Party Line

A Short Play by

Margaret O'Donnell

Run Time: 10 minutes

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Characters:

ACE, male, 20s, open and eager
CHARLEY, female, 30s, lonely, rigid, easily embarrassed
CLAUDE, male, 30s, laid-back, calm
TERRY, any gender, off-stage

Setting: Small town US in the 1960s. A party line telephone conversation.

Note to Directors: A party line served a majority of US telephone subscribers through the 1960s. It provided no privacy. See this excellent Wikipedia article for a description, history, and information about the legions of subscriber complaints about the service: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party_line_(telephony) . A 'personal' ad in US newspapers offered a way to connect to people seeking romantic relationships.

/ means an interruption by the following line.

Discourage rapid-fire delivery, and encourage actors to express their characters' characters. Have fun with this!

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At rise: A dialing rotary phone sound and ringing, 1960-era. Characters are in their separate spaces, on their rotary phones.

ACE

Hello?

CHARLEY

People are on this line! You can't just start dialing like that!

ACE

Sorry. How long will you be on?

CHARLEY

I don't know. Can you check back in an hour?

ACE

An hour! I've got an emergency here.

CHARLEY

What emergency?

ACE

You get to evaluate my emergency? Who are you?

CHARLEY

I don't have to say/

ACE

I know anyway. Charley Curtis.

CHARLEY

No I'm not.

ACE

Oh God. Yes, you are.

CHARLEY

No swearing!

ACE

That's not swearing. Anyway, who made you boss of the party line? There's sixteen subscribers on this line, and we're all equal.

CLAUDE
Charley, we can get off. We can chat tomorrow.

CHARLEY
No we can't! And I'm not Charley!

ACE
Bull hockey you're not.

CHARLEY
Swearing! This is a family line.

ACE
Anybody here under 18? So I'll say whatever crud I want. Damn it.

CHARLEY
I'm gonna report you!

ACE
To whom?

CHARLEY
I don't know. The phone company. The police. The fire department. Somebody. There's regulations! I've got the party line rules somewhere around here/

CLAUDE
I don't think we've reached that level yet, Charley.

CHARLEY
Stop calling me Charley!

CLAUDE
What do you want me to call you, Charley?

ACE
If I can interrupt/

CHARLEY
You can't!

CLAUDE
Let him talk. It's a party line. Comes with the territory.