

On The Phone

A play

Volodymyr Dibrova

CAST

OWNER, mid-forties

YOUNG MAN, early twenties

HUSBAND, late fifties–early sixties

WIFE, late fifties–early sixties

A store in an up-market neighborhood that specializes in selling cell phones. Everything here is top-notch and cutting edge. The place is crammed with large-screen TVs and top-of-the-line electronic equipment; there is also a stand with sale items. In the right-hand corner—a counter that doubles as a desk. Hanging high above is the company's motto—THE GIFT OF STAYING CONNECTED. Directly beneath it is a poster featuring the cheerful OWNER of the store and the smiling YOUNG MAN. Each is holding a cell phone and both are totally engrossed in conversation.

The OWNER moves about the stage, tidies the place, adjusts the displays, refills the stands with more brochures and catalogues, rearranges fresh flowers in vases, mutters something, and finally sits down at the counter.

HUSBAND and WIFE walk through the door from stage left. Melodic door chimes signal to the OWNER that he has visitors.

OWNER (*puts everything aside, stands up, and approaches the customers*):

Well hello! How are you?

While he walks towards them, HUSBAND and WIFE, holding hands, half whisper to each other.

HUSBAND: Who's going to do the talking? You?

WIFE: You start, and I'll ...

OWNER (*gives each a handshake*): What can I do for you? Is this your first visit?

WIFE: Not really ... We were actually thinking of ... (*tries to find a word*)

HUSBAND: What we were looking for is ...

WIFE: You may be surprised, but we are interested in your products.

(*Chuckles. HUSBAND and OWNER appreciate the joke and also laugh.*)

OWNER: This comes as a total shock to me. (*Another burst of laughter.*)

HUSBAND (*points at the company's motto*): We've finally made up our minds and decided to get into the game. (*A short pause.*) To get connected and enjoy the gift, so to speak.

OWNER: Always a good idea. That's what we're here for. (*Pause.*) Are you looking for anything in particular, or just ...

WIFE (*interrupting him*): Is it okay if we just ... um ... look around first ... and ...

HUSBAND: ... and see what you have.

OWNER: Absolutely! Be my guests. Take your time. And if you need anything, just give me a shout.

WIFE (*notices something on the stand and, without letting OWNER finish his sentence, pulls HUSBAND by his sleeve and urges him to follow her*): Look at this one!

HUSBAND (*leans forward to look at the price and whistles*): Are you nuts? Have you seen the price?

WIFE (*something else on a different stand catches her eye*): What about this one? What does it do?

HUSBAND (*after taking a closer look*): Um ... That's the latest craze. This beauty can be used as a (*reading the description*) telephone, camera, camcorder ...

WIFE: I think we should get one for you!..

HUSBAND: ... calculator, computer, flashlight ...

WIFE: How much is it?

HUSBAND: ... fan, and even as an intimate friend ...

WIFE: Wow!

HUSBAND: ... electric razor ...

WIFE: See what I mean?

HUSBAND: Yes, I do. But I thought we'd agreed. Nothing fancy. Something simple.

WIFE: If we're buying something, we might as well go for the best.

HUSBAND: But look at the price!

WIFE: Don't be such a ...!

HUSBAND: That's just like you. You start out with something basic in mind and then go for gold.

WIFE: I'm only doing it for you!

HUSBAND: But we need two phones.

WIFE: That'll give us a chance to ask for a discount.

HUSBAND: We can't be too pushy.

WIFE: Why not? It's his job to accommodate the customers, isn't it?

OWNER (*approaching HUSBAND and WIFE*): Well, have you something in mind?

HUSBAND: Just about.

WIFE: This place is pretty dazzling!

HUSBAND: So many options to choose from ... all these features, technical stuff ... not to mention the prices ...

OWNER: Well, we have to start somewhere. Why don't you tell me what you're looking for, and we'll take it from there.

HUSBAND (*having summoned all his courage*): Well, I'll be honest with you ... (*Pause.*)

WIFE: What we mean is ...

HUSBAND (*as if giving a well-rehearsed speech*): Well, sooner or later there comes a time when a man ...

WIFE: ... or woman!

HUSBAND: ... or woman has to realize ...

WIFE: ... that they ...

HUSBAND: Yes! That what they are really missing is being connected. In other words, we're going cellular! (*Gives a sigh of relief.*) There, I said it!

WIFE (*to OWNER*): We hope you don't get us wrong. We are not some kind of tech-novices! We do have a land line at home, not to mention all the electronics.

HUSBAND: But that's not the same, though, is it? We humans are social creatures. We need to stay connected every minute. And we are always in motion. So, with the help of a cell phone we can actually do both—stay in touch and go about our lives. At the same time. Isn't that right? (*After a short pause.*) Think about it.

WIFE: And don't forget about all the privacy it gives you!

HUSBAND: You just dial a number ...

WIFE: And we're not talking luxuries here. It's just one of the basic human needs ...

HUSBAND: ... and human rights, too! (*To OWNER.*) Right?

OWNER: Absolutely! Again, that's what we are here for.

HUSBAND: You might want to ask what brought us to this place. (*Pause.*) Fair enough. I'll tell you.

WIFE (*to OWNER*): You won't believe what it took to get to this point. (*Sighs deeply.*) All those second thoughts and sleepless nights!

HUSBAND: Oh, yes! And those little tizzies we got ourselves into ...

WIFE (*to HUSBAND*): Don't even go there!

HUSBAND (*to OWNER*): But don't for a moment think that we are some kind of anti-cell-phone weirdos!

WIFE (*to OWNER*): 'Cause we're not!

HUSBAND: It's just that we didn't really want to get involved.

WIFE: We preferred to look at it from our perspective.

HUSBAND: Yes. We looked at it as at a sort of spectator sport. We just observed the people who switched to cell phones.

WIFE: Out there, in the streets.

HUSBAND: While we were still holding on to the idea that it's all about detachment, distance ...

WIFE: ... restraint, if you will.

HUSBAND: Exactly! In other words, we watched the world from our cozy little armchairs, totally convinced that that was how we were actually learning things. You know, acquiring knowledge.

WIFE: And wisdom.

HUSBAND (to WIFE): That's what I said.

WIFE (to HUSBAND): No, you said "knowledge".

HUSBAND (to WIFE): No, I said "knowledge and wisdom".

WIFE (to HUSBAND): Same thing.

HUSBAND (to WIFE, *losing his patience*): What?

WIFE (to HUSBAND): All I'm saying is knowledge is WISDOM.

HUSBAND (to WIFE): What rubbish!

WIFE (to HUSBAND): Knowledge gives way to wisdom.

HUSBAND (to WIFE): Where on earth did you get such an idea? Acquiring knowledge is a process, while acquiring wisdom is something totally ... (*struggles with a definition*) ...

WIFE (to HUSBAND): That's exactly what I mean!

HUSBAND (to WIFE): Two different things!

WIFE (to HUSBAND): In this case they actually overlap. However ...

HUSBAND (to WIFE): On the contrary! They are opposites, like ... like ... cause and effect, or even like black and white.

WIFE (to HUSBAND): So which one is which?

HUSBAND (to WIFE): Wisdom!

WIFE (to HUSBAND): And how does that work?

HUSBAND (to WIFE): Here we go again! You said we wouldn't ...

OWNER (*interrupting*): Um! What would you say if I showed you some of our newest ...

HUSBAND (to OWNER, *passionately*): So we finally realized that that was a dead end for us. And that it was time to stop just being passive on-lookers and get in on the action.

WIFE (to OWNER, *passionately*): So we got out of our comfort zone and are joining the movement, so to speak.

HUSBAND: Mind you, this wasn't an easy decision to make.

OWNER: I know what you mean!

HUSBAND: But we managed to get over all this ... indecision.

WIFE: It's as if we were able to see things clearly for the first time.

HUSBAND: Oh, it's a long story!

WIFE: But not until we hit rock bottom.

HUSBAND: And at that point we asked ourselves: isn't it time to get connected?

WIFE: And to get our own cell phones?

HUSBAND: And then I came up with the idea. Why don't we, I said ...

WIFE (to OWNER): I've been thinking. What about all those irresponsible people who still refuse to accept the powerful gift of staying connected? (*wagging her index finger*) Tell me, how can they live like that?

OWNER: I've been asking myself that, too.

HUSBAND (*to OWNER, interrupting him*): Think about it! What is a regular phone? Technically speaking, I mean. (*Pause.*) It is a linear, horizontal, bound-to-earth connection, with a web of cables entangling the planet. A cell phone, on the other hand, is vertical, upward, unfettered connection. (*To OWNER.*) Does that make sense?

OWNER: You have a point there.

HUSBAND: A horizontal connection can let you down at any moment. Underground communications are always vulnerable to ground work, mice, moles, and similar creatures. A satellite connection, on the other hand, gives you instant, unsolicited access to anyone, anywhere, anytime. (*To OWNER.*) Right?

OWNER: Well, yes.

HUSBAND: And once we realized what forces were at play here, what powers could be unleashed ...

WIFE: We were in awe!

HUSBAND: And that did it for us!

WIFE: So here we are. In the very place where you get connected.

OWNER: Indeed! Welcome!

HUSBAND: Because we feel that mankind has really lost it. We have lost touch with something primary and fundamental. (*A short pause.*) Oh, yes! We've compartmentalized everything. We reduced life—nature, our own emotions, you name it—to equations, and as a result we've lost our ability to see things as they really are. (*Pauses to collect his bearings.*) Take an airplane, for example. We take it for granted that we can just load it up with luggage, packages, mail ...

WIFE: Armored personnel carriers, even!

HUSBAND: Yes. Even those. (*To WIFE.*) That's why they make cargo planes. (*To OWNER.*) You just jump on board, kick up your feet, and enjoy a glass of champagne while the plane takes you across the planet. (*A short pause.*) But we are talking tons of metal here that need to be taken off the ground! (*Pauses. Besides himself with excitement.*) If you just think about it, it's a miracle! (*Tries to catch his breath.*) It's pretty much the same with a cell phone. You can be talking to someone on the opposite side of the world while running chores, driving a car, or even sky-diving. If that's not a miracle, I don't know what is.

WIFE: And I don't care what explanation scientists come up with. The fact remains—we're dealing with a mystery here!

HUSBAND: A mystery more puzzling than an airplane. Because we are talking direct connection with ... with ...

WIFE: ... with someone ...

She does not finish her sentence when she notices YOUNG MAN appearing from stage right. He is wearing overalls indicating that he is an

employee of the store. He is rolling a telephone booth onto the stage. It is a red, full-size, old-fashioned model. The telephone booth is mounted on a trolley that is equipped with coasters. YOUNG MAN stops in the middle of the stage, right under the poster with the company's motto, anchors the telephone booth in place, and leaves the stage, only to come back a few seconds later hauling a huge backdrop screen depicting a tree-lined city street. He positions this screen directly behind the telephone booth, creating the illusion of a street pay phone.

All this time HUSBAND and WIFE watch his every move, but, since no explanation is given, they keep talking to OWNER. However, their frequent pauses suggest that they find YOUNG MAN's presence extremely distracting.

Unlike them, YOUNG MAN seems to ignore everyone, instead focusing on his task. He makes sure everything is properly installed.

HUSBAND (to OWNER, after a short pause): So ... where were we? ...

WIFE (to OWNER, with her head turned toward YOUNG MAN): Tell me something ... In your experience ... What is it that motivates your customers to ... you know ...

OWNER: Yes?

WIFE: Well ... to switch. To get connected.

OWNER (unlike HUSBAND and WIFE, he never loses the thread of their conversation): Well, as you can imagine, we have customers from all walks of life, and they all have different needs. I cannot—and will not—impose anything on anyone. But assuming that we all need the same ...

HUSBAND (still distracted by YOUNG MAN): Surely you recognize certain types.

YOUNG MAN makes sure everything is all set, looks around, steps inside the telephone booth, checks the coin return slot, finds something there, picks up the receiver, drops the coin into the slot, and dials a number.

OWNER: I'm not really sure I could say that ...

HUSBAND: Well, just for the sake of argument.

OWNER (after a short pause): I guess ... (Not really sure what to say.) though I don't think you can fit more than one person into any particular category... Some of our customers come to us looking for a fashion accessory. Others get a cell phone to boost their self-esteem. And then there are some who have it for security. Of course, there will always be those who tried everything else and have exhausted all their options ...

YOUNG MAN (into the phone, very loudly): Hello. (Pause.) It's me. (Pause.) From a pay phone. (Pause.) No, I'm fine. (Pause.) No, nothing happened... No, I can't talk right now. (Pause. Getting annoyed.) I ... (pause) I ... (pause) I... (starts yelling) I can't take it

anymore! (*Presses the receiver against his chest, covers his face with his hand, shakes his head, then pulls himself together and presses the receiver back to his ear.*) This whole life! This bloody job and the rest of it! Don't you get it? I deserve a better deal. I don't want to be ordered around. I want to start my own business. I want to give the orders. (*Pause.*) No ... yes ... no ... Something did happen. (*Pause.*) She just left me! Oh, what a nightmare! (*In total despair, he shakes the receiver, then goes back to the conversation and mocks the person at the other end of the line.*) What do you mean, "What do I mean"? She just walked out on me. Just like that! (*Pause.*) She never gave me a hint. No complaints, no warning signs. Ever! We were a perfect match. (*Pause.*) What else can I tell you? Events in chronological order? The evolution of our relationship? How can I describe it? First glance, first touch, first kiss, first ... We had years of bliss. How on earth do you expect me to describe that, eh? (*Sobbing.*) How could she do this to me?! (*Pause.*) What? What do you mean, "Pull yourself together"? There's nothing left to pull together. She ruined my whole life. She crushed my confidence. What do I have to look forward to now? What was her problem, anyway? (*Pause.*) What? (*Pause.*) No, I told you, she was happy. I gave her everything. I opened up the world for her. I taught her how to handle herself. (*Pause.*) She told me so herself! (*Pause.*) What did she tell you? (*Pause.*) No way! (*Pause.*) No, you wait! I'll be the one who ... I'll be the judge ... She could never measure up to me, that's all! (*Pause.*) And it's not my fault. It's her fault!

HUSBAND and WIFE exchange glances, totally bewildered.

OWNER (*feeling like he owes them an explanation*): This is our employee.

Apparently, he's in the middle of a ...

YOUNG MAN (*with righteous indignation*): Do you think I'm lying? Why don't you talk to my friend, then? (*A long pause.*)

HUSBAND (*to OWNER to fill in the pause*): Speaking of a regular phone ... um ... What we could never figure out ... um ... is how ...

WIFE (*jumps to his rescue*): Yes, exactly! How do you get a telephone cable from one continent to another? (*Pause.*) Suppose you stretched it all the way to the coast line. Then what? Do you just drop it out on the ocean floor or something? ... Is it even possible?

HUSBAND: Amazing, isn't it?

YOUNG MAN (*sneering at the person at the other end of the line*): "I understand" ... "I understand" ... What do you understand? You don't understand anything! (*Pause.*) No. (*Pause.*) No. (*Pause.*) I didn't choose all this. (*Pause.*) I was just thrown into it. Nobody asked my permission. (*Pause.*) Okay, I'll tell you what it's like. As soon as you learn to walk, they put hurdles and stop signs everywhere. Then as soon as you've found a favorite toy—what do they do? They snatch it from you. And so it goes, until you're old and twisted and don't give a

damn about anything! (*Pause, again sneering.*) “I know” ... “I know” ... What do you know? I feel like a violin that is being used in place of a hammer. (*Pause.*) You don’t know anything about it. (*Pause.*) Now you listen to me!

HUSBAND (*to OWNER, talking over YOUNG MAN*): So ... um ... Where can we learn more about the evolution of cellular telecommunication?

OWNER: Actually ...

WIFE (*to OWNER, talking over HUSBAND*): Can you recommend a brochure or something?...

YOUNG MAN: If only I had my own phone, she would never have left me ... I’m sick and tired of looking for a pay phone every time I need some privacy! (*Pause.*) Yes. (*Pause.*) No, it has nothing to do with me! I did nothing wrong. It was her decision. But I’m not gonna let it happen again. Things are gonna change now. I have it all planned, step by step. In a couple of months I’m quitting this job and getting a new one. I have loads of stuff in the pipeline. So I’ll be raking in at least twice as much as I do now, if not more. And that will put me into the top twenty-five percent of the population. I don’t care for the class of people I have to deal with every day of my life. I know she’s gonna change her mind the moment she finds out what she’s missing. She’ll beg me to take her back. You’ll see then. (*Pause. Scoffs.*) “Change my ways”? What for? “Then everything will work out”? But don’t you get it? I’m the victim here!... What do you expect me to do?... (*Pause.*) I always do the right thing... (*Pause.*) No, let me be the judge of that. I don’t need a sermon from anyone. Especially not from you... You want to help me? Then stop interrupting and let me finish! (*In the heat of the moment steps out of the phone booth and stretches the cord until it’s about to rip off. Gets all worked up, yanks the receiver a few times and nearly rips the cord.*) Damn it!... The signal is rubbish!...

WIFE (*to OWNER, pointing at YOUNG MAN*): Should we ...

OWNER (*to WIFE*): What?

HUSBAND (*to OWNER, pointing at YOUNG MAN*): He’s complaining about a bad connection ...

YOUNG MAN (*exhausted*): I’ve got it all worked out ... I just have to sit this one out... It’s just a bad patch... It hasn’t been my year... In January I’ll turn things around ... (*All of a sudden yells into the receiver.*) What? I can’t hear you! (*Realizes that he is being watched. Jumps back into the booth, tries to speak directly into the mouthpiece. Dramatically lowers his voice only to go back to yelling again.*) I’m not alone, and they are listening to my every word. (*Pause.*) Bad connection? (*In despair slams the receiver against the phone.*) So much for your connection! (*Finally rips the cord, and that infuriates him even more.*) You can shove it up your ... (*Now totally out of control, muttering obscenities, smashes the window with the receiver, then attacks the backdrop behind the phone booth.*)

HUSBAND and WIFE are terrified. They stagger back closer to the exit.
Having torn down the screen, YOUNG MAN breathes heavily and slowly starts to pick up the shattered glass.

OWNER (to HUSBAND and WIFE): You must excuse us ... I'll be right back. (*Approaches YOUNG MAN, tries to calm him down, picks up what is left of the backdrop and helps YOUNG MAN who is trying to get the phone booth off the stage.*)

While OWNER and YOUNG MAN are cleaning up the stage, HUSBAND and WIFE are trying to make sense of what they have just seen. They whisper.

HUSBAND: Did you see that?

Pause.

WIFE: The boy works here. That's what the owner said. (*Pointing at the poster hanging under the company's motto.*) Look there—that's him, all right.

Pause.

HUSBAND: That scene back there. What was that all about?

Pause.

WIFE: The boy was just speaking from the bottom of his heart. He's a poet!

Pause.

OWNER and YOUNG MAN roll the telephone booth away off stage.

HUSBAND (*switching to his normal voice*): He's a loser!

WIFE (*switching to her normal voice*): No, it's just a phase he's going through.

HUSBAND: Being such an egoist, you mean?

WIFE: Well, yes. It's only natural. We all go through that at some point in our lives. But I'm sure if you scratch the surface, you'll find a kind and gentle soul. A bit confused, perhaps. But what would you expect? His girlfriend has just left him.

HUSBAND: I'm not surprised.

WIFE: I have no doubt that the true reason behind their breakup has to do with his family. Maybe he suffered from a physical or emotional trauma. What if he was abused? (*Pause.*) Or maybe they were just not meant to be together. The good news is that now he has gained some experience. For his future relationships, I mean. Only it's a shame that he has resorted to this destructive behavior...

HUSBAND: I get it!

WIFE: What?

HUSBAND: It was a ploy!

WIFE: A ploy?

- HUSBAND: Yeah. They set it all up. To trick us into buying something from them. A kind of a show, like “That–was–then—and–this–is–now.” (*Imitating a TV commercial.*) “We’ve got cutting-edge, top-of-the-line phones to satisfy your wildest dreams! At your fingertips when you’re on the go!”
- WIFE (*deep in her thoughts*): Maybe we could give him a nudge in the right direction.
- HUSBAND: I wouldn’t get involved if I were you. He is a troubled young man, can’t you see? You’ll get involved and then he’ll blame you. Why do you always do that? You always feel sorry for every little piece of ...
- WIFE: How can you say that? How can you be so indifferent?
- OWNER *enters from stage right and approaches HUSBAND and WIFE.*
- OWNER (apologetically): Sorry to keep you waiting.
- HUSBAND: No problem at all.
- WIFE: We understand.
- OWNER: So, folks, why don’t we pick up where we left off?
- WIFE: And this ... your employee ... I hope you don’t mind me asking ... Will he be alright?
- OWNER: Yes. He’s been going through a rough patch, but he’ll come through it! I’ll keep an eye on him.
- WIFE: Is there anything we could do?...
- HUSBAND (*to WIFE, angrily*): You promised!
- OWNER (*to WIFE*): It’s very kind of you. I think, he just needs time.
- HUSBAND (*to both OWNER and WIFE*): But, darling, aren’t we getting a bit distracted here?
- OWNER: My fault. (*To HUSBAND.*) So, you were looking for a cell phone ...
- HUSBAND: Yes. A cell phone. Something relatively new, but not too fancy. Something basic, yet reliable and reasonably priced, too. I don’t think we should be splurging right now... If you know what I mean.
- OWNER: I understand.
- WIFE: We don’t want you to think that somehow all we care about is money. That’s not the case. Actually, we’d like to think that we’re on a quest. Believe it or not, but spiritual values are much more important to us.
- HUSBAND (*decides to cut to the chase, to OWNER*): You have to agree that, evolutionally speaking, mankind has totally run out of ideas. We have reached a dead end. And until and unless we learn to communicate with each other, we are doomed. So what we all need is a viable, universal theory.
- OWNER: Universal theory?
- WIFE (*to OWNER, with equal zeal*): A unifying doctrine that would encompass all aspects of life and give answers to the existential questions that have been plaguing humanity for thousands of years! (*Pause.*) Don’t you agree?

OWNER: What questions are we talking about here?

HUSBAND: All of the important ones. To get them out of the way. Once and for all.

Pause.

WIFE (to OWNER): Mind you, it won't be easy. But if we all pitch in, then we have a chance to ...

OWNER: I don't quite follow. So what's the bottom line here?

HUSBAND: A Universal Network!

WIFE (*points at the company motto above*): And that's where you come in, with your idea of global cellular connection. We are going to connect each and every one. We'll leave no one behind. We will include every woman, man, and child!

HUSBAND: Absolute and irreversible wireless coverage that will utilize all the latest breakthroughs in science and technology!

WIFE: And this is just the basic idea. We can polish the details as we go along.

OWNER: Is that how you intend to solve all the world's problems?

HUSBAND: Give or take. It's not so much about the problems as it's about solutions, really. If we had a network, we could reach the entire walking and talking population with our plan. We could divert their energy from destruction—like we've just seen—to something positive and constructive.

WIFE: For the common good! Then everyone will benefit from being a valued member of the Network by staying connected with all other members ...

HUSBAND: ... and by receiving important updates!

WIFE: That way everyone will be in the loop.

HUSBAND: No need to worry about anything!

WIFE: Precisely! All the information anyone might need will be dispatched to them in a timely and orderly fashion. Think of all the convenience it will bring! And think of how much time and effort it will save!

OWNER: And what if they want to opt out?

HUSBAND: Why would they? (*Pause.*) I don't know what your experience has been ... No disrespect, but when it comes to things practical ... I mean, you may be an expert in technology, but we ... we know life.

WIFE: Because there's work to be done.

HUSBAND: And I assure you that most people would like nothing more than to join the Network.

WIFE: Save for a couple of weirdos here and there.

HUSBAND: Oh yes. Most people would much rather follow clear instructions.

WIFE: To avoid taking too much responsibility.

HUSBAND: It always boils down to a sense of security.

WIFE: Or, at least, an imagined sense of security.

OWNER: Can't argue with that.

HUSBAND: And the only way to get it is by being connected to the Network.

OWNER chuckles. Pause.

HUSBAND (to OWNER, taking it as an offense): I understand your skepticism. It may sound a bit far-fetched. But make no mistake ...

WIFE (to OWNER, in an offended voice): If you look at world history, all of humanity's breakthroughs began with a crazy dream. You, of all people, should understand that. After all, we are just amateurs. While you're supposed to be an expert in these things.

HUSBAND: Isn't it your explicit goal to cover everyone with one global network? Are we missing something here?

OWNER does not have a chance to respond, because at that very moment YOUNG MAN rolls pieces of a new set onto the stage. They are supposed to represent his living room: designer furniture, a coffee table with a telephone on it, a comfortable armchair, a window overlooking a park. He is wearing casual yet stylish clothing.

YOUNG MAN puts the pieces together, then falls into the armchair, picks up the receiver, and dials a number.

YOUNG MAN: Hello!

HUSBAND and WIFE pull up chairs and sit down comfortably, with the intention of not missing a thing this time around.

WIFE gestures for OWNER to join them. He does not react.

WIFE (to OWNER, whispering): Why don't you join us?

OWNER signals to her that he prefers to remain standing.

HUSBAND (to WIFE): Sh-sh-sh!

YOUNG MAN: Hello? (Pause.) It's me. (Pause.) What? (Pause.) Yes. We did mail them out. (Pause.) And everybody has already RSVP'd. (Pause.) Yes, at the restaurant. (Pause.) Bridesmaids too ... yes ... wedding planner, menu, band— it's all set. (Pause.)

WIFE (to HUSBAND and OWNER, enthusiastically): He's getting married!

HUSBAND (to WIFE, whispering): Can you keep it down? We've already figured out that much.

YOUNG MAN: Yes, I made the reservations. (Pause.) For a suite. (Pause.) Yes. I told you, it's all set! What? (Pause.)

WIFE (to HUSBAND and OWNER, unable to hold the excitement): There's going to be a wedding! I wonder who the lucky bride is. Could it be the same girl that?...

HUSBAND (to WIFE, whispering): It's none of our business! We shouldn't be getting involved.

WIFE (to HUSBAND, whispering): Why do you always have to be so negative?

YOUNG MAN: No, no ... (*Pause.*) Nothing's changed. (*Pause.*) Except for one minor detail. (*Pause. Raising his voice.*) There will be no wedding. (*Choking.*) She packed her things and left. (*Pulls his hair and moans.*) For good! Eighteen hours before our vows! (*Bursts into tears.*)

A long pause. Everyone is in shock. OWNER shakes his head, sighs, and leans against the desk.

HUSBAND (*to WIFE, looking back at OWNER*): Didn't I tell you? Never let your emotions take precedence over your judgment.

WIFE (*resolutely*): I'm sure it's all her fault!

HUSBAND (*to WIFE, switching back to a whisper so that OWNER doesn't hear him*): Where have we seen this before?

WIFE (*dismissively*): I don't know what you're talking about.

HUSBAND: The girl—the breakup—the works ... It all happened before.

WIFE (*to HUSBAND, hissing*): Keep your voice down!

HUSBAND (*to WIFE, straight into her ear*): We are being played for suckers! Can't you see?

WIFE (*dismissively*): What's gotten into you?!

YOUNG MAN: How could she do this to me? After everything I've done for her. (*Pause. In despair.*) What am I gonna do?

OWNER shrugs in disbelief.

HUSBAND (*to WIFE*): Don't say a word. I told you—it's none of our business.

WIFE (*to HUSBAND, pointing at YOUNG MAN*): We can't just let him sink into despair. His whole life could be at stake!

HUSBAND (*to WIFE*): But what can we do?

WIFE: Under the circumstances, it might be something as simple as a word of advice.

YOUNG MAN (*outraged*): Wait a minute! (*Pause.*) I don't need your advice. When I do, I'll call you. (*Pause.*) Why? Because I know perfectly well what you're gonna say ... (*Pause.*) Okay, go on then. (*Pause.*) "Let go"? "Accept"? What exactly do you want me to accept? The fact that she used me? (*Pause.*) Or that nobody cares about me? (*Pause.*) Well, I AM focusing on the positives. (*Pause.*) Yes. I always count my blessings! (*Pause.*) Yes. But that's not enough. Because I'm not about to become complacent. (*Pause.*) Yes. He did give me a promotion... Yes, now I'm number two here. (*Pause.*) And I'm grateful to him for that ... I really am. But when I compare myself to some of my peers, I'm not happy. (*Pause.*) Well, for one thing, they're settled, with families. They have kids. And you should see their phones. Caller IDs that tell you not only who's calling but also why, plus you get their precise location, as well as current weather conditions. That's what I call real communication! (*Pause. Sobbing.*)

But how could she do this to me?! Everything she had, she got from me. I made her the way she is. Where would she be without me? ... To think of all the plans we made ... (*Pulls himself together.*) Okay, that's enough! (*Pause.*)

WIFE (*to OWNER, raising her voice*): How could you let this happen? See? That's exactly the kind of non-inclusion we're talking about. None of this would happen if he were a member of the Network. We wouldn't let him fall through the cracks.

HUSBAND (*to WIFE, trying to silence her*): Will you stop it? What's gotten into you? You don't know a thing about him.

WIFE: All I know is that he's in distress. He's trapped. If we don't intervene, he doesn't stand a chance.

HUSBAND: He's not alone. He has a job. (*Lowers his voice, points at OWNER.*) He has a boss—the owner of the shop, or manager, or whatever he is ... He'll take care of him. He already made him second in line. Didn't you hear? And how does he repay him? He trashes the place!

YOUNG MAN: I know. (*Pause.*) I know. (*Pause.*) I know. (*Pause.*) No, it has nothing to do with me. (*Pause.*) It's the curse of the leap year. I remember how four years ago ... (*Pause.*) I don't see the relevance. (*Pause.*) No, it wasn't my fault. (*Pause.*) You never listen to me! (*Pause.*) How come you always blame me? (*Pause.*) No. (*Pause.*) It's like I told you, I'm too big for this dumpy little company. I want to make it! I have ambitions too, you know. (*Pause.*) And stop interrupting me! (*Pause.*) What? What did he do for me? And, for your information, I earned my ... No, it was me who ... (*Pause.*) What did you say? (*Hurtfully.*) That was below the belt. (*Pause.*) This has nothing to do with you. It's my private life and I won't let you ... (*Pause.*) Yeah, go on, laugh it up. (*Pause.*) But let me tell you something. She WILL be my wife. You'll see. (*Pause. Getting more and more enraged with every moment.*) You're getting on my nerves now. ... I'm warning you!.. Not another word. (*Suddenly jumps up, then yanks the cord and screams at the top of his lungs.*) Boy, I wish I could smack your big, fat ... (*Slams the phone against the floor and accidentally knocks over the screen with the view of the park. Breathes heavily. From sheer exhaustion, buckles over as if in pain, and collapses into the armchair.*)

OWNER rushes to him, makes sure he is not hurt, then picks up the broken phone.

YOUNG MAN gets up and helps him. When they finish cleaning up, they roll out what is left of the set from the stage.

HUSBAND and WIFE, too frightened to say anything, just look at each other from time to time. And only when OWNER and YOUNG MAN leave the floor, do HUSBAND and WIFE start talking to each other.

HUSBAND (*shakes his head and exhales*): Well, well ...

WIFE: What?

HUSBAND: Nothing.

WIFE: No, you said something.

HUSBAND: Me? No. (*Pause.*) Okay. I said it once and I'll say it again. It's all a big set-up. We are being had. It's us they're after. They only care about their sales. They have to move their merchandise, even if they have to shove it down our throats. Who do they think we are, to buy into this rigmarole?

WIFE: What makes you think they're not for real? This whole situation looks real to me. I don't believe for a minute that this kid is a fraud.

HUSBAND: Real? Then tell me, who's he always talking to? A friend? His father? Whatever the case, this guy is not listening to anybody. He's just venting whatever plagues him at the moment. He's just pouring out his troubles. (*Pause.*)

WIFE (*as if talking to herself*): I think that instead of attacking him, we should feel sorry for him. He's the victim here. He needs someone to talk to. Somebody who cares. I'm sure he would come around. There's always hope, you know.

HUSBAND: You're doing it again. Don't be such a Mother Theresa. I'm telling you, it's a sick game! A well-calculated scam. They have teams of psychologists working for them. (*Pause.*) You want to hear what I think? (*Pause.*) For all we know, these guys could be actors. (*Pause.*) Or the owner simply pulls this kid's strings.

WIFE: No way ...

HUSBAND: No? Then how do you explain what we've just seen here? If he cared one bit about this kid, he would step in, wouldn't he? The kid is obviously crying for help.

WIFE: You've got a point there.

HUSBAND: As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to have serious doubts about the whole thing.

WIFE: What thing?

HUSBAND: Getting connected, you know, joining the Network ... What's the point, anyway? You saw it with your own eyes.

WIFE: Hang on! What if ... (*tries to articulate her argument*) ... What if you are right, and it's just a show ... Then they are probably trying to build up the suspense... In that case, we are bound to see how this whole thing plays out. (*Pause.*) The boy gets married after all... Then he makes a groundbreaking discovery of some kind, gets insanely rich and famous. (*Pause.*) I think we should give them a chance. Let's hang around to see what happens.

HUSBAND: I have a better idea. Let's try some straight talk with the owner. Maybe then he'll stop pulling the wool over our eyes.

OWNER appears. HUSBAND does not see him.

HUSBAND: We should make it clear that it's time he showed us some respect... As his valued customers. And the customer, as they say, is always right.

WIFE notices OWNER and tries to alert HUSBAND.

HUSBAND: I mean, let's face it. We, as consumers, placed a lot of trust in this company.

WIFE (to HUSBAND, in a loud voice): Love, ... I think ...

HUSBAND: I won't stand for it!

WIFE (makes desperate attempts to attract HUSBAND's attention): Ahem! ... Ahem! ...

HUSBAND: I ... (Finally notices OWNER.)

OWNER (to both of them): I must apologize ... It looks like we have a bit of a crisis on our hands ...

WIFE (to OWNER): No need to apologize! Before we let you go, we'd like some clarification on a few questions.

OWNER: All right. Go ahead.

HUSBAND: What's really at stake here is a fundamental issue ... um ... (tries to collect his thoughts) ... of ...

WIFE: ... Of the kind of commitment we are expected to make here.

HUSBAND: Because we are responsible customers. Humans, driven by greed and selfishness, have pushed the planet beyond the point of no return... So, as responsible citizens, we are expected to be the watchdogs of ... um ... (To WIFE.) What's it called?

WIFE: The environment.

HUSBAND: Yes, that's it. Take satellites, for example. Just think what it takes to launch one into orbit. And every time you do it, you make the hole in the ozone layer bigger and bigger. And do you know what happens when we lose that layer of protection? We become vulnerable to all the radiation coming from outer space.

WIFE: Turns out there's no such thing as ... what do they call it?... permafrost anymore!

HUSBAND: Yes! Next thing you know, drinking water will become the hottest commodity. Even more precious than oil. (A short pause.) Which brings us back to cell phones. Has it ever occurred to you that they are more of a hazard than a convenience?

WIFE: Of course, they'll never allow this information to reach the general public.

HUSBAND: Never. In the meantime, we are practically swimming in the radiation that these little gadgets give off.

WIFE: And it's not like we have any say in it.

HUSBAND: Precisely. And that's why business owners should be mandated to invest in researching every aspect of every product they put out on the market... To make it totally consumer friendly. And the packaging should clearly state all the information concerning ... um ...

- WIFE: Moreover, each manufacturer must guarantee that the product was not made in some sweatshop ...
- OWNER: Yes, but don't forget that we're just a retail business. If there's a problem with the product, we simply return it to the manufacturer, and they are obliged to replace it with one of a better quality.
- HUSBAND: Are you saying you are not in charge of every aspect of your business, from manufacturing to distribution to customer service? (Pause.) But ...
- WIFE: But wouldn't that make much more sense? Then you could oversee the whole process from start to finish, and have total control over every stage!
- OWNER: Maybe it would, but it's not my responsibility to control everything and everyone. I have to think of consumers first. After all, they're putting their trust in us. So to us they are more like family, really ...
- WIFE: United into one Universal Network?
- OWNER: I guess you could say that.
- HUSBAND (to OWNER, losing his patience): Wait a second! Listening to you, it sounds like you're not really in charge here. Then who is? The government? Or some giant corporation whose only game is to catch as many innocent victims in their net as they can?! To cover the whole world with their web?!
- OWNER: But isn't that exactly what you wanted?
- WIFE (with indignation): When did we ever ...
- HUSBAND (to WIFE, scoffing): I knew he would start twisting the facts. (To OWNER.) Yes, we did say so. But it was more like a dream to us... Something to strive for ...
- WIFE: A vision, if you will.
- HUSBAND (to OWNER, with reproach): But then there are people like you, who have it all. (Randomly points at various parts of the showroom.) Just look at all this stuff!... Do you know what you've done? .. You've hijacked our dream!
- WIFE: And you've distorted and ruined it for everybody!
- HUSBAND: Even worse, you took advantage of our trust, and used all the new technologies to ... to spy on us!
- WIFE (with her voice breaking up): You turned your own employee into a raving ...

YOUNG MAN stumbles onto the stage. He is wearing an expensive suit and a tie. An earpiece with a microphone is attached to his ear. He is on the phone, shouting and paying no attention to what is going on around him. It is apparent from his behavior that he has had one drink too many.

- YOUNG MAN (sneering): "Why? " Why?"... Because—that's why! She just packed up her things and left... (Pause.) There we go again ... I called you, didn't I? So, I think, I should talk and you should listen...

(Pause.) She was everything to me! (Bursts into tears, then rubs his eyes.) Seven years of my life I gave her... Seven years of marital bliss ... Seven ... What do you mean, “When”? Half an hour ago! (Pause.)

YOUNG MAN moves about the stage as if he is the only one here. From time to time he stops or sits down or leans against the displays. He is totally engrossed in this conversation that sounds more like a monologue, thrashing about the showroom without purpose, picking things up randomly, then putting some back while dropping others in odd places.

HUSBAND, WIFE and OWNER have no choice but to make way for him.

YOUNG MAN: No, we never had any fights. We lived in total harmony. I know she was happy with me... This happened totally out of the blue... She just threw a few of her things and some books into a duffel bag and took off ... Said she wasn't coming back... Said I could keep the rest of the stuff, including the car and the apartment ... What? (Pause.) Of course, she did, but what kind of explanation is that? (Imitating.) “I can't live like this, I'm suffocating ...” (Pause.) What a load of ... she watched too many soaps. (Pause.) What makes me say that? ... Well, for one thing, I had to work my ass off. And what was her contribution? All she did was go around spending my money.

WIFE (to HUSBAND): She probably met someone else.

HUSBAND (to WIFE): What?

WIFE: She met another man.

YOUNG MAN: And who did she leave me for? ... That prick! (Pause.)

What? Of course, I know him. A puny little prick! Works somewhere in a low managerial position. Earns a fraction of what I do ... I can't believe she could fall for an ugly, balding shmuck like him... (Pause.) I have my own business! I'm in charge. I do whatever I want... (Pause.) What?!.. But what does it have to do with my boss?! I can take full credit for what I have now. (Pause.) I sell only quality merchandise. Top of the line. Touch screen, voice-activated... He's no competition for me. I'm bigger than he is now... What? ... No, you can tell me that later... Because I haven't finished yet... No, it's you, who's not listening! (Moves frantically across the stage. Picks up a remote, randomly presses one of the buttons, and the lights along the walls of the showroom start blinking frantically.)

HUSBAND (to WIFE, making sure OWNER can hear him too): This is getting worse!

YOUNG MAN: I asked her point blank: how would you rate me in bed? Compared to him. And she goes: “I'd say you beat him. You are the man.” (Both relieved and indignant.) Then, I say, what the hell is your problem?! (Throws up his arms in disbelief.)

YOUNG MAN attempts to turn off the blinking lights. He presses a few buttons on the remote, shakes it a few times, and then, when everything fails, hurls it across the stage. He decides to inspect the wire to see where it leads to the switch in the wall. While doing that he accidentally elbows HUSBAND.

HUSBAND (to *YOUNG MAN*): Hey! Watch it!

WIFE (to *HUSBAND*): He can't hear you.

HUSBAND (to *OWNER, pointing at YOUNG MAN*): Shouldn't you be doing something?

YOUNG MAN: And then she has a nerve to tell me (in a distressed voice, imitating a distraught woman) "You've put up a wall around yourself!" (Pause.) What wall are you talking about? I ask her. (Pause.) "Just listen to yourself," she says, "You are not talking to me... You always talk to yourself... And you always talk about yourself... In your world there is only room for you... All you see is your reflection..." For your information," I tell her," I am too snowed under at work to look at myself in the mirror, as you're insinuating. "You are trapped," she says, "and there is absolutely nothing I can do to rescue you ... I tried, I really did!.. But this is it! We are finished!" What do you mean, this is it?... Why don't you explain that to me? "Oh, no," she says, "I'm not explaining anything anymore. But I'll tell you this much... I'm jumping on the first train that comes. Even if it breaks both my arms and legs. Because I have to salvage whatever bit of sanity I have left!" (Pause. Speaking in a calm, reasonable voice.) Well, I say, there's no need to take out your frustrations on me. (Pause.) I like using a figure of speech as much as the next person. But in this case, I'm afraid, it is totally inappropriate. (Pause.) Why don't you explain it in plain English? (Pause. Explodes.) What? How is it my fault? She just couldn't measure up to me. Isn't that obvious? (Pause.)

YOUNG MAN starts tearing down the lights. The wires throw sparks in an apparent short circuit. HUSBAND and WIFE stagger back. OWNER, on the contrary, steps closer to YOUNG MAN, who first bounces up and down, and then starts thrashing about and bumping into things.

YOUNG MAN (completely out of it): Because I've got potential! I've got energy! I've got ambition! I've got plans!

WIFE: Somebody do something! He may hurt himself!

HUSBAND (to *OWNER*): He's your responsibility, isn't he?

OWNER: What do you suggest I do?

WIFE: Restrain him, before he brings the whole place down!

OWNER (to *WIFE*): But didn't you just demand that he be given a chance?

HUSBAND (with indignation): You're doing it again. Twisting the facts!

WIFE: Of course we wanted to give him a chance—but only if he’s not a menace to society!

YOUNG MAN: What makes you think I need your advice? (*Pause.*) I’ve had your advice up to here already. (*Pause.*) And no, I’m not wearing any blinkers. I can see perfectly fine, thank you. And stop all this doom and gloom! You don’t scare me. I know what you’re doing. You’re trying to put all this guilt on me. (*Pause.*) I’ll have you know that I once took a course in applied psychology. (*Pause.*) Anyway, you always talk in generalities, using metaphors, hyperboles ... Well, I’m declaring war on generalities, metaphors, hyperboles, and other figures of speech. So stuff it! (*Pause.*) For your information, when I worked at ... What? (*Pause.*) Okay, let me spell it out for you. You want to help me? Then shut up and listen! (*Pause.*) No ... no ... (*Pause.*) I’ll worry about that later. If you really want to help now, make her come back. (*Pause.*) But there will be some preconditions. (*Pause.*) One. She should take back all the horrid things she said to me ... No, wait!.. Two. She’ll have to promise ... Hold on! I haven’t finished. We’ve got to have a baby. Preferably a boy! And then she can go screw somebody else. (*Pause.*) You are interrupting again. What? (*Pause.*) And three!.. ONLY then can I consider taking her back.

WIFE (*to HUSBAND, whispering*): Listen!.. I’ve just worked it out.

HUSBAND (*to WIFE, whispering*): What?

WIFE (*to HUSBAND, speaking straight into his ear*): It’s obvious to me now that the owner is his father!

HUSBAND (*whispering back*): Could be. (*His eyes follow YOUNG MAN, who thrashes about the showroom and, surprisingly, appears to be listening.*) Who else would tolerate such an inept employee? He’s probably suffering from some kind of a ... a neurological condition, and the boss has no choice but to keep him under his wing.

YOUNG MAN *suddenly stops in his tracks and collapses into a chair.*

YOUNG MAN (*his speech begins to show signs of exhaustion and intoxication*): I hate this time of year... All kinds of crappy things begin to happen to me. (*Lowers his voice as if trying to confide in someone.*) I don’t think it’s a coincidence. (*Pause.*) There must have been an eclipse that we all missed, or something ... Well, we don’t have any control over that. All we can do is wait until ... (*starts to sing*) ... the Moon is in the seventh house, and Jupiter aligns with Mars ... (*stops singing*) ... Everything must first fall apart, and then I’ll start afresh ... Come January, everything will be different. .. My whole life will be different.

OWNER *looks at his watch.*

YOUNG MAN: Oh, shut up! (*Looking at his watch.*) You know what?... Why don’t you go and ... (*Pause.*) I hate you! You and

YOUR GIFT! (*Sneering.*) Stay connected ... What's the point?!
(*Rips out the wire attached to his ear. Throws it on the floor and
tramples on it.*) I don't need your connection!.. See, I'm free now!
(*Totally consumed by rage, he accidentally stubs his toe, yelps, and
collapses on the floor.*)

*Without saying a word, OWNER rushes to help YOUNG MAN back to
his feet, dusts off his jacket, and gingerly walks him off the stage.
For some time HUSBAND and WIFE are unable to talk.*

HUSBAND (*to WIFE, after a long pause*): Still dreaming of getting
connected?

WIFE (*after a pause*): Actually, it was your idea ...

HUSBAND (*as if talking to himself rather than to his WIFE*): This whole
thing is just a sham ... That's what it is!

WIFE: What now?

HUSBAND: All this "staying connected" business. It's candy to lure kids of
all ages.

WIFE: It can't be that simple.

HUSBAND: You better believe it... Because that's the whole point... It
works every time. They make you believe that no matter what mess
you get yourself into, you are safe with them. All you have to do is
dial their number and they come to your rescue. (*Pause.*) And all the
while they've been creating an illusion! (*Pause.*) Need I remind you of
what you've just seen?

WIFE (*after a pause*): So, where do we go from here? (*Pause.*) Think of all
the time and energy we've put into this ... (*Pause.*)

*OWNER walks in and starts cleaning up the mess left by YOUNG MAN.
HUSBAND and WIFE wait for him to address them, but OWNER seems
to pay no attention to them. They look at each other.*

WIFE (*to HUSBAND, whispering*): Well, well ...

HUSBAND (*to WIFE, whispering*): Come on. We're out of here.

WIFE (*to OWNER, with over-exaggerated cheerfulness*): Thank you for
your time ...

OWNER (*matter-of-factly*): You're welcome.

WIFE: ... but we've gotta be going now.

OWNER (*to HUSBAND and WIFE*): Come back any time. (*Goes back to
cleaning up.*)

HUSBAND (*to OWNER, in a semi-condescending way*): And, by the way,
we both appreciate that little bit of theater you offered us.

OWNER: Theater?

HUSBAND: Very impressive. You can't beat the performing arts when it
comes to getting your idea across.

OWNER: And what idea would that be?

HUSBAND (*tries not to lose his temper*): One would expect you to remember your own company's motto... Which reminds me ... What kind of a message is it supposed to send, anyway?

OWNER (*sincerely*): I'm afraid I don't quite follow you.

WIFE (*slightly offended*): Something tells me you know exactly who we are talking about. That employee of yours! It's obvious that he was a loyal follower of your company's philosophy. And now he's a living proof that it simply doesn't work!

OWNER (*finally putting two and two together*): No ... no ...

HUSBAND (*mocking him*): Yeah ... yeah ...

WIFE: Your own flesh and ... (*stops herself just in time*) ... employee was connected up to his ears here. And look how he ended up! If that's not a tragedy, then tell me what is!

OWNER: Oh, but you got it all wrong.

HUSBAND and WIFE turn around, getting ready to leave.

HUSBAND: Oh, please ... Now you're insulting our intelligence.

OWNER: On the contrary. I'm trying to level with you.

WIFE: So you admit that everything we've seen here is merely play-acting?

OWNER (*after a pause*): Well, in a manner of speaking, we all have roles to play.

HUSBAND (*slightly irritated*): In that case I'll rephrase the question.

(Pause.) Was there anybody on the other end?

OWNER (*makes a vague gesture*): You'll have to ask him.

WIFE: But, of all people, I would expect you to know the answer.

Pause.

OWNER: I do, actually.

Pause.

HUSBAND: So? (*A tense pause.*) What is it, then?

Pause.

OWNER (*with a sigh*): Well, in this particular case, it makes no difference.

HUSBAND: But that means he was fooling us!

WIFE: And himself!

Pause.

HUSBAND (*both to WIFE and OWNER*): Let's take a look at what we've got here ... You are saying that it's all about communication ... Yet all we can see is a complete breakdown in communication. (*Pause.*) That leads to a question: how does it convince us to get on board, so to speak?

Pause.

OWNER: I guess it doesn't.

A very long pause.

HUSBAND and WIFE are visibly puzzled.

OWNER gives them a chance to respond, then resumes tidying the room.

HUSBAND (*shaking his head*): I can't believe this ...

WIFE (*lashes out at her HUSBAND*): Is that all you can say? .. It's a disaster!.. What kind of idiots would fall for a cheap scheme like this?! (*Points at OWNER.*) How delusional did we have to be to take this ... salesman ... for the real deal?

HUSBAND (*with a voice of moral authority*): That's progress for you!.. The planet is on the verge of collapse... It's time somebody pressed the "reset" button ... We simply MUST go back to square one... To such basic, fundamental notions as ...

WIFE (*interrupting him bluntly*): Will you shut up! (*Goes toward the exit. To HUSBAND, without turning her head.*) Are you coming?

HUSBAND, without saying good-bye to OWNER, follows his WIFE.

The sound of rumbling noise from the backstage. YOUNG MAN appears from stage right. He is back in his overalls, and he is pushing a telephone booth back onto center stage. He anchors it in the exact same place and leaves the stage, only to come back a few seconds later with a huge screen depicting a pleasant tree-lined city street. He positions it directly behind the phone box, then gets into it, checks the coin return slot, picks up the receiver, and dials a number.

OWNER finishes cleaning up the showroom and sits down at the counter.

A melodic door chime signals that the customers have left the store.

YOUNG MAN: Hello!

The End

Translated by Lidia and Volodymyr Dibrova

Original publication: Volodymyr Dibrova, "Na telefoni," in his *Chotyry, try, dva, ody: p'iesy* [Four, Three, Two, One: Plays]. Kyiv: Laurus, 2016, pp. 17–58.

