

## **A Copenhagen Interpretation**

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### Characters

3M, 1F

**PROFESSOR SAMUEL BRAND**, a tenure-track professor in a university chemistry department, late-thirties.

**NATHAN BRENNAN**, a junior in college and one of Sam's students. He has a stutter which comes out most noticeably in Anne's presence.

**ANNE WAGNER**, a junior in college, also one of Sam's students. Brilliant, beautiful.

**PROFESSOR JOHN GOTT**, chairman of the chemistry department, mid to late-fifties.

ACT I, Scene 1

*(The stage should look like a box. All characters interact within it except for GOTT, who is the Intelligent Observer.)*

*GOTT sits at a desk in the audience, stage left. A desk lamp illuminates his face and he speaks into a microphone.*

*At rise, SAM stands center stage looking tense. There is one stage light over him.)*

SAM

My Ph.D. advisor, Rudy Molina, liked to say that a student is not ready to defend his thesis until he is convinced, beyond all doubt, that everything he has done is wrong. I used to laugh. I thought that was something Nobel Laureates said to be quirky. But by the time I was ready to defend my own thesis, I understood what he meant.

GOTT

What did he mean?

SAM

The comment was meant to speak to the inherent uncertainty that surrounds everything. If you dig too deeply, you butt up against the limits of not only your own knowledge, but of what is knowable, and you must contend with the slippery nature of truth.

GOTT

And how have you managed that uncertainty?

SAM

Poorly. We cannot account for every possibility, every scenario.

GOTT

Clearly you didn't account for the current scenario.

SAM

No.

GOTT

There was no prior evidence?

SAM

In hindsight, you can always find evidence, John. There was the animosity that existed between Anne and Nathan.

*(Upstage spotlights up on NATHAN and ANNE. NATHAN is stage right, ANNE is stage left.)*

SAM(cont'd)

She kept no secret of her disdain for the boy. I agreed to accept both as my students because I thought I could manage it and because there was nothing that led me to expect we'd be where we are today.

GOTT

And where are we, Sam? In all my years as the chairman of this department, I have never had to deal with something like this, not even after female enrollment first began to rise.

SAM

What did Nathan tell you?

GOTT

Never mind that. I want you to tell me what happened on your trip.

SAM

I understand, but--

GOTT

Don't worry about Nathan. I want to hear it from you.

SAM

But if you just tell me a little of what he said--

GOTT

No.

SAM

Did he say that he--

GOTT

Sam--

SAM

Please, tell me what he said.

*(Pause)*

GOTT

He said he sexually assaulted Anne.

*(SAM looks confused—not at all  
what he was expecting to hear.)*

*NATHAN looks at ANNE whose gaze  
remains out. Lights down on  
NATHAN and ANNE.)*

SAM

Why would he say that?

GOTT

He didn't, not exactly. Those are my words. To me, he said, "I raped Anne Wagner."

SAM

That is such an ugly word. What did Anne say?

GOTT

She says it never happened.

SAM

I don't understand.

GOTT

Neither do I. *(Pause)* I'm in your corner, Sam. You know the plans I have for you here. The paper you delivered in Copenhagen--our paper--means so much to the future of this school, and to me personally. This is bad timing, horrible timing. So why don't you tell me what happened.

SAM

It's tricky, though. We're dealing with a closed box, you see.

GOTT

No, I don't see. What closed box?

SAM

I'm sorry. It's a teaching tool I use with the children.

GOTT

You mean your students.

SAM

Yes, my students. I'm getting old, I guess.

GOTT

Start with your arrival in Copenhagen.

SAM

There is little to tell, other than the constant bickering.

*(Lights go to wash. ANNE enters followed by NATHAN. ANNE throws her bag on the sofa.)*

ANNE

What a dump.

NATHAN

Something n-n-negative already? What a s-s-surprise.

ANNE

Sha-sha-sha-shut up.

SAM

I had to hear you two during the entire flight, I won't stand for it in my hotel room.

ANNE

You mean "motel room." The department gets tons of money from Nathan's dad. Couldn't they put us up in a decent place?

SAM

Anne, your room is across the hall. Go there. I suggest we all get a good night's sleep. We have a big day tomorrow.

ANNE

I thought we were going to practice. You were going to time my presentation.

GOTT

(To SAM) Why didn't you give the paper?

SAM

(To GOTT) Because I'm a teacher, and this was a fantastic opportunity for a student.

NATHAN

(To SAM) Wait, you d-d-didn't tell her?

ANNE

Tell me what?

SAM

(Pause) Nathan's giving the paper.

ANNE

You can't be serious.

SAM

I am very serious.

ANNE

You have got to be kidding me! N-N-Nathan is g-g-giving the p-p-paper?

SAM

Enough.

ANNE

How can he give the paper when no one will understand what he's s-s-saying?

SAM

You're not helping your cause.

ANNE

It seems your mind's made up. What more can I say in perfectly articulated English to change it? Maybe if I grew a penis I'd be able to give it.

SAM

Making fun of his stutter is just--

ANNE

His stutter is a sideshow. The main attraction is that he doesn't know what he's talking about. He doesn't know a carbene from a hydroxyl radical.

SAM

He ran all the experiments.

ANNE

Experiments I designed!

SAM

I think I had a little to do with it.

ANNE

He's a lab technician. He doesn't know enough to answer any of the questions he'll be asked tomorrow, not that it'll matter since no one will be able to understand him.

SAM

Do you know how small it is to make fun of someone's speech impediment?

ANNE

Why do you have to defend him? Why isn't he defending himself? Look at him, cowering in a corner.

NATHAN

I'm not c-c-cowering.

ANNE

If he can't defend himself to me here in this room, how is he going to defend our work in a packed auditorium filled with hundreds of internationally renowned scientists?

NATHAN

At l-least I have a good p-personality.

ANNE

(To SAM) You need someone who's passionate about this work and intelligent enough to defend it.

SAM

There's more to delivering a scientific paper than intellectually assassinating anyone who has a dissenting opinion. The people in the audience are not your enemies, no more than I am or Nathan is. Sometimes a dissenting opinion is exactly what you need, and from what I've seen...well, you are not gracious towards those who disagree with you.



ANNE

I'm going to stick with the penis theory. It goes like this: I don't have one, so I'm not giving the talk.

SAM

That's not the reason.

ANNE

Yes, it is. It's how it's always been, from way back in the Old Testament.

NATHAN

You're bringing up the b-b-bible?

ANNE

God made a covenant with mankind with foreskin, something women conveniently don't have. It excluded them completely. Have fun circumcising each other.

*(ANNE grabs her bag and walks out the door.)*

*(ANNE exits.)*

*(From this point forward, NATHAN's stuttering will not be explicitly typed. It will be up to the actor to stutter when he feels it is appropriate.)*

GOTT

She pulled the sexual discrimination card?

SAM

*(To GOTT)* It wasn't the first time.

*(To NATHAN)* Are you OK?

NATHAN

I'm used to it from her. I don't know what I ever did to her to make her hate me so much.

SAM

She doesn't hate you.

NATHAN

Yes, she does.

SAM

OK, maybe she does, but don't let that bother you. She has it in for me too.

NATHAN

She's like, in love with you, Doc.

SAM

Stop it.

NATHAN

She plotted and schemed to work with you, and you see how badly she wanted to give the talk.

SAM

And her desires are not all that matter in life, despite what she thinks.

NATHAN

It's amazing someone that smart and beautiful can be so...

*(Wash down. SAM stands in light center stage.)*

GOTT

Why would you make Nathan give the paper over Anne? Anne is number two in the whole college. Nathan has struggled, to put it lightly, his entire time here.

SAM

Nathan is smart. I have all the confidence in the world in him.

GOTT

You must know something I don't. Did Anne calm down about it?

SAM

Eventually. I went to talk to her in her room.

*(Return to wash. SAM knocks on ANNE's door.)*

ANNE (off)

Yes?

SAM

May I come in?

ANNE

The door's unlocked.

*(SAM enters.)*

SAM

You should really keep the door locked.

*(ANNE enters wearing a nightie.  
SAM averts his gaze.)*

SAM

You should have told me you weren't decent.

ANNE

I'm plenty decent.

SAM

Honestly, go put some clothes on.

ANNE

I'm very comfortable like this, and it is my room. If you don't want to talk to me like this, stand in the hall.

*(SAM turns around.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

Are you threatened by the female body?

SAM

I'm your teacher. There are rules of conduct. I could get in trouble simply by looking at you dressed the way you are.

ANNE

You're not shy about inserting ideas into my brain. That's much more intimate than anything that could be done to the body. And what about Nathan? You're sharing a room with him.

SAM

That's different.

ANNE

Why?

SAM

It just is.

ANNE

Because you don't have any sexual thoughts toward Nathan?  
Do you?

SAM

Of course not.

ANNE

Then you must have them toward me.

SAM

I do not.

*(ANNE walks toward SAM.)*

ANNE

You just said that you can stay in the same room with  
Nathan because you have no sexual feelings for him. Since  
you can't stay in the same room with me, it logically  
follows--

SAM

No.

ANNE

Don't worry, "Doc." Do you like it when he calls you  
"Doc"? "Doc". That's kind of cute.

SAM

I know you are upset about not giving the paper, and I  
should've told you before we left.

*(ANNE walks to SAM and stands in  
front of him, almost touching. He  
withdraws a step.)*

GOTT

And then what happened?

SAM

Nothing. I left, went back to my room, and Nathan and I  
worked on his presentation till it was ready.

*(ANNE exits.)*

GOTT

So you looked at Anne in her nightie? No jury of your peers would condemn you for that.

SAM

John, I don't think it's appropriate to---

GOTT

To what? To say that Anne's attractive? Anne is more than an attractive woman, Sam. She is the rarest of things, more rare than platinum, more rare than gold. She is a beautiful woman who is also as smart as...well, as us.

SAM

Us who?

GOTT

Us. You and me. Men.

SAM

I see.

GOTT

Sam, you look a little perspired.

SAM

Do I?

GOTT

Yes, you do. Why don't you freshen up a bit in the lavatory.

*(SAM exits.)*

*Anne enters, fully clothed.)*

ANNE

I wasn't in a nightie. I didn't even bring one. I don't even think I own one. And if I did, why would I bring a nightie to a motel that's in Nerd Central?

GOTT

Who came to your room?

ANNE

*(Startled)* What?

GOTT

The first night. Did Professor Brand come to your room?

ANNE

*(Relaxing)* Yes. He did. It was after I found out he chose Nathan over me. You'd have to understand how hard I worked preparing for it. The amount of disappointment was overwhelming.

GOTT

Professor Brand says you were verbally abusive toward Nathan.

ANNE

I was not.

GOTT

He said you were making fun of his stutter.

ANNE

Am I in fifth grade? I wouldn't do that. All I did was voice my opinion that Nathan was not the best person to give the talk, which is objectively true.

GOTT

What happened when Professor Brand came to your room?

ANNE

Nothing. Just the same old, same old.

*(SAM enters as he did before. He knocks.)*

SAM

It's me. May I come in?

*(ANNE unlocks the door. SAM enters.)*

ANNE

Yes?

SAM

I think it's time we had another talk.

ANNE

No thanks. Your idea of a "talk" is talking at me while I sit in silence. I have something to say now and you're gonna hear it. You know I'm the right person to deliver this paper, and the only reason you're letting Nathan give it-

SAM

I want Nathan to give it because I believe he is the best person to give it-

ANNE

No, it's because his father bought you all that lab equipment. How much did it cost? \$100K? More? That stuff's not cheap. What other equipment did he promise you after your NFS grant fell through?

SAM

You are working hard to earn your reputation for vindictiveness.

*(Light only on ANNE.)*

ANNE

*(To GOTT)* Why does it have to be this way? Men can complain as much as they want, but the moment a woman tries to stand up for herself, she's called a vindictive shrew. What decade is this, Professor Gott?

GOTT

Anne, I want you to answer one simple question. Did Nathan sexually assault you?

ANNE

*(Laughs)* If he had, would I be here talking to you? I'd be talking to the police, in Copenhagen. Besides, I think I can take him.

GOTT

Do you have any idea why he would accuse himself of such a crime if he hadn't done it?

ANNE

I have no idea. He's really strange. Like, really. Everyone knows the only reason he was accepted into this department is because of his father's donations. His dad

didn't do him any favors, because Nathan knows he doesn't deserve to be here. You should see him in class. He looks scared to death. He feels like he has to stay in this department for his dad, and it's killing him. It's tragic.

GOTT

How do you know this?

ANNE

He told me.

GOTT

When?

ANNE

The first night. He had practiced with Professor Brand, and it hadn't gone well.

*(NATHAN knocks on her door.)*

NATHAN

Anne? Can I come in?

*(ANNE opens the door.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

It wasn't my fault.

ANNE

What?

NATHAN

Doc's decision to make me give the paper. I agree with you, I'm not qualified. You're the one who should give it. You know all this stuff cold. If I go up there tomorrow, I'm going to make a fool of myself and I'm going to hurt Doc's work.

ANNE

Did you tell him this?

NATHAN

Yes, over and over, but for some reason he's insisting I give it and I'm freaking out.

ANNE

Stand up for yourself and tell him no.



NATHAN

I've tried, but he's so persuasive. Everything he says makes so much sense, is so logical. I can't argue with him. That's how he got me to come to Copenhagen in the first place. I made the mistake of telling him that I'd never been to Europe, and that was it. He kept sending me links to Copenhagen web sites and saying how I can see where all of the ground-breaking work in quantum mechanics happened. He made it sound so good, and I'm not even interested in quantum mechanics. At all.

ANNE

Nathan, you have to tell him that you don't want to do it.

NATHAN

You're just saying that because you want to give it.

ANNE

That's no secret. Who wouldn't want to give it?

*(NATHAN raises his hand.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

Have you any idea what this is? Do you know what this means? Professor Brand's advisor won a Nobel Prize in Chemistry, and he's still a big supporter of his work. The stuff Brand is doing is ground-breaking. He may have figured out how to reverse climate change. You ran all the experiments, you should know this. Don't you know this? The fact that Brand came to teach at our dinky school is nothing short of miraculous. Opportunities like this never come. We could potentially be on a Nobel Prize-worthy paper. Just me, you, and Professor Brand.

NATHAN

And Professor Gott.

ANNE

Professor Gott? What's he have to do with this?

NATHAN

Doc told me Professor Gott let him use some of his analytical equipment, and in return he's putting his name on the paper.

ANNE

Well that's not happening.

NATHAN

What do you mean?

ANNE

I am speaking in perfectly articulated English. Adding Gott would make four authors on the paper. In references, they only list three and then bury the rest in the *et al*.

NATHAN

The *et al*?

ANNE

God, are you dense. With three authors, we'd be listed Brennan, Wagner, and Brand. With Gott on the paper it'll most likely be Brennan, Gott, Brand, *et al*. I'd be buried in the *et al*. Do you u-u-understand?

NATHAN

(*To GOTT*) That was all she was worried about, Professor Gott. As upset as she was about not giving the paper, she was *really* upset about you being on the paper. (*To ANNE*) Maybe I'll be the one buried.

ANNE

No, not Brand's class pet. It's going to be me. I know it's going to be me. Well, no. Over my dead body.

NATHAN

You can have it. I don't want my name on the paper. I don't want to give the paper. I don't want any of this.

ANNE

Then do something. Stop sitting there like you're helpless, like you have no control over what's happening to you. Tell him you're off the paper.

NATHAN

It's too late. I already told my dad about it. He's really excited. It means so much to him. And I know you think Professor Brand is only doing this for me because of my dad, because he wants more money to buy equipment. You're probably right.

(*Pause*)

ANNE

I used to think that, but I don't know anymore. After spending time around him I can see it's not his style. He doesn't strike me as conniving. Don't get me wrong, I agree with the spirit of what you said regarding your earth-shattering level of incompetence, but there has to be some other motivation.

NATHAN

Like what?

ANNE

I don't know. *(Pause)* Is Professor Brand married?

NATHAN

No. Why?

ANNE

See, how come you know the answer to that and I don't?

NATHAN

What do you mean?

ANNE

Ever hear him talk about a girlfriend?

NATHAN

No. *(Laughs)* I knew you had a thing for him.

ANNE

*(Laughs)* You are adorable. You remind me of my nephew. He's six. You seem so innocent, although it could be an act.

NATHAN

I don't know how to act.

ANNE

And I understand both meanings of the sentence, even if you don't. We all play our roles when we have to. But if you want to keep up this babe in the woods routine, be careful. Seeing weakness in others brings out the beast in people.

*(Light down on ANNE.)*

NATHAN

*(To GOTT)* I knew she had the hots for him, Professor Gott.

GOTT

I don't think that's what she was suggesting.

*(Pause)*

Nathan, why do you maintain this story when it is so clearly false?

NATHAN

It's not false.

GOTT

A woman doesn't lie about being raped when her attacker turns himself in.

NATHAN

How do you know? How do you know anything about what a woman would or wouldn't do? How do you know what anyone would do? You professors think you're so smart. Just because you know a lot about one thing, you think you know everything about everything. Well you don't. You don't know.

GOTT

Then why would Anne deny it?

NATHAN

I don't know either. That's the beauty of being stupid. "I don't know" is an acceptable answer.

GOTT

Then tell me why you did it.

NATHAN

She's everything I despise about this world. I could never get a girl like Anne.

*(Lights up on ANNE.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

She's perfect. She thinks I'm a joke, and she's right. I am. But at least she doesn't ignore me, you know? So that's something.

GOTT

Then go to the police. Why talk to me?

NATHAN

Because I'm not ready for it to be in the paper. I'm not ready for my dad to find out.

*(Lights down on NATHAN. Lights up on ANNE and SAM.)*

ANNE

I wouldn't care if Einstein was the fourth author. I'd want him off the paper.

SAM

I'm sorry, but sometimes you have to put collaborators on a paper, it's what you have to do.

ANNE

But Professor Gott did nothing.

SAM

He's staying on the paper.

ANNE

Well, what about Nathan?

SAM

What about him?

ANNE

He doesn't want to be on the paper.

SAM

Of course he does.

ANNE

No, he doesn't, but he's afraid to tell you.

SAM

Nathan isn't afraid to tell me anything.

GOTT

(To SAM) It would make sense for her to want Nathan off. Nathan's confession is your perfect opportunity to remove him as a coauthor.

SAM

That's something only Anne can answer.

*(Light down on SAM.)*

ANNE

That is ludicrous.

GOTT

Why he would say he committed a crime against you while you say he did nothing.

ANNE

I can't say something happened to me if it didn't, even if it'd be advantageous to me.

GOTT

You seem to have sway over Nathan. Maybe you convinced him to make up a story about you that you would then deny. That would get him off the paper, but not land him in prison.

ANNE

I wish you could hear yourself. I don't have to hurt Nathan because I can't hurt him any worse than he hurts himself. I'm also not a liar.

GOTT

Just a very ambitious young woman.

ANNE

You say that like it's a bad thing.

GOTT

Not at all. Let's go back to when you first arrived and you stormed out of the--

ANNE

I didn't storm out of anywhere.

GOTT

You didn't leave in a huff once Professor Brand told you that Nathan was giving the paper?

ANNE

No. After we arrived, I became trapped listening to Professor Brand lecture about things we learned two years ago in physical chemistry.

*(Wash returns. NATHAN and SAM enter.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

What a dump.

NATHAN

Something n-n-negative already? What a s-s-surprise.

SAM

I had to hear you two during the entire flight, I won't stand for it in my hotel room.

ANNE

You mean "motel room." Couldn't they put us up in a decent place?

SAM

This is a great place. We're in the middle of everything. We are right near the University of Copenhagen. The Niels Bohr Institute is not far away. Do you know what happened there in 1924? Werner Heisenberg came to do research with Bohr, and it changed the world. We can see his lab.

*(SAM holds up pamphlets.)*

SAM (cont'd)

I read about it on the plane.

*(SAM reads the pamphlets.)*

ANNE

*(To GOTT)* So instead of practicing our talk, he starts planning a vacation for us, as if that was the main reason we came.

SAM

Come, sit children.

ANNE

Children?

SAM

Sit, I want to show you something.

*(ANNE and NATHAN sit at SAM's feet. SAM holds up the pamphlet.)*

SAM

Here it is. Nathan, how would you like to see where quantum mechanics was born?

NATHAN

Sounds pretty c-cool.

*(SAM reads the pamphlet again.)*

ANNE

*(To SAM)* Shouldn't we work on the presentation?

SAM

*(Looking up)* What?

ANNE

Our paper.

SAM

*(To NATHAN)* Nathan, Copenhagen is where we learned how bizarre and mysterious our world is. It has even led some major scientists to consider that all of us may be living in a computer simulation.

NATHAN

Really?

SAM

Yes.

NATHAN

Like a video game?

SAM

Perhaps.

NATHAN

*(To SAM)* No way.

ANNE

*(To NATHAN)* Have you been paying attention in class? Doesn't any of this sound familiar?

NATHAN

*(To SAM)* Wait, so you're saying the world isn't real?

SAM

*(Pause)*



(To NATHAN) No, that's not what I'm saying. (Pause) Stand up.

(NATHAN stands.)

SAM(cont'd)  
Now walk across the room to the opposite wall.

(NATHAN walks across the stage.)

SAM(cont'd)  
I know you started here, and are now over there. So you've existed in two states, two locations. But what if I told you that there is zero probability of you occupying the space between those two locations?

(NATHAN looks confused.)

ANNE  
(Exasperated) He means that you walked across the room, but how can you do that if it is impossible for you to be between the two positions. Now this is when you're supposed to go oooo and ahhhhh.

NATHAN  
(To SAM) For real?

SAM  
More or less.

ANNE  
I'm going to die from boredom.

NATHAN  
(To SAM) I'd say it's impossible.

SAM  
For you, yes, but not for an electron.

ANNE  
Can we do something productive?

SAM  
This is productive.

ANNE

But we've already learned this.

SAM

Then you're the perfect one to help illustrate my next point. Stand opposite Nathan.

*(Pause)*

The sooner you do this, the sooner we can work on the paper.

*(ANNE does as instructed.)*

SAM(cont'd)

Now suppose that the two of you are the same particle. You exist this way, in two distinctly different, but possible states, because elementary particles are weird. Their states are described by their wave functions. But if the particle is in a closed box away from the eyes of an Intelligent Observer, it exists in both states simultaneously. It is only when an Intelligent Observer comes along—

*(SAM points to himself and walks center stage.)*

SAM(cont'd)

--and observes the particle that the wave function collapses *(claps his hands)* the particle picks one state or the other.

ANNE

*(exasperated)* This was on an exam you gave us last year, including the hand clap.

NATHAN

Wait, is this that thing with the cat?

ANNE

Oh my God.

SAM

Yes, Nathan. Schrödinger's cat. Excellent.

NATHAN

And how particles can either act like waves or like particles, but never both at the same time.

SAM

Exactly.

NATHAN

Kind of like good and evil. You don't see people being good and evil at the same time.

SAM

That is an outstanding insight.

ANNE

Great. Can we please start practicing the presentation?

NATHAN

(To SAM) You didn't tell her?

ANNE

Tell me what?

SAM

Well, Nathan's giving the paper.

(Pause)

ANNE

He is?

SAM

Yes. Didn't I tell you?

ANNE

You know you didn't.

SAM

(Pause) Anne, I'm sure you'll be disappointed, but let me explain my thinking.

ANNE

How long ago did you make this decision?

(Pause)

That long?

(To NATHAN) Here Nathan, I'll teach you everything you need to know. Close the box, Anne or Nathan give the paper. Open the box, Nathan gives the paper. I have a feeling Nathan was giving the paper all along, even when the box was closed.

SAM

Anne, please. I'm sorry. I should've told you sooner.

*(ANNE exits.)*

GOTT

Why didn't you tell her sooner?

SAM

Because I didn't want to hear it. I didn't want to hear her complain.

GOTT

But what about being a teacher and looking for opportunities for your students?

SAM

Anne can be quite disagreeable when things don't go her way.

GOTT

But I do see her point. Nathan is at the bottom of the class despite extra tutoring. Because of his father, the department has bent over backwards to give him every possible advantage. All efforts have unsuccessful.

SAM

But he tries so hard.

GOTT

Then it's truly hopeless.

SAM

You haven't spent time with him like I have. You haven't seen what I've seen.

GOTT

Anne told me how badly his presentation went. Doesn't that prove her point?

SAM

Badly? He was a smashing success. I was so proud of him.

GOTT

It went well?

SAM

Better than I could've hoped. I don't know why Anne would've said that.

GOTT

You're saying Anne lied?

SAM

I'm saying that she and I must've watched two different presentations. I even had her film it.

GOTT

Can I see the video?

SAM

Well, unfortunately the file was lost when we tried to convert it to an MP4.

GOTT

So there's no video?

SAM

No.

GOTT

No proof?

SAM

If you want proof, John, I can put you in touch with Rudy Molina. He was there and he saw Nathan give an amazing presentation.

GOTT

I'm not getting anything like a consistent version of events.

SAM

What would put your mind at ease? I'll give you more details. After Anne stormed out of the room, I had Nathan practice in front of me. Admittedly, he got off to a rocky start.

*(NATHAN enters.)*

NATHAN

Will you time me?

*(SAM checks his watch.)*

SAM

Ready when you are, Sir.

NATHAN

OK. (*Straightening, but still very nervous*) Hello, and thank you all for coming--

SAM

(*Clapping*) Brilliant start! Brilliant!

(*NATHAN pauses and glares at SAM. SAM reacts facetiously, gestures that it must've been the man behind him and that he'll keep quiet.*)

NATHAN

Where was I?

SAM

You might want to tell them your name.

NATHAN

My name is Nathaniel Brennan and...(*sighs, looks down at his slides, stalls.*) (*Breaks*) See, this is what I mean--

SAM

And where are you from, Mr. Brennan?

NATHAN

(*Beat*) I'm from...(*breaks*) (*Aside*) Where the hell am I from?--

SAM

What did you study, Mr. Brennan?

NATHAN

(*More nervous*) This work was funded by a grant won by Dr. Samuel Brand--

SAM

They won't care about that. Tell them what we studied.

NATHAN

(*Beat*) Today we will--

SAM

"I" will.

NATHAN

You will?

SAM

No, speak in the first person singular.

NATHAN

*(Beat, frustrated)* Today I will discuss a mathematical model describing the... *(glances at notes)*

SAM

It's the title of our paper.

NATHAN

*(Reading directly, deliberately, from his notes)*  
The Reversal of Global Warming with Atmospheric Sulfur Injection.

SAM

Damn, that's a sexy title! *(Beat)* Go on. You're doing wonderfully.

*(Pause)*

NATHAN

*(Softly)* I can't do this, Doc.

SAM

What do you mean? You are doing it.

NATHAN

I haven't gotten through it once. Not once.

SAM

What you can't do is fall apart while discussing dissociation. Sorry, a little chemistry humor there.

NATHAN

What am I doing here?

SAM

You're delivering a scientific paper. *(Beat)* Nathan, you can do this. I know you can. Remember all we talked about?

NATHAN

I can't.

SAM

But...think about the work.

NATHAN

That's all I am thinking about. It's important work, and I keep screwing it up.

SAM

What is our work about?

NATHAN

Stuff about climate change.

SAM (cont'd)

That's right. Important stuff. Isn't that why you wanted to work for me? *(Beat)* Nathan, you are the right person to present it.

NATHAN

You should let Anne do it.

SAM

Between you and me, that girl can't find her ass in the lab with both hands.

NATHAN

She's the smartest in my class.

SAM

She has the best grades. There's a difference. Maybe some of the other professors can't see it, but I can. That's why I picked you...and tomorrow you'll prove that to yourself, finally, for once. God knows you don't have to prove it to me.

*(Pause)*

We'll practice for as long as you need. Then we'll have a few drinks, and you'll see everything in a better light. You'll see just how well everything will go tomorrow.

NATHAN

How do you know?

SAM

Because I've watched you in my lab.



*(Pause)*

Nathan, my name is also on that paper. After all this time, don't you know that I'm a man who would never, ever let anything tarnish his reputation?

*(Pause)*

Do I look worried?

NATHAN

No, and that shows how good you are at it.

SAM

At what?

NATHAN

Lying to me.

SAM

When have I ever lied to you?

NATHAN

Don't you think I know how important this paper is?

SAM

Well, we can't solve all the world's problems with this one paper.

*(Pause)*

Say the word, Nathan.

NATHAN

What?

SAM

You know what. It's what I've said from the beginning: say the word and I'll have Anne do it. I'm sure she'll give an accurate and very boring presentation.

NATHAN

Then why give it to me?

SAM

Because I teach. It's what I do, and I have every confidence in the world that you will do a good job tomorrow. But you don't have to do this. It is entirely up to you, and I won't think any less of you if you back out.

*(Pause while NATHAN considers this)*

NATHAN  
I'll do it.

SAM  
Think about it.

NATHAN  
I'll do it.

SAM  
Are you sure?

NATHAN  
Yeah.

SAM  
*(Beat)* See, *this* is why I picked you.

NATHAN  
*(Beat, nods)* Thanks, Doc.

SAM  
My name is Sam. I've told you this before. I've had enough of being called "Doc". It makes me feel like Elmer Fudd, for Christ's sake.

NATHAN  
"Sam" sounds weird.

SAM  
It sounds weird because you insist on calling me "Doc".

NATHAN  
Fine..."Sam".

SAM  
Let's try it again.

*(Lights down then up on ANNE.)*

GOTT  
Why did you tell me the presentation went badly?

ANNE  
Because it did. That's why the two of them got so hammered at dinner.

GOTT

Professor Brand was drunk?

ANNE

It's tough to tell with him. I saw him drink a lot.  
Nathan was sloppy. He was a walking party foul.

*(SAM and NATHAN enter.)*

NATHAN

*That was a fantastic dinner.*

SAM

And how about the beer?

NATHAN

*That was fantastic beer.*

SAM

And how about the presentation that earned the fantastic  
dinner and beer?

NATHAN

*That was a fucking awesome presentation!*

ANNE

Nice language.

*(NATHAN sits.)*

SAM

You're fucking right, it was.

NATHAN

*(Chuckles)* Check out the mouth on Doc.

SAM

Yeah, and that won't be the last fucking time you hear it,  
I assure you.

*(NATHAN stands up and immediately  
falls back into the chair.)*

NATHAN

Whoa. I think I'm drunk.

SAM  
Don't think. Know you're drunk.

*(SAM takes a beer from the  
six-pack and hands it to NATHAN.)*

NATHAN  
Do you ever stop?

SAM  
This isn't the half of it. Open that and stay right there.

*(SAM hands a beer to ANNE who  
shakes her head.)*

NATHAN  
More pictures?

SAM  
Of course.

NATHAN  
I don't mind. Fire away.

*(SAM exits.)*

ANNE  
*(To GOTT)* Professor Gott, it was the strangest thing. If Nathan's presentation could have gone worse, I can't imagine what that would've looked like. Yet, both were pretending it went well. They did it right in front of me, knowing I saw the whole thing. It was as if they were making their own reality. It really...

GOTT  
Bothered you?

ANNE  
Scared me.

NATHAN (cont'd)  
Doc, that was amazing.

SAM (OS)  
My name's Sam.

NATHAN

Sam, that was amazing.

*(SAM enters with his camera.)*

SAM (OS)

I know. I was there.

ANNE

So was I.

SAM (OS)

Things could not have gone any better had I scripted the whole thing myself.

NATHAN

You kind of did, but I don't care. People in the front row were nodding their heads. I could do no wrong.

SAM (OS)

You were marvelous, not to mention how professional you looked in your new suit. Who would've thought that the famed David Golden could have his head handed to him by a twenty year-old junior in college?

NATHAN

Nineteen.

SAM

Even better: by a *teenager*. This is bordering on delicious.

NATHAN

It was really nothing.

SAM

Best part of the talk. *(Clears throat)* "Excuse me, David Golden here: were those experiments carried out at constant temperature or pressure?"

NATHAN

Neither, it was an adiabatic compression.

SAM

*(Makes a backhand slapping motion with sound effect)*  
Sit down little man. Nothing could've shown his complete and total ignorance more than that one exchange—and to show

it to so many people all at once. Oh, Nathan, you've made my year!

ANNE

(To GOTT) None of that happened! There was no David Golden, Nathan didn't put anyone in their place.

GOTT

Did you tell them that?

ANNE

Not at first. I didn't know how. It was too weird. But the weirdest thing was that they started making me question what I saw. They were both so confident, so convinced by this lie they were telling each other that I started to doubt what I had seen.

NATHAN

(Beat) You know, there are only a few people on earth who would understand what we just said to each other.

SAM

And even fewer who'd give a shit.

NATHAN

(Beat) I like that.

SAM

Feeling superior?

NATHAN

Yeah.

SAM

Enjoy.

(Pause)

NATHAN

So, seeing how well everything went today, I want you to be honest: you were nervous, weren't you?

SAM

No, I've been on Ativan since last Thursday.

NATHAN

I knew it.

SAM

Well what was I supposed to do? Tell you the truth? Tell you that you were about to deliver my life's work to the fucking Prince of Darkness?

ANNE

May I ask a question?

SAM

If you must.

ANNE

(To NATHAN) Where did that final series of data come from?

SAM

Wasn't it amazing?

(To NATHAN) You're up there and I'm wondering, "What in God's name is that wonderful graph that has validated our work so completely?"

ANNE

That's the thing. We never performed experiments under those conditions.

SAM

Then obviously Nathan performed them on his own. (To NATHAN) Excellent work.

ANNE

The data is too perfect. It doesn't have the normal variance we've observed.

NATHAN

Now you're complaining that I did too good a job?

ANNE

What I'm saying is that we never planned experiments like those, to my knowledge you never carried out experiments like those, and the data looks better than from any of the ones I did know you performed.

NATHAN

What are you saying? That I fudged the data?

SAM

No, she's not saying that.

NATHAN

That's a shitty thing to say when we're celebrating the success of the presentation.

ANNE

It didn't go well! I was there!

SAM

Anne, have you ever read Aesop's fable about the fox and the grapes?

*(NATHAN laughs.)*

ANNE

I don't know what's going on, but I know what I saw.

SAM

Anne, I know you were there, but you didn't see what I saw.

ANNE

I filmed the talk. Maybe we can all watch it together so we can agree on what really happened.

SAM

Excellent idea. I'll put it on the department's website. Can I have it?

ANNE

I'll send it to you.

SAM

Go get it now. I want to relive the great moment.

ANNE

My phone is charging. I'll get it.

*(ANNE rises. Lights down except on her.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

*(To GOTT)* I never went back to their room.

GOTT

What did Professor Brand and Nathan do for the rest of the night?



ANNE

You'll have to ask Nathan.

*(Lights down.  
Lights up on NATHAN. There is a  
closed box of papers at his feet.  
His head is down.)*

GOTT

I'm not sure what to do with you, Nathan, if you insist on maintaining your version of events.

NATHAN

Do you want to see something?

*(NATHAN lifts the box of papers at  
his feet and places it on his  
lap.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

Do you want to see this?

GOTT

A cardboard box?

NATHAN

A closed box. Professor Brand likes talking about closed boxes. When a box is closed, the possibilities of what's inside are infinite. It's only when you open the box and look inside that the truth is revealed. Well, not revealed, but decided. Truth isn't even the right word. It's all chance. I'm going to open this box because I want you to decide the truth.

GOTT

I want to *know* the truth.

NATHAN

That's what I used to say.

*(NATHAN opens the box. Return to  
wash on NATHAN and SAM.)*

SAM

*(To NATHAN)* She's a strange girl, isn't she?

NATHAN

(To SAM) I was starting to think it was me.

SAM

No, it's definitely her. (Pause) So tell me, how does it feel to be an expert?

NATHAN

At what?

SAM

At understanding complex systems and describing them in the elegant language of mathematics.

NATHAN

Yeah right.

SAM

Downplay your accomplishment all you want, but what you did today isn't easy. What we do isn't easy.

NATHAN

What do we do?

SAM

We predict things about our world. That's power, Nathan. To observe what goes on around you and make sense of it, to mathematically model it, to reduce things of enormous complexity down to a few equations... It's so terribly simple--you just follow the scientific method--but it's also the most difficult thing in the world. It's so easy to misinterpret things, to draw the wrong conclusions from your data.

NATHAN

That's why you get paid the small bucks.

SAM

Yes. But once you succeed, once you achieve true understanding and *predictive* power, then the real fun starts.

NATHAN

And what's that?

SAM

Manipulation.

NATHAN

Manipulation?

SAM

Control. Making things turn out the way you want. That is the final end to all this.

NATHAN

Can you give me an example?

SAM

Observation: you need a beer. *(SAM gets another beer)*  
Understanding: I know what it's like to need a beer. *(SAM cracks open the beer)*  
Manipulation: I hold the beer in front of you because I know you will drink it, just as I want you to.

NATHAN

You're not trying to get me drunk, are you?

SAM

*(Taken slightly aback)* No.

NATHAN

Try harder.

SAM

*(Smiles)* Don't you worry about that.

*(SAM holds the beer in front of NATHAN; when he reaches for it, SAM retracts it.)*

SAM (cont'd)

First, tell me how you fit that final series.

NATHAN

Are you serious?

SAM

Very.

NATHAN

Fine, I've probably had enough to drink.

*(SAM considers this, then hand the beer to NATHAN.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)  
(*Chuckles*) Who has the power now? (*He drinks the beer*)

SAM  
(*Serious*) You do.  
(*Pause*)  
Nathan, I am the senior author on this paper. I have to know.

NATHAN  
Tomorrow.

(*Pause, then SAM laughs.*)

SAM  
Fine. Tomorrow. We have enough to celebrate tonight.  
(*SAM focuses his camera on him.*)

SAM (cont'd)  
Let's see that winning smile. Say, "Nathan's a genius."

NATHAN  
(*Modestly*) Nathan's a genius!

(*SAM snaps a picture. Pause.*)

NATHAN  
So what happens next?

SAM  
San Diego is next. It's where they're holding the next Combustion Conference. Have you been?

NATHAN  
I've never been to California.

SAM  
I didn't think so. It'll make a wonderful trip. They certainly know how to pick locations for these things.  
(*Beat*) Anyway, I was thinking that since you did such an excellent job on this presentation you could do San Diego too.

NATHAN

(Smiles) Really?

SAM

Yes, only this time I don't think we'll need Anne.

NATHAN

I...don't know. I'd have to check.

SAM

Check what? With your father? I'm sure he'd be all in. He'd probably finance the trip.

NATHAN

Probably. But that's not why you want me to go, is it?

SAM

No, I-

NATHAN

Kidding.

(Pause)

Umm...don't laugh, but I've prepared a little something I want to say.

*(NATHAN takes out a folded piece of paper.)*

SAM

A serious speech? No, no. What we need now is less talk and more drinking.

*(SAM clinks NATHAN's beer again. Both men drink. SAM chugs his down. NATHAN comes up short.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Where did you learn to chug a beer?

NATHAN

I didn't know we were chugging.

SAM

Come on, I taught you better than that.

*(NATHAN finishes the rest of his beer. SAM opens two more and hands one to NATHAN.)*

NATHAN

*(Accepting the beer)* Wow.

*(SAM clinks the beers together and both men drink.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

All right, hold on. Let me just say something.

SAM

You can say anything you want...unless it's in a serious speech.

NATHAN

OK, I just--

*(NATHAN holds the paper up as if to read it, but then puts it away.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

I guess I don't have to be so formal. *(Beat)* I just want you to know how much all of this has meant to me.

SAM

All of what?

NATHAN

This conference. This opportunity. You.

SAM

Me?

NATHAN

*(A little embarrassed)* I want you to know how grateful I am. I want to thank you for everything you've done for me.

SAM

I didn't do that much.

NATHAN

Yes you did. You gave me a chance. No one else did that.

SAM

To their loss.

NATHAN

Yeah, but...come on, Sam. I know what the other professors think of me. Dr. Gott sat me down last year and told me I should switch majors. I know you took a big chance with me.

SAM

The only thing I'll take credit for is not being an idiot. People like Professor Gott and Anne mistakenly equate information with knowledge. Such people like that can regurgitate facts on exams to get good grades, but they don't really *know* anything. You won't find either of them discovering greater truths about science or anything else for that matter. But you: you *learn* things when you're taught them. I took no chance. You, my friend, were a sure bet.

NATHAN

But...before...you know, before I started working for you-- *(Beat)* Things just keep getting better. And today, after the talk, I think that was the best feeling I've ever had in my life.

SAM

And I for one have never had a prouder moment as a teacher than seeing you up there today. You really should've seen yourself.

*(Pause)*

NATHAN

I know I have a father, but it never felt that way to me. *(Beat)* You've been like a father to me, Sam, and I want to thank you.

*(SAM doesn't like what he's heard.  
His demeanor changes.)*

*(Pause)*

SAM

Well...I haven't really been like a...*father* to you, have I?

NATHAN

Well, yeah, you have.

SAM

I'm not that old. Please, Nathan, don't make me feel older than I already do.

NATHAN

Of course you're not old enough, but--

SAM

We're not even twenty years apart.

NATHAN

I didn't mean it like that--

SAM

And how about all the fun we've had together? All those nights of drinking? You wouldn't do that with a *father*, would you?

NATHAN

I meant about how you've molded me.

SAM

I think I've molded you into a respectable drinker more than anything. When I met you, you were drinking Lite beer, for God's sake.

NATHAN

Sam--

SAM

Like a father? How banal.

NATHAN

I meant it as a compliment.

SAM

Then you should choose your compliments more carefully.

NATHAN

(Beat) You know...forget it.

SAM

Forget what?

NATHAN

This stupid thing I was doing.



SAM

But wait, I'm curious. Don't you think we're more like friends than anything else?

NATHAN

Of course we're friends.

SAM

All of the time we've spent together...you've really thought of it as father-son quality time?

NATHAN

No. All I meant--

SAM

Would you really stay out drinking with a father till two o'clock in the morning?

NATHAN

It obviously came out wrong.

SAM

Would a father sneak you into bars? I would think of myself more as one of your buddies, wouldn't you?

NATHAN

*(Beat)* Why would you want to be one of my buddies? Anyone can be a buddy. You're much more to me than that.

SAM

How much more?

NATHAN

*(Beat)* Like...everything I just said.

SAM

How much more? And don't say like a father.

NATHAN

I think I've already told you--

SAM

You've just described me as a very important person in your life. Haven't you?

NATHAN

Yeah.

SAM

Then if "like a father" is an inaccurate description, what other phrase would you use?

NATHAN

I don't understand.

SAM

You don't?

NATHAN

No. What are you trying to say?

SAM

I'm not trying to say anything. I'm just trying to find out what you're trying to say.

NATHAN

I'm not trying to say anything. I was just trying to pay you a compliment.

SAM

So you're trying to flatter me?

NATHAN

No--

SAM

Why would you try to flatter me?

NATHAN

*(Beat)* This is getting a little weird.

SAM

Is it?

NATHAN

A little.

SAM

What's so weird about it?

NATHAN

Nothing.

SAM

Are you calling me weird?

NATHAN

*(Beat)* What's going on?

SAM

You tell me.

NATHAN

I don't know.

SAM

I think you do.

*(Pause)*

NATHAN

Umm...we've been drinking, Sam, and I think maybe we've both had too much.

*(SAM laughs.)*

NATHAN *(cont'd)*

What?

SAM

*(Jovial)* You think we've had too much?

NATHAN

What are you doing to me?

SAM

Just having a little fun...that is, unless you think we've had too much.

NATHAN

*(Getting angry)* Yeah? Well, F.U.

SAM

Oh, come on.

NATHAN

Here I am, trying--

SAM

Oh, stop with your trying--

NATHAN

Here I am pouring my heart out and you're making a big joke of it.

SAM

I was just...I'm sorry. You're right. That was really irresponsible of me. I'm touched that you view me as a father. Strange that I've never met your mother. Were we happy?

NATHAN

Knock it off.

SAM

Were we in love?...although the cancer thing could be a downer.

NATHAN

We're gonna start on mom jokes now?

SAM

We'd better not, my mother's dead.

*(Pause)*

I have a surprise for you.

NATHAN

I don't think I'm in the mood for any more surprises.

SAM

Nonsense. You're gonna like it. It's not much, but they could be construed as gifts.

NATHAN

You didn't have to get me anything--

SAM

Believe me, it's a very small gesture in light of the magnificent work you've done today.

NATHAN

I'd feel strange about you giving me a gift for that. You already bought me this suit.

SAM

Please, Nathan. Don't spoil it the way I spoiled your speech. Now stay right there.

NATHAN

Where could I go?

*(SAME exits and then returns with a gift-wrapped box, two plastic cups, and a red folder. He drops the folder on the table and hands the box to NATHAN.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

What's this?

SAM

Now it's my turn to say something. Open it.

NATHAN

You didn't have to get me anything. I was just doing what you hired me to do.

SAM

You can't say I hired you to do anything because I haven't paid you a dime. In fact, you've indirectly paid me, so just open your gift.

*(NATHAN unwraps the gift. It is a bottle of scotch.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Look up.

*(NATHAN looks up and SAM snaps a picture.)*

NATHAN

Doc, why did you--

SAM

I won't answer to "Doc" ever again.

NATHAN

Sam, I mean...a bottle of scotch?

SAM

Twenty-five year-old Macallan scotch.

NATHAN

But I don't drink scotch.

SAM

I know, and we must correct that as soon as possible. Open it.

*(NATHAN opens the bottle. He then pours SAM a glass.)*

SAM (cont'd)

What about you?

NATHAN

I don't think I should drink anymore.

SAM

I've prepared a little something to say and I want to toast you.

NATHAN

Can I toast with water?

SAM

Aren't you curious what a four hundred dollar bottle of scotch tastes like?

*(Pause)*

You didn't know a bottle of scotch could cost that much, did you? Now you know why I didn't tell you how much I spent on your suit.

*(SAM holds up his cup.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Look at the color. Don't you want to smell it? Once you do, there's no going back to Dewar's on the rocks.

NATHAN

I don't drink Dewar's on the rocks.

SAM

Nathan...if you want to be a respectable scientist, you'll have to learn how to enjoy good scotch. It's practically written into the requirements of any reputable department.  
*(Beat, then frustrated)* Why am I asking you?

*(SAM pours NATHAN a drink and thrusts it into his hand.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Drink it.

NATHAN

*(Almost a plea)* Sam...

SAM

*(Forceful)* Drink it.

NATHAN

I'm not feeling so great.

SAM

This will help. The main ingredient of any remedy is alcohol.

*(NATHAN puts the glass to his mouth.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Wait, wait, wait.

*(SAM rises and raises his glass.)*

SAM (cont'd)

To you, Nathan--my student, who has done me so proud today. You survived my miserable driving skills on the way up here and you have continued to impress me to no end. More than that, you have given my life a purpose; because a teacher without a deserving student is...a ridiculous man of no use to anyone. Students like you make life worth living for a teacher like me. Had I not met you, I may not be alive today.

*(NATHAN shifts uncomfortably.)*

So, you see, you did more than give a paper. In a very real sense...you saved my life, Nathan.

*(There is an awkward silence and then SAM finishes his scotch. He gestures to NATHAN to finish his as well. NATHAN does with considerable effort.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Looks like you're due for a refill.

NATHAN

I don't think I can drink anymore.

SAM

Sure you can.

*(SAM fills their glasses and they both drink. NATHAN grows quiet.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Are you all right?

NATHAN

I don't know. I think I need to get some sleep.

SAM

It has been a long day, hasn't it? Maybe we should call it a night. But we can't let this go to waste *(swirling the scotch in his glass)*.

NATHAN

Can I pour it back in the bottle?

SAM

*(Gasps)* You'll finish your scotch, young man.

NATHAN

Shouldn't it be savored?

SAM

Drastic times call for drastic measures. Here we go.

*(SAM raises his glass and throws back his drink. NATHAN struggles to get it down. SAM rises. NATHAN looks green.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Ah, that was tasty.

*(SAM walks toward the bedroom.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Are you sure you don't want to take the bed?

NATHAN

I think I'll pass out right here.



SAM

Then pass out right there. Just don't do it in your new suit.

*(SAM walks further toward the exit, still looking at NATHAN.)*

NATHAN

Thanks for all that nice stuff you said.

SAM

I'm only being honest. I can't help it. The truth comes out when I drink.

*(Pause)*

Good night, Nathan.

*(SAM exits. NATHAN rises, takes off his suit, and lays it out carefully on the floor. Only his undershirt and shorts remain. He lies down. Fade to black.)*

*After a few seconds in the black, a harsh spotlight shines down upon the sofa. SAM has his hand buried in NATHAN's shorts. NATHAN's eyes open wide. He looks at SAM and screams. SAM backs away and NATHAN runs out of the room.*

*Fade to black.*

*In the black we hear NATHAN pounding on ANNE's door.)*

NATHAN

Anne! Anne! Let me in!

*(Lights rise. Anne lets Nathan into her room. She wears pajamas.)*

ANNE

What time is it? Nathan, what's wrong?

*(NATHAN stammers uncontrollably.)*

NATHAN  
Sam...Doc...Professor Brand.

ANNE  
What? Slow down. What happened?

NATHAN  
I woke up...

ANNE  
You woke up?

NATHAN  
I woke up and...God, I can't even say it.

ANNE  
What? What happened? Is Professor Brand OK?

NATHAN  
I woke up and his hand was down my pants.

*(NATHAN breaks down.)*

ANNE  
What?!

NATHAN  
His hand was down my pants! Oh God!

ANNE  
Are you serious?

NATHAN  
It's true. None of it was real. I'm so stupid.

ANNE  
Calm down.

NATHAN  
It was all a lie. You were right all along. I didn't deserve any of this. He just wanted to have sex with me. That's all it was. How am I gonna look my dad in the face when I get home?

ANNE  
Nathan—

NATHAN

He's gonna ask me how it went. What am I gonna say? I can't tell him the truth, and I don't know if I can lie.

ANNE

Nathan! Calm down. You can deal with this. OK? You're going to be OK. We'll figure something OK. This doesn't define who you are. Don't let it. OK?

*(NATHAN nods. ANNE sits down on her bed.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

Come here.

*(NATHAN sits next to her. ANNE takes his hand.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

This wasn't your fault.

NATHAN

Yes, it was. It was my fault for thinking that he was telling me the truth, that he thought I was smart.

ANNE

This doesn't mean everything he meant to you was a lie. He probably does see potential in you. It's probably what attracted him to you.

NATHAN

What do I do now?

ANNE

You have to confront him in the morning, the two of us will change our flights home, and then you have to report this to the school when we get back.

NATHAN

No. I can't do that.

ANNE

You have to.

NATHAN

I feel humiliated. My dad would find out. He can't ever find out. He can't find out I'm a fag.

ANNE

This does not change your sexuality. That's nonsense.

*(Pause)*

Nathan, something happened to me, and I never told anyone about it. I buried it deep, and I realize now that was the wrong thing to do. It ate me up. I should've done what I'm telling you to do.

*(ANNE places her hand on NATHAN's shoulder.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

It's going to be OK.

*(NATHAN turns toward her and kisses her forcefully on the mouth.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

What are you doing?

*(NATHAN kisses her frantically all over her face. He grabs her breasts and moves his hand down her leg.)*

ANNE (cont'd)

Nathan, stop! Stop! Don't.

SAM (OS)

Nathan!

ANNE

Stop or I'll scream.

NATHAN

Scream. Now's your chance. And scream for me too. Scream for me.

*(NATHAN attacks her again. Lights down.)*

*(Lights up. The next morning. The three are at breakfast. SAM reads the paper. ANNE has her head down, NATHAN stares off.)*

SAM

Now this is interesting.

"The Niels Bohr Institute has a long history of being an international work environment and we are looking forward to welcoming you. We wish to ensure that you get a good start in Denmark and at NBI, and we are happy to assist you with any questions you might have regarding your stay. If you are interested in a guided tour at the institute, please contact the visitor center."

They offer guided tours! What do you say? Our flight isn't until late tonight. There will be plenty of time to get sight-seeing in. Nathan, what do you say? This is what I meant about broadening your education. It's all about your education. What do you say we go?

*(Pause)*

Anne?

*(Pause)*

What a couple of Grumpy Gus's. I am massively hungover, and I want to go, plus I'm significantly older than you two. Honestly, I drank too much last night. I'm embarrassed to say that I don't remember much of anything after we arrived back after dinner.

*(Pause)*

Well, it's getting later by the minute. I'm going to go up and shower. I suggest you do the same.

*(NATHAN and ANNE exit.)*

GOTT

*(To SAM)* Do you want to explain yourself?

SAM

There is no explanation, John. Here is where we test the limits of our knowledge and what is knowable. This is what we teach, and what we teach is the truth. Our world is built on the fly before us, as we move through it. For instance, there is an infinitesimally small yet finite probability that all the molecules in my body will vanish and appear somewhere else. Maybe that's how Jesus ascended into heaven. We are pixels, and once you realize that, who is to say what is real and what is not, what has happened and what has not?

*(Pause)*

Do you see my point, John? Supposed I walked into your office, closed the door, and then vanished before your eyes. What would you tell others? As far as anyone else

knows, you were the last person to see me. People would see me walk into your office, and never come out, and I'd never be seen again. Would you tell them the truth? Truth that is backed up by the best scientific theories we have? No one would believe you, because the truth would be too strange. Do you see what I mean?

GOTT

*(GOTT thinks)* Open the box, Anne was raped. Close the box, she wasn't raped. But really, who can say?

SAM

Yes! Close the box, Sam

GOTT

What about Nathan?

SAM

What about him?

GOTT

What about the story he told me.

SAM

That's all it is. Just one among an infinite number of stories. Nathan has nothing to do with this. Can't you see that, John?

GOTT

I suppose you're right.

SAM

I am right.

GOTT

When will the paper be published?

SAM

In a couple months.

GOTT

I would like to review the gallies first.

SAM

Don't worry. Your name's on it.

GOTT

I'm not worried.

SAM

Good. Neither am I.

*(Lights down. At rise, SAM is onstage. NATHAN enters carrying the open cardboard box. We can see it is filled with papers.)*

SAM

Ah. Hello, Nathan.

NATHAN

I wanted to give you this box.

SAM

I have a box for you.

*(SAM presents a box to NATHAN.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Our paper was published.

*(SAM opens the box and takes out an article. He hands it to NATHAN.)*

NATHAN

Wow. I never thought I'd be an author.

SAM

Take several copies. Give them out as Christmas gifts. What's in yours?

NATHAN

Printouts of all our raw data.

*(NATHAN hands the box to SAM.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

I've been thinking a lot about Copenhagen.

SAM

You have?

NATHAN

Yeah, about when we were talking about how particles act like waves or particles, but never both at the same time. And I said it's like good and evil, how a person can't be good and evil at the same time.

SAM

That was the most brilliant thing I've ever heard. I even told some colleagues about it and they agree.

NATHAN

But I'm wrong.

SAM

You are?

NATHAN

People *can* be good and evil at the same time. If a pilot is sent off to bomb another country, the people who sent him think he's doing good, but the people he's bombing will think he's evil.

SAM

Hmm. I'll have to think about that. Thanks, Nathan.

*(NATHAN lingers.)*

SAM (cont'd)

Nathan...speaking of Copenhagen, we don't ever have to talk about it. You know? That was a moment in our lives, we learned some important things, and now it's in the past. That's how education works. You keep moving forward.

NATHAN

I thought education was a building process where you don't forget what you've learned.

SAM

You don't forget the important things, but you should clear your mind of the unimportant details.

NATHAN

I have something to confess.

SAM

Are we in a church? *(Beat)* Answer me, are we in a church?

NATHAN



No.

SAM

There are no confessions outside of church. We are not in a confessional. There is no priest, there is no God, it's just you and me, two people trying to view the world as the other sees it. Do you understand?

NATHAN

I think so.

SAM

Whatever did or didn't happen in Copenhagen is completely irrelevant.

NATHAN

It is?

SAM

Who's to say what really happened? Who's to ever say it, even the people involved, and how could they be convincing even to themselves?

NATHAN

I fudged the data.

SAM

*(Pause)* You fudged what data? That final series?

NATHAN

All of it.

SAM

All?

NATHAN

All of it.

SAM

But...why would you do that?

NATHAN

Because I'm stupid, and I couldn't run the experiments correctly, so I just made it all up.

*(SAM looks devastated.)*

NATHAN (cont'd)

I didn't mean to do anything wrong, it just got away from me. But once I did it, and after I saw your reactions to the great data I was making up, everything else followed easily. I felt really guilty about it. It kept me up nights. But now, after learning from you that nothing that happened in Copenhagen matters, and that nothing is knowable, and the truth is subjective, I feel a lot better about it. So thank you, Professor Brand. I'll leave this box here for you because I don't need it anymore.

*(NATHAN exits. GOTT enters,  
onstage for the first time.)*

GOTT

Hello, Sam. Let's take a look at that data, shall we?

END OF PLAY