Stage Directions

You are the director so you have some decisions to make. Begin with the time of the performance and where.

You can choose any time of course, but:

I once saw a woman in a park, sitting on the grass, holding her face to the full strength of the setting sun. Her eyes were closed. She slowly waved her arms in circles like a priestess. Every part of her that the sun touched was bronze. You don’t have to go that far. But there is power in certain moments: dawn, dusk, darkest night. You can choose any time. But try to remember that you are not choosing a set of numbers or hand positions on the face of a clock. You are choosing an instant when the sun, stars and moon are arrayed in certain positions around you and they will never be just so again.

Pick the theater where you will present your play. Perhaps you have choices: indoors or outdoors, upstairs or down. But even a single room has corners. Even a chair can be a stage.

You are the set designer so now it is your task to prepare the stage. Take away anything that does not want to be in the play. If it is a bed, take out the pillows that don’t want to be in the play. If it is a bathroom, take out the damp towels, the hair ringed around the drain. Whatever wants to stay, let stay. Whatever you leave is now a prop.

You are the lighting designer. You will need a light that delineates what is the performance space and what is not. Daylight in a bright room will not help. The eye won’t know where to look. A dark room with only one lamp on is fine. A pitch black room with only one lamp on is better.

Now you are the sound designer. Think of your young self, riding in a fast car with friends, blasting a song out the open windows. Or think of your young self in summer, leaning out a window, smoking one cigarette while listening to a song. The important thing is that it is a song that belongs to another time, another life—a song you no longer own and in fact haven’t even heard in a long time. Find that song now and don’t listen to it but have it ready.

You are the actor. It’s time to get ready. Select your costume. You have a closet full of clothes. But within it, if you look hard enough, I’m certain there is a costume.
Keep looking until you find it. It will feel as if someone stole into your house and put this costume into your closet when you weren’t looking. That someone is of course you.

Get dressed. Begin your ritual. Comb your hair. Put on your face. Make sure you have your prop: your phone, which you are never without anyway.

You are the stage manager. Tell yourself: five minutes.

You, the actor, may start to feel nervous now. Or strangely calm. There are things you can do to prepare. Deep breaths or a gesture. A prayer to a small idol. Gargling with salt water. Singing some scales. All of these are permissible.

You, the actor, step into the wings. You hover in the dark.

You, the stage manager, turn on the light and nod.

That’s your cue.

You, the actor, step on the stage.

You take a seat or stand. You lift your phone and begin to record a video of yourself reading your lines. You read a line, then look up. Read a line. Then look up.

Be sure to meet your own eyes, the eyes you can’t see but can imagine.

YOU

Hello.

You are hearing the sound of your voice, a sound you never liked even though it’s your own.

Please listen. And answer.

What is your name?
(An adequate pause.)

Do you like your name?
(An adequate pause.)

What is your real name?
(An adequate pause.)

The pauses continue after each question.
The pauses get longer.

What is your work?
Do you like your work?
What is your real work?

Where do you live?
Do you like where you live?
Where do you really live?

I’m lonely. Are you?

I’m afraid. Are you?

I can’t sleep. Can you?

Let’s close our eyes. And then let’s wake up.

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You, the actor, stop the recording.

You, the audience, press play.

You, the audience, watch the recording.

You, the audience, answer the questions.

That is your face.

That is your voice.

It is hard not to want them otherwise but they are the only ones you have.
Cherish them as hard as you can.

And then when you are ready,

you, the Stage Manager,

open a window

and play that

song.