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Play	Ward No. 7
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Ward No. 7

(ed. by way of explanation (as requested by the author): the two principles, Yulia and Roman, are, respectively, Russian and Ukrainian speakers. This is virtually impossible to show in English translation, perhaps with occasional “clue words” that show one or the other struggling to come up with a word in the other’s language. Ukrainian speakers and Russian speakers (in Ukraine) communicate freely. Nearly the entire country is conditioned by this bilingual situation, though it is not entirely without social tension. In contrast, travellers to Kyiv from Moscow, St. Petersburg, etc. (Russian speakers) routinely have difficulty understanding the Ukrainian language, whereas Ukrainians who travel to Russia experience no language problem. Ukrainians, greater than 80%, are fully bilingual. Bilinguality in Russia, however, is quite rare. Regarding this play: this is a difficult dramatic tension to capture in English, but the linguistic tension between the two characters, particularly one from eastern Ukraine (Russian speaking) and western Ukraine

(Ukrainian speaking), is a quite palpable, natural and conflict-laden in the current context.)

STILL OF THE NIGHT. A CLOCK IS TICKING.

Yulia - Water! Water!

Roman - Damn it! (A HAND SMACKS A WALL) Where's that bloody buzzer? ... Ow, shit (GROANS).... There...

A LONG DISTANT BUZZ, THEN ANOTHER, AND ANOTHER. SWIFT STEPS APPROACHING, DOOR OPENS.

Katia - What's the matter? You want a bed-pan or something?

Roman - No. Water... Someone's moaning...over there...

Katia – But she can't. Not a drop till morning.

Roman – She's in bad shape...

Katia – Oh, OK... hold on... (*WATER POURING*) Can you hear me? You can't have any. Not a drop.

Yulia - Water, please...

Katia - Strict orders from the doctor. You're just out of surgery. Let me wipe your face. Your lips are dry, suck on this damp cotton wool. You can have a little in the morning... (*BED SQUEAKS*) Now go back to sleep. Let me tuck you in. Sleep. You'll feel better in the morning. Serhiy Mykhailych does wonders. You're going to live. Go back to sleep...

A WHISPERED CONVERSATION.

Roman - Katia!

Katia - What?

Roman - Who did you put in here with me? It's a woman...

Katia - So?

Roman - Here? This is a men's ward.

Katia - It's not...it's just a ward. You've been here two days and now it's a men's ward? Aren't we something...

Roman - You must be kidding me!

Katia - Listen, she can't see a thing. Just like you. Anyway, she has other things to worry about. She has a bad wound – in the stomach.

Roman - I'm not exactly here on holiday.

Katia – Exactly what I'm talking about... all the same it has to be this way for now. The hospital is crowded; a new group of casualties arrived yesterday and there was nowhere else to put them... Go to sleep!

Roman - Wait, since you're here. Can you give me a pain injection?

Katia - Sure, hold on a sec. (*THE SOUND OF A DISPOSABLE SYRINGE BEING OPENED, THEN AN AMPOULE SNAPPED OPEN*). OK. Here. See, you don't mind me, you shouldn't mind her. There you are. Why did you wait? You should've called me right away. Now go to sleep, rest...

Roman - (*FIDGETING IN HIS BED*) Where's she from? Is she one of us? Army?

Katia – No. Civilian. Came under fire. Was in her flat, a shell landed nearby.... A neighbour brought her in. Said they'd found her by accident. She must've lain there for hours.

Roman - Bastards.

Katia - She'll live, that's the main thing.... Mykhailych spent nearly three hours patching her up. Imagine. You, too.... Your soldiers said you screamed with pain for the first few minutes, begging them to hack off your leg. Mykhailych put it back together though, piece by piece. Feeling better?

Roman - Yeah, it's eased up a bit.

Katia - Good. I'll go catch a nap. Go to sleep, now. God bless you.

LIGHT STEPS, DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES.

LOUD CLOCK TICKING.

CITY NOISES OUTSIDE. DOORS BANGING. A DISTANT MALE VOICE GIVING OUT INSTRUCTIONS, "AN IV DRIP TO THIRD, BED ONE, QUICK! PROTOCOL'S ON THE BEDSTAND." STEPS DOWN THE CORRIDOR, A DOOR OPENS.

Serhiy Mykhailovych - (*PULLING UP A CHAIR*) Good morning, hero! Let's see what we've got here.

Roman - It hurts like hell...

Serhiy Mykhailovych - I understand.

Roman - Like hell, doc. I had to get another shot at night... Couldn't fall asleep. How is it?

Serhiy Mykhailovych – You're in for a rough haul. You'll live... but fly – not so much... Still, you get to keep your leg. It'll heal. Give it some time.

Roman - What about my eyes?

Serhiy Mykhailovych - I told you that's from shell concussions. We'll need to examine you, but later.

Roman - Doc, can you transfer me to a different ward?

Serhiy Mykhailovych - Pardon?

Roman - They put a girl in here...

Serhiy Mykhailovych - Well, yes. So what?

Roman - Well... Don't you understand?

Serhiy Mykhailovych - Listen, she can't see either. Shell-shocked. A very similar case, by the way.

Roman - But she can hear! I can't piss. Can't cuss.

Serhiy Mykhailovych - So don't cuss, then. But do be sure to relieve yourself.

Roman - I'm serious!

Serhiy Mykhailovych - So am I. Listen, I can't organize a spa for you here, see? There's nowhere else I could put her. Or you. We're up to our necks in it after the attack - wounded in the corridors, for crying out loud. The time will come, when you'll be well enough to travel, I'll send you to the city. But for now you just stay put!

Roman - Doc, did we at least recapture the town? It's ours?

Serhiy Mykhailovych - Yes, it's ours. I'll need to get you a radio... Yes, we got it back... And now I have to patch you all up. Civilians, too... (*WALKS TO THE OTHER BED*). Good morning. How are you feeling?

Yulia - Please, can I have some water?

Serhiy Mykhailovych - Yes, now you can, just a little. They'll fetch you some in a minute. It's always like this after surgery.

Yulia - Can I take the bandage off?

Serhiy Mykhailovych - No. Shell concussions. Partial loss of vision, you need to avoid the light for a bit. Your sight should restore itself, I think. We'll need to examine you a bit later.

Yulia – There's a strong burning sensation, right here.

Serhiy Mykhailovych - Let me see. Uh, huh, well that's not too bad. Well done. It'll burn a little...not for long. We'll keep to the protocol and I'll add something to help you sleep. Good. Get some rest now!

SERHIY MYKHAILOVYCH LEAVES THE ROOM. HE IS HEARD YELLING, "WHERE'S KATIA? KATIA! WARD SEVEN: ALL THE CHARTS ARE ON THE BEDSTANDS. A LITTLE WATER TO BED ONE, RIGHT NOW."

Roman – Well now. Allow me to introduce myself. My name's Roman -

Yulia – I'm Yulia.

Roman – Tymoshenko herself? Sorry, it was a joke. It's a lovely name. *(PAUSE)* OK, if you're not in the mood.

Yulia – I just really want a drink of water.

Roman - Damn it! *(FEELS FOR THE BUZZER ON THE WALL, BUZZES, SWIFT STEPS, DOOR OPENS).*

Roman - Katia, is that you?

Katia - Who else would it be?

Roman - She's waiting for water.

Katia – Here, I've brought her some. And since when are you giving the orders here?

Roman - Well, I am a commanding officer.

Katia - In here you're a patient. You can start giving orders when you leave this place. I've brought you some water. But you need to drink it in tiny, tiny sips. And take this pill. *(BED SQUEAKS)* No, no, don't sit up, drink it through the straw. There you are, that's it! Did you swallow the sleeping pill?

Yulia - Yes. Thank you.

Katia - Now get some sleep. You can have a little more water later. And you, commanding officer, will be getting an IV drip in an hour.

Roman – Are you ever off duty?

Katia - No, with my shift-partner sick it's round the clock for me now.

Roman - When do you sleep then?

Katia - In between your infusions. That's it! Get some rest! I'll close the window to keep the noise out.

WINDOW CLOSES. CITY NOISES FADE AWAY. KATIA LEAVES.

A CLOCK TICKING.

A RADIO IS ON, A JINGLE PLAYING FOLLOWED BY VOICES OF DJ'S.

Female DJ - And now for our listeners the latest and hottest news!

Male DJ - Ooh, I'm intrigued!

Female DJ - Are you? You feeling okay?

Male DJ - I'm starting to sweat in anticipation of the hot news.

Roman – What the hell is this?

Yulia - Turn it off, for Christ's sake!

Roman - I can't. I don't know where the thing is.

Female DJ - You should be. So, the celeb super couple from the movie *Twilight*, one of Hollywood's most gorgeous pairs, whose divorce shook the world...

Male DJ - This calls for a drum roll.

Female DJ - Exactly. So, Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson... are talking again! They've been seen visiting a tavern together!

Yulia - Please, turn it off!

Roman - Oh damn it, where's this bloody buzzer?

Male DJ - I can't believe it!

Female DJ - Life is so full of surprises! So, they're spending a lot of time together again and I think everything might not be lost between those two.

Roman - Here it is! (*A FAINT SOUND OF THE BUZZER, RADIO BLARING*).

Male DJ - There were some scandals there, weren't there?

Female DJ - Scandals? Just life! We are all modern, tolerant people here! One day Kristen admits she's bisexual and moves in with a girl. And then Pattinson shut things down...

Male DJ - The right thing to do in my opinion...

Roman – Let's get this shit turned off. What the hell? ... Katia! Katia!

DOOR OPENS, KATIA COMES IN.

Katia - What's wrong? What happened?

Roman - Where did this damn thing come from? Turn it off!

Female DJ - So you'd do the same to the girl you love?

Male DJ - You bet!

Katia - The radio? Mykhailych said to get you one to listen to the news and such.

Roman - And such? Get it out of here now! Do you hear me?

Female DJ – Well, well. Your true nature reveals itself!

Male DJ – What say we talk about something else? For instance, do you know what tourist destination is hot among Ukrainians this year? We're now...

Katia - (*TURNS OFF THE RADIO*) Okay, okay! I'll take it out. Look at the commanding officer here! (*LEAVES*).

Yulia - Thanks. It's all... so...

Roman – Better?

Yulia – A bit. You're military, right?

Roman – Yeah. A long line of us in my family, including me...

Yulia – And where are you from?

Roman - I'm from Bilohorshcha.

Yulia - Where's that?

Roman - That's part of Lviv.

Yulia - So you're from Lviv?

Roman - Yes. But I always say I'm from Bilohorshcha. That's where my father's from, and mother, and their parents, they remember the times when it was just a village.

Yulia - So, what's there to do in Bilohorshcha?

Roman - Well ... Shukhevych was from there. He's well respected around there. I was even named after him.

Yulia - After whom?

Roman – Roman Shukhevych. Do you know who that is?

YULIA LAUGHS.

Roman – What's that for? He's a real hero to us...

Yulia - Nothing... So you're one of those?

Roman – I'm sorry, I don't understand. One of what?

Yulia - An authentic Banderite? True blue nationalist? (*ed. Ukrainian historical term for citizens who sympathised with an assortment of political and military nationalist groups that opposed both German fascism and Russian communism*)

Roman – Here, we're all Banderites to some extent...

Yulia - Not all of us...

Roman – No. Sorry. Not you, I guess. Do you speak Russian as a matter of principle?

Yulia - No. Why? It's just my mother tongue.

Roman - I see.

Yulia - What do you actually “see”? (*she slightly mocks his Ukrainian*)

Roman - I see you're one of those who those Moskaly (*ed. this is fairly harsh Ukrainian slang for traitorous Ukrainians who collaborate with the Kremlin, speak Russian, etc.*) are protecting here.

Yulia - And that would make you one of those who started it all? “Everybody to the square! If you're not jumping, you're a Moskal”, right? (*ed. a joke/pun beyond explanation*)

Roman – Sure, I heard that joke.

Yulia - A hell of a joke.

Roman - What do you mean?

Yulia - I meant what I said. Haven't you noticed? The country is at war. You are lying here, wounded. Me, too. And everybody's lives have improved so much.

Roman - We didn't start this war. Haven't you noticed?

Yulia - You know what I've “noticed”? You all fought to be independent from Russia with the outcome that you're now more dependent than ever...

Roman - On America, naturally.

Yulia - America, Europe, the IMF, the bankers.

Roman - It's better to depend on America than Kremlin. It's not the worst option. Every country depends on every other country in way or another...that's the way of the world. Life may not be getting any better but that's because all this shit that's come our way – it takes time to get over it.

Yulia – And where's the sense in it? If tomorrow the West says it won't give you any more loans and you end up doing whatever they ask? Is that “independence”?

Roman - “You”? So you don't consider yourself part of Ukraine? Why didn't you run off to Russia then?

(editorial note: Russian/Ukrainian are synthetic languages, like Spanish/German, with a “formal” YOU and “informal” you. Yulia has, perhaps insulted or feeling emotional distance from Roman, switched from “informal”/friendly ‘you’ to “formal”/cold ‘You’.

Yulia - After all this, I'm giving it some thought.

Roman - Think! At the very least, we got rid of that criminal Yanyk. We stopped the Moskaly here and won't let them get any further. We put pressure on the government every day. What have you done? You and your precious Donetsk voted for those scumbags, you supported them. If you'd all come out to Maidan, Putin would've got nothing out of this. Not Donbas, not Crimea!

Yulia – You're blaming me for this war? I didn't vote for them, just so you know. Nobody asked us here what we wanted or didn't want. They just started shooting from this side and that side. That's all. And they didn't spare the civilians, either.

Roman - You know what? Let me explain it to you in plain Russian. I never shot at a civilian, see? Not even when your separatists were raking us from the residential areas.

Yulia - And let me explain it to you in your native Ukrainian, so that you finally understand: those separatists are not mine. I never said you, personally, were shooting. I'd have left years ago if I'd had a place to go. But I didn't and don't! There's no one over there. There's no one here... not a soul. My mother died after one of the attacks – heart failure...

Roman - I'm sorry.

Yulia – Oh, fuck off!

PAUSE.

Roman – Your Ukrainian is pretty good...

Katia - (*ENTERS*) Guess what I've got for you! You'll never guess! Yulia, c'mon, hold out your hands. There...for you.

A DOG WHIMPERING.

Yulia - Jesus! Tybalt, is that you? My sweet boy. Come here. Yeah baby, I love you too. Careful, you'll rip my bandages off. Lie down here near me and I'll pet you nice...Katia, where did you ever find him? I thought he'd been killed.

Katia - Your neighbour brought you in together with him. She says it was he who led the people to you. That you'd saved his life so he saved yours.

Roman - You saved his life?

Yulia – Enough already, got it?

Katia – Come on, kids...you've managed to find something to fight about? Oh, look at that. He's giving you a kiss...look at that, Roma, licking her. What a funny little dog...

Yulia - I found him after an attack. He was starving so I took him home.

Roman - May I? ...

Yulia - Tybalt, there's a very mean man who wants to meet you.

Roman - Katia, can you hand him to me?

Katia - There. Well, now I at least know your name, little guy. But please, not a word to Mykhailych. We have to hide him in the kitchen for now. We'll keep him fed there.

Roman - Look at you, Tybalt! So fluffy. Oh, little guy... Hey! Those teeth are sharp!

Katia - Okay, that's enough. Someone might see. I should take him back. We'll come visit again, won't we, Tybalt? You've got such an unusual name. OK, let's go. (*THEY LEAVE*).

PAUSE.

Roman – Listen. This is a purely technical question. We need to find some way to agree...

Yulia – Well, what?

Roman – So, if one or the other of us needs to use the toilet, could we just warn each other and the other disappear for a minute?

Yulia – What are you on about?

Roman – I mean, get going!

Yulia – (*PAUSING*) You need me to run out of here already?

Roman – No. Not that. I'm just hoping we can agree on this.

Yulia – (*LAUGHING*) I can just see myself!

Roman – What's that about? Well, what? (*ALSO LAUGHING*)

THEY LAUGH TOGETHER, AND THEN LIE IN SILENCE.

Roman – Peace.

Yulia – Peace.

CLOCK TICKING

Yulia - (*IN HER SLEEP*) No, Mum, no!...

Roman - Yulia? Hey? What is it?

Yulia - What? Was I shouting?...Did I wake you up? What a nightmare...

Roman - Yeah... I have them too, sometimes...

Yulia - Is it day or night-time now?

Roman - Night, I think. No birds singing, no people talking...

PAUSE.

Yulia – I can't fall asleep now...I had nightmares a lot as a child...

Roman – So did I...

Yulia – Did anything help?

Roman – Well...it's a bit odd, but...

Yulia – What?

Roman – You understand, I was imagining that I had died and then the nightmare didn't really matter to me...

Yulia – Interesting...

Roman – What about you?

Yulia – My papa would pick me up and hold me when I couldn't fall asleep.

Roman – Where is he now?

Yulia – He's gone.

Roman – What happened?

Yulia - He left home one day and never came back. We looked and looked... couldn't find him. It happens here sometimes. What about yours?

Roman – Mine are at home. My grandma and grandpa, too. All still kicking. We've got a big family. I've got three other brothers. I'm the oldest. My parents were hoping for a daughter and got a whole football squad instead.

Yulia – A big family. That's a good thing.

Roman. Yeah. A real good thing. Listen, are you far from me?

Yulia – I couldn't say.

Roman - Can you reach my hand?

Yulia – Let me try.

Roman – Where is it? It's hot. Do you have a fever?

Yulia - Maybe a slight one.

Roman - You're shaking. Do you want me to call Katia?

Yulia – No, don't. You've got a big hand, just like my dad. Roman, I'll be good.

Roman - Try to get to sleep. I've got you. Did you take a sleeping tablet?

Yulia – Yes. You sleep, too. Or is this uncomfortable for you?

Roman - It's fine. Good night.

Yulia – 'Good night' brings me back to my childhood. Thanks. Good night.

A CLOCK TICKING.

Roman - Morning! Did you sleep well?

Yulia - I haven't slept that well in a long time. Were you holding my hand all night?

Roman – I was.

Yulia - Are you going to let me go?

Roman - I can't. My fingers are numb.

Yulia – Let me rub them for you. There, better?

Roman – That's a big improvement, thanks.

MALE VOICES IN THE CORRIDOR, "THERE'S WARD SEVEN, THEY SAID HE'S IN THERE..." DOOR OPENS.

Sashko - There he is! Well, hello, Roman! How are you doing?

Roman - I'm good. Who's that with you?

Serhiy - It's me, commander. How are you, sir?

Roman - Guys, grab a seat. What's going on? Tell me!

Sashko - Well... Doc says he saved your leg. Says you'll walk. Probably see, too.

Roman - He also says I'll never fly, though. That's a joke he likes to make.

Sashko - He also says...

Roman - Not that. What's new over there?

Serhiy - Everything's good... We're holding our position for now. Retook the town. Digging in now.

Roman - What's all the sighing about? That sounds...did we lose some men?

Sashko - No! Everybody's good. You were the only one that got hurt in the explosion...we've got some oranges for you.

Roman - What's wrong? Out with it!

Serhiy - Nothing. Forget about it.

Sashko - Serhiy!

Serhiy - Why me? I'm just standing here minding my own business!

Roman - C'mon. Grow up! Start talking already!

Sashko - Damn it, we agreed not to.

Serhiy - I didn't do anything. He just somehow...

Sashko - Well, we screwed up with that shot.

Roman - What are you talking about?

Sashko - Well, the day you were wounded, on that day...we were getting some good hits but one shell fell on the wrong coordinates.

Serhiy - You had your own doubts about Andriy's calculations. But we...

Sashko - But we had to move quickly because we were taking some heavy fire as well. So...

Roman - Say it already!

Serhiy - We hit a civilian quarter and now there's an investigation.

Roman - Shit! Any casualties?

Sashko – No deaths, but a few wounded. We hit a residential building. Most of the occupants had got out...but not all of them.

Roman – Ah, shit!

Serhiy - A resident filed a complaint. Now they've put together a committee to look into it. Europeans on it, too...

Sashko - So the OSCE Mission is on the case...

YULIA IS HEARD CRYING.

Serhiy - What the...that's a girl! Why did they put you together in one ward?...

Roman – This is awful. She's from the civilian quarter...at home. She was wounded during the attack...

Sashko - Oh, damn...

Serhiy - We didn't know...

Roman - Guys, listen...thanks for stopping by. Let them investigate, whatever will be, will be. I'll answer for it if I have to. Tell the guys... well, you know...

Serhiy - Get well, commander.

Sashko – I'm really sorry about that...

THEY LEAVE.

Roman - Yulia! Of all the awful...I don't know what to say ... I'm so sorry. It's horrible. Where are you? Where's your hand?

Yulia - No, don't you dare... (*CRYING*). Don't you dare...!

A CLOCK TICKING.

Roman - Yulia, you sleeping? You're not, are you? Yulia! Yulia! Where are you? Why are you so cold? Yulia! Wake up!

PRESSES THE BUZZER, KATIA COMES RUNNING IN.

Roman - Katia, Katia. Check her. What's wrong with her?

Katia - Certainly. (*KATIA TURNS ON THE LIGHT*) Yulia, Yulechka... Oh, no ...

Roman - What? What is it?

Katia - Oh my God! It looks like she took the whole box of sleeping pills. It was full and now it's empty. (*BED SQUEAKING*) I can hardly get a pulse.

Roman - Katia, do something! Katia! Pump her stomach...Get Mykhailych in here! Double time!

Katia - Hold on, and stop your yelling! (*RUSHES OUT*).

Roman - Yulia! Yulia, what have you done? Why would you... just don't leave us. Please. I won't be able to live with this...just can't...forgive me. Forgive me.

CLOCK TICKING LOUDER AND LOUDER, MUFFLING OTHER SOUNDS.

Roman - (*TALKING IN HIS SLEEP*) Yulia, Yulia. I'm holding on to you. (*WAKES UP*) Shit...Yulia! Yulia!

PRESSES THE BUZZER. KATIA RUSHES IN.

Roman - Katia, where is she now? How is she?

Katia - Still in intensive care. But Mykhailych says she'll live.

Roman - Thank God! Is she awake?

Katia - Yes, but she's extremely weak. She won't eat and won't talk. Do you know why that might be?

Roman - It's my fault, Katia...Just an awful mistake...It was our platoon that hit her building.

Katia - Jesus!

Roman - How long will she be in intensive care?

Katia - Three days at least. Maybe more...an overdose...hard to say when she'll come back from it...

Roman - Katia, do you have a voice recorder on your phone?

Katia - Yes.

Roman - Could you do me a favour? There's something important I have to tell her.

Katia - Okay, Okay. It's clear. I'll turn it on and leave if you like. There you go, talk. (*LEAVES*).

Roman – Yulia, dear girl. Listen, we are basically strangers, and yet... I held your hand all night... I had so many thoughts then... I don't know if the thoughts that held us together or if I was just holding on to you best I could.... This is all such a disaster. War is a terrible thing, it's insane... what am I telling you for? You know. And this thing that's happened... it's a real nightmare... And I don't know how to ask for your forgiveness. (*ed. Roman switches to speaking Russian here, until the very last phrase of this monologue, when he calls the nurse, he switches back to Ukrainian.*) You know, after everything that's happened lately...for me, Russian is the language of the enemy. Try to understand, but now... because it's your mother tongue...I want to talk to you. You said you don't have anyone. I do hope your father is alive. But... in any case, I... I want to buy some land, I'll build you a house. I have enough for the materials, and I can do everything else myself. My Dad, my brothers and I, we built our house together, so I know how to do it. And, if need be, my folks will come and help. And you can always count on me and my family... I know this is not the... Yulia... Yulia... please, please... live...and be well. I wish I could see you now, could say this to you. Hold your hand... Forgive me... Katia! Katia! (*KATIA COMES IN*). Thank you, Katia...can you give it to her? Please?

Katia - Sure, don't you worry. Now rest