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Circle Line

A Short Play

by

Jill Elaine Hughes

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CHARACTERS

ANNETTE (“A”)
BERNARD (“B”)
CATHERINE (“C”)
DONALD (“D”)
ENGINEER (“E”)

SETTING

A subway platform at Central Station, Amsterdam

ETC

EARLY PRODUCTION HISTORY
Staged reading by Wood Street Theatre, Palatine, IL, April 2005
World Premiere by Speaking Ring Theatre, Chicago, IL June 2005
Produced by NewGate Theatre, Providence, RI June-July 2005
Produced by Gorilla Tango Theatre, Chicago, IL Oct 19-22, 2006
Produced by Mind The Gap Theatre, NYC, 2007

PRODUCTION NOTE
“Circle Line” is a “circular” play meant to run in a continuous loop although it can also be run only once.
(AT RISE: ANNETTE, BERNARD, CATHERINE & DONALD on the platform; ANNETTE and BERNARD are at one end of the platform, CATHERINE and DONALD at the other. THEY are all leaning over the tracks and staring down the line, bewildered.)

ANNETTE
We’re going to be here a long time.

BERNARD
Yes, dear.

CATHRINE
We’re going to be here a long time.

DONALD
We’re going to be late.

CATHRINE
Obviously.

DONALD
We’re going to be late.

ANNETTE
This line is running slow, isn’t it?

BERNARD
Can’t we switch to the other line?

ANNETTE
The other line goes to Belgium. We’re not going to Belgium, dear. We’re going to The Hague.

BERNARD
Can’t we go to Belgium instead?

ANNETTE
No, dear.

CATHRINE
They’ve been having problems with the engineers, you know.
DONALD
What do you mean?

CATHERINE
The engineers. They’ve all been on strike.

DONALD
They can’t be on strike now.

CATHERINE
Why not?

DONALD
If they were, the trains wouldn’t be running at all.

CATHERINE
This train doesn’t seem to be running.

DONALD
But some of them are.

CATHERINE
This one isn’t.

DONALD
But some of them are.

CATHERINE
But this one isn’t.

BERNARD
I think we should go to Belgium instead.

ANNETTE
No. We’re going to the funeral.

BERNARD
I think we should.

ANNETTE
No. We’ve been through all of this already.

BERNARD
It would be so nice, dear.
ANNETTE
We can’t. That’s not where we’re going.

BERNARD
You never do anything I want to do.

ANNETTE
It’s a funeral. It’s not about what anybody wants. Somebody died.

BERNARD
I’ve always loved looking at all the pretty houses on the way to Belgium.

ANNETTE
Your brother’s funeral is not in Belgium, dear.

CATHERINE
None of the engineers are working.

DONALD
Some of them are.

CATHERINE
They’re not. They can’t be.

DONALD
They’re back at work. The strike ended on Tuesday. It was in the paper.

CATHERINE
The engineers on this line must have stayed on strike.

DONALD
Nobody stayed on strike, dear.

CATHERINE
If I were an engineer, I would have stayed on strike.

DONALD
Nobody stayed on strike. The union won all its demands.

CATHERINE
Then there is a new strike. An insurrection.

DONALD
No one is having an insurrection.
ANNETTE
Your *dead brother’s* funeral is not in Belgium, Bernard.

BERNARD
I’ve always been partial to Belgian beer.

ANNETTE
You can buy some Belgian beer in The Hague. I’ll buy you a *case* of it when we get to The Hague. I’ll even order some lace for you after the funeral. There are lace stores in The Hague, you know. They import everything from Belgium. It’ll be like you were really there.

BERNARD
No it won’t.

ANNETTE
Yes it will.

BERNARD
It won’t and you know it. Why don’t we ever do anything I want to do? It’s always you you you, all the time.

ANNETTE
It’s not my fault your brother died in a country other than Belgium, dear.

CATHERINE
There must be a miniature political movement associated only with this specific set of tracks.

DONALD
There are no more political movements, Catherine.

CATHERINE
There are plenty of movements these days, Donald. The working classes are all so agitated.

DONALD
Not anymore, dear. Maybe in America they are, but not here.

CATHERINE
The engineers on this line must have found another union to back their strike.

DONALD
You’re talking in circles, Catherine.

CATHERINE
Yes, that must be it! The engineers and the sandwich salesmen, Donald. They must be conspiring to strike together. They’ve taken all the sandwich and cake carts and blocked the tracks with them. A new political movement, dear!
DONALD
There are no more movements, Catherine.

CATHERINE
Yes, blocking the tracks with their little carts. How romantic!

DONALD
All the political movements fled to America years ago.

CATHERINE
Blocking the tracks. Just like the French.

ANNETTE
Your brother hated Belgium, you know. And furthermore, I despise the place. Everyone is so----well, I don’t like the sound of Flemish.

BERNARD
Well, I adore Belgium, Annette. And I adore Flemish, too.

ANNETTE
You would. We are not here to adore Belgium, Bernard. We are here to go see your brother’s dead body.

BERNARD
Belgium is a beautiful little country that deserves to be adored.

ANNETTE
All right, Bernard. I’ll tell you what. After the funeral, after we’ve buried your brother, we will go to Belgium and order waffles and speak Flemish and tell everyone there how much we adore their little country. Would you like that?

BERNARD
You can be so romantic sometimes, Annette.

ANNETTE
Yes, I suppose that’s why you love me, dear.

CATHERINE
Do you think they’d let me cross their picket line?

DONALD
Whose picket line?

CATHERINE
The engineers who are on strike with the sandwich salesmen. Do you think they’d let me cross their picket line?
DONALD
If they were in fact on strike together, which they are not, then I suppose they would be rather cross with you if you tried to cross their picket line.

CATHERINE
“They’d be cross if I cross. . .” Oh how charming, Donald. You made a pun.

BERNARD
I really could never stand my brother, Annette.

ANNETTE
Then why did you volunteer to give the eulogy?

BERNARD
So I could finally humiliate him without fear of retribution.

ANNETTE
There are ghosts, you know. He could become a ghost and haunt you. Then there would be retribution.

BERNARD
My brother didn’t believe in ghosts.

ANNETTE
But you do.

BERNARD
Well, yes, but he didn’t, so I can’t imagine him going round haunting anyone, now can I?

CATHERINE
I’ve always wanted to be tied down to the railroad tracks before an oncoming train.

DONALD
You’ve always wanted to be a prima ballerina too, but look what happened to that.

CATHERINE
Just like in the old movies. Oh, that was the life.

DONALD
Perhaps you can ask the engineer to do that for you when he arrives.

CATHERINE
But you would come and rescue me, wouldn’t you Donald?
DONALD
If it seemed worth doing at the time, I suppose I would.

CATHERINE
Don’t you think I’m worth saving, dear?

DONALD
Some days, no.

CATHERINE
What about today?

DONALD
No, not today.

ANNETTE
There was a ghost in that old manor we stayed in last year. You remember the old manor.

What manor?

BERNARD
The one outside Utrecht. The one your brother owned.

ANNETTE
I don’t recall my brother ever owning a manor.

ANNETTE
Well, he did. He invited your whole family round to stay with him there for the weekend, and then all those dishes turned up mysteriously broken and the family sword melted into the tabletop, and those strange Latin phrases floating all round the hallways all night long? Don’t tell me you don’t remember that.

BERNARD
Oh yes, yes—I remember now. Whatever happened to that old place?

ANNETTE
Your brother sold it because of the ghosts.

BERNARD
My brother didn’t believe in ghosts.

ANNETTE
He still sold that manor. Not three months after he moved in.

BERNARD
Well, yes I suppose you’re right. Your memory has always been much better than mine, dear.
CATHERINE
I can’t believe you wouldn’t save me from the tracks, Donald.

DONALD
Some days I would be better off letting you get run over, dear.

CATHERINE
How can you say such a thing?

DONALD
If you had to listen to your conversation for ten years on, you would be happy to see a train go over your belly, too.

CATHERINE
We’ll see about that, dear. (SHE climbs down from the platform onto the tracks, lays down on them perpendicular to the rails, folds her hands on her stomach, and waits.)

DONALD
Catherine, come off the tracks at once. Really.

CATHERINE
No, dear. You have to come and rescue me.

ANNETTE
Whatever is that woman doing?

BERNARD
Attempting suicide, I suppose.

ANNETTE
Really, Bernard, I don’t think that’s what she’s doing.

BERNARD
What else would she be doing?

ANNETTE
A pathetic attempt at romance, perhaps?

BERNARD
I doubt that. She doesn’t seem to know what romance is if she’s laying down upon rail tracks. It absolutely is suicide. It’s quite a mess when it happens, too. Saw that happen once when I was a boy. On the way to Belgium—

ANNETTE
Please stop bringing up Belgium, dear. We settled that matter already.
BERNARD
Well, it’s true. Legs flying one way, arms another, gallons of blood all over the train. Took seven porters nearly two hours to clean it up.

ANNETTE
Hush, dear.

DONALD
Catherine, that is quite enough. Please come up from there.

CATHERINE
No, Donald. You have to come down and rescue me.

DONALD
That’s preposterous.

CATHERINE
No it isn’t, dear. Come on down and carry me to safety. Be a man, dear.

DONALD
But I’m wearing my best suit!

ANNETTE
Go on, sir. Rescue your wife.

BERNARD
If you’d prefer sir, I’ll rescue your wife—

ANNETTE
Shut it, Bernard, dear. He needs to save his own wife.

(The SOUND of an approaching train is heard.)

CATHERINE
You’d better hurry, Donald. The train is coming! The striking engineers must have overcome their oppressors!

DONALD
The engineers were never oppressed, Catherine. Now really, you have got to get up from there. The train is coming!

CATHERINE
No, dear, you have to come and get me!

BERNARD
Sir, I really must implore you—
ANNETTE
Go pick up your wife, for God’s sake.

BERNARD
Yes, do. It will be such an unpleasant mess if you don’t—

DONALD
No. She’ll get up on her own soon enough.

CATHERINE
I will not. I am going to live the last few moments of my life romantically! Just like the French!

DONALD
Hush up about the French and get off the bloody tracks!

BERNARD
Oh, they’ll be bloody soon enough.

ANNETTE
Bernard, hush.

BERNARD
Someone needs to do something, or we’ll never get to Belgium.

ANNETTE
Shut it about Belgium!! Hurry, sir! You’re running out of time.

**This is Not the End of the Play**

*Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes*