

Party Line

a screenplay by Francis McGrath

INT. House, Upstairs - Night

OSCAR is sitting by the window, watching the snow fall and waiting for something. He's 8 years old and wearing blue Winnie the Pooh pajamas with the built-in slippers. His bed has Steelers sheets and his room is decorated with Steelers and Pirates posters and banners. After a few minutes he sees headlights light up his window, he gets up and leaves the room. He hurries over to the next bedroom where MICHAEL, age 7, is lying in bed, quietly listening to a small, portable radio that hangs on one of the bed posts. His sheets are also from the Steelers.

Oscar

Dad's home.

In one motion, Michael turns off the radio and slides out of the bed, revealing that he too is wearing blue Winnie the Pooh pajamas with the built-in slippers.

Together they walk down to the next bedroom where LARRY, age 5, is coloring on the floor. Larry is wearing red Winnie the Pooh pajamas with the built-in slippers and is foolishly sitting with his back to the door. Oscar and Michael exchange a look, they don't necessarily want to pick on their brother, but they really can't help it. They rush towards their younger brother.

INT. House, Downstairs - Night

DAD is standing in the hall paying a teenage BABYSITTER. He is a good-looking man in his late thirties, dressed in a nice suit.

Babysitter

They actually went to bed this time without putting up a fuss.

Larry (Off-screen)

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

Dad and the babysitter look upstairs.

Babysitter

Or at least they pretended to go to bed.

Dad (chuckling)

Don't worry about it. I'll take care of them.

As the babysitter hurries out, Oscar and Michael appear at the top of the stairs dragging their little brother behind them, bouncing him down the stairs. Dad is not upset at all. As they reach the bottom he wraps his arms around them and picks them all up at once. He is a giant compared to them. They know it and love it as they groan from the pressure of being squashed against each other.

Dad (in mock reproach)

What's going on here?

He gently falls to the floor where the four of them start wrestling. Even triple-teamed, they can't budge him and he brushes them off one by one. In the middle of this melee, Oscar stands next to his father, quite suddenly acting like the oldest brother.

Oscar

Dad, we have something we want to ask you.

Dad lets the other two boys fall to the floor and turns his full attention to Oscar. The other brothers listen attentively.

Oscar

Dad, can we could move our beds into one room.

Dad is a little confused, but doesn't seem to care either way.

Dad

Why?

Larry (speaking a mile a minute)

We were playing with our cars and didn't have enough room to spread out and every time we'd play Oscar or Michael would knock them over with their feet but not my feet because my legs aren't as long as theirs and..

Oscar (cutting him off)

And we thought if we put our beds in one room, we could have two rooms to just play in.

Dad

I see, and whose idea was this?

Dad looks at each boy, but let's his gaze stay on Michael.

Michael (a little nervous)

It was mine.

Dad

Well I'll tell you, you gentlemen spend the rest of the week in your own rooms and this weekend, if you all three still want to, we'll do it. But for now, everybody up to bed.

The three boys run upstairs and dive into bed; Dad follows to tuck them in.

INT - Oscar's room - Night

Dad has just tucked Oscar in bed and kissed him. They each say goodnight, and on his way out, instead of just flipping the lights off, Dad, flips the switch three times, giving a very brief strobe effect.

CUT TO BLACK

INT - Michael's room - Night

Now Michael is tucked in, and after they say goodnight, Dad flips his light on and off three times.

CUT TO BLACK

INT - Larry's room - Night

And Larry too gets the same ritual, they say goodnight and Dad flips his light on and off three times.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: Later that week

INT - House, upstairs - Night

Dad walks past Larry's room, which now has no furniture in it, just toys everywhere. A small city has been set up on the floor, complete with houses, cars and a train, but it looks like Godzilla has ravished it.

As Dad continues down the hall, he looks in Michael's room, which also has no furniture in it. This room is full of action figures and toy guns.

Lastly, Dad comes to Oscar's room and it has three rooms worth of furniture crammed in it. Dad can barely find enough floor to walk. Three beds are pushed together at right angles and the three boys are lying there. Dad tucks them all in and kisses them goodnight.

Michael
Thanks for doing this, dad.

Dad
Don't ever be afraid to share your ideas, you always think up the best stuff.

He carefully makes his way back to the door, and blinks the light three times.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: 20 Years Later

EXT - Cemetery - Day

A funeral is in progress. A group of mourners and a Catholic priest watch a casket as it is lowered into the ground. Three young men stand next to the casket. The men are the grown up Oscar, Michael and Larry.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLES

INT - House - Day

Oscar, Michael and Larry sit inside a screened-in porch, talking while they drink as much beer as possible. There are other mourners in the house, but they are keeping their distance for now, letting the boys have a moment alone.

Larry

The worst part is that every time my cell phone rings, I freak out. I either tear up, or get all anxious. I'm afraid that someone else has died.

Michael

Same thing. Ever since a voice on my cell phone told me my dad died, the damn thing's been tainted.

Oscar

There's a reason kings used to kill the messenger when they got bad news.

Larry

I'm serious. I think I have to get rid of it.

Oscar

But you live off that thing.

Michael

And what good does it do him. One problem with people always being able to reach you is that people can always reach you...and so you never make yourself completely available to the person you're with. Carol's told me before that when we're out and I answer my phone, she feels jealous, that whoever's calling is more important, even though she's standing right there.

Larry

Good point, I'm getting rid of it.

Oscar

Don't be so rash. You don't even have a regular phone in your house.

Larry

Well I'll get one.

Michael takes a gasp of breath, the other two look at him. They know him enough to know that he's just had one of his trademark ideas.

Michael

Why don't we all get a party line?

Larry
What's a party line?

Michael
It's where more than one house shares the same phone number. They usually do it in rural areas.

Oscar
They do it for people with no money. It's cheap and for good reason. If someone else is on the phone, you have to wait for them to get off if you want to make a call.

Larry
Oh, like in "Pillow Talk".

The other two stare at him, not understanding the reference.

Larry
"Pillow Talk", it's a movie. Rock Hudson and Doris Day share a phone line. They can't stand each other, but then he finds out she's a hottie and gets her to fall in love with him.

Oscar and Michael just stare at each other for a minute.

Michael
Anyway, I've been thinking a lot lately about when we were kids. I mean even before this shit with dad. One thing I miss is how we used to live in each other's pockets. We always had to deal with each other. We were always in each other's way.

Oscar
We were always fighting.

Larry
Not fighting, wrestling.

Michael
Wrestling, exactly. Sure we were slamming each other around, but it was the closest thing we could do to hugging.

Oscar
You think getting a party line will...reclaim something?

Michael
Well think of it this way: Suppose we try to move in together. I love you and all, but after a few weeks I'd probably have to kill the both of you, cut up your bodies in the bathtub and haul them out in little suitcases. This let's us get close to each other, but not too close. It makes us vulnerable, but not too much.

INT - Larry's Apartment - Day

A TELEPHONE MAN is working on installing a new line. Meanwhile Larry is sitting at a table beating his cell phone to hell with a hammer. Suddenly he gets an ice-cold expression on his face, the realization that he forgot something important. He puts the hammer down, picks up the phone and starts trying to do something with its shattered remains.

Larry

Shit!

INT - Michael's Apartment - Day

Michael is sitting on his couch, meticulously writing down every phone number that he had stored in his phone. He barely notices a knock at the door.

Michael

Come In.

The telephone repairman comes in with his toolbox.

Repair-man

I'm here to install your new phone.

Michael (without looking up)

Over there, behind the TV.

Repair-man

Someone followed me here.

Larry enters the apartment.

Larry

Hey Mike, can I borrow your address book to copy down some phone numbers.

Michael looks up for the first time. Smiling. He has a good idea what has happened.

Michael

Your phone?

Larry pulls out a small box. When he shakes in it sounds like a maraca.

Michael's brain has suddenly kicked into overdrive. He gives the same gasp of breath he made earlier.

Michael

I bet Oscar forgot to copy down his phone numbers too! We better call him!

He pushes a button on his phone and listens.

Michael
Damn, just his voice mail.

EXT - Michael's Apartment - Day

Michael and Larry rush out of the house.

Michael
If we hurry, we can catch him before he does something stupid.

Michael carefully puts his phone behind one of his tires, gets in and backs over it.

EXT - Oscar's House - Day

Oscar walks across his newly mowed yard and leans against his mower, talking on his cell phone. He's wearing work clothes and an old, worn out Pirate's cap.

Oscar
No, I've just decided I don't want service anymore. (pause)
No, I'm not switching companies. (pause) I'm really not interested in hearing about any of your other plans.
(pause) No, I'm just tired of it and don't want it anymore.
Listen, could you hold on for a minute? Great, I'll be right back.

He carefully places his cell phone on the grass. He steps back, crouches and looks at the phone the way a golfer would regard a ball on the green. He slowly walks to his mower with the air of a stuntman. He puts on a pair of goggles. He starts the mower. He pauses as if to gather strength or savor the moment. He looks around to make sure the area is clear of innocent bystanders. Then he runs forward, screaming, pushing the mower straight towards the doomed cell phone. When he hits it there's an incredible sound: the clunk from hell. Something black shoots out the open end of the mower, flies across the street and damn near embeds itself in a tree trunk.

Oscar stops the mower and pulls down his goggles. He's laughing so hard that tears are forming in his eyes. He walks across the street and picks up something that used to be one of the highest technological achievements of mankind. He sits on the curb, examining the corpse with Quincy-like precision. He even holds it to his ear in vain just to see if anyone is still there.

In the background, Michael and Larry come racing down the street.

INT - Bar - Night

All three brothers are enjoying a beer together. They are all laughing. On the table are the remnants of three cell phones.

Larry

Oh man, I wish you had called me instead. I bet that sounded cool on the other end.

Oscar (to Michael)
So can I borrow your phone list?

Michael
No problem.

Oscar
Thanks. So did Carol leave this morning?

Michael
Yeah, she caught a red-eye.

Larry (clueless)
Where'd she go?

Michael
She has to hit a series of trade shows on the west coast. She left this morning and won't be back for 3 whole weeks.

Larry
Bummer! Well, you might be without a girlfriend, but at least you have the Pirates to entertain you. Who'd have thought it would have come down to the Pirates and Cubs battling it out for the pennant?

Authors Note: It could happen.

Michael (to Larry)
Any word from your friend yet on getting tickets?

Larry
He said Thursday and Friday are definitely out. He might have a bead on Saturday night's game, if it goes the distance.

Michael
Cool, let us know. Oh, I forgot to mention that I talked to the phone company and this is how it will work. If the phone has a normal ring, a long ring with a long pause, the call is for Oscar. If there's two short rings and a pause, it's for me. And three short rings means it's for Larry.

Oscar
So if its not for you, don't answer it and don't eaves drop.

Larry
Agreed.

Michael
Agreed.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: The Next Week

INT - Oscar's House - Night

Oscar's phone as it rings with a normal, long ring. Oscar answers. He only half listens to the phone because he's got the Pirates game on TV.

Oscar
Hello? (pause) Yeah, about five minutes ago. (pause)
You're out of sausage, you got to be kidding. Then just
give me pepperoni. (pause) OK, see you then.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: 30 Minutes later

INT - Oscar's House - Night

Oscar's doorbell is ringing. He answers, pays for his pizza, sets it in on a table and heads for the kitchen. Just then the doorbell rings again, it's Larry.

Larry
I was just on the way home from the gym and thought I'd
drop by and watch the game with you.

Oscar
Come on in. I just got a pizza, want a slice?

Larry
Yeah, thanks.

Larry helps himself to the pizza while Oscar again heads for the kitchen. The doorbell rings a third time, it's Michael.

Michael
Hey
(notices Larry eating pizza, watching the game)
What, you guys having a party and didn't invite me?

Oscar
Come on in, grab a slice.

Michael dives into the pizza and joins Larry on the couch. Oscars finally makes it into the kitchen. A minute later he returns with a plate and a bottle of Iron City beer. He walks over to the pizza and stares at it. Half of it is already gone. He notices his phone sitting next to the pizza. Oscar picks up the phone and points it at his brothers.

Oscar

I thought we said no eaves dropping.

Larry (mocking offense)
What are you talking about? I was just coming home from work and dropped by.

Oscar
You said you were coming home from the gym.

Larry opens his mouth but has run out of words. He holds back a laugh and looks at Michael who is also chuckling.

Oscar (to Michael)
And what's your story.

Michael (stumbling for words)
I, er, was, uh, following Larry.

Oscar (after a pause)
I'll save this one for another day. Meanwhile, you each owe me five bucks for the pizza.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: Later That Night

INT - Michael's Apartment - Night

Michael's phone rings with two short rings. Michael answers.

Michael
Hello? (pause) Carol! How's LA? (pause) See any celebrities? (pause) I don't know, surely some celebrities are interested enough in e-commerce solutions to attend a trade show. (pause) Well did you make any sales? (pause) Hey, leads are good. (pause) Great, any chance they'll let you come home early? (pause) I didn't think so. (pause) I really miss you too Schmoopy. So what are you wearing?

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: The Next Day

EXT - Disc Golf Course - Day

Oscar, Michael and Larry are walking down the course heading for the 18th hole. They are all sweaty and each of them has at least one piece of Pirate paraphernalia on, either a hat or a shirt, or both.

Michael
So Larry, did Bill get tickets for tonight or what?

Larry
(stoops over to pick up his disc)
He's supposed to call me around 6:00.

Larry carefully lines up his next shot and lets it fly thirty feet straight into the hole. Larry does a little victory dance.

Larry
At least I don't have to buy the beer.

Oscar walks over to his disc, lines it up and throws. He's just a little low and the disc hits the rim and falls to the ground right next to the hole.

Oscar
Damn! All right Michael, I left the door open for you.
But miss this shot and you're buying.

Michael is already holding his disc, getting ready.

Larry (cheering him on)
Come on Mikey, you can sink it.

Right before Michael throws Oscar blurts out his cheer.

Oscar
Come on Schmoopy.

Michael throws wide and stares at Oscar through an embarrassed rage. He picks up another disc and throws it with deadly accuracy right at Oscar's forehead.

INT - Oscar's House - Day

Oscar falls onto his couch holding a hand to his head. Larry goes into the kitchen.

Larry
It's kind of funny. You got to admit you had it coming.

Larry returns with two bottles of Iron City beer and a bag of frozen peas. He hands the bag of peas to Oscar who puts in on a giant welt that has formed on his forehead.

Oscar
You should be talking, "Pizza Boy".

Larry
Fair enough.

The phone rings three short times.

Oscar

If it's Michael, tell him to go screw himself

Larry (ignoring Oscar)
I love that I can get my calls while I'm over here.

Larry picks up the phone.

Larry
Hello? (pause) Bill, talk to me, what's the good word?
(pause) No way, how many did you get? (pause) You got
four tickets, you are awesome. Hey listen, we're kind of
pissed at Michael right now, do you have anyone else who
might want to go? (pause) No, well, if we don't bring
Michael we'll just scalp the extra one. (pause) Right, 6:30
at the Roberto Clemente statue. See you there.

Oscar
That only gives us 45 minutes. We better hurry.

Larry (smiling)
Sit down.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: 45 Minutes Later

EXT - The Roberto Clemente statue at PNC Park - Day

Michael stands and waits by the statue as thousands of happy people make their way into the park.

INT - Oscar's House - Day

Oscar and Larry are sprawled out watching the pre-game show.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: 30 Minutes Later

EXT - The Roberto Clemente statue at PNC Park - Day

Michael is now the only one standing there. There is cheering coming from inside the park. Michael walks over to a pay phone, and makes a call.

INT - Oscar's House - Day

The phone rings three short times. Larry answers

Larry
The Bucs are up 2 to nothing.

EXT - The Roberto Clemente statue at PNC Park - Day

Michael slams the phone down and cusses. He looks around, shakes his head and starts walking off, across the bridge. A very tall man with long, curly brown hair approaches him and tries to sell him tickets. Michael shakes him off.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: Later That Night

INT - Michael's Apartment - Night

Michael's phone rings with two short rings. Michael answers.

Michael

Hello? (pause) Carol! Hold on just a second. If anyone else is on the line you better fuckin' hang up right fuckin' now. Sorry about that, it's a long story. How are you? (pause) What's wrong? (pause) I can tell by your voice something's wrong, just tell me.

INT - Same Bar as before - Night

Oscar (to Michael)

Hell of a game last night, huh?

Michael doesn't say a word, but punches Larry in the arm.

Larry just shrugs.

Michael

Were either of you listening in to my call from Carol last night? I'm going to tell you what she said anyway, so just answer me. Were you listening?

Oscar

I heard it ring for you, but I thought I better not mess with it.

Larry

Same here.

Michael

Well, she had some very interesting news for me.

Oscar

She's salesman of the month?

Larry

She saw Brad Pitt?

Michael
She's pregnant.

Long, awkward silence.

INT - Some office building - Day

Michael sits in a cubicle, in front of a computer. His screen is full of computer code, but he's just staring off in a trance. Oscar and Larry come in, prairie-dogging into different cubicles looking for Michael. Larry finds him.

Larry (way too loud for an office building)
Oscar, he's over here!

Michael (jumping up, startled)
What the hell you guys doing here.

Oscar (carrying a gift bag)
We brought you a present.

Michael slowly and cautiously opens the present. He's expecting some kind of booby trap, but instead pulls out an infant sized pirates hat. He gives out his familiar gasp and looks up at his brothers, moved and speechless.

Oscar
We wanted to get little Michael started early.

Michael
You know it could be a girl?

Larry
What are you saying, if you have a girl, she won't be a Buc fan?

Michael
Guys, thanks.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE: Later That Week

INT - Michael's Apartment - Night

Michael's phone rings with two short rings. Michael answers.

Michael (playing with the Pirates cap)
Hello? (pause) Carol! I'm so glad you called. Listen, I've been thinking about it, and this could really be a lot of fun. When you come home, I'm taking you out and we're going to celebrate this new life with the finest Sparkling

Grape Juice this city has to offer. (pause) What? (long pause, Michael loses his smile and starts looking worried.) Miscarriage? Did the doctor tell you how? (long pause) You go ahead and cry, I'm crying too.

They sit in silence for a while.

When you get back, I'm still taking you out for that dinner and maybe we can talk about giving this another try. (pause) Yes I'm serious. I love you. (pause) You do sound exhausted, you go ahead to bed (pause) Good night.

Michael sits for a while with the phone at his ear. After a few minutes he finally speaks.

Michael
You guys there?

SCREEN SPLITS IN THREE - REVEALING ALL THREE BROTHERS ON THE PHONE IN THEIR OWN HOUSES

Oscar
Yeah.

Larry
Sorry for eaves dropping.

Michael (still playing with the Pirate Cap)
It's OK. I'm glad you were here for this, I don't think I could relay this story to you later. (pause) I wish Dad was here.

Oscar
He is. What do you think he would say?

Michael
I'm not sure.

Larry
I think he'd say how proud he is of us for staying close. Michael, I think he'd tell you that the party line idea was your best yet.

Michael
And I bet he'd say this will be easier for me since I have you two helping me carry it.

Oscar
Do you want us to come over?

Michael

No, it's late and I need some sleep. I've hardly slept all week, but now I feel like I could sleep for a month. I've been so obsessed about the future lately, almost dreading it. But now, I just miss that kid I never got to meet. I'll be fine guys, I just need some alone time, some down time. Thanks again. Goodnight.

Larry

Goodnight.

Oscar

Goodnight.

All three hang up but just sit there for a minute, still in split screen.

Suddenly, all three phones ring at the same time.

Oscar's rings once.

Michael's rings twice.

Larry's rings three times.

All three answer the phone and say hello simultaneously.

The other end is quiet, but the lights in each of their houses blinks three times, giving a very brief strobe effect.

CUT TO BLACK

END