

One in a Billion

A Comedy

by Brian Mitchell

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Life hasn't been easy for Alexis this year. After divorcing her husband and setting her alimony payments, he won the lottery. Her children are running her life and her job as a Chicago-area publishing editor is in dire jeopardy because she hasn't found a new author in some time. But things are finally looking up! She has been in contact with a Russian self-help author who she is hoping will allow her to publish his books in English. So, when he demands an advance of seventy-five thousand dollars, Alexis approves the advance, only to have him run off with her company's money. Now, Alexis's boss is on her to get the money back or go to prison! Alexis sets out to get the money from the only person she knows with that kind of money... her ex-husband, Zach.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

2 M, 2 W, 2 Children

ALEXIS PINSKY: (40-50, female) – A publishing executive.

STEPHANIE NICHOLS: (40+, female) – Alexis's friend.

VLADIMIR FLAMENCO: (35-55, male) – A Russian author.

ZACH PINSKY: (40-50, male) Alexis's ex-husband.

INGRID PINSKY: (12-16) – Daughter of Alexis and Zach.

IAN PINSKY: (12-16) – Son of Alexis and Zach.

(The roles of Ian and Ingrid can be played by a child of any gender. Rename the characters as needed.)

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SETTING

The entirety of the play takes place in the apartment of Alexis Pinsky near downtown Chicago. The living room is neat and organized. There are two exits: one to the building's interior hallway and one to the rest of the apartment.

ACT I; Scene 1: Friday evening, 7:30 p.m.

ACT I; Scene 2: Friday, two weeks later.

ACT I; Scene 3: Sunday evening.

ACT II; Scene 1: Late Saturday night.

ACT II; Scene 2: Two weeks later.

ACT II; Scene 3: Two weeks later.

PROPS: *See end of script for the props list.*

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ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: ALEXIS enters, wearing a very nice dress and putting in her earrings. IAN and INGRID follow, arguing.)

INGRID: I swear, Ian, you were adopted!

IAN: No, I wasn't! Stop saying that! You were!

INGRID: Why would you think that? Mom likes me best!

IAN: She does not!

INGRID: She does! Because you were adopted!

IAN: I wasn't adopted, was I, Mom?

ALEXIS: Of course not!

IAN: Really?

ALEXIS: Ian, there are a thousand kids out there waiting to be adopted, right?

IAN: Yeah.

ALEXIS: So, why would your father and I choose you, if we had a choice?

IAN: That makes sense. Thanks, Mom. *(To INGRID.)* Told you! You were adopted!

INGRID: I was not! Right, Mom?

ALEXIS: Absolutely. I mean, we tried, but no one wanted you. *(Pause.)* Now stop arguing. Ingrid, go finish that report you have due on Monday.

INGRID: I'd be more appreciated if I had been adopted. *(Exits.)*

ALEXIS: Why aren't you dressed?

IAN: I am dressed.

ALEXIS: Mr. Flamenco will be here any minute! Go get changed!

IAN: I'm watching Netflix.

ALEXIS: I don't have time to argue with you. Go put on the outfit I laid on your bed.

IAN: Ten bucks.

ALEXIS: No. I am not paying you to do this for me.

IAN: Twenty.

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ALEXIS: Stop that! I don't have time to mess with you right now, Ian. Get your clothes changed, now!

IAN: Thirty bucks.

ALEXIS: I can't believe you want me to pay you for helping me! After all of the things I do for you, can't you help me out with this out of the goodness of your heart?

IAN: Fifty.

ALEXIS: I'll give you twenty if you get dressed right this minute.

IAN: Deal.

ALEXIS: Does your dad pay you for helping him out?

IAN: His maid does everything for him.

ALEXIS: His maid is probably cheaper than you. Doesn't he have Jessica help out, too?

IAN: He's not dating Jessica anymore, Mom. She had to go back to college in August.

ALEXIS: *(Growls.)* I can't believe that man! I'll pay you later. Now hurry!

IAN: I'd have done it for ten.

ALEXIS: Move!

(IAN exits. ALEXIS picks up her phone and dials. A pause. SHE speaks into the phone.)

ALEXIS: Arthur? This is Alexis Pinsky in 3C. I am expecting a gentleman shortly. Please send him up as soon as he arrives. ... I don't know what he looks like, I haven't met him. ... No, it's not a blind date. Just send him up. ... He'll be Russian. ... No, not as "in a hurry." He'll be Russian, as in *from* Russia. ... His name is Vladimir Flamenco. ... No. ... No, I'm not going to pay you to do your job. ... No! ... All right, I'll give you twenty dollars, but you escort him up personally. Twenty-five. ... All right, thirty. ... I'll pay you later. ... No, I don't have time right now. ... I can't. ... Okay, I'll send Ingrid down with your money. Just make sure to bring him up right away! Arthur, for thirty dollars I expect Mr. Flamenco to be *escorted* up here! *(SHE hangs up the phone, then calls out.)* Ingrid! I need you!

INGRID: *(From offstage.)* I'm busy, Mom!

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ALEXIS: Ingrid Allison Pinsky! Right now, or you are grounded from the computer for two months! (*ALEXIS digs in her purse for some cash.*)

INGRID: (*Appearing.*) What do you want, Mom? I'm working on this Einstein biography. Can't this wait?

ALEXIS: No. I need you to run down to the lobby and give Arthur some money for me.

INGRID: Why?

ALEXIS: Why do you have to ask me why whenever I ask you to do something for me?

INGRID: Why do you always answer my questions with other questions?

ALEXIS: Don't get smart with me, young lady, or you can just forget that sleepover tomorrow night!

INGRID: I'll take him the money. I mean, don't think that I'm grown-up enough to have legitimate questions... Just call for me like some servant and make your demands, Mom. It's not like I'm an adult or anything, just another dumb teenager, right?

ALEXIS: That's a rhetorical question, I take it.

INGRID: Honestly, Mother! All I get from you are questions, demands, and sarcasm.

ALEXIS: I think that's my line, Ingrid.

INGRID: (*Groans angrily.*) Ten bucks.

ALEXIS: No!

INGRID: Twenty!

ALEXIS: Why do you have to make everything so hard, Ingrid?

INGRID: I don't *have* to make things hard, Mom. I just *enjoy* making things hard sometimes.

ALEXIS: I can't afford kids! All right, twenty. Just take this money down to Arthur.

INGRID: I can't wait until I can leave for college!

ALEXIS: Maybe you can room with your dad's girlfriend... But right now, you can't even leave the building without permission, so maybe we shouldn't get ahead of ourselves.

(*INGRID storms out with the money, as STEPHANIE NICHOLS enters through the front door.*)

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STEPHANIE: *(To INGRID.)* Hi, hon! *(Pause as INGRID storms out.)* Okay, good talk. We'll do it again real soon. *(To ALEXIS.)* What's up her butt?

ALEXIS: I can't talk now, Stephanie. That Russian author is supposed to be here any minute.

STEPHANIE: A Russian? I dated a Russian once.

ALEXIS: You've dated everyone once.

STEPHANIE: You should date someone once in a while. It might improve your mood.

ALEXIS: I don't have time to date. I have two kids to raise and a career to save.

STEPHANIE: Casternanny still after you to bring in a big client?

ALEXIS: Yeah. It's almost as if he expects more from me because I'm a woman. Roger Flatt hasn't had a new client in three years!

STEPHANIE: But he has that mystery writer that pumps out a new book every month.

ALEXIS: Well, from what I've heard, this Russian guy is brilliant. He's got three self-help books that I'm hoping he'll let us publish in English.

STEPHANIE: What's his name?

ALEXIS: Vladimir Flamenco.

STEPHANIE: Never heard of him.

ALEXIS: Do you read a lot of Russian self-help books?

STEPHANIE: Point taken.

ALEXIS: I Googled him this morning. Only two sites were in English, but the reviews were very impressive. Anyway, I'm trying to talk him into letting us start with *Raising Self-Sufficient Children in the New Millennium*. It apparently sold over a million copies in Russia.

STEPHANIE: I'm sure, with tricks like "Send Your Child to a Siberian Winter Camp" and "How Marx Raised His Teenagers."

ALEXIS: I have to meet with Casternanny on Monday to let him know how it went with Flamenco. If I can't tell him some good news, I may be trying to find a new job on Tuesday!

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STEPHANIE: If all goes to pot, you can just get Zach to give you some money. The lucky bastard owes you.

ALEXIS: Technically, he didn't win the lottery until after the divorce was finalized. So, I'm still paying *him* alimony.

STEPHANIE: He won a hundred and sixty-eight million dollars. Why on earth would you do that?

ALEXIS: Because he can afford good lawyers, now, and he's apparently still mad about the divorce. Of course, he didn't have enough money to get me a card on our anniversary, but he could afford a lottery ticket.

STEPHANIE: Lex, you have to remember that at the time he bought the ticket, you were divorced. It's not that I'm on his side, you understand, but you can't get too upset that he didn't get you a card.

ALEXIS: I can when I think that if he'd spent that money on a card he wouldn't be sitting in a mansion and dating teenagers, forcing me to kiss the feet of some Russian so that I don't get fired and have to live off the state. And speaking of the Russian, where the hell is he?

STEPHANIE: Well, I can see you're busy, so I'll let you get at it.

ALEXIS: Why am I always waiting on other people, Stephanie?

STEPHANIE: Call me later and come over for coffee.

ALEXIS: Where is that *stupid Russian*? He was supposed to be here by now!

STEPHANIE: I'll make it decaf.

ALEXIS: Sorry. I just get upset with how unfair life is.

STEPHANIE: I can understand that. I mean, winning the lottery is a one-in-a-billion thing! And that much money... Who hasn't dreamed about how they would spend lottery winnings? To think your ex is enjoying all that while you wallow in middle income... I can see how a little rage might find its way in.

ALEXIS: I heard on the news this morning that there are still two grand prize winners from last year that haven't claimed their money, yet.

STEPHANIE: Really?

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ALEXIS: Probably lost their tickets or haven't realized they've won. I wish Zach hadn't realized he'd won! I'd say I wished he would have lost his ticket, but with him waving it around every time I see him, I don't think that is going to happen.

STEPHANIE: If I had a winning ticket, I'd be claiming the money the same day!

ALEXIS: Me, too. I could tell Casternanny what he could do with his Russian! I'd do some traveling... buy a house in the suburbs, pretty much live the dream. What would you do, Stephanie?

STEPHANIE: Retire from teaching. I dated that travel agent last year and he gave me some great ideas. Travel through Europe. Italy. Maybe rent a decent man. Speaking of which, I have a date tomorrow night. An actor.

ALEXIS: Anyone I've heard of?

STEPHANIE: Not yet. He's shooting a commercial next week.

ALEXIS: For what?

STEPHANIE: Foot cream? Aspirin? Adult diapers? I don't know. He's cute and single, what more is there to worry about? Come over later?

ALEXIS: All right, give me an hour. Wish me luck.

STEPHANIE: Luck!

(STEPHANIE exits as IAN enters again, changed into his good clothes.)

IAN: Twenty bucks.

ALEXIS: *(Digging into her purse again.)* I swear I should get a cash machine installed in this apartment. I bet you don't ask your father for money.

IAN: I do, but he never keeps cash on him.

ALEXIS: Hmmm. Not much has changed there, anyway.

IAN: I mean, what does he do with all the alimony you pay him?

ALEXIS: Don't be bitter, Ian. That's my job.

IAN: Why should you be bitter? The divorce was your idea, wasn't it?

ALEXIS: Now might not be the best time to bring that up. Here's your money.

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IAN: It wasn't his fault that he got laid off, Mom. A lot of the dot-coms failed when the recession hit.

ALEXIS: But it was his fault he didn't find a job for over a year. He just sat around watching *One Life to Live*, eating raw cookie dough, and playing the lotto. And I was stuck supporting him, and you, and Ingrid!

IAN: I know.

ALEXIS: Though now that I think of it, I'm *still* supporting him, and you, and Ingrid.

IAN: I guess it's still the same. He's still watching his soap operas, eating cookie dough, and playing the lotto; except he's living in a mansion on the lake now and dating girls half your age.

ALEXIS: Thanks for reminding me. Look, Ian, I know you miss seeing him every day, but maybe we could stop talking about how nice his life is, all right?

IAN: I just wish it was like the old days.

ALEXIS: I'm sorry, but I don't see that happening without some sort of divine intervention. Even if I would take him back, I doubt he'd give up his single life for me, anymore. Now, do you remember what I told you about our guest?

IAN: Yeah.

ALEXIS: Well?

IAN: He's some Russian guy that wrote a book, and you want to get him to let your company publish it in English.

ALEXIS: Right, and how do you fit in?

IAN: Okay. The book is about how to be a good parent—

ALEXIS: *How to Raise Self-Sufficient Children in the New Millennium.*

IAN: Yeah. So, you want Ingrid and I to impress him—

ALEXIS: Ingrid and me.

IAN: Oh. So, not me?

ALEXIS: Yes, you. I mean you should say "Ingrid and me" instead of "Ingrid and I." It's proper English.

IAN: Isn't this guy Russian?

ALEXIS: That's not the point!

IAN: You want Ingrid and *me* to give a good impression about how good you're raising us.

ALEXIS: Well.

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IAN: Well, what?

ALEXIS: How *well* I'm raising you. Good isn't correct.

IAN: I'll say!

ALEXIS: Don't push it, Ian.

IAN: So, did you read this guy's book?

ALEXIS: Not yet. It's in Russian. Mr. Flamenco promised to translate for me.

IAN: Aren't there any Americans writing books anymore?

ALEXIS: No. Like every other American business, we're outsourcing everything these days.

IAN: It makes sense, I guess. You'd have to *pay* an American author, but you can probably get this Russian book for a pair of blue jeans and a couple rolls of toilet paper.

ALEXIS: I just wish it were that easy. Apparently, there are three or four U.S. publishers trying to get the rights to his books.

IAN: So, you offer him more money than the others.

ALEXIS: My boss doesn't want me to offer more than the others. He thinks I should be able to charm Mr. Flamenco into letting us publish his book.

IAN: Charm him? Has your boss ever met you?

ALEXIS: You're as funny as your father.

IAN: Dad *is* funny ... kinda. When's the Russian guy coming?

ALEXIS: I know! I expected him here already! I think I'm a little nervous. Do I look alright?

IAN: You look really nice tonight, Mom. I almost didn't recognize you.

ALEXIS: Why thank y— What's that supposed to mean?

IAN: Nothing. You look nice.

ALEXIS: This dress doesn't make my butt look big?

IAN: That dress doesn't make your butt look big at all!

ALEXIS: Thank you! That's the nicest thing you've said to me in weeks!

IAN: (*Exiting.*) I mean, your butt looks big, but I'm not gonna go blaming the dress.

(*IAN exits to kitchen, as INGRID enters with VLADIMIR, who carries a briefcase.*)

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INGRID: Guess what, Mom? Arthur paid me ten bucks to bring this guy up!

ALEXIS: He did?

INGRID: Yep. He said you expected someone to escort him directly to our door. This is Mr. Flamenco.

ALEXIS: Ingrid, there's another ten dollars in it if you'll go tell Arthur that he's a dead man!

INGRID: Great! (*INGRID exits.*)

ALEXIS: Mr. Flamenco?

VLADIMIR: Da. Good evening, my dear lady, I am Vladimir Flamenco. I believe you were expecting me?

ALEXIS: Please come in. Your English is excellent, Mr. Flamenco.

VLADIMIR: Please, call me Vladimir.

ALEXIS: Vladimir.

VLADIMIR: I spent several years in college here in the states. Princeton.

ALEXIS: A very respectable school.

VLADIMIR: Passable. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me so late in the evening.

ALEXIS: Not a problem. I just appreciate you allowing me to pitch my firm to you. Please, sit down. Would you like some coffee? Tea?

VLADIMIR: No, thank you. I would prefer to get right to business if you don't mind. I have a flight leaving tomorrow and I would like a good night's sleep before traversing O'Hare.

ALEXIS: We like to think of O'Hare as the Siberia of America.

VLADIMIR: Excellent comparison. In both places people are left and forgotten, yes?

ALEXIS: I can't say anything about Siberia, but O'Hare has had people waiting on "priority standby" since 1968.

VLADIMIR: I like you, Ms. Pinsky. So, to business. Some of the publishers I have met have thought to belittle my work with insulting offers. I trust that your firm is serious in acquiring the rights to my work?

ALEXIS: Of course. I wouldn't have invited you here if we weren't serious. I did some research online and it seems that your books are quite popular in Russia.

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VLADIMIR: Required reading for all interested in a better life,
Ms. Pinsky.

ALEXIS: Alexis, please.

VLADIMIR: Alexis.

(IAN enters eating a cookie and carrying a glass of milk.)

ALEXIS: And this is my son, Ian.

IAN: Oh, this is the Russian guy? I ... AM ... PLEASED ... TO
... MEET ... YOU ... MR. ... FLAMENCO.

ALEXIS: Ian! Be polite!

IAN: Oh. Sorry. WOULD ... YOU ... LIKE ... A ... COOKIE ...
AND ... SOME ... MILK ... MR. ... FLAMENCO?

VLADIMIR: Is it difficult for you as a single parent raising a
special-needs child?

ALEXIS: He speaks English, Ian. And how did you know that
I was a single parent?

VLADIMIR: You have done your research, Alexis, and I have
done mine. I would indeed like a cookie, Ian.

IAN: Ten bucks.

ALEXIS: Ian!

VLADIMIR: I do not understand, did you not just offer me a
cookie?

IAN: Yeah, for ten bucks. The milk is free since you're a guest.

VLADIMIR: *(Holds up his hand to wave off Alexis' scolding.)*
You would do well in the Russian government, Ian. Tell me,
have you researched life in Moscow?

IAN: No. Why?

VLADIMIR: Children your age are beaten with little
provocation.

IAN: *(Beat.)* I'll get that cookie for you right away, sir.

VLADIMIR: Thank you.

(IAN exits to kitchen.)

ALEXIS: I'm impressed! You do seem to have a way with
children.

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(INGRID enters and sits, waiting for her payment until ALEXIS pulls money from her purse and pays her.)

ALEXIS: You've met my daughter, Ingrid.

VLADIMIR: Da. A pleasure, young lady.

INGRID: How's it going?

VLADIMIR: *(Retrieving a stack of papers from his briefcase.)*

It is going well, thank you. Now, Alexis, here is the first chapter, translated to English.

ALEXIS: And what is the first chapter?

VLADIMIR: It deals with the language of modern teenagers.

Their use of words is vastly different than adult usage.

ALEXIS: For instance?

VLADIMIR: When a teenager uses the term "phat," he does not mean fat. It is a term meaning beautiful.

ALEXIS: That doesn't make any sense.

VLADIMIR: True. But in your youth did not the word "bad" mean that a thing was actually good? "That is a bad ride you got, there." One might say to his friend when seeing his new automobile.

ALEXIS: I guess that's true. So fat is beautiful?

VLADIMIR: Precisely. And there are many more phrases and words listed. I feel it is very important to adequately communicate with teenagers, so that there is no misunderstanding. To do that, we must speak the same language, yes?

ALEXIS: All right. I'll take a look at this.

INGRID: That's a lot of stuff. Do we really have our own language?

VLADIMIR: In a manner of speaking, yes. Children have long adapted the usage of language to their own needs. Especially with the advent of the internet and texting, new slang and abbreviations have been invented.

ALEXIS: So, let's say that I read this and would like to pursue a publishing deal with you. Do you have an agent or a lawyer here in the states?

VLADIMIR: No. I will represent myself. Let me say that I will expect some money up front for the rights to my books.

End of Freeview

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