday. My favorite activity was to drive out to the local trout stream, relax on the bank, and watch the trout finning in the deep green water. I felt it was a holier experience than attending church. Later, I learned I was experiencing what Wordsworth called "natural piety."

(clears throat, as if to get past the sadness
the recollection has imbued him with)

Despite all of that, there are real reasons to ask if the story of Jesus -- Mary being visited by the Archangel Michael and becoming pregnant without intercourse, Christ being born in a manger, and the three wise men following a star to pay homage to him, etcetera -- is a bit of a fairy tale.

BRET

We all need to have faith, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Let me ask you something. Don't you think when it comes to our most sacred beliefs we deserve more in the way of a credible foundation for them? I'm not responsible for the lack of evidence, but I can observe that there are real reasons to decide that Christ is, for example, like Hercules, a myth.

BRET

If you don't mind, I'll stay with the New Testament.

DR. MORGAN

Good. I grant you your beliefs, just as I expect you to grant me mine. My own hope, though, is that in time enough people will make a religion out of life itself and have the religious fervor to save it. I'm hardly the first to think so.

The English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, said way back in 1916, in a book called *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, "New thought will be required ... the world has need of a philosophy, or a religion, which will promote life.... Through the spectacle of death, I acquired a new love for what is living."

BRET

Isn't he the fellow who wrote the essay, "Why I Am Not A Christian?"

DR. MORGAN

Yes, he was. Actually, it was based on some of his lectures.

BRET

I can tell you this. My father is not a big fan of his.

DR. MORGAN

I'll bet. He got himself into a numerous difficulties by being candid about his beliefs. Any other questions I can answer?

BRET

Well, sir, I understand what you're saying. But this life is only good for some people. What about people who die young?

DR. MORGAN

Of course, it's a tragedy. I know, believe me. But I think even a moment of life is better than no life at all.

BRET

And what about people with disabilities?

DR. MORGAN

Most still have a great treasure of life to value and for us to value.

BRET

OK. Then what about natural disasters, like hurricanes and earthquakes?

DR. MORGAN

You know how big the global weather system is. The natural miracle is that the atmosphere, no matter how rough it gets, sustains life so reliably we take it for granted.

BRET

And earthquakes?

DR. MORGAN

Well, let's think about that. Right now the earth is moving around the sun, rotating, and expanding with the universe. Does the ride feel bumpy? The fact is, most of the time in our journey through space and time, the earth is astoundingly stable. Let me give you a comparison. Did you ever drive down a country road with ruts in it?

BRET

Yes.

DR. MORGAN

Well, you can get bounced around doing that about as much as you can during most earthquakes?

BRET

You're starting to sound a little like the character in our high school play, called Pangloss.

DR. MORGAN

Ah, Voltaire. I know him well. Did you ever read his Philosophical Dictionary?

BRET

No, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Well, someday, look into it. What I can tell you is I find peace of mind and outright happiness in my beliefs and I know that, at least to me, they seem to rest on a firm foundation.

BRET

But how can you be happy with all the tragic stuff in the news?

DR. MORGAN

When I was growing up, we had a name for it -- the death culture. All the absorption with death and destruction is really just an orgasm of the death culture.

BRET

But a name for it doesn't make it go away. How can you still be happy when you know what's going on?

DR. MORGAN

Sometimes, it gets to me, as I'm sure it gets to most of us. But I value my life and am determined to live it, as Kant said in his categorical imperative, so that my behavior could become a universal rule of behavior. And I think part of that way of living is to have the wisdom to be happy. And part of the way I manage it is to separate my what we might call my personal life and my mass media life. In my personal life, I wake up, have breakfast, kiss my wife, come to the lab, and look into life processes that still transcend all of our knowledge. Meanwhile, I know in my mass media life, humanity will be proceeding with its usual death obsessions, without a clue about what an astounding privilege it is just to be alive.

BRET

I can tell you've read a lot of what my father disparagingly calls "fee-losophy." Without a firm belief in God, don't you ever feel alone in the universe?

DR. MORGAN

Are you kidding? Since we're all part of the universe, we have a natural personal relationship with it. It's our relationship with ourselves, along with our relationships with other people and all other life. When we appreciate all of these relationships, we feel we are part of the universe and part of its great community of life. We are, as the Indian mystics often say, at one with it. When we feel those relationships aren't sufficient, our appreciation of them isn't worthy of them..

BRET

OK. But I'm still waiting to hear where Christ fit into all this.

DR. MORGAN

In undergraduate school, I studied theology with the Jesuits. There is one thought that they use to involve Christianity in this world: Love your neighbor as yourself.

BRET

It's a great ethical principal.

DR. MORGAN

Yes, it is. But the ancient Greeks said it too. Isn't Christ also reported to have said, "My kingdom is not of this world"?

BRET

Yes. His kingdom, and the hope of all Christians, is in heaven, with him seated at the right hand of God, the Father.

DR. MORGAN

Believe whatever you wish. But I do not think anyone who would say that is an ideal candidate to inspire us to take good care of this world. I don't want to offend you. But let me go a little further. May I?

BRET

I guess.

DR. MORGAN

Have you ever asked yourself, What kind of symbol is a man nailed to a board? It's a symbol of suffering humanity. And development of such a symbol is totally understandable. The only way for intelligent life to evolve on disparate planets is naked and ignorant, but, as we've discovered, with the capacity to improve its lot. Now, that life has had time to prove we can cure diseases, build comfortable shelters from the elements, and feed ourselves reliably, as well as enjoy many pleasures beyond survival, maybe it's time to reevaluate whether we've been put here to suffer. Maybe it's time to decide we've been put here to enjoy life intelligently, which would include with mutual consideration, and settle in for the long term, instead of jabbering about such things as End Times.

BRET

I disagree with what you said about Christ. I think it's a symbol of his sacrifice to redeem us from sin.

DR. MORGAN

You're free to do so. Now, let me ask you. I've spent a great deal of time telling something about what I believe. Why have I done it?

BRET

I don't really know, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Because I want you to know that I have a religion, too, and one I think may well be the only religion that can save humanity from itself. And why do you think I've gone through all of this uncomfortable disclosure?

BRET

To convince me I'm may be wrong about Christ?

DR. MORGAN

Not at all. The whole universe seems to be a demonstration that creation delights in the possibilities of matter and energy. Consider the variety that springs from the gene pool, going back to the first spark of life on earth. So who am I to oppose human diversity? My hope has been, instead, to convince you that I might not be such an ogre that you'd feel guilty being my assistant.

BRET

Well, I can say this much, sir. I'm truly glad you're not an atheist, sir. And, knowing that, I'd be proud to be your assistant.

DR. MORGAN

Thank you. I expect great things of you, regardless of what your beliefs in nonscientific areas may be. In fact, as I said the last time we met, when you finish medical school, you may want to consider doing a couple of years of post-doctoral research and maybe decide to make a career out of medical research.

BRET

I remember.

DR. MORGAN

Good. As part of your post-doc work, you'd pick a research project. I'll tell you the one I'd like you to look into.

BRET

What's that?

DR. MORGAN

In biochemistry, you learned that there's an electrical charge across the cell wall that's generated by sodium and potassium ions. The electrical charge is what accounts for, at least in this world, life itself. When we're dead, the activity ceases. What accounts for the exchange? There's a generally accepted theory called the sodium pump. But I don't believe it's correct. I believe something else is going on. I think you might want to go in search of the sodium pump or discover what other process is the basis of it.

BRET

That's interesting, Dr. Morgan, and thank you for thinking I might be able to achieve something like that.

DR. MORGAN

Well, if you decide to do some post-doc research, I'll be happy to give recommend you to a colleague of mine at Harvard.

BRET

Harvard?

DR. MORGAN

Yes. I have a long-time friend there who does research in biophysics. He's always looking for the rare scientist who can climb out of his wormhole and see the big picture. If you do the research I'm suggesting, you could use your mathematical ability and your talent for chemistry, physics, and the other sciences. Read up on the area and think about it.

(takes a book from the shelf behind him)

Here's a book about the subject, written by our mutual friend down the hall, Dr. Jay Tang. It's the best book on the subject so far.

(hands it to him)

Take it home and read it.

(points to shelf behind him)

But remember to return it to the library.

BRET

Thank you, Dr. Morgan. I'm sure I'll enjoy it.

DR. MORGAN

I'm sure you will. Now, let me show you to your desk. The pile of freshman chemistry exams is still there, waiting for you. I corrected the previous exam myself. That was enough for me for the entire year.

BRET

Glad to do it, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Good. And welcome, Bret. Great to have you on board.

(puts out his hand; Bret shakes it; they walk together)

DR. MORGAN

Tomorrow, I need you to prepare some bottles of formaldehyde for the anatomy department. They're preparing some new cross sections of the human head for a neurology exam.

BRET

Sure. No problem.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 8

Lights come up on Martha, sitting on her porch with Scott.

SCOTT

How many times do I have to tell you I'm crazy about you?

MARTHA

You know I'm in love with Bret.

SCOTT

I know, Martha. I just don't understand how you can square being a good Fundamentalist Christian with going steady with a guy who's going to be a medical doctor. It goes against trust in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and the healing power of prayer.

MARTHA

A lot of Christians don't think like that, Scott.

SCOTT

They do in my religion, and you have the same one.

MARTHA

His dad is our pastor, isn't he?

SCOTT

Yes, he is. And thank the Lord he doesn't approve of what Bret is doing. I'm just saying, I think you should have a little bit of an open mind about who you're finally going to spend your life with. It could affect the destiny of your immortal soul.

MARTHA

Oh, rubbish.

SCOTT

I can't believe you said that. Maybe I'm barking up the wrong tree. Maybe you're not the girl for me. How can you say that about the destiny of your soul?

MARTHA

I was just upset, that's all. I don't really mean it.

SCOTT

Thank God. Hey, wanna go for a burger? My treat.

MARTHA

I'd like to, Scott. But I told you. I'm in love with Bret. And one day, when he's done with medical school and opens his practice here, I'm going to marry him.

SCOTT

Thanks for the encouragement.

MARTHA

If I would even think of two-timing Bret, what on earth kind of girl would I be?

SCOTT

I'm not asking you to two-time him. I asking you to give him up for me. I've got a lot going for me, too. When I graduate from business school next year, I'll be working at my dad's real estate company. I'll be set for life, and we can raise a good Christian family together. At least, think about it, OK?

MARTHA

(looks at watch)

Oops, gotta go. Mom's cooking dinner tonight.

SCOTT

Can we talk again tomorrow?

MARTHA

Scott, you're so sweet. One of these days, you're going to find the perfect woman for you.

SCOTT

Thanks a lot. I don't want to find some other woman. I want you to be the one.

MARTHA

You are so sweet, Scott. Good night, now.

(throws him a little kiss and turns to
leave; he sighs)

Lights fade down.

SCENE 9

Lights come up on Bret and Dr. Signa in his office.

DR. SIGNA

So, tell me, son, what have you decided?

BRET

Well, I've met with Dr. Morgan a few times now, and I found out something really interesting about him.

DR. SIGNA

What's that?

BRET

He's actually not an atheist.

DR. SIGNA

Well, that's good news. What faith does he subscribe to?

BRET

Well, that's where things get a little complicated. He is open to the idea that there may be a God, or even Gods --

DR. SIGNA

-- Gods, Bret? What kind of faith is that?

BRET

Well, I mean, God.

DR. SIGNA

That's better. Go on.

BRET

He also said he'd be happy if the idea of God turned out to be true.

DR. SIGNA

That's very kind of him. Does he believe he has an immortal soul?

BRET

He did say he wouldn't mind if after he died he was pleasantly surprised to wake up in heaven.

DR. SIGNA

Did he say how he expects to get there?

BRET

Well, he said he doesn't think we can reason about things we don't have any credible information about.

DR. SIGNA

Oh, that's the usual scientific frame of mind, as if the Bible isn't the eternal word of God. But scientific thinking doesn't carry over to religion. As you know, religion is based on faith.

BRET

Of course, Dr. Signa.

DR. SIGNA

Well, then, how on earth does he expect to save his eternal soul?

BRET

I'd rather not say. It's darn near blasphemy.

DR. SIGNA

Come on, Bret. I'd like to know. Even a humble professor at a divinity school has intellectual curiosity.

BRET

He says the logical way to earn any other life there may be to take good care of this one first.

DR. SIGNA

I guess he never heard "not by works alone."

BRET

I guess. But the good news is he's not an atheist.

DR. SIGNA

But he must have faith in something. Did he tell you what it might be?

BRET

Yes, sir. But you won't like it.

DR. SIGNA

What is it?

BRET

He said he has faith in life.

DR. SIGNA

What? Faith in this life -- this transient and troublesome trip from womb to tomb. How can he possibly justify that?

BRET

He says when we appreciate life as the biological and cosmological wonder we have come to understand it is, we should have great faith in it.

DR. SIGNA

I see. More scientific hocus-pocus. I hope your faith has remained strong in the face of all his superficial nonsense.

BRET

Yes, it has, Pastor.

DR. SIGNA

Are you certain about that, son?

BRET

As sure as Jesus Christ is in heaven with God, the Father.

DR. SIGNA

Well, you remain that way. Do not be tempted by his idle and uninformed speculations.

BRET

You don't have to worry. My faith is like St. Peter's in Christ's own words: "And upon this rock I shall build my church."

DR. SIGNA

Good, young man. But I do want you to touch base with me from time to time. Just to make sure I can correct any misconceptions that may develop.

BRET

Will do, Dr. Signa. And, by the way, I appreciate how you've kept all this from my father. If he ever found out I'm working with a man like Dr. Morgan, it would frighten the bejeezus out of him.

DR. SIGNA

I don't think there's any need to trouble him with it. He's carrying enough of a burden just knowing you'd decided to become a physician.

BRET

All I can do is hope one day he can make peace with it.

DR. SIGNA

Well, pray he will. But it's a long journey for him.

BRET

I know, Dr. Signa. Trust me, I know.

Lights go down.

SCENE 10

Lights come up on Dr. Morgan's dining room. He, his wife, Anne, and daughter Megan, are having dinner.

DR. MORGAN

Delicious meal, sweetheart.

MEGAN

I like it, too.

ANNE

Thank you both. How are things going with your new assistant? I know you had some concerns.

DR. MORGAN

Yes, I did. But he seems to be adjusting to the job quite well. Sometimes we have some pretty hot discussions.

ANNE

You do? About what?

DR. MORGAN

He comes from a fundamentalist Christian background. In fact, his father is a pastor.

ANNE

Alex, you haven't been telling him about your beliefs, have you?

DR. MORGAN

Me? Would I ever do that?

ANNE

Oh, sure. I know you better than that.

DR. MORGAN

Well, it's been interesting. At first, he didn't even think he could be my assistant.

ANNE

Why not?

DR. MORGAN

Oh, he heard the usual scuttlebutt that I'm an atheist. Thought he might lose his eternal soul just taking the job. So I had to disabuse him of the fact that I would have the confidence to take a position on the question.

MEGAN

It all sounds kind of juvenile, if you ask me. I mean, who can, in this day and age, believe everything our ancestors did, when they had so little information to go on and life was so different for them? They didn't even know there was silicon in the sand they walked on, and that we could make microchips out of it.

DR. MORGAN

I agree, sweetie.

ANNE

But you have to respect other people's faiths, Megan. He was reared in his family, and you were reared in this one.

MEGAN

Thank life!

DR. MORGAN

Spoken like my brilliant daughter.

ANNE

What you two believe isn't for everyone. Many people need to hope for something beyond this life.

MEGAN

We've been through this before, Mom.

ANNE

Yes, we have, and, despite the two of you, I still believe there is something beyond us. I know my father and mother are out there somewhere, looking down on me.

DR. MORGAN

I respect that, dear. Believe whatever makes you happy. That's one reason I smile every time I pass that little sign you have over there. "Angels are among us." As I often say, nature loves diversity.

ANNE

You know I believe a lot of the same things you do. It's just that I can't help feeling --

MEGAN

-- Oh, mother, get over it. As dad says, it doesn't matter what you think about whether or not there is something else out there. It doesn't influence whether or not it exists. The question is, what should our primary faith be -- in this life or living in the hope of another one?

DR. MORGAN

Good girl, Megan.

ANNE

I believe that, too. But I can still think there's something else out there.

DR. MORGAN

Of course, you can, dear. It's part of what makes you who you are. And I love everything about you.

ANNE

You better. That's the way I feel about you, too.

MEGAN

You two love birds. I only hope that some day I'm as happy with the man I marry.

ANNE

You'll be fine, dear.

MEGAN

I wish I was as optimistic as you are. There are so many guys out there these days who are so self-interested they can't care about anything except themselves and their needs.

ANNE

Good thing you haven't met anyone yet. You're just a freshman in med school. Isn't that right, Alex.

DR. MORGAN

Absolutely. Right now it's time to think about your education. You'll be a fine physician.

MEGAN

Thanks, Dad. I like to help people, and I think you're right. The highest calling is to put yourself in the service of life.

DR. MORGAN

How can I be so lucky? I've got the perfect wife for me and the perfect daughter, too. I've already had a life so abundantly joyful I'm glad I was born. And guess what? When I get to the end, I can watch my life complete with a smile. Maybe even with a salute to life.

ANNE

Thanks for the cheerful news, Alex. Can we talk about something else?

MEGAN

I agree.

DR. MORGAN

What's so sad? Everything has a lifespan. It's your basic gift. When you realize it's potential, you've lived. And lifespans are the price we pay for new life. Why, without lifespans, the earth would have filled up a long time ago. So actually everyone alive today owes his or her life to death.

ANNE

Another incredibly cheerful thought.

Woohoo!

MEGAN

Lights fade down.

SCENE 11

Lights come up.

Chemistry lab. Bret is beside the desk, on his knees, praying. He seems to be pleading silently. Dr. Morgan enters. He gets up quickly.

Everything OK, Bret?

DR. MORGAN

Yes, sir. Just dropped a paper clip.

BRET

How ya coming with the exams?

DR. MORGAN

Almost done grading them.

BRET

Good. Anybody get a hundred?

DR. MORGAN

Your daughter, Megan.

BRET

That's my girl. Ever met her?

DR. MORGAN

No, not yet.

BRET

DR. MORGAN

You will. She visits me here once in a while. You look a little troubled.

BRET

It's nothing.

DR. MORGAN

Come on, confide in your prof.

BRET

Well, sir, I've been thinking about some of the things you said.

DR. MORGAN

Good. Very few people do. In fact, in my entire life, I think maybe one or two people seemed to have found value in what I believe. Maybe part of the reason is I hardly ever talk about what it. I'm too busy trying to figure out what's going on? We know a good bit about what exists, we're learning more and more about how it works, even some things about why it works, but we still know absolutely nothing about why anything is here at all and very likely never will. Why is there something, instead of nothing at all? It's the question that obsessed Heidegger. Some people say the question only exists because we're here to ask it. But that's not an explanation. It's an excuse for the question.

BRET

The Bible says it's here because God created it.

DR. MORGAN

If that explanation works for you, you're welcome to it. But what do you mean by God? Could it be the universe itself? And what is the Bible? Really, what is it?

BRET

It's the word of God, sir.

DR. MORGAN

OK. Again, what do you mean by God?

BRET

God, the Father, who created the heavens and the earth, and the father of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

DR. MORGAN

What does created mean?

BRET

That He made it.

DR. MORGAN

In seven days?

BRET

That's what it says in Genesis, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

Well, many theologians have backed up to the point where they consider it a figure of speech.

BRET

Not in my religion.

DR. MORGAN

I know. And it all happened about five thousand years ago? What about the record of the rocks, going back about 4.5 billions years? What about Lucy's skeleton, going back about 1.5 million years. And what about the age of universe, now estimated at 13 billion years?

BRET

Maybe the way we count time is wrong?

DR. MORGAN

Of course. I thought you said you were thinking about some of the things I said.

BRET

I have been, sir. And I'm having a hard time with some of them.

DR. MORGAN

Like what?

BRET

Well, I was looking at the photograph of the earth from space that the astronauts took, and I was thinking how beautiful it is.

DR. MORGAN

It's a paradise of life, young man. And compare it with the rubble in the rest of the solar system. You can see how rare animate life is in the universe, and how fortunate we are to be here.

BRET

I feel the same way now, sir. When I was looking at that photograph, I kind of got a sacred feeling about it. And that's part of the problem. I can't square it with the story of Adam and Eve and being cast out of paradise.

DR. MORGAN

Well, if you grew up on the moon and saw the blue-white earth rise every day, you'd know where heaven is.

BRET

OK. That's a pretty heavy thought right there. But, Dr. Morgan, if the story of Adam and Eve and original sin doesn't hold up, what does?

DR. MORGAN

The ethics. Thou shalt not kill is still OK. But it's a command. Not a rule with a reason. Better to say, We don't kill what we revere. We revere life, especially human life. Therefore, we don't kill life, especially human life. Of course, the argument depends on whether or not we revere life. And there's the rub.

BRET

I know, Dr. Morgan. That's another thing that's been bothering me. I did what you said. Now, when I look into a microscope and see a living cell, I don't just think how wonderful God is. I think how something so precious has been put in our trust.

DR. MORGAN

Good man. But so has all the life of the earth.

BRET

I get it, Dr. Morgan. And that's the problem I'm dealing with. Could you be right?

DR. MORGAN

In what way?

BRET

Is committing myself to the care of this life, including doing the best I can with my own life, a credible way to show my reverence to God and Jesus Christ.

DR. MORGAN

I don't care who you do it for. Me? I do it because I appreciate that our ultimate good, at least within what we can credibly know, is life itself. Without it, there's nothing as a human experience. No beauty, no truth, no love, nothing.

Nothing but the same kind of dust you see on the moon. That's one thing the Greek philosophers couldn't get to, because their lives were still pretty rough. And that's one reason I'm all in. I don't care much whether there's a God or Gods outside of my experience, approving of what I'm doing. I do it because logic tells me it's the best life I can lead and the best way to worship whatever may be life's ultimate source, whether it be the universe itself or a Creator or Creators beyond our experience. And I hardly give a hoot whether or not a Creator or Creators are aware of our individual lives on different planets. However, if we take the universe as our natural God, our own awareness can be said to be part of God's awareness.

BRET

Yikes. I'm not all the way there, yet, and, honestly, I may never get there. But you sure do have me thinking.

DR. MORGAN

Well, that's why you evolved with a brain. You're supposed to use it. Consider this. Have you ever seen a representation of paradise that's more glorious than many places on earth? I haven't. In fact, I've seen islands with white sand, palm trees, and emerald seas that are more beautiful than any vision of paradise my dear mother used to have hanging on the walls of our house. And consider this. Our ancestors didn't know a fraction of what we do, for example, that we could devise supercomputers to help us decode the human genome and do big data analytics of dreaded diseases, so we might detect patterns and alleviate the burden of human suffering they still inflict on millions of people. And knowing how far we've come, knowing that we evolved with the potential to get here, how can we not finally see life as a blessing and commit to its intelligent care and fulfillment? To me, now you're talking religion. And a very special kind. Something humanity has never had: a scientifically credible religion. A religion, at long last, that is worthy of the astonishing gift of life. And wherever it came from doesn't much matter, as long as we devote our lives to what's been put in our trust.

BRET

You want to know the truth?

DR. MORGAN

Have at it.

BRET

I don't know whether becoming your assistant is the greatest thing that ever happened to me or the absolute worst thing. The only thing I know for sure, sir, is that I am torn. Truly torn.

DR. MORGAN

Hey, maybe you'll be that way for the rest of your life. Just do me a favor: try to move more toward the care of this life than living for the next one. And by the way, the need to believe in another life is partly based on not appreciating this one.

BRET

I get it all, Dr. Morgan. That's my problem.

DR. MORGAN

Oh, come on, you don't have a problem. You have more than you had before.

BRET

What's that?

DR. MORGAN

Half an answer -- and maybe, in time, even more than half. By the way, every year I invite my lab assistant to have dinner at my house. It's my formal welcome. What do you say about Tuesday evening?

BRET

(hesitantly)

Thank you, sir. What time?

DR. MORGAN

Six sharp. If you think I'm hard-nosed about requiring evidence for what I believe, wait till you meet my daughter.

BRET

The one who got an A?

DR. MORGAN

Yep. That's my girl, Megan. Proud of her. Sharp as a hypodermic needle. But underneath it all, a sweetheart.

BRET

I look forward to meeting her. I better get back to correcting the last of these exams?

DR. MORGAN

Please, do. I have to file the midterm grades this week.

(looks at watch)

Oops, excuse me. I need to check on some melanoma cells I'm attempting to make commit suicide.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 12

Lights come up on a park bench. Dr. Signa is taking in the sun. Bret enters.

DR. SIGNA

Good afternoon, Bret.

BRET

Good afternoon, Dr. Signa.

DR. SIGNA

Great place to meet, huh? Especially on a beautiful spring day like this.

BRET

Yes, sir.

DR. SIGNA

Have a seat.

BRET

(sits beside him)

Thanks.

DR. SIGNA

(continuing to enjoy the sun)

So how's it going? Lost your faith yet?

BRET

No, sir. That could never happen

DR. SIGNA

Good. Anything you want to discuss?

BRET

I'm just wondering about a few things, and I thought maybe we'd be able to talk about them.

DR. SIGNA

Fire away.

BRET

Well, do you think God would send anybody to hell who dedicated himself to the care of this life?

DR. SIGNA

Believing Christian or not?

BRET

Either one.

DR. SIGNA

Well, providing he was also a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, I think he'd very likely be welcomed into heaven.

BRET

What if he wasn't?

DR. SIGNA

Well, then, I think maybe he'd have to spend some time in Purgatory. But, unless he had committed some truly terrible mortal sins in his life, I think he'd eventually be welcomed into heaven. What do you think?

BRET

I wasn't sure.

DR. SIGNA

What's your opinion of my answer?

BRET

I tend to agree with it. I mean, since God is good, he has to think well of a person who devotes himself to taking care of what he created. Do you mind if I ask another question?

DR. SIGNA

Go right ahead.

BRET

Well, I was wondering about original sin.

DR. SIGNA

What about it?

BRET

Dr. Morgan thinks we should see life as an original blessing.

DR. SIGNA

That's quaint. Well, when God made Adam and Eve, they did inhabit paradise. So it could be considered an original blessing, that is, before they were tempted by the serpent and sinned. Then, of course, God expelled them from the Garden of Eden. OK on that?

BRET

Yes, sir. But Dr. Morgan thinks we still live in paradise.

DR. SIGNA

Well, we don't. Remember what Scripture says. They were cast out. How did he arrive at that uninformed conclusion?

BRET

He said when you see the way the earth looks from space, especially compared to, say, the moon, you know where heaven is.

DR. SIGNA

Heaven? In this world? I don't care if he won the Nobel Prize. It's pure hogwash.

BRET

I guess, sir.

DR. SIGNA

You guess, Bret? Does winning the Nobel Prize make him an authority on religious matters?

BRET

No, sir. And I don't think he considers himself one. He just has his own set of beliefs. Actually, he refers to the earth as a paradise of life.

DR. SIGNA

Well, as long as he's talking about this life, I guess we could call it that. But it's also a vale of tears. Did he tell you how he accounts for human suffering in this supposed paradise?

BRET

I asked him that myself.

DR. SIGNA

Did he have an answer?

BRET

Yes, sir.

DR. SIGNA

Can I hear it?

BRET

He said there are different kinds of suffering and that we can see now, because of modern medicine, that we've been given the ability to cure or alleviate a lot of it. He also said that today a lot of human suffering is self-inflicted,

DR. SIGNA

It certainly is. And what does he attribute it to?

BRET

He says -- and don't for a minute think I agree with him -- that it's due to the fact that our religions don't teach us that life is the holiest thing we can know.

DR. SIGNA

Well, we are taught "Thou shalt not kill."

BRET

I know, sir. But he says the greatest reverence we can show to God or, in his words, whatever the ultimate source of life is, is by taking good care of this life and doing the best we can to realize our own potential.

DR. SIGNA

You mean our God-given potential.

BRET

Yes, I do, sir. I have no doubts in that area.

DR. SIGNA

What area do you have doubts in, Bret?

BRET

Oh, none, sir. But I just wonder about some of the things he says. Do you know what he says is the best way to earn eternal life? Or, as he says it, any other life there may be?

DR. SIGNA

What is his opinion?

BRET

That the best way to earn any other life is to take good care of this life first.

DR. SIGNA

Well, of course, you want to take good care of this life, Bret. But, I've reminded you before, you cannot hope to gain eternal life through works alone. You must have faith in God and his son, Jesus Christ, our divine Savior.

BRET

Of course, sir. That kind of goes without saying.

DR. SIGNA

Kind of, Bret?

BRET

Oh, sorry, Dr. Signa. I mean, definitely.

DR. SIGNA

Good. Anything else you want to talk about?

BRET

Just one thing. Dr. Morgan says that if you look at how we're designed, two eyes, two ears, a nose in the middle, I mean, nicely balanced, and if you think how we can feel good even when we lightly stroke our arms like this --

(rubs his hand along his arm)

-- that God made us to enjoy life, not just to suffer.

DR. SIGNA

Indeed, He did, Bret. But now we're back to the sin of Adam and Eve.

BRET

Of course. Sometimes I think we all wish Adam hadn't eaten that apple.

DR. SIGNA

I guess we all do, son. It surely is an inviting fantasy to wish we were still be living in paradise. Then there wouldn't be so much evil in the world.

BRET

I hate to tell you this, sir, but he doesn't think the story of Adam and Eve is true.

DR. SIGNA

That's his problem. How does he account for evil?

BRET

I can't even say it.

DR. SIGNA

Come on, tell me.

BRET

He thinks the religions we inherited from our ancestors have been around long enough to prove they don't have the capacity to reform humans and create a world that is worthy of what he calls the gift of life.

DR. SIGNA

That's an absurd position. It is the duty of religion to wage war against the font of all evil, which is Satan. May your misguided doctor one day find redemption and forgiveness. Anything else?

BRET

Just that he thinks a God who would create us to enjoy life would be greater than a God who would condemn us to suffer for eternity.

DR. SIGNA

Well, didn't God make it possible for us to do both things. Remember, He containeth all things.

BRET

I know, sir.

DR. SIGNA

Bret, he sounds like a man who's given all this a lot of thought. But I'm afraid he's thrown out the baby Jesus with the bath water. May God forgive him. Now just assure me once again that your Christian faith remains unshaken.

BRET

You never have to worry about that, Dr. Signa.

DR. SIGNA

(slaps Bret's knee)

Good!

BRET

Can I just talk to you about one more thing. I mean, this idea is really strange.

DR. SIGNA

If you must, Bret.

BRET

He says that if a part is alive, the whole thing is alive.

DR. SIGNA

What does that have to do with religion?

BRET

Well, sir, he thinks that since we're alive, the universe is alive.

DR. SIGNA

Sounds like quite a leap to me. What else?

BRET

That since matter and energy seem to be pretty much the same everywhere, the universe is very likely made up of a great community of life.

DR. SIGNA

If God has ordained that there will be life on other planets, then there will be life on other planets. But where are we supposed to find our beliefs if all we have is the dross of this pestiferous world?

BRET

He says if the universe is logical, and it must be, since we can write equations to describe its behavior, then we're meant to find our beliefs in the world we find ourselves in.

DR. SIGNA

The world we find ourselves in is a subjective decision. Mine includes the life, teachings, and forgiveness of sins through our Lord, Jesus Christ. What guide to the conduct of life does he have that can compare to that?

BRET

None, sir.

DR. SIGNA

Good. Now, I believe I've heard enough of his naturalistic nonsense for one day. And the fact that this man began as a Christian, even if a Catholic, means he has been taught the way, the truth, and the light of Jesus Christ. So, no matter how much good he does in this life, he may be damned for eternity. Now, what do you say we amble on home?

BRET

(looks at watch)

Oops, gotta go myself. Dr. Morgan invited me to his house for dinner.

DR. SIGNA

He did?

BRET

Nothing to be concerned about. He does it every year for the person he takes on as his lab assistant.

DR. SIGNA

I see. Well, then, on your way. But remember to stay in touch. I want to make sure you're not unduly influenced by his confounded flights of imagination.

BRET

Yes, sir. I will.

(shakes his hand)

Bye now, and thanks.

DR. SIGNA

(pensively)

My pleasure, son.

They walk along their separate ways. Dr. Signa pauses and takes out his cell phone. Calls.

DR. SIGNA

Good afternoon, Pastor Wilmont. It's Dr. Signa. May I share something with you in confidence?

Lights come up on Pastor Wilmont's living room.

PASTOR WILMONT

What is it?

DR. SIGNA

It's about Bret.

PASTOR WILMONT

What errant act has he performed now?

DR. SIGNA

I think he may have come under a potentially very deleterious un-Christian influence

PASTOR WILMONT

He's been under such influences for quite some time now.

DR. SIGNA

Do you know he has taken a job as the student assistant to his chemistry professor?

PASTOR WILMONT

He hasn't mentioned it.

DR. SIGNA

Understandable. Well, it turns out the man has a veritable storehouse of "innovative" ideas that may have some appeal to your son, and I think you might want to take steps before it's too late.

PASTOR WILMONT

What sort of ideas?

DR. SIGNA

Typical secular nonsense. Another thing. He has suggested to Bret that he take up scientific research instead of going into practice. And who knows where that would end?

PASTOR WILMONT

In the dunghill of unbelief, that's where. I shall take the matter up with him.

DR. SIGNA

Excellent. But, please, do so in a way that doesn't weaken his trust in me.

PASTOR WILMONT

Count on it, Edward. Appreciate the alert. Never too early to stamp out a fire, especially when it's been lit by the devil himself.

DR. SIGNA

Agreed, Fred. Let me know how you do.

PASTOR WILMONT

I shall. Thank you for the update. Goodbye.

DR. SIGNA

Goodbye.

They hang up. Patricia enters.

PATRICIA

Who was that, dear?

PASTOR WILMONT

Dr. Signa. It seems that our son has done as I have long predicted. He has fallen under the pernicious, atheistic influence of science.

PATRICIA

What does Dr. Signa know about that?

PASTOR WILMONT

It seems that our son has found him a ready confidant. Imagine, finding that in another pastor, instead of in his own father.

PATRICIA

I think he's just afraid of you.

PASTOR WILMONT

And with good reason. I shall have a talk with him. It seems that he has become the assistant of an atheist.

PATRICIA

How is that possible?

PASTOR WILMONT

It's someone he no doubt admires -- his chemistry professor. And no doubt he's part of the secular venom that is being hissed about the word, like the very serpent that tempted Eve.

PATRICIA

Dear me. But, please, don't be too hard on him, Frederick. He's still just a boy.

PASTOR WILMONT

He is like unto what the Bible tells us of the ancient Israelites, "a stiff necked people," and I shall bend it as surely as Moses did that of his people. Bend it even if I must throw the stone tablets down before him for his worship of false idols.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 13

Lights come up on dining room at Dr. Morgan's house.

DR. MORGAN

Smells wonderful. Anything I can do to help, dear?

ANNE

Thanks. All set. You relax. Tell me more about your new assistant before he gets here.

DR. MORGAN

Absolutely brilliant young man, but, as I told you, from a fundamentalist Christian family. So I'm doing what I can to unburden him of whatever anti-life beliefs I can.

ANNE

You would.

DR. MORGAN

What can I tell you? It's part of my religion.

ANNE

I thought tolerance of other beliefs is, too.

DR. MORGAN

You know it is. But I can still talk about what I believe.

ANNE

Please, promise me you won't talk about it tonight. You'll make him uncomfortable.

DR. MORGAN

Don't worry. I'll be on my worst behavior, which means I'll button my lip.

Megan enters.

MEGAN

Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad. What's for dinner?

ANNE

Baked chicken.

MEGAN

Again?

DR. MORGAN

It's healthier for you than beef.

MEGAN

I know. But sometimes I think, oh, what I wouldn't give for a good rib roast, like we used to have before all the damaging research about the effects on your cardiovascular system. Remember how you used to trim off all the fat before mom cooked it?

DR. MORGAN

Of course. Maybe we'll have one again, if you miss beef that much.

MEGAN

What time's your new boy wonder due?

DR. MORGAN

Any minute.

MEGAN

Can't wait to meet him. Anybody who gives me an A in chemistry is a friend of mine, even if he does have some really uncool ideas.

Doorbell rings.

ANNE

That's him now.

DR. MORGAN

I'll get it.

(to Megan)

I promised to be on my best behavior. You be, too.

Heads for the door.

MEGAN

Sure. I don't have any axe to grind.

ANNE

The trouble is you both have the same axe to grind. Now, be nice to him.

(points to sign)

Remember, "Angels are among us."

MEGAN

Whatever works for you, Mom.

DR. MORGAN

Come in, Bret. Welcome and great to have you over.

BRET

Thanks. Nice to be here.

They cross to the dining room.

DR. MORGAN

Anne and Megan, meet Bret Wilmont, our resident mathematical genius.

ANNE

So nice to meet you.

BRET

Nice to meet you, too.

MEGAN

Hi, there.

BRET

Hi, Megan.

ANNE

Just make yourselves comfortable and enjoy the hors d'œuvres.

BRET

Thank you. They look great.

DR. MORGAN

(taps own waistline)

The problem is they're too good. She's quite a cook.

ANNE

Thank you, dear.

All sit down.

ANNE

Tell me, Bret, how does it feel to be a mathematical genius?

BRET

Oh, I don't think of myself that way. It's just a God-given ability I seem to have.

MEGAN

(clears throat)

How do you know that? It's just genetics.

DR. MORGAN

Now, now, Megan. It's dinner time.

BRET

Oh, that's OK.

(to Megan)

Just because you don't understand the ways of the Lord doesn't leave the Lord out.

MEGAN

Oh, that's right. Dad told me about your background. No comment.

DR. MORGAN

Good girl.

ANNE

(to Bret)

She may look a lot like me, but inside she's the spitting image of her father. Actually, though, she's very sweet.

MEGAN

Thanks, Mom.

(to Bret)

I'm like my dad. If you want to believe stupid stuff, go right ahead.

BRET

Thanks. I'll keep that in mind.

MEGAN

Where else would you keep it?

BRET

How can such a pretty girl be so hard on me?

MEGAN

Thanks. I even accept backhanded compliments. So, tell me, have you learned anything since you started to work for my father?

BRET

A great deal. I even learned how to make anisette.

MEGAN

It's yummy. Sometimes we have it for dessert.

DR. MORGAN

Bret doesn't drink.

MEGAN

Sorry about that. Haven't you heard a little alcohol is good for you

ANNE

Megan, please. Bret is our guest.

MEGAN

OK, OK.

(to Bret)

It's actually nice to meet you.

BRET

Nice to meet you, too. You did really well on your chemistry midterm.

MEGAN

Thanks. It was like all of my dad's exams. A snap, if you have half a brain. All he wants to do is figure out who studied and who didn't. So he gives the same exam every year, except for two or three questions.

DR. MORGAN

A noble goal, if you ask me. I'm out to crush no one and to nourish everyone I can.

MEGAN

Too bad there aren't more profs like him, right?

BRET

Yep. But special people are, by definition, rare. Right?

MEGAN

Right. I mean, as soon as someone says "most people" or "generally speaking," I know they're not talking about my good old dad. He only fits into his own mold. I like to think I do, too.

(to Bret)

How about you? If you're as brilliant as Dad says you are, maybe you can break out of the usual untruths that pretty much seem to rule this explosive world and become an original human being, too.

BRET

What am I supposed to do with all the beliefs I grew up with?

MEGAN

Keep the life-enhancing ones and grow out of the rest.

BRET

Sure, just like that, Megan.

MEGAN

At least, work on it, OK? Might be especially nice to know you then. That's as close as I come to flirting.

(to Bret)

Can you please pass the cheese and crackers?

BRET

Sure.

He picks up the dish and holds it toward her; their eyes meet. Dr. Morgan and Anne notice.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 14

Lights come up on the Wilmont living room. Pastor Wilmont is reading the Bible. Patricia is watching television. Sound at the door.

PASTOR WILMONT

That's him now, Patricia. Please, allow me to speak with him alone.

PATRICIA

All right, dear. I'm glad you have something good to tell him. More scolding is not the answer.

Bret enters.

BRET

Hi, Mom, Dad.

PATRICIA

Hi, Bret. Your father has something very nice to talk about.

BRET

Oh, really?

PASTOR WILMONT

Have a seat, Son.

PATRICIA

I'll leave you two alone now.

BRET

Yes, Father.

(sits)

PASTOR WILMONT

I will get right to the point. I have a member of the congregation, Raymond Jessup. Do you know who he is?

BRET

I've heard the name.

PASTOR WILMONT

Most people in the congregation have. He owns the building where the Second National Bank is located. As you may know, there are various business offices upstairs, including professional offices.

BRET

I know. And a Chinese laundry downstairs.

PASTOR WILMONT

I see you know the building. Well, quite unprovoked, he came up to me after Sunday service and said he understood you're studying medicine. I admitted it. He then volunteered that when you're ready to open your medical practice, he will provide you with an office rent-free for one year.

BRET

Really? Why would he do that?

PASTOR WILMONT

Christian charity, in case you forgot. He says he knows you'll need time to build up your practice before you can bear the burden of rent. I assume you find the offer attractive?

BRET

Of course, I do. That's very thoughtful and generous of him.

PASTOR WILMONT

Good. I thought you might, especially since by then you and Martha will be considering marriage and the usual consequent, children.

BRET

It kind of looks that way.

PASTOR WILMONT

Yes, it does. And I'm delighted. She's a good Christian young woman and a welcome addition to the family. So it's settled.

Call Mr. Jessup in the morning, offer him your heartfelt thanks, and tell him you accept his offer. To that end, I shall give you his phone number.

BRET

Great. I'll call him.

PASTOR WILMONT

First thing in the morning. You don't want to let such an unexpected advantage go unattended too long. It requires immediate acceptance.

BRET

Will do. And thanks, Dad. I'm not used to having your help with my medical career.

PASTOR WILMONT

I have prayed about the matter and have been instructed to choose between the lesser of two evils.

BRET

I don't understand.

PASTOR WILMONT

It has come to my attention, through the grace of another congregant, that you have accepted a position as the assistant to an avowed atheist.

BRET

That's not true at all.

PASTOR WILMONT

The congregant has furnished me with details that make the unfortunate situation alarmingly credible. Admit it. You've taken such a position.

BRET

Well, it's very different from how you described it.

PASTOR WILMONT

Then you have indeed taken it?

BRET

I got the highest grade in biochemistry, and my professor asked me to be his lab assistant. He takes on one assistant every year. To be selected is considered a great honor.

PASTOR WILMONT

Your chemistry professor? Tell me the truth. Is he a God-fearing Christian or an atheist and surely damned?

BRET

He's actually neither one.

PASTOR WILMONT

Jewish?

BRET

No, sir.

PASTOR WILMONT

Mohammedan?

BRET

Neither, sir.

PASTOR WILMONT

Then what the hell is he?

BRET

A Nobel Prize-winning medical researcher.

PASTOR WILMONT

Oh, and no doubt a high-priest among the scientific elite. I don't give a damn about scientific accolades. I asked about his religious beliefs, if he harbors any.

BRET

He does, but they're his own beliefs.

PASTOR WILMONT

His own beliefs? I take it that is another way of saying he does not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and his heavenly Father?

BRET

It's more complicated than that. He has devoted himself to the care of life.

PASTOR WILMONT

This paltry, sin-stained life? What about the next life?

BRET

I don't want to talk about it. You'll just get upset.

PASTOR WILMONT

I want to know the danger in which you have placed yourself.

BRET

Will you just let me talk?

PASTOR WILMONT

Go right ahead. I'm always willing to hear what the latest incarnations of blasphemy are. The knowledge assists me in defeating it.

BRET

He says the one thing we can know for certain is that we have life, by which he means this life.

PASTOR WILMONT

And the next one?

BRET

He says he's open to the idea, but that he has no information on which to make a decision.

PASTOR WILMONT

He disregards the copious evidence provided in the Scriptures? What sort of upbringing has he had?

BRET

He was raised as a Catholic.

PASTOR WILMONT

Then has at least been baptized and made aware that the only way to eternal life is through Christ. Therefore, unless he repents, he is damned for eternity. And you can tell him I said so.

BRET

I don't think that's my place, sir.

PASTOR WILMONT

Oh, the arrogance of unbelievers! It is surely due to the presence of Satan within him.

BRET

Whatever it is, I'm afraid he wouldn't be very troubled by what you're threatening him with.

PASTOR WILMONT

And what about God's wrath?

BRET

He believes that, if there is a God --

PASTOR WILMONT

-- If, Son?

BRET

I'm not talking about myself. I'm only telling you what he believes.

PASTOR WILMONT

Go on.

BRET

He believes that believing we were put here to be happy is the only way to justify that God, if he exists in the person we believe he does, is good.

PASTOR WILMONT

He seems to have invented a veritable host of his own patently erroneous answers. How does he transmogrify all of these misconceptions into anything that might be considered a religion, if he troubles himself to do so?

BRET

He believes that the most direct form of worship to whatever is, as he calls it, the ultimate source of life, is through the care of this life. He has made it his religion.

PASTOR WILMONT

Then he has made his way to the brink of hell. May his soul burn there for eternity. But to the only critical matter that concerns me.

(reaches out and takes his arm)

Tell me his beliefs have not traduced your own fine Christian ones?

BRET

No, they haven't, sir.

PASTOR WILMONT

You are still as steadfast in them as you were before you accepted the damnable position?

BRET

What else would I be, Father?

PASTOR WILMONT

I take you at your word.

(releases his arm)

But I must ask you one more question. When you finish your medical education, you do still intend to go into practice?

BRET

Why would you even ask?

PASTOR WILMONT

The same parishioner has vouchsafed to me that he is tempting you to go into medical research, too.

BRET

He has mentioned that I might consider doing so a couple of years after I finish my internship.

PASTOR WILMONT

Well, you damn well better say no. I'm sure you can count your devout Christians who do medical research or any other kind of scientific research on the head of a pin and still have room leftover for a peck of devils. Now, promise me you will not be so misguided by him as to accept an invitation to such a hornet's nest of unbelief.

BRET

Well, father, I have thought --

PASTOR WILMONT

-- I will not even entertain your excuses. It is sinful enough that you plan to abrogate the ways of the Lord by intervening in health matters with "modern" medical treatments. I will not tolerate that you enter the den of scientific iniquity inhabited by a predominance of misguided materialists. Do you understand me?

BRET

Yes, father.

PASTOR WILMONT

Good. Then so be it.

(takes a business card out of his wallet)

Here is Jessup's business card. Call him and commit to the office space first thing in the morning. And let me know as soon as you do.

(hands him business card)

Do I have your word on it?

BRET

Yes, sir.

PASTOR WILMONT

Good. Then perhaps it is not too late for you to redeem your immortal soul. I suppose it would be too much to ask you to resign your role as the assistant to this inventive acolyte of Satan?

BRET

I don't think that's necessary, Father. I promise you, I will not allow my Christian faith to be weakened by him.

PASTOR WILMONT

Swear you won't on this Holy Bible.

(holds it out)

Come on, Son, swear.

BRET

(puts his hand on it)

I swear.

PASTOR WILMONT

Swear what?

BRET

That I shall not let my faith in the Lord be weakened by him.

PASTOR WILMONT

Good. Now, leave me to my reading.

BRET

Yes, Father.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 15

Part of the campus. Megan is walking along with her books. Bret enters from the other direction.

MEGAN

Hi, there., boy genius.

BRET

Hi, Megan.

MEGAN

Mind some company?

BRET

Nope. I was just heading to your dad's lab.

MEGAN

Good. He thinks you have remarkable potential. Your parents still have a problem with you becoming an MD?

BRET

Same old, same old. Be glad your father is a great scientist.

MEGAN

Yep. We both believe in meritorious ideas like evolution.

BRET

Do you believe in God?

MEGAN

As Laplace is famously said to have said to Napoleon about a book he had written without mentioning God, "I had no need of that hypothesis.."

BRET

But even if "evolution" really happened, it's just a process. Don't you think such a complex development would have to have a cause?

MEGAN

Yes. Earth, air, water, and fire, as the ancient Greeks would describe the nature of the world.

BRET

Those are just parts of the process. I don't think intelligent things happen without an intelligent cause.

MEGAN

What if the intelligence is built into the atoms?

BRET

That's what your dad thinks. But how did it get there?

MEGAN

How can you can reason about subjects that you have no information about?

BRET

Belief isn't about reason, as much as it's about the need for faith.

MEGAN

I do have faith. In the capacity of humans to make a better world.

BRET

Why?

MEGAN

Because it's the best thing we can do. Don't tell me after all these years of science you're still a Creationist?

BRET

Believing in God is a lot better than being an atheist.

MEGAN

Either position requires information we don't have. I'm agnostic about the whole thing.

BRET

It amounts to the same thing. You lost your faith.

MEGAN

No, thanks to my dad, I was brought up this way. My lifelong faith is just different than yours. I'm like him. Devoted to the intelligent care and conduct of life.

BRET

What about your eternal soul?

MEGAN

I don't think any God worth the name would condemn me for doing the best I can with my life. I didn't design it, and I didn't ask for it. I'm just trying to do my best with it. It's like sex.

BRET

Sex:

MEGAN

Sure. I don't know why a lot of people are still ashamed of it. We didn't design the way it works. Ours is just to accept it and enjoy it.

BRET

Oh, you enjoy it?

MEGAN

Love it, that is, with the right person. My dad has a funny way of looking at it.

BRET

What's that?

MEGAN

You may not approve, because it's about preachers. But I'll tell you anyway. He says nature is obviously wiser and more generous than we are, because it makes sex, when it's good, so joyful that we can't resist reproducing. On the other hand, if you gave a bunch of preachers the job of designing how we procreate, you can be pretty certain it wouldn't be by getting naked and intimate. The man would probably have to go into the bathroom and masturbate. Then he'd drop off the ejaculum at a sperm bank, which would then alert the woman that she could go there and get inseminated.

BRET

Very funny. You're wild, do you know that?

MEGAN

Maybe to you. I just think of my spirit as being in harmony with natural promptings of life.

BRET

OK. Good for you. I'll have to reflect on the subject.

MEGAN

I think you have a lot of subjects to reflect on. Maybe you'll learn how to live in healthy harmony with nature, too.

BRET

I think I'm a very normal guy. You and your dad always talk about how you behave. But that's not the whole picture.

MEGAN

What else is there, Bret?

BRET

My father says you can't be saved through works alone but only through faith in Jesus Christ.

MEGAN

Well, isn't faith a work?

BRET

There's no sense arguing with you. You have your beliefs, and I have mine. Maybe it's even wrong for me to be talking with you.

MEGAN

Christ might not approve?

BRET

I'm sorry. I can't help what I believe, any more than you can. I feel as if I'm being tempted by Satan.

MEGAN

Satan, too? Dear me, Bret. And for such a brilliant man. My father taught me very early that there's no such thing as angels and devils.

BRET

No such thing, huh?

MEGAN

He says our minds are able to think of the worst things we can do and the best things we can do. That's the very thing that allows us to make ethical decisions. But our ancestors didn't understand that and decided our good thoughts are the promptings of angels and our bad thoughts are the temptations of devils.

BRET

I think I've heard about enough about what your dad thinks for one day. Can't we talk about something else?

MEGAN

Sure, Bret. But it's too bad. You are so handsome.

BRET

Thanks. You're kind of gorgeous yourself. But I have a girlfriend. We plan to get married.

MEGAN

No doubt she's a good Christian.

BRET

Yes, she's a member of my father's congregation.

MEGAN

I'm sure I couldn't compete with her, unless some day you hear the call of that generally abandoned and sullied orphan know as life and adopt it, as my father and I have, before it dies of neglect.

BRET

I know what you're saying, Megan, and maybe someday we'll be more on the same page. But right now I'm still not there.

MEGAN

I guess not. Well, hope springs eternal. Gotta go now. See ya!

BRET

See ya, Megan.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 16

The chemistry lab. Dr. Morgan is mixing some reagents. Brett enters.

BRET

Hi, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

Hi, Bret. Just preparing a preservative for some sarcoma samples. Done in a moment.

BRET

OK.

(wonders around the lab a bit)

Can we talk, Dr. Morgan?

DR. MORGAN

About what?

BRET

How you got from being a Catholic to where you are?

DR. MORGAN

Sure.

He finishes making the solution and sits. Bret does, too.

DR. MORGAN

Well, it began way back when. I went to parochial school, and I remember when I was in the 3rd grade, the nuns had tacked a little sign on the wall beside the classroom door. It was a black square with a white skull and underneath it in white letters it said, "You in 2010."

BRET

Apparently, they were wrong. You're still here.

DR. MORGAN

Yep, somehow, they were. I realized, much later in life, that the sign was part of the denigration of life that's an aspect of belief that's primarily devoted to life after death. In fact, such beliefs often include outright necrophilia, such as revering the bones of the saints. But my big breakthrough came later, when I had completed all of my studies and had begun my research into cancer.

One morning, I was up early, sitting at the kitchen table, making notes, when I looked out the window at the blue sky, and suddenly I had a vision, if I can call it that. I realized how majestic life's processes are and that, even in many of our most sacred beliefs, we have been unworthy of it. Yes, I saw, without intending to, that a lot of our traditional beliefs are actually a form of irreverence for life.

BRET

You believe that?

DR. MORGAN

Yes, I do, and even more so as the years have gone by. I can find no fault with the thoughts that came to me that morning and in the years following it. In fact, I've become firm in my belief that the very survival of the human race depends on enough people making the care of this life their primary form of worship.

BRET

That is so different from everything I've been taught.

DR. MORGAN

The realization was for me, too, but I'll tell you something else. When I was sitting there, I looked down at my hands, which had been making notes about my research, and now they seemed to me like holy instruments and that they would remain that way as long as I always put them in the service of life.

BRET

That's quite an amazing experience.

DR. MORGAN

Oh, I seldom talk about it. In fact, I think you're the first person I ever shared my so-called vision with. But think about. What hope do we have when even our most sacred beliefs are based on treating this life as unsatisfactory, a mere stopover on the way to a better place. We want more. I don't blame people, though. All of the science that led me to that vision is relatively new. After all, the antibiotic revolution occurred in the 1950's. Before that, life was just too fragile to have faith in.

BRET

I don't know that you need to have faith in life to commit to its care. Think of all the missionaries doing good works.

DR. MORGAN

I do. But imagine how much more harmonious their commitment would be if they believed that the most logical way to worship whatever is behind life as we know it is to devote ourselves to it as a modern religion.

BRET

I still don't think you have to go there to be productively involved in life.

DR. MORGAN

Let's stop for a second and think about what's enabling us to sit here and have this conversation. The billions of metabolic processes, producing our lives and our consciousness, and the billions of cosmological forces supporting the earth in its relatively smooth ride around the sun, as it also rotates and moves with the expansion of the universe, which also may be, by the way, its natural growth. When we understand how much it takes to enable our lives, we begin to appreciate them more. In time, one hopes, enough people will learn to appreciate life enough to rescue it from our own depredations.

BRET

Don't you believe in anything besides the natural world?

DR. MORGAN

I believe in intellectual humility. I don't believe we can or need to know anything beyond what we can experience. That said, I'm open to any surprises that may await us. Yet I do think that dwelling primarily on another life or beings beyond what we can know is a form of irreverence for life.

BRET

So all we have to do is take care of this life and everything will be fine.

DR. MORGAN

Well, think about an entire world where everyone's basic devotion was to the welfare of this life and the fulfillment of its finest potential. What would such a world be like, especially compared to what we have now? Of course, it may take time.

BRET

How much time do you think we have? My father says End Times could be here any day.

DR. MORGAN

I don't want to disrespect his beliefs. But it seems to me the human race has been on the earth for such a short time that we still can't believe we're here.

BRET

A short time? We've been here 5,000 years.

DR. MORGAN

Much longer, Bret. Actually, believe it or not, about 100,000 years. But the dinosaurs survived for 160 million years, and there is some chance we may be even brighter. The truth is, we're all very early human beings, and all of our skyscrapers have been erected just beyond the orifice of the cave. That's one reason, with distressing regularity, primitive humans show up and create havoc. And all of our science is just beginning. I still feel like Newton, standing on the shore, and saying, "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." We humans have great promise, but the time has come when we must save ourselves from our still, in many way, primitive selves.

BRET

That's an interesting perspective. Do you have a name for your beliefs?

DR. MORGAN

Oh, I've thought of what I might call them. Maybe just life itself as a modern religion. I don't have to worry about that much, because I generally keep my beliefs to myself.

BRET

And what about the afterlife?

DR. MORGAN

What if I give you, of all things, a parable?

BRET

Go ahead. I can't believe this.

DR. MORGAN

OK. Here goes. There's a knock at your door. You open it there stands an old man in a white robe. You say, "Who are you?" He says, "I'm God, and I have a present for you." You can hardly believe what's happening, but you manage to ask, "What is it?" "Life," he replies. Now here's the question. Do you accept the gift, and say, "Thanks.

I'll do the best I can with it." Or do you ask questions like, "Does it ever breakdown and need maintenance? Does it last forever?" If you do, you notice He's a little put off, but says, "Well, to tell you the truth, life can develop problems, but you have the intelligence to find ways to overcome them. And each life does have a span; then it concludes. But think. Even the great universe has a span. It's all part of the dynamic that enables the birth of new life." And you say, "Thanks. But it's just not good enough for me. I want something better." Now here's the question. Who do you think he'd love the most?

BRET

That's pretty impressive, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

Thanks. Well, as you know well, I've accepted the gift wholeheartedly. I've also realized over time that belief in life itself is naturally unifying religion, because we're all alive.

BRET

But then we die.

DR. MORGAN

As the cliché goes, living and dying are more about the realization or death of our individual and mutual potential. Each life has the capacity to produce a given amount of energy. When we realize it, we live. When we don't, we die. So at the end of our lives, if we've fulfilled our potential as best we can, we don't die. Our lives conclude, or, as I prefer to say, they complete. All that's left is the body that produced the sacred energy that gave us life. On a mundane level, a corpse is kind of like a dead battery. But what light it shined forth with all its energy! May yours shine forth as brilliantly as it can, my young man.

BRET

That's all fine, but we all still wind up six feet under.

DR. MORGAN

Burial is a practice that grew out of the misunderstanding of what a corpse is. True, the unified life has ended. But all the atoms and molecules that generated the life are still alive. Why lock them away in a box, when you can free them to rejoin the life cycle?

BRET

You mean, cremation.

DR. MORGAN

I prefer to think of it as oxidation. Poof! And there's you're entire body, back in circulation, at play on the surface of the earth for eternity, unless, of course, some of the atoms and molecules wind up being part of somebody who decides to be buried.

BRET

You are such a guy. But you're pretty much alone with all of these beliefs. Don't you miss going to church and being part of a congregation?

DR. MORGAN

Sometimes, I miss the social aspect. But then I think of the diverging rays of the sun, shining down on the earth. It can be seen as a natural temple of life, with the rays of the sun as its sides and the earth as its floor. Better yet, it's the one we all attend every day. So we might say that my congregation is made up of every other human being and every other living thing -- the great congregation of life on the life-graced earth.

BRET

Sometimes, you absolutely blow my mind. Do you know that?

DR. MORGAN

Thanks. I'm just sharing what I've come to believe and what you seem to find at least some merit in. I'm pleased about that. Are you pleased about it?

BRET

It's a struggle, but in many ways, I have to admit, I am.

DR. MORGAN

Good. Maybe there's hope for you after all!

Lights go down.

SCENE 17

Lights come up on Martha, sitting on an outdoor chair, looking at a magazine. There's another chair nearby.

Bret enters.

MARTHA
(looks up)

Hi, Bret.

BRET

Hi, Martha.

MARTHA

Come and sit down.

BRET
(sits down beside her)

Thanks.

MARTHA
I'm always so happy the moment I see you.

BRET
I feel the same way about you. Can I ask you something?

MARTHA
Sure.

BRET
My chemistry professor says he thinks I would be great at medical research or some other kind of scientific research.

MARTHA
I guess he figured out how brilliant you are.

BRET
I guess, at least, it seems I have a talent for math. Anyway, how would you feel about it?

MARTHA
In what way?

BRET
Well, if by some chance I decide to do it, I wouldn't open up a practice, at least, for a couple of years, and maybe never.

MARTHA

I thought you wanted to go into practice and help cure diseases and save lives, I mean, because of what happened to your brother.

BRET

I do. But Dr. Morgan says if I can make a scientific breakthrough, I could help people all over the world, maybe with a cure for some awful disease or just help humanity understand more about the world we find ourselves in.

MARTHA

You mean, about God's Creation?

BRET

Of course.

MARTHA

Oh, I don't know, Bret. I wouldn't want to stand in the way of what you think is best. But I always dreamed of us living here as Dr. and Mrs. Wilmont and raising a family. Where would we live?

BRET

Well, while I was doing the research, we could wait to get married till I'm done.

MARTHA

I've waited long enough, Bret. Clear through medical school and now your internship. I want us to get married right after you complete your internship or even before then.

BRET

OK. It's just that we'd have to go live where I can get a fellowship.

MARTHA

Where would that be?

BRET

I don't know yet. My chemistry professor has mentioned he might be able to help me get a post-doctoral research fellowship at Harvard.

MARTHA

Harvard? That's kind of impressive.

BRET

Yeah, it sure is.

MARTHA

Isn't it way on the East Coast?

BRET

Yes, it's in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near Boston.

MARTHA

That's so far away, Bret.

BRET

I know.

MARTHA

I'd miss my family so much.

BRET

That's one reason I said maybe we should wait to get married. But, hey, it may not be at Harvard. It might be somewhere closer.

MARTHA

When will you know?

BRET

It could be anytime now.

MARTHA

Well, then, let's cross that bridge when we come to it.

BRET

Fair enough.

MARTHA

Did you tell your parents what you're thinking of doing?

BRET

Not yet. No sense getting my dad riled up unless I really do get a research fellowship.

MARTHA

How do you think he'd feel about it?

MARTHA

You wouldn't ever lose your faith, would you? I mean, I couldn't stand it, Bret.

BRET

I don't see any sign of that happening.

MARTHA

Are you sure? That's the one thing I couldn't abide -- being married to an un-Christian man.

BRET

I don't think we have to worry about that, Martha.

MARTHA

Good. I want our children to be brought up good Christians, too.

BRET

Of course. Hey, what do you say we go get a pizza together?

MARTHA

Sounds good to me. Where would you like to go?

BRET

How about Muggsy's? I think they have the best pizza.

MARTHA

Me, too. I love you, Bret. And I only want what's best for us and our kids.

BRET

I know, dear.

(gives her a little kiss)

You're a sweetheart.

Lights go down.

SCENE 18

Lights come up on chemistry lab.

DR. MORGAN

(on phone)

That's great, just great, Ralph. I'm sure he'll be thrilled. And you're gonna love him. He's absolutely brilliant at math, chemistry, and any other science you throw at him. I'm relatively confident that he might do some important work.... I'll get back to you with a formal acceptance shortly. Goodbye for now and thanks again.

(hands up; thinks; dials again)

Hi, Megan. Guess what?... I just heard back from Harvard. Bret's been awarded a post-doc fellowship in biophysics.... Yeah, I'm sure he'll be thrilled.... Yeah, he should be here anytime now.... Sure, come on over. We can all celebrate together.

(hangs up; goes through some paperwork)

Bret enters.

BRET

Hi, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

Great news, Bret!

BRET

Did I get the fellowship?

DR. MORGAN

Not only that, my first choice for you. Harvard, in biophysics.

BRET

Oh, that's great! Thank you!

(hugs him)

Thank you so much.

DR. MORGAN

A pleasure to help you along, young man. I know you'll do me proud. Just remember, if you get offered the Nobel Prize someday, consider all the consequences before you accept. It's a great honor. But that medal can also be a millstone.

BRET

I'm telling you right now, if I ever win it, I'm accepting it. That I can promise you.

DR. MORGAN

Yeah. After careful deliberation, I seem to have accepted it myself. Just don't do what a lot of researchers do these days -- pick your project, not by how likely it might be to benefit humanity, but by how likely it might be to win you the Nobel Prize.

Megan enters with a bottle of champagne and a bottle of Coca-Cola..

MEGAN

Hey, who's the young man with the post-doc fellowship at Harvard? Congratulations!
(gives him a hug)

I'm so proud of you!

BRET

Thank you. I'm kind of excited myself.

MEGAN

Kind of excited? I'd be ecstatic if I were you.

DR. MORGAN

So what do you say, Bret? Do we accept the fellowship?

MEGAN

Of course, he accepts it, Dad. Why on earth would he do anything else?

DR. MORGAN

Well, Bret, how about it? It's an opportunity to realize your finest potential and maybe make a breakthrough that will benefit humanity for all time? I told my connection at Harvard I'd get back to him asap. So let's hear it.

Bret struggles to make up his mind. Takes time to do so.

BRET

I'm very grateful.

MEGAN

So?

DR. MORGAN

What do you say?

BRET

Of course, I accept.

DR. MORGAN

Congratulations, young man! Time for a toast.

(takes bottle of champagne from Megan)

MEGAN

(holds up bottle of Coca-Cola)

I picked this up on the way, too, since you don't drink alcoholic beverages.

BRET

Well, maybe this one time I can make an exception.

MEGAN

Wow, wonders will never cease.

DR. MORGAN

Good decision, Bret. After all, it's just fermented grape juice. And remember, among the Greeks and Romans, in what we call ancient times, wine was known as the nectar of the gods. And it had, not just as one, but two Gods -- Dionysus and Bacchus.

(pours him a glass)

BRET

(takes it)

Oh, boy! I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do at home.

DR. MORGAN

Many of us do, Bret, at one time or another. I remember my trial by explanation. Just love your parents and be as thoughtful as possible.

(toasts)

Here's to a remarkable career in medical research.

MEGAN

I'll second that. May you achieve greatness.

BRET

Thank you. Thank you both to the tenth power.

They all drink. He seems to enjoy it.

BRET (CONT')

Actually, this stuff is surprisingly good. I just may take another sip.

DR. MORGAN
(raises glass)

Here's to ya, Bret.

Bret raises his glass, too. He looks at them both,
smiling, and takes another sip.

Lights fade down.

THE END