

JUAN: My father used to say he would fuck 'em from eight to eighty, blind, cripple, and/or crazy.

CLARK: Juan, you are the only human being I've met.

JUAN: Don't try to leap me up . . . cause I don't know how much of a human being I would be if I let you make the sidewalk. But there's no way I could stop you short of taking you off the count.

LUV

by Murray Schisgal

ACT I

Harry Berlin is miserable. He is a beaten man, disillusioned with life, despairing over its senselessness. Harry is so miserable that he has decided to end it all this very night by jumping off a bridge. Along comes Milt Manville, Harry's old school chum of fifteen years ago. Milt is successful, wealthy, well tailored, confident—but also miserable. He is madly in love, but not with his wife. So he has arranged to meet his wife on the bridge intending to kill her. While waiting for her, Milt notices Harry's coat on a trash basket; then he spots Harry by the railing and recognizes him. Out of this chance meeting Milt hatches a scheme to pair Harry with his wife; thus, in one bold stroke releasing both men from their unhappiness.

The following is the opening scene of the play. Harry writes a brief note, puts it on the railing, and climbs up.

MILT, with a sense of recognition, moving up to him: Is it . . . Harry turns, stares down at him. No. Harry Berlin! I thought so! I just caught a glimpse of you and I said to myself, "I bet that's Harry Berlin. I just bet that's Harry Berlin." And sure enough, it's old Harry Berlin himself. *Taking Harry's hand, shaking it:* How have you been doing, Harry? What's been happening?

Harry squats and slowly comes down from railing. It must be . . . why, at least fifteen years since I saw you last. We had that party after graduation, I said, "Keep in touch," you said, "I'll call you in a few days," and that's the last I heard of you. Fifteen years.

HARRY, feigning recognition: Is it fifteen years?

MILT: Fifteen years.

HARRY: Hard to believe.

MILT: Fifteen years next month as a matter of fact.

HARRY: Time sure flies.

MILT: It sure does.

HARRY: Fifteen years next month.

MILT: Fifteen years.

HARRY, slight pause: Who are you?

MILT: Milt! Milt Manville! Your old classmate at Polyarts U.

HARRY, grabbing his hand: That's right! Milt! Milt Manville! *They embrace, laugh joyfully. Harry puts on jacket, then crumples note, throws it over railing as Milt speaks.*

MILT: Say, Harry, I've been doing wonderful for myself; terrific. Got into the brokerage business during the day: stocks, bonds, securities, you know. The money's just pouring in; doing fabulous. Got into second-hand bric-a-brac and personal accessories at night: on my own, great racket, easy buck. And, say, I got myself married. Oh, yeah, I went and did it, finally did it. Ellen. A wonderful, wonderful girl. Do anything for her. A home in the suburbs, no kidding, thirty-five thousand, and that's not counting the trees, big tremendous trees; you should see them. Hey. Look at this watch: Solid gold. Twenty-two carats. *Opening his jacket to reveal garish yellow lining:* Notice the label? *Unbuttons shirt.* Silk underwear. Imported. Isn't that something? *Lifts arm.* Hey, smell this, go ahead, smell it. *Harry is reluctant to come too close, Milt presses his head to his armpit, laughing:* Not bad, huh? *Solemnly:* Well, how's it been going, Harry? Let's hear.

HARRY, mournfully: Awful, Milt; awful. It couldn't be worse. I'm at the end of the line. Everything's falling apart.

MILT, perplexed: I don't get it.

HARRY: The world, Milt. People. Life. Death. The old questions. I'm choked with them.

MILT, still perplexed: Oh.

HARRY, arm around him, leads him forward right: I must

have been out of school for only a couple of weeks when . . . it happened. Out of the blue. Disillusionment. Despair. Debilitation. The works. It hit me all at once.

MILT: Oh. Ohhhh. *Harry sits on curbstone. Milt puts down white handkerchief, sits beside him.*

HARRY: I remember . . . I was sitting in the park. It was Sunday, a hot lazy Sunday. The sun was burning on the back of my neck. An open book was on my lap and I was kind of daydreaming, thinking of the future, my plans, my prospects . . . Then . . . Suddenly . . . Suddenly I looked up and I saw, standing there in front of me . . . How can I put it in words? It was a dog, Milt. A fox-terrier. I'd swear it was a fox-terrier. But who knows, I . . .

MILT, *interrupting*: Let's just say it was a dog, Harry.

HARRY: It was a dog. Right.

MILT: A dog. Go ahead.

HARRY: And . . . And he was there, right in front of me, standing on his hind legs and . . . He looked almost like a little old man with a little white beard and a little wrinkled face. The thing is . . . Milt, he was laughing. He was laughing as loudly and as clearly as I'm talking to you now. I sat there. I couldn't move. I couldn't believe what was happening. And then, he came up to me, now he was walking on all fours and . . . When he got up to me . . . When he got up to me, he raised his leg and . . .

MILT: No.

HARRY, *nodding, with twisted expression*: All over my gabardine pants. And they were wet, through and through. I could swear to that! Then he turned right around and walked off. The whole thing was . . . It was all so unreal, all so damn senseless. My mind . . . I thought . . . (*emotionally*) Why me? Out of everyone in that park, out of hundreds, thousands of people, why me? *Milt looks about bewilderedly*. What did it mean? How do you explain it? *In control of himself*: That started it; right there was the beginning. From that minute on, it changed, everything changed for me. It was as if I was dragged to the edge of the cliff and forced to look down. How can I make you understand. What words do I use. I was nauseous, Milt. Sick to my soul. I became aware . . . aware of the whole rotten senseless stinking deal. Nothing mattered to me after that. Nothing.

MILT: Your plans to go to medical school?

HARRY: I couldn't.

MILT: The book you were writing.

HARRY, *throwing up his hands*: No use.

MILT: Your Greek studies?

HARRY: I couldn't. I couldn't go on. *Rises, moves to sandbox, paces around it, Milt also rises*. No roots. No *modus vivendi*. I had to find some answers first. A reason. I traveled, went everywhere, looked everyplace. I studied with a Brahmin in Calcutta, with a Buddhist in Nagoya, with a Rabbi in Los Angeles. Nothing. I could find nothing. I didn't know where to turn, what to do with myself. I began drinking, gambling, living in whorehouses, smoking marijuana, taking guitar lessons . . . Nothing. Still nothing. Tonight . . . Milt, tonight I was going to end it all, make one last stupid gesture of disgust and . . . that would be it! MILT, *glances at railing*: You don't mean . . .

HARRY: That's right.

MILT, *going to him*: How terrible. How terrible, Harry. I'm ashamed of you at this minute. I'm ashamed to have been your classmate at Polyarts U.

HARRY: Ask me what I believe in, Milt.

MILT: What do you believe in, Harry?

HARRY: I believe in nothing, Milt.

MILT: Nothing? That's terrible. How can someone go on living without believing in anything?

HARRY: That's the problem I'm faced with. And there's no answer to it, none, except down there! *He points to railing, moving to bench*.

MILT, *turns Harry toward him*: Now let's not lose our heads. Let's control ourselves. Keep calm. Keep calm. Now listen to me. I can understand. I can understand everything you said, but, Harry . . . Don't you think it's more than unusual, just a little more than unusual, that I happened to be passing at the very minute, the precise exact minute, that you were contemplating this . . . this horrible thing?

HARRY, *pointing upward*: You don't mean . . . ?

MILT, *throwing both hands up defensively*: I'm not saying it! I didn't say it! *Wagging finger*: But just remember, science doesn't have all the answers!

HARRY: Talking about it only makes it worse, Milt. You don't know what agony I've been through. It's gotten so bad that sometimes, sometimes, in the middle of the day or night, with-

out a warning of any kind, my whole body becomes paralyzed, I can't move a muscle and . . . *(In mid-speech his body stiffens like a board and he topples forward. Milt catches him at the last moment, shouts and shakes him frantically.)*

MILT: Harry! What is it? Harry, for God's sake . . . *(He runs around in a complete circle, holding Harry whose stiff body revolves like the hand of a clock.)* Help! Help! Help, here! Help! Help! *To Harry:* Look at me! Speak to me, Harry!

HARRY, calmly: That's the way it happens.

MILT, sitting on sandbox: You scared the life out of me. That's terrible. Why don't you see a doctor, a specialist, someone . . .

HARRY: I don't have to see anyone. I know what it is, Milt. The will to live drops out of me, plops right out of me. Why move? I say to myself. Why do anything? But that's not all of it. Sometimes, sometimes, I can't see, I lose the power of sight completely and I grope about . . . *(Throws up his hands, feigns blindness and moves dangerously close to the edge of the stage.)*

Milt . . . Milt . . . Where are you? Are you still here, Milt?

MILT, jumps up, grabs him in the nick of time: Right here, Harry. I'm right here.

HARRY, clawing behind him at Milt's face: Help me, Milt. Help me get to the bench.

MILT, pushing him forward: Of course. This way, Harry. That's it. Watch your step. Here, here it is. *They're seated on bench.*

HARRY, calmly: Thank you, Milt.

MILT: Is there . . . anything else I can do?

HARRY: No. I'm all right now. That's the way it happens.

MILT: I would never have believed it.

HARRY: Why see? I say to myself. Why be a witness to it? *Grabbing Milt's lapels:* Why, Milt? Why?

MILT: I don't know, Harry. I don't know. *Pulling himself free, straightens tie, etc.*

HARRY: So I go blind and I don't see. The whole thing becomes completely automatic. I have no control over it.

MILT: But there must be something you can do.

HARRY, cupping hand to ear, feigns deafness, loudly: What did you say, Milt?

MILT: I said, "There must be something you can do to correct . . ."

HARRY: I can't hear you, Milt. Speak slowly and I'll try to read your lips.

MILT, speaking slowly, loudly, drawing out words: I said, "There must be something you can do to . . ."

HARRY, abruptly, calmly: I hear you now, Milt. That's another one of my . . . my fits. Sound becomes so damn painful to me . . . Why listen? I say to myself. Why listen?

MILT: Incredible. I wouldn't have believed it was possible.

HARRY: Well, it is. Look at me. I'm a living example of it. Now you can . . . *(He feigns muteness, his mouth opening wide and closing without uttering a sound, gesturing.)*

MILT, becoming increasingly distraught: Harry? Are you speaking to me, Harry? Harry, I can't hear you. Can you speak? . . . *Harry removes pad and pencil from jacket pocket, jots something on pad.* Oh, God, not that, too. *Glances at Harry's note.*

I understand, Harry. I . . . Give me that. *Takes pencil and pad from Harry, he starts writing:* "Dear Harry. What we have to keep in mind, no matter what . . ." *Harry pulls pencil out of Milt's hand. Milt pulls it away from Harry. Angrily:* The least you can do is let me finish! *Starts writing again.*

HARRY: I can hear you, Milt.

MILT: You can?

HARRY: I can't speak when that happens, but I hear all right. Why speak? I say to myself. Words have no meaning; not anymore. They're like pebbles bouncing in an empty tin can.

MILT, pockets pad, pencil: I don't know what to say, Harry.

HARRY: What can you say? It's no good, Milt; no good. For cryin'-out-loud, let me get it over with!