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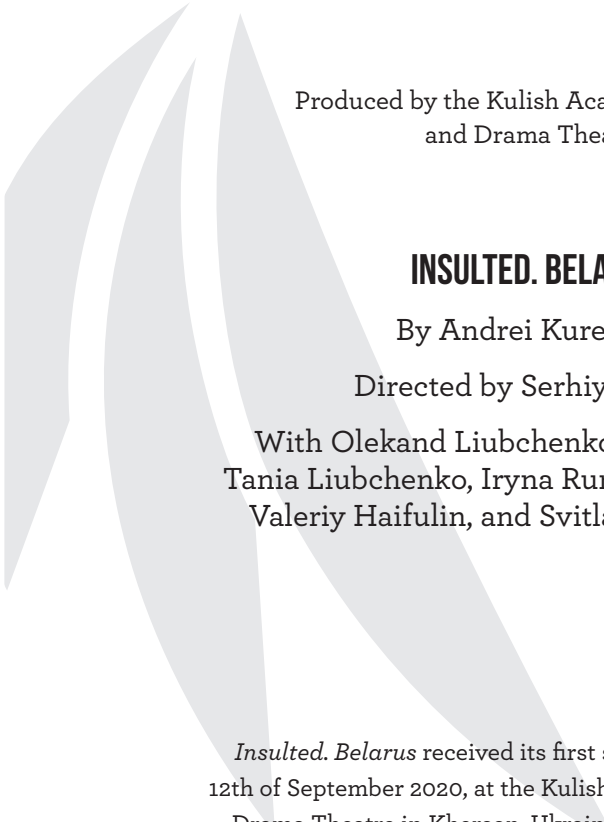
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INSULTED. BELARUS



Produced by the Kulish Academic Musical
and Drama Theatre

INSULTED. BELARUS

By Andrei Kureichik

Directed by Serhiy Pavliuk

With Olekand Liubchenko, Kostia Rohan,
Tania Liubchenko, Iryna Rura, Serhiy Mevsha,
Valeriy Haifulin, and Svitlana Zhuravliova

Insulted. Belarus received its first staged reading on the
12th of September 2020, at the Kulish Academic Musical and
Drama Theatre in Kherson, Ukraine. It was performed in
the Russian language.

The first staged reading in English was performed on the
18th of September 2020 at Rogue Machine Theater in
Los Angeles.

Its first full production, the English-language world premiere
was mounted by City Garage in Santa Monica, California,
on the 10th of November 2023.



From left to right: Joshua Britton, Rachel Brunner, Aric Floyd, and Joseph Spano in Rogue Machine Theater's YouTube reading of *Insulted. Belarus*, directed by Guillermo Cienfuegos.

CAST

OLDSTER

YOUTH

NOVICE

CHEERFUL

RAPTOR

CORPSE

MENTOR

ACT 1

SCENE 1

OLDSTER. I hate theater. Never been attracted. It's a bunch of crap. Bullshit. You see it — what good is it? What is it, entertainment? Full-grown adults mucking around, baring their bare butts, laughing at something? Hee-hee, ha-ha. What smart person is going to act like that? It's all fake. Stupid. Goofing off. Look at those foreheads! Those huge arms and legs! You could plow a field with those. Put somebody like that on a tractor, he'll plow a good ten hectares for you . . . In one day. Maybe more. And these women — you should have babies . . . make borscht! Provide the State a little support. Be useful. But what good comes of some painted-up guy wiggling his ass on a stage?

[*Pause.*]

They're all vermin. What more can I say? Vermin. Scum of the earth. Traitors. They feed out of my hand, then bite the hand that feeds them. I fed them all with my left tit, and they . . . Traitors.

That's why there's no theaters in villages. Villagers won't put up with that crap. Peasants, they're . . . They're of the earth. They're pure. You can't fool them. Villages don't have any picture galleries either! Because look how pretty it is out the window! You don't need pictures for that. Anyway, how can you call those things pictures? A kid could do that! Chagall-shmagall. Thirty million dollars, forty, give 'em a hundred, a kid could still do it!

We had apple trees out our window. Then a meadow, where the kolkhoz horses grazed. Now there's a noble animal. I don't know why, but I've been attracted to horses my whole life. They're quiet and they obey. They work until they drop.

Never ask for anything. Yeah, mares can be a bit feisty, but you just give her a little crack on the head, and she'll calm right down. Then put blinders on her, and you can run her into fire or water. She's loyal. Like a country should be. Workhorses. Loyal. She'll eat from your hand, won't even lift an eye. Sometimes I even have dreams that horses would make a good country!

We'd find common ground. A few oats, a few whacks, and she'd work for me and love me.

SCENE 2

CHEERFUL. You can change everything! Literally everything! You just need to want it and you can change everything for the better. That's my motto and my message. Let's say it's my epistle. Zing, zing, zing! My message to the Universe. I love sending messages to the Universe. Because the Universe answers. It is so cool! Lena, are you searching for cheerful positivity? Here you are, Lena, here's all the positivity you want!

I'm from Grodno. Grodno is like the West of Belarus. It's kind of like Belarusian Europe. There were Poles there before the war. Our city used to be really pretty, but pretty old. Everything was Soviet and falling down. Now even Poles come and are knocked out by our city. We wanted to do it and we did! Or take manicures, for instance. I used to do pearl, and I shied away from bright colors. Then I just went ahead and did it: white, red, white. A really pretty combination. White, red, white. Very fashionable. That's our national flag.

That was my wedding manicure, by the way. Ha-ha, you thought it was mine? No, I'm still freelancing. I'm accepting offers. Casting. Just kidding. It was my sister's wedding, Maria. It's okay for her, she's already 21. A very formidable lady. I'm so happy for her! Universe! You love us! It was planned for August 9, a Sunday — just a super day! Her guy is really cool, from Ukraine. Super tall, an athlete, runs every day. And he's good looking, of course. Natch, I was kinda jealous. Ukrainians are so hot! Lviv is like my hometown, I love everything about it! The java, the chocolate! I feel completely at home going to the super trendy cafes in town. If only the whole world was like Lviv!

For the wedding I asked to be let off as an observer in the 9th voting precinct. I asked another girl to replace me.

They didn't let us inside anyway — because of coronavirus, they said. No observers allowed. Anybody else, sure, but not observers! So we just looked in from outside. True, they taped paper on the window! It's really funny, all the windows are normal, just the ones for the voting commission are taped up! It's really stupid. So we just counted the voters. How many went in. If they had white bracelets — that was the sign of change. So far nothing adds up. We saw 30 people go in there, but they say there were 126. That's just stupid. A mistake. How can you fake things like that?

SCENE 3

CORPSE. BATÉ wins it! BATÉ is champion! All the cities know it! Every house! All us hooligan fanatics, we'll put fear in you! What're you grinning at, sucker? Want a kick in the ass?

Oops, my bad, overdid that. The game is over. A good fight after a game is good for all the fans. See this nose? Busted twice. And this scar here, that's from a Dynamo crowd whacking me with a flagpole. Thirteen stitches. Blood was everywhere. You should have seen us drink with them after. Bro's! You guys are hardcore! I love you all! You gotta respect your opponent. You wanna fight? Fight! But fight fair. Don't hit kids. And leave the girls alone. Don't gang up two and three on one. Don't call the cops! And the main thing, if you take one in the chops — don't bitch about it later. Beyond that, hit 'em as hard as you want.

[Pause.]

Not like the mustache guy. I got no problems with someone showin' off he's strong. But fight fair, asshole! Your fat face is always smeared all over the TV screen, and you're always making all your flunkies sing praises in your ear! Let somebody else have a chance! Then toss all the votes on the table — here, all you freaks and Freemasons, count how many voted for me. Count 'em and shut up. I answer for every vote! But, no! This rat comes slinking at you under the table. Stabs you in the back. Anybody who is against him, anyone who raised his head, they all get prison terms. Everybody laughs. In 26 years it's like not one single honest person ever opposed him, nothing but thugs, thieves and criminals. I'm fuckin' sick of him. Fuckin' sick, I tell you!

Twenty-six years. That's how long I've been alive. To the day. I've loved soccer my whole life, just as long as I have absolute-hat-ed that bastard.

SCENE 4

YOUTH. I used to binge play Counter-Strike. Well, maybe not binge. I wasn't supposed to play for long, but I'd hide my laptop under my blanket and play. Later I stopped doing that. Counter-Strike, I mean. Later I got hooked on Dota. Then Dad made them take my laptop away. Shit. The last fucking dictator in Europe.

All the kids play it. It's no big deal. But that's how he is: You wanna be like them? Like these guys? What's got in your head?

Fuck . . . Dad! But everybody else can play!

Then he starts up that same old tune: Young people were the real thing back in the old days. The Young Communist League, the student construction brigades, how they just loved marching lock step, how they defended villages in Afghanistan, how he milked cows and drank steaming hot fresh milk. I can't stand that milk. It smells like a wet dog, and I get instant diarrhea. These stories of his, I can't stand 'em anymore. About the Soviet Union. I never lived a day there! I'm only 16! There was nothing interesting about it. There wasn't any internet! No smartphones! No tablets! There weren't even any decent movies. They did nothing but milk cows and binge drink vodka.

I still play on a computer though! I got a laptop from Vasya that I play. On the sly. To spite him. Vasya's my only friend. He'll be 32 soon. He can put out a rabbit's eye with a knife at a distance of ten yards. He's badass. My bodyguard.

Not even Sleepy knows about that. Sleepy is Larisa Nikolaeva. She makes sure I don't quit my schoolwork. She takes me to school and picks me up. She's mean and she's an informer, sticks her nose everywhere. I know she checks my phone and tells Dad everything. I have to show her my

homework before I take it to school. She's the one who tells teachers what grades I get. A fine teacher! Sleepy Larisa. I heard them talking once. Dad says he needs a woman around all the time. Like I miss my mother. You need to be his mother in some things, Larisa.

How can somebody else be my mother? Sometimes I wonder, do I love him? I mean, I'm his son. It's my duty to love him. My duty. Everyone is bound in duty to him.

SCENE 5

RAPTOR. She's not a great lay. I mean, she tries. She squeals and thrusts. But it's not much. Now, the broads we had in Luhansk, they suck you dry! You'd come out soaking wet, like out of a bathhouse. I'd have to cool it off with ice! They had lips like bicycle tires. Like this! Then there was this Masha . . . from Belarus. They're a little more reserved. Like you're a little beholden to them. But she was pretty. White teeth. Kept herself neat.

You can count on me. Everything's in working order. Now . . .

There was a time when things were dicey. I'd get it up, then I couldn't. In training we had this doctor — that was here already. He said it was nerves. But that was obvious to me. 2014 was a nervy year. A whole mix of things. I thought I was done for. Ten years or more eating slop out of an aluminum prison bowl. For what? For defending the foundations of the state! For taking on fascists. Thank God, slipping through their fingers in little groups — to put it elegantly — the whole crew got the fuck out of there.

We had one hot platoon. Beasts. Lyokha, Mushroom, Greenie, Pepper, Nitsko. Some of them ended up in Kemerovo, some in Vladikavkaz. A couple officers even made it to Moscow, and some of us ended up here. In Soviet Belorussia. Europe. They have casinos here. It's clean. The pay's good. The girls . . . The place has an ideology! You know what's good and what's bad! It's black and white. As it should be. It's got its drawbacks. I already said about the girls.

[Pause.]

That was no time to schedule a wedding! August 9. I took leave, but I felt it in my heart, there would be hell to pay.

My guts were churning. Then, fuck it all, I lost my hard-on. The only other time that happened was in 2014. In Kyiv. Everybody then was strutting around, talking tough. They were on their way out now. The Banderites were done for. Washed up. We could pick 'em off one-by-one. Backup was flying in from Moscow. Ten platoons. Ol' Putin wasn't going to abandon his ol' friend Yanukovych. But I had a feeling the hammer was coming down. A different hell to pay. And now, here, again — not good. And I still have that fucking wedding night ahead of me.

SCENE 6

NOVICE. You need lots of fat for good, tasty meat patties. 'Cause if you just use red meat they'll be dry. Here's what I do: I take ground beef and ground pork, and I always add a chunk of pork fat. Let's say half a pound or so. Or it can be lard. You put that all through the meat grinder. Add onion, garlic, and spices . . . Or . . . you can use onion powder. I haven't done it in a long time. Seryozha always loved my meat patties. He could eat ten, yeah, ten at once. The kids could, too.

Sergei . . . Sometimes he comes home from trips really angry. He films everything he sees: all the dirt, the confusion, the pain of being with people. As a blogger, people always tell him the straight truth, as it is, and he says to me, "How is this possible? This country is filled with lies! Everybody lies and lies and lies. The TV says one thing, but life is completely different." Then I serve him a plate of meat patties to get his mind off things.

I often ask myself these days . . . I'll sit in front of the mirror and turn off my phone so people don't bug me, otherwise BBC, CNN, ours and other channels all harass me all the time. I comb my hair, seems like forever, and I have just one question in my head: What will people do for love?

[Pause.]

In the past I would have said: anything. Now, I don't think so. Not just anything.

Die? Sometimes that might be the easiest thing to do. You die and you're gone. No more choices. The sacrifice is made. You gave your life. Fulfilled your mission.

But what if you want to live?

[Pause.]

But live for whom? For him? For yourself? Your country?

The kids often ask when dad will get out. Mom, you're president now, why don't you let him out? What am I supposed to answer? I'm president. And I have nothing. I'm in control of nothing. Myself included.

SCENE 7

MENTOR. I have 37 years of service behind me. Thirty-seven years. I have five certified awards from the department of education. With gold seals! Signed by four different ministers. One even sent my nomination for Teacher of the Year to the president, but something got hung up. It's all right, I don't lose faith because I know: The President is thinking about us, always. The President remembers all of us! The teachers, the milkmaids, the pensioners, everybody. Can you imagine the head he must have to remember everyone like that? What a head! Whenever I think about his head, I grab my own head in my hands.

I tell the students, why do you all hang out in these gadgets and Minecrafts of yours? That man is always thinking. He's always solving some problem. Nothing gets past him. So all you ingrates can live a better life. So there's stability. He gave you textbooks, he pays our salaries, gives us work. Look at the building he built, the flowers he planted. He put a sputnik into space, everything, so you can study. And you? You have no conscience!

But then he went and scheduled elections this summer. Why did he do that? It's vacation time. Everybody's at the dacha. Tomatoes, pumpkins . . . The dacha! And the whole weight of it was on us teachers. I don't support that. It would have been better to cancel them altogether. What a pain these elections are! Look who they bring us! Trump, Poroshenko, Yeltsin — they're all savages. Even without them you know what the people want. The people always want one thing — stability! And what is stability? The Boss, that's who! Twenty-six years, that says it all. Every one of them — stable. And may it stay that way. I have four more years 'til my pension starts. Our high school is a showcase among schools. The President's son even went here.

Only I worry about the young teachers. What's in their heads? They fall for all that western propaganda. How do we count the votes? I always tell them — whatever the country needs, that's what you do! Smarty-pants, there are smarter ones above you. You want a job? Work. Go ahead and do your job as a teacher. But elections, though — that's our duty to stability. You save the government, and they give you bonuses. God's grace, I was in charge of five elections at our school. I did everything that needed doing. Precisely as the results were planned. And everybody got their bonus!

I don't like these observers, though. What are you trying to observe? Huh? I have all the numbers up here, in my head. You just rattle my nerves.

SCENE 8

NOVICE. Where do I talk? The camera? Okay. Ooof. Wait . . . [Pause] Hello! I am Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, candidate for president. I am 37 years old. I was born in the Polesye region. I graduated from the philology department of Mozyr State Pedagogical University. I am fluent in Belarusian, Russian, and English.

I was never attracted to the idea of making a career. I always saw myself primarily as a wife and mother. A homemaker. That's what I do best. I was never interested in politics. I was perfectly happy with that.

A year ago my husband Sergei Tikhanovsky created a project he called "A Country for Life," in conjunction with which he met all kinds of people of all professions. They would tell him what worried them, what they were feeling, what they thought about Belarus. People talked about their difficult lives, and shared dreams about life in a free, prosperous country.

What amazed me most of all was that people who appeared on our blog channel were being thrown into prison. What is that all about?!

Can we possibly make peace with such injustice?

That is why, when my husband Sergei was not permitted to participate in the election, I chose to replace him and march all the way to victory.

Did I stumble? No? I can't believe I'm saying this.

All the way to victory! For myself, my husband, for all of us, our children. As a wife and mother, I understand that it's one for all and all for one in the family circle. I want it to be like that in our country too.

They say a woman can't be president. That's not true! Nobody can stop a woman who is defending her family, just as no one can stop a nation that demands justice.

RAPTOR. Wouldn't you know it, God dammit! Fuckin' bastards! I'm on duty the 9th. The 9th and the 10th and the 11th. All leaves cancelled. All vacations. The whole nine yards. I tell my commander I'm getting married, we've been planning it for two months. He says, "Are you an idiot? I don't give a shit if you die, that's no excuse not to report for duty." Again. "Are you an idiot?" He looks me right in the eye . . . "Are you an idiot?"

I'm no idiot. I called Masha right away. The wedding is fucked, Masha, I say. Duty calls. Duty comes first, Masha. I called on the phone on purpose so I wouldn't have to listen to her scream and yell at me to my face. About her relatives coming in from Lida, about the restaurant her mother already paid for, about "Are you a man or not? You promised!" Fuck me, if she doesn't understand the phrase "duty to your country," then what can I say? I serve Belarus. I serve Lukashenko. He's my commander-in-chief! In other words, whatever he says, we do.

Our deputy political officer is an excellent guy. His every word burns. Bullseye. Death to the enemy. Poles, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians are our enemies. The Russians aren't enemies, but they want to snap us up. Which means they're enemies, too. But brothers, too. But enemies, too. Stuff like that happens. But first, with the Russians alongside us, we'll bury our main enemies, those western pricks, Yankees, and Maidan maniacs. We'll take care of the Russkies later. The Boss won't let them get away with anything. Even if he becomes a Russian governor.

Shit, Masha calling again. Hey! Oh, now, now . . . Quit crying! I know you're pregnant. So what? We just put it off a little.

We'll push these guys back. Make minced meat of them! Yeah, I'll take care, I'll take care. You should see our outfits. Seven planeloads from Moscow. Cherry stuff — impressive. If it weren't for the damned heat. You're in body armor, a helmet, a face mask, and shin guards too. How about that? A day or two of that and we'll clean out the country. Impressive.

YOUTH. [*Shouts*] Dad! Daddy! What happened to the internet?

OLDSTER. [*Shouts back*] I'm doing an interview, Kolya! Dima Gordon is here from Ukraine . . . Pay no attention, Dmitry. You asked about my father? Yes, I think I saw my father once, when he came home to us. I remember he came home . . . I vaguely remember it: It's the only thing my memory preserves. He was a very, very tall man. Well over six-and-a-half feet.

The police put me on notice when I was in elementary school. We had this gang of schoolkids who used to turn over benches . . . [*Thinks*] But you don't care about that.

YOUTH. If you don't turn on the internet, I'm not going to be president after you!

OLDSTER. Jokester. Still a kid. What do you expect? He's the leader of the opposition in my house. I'll tell you something strange, Dima. Believe me as an experienced president: You don't become a president. You're born a president.

CHEERFUL. D-a-a-a-m-n! Why did I have that manicure, hairdo, and hot wax? Why did I buy that dress? Three hundred sixty-seven rubles! That's two monthly stipends! The wedding is off! Roma has to work. Turns out Roma works for the riot police. Although he's Ukrainian. I thought he was just a policeman somewhere. You know, a street cop

or traffic cop. But he's some riot trooper. So what, though. They'll get married in the New Belarus! That's even better! Look at all those people out there in line in their white bracelets! Universe! We are the majority!

MENTOR. Our commission is tried and true. There's me and two vice principals: Kristalina Sergeeva and Lidia Mikhailova, the administrator Igor Nikolaev, and teachers from the lower classes.

Okay, everyone, listen here! I'm giving instructions. Get this right. Here are the numbers to memorize. This is how the count will go. You take a ballot and show it to the person on your right. Lidia is on my right. I show it to her and put it in the pile. I know my pile must have 206 ballots. So I build it up to 206. Now, Kristalina is supposed to have 1,361, which will be President Lukashenko's pile. Memorize the numbers for each candidate and put that precise number in your pile. Everything left over is declared null and void. Defective, and that's that.

Miss Kasatonava, who cares where the numbers come from? The higher-ups already did the count. Your thirty-something brains can't make things add up. Okay, here's what we memorize: Tikhonovskaya — 206. Don't write it down — just memorize it! 206. President Alexander Lukashenko — 1,361! Dmitriev — 52. Kanapatskaya, God I hate her face! 73. Cherachen — 39. Against all — 100. See how nice and even? One hundred against everyone. You got that? Let me repeat it for the especially gifted among us . . .

CORPSE. I saw this in a film about zombies. These zombies took over the world. Like here in Belarus. You take a magazine, as fat as you can get, and wrap it around your arm and tape it — now you've got an arm shield. Go ahead, hit me with your truncheon. It's kind of awkward, but it's protection. He won't give up easy. He doesn't give a shit

if he wins or loses elections! He won't give up power! He's got his teeth sunk in it! His teeth may be crumbling, but they still hang on. He's got nothing but power. His fingers are blue, his hands are shaking, but they hang on. He said he'd die before letting go. Then turn power over to his son. Screw that shit! I don't know, should I take my billy club or not? They might see it on me. Anyway, this revolution is supposed to be "peaceful." People walking around with flashlights and flowers . . . They go around hugging the bastards. Sing 'em songs. These girls are crazy. These guys have truncheons, grenades, combat weapons, blood in their eyes. They're defending their Führer. They don't give a rat's ass about your flowers.

All the guys from our hood are coming out today, all the fanatics, they're all on our side. We're going to defend our votes. BATÉ is champion! All the cities know it! Every house! All us hooligan fanatics, we'll put fear in you!

SCENE 9

RAPTOR. All's good now. They sent in good backups. Very polite. I asked one, what's your name? He says, Renat. Last name? No-o-o-o. He smiles. "My last name stayed home," he says. So where were you, Renat, when we were dodging the bullets of Banderite bandits during Maidan? He laughs. White teeth. "Don't worry, bro," he says. "Breathe easy. This city will be ours tonight."

CHEERFUL. Masha, Masha, just don't worry! I have great news! She won! I counted the bracelets! 1,412 beautiful, marvelous white bracelets. And we only have a few more than 2,000 people in our precinct. Do you realize what that means? Masha! She won in a landslide! We will have a new Belarus. And a woman president! I am so-o-o excited!

MENTOR. What idiot posted a recording of our rehearsal on the internet? Look me in the eye! Svetlana, you? Katsyaryna, did you do it? Kasatonava . . . Oh, Kasatonava . . . You think this is a joke? These are state secrets! You were entrusted to look after the interests of the state! You were given that trust! Trust! And you?! Look what people are writing? Right there in YouTube! "Judases! We'll throw you in prison! Falsifiers!" For 20 years I was never a falsifier, and now, all of a sudden — a falsifier. "You broke the law." I have four years left to my pension. And I am not leaving the position of principal! And the president is right not to leave. You've got to hold your position to the end! You earned it with spilt blood! All these ballots — self-indulgence and nothing more. Okay, put the numbers I gave you in the protocol. Hang them on the door and let everyone else go hang themselves. Riot police will get you home.

YOUTH. What a pain this internet is! Damn, we never have any problems . . . at the residence here. Damn, Dad. Why would you cut off the internet everywhere?! All the games I

play are online. Dota is frozen. Tanks is frozen. Dad says it's his enemies doing it. That Merkel's hackers are knocking us offline. Then I hear my brother give the command to knock out "Telega" with Chinese jammers . . . 100% down. I mean the Telegram app. My brother is like my father's right-hand man. Dad gave him the Security Council. He doesn't trust anybody else. And he can't stand his servants. He says they're stupid and they screw everything up, but they're loyal. But you gotta keep on top of things. If you quit making things hard for them — they'll get comfy and eat you alive. He wants my brother to serve me when I'm president. Like a Grand Vizier. I say, Dad, let's do it in order: First you, then Vitya, then me. For some reason he got really angry.

NOVICE. Seryozha, do you hear me? Through the wall, my voice, can you hear me, Seryozha, Sergei . . . Do you hear me, my love? We won, Seryozha.

OLDSTER. I want this stopped! And I'm asking you to spare no one. I want order in the country by morning!

CHEERFUL. Wait . . . Yes, I have completely different numbers. None of this adds up. How can that be?

CORPSE. We are f-u-u-u-cked!

MENTOR. I'm not going out there. I won't go out there! Look at that mob, they'll tear us apart! Banderites! What idiot put that video on the internet?! Whoever posted that can go out there yourself! I'm not going.

RAPTOR. Take this woman home, Renat. She already shit herself from fear. She paints up the elections then cries she's splashed with paint. Stuff happens. Now she's afraid of the "voters."

CORPSE. Shame! Shame! Shame on you!



Błażej Wójcik as Oldster in Jerzy Jan Polński's production of *Insulted*. Belarus for Teatr Miejski in Gliwice, Poland.

ACT 2

SCENE 10

OLDSTER. Thank you, residents of Minsk! For tolerating me for a quarter century, a man who came to you from the provinces! Thank you, Vladimir Putin, for your victory congratulations! After all, our homeland is one and the same, from Brest to Vladivostok.

CORPSE. Throw Lukashenko in a prison van! Throw Lukashenko in a prison van! Go! Go! Go away!

OLDSTER. I'll answer that. Put away your telephone! I'm not going to hit you, yet . . . We'll deal with all of you before long. We're not surrendering the country to you!

RAPTOR. Let's grab this little lost sheep, too! Stop, bitch! Stop! Lively little fuck, aren't you! Twist her arms . . . You wanna resist? Hit her in the face!

CHEERFUL. I'm an election observer.

RAPTOR. Observe this, cow. Shut your trap, into the prison van . . .

CHEERFUL. I can't move that fast. I'm in heels.

CORPSE. Here comes the Dynamo crew! And the guys from the factories! Hey guys! Fuck, man, who gets who now?

RAPTOR. Stupid idiot. An observer in a white dress and heels? Observer, hell — you prostitute. Slut. You'll suck everyone's cock tonight. Got that? And if even one doesn't come, I'll personally stick this truncheon up your ass. You like it in the ass?

CORPSE. Hey! Hands off the girls! You skullfucks.

RAPTOR. Renat, there's kind of a lot of them. A whole lot. Toss 'em a grenade. Excellent! Now pop a few bullets in their guts. Not the legs! The bellies! Give all the bastards a long recovery.

NOVICE. Good God, what is happening? It's war. He unleashed civil war. They are shooting . . . shooting point blank. You can't shoot at your own people! I call on the whole world to intervene and stop this unprecedented violence!

CORPSE. They were beating women. I mean girls, women. Fuck-all knows. That grenade has thick, nasty smoke. Your eyes sting. They just grabbed everybody, threw 'em on the ground and beat 'em. They mauled 'em a lot worse than our soccer fanatics ever fucked anyone up. They stomped bare women's legs with jackboots, stomachs with truncheons, faces with fists. They weren't just beating them. The girls are shouting and screaming, "Don't!" and they just keep on going! Then our guys joined arms in a chain and began . . .

MENTOR. It's all right, it's all right. It's okay! It passed in the past and it'll pass now. They'll roughhouse awhile then calm down. Teachers understand that. Everything will calm down. Mommy's home, child. Why do you look at me like that? My sweet girl, what's wrong?

YOUTH. Vasya gave me body armor. Why would I need that? Are we playing some game?

CHEERFUL. My nails are broken. White, red, white. My finger, too, maybe. I can't move it. It hurts. Everything hurts. And that metal in my mouth. The taste of metal. Strange, I'm sitting in this prison van, there's lots of us here, and I'm thinking how not to wrinkle my dress. It's an expensive

dress. Sorry, I can't hear you? Who am I? Did you call me a "runt?" I can't hear you.

CORPSE. We freed six girls! Six! True, we lost a couple guys. The bastards pulled them out of our chain and dragged them off! Men — BATÉ is with you! And that fat magazine works. They hit me as hard as they could. They would have shattered my bare arm to pieces. To say nothing of my head. But I gave one a good shot of construction foam in the face. Sent that fucker flying six feet. Then our guys showed up. Fifty of 'em. Oh, gentlemen! They howled like they were at a Barcelona-Real match! I went deaf. Did they ever unload on them! All we saw were the soles of their boots. I was able to give one a good whack on the ass. I thought he'd go down. But, no, he just ran faster. Although they didn't run very far. They hid behind an armored personnel carrier. The Boss ran tanks out on the streets. You should have seen those things — straight out of "Mad Max!"

MENTOR. I didn't have you in my 40s for you to start teaching me! You think someone better will come along? They'll close all the factories! You'll have to pay for everything! I have just four years to my pension, and I haven't been to the seashore in 15 years! You think we didn't live and don't want anyone else to? So be it!

OLDSTER. Everybody! All of 'em into prison vans! If you run out of space, stick 'em in the gymnasiums! Take over the stadiums! Give 'em something to remember for the rest of their lives. Authority here doesn't waver.

YOUTH. Dad, what is freedom?

SCENE 11

CORPSE. Bring on the bulls — freedom will come! Hey! You! Beasts! Listen up! My name is Nikita Mitskevich! Mitskevich! Remember that name because it's the name of someone who isn't afraid of you bastards. This is my country! Belarus is my country! This is my city. And this is me, Nikita Mitskevich, apprentice metalworker. Fuck, I can't see a thing. There's blood everywhere. How many of you are there? Thousands? Where did you come from on my land? Who are you defending? Who? That cockroach? He's a nobody. A zero. A cockroach! A fat-cock-roach. Squash him with your heel, he'll crunch and squirt. Be done with him. He sets us all against each other. Drowns the nation in blood. And hate. Pain! We don't want him anymore! You hear me? Beasts! We don't want him anymore!

RAPTOR. That one's bought and paid for. That's for sure! By the Yankees or the Poles. An organizer! On drugs. Fuck-head! That's obvious. Just like the political officer said. Gimme another tab. Good stuff, Renat. Nice little high, and you want to beat, thrash, and maul! I'm takin' this guy down. They sent some excellent ammo, metallic covered bullets. They rip through intestines. Flip a grenade under his feet. All these bastards are filming us on telephones.

YOUTH. Dad said two planes are ready. He bought one from President Niyazov of Turkmenistan. He was Dad's friend. His own people poisoned him. Not too shabby inside. The internet is always good there. And the toilets are genuine gold. That one's at the national airport. The other, the smaller one, is at the air base. Sleepy came in out of breath, all in tears for some reason. Eyes like headlights. She hugged me like she was my mother and said I should gather my things and be ready at any minute. What do I need my things for? Are we going somewhere?

CHEERFUL. Someone's howling in my ear: "You scum just couldn't sit home today. I'd put you all on the stake and send you to outer space so you could tell everyone out there about your stupid-ass lives!" Then the door of the prison van opens and something plops on the floor. Just drops. Like a chunk of meat. And I feel something warm spurt on my knee. My dress, too. My white dress that I bought for Masha's wedding. Now there's a swathe of black on it. Then a grenade explodes and I see it's not black, it's red. And the piece of meat is a person. Weird, something is taped to his arm. I thought it was a rag. But it's a magazine. "Rolling Stone." Only it's all shredded and drenched in blood, like if a dog ripped it with its fangs. He lifts his eyes to me, one eye — I can't see his other one — and he says: "I'm so sorry we didn't free you."

CORPSE. I'm so sorry we didn't free you.

RAPTOR. Who's that barking in here? Shut your trap, fucker!

CHEERFUL. You stepped on his arm! He's hurt!

RAPTOR. Of course it hurts. Hurts like fuck. Why else would he shout like that? Thought he was so smart. Wrapped his arm to hide his weak spot? His little fingers sticking out?

CHEERFUL. He's bleeding.

RAPTOR. That's his eye socket bleeding. Brace yourself, kid, I'll shove my truncheon in it, or my cock. Whatever you want! He's bleeding out!

MENTOR. What more do you want? Europe is full of barefoot beggars. Their economy crashed long ago. The only thing keeping Merkel propped up is Putin. But we are independent. And the only one defending our independence

is our president. Our president even scared off coronavirus! Everybody's sick, but not Belarusians! Three of our high school teachers died in May and June. None from coronavirus, though. Each had ischemic heart disease. Although they buried them in closed caskets.

CHEERFUL. He's Belarusian. You're Belarusian. Why?

RAPTOR. I said to this idiot: "Who's Belarusian? Renat, you Belarusian? Me too! I'll show you, bitch, not to interrupt your elders!" Then it got really bizarre! I grabbed this chick in white and heels by her bangs and lifted her up to spit in her face and choke her a little. [*Pause.*] And it was her. Fuck, I crapped my pants — her! Masha's sister. Tiny little thing, smiling all the time, always cheerful . . . "Hey, let's play charades! Have you heard the new song by Spleen? Back in Grodno this new little cafe opened, just like in Lviv . . ." She's the bridesmaid at my wedding that didn't happen. It's her! Only her lip is cracked, and she's covered in tears and snot. Fuck, what is she doing in this meat grinder?

CHEERFUL. This is scary, I'm scared.

RAPTOR. And her eyes. Frozen from fear.

CHEERFUL. Never. Never in my life have I been so scared. His eyeballs are like two pieces of fiery coal filled with hate. There's nothing human in him. He stares. What's he staring at me for?

CORPSE. I'm so sorry we didn't free you.

MENTOR. Oh, thank God "Slavyansky Bazaar" is on the tube. I can catch my breath. All my favorite entertainers! Stas Mikhailov, Galkin, Alegrova, Povaly. Everything's calming down, then.

RAPTOR. Thank you, Trump, for coronavirus! For masks. I'm in a mask! She's staring right at me, but doesn't recognize me, even though we've been together ten times at least. Just a little chick! Nice, slender neck, unlike her sister. Fragile. A little chick. If I squeeze her fingers — they'll crumble. Should I fuck her today? Tell the truth, she's just what I was looking for before the wedding. Slender, nice, shapely legs, white skin. Very soft. I'll admit it, when we went to the aqua park once and she sort of playfully humped her sister, I got a hard-on. Masha thought it was for her. Why not? I've got a hard-on now. So, all the shit's ending. We won!

MENTOR. The TV will announce the results. Okay, let's see now! TV reports everything just as our commission had it. To a T. Eighty-one percent! We did him proud! We didn't let him down! I'm safe until my pension now! Plus a bonus of two month's pay. Otherwise, we might as well just be some lousy Polish province! Oh, the president's going to speak! A sight for sore eyes.

OLDSTER. Friends, I call on you not so much to defend me, although that, too. First, I know you have much to do at home. You've got the harvest. I know school starts soon. But most important, I remember the 1990s: people everywhere standing in line, workers with tin dishes and teapots, begging for food, begging to feed their children.

NOVICE. I am grateful to all the factory workers, students, and office workers who have gone on strike! Strike committees are forming all over the country.

OLDSTER. Back then I swore to help you, and never let street demonstrations mar the lives of Belarusians.

RAPTOR. Where do we take them? Where do we take them all? Got it. Listen up, guys, new orders. Not taking anyone

anywhere! Just fuck 'em all up, anything that moves! The KGB and Financial Crimes Unit will take care of the leaders.

OLDSTER. We destroyed everything God gave us: our huge, great empire, without which no problem in the world would have been solved. We received just a bloody chunk of this empire. What did those people want then, what did you want?

YOUTH. Internet! I want my internet! Dad, when will the internet come back?! I'm hot in this armored jacket! My head itches in this helmet. Oh, Telegram is back up. Do you even know what's going on, Dad? It looks like a revolution out there. NEXTA is saying Minsk is rebelling.

NOVICE. I came to the head of the Central Elections Committee to lodge a complaint. They let no one else come in. Only me. She has a very large office. A leather sofa stands by a window. And there were two . . . I had seen their faces many times on television. Either the head of the KGB or Internal Security Forces. Or the State Security Committee. Two of them. "Be seated, Mrs. Tikhonovskaya." They offered me tea. And then the following conversation. "So, there is an opinion that you won the first round of the elections. We fear for your life . . . and you have a four-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. My, my, how did we miss them skipping out of Belarus in such a timely fashion? So now you won't be together to record a statement conceding that you lost the election. And we won't be able to put your children up in an orphanage." I was silent, they alone spoke. Blood was pulsing through me right here, in front of my ears. Thump-thump-thump . . . "You leave us very few choices," said one of them. And the other leaned over and said, with a smile, "So, Mrs. Tikhonovskaya. We will give you a piece of paper. There is a statement on it that you will read into a camera. Then you will publish the recording as if it were yours. After you have done that, we will deport you to Lithuania. Should

you refuse, we will perform a unilateral orchiectomy on your husband, Mr. Sergei Tikhonovsky, whom we currently hold in prison. Do you know what that is? No? Let me explain. It is the surgical removal of the right testicle. We will preserve it in a jar of alcohol for you." I thought it was daytime, but it was suddenly dark. I said something into the camera. I don't remember what. That I had lost. That everybody should go home. That I conceded . . . I spoke in the dark. Light returned only when I heard a quiet voice say, "Good morning!" in Lithuanian.

MENTOR. A phone call woke me up. I was having such a good dream. Right out of the movie, "Spring on River Street." I was back in the Soviet Union. Ice cream cost 28 kopeks, and sausage cost a ruble, thirty. Brezhnev was there. My sister in Borisov called. She said her son is missing, Nikita. He's a metalworker. Good kid, an athlete. A little wild maybe. She called and said he left home two days ago, and there's been no news since. She called all the hospitals, all the police stations. He was nowhere to be found. She couldn't stop crying. Svetlana's son disappeared, too. And Vera Nikolaeva's, she's from School No. 39. I said they had no business being out on the street at a time like this. My daughter, Alina, she sits at home and reads books. She keeps out of trouble. Alina! Ali-i-i-ina?! Where are you, sweetheart? Where are you? Alina . . .

CORPSE. *Let's destroy the prison walls!*

If you want freedom, take it all!

The prison walls will crumble, burn and fall —

And bury the old guard once and for all!

CHEERFUL. We sat the whole night, hunched over, kneeling on the floor of the school gym, our faces to the floor. Our hands were tied with construction ties. The guys were hung on tethers and beaten every hour. I've never heard such

howling. High squeals almost passing into ultrasound. The girls were constantly threatened with rape. They wouldn't let you go to the toilet. Many just peed where they were, and a pool of blood and urine grew on the floor. It smelled really bad. But there was a child's drawing of the sun on the wall. And somebody had written, "Vasya loves Olya." And they drew a heart. "Vasya loves Olya." There is love even in all this horror.

RAPTOR. He turned out to be tough. Took two rubber bullets in the gut. Intestines inside out, and the guy sings like it's a holiday. As if it's his wedding day and not mine!

CORPSE. *Let's destroy the prison walls!*

If you want freedom, take it all!

The prison walls will crumble, burn and fall —

And bury the old guard once and for all!

YOUTH. Sleepy Larisa saw me looking at Telegram on my phone and reported it. The snitch. Now everybody's screaming and yelling again. Why are you watching that? It's NEXTA! Those pictures are propaganda for the West! Nobody's beating or torturing anyone! Who's going to punish the special forces? Touch just one of them and the whole system will cave in. The system is a monolith. Then that old song and dance about people being ungrateful! I took you all in when you had nothing, wearing peasant boots, blah-blah-blah, I fed you, I led you into the world, and now you all have iPhones. As though he invented the iPhone! Steve Jobs did that in America. And in Belarus that iPhone's not much more than a brick in your hand! 'Cause the internet's always being knocked offline and you can't watch anything. *[Pause.]* I thought he would hit me. I could see it in his eyes that he wanted to punch me in the nose. I cried . . .

RAPTOR. We crushed his fingers. Turned his back and ass purple with truncheons. Beat his foot-soles to a pulp. And I poked him good between the butt cheeks with my club — I promised him I would. That's the way it is with us . . . Guy says he'll do it, he does it. So nobody else gets any bright ideas. He'll need the experience in prison anyway. We're helping 'em out. Educating the dickbrains! They don't learn, though. Fuck, Masha calling again! Ten times today. Yes, Masha, honey! I'm at work. I said, I'm at work! I can't talk!

CORPSE. *Let's destroy the prison walls!*

If you want freedom, take it all!

The prison walls will crumble, burn and fall —

And bury the old guard once and for all!

CHEERFUL. Thank you.

CORPSE. No, I thank you. You're pretty. That's a pretty dress. It was . . . You're fucking amazing, really.

[Cheerful makes the heart sign with her hands for him.]

RAPTOR. Shut the fuck up! Goddamn billing and cooing! Shit, not talking to you, sweetie. No, honey. Masha . . . It's just some asshole listening to the TV too loud. It's okay, honey, don't worry, we'll find her. Maybe your sister's visiting a friend? Or lost her phone? She's a bit ditzy, your sister.

CHEERFUL. There was something wrong about that storm trooper who held me by the neck. He came up to me a couple of times, and I just shut down. I thought he'd hit me or something worse. It was like I was sending signals to the Universe — sweet Universe, protect me! He'd stand there and look, like he wanted to say something. Then he'd turn and go off and start bludgeoning the guys.

MENTOR. She won't answer her phone. Damn! Takes after her father! He had to do everything his own way. She does, too. Where's my damn Valium?! You shouldn't do things your own way. One-two-three-four . . . Do what they say. Clench your teeth, do what they say, and that's it! Well all right, let her run free awhile! Teachers understand that!

YOUTH. He didn't even want me to be born. When he found out Mom was pregnant, he would beat her within an inch of her life. She was all black and blue. He demanded she get an abortion. He shouted, "Are you trying to earn the Belarusian throne with your cunt?" A nurse at the state medical hospital where my mother works told me that. But Mom kept me. Now I'm with him. His heir. But where's my mother? Mom . . . Get me outta here.

RAPTOR. So, should I bump her or not? Kinda awkward about Masha. What do I tell her? We took your little sister out for a game of hide the sausage? That hard-on, man! Gotta change the subject.

CHEERFUL. He beat Nikita harder than the rest. The guy from the prison van, with the hole in his stomach. He whispered me his name. Nikita . . . Metalworker . . . BATÉ . . . Very nice guy. He wasn't understanding much anymore. Had no idea what was going on. I think he was in shock from the pain. We shouted that he needed an ambulance. But the policemen only laughed. And he sang. It was probably all he could do. Sang the same song over and over. Over and over. Meanwhile, outside, new prison vans were coming up all the time.

CORPSE. *Let's destroy the prison walls!*

If you want freedom, take it all!

The prison walls will crumble, burn and fall —

And bury the old guard once and for all!

RAPTOR. Mom always said family is sacred, though. Let somebody else do her. Idiot! She knew where I work! Her sister told her: Roma works for the country! What are you provoking me for, bitch? There's cameras everywhere. Whatever, I'll let Big John take a walk somewhere else here tonight. Look at those new chicks they brought in. What are you shouting about? Who's your mother? Ah, the head of an election committee? Excellent! She stewed up a fine stew! Fucking screwed my wedding! My wedding night! You'll pay me back for that! What's the girl's name? Alina? Renat, let's take Alina in for interrogation! A good lively one!

OLDSTER. I heard you law enforcement officials were rather harsh, rather zealous on the streets. But, did you start the violence? Did I start it? The authorities? They had to be stopped! These fascist thugs! Insurgents! And their puppeteers!

YOUTH. Mother says he's sick. In the head. That we should pity him. But why doesn't he pity anyone? He knew about those old women dying from coronavirus by the thousands. And he knows everything going on now. My friend Vasya says it's because of my father's fears. He's afraid. Has been for a long time. He's very afraid — of dying. Lately he talks about death all the time. About being "carried out feet first," and "right to the grave." I think he thinks he'll be murdered.

CHEERFUL. I never saw them again. Neither Nikita nor that creepy storm trooper.

NOVICE. What if I never see him again? What if they do what they threatened to do? What if the KGB tortures him? What good is all this if Seryozha is gone?

CHEERFUL. I think I figured it out. No. It can't be. No, impossible. I can't wrap my head around that. He's the father of Masha's future baby. She loves him so. No. Of course not. That simply can't be!

OLDSTER. Fascist thugs! Insurgents! And their puppeteers!
The main thing is the puppeteer!

CHEERFUL. They took us to the prison at Okrestino, and when they opened the cell door . . . I didn't think such a thing was possible. In cells made for four, there were already 23 girls, and they brought in 13 more of us. Thirty-six people in 65 square feet. There was no air. No water. No food either. We all could only stand. They put two alcoholics in with us. They stunk to high heaven. At one point the door opened, a guard splashed a bucket of dirty water over us, then shut the door. Two girls had panic attacks and vomited. I was next to them. Then they stuck in some food through a hole in the door — one loaf of bread for everyone. You know, the most amazing thing was that there was enough for everyone. Even a little piece left over. We gave it to one of the alcoholics. We had interrupted her calm life with our revolution.

MENTOR. What do you mean you don't know? Then who does?! Who's on call here, you or me? Call your superior! What do you mean he's busy? Do you know who I am? Yes, I taught all you dimwits for 37 years! I fixed your elections! I'm the one who faked 80 percent for the mustache man! I never feared anyone. Whatever you asked me to, I faked. And now you can't find my daughter? What the hell did I do all that for? So you could be rude to me? I'll complain to the president! Hello! Hello! *[Pause]* My daughter! My sweet daughter! Forgive your mother . . . Forgive me.

NOVICE. Belarusians, you are unbelievable!

OLDSTER. If you do in your first president, that will be the beginning of your end!

NOVICE. Belarus will run out of champagne when he goes!

OLDSTER. NATO wants to send soldiers. NATO tanks are going to roll down our streets!

RAPTOR. You say they're sending in two more battalions from Moscow? How about we double up and attack Ukraine, too? To the music of Wagner!

OLDSTER. They want to put bast shoes on us and crack the whip over you!

CORPSE. *Bring on the bulls — payback will come!*

OLDSTER. Starting Monday, lock the gates at every striking factory! Don't worry, we'll bring in people from Ukraine and Kirghizia. And that damn theater, fire them all! Villages don't have theaters — cities don't need 'em!

YOUTH. Dad, they've come really close this time!

OLDSTER. Grab your machine gun and get in the helicopter! We'll come back when they leave!

YOUTH. There's a lot of them. A whole lot. They're shouting — "Freedom!" Freedom, freedom. Dad, you still didn't tell me what freedom means.

RAPTOR. So, how much do they pay you in Russia, Renat? I used to think I'd settle down here. It's calm. Stable. None of that western Gayropa shit. It has casinos. The broads are obliging. Now I get this feeling they're just not going to stop. I can feel it in my bone. I haven't had a hard-on for days. We've been fucking with these people for a month — and they just don't stop. At some point they're going to start pulling off our masks.

CHEERFUL. No need to take off your mask. I know who you are.

YOUTH. Dad, I packed my things. I've got my machine gun. Who do we shoot?

OLDSTER. Rats . . . Prostitutes, drug addicts! Sheep! Cannon fodder! You'll be on your knees yet, begging me to come back! How could they trade me for that . . . That dumb cluck? That housewife! A woman! That pathetic thing! If that's how it is, I'll die, but I still won't go! And if I do go, I'll take as much and as many with me as I can! You don't want Lukashenko? You'll get Putin.

CHEERFUL. The wedding is off!

NOVICE. What will a person do for love? *[Pause]* And for hate?

OLDSTER. It's easy, kid. You aim at a person, a traitor, any traitor, you give him a good look, and you squeeze the trigger. Pop! The traitor's gone. It's easy, son. I learned to do it. You can, too.

MENTOR. I don't want your pension! And I don't want your job! Take back your certificates. And your stability! And your flower gardens! Take it all back! Just give me my daughter, Alina! She has a weak heart. She has asthma! Give her back. And my nephew, Nikita. My sister has hypertension. I won't survive if she . . . Give them back! Give back our children!

NOVICE. Belarusians, thank you for the choice you made. You are unbelievable.

RAPTOR. Well, Renat . . . I can feel it in my bones. When we go to back Putin, we won't fuck that one up!

CORPSE. When absolutely everything hurts, it seems like nothing hurts. The feeling wasn't of blood seeping out of a wound. It just seeped out everywhere. Your skin bleeds as if you were sweating. Because battles like this happen once in 100 years . . . I mean the battle between good and evil. In the sense that everything is totally clear. I understood immediately that my life was over. And I understood

instantly that they would cover up my murder. They'd cremate me in a crematorium. List me as missing. Or bury me in a forest. Or hang me as if I committed suicide. Fuck 'em, though. It won't help. Belarusians are a unique people. They'll put up with stuff forever. For decades. Sometimes a whole life. And then, snap, their patience pops. Belarusians have been insulted. And you can't defeat that kind of insult. Just like you can't defeat BATÉ!

CHEERFUL. After all those nights in the prison van, the gym, and the prison, my dress looked nothing like what I bought for the price of two monthly stipends. It's a dirty, tattered, white-red-white rag. The blood stain has darkened, and it's covered by brown spots of vomit. Still, it's the most fabulous dress in the world! I wouldn't exchange it for anything! Here we are standing in this cramped cell, and what marvelous people there are around me. They're all so polite and smart. Microbiologists, teachers, musicians, actors, students. The woman who crawled into the prison van after her son and husband. People snatched off the streets all these days: priests, journalists, students, miners and workers, attorneys, and doctors. These are the best people on Earth. Belarusians. There is a new, true Belarus here in this cell. And we all feel the love. You can't defeat love. Isn't that so, Universe?

NOVICE. Hello. My name is Svetlana, I'm a housewife, the mother of two children. I am the president-elect of Belarus. What are you willing to do for love?

[The play closes with the song “Walls,” by Lluís Llach, sung in Belarusian, <https://youtu.be/FQz3NazwkUc>]*

* The following adaptation in English was created by Lev and Olga Frayman of Theatre Novi Most in Minneapolis:

He was inspired, brave and young,/ They were too many to count/ He led the whole city in song/ It's time to gather around.

They lit up candles for him,/ Smoke rising up to the sky./ “Break down the prison, end this regime”/ And the crowd joined his cry.

Let's destroy the prison walls!/ If you want freedom — take it all!/ The prison will crumble, burn and fall/ And bury the old guard once and for all!

They knew the words by heart — and the song/ Carried them through the streets./ Their blood boiled, their anger grew strong,/ Hearts were synched in one beat.

A thousand hands clapped to that beat./ Blowing the prisons away./ They took their message of change to the streets/ While the song continued to play:

Let's destroy the prison walls!/ If you want freedom — take it all!/ The prison will crumble, burn and fall/ And bury the old guard once and for all!

Everyone felt — the time it has come,/ to rise up for freedom for all/ If you're not with us — don't stand in the way/ those who're against us will fall!



A scene from Gabriele Tuminaitis's made-for-TV production of *Insulted, Belarus* at the Vilnius State Small Theatre of Lithuania.