

VOX NEXUM

by Alejandro Ruiz

© 2020 by Alejandro Ruiz
119 West Jackson street
York PA, 17401
(323) 793 - 4386
aleruiz.actor@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

The VOICE ACTOR - A human with a pleasant, versatile, or unique vocal instrument.
Any age. Any gender. Any body type. Any ethnicity. ANY HUMAN of ANY KIND. *

The DIRECTOR - Professional. Charming. Direct.
Any age. Any gender. Any body type. Any ethnicity. ANY HUMAN of ANY KIND. *

SETTING

A professional quality home recording studio somewhere in New York City.
A sound engineering studio in an office building somewhere in Washington, DC.

* I mean it, goddamn it.

SCENE

We see two people onstage. One - a VOICE ACTOR - is standing behind a microphone. Around them, a meticulously curated and organized recording space. An assortment of microphones, mic stands, and book stands. Perhaps a side table or standing desk with a laptop nearby. There are a variety of small bottles full of glycerin, marshmallow root, and other potions. Nearest to them, a bottle of water and a large stick of chapstick. Their space feels small. Cozy. Minimalist. There are acoustic panels and acoustic foam that give the space a feeling of warmth and a mixture of textures.

The second person - a DIRECTOR - sits in a swivel chair surrounded by computers and monitors. The space feels larger. Utilitarian. Colder, harder, older and well-used. This is the space of someone who has a lot of deadlines. It's obvious that the building has a cleaning service ... but also that they only come at the end of the night. Food wrappers and drink bottles decorate the studio surfaces. The carpeted floor is the only soft thing in the room.

VOICE ACTOR

Okay, um ...

They move toward the laptop and check that everything is operational. Double-checking. Maybe triple, for good measure.

The VOICE ACTOR breathes for a moment, trying to purge their body of the anxiety. They shake their hands and dry the palm sweat off on their shirt. They apply chapstick and trill their lips.

Their lip trills are interrupted by the sound of a digital call on their computer, accompanied by the musical notification tones of either Skype, SourceConnect, bodalgo, or some other communication software. They answer.

DIRECTOR

Hello?

VOICE ACTOR

Yep. I'm here.

DIRECTOR

Hey! Thanks for taking the time to schedule us.

I know you're busy right now and -

VOICE ACTOR

Of course. It's not a problem.

If I couldn't do it, I wouldn't.

DIRECTOR

Well, we really appreciate it.
Uhh, did Greg happen to send you the drive link for the most recent draft?

The VOICE ACTOR searches and we hear various clicks on their laptop screen.

VOICE ACTOR

I have the ... March 22nd version. Is that right?

DIRECTOR

That's the one. Great. Okay. So, we'll be starting on page 27.
Your first line starts "If you develop any of these emergency symptoms..."
and it should be highlighted in orange.

VOICE ACTOR

I ... see it. Okay.

DIRECTOR

Did you get a chance to look at it beforehand?

VOICE ACTOR

Of course.

DIRECTOR

Great. Okay. Good. Umm, if you have any questions feel free to ask.
I may have you do A,B,C takes on a few of these, but I probably won't give you much
direction, 'cuz ... well, you ... know what you're doing.

VOICE ACTOR

Sounds good.

A moment of silence. The VOICE ACTOR waits, expectantly. Did ... did the phone audio cut off? We see the DIRECTOR scanning the screens and clicking rapidly.

DIRECTOR

Alright. We are ... rolling.
Let me just set a marker really quick aaaaaand ... whenever you're ready.

VOICE ACTOR

"If you develop any of these emergency symptoms,
please seek medical attention immediately."

DIRECTOR

Good. Moving on.

VOICE ACTOR

“Symptoms may include bluish lips or face, persistent pain or pressure in the chest ...”

The VOICE ACTOR grasps at their chest. Breathing becomes laborious and they struggle to get the words out.

VOICE ACTOR

I ... I ... Oh my god ... I ...

DIRECTOR

Are you okay?

VOICE ACTOR

I love you.

DIRECTOR

Umm, I ... don't see that in my script. The next line I have is -

VOICE ACTOR

I love you.

DIRECTOR

Gimme a sec.

Yeah, actually, the next line I see is -

VOICE ACTOR

I know what the next line is !

DIRECTOR

Oh! Umm, no worries - uh, we can just pick it up from there, then.
Still rolling.

VOICE ACTOR

It's not .. in the script ... I ...

This is why they pay me to say words that other people write ...
I just ... the world is so crazy now and it's made me realize how precious it all is and how
important it is to say these things before it's too late. Oh. My. God. I love you.

The VOICE ACTOR laughs. The DIRECTOR laughs.

VOICE ACTOR

I'm sorry.

DIRECTOR

Oh, my god. I really believed you for a second there.
I guess that's why you're called voice actors.

VOICE ACTOR

Oh. I. No. I - I - I mean it. I love you.

DIRECTOR

Excuse me?

A beat.

VOICE ACTOR

I took this job because of you. We've worked together for months now and I can't tell you how much I love hearing your voice. Every time I see your name appear in my inbox, I get so excited and -

*We hear a dial tone. The sounds of failing software and digital searching.
It all unplugs so fast.*

VOICE ACTOR

Hello? Hello?

DIRECTOR

Yeah, I'm -

VOICE ACTOR

Are you -

DIRECTOR

I seem to be -

VOICE ACTOR

Ugh - Fuck!

DIRECTOR

Shit!

*They both struggle to reconnect. Literally.
The desperate sounds of technological reaching persist as they scan through their equipment and inventory dozens of wires.*

VOICE ACTOR

Can you hear me?

The VOICE ACTOR makes a sound of frustration and becomes manic. The DIRECTOR is methodical, scanning equipment again ... and listening.

VOICE ACTOR

Okay. Everything is connected. Software's all up to date.
Umm. Internet seems fine.

A beat.

VOICE ACTOR

Oh my god ... What were you thinking? Idiot! Why would you -

They take a moment to collect themselves.

VOICE ACTOR

Don't be so hard on yourself. You're just ... lonely. And ... stressed.

But it's not working.

VOICE ACTOR

And you miss people. People who are counting on you to be okay.
You have to be okay. You have to be okay. People are counting on you.

The facade is beginning to break. We hear breathing. We realize that the dial tone has ended. Though, we're not sure when the two channels reconnected. The DIRECTOR lets out a sound of interruption.

VOICE ACTOR

Hello?

DIRECTOR

Yeah.

VOICE ACTOR

You heard that?

DIRECTOR

Yes.

VOICE ACTOR

I'm so sorry - I didn't think anyone was there.

DIRECTOR

I'm here.

A beat.

VOICE ACTOR

I'm a little embarrassed.

DIRECTOR

Don't be. You're - I'm -

The DIRECTOR takes a moment to gather their thoughts.

DIRECTOR
Tell me everything.

VOICE ACTOR
What?

DIRECTOR
Tell me what you're feeling.

VOICE ACTOR
It's not your job to -

DIRECTOR
I know it's not my job. I'm asking you to tell me what you're feeling.

VOICE ACTOR
Umm. Lonely, I suppose.

DIRECTOR
I am too.

VOICE ACTOR
I guess all of us are. Have been.

DIRECTOR
When was your last time?

VOICE ACTOR
Umm ... when was ... sometime last fall? September.
My sister's wedding. You?

DIRECTOR
Last time I had a ration stamp, I held onto it as long as I could.
Ended up using it in August ... my mother was dying.
I wanted to see her.

VOICE ACTOR
Oh my g- ... I'm so sorry. I -

DIRECTOR
It's fine. We knew it was coming.
Anyway, my next stamp isn't due for another month.
How was the wedding?

VOICE ACTOR

Umm ... it was fine. It was a ... home ... wedding.
The service was in the kitchen and the reception was in the living room.

The VOICE ACTOR laughs.

VOICE ACTOR

You could smell that someone had used the bathroom while they were cutting the cake.
Home wedding. What the hell does that even mean?

They laugh together.

VOICE ACTOR

Anyway, we - we saved our stamps - my parents, my brother and me.
She planned it months in advance. It was ... actually kinda sad.
Still, it was nice to see people ... for real ... even if it was just a handful of us.
I miss it. And I feel selfish.

DIRECTOR

Why?

VOICE ACTOR

Because I'm healthy ... and I'm working ... and I feel shitty for complaining.

DIRECTOR

Hmm.

A beat.

VOICE ACTOR

This isn't what I wanted to do with my life. This is what I do now. To survive.
Before The Severing I used to work with a lot of people.

DIRECTOR

What did you do?

VOICE ACTOR

I was an actor. A real actor. A stage actor.

DIRECTOR

I didn't know that. I thought -

VOICE ACTOR

Yeah. Mostly regional stuff. Some off-Broadway. Nothing too big.

DIRECTOR
Do you miss it?

VOICE ACTOR
Every day.

DIRECTOR
You're still an actor, you know. It's just a little different now.

VOICE ACTOR
This isn't acting. I'm not telling stories anymore.
I'm just ... sharing information.

DIRECTOR
Sharing is important. Now more than ever.

VOICE ACTOR
It's not the same. It's ... disconnected.
I miss the immediacy, ya know?

DIRECTOR
You're talking to someone who's spent their whole life in offices.

VOICE ACTOR
Sorry. It's just ... well ... there's nothing else like it. Looking hundreds of people in the face
and ... making them feel things. I miss being seen. As terrifying as it was sometimes. At
least when people could see me I knew that I was real.

DIRECTOR
I see you. You're pretty real to me.

VOICE ACTOR
You're sweet.

DIRECTOR
People are more than what they do for a living.

VOICE ACTOR
I know. It's just ... for years, who I was was defined by the work I was doing.
And now that the work is gone I feel like I don't know who I am anymore.
Who am I when I'm not doing what I love?

DIRECTOR
Plenty of people work jobs they're not particularly passionate about.
I admire your purity. You're a survivor.

VOICE ACTOR
... Alien?

DIRECTOR
What?

VOICE ACTOR
Nothing. Umm ...
I ... think that's why I miss it so much. It was everything to me.

DIRECTOR
Well ... Personally, I miss being able to separate work from home.

VOICE ACTOR
Oh?

DIRECTOR
I've been living out of my office since the last transition period.

VOICE ACTOR
Shit.

DIRECTOR
It's not terrible.
I get groceries delivered to me and they have high speed internet, so ...

VOICE ACTOR
Does it ever get to you? The loneliness?

DIRECTOR
Yeah. It mostly comes at night. Mostly.

VOICE ACTOR
Okay, that time it was **definitely** Alien.

DIRECTOR
Yeaaaaaah ...

VOICE ACTOR
You really thought you could just sneak those by me ?

DIRECTOR
In space no one can hear you scream.

VOICE ACTOR
Now who's the voice actor?

They laugh. A beat.

DIRECTOR
I'm beginning to forget my mother's face and that scares me.
Even before everything changed ... before she died ... we weren't that close.

VOICE ACTOR
I know what you mean. It's so quiet in here all the time that I can't stop thinking about
every mistake I ever made. I've been pushing people away for years.
I was already quarantined ...

DIRECTOR
Well, I'm listening ... so, you got me.

VOICE ACTOR
Thank you ... for listening.

DIRECTOR
Yeah. You too.

A beat. They see each other. For real this time.

DIRECTOR
What you said earlier? Did you really -

VOICE ACTOR
Yeah. Yeah, I did.

DIRECTOR
I get my next stamp in a month ... maybe when you get yours we could ...
I dunno ... connect ? For real, I mean ?

VOICE ACTOR
This seems pretty real to me.

DIRECTOR
You know what I -

VOICE ACTOR
Yes. I'd like that.

DIRECTOR

Okay. Let's get back to work, then. Shall we?

VOICE ACTOR

Sounds good.

They return to their original positions.

DIRECTING

And ... we are ... rolling.

The lights begin to dim, and we see the cables and vast amount of technology that surrounds them more clearly. Billions of blinking lights and cables and wires all over the stage ... the whirring sounds of machinery and digital notifications and human voices fill the void. It's like a universe. Terrifying and Beautiful.

Lights.

End of Play.