

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 Nobel Prize winning medical researcher
DR. EDWARD SIGNA, Dean at Fundamentalist Divinity School
ANNE MORGAN, Dr. Morgan's wife
MEGAN MORGAN, His daughter and first-year medical student
SCOTT, In love with Martha

Production Notes:

Time: The Present

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

ACT I

SCENE 1

Dr. Morgan is in his office, on the phone. There are piles of papers on his desk and thick white plastic binders in the bookcase behind him, with handwritten labels on them.

DR. MORGAN

I know he feels he deserved the Nobel, Stan. But frankly he might be glad he didn't get it, at least, not yet. While it's a great honor, once they hand it to you, you become a poster boy for it. From then on, you're known as a Nobel Laureate more than for the work you did that earned it. I've been fighting the battle since the morning I heard I won it.

Megan enters. Dr. Morgan waves her in and indicates she should have a seat. She crosses to it.

DR. MORGAN

Just got an unexpected visit from my daughter, Stan. Let's trade notes again soon.... Great. Bye.

(hangs up)

MEGAN

(as she sits)

Hi, Dad.

DR. MORGAN

Hi, Megan! What brings you here?

MEGAN

Just thought I'd drop by to see if you need any help.

DR. MORGAN

(motions to desk)

That's an understatement, but I need you to concentrate on your studies.

MEGAN

I am. In fact, I'm concentrating on them so much Larry broke up with me.

DR. MORGAN

Sorry to hear that. Maybe he wasn't the right guy for you after all.

MEGAN

I guess not.

DR. MORGAN

When you're dedicated to something, it's usually better to be with someone who is, too.

MEGAN

I think that's why you and Mom are such a great couple. I want a relationship like that, too.

DR. MORGAN

Good. As usual, I invited one of my students to be my lab assistant.

(looks at watch)

He should be here soon.

MEGAN

Glad to hear it. Then I'll be running along.

(stands)

Time to hit the books again.

DR. MORGAN

Excellent. See you for dinner.

She turns to go, just as Bret enters.

MEGAN

Hi, there.

BRET

Hi.

They look at each other with interest. Then Megan exits.

DR. MORGAN

Good afternoon, Bret.

BRET

Good afternoon, 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, last year you got the highest grade in my biochemistry class.

BRET

Yes, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Each year I invite the student with that proud achievement to be my lab assistant. So I'm offering you the position.

BRET

Thank you, sir. I'm truly honored.

DR. MORGAN

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

BRET

What would my duties be?

DR. MORGAN

Correct and grade chemistry exams, make up a variety of reagents, for example, the formaldehyde to preserve the cadavers and body parts for the anatomy department. On a lighter note, make anisette for my friends.

BRET

Anisette?

DR. MORGAN

It's a simple formula. Water, ethyl alcohol, sugar, and anise flavoring. You just follow the formula. Then you pour it into reagent bottles and pop in a cork. It's my most popular gift.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Oh. Well, you don't have to drink the damn stuff. But in moderation, alcoholic beverages can be good for your health. When you dissect an alcoholic, do you know what you find? Clear 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, I see. Well, whatever rings your chimes. 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. Did it all through undergrad school, too, although I had a pretty good scholarship then, too.

DR. MORGAN

The Ford Foundation Grant in mathematics? 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. 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 chemistry exams in there that need to be graded. It's on the Krebs Cycle, which you know forward and backward.

BRET

Yes, I do. I'll get back to you 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 help as many people as I can.

DR. MORGAN

A noble goal. But you might want to consider going into medical research, at least, for a few years. 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 meticulously skeptical peers? Maybe, if you're gifted and lucky. Tell ya what. If you decide to go for it, 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 medical education. I'd write you a stellar recommendation.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Of course, it is. I sense, despite our evident differences, that you're a kindred spirit with a wandering imagination. As you know, my specialty is cancer research, with an emphasis on the genetics. Basically, I'm trying to figure out how to work with nature, instead of against it.

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 don't compare with having a family to go home to. Tell you what, though, if I had to do 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 call God did. I'm not referring to knowledge that's beyond our experience. I'm talking about the chemistry behind the natural origin of life on earth.

BRET

In Genesis it says --

DR. MORGAN

-- We all know what the Bible says, Bret. Let me give you another way to think about it. What if what we call matter and energy are really the fundamental form of the body and life of the universe, inanimate, to be sure, but nevertheless life. Then the question becomes, how does the inanimate stuff 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 and molecules under the right environmental conditions. 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 observable 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. That's what 90 percent of our science is about. As you know, the

(MORE)

DR. MORGAN (cont'd)

earth didn't come with an instruction manual, but we did evolve with the intelligence to discover some of what such a manual's contents might be. True, in fragments, but the more fragments we discover, the more we can assemble the book we might call the revelations of science. Got it? 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 here.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 2

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

PASTOR

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 unchristian 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 divinity school. But no. He chose medical science. How much of it 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 we should 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 has 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 everlasting 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.

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.
 (hears door opening)
 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 my brother.

PASTOR WILMONT

It most certainly did. It freed him from this sin-fraught vale of tears at a blessedly young age. He has found eternal life 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.

BRET

Do you know what it's like to be in medical school and to learn that Lyle did not have to die. All he needed is an appendectomy.

PASTOR WILMONT

I tremble to think of the increasingly likely destiny of your immortal soul.

PATRICIA

That's quite 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

Then you should be concerned for refusing to get a vaccine and forbidding Mom to get one.

PASTOR WILMONT

We prefer to trust our lives to the Lord. And what is death for the virtuous, but the gateway to heaven and eternal life with Christ and God, the Father?

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

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 3

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 fever.

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 power of prayer.

BRET

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

PASTOR WILMONT

We shall 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 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, can have the glorious hope that, through the supreme sacrifice and intercessions of Christ Jesus, we may find forgiveness, the forgiveness that alone can save us from eternal damnation and grant us entrance into heaven and

(MORE)

PASTOR WILMONT (cont'd)

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 Jesus Christ. 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 Judgment 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 judgment, 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 to save our immortal souls.

BRET

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

MARTHA

What?

BRET

Us. And 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 medical doctor.

MARTHA

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

BRET

Well, what about you, Martha? Are you ever 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 in my personal life 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

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. 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 the insurance agency.

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 as a whip, too. I never met another woman with all three of those things going for her.

MARTHA

Thank you, Bret. I know we'll always be together.

BRET

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

MARTHA

Are you kidding? No chance!

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, Dean Howell. We may need divine help.

(knock at the door;

looks at watch)

Oops, I have a visitor now. See you at the meeting.

(MORE)

DR. SIGNA (cont'd)
(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 he is. We even allow a bit of critical
Biblical scholarship. 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 genetics 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 medical research myself.

DR. SIGNA

I thought you were going into practice?

BRET

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

DR. SIGNA

Talk to me, son.

BRET

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

DR. SIGNA

Why not? Sounds like a great distinction 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 I've heard from other students that 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, Bret. What do you think?

BRET

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

DR. SIGNA

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 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 does? I'd hate to miss out.

DR. SIGNA

Frankly, I'm 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 to doubt that.

DR. SIGNA

Yes, I do, Bret. You're a fine young Christian man. No doubt some of the credit goes 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's 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 working for him is OK?

DR. SIGNA

I don't think it's 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 medical 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. In fact, my mother insisted that I become an altar boy. 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 always wanted me to 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 science and faith are different kinds of knowledge.

DR. MORGAN

As you like. There do seem to be many people who can accommodate a commitment to the care of this life with the otherworldliness of our traditional religions.

BRET

Christian missionaries do, sir, and many others.

DR. MORGAN

I'm for anybody who finds a way to do it -- scientists, traditionally religious people, nones. We need everyone we can get to work together to save the biosphere and the naturally miraculous diversity of its life. The difference is, I'm all in.

BRET

Great! I think I've committed to it. But I do it for Christ and my hopes for the hereafter.

DR. MORGAN

Whatever works for you. But doesn't that leave you with one foot in this life and the other foot in the next one?

BRET

As a devout Christian, I think that's the right way to live. The preachment to love your neighbor is a charter to care about this life.

DR. MORGAN

To each his own. Life-affirmation seems to come to each person in a different way. But back to the question of the day. 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 it. But I'm not sure I can.

DR. MORGAN

Oh, well, what's troubling you?

BRET

I don't quite know how to talk about it with you. I respect you enormously.

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

Some students seem to think so.

DR. MORGAN

Actually, I'm not.

BRET

You aren't?

DR. MORGAN

No, that would be taking a position on a subject 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 of the latter William is specious. We are allowed to disbelieve until we hear convincing evidence for belief.

BRET

Then may I ask what you are?

DR. MORGAN

My beliefs are my own. They're my secret sauce.

BRET

Can you please share a little bit with me? I want to know how you can be so at peace and confident without Christ.

DR. MORGAN

I don't usually get into such discussions. I don't find them comfortable or don't wish to crash the fragile ship of my life into an iceberg. And I certainly don't want to undermine your faith. I have nothing to prove.

BRET

Just tell me a little.

DR. MORGAN

OK. Just don't hold any of what I say against me.

BRET

I won't.

DR. MORGAN

Then hang onto your britches. My religion is based on this life.

BRET

On this life? I never heard of such a thing.

DR. MORGAN

I suppose not.

BRET

Can you explain what you mean?

DR. MORGAN

Why?

BRET

It will help me make a decision.

DR. MORGAN

All right. Here ya go. I believe we've learned that life is improvable at about the same time it needs us to commit to it to with religious fervor. I view it as the pivot of history.

BRET

May I ask exactly what you mean by that?

DR. MORGAN

Sometimes the thought crosses my mind to write a book called "Misaligned with Life. The Human Race on the Brink." Now, I believe I've said enough.

BRET

Is that fair?

DR. MORGAN

Probably not. OK. I believe if we're going to save life from our own misbehavior, we have to appreciate it enough to place our primary faith in it.

BRET

That's a pretty radical thought, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

That's why I'd rather not discuss it. I've learned it's not the ideal way to win friends and influence people. Even among leading scientists, there are some who have faith in our traditional religions. They separate them from what we can know through science. I've also learned that every time you share something you believe deeply, you use it up a little. I prefer to keep it all inside me as my inner treasure, the beliefs that support me and enable me to settle into this life in a comfortable and happily productive way.

BRET

What about death?

DR. MORGAN

What about it?

BRET

I mean what does this life mean if we all just die and are not saved by faith in Jesus Christ?

DR. MORGAN

If I decline to answer that, will be you irredeemably upset?

BRET

No. But I'd appreciate knowing what you think.

DR. MORGAN

Well, I'm no good at relating to people indifferently. I prefer to do it with love and hope. Or to retreat into myself. So look at it this way. If you make peace with lifespans -- that we all get a share of life, that a limit on our days gives value to them and makes room for newborns -- then death doesn't ceaselessly haunt you.

BRET

You don't think about death?

DR. MORGAN

I didn't say that.

BRET

Can you explain a little more?

DR. MORGAN

No, not really.

BRET

Please, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

Well, then, buckle your seatbelt. You know what the Stoic philosophers said, from before Epicurus to Marcus Aurelius. Death is nothing to us, because it is the loss of consciousness. If you accept that observation, then, by extension, the only experience is life. What we call death is only an observed experience, not a lived one.

BRET

That truly bends my mind. Death is nothing to us?

DR. MORGAN

Well, don't get too bent out of shape. We all want to hang around as long as we can.

BRET

Sure, but death is forever. Let me ask you this. Where do you expect to go after you die?

DR. MORGAN

To the funeral home. Thence to the crematorium or perhaps I'll select alkaline hydrolysis or one of the new and more eco-friendly ways of returning the final molecules that make up my body to the life cycle.

BRET

Come on, Dr. Morgan, I mean it. Heaven or hell?

DR. MORGAN

Do I have a choice? Let me ask you something. What do you think is more logical -- belief in life after death or life before death?

BRET

Excuse me, but isn't that question blasphemous?

DR. MORGAN

How do you know what you believe?

BRET

It's in the Bible.

DR. MORGAN

OK. Tell you what, young man. I think we've talked enough for today.

BRET

But all I want to know is whether or not you're an atheist.

DR. MORGAN

Haven't you been listening? I'm afraid I can't draw a conclusion about something about which I have no credible evidence. I do, however, observe many incidents, or

(MORE)

DR. MORGAN (cont'd)

unstructured data points, that seem to indicate we're on our own. In other words, events happen within natural laws. So life appears to be a free gift, often defined by statistical probabilities we perceive as chance, but, within natural limits, to define by our choices.

BRET

What about making choices based on the teachings of Jesus Christ?

DR. MORGAN

If that works for you, great. My principal concern is with excessive otherworldliness, not otherworldliness per se. But let me ask you something. Does the New Testament, or, for that matter, the Old Testament, mention one thing that indicates the characters and authors knew anything more than the knowledge that was available in their time?

BRET

The principles Christ teaches are eternal.

DR. MORGAN

Oh, I agree with some of them. I especially like "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall inherit the earth."

BRET

Good. Anything else?

DR. MORGAN

Sure. But where might I find, say, Behold the sand. In it you will one day discover silicon, which will allow you to manufacture what are called microchips?

BRET

Is that fair?

DR. MORGAN

If you believe in the omniscience of God, it's at least interesting. But now I've told you more than I've told anyone else, with the possible exception of my daughter, who has, thankfully, demonstrated she has ears to hear. It's a trust. And I trust you'll honor it.

BRET

I will, Dr. Morgan. But what about your wife?

DR. MORGAN

My sweetheart is an art teacher, in fact, an instruction leader in middle school, as well as an accomplished painter.

BRET

What does she think about your beliefs?

DR. MORGAN

We agree about many things, but she has her own strong beliefs and her scientific education ended with her freshman course in biology and zoology. She still refers to bacteria and viruses as cooties.

BRET

That's funny.

DR. MORGAN

Yes, as amusing as she is lovable. Let me share a lesson that was especially hard for me to learn. A wise man learns his wife is always right. It's the foundation of a long marriage.

BRET

I'll take that under advisement, sir. But I still don't know if you're an atheist?

DR. MORGAN

Perhaps your upbringing has made you tone deaf to what I've told you.

BRET

Maybe. Lord knows it's had an influence on me.

DR. MORGAN

Let me ask you a question. Is the choice only between religion that's foundation is primarily otherworldly or a life of wine, women, and song -- which, by the way, are hardly an unpraiseworthy trio? What about the conduct of this life with reverential devotion to its care and the intelligent realization of its finest potential.

BRET

Do you think that's possible without Christ?

DR. MORGAN

Do you?

BRET

I honestly just don't know how.

DR. MORGAN

And you never have to, Bret. But let me help you out a little, so you don't leave plagued by uncertainty. I have no problem with religion per se. In fact, I have my own. It's based on any idea I or anyone else can come up with that nourishes life, so it may flourish. One of my own is the realization that it's the highest achievement of the universe. I find that sufficient to inspire my adoration. Do you spot any shortcomings in that?

BRET

No, sir. But what about God?

DR. MORGAN

Let me answer you with a question. What if taking care of this life and doing our best with it is the most direct way to show reverence for whatever it's ultimate source may be?

BRET

Excuse me, sir, but how can you believe in "whatever"?

DR. MORGAN

The same way you believe in God. I just prefer the indefinite nomenclature that coincides with my knowledge. Let me ask you to consider a prospect. What if many of the most fervently religious people converted to belief in this life as their primary form of reverence? Do you think it might help achieve, if you'll excuse the expression, our salvation? And don't you think the environmental crisis has made such a conversion even more urgent? Now, I assume you have the great answer you seek.

BRET

Well, kind of.

DR. MORGAN

I'm afraid it will have to do, at least for now. I decided a long time ago that I want science to remain the central aspect of my life, not chatter about my personal beliefs.

BRET

I understand.

DR. MORGAN

Good. See you tomorrow. I'll expect an answer by then.

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 God-fearing Christian with going steady with a guy who's going to be a medical doctor. It goes completely against trust in the Lord 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 his son 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, Martha. Maybe I'm barking up the wrong tree. Maybe you're not the girl for me.

MARTHA

I was just upset, that's all. I didn'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 woman 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 I see you again tomorrow?

MARTHA

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

SCOTT

I don't want to find another woman. I want you to be the one.

MARTHA

You are so nice, Scott. Good night, now.
 (throws him a little
 kiss and turns to
 leave; he sighs)

Lights fade down.

SCENE 9

Dr. Morgan's lab. Bret takes a seat.

DR. MORGAN

So tell me, Bret. What have you decided?

BRET

I want to take the position. But I'm having a hard time squaring it with my personal life.

DR. MORGAN

Well, where do we go from here?

BRET

I just don't know.

DR. MORGAN

OK, then, let's try something else. 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 of the wonder of it all, too. Or, as Einstein said, with a similar appreciation, "Every moment is a miracle." But I also think of it as a sacred trust.

BRET

I understand that, sir. And I agree. Life is sacred. The great commandment tells us, "Thou shalt not kill."

DR. MORGAN

Yes, it does.

BRET

Good.

DR. MORGAN

Don't get too excited.

BRET

I prefer a positive statement of it -- the simple cliché' to live and let live.

BRET

I like that thought, too. But where does God come in?

DR. MORGAN

Is the fundamental question of religion, Is there a God or isn't there?

BRET

Of course, it is.

DR. MORGAN

May I suggest a more earthbound question? What if it's, Do we have life or don't we? And, as a followup, since we do, what should we do with it?

BRET

But, Dr. Morgan, how does that compare with belief in the one true God?

DR. MORGAN

You can call the ultimate source of life whatever you want. 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 the love of 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 had 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

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

DR. MORGAN

Well, let's talk about that ancient 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?

BRET

It's an interesting thought, sir, but where does Jesus Christ come in?

DR. MORGAN

Anywhere you want him to.

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

When I was a freshman in college, I studied theology with the Jesuits. They were commendably honest about the facts. 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 forty 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. As you can see to this day, the guiding principle in that region is hardly credible communication.

BRET

But the books of the New Testament are divinely inspired, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

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

Exactly. It was a tough life. It taught him one of the most consoling principles I know.

BRET

What's that?

DR. MORGAN

When you have something you don't want to do, the way to do it is with great devotion. You'd be surprised by how much inner turmoil it relieves. Do you know how he began?

BRET

No, sir.

DR. MORGAN

As a theologian, actually, as a professor and then the Principal of a Theological Seminary at Strassbourg. He decided to write a book, called The Search for the Historical Jesus. It was a careful analysis of the many

(MORE)

DR. MORGAN (cont'd)

books about the life of Christ as described in the New Testament, which are in frequent disagreement. He did not include the historical evidence we have beyond it.

BRET

Why would he?

DR. MORGAN

Perhaps because there really isn't much.

BRET

So what?

DR. MORGAN

Oh, well, there's no reason to trouble yourself. But the lack of a historical record did concern Medieval Christians. At any rate, although Schweitzer concluded by saying that human reason wasn't equal to the analysis, not long afterward, he 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. In fact, I was so taken by the thought and his life that I made a special trip to New York to visit the Albert Schweitzer library, which is in the apartments buildings that are in United Nations Plaza. But to go on. He explained his new ethic as "What is good for life is good, and what is bad for life is bad." It's a fine principal for a physician or, for that matter, for anyone else.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Well, let me answer with my own questions. What if all we're meant to 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, when you know modern science, you realize what a wondrous and rare existent life is. It's certainly more distinguished than the rubble we find on most planets. Yet many humans still think it's not good enough for them. They want something more.

BRET

Eternal life.

DR. MORGAN

OK. The hope is a consolation to many. But, 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

Of course, I do, although whether or not you believe in eternal life probably doesn't have much influence over whether it actually exists.

BRET

That's because Satan 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 and ask how we might finally make the kind of world we would all like to live in. I'll tell you what I think. It's when we express our primary devotion through faith in life.

BRET

Faith in life? I never heard of such a thing.

DR. MORGAN

Probably not. Because I thought it up.

BRET

You thought it up, Dr. Morgan?

DR. MORGAN

Oh, as part of my own search for a solid foundation for my own life. And do you know why I decided to place my faith in it? At one point, I realized that life is smarter than we are, a lot smarter -- and very likely always will be.

BRET

Even smarter than --

DR. MORGAN

-- Anyone. Here's proof.

(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. But can you explain how I was able to do that?

BRET

Well, your neurological system stimulated the musculoskeletal system in your arm and --

DR. MORGAN

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

(points to head)

... let alone have the thought make my arm move. Got it?

BRET

Well, you're right, sir.

DR. MORGAN

Of course, I'm right. Modesty about what we know is the most secure foundation I know for credibility. 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 to act -- as a religion. In short, I like the idea of life itself as a modern religion.

BRET

You really think that?

DR. MORGAN

I simply think to get to where we have to we need to start thinking of this life as more than just a stopover on the way to a better place. All you have to do is think of the condition of the average bus stop compared to your home. A lot of people would spit on the floor at a bus stop, but never in their homes.

BRET

I get that, Dr. Morgan. But I grew up being taught we've been sent here as a banishment and a punishment because of original sin.

DR. MORGAN

So did I. But what if we still live in the "garden" in which we evolved? And what if the idea that's worthy of life as we have come to understand it is, not as the result of an original sin, but as an original blessing?

BRET

Wow, Dr. Morgan, that's a pretty intense take on things.

DR. MORGAN

The appreciation of emerging knowledge and the expression of it often is.

BRET

I'm ready to admit this much, sir. You have a way of thinking that's hard to disparage, except it still leaves out Christ and eternal life?

DR. MORGAN

Well, let me be a little direct. The chuck wagon of your beliefs seems to be stuck in some pretty deep ruts and I don't intend to tow you out. I had my own work to do in that area.

BRET

In what way, sir?

DR. MORGAN

My mother, educated as she was and a member of Phi Beta Kappa, too, spent so much time on her knees, saying her rosary, that I used to tell her I was going to buy her knee pads. 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 sixteen.

BRET

I'm sorry to hear that, Dr. Morgan.

DR. MORGAN

It was a complete disaster. If my family was a diamond, it was as if it was hit the wrong way and shattered. I was eleven years old, when 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 seemed to have turned yellowish gray overnight and my mother was frighteningly pale. I asked what happened. They couldn't speak. Then the man between them said, "We're picking out a tombstone for your sister. I'm sorry to tell you that last night she was killed in a car accident."

BRET

That is so ineffably sad.

DR. MORGAN

Yes, it is. The loss was profound. My sister was one of those wonderful, statistically unlikely 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, eventually 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. Her Catholic faith is pretty much all that kept her going.

BRET

Faith can work wonders.

DR. MORGAN

So can faith in life. But I knew how important her Catholicism was to her, so I even pretended to go to mass long after I realized that I wanted to put myself wholeheartedly 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 fining in the deep green water. I felt it was a holier experience than attending church and hearing what a sinner I was. Later, I learned I was experiencing what Wordsworth called "natural piety."

BRET

I like to be out in nature, too. I see it as a work of God.

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 fervor to save it. I'm hardly the first to think so. The

(MORE)

DR. MORGAN (cont'd)

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 was never a fan of his. He used to refer to him as one of those damned "fee-losophers."

DR. MORGAN

I'll bet. Bertie, as the people close to him called him, got himself into a sea of difficulties by being candid about his beliefs. And I don't intend to sail into one myself. So any other questions I can answer? Or can we wrap this up?

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Sometimes, it gets to me, too. But when you value life, you value your own. And I'm determined to live in a way that helps it flourish. Or, as Kant said in his categorical imperative, to live 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. One of the ways I manage it is to separate my personal life from my mass-media life. In my personal life, I wake up, have breakfast, kiss my wife, come to the lab, and investigate life processes that transcend all of our knowledge. Meanwhile, I know in my mass-media life, humanity will be proceeding with its usual death-obsessed behavior, without a clue about what an astounding privilege it is just to be alive.

BRET

I like the idea of separating those two things. But without a firm belief in God, the Father, don't you ever feel alone in the universe?

DR. MORGAN

Not really. Actually, I feel surrounded.

BRET

How is that possible?

DR. MORGAN

Well, we're all part of the universe, right? So we all have an as intimate a relationship with it as possible. It's made up of our relationship with ourselves, along with our relationships with the people we love, our colleagues, and, in fact, all other life. Venturing a bit farther, since the big bang, or, more sensitively expressed, the birth of the universe began with a singularity, or concentration of similar matter, we may, I think, intuit we're members of all the life in the universe. We are, as the Indian mystics often say, at one with the universe. When we feel all these relationships aren't wonderfully sufficient, our appreciation of them simply isn't worthy of them.

BRET

I'm trying to wrap my head around your beliefs, *so, sure, go ahead.*

DR. MORGAN

Think about it. The only way for intelligent life to evolve on disparate planets is naked and ignorant, unless you expect the necessities of life to be shipped in from outer space. But, as we've discovered, we have the capacity to improve our 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 and to stop jabbering about such calamities of the early imagination as End Times. Now, I've spent a great deal of time telling you about what I believe. Why have I gone to all the trouble when I find such disclosures deeply uncomfortable?

BRET

I don't really know, sir.

DR. MORGAN

So you might consider working for me.

BRET

I'm very flattered that you've taken the time, sir. Honestly, I thought you were trying to convince me I'm wrong to place my faith in Christ?

DR. MORGAN

Nope. I think I've made that abundantly clear.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Excellent. I commend your decision. And I expect great things of you, regardless of what you believe in areas that are no concern of science. In fact, as I said the last time we met, when you finish med school, you may want to consider doing a couple of years of post-doctoral research and perhaps decide to make a career out of medical research.

BRET

I was really flattered you made the suggestion.

DR. MORGAN

Good. Turns out that aligning my ability to do research with my career has been more rewarding than I could have imagined at your age, and I think you may find it will be for you, too. As part of your post-doc work, you'd pick a research project. I'll tell you the one I'd like you to consider.

BRET

What's that?

DR. MORGAN

In biochemistry, you learned that there's an electrical charge across the cell wall that's generated by the exchange of 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 believe something else is going on. And I think you might be the person to make the concept credible or discover what other process is at work.

BRET

It would certainly be an interesting voyage of discovery, Dr. Morgan. Thank you for thinking I might be able to achieve something like that.

DR. MORGAN

Let me try to perk up your interest a little more. If you decide to do some post-doc research, I'll be happy to 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 explore the blue sky. If you do the research I'm suggesting, you could combine your mathematical ability with your talent for chemistry, physics, and the life sciences.

(MORE)

DR. MORGAN (cont'd)

(takes a book from
the shelf behind him)

Here's a book about the sodium pump, 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 study it.

(points to shelf
behind him, where we
see medical books
and quite a few wide
white binders with
hand-written labels
on the spines done
with a Sharpie)

But remember to return it to the lab library.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Good. Now, let me show you to your desk. A 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 review and correct them, sir.

DR. MORGAN

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

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

DR. MORGAN

Oh, 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 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 -- paganism?

BRET

Well, I mean, a 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

I don't think he's sold on the idea. But he did say he wouldn't mind if after he died he'd be 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. There's no credible bridge. And, as you know, religion is based on faith -- faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

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, Dr. Signa.

DR. SIGNA

Are you certain about that, son?

BRET

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

DR. SIGNA

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

BRET

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

DR. SIGNA

Good for you, 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 arise.

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 bejesus 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. 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

Would I ever do that?

ANNE

I know you think you keep them to yourself. But you're the only one who does.

DR. MORGAN

Thanks.

ANNE

I'm sorry. But I know they can build up in you and sometimes you do move the lid to the side to let out some steam.

DR. MORGAN

Well, when I think it might do some good. 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 by 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
(MORE)

MEGAN (cont'd)

did, when they had so little information to go on and life was so much harder for them?

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 the gene pool!

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 still out there somewhere.

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.

ANNE

But I can still think there is.

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 astound me. 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 don'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.

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. Heck, I might even throw it a kiss.

ANNE

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

MEGAN

I agree, Dad.

Lights fade down.

ACT II

SCENE 1

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.

DR. MORGAN

Everything OK, Bret?

BRET

Yes, sir. Just dropped a paper clip.

DR. MORGAN

How ya coming with the freshman exam?

BRET

Almost done grading it.

DR. MORGAN

Good. Anybody ace it?

BRET

Your daughter, sir.

DR. MORGAN

That's my girl. 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. But frankly I don't give a hoot. I'm too busy trying to figure out what's going on? We know a good bit about what exists, but we still know absolutely nothing about why anything is here at all. Why is there something, instead of nothing? It's the question that obsessed Heidegger. Maybe we can divine the answer if we look at the behavior of simpler creatures, who go about taking care of their basic needs while they enjoy life as it has evolved. So maybe one thing or the other made the decision that without creatures to appreciate and enjoy it, the universe would be quite a dud.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

If that explanation works for you, you're welcome to it. 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 lifeless planets in the rest of the solar system. You can see how rare animate life is, at least in the nearby 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, consider this. If you grew up on the moon and saw the blue-white earth rise every day, I think 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. As we discussed, Thou shalt not kill is still valid. But it's a command. Let me indulge you with, of all things, a syllogism: 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 the credibility of the premise, that is, 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

Excellent! But so has all the life of the earth.

BRET

I get it, Dr. Morgan. And that's the difficulty 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, young man. Me? I do it because I appreciate that our supreme good, at least within what we can credibly know, is life itself. Without it, there's no such thing as a human experience. No consciousness or sensation. No beauty, truth or love. 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. Or, for that matter, modern ones, who may know science, but not deeply enough. And that's one reason I'm all in.

BRET

I'm not all the way there yet, and, honestly, I may never get there. But you sure do have a way of making me think.

DR. MORGAN

Well, that's why you evolved with a brain. You're supposed to use it. And knowing how far we've come, how can we not finally see life as a blessing and commit to its intelligent care and mutually considerate fulfillment? To me, now you're talking about something humanity has never had: a scientifically credible set of beliefs. To me a religion, at long last, that is worthy of the astonishing gift of life.

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 remain that way for the rest of your life.

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

Some empirically based thoughts to contemplate. 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. I'd consider it a privilege. What time?

DR. MORGAN

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

BRET

The one who got an A?

DR. MORGAN

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

BRET

I look forward to the dinner, sir. 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 prostate cancer cells. I'm attempting to abbreviate their lifespans.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 2

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? Faith still strong?

BRET
Yes, sir.

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

But what if he wasn't?

DR. SIGNA

You mean your Nobel Prize winning chemist? I'm afraid he'd at least have to spend a considerable 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 do you think 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 still live in paradise.

DR. SIGNA

In this sin-filled world? I don't care if he won the Nobel Prize. His highfalutin thoughts are pure rubbish.

BRET

I guess, sir.

DR. SIGNA

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

BRET

No, sir.

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

(MORE)

BRET (cont'd)
eternal life? Or, as he says it, any other life there may be?

DR. SIGNA
What is his ill-informed 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 maybe there wouldn't be so much evil in the world.

DR. SIGNA

It is the duty of religion to wage war against the font of all evil, who 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, God 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 life can't arise from something dead, and, since we're alive, the universe must be.

DR. SIGNA

Sounds like quite a leap to me. What else?

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 the 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

Of course, he doesn't. 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 might well be damned for eternity. So try not to follow in his footsteps. 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

Dinner?

BRET

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

DR. SIGNA

I see. Well, then, be 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

Of course, Dr. Signa. What is it?

DR. SIGNA

It's about Bret.

PASTOR WILMONT

What errant act has he performed now?

DR. SIGNA

I'm concerned that he may have come under a deleterious unchristian 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

No, he hasn't mentioned it.

DR. SIGNA

Understandable. Well, it turns out the man has a veritable storehouse of "innovative" unchristian 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 could end?

PASTOR WILMONT

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

DR. SIGNA

I thought you would want to. But, please, do so in a way that doesn't weaken his trust in me.

PASTOR WILMONT

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

DR. SIGNA

Agreed, Fred. Let me know how you do.

PASTOR WILMONT

I shall. And 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 influence of science.

PATRICIA

How 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, for he has become the assistant to an unbeliever.

PATRICIA

How is that possible?

PASTOR WILMONT

It's someone he no doubt admires -- his chemistry professor, who is, no doubt, an espouser of the secular venom that is being hissed about the world, 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 young man.

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 the golden calf.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 3

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

DR. MORGAN

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

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.

ANNE

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

DR. MORGAN

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

Megan enters.

MEGAN

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

ANNE

Baked chicken with vegetables.

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 juicy slice of rib roast, like we used to have before all the damaging research about the effects on your

(MORE)

MEGAN (cont'd)

cardiovascular system, not to mention the damage raising billions of animals for food does to the environment
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. As you know, I'm a fan of moderation in all things.

MEGAN

What time's your new boy wonder due?

DR. MORGAN

Any minute.

MEGAN

Great. Anybody who gives me an A in chemistry is a friend of mine, even if you say he has some really uncool ideas.

Doorbell rings.

DR. MORGAN

I'll get it.

(to Megan)

I promised to be on my "I have no beliefs" behavior. You be, too.

Heads for the door.

MEGAN

Sure. Who has an 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'oeuvres.

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. Nature with a good
helping of nurture.

DR. MORGAN
Now, now, Megan. It's dinnertime.

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
Dad told me about your background. No comment.

ANNE

(to Bret)

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

MEGAN

Thanks, Mom.

(to Bret)

I'm a lot like my dad. So, 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

Yummy, isn't it? Sometimes we have it for dessert.

DR. MORGAN

Bret doesn't drink.

MEGAN

Sorry about that. Haven't you heard a little alcohol can be good for your cardiovascular health?

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

(MORE)

MEGAN (cont'd)
 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.

MEGAN
 Right. I mean, as soon as someone says "most people" or "generally speaking," I know they're not talking about my dear 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 become a commendably 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 toss the rest.

BRET
 Sure, just like that.

MEGAN
 At least, work on it. 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 4

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, Arthur Jessup. Do you know who he is?

BRET

I've heard the name.

PASTOR WILMONT

Most people in the congregation have. He owns a number of significant properties in this God-forsaken town. One of them is the building where the Second National Bank is located. As you may know, there are various business offices upstairs, including professional offices.

BRET

I've passed it. The one with 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 about such virtues. 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

I thought you might, especially since by then you and Martha will be well along in your marriage and expecting the usual consequent, children.

BRET

It looks that way.

PASTOR WILMONT

And I'm delighted. She's a good Christian young woman and will be a welcome addition to the family. So hop to it and 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 and grateful 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 by Christ Jesus 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 devout Christian, that you have accepted a position as the assistant to an avowed atheist.

BRET

That's not at all true.

PASTOR WILMONT

The devout Christian has also 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

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 dangers 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 life?

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 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, Father.

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, Dad. I'm only telling you what he believes. Do you want to hear it or not?

PASTOR WILMONT

Go on.

BRET

He thinks that believing we were put here to be happy in a perfectible world is the only way to justify that God, if he exists, is the all-good Creator we believe he is.

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 system worthy of belief, 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 let's get to the only critical matter that concerns me.

(MORE)

PASTOR WILMONT (cont'd)
(reaches out a takes
his arm)

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

BRET

No, they haven't, Father.

PASTOR WILMONT

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

BRET

What else would I be?

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 good Christian has vouchsafed to me that your
chemistry professor is tempting you to go into medical
research.

BRET

He has mentioned that I might consider doing so for 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 believing 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 multitude 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 also enter the den
of scientific iniquity no doubt 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 in the morning. And let me know as soon as you lock it in.

(hands him business
card)

Do I have your word on it?

BRET

Yes, sir.

PASTOR WILMONT

Good. 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 studies.

(picks up Bible)

Lights fade down.

SCENE 5

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

I count my blessings every day. Do you believe in evolution?

BRET

Do you believe in God?

MEGAN

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

BRET

Even if it 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 the intelligence 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 very natural miracle of life and the capacity of humans to make a better world.

BRET

Why?

MEGAN

Because, as my father says and I agree, 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, I've kept it. 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 the same with 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 ejaculate 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 that.

MEGAN

Have bright fun. Maybe someday 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

Nope. 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 dynamic 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 you and your dad think for one day. Can't we talk about something else?

MEGAN

Sure, Bret. But it's sad, because I think you're quite 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
(MORE)

MEGAN (cont'd)

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, gotta go now. See ya!

BRET

See ya, Megan.

Lights fade down.

SCENE 6

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 new cancer tissue samples I received. Be 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. If you insist.

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 2020."

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Yep, somehow, they were dead wrong. But my big breakthrough came later, when I had completed all of my medical 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 them.

BRET

You really 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. I felt as if I had entered a new room in the mansion of knowledge, and the longer I inhabited it, the more I discovered. 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, or, if you will, converting to faith in this life.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

Trust me. The realization was for me, too, but I'll tell you something else. When I was sitting there that morning, 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. 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 it. But when we understand how much it takes to enable our lives, we begin to appreciate them more. In time, one hopes,

(MORE)

DR. MORGAN (cont'd)

enough people will learn to appreciate life enough to rescue it from our own depredations.

BRET

I still don't think you have to give up faith in everything but the natural world to be productively involved in life.

DR. MORGAN

Fine and dandy. I'm open to any surprises that may await us.

BRET

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 we still can't believe we're here.

BRET

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

DR. MORGAN

The record of the rocks and remains of human habitation say far longer, Bret. Actually, a couple hundred thousand years, give or take a hundred thousand. And, believe it or not, the dinosaurs survived for 160 million years. The truth is, we're all very likely 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, humans create havoc. And all of our science is just getting started. 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 sea-shore, 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 still have great promise. The question is, can we save ourselves from our still, in many way, primitive selves?

BRET

Very early human beings? That is truly a wild perspective, Dr. Morgan. Do you even have a name for your beliefs?

DR. MORGAN

Oh, I've thought of what I might call them but still don't have anything better than life itself as a modern religion.

BRET

Nothing beyond this life?

DR. MORGAN

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

BRET

Go ahead. I can't believe this is happening.

DR. MORGAN

OK. Here goes. There's a knock at your door. You open it and 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."

BRET

Where is this going?

DR. MORGAN

Hang on. You can hardly believe what's happening, but you manage to ask, "What is it?" "Life," he replies. 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 lifespan. It's all part of the dynamic that enables the birth of new life and its early fulfillments." 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 say, "Thanks, but it's just not good enough for me? I want something better." Now who do you think he'd love the most?

BRET

You know you just blew my mind?

DR. MORGAN

Sorry about that. No wonder I usually prefer to keep my beliefs to myself. But I would like to add one thing.

DR. MORGAN

Since we all share in the gift of life, faith in it can be naturally unifying.

BRET

Unless you're my father He'd blow his top.

DR. MORGAN

I'm sure he would.

BRET

He'd also demand to know what your beliefs can do about the undeniable fact that we all still die. What would you tell him?

DR. MORGAN

As the cliché goes, living and dying are more about the daily realization or death of our individual and mutual potential. But let's look at it biochemically.

BRET

Biochemically? He'd love that.

DR. MORGAN

Be that as it may. Perhaps you'll like what I'm getting at. Each life has the capacity to produce a given amount of energy. When we expend it positively, we live. We 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 while it expended its energy! May yours shine forth as brilliantly as it can, my young man.

BRET

I get it, Dr. Morgan, but we all still wind up six feet under.

DR. MORGAN

Do we? It seems to me that 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 made up the life toward the end are still alive. Why lock them away in a box, when you can free them to rejoin the life cycle?

BRET

You mean, cremation **or** another such process?

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.

BRET

You are such a guy. But you're pretty much alone with all of these beliefs.

DR. MORGAN

Yep -- with the exception of the intellectual companionship of my brilliant daughter and in the works of a few contemporary philosophers. I've found particular value in the work of the British philosopher A. C. Grayling about life's flourishing and the work of the Australian

(MORE)

DR. MORGAN (cont'd)

philosopher Peter Singer about the value of all the forms of life.

BRET

Your daughter is quite a woman, and I'll consider looking into their work. But let me ask you something. Don't you every 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 astound me. Do you know that?

DR. MORGAN

Thanks. I'm just sharing what I've come to believe because 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, yes, in many ways, I am.

DR. MORGAN

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

Lights go down.

SCENE 7

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.

MARTHA

I guess he just figured out how brilliant you are.

BRET

I guess, at least, it I seem 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. You told me yourself. It has a lot to do with what happened to Lyle.

BRET

I still 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 mortal disease or just by helping 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 for yourself. 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, I wouldn't have much of an income. So we could wait to get married till I'm done.

MARTHA

I've waited long enough, Bret. Clear through medical school and soon 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, I think so. He's got connections that never stop.

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

You wouldn't ever lose your faith, would you?

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 unchristian man.

BRET

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

MARTHA

Good. I want our children to be brought up to be good, God-fearing Christians.

BRET

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

MARTHA

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

BRET

How about Patsy'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 8

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. His beliefs are a bit quirky but 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.... Oh, 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, [**right after you graduate.**]

BRET

Oh, that's so 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.

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 by how likely it is to win the Nobel, instead of by how much it might benefit humanity.

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? My dad told me. 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? I told my connection at Harvard I'd get back to him asap. So let's hear your answer.

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

BRET

I'm very grateful.

MEGAN

So?

DR. MORGAN

And so?

BRET

Of course, I accept it.

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.

DR. MORGAN

She's right. The guidelines say if you don't drink you shouldn't start, even in moderation.

BRET

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

MEGAN

Wow, wonders will never cease.

DR. MORGAN

Not an entirely risky 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 began, not just as one, but two Gods -- Bacchus and Dionysus.

(pours him a glass)

Now, of course, it's become a warning by the surgeon general, who, I know, enjoys a glass of good cabernet himself.

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. May I have
another sip?

(Dr. Morgan pours
him a little more)

That's enough. Thanks.

DR. MORGAN

(raises glass)

Here's to ya, Bret. May you accomplish something great.

MEGAN

(raising glass)

I'll second that.

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

Lights fade down.

THE END