

*The History of Last Night*  
Tyler Smith September 2002

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A short play

Characters:

Philip: Young man

Sara: Young woman

Setting: The kitchen of Philip's small house

Time: Early morning

Props: Various small scraps of paper, bottle, glasses, thin gold chain (concealed under paper), cup(s), all crowded together on a kitchen table

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AT RISE: *Philip is slumped over a kitchen table littered with the various objects, remnants of a party the night before. Slowly, he raises his head, looks about, unsure for a moment where he is. Soon a thought emerges.*

PHILIP: Sara. *(Looks about, trying to think.)* Gone. What...where...?

*(Surveys the wreckage on the kitchen table and places wrists on temples. Suddenly remembers something, begins rooting through scraps of paper on the table.)*

Phone number. Wrote down her phone number. Call her.

*(Finds small scrap of paper, picks up phone, dials. Listens impatiently.)*

Come on!

*(Hangs up in disappointment.)*

Nothing.

*(Looks about at the wreckage.)*

My head. Feel like I'm gonna die. No. Jesus. It's worse. I'm gonna live! Time to face the music.

*(Sighs with relief.)* The old hovel seems to have survived another bombing.

Everything in one piece but *(holds head)* my memory. *(Picks up some of the many bits of torn paper.)* That is scattered. *(Smacks side of head)* Snowy TV reception.

And no Sara. Try again.

*(Picks up phone.)*

*(Dials. After a moment, hangs up with some frustration.)*

Maybe too early. Sure. Sleeping it off. But why not here?

*(He stands, facing audience. Sara enters from upstage left, keeps her distance from Philip, who is still unaware of her. She waits as Philip continues to struggle with his memory of the night before.)*

PHILIP: OK. Think backward from the last. *(Crosses quickly downstage right.)* We were standing at the door for the longest time. Everyone had left. Couldn't she please have another...

SARA: *(Crosses to address him)* ...drink?

PHILIP: *(Crosses back to the table, smiles, picks up bottle, starts to pour, stops, holds up glass)* Neat?

SARA: Oh, it is so neat of you to ask before you put in the ice.

PHILIP: A cube or two then?

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SARA: Ice...would be nice. But now it detracts from the clarity of the oblivion.

PHILIP: Then allow me to fill your glass darkly. *(Hands her the drink, neat.)*

SARA: *Merci. Et vous?*

PHILIP: Maybe not just yet.

SARA: *(Mocking)* The clean liver!

*(She moves back upstage, far into the corner, not offstage but in darkness.)*

PHILIP: *(Calling after her.)* Hey, I never said my liver was clean!

*(Looks at an empty glass)*

Made her drink alone. Flowers in the wallpaper were starting to spin.

God, where did the hours go? Can't fill in the blanks. Well, you can remember when she came, can't you? Start from there.

*(He turns toward Sara's upstage position, walks eagerly toward her.)*

Sara!

*(Lights come up on Sara. She walks downstage and embraces Philip.)*

SARA: I can't believe I'm seeing you. I can't believe *I'm* here!

PHILIP: *(Holding her tightly)* You are. I'm seeing *you!* *(Pause)* Two years.

SARA: I lost count.

PHILIP: Did you? I didn't.

SARA: Don't look so solemn.

PHILIP: Thought we'd lost touch.

SARA: I never could write letters like you.

PHILIP: Like hell.

SARA: True. I write like hell. *(Beat)* I'd try to write you...I'd just try to *write*, like I used to. I couldn't. Things dissolved.

PHILIP: Now who's solemn? You didn't write. It doesn't matter. You're here now.

SARA: Yes, here...for now. *(Tries to brighten)* Too soon to talk about this. Spoil the party.

PHILIP: Just a few people. Wanted to see you alone first.

SARA: I'm glad. *(They embrace again. After a moment, Sara pulls away and returns to the upstage corner.)*

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PHILIP: *(Remains for a moment staring outward, then shakes himself)* Sadness around her, like a shroud.

Why can't I get clear? Everything's wisps of gray. *(He remembers.)* Wisp. My god. Her arm. A stick. Where was she putting it?

*(Lights come up on Sara, who walks toward him. She has been drinking but is lucid.)*

SARA: You own this joint, right? Buy a girl a drink?

PHILIP: Buy you a drink? I own the joint, see? Come on. *(He takes her arm, then stops, looks at her in surprise.)*

SARA: What? See a ghost?

PHILIP: *(Hugs her.)* No. Just a little lost waif. *(Takes her arm.)* Damn, couldn't anybody out there in the world buy you a malted milk every once in a while, girl? *(Puts his thumb and forefinger around her forearm.)* I can about touch.

SARA: Well, I'm tired of apple-cheeked pictures of health. You can see them in all the magazines.

PHILIP: OK, but I can offer something...Cheez-Its? I'd have more refreshments, but I found they cut into my liquor allotment.

SARA: *(Gently leads him toward the table)* Speaking of which...

PHILIP: Yes, of course. I'll pour while you get the Cheez-Its. They're in the cupboard. Third shelf of empty calories down.

*(Sara goes back upstage to the corner. Lights are on her, dimly. Philip starts to pour a drink, then stops. He sets bottle down, moves downstage, remembering. He "argues" with himself.)*

PHILIP: So thin.

Come on, now. You know what they say, you can't ever be too thin or too rich.

Who are you kidding? Not thin. Gaunt...*dissipating.*

*(Places hands on temples.)*

Think. What was she saying?

Crazy stuff. I couldn't make it all out.

Come on, brain. Just a shaft of light. Shaft...shards. That was it.

*(Sara moves downstage, out of the darkness, toward him. She picks up a glass from the table, hands it to him.)*

PHILIP: You want another drink?

SARA: Nothing to be done with an empty glass except to fill it up again.

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PHILIP: How profound. *(Gets bottle from table and pours into her glass.)* One might wash a glass once it's empty.

SARA: Ah, kitchen-sink realism. Your strong suit.

PHILIP: My "strong suit," as you well know, *(sniffs underarm)* is whatever clothes I may be wearing.

SARA: Your strong suit keeps me at arm's length. *(She moves closer to Philip.)* It keeps you from joining me in *(she swirls the liquid in her glass)* the romance of drink.

PHILIP: *(Very attracted, but continues to banter)* How film-noir of you. Did I invite Lauren Bacall tonight and let it slip my mind?

SARA: *(Sultry)* You know how to drink, don't you, Phil? All you do is put your lips together and...sip.*(She does.)*

PHILIP: Sure, Slim. *(He drinks.)*

SARA: Now. Listen to the ice pieces fall against each other.

PHILIP: Ah, yes. The merry tinkle of ice mixing with the banal din of cocktail-soaked voices. *(Drinks again.)* Where's the romance?

SARA: Listen again. *(She swirls the drink.)* There's no one else in the room, and it's late in the evening, and we're old friends and we're drinking. *(She moves closer to him.)*

PHILIP: *(Moved)* That is the romance of drink.

SARA: But I want you to see what I see. *(She drinks.)* The ice...shards of glass when a mirror collapses.

*(Drinks again.)*

Image shattered.

*(Hands Philip her glass. He takes it but doesn't move immediately.)*

Fill it again...Philip. *(Laughs weakly at her word play)* Rattling cubes. Empty glass, empty sound.

PHILIP: *(Softly)* OK, kid. Another drink it is.

SARA: *(Moving upstage)* Back porch. The stars.

*(Sara returns to the upstage corner, where the lights dim on her.)*

*(Philip returns to the table and sits. Begins another argument with himself)*

PHILIP: Rattling ice cubes. Rattle of bones. Chill of death.

*(He involuntarily shudders.)* Is cold in here. I forget to pay the bill?

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*(Shakes himself, laughs.)* Hell, she hasn't changed. Card-carrying member of the English Majors Union. Required to say things like that.

*(Picks up the crumpled, empty cigarette package)* Strange. Smoking. She never smoked.

*Lightens a bit.)*

Blame it on her trip to France. I'm told nonsmokers are singled out for special punishment there.

No. Stop kidding yourself.

*(The lights come up very softly on Sara, who speaks without leaving her position as Philip looks out into the distance.)*

We were on the back porch. Dim light...the end of her cigarette going on and off...like a signal.

SARA: Watch the smoke curl up and float away, Philip.

PHILIP: Then another drink. Words...flashes in the dark.

SARA: *(As if watching the floating smoke)* Dissipation. Time vanishing into blackness.

PHILIP: What did she mean? I heard fragments, saw shattered images.

SARA: I got up, a gray morning. The cat was hungry, whining. I spilled food all over the floor for him and left the house, down a road in France.

PHILIP: I couldn't find her face in the dark. The drink swallowed us up. I couldn't connect.

*(Puts the bottle down, moves stage left to look out window, now clearly frightened.)*

And now she's gone. Where?

*(Moves back to table, speaks impatiently to himself.)*

Look, pal, we're all adults here, right? Two of you got a little drunk. What's the big deal?

Yeah. Nobody remembers everything, even with a mind as clean as God's green earth. Now, you, all you remember is a few words, like a couple of patches of land when the fog lifts, but you think you're looking at the whole world.

*(Picks up pieces of paper, lets them drop.)*

OK. But I don't want to understand the whole world. Just the history of last night.

*(He idly moves a piece of the newspaper, sees the thin gold chain. He picks it up, moves it through his hands, puts it back down on the table, then walks to downstage left corner.)*

Then stop looking away from it.

*(Sara walks downstage, picks up chain from table, puts it around her neck, joins Philip. Although they are drunk, they are very aware of each other and try mightily to be clear.)*

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SARA: Here we are, like always. At a door. Seems that one of us is always leaving.

PHILIP: You don't have to go. I don't want you to go.

SARA: I have nowhere to go. That's why I have to go.

PHILIP: *(Struggling with the fog of drink)* That makes no sense.

SARA: When you have nowhere to go, you just go and go. No matter where you find yourself, you're lost.

PHILIP: Stop. We've talked too much. We're drunk. We need to go to bed. *(Trying to concentrate.)* Circles. Stop talking in circles, Sara.

SARA: There are no circles, nothing that completes.

PHILIP: Completes what?

SARA: *(Goes on as if he hasn't spoken)* No closing of loops, even if you go away and try to come back.

PHILIP: I just want to start again. Let me.

SARA: *(Moves closer to him.)* I'm sorry. You want me to stop. I can't start stopping. I can't stop starting again. *(Pause, then looks at him squarely, then speaks helplessly)* I'm crazy.

PHILIP: *(Finally very angry and drunkenly sarcastic)* Sure. Crazy is very in these days.

SARA: I am.

PHILIP: Done school. Done Europe. Done everything, haven't you?

SARA: I can't help it.

PHILIP: Why, crazy must be all you've got left...for a while at least.

SARA: Well, there you have your circle of logic. Clean and round and simple.

PHILIP: You want to go. Go. I can't complicate things enough for you. I can't understand you. Go.

SARA: This is backward, like looking in a mirror.

*(After a pause, Sara undoes the chain around her neck. She holds it briefly, then hands it to Philip.)*

PHILIP: What do you mean?

*(She turns to the door, hesitates a beat, returns to upstage corner, where she stands motionless in very dim light, barely able to be seen.)*

Sara! Where are you going?

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*(Philip stands stunned, looking at the thin gold chain in his hands.)*

Come back!

*(He slowly walks back to the kitchen table, sits, chain still in hand.)*

The chain...look at it...you have to remember.

*(Lights come down.)*

Was it so long ago? A shaft of yellow from a streetlight entering a dark room, falling across her breast. The chain around her throat, so thin, delicate, a golden glow in the darkness.

She unhooked it, held it in her hand, put it on the table. We were the only two people in the only room in the world, linked to each other moment to moment in time's perfect embrace.

Her eyes looked only at me and filled up the whole world but then it all began rushing away from me. A slip of a girl...in a slip...something in me failed...I turned away...from *her*...sat for a while at the window in the yellow light...then I left.

SARA: *(From the dim light, a voice from his past)* Philip! Where are you going? Come back!

*(Philip stares into his hand at the gold object.)*

PHILIP: Broken chain...

*(Lights on Sara go completely black. Philip runs to the door.)*

Sara!

*(No answer. The upstage corner remains dark. Picks up phone, dials, says nothing for several moments.)*

*(With phone to ear.)* Answer. Answer!

*(Lights fade slowly to black.)*

**END OF PLAY**