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This Phone Will Explode at the Tone

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THIS PHONE WILL EXPLODE AT THE TONE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



This Phone Will Explode at the Tone
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Characters

MAN ONE

MAN TWO

WOMAN ONE

WOMAN TWO

A larger cast is possible by having different actors in each scene.

Setting

Two phones, downstage left and right.

Author's Note

The more abstract this piece is, the better. The show should flow quickly from one scene to another without blackouts or lengthy scene changes.

This play takes place in 1993 where technology was vastly different than it is today. It was a time before texting... before cellphones... before Wi-Fi...

Sometimes I look back and can't believe how much has changed! I have such fond memories of making answering machine messages in university – who does that anymore? Who even has an answering machine?

While the play is indeed trapped in the past technology-wise, the nature of human beings and their communication foibles (despite the latest, or not so latest technology) remains. Harry's fears about asking a girl out are timeless fears. Your mom will still talk your ear off whether it's 1993, 2023, or 2123! So even if you have no idea what it means to dial a phone, you know how hard it can be to talk to people. That was the focus of the play when I wrote it and that is still its focus today.

A telephone is heard ringing. And ringing. And ringing. There is a beep of an answering machine and then the lights come up on the four actors.

MAN ONE: Don't hang up! Don't hang up!

WOMAN ONE: Due to circumstances beyond our control...

MAN TWO: ...we can't come to the phone right now.

WOMAN TWO: There's a slight problem.

MAN ONE: We're being held hostage by Kiki the mentally deficient budgie!

WOMAN ONE: If Snowball the wonder dog can disarm him...

MAN TWO: ...take that semi-automatic weapon away...

WOMAN TWO: ...we'll get back to you.

Answering machine beep. Then a phone rings. And rings. And rings.

WOMAN ONE: (offstage voice) I'm coming!

Phone continues to ring, and ring.

WOMAN ONE: (still offstage) I'm coming! Don't hang up! I'm just opening the door! I'm almost there! Keep Ringing!

Phone is still ringing. WOMAN ONE comes running on stage, her arms are full of groceries. She throws everything into the air as she dive-bombs the phone.

WOMAN ONE: Hello? Hello? I'm here! I'm here. I had to vault over two cats and my landlady but I don't have a machine you see so I try to get as many calls as I.... Yes, this is she. I'm fine, how are you? Who are you? Carpet Cleaning? I risked life and limb to answer the phone and all you can offer me is carpet cleaning?? I want romance! I want to win the lottery! I want tragedy and travesty! Carpet Cleaning doesn't come close. It isn't even in the ballpark. It isn't even in the solar system! (She hangs up the phone) Of all the nerve.

Phone rings. MAN ONE and WOMAN TWO are in the middle of a conversation.

MAN ONE: So when are we going to get together?

WOMAN TWO: Listen.

MAN ONE: Do you want to go to the movies?

WOMAN TWO: Listen, I have to tell you something.

MAN ONE: Sure, go ahead.

WOMAN TWO: I hate to tell you this over the phone...

MAN ONE: What's the matter?

WOMAN TWO: I'm not sure how to tell you this....

MAN ONE: What?

WOMAN TWO: And I don't want you to take it personally....

MAN ONE: Come on, you can tell me.

WOMAN TWO: Well you know I like you...

MAN ONE: Yes. I like you too.

WOMAN TWO: Well,

MAN ONE: Yes?

WOMAN TWO: Well...

MAN ONE: Yes?

WOMAN TWO: I...

MAN ONE: I...?

WOMAN TWO: I like you better on the phone than in person.

MAN ONE: I'm not supposed to take that personally?

WOMAN TWO: It's not you. It's me. It's all me. I just like talking to you on the phone. And we talk and talk and talk and it's really great. And then we get together and we don't talk so much and it's just different.

MAN ONE: I see.

WOMAN TWO: Less exciting.

MAN ONE: I see.

WOMAN TWO: I'm not explaining this well.

MAN ONE: No.

WOMAN TWO: Well, it's your voice. I love your voice and sitting in the dark, talking, listening to your voice...

MAN ONE: So you don't like the way I look.

WOMAN TWO: No! No. You're very good looking.

MAN ONE: I'm getting a headache.

WOMAN TWO: I've done this wrong.

MAN ONE: Let me get this straight. We talk on the phone...

WOMAN TWO: It is just so great.

MAN ONE: But in person...

WOMAN TWO: I don't know what happens. I really don't.

MAN ONE: Well I can hardly be expected to know.

WOMAN TWO: You're mad.

MAN ONE: Why should I be mad? Why should I be mad?

WOMAN TWO: Yes you are. I can tell you're mad. I can tell by the sound of your voice.

MAN ONE: I should have known. We go to the movies all the time, to the theatre, we walk in the dark. Have we ever seen each other in the daytime? The sound of my voice, that's a good one. I've heard some good lines, "Let's just be friends, you're too tall, you remind me of my father..."

WOMAN TWO: You do sound like dad.

MAN ONE: But this just tops them all. This is the cream of the crop.

WOMAN TWO: I guess keeping in touch is out of the question? Hello? Hello?

Answering machine beep.

MAN TWO: OK, I don't have a great message, alright? I call my friends and they have these massive production numbers right on the phone, right on the freaking phone. Well, I'm an accountant. I don't have an imagination. There's no singing, no jokes, no fun time and I'm tired of people getting upset with me because my messages are boring. I'm an accountant. I like numbers. I hate musicals and if you ask me, humour is overrated. So just leave a message, just leave a stupid message, another stupid message telling me how boring I am and how I should get a freaking life.

Well. Let me tell you, I'VE HAD ALL I CAN STAND AND I
WON'T STAND IT NO MORE!!!

Answering machine beep.

MAN ONE: Well...what do you want?

Phone rings.

*WOMAN ONE and WOMAN TWO sit back-to-back
centre stage. They are 11 years old.*

WOMAN ONE: Are you still there?

WOMAN TWO: Yes...

WOMAN ONE: Hang up!

WOMAN TWO: No, you hang up.

WOMAN ONE: Uh uh it's your turn.

WOMAN TWO: No way. Last night we were supposed to hang up at
exactly the same time, and I know you waited.

WOMAN ONE: How do you know?

WOMAN TWO: It wasn't a clean click.

WOMAN ONE: But how could you know when you already hung up?

WOMAN TWO: See! See, see, I was right! I was right!

WOMAN ONE: Ohhhhh.

WOMAN TWO: Hang up.

WOMAN ONE: What are you going to wear to school tomorrow?

WOMAN TWO: I don't know. We can't wear the same thing 'cause I
heard that Marjorie Temple and Gloria Olson are going to wear
pink hi-tops and overalls and if we wear the same thing it will
look like we're copying them even though we had the idea first.

WOMAN ONE: They're snobs anyway.

WOMAN TWO: Do you think we talk too much on the phone?

WOMAN ONE: A lot of things can happen from the time we leave
school to the time we get home. We're just catching up.

WOMAN TWO: My sister's not allowed to use the phone anymore.

WOMAN ONE: Why?

WOMAN TWO: Something about long distance calls to Peru. Some guy she met in a bar last month. She is a mess.

WOMAN ONE: My sister hates the phone. She says it's a something of a travesty of communication something. She wears a lot of black.

WOMAN TWO: Hang up.

WOMAN ONE: Maybe we should never hang up.

WOMAN TWO: Never hang up?

WOMAN ONE: And we should stay on the phone forever.

WOMAN TWO: Forever?

WOMAN ONE: Why not?

WOMAN TWO: My mom wouldn't like it very much.

WOMAN ONE: I guess.

WOMAN TWO: And my sister would definitely freak out.

WOMAN ONE: Hey shhh.

BOTH: Do you hear something at your end?

WOMAN TWO: Was that a noise?

WOMAN ONE: Coming up the stairs?

BOTH: MOM!!!

Phone rings.

MAN ONE: Hi mom. Fine. Fine. So what's new? Uh huh. Uh huh. Really. I did something like that when.... uh huh. Uh huh. No but.... uh huh. Hey mom? Mom? Mom I haven't talked to Dad in ages, how about.... he's not there? That's a shame. Anyway... uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh. *(Walks away, gets a drink of water, walks back)* Uh huh. Mom, I gotta.... I have to.... I... I... Mom, I have to go because.... there's something on fire in the kitchen. No just a little one. I should probably do something about it. What do you mean you never liked the wallpaper? No. No. But I.... I know Cousin Shirl burnt her house down. She was a nut case mom. No I...But she...but I...Mom. Smoke Mom. Fire Mom. Oh. You have a call on the other line? No go ahead. No I insist. It's OK. Really. Nice talking to you mom.

Answering machine beep.

ALL FOUR: *(singing)*

Leave us a message, leave a message
We're dying to hear from you.
Leave a message, leave a message
After the beep will do.

ALL FOUR: But make sure you have something to say, 'cause we really hate people who can't handle technology and they hem and haw and usually they run out of time so they have to call back only to embarrass themselves for a second time further sounding like the idiots they are in their hearts and not the type of people we would want to talk to in the first place.

ALL FOUR: *(singing)*

Leave a message, leave a message
We're dying to hear from you.
Leave a message, leave a message
After the beep will do
After the beep will do.

Phone rings.

MAN TWO: Hello?

MAN ONE: Hi.

MAN TWO: Oh hi. How are you?

MAN ONE: Fine. How are you?

MAN TWO: Fine. *(Pause)* What can I do for you?

MAN ONE: Oh nothing. I just called to talk.

MAN TWO: Oh.

MAN ONE: You do talk don't you?

MAN TWO: Sure I do. Sure. Sure.How's work?

MAN ONE: Fine. You?

MAN TWO: Fine.

MAN ONE: *(pause)* How's Erin?

MAN TWO: Fine. How's.... is it Joan?

MAN ONE: Jane.

MAN TWO: Jane, right.

MAN ONE: A lot of people call her Joan.

MAN TWO: Well, it's a simple mistake.

MAN ONE: The names sound so close.

MAN TWO: Yes I can see that.

MAN ONE: We laugh about it quite a lot.

MAN TWO: I can see that

MAN ONE: Jane, Joan, Joan Jane.

MAN TWO: It's hysterical.

MAN ONE: Sure is.

MAN TWO: (*pause*) Well, how is Jane?

MAN ONE: Fine.

MAN TWO: Have you talked to Lynn lately?

MAN ONE: Yesterday. She got a haircut.

MAN TWO: Yesterday?

MAN ONE: Well. No. I saw her yesterday, but I think her hair has been cut for awhile.

MAN TWO: Oh.

MAN ONE: Anyway she's fine.

MAN TWO: Good.

MAN ONE: Anyway.

MAN TWO: Yes, well.

MAN ONE: It's been good talking to you.

MAN TWO: Gotta go.

MAN ONE: Busy busy.

MAN TWO: Bye.

Answering machine beep.

WOMAN ONE: Hey there, Hi there, Ho there. I'm not home right now so leave a message and I'll get back to you. Of course you should know that this machine is wired to my cat. If you don't leave a message, it's bye bye Coleman!!

Phone rings.

MAN TWO: Hi Anne? This is Harry. Yeah that's right, Harry from English class. Well you know about the dance on Friday night? Well I was wondering if you would like to be my date? You would? That's great, I'll pick you up at seven. Bye. Now. All I have to do is actually dial her number and I'll have this down pat. Although I've asked the dial tone out so many times maybe I'll ask her to the dance. Hi everyone, this is my date – the dial tone. This is silly. OK. I can do this. I'll just take some deep breaths and pick up the phone and call her. It's just a phone. It's easy. Millions of guys do it every day. I mean the population would seriously decrease if guys didn't ask girls out on dates. And vice versa. Oh geez I could get into trouble over that. What if she thinks I'm a sexist pig because I want to ask her out on a date? I'm much too young for all of this. At least I don't have to see her face when she rejects me. This way she can politely turn me down, we can both hang up and I will quietly bang the receiver against my head all night. Pick up the phone. Pick up the phone. AHHHHH!!! What is the worst she can say? She can say no. Would that be so bad? Would that be so bad? It would be so bad. It would ruin my existence. As little of an existence that I have... It would ruin it completely. OK. OK. OK. Maybe some push-ups. I'll do some push-ups get the blood running to my head. Yeah. Hello Anne, will you go to the dance with me? If you need some convincing, feel my manly arms! I do 100 push-ups every day!! Or maybe 2. Enough. Enough, Enough, Enough! It's probably busy. That would solve all my problems. Yeah that's it. It's busy. I've got nothing to worry about. I'm picking up the phone. I'm dialling her number. I'm...oh my god. Oh my god. It's ringing.

WOMAN ONE is the ringing phone. She keeps making the ringing noise until MAN ONE picks up the phone. MAN ONE and WOMAN TWO are on the opposite side of the stage.

MAN ONE: Anne, the phone is ringing.

WOMAN TWO: I know.

MAN ONE: Are you going to answer it?

WOMAN TWO: It could be Harry.

MAN ONE: Was he going to call?

WOMAN TWO: Maybe.

MAN ONE: So it could be him.

WOMAN TWO: Maybe.

MAN ONE: Well, why don't you find out?

WOMAN TWO: What if it's not him?

MAN ONE: It could be.

WOMAN TWO: What if it is him?

MAN ONE: What if the phone stops ringing?

WOMAN TWO: You answer it.

MAN ONE: What?

WOMAN TWO: Pick it up! Hurray!

MAN ONE: I don't want to. I really don't want to. I don't.... Hello
Tom's Tropical Love Palace!

WOMAN TWO: Tom!!!

MAN TWO: Hello? Who is this?

MAN ONE: This is Tom, who is this?

MAN TWO: Uh...Oh my god.

MAN ONE: Isn't this Harry?

MAN TWO: Yes. It's Harry. That is who I am. I am Harry.

MAN ONE: Well, Harry, you big stud, how the hell are you?

MAN TWO: I am Harry and I am fine. And how are you?

MAN ONE: Nothing new here.

MAN TWO: I actually called to talk to Anne. Is... Is she there by any chance?

MAN ONE: Anne? No I don't think she's here. (*WOMAN TWO whacks MAN ONE*) Wait a minute, I think she just walked in. (*As if calling to someone far away*) Oh Anne... phone!

WOMAN TWO: Thanks!

She physically primps herself to talk on the phone.

MAN TWO: I'm going to throw up. I'm going to throw up. I'm going to....

WOMAN TWO: Hi Harry.

MAN TWO: Hi Anne.

WOMAN TWO: I wasn't expecting you to call.

MAN TWO: Me neither. I mean, I wanted to ask you a question.

WOMAN TWO: A question?

MAN TWO: Yeah a question. The question I want to ask is...would you like to go to the dance with me?

WOMAN TWO: The dance?

MAN TWO: On Friday. I'd really understand if you had plans....

WOMAN TWO: You want to go to the dance on Friday with me?

MAN TWO: I think so.

MAN ONE: She's busy!

WOMAN TWO: Shut up! I think I'm free. Let me check.

MAN TWO: OK.

WOMAN TWO: WHOOPEE HE WANTS TO GO TO THE DANCE
WITH ME YAHHOOOOOOO!!!

MAN TWO: I'm going to throw up. I'm going to throw up.

WOMAN TWO: Harry?

MAN TWO: Hello?

WOMAN TWO: Friday would be fine.

MAN TWO: Really? You don't have other plans? Really? How about I pick you up at seven o'clock?

WOMAN TWO: Seven o'clock would be perfect.

Answering machine beep.

MAN ONE: Real men don't have answering machine messages.

Phone rings.

WOMAN ONE: Oh my God. You want to do what? OH MY GOD!!

MAN TWO: What's the matter.

WOMAN ONE: It's an obscene phone caller. He won't go away.

MAN TWO: Why don't you hang up?

WOMAN ONE: He'll just call back.

MAN TWO: Why don't you take the phone off the hook?

WOMAN ONE: What if someone tries to call?

MAN TWO: Give me the phone.

WOMAN ONE: No it's just too gross.

MAN TWO: Give me the phone. Excuse me, excuse me Mr. Obscene Phone Caller? Mr. Obscene Phone Caller could you hold for just a sec? I just have to talk to my friend here and then you can get right back on the profanity rail OK? Thanks a lot. (to WOMAN ONE) Now if you're not going to hang up, why do you listen to him?

WOMAN ONE: I wasn't listening.

MAN TWO: You were practically having a conversation.

WOMAN ONE: Well, I didn't want to be rude.

MAN TWO: Allison!

WOMAN ONE: Well, it's like when people call and want me to subscribe to the paper or get my rugs cleaned. I feel so bad that I can't hang up.

MAN TWO: Is that why you own a large assortment of Chia pets?

WOMAN ONE: It's not funny.

MAN TWO: Well, what are you going to do about Obie here?

WOMAN ONE: I forgot...would you mind?

MAN TWO: You really should do it.

WOMAN ONE: Please, you would do a much better job than I ever could.

MAN TWO: OK, OK, OK. Mr. Obscene Phone Caller? Hi! OK you can go ahead. Don't mention it. (*Listens for a second*) You know, Mr. Obscene Phone Caller we have something in common. We do!



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