

JOE: I want to love you, Kirs, but I'm afraid of you. I'm an alcoholic. I can't take a drink. But I'm afraid of what we do to each other. If you'd only say you'd try—

KIRSTEN: I know this sounds crazy but—I can't face the idea of never having another drink.

JOE: One day at a time. One day at a time.

KIRSTEN, overlapping: I can't. I can't.

JOE: Doesn't it impress you at all that I've been sober for almost a year, that I'm delighted to be this way, that I'm working steady and feeling great, that Debbie and I are moving out of this dump into a decent place? And all because I'm sober.

KIRSTEN: You're strong, Joe. That's why I know you can help me now. If we only had it back like it was—

JOE, too loud: Back like it—! *He stops himself, remembering Debbie. Then he continues in a low voice:* Do you remember how it really was, Kirs? It was you and me and booze. A threesome. A threesome! Remember? Oh, it was great while it lasted, don't get me wrong—

KIRSTEN, pathetically eager: And we can have it back that way! I know we can! If—

JOE: If I'd drink with you! Right? But I'm not going to drink with you! That's finished!

KIRSTEN: I wouldn't ask you to drink with me. I'd control myself—

JOE: You can't control yourself! You're an alcoholic, same as I am!

KIRSTEN: No!

JOE: You and I were a couple of drunks on a sea of booze in a leaky boat! And it sank! But I've got hold of something to keep me from going under, and I'm not going to let go, not for you, not for anybody. If you want to grab on, grab on, but there's only room for you and me. No threesome. *She turns away abruptly with a kind of desperate anguish, crosses to the "door" and opens it. Then she stops, as though staring out at the world, struggling with herself.*

KIRSTEN, finally: I can't get over how dirty everything looks.

JOE: Try it one more day.

KIRSTEN, turns to face him, hopeless, dead voiced: Why?

JOE, motioning left toward Debbie's room: For her.

KIRSTEN: I'm afraid I'm not that unselfish. You'd better give up on me, Joe.

JOE: Not quite yet.

KIRSTEN, after a moment: Thanks. Good night. *She turns quickly and starts through the door.*

JOE: Kirs— *(she stops)* Take care of yourself. *She nods, goes quickly through the "door" and disappears off right. Joe stares after her. For a moment or two it looks as though he is going to call her back. He takes two or three strides toward the door, then stops, holding himself precariously in check. He stands this way for several seconds, rigid, trembling, grimly fighting for the biggest victory of his life. Then, praying:* God—grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. *Lights fade slowly to black.*

DID YOU EVER GO TO P.S. 43?

by Michael Schulman

This one act play depicts a very unlikely romance emerging from a very inauspicious first encounter in Central Park, New York City. ("P.S." refers to "Public School" in the New York City school system.)

*A bench in Central Park, New York City, late afternoon in mid-
autumn. She is sitting, reading an abnormal-psychology book,
not pleased with what she is discovering. He enters. He is clearly
upset. As He walks he gazes toward the horizon, apparently look-
ing for something or someone. He is dressed in a suit and tie, but
is somewhat disheveled now. He spots her on the bench. He is
very interested—even excited. He seems to recognize her—per-
haps, perhaps not. She becomes aware that she is being stared at.
She turns away, hoping He will go away. He moves in on her.*

HE: Hey, did you ever go to P.S. 43?

SHE: No.

HE: Damn, I thought you might have.

SHE: No.

HE: Are you from Crotona Avenue?

SHE: No. I'm sorry, you must . . .

HE: The Bronx?

SHE: No. Look, I'm trying to read this . . .

HE: Goddamn it! *Cries out:* Did anyone around here go to P.S. 43? *To an off-stage person in the direction of the audience:* Hey, did you go to P.S. 43? Yeah, well fuck you too. *To She as she starts to get up:* No, don't go. You can stay. I'm not crazy. Really, I'm not.

SHE: I have to go.

HE: Look, you can stay. I'm not crazy. I won't hurt you. I'm just upset.

SHE: I really have to . . . *(As she picks up her briefcase all her books and papers fall out.)*

HE: Please, I'm sorry. *He tries to help her pick up her belongings.* Look, I'm upset, that's all. I'm just . . . I'm just looking for my past.

SHE: Oh my, that sounds awfully poetic. Are you a poet?

HE, *missing her sarcasm:* Well, no, I . . .

SHE: God!

HE, *defeated:* Shit! I'm desperate and you throw some sarcastic crap at me. *Slumps onto bench.*

SHE: I throw crap at you? I'm sitting here reading a book and you come around . . . First I just think you're on the make with that line, Did you ever go to P.S. whatever it was . . .

HE: Forty-three.

SHE: But then I see you're just another nut in the park. Well I am up to my esophagus with nuts in the park. *She decides to sit to defend her territory.* Twice a week I come here after work and I have just one hour to calm myself before going to the shrink. All I want to do is read my book and relax so I can make a good appearance. And every goddamn time either some creep tries to pick me up with some stupid line like didn't you go to P.S. something or other . . .

HE: Forty-three . . . but I . . .

SHE: Or else some nut comes over with some kind of bullshit trying to get a rise out of me. On Monday it was a big guy with a suitcase and a Texas accent who asks me if I want to see his large snake. I figured it's just some creep who on his first day in town wants to give a city girl a thrill by pulling his pants down in front of her. But I'm not so lucky. No, this is a super creep

who is not into euphemisms. This nut opens his suitcase, pulls out a boa constrictor, and puts it right down in my lap. Dolores is friendly, he says. She only wants to hug, he says. *Crazies! Nuts!*

HE: Wait a minute, I just . . .

SHE: Oh, last Friday it was a baldheaded fag who wanted to show off his new dentures to me. *This creep kept taking his teeth out of his mouth and snapping them in my face.* In his mouth; in my face. Then this prunefaced queen asks me if I think the pretty young boys will like him better if he takes his teeth out of his mouth when he gives them . . . Ech! I don't even want to think about it. *Crazies! Creeps! They all come to the park, and they all come to my bench.*

HE: Miss, I'm not . . .

SHE: No! I walked away from that Texas boa constrictor and I walked away from those snapping teeth—I walked away from all of them—but mister, I have had it. Maybe your craziness, objectively speaking, is not as bad as some of those others, but mister, unfortunately for you, today you are the straw and I am the camel. Now you creeps have your problems and I have mine, and mine right now is to stay very, very, very, calm, so if you don't right now, immediately, this very instant—fuck off—right now, immediately, and get your creepiness away from my bench, I am going to scream so loud it will . . . *(the intensity of her "fuck off" has lifted him off the bench)*

HE: Look, I'm sorry. I only wanted to . . . *(he tries to move in to explain)*

SHE: Don't sit down. Get away from my bench. Get away!

HE: I . . .

SHE: Get away. Get away. *Takes breath to scream.*

HE: I'm going . . . Please . . . I'm sorry. *She takes breath again.* I'm going, I'm going. *He runs off.* *She is quite pleased with herself.* *She sits on the bench, opens her briefcase and takes out the book On Aggression. She resumes reading, trying to relax. Shortly, she finds something discomfiting in the text. He reenters from behind her; carefully, desperately, He sneaks up on her and covers her mouth with his hand. Don't scream. Please. Don't scream. I'm not going to hurt you. Please. I couldn't just leave with you thinking I was that kind of person, some maniac who comes to the park to frighten people. She struggles to get loose; tries to hit him with book.* I'm not a nut. I'm not a creep.

I'm sane. There's nobody saner. No boa constrictor. My teeth don't come out. I'm . . . I'm a . . . regular person . . . You know . . . People like me. Animals like me. I'm a member of the Humane Society . . . I . . . I don't know what to say. I read books too. I . . . uh . . . I keep my apartment neat . . . You know, I'm regular. *She starts to laugh.* I have a regular job, a good job. I run a private school. I make a lot of money. *She bites him hard, still laughing.* Ow! *He lets go.* Damn. Oh God, what are you, crazy? You're crazy. What are you laughing at?

SHE, laughing all the way through: I'm sorry, but that was so funny . . . I keep my apartment neat? . . . Did I hurt you?

HE: Yes, you did.

SHE, laughing: I'm sorry . . . so funny . . . I'm a member of the Humane Society . . .

HE, takes out wallet; angry: It's true. I am. Here, look. *Shows her card.* And I do run a school, and I do make a lot of money. *Shows her money.* . . . Would you stop laughing.

SHE, laughing: I can't. Once I start, sometimes I just can't . . .

HE: Look, I was just trying to explain to you . . . Big joke, huh? You know, you ought to tell your shrink that you're not a very sensitive person.

SHE, laughing: I am, I am. Look, my eyes are tearing. *She finds this very funny. At times she tries to stop laughing, but it bursts out of her.*

HE: You are something. Go on, laugh. I hope you swallow your tongue . . . You know, you're the one who is crazy . . . You've probably given me rabies . . . *He shows her his hand, then suddenly realizes what he has done and is very embarrassed. He backs away, but is too embarrassed to leave.* Oh my God. That was the dumbest thing I have ever done. I can't believe I grabbed you like that. I just can't believe it. I guess I really made a fool of myself.

SHE: Yes, you did . . . No, no, it's okay. How else could you explain yourself. I mean, what would I say if I tried to let a stranger I was choking in the park know that I wasn't crazy. That's really a hard one. The only things that come to my mind are that I study yoga—that's sane, isn't it? And . . . and I read the *Times* . . . and I don't know what else I would say.

HE: Well, don't forget you go to a therapist twice a week.

SHE, suddenly very upset, as if she is jolted back to reality: Oh, yeah, that sounds supersane, doesn't it?

HE, not quite sure why she has become upset. He sits . . . carefully. Well, I mean, that at least shows that you're working on your problems.

SHE, tries to pull herself together; takes out her compact and applies powder: Please, don't remind me. Don't take this personally, but these afternoons in the park are destroying my therapy. In my hour from five to six he only hears about my adventures in the park from four to five. I'm sure Dr. Monska—that's my therapist—thinks I'm insane. I try so hard to show him how calm and normal I am, but something always comes along and messes it up. You know, it's pretty disgraceful when your own therapist thinks you're crazy.

HE: But isn't that why you go to a . . . Hey, I know it's not usually done, but if you want I can go with you today and swear to him it was all my fault.

SHE: Thanks, but no. They don't allow you witnesses for the defense. Never. Whatever happens, they always find you guilty . . . Hey. *She has thought of something delightful.* Hey! Come to think of it, you have already done me an enormous favor.

HE: After the series of miseries I just put you through, I can't imagine what.

SHE: It's wonderful! For eight months Dr. Monska has been trying to get me to show my anger, and now I can finally tell him that I did it; that between four and five o'clock today during my adventures in the park, I did it. I let it all out—thanks to you.

HE, trying to be ingratiating: Anytime, anytime, but I'm not sure whether to congratulate you or to start mourning for your enemies. You were pretty vicious.

SHE, delighted with herself: Yeah. It really felt good. You were actually scared, weren't you? You really looked scared when you thought I was going to scream.

HE, pointing to his hand: My only mistake was that when you opened your mouth like that I didn't notice how sharp your teeth were.

SHE, ignoring him; self-possessed with her newly discovered strength: You know, I've never scared anybody before. I think I could have, and I think sometimes I would even begin to scare somebody; but then I'd feel . . . oh, I don't know, I guess guilty . . . like it's not right to show someone you're stronger than they are—emotionally stronger—because it might hurt their feelings,

especially a man's. But you got me so pissed, I just didn't give a damn.

HE, *has had enough; starts to walk away*: Yeah, well, I'm happy to have helped you on your climb toward meanness. You keep at it and I'm sure you'll be king of the park soon. Sorry to have bothered you . . .

SHE, *realizing he is hurt, goes after him*: No, don't take it that way. Sometimes I just talk too much. That's another one of my problems.

HE: Well, that's really tough, but one cure a day is all I'm good for. See you around . . .

SHE: Wait. Please. It's just that you happened to come along after all those other guys, and actually it was just what I needed to finally rescue me from my guilt. You did me a big favor . . . I'm serious . . . Really . . . Really. *For the first time each notices that the other is quite attractive.*

HE: Okay.

SHE: Okay . . . How's your hand?

HE: It's okay . . . *A flirtation begins*: Those are some teeth marks. Are you a vampire?

SHE: Oh, wow. Come here. I have some hand cream. I'm really sorry. *She applies cream*. Maybe I should have stuck with my guilt.

HE: No. *Mock poetic*: The pains of the flesh are no match for the pains of the spirit . . . You missed a spot.

SHE: Oh.

HE, *gives her other hand*: Try this hand.

SHE: You're silly.

HE: No, it's having sympathy pains. It's a neurological phenomenon. You know, the sympathetic nervous system.

SHE: Come on.

HE: What did you expect from a crazy nut in the park, huh? *He likes her.*

SHE: Well . . . something different. *She likes him*. I guess since we're holding hands I should know your name. It's only proper.

HE: Jerry.

SHE: Jerry, thank you for ridding me of my guilt. *She shakes his right hand, the one she bit*. *He grimaces*. Oh, sorry. I feel so good. If I had my box of gold stars . . . Oops, I guess that's a giveaway.

HE: What?

SHE: That I'm a school teacher. Anyway, if I had a gold star, I'd pin it on you.

HE: Some gilt for some guilt? *Very proud of this*.

SHE: Some gilt . . . for . . . some guilt? Huh? Oh, I get it . . . guilt. Gold is gilt and you get some gilt for helping me to get rid of my guilt . . . Jerry, I know you're going to think I'm insensitive again, but I hope you don't use puns like that when you write your poems.

HE: You are not only insensitive to people, but you are also obviously insensitive to art. I thought that was pretty good.

SHE: Well . . . *They look into each other's eyes and stop for a moment*.

HE: Nice eyes . . . *A bit embarrassed; recovering*: Actually, I don't write poems. I wasn't kidding before when I said I run a private school. The Hanley School on West Seventy-ninth Street. I'm the director.

SHE: That sounds like it's a long way from P.S. . . . forty . . . ?

HE: It was forty-three.

SHE: Yes, forty-three.

HE: And it was a long way away and a long way back, if I'm not being too poetic again.

SHE: What were you after before? Did you really think that you remembered me from there?

HE: Yeah . . . *Something quickly changes in Jerry. His troubled face from the beginning of the play is becoming visible again*. Well, no, not exactly. I'm not sure. I thought you might have looked familiar. No . . . I just thought . . . maybe . . . I don't know. *Tries to recover his composure*: Forget it. It's over.

SHE: I don't understand. We're friends, right? You choked me; I bit you. So you can tell me anything.

HE: Forget it. It was a mistake. You're one up on me. I bet you have a name, too.

SHE: What's happening? Why are you getting upset?

HE: I'm not getting upset. Don't start turning sensitive on me now. Forget it. *Checking his pockets*: Do you have a pen?

SHE: Come on, Jerry. Something is obviously wrong. You don't seem like the kind of guy that ordinarily screams out in the park like that. Everybody knows that guys with neat apartments who belong to the Humane Society don't do that sort of thing. Come on. I'm serious. Maybe I shouldn't pry, but . . .

HE: No. It's nothing. It's . . . *He is bothered by something he*

doesn't quite understand.

SHE: What?

HE: It's really nothing . . . it's . . . just . . . lately . . . I've been thinking a lot about when I was a kid . . . and sometimes I think I see someone I remember. I think I recognize someone, that's all.

SHE: But can't you . . .

HE: Actually, it's more like I've been looking for someone from when I was a kid. Yes, it's more like looking for someone than actually recognizing someone. *He is getting caught up in some kind of inner turmoil.*

SHE: Is it someone . . .

HE: Actually . . . it's kind of hard to describe, but there was a feeling I had then, a special kind of feeling . . . it's hard to describe . . . a feeling . . . that I seem to be missing now. I don't know why.

SHE: Do you think . . .

HE: Actually, everything is really going very well. I took over this school recently, and it's been very successful, and I like what I'm doing. I'm my own boss, and I really like working with kids, and with the teachers and parents. It's very interesting, really, and I'm good at it. The school has been very successful and I feel I'm pretty well liked. The kids seem to like me, and my teachers seem to like me. I mean everything is really okay.

SHE: Well, have you ever . . .

HE: Actually, I really haven't been thinking that much about when I was a kid. *Making discoveries as he goes along:* No . . . at least not in general . . . Actually, I've been thinking a lot . . . kind of imagining . . . reliving in a way, one particular time. Actually, it was a basketball game when I was in the ninth grade. I used to play a lot of basketball when I was a kid and I was pretty good. Actually, I was very good. Toward the end of the ninth grade we had a basketball all-star game. You see, it was a junior high school and we were the seniors. The best players in the school were divided into two teams and the whole school came to watch: friends, teachers, parents—even the man from the candy store came. It was a big event . . . and I could do no wrong. I mean I scored more than anybody else. I got the most rebounds, the most assists. *Remembering a special moment:* I could dribble the ball well . . . with my left hand too . . . I used to practice for hours with my left hand. Towards the end of the

game I froze the ball for four minutes by myself. I just kept fiddling and dribbling and dribbling and nobody could get the ball away from me. And then, with six seconds left I hit a jumpshot from the corner and we won by five points. It's strange how I remember that jumpshot. I remember it, somehow, in my bones. It's as if I can still feel it . . . some kind of muscular memory. I don't know if it makes sense to you—a junior high school basketball game—but it was a fabulous moment. You see, everybody was there, everybody saw it, everybody knew. I played basketball a bit in college, and it was good. But when I look back . . . my junior high school was in my neighborhood, you see, and everybody knew. And it felt great. Somehow it's different now. Now . . . well, now I feel . . . I guess I feel . . . disconnected? Anonymous? I don't know how else to put it. You see, it's not that I don't have friends now. I do. I have good friends, and I still get my share of cheers. You should hear the parents tell me what wonderful things I'm doing for their kids; but I don't even need them to tell me. I know what I do. But somehow it's not the same. I don't know, maybe it's that they're not really connected to my life, they're not really important to me—in a personal way, I mean. And with my friends, I guess we just try to enjoy ourselves together. Oh, sometimes we get serious and we help each other out sometimes, but still it's not like it was then at that game when everybody was there. Everybody who was important to me saw it and shared it with me. And now I wonder if I'm the only one who remembers. I wonder if that event has simply vanished, except for my own memory of it. Somehow, that's frightening. Maybe that's why lately I've been thinking I recognize people who went to P.S. 43. I've stopped a lot of people and asked if they went to P.S. 43, but I haven't found anyone. For some reason I don't want that game to have been forgotten. It's as if in some way if only one other person remembers—if I can talk to one person who saw that game—some meaning, some connection could be reestablished . . . a kind of commemoration of something I'm afraid I'll never really experience again. I need to find someone who remembers that basketball game. *By now he is fully back in his earlier troubled state, gazing again toward the horizon.*

SHE: That's very sad.

HE, *shocked:* You bastard. You are the most sarcastic son of a bitch I have ever . . .

SHE: No.

HE: I tell you—share with you—some of my deepest feelings . . . and you make fun of me? You better get yourself a smarter therapist, sweetheart. You don't have any trouble with aggression—only you disguise it in bitchy, sarcastic remarks. *He starts to leave.*

SHE, *going after him*: No, I mean it. It's sad. I mean I really think what you're saying is sad. It really made me feel sad. I'm sorry it sounded sarcastic, but Dr. Monska says that that's another one of my problems, showing compassion. He says I can't show anger and I can't show love.

HE: Yeah, well, that doesn't leave much does it? Look it doesn't matter anyway. We just don't . . .

SHE: No please, give me a chance. It's my problem . . . Please . . . Let me work on it. I do feel sad . . . I do . . . for you. *She starts to cry.* I do.

HE: Hey, don't. Please don't.

SHE: No, let me. *Her crying is very full.*

HE: Come on.

SHE: It feels so good. Dr. Monska will be so proud.

HE: You don't have to . . .

SHE, *an idea*: Hey, Jerry, would you do me a favor?

HE: What?

SHE: Would you let me watch you play basketball?

HE: What? You're kidding?

SHE: No. I'd really like to watch you play.

HE: Oh, that's ridiculous. I'd feel foolish.

SHE: Are you still good?

HE: Well, yeah, I'm still pretty good. I mean, I don't play much anymore. Sometimes I take jumpshots in front of the mirror, and I still look almost as good as Bob Cousy. You ever hear of Bob Cousy?

SHE: Sure I did . . . sure.

HE: Cousy was the greatest. Cousy, Carl Braun, Max Zaslofsky, they were some players. And they weren't much bigger than me. It's a game for giants now.

SHE: Is there a basketball court around here?

HE: Yeah, there's one just over there.

SHE: Play for me, Jerry. I'll cheer and I'll clap. I always wanted to be a cheerleader. Play for me, please. I'm serious. For me, so I can tell Dr. Monska that I can show enthusiasm.

HE: It's ridiculous.

SHE: Please Jerry.

HE: Oh . . . I don't know . . . Okay.

SHE: Oh, great, great.

HE: When?

SHE: How about tomorrow, same time . . . *(suddenly remembering)* Oh my God, I better go or I'll be late. Do I look okay?

HE: Fine.

SHE: Not too frazzled?

HE: You're just fine. Be a little frazzled. You never know, he might like challenges in his work.

SHE: Yeah, maybe you're right . . . maybe you're right . . . Hey, you're not a fag are you?

HE: No!

SHE: Didn't think so . . . Tomorrow?

HE: Yes.

SHE: Do you have a basketball?

HE: Yes.

SHE: Okay—see you tomorrow.

HE: Hey, what's your name?

SHE: Sheila. *Rushes off. He is delighted, but then . . .*

HE: Holy God . . . I must really be crazy. What did I do? Play for her? I can't do . . . *About to call her back, then hesitates. He pantomimes dribbling and a jumpshot. Shouts: I'll see you tomorrow, Sheila. Exits.*

THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

by Frank D. Gilroy

ACT I, SCENE 5

Joe is a compulsive gambler (and inveterate joker) who plays the piano for a living in a Las Vegas nightclub. His goal is to save up \$5,000 in order to move back to New York City. One