

GEORGE: I warn you, Harriet. We are at the Rubicon.

HARRIET: I thought it was the Persian Gulf.

GEORGE: I can hear the doves!

DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES

by JP Miller

ACT III

Joe Clay is working in the fast-moving and hard-drinking world of Madison Avenue when he meets Kirsten Arnesen. They fall in love and marry. Both have found in each other the perfect drinking companion, and soon their increasing drinking habits become a serious problem for them. Before they can admit to themselves that they are alcoholics, Joe's career collapses, their marriage fails, and they lose the respect of friends and family. In the midst of this deteriorating situation Joe finds the courage and strength to try again—without alcohol and with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. But Kirsten cannot stop drinking despite Joe's help and encouragement. He realizes the only way he can conquer his alcoholism is by separating from her.

In this final scene of the play Kirsten returns to beg Joe to take her back. Their daughter, Debbie, is asleep in the bedroom.

JOE: Kirs . . . *She smiles wanly, he motions her in. She enters, unable to disguise the slight sag of her shoulders and the hint of shuffle in her walk.*

KIRSTEN, *looking about her furtively:* Debbie asleep?

JOE, *nodding:* It's after eleven.

KIRSTEN: I didn't want her to see me.

JOE: You don't look— *(he stops himself)*

KIRSTEN: So bad? Not as bad as you imagined I would.

Thanks for trying. But I know how I look. This is the way I look when I'm sober. That's enough to make a person drink, wouldn't you say? *Joe answers her little joke with a smile. Joe—I haven't had a drink in two days.*

JOE: Well, that's—that's terrific.

KIRSTEN: It wasn't easy. But—I wanted to talk to you, so I thought I would try to make myself deserve it, at least a little. Sort of a penance, you might say.

JOE: You'd be surprised how much fun you can have sober, once you get the hang of it.

KIRSTEN: And you've got the hang of it.

JOE: I think so. And believe me, it's the greatest. *She turns away, barely able to keep herself in check.*

KIRSTEN: I want to come home.

JOE, *finally:* It's been a long road, a lot of detours. I can forgive you, I can try to help you, but I don't know if I can take you back. I don't know if I can forget enough. I thought I could, but now I don't know.

KIRSTEN: You're talking about them. Yes, there were plenty of them. But they were nothing. I never looked at them. They had no identity. I never gave anything out of myself to them. I thought they would keep me from being so lonely, but I was just as lonely, because love is the only thing that can keep you from being lonely, and I didn't have that.

JOE: I'm listening, Kirs. *Points left:* There's a little kid in there asleep who sure would like to wake up and find you here, so all you have to do is say the right words.

KIRSTEN: I don't know if I have the right words. That's why it took me so long to get here. You see—the world looks dirty to me when I'm not drinking—like the water in the Hudson when you look too close. I don't think I can ever stop drinking, Joe—not completely, like you, I couldn't.

JOE: You could—

KIRSTEN: —if I wanted to, really wanted to. But I don't. I know that now. I want things to look prettier than they are. But I could control it if I had you to help me. I know I could. I know I could be all right if we were back together again and things were like they used to be and I wasn't so nervous. But I need to be loved. I get so lonely from not being loved, I can't stand it.

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 looking 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—perhaps, 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.