

Adventure Cabaret

Selfie Intervention

Scene One

A young man is sitting alone in his room. He is holding his cell phone, and moving his hand left and right on the phone, looking at pictures. Periodically he holds the phone up, smiles a strange, empty smile, and takes a picture of himself. His parents enter. He stops looking at the phone, but is still holding it where he can see the screen.

Father: Hi Luke.

Luke: Hi Dad. Hi mom. What's up?

Mother: Luke, we'd like to talk with you for a minute.

Luke: Uh...ok. What about?

The parents seat themselves, facing Luke. He barely looks at them, because he is still looking at his phone.

Mother: Honey, would you mind putting your phone down for a little while?

Luke: Why?

Father: Because this is important, and we need your full attention.

Luke: Sheesh. So *heavy*. Well, ok.

Reluctantly, he puts the phone down, but barely away from his hand. While his parents are talking, he can't help glancing at the phone repeatedly.

Mother: Luke, we're worried about something.

Luke: Worried? What about?

Father: Luke, we're worried about you.

Luke: Me? I'm fine.

Luke emits a nervous laugh, and glances at his phone.

Mother: Luke, I'm so sorry to say this, but we are beginning to think that you have an unhealthy relationship with your phone.

Luke: What? That's ridiculous.

Father: No. No, it's not. Luke, you can't even put your phone down for a minute.

Luke: Oh, come on. I just put my phone down.

Mother: Yes, but you can't help glancing at it every few seconds, as though you'll die without it.

Luke: Jesus...this is getting crazy.

Father: We agree, but I don't mean this conversation. I mean your behavior. It's getting crazy, because you also take pictures of yourself nearly every minute of the day.

Luke: I do not!

Mother: Yes, Luke. Yes, you do.

Luke: Man, what is this, the Inquisition?

Mother: Luke, we love you, and we're worried about you.

Father: You don't seem to have a life outside your phone.

Luke: I do have a life! I spend time with my friends!

Mother: Yes, but they are all on their phones too.

Luke: So what? That's what we do!

Father: Luke, I want to ask you a question.

Luke: Oh, the Inquisition has another question?

Father: Yes, as your father I need to inquire about something.

Luke: Jesus...ok.

Father: Do you actually have any interests, other than what is on your phone?

Mother: It's as though your phone has taken you over, and you don't exist without your phone.

Father: Even now, you keep glancing at your phone as though you are depending on it for your next breath.

Luke: Bullshit! I'm interested in lots of other stuff.

Mother: Like what, Luke?

Father: Yes, like what?

Luke: Like stuff on...WhatsApp..and TikTok...and YouTube...and...other stuff.

Painful silence.

Father: Ok, this is exactly what we mean.

Luke: Leave me alone! You're crazy! You're both crazy!

Luke suddenly stands up, but as he does so he grabs his phone, and starts looking at it, completely ignoring his parents.

Father: Luke, we want to send you to a psychiatrist.

Mother: Yes, we do.

During the next line, Luke is holding his phone, not looking at his parents, jabbing away at the phone.

Luke: Fuck you! I'm not the one who's crazy. You are!

Father: Luke, we are sending you to a psychiatrist we have already selected.

Mother: Sorry, honey, but you are grounded until you see Dr. Belsen.

Luke: Oh my god. I can't believe you guys.

Father: Sorry, kid. That's the deal. Tomorrow you're staying home from school, and then your appointment with Dr. Belsen is at 2pm.

The parents get up and leave, the mother looking back with a worried expression of love and concern. Luke looks around, distraught. This only lasts a few seconds. He suddenly grabs his phone, holds it at arm's length, puts on the empty smile, takes a selfie, and then looks at the selfie on his phone.

Scene Two

On stage are two chairs, facing each other, turned somewhat toward the audience. In one chair is Dr. Belsen, the psychiatrist. She is holding a letter-size notepad and pen, making a few notes. Luke enters, holding his cell phone by his side. Dr. Belsen looks up.

Dr. Belsen: Oh, hello, Luke. Come on in.

Luke: Ok, thanks.

Dr. Belsen: Have a seat.

Luke: Ok.

He sits, reluctantly, and can't stop glancing at his phone.

Dr. Belsen: Your parents have told me why they sent you to me. Could you give your own explanation of why your parents wanted you to see me?

Luke: Yeah, they think I spend too much time on my phone.

Dr. Belsen: No, it goes beyond that. They think you have an unhealthy relationship with your phone that is hurting you, and will hurt you even more if you don't change that relationship.

Luke lifts his phone up toward his chest, shielding it.

Luke: That's crazy. I'm just a normal kid, with a phone.

Dr. Belsen: Why did you just pick your phone up? Why are you holding it against your chest?

Luke: Wow. The Inquisition again.

Dr. Belsen: Luke, I'm going to ask you to please put your phone down.

Luke: But why?

Dr. Belsen: Because you're in a serious therapy session, and both of us need to give the session our full attention.

Pause. Luke looks at his phone.

Dr. Belsen: Put the phone down, Luke.

Luke: Jesus. Ok, ok.

Luke slowly puts his phone down, still holding it in his hand, screen up.

Dr. Belsen: Your parents tell me that you take a lot of selfies.

Luke: Just like all my friends.

Dr. Belsen: Why do you do that?

Luke: Do what?

Dr. Belsen: Take all those selfies.

Luke: You don't get it. It's just what we do.

Dr. Belsen: So you want to fit in?

Luke: Of course I want to fit in. I want to fit in in every way.

Dr. Belsen: In every way?

Luke: Yes, of course. I just want to like what my friends like. I want to be just like them. I don't want to be unlike them in any way.

Dr. Belsen: Okay. Getting back to the selfies. Do you take pictures of anything else?

Luke: No. Why would I?

Dr. Belsen: Well, because it's a big world out there: oceans, the sky, mountains, trees, buildings, flowers, so many different people, beautiful animals...

Luke: So? I can always put that stuff in the background, if I want.

Dr. Belsen: You don't think that only taking pictures of yourself is a bit...narrow?

Luke: Look, the point of a selfie is so that you can look at yourself later.

Dr. Belsen: And?

Luke: And then feel alive.

Pause.

Dr. Belsen: You don't feel alive right now?

Luke begins to bring the phone back up in front of him.

Dr. Belsen: First, put the phone back down. Next, answer me.

Luke slowly brings the cell phone down to his side.

Luke: I'm not sure.

Dr. Belsen: So you're telling me that you only feel alive when you're looking at a selfie on your phone?

Luke: You make it sound so weird.

Dr. Belsen: Tell me more about how you feel when you are looking at a selfie you took.

Luke: Well, when I look at a selfie I took, and see that I'm smiling, I feel happy.

Dr. Belsen: What happens when you look at a selfie where you aren't smiling?

Luke: I make sure I never take those. If I took a picture like that I would feel bad, and my friends would laugh at me.

Dr. Belsen: Ok. Luke, now I'm going to ask you a very serious question, and I want you to answer me honestly. Is that all right?

Luke: Um...I guess so.

Dr. Belsen: Do you ever have any strange thoughts?

Luke: What do you mean?

Luke's arm lifts the phone a bit closer to his chest.

Dr. Belsen: Like thoughts that you find shocking, or disturbing?

Pause.

Luke: I don't want to tell you.

Dr. Belsen: Tell me anyway. It's important.

Pause.

Dr. Belsen: Luke, this is very important. Please tell me.

Luke: Do I have to?

Dr. Belsen: Yes.

Luke: Ok...sometimes I want to kill all my friends.

Dr. Belsen: Why?

Pause, confusion, then outburst.

Luke: Because they're all just shallow, conformist idiots who only relate to their phones, have no other interests, and only take selfies. I hate all of them. They disgust me. I don't want to be anything like them.

Pause.

Dr. Belsen: Thanks for your honesty. I know that was hard. You do see the problem, don't you?

Luke: No.

Dr. Belsen: You just described yourself.

Luke: No I didn't!

Dr. Belsen: Luke, please. We need to make progress here, and psychological progress depends on honesty.

Luke: Now you're accusing me of dishonesty?

Dr. Belsen: Luke, we all have a choice to make: me, you, your friends, everyone. We can either try to hide from life, or we can embrace life, with all its messiness and disappointments and joys and pains and surprises, pleasant and unpleasant. You are trying to hide from life inside your phone. You have hidden from life inside your phone for so long that you don't even know what you feel. You're so tied up with your phone that you don't even know whether you're alive, outside of your selfies. It's dangerous. I just want you to know that. What you are doing is dangerous. You need to make a choice: life, or your phone. I want you to think that over while I make a few notes.

Dr. Belsen lifts her notepad to write on it such that it blocks her view of Luke. Luke looks distraught, his gaze darting about. Suddenly he reaches for his phone, smiles the empty smile, and takes a selfie. Dr. Belsen finishes her notes.

Dr. Belsen: Now Luke, I'd like to...huh.

Dr. Belsen looks around the room, surprised, then sighs, then shrugs.

Luke: You'd like to what?

Dr. Belsen gets up, and walks across the room.

Luke: Didn't you hear me? You'd like to...what?

Pause.

Luke: Why are you ignoring me? Jesus, what the hell is this?

Luke stands up, and walks directly in front of Dr. Belsen, who is rooting around in her purse.

Luke: Hey! Don't you hear me? Don't you see me? I'M STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU! Ok, you really are crazy. I'm going home.

Luke exits.

Dr. Belsen: Well, that was a first—a patient just suddenly disappearing.

Dr. Belsen exits.

Scene Three

Luke's bedroom. Luke is sitting, playing on his phone. He smiles the smile, and takes a selfie.

Mother: (offstage) Luke?

Luke: Yeah, mom?

Luke's mother enters.

Mother: Luke, honey, where are you?

Luke: Mom, I'm right here! What the heck is wrong with you?

Father: (offstage) Is Luke up there?

Mother: No, he's not here!

Luke: Mom, what the hell is going on? Is this some sick game?

Luke's father enters.

Father: Ok, I'll check out in the garage.

Luke: Dad, I'm standing right here!

Luke's father exits.

Mother: Oh Luke. Where are you?

Luke walks directly in front of his mother.

Luke: Mom, stop this. I'm standing right in front of you. Don't you see me? Don't you hear me?

Luke's mother looks around, distressed.

Mother: Luke!

Luke puts his arms around her.

Luke: Mom, can't you feel my arms around you? Mom..I'm afraid.

Luke's mother shrugs, which has the result of Luke releasing her from his embrace. She exits.

Luke: Mom...I'm afraid. I'm afraid.

He begins to cry, then sob. Then he lifts his phone to chest level, wipes away his tears, lifts the phone into position, smiles the empty smile, and takes a selfie.

Lights out.

Screen: Luke's body was never found.

But a week after his disappearance his cell phone was found, at the edge of the river.

It contained nothing but smiling selfies.