

A Mild Concussion

The Rapid Rise and Long Fall
of an Idealistic Computer Genius

A play in two acts

by Steve Hauk

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Characters

RYAN, *a computer scientist*

DONNA, *his wife*

ROBIN, *once worked for Ryan*

JOHN PERSONS, *a microcomputer entrepreneur*

JIM, *associate of Ryan's*

FIRST MAN, *representing a giant company*

SECOND MAN, *the same*

A YOUNG NURSE

Act One

The First Day

Music. Hard rock. Dancing. Sensual and menacing figures. All figures except Ryan suggested by shadows. Ryan staggers, falls, striking his head. He wears jeans, cowboy boots, a vest. This is a memory play. A slight haze over everything, a surreal quality. Nothing is absolutely real. Just glimmers of reality and the perception of what might or might not have been. All is in doubt.

A siren. Figures _ shadows or silhouettes _ gather around Ryan's body. He struggles to his knees. Siren dies out. Figures back away. Then the figure of a woman approaches; Ryan holds out his hand, she takes it. He stands.

Blackout. Music stops. Lighting up to indicate the spare representation of a living room, a few pieces of furniture, a small bar. Ryan in a chair, his eyes closed. No longer wearing the vest. The same woman sits by him, holds a damp cloth to his forehead.

Ryan is in his early fifties. He is slim, roughly handsome. Until a year or two ago he was in fine physical condition, but since then he has gone through particularly bad times and shows it _ some darkness under his eyes _ which can still sparkle at times with a high degree of intelligence and humor _ gauntness in his face, and a slowness of movement brought on by the fall he has just taken, and alcoholism.

She _ Robin _ is a woman in her early forties, attractive. She is dressed for an evening out of respectable club and/or bar-hopping _ but the night has dragged on excessively and punishingly and she and her clothing show it.

On the periphery, in their own light and surrounded by shadow, two men in suits, standing together; Jim and Donna, standing together; John Persons, alone; the Nurse, alone.

A suspended window indicates darkness. The outside lighting will move toward dawn at the end of the first act.

ROBIN (*To audience*): Ryan makes me think of a bird called killdeer. He's wounded _ in many ways _ and the Killdeer is a bird which continually plays the wounded creature . . . This time, though, Ryan is truly wounded, and that also eventually happens to the killdeer . . . (*Smiles.*) Of course.

DONNA: I'm not surprised Ryan found a woman to take care of him _ he was always good at that. God knows, I did it long enough and helped him to achieve what he achieved. Isn't that what the first spouse always does? And then is thrown aside?

(Pause.) But he's a gifted man . . . and sometimes I miss him, especially his humor.

ROBIN: I hadn't seen him for years, more than two decades. Then, last night, I saw him on the floor of a local club, after a terrible fall _ that's what they think it might have been, a fall. It could have been something else. There will probably be an investigation. He opened his eyes, all these people around _ and recognized me! I couldn't believe it. After all those years.

DONNA: Ryan died two days after the fall.

NURSE: He had been misdiagnosed . . . If they had brought me in a little earlier . . . well, I take it back _ if the doctors missed it, who's to say I wouldn't have, too . . . On the other hand, who's to say I would . . .

JIM: I had the feeling he was dead before he died . . . He gave away so much in his life . . . it became a habit . . . and then he gave away his life.

FIRST MAN IN SUIT: That's meant for us _ his ``giving away'' things.

SECOND MAN: Don't believe it.

FIRST MAN: Slander, grounds for a lawsuit.

A moment, then they all look at Persons.

PERSONS: No comment _ for the moment. *(Pause.)*

Ryan opens his eyes. Robin removes cloth from his forehead, looks at him.

ROBIN: Go slowly, please . . . you're injured.

RYAN: No, I'm . . .

ROBIN (*Just noticing*): There's blood, on the back of your head _ where you struck your head. Lift your head, please . . .

She raises his head, dabs at the blood with the cloth.

RYAN (*Pause*): I drink . . . An everyday thing . . . What's a killdeer?

ROBIN: Oh . . . I thought you were . . .

RYAN: Out?

ROBIN: Yes . . .

RYAN: Well, I was . . . that doesn't mean . . . (*Studies her a moment*): I didn't _ don't know _ about this bird . . . Why is it called a Killdeer?

ROBIN: That's the sound it makes! `Killdeer! Killdeer!' Especially when it flies off after faking an injury.

RYAN (*Pause*): Why would it do that . . . what you just said _ fake an injury?

ROBIN: Well, it's a silly bird _ a beautiful bird but a silly bird. It makes it's nest on the ground . . . in dunes . . . on a beach. So very vulnerable, the nest and the eggs, and when they are born, the chicks . . . If you approach the nest, the parents will limp off, faking a broken wing or leg or whatever . . . lead you away from the nest. Amazingly, it works. It would have to or the killdeer . . . as a species . . . would be extinct.

RYAN: So not so silly.

ROBIN (*A beat*): No, I guess not completely silly _ when you think about it. The ruse is clever, the silly part is making its nest on the ground.

RYAN: Sounds like some people, doesn't it? . . . Building on flood plains, earthquake fault lines . . . you name it. . . . Anyway, I may be silly but I'm not extinct _ yet.

ROBIN: You're famous.

RYAN: You think so.

ROBN: Oh, sure, cover of Fortune, Time.

RYAN: People say that. I didn't make Time . . . People imagine that.

ROBIN: Well, Fortune, Newsweek?

RYAN (*Pause*): Maybe . . . It all blurs. Long time ago in any case. (*After a moment, looks toward window.*) What time is it?

ROBIN: I don't know . . . Wednesday, approaching dawn . . . very early . . .

RYAN: This will sound stupid _ really dumb _ but the year? . . . wait, I know _ 1995?

ROBIN (*Smiles*): You get an `A'.

RYAN (*Thinks a moment, then with a sheepish smile*) : I'm afraid I don't know the month.

ROBIN: July, late July.

RYAN (*Pause.*) I apologize for this because I know I should, but . . . but I'm afraid I don't know you.

ROBIN (*Pause*): I worked for you, a long time ago. (*Pause.*) My name's Robin.

RYAN: You worked for me _ the early days?

ROBIN: There were a lot of us; I was one of dozens. No reason for you to remember me . . . I wasn't one of the `geniuses'. . . But you were encouraging. I was young, I didn't know how rare that would be _ encouragement. I've always appreciated the way you treated me . . . the others.

RYAN: Thank you . . . I'm in my home? (*Smiles.*) I mean, it feels familiar _ is it?

ROBIN (*Nods*): I drove you here, in your car. You gave me directions . . . when you could.

RYAN: It was a long haul . . . difficult, I'm sure . . . sorry. Drunk passenger, no street lights to speak of . . . People get lost trying to find this place in the daytime . . . sober. (*Pause.*) So . . . what happened?

ROBIN: You don't remember anything?

Ryan starts to stand.

ROBIN: I wouldn't . . .

RYAN: I need to . . . *(He takes a few steps, shaky; she hovers nearby, at first a hand on his arm.)* So, I drank too much . . .

ROBIN: I'm sorry _ did you hear me when I said you struck your head?

RYAN *(Somewhat forced blase')*: I was drinking _ right? _ and stumbled . . .

ROBIN: You were drinking, yes _ but add to that, you took a nasty, heavy fall . . . I really can't overemphasize . . . I heard the thud across the room _ over loud music, loud talking . . . We all did . . . Fifty, sixty people, some drunk . . . I saw you on the floor. That's when I recognized you. *(Pause.)* I really do think we should get you to a hospital. *(Pause.)* Since we arrived here you've been talking to people . . . people who are not here.

RYAN: Have I? . . . been doing that lately . . . Anyone in particular?

ROBIN: Your wife, I mean your first wife . . . Donna . . . she treated me well, too . . . your children . . . other voices . . . *(Pause.)* You don't remember anything before? . . . An ambulance was called, you refused attention . . . said you'd be OK.

RYAN: I was with? . . .

ROBIN: You were alone as far as I could tell. *(Pause.)* Well, no one claimed you. I just happened to be there. You recognized me . . . *(A beat; a little embarrassed.)* . . . *then.* . . for a moment at least . . . Held your hand out to me . . . I was surprised you'd remember me . . .

RYAN: Did I say your name?

ROBIN: No. You didn't know it . . . I brought you here, to your home, at your request, since there didn't seem to be anyone else. I was happy to do it because . . . Well, you seemed very alone for . . . *(Pause.)*

RYAN: For . . . ?

ROBIN: For who . . . *whom* you are . . . *(Pause.)* But now . . .

RYAN: Yes?

ROBIN: I don't think you should have refused medical attention . . . You should have let them . . . the paramedics . . . take you to the hospital.

RYAN: Well, I don't remember and I'm OK . . .

ROBIN: That's what I thought at first . . . hoped . . . sober you up _ everything's fine . . . I've done it before _ not with you, other guys . . . it's well known you drink . . . but _ you see _ you've been in and out of consciousness . . . several times . . . the last few hours . . . So I think . . .

RYAN *(Simply)*: It's happened before.

ROBIN: Has it? . . . Really? . . . *Pass out, come back like that?*

Really? . . . I need to tell you, this is the first time you've been . . . conversant.

RYAN (*Small smile*): With you, you mean?

ROBIN (*Also smiles*): Right, you've been conversant with others, but not me. (*Pause.*) And the police _ they've called. Several times. They want to talk to you _ when you're able.

RYAN (*Pause, serious*): What do the police want?

ROBIN: To know what happened, naturally . . . Stand still. (*She pushes the hair off his forehead.*) I don't know how you can see and we don't want you tripping . . . and because it was . . . violent . . . your accident . . . and because of who you, who you are . . .

RYAN: *Was*, you mean, before it all went to hell . . . I'm not anyone anymore . . . to speak of . . .

He looks at her a moment, attracted, but moves away.

ROBIN : Where are you going?

RYAN: The bar _ something to hold onto . . . not to drink . . .

ROBIN: You're talking about . . . it went to hell six, seven years ago?

RYAN: Around. Little longer. I don't remember a lot at the best of times . . . lately . . . a kind of ongoing fog . . . And now . . . (*Pause.*) Hey, are you a reporter? . . . (*Smiles.*) I was on my way

then . . . injured but not faking it, no kill . . . what do you call that bird?

ROBIN: Killdeer. It's called a killdeer. A precocial species _ as in *precocious* _ chicks born with their eyes open, able to run in minutes . . . from predators.

RYAN (*A beat*): No killdeer, not me . . . I get caught . . . Why do I have a headache?

ROBIN: Well, that fall.

RYAN: Oh, right . . . slipped my mind, not a good sign.

ROBIN (*Pause*): It was _ what? _ fifteen, twenty years ago you got *the* idea?

RYAN (*Suspicious*): How do you know this?

ROBIN (*Smiles to reassure him*): I followed your career _ in the papers, the computer magazines. I'm sure thousands of people know that.

RYAN: Sorry, you're right, of course . . . Stupid of me. (*Pause.*) I've been . . well, no reason, really, to care anymore, what gets out . . .

ROBIN (*Pause*): Years later _ about the time you did it and became famous _ I read a quote by you, ``It will change the world as we know it." And it did and I thought . . .``I knew him once . . ."

RYAN (*Looks at her a moment, smiles*): ``The *computer* world as we know it."

ROBIN: An operating system to tie all personal computers in the world into . . . (*Genuinely curious.*) I've always wondered _ do you mind if I ask? _ if I'd put a few thousand in at that time _ not that I had it _ what would I be worth today? A million? Ten? Something like that?

RYAN: But your life would have spiraled downward, Robin. You'd be a major depression case with the rest of us. The industry is littered with bodies _ and souls.

ROBIN: You changed the world.

RYAN (*Politely correcting*): The *personal* computer world.

ROBIN: Well, almost the same thing.

RYAN (*Considers pouring a drink, pushing a glass around bar surface*): But not quite . . . No one remembers anyway.

ROBIN: I do _ was it exciting?

RYAN (*A beat _ his natural, broad humor beginning to return, turning away from the glass*): Oh, sure _ most exciting moment in my life, except the time I visited Niagara Falls. Anyway, your ten million, that's stretching it. That's about what what's his name offered me for the whole company a year ago.

ROBIN: Who's what's his name?

RYAN: You know . . .

ROBIN: Who?

RYAN: What's his name . . . (*Indicates his head and trouble thinking.*) . . . Oh, boy . . . guess I did hit it pretty hard . . . guy with

the glasses and slicked down hair . . . Most depressing day in my life, except the time I visited Philadelphia. I said _ this was very late in the game, understand _ just last year if I recall _ heyday over, bottom falling out, I fly to see him _ I say _

Lighting change. Robin gone. John Persons, older, steps forward, in a rumpled gray suitcoat over a red V-neck sweater. We will see him at various times at age twenty-two or so, to his present age of forty-three or forty-four. He wears rumpled slacks and a red V-neck sweater over a white button-down; when he plays older he wears the gray suitcoat he has on now; when younger, he does not wear the suit coat. Persons is average looking, his hair slicked down but not enough to hold down his natural cowlick; he wears glasses and could probably lose a few pounds. He is a very intense, difficult-to-ignore presence. He is pushy, combative, quick on his feet.

RYAN: How can you offer so little after what you did _

PERSONS: What?

RYAN: You know . . .

PERSONS: No, I don't. Is this why you wanted to see me, Ryan, recriminations? . . . because I'm busy and _

Starts to leave.

RYAN: No, don't go, John, please . . . We're in trouble and _

PERSONS (*Turning back to him; subtly aggressive*): You arrive unannounced . . . Do you think I can just drop every _ who's in trouble?

RYAN: The company and, and _

PERSONS: Sure it is. I know that. The industry knows that. Why you're here. Are you blaming us?

RYAN: Because _

PERSONS: Look!

RYAN: No, I don't _

PERSONS: You want _ *need* _ to sell?

RYAN (*Some pain*): I can't remember this _

PERSONS: What? Remember what?

Light dims on Persons as he takes a few steps back. Robin back in light, moving close to Ryan.

RYAN: _ remember this now. I don't want to . . . not now . . . head throbbing . . .

ROBIN: Remember what? . . . Are you OK?

RYAN (*Smiles sheepishly, a beat*): Sorry . . .

ROBIN: I'm calling the hospital . . .

RYAN: No, please _ get the hospital involved and the police will follow for sure; this business, everyone hears everything . . . I need to sort this out . . . come to some . . . resolution . . . He called. Persons. Years ago. When I first met him. The first time. No one'd heard of him.

ROBIN: *Persons? Do you mean John Persons?* Everyone in the world has heard of John Persons.

RYAN: Not then. I was on all those covers before Persons . . . The idea was still forming . . . coming together as a concept. I was close . . . and excited. Floating, every day _ floating in this unreal world of ecstatic anticipation. Everything was better . . . food . . . sex . . . driving fast . . . flying! . . . I couldn't wait to get back to the tool shed and the computer and begin composing. I hadn't been so excited since the day . . . (*Searching.*)

ROBIN: You saw Niagara Falls?

RYAN (*Gives her a funny look*): Yes _ *Niagara Falls!* How can anyone forget Niagara Falls? . . . I don't know what's going on with my head. So one day I received a call from . . . (*Searching.*)

ROBIN: Persons.

RYAN: Yes _ *Persons!* He had been thinking of forming a company _ inspired by mine! . . . That's what he said . . . he was in town. Could he drop by? Donna welcomes everyone. We invited him to dinner, to spend the night. Persons was so young. I was, back then? . . .

ROBIN: Twenty-nine, thirty?

RYAN: Thank you, about that _ almost decrepit. He was twenty-one, -two, something like that . . . looked fifteen . . .

Lighting change. Robin backs away. Persons, appearing much younger, minus suit coat, and Donna step forward. She is dark, attractive, wears dark slacks and a white blouse.

PERSONS: . . . kind of you to invite me . . .

RYAN: . . . sounded twelve.

PERSONS: I know it was sudden . . . but driving up the coast . . . passing though . . . lovely house . . .

RYAN: Not much room . . . two small kids . . . I work in a tool shed _

PERSONS: Well, we're all struggling, aren't we? . . . Looking for our niche _

RYAN: _ *and the payments* . . .

PERSONS: _ pioneer days. I heard someone say that recently, good description. We're like (*Indicating he and Ryan.*) Lewis and Clark . . . (*Smiles.*) Navigating upriver . . . against the current . . . Anyway, money shouldn't be a problem long for you . . . from what I hear.

DONNA: What *do* you hear?

They both look at her.

RYAN: Drink, John?

PERSONS: Thank you, but I don't drink . . . You do?

RYAN: Now and then. Sure.

PERSONS: I don't disapprove, not at all. But surprising, someone with your gifts . . . Something could happen to that talent, couldn't it? Isn't that a concern . . . with genius, you don't want to . . . rock the boat, do you? . . .

RYAN (*Uncomfortable*): No. Well, I . . . maybe I do . . .

PERSONS: They say you're working on an interesting operating system . . . intriguing concept . . . bold application . . . almost visionary . . .

RYAN: I wish. Right now I'm just at the point of, of _

DONNA: Shouldn't we eat? . . . John? . . . Ryan? . . . (*Pause.*)
Hungry?

They look at her. Persons considers. Lighting change as Donna and Persons step back, just Ryan and Robin.

RYAN: So he stays over. We talked and talked. He stayed up late. Maybe the whole night. I got up to go to the john about _ well, like this hour, whatever *that* is _ and saw the light under his door . . . I heard him on his computer, tip-tapping away. He left early, before we woke . . . (*Pause.*) He left a thank you note . . .

Ryan unsteadily walks front, distracted.

ROBIN: He was typing? . . .

RYAN: Something . . . *(Puzzles, smiles.)* . . . The thank you note? . . . At the time . . . at the time as I recall . . . I didn't think anything of it. Well, maybe that he was composing, being creative . . . Now I know _ how wrong that was . . . His mind doesn't work that way . . . Instead, he . . . *(Pause.)* Sorry . . . But I envied him at that moment, *if* that was what I was thinking about. Everything's fuzzy now, so can't be sure of anything . . . that fall _ that's what you said, right, I took a fall? *(Pause.)* What I meant is, I can't work at night. Too bad. For me the night's for other things. Why I get in trouble _ for instance, last night _ *(Smiles at her.)* _ if we're to believe the rumors. *(Pause.)* I need to work on that . . . once I clear my head. Once this . . . headache . . . goes away . . . *(Pause.)* Donna wasn't sure about him . . . reserved judgement. Suspicious, as I recall . . . she has better instincts . . . than I . . . He showed up several times over the next year or so . . . usually unannounced . . . as I got closer to . . . to . . . *(Can't find the word.)*

ROBIN: `Composing' ? _ Composing it?

RYAN: Yes! _ as it became more clear . . . clearer . . . as I began to finally visualize it . . . *(With difficulty.)* . . . to *conceptualize* . . . the program . . . he must have known, an instinct . . . But then I think . . . *(Depressed.)* I'm sorry, what did I just say?

Light dimming. Persons approaching, wearing the ruffled suit coat, older demeanor.

PERSONS: Are you blaming us?

RYAN: What?

PERSONS: Are you saying we stole from you? Because if that is what you are saying _

RYAN: No, of course not. Did you?

ROBIN: What?

Lighting change as Persons steps back.

RYAN: Oh, thinking of something else. Not very well. Something that happened more recently _ not clear what, but it nags at me . . . Wondering _ just at this moment _ if I was pushed.

ROBIN: Your fall? . . . Last night? . . . You said you didn't remember.

RYAN: Something's come back . . . a glimmer . . . and feeling . . . a soreness in my back, as if someone had shoved me. Perhaps that precipitated the fall. Of course, I was so bombed, it wouldn't have taken much, much of a shove . . . I've dissipated badly . . . muscle tone goes, balance follows . . . I think that's the sequence . . .

ROBIN: They said . . . *(Pause.)*

RYAN: Said . . . ?

ROBIN: . . . you knocked over a stool, falling. Perhaps that accounts for _

RYAN: Who said?

ROBIN: Television news.

RYAN: *Television? Television has it? (Looking off, looking back.)*
And . . . *what* did television say again?

ROBIN: That you knocked over a stool _ when you fell.

RYAN: And so the soreness in my back . . . Sure. I guess . . . But why did I fall?

Spot on Persons, in suit coat, as he comes forward a few steps, chin out.

PERSONS: Are you blaming us, Ryan?

RYAN: What?

PERSONS: Are you saying we killed you? _ that is, rather, caused your fall? . . . Because, Ryan, if that's what you are saying _

RYAN: No! Yes! Did you? *(Pause, looks at Robin.)* Did I just say something? I did, didn't I? It's . . . I'm dizzy . . .

Persons steps back, spot off.

RYAN (*Looking at audience, but to himself*): John Steinbeck got a call one day from his hometown _ Salinas . . . California . . . It's, it's 1938, or around then and he's in a little cottage twenty miles away on the coast putting the finishing touches on ``The Grapes of Wrath." A woman _ friend for years, high school classmate _ calls and says, ``John, what's this talk you think people are after you because of what you're writing? It's not so! We all love you! We're having a picnic today in Salinas. Please come. We want to see you, like the old days." . . . So he went and it was great for him _ a picnic in the sun . . . life rich, *heady* _ the promise of a great novel . . . friends, warmth, wine . . . and then two cowboys approach and one sticks a gun under his chin and says, ``If you write another fucking word about farm workers being exploited, we'll blow your fucking head off." (*Pause.*) Well, they didn't, because all those people were there . . . otherwise . . . and Steinbeck overcomes . . . the trauma . . . and writes for another thirty years . . . but the gun stuck under his chin was real . . . it could have gone off and we wouldn't have. . . what? . . . ``East of Eden." (*Pause.*) He thinks about such things. He knows himself and he knows what he might do if he lives. He moves to the East Coast _ to New York. He applies for and receives a license to . . . naturally . . . own a gun. (*Pause.*)

Lighting change.

ROBIN (*Coming forward, to audience*): All kinds of stories came out about what happened to Ryan that night . . . That a biker brawl led to his death . . . He died from a heart attack . . . blow to the head . . . suicide . . .

Lighting change.

RYAN: Slow suicide then . . . (*Sexy smile.*) Did we ever . . . Robin, did we . . . ?

ROBIN (*Smiles*): You were faithful in those days . . . you looked me up and down a time or two . . .

RYAN (*Pause*): Did I really ask what I think I just asked you or am I . . .

ROBIN: You asked it.

RYAN (*Smiles*): But I didn't try anything _ good and good. We were close then . . . Donna and I . . . (*Ryan temporarily loses his balance, grabs a chair before Robin can get to him.*) Fuck . . .

Ryan is temporarily in his own light.

RYAN: So he showed up a few months later . . . We're all still young . . . early 1974, maybe `73, somewhere in there. Right decade, I'm sure. (*Smiles, mocking himself.*) *Twentieth Century*. He . . . You know . . . (*Frustrated.*) . . . *him!* (*Coming toward Robin, searching _ before Robin can speak.*) No! I'll get it for God's sake! _ *Persons!* . . . John Persons. (*Visibly relaxes.*) That's it, you know . . . something eludes you, think of something else . . . I used to advise my students to try it. That's the way I compose. Easy . . . not thinking directly of the problem . . . Drifting, in a way . . .

A phone rings.

ROBIN: I'll just be a moment, do not, Ryan . . . do not do anything
...

Lighting change. Persons, young, and Donna approach as Robin moves off.

RYAN (*Suddenly exuberant*): . . . drifting, in a way . . . freeing the mind! . . .

PERSONS (*Eager*): And then _ ?

RYAN: . . . I try, John, to let my subconscious kick in. Well, the opposite of "try," really . . . open the way for it is better . . . and when it does _

PERSONS: When it does?

Donna turns away. Ryan and Persons, momentarily sharing this world, do not notice.

RYAN: It's like _ you know, John _ it's so wonderful! It's like _ it's what I *imagine* it's like _ to compose *music*. It pours out, the binaries becoming notes. And look _ when you look at it, isn't the computer keyboard like a piano? A chess board? Hell _ a lit up jet control panel as you cross the country in the middle of the night with the whole country sleeping below you . . . There's a beauty there, isn't there? . . . Don't you think . . . a kind of elegance?

PERSONS: Yes, yes, I think so, Ryan _ I know what you are saying. I've felt this myself! . . . Those moments! . . .

RYAN: Or am I overstating it?

PERSONS: No, no, I don't think so.

RYAN: I knew you'd understand, John.

PERSONS: Well, sure . . . it's something . . . we both . . .

RYAN: We can talk.

PERSONS: Of course.

DONNA: How . . . how do you compose, John?

*Lighting change, Persons and Donna
step back. Robin returns.*

ROBIN: Well, that's interesting _ now there's a story that has you falling off a ladder.

RYAN (*A beat*): What story?

ROBIN: A call just now about your fall last night.

RYAN: Oh, yes, the fall . . . I forget, but maybe that's a blessing. I thought the biker brawl story seemed . . . I mean, I ride, but . . .

ROBIN: But you were wearing a biker's vest, Ryan . . . with Harley-Davidson patches. I took it off you because there was blood . . .

RYAN (*Pause*): Oh, well, sure, I wear that vest sometimes, but would that cause a brawl? . . . (Shakes his head as if to clear it.)

Someone hit me, that's what's implied? Some biker? . . . And that last one again _ ?

ROBIN: Falling off a ladder.

Ryan's own light, dim, softly pulsing.

RYAN (*Amused*): Falling off a ladder in a `nightclub'? What would I be doing *on* a ladder in a nightclub? Adjusting the lights? (*Grudgingly, smiles.*) Well, I stick my nose in . . . Wait, you'll see, someday they'll program lighting _ lighting ``concerts," on a disc, gorgeous compositions of _ (*Catches himself.*) . . . All I remember is _ all I remember is my head on the floor, looking up at dancing bodies, thinking _ or maybe they were brawling bikers looking like dancers _ I remember thinking, ``Please do not step on my head . . . Please, oh God, please do not let them kick me in the head . . . I still have use for it . . . It has more to do . . . more to . . . finish . . . "

A silence. Lighting back to normal.

ROBIN: Do you?

RYAN: Have more to do . . . finish? Of course. (*Trying to focus.*) People think you do something . . . you should be content with that . . . even if that thing has been taken from you . . . Do you think I want to spend the rest of my life . . . not doing what I was meant to do? Not . . . testing myself?

ROBIN (*Softly*): Why did you go alone, Ryan?

RYAN: Go where?

ROBIN: The club . . the fall.

RYAN: Oh, the fall. Did I go alone? Did I? I don't remember.

ROBIN: No one has come forward . . .

RYAN: To say they were with me? Then I guess I was alone. What are you saying? I'm not popular? . . . That's not news. Word's out I'm bad luck. The man who could have . . . could have had it all . . . but let it slip through his fingers. *(Pause, rubs his forehead.)* I did, didn't I? . . . That's what happened, isn't it? . . . I blew it. Made all the wrong moves.

ROBIN: I don't know. I told you, I only know what I read . . .

RYAN: A lot of that *_ this I do remember _* is bullshit. The stuff with the suits, for instance _

ROBIN: Suits?

RYAN: Suits. The kind of people . . . I'm . . . I've always been . . . uncomfortable with . . .

*Lighting change. Donna and Jim step forward.
Jim is thirty-five, a straight-forward, uncomplicated
appearing person, casually dressed.*

JIM: The ``suits" are here, Ryan.

DONNA: They've taken a room in town.

JIM: They want to meet with you.

RYAN: The suits . . . Oh really, I can't . . . You do it . . .

JIM: They want to talk to *you*. You're the one they've come to see.

RYAN: I was about to leave for the track.

JIM: Look, Ryan . . . these are very powerful men. And this is an important thing we are talking about, something we have been working a long time to achieve . . .

DONNA: Jim's right. It's an opportunity that may not come around again, Ryan. You should think about that.

JIM: The fruit of your genius, Ryan.

DONNA: They've come to us. That's a point . . . Still, if you . . .

JIM (*Glances at her, mildly disapproving*): Not us to them. We have the leverage at this point.

DONNA (*Glances at him*): That's so, but it is Ryan's creation.

JIM: But it's for the taking now.

RYAN (*Pause*): We don't need them. Money's not a problem. We're doing fine. We're growing.

JIM: Ryan, we're talking more than fine _ we're talking huge. We're talking the world _ the PC world. They can place our operating system in every personal computer _

RYAN: _ In the world? Well, this is very exciting. As exciting as the first time I saw _

DONNA (*Cutting him off*): Ryan, this is serious. Whatever decision you make, I am with you. But I want you to think about it, I don't want regrets.

Donna waits. Ryan gives no sign of acknowledging the gravity of the situation.

DONNA: *Ryan?*

RYAN: I'm sorry, Donna. I'm going to the track _ I'm going to take the Lamborghini around the oval a few times.

DONNA: That is what you are going to do now _ race your Lamborghini around the track?

Ryan nods.

DONNA (*To Jim, who's about to protest*): No, let him be. (*To Ryan.*) Do as you wish. I just hope this is what you really want.

She steps back. Jim looks after her, looks toward Ryan, waits.

RYAN: I can think when I am behind the wheel. It . . . frees me up. I thought she understood that.

Jim nods, shrugs, steps back.

Lighting change. Ryan and Robin.

ROBN: Did you go racing that day?

RYAN: I think so.

ROBIN: *Think so?*

RYAN: The most traumatic episode in your life _ not dramatic, *traumatic* _ do you remember everything? In the proper sequence, scale . . . ? I've never been clear about that day . . . or days. I wasn't sure what had happened the day *after* it happened. Time shifts . . . Events . . . incidents recede or become exaggerated . . . What you imagine becomes real, and reality becomes dreamlike . . . surreal . . .

Lighting change.

RYAN: . . . and you begin to doubt it.

DONNA (*Not moving forward*): Or, Ryan . . .

RYAN: Yes?

DONNA: Perhaps you simply don't want to remember.

RYAN (*Smiles*): There's that, too.

Lighting change.

ROBIN: What?

RYAN: Maybe I simply don't want to remember.

ROBIN: And the fall _ ?

RYAN: Has nothing to do with my memory of *that* . . . those days . . . (*Frustrated.*) I don't *think* it does. (*Pause.*) I went racing _ no, *driving fast, racing myself*. But the suits were there when I returned. That part has been left out of the story. . . It's a story they love repeating. ``The day he could have owned the world, he drove around and around in circles" . . . It's catchy _ even amuses me _ and makes me look like an idiot . . . So of course *they* keep it out there, keep it alive . . . Makes it seem I deserve what happened to me . . . Justifies what they did . . . But I met with the suits, that day or the next. Whenever the hell it was. I think I finally realized it was a business _ as I drove around the track I realized it was a business. It was as if the words were stenciled on the windshield of the Lamborghini: *It Is Business, Ryan. This is Business.*

ROBIN: What else could it have been?

RYAN: I'm not sure _ I had been a teacher, for a government institution, what did I know about business? _ you teach, you grade papers _ you hope you inspire and instill passion _ you get your paycheck. Maybe I thought *it* was discovery . . . innovation . . . education . . . *fun!* . . . those things . . . Things I would never associate with what people call business. Anyway, it was new . . . a new science; in a way an art, part mathematics part composition, like music _ business hadn't fully sunk its claws into it . . . yet. It _ software, the concept of it _ was still . . . virgin . . . territory. No one knew how to copyright it, protect it . . . No one knew if you *could* copyright it. All I knew was suddenly I was

doing it _ and doing it well! And it was consuming me! *(Pause.)* As I remember. *(Pause.)* If I remember. So we met . . .

Lighting change. Misty, shadowy. The two men in suits approach. Their faces kept in shadow.

RYAN: There had been three suits. One had left _ to report back to suit headquarters, I suppose. So we met _ *and I knew it was business.* *(To them.)* You propose? I think you have a proposal for me.

FIRST MAN: You've kept us waiting, you know.

RYAN *(Uncomfortable, awkward, but trying to assert himself):* Sorry. I was involved in something . . . Tell me what's on your minds.

SECOND MAN: You know who we are and you kept us waiting anyway.

FIRST MAN: We flew across the continent to meet with you.

SECOND MAN: In the company jet _ one of the company jets.

FIRST MAN: Don Hatcher had to return to the home office

RYAN: Don Hatcher? . . .

FIRST MAN: There were three of us. Now there are two.

SECOND MAN: Don's reporting on what's gone on here.

FIRST MAN: Which has been very little. The story is you brushed us off to drive a car around a track.

RYAN (*Smiles, more at ease _ ``Who wouldn't skip a meeting to drive a Lamborghini?"*): A Lamborghini, a *red* Lamborghini.

SECOND MAN: We heard that you like speed.

FIRST MAN: Is that a death wish kind of thing _ the love of speed?

RYAN (*Smiling, offhand*): Naw . . . if it was?

FIRST MAN: Well, then we'd have to think about it. (*To Second Man.*) Wouldn't we?

SECOND MAN: Would we? Why?

FIRST MAN: It would make a difference.

SECOND MAN: I don't see that. Once an agreement is signed . . .

FIRST MAN: Oh, right.

RYAN (*A beat*): I'm sorry, you had a proposal . . .

The two men look at each other.

FIRST MAN: Right.

SECOND MAN: Righto.

FIRST MAN: We have developed a hell of a new personal computer, if we do say so _ the _

SECOND MAN (*Warning*): Richard.

FIRST MAN: Well . . . model name's not important.

Donna approaches. They look at her a moment.

SECOND MAN: Can do anything.

FIRST MAN: Or could _

SECOND MAN: _ if it had an operating software system. We mean, a system worthy of its excellence.

FIRST MAN (*Pause*): What we have is, frankly . . . limited.

A general silence.

DONNA: So then it can't do much?

Ryan smiles.

FIRST MAN (*Irritated she'd have a question*): What's that?

DONNA: Your new computer, as is.

FIRST MAN (*Clears throat, somewhat hostile*): Well, sure _ that's the point. But it *could*.

SECOND MAN: *If* it had a superior operating system.

A general silence.

DONNA: A brain, you mean.

Ryan smiles.

FIRST MAN (*A beat*): Well . . .

SECOND MAN: You might call it that. Maybe nerve system's better.

DONNA: Otherwise it functions . . . well? . . .

FIRST MAN: The new computer?

SECOND MAN: Of course it does!

FIRST MAN: No problem there.

DONNA: Adds numbers, subtracts and multiplies, too, but can't communicate, you mean. Other than that . . .

SECOND MAN (*Rattled, irritated*): Look, the thing is: it's all there, except for _

FIRST MAN: _ you know.

SECOND MAN: And John Persons says you have one.

RYAN: John said that?

FIRST MAN: Yes.

SECOND MAN: He recommended you.

RYAN: John Persons?

FIRST MAN: Yes.

RYAN (*A beat*): John's a friend.

Donna looks away.

FIRST MAN: Well . . .

SECOND MAN: If you say so.

RYAN (*After a pause*): So you talked to him _ John Persons _ first?

FIRST MAN (*After looking at other man*): Yes.

DONNA (*Turning back quickly*): Why didn't you go with him?

FIRST MAN: With . . . ?

RYAN: Donna means with John's operating system _ for your new computer.

DONNA: If he has one. *Does he?*

SECOND MAN (*A beat*): Look, I don't think we can talk about that.

FIRST MAN: John wouldn't like that.

SECOND MAN: We keep our dealings _ (*Looks at other man.*) _ what?

FIRST MAN: Compartmentalized.

SECOND MAN (*Nodding*): Compartmentalized.

FIRST MAN: It's the ethical thing to do.

DONNA: He knows *we* have one.

FIRST MAN: That's between you and him.

SECOND MAN: Not us.

DONNA: He knows about us, we don't know about him.

FIRST MAN: Look _ (*They'd rather not talk to her; pointedly to Ryan*): _ we'd really like to work something out. We'd like to do business . . . (*Again excluding Donna.*) . . . with you.

SECOND MAN (*Only to Ryan*): There's something here for both sides.

RYAN: Which is _ (*A flicker of anxiety _ and perhaps pain _ registers on his face.*) . . . specifically?

SECOND MAN (*Registers on this, a beat*): Well . . . excuse me, you're OK?

RYAN: Yes.

SECOND MAN: You're sure?

RYAN: Yes.

The two men exchange looks, making a mental note of this. Donna has missed it, but realizing she has missed something she moves protectively to Ryan's side.

DONNA: Ryan?

FIRST MAN (*To Donna*): Excuse me. (*To Ryan after a glance at his friend _ this has been rehearsed.*) Before we proceed _

SECOND MAN: _ we need you to sign _

FIRST MAN: _ a nondisclosure agreement.

He pulls a folded paper from his suit coat pocket.

SECOND MAN: It simply says this meeting _

FIRST MAN: _ never took place _

SECOND MAN: _ generally and, of course, as pertains to the particulars.

A general silence. First Man taps the paper in the palm of his other hand. Ryan, unsteady, and Donna look at each other.

RYAN: We're not here then.

FIRST MAN: That's a good way of looking at it.

RYAN: If we're not here, how can we sign it?

SECOND MAN (*Shrugs _ ``What can I say?''*): That's another way of looking at it.

DONNA: What are the particulars we wouldn't be disclosing?

FIRST MAN (*To Ryan*): Our business arrangement, naturally.

RYAN: So . . . our operating system . . . our software . . . (*Falters, takes a deep breath.*) Sorry . . . in your computers?

FIRST MAN: Yes.

The two men exchange glances.

SECOND MAN: That's it.

FIRST MAN: We don't discuss it at this time . . . With people, the press . . . Eventually it becomes known. When we're protected. Both sides.

RYAN: What kind of royalty are we . . . not talking about?

SECOND MAN (*After a glance at Donna*): How does _ would you feel better about the disclosure _ about this agreement _ if I whisper it? (*Approaches Ryan, whispers in his ear, then backs away.*) How does that strike you?

RYAN (*Pause*): As . . . as not enough.

FIRST MAN: You realize we are talking several *million* computers _ just to begin with! Take that number and multiply by _

DONNA (*Impatiently, suddenly*): He's a mathematics genius, for God's sake. He figured the numbers _ tabulated them, extrapolated them and square-rooted them _ the instant they were out of your mouth. He doesn't think about it _ it just *happens*. Do you understand him *at all*? *Do you*?

A general silence; they shift uncomfortably.

RYAN (*Pause*): Donna . . . (*A beat*): We're being dictated to, but . . .

DONNA: Ryan, remember, it's just money.

SECOND MAN: *But?*

RYAN (*To Donna*): *Meaning?*

DONNA: Don't make money the determining factor _ whatever you decide to do.

FIRST MAN: So, *but?*

RYAN: I'll consider the offer, we'll consider the offer _ *if . . .*

FIRST MAN: *If?*

RYAN: _ *if you sign a nondisclosure agreement with us. (Pause.)* I think that's fair.

SECOND MAN (*A beat*): It's out of the question. *We don't sign disclosure agreements of any kind, Ryan . . . It is Ryan, isn't it? . . . (A beat.)* Because, Ryan, you don't seem to understand us at all.

FIRST MAN: If you'll take a moment and look at this document, you will see it states we are allowed unfettered _ (*To Second Man.*) Is that the word? Yes, unfettered use of any information we may wish to use, privately or publicly, on you and/or your company.

SECOND MAN: And as you might understand, signing a nondisclosure agreement with you would contradict the unfettered provision.

First Man taps document on his hand as others stand silent. Ryan and Donna look at each other.

DONNA (*Finally; British accent, to Ryan only, smiling*): Lovely.

RYAN (*Smiles and nods at her and them; British accent*): Quite, I say. . . (*He staggers, stumbles forward, grabbing his chest _ stricken*) I say! . . .

DONNA: Ryan!

Lighting change as Donna repeats Ryan's name. Ryan and Robin. Robin goes to Ryan's assistance. Ryan takes a moment to regain his balance and composure.

RYAN (*Smiling sheepishly*): Clumsy lately, but I *think* that's what happened . . .

ROBIN (*Holding his arm*): And just happened again _ which was?

RYAN: Irregular heartbeat.

ROBIN: Still?

RYAN: No _ just imagination . . . memory . . . (*Moves away from her.*) No reason to stumble like that . . . then . . . I recovered in moments . . . then, like now . . . I guess I was _ am _ being like that shore bird of yours _ the, the _ ?

ROBIN: Killdeer. It's _ they're called _ killdeer.

RYAN: Right _ killdeer. Drawing the predators away, away from the nest, pretending an injury, a broken wing or something _ isn't that what you said? (*Smiles.*) Scared me, that's all. I didn't know what it was . . . then.

ROBIN: Your heart?

RYAN (*Nods*): That was the first time. Well, a few hours earlier, on the track just a quick few beats, taking a curve in the red Lamborghini . . . I dismissed it. Thought it had something to do with the coming meeting with the suits. (*Pause, laughs.*) Thought it was me composing _ da-da-da, da da. Binary rhythms, you know. (*Smiles, looking at her.*) Or perhaps you don't. Then, at the suits meeting, I pretty well knew it was something else.

ROBIN: And that had something to do with your decision _ your health?

RYAN: What decision?

ROBIN: Not to go with them.

RYAN: I didn't go with them because a lump sum, for the rights to my work into perpetuity, seemed like a raw deal. Maybe health figures into perpetuity, I don't know.

ROBIN: I thought they offered a royalties deal. Isn't that what you said?

RYAN: Did they? Did I? I don't know. I don't remember that . . .

ROBIN: You said a royalty on each computer, with the computers numbering into the millions.

RYAN: No. I think . . . I think . . . Sorry, head's throbbing a bit . . . I think I asked for a limited royalty contract and they said ``lump sum, perpetuity. Plus, sign the disclosure." If I indicated otherwise . . . did I?

Robin nods.

RYAN: I don't know, maybe that happened. (Pause.) Anyway, whatever they offered _ we weren't going to get by the disclosure requirement.

ROBIN: So you said _

RYAN: ``Sign my disclosure." Another way of saying kiss my ass. (*A beat, small smile.*) I'm afraid I'm not very good at this, am I?

Lighting change. Donna and Jim move forward a bit.

DONNA: You're not. We're not. So take it, Ryan, take the deal. Let's be done with it before it destroys us.

RYAN (*Looking front, not at them*): That's no deal.

DONNA: Don't take it then. I don't know. I don't know what you want. I just don't know.

JIM: Donna, if he doesn't . . .

RYAN: If I don't?

JIM: You could _ we could _ be left out.

DONNA (*Weary*): Is that so bad?

JIM: But it all comes from _ it all stems from _ Ryan. Without him, *it isn't*. It is his creation. How can he be left out of that? That doesn't seem right to me.

DONNA: But it happens, doesn't it? Isn't that a pattern in the . . . world?

Sudden lighting change. Ryan and Persons, stepping forward, older.

PERSONS: So, I ask you again, why are you here? What do you want? . . . Ryan, you must understand I'm busy.

RYAN: We have, John . . . John, we have a number of stockholders . . . not wealthy . . . good, honest people . . . In deep . . .

PERSONS: Yes?

RYAN: Who could be hurt . . . Deeply invested, close to life savings tied up in the company . . . Some of them . . .

PERSONS: And? . . . That's too bad but what does that have to do with me _ and *my* company _ Ryan?

RYAN: I'm fine, myself and the rest of the board, we're secure, covered . . .

PERSONS: Same question applies. (*Looks at wristwatch.*) I'm waiting, Ryan. (*Pause, sighs loudly.*) I assume, you fly a thousand miles, you must have something on your mind. Something important to say. (*A beat.*) Something difficult for you to say.

Ryan turns away, bites his lip.

PERSONS: You have trouble with this kind of thing, don't you? Some sort of hang-up, isn't it? . . . *(A beat; suddenly intensely curious, moving toward Ryan):* You flew yourself, as usual?

Ryan turns back.

RYAN: What does that have _ ?

PERSONS: Plenty! I thought something was missing. You usually march in with your pilot's helmet in the crook of your arm, scarf thrown back, like some sort of World War II hero. Swashbuckling . . . swaggering . . . big smile . . . But not today. *(Pause, waits.)*

RYAN: Right, John, I didn't fly myself . . . but we were talking about _

PERSONS: No, you didn't. I'd heard that maybe . . . you weren't anymore . . . flying, I mean . . . for some reason . . . *(A thoughtful pause, then with extra animation, pacing, in a way stalking him.)* But, Ryan, you're a famous flyboy! The flamboyant genius!

RYAN: John . . .

PERSONS: Wait: the devil-may-care pilot who jets himself across the continent at the drop of a hat! . . . under a star-lit sky, reciting poetry! . . . while the rest of us . . . the rest of us unbathed nerds . . . the popular perception . . . we're having trouble tying our shoe laces . . . Isn't this what I've read? . . . Is written? . . . You're the un-nerd of the computer world. You never fly commercial _ you never let anyone fly for you _ unless . . . *(Looks at him differently, moves closer again, circles him.)* . . . unless they took away your pilot's license. Did they? . . . Is that what happened, Ryan? . . . What's wrong? Were you stripped of your license?

Grounded, isn't that what they call it? *(A beat.) Something* happened. Are, are we looking at a drinking problem? . . . I hope we are not looking at a serious drinking problem, Ryan . . .

RYAN *(A beat)*: Do you, John?

PERSONS: Because we all know . . . have known for a long time . . . that you have a propensity . . . A weakness toward . . . *(Pause.)* . . . for . . . *(Wants Ryan to say it.)* Ryan? . . . *(Pause.)* Well, you can't say I didn't warn you, years ago, can you? Do you remember, Ryan _ that first night at your house? Talking about your gift? The danger of abusing it? *(A beat _ pointedly.)* Donna was there. Ask her, she'll remember.

RYAN *(A beat)*: Fuck off, John.

PERSONS *(Pause, shrugs)*: Well.

Persons steps back, shaking his head.

Lighting change, Ryan and Robin.

RYAN *(Smiles)*: I don't think I said that. I wanted to. But I needed him. Anyway, it was probably better that he thought I wasn't flying because of a drinking problem than a . . . a health problem. You can kick the booze, or so they say. But if he knew I might be about to kick off . . . well . . . and the odds of that seem to have gone up considerably in the last few hours . . .

ROBIN: He was . . . for a long time you thought he was your friend.

RYAN: By *then* _ and for some time _ I knew he wasn't. But I had for years _ admired and respected him. His fight . . . intensity . . . tenacity . . . his . . . tunnel vision . . . (A beat.) That's what kind of genius I am. So the . . . where was I?

ROBIN: Persons, your friend.

RYAN: Before that.

ROBIN: The suits?

RYAN; So the suits, giving up on me, fly up to see John _ and miracle of miracles, he suddenly has an operating system. One that would work for them. I thought, ``Wow, to come up with something like that in twenty-four hours after years of trying, that's something." (*Pause.*) That's what I *really thought* . . . was blown away. (*A beat, somewhat unsure.*) I mean, it's not that farfetched. Someone with John's talent . . . It can happen, you know? (*Pause.*) You know? . . .

Lighting change, Jim and Donna step forward. Ryan pours a drink.

JIM (*With urgency*): They've made some kind of deal _ Persons and the suits. That's the word.

RYAN: The word? What word?

JIM: That is what they are saying, what is being said. Word gets around quickly.

RYAN (*Shrugs*): Screw `the word.' It's really none of our business. We have enough on our own plate.

He offers Jim a drink, who declines with an impatient gesture.

JIM: *Ryan*, two days ago he sends the suits to us because he *doesn't have* an operating system. How can he have one now? It doesn't make sense.

RYAN (*Looking off*): As you say, he sent them to us. John was doing us a favor. Otherwise, why would he do it?

He drinks.

JIM: Because he didn't *have* anything. Because he needed us . . . He would have wanted something eventually, a cut, a partnership, a percentage of the licensing fee _ *something*. (*A beat.*) *Ryan*, he knew he could talk you into something like that, no problem _ (*A beat, considers.*) _ and in the long run get the better part of the deal _ something for nothing is probably what he had in mind.

RYAN (*Pause, flushes, deeply embarrassed*): That's what John thought?

JIM: Yes. Of course he did. Is that a surprise? (*Pause.*) Face it, *Ryan*: you're an easy touch . . . not a . . . you're not a businessman . . .

RYAN: And? . . .

JIM: And?

RYAN: And I'm . . . naive?

JIM (*Considers*): . . . Let's just say you're not exactly Machiavellian. (*Pause.*) Sure, you're naive _ so was Othello. It's nothing to be ashamed of . . .

RYAN smiles, still embarrassed, makes a quick little toast with his glass to Jim. Both look away. There's a general silence.

DONNA (*Thoughtfully, softly, and to break the silence*): Well, it does happen.

JIM: What happens?

DONNA: They come up with their own program in a day . . . a sudden inspiration. Some of Ryan's best ideas have come suddenly.

JIM: Yes, I understand that. But it doesn't usually come packaged and ready to go as an operating system. And if it did happen _ if they were on the verge, close _ even if they saw it as a remote possibility down the line – would they have sent the suits to us? No, no way in hell.

Ryan moves off.

DONNA: So. Does it really matter?

RYAN: Donna's right. We're getting all the business we can handle. *(Drinks.)* Jim, we're in a million computers and still growing. What's the problem?

JIM: We can lose business, Ryan. As fast as companies pop up in this business, they go away . . . disappear. No one has signed on with us for forever. We don't do perpetuity contracts, remember? That's someone else. Maybe we should.

DONNA: Whatever program they have, it won't be better than Ryan's.

JIM: What if it's just as good as Ryan's, Donna? *(Pause.)* What if it *is* Ryan's?

RYAN: John wouldn't do that. That's not something John would do.

JIM: Really? *(A beat.)* I don't think there's anything he *wouldn't do* . . . to come out on top. *(Pause.)* Look, I'm not saying . . . I mean, I don't know where they got it . . . it's just, from what I hear . . . it's an awful lot like . . . and if you believe in unbelievable coincidence . . . nearly incalculable odds . . . well, you're the genius, I'm not . . . *(Pause.)* I'm sorry, I've got to go, I've got family . . . *(Starts to go, stops.)* Remember that, Ryan _ factor that in _ most of us have family.

Jim steps back. Donna looks at Ryan, he doesn't look at her. Ryan sets his drink down, moves back.

DONNA: Ryan, where are you going?

RYAN (*Shrugs*): I don't know.

DONNA: It's night _ you can't go racing.

RYAN: No.

DONNA: Don't fly . . . not tonight, Ryan, please. I'd worry . . . I can't . . .

RYAN: No. I don't fly if I'm not . . . right. You know I wouldn't do that.

DONNA: Then why don't you stay?

Ryan hesitates, shrugs apologetically.

RYAN: I don't know, I'm sorry.

Lighting change, Donna steps back. Ryan and Robin.

RYAN: It was after that . . . a few days later, we realized Jim had been right about Persons.

ROBIN: It's like your program?

RYAN: It's almost exactly mine, with a tweak here or there for appearance's sake . . . As Jim said, the odds are, well . . . say . . . say someone takes ``Hamlet'' and changes the title to . . . ``Lars'' . . . (*He smiles.*) . . . and moves the play from

Copenhagen to, say, Tuscaloosa . . . and Polonius becomes Felonius . . . *(A beat, but can't resist: with a sly smile.)* Portia a . . . Lamborghini . . . That sort of thing . . . So blatant it's kind of funny. *(Serious again.)* The thing is, those tweaks . . . they're not harmless. They cause crashes . . . which cost money . . . sometimes . . . *could cost . . . lives . . . (Pause, he hesitates, having difficulty with his balance; takes a deep breath.)* . . . so they sold my work _ now called something else, of course _ to the suits, interesting that . . . I've never heard of selling anything that belonged to someone else. I didn't know you could do that. A neat trick. *(A beat, with a whimsical, sad smile.)* In that area, it must be admitted, they're . . . innovative.

Lighting change and Jim takes a step forward.

JIM: There's only one thing to do, Ryan: we have to take them to court.

RYAN: I didn't get into this to sue people, Jim. My God, it's the last thing I want to do with my life _ waste my time that way . . . Besides, we don't even know if we can.

JIM: Well, we have to do something or we go down. We eventually get ground into the dirt. They're taking over the business overnight. Using what you created, they're four times our size . . . And they're just not growing, they're taking our customers with them. *(A beat.)* It continues, we're history _ a footnote, one of dozens of little footnotes in this business that come up with a good idea and are buried because of it. The reward of innovation is destruction . . . But none of them had or have your vision, Ryan _ and I hate to see you go their way.

RYAN (*Really to himself, a slight note of panic*): It's about education, Jim . . . Don't you see that? It's innovation . . . communication . . . discovery. It's supposed to be fun, like . . . like music!

JIM: *Music's a business, Ryan!* Get your head out of the . . . out of wherever the fuck it is.

RYAN (*Off somewhere*): John and I spoke of that once. You weren't with the company then. He agreed with me, about the beauty of it, the excitement of breaking new ground. I had this idea _ a long time ago _ that we might work together someday, create something magnificent.

JIM: Are you kidding _ *you and John*? Oh, for Christ's sake, Ryan _ he's going to bury you! (*Pause.*) I think he already has. (*Pause.*)

*He steps back, Donna moves forward tentatively.
Pause.*

DONNA: I think, Ryan, whatever's going on with you and John and the suits _ the whole business, actually _ it's becoming beside the point now, isn't it? . . . I mean, you're so far removed . . . from me, now the kids . . . maybe there's nothing left. (*Pause.*) Or is . . . or is your creativity all we ever had in the first place? (*Pause.*)

She remains. Ryan takes an unsteady few steps, having trouble with his balance. He looks around for Donna but can't find her. He grabs a chair for support, takes a few deep breaths. Looks at

Robin.

RYAN (*Smiles, shaken*): I'm remembering a little too much . . . It's (*Indicating his head.*) . . . the old noggin . . . it's suddenly working . . . but . . . all of a sudden I wish it wasn't . . . don't appreciate the . . . clarity . . . not at . . . (*Pause.*) . . . Robin, could you give me a ride to . . .

ROBIN: Sure. Wherever.

RYAN: To . . . Or maybe better, call an ambulance, please. I've always wanted to ride in an ambulance _ (*Smiles.*) _ all that legal speed, you know.

ROBIN (*Briskly*): OK.

She starts to move off quickly.

RYAN: Because this headache . . . is acting up a bit . . . And I think you might be right _ (*Pause.*) _ I think I might be in some, some trouble . . . (*Smiles, waits.*)

Light fades.

Act Two

The Final Day

In dim light, Ryan and a Nurse. He is in the chair, leaning back; she has pulled up a chair to be nearby, pages through a magazine. He is in different clothes, casual and comfortable, but similar; he now wears the motorcycle vest with Harley-Davidson patches. A strip of gauze on the back of his head. His eyes are open. The Nurse is attractive and young.

On the periphery: Persons; Jim and Donna, together.

It is evening twilight; the act will advance into darkness.

RYAN *(After a few moments):* It's like, it's what I *imagine* it's like to compose music . . .

The Nurse smiles wanly, watches him from the corner of her eye.

RYAN: . . . the binaries becoming notes . . . The notes appearing out of nowhere. *(Pause.)* There's a beauty there, isn't there? A kind of elegance?

Persons moves up a few strides.

PERSONS: Speaking to me, Ryan? . . . *To anyone?* . . . `A kind of elegance'? Well, it's neither here nor there anymore, if you ask me . . . You're dying and you know it. So why go on about the beauty of composing programs? Once it was . . . acceptable . . . tolerable . . . But now? . . . You might as well talk about building a house or founding a business _ you're not going to do either. They make as much sense as composing a program. It's futile. *(Pause.)* You're no longer in the game. Not a player. *(Pause.)* You're history _ *if that . . . if you're lucky . . . (Pause.)* If I allow you to be. *(Pause.)* History. *(Pause.)* Because, Ryan, the winner writes the history. Everyone knows that. *(Pause.)*

RYAN *(Not looking at him)*: Do they? . . .

PERSONS: Yes. But I'll tell you what I'll do _ I'll think about it, about you getting some credit, I mean . . . because I really don't think you should be forgotten . . . I feel a certain responsibility that you're . . . remembered . . . But . . . well . . . I will have to think about it.

RYAN *(Pause)*: Good of you, John.

PERSONS: I pick up on your tone, but you think about it, Ryan _ you haven't been cooperative . . . I want to do what's right, but you don't make it easy . . .

RYAN: No, I meant it _ good of you, considering . . . considering all that . . . *(Breaks off, adrift.)*

PERSONS *(A bit awkward)*: It's . . . that's OK . . . glad to consider it.

He steps back. Lighting change.

RYAN *(To Nurse, after a moment, refocusing, a friendly smile)*: Hello.

NURSE: Hello.

RYAN: You're? . . .

NURSE: Certainly not John. Or Donna or Jim. You've been calling me John or Donna or Jim. And some other names, including your children. You miss your children. *(Pause.)* I'm a nurse _ Helen.

RYAN: *My nurse?*

NURSE: Your nurse. We've already met by the way.

RYAN: Sorry . . .

The Nurse shrugs.

RYAN: There was someone earlier . . .

NURSE: A woman _ Robin.

RYAN: She won't be coming back?

NURSE (*A beat*): I don't know . . . she was very upset . . . felt she let you down . . . nice lady.

RYAN: It's that bad?

NURSE: Not so bad. But the doctors feel it's a good idea for you to be observed. Someone to keep an eye . . .

RYAN: Because I have . . . ?

NURSE: A mild concussion . . .

RYAN: That's the diagnosis?

The Nurse nods.

RYAN: Which is better than . . . ?

NURSE: . . . than moderate or severe, of course . . . or any other number of things that can happen when a person takes a hard fall.

RYAN (*Considers*): Well . . . so . . . (*Pause.*) What are they saying . . . ?

NURSE: Saying?

RYAN: In the papers . . . ?

NURSE: I'm not sure I understand . . .

RYAN: The papers, television, about . . . from what Robin had said . . .

NURSE: About you? It might not be a good idea to . . . *(He looks at her, she considers.)* Well, quite a lot. You create things, things which I cannot begin to understand. You're a very creative man, perhaps a genius.

RYAN: About the other night, I mean . . . the fall.

NURSE *(Considers again; a pause)*: There's speculation, that's all.

RYAN: Speculation? . . .

NURSE *(A beat)*: Well, perhaps suspicion.

Silence; she regrets having said this.

RYAN: Suspicion? . . .

NURSE: Well, most likely you fell . . . that's the feeling . . . but maybe pushed . . . *(Pause.)* That would be suspicious, of course _ being pushed . . . But someone bumping into you . . . accidentally . . . that seems more likely . . . that seems to be a theory . . . and you drinking too much . . . You did, didn't you? . . . That is more than implied . . . *(A beat.)* And maybe something else . . .

RYAN: Something else?

NURSE: In addition to the . . . to the drinking . . .

There is a silence.

RYAN: Stuff? . . . Using stuff? . . . That's what they're saying? . . .

NURSE: Look, I shouldn't have said that, this isn't something I should be . . .

RYAN (*Shrugs*): It's possible . . .

NURSE: Because your health is what matters.

RYAN: What else?

NURSE (*A beat, sighs*): What it comes down to . . . no one knows, really . . . (*Pause.*) What I mean is . . . it's been almost two days now since the accident and no one's come . . . coming forward . . . about it . . . (*A beat.*) From what I've read and heard . . .

RYAN: Well, that's not surprising with me . . . lately. People have careers to protect . . . Dangerous knowing me if you want to keep your job, much less . . . advance . . . much less . . . (*Pause.*) . . . much less . . . (*Pause.*) Have _ do you happen to know _ have the police spoken to me? They wanted to speak to me _ that's what she . . . (*Searches.*) . . . *Robin* . . . said.

NURSE: Not to my knowledge. You don't know?

RYAN: No. I think perhaps . . . I don't think so . . . I've been to the hospital? . . .

NURSE: Of course _ you know *that*. I just said _

RYAN: Do I know that? . . . I don't know much . . . (*Pause.*) How much time do I have?

NURSE: That's an absurd question, especially for a `genius' . . . If there was any doubt about that, you'd still be in the hospital, for sure.

RYAN: It's just that . . . something's happening . . . going on . . . (*Looks at her, smiles*): You just sounded like my first wife _ Donna.

NURSE (*Also smiles*): How many have you had?

RYAN: You really want to know?

NURSE: Well, I was going to ask you to do the usual thing in cases like this _ recite the alphabet, count to ten. You know, every few hours or so. But if you want to count wives instead, that would let you off lightly _ let *me* off lightly _ *if* you've had less than ten.

RYAN (*Thinks, smiles*): I've . . . this is funny _ maybe a godsend _ but I think I've lost count. You know, the . . . (*Gestures to his head.*) . . . fall.

NURSE: Don't worry. Typical concussion case . . . Are you married now? The papers don't say.

RYAN: I'm not sure . . .

NURSE (*Laughs*): Classic concussion case, for sure.

RYAN: I mean, I don't know if *it's* gone through _ this last . . .
(*Searches for the word.*)

NURSE: Divorce? . . .

RYAN (*Bitterly*): Yes . . . last I recall, was in the throes of . . .
a . . . (*Searches for word.*) . . . a . . . *divorce*.

NURSE (*Smiles, strokes his forehead once, then takes her hand away.*) Please. Try to relax. Do it sitting up. Reasons of observation. We don't want you sleeping just yet. A precaution. I'm the one observing. That's part of my job.

RYAN: And waiting?

NURSE: I do a lot of that, too . . . (*Ruefully.*) That's for sure . . .

RYAN (*Pause*): I feel . . . (*Pause, moves a hand across his eyes.*)

Lighting change. The Nurse steps back.

NURSE (*From a distance*): Don't drift off, please don't close your eyes.

RYAN: I suppose I should thank you, John.

NURSE: And please keep John out of it.

Persons steps forward, studies Ryan for a

few moments.

PERSONS: What's that, Ryan ? _ I caught you drifting there a bit. Thought we might have lost you _ I mean, *you lost me*. Your imagination's not what it used to be.

RYAN (*Not looking at him*): Do you mean . . . memory?

PERSONS: Almost the same thing, don't you think?

RYAN (*Smiles*): Maybe . . .

PERSONS: The great ones _ they have . . . had . . . both. You were one of those, but you've lost one . . . or another . . . I hope not both . . . that could be the end.

RYAN: You said . . .

NURSE (*Sounding far away, almost an echo*): *Eyes open, please!* . . . Thank you and keep them that way. I'll get you . . . something to drink . . .

She stands off.

PERSONS: She cares about you, Ryan. Another one falling for you . . . amazing . . .

RYAN: I think you said . . . you said you'd see that I was remembered.

PERSONS: Considering it . . . No commitment yet . . . No promises . . . ``Maybe's'' the best I can do for you now. (*Pause.*)

Or for anyone else, for that matter.

RYAN (*Smiles, amused despite himself*): John. You're a kind of mad dream, aren't you? A sort of devastation?

PERSONS (*Considers it, somewhat amused himself*): I don't know, am I? Perhaps. (*Moves around a bit, pauses, considers.*) Ryan, remember we both gave speeches once, a convention somewhere . . . Miami or Boston or somewhere _ one of the stops in the early days anyway, when it was all still so new . . . And you looked out at all those faces, all those hopeful upturned faces with their pasty complexions and big ideas, and you said, ``There's room for all of us. There are opportunities for all of us in this business. There's so much we can do. We're only at the threshold. It's just the beginning" . . . You were inspiring, I give you that. My God, you made it sound like we were capable of saving the world.

A silence. Ryan says nothing.

PERSONS: They loved you for that . . . those people . . . for saying that they were going to be part of it . . . for giving them hope. I've never had that, that ability to inspire, so I've had to be . . . had to cultivate other talents. (*Pause.*) But I understood my weaknesses . . . limitations . . . and did something about them, whereas you . . . you didn't. Simply didn't bother. I guess you thought the world would accommodate you, but it doesn't work that way.

A silence. Ryan says nothing.

PERSONS: Anyway, I followed you to the podium and, and what did I say, Ryan? Do you recall? (*Pause.*) Ryan?

RYAN (*Some head pain, looking down, pause*): What I said, John?

PERSONS (*Irritated*): Not what *you* said, Ryan _ we just went over that. You're not concentrating very well, are you? What *I* said.

RYAN: Well . . . (*Pause, looks up, off.*) I think it was . . . it's been so long . . . was it something like, ``Sorry, Ryan . . . there's only room for one in this business"?

PERSONS: Good. You can remember when you want to, can't you? And how did that crowd respond, Ryan? . . .

RYAN: I'm sorry, I _

PERSONS (*A sudden anger and passion*): It _ *they* _ laughed, Ryan! I told them, I warned them _ *and you*. I put it out there. I *didn't* give them false hope like . . . Well, not that you did . . . intentionally . . . I think you believed what you said . . . But . . . it's . . . what you told them . . . it was nowhere, Ryan. A dead end. Time has proved me right. (*Pause.*) There was even press there, for God's sake. They laughed. All of them, including the press _ including *you*. Do you remember that? Because I sure do. (*A beat.*) I told you _ all of you _ there was only room for one . . . for *me* . . . I was proud of that _ proud of myself for being forthright . . . honest about my intentions . . . and none of you took me seriously.

RYAN: Now I remember _ *you* laughed when you said that, John . . . You smiled.

PERSONS: And?

RYAN: That's why they laughed.

PERSONS (*Interested*): What's the point? They didn't take me seriously?

RYAN: Of course they took you seriously. They laughed because you laughed. They feared you _ it was nervous laughter . . . forced . . .

PERSONS: Did you laugh?

RYAN: Sure, but because I *didn't* believe you. They were smarter than me. I've always been stupid that way _ lie to me and I believe you, tell the truth and . . . (*Gestures.*)

PERSONS (*Irritated*): You didn't believe me? Christ, Ryan.

RYAN: How could I? I couldn't _ still don't _ see how anyone _ in all seriousness _ could believe something that . . . that narrow and confining _ I mean, room for *only one* in a field so vast, with so much potential for good, with so much talent eager to contribute. What kind of ego claims that? It would be a crime to put that into one person's, one company's hands . . .

PERSONS: Nothing gets done your way, Ryan. . . . that's anarchy.

RYAN: Have you ever heard of ``creative chaos"?

PERSONS (*Impatiently*): Whatever the process, usually just one emerges. A dominant figure. Look at history . . . Besides, how many of those so-called creative types that were in that audience

that day, Ryan _ how many do you think are still with us? . . . Not many . . . You're among the last.

RYAN: What do you mean by `still with us'?

PERSONS: Still in the field, of course.

RYAN: *Still in the field?* Screw the field _ some of them are dead, John.

PERSONS: Yes, that may be.

RYAN: Died while young, John _ a few by their own hand . . . hands.

PERSONS: Right.

RYAN: Disillusioned . . . depressed . . . betrayed . . . fucked over . . .

PERSONS (*Weary*): It happens, Ryan, it happens.

Simultaneously, Nurse approaches with a glass as Persons backs away and lighting changes.

PERSONS (*His voice becoming distant*): Are you blaming me for them?

NURSE: Open your eyes, please.

PERSONS: Are you blaming me for *you*?

NURSE: Now!

PERSONS: Because if you are _ remember, Ryan, I'm the one who decides . . .

NURSE: Drink this, please.

PERSONS: . . . and I *don't* forget . . . I thought you understood this . . . I thought you realized . . .

Persons is gone. Ryan drinks from glass, looks at her. She waits a few moments.

NURSE: How do you feel?

RYAN: I feel a . . . a slight buzz. (*He smiles at her.*) That was quick.

NURSE: Is it a good or a bad buzz? (*Noticing his smile.*) Oh _ right, it must be good.

RYAN: As good as I've felt in some time . . . Is it legal?

NURSE: You must be feeling *very* good. It will relax you. You can sleep now, if you wish, but I will have to wake you now and then. (*She pushes the hair back off his forehead.*) Just to check. Nothing to worry about.

She leaves. Lighting change. A few moments of silence.

JIM'S VOICE: Ryan, we can't afford to delay any longer _ we need to sell now.

RYAN: *Sell?* What do you mean?

Donna and Jim both move forward, Donna somewhat reluctantly.

JIM: The bottom's falling out. The company's at fifty-million and slipping. We have to do something about it _ soon.

RYAN: It's amazing to be in trouble and be worth fifty million _ or maybe it'd be more amazing the other way around.

JIM: Our reputation's a bit shaky. Word's out you're not . . . you. Next month at this time it could be forty. And the month after that _

RYAN: Right . . .

JIM: Sinking ship . . . You forget, but there was a time we were pushing a couple hundred million.

RYAN: I don't forget. Those were the days . . . cover of . . . cover of . . . *(Pause.)* . . . what? . . . something . . .

DONNA *(Pause)*: But we're fine, Ryan.

RYAN: *Us. Financially* . . . that's what you mean.

They assent through silence.

RYAN: Well . . .

JIM: But there are others, Ryan, who aren't, who are heavily invested.

DONNA: Non-partners, people not on the board. But good people who trusted us . . . believed in us . . .

JIM: Mortgages, college education funds, you know, tied up _ with _ in _ us . . . We can't let those people lose everything.

DONNA: We can survive it, they can't.

JIM: We should have sued when we could . . .

Donna gives him a look.

RYAN: Oh, right _ sue. I forgot about that. (*Brightly hopeful.*) Too late?

JIM (*Smiles ruefully, glance at Donna*): Oh, yes, missed the seven-year window some time ago. By six or seven years. Went by like that. Papers sat on the lawyer's desk. Sat and sat. He didn't know what to do _ out of his depth. And we, we weren't much better _ we sat and sat, did nothing.

DONNA: Jim . . .

RYAN: I said, screw them. I'll come up with something new, something even greater. There's more where that came from, for God's sake.

DONNA: But there has been, Ryan . . . you've developed . . . innovated . . . educational programs for kids, an encyclopedia of the internet _

JIM (*To Donna, interjecting*): But nothing to top himself. Not the next brilliant concept. That's what he's talking about and that hasn't happened. We had to have that. Well, *we had it*, but he _ we _ gave it away.

DONNA (*Irritably*): Nothing was given away. It was taken . . . everyone knows that . . . the law wasn't clear . . . You just said as much . . . and Ryan's not done, and it can't be just on his shoulders.

JIM (*Shrugs*): You usually get just one great concept, even the 'geniuses.' Whitney the cotton gin, Franklin electricity, Morse the code, Farnsworth the TV _

RYAN (*Very dry, distant, ticking them off*): Edison the telegraph transmitter _ phonograph player _ incandescent lamp _ alkaline battery _ talking movie pictures _ microphone . . . the, the whatever he set his mind to . . .

A silence.

DONNA (*Pause*): You've been ill, Ryan . . . You've been sick.

JIM (*To Donna*): Which is why we need to get this done as soon as possible . . . We can't . . . sustain . . .

RYAN (*Pause*): And _ again _ you want me to . . . ?

JIM: Not *want* _ what we want is no longer . . . anything. It's what we need to do.

RYAN: Sell it? Sell the company now?

DONNA (*A beat*): There's no choice, Ryan.

JIM: That or stand by and watch it die . . . better someone else have it than that.

A silence. They both look at him.

RYAN: If that happens we get out OK, but the others _ the others, they lose?

JIM: Right. If we could get, say, twenty-seven, hell, twenty-five million, that would protect them, get them their money back. And the buyer will be getting a wonderful deal . . . a steal, actually . . . having the stability we lack.

RYAN: Selling a life's work _ it would include everything we've done, everything we have in development . . .

JIM: Everything? . . . I don't know . . . we could hold back on some of the latter, perhaps . . . Some of those . . . concepts . . . that we've been working on that are . . . well . . . not quite there yet . . . I mean, who'd know?

RYAN looks at him.

JIM (*A beat*): OK _ but you can't give them those things that are *still* in your head, that are not on paper. They don't get that for their lousy twenty-five million. Please don't screw yourself again, Ryan. You keep saying ``screw them'', but you're the one who gets it. You screw yourself. Don't give them what's still up here _ that's still yours.

RYAN (*Pause*): No . . . not that . . . they can't have that
(*Smiles, taps his head.*) If it's still there . . . big question.

A silence. They watch him, waiting.

RYAN (*Catches himself*): Oh, right _ business.

Lighting begins to change.

RYAN (*A long pause*): There's . . . well, there's only one person I know who could write a check for . . . that amount . . . just . . . like . . . that. Just . . . write . . . it. (*Pause, he smiles slightly, ruefully.*)

A silence. They watch him as he looks down, considers.

RYAN (*Pause, shrugs*): OK, that's settled _ meeting's concluded.

JIM: You never did like long meetings.

RYAN: Meetings period. *(Pause.)* OK, I'll fly up and see him.
(Pause.)

DONNA *(Pause)*: Don't fly yourself, Ryan.

RYAN *(Smiles)*: Don't worry. Haven't you heard? _ my pilot's license's been revoked . . . health reasons . . .

The Nurse approaches, then waits in a separate light. Donna exchanges a look with Jim, who hesitates, then steps back.

DONNA: Ryan . . .

RYAN: Yes?

DONNA: The papers are going through . . . when you return, our divorce should be final.

RYAN: Oh, right. *(Pause.)*

DONNA: I don't think we'll see each other again . . . *(A beat.)* Do you? . . .

RYAN: No. Well, by chance . . .

DONNA: Take care of yourself . . .

RYAN *(Pause)*: Thank you . . . you too . . .

Lighting change as Donna steps back.

NURSE (*After a moment*): Did you doze?

RYAN: No . . . (*Begins to struggle to his feet.*) I'm going to the airport. I have to fly to _

NURSE: To the *where?* . . . *The airport?* (*Smiles.*) Oh, you've been dozing, for sure.

RYAN: Oh, yes, I suppose . . . I thought I was

NURSE: Yes. I know _ going to the airport . . . not tonight you're not.

He stands cautiously.

NURSE: Steady . . .

RYAN: What are they saying?

NURSE: About what?

RYAN: There's not been something more? . . .

NURSE (*Pause, considers*): They _ the radio _ say there's going to be a formal investigation.

RYAN: Of my death?

NURSE: Of the accident.

RYAN: It will come to the same thing . . . no? . . . accidental death?

NURSE: No! . . . *(Pause.)* Let's hope not, shall we?

Ryan falls to his knees.

NURSE *(Going to him)*: But I think we do have a problem here.

She drops to one knee, tries to support him.

NURSE: Look at me.

RYAN *(Trying to rise)*: I have to get to the airport. I'm a pilot, you know.

NURSE: You're a grounded pilot _ Isn't that obvious to you?

RYAN: I have to see John . . . to sell the . . . people depending on it . . .

NURSE *(She tries to look into his eyes)*: You've seen John _ that was years ago . . . John is a very powerful man now _ he would not see you. I do not even think he is presently in the country. He is done with you. Don't waste your . . . strength on him. *(She snaps her fingers in front of his face.)* Wake up! _ now! _ quit dreaming!

RYAN *(Small smile)*: 'He wouldn't see me?' . . . I see you've been doing your homework, Nurse Helen.

NURSE: But not my job. You distracted me . . . You're good at that . . .

RYAN: Like that bird . . . the . . .

NURSE: No talking about birds. (*Takes his head in her hands.*)
Your eyes are glassy. (*Pause.*) Tell me about that bird . . .

RYAN: I thought . . .

NURSE: I changed my mind . . . And look at me while you do it!
. . . What is it called?

RYAN: It's called . . . called . . .

NURSE: Yes? *It's called?*

RYAN: A . . . (*Mild triumph.*) . . . a . . . *killdeer!*

NURSE: And the killdeer is good at _ *what?* (*Waits.*) Distracting
people, isn't it? . . . That's what it does!

RYAN (*Boyish smile*): Yes _ predators. Throwing people off its
trail . . . faking injury . . .

NURSE: Just like you, right? . . . (*Pause, still looking into his eyes*
_ *with deep concern.*) Well, no more . . . No more killdeer. This is
very real . . . I'm going to make a phone call, Ryan. You *will sit* _
and wait _ *understand?*

RYAN: So I'm dying . . .

NURSE: No, you are *not* dying. But it's not good. We need to get
you to . . . Look at me _ I want to see your eyes again! (*Looks into*
his eyes, a beat.) Maybe a mild hemorrhage . . . be quiet and sit
still.

RYAN (*Smiles*): First a mild concussion . . . and now . . . is there such a thing as a mild hemorrhage? . . .

NURSE: It's possible . . . for one to lead into the other . . . (*She brushes the hair back from his forehead, looks at him, pauses.*) Don't stand. Let's hope, shall we? That's important. You're better off where you are . . . Don't exert yourself _ we want to keep your heart rate down. That's important too. I'll be back in a few minutes.

RYAN: Another ambulance?

NURSE: Yes.

RYAN (*Smiles*): If you don't mind, I'd rather not _ I didn't like the last ride.

NURSE: You're not supposed to like it.

She goes, completely leaving the stage.

A radical lighting change, moody with a blue or green tint. Persons steps forward into Ryan's space, will look ``at'' Ryan in this scene as if Ryan is standing, at eye level. Ryan remains on the floor, looks straight ahead.

RYAN: . . . Could be hurt, John . . . People deeply invested, life savings tied up . . .

PERSONS: Sad, Ryan, sad sad, but what does that have to do with? . . .

RYAN: I'm fine . . . rest of the board . . . all taken care of . . .

PERSONS: Question remains the same . . . (*Looks at wristwatch.*) I assume, you fly this distance . . . you have something

RYAN makes an effort to rise, can't.

PERSONS (*Said flatly, metalically*): something difficult for you to say . . . hang-up you have . . . Where's the devil-may-care . . . ? (*Shaking his head, now ironically.*) Grounded . . . abusing your gifts . . . Someone like you, given that kind of genius, one in a million _ *hundred million* _ and pfitt! (*Shakes his head, starts off.*) Ask Donna . . . I warned you . . . Long time ago. You should have listened. Look, I have people waiting . . .

RYAN: John! . . .

Persons hesitates.

RYAN: The company, John! Twenty-five million for the company _ to you. Worth almost double that . . . easy!

PERSONS (*Stops, interested*): Really? For everything? . . .

RYAN: Yes . . .

PERSONS: Everything . . . all patents . . . all projects in development? . . .

RYAN makes an effort to rise, can't.

RYAN (*Frustrated, as he falls back onto his knees*): Yes!

PERSONS (*A beat, cocks his head*): Projects you inaugurated?
. . . we can't do it if it doesn't include projects you _

RYAN: Yes! . . .

PERSONS: Holding nothing back?

*Ryan doesn't respond, stares straight ahead,
his eyes dull, glassy.*

PERSONS: Of course _ not you. Not Ryan . . . Stupid of me . . . I
apologize for the remark. (*Pause.*) What about? _ what about, you
know, what's still in your head? . . . (*Pause.*) Ryan?

Ryan doesn't respond, stares straight ahead.

PERSONS (*Smiles*): No, I guess not. That would be asking a lot
. . . though there has to be a question of . . .

RYAN (*Smiles, slowly*): What's left there, yes . . .

*Persons nods. Ryan makes a weaker effort to stand.
Persons studies him dispassionately.*

PERSONS: One thing I have to know, Ryan _ why would you come to me with this opportunity?

RYAN: Because I think I finally understand business, John . . . and . . . and you're the person who can write the check . . .

PERSONS: Yes? And?

RYAN: And . . . *(Pause.)* . . . and I still . . . I don't know . . . I still had some kind of hope . . .

PERSONS: Well . . . *(Studies him a moment.)* I'll tell you what, Ryan, I'll tell you _ I'd like to do it, I really would . . . but you've weakened that company of yours considerably, and I can't _ I am responsible to other people, too, you know, just as you are _ and I can't justify . . . justify that kind of money on a company that's faltering . . . *(Pause.)* So I'll tell you what I'll do, out of respect for our past friendship, our shared . . . tribulations _ I'll write a check right now *(Pulls a pen and checkbook from his suit coat pocket)*, this minute, for . . . say, twelve million dollars _ and the deal is done.

A silence broken by the audible click of Persons' pen. He clicks it several times. Ryan waits a moment then smiles.

PERSONS: Why are you smiling, Ryan?

RYAN *(Pause)*: Because . . . because, John, you know what the company's worth _ and that I'm going to tell you . . . to go fuck yourself.

PERSONS (*Pause*): I think you probably will . . . (Small smile.) . . . *did* . . . and that's . . . that's unfortunate.

RYAN: You are making a bad business decision, John.

PERSONS: Perhaps.

RYAN (Taking a great effort): It will go to someone else _ a competitor _ and that competitor will come after you like I wouldn't . . . should have, but didn't.

PERSONS: Perhaps.

RYAN: And cost you money.

PERSONS: Maybe.

RYAN: *Money*, John.

PERSONS (*Immovable*): Right. I hear you, Ryan.

Ryan tries to rise.

RYAN (*Pause, he tries to concentrate, then smiles*): You know . . . it's kind of funny, John _ I think I just said I finally understood business . . .

PERSONS: And?

RYAN: Well, if I do . . . well then I have to ask myself . . . why would John Persons . . . a business genius . . . intentionally make

a bad business decision? . . . What does John Persons have to gain by that? . . .

PERSONS (*Pause*): I guess, Ryan . . . (A beat.) I guess you'll never know.

A silence, then Persons clicks pen _ the sound again heightened _ and replaces it and checkbook in his suit coat pocket. Sound of a siren in the distance. Ryan tilts his head in the direction of the sound; Persons does not hear it.

PERSONS: But If you want to be remembered . . . (*Light dimming on him.*) If you don't want people to . . .

The stage begins to darken.

PERSONS: . . . don't want people to forget . . . because, Ryan, *they do . . .*

Persons steps back and watches with others.

Ryan tries to rise, but can't.

RYAN (*After a few moments*): That's something I . . . I don't . . . / *simply . . . don't . . . can't . . . understand . . .* what you would have to gain by *that . . .*

The Nurse approaches tentatively. Ryan tries to rise but can't. The siren draws nearer then winds down as the pulsating lights from the ambulance flash through the room, at first with the rhythm of a heartbeat, then steadily decreasing.

Ryan's head drops slowly as his body folds into itself, then remains still.

End of play.