

NEXT!

a play

by

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NEXT!

CHARACTERS

ACTOR 1

ACTOR 2 (much younger than ACTOR 1)

ACTOR 3

ACTRESS 1

ACTRESS 2

ACTRESS 3 (in a wheelchair)

NURSE (SISTER)

ANGEL

HANDICAPPED PEOPLE

SETTING

Space resembling a doctor's waiting room.

TIME

Presumably today.

A huge waiting room at the doctor's office. On the right - a door with a backlit incandescent sign reading "Next!".

In one of the corners there is a psychoanalytic couch (resembling an ancient Greek bed) where ACTOR 3 is sitting. Two benches are occupied by ACTORS 1 and 2 and ACTRESSES 1, 2. ACTRESS 3 is in a wheelchair, while somewhere apart and gathered together are HANDICAPPED PEOPLE - sitting on the floor.

These are men and women with mild mental or psychological disabilities who are not aggressive, can understand where they are and want to be on stage. If some of them know a poem, can sing a song or simply wish to tell a life story, they are encouraged to present them, when and if they want to. The director, however, should not rehearse any new lines with them, but only things they already know and can talk about. It is the actors who are on the second place in this play and they have to stop any dialogue or action between them if the HANDICAPPED PEOPLE decide to say something on the stage.

Among the HANDICAPPED PEOPLE there is an ANGEL who can be an actor or even their doctor, but in any case - a person who has become very close to them and who will be able to act as one of them. He constantly smiles, touches, kisses and embraces them and may even use several simple musical instruments in order to instil rhythm and harmony among them. The ANGEL, of course, attempts to kiss and embrace also some of the ACTORS and ACTRESSES, who, in turn, avoid him harshly.

The only thing that each of the HANDICAPPED PEOPLE is required to do is leave the stage at a certain moment. If that happens to be a problem for some of them - the NURSE, or the ANGEL, are there to help.

The room where they are incorporates subtle details to imply doubt about the reality of this space. It only looks like a waiting room, but the discerning eye should be able to grasp something surreal in it.

The set designer should bear in mind that mentally disadvantaged people usually dislike white as a colour.

(The rehearsal process is of exceptional importance for the handicapped people. They have to be clearly shown that it is they who are in the main parts. If the director gets to know them really well, these people should be able to present very strong texts that they may have learnt before their illness began, for example. However, they don't need to say anything at all – they will still have their crucial importance with their observing (or not observing) the ACTORS, with their mere presence on the stage. It is important that ACTORS should never raise their voices.)

If for any reason the participation of handicapped people on stage is considered impractical, they can be replaced by actors (at least four of them).

ACTRESS 1

So, a spoonful or two of sherry -

ACTRESS 2

(slightly drunk)

Oh, I can't drink sherry.

ACTRESS 1

(from time to time glances to the corner where there is a broom, a dust-pan and a mop)

But it's not for drinking, you will use it as a flavour.

ACTRESS 2

Still – to be stinking of sherry -

ACTRESS 1

No, it won't be stinking. And you can substitute it with vermouth.

ACTRESS 2

Mmm, great. I like vermouth.

ACTRESS 1

You do, don't you? So, you take the duck, rinse it thoroughly and boil until it becomes white, then you hang it up to dry for two to three hours – it is important to have it absolutely dry before the -

ACTRESS 2

Buth..., ahm but, we aren't making dried duck here -

ACTRESS 1

Listen to me – it will be juicy and mind-bogglingly tasty, but before you glaze it, it has to be dry. So, you have boiled it, and now have to let the water drain off. You can use a desk fan for that.

ACTRESS 2

(writing down)

Use a fan... Will a hairdryer do?

ACTRESS 1

I haven't tried that – you may overdry it this way. Better use a fan. I told you it's not an easy recipe. But, in the end, you will have everybody on their knees in veneration.

ACTRESS 2

Wow, that's it, venera...uhm. And then?

ACTRESS 1

And then you take the sherry sauce and glaze it.

ACTRESS 2

Well - first we dried it and now we moisten it?

ACTRESS 1

That's how it is cooked - you can't put the sherry when the water is still dripping from the duck. The aroma will be entirely lost.

ACTRESS 2

Oh, the aroma! I told you sherry is something I don't ... use.

ACTRESS 1

Okey, vermouth.

ACTRESS 2

Vermouth is all right. What about some vodka?

ACTRESS 1

No, no vodka whatsoever!! But - I forgot to tell you that the first boiling -

ACTRESS 2

Oh, is there a second boiling?

ACTRESS 1

Plenty of that. It takes up the whole day.

ACTRESS 2

Imagine that -

ACTRESS 1

(as if to jump and grab the dust pan and the broom)

Yes, dear, I can. But! I forgot to tell you that it would be much better if you used pot for the first boiling.

ACTRESS 2

Pot? Ah, you mean ... ceramics?

ACTRESS 1

A pot. Ceramics, you know, a clay pot you can use - the taste gets much better.

ACTRESS 2

(writes down)

Clay. All right. Then?

ACTRESS 1

Then you put the duck in the pickle.

ACTRESS 2

Oh, that's something I've missed. What pickle?

ACTRESS 1

You prepare it like this: six slices of ginger-

ACTRESS 1

And how big are these zhinzher shlices?

ACTRESS 1

As big as a thumbnail, not more.

ACTRESS 2

(writes down)

Thump-nail. How big a thumbnail?

ACTRESS 1

Well, an ordinary thumbnail, not one of those... most feminine ones.

ACTRESS 2

(writes down)

All right. And how about zhinger powder?

ACTRESS 1

You can..., but as a rule fresh ginger is the best. I use powdered ginger only when there is no fresh one, which is never.

ACTRESS 2

(writes down)

Ne-ver!

ACTRESS 1

Two blades of leek, three pints of water, three spoonfuls of honey - organic acacia honey is the best - and two spoonfuls of soy sauce.

ACTRESS 2

What kind of soy sauce?

ACTRESS 1

Oh, good that you asked! Soy sauce from Japan. I don't know what rubbish they put in the Chinese ones. You'd better buy one of those Japanese brands that they use for sushi. Naturally fermented and produced only of organic soy, which is more expensive, of course, but they are fantastic, I can tell you.

ACTRESS 2

(writes down)

Rubbish, all right.

Enters SISTER.

SISTER

The next!

Picks out a HANDICAPPED PERSON. ACTOR 1 jumps to his feet, anxious.

ACTOR 1

But -

SISTER and the HANDICAPPED PERSON go through the door without noticing ACTOR 1 who nervously walks around the waiting room, then sits down.

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

There is certain order here, why are people so impatient, that's what I can't understand...

And so – you put the duck in the pickle it should be completely covered by the liquid and you start boiling it again during which you turn it over several times.

ACTRESS 2

(turns her hand over)

You turn it over.

ACTRESS 1

Then you take it out and dry it again.

ACTRESS 2

(hiccups)

They are tireless these Chinese, they are. And again - a fan?

ACTRESS 1

Yes, you can use a fan, but turn it lower, so that it doesn't blow your duck away, because now the meat is more tender and there are a lot of spices on it.

ACTRESS 2

Hee-hee. Oh, ok, yes.

(writes down)

I turn the fan lower... and?

ACTRESS 1

The oven is preheated to 175 degrees and the duck is put on a metal fire-grate-

ACTRESS 2

Metal fire-grate. Yes-

ACTRESS 1

And you put a saucepan full of water below the grate so that it doesn't touch its surface -

ACTRESS 2

Wait a minute what doesn't touch what?

ACTRESS 1

The duck doesn't touch the surface of the water.

ACTRESS 2

(writes down)

Oh, that's like an I-Ching verse. And... what does it mean?

ACTRESS 1

This way, while you are roasting the duck, steam is coming out of the saucepan, which keeps the meat succulent and tender. It doesn't dry.

ACTRESS 2

Does that apply for the Peking Duck only?

ACTRESS 1

No, dear. When roasting in an oven it is generally advisable to have some water beneath the grate so that the meat can stay tender.

ACTRESS 2

All right, I'll know it. *Darling*, you are great!

ACTRESS 1

You roast it for about an hour and a half, then turn it over and roast it for another thirty minutes. Until it gets reddish-brown. That's when the skin gets crispy.

ACTRESS 2

And you keep the oven at 175 degrees all the time?

ACTRESS 1

All the time. After that the meat is separated from the bones and is cut in thin flat chunks and you arrange them in a round pre-heated plate.

ACTRESS 2

Chunks of meat...all right.

ACTRESS 1

Then you pour on the preliminary prepared sauce-

ACTRESS 2

There is preliminary prepared sauce?

ACTRESS 1

Yes, dear. Write down. Three spoonfuls of soy sauce, a spoonful of water, two pinches of sugar and a little sesame oil.

ACTRESS 2

And you boil it?

ACTRESS 1

No, you don't boil it. This is your cold sauce.

ACTRESS 2

Oh, great. I will put in some ice.

ACTRESS 1

No ice! You dip the blades of leek into the sauce and together with some chunks of the meat you wrap them in the pancake-

ACTRESS 2

Wait a bit, what pancake?

ACTRESS 1

Oh, yes! Beforehand, you have prepared twenty four small pancakes.

ACTRESS 2

I have prepared twenty four pancakes? And?

ACTRESS 1

And you serve. Bon appetite!

ACTRESS 2

(for a certain period she has held her hand as if holding a glass of drink, she now looks at it, realizes there is nothing in her hand and throws the imaginary glass on the floor. Sound of breaking glass)

How appetizing! It must be delicious, no? After so much hard work!

ACTRESS 3

When the Chinese want to have the Peking Duck, they go to a restaurant.

(pause)

ACTRESS 2

Excuse me, what did you say?

ACTRESS 3

When the Chinese want to have the Peking Duck, they go to a restaurant.

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

The Chinese may go wherever they want, but do you really think that the Chinese restaurants here will prepare it exactly this way?

ACTRESS 3

And do you really think you will feel the difference if they don't?

(ACTRESS 2 chuckles)

Enters SISTER.

SISTER

Let's see... who's next?

SISTER advances to ACTRESS 2, who is playing with her notebook. SISTER stares at her sternly and intently.

SISTER

It's your turn.

ACTRESS 2

I..., I..., and so suddenly-

SISTER

Let me see.

(Takes her notebook, reads from it.)

SISTER

„Fan, pot, a nail of a normal person, turn it over, turn it lower, iron fire-grate, the bird doesn't touch the surface of the water, chunks of meat separated from the bones, rubbish, never.” Yes. Chunks of meat... a nail of a normal person... I see. Please, come. Come with me. This way.

ACTRESS 2

But this is a recipe... I -

SISTER

A recipe, of course, a recipe. Come.

The two of them go towards the door.

ACTOR 1, obviously anxious, goes after SISTER, but she doesn't seem to notice him and goes out together with ACTRESS 2. ACTOR 1 regains his composure, sits down.

(pause)

ACTRESS 1 gets up and starts tidying up things. She goes to the corner, takes the broom and the dust-pan and begins to sweep, after which she will start rubbing the floor just in front of ACTOR 2.

ACTOR 2

But, Madam, what are you doing?

ACTRESS 1

Cleaning, can't you see how dirty it is here.

ACTOR 2

It's smelling of detergent everywhere.

ACTRESS 1

It was smelling of detergent yesterday. Now it's smelling of germs reproducing in remnants of detergent.

ACTOR 2

Really? But isn't this the job of the cleaning woman?

ACTRESS 1

And so? By the time she remembers to do what she has to, we will surely have passed away – all of us. Don't you see how much one waits for this doctor? I can't just sit and do nothing in this case. Most probably some strange disease is already developing in your lungs.

ACTOR 2

Oh, no please, no. Do you really think it's that dirty in here? Oh, my!

(he puts a flu mask on his face)

And why didn't you tell us earlier? ... That was, in fact, that was what

(contd.)

I was wondering about: we have been waiting here for ages and no sign of a scrubbing woman at all! You go to the doctor's and get infected with something you haven't even heard of!

ACTRESS 1

And it's only now when you realise it? Oh, dear. The highest concentration of diseases is precisely at the doctor's.

ACTOR 2

Oh, my god. It's good that we have you here. Madam, I'm kissing your hand. Well – no, not exactly at the moment. Figuratively speaking. You are pure gold. A fabulous house...wife!

ACTRESS 1

Oh, thank you, but this is nothing special. You have to come home to see-

ACTOR 2

Yes, of course, of course. I am sure it's like a ... space lab there.

ACTOR 1 (to ACTOR 2)

You know, talking about homes, you must come round.

ACTOR 2

(during the whole conversation with ACTOR 1, he looks at ACTRESS 1, half-enamoured, half-interested in whether she will clean everywhere, and from time to time shows her the places he thinks she has left out)

Mhm?

ACTOR 1

I have extended the house with three more rooms, I called an architect – a young boy, but a true aesthete – the project was superb. Now, I just have to find some free time, to start throwing parties-

ACTOR 2

Oh, yeah? Do you still have his phone number? I also have some things to be designed.

ACTOR 1

And what is to be designed in a flat?

ACTOR 2

In my flat – nothing, but I want a swimming pool designed for my summer house.

ACTOR 1

Oh, a swimming pool for the summer house-

ACTOR 2

Yes, when my daughter comes back from America-

ACTRESS 1 pricks up her ears.

ACTOR 1

Oh, you have a daughter... in America?

ACTOR 2

Yes, yes. She went there several years ago. Before my wife died. She got a full scholarship-

ACTOR 1

I see. And! - they have swimming pools everywhere in America, and when she comes home, she surely needs to have what to plunge into-

ACTOR 2

By all means. But I want to have something more - how did you put it – 'more aesthetic'.

ACTOR 1

Well, this young architect is just what you need. He will examine your yard, see what is suitable. And how big is your yard?

ACTOR 2

Very big – two thousand square yards.

ACTOR 1

Ugh, a tiny yard that is.

ACTOR 2

Enough for a swimming pool.

ACTOR 1

Do you have balconies?

ACTOR 2

Of course, how come without balconies?

ACTOR 1

You know, this man might decide to design a deeper pool so that you can jump into it directly from the balconies. From a springboard.

ACTOR 2

Fancy that-

ACTOR 1

Well, with such a small yard... – you have to make the most of your environment's features.

ACTOR 2

My daughter, she is doing environment studies in the USA, she will have what to say about environment. By the way, how's your son?

ACTOR 1

Studying ecology in the United States? Ha ha ha hee hee! That's like going to Africa to specialize in Polar Studies.

ACTOR 2

Ha ha ha hee hee!

(beat)

And how's your son?

ACTOR 1

Well, ok, ok, thanks.

ACTOR 2

But how is he doing?

ACTOR 1

Well, he's very, very-

ACTOR 2

Did he marry, did he graduate from university?

ACTOR 1

No, no, he is against marriage-

ACTOR 2

How do you know? So you see him?

ACTOR 1

But, I, you-

Enters SISTER.

SISTER

Next!

SISTER picks up a HANDICAPPED PERSON. ACTOR 1 jumps to his feet, anxious. In the meanwhile ACTOR 2 slips out of the stage, but not through the door of the doctor's office.

ACTOR 1 (to SISTER)

But-

SISTER and the HANDICAPPED PERSON go through the door without noticing ACTOR 1 who nervously walks around the waiting room, then sits down.

ACTRESS 1

What is going on?

ACTOR 1

Don't you see what is going on? They call other people, while my son is still there and they don't let him out.

ACTRESS 1

Your son?

ACTOR 1

Mmmm.

ACTRESS 1

What's wrong with him?

ACTOR 1

He is a little unwell.

ACTRESS 1

Unwell? A little?

ACTOR 1

Yes. Down's syndrome.

ACTRESS 1

I am sorry very much. Is it congenital?

ACTOR 1

Yes, it's congenital. You can't get infected.

ACTRESS 1

And you have only one child?

ACTOR 1

Only one, yes. We didn't dare have another one. His mother can hardly bear it any longer. She doesn't want to come here to go through all this again and again.

ACTRESS 1

You can calm down – this one is a very good doctor.

ACTOR 1

I am calm. I'm calm. Calm. But there is no order here at all.

ACTRESS 1

A very good specialist, mind you.

(pause)

ACTRESS 3 *(to ACTRESS 1)*

And who told you the doctor was a good specialist?

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

Excuse me?

ACTRESS 3 *(to ACTRESS 1)*

Who told you the doctor was a good specialist?

ACTRESS 1

Oh, dear – that’s what everybody says.

ACTRESS 3

I see.

ACTOR 1

And why are you here if you don’t believe it.

ACTRESS 3

Believe it, or not – I have to be here.

ACTRESS 1

But why ‘have to’?

ACTRESS 3

I can’t avoid it – he’s the only one who can help me to do what I want.

ACTRESS 1

Which is?

ACTRESS 3

Pardon me?

ACTRESS 1

What is that you want to do?

ACTRESS 3

But what the... *(pause)* I want to get rid of this body.

The “Next!” sign is lit. A HANDICAPPED PERSON slowly gets up and goes towards the door. There is a touch of finality in this situation. He closes the door behind himself.

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

You want to kill yourself?

ACTOR 1

So this doctor performs euthanasia or what?

ACTRESS 1

What kind of a doctor would do that?

ACTOR 1

But, but... why nobody goes out?

ACTRESS 1 (*to ACTRESS 3*)

So you want to put an end to your life?

ACTRESS 3

Are you in your senses? – Of course I don't want to end my life. I want to transform my life. To be happy. These arms and legs are a huge handicap for me. I can't stand them. I want them amputated so that I can have a clean start. I feel myself only from here to here

(she shows her torso with her head)

These arms and legs make me ugly. I want to be in a wheelchair.

ACTRESS 1

Oh really? I haven't heard of such an illness-

ACTRESS 3

It's not an illness! It's body modelling! Why do you look at me like that? There are people who want to have a tattoo. Well. Is that a change to your body? It is. And a permanent one. Does somebody call it an illness? Other people put all kinds of things on their bodies, including metal horns. Some people even change their sex – they pay and they change it. Does anybody think they are ill? I want to have my body modelled in the shape I like. Like an ancient Greek statue. And that's it. But it turns out to be very difficult.

ACTOR 1

Of course, it's difficult, especially when you come to the wrong place. This is not a surgery, you know.

ACTRESS 3

Exactly! You are quite right! From this doctor here I only need a certificate I am mentally normal.

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

Without any doubt, you will get a... certain certificate.

ACTRESS 3

You bet I will. I am totally prepared: I have been in a preliminary programme for several months now, and I am not allowed to use my arms and legs, so that I can be entirely aware of what to expect. With every day I feel closer to myself – freer and more stable. I've been through all kinds of psychological tests-

ACTOR 1

And you had outstanding scores on all of the tests?

ACTRESS 3

Not at all. I scored perfectly normal. Nothing like Peking Ducks or balconies with springboards-

ACTOR 1

Why do you listen to other people's conversations?

ACTRESS 1

What do you have against fine cuisine?

ACTRESS 3

Fine cuisine and balconies with springboards are the most stupid thing you can do with your hands.

ACTRESS 1

It seems you don't like anything to do with hands.

ACTRESS 3

Good morning, dear.

ANGEL

Good morning.

ANGEL, smiling, goes to ACTRESS 3 and starts kissing and embracing her.

ACTRESS 3

Get lost! Get lost! Help! Monster! Help!... Fire! Fire!

ANGEL, smiling, goes to see where the fire is.

ACTOR 1

Madam, please, calm down, he doesn't look like a monster. He was just embracing you-

ACTRESS 3

Just embracing me? Me, the helpless invalid?

ACTOR 1

But you are not an invalid!

ACTRESS 3

At least I've got used to that thought. In contrast to you!

ACTOR 1

What is that "in contrast to me"? What do you mean?

ACTRESS 3

That, since you are here, there must be something wrong with you!

ACTOR 1

By I am not here because-

The sign Next on the door is lit.

ACTOR 1 stands up, starts walking around nervously.

ACTOR 1

Who's the next?

ACTRESS 3

Not me.

ACTOR 1

I am not.

ACTRESS 1

It's not my turn.

(to ACTOR 3)

Maybe it's you?.... *(to ACTOR 1)* Ah?

ACTOR 1

NO, IT IS NOT ME. I am just accompanying someone. And why do they let new people in while nobody goes out?

(It's obvious that ACTOR 1 can't wait any longer and his next step will be to go and open the door.)

ACTOR 3

(stands up from the couch and will not sit on it until the final scene; if he has to sit down, it will be somewhere else.)

Who told you nobody goes out?

ACTOR 1

Sorry?

(pause)

ACTOR 3

Why do you think nobody goes out?

ACTOR 1

I can see it. Or you believe I am crazy?

ACTOR 3

And who do you believe you are?

ACTOR 1

What? I am a visitor – I am accompanying my son.

ACTOR 3

So that's what you are in life – a visitor?

ACTOR 1

I am not much into... generalisations.

ACTOR 3

And maybe you should. And where is your son?

ACTOR 1

What do you mean? Didn't you see him going in to the doctor?

ACTOR 3

I see only what you tell me.

ACTOR 1

Oh, I see. Well, as I told you – he went in.

ACTOR 3

Ok. When did he go in?

ACTOR 1

Quite a while ago.

ACTOR 3

Oh, really? And has not come back yet?

(Sounds of a door being opened, somebody's invisible steps, sounds of a door being closed. The door with the sign remains closed.)

ACTOR 1

N-no. No. He hasn't.

ACTOR 3

I see. I understand

ACTOR 1

Why are you talking like that?

ACTOR 3

Like what?

ACTOR 1

Like this – „I see. I understand“.

ACTOR 3

Because I do understand. Does that scare you?

ACTOR 1

Hey, what's your problem?

ACTOR 3

Yes, what is it?

ACTOR 1

It's hardly likely to be connected with your vocal organs.

ACTOR 3

You don't have a son.

ACTOR 1

Here, here – have you heard him? Gloating over people's misfortune-

ACTOR 3

Is that what you see in me? Gloat?

ACTOR 1

Why don't you stop acting a doctor with these questions!

ACTOR 3

I am the doctor.

ACTRESS 1

Ah!

(pause)

ACTOR 1 sits on the couch.

ACTRESS 3

(to ACTOR 3)

My dear, this is interesting! And you have been watching and eavesdropping on us... all that time?

ACTOR 3

You have the feeling that somebody is watching and eavesdropping on you?

ACTRESS 3

Oh, no, Doctor, I have none of these feelings. Perhaps you have been analyzing and examining us. Closely.

ACTOR 1

A madman analyzing and examining!

ACTRESS 3

Nobody's possibly so crazy as to become a doctor here... For this job you have to be kind of... normal, I suppose.

ACTOR 3

Thank you very much, indeed.

ACTRESS 3

Oh, not at all.

ACTRESS 1

And all these people here are being examined? Now? Is this a kind of therapy or something? Nobody has gone into ... m-m... there... they were just taken out? Is that it?

ACTOR 3

Of course.

ACTRESS 1

And how do you decide when to have somebody out?

ACTOR 3

When I believe I've done my job. When I've solved the problem.

ACTOR 1

My son is the one with the problem, not me, but you had *him* "out".

ACTOR 3

It's only in your imagination. As a matter of fact you never had a son, and I think you know it.

ACTOR 1

I never had a son! And what about his mother who's so worried? Or do you want to say he is not *my* child?

ACTOR 3

Your wife is worried about *you*. *You* couldn't have children and you have always wanted it. Desperately. So much, that you chose to have an imaginary ill child, than put up with the thought you have none and you will never be allowed to adopt one.

(All of them go back to their positions from a minute earlier in order to repeat the last cues - in the same way and with the same gestures they have been just said.)

ACTOR 3

It's only in your imagination. As a matter of fact you never had a son, and I think you know it.

ACTOR 1

I never had a son! And what about his mother who's so worried? Or do you want to say he is not *my* child?

ACTOR 3

Your wife is worried about *you*. *You* couldn't have children and you have always wanted it. Desperately. So much, that you chose to have an imaginary ill child, than put up with the thought you have none and you will never be allowed to adopt one.

ACTOR 1

Why, why not allow me to?

ACTOR 3

Well, roughly speaking – because you already think you have one.

(pause)

ACTOR 1

How can I believe you? You just – bang – and take my whole life... turn one's life upside down! How can I be sure you are a doctor and not just another madman waiting for the doctor-

ACTOR 3

You can see it in the fact that I want to get you back in touch with reality. Because you have just spoken to an imaginary person. Aloud!

(ACTOR 1 looks around, studying everybody on the stage)

ACTOR 1

What!? Spoke to whom? Who's imaginary?

(ACTOR 1 studies people around him one by one, all are silent.)

ACTOR 3

What do you see now?

ACTOR 1

Oh, no, no. I'm not telling you what I see.

(beat)

ACTOR 3

Okey. How many people are here now in your view?

ACTOR 1

(counts only the ACTORS)

Four.

ACTOR 3

Including you?

ACTOR 1

Including me, of course!

ACTOR 3

I see!

ACTOR 1

What is that you see now?!

ACTOR 3

And what about all these people here? Don't they count, or don't you see them?

ACTOR 1

Oh, yes, of course, so there are, one, two ... of us.

(counts, says the actual number of ACTORS and HANDICAPPED PEOPLE, who are currently on the stage.)

ACTOR 3

Very well. That means you don't see the man with the small yard now?

ACTOR 1

(stands up, searches for ACTOR 2)

But this is... this was a pal from high school. Where's he gone?

ACTOR 3

Yes, where's he gone?

ACTOR 1

(searching everywhere, then stares at ACTOR 3)

But he was just...

(pause)

ACTOR 1

(to ACTRESS 3)

Madam, didn't you say "balconies with springboards" earlier? Which means - you heard our conversation, didn't you?

(pause)

ACTOR 1

Didn't you say that? Didn't you hear it? Our imaginary conversation? Please, at least you are not imaginary, are you. Oh, say something. Don't keep silent. Like the sphinx. Didn't you say "balconies with springboards" mockingly?

ACTRESS 3

Yes, I did.

ACTOR 1

Oh, thank you. Thank you very much, Madam. I'm so happy that you exist. Really. I kiss your hand, Madam.

ACTRESS 3

Please, stop it. Stop it with these hands. It's abominable. And who kisses hands these days? Retro-perverts... I said it, because I heard you mentioning it.

ACTOR 1

And there was no other man here? A humble one, neither tall, nor short, from high school?

ACTRESS 3

No, you were speaking to yourself.

ACTOR 3

You were talking to you alter ego. To the less successful part of yourself. And you wanted to show him how small his... yard is.

ACTOR 1

No... That's ... that's impossible!

(pause)

ACTOR 1

(to ACTRESS 1)

And what about you, Madam? Didn't you hear him, didn't you start a conversation with this person?

ACTRESS 1

Conversation about what?

ACTOR 1

Well, about your home, about the space lab-

ACTRESS 1

Space what?

ACTOR 1

(sits on the couch)

No, no, no, no!

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

It was you who were talking to me.

ACTOR 1

Noo, no! ... either all of you are crazy, or you want me to believe I am crazy.

(beat)

ACTOR 3

Is there any difference, by the way?

ACTOR 1

Of course there is?

ACTOR 3

Let's use your terms: "crazy" and, probably, "normal" – they are definitely not part of my vocabulary. But what do we have here: if you are the only crazy person and all the rest are normal – you will feel rather unhappy, won't you; and if you are the only normal one, while all others are crazy – you will be the unhappy one again. It's the same.

ACTOR 1

Oh, this was very reassuring to hear.

ACTOR 3

Why don't you accept you are a perfectly ordinary person, just as everybody else? This way it won't matter whether you are "normal" or "crazy".

ACTOR 1

Of course it matters, because in the first case I have a son, while in the second one – I don't!

ACTRESS 1

(throws down the broom and the dust-pan)

But that's fantastic! I would love to be in your shoes. You are probably the only person on earth who can decide to have a son and have it immediately. No planning, no waiting, no pregnancies, no pains, nothing. This very moment. And the other way around! You can also decide to stop having a son, and you get it! Immediately. Without the boy having to die, of course... You are to be envied, Mister. While I go mad cleaning, because my son's so sloppy and stains everything he touches.

ACTRESS 3

Come to think of it why do you have to clean so much? And is it certain that at least you have a son?

ACTRESS 1

Mind your own business! You have enough problems of your own!

(pause)

ACTRESS 3

What kind of problems, dear? My problems, as you put it, are entirely a product of your imagination.

ACTRESS 1

Oh, yes! Of my imagination!

ACTRESS 3

Only because you are intolerant.

ACTRESS 1

I am intolerant?

ACTRESS 3

Absolutely. I am different and you are condescendingly taking pity on me, because I am not like you. Let me just remind you that it's you who are waiting for the doctor, while I'm here only to get a piece of paper.

ACTRESS 1

And how do you know I am not waiting for a piece of paper either?

ACTRESS 3

Yes, a prescription for powerful sedatives!

ACTOR 3

Please, please, don't give prescriptions so easily.

ACTRESS 1

And even if you want to have your arms and legs cut, you have no problem?

ACTRESS 3

Absolutely. I am the only person here, probably apart from the Doctor himself, who has no problems at all. Yes. Except with the timing. That I need to wait.

ACTRESS 1

And maybe the fact that you have no problems is your biggest problem?

ACTRESS 3

Ha! I wish everybody had such a problem.

ACTRESS 1

You probably don't understand how wonderful it is to prepare a delicious dish for your family, following the most exquisite recipe, so that your dearest can feel a true fairy tale of scents and flavours dancing on their palates. Then to clean the house, every nook of it, so that everybody can feel comfortable; the whole house shining with cleanliness, and everybody knows you care. When you wash the laundry, you iron every piece of clothing – immediately – for additional disinfection. To always have clean windows..., to prepare the afternoon tea, or a mid-morning snack for the son and serve it as if for a royal person, showing attention to every tiny detail. You have no idea what pleasure that is and that everybody at home-

ACTRESS 3

That everybody at home unanimously sent you to household workaholic treatment-

ACTOR 3

(to ACTRESS 3)

Please, stop this! It's not your job to diagnose people.

ACTRESS 1

(sobbing, sits on the couch, turns to ACTOR 1, who appears to be smiling)

How, how can you smile at that!

ACTOR 1

I... am not smiling.

ACTRESS 1

Of, course you are – I can see it!

ACTOR 1

No, Madam, this is not a smile.

ACTRESS 1 gets even more upset, but can't express herself.

ACTOR 3

(to ACTRESS 1)

Calm down! Please, give me this mop. You don't have to clean here. Give me the mop!

(pause)

ACTOR 1

OK, I just have nothing more to do here.

ACTOR 3

Really?

ACTOR 1

Perfectly sure. I think I'd better go now.

(heads for the door)

ACTOR 3

Wait, wait a moment! You are not here by chance.

ACTOR 1

Come to think of it, maybe I am here only by chance, yes.

ACTOR 3

Stop! This is the worst you can do. The worst thing for you. To leave, means not to recognize your problems - to escape. You need treatment.

ACTOR 1

And what kind of treatment do you offer me? Before, I thought... I think... I had a son. Even if the boy is... even if he was a bit ill, but – this is my son – there was a kind of pleasure, pride of all the things I've done for him. And now – there's nothing. Only cold.

ACTOR 3

Do you feel cold? Where? Your hands and feet?

(takes him by the hand, ACTOR 1 wrenches himself away, but sits)

ACTOR 1

(pointing at his heart)

No. Here.

ACTOR 3

Oh, I see. How long has it been like that?

ACTOR 1

Since you started this "treatment".

ACTOR 3

One doesn't hurry with such things.

(takes out a pill and gives it to ACTOR 1)

ACTOR 3

Here, take this.

ACTOR 1

No hurry? That means – pills and cold for a long time, uh?

ACTOR 3

Take it, take it.

(ACTOR 1 swallows the pill, he and ACTOR 3 stare at each other. Pause)

ACTOR 1

I don't believe you. Nor your pills... And I don't believe this is happening to me!

ACTOR 3

Nothing unusual. Everybody goes through this stage in the beginning.

ACTOR 1

Everybody?

ACTOR 3

Please, come, lie on the couch. I want you to calm down. Close your eyes. Yes, of course – everybody is like that. You don't know how relaxing it could be to think of your own case as nothing exceptional.

ACTOR 1

Relaxing? And for you everybody's alike? I am the same as her, as her, as him-

ACTOR 3

Well, now,... don't bother yourself with this... Close, please, close your eyes.

ACTOR 3

How do you feel: are your legs shorter than the bed, or do they stick out? M?

ACTOR 1

And do you feel more of a doctor when you are asking me this question, or less? M?

ACTOR 3

Well, now... this is nothing you should be concern yourself with. You just have to learn to look on the bright side.

ACTOR 1

And you are going to show me... the bright side?

ACTOR 3

Naturally. Close your eyes, don't worry about anything.

ACTOR 1

OK, I already see bright, pinkish spots.

ACTOR 3

Where do you see bright pinkish spots with your eyes closed?

ACTOR 1

Between the hairs in your ears.

ACTOR 3

You are still being negative. Well now, calm down, think about something nice you would like to do. What would you like to do?

(beat)

ACTOR 3

Yes?

ACTOR 1

To be jumping on the couch. Thoroughly. I think it will be bouncing nicely. At least at the beginning-

ACTOR 3

Very well, very well. This is quite good. But the couch is very special, it doesn't allow it. Think about something possible.

ACTOR 1

What's so special about it?

ACTOR 3

Well, now-

ACTRESS 3

Well, now – are you going to just keep *wellnow*-ing all day long? What about my document? When are you going to write it? I've been waiting for ages!

ACTOR 3

Well,... Madam, this document will cost two arms and two legs. How do you want me to hurry with things of such significance? What will happen if one day you decide you actually want your limbs back? Try to put yourself in my shoes.

ACTRESS 3

(hysterically, but without raising her voice)

And why don't you try to put yourself in my shoes?

(beat)

So much effort all these years to realise what makes me alive and happy, to convince people that what makes me myself is different from all their weird ideas. To stop pitying me and simply understand that my wishes don't violate any social norms. I am not a terrorist! How much time does a normal person need to see the true desires of another normal person? How much, can you tell me?

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

And who's going to clean and cook for you, how are you going to do the laundry, to go to the loo-

ACTRESS 3

You clean and wash and cook - but are you happy? ... I'm well off enough to hire somebody more...energetic. Like you.

ACTRESS 1

Never!

(goes and picks the mop, ACTOR 3 takes it from her hands, ACTRESS 1 grins, pause)

ACTRESS 1

(to ACTRESS 3)

How much do you pay?

ACTRESS 3

You see, it doesn't matter for you if I have arms or legs, what actually matters is how much I pay!

ACTOR 1

(gets up from the couch)

Or more probably – how much work there will be.

ACTRESS 3

Are you crazy!

Who is asking you!

ACTRESS 1

Mind your own business!

See!

ACTOR 1

Oh, ladies, excuse me for intruding in your business symbiosis.

ACTRESS 3

Go and jump
from the springboard!

ACTRESS 1

Excuses!

Looney!

(ACTOR 3 pulls aside ACTOR 1)

ACTOR 3

Please, calm down, all of you.

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

(to ACTOR 3)

Please, give me the mop! You have no use of it. There are still many spots here to be cleaned. To wipe them... I'll clean them, wipe them... please. I implore you.

(ACTOR 3 sits on the mop, a pause)

ACTOR 1

(takes a look around, to ACTOR 3)

Well, who's next? Which one of us do you feel is closest to getting healed?

ACTOR 3

Well now... Let's not be overhasty. We'll see.

ACTOR 1

And what's that we'll see?

ACTOR 3

Let's not be overhasty. Will you, please, pour me a glass of water.

ACTOR 1

You want me to pour you a glass of water?

ACTOR 3

Well, yes, why not? You are closer.

ACTOR 1

I may be closer but it's not my job to pour you glasses of water.

ACTOR 3

Oh, really?

ACTOR 1

Yes, of course. Why don't you ask the nurse to pour you some water. She's going to catch cold outside. What – is she waiting outside –

(contd.)

shifting from one leg to the other on the threshold – until you decide to be so kind as to invite her in?

ACTOR 3

The question of who is waiting on the threshold does not concern you.

ACTOR 1

How come it doesn't? I am a consumer! I want to know! I have rights!

ACTOR 3

Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha! Oh, really! Ha-ha! You have rights? And how do you plan to exercise them? By not pouring me a glass of water?

(pause, they stare at each other)

(ACTOR 3 goes to the water machine, taking with him the mop he was sitting on, pours himself a glass of water. ACTRESS 1 closes her ears not to hear the sound of the water. ACTOR 3 holds his glass way below the tap so that the pouring can be distinctly heard.)

ACTRESS 1

Stop it! Stop it! Stop pouring like that!

ACTOR 3

(continues pouring)

Pouring like what?

ACTRESS 1

This noise is driving me crazy! Can't you pour more quietly?

ACTOR 3

How to pour more quietly?

ACTRESS 1

By keeping the glass closer to the tap – this way it won't be so noisy! Oh, please, stop it. Stop it!

ACTOR 3 keeps pouring noisily, ACTRESS 1 stands up and kicks the glass from his hand. The water splashes on the ground in front of ACTRESS 3, she looks at it as if in a mirror.

ACTRESS 3

Ah!

ACTOR 3

What, the hell...

(to ACTRESS 1)

Please, come, lie down here, you've got to calm down. You need not listen to the sounds of the water. Lie down, lie down comfortably. Close your eyes. How do you feel yourself? Do you feel you are much shorter than the couch or are your legs sticking out? M? How do you think? Calm down, breathe, breathe, relax!

(pause)

ACTRESS 3

And why did you have that woman out so soon?

ACTOR 3

Which woman?

ACTRESS 3

Well, the one with the chicken... and the vermouth?

ACTOR 3

What chicken?

ACTRESS 3

Please, stop it! The Peking Duck – why did you have her out?!

(ACTOR 3 glances in surprise to ACTRESS 1 who is still lying on the couch.)

ACTRESS 3

Not this one!!! The other one, the first duck!!!

ACTOR 3

Calm down, please, sit down! I mean – don't stand up! There are glasses over there – will you please pour her a glass of water. I mean – I will pour you a glass of water.

(ACTOR 3 starts pouring. ACTRESS 1 covers her ears, not to listen to the sound of the running water. ACTOR 3 gives the glass of water to ACTRESS 3 and it remains floating in the air in front of her.)

(pause)

ACTOR 1 examines the glass that is hanging in the air, goes around it, says nothing.

ACTOR 1

I may not be one of the normal people, but I want to find out!

Rushes on ACTOR 3, conducts a search of his pockets – than feels the couch where ACTOR 3 was sitting and where now is ACTRESS 1.

ACTRESS 1

What are you doing?

ACTOR 1

(panting)

I am searching for the button.

ACTRESS 1

What button?

ACTOR 3

Which button?

ACTOR 1

The thing's there is no button.

ACTOR 3

I don't understand you?

ACTOR 1

So, you started not understanding, huh? How come YOU call the sister when there is no button or something to signal her? Where is this sister? Who tells her when to enter? Who is this sister? What's beyond this door?
(pause, they stare at each other)

ACTRESS 3

(looking in the water in front of her)

And how long do we have to wait, by the way?

ACTRESS 1

Without any cleaning woman at that...

(ACTOR 3 bars the way to the door with his body, pushing his glasses back up his nose nervously)

ACTOR 3

You can't ask yourselves such kind of questions.

ACTOR 1

And why not?

ACTOR 3

Because no norm... reasonable person does that. You have to avoid stress. You need tranquillity. Please, sit down.

ACTOR 1

How can I sit down? I can't just sit and do nothing! I want to know what is there on the other side. I want to see if my son is there, I want to know what this place is. Whether I am inside or outside, whether you are a doctor or not. I don't know where I am now!

ACTOR 3

Of course you don't. But that's because you haven't been cured. Once we restore you to health, you won't ask yourself such questions. Now you have problems with reality.

ACTOR 1

Of course, I have problems with reality – there is only one door here for going in and out and this is beyond all reason!

ACTRESS 1 and 3 are startled, they look towards the door. ACTOR 1 goes to open the door, ACTOR 3 tries to stop him.

ACTOR 3

Rationally thinking-

ACTOR 1

Rationally thinking, you want to keep me in the rational world. But I want to see what is there! Move away!

ACTOR 3 stops him, tries to drag him to the couch, they wrestle. ACTOR 3 almost succeeds in putting him on the couch. It turns out that the couch is equipped with two straps to fasten the lying person. The material they are made of resembles knife blade. ACTOR 3 has almost succeeded in fastening ACTOR 1 to the couch, while ACTRESS 1 hits him from behind with the dust-pan. A strange noise is heard. ACTOR 1 and ACTRESS 1 put ACTOR 3 on the couch binding him with the straps. During their fight, ACTRESS 3 pensively watches the water in front of her and starts silently humming some melody.

(pause, ACTOR 1 and ACTRESS 1 watch each other)

ACTRESS 1

There is... something ...here.

(pause, they watch each other)

ACTRESS 1

You are afraid, aren't you?

ACTOR 1

No. I think I am not – not any more.

ACTRESS 1

Will you open the door?

ACTOR 3

No!

(they gag him with the mop)

ACTOR 1

Yes. I will.

ACTRESS 3

(pensively, looking at the door)

And what is this place? How did he manage to deceive us all with that door?

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

(looking thoughtfully at the door, many pauses between the next lines)

Do we remember how we came here? ...Do you remember?

ACTOR 1

No.

ACTRESS 3

And you?

ACTRESS 1

No.

ACTRESS 3

And we have made ourselves at home here, without even knowing where we came from?

ACTRESS 1

Yes.

ACTRESS 3

Maybe that's a proof that at least we suffer from amnesia, isn't it?

ACTRESS 1

Now I really don't know who to name "normal people".

ACTRESS 3

I don't know whether to name anything in any way whatsoever.

ACTRESS 1

Does anybody treat anybody here?

ACTOR 1

The worst thing is that now I don't know if I have a son.

ACTRESS 3

Ha! You want to know about the son without knowing who you are.

ACTOR 1

And do you know who you are?

(pause)

ACTRESS 3

(looks in the water in front of her)

I ... I remember... I started remembering...

ACTRESS 1

Remembering what?

ACTRESS 3

Remembering who I am. Because of the water.

(pause)

ACTOR 1

(heads slowly to the door)

I am going to open the door...

(ACTOR 1 stands up, goes towards the door, opens it and this is the beginning of the visual transformation of both characters and stage space. The walls fall, or go up, leaving behind a wonderful space of blending colours and forms, while the door with the sign " Next!" appears to be standing in the middle of nowhere. Depending on the available equipment, there are several possible options. ACTRESS 3 may turn into a marionette representing Zlatka the Golden Girl, [the Bulgarian version of Vasilisa the Beautiful] with marvellous long sleeves. She may simply break the ropes that were binding her to the chair and with a single movement change her clothing into something extraordinarily beautiful. ACTOR 1 (if there is enough equipment for that) may become a cartoon hero projected on a screen somewhere there. He can also just go out of the visual field of the stage and be present only as an image shot by a camera and shown on a screen. Whatever the technical aspect of

(contd.)

his transformation may be, he grows into a child. All of them actually may be replaced by children now. ACTRESS 1 may split in two identical women, but in any case her garment starts glittering as if she were a princess. ACTOR 3 may or may not be on the stage.)

ACTRESS 3

(looks at her hands and legs amorously, stands up, dances and hums as if in a dream)

The first water passed, black as tar; the second water passed – bluer than the sky. And then the third water came – golden as my hair. The river braided flowers in my hair. And rosemary for remembrance. I am the Golden girl.

ACTRESS 1

Really?

ACTRESS 3

Yes, the Forest Fairy dipped me in the golden water. Teehee!

ACTOR 1

Why?

ACTRESS 3

Because I was very good.

ACTOR 1

Why were you very good?

ACTRESS 3

Because I was very deft, I did a beautiful job of whatever I touched. With these wonderful white arms. And how nimble I was! I would not break a dish, I would not overcook a meal. I fed her beasts I tied a ribbon to each of them, although they were repulsive. But they were repulsive at first glance only. In fact they were all splendid... Then she immersed me in the golden water and let me go home, all sparkling. And with a box of true treasure in my hands.

ANGEL

Arms have been finally found at the island of Milos!

(pause)

ACTOR 1

And why? Why did she let you all gold and sparkling?

ACTRESS 3

To be shining. To be as beautiful as good.

ACTRESS 1

Oh, how nice. That reminds me of the slipper.

ACTOR 1

Why of the slipper?

ACTRESS 1

Because I was not only meant to clean, but also to win the heart of the prince. He dressed me up in such nice slippers.

ACTOR 1

Why did he dressed you up?

ACTRESS 1

Because he is a true prince.

ACTOR 1

Why? Why?

ACTRESS 3

Because true princes do exist. I married one at the end.

ACTRESS 1

Me too.

ACTRESS 3

And what happened?

ACTRESS 1

We had a three-day feast.

ACTRESS 3

And dances, dances, dances-

ACTOR 1

Why?

ACTRESS 3

Because we are not only meant to sit and wait for the doctor!

ACTOR 1

And why did we wait for the doctor?

ACTRESS 1

Because we fell through. We tried to be people... and we fell through.

(pause)

ACTRESS 1

Do you think everybody is so wonderful?

Enters ACTOR 2

ACTOR 1

(to ACTRESS 1)

Mum, Mum – Daddy, there's Daddy!

ACTRESS 3

He was wearing an ould battered shiny blue shirt... There was no collar to his shirt. His toes were sticking out of his shoes and the fiddle case was tied with bits of old strings.

ACTOR 1

And what happened?

ACTOR 2

He pulled out the fiddle, started playing and with his music he chased the evil dragon away.

ACTOR 2 pulls out his fiddle and starts playing.

ACTOR 1

And what, what happened?

ACTOR 2

The King gave him the hand of his daughter in marriage along with half of the kingdom.

ACTRESS 1

Did he rule as a good king?

ACTOR 2

I don't know. I don't remember.

ACTOR 1

And what happened?

ACTOR 2

He had a son from his wife. And on the birthday of his heir he buried the fiddle and the old case under a giant rock. He told his wife – the Queen – that when the boy grows up and becomes a hero, he may have the fiddle, but only if he manages to pull off the rock.

ACTOR 1

And?

ACTRESS 1

The boy grew up and managed to pull off the rock, I remember that for sure.

ACTOR 2

Then there were two ways the young man could reach his father's kingdom: a short and secure one – by sea; and a very dangerous, roundabout way – by land.

ACTOR 1

And the boy chose the roundabout way, didn't he?

ACTOR 2

Yes, because he knew he would thus pass through a very big and important feast.

ACTOR 1

Yes, yes, and?

ACTOR 2

And he passed through many adventures, but the last test was dreadful.

ACTRESS 1

Oh!

ACTOR 2

On the way leading to the feast there was a very strong and cunning villain. He invited every traveller who was passing by to spend the night in his cave. There he kept a special bed. When the traveller grew sleepy and dropped off, when he forgot all the dangers, the villain came and-

ACTRESS 1

No!

ACTOR 2

He came to see whether the traveller fitted the bed. Those who were too short he would savagely stretch to match its length, while if somebody was too tall, he would cut off the excess length.

ACTRESS 1

Why?

ACTOR 2

Because he had only one bed. And he thought it was for the one who would really fit in there.

ACTRESS 1

But nobody fitted.

ACTOR 2

Nobody.

ACTOR 1

But why couldn't passengers see through his tricks? Why didn't they go directly to the feast?

ACTOR 2

Because they were exhausted. And he cooked so well. Nobody could resist this taste. The air in the whole gorge was sweet with the scent of his dishes. Murmur of water was to be heard. As well as the sounds of gorgeous music. He played stupendously. And the lights from his cave looked enchantingly beautiful by night.

ACTOR 1

Nobody could resist the scent.

ACTRESS 1

Nobody could resist the images.

ACTOR 1

Nobody could resist the sounds.

(pause)

ACTRESS 3

The man with the fiddle – was that you?

(pause)

ACTOR 2

I don't know. I don't remember. I... don't know if I exist.

ACTOR 2 exits. Pause.

ACTOR 1

The boy went and hired himself out as a King's gardener. He dug and planted and weeded out the flowers from early morning till late at night. The King's garden blossomed.

One night he put the three strings above the fire. But they were no ordinary strings, they were three golden hairs. Without delay the stallion ran up. The boy put on his golden clothes, spurred the horse and galloped around the garden all night long.

Not before dawn did he take off his clothes, tied them to the saddle and sent the stallion away. Then he pulled out his fiddle and started playing softly and magically. The boy thought nobody had seen him.

ACTRESS 3

But the King's daughter had watched him all night long, from the castle's tower.

ACTOR 1

Yes.

ACTRESS 3

Yes.

ACTRESS 1

Yes.

(Gradually, all ACTORS disappear among a faerie of colours and forms. When the normal interior lighting is back, on the stage there are only the HANDICAPPED PEOPLE, a fiddle, a slipper, golden clothes and a treasure box. The HANDICAPPED PEOPLE watch as if in a cinema hall. Then the light fades away to full darkness, and when the stage is lit up again, there is nobody there.)

CURTAIN

Alexander Manuiloff

is a 33-year-old Bulgarian scriptwriter and dramatist, a former Reuters reporter and journalist for BusinessWeek Bulgaria.

His first book, *Film*, received the Bulgarian Writers' Guild Award for the best debut book of 2005.

Alexander's first work as a dramaturge, *United Shapes of Babylon*, went into the official selection of Prague Quadrennial 2007 and was staged in the Czech capital. The same year the performance was invited to Sfumato Theatre, Sofia. In 2008 it toured in Varna as part of the *August in Art* festival.

In 2008 his second book came out, this time in Berlin: *Language Ideas*", Berlin 2008, VDM Verlag).

In 2009 Alexander's script "Who's that town?" won the support of both the National Culture Fund, Bulgaria, and the Municipality of Sofia. It was picked up for production by Martichka Bozhilova, a Silver Wolf winner at International Film Festival in Amsterdam. The film is presently in post-production.

The play *The Invisible* was developed in co-operation with award winning Bulgarian director Vasilena Radeva, and was presented as a reading/art-video performance in Sofia City Art Gallery in mid-November 2010.

In 2011 Alexander participated as a dramaturge in an international site-specific performance in Prague (as part of Prague Quadrennial 2011) and also led a theatre workshop in Sfumato theatre, Sofia, based on his play, *Big Sister*.

Several scripts for short films and three other plays are in production negotiations. One play has been optioned by a New York literary agency.

Translates English language literature into Bulgarian and writes scripts for documentaries with Bulgaria's only travel television TTVI.

A member of Actassociation, Bulgaria's organisation of independent theatre artists.