

IN PRETEND

A one-act monologue (~20–25 minutes)

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Logline:

During a psychiatric evaluation, a 58-year-old actor re-enacts the symbolic slaughter of his director—as part of a radical performance that collapses theatre, trauma, and identity into one destabilizing confession.

Short Synopsis:

IN PRETEND is a psychological monologue set during a psychiatric assessment. Antonis, a 58-year-old actor, stages an intense, ritualized performance in which he symbolically “slaughters” his former director—the figure of artistic and paternal control. The play explores blurred lines between reality and role, ritual and violence, asking whether healing can emerge through performance. Both psychiatrists and audience become unwitting participants in his act, as he challenges their power to label him. Minimalist and emotionally volatile, the monologue uses theatrical form as a means of existential defiance.

Author’s Bio:

Nikolaos Antoniou studied Hellenic Culture and holds a Master’s degree in Creative Writing, where he developed a strong focus on playwriting and screenwriting. His first short film script received a commendation from the Scriptwriters' Guild of Greece (ESE). “*IN PRETEND*” is part of his ongoing exploration of performative identity, memory, and psychological space in minimalist theatrical settings.

Characters:

- Antonis (Male, 58) – Solo monologue

Production History:

Unproduced. No prior public performance.

A psychiatric evaluation room. Empty stage. A single chair at center. Downstage, implied, a desk where two psychiatrists sit — invisible.

ANTONIS (58) bursts in with sharp, rapid steps, scanning the room like an animal in a cage. He holds up a battered phone with the flashlight on and sweeps it in slow arcs.

ANTONIS

(mimicking a siren, clipped)

Ee-oo — ee-oo — ee-oo — ee-oo — ee-oo...

He stops abruptly. The beam pins an invisible target.

You are under arrest!

He circles the chair — like a radar sweep. Stops behind it.

Charged!...

with spreading panic,

with damage to public property,

and — pay attention now — incitement to acts of hatred.

Hatred? Me?

He turns off the light. Holds the phone to his chest like a talisman, then pockets it.

He paces around the chair — slow, hunched. Incoherent murmurs. Stops to its left.

(as a third voice)

“The man is insane! He doesn’t know what he’s saying!

A psychiatric evaluation is hereby ordered.”

He spins once around himself. Sits. Can’t bear it — rises. Shifts the chair. Sits again.

(performing a vocal warm-up)

Six sleek swans swam swiftly south.

He moves the chair again — as if obeying an unseen cue. Sits.

(nervously, compulsively — an exercise)

Fss... fass... fss... fass... fss... fass...

He stands. Shakes out arms, legs. Little hops.

Inhale... four... three... two...

Exhale... slowly...

That's how you relax before a performance. That's what my director tells me.

(to the audience)

A bit of relaxation never hurt anyone.

The way I see you... you could use some relaxation yourselves.

Are you afraid of me?

(shakes his head — answering his own question)

I don't bite... usually.

(vocal exercise)

Brrrrrrrr... Brrrrrrrr...

The voice exists only when it passes through you.

Otherwise — just noise.

He darts toward the chair with short, sharp steps. Stands before it.

Three steps forward. One... two... three...

Returns. Sits. Measures distances with his eyes.

Yes... now it's right.

The light, the distance, what I see and what you see.

Although — obviously — I'm not going to stay in this chair.

I'll get up. I'll go. I'll come back.

The stage is big.

You—no.

You'll stay there.

Behind your gray desk.

Protocol, of course.

He points at them.

You two... will evaluate me.

My mental balance...

He studies them head to toe. Rises.

Dull clothes.

Clinical white — odorless — sterile.

Disgustingly sterile.

Whereas I...

He gestures to his clothes.

Light-blue shirt. Red stains.

Torn trousers. Muddy boots.

They stink of theatre.

You — disinfectant.

(sharp)

Who am I?

(calmly)

My name is Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplev.

Age: twenty-six.

Artist.

From Chekhov's *The Seagull*... You know it?

(pause — waiting for an answer)

So I thought.

He sits.

Did you know that gazes have colors?

Not the eyes — the gazes.

He points to the one "on the right."

You. Yes, you — on the right.

Lift your head...

He observes, abruptly.

Khaki. My father's gaze.

Military. The color of his uniform.

Monolithic. Unyielding.

A gaze that does not listen — only commands.

A gaze that says: "You live with my permission."

And then — the phrase that never leaves:

(as the father)

"An actor? Shameful."

He turns to the one “on the left.”

You, next to him... Different material.

Behind your little glasses, you pretend to be kind.

Your gaze says otherwise.

(sharp)

Green... My director’s gaze.

The green of stagnant water.

Water that doesn’t mirror you — it swallows you.

(ironic, almost tender)

You think you’re a savior.

That you’ll slip through my cracks, “analyze” me.

Just like he thought he would.

He rises slowly.

My director wasn’t directing me...

He was unravelling me. Piece by piece.

(as the director)

“Not like that. Again. That’s not how Konstantin is.”

“Discipline!”

Sixty corrections for a single breath.

And I... twenty-six years old... Konstantin...

dying...

dying still.

(as the director, harsh)

“Konstantin is not a vehicle for self-expression.”

“You’re sabotaging the good of the troupe...

the success of the production.”

(darkening)

The good of the troupe...

The success of the production...

What is success, director?

For me to bow my head on the altar?

(hardens)

No.

(cold, steady resolve)

I became undisciplined.

Reactive. Defiant.

And then he—

“You’re expelled!!!”

(a faint irony)

Familiar... Very... Yesterday...

(pause)

It was simple. Either him... or me.

He had to be erased...

Otherwise... I would vanish.

Calmly...

Coldly...

Ritually.

(pause, lower tone)

I decided... to slaughter him.

The blade had already been sharpened inside me.

The moment was there...

The need was there...

And the director... there.

In the train car...

Same hour... same seat.

Like every night after rehearsal... Like back then...

He looked at me...

His gaze a swamp...

And I... ready to step into the light.

He saw the knife and flinched. Tried to run...

He knocks the chair over without looking.

I throw him down. I fall on top of him.
 His limbs thrash, his body jolts, he tries to escape.
 In vain.

He grips an imaginary phone.

The phone — always in the hand.
 The camera fixed on me.
 The viewers tuned in.
 Witnesses — not of a crime... but of a passage...

He mimes grabbing the head by the hair.

I grab his hair. I lift — the neck stretches.

He mimes a knife in his other hand.

A knife — the blade on the taut throat...

(fiercely)

“This kind of theatre is tired, worn-out, restrictive.
 We need new forms.
 New forms — and if they don’t exist...
 then better... nothing.”

He tries to speak. He doesn’t make it.

A brutal slash through the air.

(long pause)

I look around.
 The train car... red.
 Walls. Seats. Floor.
 My face — red.

Passengers scream, run, dissolve into shadows.
 And from the livestream... digital applause.

(pause)

Likes erupting —
 ‘Freedom,’ they write.

‘Poetry.’

‘Show the flesh.’

(calmly)

No. There is no body...

There is only the act.

Its trace...

Its color that remained — that still remains...

(small pause — his tone drops almost imperceptibly)

Inside the uproar, everything slowly fades...

The sound of the train turns to rustling...

At the edge — a figure.

(small pause — gaze into emptiness)

A deer. Calm. Still.

(sinks into the image of the deer)

It looks at me with those eyes...

The knife releases me.

It slips from my hand.

(a breath, almost trembling)

A slit opens.

Light... I don't know from where.

My chest... loosens.

The deer lowers its head slightly...

A greeting. An assent.

As if saying... Here.

(bare pause — hand extending)

I reach out. I go to touch it—

It vanishes.

Everything returns.

The noise.

The space — I no longer know whether it's a train car, a stage, or... nothing.

And then—

(a jolt, a snap back into reality)

Hands up! Drop the weapon!

Weapon. Me.

The “weapon” had already done its job.

It stayed behind — a piece of the set.

They saw only blood.

Not the story.

(sudden, brutal)

Hands tied. Face to the floor.

Voices: “Monster!!”

(as if a small revelation)

For a moment... yes. Maybe.

(a sharp breath — as if yanked upward)

They lift me, shove me, fold me into a car.

(half-laugh — an acidic irony)

And of course — you can’t “slaughter” your director without being locked up.

I asked the policeman at the station.

He looked at me... the way you’re looking now.

(small pause)

Then — the usual.

Protocols and questions like:

(as a third voice)

“Name?... Where are you?... What year is it?...”

He snaps to attention — like a soldier giving a report.

(loudly)

Nikolaou Antonios. Son of Georgios and Evrynomi.

Age: fifty-eight.

Occupation: actor.

Location: Athens Psychiatric Hospital.

Time: morning.

(calmly)

That's... what you'd ask, isn't it?

(with a note of familiarity)

Am I passing the test?

(leans forward — as if confiding a secret, low)

I'm passing it, aren't I?

(neutral again)

Well. Since we've passed that too, let me tell you this:

Nothing happened by accident.

Not even this performance — here. Now.

He slowly takes the phone out of his pocket and lifts it.

Let's open... the larger audience.

He taps the screen — camera on. Turns it toward the house.

You here...

You there...

You in the back...

All in the same frame. Perfect.

He turns the camera on himself. Lets it orbit him. Eyes locked on the screen. He straightens his neck. Poses.

I know what you'll write...

I hear the terms before you say them.

The rotation stops. The phone steady. He looks at the "psychiatrists."

(sharp)

Neurosis.

Identity dysregulation.

Narcissistic disorder.

Psychotic delusion.

(tilts his head slightly, as if sniffing them)

And then the explanations:

The subject exhibits a conflation of the real and the performative;

ritualized violence;
paternal transference.

He lowers the phone.

In other words...

I 'slaughtered' — in pretend — the director-father
to heal myself from an old wound.

Primordial...

Isn't that right?

He slowly turns the phone toward the house — a panoramic sweep.

So I made a performance, an action, a rite.

He turns the phone back on his face.

(lifts his chin — like an officiant)

Estin oun... Performance—

mimesis of an enacted act

not to display

but to generate meaning and identity

in the very instant of the act.

And whatever happens...

(raises the phone)

...is streamed.

He brings the phone back to his face — an icy smile.

Thank you...

...for standing here.

You... together with the other audience.

He reads from the screen.

(affected modesty)

A hero?... hmm... exaggerated...

A small gesture with the phone toward the house.

Look...

All of you.

In the same frame...

There are so many of you...

He closes the phone. Lowers it. A dry smile.

(a small pause)

We're done.

That was the evaluation.

A slight flicker in his gaze — toward the "psychiatrists."

Whatever you write... falls into the void.

He looks between them.

Who are you writing it for, anyway?

(an indeterminate smile)

I become, moment by moment...

I'm never the same... never.

That's how I exist...

—or so I say I exist...

(softly — almost tenderly)

From you... I want only one word.

He approaches.

(a long pause)

Was I... good?

(pause)

He looks at each "psychiatrist" in turn.

Huh?

(a vague smile)

Say it...

He opens his hands — wide, empty.

Was I... good?

(a long pause — wrestling with a phrase he shouldn't let be heard)

(softly)

I was... good...?

Silence.

Blackout.