

*THE BARGAIN*

*AT RISE: A LOUD RINGTONE splits the darkness, ringing insistently.. STAGELIGHTS RISE on a well-appointed Living Room. DR. RONALD RICKMAN, 55, sits on a sofa and stares apprehensively at the RINGING iPhone. Makes no move to pick it up as it RINGS AGAIN. His wife, REGINA RICKMAN, 32, well-dressed and putting on her earrings, enters STAGE LEFT.)*

REGINA. Aren't you going to answer that?

RICKMAN. Huh?

REGINA. Your phone. Why don't you answer it?

RICKMAN. It's um, an unknown number. Probably just some robocall.

REGINA. Are you sure? It could be one of your patients.

RICKMAN. I don't give my patients my cell number.

*(The phone continues RINGING. Rickman just stares at it.)*

REGINA. Spam callers are not usually that insistent. You should probably answer it.

*(Rickman hesitates. Just as he reaches out to the phone, it stops ringing)*

RICKMAN. Oh, well. If it's important, they'll leave a voice mail.

REGINA. This isn't like you. You're usually a lot more attentive to your patients.

*(She retreats STAGE LEFT. A moment later, the Phone RINGS AGAIN, and Rickman grabs it immediately. He says nothing, but what he hears makes his face pale. He tosses the iPhone back on the table, as if it was burning hot. Regina enters, putting on earrings.)*

REGINA. So, who was it this time?

RICKMAN. Nobody. Robocall just trying to sell me something.

REGINA. Like what?

RICKMAN. I don't know. I hung up before they said.

REGINA. *(Sharply.)* You expect me to believe that?

*(He looks around nervously. The phone RINGS AGAIN.)*

REGINA. Let me get it this time.

RICKMAN. NO!!

*(He leaps forward to grab the phone before she can reach it, nearly knocking her over in the process. He presses the phone to his ear.)*

RICKMAN. *(into phone)* Listen, I'm done. I can't do this anymore...

*(He drops the phone. Looks up to see Regina glaring at him.)*

REGINA. Is there something you want to tell me, Ronald?

*(Before he can answer, the phone RINGS AGAIN. This time, a suspicious Regina moves for it.)*

RICKMAN. Don't answer it!

*(He grabs the phone first. Yells into the phone.)*

RICKMAN. *(into phone)* I said I'm done! Leave us alone!

*(Rickman shoves the phone in his pocket. Looks up at his wife. Her fierce expression says it all. She turns her back to him, fuming. The PHONE RINGS AGAIN. But this time, it is her iPhone.)*

REGINA. Hello?

*(She looks at her husband with a confused expression.)*

REGINA. It's for you...

*(He yanks the phone from her hand. Screams into it.)*

RICKMAN. *(into phone)* It's over! I'm out!! Don't ever call me again!!

*(He throws her phone onto the sofa. She has never seen so much panic in his eyes.)*

REGINA. *(Carefully.)* Tell me what's going on, Ronald...

*(He opens his mouth, but before he can think of an explanation, his PHONE RINGS. So does HERS. Then the landline RINGS. And the computer starts to BEEP.)*

COMPUTER. You've Got Mail!

*(The TV turns on, with the words: INCOMING MESSAGE. VOICES, SOUNDS and CHIRPS erupt from electronic devices all over the house.)*

ANSWERING MACHINE. You have three new messages.

SIRI. Incoming call for Dr. Ronald Rickman.

*(The two stares at each other, as the cacophony of RINGTONES & BEEPS INCREASES to a frightening level. Terrified,. Rickman reaches for his phone. But before his fingers touch it, everything stops. Somehow the SILENCE is even more disturbing. His voice quavers as he turns to his wife and says...)*

RICKMAN. Tell me you locked the door?

SETTLEMENT AGENT. It would hardly matter.

*(In the UPSTAGE RIGHT corner of the room stands the SETTLEMENT AGENT. Straight-faced. Age Indeterminate. Dressed all in black. Rickman grabs an IRON POKER from the fireplace.)*

AGENT #2. That would be unwise.

*(Both turn to see AGENT #2, similarly dressed in black and eerily calm, appearing STAGE LEFT. A third, similarly dressed AGENT 3 enters STAGE RIGHT. He calmly removes the iron poker from Ronald Rickman's hand.)*

AGENT #3. Extremely unwise.

REGINA. *(Panicked.)* What's going on, Ronald? Who are these men?! What are they doing in our house?!

SETTLEMENT AGENT. Please sit down, Mrs. Rickman...Dr. Rickman...