

Author	ua	Тетяна Киценко
	en	Tetiana Kytsenko
Play original name / translated	ua	Хрест
	en	The Cross
Translator	en	Victoria Somoff, Kiersten Giebutowski
Language of translation	English	
Copyright of original text belongs to	name	Tetiana Kytsenko kicenko@gmail.com
	e-mail	Maryna Kotelenets - mk@ula.ua
		Ukrainian League of Authors
Copyright of translation belongs to	name	Maryna Kotelenets, Ukrainian League of Authors
	e-mail	mk@ula.ua

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Auswärtiges Amt



**Tetiana Kytsenko**

## **THE CROSS**

Translated by Victoria Somoff & Kirsten Giebutowski

### **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

**Alevtyna** – hospital aide, mother of an adult son

**Fedorovych** – Yuri Fedorovych, former employee of the village council

*May 2022, a modest Ukrainian village in the Kyiv region. Dusk. Fedorovych is digging a pit half a yard in diameter. Alevtyna stands beside him.*

**Alevtyna.** What should I do now, tell me? What do I do? (Sobs) I was working the twenty-fourth. You know I'm an aide in the ER, right? The surgery unit. In the morning I was taking the garbage out and – bam – explosions. I came back and told the girls: it's war. They laughed at me: "Probably some kind of drill." I turned the TV on – there it was: they shelled Boryspol airport. They said, it's war. Here, nothing. Everything quiet. Up to the beginning of March, on the fourth of March still, it was quiet, wasn't it?

*Fedorovych nods and continues digging.*

**Alevtyna.** On the fifth and sixth you could already hear the echo from somewhere. But on TV they were saying, we're fighting back, everything will be fine, everything will be fine.

*Fedorovych sighs.*

**Alevtyna.** On the sixth we're having lunch. I'm sitting at the table, and Tolya, my husband, is next to me. Misha comes in, and says: "Mama, I got drafted." I'm looking at him, and he – "Mama, if they kill me, you'll get filthy rich." I tell him, "Here, Misha (*twists her finger at the temple*), you're an idiot! I'm only rich when you're here with me, alive!"

*Fedorovych wipes sweat from his forehead, continues to dig.*

**Alevtyna.** And who else do I have? My son was married, then divorced. My grandson Oleh, fourteen years old, lives with my ex daughter-in-law in the Vinnytsa region. So that's how we've been living, the three of us: me, Misha, and Tolya.

*Fedorovych, sweating, removes his jacket, about to put it on the ground. Alevtyna takes it, holds it in her hands. Fedorovych continues to dig.*

**Alevtyna.** So on the seventh of March I went to work, for a two-day shift, since the roads were bad, the seventh and the eighth. And on the eighth, Tolya calls and says, "Tanks in the village." And that's all. Didn't have time to get out. (*Rolls up Fedorovych's jacket*)

*A song is heard from out of nowhere:*

*The night was dark, everything was quiet –  
Yet disaster was creeping up to the village.*

**Alevtyna.** I stayed in Kyiv with some friends. And we talked again on the ninth and the tenth. On the eleventh, at 1:30 in the afternoon, I called again, and I talked to Tolya. I told them: "Do not be heroes, hide, don't take any risks" – that's what I told them. "Why are we gonna take risks?" And then we got cut off – and that was it, I couldn't reach them again.

*Fedorovych catches his breath, looks at Alevtyna, resumes digging.*

**Alevtyna.** Misha was working at the warehouse. Loading things and all the rest. Whatever they needed, he did it. He was working, earning money, making a living. He paid the alimony, everything was good. And Tolya was a driver, a trucker. He limped along on one leg – he had surgery on his leg recently. Gray-haired, skinny, crooked like this...

*Fedorovych levels the edges of the pit, looks into it.*

**Alevtyna.** We're regular people. I was working twenty-four-hour shifts. We had a big vegetable garden. Built a house, kept cows. Two cows, then three cows. Pigs, bulls to plow the gardens. Seventy acres of potatoes! Took care of it with our own hands. We did our best, didn't hurt anyone. Minded our work, the best we could. (*Cries*) O-o-oh. What should I do now? What should I do ... ?

*Fedorovych takes a bucket from the wheelbarrow, puts it in front of Alevtyna.*

**Fedorovych.** Hold it.

*Alevtyna quickly puts the rolled up jacket on the bench and takes the bucket. Fedorovych pours sand and cement into the bucket and mixes with a trowel.*

**Alevtyna.** Then on the thirteenth I got through to the village, to the neighbors. They said the orcs took Tolya and Misha.

**Fedorovych.** Who saw it happen?

**Alevtyna.** No one. No one saw it. Natasha, the neighbor, said: "They were just here and then – wham – they're gone." That's all. They took them on the eleventh and we still haven't heard anything. They also took a neighbor, Vasyl. They took all three of them. And then they took Petro Bondarenko from the village center, that was on the nineteenth. And Slavik Yeremenko. Well, they took Slavik Yeremenko because he worked in the police department. But the Russians took them away saying, "We'll check them out and let them go." And what does that mean, "check and let go"?

**Fedorovych.** Here, give me a hand.

*Alevtyna mixes cement with sand, as Fedorovych pours water into the bucket.*

**Alevtyna.** I never thought the Russians would do this to us, never thought it. I always thought it was a lie.

**Fedorovych.** Go on, keep mixing.

*He adds water to the cement solution, as Alevtyna mixes.*

**Alevtyna.** They were here for twenty-one days, right? Came on the eighth, left the twenty-ninth – how long is that? Three weeks. My girlfriend says, they came and asked, "Hey, are we in the city already?" – (*Mockingly*) "In the city" – Natashka says – "You are in Kyiv already". They were mostly Buryats, right?

**Fedorovych.** Buryats, and Russians, too ...

**Alevtyna.** She says they're rude, nasty. They were surprised we have paved roads in the village: their eyes were like this (*Shows*). They came to the neighbor's house. Surprised we have gas: "What, you have gas in the village? How long have you had it?" Tanya says, "The past thirty years. For thirty years we've had gas". And they yapped to one another in Russian: "Whom did we come to liberate? From what?" Well, in three days there was no more gas: the pipe got hit. Now, that's Russian liberation for you. And as they came into the village, my friend lives in the center, they

stayed with her. Not in the house, there was no gas in the house, it was cold there, but in the summer kitchen. There was a woodstove there. So these orcs would heat up the stove and sleep there. And my friend and her family were sitting in the basement. Sitting in the cold basement ...

*Fedorovych takes a trowel from Alevtyna, mixes himself.*

**Fedorovych.** Here, pour some more.

*Alevtyna adds more water, Fedorovych mixes.*

**Alevtyna.** I came home on the second, the second of April. They weren't letting people in then, but I knew someone here, he drove me home. I go inside. The window is open. The cats, the dogs ... Everything in the house is upside down, everything: the futons are shoved away, the rugs ... I have no idea what they were looking for: everything is turned upside down, everything, everything. They took everything from the dresser, threw it all over the place... It was a horrible mess.

**Fedorovych.** A little more.

*Alevtyna adds more, Fedorovych mixes.*

**Alevtyna.** We had vodka in the barn, in a big jar. The vodka was gone, and the jar, too. Besides vodka, they took two broken T-2s.

**Fedorovych.** "T-2s"?

**Alevtyna.** Gaming consoles. They were broken, but they took them. Other than that, nothing else ... Well, also knives – we had these strong knives, good tough metal, with handles, some very good knives. They took the knives, but nothing else really. Well, also Tolya's equipment: there was a tool box, with all the tools – they took everything. And it wasn't cheap. The boys' documents – all the documents were missing. Even Misha's birth certificate, they took that too. This is how it is.

*Fedorovych evaluates the consistency of the solution.*

**Fedorovych.** Keep mixing, or it will harden.

*He gives Alevtyna a trowel, she mixes.*

**Alevtyna.** When they left, as soon as they left the village, Tolia's brother, and Ivan, his neighbour, and that woman, Tolia's neighbor or whoever she is. All of them got in the car and went out to search. They got the soldiers and the deminers to help: first this red house where they kept prisoners, and the ... where they kept the ... they thought maybe they would find them. They drove there and looked but didn't find anything: no dead bodies, no remains, nothing.

*Fedorovych looks at the thick wooden pole lying behind them on the ground.*

**Alevtyna.** I was at work. Unfortunately, I went to work. If I'd been home, my boys would have stayed home with me! I would have begged, I would have pleaded with them! But no, that's not what happened. And how do I live now? How am I supposed to live? How? How can I live all by myself in the village? But I'm home. I'll handle it somehow. But how are they, wherever they are? How are they, and what are they doing with them, fuckers?

*Fedorovych picks up the pole from the ground, drags it to the pit.*

**Alevtyna.** I never thought they would come kill us. I never thought that, never. It never occurred to me. How is it possible – to just come and kill people? For what? I don't understand that. If we don't want to be with Russia, then what, kill us for that? If a neighbor doesn't want to be friends with me, then what, I should kill him?

*Fedorovych thrusts the pole into the pit.*

**Fedorovych.** Hold it.

*Alevtyna holds the pole with both hands.*

**Alevtyna.** In our village the houses are ruined, destroyed. And Zalissya? Completely ruined. Over there they bombed a warehouse with chickens (*Nods towards the warehouse*) – now it stinks. On the other side of the village they have fish. They say they're burying everything, but there were, like, fifty thousand tons of chicken there – how long's it gonna take to bury them all? And why are they doing it? Do they think they're gonna starve us to death here?

*Fedorovych pushes the bucket closer to the pit.*

**Alevtyna.** I don't understand why does that Putin barge in on here. You have such a big country, you have – o Lord – so much land, so much everything! Take care of it, strive toward something. You gotta have wealth, so your people are comfortable. You gotta take care of them, so they're grateful. But they ... they showed it on TV ... the gas in the pipeline, they burn it – even though people in the villages don't have any gas. What is that? I don't get it. There's no logic in any of this.

*Fedorovych tilts the bucket.*

**Fedorovych.** Just keep it straight.

*Alevtyna holds the pole. Fedorovych pours cement into the pit.*

**Alevtyna.** Tolya has an uncle and cousins in Russia, near Krasnodar. They didn't call ... didn't ask how we're doing. They think we're making everything up. "You're making this up, pretending – that's all. "You're pretending." I have a neighbor, a military pilot in Kamchatka. I have video chatted with him. He says, "What are you talking about? That's not possible." I say, "Seryozha, look at me! I'm worn out. I don't know where my boys are. Did they kill them? Where are they? What did they do to them?" Then he started to cry. He's in Kamchatka – the Russians haven't sent them here yet. They haven't drafted them yet in Kamchatka.

*Fedorovych straightens the pole, pours the remaining cement into the pit.*

**Fedorovych.** (*Muttering*) As it hardens, we'll need to sprinkle some sand ...

**Alevtyna.** Anya ... in the police, a young girl ... they found the corpses – over there, near the store. The store is near the school, and that's where they were buried – three or four corpses.

**Fedorovych.** I was the one who dug them up.

**Alevtyna.** Well, yes, yes ... Anya says, "Looks like your son." But corpses, they are like – they're distorted. You saw it yourself: the clothes were burned, the dogs bit them all over, only the head was left, more or less. So they called me at 2 o'clock and said, "Probably your son. The morgue is closing now, come over tomorrow at nine."

**Fedorovych.** Almost done ...

**Alevtyna.** I thought I'd go crazy waiting until nine in the morning. I thought I'd end up in Glevakha, in the nuthouse, I didn't know what to do! How do you survive, endure all this?

*Cries. Fedorovych sits Alevtyna down on a bench.*

**Alevtyna.** When we went to the morgue, I took my friend with me, she's a nurse. And they showed

us the corpse right away. We weren't sure at first. She says: "I'm not sure, it doesn't really look like Misha." So she went to the nurse there, and asked, "Do you have a description of this corpse? Or something else, maybe some clothes?" The nurse says, "This corpse has crowns on the teeth." Misha had no crowns. So it wasn't him. And then ... there's a woman in the village, she's also a nurse there. Tolya's classmate ... my husband's classmate. She says, "They collected DNA, for all of them, and yours are not there." So they weren't killed. Maybe... And where did the Russians put their own bodies?

**Fedorovych.** Who knows. They drove them out.

**Alevtyna.** This is what I heard, that they put them in a truck, loaded them and covered them with a tarp, and drove them out. The wind blew – the tarp came off – and everyone saw there were dead people, bodies lying there. And my guys ... people are saying already, "They've burned them alive." – "WHERE have they burned them then?" – "They had a crematorium." – "What crematorium? A crematorium for five people? All the bodies were taken out, but these five people were burned? They brought a crematorium here for only five people? And why didn't they burn the ones they buried?"

*Fedorovych sighs, loads the bucket on the wheelbarrow, pours the remaining water onto a plant near the pole, puts it next to the bucket. Puts the empty bags there as well.*

**Alevtyna.** I already called the hotline, the ministry of defense, the Security Service, the prosecutor's office – everywhere I could think of, but for nothing. I've been writing letters (*Takes out a large envelope with documents from the pocket of her raincoat, shows them one after another.*) This one I sent to the Red Cross, and this one about how tall they are and all that, and here's a photo, too. These ones I wrote to the Security Service and the prosecutor's office. The prosecutor's and the SBU sent me notices that they got my letters but didn't say when I'd hear back. (*Sobs, shows Fedorovych the papers. He flips through them uneasily.*) How can you possibly bear this, how? I wrote to Proskochili – he's the one for the military in the Brovary district, what's it called, for the entire military, the top one in the Brovary district ... military, what is it ... attaché, or something like that ...

*Fedorovych gives the papers back to Alevtyna, secretly hides the photo of Tolya and Misha in his pocket.*

**Alevtyna.** O-o-oh...

**Fedorovych.** He was the one who came here.

**Alevtyna.** Yes. He says, "Well, what problems are you having, tell me." So people have been telling him their houses are destroyed. Natasha asks him: "What about the men? Five people in our village disappeared – does someone do anything about this, or does anyone know something?" He says: "I don't know anything about it. You should ask Katya Osadcha."

[...]

Brovary, November 10, 2022

This play is based on an interview with a female resident of a village in the Kyiv region. All personal and geographical names have been changed; resemblances are unintentional.

*The play was translated due to Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings.*

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