

Falling Slowly

a play

by

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CAST

JOHN – 60s
BRIAN – 40s
ANN – 40s
MEG – 60s

also..
Nurse – 30s
Hooker – 30s
Female Ghost – 40s

SCENE I

As the lights come up JOHN is standing with his back to the audience, looking out the window. His office sits on the 24th floor, so he has a majestic view of the city. His office is small and worn, but still comfortable. Books thrown casually about. Desk. A few chairs. A couch. A black and white picture of he and his wife is in a frame.

JOHN is in his 60s, large. A quiet, dignified way about him. Outwardly tender, but not one who ruffles easily. He's seen it all, and not much can come through that door and rattle him.

Through an unopened door stage left walks BRIAN. He comes in, then takes a step back and nervously taps on the door, so as not to startle. He seems a bit nervous. He's about 40 years old.

JOHN: Sorry. Caught me daydreaming here.

BRIAN: No no....sorry. The door was open so I....

JOHN: Come in come in. (sees his wet jacket) Here...give me that. Let me hang it for you. Raining again eh?

BRIAN: Yea....steady drizzle only.

JOHN: Still enough to get you wet though...

BRIAN: Yea....if you're out there long enough.

JOHN: I hate it when it's like this.

BRIAN: Yea. It's kinda....depressing (laughs at where he is)

JOHN: Well, you're in the right place for that, right?

BRIAN: Let's hope so (laughs)

JOHN: Brian...right?

BRIAN: Yea, Dr. Ross sent me over. He thought maybe....

JOHN: Ross eh? (eyes him...then introduces himself) John Feeny (shakes his hand).

BRIAN: Nice to meet you John...can I call you John?

JOHN: Sure sure...

BRIAN: Ok...

JOHN: Come come....sit down. Take a load off. Sorry about the elevators.

BRIAN: Oh...well....I need the exercise anyway. And it helped me dry off (laughs)

JOHN: Yea....well I do too....but 24 floors is a bit much. They're supposed to be back on-line tomorrow. We'll see. If not I may move these sessions lower to the ground....maybe the bar across the street.

BRIAN: Now you're talking (laughs) It's cozy in here...(looking around)

JOHN: Is it too warm you think?

BRIAN: No no....it's fine. Really. Cozy.

JOHN: You think so? I guess it's not a bad little place. A little small though....right? Still....nice and quiet this high up.

BRIAN: (looking out) Nice view.

JOHN: Yea....weird watching the city go by from all the way up here. Like TV with the sound off. You go down to the street and the noise is jarring.

BRIAN: (looking out the window) I'll bet it almost looks....what....choreographed from up here.

JOHN: That's a good way of putting it. It is like a crazy dance down there right?

BRIAN: (laughs) From here it almost like people know what they're doing.

JOHN: (laughs) Well, we can't have that or I'd be out of a job. (laughs)

BRIAN: Yea....(dries off his wet head) Traffic is terrible too. Or maybe it just seems like that with the rain and all.

JOHN: Bad time I guess. We can move the time around if you want. Make it less crazy.

BRIAN: No no....it's ok. I was rushing to get out of the house....so....

JOHN: No no....it's fine. You're right on time anyway. So...

BRIAN: Yea....ok. Only get one chance to make a first impression....so....you know....I didn't want to come running in here a half hour late or whatever....

JOHN: Please.....don't worry about me. I can barely remember to put my pants on in the morning....

BRIAN: (laughs) Ok...well...I'm glad I'm here.....and that you're wearing pants (laughs)

JOHN: Can I get you anything? Coffee maybe? I was just going to put a pot on. (gets up)

BRIAN: Oh no...no.

JOHN: C'mon....it'll warm you up. I hate to drink alone.

BRIAN: Ok....sure. I'll have some.

(JOHN starts to put a pot of coffee on)

JOHN: Ok....it'll just be a few minutes.

BRIAN: (nervous....playing with his hands) I've never been.....

JOHN: What? (getting his meaning....never been to a "shrink") Oh....yea....that's ok. It's just talk is all. No big deal anymore...right?

BRIAN: I guess not.

JOHN: Nah. Business is booming.

BRIAN: I guess there used to be more of a....stigma to it.

JOHN: Yea...it's common nowadays. Things move so fast....nothing wrong with taking a deep breath every once in a while...especially around here.

BRIAN: I guess it's easier for most to talk to a stranger than somebody close to them. Don't know why that is. Dr Ross says you're good though...Some guys he told me to stay away from. Said they...

JOHN: (cuts him off) Well.....we all have different methods to our madness I suppose.

BRIAN: Plus your office takes my insurance.

JOHN: (laughs) Well, that helps too.

BRIAN: (curious) What did Ross tell you anyway?

JOHN: I didn't talk to him directly. They just sent the paperwork over is all....Just what's in the file....(going through papers on his desk)

BRIAN: Jeez.....that could mean anything.

JOHN: (laughs) Well.....you know.....

BRIAN: You see a lot of this?

JOHN: What?

BRIAN: I don't know.....(wondering how to put it) the 9/11 gang I guess.

JOHN: Well....not so much recently. But sure....they've been here. Quite a few actually, especially right after. It's a hard thing to get past....you know?

BRIAN: (slowly) Yea well....(looking down...speaking slowly) what are...or what were they looking for?

JOHN: (pause...taken aback some) Same thing you are I guess.

BRIAN: Yea well....it sure took me long enough (runs his fingers through his hair). Seven years is a long fucking time. (curse slipped out..) Sorry.

JOHN: (not fazed) No no....There's no time-frame for this kind of thing Brian.

BRIAN: No statute of limitations.

JOHN: Right.

BRIAN: Maybe there should be...(laughs nervously)

JOHN: Only insurance companies feel that way....(smiles)

BRIAN: I wish there was just a goddamn pill you could....

JOHN: Everybody wants that. But it ain't been invented yet. Believe me. If it had....I'd take the damn thing myself...(laughs)

BRIAN: I think it may be out there.....it just may be illegal.

JOHN: (laughs) Problem with the illegal stuff is that it wears off.

BRIAN: And insurance doesn't cover it either.

JOHN: Yea, they're funny that way.

(beat)

BRIAN: (quiet...almost shyly) Do people ask you.....where you were?

JOHN: What....

BRIAN: That day.

JOHN: Oh....yea.....it's like when Kennedy was shot...right? That kind of thing. I was here. I saw everything. Well, most of it anyway.

BRIAN: (realizing the view) Jeez.....you had a front row seat from here....

JOHN: Yea...

BRIAN: (curious) Did you have someone in here with you? It was normal business hours...right?

JOHN: (laughs) Yea....

BRIAN: (laughing) How'd *that* session go?

JOHN: (laughs too) Not too well as I recall. I don't think she ever came back actually.

BRIAN: Things not so bad after all huh?

JOHN: No, I guess not. It's all about perspective right?

BRIAN: That's what they say.

(quiet now.....needing to get into it....)

JOHN: So tell me about....

BRIAN: My wife...

JOHN: Yea....tell me about her.....

BRIAN: Jeez....what do you want to know?

JOHN: Whatever you want to tell me.

BRIAN: She jumped.

JOHN: From the North tower?

BRIAN: Yea

JOHN: Jesus.....I'm so sorry.....My God.....I....can't even....

BRIAN: (helps him along) Yea....

JOHN: (squirms in his chair) I can't even imagine....

BRIAN: I know....it's not something you.....you can.....prepare for...

JOHN: You have children?

BRIAN: Yea...2 girls. They were 5 and 2 at the time. I didn't tell them. I *still* haven't told them everything. They just think she was inside when it....when it came down....

JOHN: Why haven't you told them?

BRIAN: I don't know....you know? I'm not sure how'd they'd take something like that. Being Catholic and all. It's so much damn grey area to process for kids.

JOHN: What...

BRIAN: The....

JOHN: Suicide you mean...?

BRIAN: Well yea....taking your own life. That's what she did, right? You strip all the extenuating circumstances away.....and that's what it is. I mean....you can't get a little bit pregnant....right?

JOHN: You're saying you're worried about how your kids might take it. How do *you* take it?

BRIAN: I'm pissed off that this stuff has been driven into my head to begin with. Once it's there...it's like riding a bike. You always have that bit of doubt. You know...."what if they're *not* full of shit?".....that's what you think. Hell doesn't sound like a very pleasant place....and the fucking pictures of it are even worse. (sorry it came out this way, with the curse) Sorry.

JOHN: You can express yourself any way you want in here. I'm not a priest

(they laugh)

BRIAN: Thank God for that.

(they laugh again)

JOHN: What you're saying.....it doesn't paint a very flattering picture of....er God.

BRIAN: Yea....well.....ever read the Old Testament? He can be pretty crotchedy.

JOHN: (smiles...trying to lighten the mood a bit) Faith can be a bitch.

BRIAN: (finishes the thought)on fucking wheels. (they laugh again) Can I ask you.....are you Catholic?

JOHN: Yes.

BRIAN: Yes I can ask?....or yes you're Catholic (laughs)

JOHN: I was raised one...yea....but I'm not so much now....you know?

BRIAN: Sure....that's more and more common these days....times change and sometimes the other things don't.....catch up...

JOHN: Yea...

BRIAN: I went and talked to our pastor. A few weeks after it happened...

JOHN: What did he say?

BRIAN: He said.....well he didn't come right out and *say* it....but essentially he said that rules are rules...you know? And that it was dangerous for us to try to interpret them...or whatever. So...you know....apparently God's plan was the have the fucking building fall on her...and she fucked it all up by jumping out the fucking window.

JOHN: And she's not allowed to do that.

BRIAN: No improvisation allowed.....even when it comes to a wild pack of virgin jihadists.

JOHN: (trying to minimize this) Well.....your pastor is just a man. He's as fallible as we are.

BRIAN: Yea....but that's not the way we were taught. These people were *chosen*. They answered a call...

JOHN: Well.....I think we've moved on a bit from that line of thinking...

BRIAN: Yea....but shit....parts of it are like riding a bike....isn't it? (laughs)

JOHN: I know what you mean....

BRIAN: I don't know why....

JOHN: (cuts him off) Brian.....the way you're talking, or at least reading between the lines.....it seems like you *know* all of this is....you know....open to interpretation let's say.....that God *doesn't* have a hard-on for stringent rules.....like some judge forced to give a mandatory sentence.

BRIAN: Does it sound like that?

JOHN: It does to me.

BRIAN: I guess it's just the bitterness talking. Gotta blame someone....else it's my fault...right?

JOHN: You're entitled to to be bitter.

BRIAN: Or to have a grudge maybe....

JOHN: You holding a grudge?

BRIAN: Aren't I entitled to that too?

JOHN: It depends who you're holding it against I guess....

BRIAN: It's just.....I don't know.....this isn't easy. I mean....what do you compare it to?

JOHN: I know.

BRIAN: I mean....does God have a hand in *any* of this? You know....we're supposed to believe that he stays out of the way and lets all this evil shit happen....all some sort of

divine plan or whatever.....and then he *finally* decides to intervene when somebody jumps out a window to avoid being roasted like a fucking chesnut?

JOHN: Well....that's not what I believe.

BRIAN: But that's what we're *taught*. That's what my daughters are being taught in school right now.

JOHN: (losing a bit of patience with this) Well teach 'em different when they come home. Or send them to a different school. You can't blame the nuns and the priests for all this voodoo. It's take two to tango....you know what I mean? You can browse and not buy anything...

BRIAN: Yea....but you break it....you bought it....right?

JOHN: You sure it's me you need to be talking to?

BRIAN: (sarcastic) You want me to go back to my pastor?

JOHN: (more impatient now) Well I can't forgive sins here.....all I can do is listen....and maybe unscramble some letters for you. But I don't do the spiritual side.....sorry.

BRIAN: (waving it away....weary of even thinking on it anymore) God just gets in the fucking *way* is all. Does it sound bad to say that?

JOHN: I don't know.....

BRIAN :He who is *without* sin....you know? I should have been stoned to death 100 times over.....or at least been blinded by fucking shattering glass from the glass house....you know? (smiles)

JOHN: (laughs at this) Yea....

BRIAN: Sometimes I wish we could just go in the fucking ground and stay there. This stuff'd be so much easier to take if once you were gone you were....*gone*....you know?

JOHN: I don't know. I suspect it helps some people....having faith....otherwise...what's the point of having it?

BRIAN: Does it help you?

JOHN: Sure it does.

BRIAN: How?

JOHN: (getting uncomfortable) Am I paying you or are you paying me?

BRIAN: Sorry.....I just....

JOHN: I know..

BRIAN: I get worked up over this stuff...

JOHN: That's alright....there's no.....there's no easy answers.

BRIAN: (pause...finally gets to it) I've seen her. I *see* her.

JOHN: (shocked a bit) What? Who? Your wife?

BRIAN: Yea.

JOHN: What....in your dreams...or?

BRIAN: I don't know what or where you call it. But I *see* her.

JOHN: Ok

BRIAN: I'm as sane as you are.

JOHN: I don't doubt it. (shifts in his chair) How does she.....look?

BRIAN: About as well as could be expected.....you know? Under the circumstances I mean.

JOHN: Ok...well....is she...er.....*alive* when you see her? Does she speak to you?

BRIAN: She just looks at me....and it's gotten so I don't want to close my eyes anymore. (suddenly smiles) I want to be like that guy in that movie about Jesus. You ever hear about this? The actor who played Jesus never blinked while he as on camera. I thought it was some urban legend until I sat down one night and watched it. Eyes *never* blinked. I wish I could do that. Train myself to do that. So I could only see what everybody else sees.

JOHN: You're the only one who can see her?

BRIAN: Well...yea. If there were others I probably wouldn't need to be here....right? Or maybe I'd have company.

JOHN: When did you first.....?

BRIAN: When did she first come?

JOHN: Yea....

BRIAN: Not long after. A few weeks maybe.

JOHN: Ok

BRIAN: Sounds crazy right?

JOHN: Oh....you'd be surprised the things I hear in this chair...

BRIAN: Yea well...I just need to get this off my chest. I guess it doesn't matter if you don't....I mean....

JOHN: (cuts him off) If you *think* you see her....then you see her. Is it in your dreams or...?

BRIAN: When do the dreams end and the night begin....you know? When you close your eyes and see someone, I guess it's a dream. But when you open them and she's *still* there...I'm not sure *what* you call that. (laughs) Time to call the shrink maybe....

JOHN: Or grief....or even love. You could call it a million things. It's not uncommon.

BRIAN: Yea...but here's what it *did* to me. I guess that's what matters...right? (pause) It got so I didn't want to sleep anymore. Because she'd come then. If I could stay awake.....you know....stay out of the dark....it was Ok. Every light in the house was on all the time....you know....24 hours a day. I stopped tucking my kids in bed.....wasn't able to anymore. (long pause) It started with the coffee....

JOHN: Oops...that reminds me....let me get that...(he gets up and pours 2 cups....then realizes what he had been saying)...sorry.

BRIAN: Black is fine.

JOHN: You sure it's Ok?

BRIAN: Yea....the coffee phase didn't last long....believe me.

JOHN: (getting the gist of this) You needed something a little more....robust?

BRIAN: You could say that.

JOHN: Like?

BRIAN: Name it.

JOHN: Pills....?

BRIAN: It got so I'd take anything I could get my hands on. Turned into a damned junkie....staying up for days. Coke. Pills. Anything to get up....and nothing to come back down. It was like climbing up those stairs....with those firemen....you know? Just up....and then you'd get to a corner....and turn....and there's another set of stairs. Another floor. So you go up again. Trying not to think about what you're getting into. Maybe I was thinking about reaching her....saving her....I don't know. I was so wired I couldn't function anymore. Couldn't work. My mother in law had to take the kids. I'm building fucking fires in the fireplace in June....in case the power goes out.

JOHN: How you doing now? You look Ok I mean. Clear eyed.

BRIAN: Yea....well.....I needed to look my kids in the eye again. So I sweated it out....I got clean.

JOHN: And how are you sleeping now?

BRIAN: Well....it's like going underwater for 8 hours. You just hold your breath....right? "If I should die before I wake...."....there's a fucking lovely thought eh?

JOHN: Do you still see her?

BRIAN: Yes

JOHN: (confused) But why are you dealing with this now.....instead of back then I mean.

BRIAN: You said yourself there's no time table.

JOHN: No....there's not. I was just wondering if something happened recently....

BRIAN: (cuts him off) Seven years is a long time.

JOHN: (not pushing it....leaning back in his chair) Still seems like yesterday it happened though. God....what a terrible day.

BRIAN: (looking out the window) Yea.....you look out there....and you still can't get used to the view.

JOHN: Time is supposed to make things easier.

BRIAN: You believe that?

JOHN: (waves his arms around the room) That's what all these books tell me.

BRIAN: 'Course.....your wife never threw herself out a fucking window.....

JOHN: (taken aback by this....not sure what to say....) No.

BRIAN: Sorry...

JOHN: No no...

BRIAN: We talked about the sound being off....remember? So quiet. When I see her. And she's falling. There's nothing. No screams. Nothing. Just....silence. And I can almost get to her. I can feel it. I can almost feel the breeze as she goes by. That's how close. But I can't. And she falls. Again and again.....she falls.

JOHN: Um...

BRIAN: (matter of fact) I tried staying in other places...

JOHN: And you still see her?

BRIAN: Yea.

JOHN: (gently...smile) She's following you.

BRIAN: The house....I don't know. It's like the house itself is just waiting for her to get home from work. Like a big giant inhale. Being there....it just feels so *normal*. It's not spooky. It's not some big echoey place....like in the movies. Everything is so damn normal. It's just that....she's not there. And when the night comes....and sleep won't stay away no matter what I do....she's comes. And I don't know what the fuck she's trying to do. Is she trying to help me? Hurt me? Save me? So I run. Friend's couches. Hotels. Back home to my parent's house....

JOHN: Where's that?

BRIAN: Scranton...

JOHN: (laughs) Jeez....she follows you there too?

BRIAN: It's either true love or the girl is fucking crazy.

(they both laugh....then a silence....)

JOHN: Still....I guess I need to know. Why now?

BRIAN: (shifts on the couch....slowly) This reporter from a paper in Canada calls me....and says he's got this series of photos....from a photographer from the Associated Press. It's a woman....falling. A few papers ran one of the photos on 9/12....not in the city though. I hear they ran it in Allentown. But I never saw it. Hardly anybody did. I guess public reaction was brutal where they did print it. It was too....what?.....it was just

too much too soon I guess. This wasn't what the country needed on 9/12.....to see people splattering on the sidewalk from 100 stories up...you know what I'm saying? So I hear they buried the fucking thing. Never showed it again. Instead we get shots of firemen working in the rubble....and hoisting the flag....and the President on his megaphone. You know....I'm not gonna say that's wrong. We needed to heal.....we needed to come together. We needed to cry on each other's shoulders.

JOHN: So this guy is telling you this is your wife in the pictures?

BRIAN: Well, he *thinks* it's her. But he wants to be sure. You know.....he's trying to win a Pulitzer or something.....he's gonna tell us what it all means...all this kind of psychiatric bullshit.....(sorry....they laugh) I don't know what anybody has to gain from any of this...you know? She's fucking dead. She's not coming back...

JOHN: (pause.....quietly) But she does *comes* back.....in your dreams she's still....what?.....she's still like she is in those pictures. Halfway maybe. Between living and dying....

BRIAN: I don't know if it's her. I told him I wouldn't look at them. I kept putting the guy off and he finally showed up at my door....and I broke his fucking nose.

JOHN: (stunned) You what?

BRIAN: Yea.....it was just a...what? A *visceral* reaction I guess....if that's the right word. I think it was the first time I was mad instead of sad....since that day. You know what I mean? It felt pretty good actually.

JOHN: (laughs) Ok...

BRIAN: I think in a way he expected it anyway.....this was like walking on hot coals, wasn't it? He didn't call the cops or nothing. He just stood there and bled all over my front porch for a few seconds....and then he left a manilla envelope in my mail box...and fucked off back to Canada I guess.

JOHN: He left the pictures?

BRIAN: I don't know what he left. I assume that's what he left.

JOHN: You never looked?

BRIAN: No.

JOHN: Ok.

BRIAN: Not yet anyway.

JOHN: You planning on it....someday maybe? You have the envelope at least?

BRIAN: Yea, I have it.....Jeez...would *you* look at it? If it was your wife? I mean...

JOHN: I don't know. Why do you think she keeps.....coming to you?

BRIAN: (laughs) I should ask her...

JOHN: Why don't you?

BRIAN: (silent...almost in a whisper) I don't know if I want to know the answer....

LIGHTS

SCENE II

JOHN'S office. Nighttime. The place is a mess. Papers everywhere. An opened suitcase with clothes hanging out of it sits on the floor. An open whiskey bottle sits on the desk, and JOHN stands with his back to the audience looking down at the city below, glass in hand. After a few moments, he drains the last of his glass and pulls an afghan off the back of the couch. He lays down and covers himself.....trying to sleep. He seems strangely calm about it all.

There are footsteps heard on the steps....and then a woman enters through the office door, which is unlocked. She peers into the dark.....calling out "John?"

She is ANN, JOHN'S mistress. Around 40. Attractive. She's somewhat out of breath. She calls out again...

ANN: John?

(He stirs from the couch, and she looks....his way.)

JOHN: Annie?

ANN: What the hell are you doing?

JOHN: I'm trying to sleep. Well....I *was* trying to sleep.

ANN: This is your office. You're supposed to sleep at home.

JOHN: Yea....well....talk to my wife about that.

ANN: She tossed you *again*?

JOHN: It'll blow over.

ANN: Uh huh

JOHN: What's going on? What are you doing here?

ANN: Oh....just got a bit of news to share. You never answered your pager.... I didn't see the car in the driveway.....and (looking over at his desk) your phone is off the hook

JOHN: I'm trying to sleep.

ANN: (jealous) You get other calls at night too?

JOHN: (ignoring the taunt) I'm kinda drunk right now dear. Can we do this in the morning?

ANN: No....we need to do it now.

JOHN: Well.....then I'm gonna need a drink...

(he gets up from the couch and heads over to the desk, where he pours himself another drink. in the meantime, ANN turns on some lights, which hurt his eyes, already bleary from the drink)

JOHN: (covering them) Jesus.....

ANN: Let there be light.....jeez....you look like hell.

JOHN: Turn them off then. (she doesn't) You want one too? (meaning a drink)

ANN: Sure. Pass it along.

JOHN: What time is it anyway?

ANN: After midnight. One I think.

JOHN: Christ....is it that late?

ANN: Well....time flies when you're having fun (she peels off her coat) It's so hot in here. How can you stand it? (she cracks open a window....then feels that heat is coming out of the radiator) Christ....the heat's on.

JOHN: I keep forgetting to turn it off.

ANN: And you're covered in that afghan?

JOHN: I hate the cold....you know that.

ANN: John....um...

JOHN: Can't this wait? I'm seeing three of you.

ANN: Yea....well listen to the one in the middle....

JOHN: Thank God I can write my own prescriptions.....

ANN: Well....

JOHN: What?

ANN: I'm pregnant.

JOHN: (shocked....pause) What?

ANN: You heard me. This might be a good time for another drink..

JOHN: (suddenly shivering) Jesus...it's freezing in here. What do you mean you're pregnant!?

ANN: Are you kidding me? You need me to explain it you you?

JOHN: Oh Jesus....

ANN: You seduced me on your couch....and now I'm going to have your baby. Drink up.

JOHN: This is crazy. I'm.....

ANN: You're what?!

JOHN: Er...

ANN: Married?

JOHN: Well....yea.

ANN: (looking at his surroundings) Happily too I see.

JOHN: I told you these things always blow over with her when she..... (long pause) My God. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to....Jesus.....you're my *patient*.

ANN: (smartass) Quite the service you provide.

JOHN: Stop it...

ANN: Test came back today. Two months in. (he buries his face in his hands....he can't believe this) I figured you should know.

JOHN: Yea...

ANN: John....I'm sorry....really I am.

JOHN: (reaching out for her) No no....what are you saying that for? C'mon now...we'll get through this....c'mon

ANN: I don't know. I just....

JOHN: How much will it cost?

ANN: How much will what cost?

JOHN: I'll pay for it.

ANN: (smart-ass) You talking about college tuition or what?

JOHN: Annie....we can't have this baby.

ANN: *We?*

JOHN: Annie....c'mon.

ANN: (confused now....getting upset) Just give me some time will you? I just need.....I just needed to tell you. Look...I gotta go (she gets up to leave....but he stops her)

JOHN: No no....Annie....Ok....I'm sorry. Really I am.

ANN: Stop saying you're sorry. It's just....

JOHN: What?

ANN: (stands up....looks around the room) It's weird seeing this place at night. And you looking so....disheveled. You're usually so crisp and clean....the charm oozing from you. (pause....looking intently at him....having a realization) You know what it is? You *finally* look your age.

JOHN: Yea well....I wasn't expecting this. If I knew you were coming I'd have rubbed on some fucking Nivea.....

ANN: (cuts him off) It's alright. (pause) Wait a minute. How old are you anyway? I don't think I ever asked.

JOHN: Well.....I'm not gonna ask you to guess....it might ruin the moment we got going here. (hand on head....it's pounding now) Can you go out and come back in again. I swear I heard you say you were pregnant....

ANN: (looking out the window) I guess it doesn't matter. Christ....what a view.

JOHN: Makes the obscene rent almost worth it I guess....

ANN: Almost. Sad though....a view like this....isn't it?

JOHN: It can be....but....

ANN: I remember the first time I came in. You remember that day? Jesus....I was shaking so bad I couldn't hold the coffee you offered me. Spilled it all over your floor.

JOHN: Yea....I remember.

ANN: (tender, looks at him) Do you really?

JOHN: (soft) Yea....I do.

ANN: That makes me feel good. Don't know why....

JOHN: (defensive) What did you think?

ANN: I know there's probably others.

JOHN: What are you talking about? There's no others. Why are you thinking that way...

ANN: It's Ok. It's not fair.....all the shit I dumped on you. It's not fair to a *lot* of people actually.

JOHN: Stop that now....c'mon.

ANN: After a while nobody else wanted to listen. Nobody wanted to hear it. It was just...."lady....get over it already"....you know what I mean?

JOHN: Yea....I know

ANN: (pissed) *Get over it*. I can't tell you how many times I've heard that over the years. Get over it. Get over it. Like I tripped and fell or something. People will give you only so much....even after something like this. You know how it feels when you start making other people uncomfortable just by being there?

JOHN: (laughs) I have a pretty good idea....

ANN: Yea...well...

JOHN: Short memories. Short attention spans. Or just things moving too damn fast. Everybody afraid something's gonna get past them....like missing a fucking cab or something.

ANN: You always listened though.

JOHN: (not meaning for this to be offensive, but it sorta is) Annie....that's my *job*.

ANN: (wanting it to be so) Well....it was more than that after a while....wasn't it?

JOHN: (not very convincingly) Yea....it was.

ANN: I didn't know what to do. I was walking the streets like a ghost....taking any pill I could charm any doctor out of. And then I came here....I don't even want to say it was a last resort....'cause that would mean I had some hope to begin with. I don't know what it was. Jesus John.....

JOHN: You were ready. That's when it happens. Not a minute before. It wasn't me. It was you.

ANN: It was like walking in the pitch dark....with your arms in front of you....feeling your way. Scared to death, you know? And then finally brushing past something that you recognize. It....what.....it *orients* you again. How's that for an explanation? I should be sitting in that chair.

JOHN: (smiles) You were always smarter than me.

ANN: Well.....yea...

JOHN: Are you gonna be Ok?

ANN: Yea....I'll be fine. You know me...

JOHN: Annie.....what happened between us broke about 1000 different rules.....professional, personal.....It's not something I take lightly....but to me it's more than brushing past something comfortable in the dark. I want to make this....but I just....I don't know....

(she walks towards the window and peers out into the darkness)

ANN: I don't know either.

JOHN: But I still want...

ANN: What? What do you want?

JOHN: You.....I guess I still want you.

ANN: No you don't.

JOHN: Annie....

ANN: (cutting him off) I still can't believe he's gone. What's it been? Seven years now? Jesus...between photo albums and picture frames and old clothes hanging in the closet...how the hell am I supposed to forget? Tools in the garage. Paint drops on the cellar floor. Even the toys he put together on those Christmas Eve's.....you look at them and wonder why he's not coming through the door.....you know what I mean?

JOHN: I always wanted what you had. Maybe that's why I....I mean we.....

ANN: Jealous?

JOHN: Maybe...

ANN: It...he....wasn't something that I took lightly. While it was happening I *knew* it was special. That's the difference....isn't it? If you don't recognize it until it's gone, what's the damn point of having it in the first place?

(JOHN walks to the window and peers out into the city night...silent for a time)

JOHN: (almost to himself) What's the point...

ANN: But now....

JOHN: Yea....now.

ANN: All that's gone. It's only real if you can touch it. And I can't touch it....I can't touch him....anymore

JOHN: But it *was* real Annie. You had more than most.

ANN: It's better to love and lose than to never love at all.....right?

JOHN: Fuck.....I sure hope so.

ANN: (slumps down on the couch) Christ....I'm barely 40. You know that? I feel like the tiredest 40 year old in the world. The phone rings now and I jump. I turn the ringer off half the time. (looks at him....with a sly smile) You're not gonna bill me for this session are you?

JOHN: (smiles) No Annie....this one's on the house.

ANN: You're so sweet.

JOHN: I know.

ANN: Jeez....I can't remember half the things I've said to you over the years. It must've sounded crazy...

JOHN: No. You lost someone you loved.....under horrible circumstances. What's it's supposed to sound like?

ANN: That last call.....he sounded so scared. He knew there was no way he was gonna get down. And he was alone....got blown apart from everyone else....and he was alone. In the dark. You know.....you can find strength you never knew you had when you're with a group. He was the kind that would have rallied them all.....take them by the hand. Give them a kick in the ass. You know....whatever. But here he was alone....and none of that comes out then. It's just raw fear...you know? He was like a little boy on the phone. He lost it. Just lost it. At one point he said...."Annie, come get me". You believe that? That's what he said. It was like a knife to my heart that nobody pulled out yet. You know what I said? I said "I'm coming.....I'm coming to get you.....I love you so much...I'm coming"...and then I heard over the phone what I was seeing on the TV. And that was it. Dust to dust. (long pause) Did I ever tell you about the call?

JOHN: Some of it....but not....

ANN: (cuts him off) Yea. The last bit I kept to myself....from the "picklocks of biographers"...I heard somebody say that once. Some things you keep to yourself. I didn't want anybody talking me out of thinking that he really *thought* I was coming. That he was comforted in that. You would have been good at that.

JOHN: Do you think he thought that? Really and truly?

ANN: If you heard him, you'd know. We had this pact. From when we fell in love. That one would never let the other fall.

JOHN: Jesus Annie, how do you stop somebody from falling?

ANN: You never let go.

JOHN: (softly) Yea....but when they're gone.....

ANN: Where's the rule that says you have to let go then?

JOHN: I can't imagine hanging on to a....

ANN: What? A memory? Or a ghost?

JOHN: I don't know. Yea, I guess that's what I mean.

ANN: Well aren't you doing the same damn thing?

(he stares back at her....uncomfortable....says nothing)

ANN: What am I doing here John? Tell me.....what are *we* doing? Christ....I'm fucking my therapist. This is a Lifetime movie plot. I feel like Meredith Baxter Birney.

JOHN: (laughs...breaks the tension) Does she still have the Birney?

ANN: Doesn't she? What....she got divorced?

JOHN: I think it's just Meredith Baxter now.

ANN: John.....you can't even rely on Meredith Baxter Birney anymore. Jesus....everybody is splitting themselves in two....like atoms. What are we doing?

JOHN: Maybe we're just holding on....

ANN: To what though?

(he reaches for her hand)

JOHN: To something you can feel....with your hand. Something right in front of you.

ANN: Yea....well I don't want to hold on anymore. It's too damn hard.

JOHN: Well what then?

ANN: I'm done....I have to be done here....don't I? I can't do it anymore.

JOHN: (appears shocked) What do you mean? You mean the therapy right? Not....us.

ANN: Christ John....what fucking *therapy*? We roll around on the couch like a couple of animals and then I get a bill.

JOHN: Annie....it just happened. You can't just shut it off like the shower water. I just...I guess I just fell in love with you and....

ANN: Oh Jesus John.....*love*? Please. A few minutes ago you're throwing money at me to abort our child.

JOHN: I'm just trying to be practical Annie. I'm just trying....

ANN: John....it's gotta be over. I'm going to have this baby. Nobody has to know who the father is. And you can wake up tomorrow and go back to your wife.

JOHN: If it's about her.....I'll.....settle things....

ANN: Don't insult me any more than you already have John. Please....

JOHN: It's just.....you don't understand. She's not been well and....

ANN: (snaps) Jeez....married to you? I can't imagine why.

JOHN: Annie please....you don't know what it's like at home.

ANN: You know what I feel like? Somebody in free-fall. And I look at you...and I see the same thing. You remember that day? You could see them. Flying out of the windows. Arms flapping like birds.....fighting it all the way down to the ground. That's what it looked like. Like they were trying to right themselves. To land in a more.....dignified way. So let's at least do that. Let's try to be dignified about this. Christ. You're as screwed up as I am. It's like I'm fucking myself....

JOHN: (exploding) Christ Annie.....you can't just come in here and tell me you're carrying my child.....and then....*this*.

ANN: Listen....I don't want anything. Money....nothing. I just want to get away from all this. How can I stay here? With that view from the fucking window.

JOHN: But you can't get away from it. You *can't*. Where are you gonna go? Who are you gonna meet? No matter where you go....the shadow of those towers is gonna follow you.

ANN: What are you trying to do? Chain me to them? Bury me in the fucking rubble too?

JOHN: Annie.....he's not coming back. Dammit....it's been 7 years. He's not coming back.

(she breaks down in tears....)

ANN: He accepted it. Dying. He just.....laid there and took it. JESUS CHRIST! I kept saying to him over and over...."you gotta move.....try to get to the stairs"....over and over. He could have gotten out....right? But he was paralyzed. Wouldn't move. Didn't see anybody else. Didn't want to let go of the phone...of me on the other end. "Come and get me....come and get me....."I tried so hard. (she screams) YOU SON OF A BITCH! (cries...) I'm coming.....I swear I'm coming to get you.....(sobbing uncontrollably now)

JOHN: It's not your fault....(comforting her.....holding her in a tight embrace)

ANN: You know....those jumpers. I wish he was one of them. They stood up and said "hell no.....I'm not taking this".....you know what I mean? I'd feel better knowing he was one of them.....and died like a man instead of some scared animal. How long does a promise *not* to let go have to last? How long are you held to it? Jesus.....I wear out my knees praying and nobody's answering me.

JOHN: If you let go I'll catch you....

(she looks into his eyes.....and they kiss)

ANN: John.....

JOHN: I'll catch you.....

ANN: Why?

JOHN: I'll catch you.

ANN: Can you answer?

JOHN: I'll catch you

(they kiss passionately....and tumble onto the couch as the lights dim...and then fade. after a few moments to represent the passage of the evening...the lights come back and they are awakening where they lay...she gets up and prepares to leave)

JOHN: Leaving so soon?

ANN: It's morning. (looks at her watch) Jeez...it's *way* morning.

JOHN: Stay longer....

ANN: (teasingly) Some of us have to earn a living.

JOHN: Tuesday?

ANN: Yea....

JOHN: Annie.....

(she looks at him....he hesitates)

JOHN: I'll pay for it.

ANN: (resigned) I know. Ok....

(she leaves as he sits up on the couch. he heads over to his desk and pours himself a drink....putting his phone back on the hook as he does so. he then checks that he has a dial tone, and dials his voice mail number. he seems pleased. he deletes the messages that he has and hangs up...picking the phone back up to make a call.....)

JOHN: Hey it's me. Yea....I'm at the office. I just got here. I'm sorry....I got the dates mixed up. You wanna meet somewhere? I'm starved. (salaciously) Yea....for food too. Don't worry about it. You worry too much. He won't find out. It's therapy....remember?

LIGHTS

SCENE III

The following week. JOHN'S office again. It looks cleaned up. The suitcase is gone. There are no signs that he's been sleeping there. BRIAN is at the door again. JOHN is standing at the window, looking out again. BRIAN gently knocks...

BRIAN: Hey doc....

JOHN: Brian....come on in. Sit down sit down.

(sees his jacket is wet again....comes over and helps him out of it)

JOHN: You seem to bring the rain.

BRIAN: Yea....harder this time.

JOHN: Take the elevator this time?

BRIAN: Is it working?

JOHN: Yea....don't tell me you took the stairs again...

BRIAN: Getting used to it I guess. Keeps the blood flowing.

JOHN: You'll wear yourself out before I have a chance to bill you....

BRIAN: (laughs) I'm Ok.

(he settles in...sits down)

JOHN: So how are you? Where'd we leave off?

BRIAN: Not sure....

JOHN: Haven't punched any more reporters have you?

BRIAN: (laughs) Not recently....no.

JOHN: What about the pictures he left for you. Did you ever....

BRIAN: No.

JOHN: Ok. (beat) Have you...are you still.....seeing her?

BRIAN: You think I'm nuts don't you?

JOHN: Brian.....I told you....if you see her....you see her. That doesn't make you nuts.

BRIAN: What does it make me then?

JOHN: It doesn't make you anything. Just somebody trying to come to terms with losing a loved one.

BRIAN: By bumping into her when I go to the bathroom?

JOHN: (laughs) Well.....whatever it takes.

BRIAN: You get a lot of people claiming to see their dead wives do you?

JOHN: (shifts....uneasy) Well....I wouldn't say that exactly. But compared to most they send over here....you're as normal as green grass.

BRIAN: (out of left field) How do you know someone isn't full of shit?

JOHN: Come again?

BRIAN: When they talk to you. Can you tell if they're lying?

JOHN: Well....I'm not sure what you mean. I still get paid if you lie. But why would anybody come all the way down here.....to lie? What would they get out of that?

BRIAN: So you have to trust them.....er.....us.

JOHN: There's a certain amount of trust....yea. I guess. What brings this up?

BRIAN: I don't know....I just imagine you hear some....pretty interesting stuff.

JOHN: Yea....sometimes. (laughs) That's one word for it.

BRIAN: Well...I'm not sure how this is gonna sound...but sometimes she.....she *scared* me.

JOHN: Scared you.....how?

BRIAN: Just how much she seemed to.....*need* me. She didn't have a whole lot of confidence. Like we'd go to a party....and she'd grab hold of my hand....and not let go. Wouldn't even let me go to pee....you know? Didn't want me to leave her alone. And when I was out....she'd call the cell.....10, 15 times a day. Not nervous or anything. Not screeching at me or anything.....like some do. You know....just to say hi....or to ask if I needed anything at the store. Or to tell me something about one of the kids. She had lots of friends before we met....and when we were dating...but she kinda let them slide away. It was nothing *I* did. And then the kids come and you've got an excuse...right? You get wrapped up in what's happening within the 4 walls.

JOHN: You lose touch....

BRIAN: Yea...and you can start to kinda shrivel up. Hey look.....I'm not a very strong guy to begin with....you know? I mean....if I was, I wouldn't be here. I'd tough it out. And now I was dealing with somebody who was leaning on me. It sounds terrible to say. It really does because I loved her and I never stopped loving her. And we had a good life together. Nice house. Good jobs. Kids in private school. Money was never a problem. To everybody...we were the perfect couple....you know?

JOHN: Sounds like to her you were the perfect couple too...

BRIAN: (leaning forward) Exactly. Exactly. That's what I'm saying. There was never anything *wrong*. There could never be anything wrong. If I fucked up....she'd always find a way to make it *less* of my fault....or even her fault...you know what I mean? She'd never just stand there and go toe to toe with me. She'd never just come right out and say...."you know Brian, you're full of shit".

JOHN: Is that what you wanted?

BRIAN: Well...really....who wants that...you know?

JOHN: Yea....I guess.

BRIAN: I don't know. Maybe I was looking for....a little opposition. Sounds perfect right? A wife who's not screaming at you. Not giving you hell. She'd take care of the kids....the house.....she always looks great. Looked as good as the day I married her. All she wants....really....is attention. She wants to know that I love her. She wants to know that I'm there. She can't sleep unless I'm in the bed with her. If there were nights I was up....she'd stay up too. When I had problems at work....or whatever....she'd want to solve them. You know....right *then*. I'd tell her to go out....you know....do something for herself. Buy herself something nice. She deserved that. She really did. And she'd come

home with bags of stuff for *me*. You know...saying she just bumped into this sale or whatever, and couldn't pass it up. And I'd say..."did you get yourself anything?"....and she'd be like....."nah....I couldn't find anything good"....you know? It drove me fucking nuts after a while. You know....I didn't.....

JOHN: You didn't deserve this?

BRIAN: Is that what I was gonna say?

JOHN: I don't know....isn't it?

BRIAN: Maybe....I don't know. But yea....in a way. I could be a real shithead sometimes, you know? I *didn't* deserve this. Somebody like her should have been reserved for someone special. Someone who could match her.....her goodness. Her grace. Somebody strong enough to need her.

JOHN: You never did?

BRIAN: What?

JOHN: Need her?

BRIAN: You're supposed to be taking my pulse....what do you think?

JOHN: C'mon Brian....that's a cop-out. You feel like shit because she loved you more than you loved her. Where's it written that it's gotta be equal? There's degrees of love I guess...the *severity* of it....or whatever.

BRIAN: Well that's fucking comforting. Is that written in your books too?

JOHN: Just something I believe in.

BRIAN: (sarcastic edge) So it's more like some sort of cosmic emotional misunderstanding then?

JOHN: I don't know. Sounds to me like she thought she found the match she needed...and maybe that blinded her to the gulf.

BRIAN: So what does that mean? She's too stupid to realize that I'm treating her like shit all these years?

JOHN: Brian....

BRIAN: (cuts him off) The last thing I ever wanted to do was hurt her. She was like China...you know? Fine China.

JOHN: Yea...

BRIAN: And now's she's gone? So how do I make it up? Because....in a way, I just know I could have gotten away with it....*somehow*. Talked my way out of it I mean. If I just had the chance.....face to face mean.

JOHN: Talk your way out of *what* exactly?

BRIAN What was it.....around quarter to 9 wasn't it?

JOHN: What....that morning?

BRIAN: Yea. She called my cell phone. I missed the call. I called her back.....maybe an hour later. Her message just said to call....you know? There wasn't anything in her voice saying that something just happened. She called me all the time. She didn't sound any more frantic than usual....

JOHN: So you were at work too?

BRIAN: (pause) Actually.....I was with another woman.

JOHN: (shocked) What's that?

BRIAN: Yea....now you're gonna earn your money....right? I was fucking another woman. At the very moment the plane hit the North tower...

JOHN: Ok..

BRIAN: It gets kinda complicated now I guess...

JOHN: I guess.

BRIAN: Do you wanna know where I met her....or what?

JOHN: Who? Your wife?

BRIAN: No...this woman.

JOHN: Um....Ok....Sure. Where'd you meet her?

BRIAN: Maybe it matters...you know? (waits....then goes on) I was at this thing for work...one of those conferences....where they throw you together and try to make you play nice with others.

JOHN: So you work with this woman?

BRIAN: No....she were there....I guess for lunch or something. And we met up...started talking. Turns out she was going through a nasty divorce.....something like that. She needed to unload on somebody.....you know.....with her fucking marriage horror stories. If it wasn't me it coulda just as easily been the guy sitting next to me....or the goddamn bartender.

JOHN: So it's safe to say that there wasn't much of an....(twisting the knife a bit maybe) *cosmic emotional* connection then?

BRIAN: No....it never really progressed that far.

JOHN: How long did the affair last...

BRIAN: Well it *ended* on 9/11, I can tell you that.

JOHN: But that morning wasn't the only time you...

BRIAN: (finishes for him) No...it was going on for a couple of months I guess. She'd call me at work...or send me an email...and we'd meet up for drinks and whatever. I think it started in the summer. I'm not sure.

JOHN: She sounds like the take charge type...

BRIAN: Yea....you could say that. After a while it was like going to the fucking hardware store.

JOHN: So how do you.....er.....feel about all this?

BRIAN: (slightly sarcastic) Well....I was sitting on the edge of the bed....naked as the day I was born....with another woman.....with my wife on the other end of the phone waiting to die. How do you *think* I feel?

JOHN: (slightly taken aback) I don't know. Just in telling me....you seem....I don't know....detached maybe. Almost like you're talking about someone that happened to someone else.

BRIAN: Do I?

JOHN: Yea...

BRIAN: Well, like I said....this is my first time..

JOHN: I know...

BRIAN: I'm not sure how I'm supposed to...

JOHN: I know....I don't know either..

BRIAN: She was crying hysterically when I got her. And I turned on the TV.....and I saw the fire....and the smoke. And I was trying to count down....you know....to figure out the floors. But I didn't know how tall it was. I wasn't sure how many floors it was total. I kept telling her she had to get out. You know....start running. The stairs I said. The elevator was too dangerous.....I was almost glad yours was out...you know? (slows down now...almost in a trance)....and then her voice got real calm....and she started asking about the kids. You know...."never mind the kids, the kids are fine. You need to get out!" But she was real insistent. How are the kids? Are they ok? I said yea...they're fine. And then she made me promise that I would tell them that she was sorry. I said "Sorry for what?"....you know. She's got nothing to be sorry for. But she had already decided. She knew what she was gonna do.

JOHN: What?.....What do you mean? Decided to jump?

BRIAN: You could see them on the TV.....at first we thought they were birds.

JOHN: (shocked by this) Did she tell you she was gonna jump?

BRIAN: She said....she said...."I *know* where you are....and I know what you're doing." She said it like that....like somebody ordering tea. I could hear the noise in the background....I swear I heard screams. I said....you know...."what are you talking about? I'm at work. Where do you think I am?" And she said...."no, you're not. I know what you're doing. And I know where you are." It didn't even sound like her. It was like it was somebody else's voice. I just kept screaming at her....."you have to get out....you have to get out. I'm coming down there." And here I am hopping around the room with the phone in one hand and trying to get my pants on with the other. You know....a guy can't get much more disgusting than this. You ever hear that saying "fear and loathing?"

JOHN: Hunter Thompson...

BRIAN: Well....I know what he means. Fear and Loathing. That's what it was like then....and that's what it's still like now....all these years later. I'm sitting in this hotel room....forced to share these final moments with a woman who's last name I never bothered to learn. Like I said.... at first I thought they were birds.....and then it sorta dawned on everybody...I think.....at the same time....just what we were seeing. Weird though....with all that smoke. But these were *people* jumping out of that tower. They're waving sheets....or whatever they have.....calling for help. And helicopters are flying back and forth....they can't do anything. And there's no such thing as a superhero...right? No superman or spiderman or batman is gonna come and whisk these people away. And God sure as shit ain't gonna do anything. This whole thing is done in his name...right? Or somebody's idea of him anyway. Allah or Yahweh or Jah or Buddha or Bob Fucking Dylan....who knows anymore. But it doesn't matter. They're gonna die without any comfort from any supreme being. All they can do is choose how. And there I was.....I felt like I was burying myself alive.

JOHN: All this...and you still had time to be worried about your wife being right with God....for jumping. What about *you*?

BRIAN: I was wondering when you were going to bring that up.

JOHN: Well....I'm a little slow....but I come around.

BRIAN: God is more for her than for me. That much I know. I don't want anyone watching over me. I don't want to answer to someone I don't fucking know. That's too much like living down here isn't it? (pause) So I can blot out the damn sun if I have to. She was so pure...so weak...that I *had* to worry about her. I'd given up on myself a long time before 9/11.

JOHN: Brian.....sounds to me like you want to take responsibility but don't know how. And by that I don't mean the planes....I...

BRIAN: (cuts him off) Oh no? I heard the TV say that the plane had hit between the 92nd and the 98th floors. That was the first time I heard the numbers. I just assumed...you know? But she was on the 85th floor. That's where she worked. Her whole office got out. But she didn't.

JOHN: (shocked....getting it now) So what are you saying? That she didn't *have* to jump?

BRIAN: I killed her. As sure as you're sitting here. I killed her. With words. Or lack of them. With deeds...or lack of them. With secrets and whispers. What does that make me? Any better than those savages who drove that plane into the building? And now I got some guy knocking on my door saying...."excuse me sir....but is this a picture of your wife falling out of the north tower?" My soul is fucking barren. I'm not looking to be healed. I'm not looking for redemption.

JOHN: (*baffled by all this....loses his composure for a moment*) Well then what the hell are you doing here then? What do you want me to do? Give you some pills to make it all go away? Who do I look like? Father fucking Flanagan? You know what I think? I think she's gonna keep coming at you until you face up to what you did. Until you face up to the fact that you dirtied something as pure as she was. You say it...but it still sounds robotic. If that's her in those pictures, you need to see them....and you need to put it to rest once and for all. She's not gonna rest until you do. And she's not gonna let you rest either.

BRIAN: You ever do something you wouldn't want God to know?

JOHN: (ignoring this) How'd she find out?

BRIAN: Does it matter?

JOHN: It might.

BRIAN: How hard can it be? You know....in retrospect I mean. Do you realize that the only time you can see everything going on in front of you is when you're backed up against a wall? Nothing can sneak up on you then. Finally. The late nights. That smell on the hands. The cheap perfume....the jewelry receipts stuck in the glove compartment. The smoke in the clothes. The kids waiting up until they can't keep their eyes open anymore. We might as well take the people we love and smash their heads against the wall.

JOHN: You gonna look at the pictures?

BRIAN: You ever do something you wouldn't want God to know?

JOHN: This isn't about me Brian.

BRIAN: Actually.....I wouldn't tell my story to anyone else.

JOHN: (nervous...a bit bitter) And why's that? Why honor me with this?

BRIAN: Some people are better suited for understanding this sort of thing than others...you know what I mean?

JOHN: (real nervous now) No....I don't.

BRIAN: It's like what Twain said. I like Twain, don't you? All these years later and he still gets it right. How many can say that? He said "Heaven for climate, hell for society."

JOHN: I'm sorry, I don't....

BRIAN: (cuts him off) I mentioned to Dr Ross wanting to talk to someone. I'd heard your name somewhere. So I brought it up. He just said...."no no no"....almost underneath his breath. It....what's the word? It *intrigued* me. I pressed him....again and again....and finally he told me he didn't think it'd be a good idea if I was getting therapy from someone who was.....you know....fucking around on his wife. For obvious reasons.

JOHN: You son of a bitch.

BRIAN: Hey....don't blame me. I had the *opposite* opinion. I thought you'd be the *perfect* person to talk to.

JOHN: (standing now...red with rage) I want you out of here.

BRIAN: Hey....I can't face myself. I can't even look in the goddamn mirror anymore. I figured you were the next best thing.

JOHN: Get the fuck out before I throw you out of the window...

BRIAN: (getting up and putting on his coat) Believe it or not.....you've helped me a great deal. More than you'll ever know. I'll even make copies of the pictures for you..whenever I decide to look at them. I figure you might want to see them too....

LIGHTS

SCENE IV

JOHN's house. Couch. Coffee table. A few chairs. A few tables. Nice, but not elegant. He enters.....and calls out to his wife MEG.

JOHN: Hey! Where are you?

MEG: (from offstage) What are you doing here this early?

JOHN: Aah....had a guy cancel on me at the last minute.

(MEG enters. She is around the same age as JOHN. She's in a wheelchair. A very noticeable scar runs across her cheek. She looks run down.....weary. A bit overweight. Hair unkempt. She wears a robe. A woman one can tell was once beautiful....but no longer. JOHN throws his coat on the couch and sits down....but seems apprehensive. He looks closely at his wife)

JOHN: You ok?

MEG: Never better. You want a drink?

JOHN: No...no. It'll put me to sleep.

MEG: You didn't close the door.

JOHN: Didn't I?

MEG: I think the latch is busted (she wheels over to close it)

JOHN: I'll have to get that fixed.

MEG: It's freezing in here.

JOHN: I just walked in so....

MEG: I've been shivering...

JOHN: You get any painting done?

MEG: What?

JOHN: I said did you get any painting done....

MEG: Some. My hands.....after a while they were....did you bring....

JOHN: (cuts her off) They still shaking?

MEG: (suddenly....furious) What'd you have to ask me that for? Dammit....I'm trying to pretend they're ok.

JOHN: I'm sorry....I like your paintings.....I like it when you...

MEG: (cuts him off) With *these* hands? I might as well be throwing the paint at the damn canvas....

JOHN: You just need to....

MEG: (angry) What? What do I need to do?

JOHN: Nothing Meg.....you don't need to do anything. (weary) Do we need to do this tonight?

MEG: You got someplace else to go? Or are you home for the night now?

JOHN: Look....we've been through this....sometimes I have to....

MEG: I just asked if you were home for the night....that's all. I don't need an explanation.

JOHN: Yea....I'm home for the night.

MEG: (putting her hands up) Can you tell by looking at them? Chirst....look at these hands!

JOHN: I see them....

MEG: No wonder you're always in such a hurry to get out of here....to find somewhere else to go or something else to do. You remember what they used to look like?

JOHN: Meg...they look the same. What are you talking about? We're just getting older is all. (shows her his hands) Look at mine.....shit.....I'm a goddamn old man.

MEG: (suddenly crying) Why won't they stay still? I got stuff in my head....but I can't get it out. How my supposed to paint with these hands?

JOHN: Meg....it's ok. We're gonna stop the shaking....we always do. You know that...

MEG: (calms a bit) You want a drink?

JOHN: No, you asked me that already.

MEG: Did I?

JOHN: Yea.

MEG: Since when do you turn down a drink?

JOHN: I just don't feel like one right now. Maybe later.

MEG: Did you bring them?

JOHN: (weary) You really don't need any more....we gotta find another way...

(she wheels over to his jacket and goes through it...finding the bottles she wants)

MEG: (spits this out) You were gonna keep 'em for yourself....

JOHN: I don't want any of that stuff....if you want them then go ahead.

MEG: (vicious) Sure.....what do you need it for. Nothing touches you....right? You walk away from everything....

JOHN: (stern) Don't....

MEG: Are these all of them?...

JOHN: Meg....they're killing you. You can't keep gobbling them up like this....

MEG: Oh.....it's the *pills* that are killing me? You're the expert...right?

JOHN: (weary) Yea Meg....I'm the expert.

MEG: (waving the bottles in the air) You know how long I've been without these now?

JOHN: Yea....what....a day and a half?

MEG: (spits out) LIAR! Look at these hands! Do they look like a day and a half without?! More like a month and a half! This is medicine. What kind of person holds medicine back from his own wife?!

JOHN: Meg....it's been 2 days max. I have to be careful getting this stuff. I can't just write something up for....

MEG: (sarcastic) Really? Worried about your spotless reputation now? Mr. Ethical is it?

JOHN: (blow his stack) You know what Meg! Fuck off! How's that? Is that ethical enough for you? Get your own damn pills. Go see a fucking shrink and leave me be. I can't be everything to everybody.....

MEG: (suddenly lunging towards him...crying) No no John....I'm sorry. Please. I'm sorry. Don't be that way. You know how I get....especially at the end of the day when you're not here....

JOHN: (reaches for her...tender) Stop it. You're gonna tumble out of the chair. Now stop this.

MEG: You want a drink? I'm gonna get one....to wash this down.

JOHN: No....

MEG: The pain....it's really been.....

JOHN: I know Meg. It'll take away the pain. You know that. And it will help you sleep.

MEG: I can't sleep.

JOHN: I know.

MEG: I try not to wake you when I can't sleep.

JOHN: I know Meg. It's ok. You'll sleep tonight.

(she wheels over the the cabinet and pours herself a drink. she then opens the 3 pill bottles, and takes one of each)

MEG: I had an idea.....for a painting.

JOHN: Yea...

MEG: The view from your office window. The towers....

JOHN: Meg....the towers are gone.

MEG: (remembers) Oh....that's right....that's right. Jeez...it seems like yesterday right? Have I seen the view since the towers?

JOHN: I don't think you have....

MEG: Damn elevator.....I can't fly up those steps.

JOHN: It's fixed now. It just goes on the fritz every now and then.

MEG: It's fixed now?

JOHN: Yea...

MEG: What does the view look like....now I mean? Is it even worth it?

JOHN: Sure it's worth it. It's still beautiful...especially at night. With the lights....

MEG: Will you take me?

JOHN: (looks at her) Of course I'll take you

MEG: What if the elevator....

JOHN: (smiling) I'll carry you....

MEG: (with a twinkle) Oh....you want to end up in a chair too?

JOHN: I'll take my chances.

MEG: You know what I want?

JOHN: What?

MEG: (smiling now....the drugs are kicking in) I want you to take me dancing. Remember how we used to dance.....(she wheels herself around)

JOHN: Sure...

MEG: Take me.

JOHN: We'll have to learn some new steps...

MEG: I want to wear a pretty dress again. Look at this thing (meaning the nightgown). I don't even dress myself anymore.

JOHN: (apologetic) I thought you were more comfortable...

MEG: (cuts him off) Oh no....I don't mean you dear....it's just that....

JOHN: I'll help you put on a pretty dress....don't worry. We'll even get you a new one. How's that?

MEG: When's the last time we danced....(she stops....he looks at her).....well....I remember that night. What a time we had. At least we had that...right?

JOHN: Yea...

MEG: Was I prettier back then? I must have been....right? To snag a catch like you. So handsome....

JOHN: Meg...please....

MEG: I was lighter on my feet though....back then.....I know that....

JOHN: I think we both were.

MEG: That was a long time ago.

JOHN: Yea....well....we have to.....move on....right?

(pause....she stares at him as if he's a stranger for a moment...and then...a moment of pure clarity)

MEG: But John.....most of me *can't* move.

(long pause....he looks away)

JOHN: I know that Meg....

MEG: (now childlike again....starts to sing....Sinatra) You remember?

*You make me feel so young
You make me feel like spring has sprung
Every time I see you grin
Im such a happy individual*

JOHN: Sure I do.

MEG: Why can't we go back? Back in time? Can you give me some pills that will do that for me? Can you John? Don't you think I know what this does to you....to see me like this? That's the worst part some days.....do you know that? Knowing what this does to you. What does this force you to do?

JOHN: Meg....it doesn't force me to do anything. What are you saying? Now c'mon...there's no use talking like that. How many times do I have to tell you that...

MEG: It was such a silly thing though...wasn't it? The things that change everything they're so.....silly. Aren't they? (a pause here...she stares at her hands again) Look....my hands John. They've stopped shaking. (now looking towards the past again...) I remember that night.....waiting to die I guess....scared as hell....and feeling your hand.....I couldn't see it....I could only feel it. It was just....your hand....and nothing else. The rest was....what....invisible? The rest just....went away.

JOHN: (leans his head back and closes his eyes) I don't want to think about that night anymore.

MEG: (now very matter of fact, almost lecturing) Well now....I'm not sure you have that luxury. I mean....look at me John. Talk about getting smacked in the face with the past every time you walk through the door.

JOHN: It's not like that. It's not....well....maybe it is. Maybe it is.

MEG: I don't blame you. I really don't.

JOHN: You have to know how hard I'm trying.....just to hold on sometimes.

MEG: I know...(now back again)....do you remember our song?

JOHN: Our song?

MEG: Yea...do you remember.

JOHN: Sure I do.

MEG: Do you?

JOHN: It was a strange pick.

MEG: Yea...so what though. Screw 'em...right? (laughs) Shakes things up... (sings the first verse of Send in the Clowns)

Isn't it rich?
Are we a pair?
Me here at last on the ground,
You in mid-air.
Send in the clowns.

JOHN: You're making me feel old all of a sudden...

MEG: (she sings the 2nd verse....not realizing how poignant the lyric is considering what has happened)

Isn't it bliss?
Don't you approve?
One who keeps tearing around,
One who can't move.
Where are the clowns?
Send in the clowns.

(she tears up...there is a long pause)

JOHN: (reaching for her) Meg...

MEG: (pulls away) What are you holding onto?

JOHN: You....Me....Us. It's like a ghost in the room....you know that don't you? When you're like this? When you're filled with drink....and the pills. It's like living with a ghost. I went around that corner that night....thinking I knew what was around that bend. We'd done it....what....200 times? It was gonna be the same empty space that's always been there. But instead....that one time.....that one fucking time.....

MEG: One headlight. That I remember. I thought it was a motorcycle. Didn't you? And thinking....."it's awfully cold for that.....for that poor rider on a motorcycle".....I had time for that to enter my head.

JOHN: (turning on her...she hit a nerve) Are you saying I had the time to miss it?

MEG: John.....stop sounding so.....*guilty*. It doesn't become you. You drove us straight into an oncoming car. That's what you did. Turned the Lincoln into an accordion. But how could you know he was there? You didn't see him. I didn't see him. Well....only for a minute like I said...but still.

JOHN: Jesus Christ.....I can't believe this...it *wasn't* my fault! He swerved. He was in our lane...fuck knows what he was doing. There was no way not to hit him. He's lucky he's not....

MEG: (cuts him off) Walked away too didn't he? Both of you actually.

JOHN: It all happened so fast..

MEG: Well....there's nothing....

JOHN: (cuts her off) Meg....we were both stunned. Bleeding. I didn't know you were still in there. I was trying to figure out where *I* was. It took me some time to get my

bearings.....and then I heard you calling my name...(almost to himself) Christ it you took long enough.

MEG: Would you like a drink? To dull the pain I mean.

JOHN: No....I don't want to dull the pain!

MEG: Oh....it hurts like hell. Doesn't it? I mean that. Doesn't it? I wish I could take yours away the way you help me with mine.

JOHN: (to himself) A ghost in the room. (now louder) Jesus Meg....don't remind me. I'm in enough trouble already.

(he knows what's coming)

MEG: And our child too.....she was a girl you know. Or was going to be. I wonder what she would be like now. Do you wonder that? If she'd be here now.....taking care of us as we get old. Or if she would have run away.....the way other kids do. I think it's terrible the ways kids do that....don't you? We wipe their behind's....but they won't wipe ours. Hardly seems fair. But she would have been different. I think so anyway. Don't you think so?

JOHN: Why would she be any different than the rest of 'em? What would make her special? Her....genes? Please....

MEG: I didn't even know I was going to have her.....can you imagine such a thing? To find out the way I did.....in the hospital like that. So....unseemly.

JOHN: (quiet now) They assumed you....we both....they assumed we both knew.

MEG: But still.....it makes you wonder....doesn't it? The things you're responsible for....that you don't even know about. Life's hard enough....but....well.....never mind. Would you like a drink dear?

JOHN: (weary) No Meg....I'm fine.

MEG: I worry so much about you. You haven't looked well. You look pale.

JOHN: Just tired is all.

MEG: But you always land on your feet, don't you? I shouldn't worry too much about you. I should spend more time on myself. My painting....

JOHN: (sighs) No scars on me....right?

MEG: (looks towards the mantle...where there is a picture of her and JOHN in younger days...the same picture that sits on his desk at the office) Look at that. Can you get that for me? (he gets it down off the mantle and hands it to her) How skinny you were. And look at my hair...not a spec of gray. When was this taken? How long before? Do you know? Ah.....what does it matter? Right? John, does it matter to you? It doesn't really matter to me. Anymore I mean. When you're forced to sit all the time.....the clock.....it kinda freaks me out. What are we John? 60? That's 60 birthdays. Why can I only remember about 3 of them? So what....I went from 21, to 40, to 60? Saves a lot of time. It's like we've been in overdrive. And now....now I can barely reach the windows I want to look out of. (long pause) You know what I think? I think God wanted me. I think he wanted me that night....that was the plan. And you went and mucked it up. That's what I think.

JOHN: (exploding) By running through the fucking dark woods looking for lights....to get to a phone? Yea....what a cowardly thing to do. You should have told me that this was part of God's plan, and it would've saved me at least a good suit. I got the thing ripped to shreds on the braches and the briars running through there. And my shoes were scraped raw...and all the while you're laying back there cutting an end deal with the Almighty..right? Well, you could have let me in on your cosmic plans. But no....and for what....for 30 years now I'm *still* running through the dark woods, getting torn to pieces....looking for that light. Trying to *save you*. Night after night.....trying to keep the pain away. Trying to bury the guilt I feel for putting you in that fucking chair.

MEG: Now now....don't get all worked up. You'll never sleep.

JOHN: Meg...

MEG: There's no sense both of us roaming the halls at 3am. The neighbors'll be calling the police with the lights on that late. But I might enjoy the company. (pause) Yes....I know I would. We could talk.....we could talk each other down. What do you think John? We used to stay up all night. Remember? (suggestively) I 'm not sure it was to *talk*....but we were a lot younger then....and I didn't need this damn thing. I know it's a turn off for you. I can understand. I really can. I mean....I can put myself in your shoes....

JOHN: I don't think I can do this anymore. I really don't.

MEG: C'mon now John. What are you saying? Stop this now.

JOHN: Meg.....you don't get it.

MEG: You're tired. You don't look well...

JOHN: How long do you expect me to do this? There's no bars on the windows! So why are you making me feel...

MEG: Feel? Feel *what* John? (she takes more pills...and washes them down with a drink) I can tell you from experience....that feeling is *way* overrated. So go on....run away again. Back to the flavor of the month....or whatever name you have for them. Go and tell her that I threw you out. The crazy bitch threw you out again. I don't care what they say about me. Go and do what you need to do. But I know you'll be back. You know you'll be back. Don't you get it John? It's like being tethered together. (long pause) If you jump.....I jump too.

JOHN: That supposed to scare me? Huh?

MEG: You afraid of ghosts John? Is that it? (then looks at the pill bottles) Are there refills on these?

LIGHTS

SCENE V

A tremendously pregnant ANNIE is being led across the stage by a nurse...

NURSE: C'mon now Annie. We'll get you to a room now. We've had one open up....

ANN: Wonderful....

NURSE: How you doing?

ANN: Well....I've been better.

NURSE: Yea.. well.....she's coming. It won't be long now I don't think.

ANN: Feels that way....

NURSE: (questioning) Is there....? Will there be anyone...?

ANN: No....there's no one. Just me...

LIGHTS

Now MEG is alone onstage...in her wheelchair. She heads towards the mail slot and finds a padded brown envelope. She tears it open and finds what she expects. Pills. The stereo plays Sinatra's "Send in the Clowns". She sings along as she washes down more pills with more booze.

MEG: (startled....like she heard something. and now....almost in a whisper) John? Is that you? (she spins her head around....there is no one there...but she speaks to him regardless)

MEG: Where you been anyway? I feel better today. Look at my hands (she puts them in the air...they're not shaking). I could probably get some painting done. But....I'm so tired. Tomorrow. Ok? I promise. Oh John.....there's so much left after all....isn't there? There's so much left. Who wants to spend it alone? I'm so glad we have each other. Just let me.....(she takes more pills).....just let me sleep, Ok? This one time....I think I can. Will you help me? Just lay down next to me. Be with me. When I wake up....I have the perfect dress. Will you help me put it on? I know you'll remember it.....I just know you will...

LIGHTS

BRIAN is walking across the stage. His coat is buttoned up to the top to ward off the chill. A woman hovers.....she's wearing your basic hooker garb. His cell phone rings. He picks it up..

BRIAN: Hello? Hey.....yea. I'm on my way. I'm coming now. Tell grandma I'll be there in a half hour...ok? You taking care of your sister? Ok.....see if you can get her to put her pajamas on will you? Ok....soon.....ok? Ok....bye

(he hangs up....the HOOKER calls to him)

HOOKER: On your way home?

BRIAN: (Stops....checks her out) Yea...

HOOKER: Got time for a pit stop?

BRIAN: That depends....

HOOKER: Yea....

BRIAN: (pulls out some money and shows it to her) What'll this get me?

HOOKER: (smiles) Just about anything you want honey....

BRIAN: You got a place?

HOOKER: Right upstairs (she looks up)

BRIAN: (follows her gaze) All the way up there?

HOOKER: Nice and quiet.

BRIAN: Uh huh....

HOOKER: You still gotta get home?

BRIAN: I got some time I guess.

HOOKER: What would we do without the grandparents (laughs)

BRIAN: You got kids?

HOOKER: Mother's watching them.

BRIAN: Yea? She know what.....you know...

HOOKER: She know what I'm doing? No. Yours know what *you're* doing?

BRIAN: It's my wife's Mom who has them actually....

HOOKER: Yea? Where's your wife then?

BRIAN: Not around anymore. Where's your husband?

HOOKER: (cackles) Are you fucking crazy or what?

BRIAN: I don't think so. Do I look it?

HOOKER: I'm not quite the marrying type.

BRIAN: Me neither I guess.....

HOOKER: Yea well....it doesn't really matter to me, you know?

(They start to exit together. BRIAN pulls on the chain around his neck....a crucifix. He kisses it. She sees this..)

HOOKER: (laughs) You think that's gonna help?

BRIAN: Well.....my theory is it can't hurt...

LIGHTS

JOHN is back in his office. He looks out the window at the city at night. He then goes over to his desk and writes an address on a padded manilla envelope and throws it into onto a small table by the door. He takes a sip of a drink.

His office is a shambles. Boxes are everywhere....as if he's moving out, or perhaps been evicted. He picks up the phone....and gets no dial tone. He fiddles with the heating unit on the wall....and feels for heat coming out of the radiator. There is none. He walks

center stage....then kneels as if to pray. After a few moments he feels foolish...mumbles "too late for that shit" and laughs a bit under his breath.

He moves over to his desk....picks up his chair, and tosses it through the window. The sound of the city now fills the air. Horns. Sirens. He teeters on the edge..

JOHN: (shouting) I'm the king of the world!!!

(a moment later this is met by somebody yelling back at him...."Shut the fuck up asshole, we're trying to sleep over here!". He ignores this....and walks over to his desk and picks up another manilla envelope. This one is thin. He tears it open and pulls out the pictures inside...looking at them closely as he sits down sideways on the ledge, one leg in and the other leg out. Tears are running down his cheeks. He closes his eyes and rolls himself out the window.....to his death. Lights concentrate on the ledge...as the rest of the stage grows dark. Suddenly a ghostly apparition appears. A pretty young woman. She's dressed all in white. She moves towards the ledge, and peers over the side.....putting her arms around herself as if she's shivering....)

GHOST: It's so cold in here. (long pause) I want this to end.....I wanted *this* to end. But it goes on and on. That's what betrayal does. It's like being suspended.....in mid air. Falling slowly....

(she looks out at the city)

A hole in the sky. What a terrible view.

When love turns on you....what do you have left? All that's left is indifference. If you can reach that....you can go on. If not....well....you fall.....slowly....again and again.

From what I've been seeing.....this could take a while.

(she raises her arms at the ledge, and tumbles over)

LIGHTS

End of Play