

THE BRANCH WHERE I LIVE

Maxim Marukh

EXT. BROOKFIELD HIGH SCHOOL - GROUNDS - DAY

A wide drone shot of the school grounds and parking lot. A battered Chevy Cruze pulls in.

1. INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

On the passenger seat lies a book:

"Our Mathematical Universe" - Max Tegmark.

CLOSE ON: The driver pulls a small pill bottle from his pocket. Label: "Zolof 50 mg - Sertraline HCl - Take one tablet daily. Prescription: Nathan Cole."

He pops a pill and washes it down with lukewarm coffee from a paper cup.

2. EXT. BROOKFIELD HIGH SCHOOL - GROUNDS - DAY

From high above: the tiny figure of the driver steps out of the Chevy and briskly heads toward Entrance A.

3. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

On the green chalkboard, neatly written: "YOUNG'S DOUBLE-SLIT EXPERIMENT." Below it - a hand-drawn diagram: two narrow slits and particles of light hitting a screen.

At the board stands NATHAN COLE (40s): tall, thinning hair with a halo of reddish fuzz. His striped wool sweater and badly pressed slacks silently testify that no woman has veto power over his wardrobe.

NATHAN

Young's double-slit experiment.

(makes air quotes)

"In this experiment lies the very heart of quantum mechanics. In fact, it contains its only mystery." - Richard Feynman, 1965.

Nathan knows how to hold a room. The class sits in dead silence, hanging on his words.

He turns to the board, pointing at the drawing as he speaks.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

We take a narrow beam of light - say, a laser - and aim it at a screen. But first, we place a plate with two slits in its path.

Open just one slit, and the screen shows a single bright stripe – exactly what we’d expect.

(draws the stripe)

Now open both slits... and suddenly – interference!

(adds wave pattern)

Alternating light and dark bands, like this. Where the waves reinforce each other – bright. Where they cancel – dark.

Pure wave behavior. Drop two stones into water, and you’ll see the ripples intersect, creating the same interference pattern.

(turns to class)

So with one slit, photons act like particles; with two, they act like waves. Why?

Silence.

NATHAN

Right. Young didn’t know either.

CUT TO:

4. INT. COLE HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT - SIX MONTHS EARLIER

Nathan tiptoes down a dim hallway toward a half-open bedroom door. Through the narrow crack: flickering shadows, the rhythmic glow of a bedside lamp and the unmistakable, muffled sounds of sex.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

5. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan adjusts the diagram slightly.

NATHAN

Okay, let’s try something different. We dim the light so much that only one photon passes through at a time – firing them like bullets, one by one.

(turns to class)

What should we see on the screen?

Several students in unison: “Two stripes!”

Nathan nods, satisfied, turns back to the board.

NATHAN

If a photon is truly a particle, it should go through one slit, hit the screen at one spot. Then the next photon, and the next – until we get two neat clusters, like bullet holes on a target. But... that's not what happens.

CUT TO:

6. INT. COLE HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT - SIX MONTHS EARLIER

Back in the past. Nathan approaches the bedroom door, moving slowly. He stops, hesitates – then peers through the narrow crack.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

When the experiment is repeated millions of times, firing photons one by one at the screen, the same interference pattern slowly emerges – as if the photons had been interfering with themselves all along.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

7. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan turns, a glint of triumph in his eyes.

SAMMY (O.S.)

How can something interfere with itself?

NATHAN

Excellent question, Sammy. The scientists wondered the same thing-

CUT TO:

8. INT. COLE HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT - SIX MONTHS EARLIER

Nathan stares through the gap in the doorway. His face freezes into a mask.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

-So they decided to check which slit each photon actually went through. They set up a detector behind each slit, to catch the little culprit in the act.

NATHAN'S POV: On the bed – Nathan's wife (her face unseen).

Above her – the bare-chested body of her lover.

The lover turns, locking eyes with Nathan – frozen in guilty recognition.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

9. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan adds two small eyes behind the slits on the board – crude symbols for detectors.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

The moment we place a detector, the interference disappears.  
The particle “chooses” one slit.  
We’re back to seeing two stripes.

He drops the chalk, dusts his hands, turns toward the class.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

The very act of observation changes the result. The universe behaves differently depending on whether we’re watching or not. Questions?

The students mull it over. Finally, SAMMY raises a hand.

SAMMY

I don’t get it. How is that even possible?

Nathan’s gaze drifts, unfocused.

NATHAN

Neither do I, Sammy. Neither do I–

CUT TO:

10. INT. NATHAN’S RENTED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FOUR MONTHS EARLIER)

Back in the past. A bare, half-unpacked apartment. Boxes everywhere. Nathan enters, arms full of clothing bags. He stops in the middle of the room and drops them to the floor.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

–Still don’t understand how that’s possible.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

11. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan shakes himself out of the fog and faces the students.

NATHAN

There are many interpretations. The first – and most famous – is the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, proposed by Niels Bohr in the late 1920s. In essence: before measurement, a quantum object – like a photon or an electron – has no definite properties. It exists as a wave function – a cloud of possible states. Don't even try to picture it.

CUT TO:

INT. NATHAN'S RENTED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FOUR MONTHS EARLIER)

Bachelor chaos. Most boxes still unopened; the few that are unpacked contain nothing but books stacked haphazardly.

Nathan slumps in a torn armchair by the window, a cheap bottle of Canadian Club in hand, staring at the building across the street.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

It's not "either here or there" – it's "both here and there," each with a certain probability. Observation – measurement – collapses the wave function. In that instant, the system "chooses" one outcome, and that's what we perceive as reality.

CUT TO:

12. INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL - DAY (FOUR MONTHS EARLIER)

Rows of students – frozen, like wax figures – watching with a mix of fear and pity.

At the front: professor Nathan Cole, slumped in a chair, head drooped to his chest. Unshaven. Drunk. A thin strand of drool swings beneath his chin.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

So the act of observation turns the undefined into the defined. Without an observer, you can't even say the photon exists anywhere at all.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

## 13. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan briskly wipes the chalkboard clean and sketches a new diagram – a square box with a cat inside.

Some student: "I know that one! Schrödinger's cat!"

NATHAN

(draws as he talks)

Just like me, Schrödinger didn't like Bohr's theory. He said: imagine a box containing a cat, a radioactive atom, a detector, and a vial of poison. Within one hour, the atom has a 50 percent chance of decaying. If it decays – the detector releases the poison, and the cat dies. If not – the cat lives. Before observation, the atom exists in superposition – both decayed and not decayed. Which means the entire system – including the cat! – is also in superposition: the cat is both alive and dead until someone looks inside.

Laughter breaks out: "I thought cats had nine lives!", "That's only girls' cats, genius!", "Hey, hands off!".

SAMMY

Sounds like total nonsense to me!

NATHAN

I'm with you, Sammy. According to Bohr, when we open the box, we make a measurement – and the wave function collapses. At that moment, the cat becomes either alive or dead. The universe makes its choice.

CUT TO:

## INT. NATHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Recent past.

Nathan sits slumped at a cluttered table – a week's stubble, messy hair, dark circles under his eyes. A glass of whiskey in his left hand, his right hand scrolling on a laptop trackpad. Click. Click-click...

CLOSE ON LAPTOP SCREEN: Email client. A new message from: "UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN - Office of Human Resources." Subject line: "Termination of Employment - Nathan Cole."

The cursor clicks the message.

CLOSE ON: Nathan's eyes behind his glasses dart across the text.

ON SCREEN:

*Dear Mr. Cole,  
Following recent events and prior disciplinary proceedings, the University has determined that your conduct constitutes a breach of the faculty code of professional standards. Effective immediately, your employment with the Department of Physics is hereby terminated.*

Nathan takes a slow sip of whiskey.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

14. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan studies the cat drawing, then turns to face the class.

NATHAN

The Copenhagen theory, like religion, fills in the gaps with words. It leaves the boundaries blurry. Where does the quantum world end and the classical one begin? The cat's made of atoms too, right? So when does it stop being quantum and turn classical? What is a "measurement," anyway? Why does the universe care whether we're watching or not?

(pause)

A weak explanation. When your Swiss cheese has more holes than cheese, there's not much left to taste.

Nathan paces along the board, rubbing his unshaven chin. The class sits spellbound, tracking every move.

NATHAN

There's a better explanation — one without the flaws of the Copenhagen interpretation. Hugh Everett III, a young physicist from Princeton, came up with it back in 1957. Bohr dismissed it as nonsense — too wild, too far-fetched, even for theoretical physics. Everett wasn't disproven; he was just... ignored. Disillusioned, he left academia, became an engineer. Drank. A lot. Died at fifty-one, unrecognized. No funeral. His ashes were literally flushed down the drain. But you know what?

Nathan stops at his desk, picks up Max Tegmark's *Our Mathematical Universe*, and holds it up to the class.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I'm with Max Tegmark on this one - one day Everett will be recognized as a genius on par with Einstein and Newton, and his Many-Worlds Interpretation will become mainstream physics... at least in most branches of the universe.

SAMMY

(raising his hand)

Sir... did you say "many worlds"? Are we talking about a multiverse?

NATHAN

None of this is in your curriculum. But I think you deserve to hear it - and to know about Hugh Everett, the unsung genius of the twentieth century. You nailed it, Sammy. I'm talking about the multiverse.

CUT TO:

15. INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT - PRESENT

A dim, narrow stairwell in an old apartment building.

CLOSE ON: worn-out shoes, stepping slowly, rhythmically up the stairs.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)

When life really goes off the rails - you know it. There's no second-guessing, no "maybe I'm just overreacting" or "sleep it off, it'll pass." No. What hits you instead is fear. Fear that you might do something terrible - to yourself, or to someone else. Because part of you wants to. At first, you fight those thoughts off. But they keep coming back. Then they start pushing everything else out. And finally, they take over. You just... let them.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

16. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan wipes the board clean again and draws a branching tree of the multiverse.

NATHAN

In Everett's Many-Worlds interpretation, there's no such thing as "collapse." The wave doesn't disappear - it branches. When the atom decays, reality splits in two: in one branch, the cat lives; in the other - it dies.

Nathan sketches two boxes: one with a living cat, the other dead.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

When the observer opens the box, he splits too. In one version, he sees a living cat; in the other, a dead one. And both versions keep going. That process is called decoherence. When a quantum system interacts with its environment, the superposition breaks into separate, independent branches - but none of them get erased. Sammy?

SAMMY

Sir... where are all these parallel worlds supposed to exist?

NATHAN

In a mathematical space of states called Hilbert space. They all exist at once - overlapping, like radio waves on different frequencies, never interfering, yet all coexisting-

CUT TO:

17. EXT. APARTMENT ROOFTOP - NIGHT - PRESENT

Nathan steps out onto the rooftop - a small figure framed by the glow of the city. The wind tosses his hair.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

Everett's worlds aren't somewhere behind a wall. They're right here - just tuned to another frequency. We can't see them, the same way we can't hear a radio station we're not tuned to.

Nathan walks slowly toward the edge.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)

I can't remember when those thoughts first showed up.

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Maybe it was when my old life –  
like a crash-test dummy – hit a new  
one head-on. A new life inside the  
same old universe. Or maybe it was  
when I kept slamming into that wall  
again. And again. Trying to break  
through reality itself.

He lifts a foot and steps up onto the ledge.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

18. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan adds more branches to the drawing – tiny stick figures  
on each: one eating, one sleeping, one alive, one dead.

NATHAN

The entire universe is described by  
a single wave function –  $\Psi$  –  
containing every possible state of  
matter at once. Whenever a quantum  
event happens – an atom decays, or...  
you make a choice, Sammy – that  
wave branches inside mathematical  
space. Each branch evolves on its  
own, becoming its own version of  
reality.

Nathan turns and points at Sammy.

SAMMY

Uh... Mr. Cole, sir... are you saying  
that in one branch I could be  
alive, and in another... well, dead?

Nathan nods, solemnly.

CUT TO:

19. EXT. APARTMENT ROOFTOP - NIGHT - PRESENT

Nathan stands on the edge – fifteen stories of air and  
pavement below.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)

That night I stood there, ready to  
end it.

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Knowing that my decision came down to – to quote Max Tegmark – whether a single calcium atom would hit one particular synapse in the prefrontal cortex of my brain, triggering one neuron, which would fire an electrical signal, which would set off a cascade of thousands more, together forming one thought: "Take the step."

Nathan steps back from the ledge.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)(CONT'D)

That night, the calcium atom hit a different synapse.

(pause)

But there's another world... one where it didn't. One where I didn't make it.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

20. INT. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan scans the classroom, then suddenly... smiles.

NATHAN

Here's the good news. Since it's impossible to experience your own death, your consciousness will always find itself in the branch where it's still alive. Which leads us to one unavoidable logical conclusion – each of us is, in a sense, quantumly immortal.

The class bursts out: "Whaaat???"

Nathan chuckles.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Quantum immortality – a philosophical consequence of Everett's interpretation. We can't feel the state of being dead, so our perception always ends up in the branch where death didn't happen. And since Everett's multiverse contains infinite branches, there will always be at least one where you survived.

Shouts: "Even if you fell out of a plane?", "Without a parachute!", "Broski, wanna learn how to fly! ?", "Bite me, Jack!".

NATHAN

Even if you fell out of a plane.

Shouts: "What if you were in the middle of a nuclear blast?",  
"Nah! Then you're definitely toast!", "I'd become a ghoul!".

NATHAN

Even if you were at ground zero of a nuclear blast. Infinity is a terrifying thing – it doesn't allow absolute probabilities. Which means anything not forbidden by the laws of physics can happen. That's just math.

SAMMY

But... how do you test that, sir? If it's a scientific theory, there has to be a way to prove it!

NATHAN

(pauses)

There is. Max Tegmark called it quantum suicide. And I strongly advise you... not to try that one at home.

CUT TO:

21. EXT. SELF-STORAGE FACILITY - LATE EVENING

A wide shot of the storage complex and its nearly empty parking lot. In one of the spaces sits the same beat-up Chevy Cruze.

22. INT. SELF-STORAGE UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Inside a spacious unit that now looks more like a mad scientist's workshop. In the middle of the concrete floor stands a strange contraption – a scuffed metal cube with a tubular muzzle, the kind used in slaughterhouses to kill livestock with a steel bolt. Short guiding rods jut from the barrel, and its front panel bristles with switches, indicator lights, and a mechanical counter reading CLICKS 0/30.

Nathan, wearing an apron and a headlamp, works inside the cube's open panel. Sweat trickles down his face as he adjusts wires.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

Imagine a gun connected to a decay detector and a counter. The device either fires or doesn't, depending on whether a single radioactive atom decays. If it decays – bang. If not – click.

DISSOLVE TO:

## 23. INT. SELF-STORAGE UNIT - LATER

Nathan flips a few switches. The cube responds with a deep hum. He checks his watch. The counter changes: CLICKS 0/30 ... 1/30 ... 2/30.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS)

If you run such a device, it'll  
fire or click with a 1/2 chance.  
Click. Bang. Click. Click. Bang.  
Bang. Exactly as expected.

From the muzzle, a steel spike the length of a pencil shoots out and retracts in a blink. Nathan jerks back.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

## 24. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan steps away from the board, which shows a rough sketch of a gun and a detector. He turns to the class, his tone deadly serious.

NATHAN

This is only a thought experiment.  
(pause)  
All the experimenter has to do –  
and let me repeat, this is purely  
hypothetical – is put their head  
under the barrel.

The class is silent. Someone whispers: "What the hell..."

NATHAN (CONT'D)

If Bohr was right, sooner or later  
the gun fires and that's it. If  
Everett was right, the universe  
splits – in one branch you die, in  
another you live. Consciousness  
can't experience death, so the  
experimenter always finds himself  
in the branch where he survived.  
And the experiment just keeps  
running – click after click after  
click.

CUT TO:

## 25. INT. SELF-STORAGE UNIT - LATE EVENING (ANOTHER DAY)

Nathan is dressed neatly now, jittery and wired. He watches the device, taking swigs from a flask.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)

I thought – since I'd almost made up my mind – why not do it scientifically? I simplified the design. Replaced the bullet with a spring-loaded steel spike. For the random trigger, I used a sample of Polonium-210 – its alpha decay provides a steady stream of particles. The detector is a simple scintillation tube with a photomultiplier that sends a pulse to a relay. If it registers decay, the spike fires. If not, there's just a click.

Nathan tosses the flask aside and powers up the machine. A low hum fills the unit. He slowly kneels in front of the muzzle.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)(CONT'D.)

I need thirty clicks in a row – that's a one-in-a-billion shot. Which means the odds the multiverse is real? Pretty much a hundred percent.

He lowers his head beneath the barrel and closes his eyes.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

The metal door suddenly slides open. The NIGHT ATTENDANT (50s) appears in the doorway..

NIGHT ATTENDANT

Hey, mister, everything okay in there? I heard some–

He freezes. Nathan stares at him.

CLICK. CLICK.

A sharp metallic crack! The spike fires, punching clean through Nathan's skull. Blood sprays the floor. His eyes roll back; he collapses. A thin jet of blood trickles from the neat hole in his temple.

NIGHT ATTENDANT

Holy Mother of God! What the fuck!

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

26. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan raises his index finger, teacher-like but sharp.

NATHAN

Okay, let's clear something up. Subjectively, the participant never feels a final death – he always "gets lucky" in one of the branches. But objectively–

CUT TO:

27. INT. SELF-STORAGE UNIT - LATE NIGHT

We're back in the storage unit – but in another branch. The Night Attendant stands frozen in the doorway, staring at Nathan kneeling on the floor, his temple pressed against the barrel of his bizarre machine.

CLICK. CLICK.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM CLASS) (CONT'D.)

–objectively, in the overwhelming majority of universes, an outside observer will witness the tragic and inevitable death of the experimenter. Because the number of worlds where he dies is mathematically greater by orders of magnitude. So, as Tegmark put it, the multiverse can only be confirmed subjectively. Which means – sorry, kids – no Nobel Prize.

Nathan stares at the Night Attendant.

NIGHT ATTENDANT

Hey, mister–

NATHAN

(shouting)

GET THE FUCK OUT!

The attendant stumbles back in horror and disappears into the corridor.

CLICK. CLICK.

CLOSE ON: the counter – 28... 29... 30.

Nathan opens his eyes. He's quantum immortal.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

28. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan sits on the edge of his desk, looking drained.

SAMMY

Mr. Cole... if you somehow knew you were quantum-immortal... what would you do next?

Laughter from the class: "You ever see Groundhog Day?", "Matt would lose his mind!", "I'd drop out that same day!"

NATHAN

Me? I'd get rich.

CUT TO:

29. INT. SELF-STORAGE UNIT - LATE NIGHT

Another night. The unit is stripped bare – only the quantum device with its bolt mechanism, a folding cot, a small table with a laptop, and a chair remain.

Nathan sits at the table, typing on his phone.

CLOSE ON: phone screen – the LottoNow app. Nathan fills in a digital ticket: 7 14 19 33 42 47.

NATHAN (V.O.. FROM PRESENT)

QRNG (Quantum Random Number Generator) – a source of pure chaos. It doesn't simulate randomness; it takes it straight from atomic decay. You take those quantum bits – zeros and ones – and convert them into numbers. A binary block of N bits gives a range from 0 to  $2^n-1$ . If the number is below the threshold T, the system logs a WIN; if not, a LOSS.

CLOSE ON: the device in the middle of the room. A panel reads: QUANTUM RNG MODULE, LOTTERY MODE/SELF-TEST, CLICKS 0/0.

Nathan connects his laptop to the machine.

NATHAN (V.O.. FROM PRESENT)(CONT'D.)

The probability of winning  $p = T / 2^n$ . For a lottery with odds of one in fourteen million,  $p \approx 7 \times 10^{-8}$ . Almost zero. Almost.

ON LAPTOP SCREEN: A dark terminal window fills the display.

*[QUANTUM RNG MODULE v2.8.4]*  
*Source: Po-210 / Scintillation Detector*  
*Entropy pool: 1.28 Mb*  
*Acquiring bitstream...*  
 LOTTERY COMBINATION: 7 14 19 33 42 47  
 DRAW DATE: 2025-03-14  
 MATCH DETECTED: PENDING

Nathan types a few keys.

ON LAPTOP SCREEN: A dark terminal window fills the display.  
 SYSTEM STATUS: ARMED  
 AUTORUN IN: 02:57:14  
 MODE: Deferred Execution / Sleep Sequence

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)(CONT'D.)  
 Fourteen million branches will  
 collapse. One will remain – the one  
 where the numbers match.

Nathan pulls a pill bottle from his pocket, downs a handful of sleeping pills, then drags the cot closer to the machine. He lies down, resting his head on the pillow, pressing the bolt muzzle gently against his temple.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)(CONT'D.)  
 If my math is right, tomorrow I'll  
 wake up very rich.  
 If not – very dead.

Nathan closes his eyes.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

30. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The class is silent, mesmerized. Nathan grins triumphantly.

NATHAN  
 That's called the quantum lottery.  
 A thought experiment – one I  
 strongly, strongly advise you never  
 to try in real life.

CUT TO:

31. INT. SELF-STORAGE UNIT - MORNING

The next morning. Dim light filters through the vents. Nathan sits on the edge of the cot, the glow of his phone illuminating his face.

CLOSE ON: phone screen. The LottoNow app fills the display. At the top: the logo LOTTONOW and Draw Date: March 14, 2025. Across the center, a gold banner flashes: "CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'VE WON THE JACKPOT!" Below it – matching numbers: 07 • 14 • 19 • 33 • 42 • 47. The prize amount pulses in bold digits: \$17,364,000.00.

Nathan's lips curl into a self-satisfied smirk.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

## 32. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nathan sits on the desk again, staring out thoughtfully over the room.

SAMMY

Mr. Cole, sir? Would it be right to say that consciousness kind of... jumps into a happier universe?

NATHAN

Yes and no, Sammy. Consciousness doesn't jump to another branch - it already exists in all of them. The version that continues in the "happier" branch, as you called it, isn't a soul that transferred - it's a quantum copy of you. Identical down to every atom and every memory. In fact, it's your clone - continuing to experience itself as the luckier one in one of the endless branches of the multiverse.

## 33. INT. NATHAN'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Nathan sits in a leather armchair by the panoramic window, the city harbor glowing beneath him. He drinks Lagavulin 16 straight from the bottle.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)

The irony is, I can jump into a universe with a happier present - but I'll never find one without a rotten past. It's out there, somewhere, I'm sure. But in that world, another Nathan lives. Not me. And that can't be changed.

The camera lowers. In Nathan's other hand rests the grip of a six-shot Smith & Wesson.

CUT TO:

## 34. EXT. RENTAL APARTMENT LOOP - NIGHT

A dark figure walks along the fire route toward the main entrance of a high-rise rental building. We follow it through the drizzle and neon reflections.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)

But there's something else I can try to change.

(MORE)

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I don't know if it'll make my branch any happier, but I've learned one thing for sure: money doesn't.

The figure reaches the front door and enters the building's vestibule.

35. INT. LOBBY INTERCOM - CONTINUOUS

The dark figure is Nathan - trench coat, hat, and a fake beard. He leans toward the buzzer panel.

Long beeps. Then a voice crackles through.

SUPERINTENDENT (O.S.)

Superintendent.

NATHAN

UPS delivery for 726. Tried buzzing but no answer. I can leave it at the door or take it back-

SUPERINTENDENT (O.S.)

(sighs)

Name of the resident?

NATHAN

Uh... Hoffman.

A pause. Then - BUZZ! The lock clicks. Nathan steps inside.

36. INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Nathan rides alone. The 7th Floor button glows faintly.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)

Everett's interpretation leads to another nontrivial consequence. In a philosophical sense, within the multiverse, no one can truly be killed.

37. INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nathan walks calmly down the corridor, hands in his pockets.

NATHAN (V.O., CONT'D.)

Objectively, that's impossible. Because subjectively...

He stops at Apartment 726 and knocks.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)(CONT'D.)  
 ...from the victim's point of view,  
 they always live on. Somewhere. In  
 some branch of the multiverse.

The door opens. Hoffman (30s) stands there – the same man  
 Nathan found with his wife six months ago.

NATHAN (V.O., FROM PRESENT)(CONT'D.)  
 Understanding that makes the moral  
 dilemma... negligibly small.

Nathan shoves Hoffman back into the apartment, pulling the  
 revolver as he steps in after him.

38. INT. HOFFMAN'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nathan slams the door shut and keeps Hoffman at gunpoint.

HOFFMAN  
 Jesus – wait! Hold on, man, let's  
 talk, okay? Please!

Nathan cocks the hammer. A moment later, Hoffman LUNGES at  
 him. A GUNSHOT rings out!

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

39. ИИТ. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - ДЕНЬ

BANG!

Nathan, still sitting on the desk, jolts as if struck. His  
 eyes glaze over slightly, scanning the silent room.

NATHAN  
 I want you all to remember  
 something important. Quantum  
 immortality doesn't promise a happy  
 eternal life... or even a healthy  
 one.

The sounds of a fight – shouting, chaos, a struggle – echo  
 faintly, bleeding in from another universe.

NATHAN (CONT'D.)  
 It just promises that you'll keep  
 on living. Nothing more. Nothing  
 less.

The school bell rings – and at that exact moment, BANG!  
 Another shot. Nathan flinches. The class erupts with noise,  
 students grabbing their bags, rushing out.

CUT TO:

INT. HOFFMAN'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nathan lies face-down on the floor. Blood seeps slowly from a small hole in his neck.

He groans faintly.

Hoffman, pale and shaking, still holding the revolver, stares down at him.

HOFFMAN

Oh God... oh God, don't die. I'll  
call 911-

CUT TO:

40. INT. LONG-TERM CARE ROOM - MORNING

A single-patient room. White walls with a gray tint. The steady hum of ventilation. The occasional beep of a monitor.

On the bed lies NATHAN COLE - motionless, a tracheostomy tube at his throat, catheters beneath the sheets. Only his eyes are alive, following a slow-moving stripe of light crawling across the ceiling from a narrow window.

Beside him: a ventilator, an IV stand, a monitor pulsing a steady green line. Sitting at the bedside is MARY (40s), a nurse. She carefully shaves Nathan's face with an electric razor - a ritual performed with quiet precision.

MARY

(to herself, almost)

You know... I read this article the other day. In The Atlantic, I think... or maybe Wired. About scientists who are actually trying to figure out how to, um... "transfer human consciousness" onto silicon. Not just memories - but the whole thing. Personality, thoughts, habits, fears. Onto a computer! They call it... what was it...

(trying to remember)

Trans... transhumanism! That's it.

Nathan lets out a half-moan, half-rasp.

MARY (CONT'D.)

You don't like that, huh? Well, hang on, hear me out. They say we're basically information - and our brain, our body - just storage. A carbon-based hard drive. So if you swap it for silicon-

Nathan's throat produces strange, guttural noises.

MARY (CONT'D.)

-then the information could last for centuries. Maybe forever! Isn't that amazing? Living on a digital drive, inside a machine. No pain, no weakness. No death! Not the worst deal, right?

Nathan continues to rasp and moan, his eyes darting wildly in their sockets.

MARY (CONT'D.)

For folks like you, that could be a real miracle. Don't you think? You don't like that idea, huh? I can tell. But I do! Honestly, I'd sign up in a heartbeat.

(finishing the shave)

There. Look at you. Fresh as new.

Mary stands, walks to the wall-mounted TV, and turns it on.

POV - NATHAN'S EYES: staring forward in horror.

MARY (O.S.)

What do you want to watch today? Hmm... Interstellar? You never get tired of that one, I know. Or maybe... oh! Been a while since 2001: A Space Odyssey. Blink twice for yes.

CLOSE ON: Nathan's eyes. Two tears roll down simultaneously. He blinks once.

MARY (O.S.)

(pause)

Okay. Okay. I know what'll cheer you up.

A beat - then the room fills with the Friends theme: "I'll Be There for You." Clap-Clap-Clap-Clap...

Mary hums along, cheerful.

CLOSE ON: Nathan's eyes. Tears stream down in silence.

BACK TO CLASSROOM:

41. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The students have almost all left. SAMMY approaches NATHAN, who's packing his things into his briefcase.

SAMMY

Mr. Cole?

NATHAN

Yeah, Sammy? What's up?

SAMMY

What's the probability that Everett was right?

NATHAN

(smiles faintly)

Same as everything else in life – fifty-fifty. He's either right, or he's not.

SAMMY

(pause)

I really, really hope he was wrong.

For a moment, teacher and student just look at each other.

Then Sammy turns and quickly leaves the classroom.

Nathan watches him go, then places Max Tegmark's book into his briefcase and snaps the lock shut.

FADE OUT.

THE END.