

# Tempo

A one act play by Harron Atkins

## **Characters**

Dominick (Dom): College student, kind, contemplative, a romantic

Jason (Jay): College student, cool, has swag without trying. Dominick's best friend.

Tempo: A warm, female, disembodied Siri-esque voice.

## **Time and Place**

College Campus in an American City

The not so distant future.

*(Two friends sit in a college apartment. Nothing fancy. DOMINICK sits on a couch surfing the newest dating app. JASON is sitting in a chair tossing a small ball into the air and catching it. Maybe there is light music playing in the background Daniel Caesar, Frank Ocean, SZA vibe.)*

DOM

Listen to this shit:

*(reading off of his cell phone)*

“A down low nigga who ain't scared to pop a mutha fucka. Got a wet throat and looking to eat ya dick up”

*(puts the phone down)*

Looking.  
to eat.  
ya dick up.  
I mean, WHAT?! What am I supposed to do with that??

JAY

....Get ya dick ate up?

DOM

Ew.

JAY

Betta get while the gettin's good...

DOM

No thank you.

*(he swipes)*

...ugh, I hate when cute guys take pictures with cute dogs.  
I feel like that's cheating. You know?

*(showing JAY)*

Like, look at that.  
Look at HIM, then look at that corgi. That's bullshit.  
That's bullshit!  
...Imma swipe right tho..  
But that's bullshit.

JAY

I don't know why you stay on that app. You *know* what you gon' find on there.  
Same old same old.

*(DOM continues swiping)*

JAY

You know what insanity is?

DOM

*(Looking at his phone)*

Wearing Uggs in July?

JAY

Doing the same shit over and over again and expecting a different result.

DOM

Well, I ain't got too many options, unfortunately.  
It's either the app or the club.  
And the club is just a live version of the app which honestly sounds like a nightmare on fuckin'  
Elm Street.

JAY

You the most dramatic nigga I know.

DOM

It's the truth!

JAY

Those ain't the only options. They might be the *easy* ones but-

DOM

Look, Jay you just don't get it, alright?

JAY

What you mean?

DOM

I mean I feel like shit's just more straightforward for you.

JAY

For *who*?

DOM

Straight guys.

JAY

And where did you acquire this inaccurate ass information?

DOM

You know what I mean! Like...

I don't know, I wanna meet people the old fashion way, right?

But there's all this shit, like a screening process I gotta go through before I even *think* about approaching a guy. Cus if I'm wrong, I get my shit kicked in.

If you approach a girl and make a move and she's not into it-

JAY

I get my shit kicked in.

DOM

*(sucks his teeth, doubtful)*

Whatever...I just..it's just different.

*(he swipes, disappointed)*

And this is pointless.

*(he tosses the phone to the side and slumps into the couch)*

Imma die alone

*(he pulls his hood over his head and pulls the strings tight. His little cocoon. He turns his back to the world)*

*(JAY stops tossing the ball and looks over at DOM)*

JAY

Yo.

DOM

.....

JAY

Dom.

DOM

.....

JAY

Dooooom...

DOM

.....

JAY

Really?

DOM

.....

*(JAY reaches into his backpack beside the chair and pulls out a bag of Candy Corn. He throws a piece at DOM)*

DOM

Ow.

JAY

He lives!

DOM

What is that?

*(JAY throws another piece)*

*(DOM turns over and looks at JAY, who holds up the bag of Candy Corn)*

DOM

Is that Candy Corn??

Are you for real assaulting me with candy corn??

JAY  
yes.

DOM  
.....i fuckin' love candy corn.

JAY  
I know.

DOM  
Throw another one.

*(DOM leans forward, closes his eyes and opens his mouth)*

JAY  
This is weird.

DOM  
THROW THE DAMN CORN I'M DEPRESSED DAMN IT!

*(JAY throws it immediately and it smacks DOM in the face)*

DOM  
Ow! I wasn't ready!

JAY  
Well get ready, shit.

DOM  
Alright, shit!

*(DOM assumes the position. JAY throws the corn, misses)*

JAY  
Okay, homie I don't think you're cut out for this.

DOM  
No, you just gotta get closer.

JAY  
I think you should just come get-

NO! We don't give up!

DOM

But-

JAY

Jay PLEASE. I really need a win tonight, aight?

DOM

...okay brotha.

JAY

*(JAY gets up and moves closer to the couch. DOM assumes the position. JAY leans in to aim...and he can't help but snicker)*

what??

DOM

My bad, its just kinda funny.

JAY

*(laughing)*

Get it together.

DOM

Okay okay, here we go.

JAY

*(JAY bends down, DOM assumes the position, JAY breaks again)*

JAY.

DOM

*(sucks teeth)*

I'm sorry I'm sorry its just// kinda funny

JAY

*(laughing)*

This is serious nigga, damn!

DOM

Okay! I'm done. For real. Let's go.

JAY

*(DOM is doubtful and takes a tentative beat to eye JAY, then closes his eyes and begins to assume the position. He's not even halfway there before JAY instantly bursts into laughter. This time not even trying to hide it. DOM just slowly opens his eyes and blankly stares at JAY's laughing fit. DOM fights the urge to laugh too.)*

DOM

This is *not* funny. This why black people can't move forward. We don't support each other.

JAY

*(laughter subsiding)*

Boy, shut up.

*(he walks over to the couch so he's standing over DOM)*

Open your mouth.

DOM

No.

JAY

Boy, open your damn mouth.

DOM

*(fake reluctance, then he tilts his head back and opens his mouth. JAY drops a piece of candy corn in. DOM chews)*

I fuckin' love Candy Corn.

JAY

I know. Nasty ass candy...

*(he places the bag in DOM's lap, then he touches his shoulder)*

Happy Valentines Day, brotha.

*(JAY begins walking back to the chair when-)*

DOM

Tempo, Pause.

*(JAY freezes, mid-walk)*

DOM

Can I see that again, please?

TEMPO

*(a warm disembodied voice explodes into the space)*

Certainly Dominick. How far back would you like to go?

DOM

10 seconds.

TEMPO

Request accepted.

*(we hear a chime and JAY rewinds his steps to end up over DOM on the couch)*

JAY

Open your mouth.

DOM

No.

JAY

Boy open your damn mouth!

DOM

*(fake reluctance, then he tilts his head back and opens his mouth. JAY drops a piece of candy corn in. DOM chews)*

I fuckin' love Candy Corn.

JAY

I know. Nasty ass candy...

*(he places the bag in DOM's lap, he touches his shoulder)*

Happy-

DOM

Tempo, Pause.

*(JAY freezes, his hand rests on DOM's shoulder. DOM takes a beat. He looks up at JAY. He then places his hand over JAYs and breathes. A beat. DOM removes his hand.)*

DOM

Resume.

JAY

-Valentine's day, brotha.

*(JAY walks over to chair and sits. He pulls out his phone. He reads a text and smiles)*

DOM

What you grinnin' about??

JAY

Ain't nobody grinnin'!

DOM

Oh, you grinnin'. Who you textin'??

JAY

*(leaning down to put the phone away)*

Nobody fool-

DOM

Tempo, pause.

*(JAY freezes mid-motion. DOM goes over to JAY, takes the phone from him.)*

Nobody... Please.

*(he walks over to JAY and takes the phone. He reads)*

Hey baby, thanks for the flowers.

*(to JAY)*

I *knew* it...

*(back to phone)*

Poinsettias instead of roses, you know the way to your mama's heart. Love you Son.

*(he lowers the phone)*

Really?

Your mom is your valentine?

Of *course* she is.

...this ain't fair.

You worse than them dog loving niggas.

TEMPO

Memory will automatically resume in 5, 4,

DOM

Wait, automatically resume???

TEMPO

You are currently operating the free trial of Tempo. If you'd like to enjoy unlimited pausing privileges, please upgrade to our Platinum service.

DOM

Oh, I'm not doing that.

TEMPO

Very well Dominick.

Memory will automatically resume in 4, 3,

*(DOM rushes to put the phone back in JAY's hand and get back to couch)*

2, 1

*(JAY snaps back into action, putting phone away)*

JAY

Anyway, we ain't here to talk about me. I'm playing your relationship counselor tonight so, talk to me. What are you lookin' for?

DOM

I don't know.

JAY

Yeah you do.

DOM

I just want the real thing, i guess.

I'm in a place where like...I don't know, I hope it's still out there... like...

like, I hope I didn't miss it, you know?

Cus I had it, I think.

JAY

*(obvious shady history here)*

...Jerome?

DOM

Don't do that.

JAY

What??

DOM

Say his name like he shot yo dog.

YES Jerome.

And YES I know you sick of hearing about him and YES I know he was a asshole but-

JAY

He was a ho.

DOM

He was my first love.

And before it got bad it was really really good...

He was so cute...

JAY

He was a ho.

DOM

*(ignoring him)*

I still remember how we first started talkin'. We in class and...It's that thing where you feel somebody lookin' at you. But not like other people look at you, right? You feel somebody *seein'* you. It just feel different. And I remember lookin' in the direction of that feelin' and findin' him on the other end of it. Just starin'. And I look away. And I look back. He still starin'. And I look away again, stupid ass smile breakin' out across my face, and I look back one more time, and he's up, out his seat, headed right for me. Man, I thought I was gon' die. My heart slammin' against my chest like it's about to break right through, and I start sweatin' and shit and then-  
He right in front of me.  
He say "what's yo name again?"  
And I say "huh?"  
And he say "is that your first or last name?"  
And I laugh that laugh you laugh when somethin' not actually funny but you feel awkward as shit and you tryin' to resemble a human in *some* capacity?  
And then I say "sorry, I'm Dominick"  
And he say-

JAY

Hi, I'm a ho?

DOM

...you never gave hm a chance.

JAY

You damn right I didn't, cus I *knew* somethin' wasn't right.  
But...

DOM

...But?

JAY

I don't know, I just..  
I guess I just never seen you smile like that.  
Sometimes you bite your tongue when you see somebody you care about happier than you ever seen them before...

*(JAY goes back to tossing the ball, but  
DOM is still in the moment)*

*(sweet beat)*

DOM

Tempo, pause

*(JAY freezes)*

Can I see that again?

TEMPO

Certainly Dominick, how far back would you like to go?

DOM

8 seconds.

TEMPO

Request accepted.

JAY

Sometimes you bite your tongue when you see somebody you care about happier than you ever seen them before...

DOM

Tempo, repeat

JAY

You bite your tongue when you see somebody you care about-

DOM

Again

JAY

When you see somebody you care about-

DOM

Again

JAY

Somebody you care about

DOM

Again

JAY

Somebody you care about-

DOM

Pause.

*(JAY freezes. DOM leaps up from his seat. He is agitated. He breathes deeply and walks around the couch, he contemplates, he weighs, he seems almost tortured by something)*

DOM

*(to himself)*

Somebody you care about...

As a friend, Dom.

...right?

*(to JAY)*

Right??? As a-

A brother??

TEMPO

Memory will automatically resume in 5, 4,

*(DOM doesn't move. He keeps staring at JAY)*

TEMPO

3, 2,

DOM

...fuck.

*(he sits back down)*

TEMPO

1

JAY

-happier than you ever seen them before...

*(back to tossing ball)*

So what you wanna do?

You know they got all them dumb ass Twilight movies you like on Netflix.

DOM

Shut up, you like em too.

JAY

I tolerate them. On your behalf. There's a difference.

*(JAY grabs the remote and heads over to sit on the couch. He taps DOM to move over, DOM does, JAY sits)*

DOM

Well, I don't wanna feel like you're at the mercy of my terrible taste in movies so, what you wanna watch?

JAY

No, for real, let's watch Twilight. I wanna see that nasty ass CGI baby they tried to get away with.

DOM

Renesmee.

JAY

You would know it's name.

DOM

HER. Don't play my girl Renesmee. Okay?  
She..you know, she went through some deep shit.  
Imagine you almost kill yo mama in birth,  
You can read everybody mind so don't nobody wanna get too close to you cus you a walkin' Dr. Phil, Maury ass lie detector,  
and then people think you're like this immortal devil child so you get hunted by the Vullurie ,  
which// is kinda-

JAY

Vulturi.

DOM

...what?

JAY

what.

DOM

What did you just say?

JAY

Nothin'.

DOM

Jay, did you just correct me on a Twilight pronunciation?

JAY

Um, no.

DOM

Oh my God yes you diiiiiid.

JAY

Boy get outta my face.

DOM

I will nooooot.

Jason Leonard Washington, you're a Twilight fan!

JAY

Man, whatever I just happen to remember one-

DOM

Noooo no no no that's why you wanted to watch it!

*(he gets up)*

Oh my God you love it!

JAY

I do not *love* no damn twilight.

DOM

Oh my sweet Jesus in a tiny manger I'm about to tweet this right now!!

*(pulls out his phone)*

JAY

Dom-

DOM

You can't make this shit uuup!

JAY

*(getting up)*

Dominick don't tweet that I'm not playin.

DOM

Listen Jay, ain't nothin' wrong with lovin' a lil Twilight-

JAY

I DON'T LOVE TWILIGHT!

DOM

*(typing)*

Hey everybody-

JAY

Give me the phone.

*(he lunges at DOM, who dodges and turns away from him. This becomes a standing wrestling match for the phone, DOM's back is to JAY whose arms are wrapped around him trying to get the phone)*

DOM

*(typing)*

Jason Washington-

JAY

Imma kill you

DOM

Loves him-

JAY

Imma break yo thumbs!

DOM

some...twiliiiiight.

*(JAY does some maneuver and is able to lock DOM's arms behind his back. It's all*

*playful, but this position is kinda painful for  
DOM)*

Ow! DOM

Uh, huh. JAY

Jay let me go. DOM

Say you'll delete the tweet. JAY

No. DOM

Boooy- JAY

Its too good! DOM  
*(JAY tightens his grip)*

Okayokayokay I'll delete it, damn!

as SOON as I let you go. JAY

Fine! DOM

and say "Jay is the shit" JAY

what? DOM

Say it! JAY

DOM

ow, okay, Jay is the shit, let me go-

JAY

And he's the sexiest man alive.

DOM

*(laughing)*  
what???

JAY

say it!

DOM

Nigga no!

JAY

You sure?

DOM

I'm not sayin' that!

JAY

I can do this all night.

*(he tightens)*

DOM

Ouch! OKAY, DAMN! JAY IS THE SEXIEST MAN ALIVE! LET ME GOOO

JAY

Fine.

*(he's about to let go when he suddenly  
freezes, with DOM still held captive)*

TEMPO

Memory override

DOM

what?

TEMPO

Please enjoy this brief advertisement from our sponsors.

DOM

ARE YOU SERIOUS?

TEMPO

You are currently operating the free trial of Tempo. If you'd like to enjoy ad-free privileges, please upgrade to our Platinum service.

DOM

Do we need to do this *now*?

TEMPO

If you'd like to enjoy ad-free privileges, please upgrade// to our-

DOM

ohmygod..

TEMPO

Could not register your response.

DOM

Play the damn ad!

*(DOM listens, trapped in JAY's hold, as the following ad explodes into the space. It's campy and annoying)*

***Ad (male VO)***

***Get ready to take your music experience to the next level with Underscore. Wanna make that campfire story even scarier?***

***Wanna get your special someone in just the right mood?***

***Wanna make that wedding speech a real tear jerker?***

***Well with Underscore, you can have your favorite tunes accompany all those special moments life has to offer.***

***Underscore. Subscribe now and start creating the soundtrack of your life.***

*(ad ends)*

TEMPO

Dominick, would you like to subscribe to Underscore?

*(DOM makes a face like "the fuck do you think?)*

....Memory will resume in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

*(JAY lets go)*

DOM

*(stretching)*

Damn you strong.

JAY

Four years of football, baby.

DOM

*(mocking)*

fouryearsoffootballbaby

*(DOM sits on the couch)*

JAY

Ummmm...

*(indicates the phone)*

DOM

I got it, damn.

*(deletes tweet)*

Deleted.

Your secret's safe with me.

*(JAY plops down next to DOM)*

JAY

Ain't no secret.

I watched it like ONCE after we saw it the first time.

Needed background noise while I went to sleep. Guess some shit just stuck with me.

DOM

MMmmhmmm...

...so you team Edward or Jacob?

JAY

*(playfully pushes DOM)*

Shut up fool.

*(JAY gets the remote)*

Aight, let's do this.

*(he presses play on the movie. They watch for a beat. Then JAY rests one arm on the couch behind DOM. DOM is affected...what is this?...DOM watches the movie while being painfully aware of how close JAY is. Suddenly JAY reaches across DOM, for half a second it looks like he's going in for a kiss, but he's actually just reaching for the candy corn. JAY eats, DOM watches...there is a thick tension, one DOM can't ignore anymore.)*

DOM

*(he stands)*

Okay, Jay, I need to tell you somethin-

TEMPO

Memory override.

DOM

Wha-

TEMPO

You are currently operating the free trial of Tempo. You may not alter a memory, you may only revisit it. For alteration privileges, please upgrade to our Platinum service.

DOM

No, I don't want to change what- I just...  
I just need to tell-

TEMPO

For alteration privileges, please upgrade to our Platinum service.

*(DOM looks at JAY. He makes his decision)*

DOM

Fine, I'll do it.

TEMPO

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Platinum member. Would you like me to charge the card ending in 554-

DOM

Yes.

TEMPO

No problem, I'll do that for you.

Listen to the following terms before confirming your purchase.

Please note that any alterations are restricted to this memory. They will have *no* effect on the world beyond this consciousness. When you exit the application understand that any persons present in this simulation will recall this memory exactly as it happened in real time.

Do you agree to these terms?

DOM

...yeah.

TEMPO

Could not register response-

DOM

Yes.

TEMPO

Congratulations Dominick! You are now a Platinum Tempo Member.

Memory will resume in 5, 4, 3, 2,

Happy remembering.

JAY

You need to tell me what?

DOM

Uh... I-

JAY

Hurry up! We bouta miss Ranisha, or whatever her name is.

DOM

Renesmee.

*(DOM takes the remote and pauses the movie. JAY senses the tension)*

JAY

What's up?

DOM

Okay...

Can you close your eyes?

JAY

What?

DOM

Nevermind. Um...

Okay,

I've played this conversation out over and over again a million times in my head.

So, I'm sorry if it's one sided.

And these might be the only conditions under which I'm actually brave enough to say these words

And maybe that's okay.

And I know you always got some smart shit to say but if you could just shut up and listen right now, that'd be real cool.

*(JAY has never seen DOM like this. He complies)*

Um.

I read this quote recently.

It said, "the truth is rarely pure and never simple"

And that shit feels more and more true for me every day. See, I'm trying to get more comfortable with it.

The truth.

Trying to face it.

Name it.

Be friends with it.

Cus I'm learnin' its like quicksand, you know?

The more I run from it, fight against it, the faster I sink. The more I suffocate.

The more I die. A little every day.

I mean, that sounds dramatic but,

here's the truth:

...The happiest memories I have are wrapped up in you.

The sweetest sounds I've heard are wrapped up in your voice. I can't listen to a love song and not see your face.

You smile and I fall the fuck apart.

Standing too close to you is like torture sometimes. But moving away feels worse. Sometimes you touch me playfully and I wanna kill you and kiss you at the same time. When you go on dates I secretly pray they turn real shitty real fast so you can call me and complain till 3 in the mornin'.

I like hearing the sound of my name in your mouth.

I like the way it fit. How you make it sound like a song.

If my name could only be spoken by you for the rest of my life, I think that'd be okay.

I really do.

And that's how I know I love you.

Cus that shit don't make *no* sense

At all.

And look, maybe we love differently

And maybe I'm alone in this.

And maybe I'm not.

I don't know!

You a tough dude to figure out.

And that's okay

Maybe this moment right now is more for me than you

And maybe it's weird and uncomfortable

And all that's okay too.

But what I know for sure is I don't know how to not love you.

Maybe one day I'll learn

Maybe I won't

But that's the truth.

Its complicated and stupid and messy but, it's where I'm at.

It's where I've *been*.

And I needed you to know.

*(a beat.  
A long,  
Filled as fuck, beat.)*

JAY

...Dom-

DOM

Tempo, pause.

*(JAY freezes, DOM breathes. He then sits down beside JAY. He looks at him. Really looks at him...and he reaches over and gently weaves his fingers between*

*JAY's. He holds his hand for a bit...  
Then- )*

DOM

Tempo, quit application.

TEMPO

Are you sure you'd like to end your Tempo session?

*(DOM rests his head back on the couch.  
closes his eyes)*

DOM

Yeah, I'm sure.

Tempo:

Very well, Dominick.

See you on your next visit to the past.

*(lights change. DOM opens his eyes.  
JAY is gone. DOM is in the present. He  
stretches. He sits up, grabs his phone and  
dials a number. He waits for an answer. He  
waits...and waits...)*

DOM

Hey, it's Dom...

Uh...

I was really hoping you'd pick up.

It's um..It's kinda weird not having you over here this year...

Not that-

I don't know...

I hope you're having fu-

uh

a good-

*(He's frustrated.)*

We should talk soon. Bye.

*(Hangs up the phone. Tosses it to the side.  
He flips his hoodie up, pulls the strings tight.  
His little cocoon...suddenly his phone rings.  
He quickly rips his hood off and jumps up.*

*He stares at the phone. It rings...and rings....  
and rings...)*

*Blackout.*

END OF PLAY