

Author	ua	Олена Гапєєва
	en	Olena Hapieieva
Play original name / translated	ua	ЧОМУ Я НЕ ХОЧУ БУТИ ЛЮБ'ЯЗНОЮ З ТИМИ, ХТО ПРИЙШОВ МЕНЕ ВБИТИ
	en	WHY I DON'T WANT TO BE NICE TO THOSE WHO CAME TO KILL ME
Translator	en	John Freedman with Natalia Bratus
Language of translation		English
Copyright of original text belongs to	name	Olena Hapieieva
	e-mail	lenna.romann@gmail.com
Copyright of translation belongs to	name	John Freedman with Natalia Bratus
	e-mail	jfreed16@gmail.com

Here you can read only a fragment of text. In order to get access to the full text or to receive permission for staging the text, please, contact the copyright owners of the text and translation.



ukrainian
institute



ukrdramahub

The project is implemented with the support of the International Relief Fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Goethe Institute within the project "Theatrical windows. Work in progress" implemented by the NGO "Teatr na Zhukah" (Kharkiv).



Auswärtiges Amt



ABOUT RUSSIANS
"WHY I DON'T WANT TO BE NICE TO THOSE WHO CAME TO KILL ME"

Translated by John Freedman with Nataliia Bratus

"Ooooooo..."

This sound howls between the segments of text like the existential melancholy of all Russians.

Part 1. "Dad"

1

My dad is Russian. My family has had strained relations with representatives of the Russian Federation for a long time.

"Sasha, why is your child screaming like that?"

"He's sitting on the pot."

"I went out to the garden half an hour ago, and he's still at it?"

"He can sit there until he's blue in the face."

"What a beast," the woman says almost in a whisper. - "He lies there stretched out on the couch with his head on his hands, watching that Alla Pugacheva concert. Meanwhile his baby has fused with the potty."

"Song of the year," Dad grumbles into empty space.

My grandmother hates Russians and she calls them *katsaps*, or goats. "What are they in such a hurry about?" she asks rhetorically. "All they want to do is drink. Look at your dad. Look what he did to your mother – she went completely stupid."

"I am Russian," my biological father proudly declares and shoots a contemptuous stare at my grandfather and grandmother — his father-in-law and mother-in-law, our relatives, neighbors and other Ukrainian peasants in Sumy region.

And eats and eats and eats — he can't eat enough.

My mother cooked lard-fried potatoes for him in a dorm in Sumy and conceived me. True, my father hinted at an abortion, saying he did not serve in the army and the mother is seven years older than him.

"I fell in love like the Devil with a dry pear," my mom jokes and smiles all around. To other women, of course.

I was born when "Dad" was in the army. He immediately denied I was his daughter. "All the guys in the regiment counted out the days," he said. My mother did everything she could to incorporate her husband in the "family." She sent me to my grandparents so I wouldn't ruin my father's view and spoil his sleep.

In the end, she couldn't pull him out of other beds — doubles and twins. In her attempts, my mother would knock on doors pretending to be a mail carrier, a doctor or a housing department employee. She is quite good at acting in a practical sense. Usually strong, my mother can pull her rivals by the braids and drag them around. But before my Russian dad, she always shrinks, wilts and nearly

faints, accepting guilt for existing at all.

Dad justifies himself. He likes mother's potatoes and lard, cooked with homemade onions, as well as the canine submission and enthusiasm with which my mother directs the most delicious morsels into his mouth, even as she sells off her childhood treasures, such as a winter hat her parents gave her.

Living with Mom allows Dad to visit his friends with a guitar instead of going to work, write feeble poems, consider himself a poet, and take pictures without ever worrying about their quality. But most often he just lies on the couch with a book from the *Conan the Barbarian* series, or in front of the TV, contentedly folding his hands behind his head. That's it. Not much good to be said about him.

Meanwhile, at my grandmother's place in the village, I listened throughout my entire childhood to a heavy drumbeat about wars, three Holodomors – famines – the liquidation of the kulak peasants, people being sent to Siberia, and local communists seething with ample hatred for Russians as represented by my dad.

However, Father disappeared after my sister was born, leaving Mother alone with her “dreams of a family” and two small children.

2.

“If I put in my teeth, all the women will be mine,” Dad says proudly, looking himself over in the mirror.

Mom brought him to Sumy, fed him, got him a job, put shoes on his feet, and clothes on his body. I was 10 and I dreamed madly about a Barbie doll. So I saw my dad's arrival as an opportunity to get what I wanted, despite my grandmother's daily complaints that there was “no money.”

At first my father worked as a locksmith at some factory, and my sister and I even got New Year's gifts and a trip to the Shchepkin Theater in Sumy to see the fairy tale “The Mitten,” in which all the actors wore bags for some reason. Later I would come to understand the notion of theatrical convention.

Dad started drinking right away at his job, and chased after someone's wife, so was kicked out of the factory. Mother quietly dragged him to grandpa's and grandma's village, taking over the big kitchen — and one more hut in the courtyard.

Dad didn't just eat, he emptied everything he saw into himself, especially at night, far from the eyes of the women.

With difficulty, Grandpa (because Dad doesn't want to, of course) arranged for his son-in-law to go to the farm to feed and clean up after the cows. In a village where people saw the basic meanings of existence in labor, it was not easy to live embracing a book called *Conan The Barbarian*.

One day, getting off the couch, Dad ate an entire pot of meat that Grandma put out for a family dinner when everyone would return from the garden.

When my grandmother started expressing signs of protest, my mother opened her mouth so wide you had to cover your ears and run away somewhere into the ravine or the forest.

Dad was not good at his work duties: the cows roared with hungry voices, and he drank in Nizovoye with the local drunks.

Basically, Nizovoye, a small community near the cowshed, has its own odd history. Once Upon a Time, during the times of the serfs, a gentleman who lived in this area exchanged dogs for people with a gentleman from the Russian provinces. That is, the Ukrainian gave the Russian good hunting dogs, and the Russian gave the Ukrainian his serfs. Ever since, they have lived in Nizovoye where, for generations, they have battled lice, scabies, alcohol fumes, and crime. The paradox of life is that my father connected and drank with those descendants of Russian serfs.

Grandpa's and Grandma's patience ran out — their son-in-law not only shamed them before the whole village, but he did nothing at home, didn't bring home a single kopek of money, and he drank. He threatened and bullied my grandfather.

"I'll kill you all the same," he would say to Grandfather, piercing him with evil eyes. "Mother of God, we've taken a snake into our midst," Grandma would whisper, and I could sense their fear.

In the end it came to this: Father tried to strangle Grandpa, but since he had had so much to drink, he fell into a vat with hot pig food, which Grandma had just removed from the fire. We exhaled with relief, but then saw Dad's hand groping for an axe in a pumpkin, and swinging it at my grandfather.

My grandfather had dressed me, put on my shoes, fed me, bought me gifts, and walked me to first grade. I rode with him through fields in a cart singing songs... Dad took a swing at my wonderful Ukrainian grandfather... An alien evil person, my father... I closed my eyes and screamed as loudly as I could.

Dad's legs betrayed him — he can't keep his balance from the alcohol level in his blood and he just toppled over. It looked like Grandma was intercepting an axe flying through the air.

My frightened mother took Dad to the city. "Get him out of here quick," said my equally frightened grandfather. I heaved a sigh of relief. No longer do I have to kiss my dad good night on his swollen, drooling lips under my mom's watchful eye.

To reconcile the situation, Dad's father, Grandpa Myshko, brought a large red carpet as a gift and tossed it on Grandma's beloved bed. Myshko is dark, scrawny and always drunk. In his village, they call him "Katso" — "the Georgian version of amigo in Spanish." But my grandmother cared nothing about this — she had loved her feather comforter which now she sells to Gypsies who are driving around in a dirty white car buying up feathers.

"That is how these unconscionable people repressed my grandfather, this is how they, inhuman freaks that they are, hoarded grain so that children would die, this is how they stole all my mother's blouses and towels, sent my grandfather to Siberia, signed off all my mother's pay for tank bonds — ugh, the damned goats," — my grandmother would rattle off shotgun-style.

But the carpet hangs on the wall all the same.

3.

Mom brought a bag of groceries to her goat in-laws in Russia hoping to get a standing ovation — what a beautiful wife and daughter-in-law! — while, at the same time, get back together with Dad. Mom took us kids along with her in the hopes of restoring the family. Mom thinks Dad was constantly knocked off course by vague external circumstances. If only you found the right place for him, everything would be better.

The village Dad grew up in was like paradise — tall pines in the sun, giant ants in the woods, the

headwaters of the Psel River where old catfish could be found. But this was only if you look at the natural world there, because the houses were dirty and musty, the fences were unpainted, and drunk people wandered the streets, staggering and waving at the air with their hands.

"You bastard, don't shame me," my mother whispered to me.

"I will not eat borscht with duck, or milk, or soup, or potatoes. Everything here stinks," I said. I had just thrown up the food that a hungry Russian woman named Katya scraped off a salted frying pan.

"Shut up," my mother hisses as she remade my bed herself.

"So capricious," my grandmother said impatiently. "I have no idea who she takes after."

Dad held out for four days as a "proper groom" and fine family man. But on the fifth day he got silly drunk with his father and they ate chicken or duck out of the borscht at the kitchen table that always stunk. They broke the meat up with their hands, digging into the broth, then drank it as if it were an aperitif. I felt nauseous, but I had to get my sister out of there. She was staring at the bird's head on the table.

"Give me the brains," my sister said.

"Huh? What do they want?" Dad asked, blinking his eyes at us.

Grandfather Myshko paid no attention, crushes the head unthinkingly, cracking the bones in his mouth as if it were chocolate. He was dark and skinny, a little scary, like an old Gypsy in a folktale. I savored the word "Katso" in my mouth to avert my attention so I wouldn't throw up.

Mom attacked my drunken father in all her tragic anguish: "You left no brains. Your own father ate them up himself in front of the child. Mine would never do that." Meanwhile, Dad continued chewing his food, making no effort to understand anything at all.

I wanted to escape this stinking place for Sumy as quickly as possible, but that night the bed creaked especially loudly and, in the morning, my mother fluttered around my curly, impudent, Russian dad like a butterfly.

Grannie Katya solemnly pointed out to me a large school made of dark bricks right on a sharp bend in the road where many cars have crashed. "It's a dangerous turn, but the school is good," she says.

"You'll read Pushkin here, not that stuff they teach you in your lousy Ukrainian school," Dad snapped.

Village boys in a dirty red car shouted at Grandpa Myshko, who sat smoking on a bench: "Katso, let the girls go for a walk!" They were wearing T-shirts and stretched, dirty baggy pants. "The young ones!"

I watched a pot-bellied city bus turn on the road, and I dreamed of my grandma and grandpa's house in Sumy. My mother hisses at me again, arching like a snake. Even with all its problems and the local bullying of the nineties, the Ukrainian village seemed like paradise.

"You are my night moth. Fly, fly, fly..." Dad sang and drank, and sang and drank. Sleepy after drinking and counting up all the ways life had offended him, Father ran around the yard with an ax, chasing everyone he saw.

"Oooooo" - resounded in the air and, most likely, in Dad's head. His legs lifted him up again and this healthy, young man – who could have been different – fell face down in the mud in the middle of the yard, releasing the ax into free flight.

This time the bed didn't creak. Mother slept next to us and packed her bags the next day. "Raia, stay," Baba Katya tearfully pleaded. But it was clear to everyone that there was no hope of that, and that Mother had made the best decision.

After crossing the border, I noticed an immediate change in the scenery – from the "gray zone" of unpainted fences punctuating the sky and thickets lacking any flowers, we entered the colorful villages of Ukraine, the wheat fields of the Sumy region, where even the sky was thicker, and the sun played with colors on flower gardens with bright fences. The contrast was so striking that it blinded my eyes. I was home.

After another abortion, Mom fell face down on the asphalt and ended up in the hospital, after which both her health and the smallest illusions of "family" were crushed.

Grandma noticed the name "Sashka" scratched in calligraphic handwriting on her sewing machine with the underside mechanism which "Grandfather had brought her as a wedding gift from Belarus after the war." For the longest time, Grandma could not remove the mask of shock and despair from her face, dissolving her despair in a difficult web of words about the place of Russians in history. This time, starting with the Cossacks.

Part 2 - "Theater"

Every time I would read a book, My grandmother would ask me again:
"Russian or Ukrainian? Don't read Russian, the goats have caused us too much trouble - we don't want them here!"

Still, I read books in Russian and dreamed of applying for a master's degree in Moscow to study theater directing. My teacher in Kharkiv told me about the higher directing courses there, and ever since then this dream had percolated in my brain like a virus. Additionally, I was convinced that the "land of my father" must also make at least some contribution to my life aside from the biological material contributing to my birth.

"She's crazy, but we'll take her," the examiners said, adding my last name to the list of undergraduates, and I was happy that I would engage the traditions of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold.

One autumn day in Moscow. I was baking pancakes in the kitchen of the apartment where our international group lived. I lit a candle and told everyone about the Holodomor in Ukraine.

"The Soviet Union destroyed nine million Ukrainians by starvation alone, not counting war and labor camps," I told them.

Savva from Moldova was angry: "Have you heard about Pridnestrovie? How is it possible that this is happening now, but no one is talking about it?!"

Loreta from Lithuania was indignant: "Why did you come here, then? This is Russia!"
Savva became even more heated: "And you? You think the Soviet Union never did anything evil to Lithuania?"

Loreta justified herself: "Our students studied here: Nekrosius, Tuminas, Karbauskis, they are like a Lithuanian affiliate in Moscow theater pedagogy."

Savva wouldn't let up: "There are traditions here, and all people of all nations participated in their formation. Russia kept the best for itself."

"Guys, don't fight," said Sergei Lysenko from Kyrgyzstan, as he came out in a Kyrgyz national hat and slippers. "I am Russian, for example, but I live in Kyrgyzstan."

"Are you sure you're Russian - Sergei Lysenko?" I asked, analyzing his last name.

"That's what we always said in my family," he said.
"Russia helped us," Zara from Armenia added. "We had no gas, and ate only potatoes... I remember that piercing cold... I am very grateful to the Russians. Now I walk around the supermarket and look at the food, and it often brings me more pleasure than a production by some famous director."

Someone turned on the news. It was 2011. Russian President Medvedev was walking around a factory, going on for 15 minutes in some naive political meditation about "five-year plans and daily policy."

No one from Georgia was studying for a master's degree. But at that time I was interested in "the great art of theater, not some geopolitical topic."
"Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers," students of the Moscow Art Theater Studio School repeated over and over.

An aunt who lived near the Mosfilm studios invited me to dinner. Her friend Vera had just arrived from the Chuvash Republic and was conducting healing sessions at home. People came by appointment, and that day Vera was "working" on a boy with cerebral palsy. The long-suffering mother paid handsomely, and the healer talked about "waiting for next time," and the "great progress being made." Then she sat down at the table and ate a large piece of cake, while simultaneously writing down thoughts that God allegedly was dictating to her.
"Let Vera work on you. You don't have a boyfriend yet, let her take a look," my aunt would encourage me, while Vera walked around me waving her arms like drunken Russians do as children.

"Oooooo," hummed the taps that splashed water all over the walls in my aunt's rented apartment. All the plumbing was falling apart, to which Vera replied, "Everything is just as it should be," while continuing the seance. In Vera's books of faith dictated by God and published for the money of the "Chuvash people," there was no meaning even in the words.

At great, famous theaters we would go see performances that "celebrated traditions" and churned out plays in the proper Russian language that orbited the world of the classics like space stations: "Attention, dialogue with Dostoevsky. Dialogue with Pushkin, and Platonov... Attention. Attention great Russian classics!"

"How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?"

Putin became president again in 2012. The news described it as a "turnover in the ruling tandem."
Thirty-seven people were killed in a terrorist attack at Domodedovo airport outside of Moscow, including a playwright from Ukraine, Anna Yablonskaya. A 20-year-old resident of Ingushetia wore a shahid belt...

"Oooooo," the wind howled through a three-kilometer line of people who came to see the relics of Matryona of Moscow. You could hear the hopes for miracles all around you: "Matushka Matryonushka, Matushka Matryonushka." Priests threw thick handfuls of flower petals at the faithful: "MatushkaWillHelp- MatushkaWillHelp."

Rallies on Bolotnaya Square brought together the Moscow intelligentsia, and after the political unrest, activists received four and a half years in a penal colony "for organizing mass riots."

/.../

Here you can read only a fragment of text. In order to get access to the full text or to receive permission for staging the text, please, contact the copyright owners of the text and translation.