



drama by george

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Past Tense

Synopsis: A teenage guy meets his girlfriend "the morning after" they have slept together for the first time. The previous night's intimacy leads to unintended consequences on their friendship.

Themes: Sex, relationships, dating, infatuation vs. love.

Characters: 1 male (Roger), 1 female (Beth).

Running Time: 8 minutes.

Staging Needs: The stage directions call for Beth to be standing at her locker, but that can be pantomimed. No special lighting or sound effects. Beth needs school books, a coat, and a backpack; Roger has a coat and a backpack.

Acting Difficulty: Difficult.

Tone: Dramatic dialogue.

Can It Stand Alone?: No.

Author's Comments: There are more questions than answers in this script. It's a very serious, very real situation. I pray that it helps teens rethink the effect that sex can have on their relationships. It speaks powerfully to the connection between infatuation masquerading as love . . . and sexual involvement. I think this one might be better followed by a small- or large-group discussion than a sermon.

Performance Tips: Finding the right "build" is vital; it must be given a progression and a shape. Also, watch for the "touchstones"--the key moments. Particularly be conscious of each time the characters discuss "past tense." The characters should not pause the dialogue; it should come rapid-fire--except when there's a dramatic reason to pause (indicated in the script). Using silence in that way is a very powerful theatrical device. Beth is wise beyond her years; a little brighter than your average high school clone. Make sure we believe that in the way your actress portrays the part.

Past Tense

By George Halitzka

"Past Tense" was awarded Second Place in the 2007 CITA National Playwriting Contest, Drama Sketch Category.

(The lights rise on a high school hallway as the bell rings. BETH enters and goes to her locker. There is something a bit furtive and uncomfortable in her movements. ROGER approaches her.)

Hey.

ROGER

Hi.

BETH

How was the Chem. test?

ROGER

Hard.

BETH

You study much?

ROGER

Fell asleep.

BETH

Sorry.

ROGER

(A beat.)

My dad's waiting--

BETH

I can take you home--

ROGER

Don't worry about it.

BETH

(BETH is done at her locker. She heads down the hallway. ROGER follows.)

ROGER

Can I come over?

BETH

(shaking her head)

I gotta study again--

ROGER

Call me?

BETH

Sure.

(Brief pause.)

ROGER

Is that like, "Sure, when I get home"? Or "Sure, when monkeys fly outta my butt"?

BETH

What do you think, Rog?

ROGER

I don't know; I can't read chick's minds--

BETH

I'm not a chick.

ROGER

"Empowered female"?

BETH

Don't start.

ROGER

You thought it was funny.

BETH

"Thought." Past tense.

ROGER

Thanks. I got an "A" in English.

(BETH starts to walk off. ROGER stops her.)

Beth, what's wrong? ROGER (*cont'd*)

Gee, Rog, I wonder-- BETH

Will you call me? ROGER

(No response.)

Will you? BETH

I don't know. ROGER

"Should I call my best friend?" That's a hard one-- BETH

If you were my best friend-- ROGER

Maybe the dating thing isn't working. Let's-- BETH

That'd be nice for you. ROGER

No, I think-- BETH

My best friend wouldn't have . . . ROGER

What? BETH

I don't know; remember how you beat me at bowling last night?
That's it-- ROGER

I'm not a mind reader-- BETH

Go screw yourself.

ROGER
Oh; you don't like the way I screwed you?

(She turns away.)

What?

BETH
I can't believe--

ROGER
You wanted to--

BETH
No, I . . . *wanted*. Past tense.

(A beat.)

ROGER
Beth . . . I'm really . . . I'm sorry, okay? But you thought about it--

BETH
Roger, don't--

ROGER
It's like *Smallville*, right? I'm not Superman--

BETH
And we're not on TV.

ROGER
Guess I'm not handsome enough--

BETH
You're my best friend. Since *fourth grade*.

ROGER
Beth, your Mom wasn't home--

BETH
Because she *trusts* you.

ROGER
You took me to your room.

BETH
To look for a movie.

ROGER
That's why you laid down?

BETH
Roger--

ROGER
C'mon, it was . . . romantic. I wasn't gonna do anything--

BETH
Which is why you started kissing me--

ROGER
Never told me to stop--

BETH
And you couldn't go, "Hm, maybe my best friend isn't a ho--"

ROGER
Beth! You're my . . .

BETH
Slut?

ROGER
No! My . . . "soulmate"--

BETH
I don't know what that means--

ROGER
It's what you said at Valentine's Day--

BETH
"Said." Past tense.

ROGER
What--after eight months, you don't love me?

BETH
Roger--

ROGER
You know I would've stopped!

(A beat.)

BETH

I didn't want to. Okay?

ROGER

Neither did I. This might piss you off . . . I really don't regret it.

BETH

It was *my* first time.

ROGER

I know.

BETH

It--hurt, okay?

ROGER

That's not what you--

BETH

I didn't want you to get mad--

ROGER

Right.

BETH

Fine. I didn't . . . I . . . I thought it would be better. After. Like *Romeo and Juliet*--

ROGER

You're smarter than that--

BETH

No I'm not, Roger! Not . . .

(She points to her heart.)

not *here*.

(A pause.)

ROGER

Beth . . . I'd never do anything--

BETH

I know.

ROGER

Do you . . . do you love me?

BETH

I don't know . . . I'm sorry; how . . . What's love?

ROGER

This is gonna sound retarded. I never felt closer to you.
Than--right after. *That* never happened--

BETH

So if I get pregnant, will you marry me?

ROGER

You know I was wearing--

BETH

Will you date anybody else at college?

ROGER

I don't know; we need to talk--

BETH

Do you wanna spend the rest of your life with me? And when I'm
sick, you'll take care of me?

ROGER

Who made chicken soup when you had mono?

BETH

And when I'm forty with a mustache and saggy boobs you'll still
want me, and you'll have babies with me, and you'll stick around
forever?

ROGER

I don't know. I told you, *I love you*--but we're in high school.

BETH

That's love.

ROGER

But it's, like, marriage love.

BETH

So is sex, Roger.

(Silence.)

ROGER

Will you call me?

(No response.)

It's not that hard. "Will I call my best friend?"

BETH

Yeah. I would've called my best friend.

ROGER

Past tense?

BETH

I don't know.

(They look at each other for a moment. BETH turns to leave. ROGER calls after her--)

ROGER

Beth . . . I love you.

BETH

I know.

ROGER

Do you?

(BETH turns around.)

BETH

It really doesn't matter right now, does it?

(ROGER can only shrug helplessly. She exits. Slow blackout.)

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