



Ukrainian Drama
TRANSLATIONS

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Author

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Play

HE WHO OPENS THE DOOR

Original name /
translated

ТОЙ, ЩО ВІДЧИНЯЄ ДВЕРІ

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A black comedy for the theatre of national tragedy

Cast:

1st Woman, VERA, aged 30-32

2nd Woman, VIKA, aged 25-26

[The names are short for Faith and Victory]

The action takes place in a morgue during a cold season in present-day Ukraine.

PROLOGUE

Reception room of a morgue. Doors on left and right. Maybe a table, chair, hanger. Magazines are on the table. A WOMAN enters, puts on medical clothes, sings a melody from a popular song, notices a magazine, obviously a women's magazine, sits down, flips through.

1st Woman What totally weird things they come up with – you don't know whether to laugh or cry. Now that looks sexy! But it suits her like a saddle suits a cow. Might suit me, though. (*Tidies her hair and critically studies her own figure*). But when would I wear it? To turn on the dead? Ugh!! In this bloody morgue, only one thing ever comes to mind. (*Turns over the pages of the magazine*). Ooh look, exercises for breasts. Just what I need. (*Gets up and begins exercising*). Yes, but how do I get my breasts moving? (*The sound of something creaking comes from behind the stage. She listens intently*). Are my breasts creaking, or what? (*More creaking*). Mice. (*The creaking sound grows stronger*). They maybe mice but they sound like slaughtered pigs. We need to put down poison. Might not kill them, but it might ruin their health. Oh, and then we get rats! (*Again the creaking sound*). They said this would be a nice job, quiet and clean, and the clientele are ever so well-behaved. They just might smell a bit. Oh come on, relax. Mice or rats, who cares if they wear white coats. (*Puts on earphones*).

At that moment, a door opens on the right of the stage. A half-naked woman with a tag on her foot appears in a ghostly light. The 1st Woman lets out a stifled scream and faints. The 2nd Woman has signs of a wild night, smeared make-up, messed-up hair. She cautiously enters the room and looks around. She is obviously cold. At first she does not notice the 1st Woman.

2nd Woman Hey, where am I? Not much of an office. Or is it a drying-out station? And where is everybody? Am I the only drunk in town? Or is the Dry Law in force? It's ok, I drank only dry wine. Why's it so flipping cold? (*Only now notices that she is almost naked*). Flaming hell, they could've have at least covered me with a tea towel. (*Sees a pile of bed sheets, wraps a sheet around herself like a Roman toga*). I can dress 'antique', yeah. (*Sees a ledger on the table*). Ledger of Morgue No.5. Shit, this is a morgue! Good god girl, you really, really wasted yourself this time! Can't remember a damned thing. Brain partly intact? Check... Halloo! Is anyone alive in here?! Oh yeah, this is a morgue, doh! (*Sits down on a chair and notices the 1st Woman*). Oh... (*Takes a closer look*). Doesn't seem to be breathing. What kind of second-rate morgue is this? It's a flaming pigsty. Corpses lying around all over the place. Real trip hazard. Especially with pissheads on the loose. I should move her. It's just not decent leaving a corpse out.

She drags the 1st Woman towards a couch. Suddenly, the 1st Woman opens her eyes. The 2nd Woman starts in horror and retreat to a safe distance.

Scene 1

2nd Woman: Get away from me! Don't come any closer.

1st Woman: (*Bewildered*) Sorry, but you seem to be a corpse.

2nd Woman: Hey! You look like a corpse yourself.

1st Woman: You definitely died. How are you talking? Is this a dream?

2nd Woman: Maybe. But this is one you don't wake up from. You can see me because I too, as it were, gave up the ghost.

1st Woman: Where am I?

2nd Woman: You've joined the other side, you could say.

1st Woman: So who are you?

2nd Woman: Hmm, several possibilities: an old corpse, a new corpse, or a corpse like you.

1st Woman: How can I be a corpse?

2nd Woman: Sudden death. It happens.

1st Woman: No, I don't want to... (*Tears well in her eyes*).

2nd Woman: (*Approaches and comforts her*). Well all go through that, sweetie. No need to fret about it. Living nowadays is tough – and *so* expensive! Dying is much cheaper. All you need is a coffin.

1st Woman: (*Through tears*). Do you know how expensive coffins are today?

2nd Woman: Ah, but it won't be you buying it. It'll be your hubby. You can just lie quietly in your coffin, and forget all about the worries of feeding and clothing that unreliable body. And he'll bring flowers to your grave. How often did he buy you flowers before?

1st Woman: Oh, but I didn't say goodbye. It'll be such a shock to him.

2nd Woman: A shock? Oh no, he'll heave a sigh of relief. Just think – a man having to put up with one woman all his life. You've lived your life, let him live. Free...

1st Woman: Hold on! How did it happen? I was so healthy.

2nd Woman: You just said it, lady – *was* healthy. What kind of health is there in an environment like ours? The soil is stuffed full of pesticides and herbicides. The air is, pardon my French, full of shit. And water, well – don't bother. And then there's bacteria and viruses... So just take a seat and get ready for the final curtain.

1st Woman: But I also did exercises to keep my breasts in good shape. I didn't drink – well only a little – and I religiously swallowed all those disgusting health tonics.

2nd Woman: Well you wasted your money, didn't you? Most people here got a thumping heart attack – then, toes up.

1st Woman: My God, what a way to describe it. How can you joke about it? Don't you really have anything to regret?

2nd Woman: Only things to remember, But what's the sense of going over it all again? Who are you trying to wring tears from? Death? Take that strapping dame with the braids? She's deep purple. I'd rather have a stiff lip and rosy cheeks than a complexion like mouldy grape.

1st Woman: (*Rushes to a mirror to have a look at herself*) There, I don't look like a corpse at all, and there's nothing grapeish about my cheeks.

2nd Woman: What do want? Instant decomposition. Just wait a few days. Better worry about things that matter.. Do you have a plot in the cemetery?

1st Woman: No.

2nd Woman: What about relatives? Nowadays you can easily cohabit/

1st Woman: (*Sighs*) No, unfortunately, they all are still alive.

2nd Woman: So next stop crematorium. Woof!

1st Woman: Do they burned alive just like that?

2nd Woman: First, not alive but dead. And second, why not? Better to burn fast than rot slowly. So much more exhilarating.

1st Woman: Brrrr! ... listen, don't you have any other topics of conversation? And why are we just sitting here? Where's Paradise, where's Hell, where's the shining light at the end of the tunnel – or at least a vaguely decent afterlife?

2nd Woman: Maybe we're just waiting for the bus. Just remember how many are waiting on death's door nowadays! There's got to be one helluva queue.

1st Woman: Are you next in line?

2nd Woman: I guess so.

1st Woman: I'll be next then. I'm not very good at waiting. I get nervous.

2nd Woman: Don't worry. It's all over now.

1st Woman: So what do we do now?

2nd Woman: Nothing to do. Relax and... oh yes, rest in peace. By the way, let's get acquainted? Last trip together and all that. My name's Victoria. You can call me Vika.

1st Woman: Vera... Vera Georgievna.

2nd Woman: Vi-ra Ge-orgi-yvna... Just imagine how good this name will look in gold letters on granite. With the epitaph: "From deeply grateful descendants!"

VERA But I don't have any descendants.

VIKA Ok: "In memory. Honour and glory forever and ever."

VERA Amen... I won't live that long.

VIKA Ok: "You'll live in our hearts" period.

VERA Oh that's too cold and formal.

VIKA My, my, are you hard to please. Do you have a nice photograph for the tombstone?

VERA No. Just one for my passport. On the whole, I'm not very photogenic and my figure is too...

VIKA Oh, your figure isn't too bad... for a coffin. And what will you wear?

VERA Oh dear, I haven't a thing to wear. Oh, I did acquire a fur coat not so long ago.

VIKA Oh no – a fur coat in a coffin? Bad taste. And maybe a trifle warm.

VERA I also bought a new swimsuit, cheerful with pretty flowers?

VIKA No, it won't work unless it's black or dark blue. It's out stupid habit of putting off everything for later on. Sometime, somewhere...

VERA But I was caught by surprise!

VIKA Everyone is warned about it... Well in advance. We get taught everything else. Want to drive a car? Just take a three-month training course, pass exams, and get a driving license. But nobody gets ready for death. We need courses and exams. Fail your course – you're not qualified for it.

VERA I'd go with that. I'm not ready. What if they don't accept me?

VIKA Why ask me? I know as much as you do...

VERA But you seem so experienced. Like you died dozens of times.

VIKA Know why? Logical thinking. For some reason I've got a headache right now. What if thinking is bad for corpses?

VERA I don't think anything is bad for corpses.

VIKA A sobering thought. I need to take some painkillers for the headache (*looks for some pills on the desk, swallows a couple, sits down at the desk and falls asleep*).

VERA I'll take some, too. All this weirdness has made me dizzy (*takes some pills*). They taste reminds me of sleeping pills... Maybe I'll rest peacefully... (*goes to lie down, maybe off stage*).

(Fadeout)

The telephone rings.

VIKA Come on, pick up the receiver and talk to him medic to medic.

VERA Hello... yes (*pause*). Excuse me, but won't you tell me... (*replaces the receiver*).

VIKA Well, what did the doctor say?

VERA I don't think was a doctor. He said they were late and we should make up our minds...

Scene 5

VIKA Make up our minds about what?

VERA I haven't a clue. But if they consider us mentally ill, they would've said something else. Disturbed people don't make up their minds; it's something that's done for them by others.

VIKA Exactly... make up your minds... sounds like an appeal on a ballot slip.

VERA Hey, you hit upon a good idea. What if it's a coup?

VIKA What coup?

VERA A political coup d'état, of course. While the higher-ups are locked in a power struggle, the masses have been cooped up in their homes in case they pull a different way. So we have to make up our minds whether we support 'our side' or 'their side.'

VIKA But what is 'our side' and 'their side'?

VERA What the hell does it matter? Can't be any worse than now.

VIKA How's that?

VERA Oh I don't know. At least put they might bring order to the country You know – jailing some, shooting a few others. Help us breathe easier.

VIKA And what if they jail or shoot us?

VERA Why us, and what for?

VIKA If they knew what for, they'd have done it a long time ago. They told us to make up our minds. So we need to find out who's in power – patriots or quilters¹.

VERA Can't you put it more clearly?

VIKA Ok dumb-ass. Quilters are crying for a full house - so everyone is equally happy and in full and final unity with our eastern brothers, and patriots want to fraternize only with the EU.

VERA Which means that we'll all be brothers?

VIKA Who knows. So if we don't decide, we'll be all screwed, and very, very screwed!

VERA So these jerks are like the quilted jackets... How many cities have they captured...

VIKA Shh... (*whispering*). Choose your words carefully, or they'll lock you in a basement.

VERA (*quietly*) We are locked in a basement...

VIKA Yes, but this a cozy, quiet basement. There it will be a concentration camp.

VERA (*loudly*). Yes, I'm very much on for a bright future. Better yet, a bright present. Everyone equal to everyone – equal yacht, villa, Mercedes per capita.

VIKA (*quietly*). What are you saying? Mercedes? That's German - EU products!

VERA Well, then everyone has the same bike... or scooter... much greener!!! Cheap and keeps you fit. No need to join NATO! And no need to ever wash.

VIKA Imagine some nice western soldiers here... Oh ... I wanted to say - ideologically hostile! ...

¹ *Vatniks – blind followers of Russian propaganda, depicted as wearing quilted jackets.*

VIKA comes up with an idea - she takes the white sheet in which she wrapped herself, ties it to the mop like a flag.

VERA (*whispering*) What are you doing?

VIKA You'll see... (*Raises the flag, starts waving*).

VERA (*whispering*) What's that about?

VIKA (*whispering*). To show that we are for peace! (*Aloud*). Can you imagine how well we will live! ..

VERA When?

VIKA When these damn casinos, nightclubs and other remnants of the Wild West are vanquished...

VERA picks up on the game and also grabs the pole of an improvised white flag.

VERA Yes, because they rob you of sleep. And with our rotten health we just aren't up to partying all night.

VIKA And you've no chance of winning in a casino figs you win. They're all cons suckers, reptiles. All the machines are fixed to twist, cheat. Throw them in jail!

VERA Exactly. And instead of casinos, let have galleries, theatres and cinemas! And our own movie! About us!

VIKA Right! Let money go to movies and plays, not these fucking oligarchs! And let's have rock star concerts at affordable prices, or even in the squares, for free!

VERA Right! (*whispering*). Maybe if we sing something about brotherhood, and we'll be released?

VIKA (*whispering*). You start, and I'll sing along, because I don't know those songs at all...

VERA (*nods, tunes in, sings solemnly*). Union of Immovable Republics...

VIKA (*sings along*) Europe...

VERA (*stops abruptly*) What's that with Europe ?! Dumbo! Hey, wait, I don't think these are quilted jackets...

VIKA Then who?

VERA You spoke to him as well, remember how he addressed you?

VIKA He said ‘lady’, exactly, and in Ukrainian ...

VERA You see. Of course, these aren’t quilters... You’d hear a Ukrainophobe from his crap accent. Even our deputies wouldn’t know a simple phrase in our language if it came up and bit them.

VIKA Ugu, tundra, surzhik with a dictionary... They are patriots, exactly ...

VERA Hooray! ... And how I remember the giant queues for green bananas...

VIKA Green? And can they be eaten?

VERA No, they are sour and disgusting... Thank God, they are not...
Both quickly untie the knots of the white flag and put everything back.

VIKA No, we don’t really want a bright future...

VERA We’ve had enough friendship of peoples. You can't go far on a scooter - someone'll hit you with an SUV.

VIKA People in the West have decent lives. Maybe life will be decent for is one day. The main thing is to head in the right direction.

VERA Yes, let's start with the image of the Ukrainian woman.

VIKA Do you happen to have embroidered shirts?

VERA Of course, corpses get really excited by artistic embroidery?

VIKA Oh, sarky! I only asked. How about songs. Do you know any patriotic-consciousness songs, preferably traditional?

VERA I know the traditional traditional.

VIKA Ok. (*VIKA ‘announces’ the number*). The morgue folk ensemble sings №5. Folk music, folky words, a thoroughly folked up performance...

VERA People. (*Starts*).
"Oh there, in the crowd, in the bazaar,
You could find women selling off men..."²

VIKA What are you singing about? They’ll say first men, then the whole free state will be sold! Everything will be sold. For heavens sake don’t sing about that ... Something else – how about military exploits ...

² Ukrainian folk song *In the Ой там, на товчку, на базарі*
<https://youtu.be/3kKrZPaIOL0>

VERA Oh, I know one - about the Cossacks.

VIKA Good, the Cossacks. We need protection.

VERA ‘The Cossacks went a-riding back to the River Don! They deceived poor Halya. Took her away with them. Oh, poor young Halya, you poor young Halya, They deceived you, Halya. Took you away with them...’³

VIKA (*quietly*). Now there’ll be something about valour...

VERA (*fast*). ‘They took Halya to the forest, and tied her braids to the pine. They gathered bushes and branches, and set fire to the pine...’

VIKA (*interrupts*). Wohwoh! What’s with this sadistic repertoire? They’ll you’re you slandering our military prowess and honour... I think we better dance. (*Announces "number" again*). The morgue folk dance ensemble №5 performs. A dance suite.

VERA starts dancing, VIKA picks it up, they dance harder and faster, then VERA grabs her waist.

VERA Oh, my sciatica is killing me! Damn sedentary work! Stuck all day in the basement.

VIKA No, we’re just flipping amateurs. So maybe the main thing is not dance songs, but pedigree. What is your patronym?

VERA Varletenko, from my husband’s name.

VIKA (*giggles*) Varlet! Oh my god. Knave-enko! Blaggard-enko! Were you looking for a husband for a long time? (*Seriously*). Yes, just perfect for us. Captures, as it were, the national character. And what girl?

VERA Dopelova

VIKA Oh my giddy aunt.

VERA It’s respectable name.

VIKA So dope lover. Weed addict. We need drugs right now.

VERA Ok, so what's your patronym? (*Grabs the magazine and bashes VIKA with it*).

³ Ukrainian folk song, ‘Young Halya’ *Oŭ mu, Галию*
<https://youtu.be/rHttG140vLM>

VIKA (*Picks up the morgue ledger*) I'm a corpse, temporarily, with a stamped document to confirm it..

VERA A corpse is not temporary, but forever. (*Phone rings. They freeze.*)

Your turn. Try to catch the party affiliation from the voice.

VIKA Maybe the colour of his boxers (*Picks up the phone*). Hello ... (*long pause*) Stuck...

VERA How. Where? So patriots or quilters?

VIKA I don't know. So we're stuck here. They are stuck on the road – traffic jam. And we are told to be ready for anything, maybe for the worst...

Epilogue

VERA Well, what did he say? (*Pause*). Why are you silent? (*Pause*) You're scaring me. Was it what you thought? (*Victoria shakes her head*). What then? Who was it? Speak up, don't torture me

VIKA I don't know ... He said that they changed their minds and won't come.

VERA They won't come! Why?

VIKA He didn't say, but added, "You can choose yourself – either leave or stay."

VERA Well bugger me! They tortured us like tearing wings of flies then... Do they even know that we're locked in here?

VIKA (*still thoughtfully*). It seems to me they know about us much more than we suspect. Maybe something we ourselves don't know.

VERA Well, here we back at the beginning: we don't know who we are, where we are, what'll happen to us, and who and when will open the door.

VIKA Just a sec. He said we could go. Try the door.

VERA I'm sick of trying. Well, just for you... (*They push the door – it swings open*). Oh, mummy!... There's a tunnel and a light ...

VIKA (*runs to the other door – it's not locked either*). And these too. There's a street and the sun's shining ... Look at your watch, quickly.

VERA Yes.. (*Takes it out and listens*). It's ticking, Vico, you hear, it's ticking! Is it over? Are we free?

VIKA Is it over? No, it's just beginning...

VERA Another scenario? What do you mean?

VIKA The worst. Do you remember him talking about the worst?

VERA Why the worst?

VIKA Don't you get it? They gave you a choice.

VERA What's so bad?

VIKA They threw it at us like a dog's bone. Take your freedom, or give it up. Leave or stay. You can be alive or you can be dead. You choose. There is nothing above or below. Nothing! You have no one else to blame for your troubles and mistakes. You do not have to adapt to the circumstances. You create them yourself. It all depends on you. Your words are your words, your steps are your steps, your shadow is your shadow ... We have been waiting for someone to open this door - in vain. And the worst thing is that the phone will never ring again - they passed us by. They did the worst ...

VERA And what will happen to us next?

VIKA I don't know...

The two women huddle together in the middle of the stage. The doors remain wide open. The nature of the light from each doors is different – they are different worlds. The illusion of a strong draft. The women freeze uncertain. The light goes out slowly.