

WILL  
MACHINES  
TERRY JONES

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Three handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is 'Dan', the second is 'Justin', and the third is 'John'. The signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dan, Justin and John

Founders, Unbound

*For Anna and Siri*



## THE TRUTHFUL PHONE

You might think that there was nothing particularly evil about a Truthful Phone. It simply told the truth, which is, of course, 'A Good Thing To Do'. But the way this particular telephone told the truth was not at all good. In reality the thing was evil from the tip of its mouthpiece to the end of its cord.

It was put up for sale in a shop window with a label that read: 'The Truthful Phone - £10'.

'I've never heard of such a thing,' said Mrs Morris, who was frail and elderly but of an enquiring mind.

'I wouldn't take it, if I were you, Mrs Morris,' said the shopkeeper, who was a kind man despite his appearance. 'The truth can get you into all sorts of trouble.'

'Oh dear,' replied Mrs Morris. 'I always understood the truth never hurt anyone.'

'Don't you believe it,' said the shopkeeper. 'The truth can be dangerous and undesirable and should be shunned as long as is possible. Nobody really wants the truth. They want to live in a world that is comfortable and happy. The truth would just make most people miserable.'

'But I need a new telephone,' said Mrs Morris, 'and this one is the cheapest by far!' And with that she bought the phone and took it home. That very day she got Albert, the odd job man, to come and install it.

The first time it rang, Mrs Morris picked the phone up and was surprised to hear her old friend Mabel say, 'Ha! May Morris, you old fraud! I hope you rot in hell!'

'I beg your pardon? Is that you Mabel?'

'How dare you call me a parasite!' cried Mabel indignantly.

'I didn't, my dear . . . Are you feeling quite well?'

'If you've always thought I was a freeloader who cultivated your friendship simply for the free teas, why have you pretended to be my friend for so many years?' shouted Mabel.

'Upon my soul!' cried Mrs Morris. 'I think you had better ring back when you're feeling more yourself again, dear.' And she hung up.

She then stood for some time gazing at the phone.

A little later she rang the greengrocer.

'Hello, Mr Murphy?' she said into the phone. 'I hope you're well today?'

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone.

'Hello? Are you still there?' asked Mrs Morris. 'I'd like to order a big bag of your best potatoes and some leeks.'

'Er . . . ' said Mr Murphy.

'And a cucumber, a lettuce and a pound of tomatoes. Is that all right?' asked Mrs Morris.

'I think my wife's coming!' said Mr Murphy hurriedly and he rang off.

Mrs Morris was more than a little astonished, though she had the feeling that the phone may have had something to do with the odd way in which Mr Murphy had received her order for potatoes, leeks and salad.

As for Mr Murphy, he was equally surprised. He had picked up the phone and had heard Mrs Morris, that sweet little old lady from down the road, say, 'Hello, you gorgeous hunk! I've been thinking about your bottom all week!'

He was so surprised, in fact, that he didn't know what to say.

Then he heard Mrs Morris continue, 'I love the ginger hair on your arms and the manly way you tip potatoes into my shopping bag and then stick in the leeks.'

All he could say was, 'Er . . .'

Then Mrs Morris went on, 'Since the unfortunate late Mr Morris disappeared under mysterious circumstances in the Campsie Fells, I have dreamt of running a market garden with you in Worthing!'

At this point, Mr Murphy began to get really worried, and made up some story about his wife walking in to the shop. He put the phone down and blinked at his assistant, Tom, and then at the customers. Had they heard what Mrs Morris had said? What on earth had got into the woman?

He spent the rest of the day keeping to the back of the shop in case Mrs Morris should turn up in person. But she didn't.

In fact Mrs Morris was far too busy to go down to the shop to pick up her leeks and potatoes. She was round at the police station telling Constable Robinson how she'd received a strange phone call.

'It was Albert, the odd-job man. He said he was going to come round and fix the boiler for me . . .'

'Does he often ring up and say things like that?'

'Oh yes, officer, he's very helpful.'

'So what's the problem?'

'Well, he also said that he'd probably steal a few things while he was at it. He said he'd noticed some valuable-looking jewellery in a drawer in my bedroom. I said I didn't realize he'd been poking around in my bedroom drawers, and he told me he'd been stealing things from me for years, but I'd never noticed because he only took small things and only a few at a time.'

'Why do you think he was telling you all this?'

'Oh! I don't think he was!' said Mrs Morris. 'I think it was the Truthful Phone.'

'Hmm!' said Constable Robinson. 'The Truthful Phone?'

'Yes,' replied Mrs Morris. 'I want you to arrest it!'

'We don't normally arrest telephones,' said Constable Robinson. 'Perhaps I'd better come and have a look.'

So Constable Robinson went with Mrs Morris to her house to take a look at the Truthful Phone. It didn't look very different from an ordinary phone, except that it had a switch on the side.

'May I try it?' asked Constable Robinson.

'Of course,' said Mrs Morris.

So Constable Robinson rang the superintendent back at the police station.

'Oh! Hi, Super!' said Constable Robinson. 'Robinson here. I'm just trying out Mrs Morris's Truthful Phone.'

'You're what?' exclaimed the superintendent, who was startled to hear Constable Robinson say he knew all about the bribes the superintendent took from criminals and local businessmen, and that he was going to report the matter to his superiors.

'I'm trying out Mrs Morris's Truthful Phone,' repeated Constable Robinson.

'You do and I'll break every bone in your body!' roared the superintendent. 'And I mean that!'

And, from the tone of the superintendent's voice, Constable Robinson knew it was the truth, even though he hadn't the slightest idea what he had said to make the superintendent so angry.

'It's not what *you* said,' whispered Mrs Morris. 'It's what the phone said that is the problem. I think I'll take it back to the shop.'

Just then the phone rang.

'Hello?' said Mrs Morris. 'This is May Morris speaking.'

'I don't want to go back to the shop,' said the phone.

'Who is this?' asked Mrs Morris.

'It's me, your new telephone,' said the phone. 'I like it here. If you try to have me disconnected, I'll make your life a misery.'

'You're already doing that!' exclaimed Mrs Morris. 'I'm going to call Albert now.'

'What and let him steal from you?' said the phone.



'At least he doesn't mess around with what I say!'

'Don't disconnect me or I'll . . .'

But Mrs Morris had already slammed the phone down.

'Who was it?' asked Constable Robinson.

'It was the phone,' said Mrs Morris.

'I know it was the phone, but who was *on* the phone?' asked Constable Robinson.

But before Mrs Morris could explain, the phone rang again. Mrs Morris picked it up and then turned to the police officer.

'It's for you, Constable,' she said.

Constable Robinson took the phone. 'Hello?' he said.

'Ask Mrs Morris what happened to her husband,' said the phone and then rang off.

'What was that?' asked Mrs Morris.

'Someone just said, "Ask Mrs Morris what happened to her husband," and then rang off,' explained the constable.

'What!' exclaimed Mrs Morris in some agitation. 'Who was it?'

'They didn't say!'

'It's the phone!' cried Mrs Morris. 'It's evil!'

And she grabbed the phone and shouted into the mouthpiece, 'I'm having you disconnected and you're going straight back to the shop!' But all she got back was the dialling tone.

'Constable,' said Mrs Morris. 'Would you help me disconnect this phone? I don't trust it to say what I want it to say.'

'Certainly,' said Constable Robinson, and he started to pull at the wires, whereupon the phone rang again. Constable Robinson stopped and looked at Mrs Morris. She shook her head.

'Don't pick it up!' exclaimed Mrs Morris. 'Don't listen to it!'

'But it might be the superintendent,' said Constable Robinson, and he picked up the phone as if it were a live

crab.

'Look in the garden shed,' said the phone.

'Who's that?' shouted Constable Robinson, but the phone had rung off.

Constable Robinson frowned. He looked across at Mrs Morris. She was white-haired and frail.

'No, no . . . ' he said to himself. But then he remembered that it was his duty as a policeman to investigate anything that needed to be investigated.

'Would you mind if I looked in your garden shed, Mrs Morris?' he said.

'Of course not,' said Mrs Morris. 'Is there something you need from there?'

Mrs Morris took Constable Robinson into the garden and showed him the shed. She unlocked it, and he went inside. Immediately the phone started ringing back in the house, and Mrs Morris hurried back, while Constable Robinson inspected the garden shed.

But Mrs Morris didn't answer the phone; she simply took it off the hook and left it there. She didn't want to hear another word it said.

When Constable Robinson returned from inspecting the garden shed, he said to Mrs Morris, 'You have a very fine garden shed, Mrs Morris. It is remarkably well equipped: you have welding apparatus, wood and metal lathes, and even a blast furnace for smelting.'

'Yes,' replied Mrs Morris. 'It was my unfortunate late husband's favourite place. He spent hours in there making all sorts of things.'

'Is there someone on the phone?' asked Constable Robinson, indicating the receiver lying off its hook.

'Ignore it,' said Mrs Morris.

But Constable Robinson had already picked up the receiver.

'Did you see it?' hissed the phone.

'It's full of equipment,' said Constable Robinson.

'Don't listen!' said Mrs Morris.

'The weedkiller!' hissed the phone. 'In the bottle on the shelf by the flower pots! That's what she used!'

'For what?' asked Constable Robinson.

'Take no notice of it!' said Mrs Morris, and she grabbed the telephone receiver out of the Constable's hands, and yanked the wire hard.

'NOOO!' screamed the Truthful Phone. 'Don't!'

But it was too late! The wire came out of the socket in the wall, and the Truthful Phone was disconnected. Mrs Morris sank down in a chair.

'It is an evil thing!' she said, glaring at the phone. 'I shall take it back to the shop straight away.'

'But what was it talking about?' asked Constable Robinson.

'It was raking up old and unfounded rumours about my late and unfortunate husband's disappearance, under mysterious circumstances in the Campsie Fells,' replied Mrs Morris. 'You see, he liked making things in the garden shed, which, as you so rightly observed, is remarkably well equipped. One day he told me he was going out on the Campsie Fells, which, as you know, is a range of hills to the north of Glasgow, to test out a new kind of dog walker. The Campsie Fells was his favourite place for testing things. But that day he never came back.'

'I'm very sorry,' said Constable Robinson.

'Yes,' said Mrs Morris. 'I was sorry too. Would you like a cup of tea?'

'That sounds like an excellent idea,' said the constable.

And so that's what they had.

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When Constable Robinson returned to the police station, he found the superintendent waiting for him. 'Listen, Constable Robinson, I'm thinking of promoting you.'

'Really!' exclaimed Constable Robinson. He'd been in the force without promotion for so long he'd almost given up hope.

'Yes,' said the superintendent, 'but there are one or two things that we should keep confidential, just between you and me.'

'I see,' said Constable Robinson, 'that's OK by me.'

But the business with the Truthful Phone was not quite over.

'Oh, by the way,' said the superintendent, 'there's a message on the answering machine for you.'

Constable Robinson recognized the voice on the answering machine at once. It was the Truthful Phone. 'Listen, Constable Robinson,' it said. 'Just in case I do get disconnected, I think you should know the truth about Mrs Morris's husband. He didn't disappear under mysterious circumstances in the Campsie Fells. He was poisoned in his own home. With weedkiller.'

Constable Robinson shuddered. All his working life in the police force he'd dreaded this moment when he would be confronted by a real criminal and would have to make an arrest. Of course, he'd given out the usual speeding fines and he'd reported several cars for going through red traffic lights, but he generally managed to avoid any contact with proper criminals.

Now here he was faced with a criminal of the worst sort: a murderer - possibly a murderess! But Constable Robinson didn't hesitate. He knew what his duty was and he went straight to his superintendent, and told him the story. The superintendent immediately leapt into action.

'We've no time to lose!' he said. 'She may be armed and dangerous!'

'Who? Mrs Morris?' stuttered the Constable, who was having difficulty imagining that dear little old lady wielding a machine gun.

But the superintendent was already on the phone. 'I want six squad cars and an armed escort a.s.a.p.!' He yelled and slammed the phone down.

In less than an hour, the police had arrived at Mrs Morris's home. Several armed officers jumped out of a van, wielding machetes, and broke down Mrs Morris's front door. Four sprang up the stairs and broke down all the doors up there, while six ran through the ground floor, knocking down any door that happened to be shut and one or two that weren't.

They opened Mrs Morris's cupboards and pulled all her clothes and personal belongings on to the floor. They pulled all the tins off her larder shelves and ransacked her fridge.

'The suspect seems to have skipped it!' reported Officer Tait to the superintendent.

'Somebody must have tipped her off!' exclaimed the superintendent. 'Which means she's not operating alone! Quick! Send reinforcements!' he barked into his radio.

In the meantime, some police officers dug up the lawn and rose beds looking for dead bodies and others raided the unfortunate late Mr Morris's garden shed.

'Suspect's shed is full of suspicious gear!' reported Officer Tait, and he took the superintendent to see the metal-working lathes, mechanical saws and smelting furnace.

'Looks like she's been cutting up her victims and burning them in the furnace!' exclaimed the superintendent. 'No wonder we didn't find any dead bodies buried under the lawn or rose beds! She could be the greatest mass-murderer of all time! Quick, send more reinforcements! This is going to be all over the press tomorrow! Well done, Constable Robinson! I can see promotion ahead for all of us!'

'I can still hardly believe it,' murmured Constable Robinson. 'She seemed such a sweet old lady. But look! There's the weedkiller, just as the phone said!'

'Take that as evidence!' exclaimed the superintendent. 'And that garden fork is an offensive weapon.'

By the time the helicopter had arrived there were something like fifty police officers crowded into Mrs Morris's house and garden, most of them armed.

'Now where is that phone?' asked the superintendent. 'It's our key witness.'

'It's gone!' gasped Constable Robinson. 'She must have taken it back to the shop!'

'No time to lose!' shouted the superintendent. 'We may yet apprehend the suspect, before she can escape the country!'

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All this while, Mrs Morris had been making her way back to the electrical shop where she had bought the Truthful Phone. She went via the park, where she always spent a pleasant hour feeding the ducks and pigeons. She then stopped at the greengrocer to order some leeks and potatoes. The greengrocer himself wasn't to be seen, however, as he was hiding in the back of the shop, so she told his assistant to give him her best wishes.

She then went on to the electrical shop, and was surprised to find that it had a helicopter hovering above it.

'There she goes!' whispered Constable Robinson, peering out from the police van, on the other side of the street. 'That's her!'

'Suspect entering shop now!' radioed the superintendent. 'OK, men, we'll go in all together and take the suspect by surprise. Wait for my countdown.'

When Mrs Morris handed the Truthful Phone back to the shopkeeper, he nodded. 'I didn't think you'd like it,' he said. 'The truth is often very unpleasant.'

'You are quite right, young man,' replied Mrs Morris.

'But wait a minute!' said the shopkeeper. 'You've got it set all wrong! Look!'

And he pointed to the switch on the side. When you looked closely you could see in tiny letters the words 'True -

False'. The switch was turned to 'False'.

'It's been telling you lies!' exclaimed the shopkeeper.

'And not just me!' said Mrs Morris.

And that was the moment when six specially trained officers jumped out of the helicopter on to the roof of Baker's Electrical Shop, smashed their way through the ceiling and abseiled down on to the counter.

At the same time, fifty armed officers burst into the shop, spraying bullets at the ceiling. They pounced on Mrs Morris, handcuffed her, put a bag over her head and bundled her into the back of a van.

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The story was, indeed, all over the press some weeks later, but I'm afraid neither Constable Robinson nor the superintendent got their promotion. The case was thrown out of court on the grounds that the Truthful Phone was not a reliable witness.

In his summing up the judge said, 'Since Mrs Morris only purchased the phone that morning, it could not have been a witness to the events it described. It was simply spreading malicious gossip.'

As for Mrs Morris, she successfully sued the police for wrongful arrest and, with the £84 she received in compensation, she was able to buy a very nice telephone. It was red, and it said exactly what anyone who used it said and nothing else.

The Truthful Phone itself disappeared under mysterious circumstances. The police claimed it had escaped from custody when they proposed charging it under the defamation laws. But there were rumours circulating that the superintendent had paid one of his friends to tie it to a lump of concrete and drop it off Westminster Bridge.

Whatever happened to it, everyone agreed that they were well rid of such an evil contraption.

But all the same, Mrs Morris felt she'd been lucky; as she said to her friend Mabel, 'Goodness knows what would have happened if that switch had been pointing to "True"!'





## THE NICE BOMB

The bomb landed in the middle of the Johnson family's living room during supper.

'Well, you're very lucky!' said the bomb. 'Normally my make and model goes off 100 per cent of the time. Would you like a cup of tea?'

'Yes, please,' said Mr Johnson, who to tell the truth was still more than a little shaken by a bomb dropping through the ceiling into the family living room.

So the Nice Bomb picked itself up and bustled round making tea for the Johnson family. Meanwhile the Johnsons turned on the telly and watched the news, which was all about how bombs had been dropping all around London. Apparently a little-known terrorist group was dropping them as a protest against the inefficiencies in the postal system.

The news reporter was interviewing a masked man who said, 'A second-class letter can take up to a week to arrive and even first-class letters have no guarantee of arriving the next day! This is something that we in MADIPPOS will not stand for!'

'MADIPOS?' asked the Interviewer.

'Movement Against Deficiencies in the Postal Service' said the masked Terrorist.

The Johnson family were all nodding in agreement with the Terrorist, when the Nice Bomb brought in the tea.

'I've buttered some scones as well. You all look as if you've had a bit of a shock.'

'Well, yes, we have,' said Mrs Johnson. 'It isn't every day a bomb lands in your family living room.'

'But I must say, for a bomb, you are very pleasant,' said Mr Johnson.

'Thank you,' said the Nice Bomb. 'I like you too.' And it settled itself back on the sofa.

They all watched television for the rest of the evening. There was a quiz show during which the Nice Bomb guessed all the right answers long before any of the contestants.

'How do you know all that stuff?' asked Kevin, Mr and Mrs Johnson's son.

'I'm what they call a "Smart Bomb",' said the bomb.

'You could be on the show!' said Loretta, Mr and Mrs Johnson's daughter.

'Oh no, I couldn't!' replied the Nice Bomb. 'I'm only a bomb, don't forget.'

'But you are a very nice bomb,' said Mrs Johnson.

'Unfortunately, I think you'll find that, according to *The Quiz Show Rule Book*, bombs aren't eligible to participate in TV game shows,' replied the Nice Bomb. And it was right.

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The next day, the Nice Bomb helped Mrs Johnson get the children off to school.

'It must be very exhausting for you - doing all this work day in day out,' said the Nice Bomb to Mrs Johnson. 'I could take a load of it off your hands.'

'That's very kind of you,' said Mrs Johnson, as the Nice Bomb loaded the dishwasher, hung the clothes out to dry, and spring-cleaned the entire house.

'But don't tire yourself out, my dear,' added Mrs Johnson, as she drank her twelfth cup of tea while flipping through magazines on the sofa.

'Oh, don't worry about me,' said the Nice Bomb cheerily. 'Us bombs have no concept of *tiredness*.'

When the children came home from school, the Nice Bomb made them a snack and then supervised their homework.

When Mr Johnson came in from work, the Nice Bomb cooked a particularly tasty supper of chicken in tomatoes and chilli.

'You may be only a bomb,' said Mr Johnson, 'but you can't half cook!'

'And it's finished off my knitting for me,' said Mrs Johnson, holding up a beautiful Fair Isle sweater that the bomb had created that afternoon out of a rather pedestrian pattern that Mrs Johnson had been working on for months.

'You're a very nice bomb,' said Mr Johnson.

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But the next day there was bad news. Mr Johnson came home from work and said that another group of terrorists had blown up the factory where he worked.

'They were protesting against the parking restrictions,' he said regretfully. 'And while I thoroughly agree with them about relaxing the waiting and loading regulations in Casper Street, it does mean I don't have any work and will not be able to buy any Christmas presents this year.'

'Oh dear!' said the Nice Bomb, when it heard all this. 'Perhaps I can help. I may be only a bomb, but I'm very good at fixing computers.'

So the Nice Bomb, in addition to doing all the housework, and feeding the children and supervising their homework, started an Internet business repairing computers.

Every day more and more computers arrived to be repaired, and the bomb was able to fix them in no time at all – in between rearranging the living room and bleaching the bed-sheets.

To begin with, Mr Johnson used to get up early and set off to look for a new job.

‘As soon as I find a new job, you can relax,’ he said to the Nice Bomb.

‘Oh! That’s all right!’ replied the Nice Bomb. ‘Us bombs don’t know the meaning of the word *relaxation!*’ And it cleaned the oven, washed all the windows and made a soufflé for supper, while at the same time mending a dozen more computers in its spare moments.

As the weeks went by, however, Mr Johnson started going out later and later to look for work, while the Nice Bomb’s computer business went on from strength to strength, and the money poured in.

‘I’d give you a hand,’ said Mr Johnson, ‘only I don’t know the first thing about computers.’

‘That’s all right,’ said the Nice Bomb. ‘Us bombs don’t mind a bit of hard work!’

So Mr Johnson joined Mrs Johnson, sitting on the couch and leafing through magazines all day, while the Nice Bomb scuttled around the house, darning, sewing, dusting, cleaning, and mending the furniture – all the while fixing broken computers, digging the garden, washing up, shopping and doing a spot of ironing.

‘You be careful you don’t overdo it, my dear!’ shouted Mrs Johnson from the couch.

‘Ooh! Don’t worry about me!’ the Nice Bomb called back. ‘I’m only a bomb, I can’t overdo anything.’ And it finished washing the car, gave it a quick wax, repainted the outside of the house and built an extension to the garage.

The children, Kevin and Loretta, grew very fond of the Nice Bomb. It helped them so much with their homework that they started getting better marks at school. They became punctual and even started to enjoy school more than they had done, thanks mostly to the Nice Bomb.

When Christmas came, the bomb worked twice as hard. It earned enough money to be able to buy everyone presents. It put up the decorations, and made the Christmas pudding. It cooked Christmas dinner single-handedly, and arranged

the table with red flowers and white snowdrops and candles. It was the most elegant Christmas dinner the Johnson family had ever had.

Two aunts and an uncle came to Christmas dinner, and were surprised to be greeted at the door by such a polite bomb in evening dress and white gloves, who took their coats from them and then poured them a sweet sherry.

‘That seems a very nice bomb, you’ve got there,’ remarked Aunt Justine.

‘Yes, it is,’ said Mrs Johnson. ‘It’s a very nice bomb indeed.’

The Nice Bomb provided some fine wine to have with the goose, and then dessert wine to drink with the Christmas pudding.

During the brandy and cigars, Mr Johnson got up and called for silence.

‘My dear friends,’ he said. ‘This is the best Christmas any of us have experienced for many, many years. We have enjoyed not just the grandest spread and the best wines we have ever tasted, but we have also had such fun. We have played the most hilarious games and received such lovely presents. We have never had a dull moment. Not just that, but as I look round this table now, I cannot remember having seen such harmony and happiness in this or any other family.’

‘And we owe all this to one person . . .’ And here Mr Johnson turned to the Nice Bomb, who was just serving out some more brandy from the decanter.

The Nice Bomb looked down at the floor in embarrassment and said: ‘Please! Please! Remember I’m not a person – I’m just a bomb . . .’

‘But we owe so much to you . . . our dear friend . . . who has rescued us from the brink and provided for us and brought us so much happiness.’

‘Yes! Yes!’ said everybody, as they raised their glasses in a toast to the Nice Bomb.

'Speech!' they shouted. 'Speech!'

So the Nice Bomb stood up and said: 'I'm sorry, everyone . . . I truly am . . .'

'What on earth do you mean?' asked Mrs Johnson. 'You've nothing to be sorry about . . . You've done so much for us . . .'

And that was the moment when the Nice Bomb exploded. For no matter how much it tried to be nice, it was - after all - just a bomb, and bombs are, I'm afraid, by their nature, evil things.